



"Roond About Birsay"

News for and by the people of Birsay

Editorial – Johnny Johnston

Hi folks, here we go once more for what will be the final Newsletter for 2016. I will keep to my time-honoured pattern of having a go at the weather first of all, although it has been almost kind to us this summer. There was a touch or two of its old

tricks early on but now, when the harvest is on us, it has been great. I expect Marty and his gang will be about ready for a rest by now, they have been on the go day and night for weeks. Certainly the Birsay Heritage Trust have had a better year this

year than last year's almost total disaster so our supply of bere bannocks should be safe.

Johnny Johnston - Editor

Autumn 2016, Issue 50



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DOUNBY FLOWER CLUB— *Yvonne Paice, Secretary*

Meetings are usually held on the third Tuesday of each month in the Dounby Centre at 7:30 pm. Do come along, everyone is made very welcome.

October 18th - "It's a musical" workshop with Barry Grey

November 15th—"Run up to Christmas" Demonstration by Silvia Brown. Open night in the Milestone church at 7:30pm

December date TBA - Christmas meal out.

January 17th—"Bonnie Scotland" workshop and Mince and Clapshot

February 21st—"By candlelight" workshop with Corena Taylor and Ann Poke

March 21st "Back to nature" workshop with Karen Johnston and Alison Grieve

April 18th - Visit from Orphir Flower Club



Special points of interest:

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BIRSAY COMMUNITY COUNCIL

JOHNNY JOHNSTON—CHAIRMAN

Well, our Community Council has been moving along as usual. There are always several items coming up which require our attention, although it has been rather quiet lately. We had our annual election of Office Bearers in the summer and the result is that I am still Chairman, Kenny Spence is still Vice Chairman and the rest of the Council are Marty Hay, Allan Spence, Stevie Spence, David Scarth and Derek Johnston. As ever, please don't hesitate to contact any of the Councillors if you have a problem or a query.

We are still waiting on more information from the Hoolan Energy lot, who plan to erect large wind turbines at Swannay so we have no further information on that at the moment.

We are also still working at getting signs erected at the Fisherman's Huts in Marwick and we understand the Birsay Heritage Trust is working on repairs to the hut at Skiba Geo.

We have been trying to get some improvements done to the toilets in the West Mainland but have not had much success with that yet. The toilets in Dounby and at the Birsay Village are badly in need of upgrading but the old story of "no money for this purpose" is all we get. Still, we will keep trying.

We are also still working at getting signs erected at the Fisherman's Huts in Marwick and we understand the Birsay Herit-

age Trust is working on repairs to the hut at Skiba Geo.

There is also a pressing need for repairs to the gates at all the Birsay Kirkyards and we are pursuing that too.

The Christmas Tree lighting ceremony will once more be held in Dounby, this year on Friday 2nd. December, at 6.30 pm, just after the worker's bus goes through. Once again it will be organised by the Sandwick & Harray Community Council and the Birsay Community Council, along with plenty of assistance from the Dounby School, Friends of the Dounby School, the Dounby Co-op and many others. Our Minister, David McNeish, will be there giving the Christmas Blessing and Santa will be in his Grotto at the Milestone Kirk afterwards

As ever, if anyone has any questions, please feel free to contact any of us and we will try to help.



Above: Photograph of Fisherman's Huts at Sand Geo, Marwick Head by John Tulloch, Orkney Image Library.



VISITORS

May brought a welcome increase in the number of visitors. There had been virtually none from October to March, and not many in April. But since the very cold winter of 2010, this is what we have come to expect.

The Hilda continues to link Birsay and Brittany after 111 years

The story of Mary Linklater, told in issue 48, is still arousing interest. A few months ago, Bertha Mainland had a visit from Sheila Simkin from Jersey, a sister of Julian Clyde-Smith, whose letter in *The Orcadian* some years ago, asking if anyone knew why the name of Mary Linklater appeared on the gravestone of his great great grandmother and great grandmother in Dinard, led to Bertha's contact with 'l'Association le Hilda.' Bertha brought Sheila over to see the Linklater gravestone with Mary's name on it.

And when Roger and Geraldine Davies were in Brittany on holiday recently, they visited the museum in St. Malo and saw a model of the shipwreck of the *Hilda*. So the story continues to link Birsay and Brittany after 111 years.

(Correction: In issue 48, in connection with this story, I said that the new cemetery was opened in 1919; it was, in fact, opened in 1916.)

Just after the Jutland commemorations, I had a brief visit from Evelyn Cook, who lives in Methlick in Aberdeenshire. Although her family hadn't lost anyone in the Battle of Jutland, a relative had been lost at sea two years later, so she felt it was an appropriate time to visit Orkney.

It wasn't Evelyn's first visit: she had been here twice to visit her uncle, Rev. Sylvester Skinner, who was the first minister of Birsay Church after St Magnus church and Twatt Church were united. Evelyn wanted to check the exact dates of his ministry, which were in fact 1947 to 1956.

On the day she called to see me just after 3.30p.m., she had already cycled out from Kirkwall and visited the Brough and the church, and in the evening she was going to cycle to Marwick Head to do some bird-

watching with a friend from Kirkwall. "So what?" you ask. Well, she's just 77! She has been in Malawi on more than one occasion, cycling to raise funds for a church there, and she was going out this year again to take part in a triathlon.

