

# PONTOON RECOVERED FROM MARWICK BAY—

• The mystery pontoon washed ashore on 16 March 2019



THE large pontoon that became a familiar site on the rocks between Sand Geo and the Choin was removed in an enormous effort by J&S Hay with Orkney Islands Council on Friday 15th November. The pontoon, which is yet to be claimed for, measured 9 metres long, 2 metres wide and 2 metres high. To ensure it did not pose a future shipping hazard the decision was made to remove the pontoon with the council securing a grant to help cover costs. An initial plan to crane lift the pontoon when the nearby land was dry was missed, so

local firm Andrew Sinclairs were approached to arrange the winching up of the challengingly placed pontoon. Described as a “difficult job” the operation began at noon once the tide was low enough and was on dry land some seven hours later. This was a fantastic joint effort by Jim Hamilton, Robbie Tulloch, and Ross Sinclair from Andrew Sinclairs, Malky Moar, Grant Rendall, James Gaudie, Dunky and Marty Hay. If you, or someone you know, think that you might have a use for the pontoon, phone Marty Hay on 07702 913 902.

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## DOUNBY CHRISTMAS TREE FUNDED BY DOUNBY COOP ———



## IN THE NEWS

### END OF AN ERA AS PALACE STORES CLOSES DOORS

The Palace Stores closed doors and ceased business as a convenience store and post office on Thursday 12 December. Writing on their Facebook page, owners Caron and Ian cited the decision came with a heavy heart amidst a challenging environment that made the Birsay Village shop no longer sustainable.



*Continuing they wrote: "Although still trading profitably during the spring and summer months the autumn and winter have proved more of a challenge, along with the changing way in which the majority of folk now do their grocery shopping. Over the coming weeks and months we will look for a positive way to evolve and develop the premises. Any future business we feel will need to be more seasonally based and tourist focused and yet strive to continue to serve our community. We would like to end by giving our heartfelt thanks to all those who have supported and encouraged us over the past 5 years and wish you all well for the future."*

### BROUGH OF BIRSAY LASER SCANNED IN A SWEDISH STUDY INTO ANCIENT STONE INSCRIPTIONS



The latest laser scanning technology is being used to investigate ancient inscriptions left on Orkney by the Picts and the Vikings. Experts from Sweden hope their software will make it possible to recognise the work of individual carvers. The study may tell us more about the transition between the different groups who occupied sites like the Brough of Birsay over hundreds of years. The team are hoping for preliminary results by the start of 2020. The Brough of Birsay and Shetland's Cunningsburgh have been highlighted as the only two sites in the world where three alphabets have been discovered from this period together. Read more on the [BBC News Website](#).

### NEW POST OFFICE SERVICE FROM ST MAGNUS KIRK

A new Post Office service is to commence in the St Magnus Kirk from Thursday 9 January following the closure of the service from the Palace Stores. Operated by the Finstown Postmaster, the new service will be available on Wednesdays from 2pm to 4pm. The service is temporary Hosted Outreach service while the Post Office seek to find a permanent solution. Copies of The Orcadian will be available.

### ART EXHIBITION AND WORKSHIPS IN JUNE AT KIRK

For a week in June Catherine Wells, local mixed media artist 'arts a flutter' will be holding an exhibition and workshops in the church as part of the Natural Festival. Catherine who lives in Birsay is a mixed media artist specialising in using eco friendly materials where ever possible. Her work is often influenced by nature and the natural world. She will be having a display of her work in St Magnus Kirk during the nature festival from the 9th - 17th of May. Eco friendly cards, decoupage using recycled books, and needle felt work along with a few pieces of sea china mosaic will be amongst the items.

