

Hebridean Hostellers

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

Newsletter 57

April 2015



Good Company and Kit at Berneray

The Chairman Observes

Peter Clarke writes: 'The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust (GHHT) has always been a rather special voluntary organisation. We employ no staff. So all the decisions made by Trustees have to be carried out by them. All Trustees are volunteers who offer their time, talents and skills to the organisation freely. This volunteer effort is a vital ingredient in maintaining the unique atmosphere (the 'Gatliff difference') at our hostels. It keeps our overheads and overnight charges down; it means that hostellers are running the hostels for other hostellers.

This is also why we ask members to get more involved. There is, of course, plenty to do at the hostels. Work-parties in the islands are organised by John Joyce. They involve hard work but provide an enjoyable and satisfying opportunity for members to get hands on with running a youth hostel.

We also have volunteering opportunities which do not entail doing physical labour at the hostels. There is plenty to do behind the scenes which can be done from members' own homes. All you need is a knowledge of, and a commitment to, the hostels. Contact me (details on last page) if you would like to help in this way.

Ours is a worthy cause. We are providing hostel accommodation in partnership with islanders to a sound basic standard. Our goal is to provide hostellers, including young people of limited means, with the opportunity to stay a while to get to know, and maybe come to love, the unique culture and natural environment of the islands. There is every incentive to linger and mesh in with local life. And what better environment for young people to blow away the cobwebs, to get the pressures of modern life into perspective and to meet others of like mind?'

The Howmore Appeal

The Howmore Fund is now approaching £32,000 thanks to a steady flow of donations in the past six months. The end is in sight. Thank you all donors, especially to Vanessa Johnson who in October ran the Great Scottish 10K Run 2014 for the Appeal. Her sponsorship raised £367, a fantastic effort!

Housekeeper

We welcome back our 'Housekeeper' - Meg Richards. Meg served as a GHHT Trustee for a while during which time she took on this role. Meg has now returned, though not as a Trustee. She will keep the Committee up to date on how to improve the 'creature comforts' for hostellers in respect of such items as bedding, soft furnishings and kitchen equipment. Already we have acted on Meg's recommendation and ordered new beds, chairs and tables for Berneray. There is more to follow!

GHHT AGM - Saturday 25 July 2015 – 10.30
YHA St Pancras Euston Road London

Business Plan

The Executive Committee held its Spring planning meeting at Berwick-upon-Tweed Youth Hostel. Discussion focused on the five-year business plan, what our objectives should be this year, next year and beyond. A series of action plans are being drawn up, with plenty of opportunities for more members to get involved.

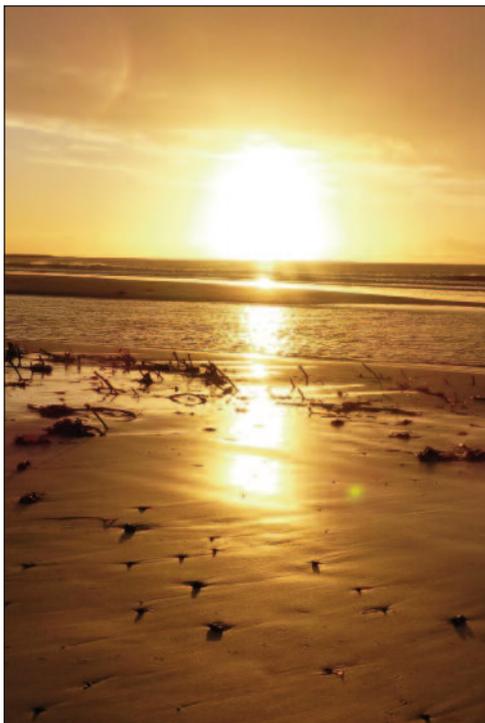
In early September the Executive will be touring the islands, visiting each of the hostels and meeting all the wardens to discuss our plans. We also look forward to linking up with members and supporters in the islands.

Hostel Overnight Charges

We put up our charges from 1st January 2015. This is the first increase for three years. The Adult overnight-fee rises to £14 and £9 for camping. The Under 18 overnight fee rises to £8. We have increased our charges to help us cope with the inexorable rise in costs, especially our heating bills.

New Addresses

If you move, please remember to notify us of your change of address. This is important to us as we want to keep you on the mailing list for our newsletters. We also need your current address if you have signed a Gift Aid. Under new arrangements introduced by HMRC, we have to report the address of donors when we lodge our claim for the Income Tax paid.



An AGM Opportunity

The GHHT AGM will be held on Saturday 25 July at 10.30 (coffee from 10.00) at the YHA, St Pancras, London. The hostel is opposite St Pancras International Station at 79 -81 Euston Road London NW1 2QE. Kings Cross / St Pancras is a hub for national and international rail links and the largest interchange on the Underground network, with six tube lines converging. Hostel accommodation is available at a reasonable price. Why not have a London weekend? Book now!

Howmore Work-Party

Frances Passey reports: I reached Howmore as daylight was fading, one afternoon last November. Other members of the work-party were there, the wood burning stove was glowing, and Eddie was busy preparing a meal. He likes cooking and always comes with his kit and ingredients, ready to produce delicious meals.

The atmosphere is relaxed - John Joyce's long list of jobs is seldom completed! Rob had electrical work to do, John, Eddie and Stuart undertook concreting, roofing and guttering repairs outside, dodging the frequent showers. I was inside, painting or varnishing frames, walls and doors in the kitchen, shower and toilet.