On 6 June the church was visited by a group of about twenty ramblers, led by Peter Dodd from Abingdon in Oxfordshire, who has been leading similar groups for about twelve years. In the first year or two, he worked out a programme of visits and walks which fitted in with local bus schedules, and then stuck to that. But for the last two years he has had to make changes because of the lack of buses on West Mainland routes from Stromness, and because of the commitment of buses to cruise-liner passengers, to which, among other things, he drew attention in a letter in *The Orcadian*.



Roger Davies took this photograph in the Museum of St Malo, Brittany in August. Being aware of the sinking of the Hilda, Roger was astonished to see a model of that very ship approaching the rocks.

Later that week there was a visit from a group of eighteen 'pilgrims' from the Church of St Magnus the Martyr on London Bridge, spending a few days in Orkney and taking in some of the tourist sites as well as visiting St Magnus Church, Birsay, St Magnus Church, Egilsay, and St Magnus Cathedral. They were well informed about the story of Magnus, and they have a particular interest in Egilsay, since it was members of their church who had a cairn built there in 1937 to mark the place where Magnus was murdered. After lunch at the Birsay Bay Tearoom and their visit to the church they were going to Skara Brae before coming back in the early evening, when the tide was suitable for crossing to the Brough. And they had been at the Ring of Brodgar in the

morning before coming here, so I imagine they would have slept well on that night!

On 1 August, David Murray-Smith and his wife, from Bearsden, visited the church. David is a great grandson of Rev Samuel Trail, who was minister of Birsay and Harray from 1844. The church was extensively rebuilt during his Ministry, in 1867, and the plaque which commemorates this can still be seen.

Dr Trail went on to become Professor of Systematic Theology at Aberdeen University, and his youngest son, James, David's grandfather, became Professor of Botany there in 1876 and was still there forty-three years later at the time of his death. Some of his former students published a biog-

raphy in 1923, and David downloaded and sent me a copy of the first chapter, which is mainly about his education, and has references to his early life in Birsay and Harray. One astonishing detail is that, when he was born, he was so small that it was impossible to dress him, and he had to be wrapped in cotton wool and pinned to a pillow. But he must have had a cast-iron immune system, because in his schooldays he missed only four days, because of chickenpox, and he helped to nurse his three older brothers and older sister when they developed typhoid fever, without catching it himself, and in his forty-three years as a Professor, he missed only two days' lectures, and that was because of his father's death.

Over the years, several relatives of former ministers have visited the church, with connections going a long way back in time:

1997 Heather Jensen and Jeanie McPhearson from California, grand-daughters of Rev. Joseph McPhearson, minister from 1900 to 1906.

1998 Wynn Osborn-Clarke from Bristol, grand-daughter of Rev. Henry Dodd, minister from 1884 to 1899.

1999 Andrew Douglas from Kent, great-grandson of Rev. James Struthers Douglas, assistant minister from 1870 to 1877.

2016 David Murrays-Smith from Bearsden, great-grandson of Rev. Samuel Trail, minister of Birsay and Harray from 1844.

2003 Deidre Hay, an Australian married in New York, who can trace her ancestry back to Rev. Francis Liddell, minister of St Magnus Church from 1627 to 1635.

I don't think we're likely to find a connection further back than that!

VISITOR'S COMMENTS

When I last checked, there had been visitors to the church from 27 countries this year, including three which haven't been mentioned before, so far as I know – Mongolia, Portugal and Puerto Rico.

Visitors comments included

“Empty of Man, full of God”

Most of the comments follow the usual pattern, thanking us for keeping the door open and form maintaining the church so well, or remarking on the feeling of peace, e.g. 'A place of great beauty and peace.' But some have expressed their impressions rather differently, e.g. 'Awesome', 'Mind-blowing history', 'Austere but powerful', 'Trailing Saint Magnus.' One, presumably from a musician, says 'Sounds wonderful.' And there are one or two quite different from the usual: 'Thank you for the blessings,' 'Empty of man – full of God,' 'The Golden Thread. And a German family took the trouble to let us know that they were back after almost five years.

EVENTS

On 16 June, Palace Stores stayed open until 8.00p.m. to mark the launch of their new lines – Birsay crafts and freshly made sandwiches. A good number of people took the opportunity to sample the delicious sandwiches, with crab proving a clear favourite. Donations amounted to £146.81, and the trustees are very grateful to Caron and Ian for this generous donation.

On 8 September they maintained their connection with the church by getting married there. We are sure we speak for everyone in Birsay in wishing them every happiness in their private life and every success in their business.

On 20 June, Jo Philby and Elaine Grieve shared a concert with Gness, i.e. Graham Rorie and Aidan Moodie, the latter having a close connection with Birsay through his grandmother. There was a good-sized audience, and the concert was greatly enjoyed by everyone who attended.

On 1 September, the opening evening of the Orkney International Science Festival, the now traditional Orkney Night was replaced this year by a performance of *A Fitful Sea*, previously seen during the St Magnus Festival and at the time of the Kitchener Memorial commemorations. There could have been no more appropriate setting, since there had been a proposal as early as mid-July 1916 to have a memorial in the church to the men who had lost their lives when the Hampshire had sunk “within sight of the church and within hearing of the church bell.” The script by Pam Beasant was excellent, and every word could be clearly heard in this very fine performance by the Birsay Drama Group. The trustees are very grateful to them and to the Science Festival committee, who donated the proceeds of the event to the Trust, as they have done every year since 1998.