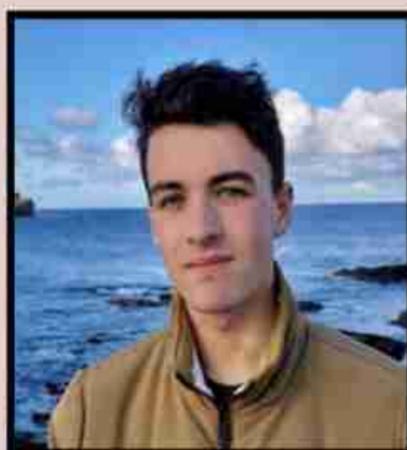
# Editorial

Email us at [birsayroondabout@gmail.com](mailto:birsayroondabout@gmail.com)



## Editor Kenny Spence

Hello and welcome to the latest edition of Roond About Birsay, full of interesting articles and news from the various groups in the parish. In an attempt to be more environmentally friendly, by using less paper and avoiding delivery to every house in Birsay, we are going to start putting the newsletter online and will be found on the Birsay Heritage Trust website [www.birsay.org.uk](http://www.birsay.org.uk) We realise that some folk in the parish would still prefer a printed copy, so if you wish to receive a paper copy please complete the form on the back page of this edition and post back promptly.



## Administrator Jack Norquoy

Happy New Year and welcome back to the Roond About Birsay. As we enter a new decade much change is afoot, including with the newsletter as we move online. We hope you enjoy reading the first newsletter of the new year and if you have an article you want to put in the newsletter in the future or any ideas you think would be of interest please contact us on the email address above.

**NEW CONTRIBUTIONS ALWAYS WELCOME**

## Birsay Drama Club

As this was our winter of no panto, the Birsay Drama Club have been busy getting ready the annual Scottish Community Drama Festival at the end of February. This year we have three teams from Birsay going forward. We have a youth play with 16 young people taking part. They have been rehearsing a play called the The Jabberwock, which is based on a well known poem with a similar title. Two sisters become lost in a wood where they meet all sorts of mythical creatures and some rather strange people. Will the sisters ever find their way home? The second team are in the early stages of a comedy which takes place in a hospital, an old favourite of the club, this is a fun play with many twists. The third team have been rehearsing a black comedy, it is an Irish play about three sisters. The club will be performing all three plays in the Birsay hall the first weekend in March, definitely an evening not to be missed. The club are also bringing a play from the Edinburgh Fringe Festival to the Birsay stage in May. This play explores the issues of well being and mental health through a solo performance, watch out for more details in the local press.

## 2019 Weather Report

**Temperature** Highest Temperature | 26.4 (July) Lowest Temperature | -4.5 (May)

**Rainfall** Highest Rainfall | 40.9mm (February) Lowest Rainfall | 6.9mm (June) Total 2019 | 1106.7mm

**Wind** Number of gale days | 21 (March Max. 6) Highest Wind | 68kph (January) Average Wind | 12.5, SE

**Sunshine** Sun max hours: 14.8 (July) Sunshine 2019 total hours: 1039.2 Days with no sun: 81

Fog Days: 15 | Thunder days: 4 | Days with snow: 3 | Days of hail: 17

# Birsay Community Council

## HEADSTONES REINSTATED AT SAINT MAGNUS CHURCH KIRKYARD



The last Community Council meeting was held in October 2019. The next meeting is due to be held on 2 April 2020 in the Birsay Hall 7.30pm–9.30pm.

**BIRSAY COMMUNITY COUNCIL BEARERS:**  
Richie Delday (Chair), Kelly Coghill (Vice Chair), Allan Spence (Planning Rep) and Nerys Phillips (Clerk).

In October 2019, the Birsay Community Council met where local issues and updates were discussed. Local West Mainland Councillor Duncan Tullock updated on the headstone inspection at St Magnus Kirkyard and reported work would be completed by Christmas 2019 to ensure all previously laid flat headstones were safely reinstated.

A new sign made by Linnabreck Vinyls with the mason work carried out by Robbie Rendall, is now in place at Sand Geo Fishermen's Huts, Marwick detailing the history of the Huts and was erected by J & S Hay.

Members of Birsay, Harray and Sandwick Community Councils gave their time to put up the community Christmas Tree in Dounby and assisted in the Tree Lighting evening where both Harvey Johnston and Minister Linda Broadley welcomed everyone and led the event. Pupils from Dounby Community School along with The Kirkwall Town Band and members of the public enjoyed a festive gathering round the Tree.

## WHAT IS THE BIRSAY COMMUNITY COUNCIL?

Community Councils play an important role in local democracy by representing local views which can influence decisions in planning and the provision of local services. The Community Councils provide an effective, strong voice within each community area offering sound, local advice on a range of community issues.