BIRSAY KID'S CLUB

**STOP
PRESS**

The Youngsters' Activities Group held a coffee morning in aid of MacMillan and remarkably raised over £850. Very well done to you all!

Barony Mill by Sue Flett/Bright

BARONY MILL & SOCIAL MEDIA

Everyone at the mill is hard at work dealing with the harvest so I'm writing this on behalf of the Barony Mill's Facebook and Twitter pages. If you haven't discovered the mill already on social media and you are already signed up/want to find out more please do pay us a visit* and "Like" us as it means a lot to know that you support us. We put lots of up to date news, information, photographs and recipes online which people from all over the world, as well as Orcadians, seem to be enjoying.



Above: The latest addition to the Mill, Cedric the Cat

One such recent post has been concerning Cedric the (Cat) "intern" at the Barony Mill. He is a very handsome chap which may be one of the contributing factors to our getting nearly 50 likes within 24 hours of his photograph going online. Could it be his looks or just that

there are an awful lot of cat lovers out there? I am not sure but it has been suggested that he gets his own hashtag #cedricatbaronymill on instagram? This could go viral? We shall see.

Leaving cat lovers aside for a moment we do find that there are a great deal of bakers amongst us as the new bere recipes seem to be very popular. There is a strong movement within the baking and gourmet fraternity it seems for "Farm to Table" or Field to Table" food in our case. People like knowing where their food comes from and this is absolutely & definitely one of Orkney's strengths. Locals and visitors alike can buy top quality ingredients and prepare a feast using named, local ingredients.

Just as an imaginary menu this trips off my tongue; Birsay tomatoes (slow roasted with lemon and cumin perhaps) with crumbled roasted Grimbister cheese, torn mint leaves (with a warm bere ban-nock and Orkney butter on the side), Swartland Organic beef with local roasted potatoes, buttered carrots, cabbage and Swannay Brewery bere beer gravy. If there is room (?)...Orkney fudge cheese-cake or a delicious cheese plate served with Westray chutney, Stockan's Barony Mill bere oatcakes or possibly bere sour dough bread (recipe on Facebook!)? Slightly Birsay biased but who can blame us?



I wonder if this might be as good a time as any to share a new recipe? New recipes have been posted on Facebook and have had a good response. Winter is coming and nothing is nicer than filling your home with the smell of home baking. Barony Mill bere and oats are easily bought at lots of places including Shearer's, Kirkness and Gorie, Palace Stores, Bayleaf delicatessen and of course at the mill itself even when we are closed for tours. Tip-It keeps well in the freezer if you can't use it regularly.

This **beremeal bannock tray bake** recipe is great. It's like a fluffy soda bread & so easy to make. Great served with soup or cheese or salad for instance and perfect if you need a quick hunk of low gluten home made bread but don't have time to do the prep.

8oz Beremeal

8oz Plain Flour

2tsp Bicarb

1 tsp cream of Tartar

1 tsp salt

2oz Margarine/ butter

1/2 pt Milk or more to mix (or substitute a buttermilk /yoghurt mix)

NB I used about 3/4 pint today.

Rub the fat into dry ingredients sifted together then mix in the liquid until the mixture has the texture of porridge.

Put the mix into a roasting tin (I used a silicone square)and cook for 15-20 minutes on fan 180 degrees (or longer in conventional oven)

For more recipes do visit Facebook or Twitter

*<https://www.facebook.com/BARONYMILLSORKNEY/>

<https://twitter.com/baronymill>

The latest BARONY MILL recipe book is available to buy at Twatt Post Office, Palace Stores, Kirkness and Gorie and Shearer's along with the Barony Mill itself. The mill is part of the Birsay Heritage Trust which is a registered charity. The sales of the products help to ensure that the mill (Orkney's last working watermill) and the bere continue to survive in Orkney. Please support local producers.

This recipe for a **light parkin loaf** is taken from an interesting book called GREAT BRITISH BAKES by Mary-Anne Boermans.

BROONIE 1890

F. Marian McNeill was a Scottish traditionalist and folklorist, born in Holm (Orkney) in 1885. In her celebrated book on Scottish food customs and traditions "The Scots Kitchen" first published in 1929, she remembers that Broonie was the first recipe that she ever collected. She recalls at the age of 5 or 6 wanting to know how to make her playmate's lunchtime snack. As an adult, armed with the list of ingredients she had memorised as a child, she was able to work out the correct proportions.

This loaf cake has a wonderful texture from the oatmeal and is like a lighter, milder version of parkin. As with all treacle based cakes it also has great keeping qualities if kept wrapped up in an airtight box or tin.

Recipe makes one large light parkin loaf:

170g BARONY MILL medium oatmeal

170g plain flour

1tsp ground ginger

3/4 tsp baking powder

60g butter plus extra for greasing

30ml treacle

112g soft brown sugar

1 egg

150ml milk

150ml natural yoghurt

1 x 2kg/28 cm loaf tin or similar capacity

Preheat the oven to 180 degrees C/160 fan/gas 4'

Grease and line tin with parchment'

Sift the oatmeal, flour, ginger and baking powder into a bowl.

Put the butter, treacle and sugar into a pan and warm gently until the butter is melted and the sugar dissolved.

Remove from the heat.

Whisk the egg and add to the dry ingredients together with the warm treacle mixture.

Stir the milk and yoghurt together and gradually add to the mixture until a "dropping consistency" is formed (i.e. should drop freely off a spoon). Use more milk if necessary.

Pour the mixture into the prepared tin and smooth the surface.

Bake for 1-1 1/2 hrs until well risen and firm in the middle.

Set aside to cool in the tin.

Enjoy.

Birsay Agricultural Society, *Issy Grieve*

New Group

BAS held their first 'farmers gathering' in the hall on Friday 7th Oct. Forty current and retired farmers in the parish enjoyed a lovely evening in the company of John Copland. John reminisced about life at the mart and shared a host of interesting photographs, which had folk yarning about past events, outstanding beasts and some great memories. Everyone en-

joyed a cup of tea, a few fancies and agreed what a grand evening had been had by all.

The next 'gathering' is planned for Friday 18th November at 7.30 when Richard Shearer will share some of his memories and photographs of times spent on the road. BAS would be delighted to see a few more farmers from the parish and would encourage neighbours to offer lifts to others. BAS are also keen to hear

from any of the farmers in the parish, any suggestions they may have for future 'gatherings'. Some of the suggestions to date have included, a farmers supper, talk from farmers who have been abroad working on farms, talk from a cattle breeder, update from Birsay Heritage Trust on their projects, film show, visit to the Swannay Brewery, an evening on ploughing competitions, etc. further suggestions welcomed.



MILESTONE CHURCH

It's been a delight to welcome a growing number of folks to Milestone Community Church every Sunday at 11am. You'd be very welcome to join us. Sunday Club runs throughout the school term for pre school and primary children and each week we're looking at the same stories whether we're nine or ninety.

Messy Kirk also goes from strength to strength, meeting at 3.30pm til 5pm on the last Friday of the month (except at Christmas!). The theme for November is Trusting God whilst in December we'll be thinking about the special message of Christmas. You can find out more about Messy Kirk and Sunday Club on our website www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/milestone



We've decided to make it easier to remember what time the remembrance services are at each of the war memorials by keeping them the same each year. This year remembrance Sunday falls on the 13th of November – and the times are the same as last year:

10am Birsay War Memorial
11am Milestone Community Church
12.30pm Harray War Memorial
1pm Sandwick War Memorial

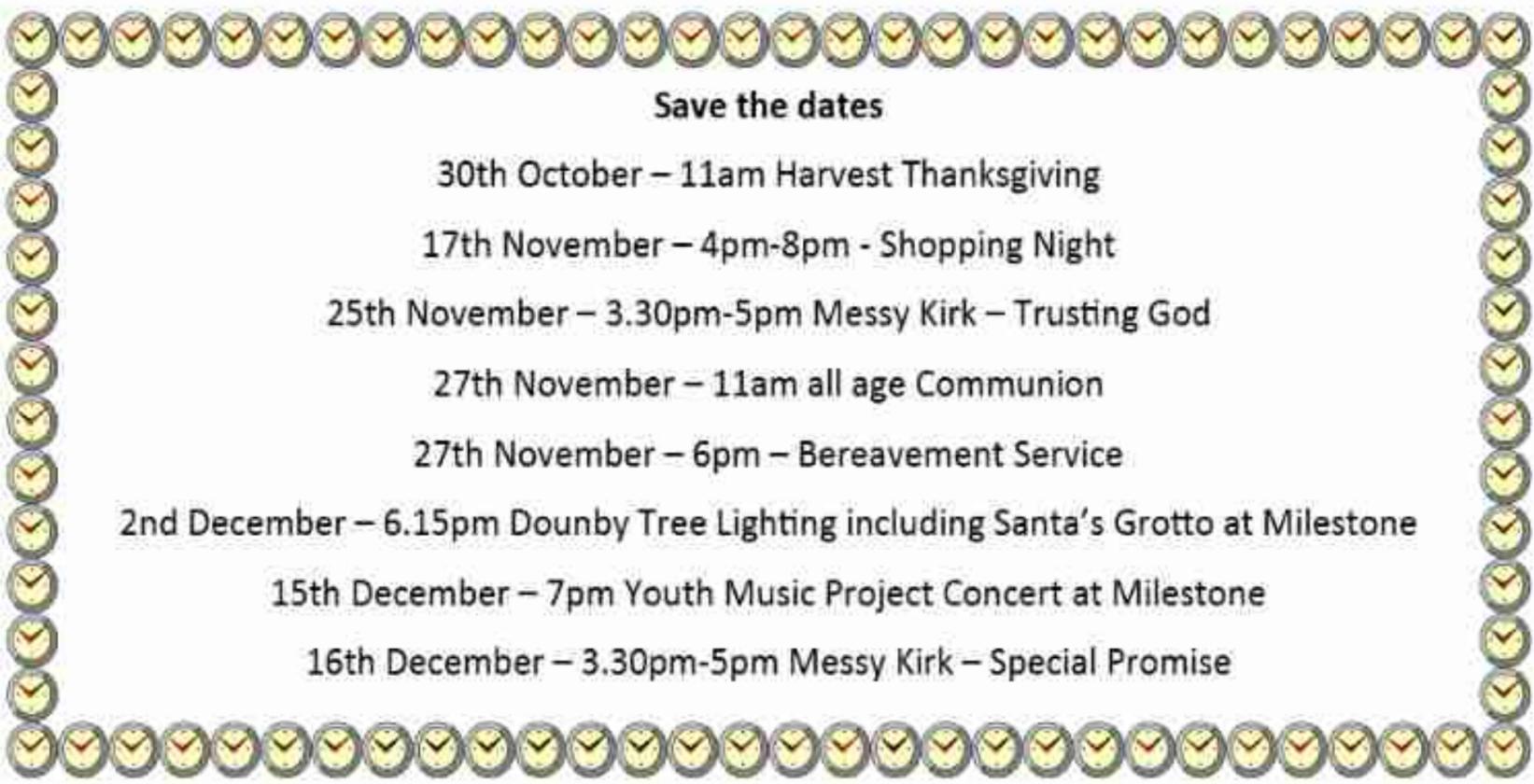
Once again on Dounby Shopping Night Milestone will be serving soup and sandwiches and hosting a wide range of stalls. If you would like to book a table for £10 at Shopping Night please speak to our new booking clerk, Hazel Keveran, who has taken over from Caroline Tait as our bookings clerk. To book a table or to discuss booking a room for another meeting or event please contact Hazel on 01856 771709 or milestonekirk-bookings@gmail.com