Orkney Islands Council consults and depends on information and views from Community Councils and these are used in shaping local authority policies. Community Councils are regularly consulted by other public agencies on a wide range of community issues.



**FOR MINUTES PLEASE VISIT – [www.orkney.gov.uk/Council/B/Birsay-Community-Council.htm](http://www.orkney.gov.uk/Council/B/Birsay-Community-Council.htm)  
CONTACT RICHIE DELDAY AT – [delday73@gmail.com](mailto:delday73@gmail.com)**



**Dounby Community School**

Thinking • Learning • Community



# Birsay Community Association

## **BINGO NIGHT**

Sunday 19th April

2pm, Birsay Hall

*Afternoon Tea*

## **WHIST & 500**

*Last Tuesday of every month*

## **LUNCH CLUB**

*Every second Wednesday, 2pm in Birsay Hall*



## **PREPERATIONS UNDERWAY FOR 2020 ST MAGNUS MARATHON IN JULY**

This year's Run St Magnus will be held on Sunday the 5th of July. The Marathon, Relay (teams of 3 covering the marathon distance) and 10K are all open for entries at: [www.entrycentral.com/Run-St-Magnus](http://www.entrycentral.com/Run-St-Magnus) The family fun 5K can be entered on the day as usual. The Run St Magnus committee would like to thank the Birsay community for their ongoing support of our event. Anyone keen to get involved, please contact [info@RunStmagnus.org](mailto:info@RunStmagnus.org) or find us on our Facebook.



**Birsay**



**SWI**

**£1200+ RAISED FOR CHARITY**

The cancelled Xmas Bingo was cancelled was rectified with an Extra Special Xmas Bingo which was held on Friday 6th December 2019 by the Birsay SWI. The event was extremely well attended with a very generous amount of £1247.88 raised on the night for Clan Orkney, MacMillan Orkney and Cancer Research. The ladies of the Birsay SWI would like to thank everyone who attended and made the evening a success.



## **NEWS FROM DOUNBY SCHOOL**

The younger children's end of term concert was held last month (picture 1) and a Singathon was held in Dounby, outside the Coop on Thursday, 19th December when we raised £205 for Orkney Charitable Trust, where the children took turns, class, by class to sing over the course of the afternoon, and then for the last session all sang together (picture 2). Westray Class (P6) made a CD of their own songs, and each received a copy of the CD (picture 3).

## JOIN THE BARONY MILL TEAM IN 2020 TOUR GUIDES AND VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

FANCY something new in 2020? The Birsay Heritage Trust are open to anyone interested in joining our summer team. From May to September we are open seven days a week to the public for guided tours and visitors. To do this, we depend on a team of volunteers and tour guides. We have a variety of tasks from shop and admission duties to tour guiding and welcome any commitment, large or small! Training and a warm welcome are guaranteed. If you are interested please contact Issy Grieve on



### MILLING AHEAD WELL INTO 2020

Barony Miller Ali Harcus, pictured left, feeding the flame to the kiln with leftover scrubs, or chaff, to dry the Bere grain which must be turned hourly until the correct moisture. Milling will continue to take place up to May when the Mill will reopen to the public for tours. You can now purchase Beremeal online and delivered to your door at [baronymill.com](http://baronymill.com)

## BEREMEAL TOP CHRISTMAS INGREDIENT – THE GUARDIAN

Beremeal found itself in a prestigious place in The Guardian's Top 20 Christmas Recipes part of a treacle sodabread by London based chef Jeremy Lee. Inspired by the *Book of Bere: Orkney's Ancient Grain*, Lee who owns the Quo Vadis restaurant in Soho, London is one of many new customers to the Barony Mill from the UK capital.

**Makes a 20cm round loaf**

Self-raising flour 115g	
Beremeal 85g, plus extra for dusting	sea salt ¼ tsp
Baking powder 1 tsp	Bicarbonate soda ½ tsp
Black treacle 30g	Honey 30g
Butter 45g, melted	Buttermilk 150ml



# SPURWHEEL TRANSFORMATION

The Barony Mill transforms each autumn from a visitor attraction to what it was built for, food production. Before the milling season begins there are usually a few maintenance and repair jobs to be undertaken and this year was no different – but as *Tommy Matches* reports, a unique transformation took place to the Mill's spurwheel in October.