And then before we know it it's Christmas! This year I've written a new song about the Christmas story and it will receive a sneak preview at the Tree Lighting ceremony on the 2nd before it is performed by the newly formed Dounby Music Group and Choir as part of the Youth Music Initiative Christmas Concert. As with the Hampshire events earlier in the year its great to work on music with the school pupils – their passion and their talent are an inspiration.

But that is getting ahead- the clock's haven't gone back yet . And first of all we've to celebrate the Harvest safely home, which we'll be doing on the 30th of October, including donations of tinned and dried food for the Orkney Foodbank. There is much to be grateful for amidst much that has been challenging as well. For this reason, every November on the last Sunday evening of the month we have our Bereavement Service. Invitations are sent to the next of kin of those whose funerals I have been privileged to conduct this year, but everyone is invited to remember loved ones whether recently departed or longer ago. There is an opportunity to light a candle in memory of someone and many commented last year how helpful they found this.

Wishing you every blessing as the seasons turn.

David McNeish 771599, dmcneish@churchofscotland.org.uk



Save the dates

30th October – 11am Harvest Thanksgiving

17th November – 4pm-8pm - Shopping Night

25th November – 3.30pm-5pm Messy Kirk – Trusting God

27th November – 11am all age Communion

27th November – 6pm – Bereavement Service

2nd December – 6.15pm Dounby Tree Lighting including Santa's Grotto at Milestone

15th December – 7pm Youth Music Project Concert at Milestone

16th December – 3.30pm-5pm Messy Kirk – Special Promise

St Magnus Way

Plans for a long distance pilgrimage route through the West Mainland of Orkney are well underway, with the hope being to launch the 51 mile St Magnus Way on St Magnus Day, 16th April 2017. This will be the nine hundredth anniversary of Magnus's death and it was felt to be a fitting way to acknowledge the lasting peace Magnus brought to Orkney, retell the story and offer a chance for pilgrims both near and far to reconnect with a sense of spirituality that can so often get squeezed out of our busy lives. The walk is in four sections:



- ◊ Evie to Birsay – following Magnus body as it was taken from Egilsay to Gurness and walked round to the Kirk in Birsay.
- ◊ Birsay to Finstown – following Magnus's bones as they were taken in procession from Birsay to Kirkwall.
- ◊ Finstown to Orphir – it is likely Magnus travelled by sea from Finstown to Kirkwall, so we follow Hakon, who murdered Magnus and then went on penitential pilgrimage to Jerusalem, returning to build the Round Kirk in Orphir.
- ◊ Orphir to Kirkwall – from Scapa Flow we follow the spires to Kirkwall finishing at the cathedral that bears Magnus's name.

We're delighted that Tesco have awarded us at least £8,000 towards the establishment of the St Magnus Way – now we need your help to vote for the project as we could gain as much as £12,000. The Tesco funding will go towards fencing and path improvements along the first section from Evie to Birsay. We are also seeking funding from other sources for other sections of the route as well as resources that people can make use of as they undertake the pilgrimage. There is a lot of interest in pilgrimage - a journey with a spiritual purpose – and it offers a chance to reflect on our place in the landscape and the wider world, and even to encounter God as we do so. As much as possible the route follows existing core paths and short sections of road and it is designed to be walked in short sections or long days, for both locals and visitors.

For further information check out the Facebook page (www.facebook.com/stmagnusway) or speak to David McNeish or John Stockan, who are both Trustees of Orkney Pilgrimage, the group behind the establishment of the pilgrimage path.

BOYS BRIGADE

Kenny Spence

All boys welcome

1st Dounby Boys Brigade meet in the Dounby Centre on Tuesday nights during school terms, we start on 1st November and will finish about the end of April:

Anchor Boys for P1 - P3 6pm - 7pm £1.50/session

Junior Section for P4 - P6 7pm - 8.30pm £2/session

Company Section P7 - S4 8pm - 10pm £3/session

The boys will be doing all the usual activities as they work towards gaining their badges in March.

The five headings in the programme are, Body, Mind, Spirit, Community and Creativity so our sessions are made up of a range of activities which include physical games, thinking games, bible stories, crafts and marching. We take part in events with the other Companies in the Orkney Battalion and take part in the annual Battalion Parade in April.

We organise a Christmas Post for the parishes of Birsay, Harray and Sandwick in December to raise funds and help out with Bag the Bruck in April. Boys are provided with a BB jersey to wear when they come to BBs and attend parades etc.

Anchor Boys: a typical session would be to start with a physical game, spend some time talking to them about a story from the bible or have a thinking game, we might do a craft so that they make something to take home, and then practise a small bit of marching and end the session with a physical game if we have time.

Junior Section: the session activities are similar to Anchor Boys but are made to suit the boys age group, Junior Section also compete for a Robertson Trophy against the other Orkney Companies, we practise for the Bible Reading competition, a quiz, indoor football and the marching competition. We usually try and arrange a trip for the boys during the session, in the past we have been to the Kirkwall Police Station, Stromness Fire Station, Stromness Lifeboat and the Orkney TA.

Company Section: boys work out of the BB Discover Programme which is divided into Community, Recreation and Skills sections. We usually have some games do a craft and work on one of the sections in the programme. We occasionally finish the session by making toasted sandwiches. Company boys also compete for a Robertson Trophy so we have games competitions and also a bible reading competition. We did not manage to get away on a camp this year but plan to do so next year, probably in May.

Birsay Toddler's Group - Play Park Subgroup

The new Play Park at the Birsay Hall has been successful in securing a Tesco groundworks grant. This means that it has been chosen as one of the three projects that customers in the Kirkwall branch can vote for. Voting is in-store from 31st October to 13th of November. If our project gets the most votes we receive £12,000. £10,000 for second and a minimum of £8000. This money will fund a central climbing frame for the play park. The more money we receive the bigger and better piece of equipment we can buy. So please can we all encourage friends and family to vote for the Birsay play park!

We have also been successful in securing European leader funding, on the condition that match funding from the councils community development fund is granted when the committee meet in November.

If secured these grants along with the fundraised money will allow purchase of the equipment needed. With installation of the play park starting in early 2017.

The fundraising, planning and securing of grants has been a long and complicated process. However thanks must go to the Birsay Community for supporting all the fundraising efforts. Without the offers of help to install the play park, picnic area with BBQ and sensory garden, the project could not have progressed. Here's hoping we have a play park completed by this time next year.



BIRSAY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION *by Val Johnston, Chair*

I can hardly believe that we are nearly at the end of another financial year.

BCA have had a busy year, with lots of weddings and other community events happening in the hall.

We have a great team on our committee who have given lots of

their free time to make sure the events have run without a hitch, not forgetting our willing friends of the BCA who come along when we need extra help.

With our AGM due to be held in November we are looking for new members to come and join us.

If anybody has any spare time on

their hands, and would enjoy being involved in any of the events that are happening in the hall, we would be delighted if you would come along to the AGM.

Keep an eye on our face book page for dates of events happening, or get in touch with any of the committee.



BIRSAY SWI, *Eileen Evans*

One of our aims at the SWI (afraid someone took the R for Rural out of it) is to have a variety of programmes at our monthly meetings, which are held at the Birsay Community Centre on the 2nd Tuesday of each Month. That is except January (Xmas night out) and July (Summer Trip).

This past year we have had Penny Park and some items from her collection of woodturning, Alison Moore with her beautiful Jewellery. Singing was the highlight of the evening in March when Charlie's Angels entertained us. Around the world to Cambodia is where Heather Bichan took us to in April, what an interesting evening that was. We also had Zero Waste with Mary Rutter & Fiona Bailey, which made you stop and think about your waste. The Dounby SWI joined us for their meeting in June and to entertain us afterwards, which they did with such a variety of items. Jeanne Bouza Rose from Art Works Magic gave us a smashing programme with her Water Colour Prints in August. Finally in September was Rebecca Carberry from Beccas Bakes and our very own cake made and iced for us, plus cup cakes as well, what a delightful treat.

We would love for new members to join us, but anyone can come along to our meetings as a visitor, and you will be made more than welcome. The new schedule of programmes should be out in November, and a list put up on the notice board at the Community Centre.

LOCAL JOB OPPORTUNITY:

The Birsay Community Association are looking for a cleaner for the Birsay Community Hall. Duties will include cleaning all areas of the hall the day after functions. All equipment and materials will be supplied. It will be mostly weekend days, on an "as and when required" basis.

Please forward your details and hourly rate to:

treasurer@birsayhall.com



DOWNBY COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Alastair Forsyth—Head teacher

Recent events at the school have been the very successful coffee morning that Primary 6 ran for MacMillan last Friday, 30th September when just over £609 was raised. Thanks to everyone for donating home bakes and making the coffee morning such a success.

Nursery had a sponsored cycle around the school car park for the RNLI on Tuesday, 25th September and they raised over £300.



Ex-Dounby School Pupil makes us all proud.

While playing for Orkney in the Northern Counties U12 football tournament hosted by Orkney Youth Development in June 2016, young Birsay boy Archie Atkinson was named Orkney's player of the weekend by Inverness Caley Thistle youth coaches. Archie was then invited to attend trials for the Inverness club's U13 team. After playing in 2 games against Stirling Albion and Airdrieonians in the Club Academy Scotland Programme Archie was signed up to the SPL club. Archie will now continue to travel south at weekends to play in upcoming games against Dundee, Ross County and Livingston.