A task which has been on the back burner for a few years owing to its perceived difficulty became more urgent, the replacement of the wooden cogs of the spurwheel; all 112 of them. With production of Beremeal increasing yearly the decision was taken and investigation made into what was involved, timber type and such like. Fruit wood such as apple and pear were traditionally used but being in short supply in Birsay we used beech as per the original teeth.

The job went fairly well and it was with relief when the water went on the millstones turned. The stones were lifted as usual, cleaned and re-set. One pair required new bushes fitted to the bed stone along with a meal seal. The thrust washers, which are old pennies, were replaced to two sets of stones at the same time so all should be in good condition for many more kilos of Beremeal.

A big thank you is due to one of our trustees. Anne Mathieson, who has been busy carving wooden spoons from the removed cogs which have sold like hot Bere bannocks to raise funds to help finance repairs and improvements. *Birsay Heritage Trust – Recycling and water power, helping to save our planet.*



The new and old wooden teeth from the Barony Mill pictured above with a hand carved spoon by Anne Mathieson recycled from an old tooth.

***Heat the oven to 190C/gas mark 5 and oil a baking tray. Sift the dry ingredients into a mixing bowl.***

***Melt treacle, honey and butter together, but do not boil, then pour into the dry ingredients. As deftly as possible, mix in buttermilk to make a soft dropping consistency.***

***Scrape onto the middle of the baking tray and dust with extra beremeal. Shape into a round and cut a deep cross in the top with a long bladed knife.***

***Bake for 25 minutes until risen and firm. Cool on a wire tray. This is best eaten freshly baked.***

## From Northside to Southside...



### **BIRSAY'S LINDA AND KENNY ROSS WRITE ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE RECENTLY RETURNED FROM THE FALKLANDS**

In 2011, Kenny was given the opportunity to go to the Falklands to work for FIGAS (Falkland Islands Government Air Service). FIGAS operate 5 Britten Norman Islanders: the same aircraft which Loganair operates in the North Isles. Although he had been asked to go back in the intervening years it had never fitted in but having retired in August he was pleasantly surprised when an invitation popped into our in box. So off we set for 8 weeks – we flew on a RAF chartered plane which is primarily for military personnel with some civilian passengers leaving from RAF Brize Norton near Oxford to RAF Mount Pleasant, on route you have a 2 hour stopover in Cape Verdi. In total the journey takes about 19 hours.

Stanley is set on a hill with the harbour at the bottom of the hill, the houses and roofs are all multi-coloured. Islanders drive 4 x 4's, Land Rovers are king – this is a necessity as although the roads in Stanley are tarred, beyond that roads are gravel or tracks over peat bogs Islanders are a combination of British decent, originating from sheep farmers and other settlers who came to the islands of their volition and from seafarers who arrived and never left and in recent years people from St Helena, Chile and the Philippines.

The islands economy is based mainly on fishing licences, sheep farming and latterly tourism. The weather was very mixed it was supposed to be late spring/ early summer but we were told it was the worst summer since they started weather recording – it felt very like Orkney but we did have a few stunning days of weather.

Before we visited all I really knew about the Falklands was anything I remembered from the Falklands War in 1982: it was quite something to visit places like Tumbledown, Fitzroy, Goose Green, San Carlos and most poignantly Blue Beach where the British Task Force first landed during the conflict and now where one of the war cemeteries is situated.

Kenny arranged a helicopter flight to the rookeries at Volunteer Point to see King, Gentoo and Magellanic Penguins, not something I was particularly excited about because I am not a very happy flyer at the best of times and particularly when I saw the size of the very small helicopter, but as we walked among these wonderful creatures all in their own colony's and who appeared so relaxed at our close proximity even I had to admit the flight was worth it.

As those of you who know Kenny will be well aware Birsay is never far from his thoughts even from over 8000 miles away. On the island there is a totem pole situated outside Stanley set up by individuals who came to the islands after 1982 to repair the damage following the war – it is covered with signs detailing all the places in the world they came from and were missing, over the years tourists have kept up the tradition. He was very determined that he would add his own sign which is now in evidence for everyone to see.