Handbell Ringing Group

P7 are planning to set up a Bell Ringing group to help raise funds for their school trip to Lagganlia next year. On the first taster session nearly everyone had a go and the whole class was able to recognise the Christmas Carol they were playing. Well done! Look out for their first performance at the Dounby Christmas Shopping Night on the 11th November. They will be playing in the reception area at Milestone church.



There is always information about what we have up to on our blog. You can access our blog here:

<http://dounbycommunityschool.blogspot.co.uk/>

Birsay Drama Group



NEWS

Rehearsals are well underway for our biennial pantomime. This year we are performing 'Calamity Jeannie', with Lynne Nicolson taking the lead role of Jeannie. Duncan Tullock takes the part of the evil card sharp 'Stud Poker' with his daughter 'Tammy Wincyette' being played by Kylie Harcus. Many other well known faces take to stage including Karen Hay, James Gaudie, Marty Hay, Dale Groundwater, Murray Hay, Christina Copland, Jack Norquoy, Connor Nicolson and a host of others.

We don't want to spoil too much of the story line for you, but it is set in the Wild West with a host of cowboys and quite a few Native North Americans. Keep any eye out for

'Billy the Kid', Jeannies youngest son, he seems to spend most of time at rehearsals hiding, but hopefully you'll be able to spot him on stage.

The panto takes place in the hall on the 6th, 7th, 8th Dec, with a matinee as well as an evening performance on the 10th Dec.

During the interval there will be refreshments available from the bar, and ice cream for those whose throats are sore from shouting 'Howdy Cowboy', 'He's behind you'.

Tickets go on sale in the Hall at 2.00 p.m. on Sunday 20th Nov, the Drama group accept payment by cash or cheque.

On the 1st September we performed a 'Fitful Sea' in the St. Magnus Church as part of the annual Science Festival and we now head off on the 16th of October for our seventh and final performance of the Foy, in Boat in Garten, near Aviemore. We are delighted that Northlink Ferries have agreed sponsor our travel costs. If you have friends or relatives near Boat of Garten then we'd be delighted to have them call past, our performance starts at 7.00 on the 16th.

We are hoping to have two plays entering the annual SCDA festival in Feb, with rehearsals starting after the pantomime, if you'd like to be involved, then get in touch with Margaret on 721222.



Looking back on a busy summer, we led seven guided walks at Marwick Head during the seabird breeding season and held ten 'wildlife watch' events in The Loons hide and the Birsay Moors hide. Thanks to all who came. The addition of tea and coffee to these drop-in sessions seemed to go down well and we will be holding more - all are very welcome. We'll add dates to www.rspb.org.uk/orkney and www.facebook.com/rspborkney as well as Radio Orkney.



Four corncrakes were recording calling around the parish, the only four on Mainland this year. All had a good chance of raising chicks thanks to the support of local farmers who put in place corncrake-friendly habitat management.

We continued to add to the wildflower area around the Listening Wall with more yellow rattle, red clover, primroses, sneezewort and ragged robin – all native flowers that will make this a hot spot for bees. It'll take some years to get properly established but the good news is that great yellow bumblebees, one of the UK's rarest species, were spotted already making the most of this food source towards the end of the summer.

An important area of work was monitoring breeding seabirds. As you may know, several species of seabirds including kittiwakes, guillemots and razor-bills have been struggling to raise chicks in recent

years due to shortages of the sandeels they normally catch at sea, a decline that is linked to warming seas (for some background info see www.rspb.org.uk/choosesealife). For example, nearly nine out of every ten kittiwakes nesting at Marwick Head have disappeared since 1999.

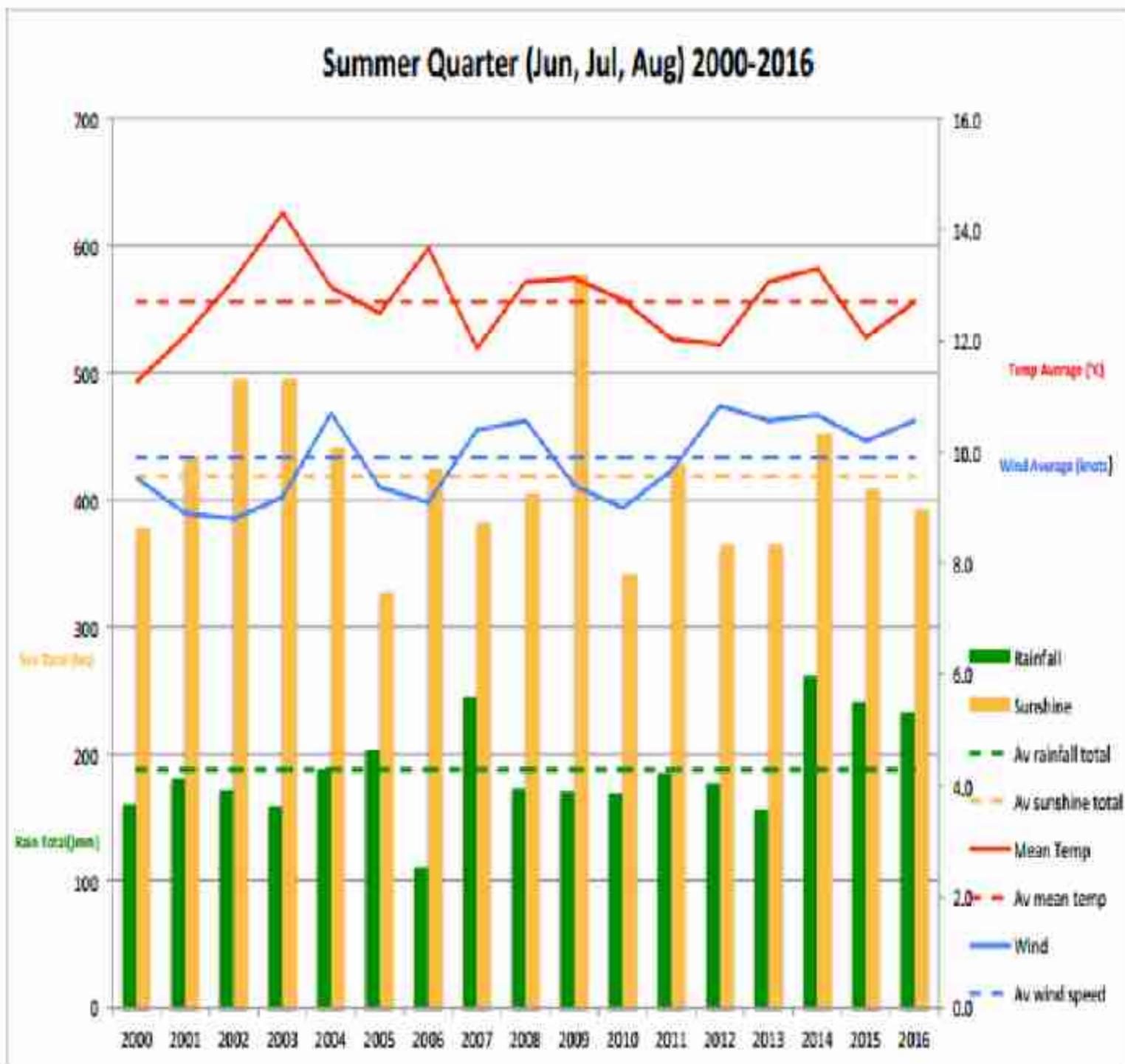
This year, Marwick's kittiwakes on average fledged just over one chick per nest, which continues a run of slightly better news compared to the almost complete failure of the colony to raise any chicks in the years leading up to and including 2013. Kittiwakes nesting in one area at Costa Head also did well, although other kittiwake colonies around the parish, including the Brough of Birsay and the rest of Costa Head, recorded no fledged chicks at all. It looks like the smaller the colony, the worse it is faring – perhaps because colonies that have already been reduced to just a few nesting birds find it harder to keep chicks safe from natural predators.



These figures come from weeks of painstaking survey work largely carried out by volunteers, to whom we are very grateful. Not only does this information capture how seabirds are doing here and now, it feeds into wider national research attempting to understand in more detail the factors affecting breeding success from year to year.

As always, if you have any questions about what's going on around the nature reserves or would like to get involved, please do get in touch.

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The Graph shows the following for the three summer months June, July, August, 2000-2016

- The average temperature (red) for the three months with the red dotted line showing the average of the averages; the scale is on the right side of the graph.
- The average wind speed (blue) for the three months with the blue dotted line showing the average of the averages; the scale is on the right side of the graph.
- The total hours of sunshine (yellow) for the three months with the yellow dotted line showing the average of the totals; the scale is on the left side of the graph.
- The total rainfall (green) for the three months with the green dotted line showing the average of the totals; the scale is on the left side of the graph.

FARMING FOCUS

By Ian Tait

While writing my last article, I remember thinking – “it’ll soon be harvest time, plenty to write about then”.

For most of us, harvest has been and gone. Compared to recent years it was relatively straight forward with standing crops and reasonable ground conditions. In many fields, the geese moved in and began to strip grain, moving 6 or 10 feet forward each day.

Post harvest the geese have continued to be a problem, fouling straw as they forage for any remaining grains left on the ground. Numbers appeared to manageable earlier in the year but since early September we’ve experienced numbers never seen before. In some areas they now make crop growing un-viable. Establishing new grass is also a challenge as they will pull the new growth out from the root. It’s a problem with no easy or quick solution. It was an interesting experience baling straw for a customer high on Ravie Hill, the steep ground made finding a safe place to discharge round bales

something of a challenge but the panoramic views made it worthwhile. All around me was a hive of activity, with combines,

ways easier, and cattle will always perform better with a dry back.

Other seasonal changes include the departure of



Above: Geese on the Stubble

“Post harvest the geese have continued to be a problem, fouling straw as they forage for any remaining grains left on the ground.”

balers and trailers constantly on the move.

The land is now wet and many farms already have feeding cattle inside. Gates get in a “guddle” if we continue to feed outside in a wet autumn. Having them inside is in many

the many swallows which have entertained us all summer. One pair successfully hatched twice in our workshop and within three weeks of hatching the youngsters had flown the nest. My newly created wildlife pond in Ingsays meadow is proving popular with Mallard ducks. Most mornings there are 30 or so on it. A visiting party of shooters have been warned – “shoot as many geese as you want, but don’t shoot my ducks!”

Continued over page



Above: Baling Straw



On Sun 30th October



Right: Popcorning barley

Bottom: Combining at Ingsay



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Please contact Sam if you would like to add any items to the next newsletter or have any photographs of Birsay you would like to share.