***Our warmest thanks to Linda and Kenny Ross for sharing their experience to the Roond About Birsay newsletter.***



# BIRSAY FARMERS GATHERING

## MARTY HAY LOOKS BACK ON A BUSY PERIOD FOR BIRSAY'S FARMERS GATHERING – NEW MEMBERS VERY WELCOME!

Our Gatherings continue to be well supported with between 35 and 45 folk attending, but there is plenty room for more, so if you haven't attended before and you have any connection with agriculture, whether now or in the past, feel free to come along for a yarn and a grand night oot!

Meetings started again in October with Rhona Ley giving a very interesting talk on her study of calf still births and early deaths up to 48 hours old. Some calves are even born with pneumonia that can result in death. You will have to forgive me for not having too many details as I was on holiday and missed this meeting, but by all accounts it was fascinating and informative. Rhona is continuing her study again this spring calving season with some farmers helping her by keeping records of any still births and early deaths, reporting to her, then she will carry out a post mortem on them. So hopefully with this information it will allow for better management of pregnant cows and live born calves.

In November we held a Matter of Opinion with Billy Scott, Kevan Harvey, Peter Moss and David Scarth making up the panel, and myself chairing the debate. We gathered a lot of questions from the folk as they came into the hall, we got through most of the very varied topics before supper time. Questions were of course about Brexit, farming, politics, veganism, renewable energy to name but a few, although the panel were farmers, or involved in the industry, they didn't always have the same opinion which made for some entertainment, but it was all light hearted banter. What I took away was the positive attitude for the future in agriculture, especially from the younger members of the panel. The yarning continued over supper which as usual was fantastic.

The supper that we get every night at the hall after our meeting deserves a mention, special thanks to Ruth and Sandy Rosie for providing it. Traditional Orkney fayre, tea and coffee with bannocks and cheese followed by homebakes. Not forgetting the ladies who help ensure that everything runs like clockwork, thanks to Issy, Greer, Phyllis, Sheena and Margaret.

Our December meeting was held in the Barony Hotel and with a change of venue came a change of procedure, as we had our Christmas meal of mince and clapsot, tea, coffee and shortbread first, followed by the entertainment. It was an extremely fascinating talk and slide show by Martin Gray about a boat trip he made back in 2007 following the route that Ernest Shackleton took in 1914, setting off just days after the outbreak of WW1, on his ill-fated attempt to reach the South Pole. They started from the bottom of the Falkland Islands, (which looked very like Orkney, especially Sanday), on to South Georgia, and then to Elephant Island off the southern tip of Cape Horn. Martin told his story enthusiastically, as if he had just returned yesterday. The photos of the land and seascapes were breath taking, also the wild life close ups were amazing. The talk seemed to be over in no time and everyone agreed over a beer or two later that we could have listened to him speak for a while longer. But as they say you should always leave the audience wanting more, so on that note I'll stoop for now with a quick reminder that the January meeting is on Friday 24th with Keith Eunson, Braebuster, Deerness. February date tbc, with a farmer from sooth on a Monday night. March meeting, which will be the last of the season, on the 13th, with Richard Herdman.



# Councillor Chat



*Roond About Birsay are pleased to introduce the Councillor Chat feature back into the newsletter. Each edition we will hear from one of the West Mainland's four elected representatives on the Orkney Islands Council.*

## “ Councillor Rachael King



When Jack asked me to write a contribution for the newsletter on key council news and things of importance to the West Mainland, I had a familiar thought – what could I possibly write that you would want to read to the end? I remembered a similar thought when asked to write a piece for the unveiling of the St Magnus Way marker in Dounby. What life has eventually taught me (or rather what has taken me time to learn), is that if you are going to say anything, trust your instinct and make sure it comes from the heart if you expect anyone to listen?

So this is not a piece on the workings of the council, if interested you can read that on the website, committee reports or will have heard it already on the radio or in the paper. This is a piece about what sits behind all that... more a 'thought for the day'.

Sitting down to pen this piece, I found myself thinking of an interview on Radio Orkney with the Chief Inspector in the early hours where, after listing the formal practicalities of flooding such as road closures and cars parked within the flood defence area, he ended his interview with a request that people take a moment to think about the more vulnerable members of the community who may need assistance with sand bags or of moving out of their homes to places of safety. Something in the way he spoke invited me not just to hear but to act. I checked my watch, put down my pen and called a friend.

As elected members, we are limited by our own experiences, will inevitably have blind spots in our knowledge and even at times loose perspective in the myriad of issues that we are asked to consider. But we have something very special - a community that will 'take a moment' to think not just about themselves –

but about each other, and will find a way to ensure that this is communicated in a way that can be heard.

In looking back, there have been numerous times in the past year when either a comment or conversation, at a community council or on the street, a phone call in the evening or weekend, an email or letter, has provided an opportunity to really listen. This may have been about childcare, about wind turbines, about support for learning, about buses, about mental health, about mortgages for the fishing industry, about caring for older or younger family members, about geese, about toilets, about waste, about the way in which we have all lost the ability to drive in a way that keeps others safe... about so many things. But as elected members, we cannot do what you ask us to do without your help.

So thank you to everyone who has taken a moment of their time to communicate things that are important to our community and I wish you all a very happy, thoughtful and communicative New Year.

Rachael ””

## News from the Kirk...

On September 8th, Jo Philby and Elaine Grieve held a late afternoon concert in the kirk. The small audience was treated to a fine selection of music accompanied by the gentle humorous camaraderie between the musical duo making the audience feel very included. Jo and Elaine entertained with some well known pieces as well as some beautiful new works. We look forward to hosting this talented duo again.



The event 'Fit as a Fiddle' was hosted by Robin Barr and his wife Anne in the kirk on Sunday 13th October. Talk about fit as a fiddle, if you can play a fiddle and dance up the aisle at the same time then you truly are. This was a great event and much enjoyed by a good audience. With photos, music and stories of Orcadians he met on his journey in 2018, Robin told of his excursions to play his fiddle tunes in a secret cave, at the site of an ancient fire ritual, in a Viking castle and many more adventures, as well as a strathspey and reel played at the highest cliff in Britain looking down upon the Old Man of Hoy. The evening was a relaxed one for everyone except Anne, whose carefully and faultless powerpoint accompaniment of stunning photos had been affected by her laptop rebooting earlier in the day. Technical nightmare! However it all came right in the end and Anne must be commended for keeping her cool.

On the 24th of October the church hosted one of the events of the 2019 Orkney Storytelling Festival. This annual event is part of The Orcadian Story Trust. This was just the ticket for the long darker nights. This year the theme of the stories centred around Planet Earth. The guest storytellers are rooted in creation stories from three continents: North America, Europe and Africa. Fran Flett Hollinrake introduced the evening by telling a lovely tale about the northern lights before introducing our first guest Robert Seven Crows Bourdon from Quebec. He has travelled the world with his stories and songs. Next up was Gordon MacLellan, known as Creeping Toad who has spent many years working as a poet, storyteller and children's entertainer. Gordon's stories are fun lively and pack a powerful message environment.

Rounding off the first half was Mara Menzies. Mara is a Scottish-Kenyan storyteller with a rich heritage of stories. All three guests complimented each other. After a short interval Tom Muir, Orkney's well known Orcadian storyteller, set the mood with Assipattle and the Stoorworm. The other guests by this time had decided to change their planned repertoire and choose another tale to tell. The second half was seamless and rounded a perfect evening. This event is a delight for the whole family and I would recommend you go along to an event at next year's festival if you can. The next event planned in St Magnus Church is the annual St Magnus Day Service on the evening of Wednesday 16th April. This year's theme is Magnus's journey down the West Coast of Scotland and Wales. Come along and celebrate the life of St Magnus and have a cup of tea afterwards.

Should you wish to view the church for an event or with visitors please get in touch with Duncan Tullock (721 215) and arrangements can be made. Spring and Summer months the church will be open daily from 9am to 6pm.



# IN 2020

## WE'RE GOING ONLINE TO HELP THE PLANET

In light of local, national and global efforts to protect the environment, the Birsay Community Council has decided to make the Roond Aboot Birsay newsletter available online following this edition to cut our down paper usage and pollution associated with delivery. Paper copies of the newsletter will now be available on request only. To request a paper copy, please email [birsayroondabout@gmail.com](mailto:birsayroondabout@gmail.com) or complete the form below. Roond Aboot Birsay will now be available to read online at [www.birsay.org.uk](http://www.birsay.org.uk) quarterly.



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