Towards the end of the week, Eddie, Rob and John went off to work at the other hostels. John returned on Friday as he, Stuart and I were leaving early the following morning. Stuart and I decided we needed time off, so took the short walk to the beautiful sandy beach, which stretches for miles, and watched the glorious sunset which appears overleaf..

The hostel looked better after our efforts. If you fancy joining the Spring or Autumn work-parties, then please email johnejoyce@hotmail.com



On the Road to the Isles ...

The SYHA has recently opened a brand-new 60-bed hostel in Portree. By chance our Chairman, Peter Clarke, was the first paying-guest. He took refuge there on a wet and windy night on his way to the Western Isles, after the evening boat to Lochmaddy was cancelled. Do try it on your next visit to the islands. The hostel is warm and well-appointed, with kitchens and common rooms. It is conveniently located for the bright lights of Portree and for buses to Uig or to the Skye Bridge, the mainland and Inverness. There is free parking in the hostel grounds.

... and at Uig

The SYHA has sold its hostel at Uig. Refurbishment is taking place, an opening date is to be announced and its new owners will welcome you. So be ready to enjoy the view of the bay, with the silhouette of the Outer Hebrides on the horizon, knowing that you can catch a CalMac ferry to Lochmaddy (for Berneray and Howmore) and Tarbert (for Rhenigidale). From 20 April - 18 May 2015, ferries to Stornoway will be available while the Ullapool linkspan is improved for the new MV *Loch Seaforth*.

Walks from the Hostels

The GHHT publication, *Walks from the Reinigeadal Hostel* by Neil Pinkett, was first published in 2000 and continues to be at hand, in rucksacks, on shelves and in stock. It focuses on a variety of places in that section of North Harris and there is no comparable guide. Preparations are underway for there to be two web-based compilations of walks for the areas around Howmore and the island of Berneray. Please let the Editor know of any applicable favourite routes that you have so that they can be included. The new long-distance footpath from the Butt of Lewis to Vatersay needs a series of hubs to create a different kind of interest. Walking can be a singular pursuit or a shared pleasure.



Soon to be Fifty

Herbert Gatliff first visited the Outer Hebrides in 1947 and 15 years later had demonstrated his enthusiasm for small hostels with the opening of Rhenigidale. Then 50 years ago he went even more remote and smaller with the creation of the relatively short-lived hostel on Scarp. In 1966, with the assistance of Frank Martin, came the establishment of Howmore. It was owned by the MacSween family and long-standing connections were started by Mrs Catherine MacSween, the first warden, who passed the role to her daughter, Betty MacDonald, the current warden. So next year marks a significant anniversary and the GHHT Trustees will be pleased to receive suggestions of how this could be celebrated. Recent modernisation of the buildings and the fund-raising to enable this, have been well-received. So should its half-century.

MV *Loch Seaforth* in Service

Hostellers wanting to make a sea-crossing to the Outer Hebrides face a choice in the Summer months. They can arrive from the south on sailings from Oban; take the road to Skye and services from Uig; or journey to Ullapool and take the newest member of the CalMac fleet. The MV *Loch Seaforth* was built in Germany and after extensive trials started on the Stornoway service in mid-February 2015. It is capable of 24-hour operating, is greener and faster than other vessels and was named after the MacBrayne's mailboat launched in 1947, an important time for Herbert Gatliff. He could well have travelled on the original *Seaforth*.

Annie MacKillop (1920 - 2014)

Annie MacKillop was born, together with her younger identical twin, Jessie, on Berneray, an island then connected to North Uist by ferry and not causeway. After schooling, she entered domestic service in Glasgow and the Clyde Valley, but eventually lived for many years with her widowed sister. Annie and Jessie became wardens of the hostel in 1978 and continued until the Spring of 1996.

They were assiduous in collecting overnight fees and kept a close eye on the hostel from their home with a pair of binoculars discreetly stationed on the window sill. Despite their, at times, stern demeanour, they had playful temperaments. One of their innocent games traded on their identical looks. They were also very hospitable, often engaging in light-hearted chat over cups of tea with hostellers.

During the last two years of her life, some while after Jessie's death in April 2009, Annie moved to Trianaid, a local care home. It was obvious that the hostel had meant a lot to her. On her door was a photograph of the building. On her shelf, the two figurines the Trust had given the sisters to mark their retirement.

On the wall of her room was a picture of Jessie taken during the last re-thatching of the Macleod Gunnery. Jessie has twisted a sheaf of marram bent around her body as if it were a grass skirt. With a large smile on her face she is demonstrating the Berneray grass skirt! The GHHT owes much to the MacKillop sisters.

David Seddon (1936 - 2012)

David William Seddon, who left a legacy of £20,000 in 2014 to the GHHT, was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, grew up in Barking and did National Service in the RAF. He was stationed in Fife, had the opportunity to travel extensively in Scotland, particularly by train and cycle, and developed a lifetime love of the land. After studying at the London School of Economics, he qualified as an accountant and lived at Blackheath in South London. Numerous trips north were made to the Highlands & Islands. He enjoyed collecting bus and tram tickets from around the world and specialised in those of the Scottish bus operators.

Alec Chisholm (1922 - 2014)

Professor Alec Chisholm, from Prestbury, near Macclesfield, had an affinity for sailing, particularly in the west of Scotland, and for small hostels, particularly for Cumbria's Black Sail Hut, England's loneliest youth hostel. He was a former President of CIRP, an international academy for Production Engineering, and a Director of CIRP UK from 1991 until 2010. His interests extended to the Gatliff Hostels. We have received a legacy of £10,000 from Alec.

Gin-and-Tonic Moments

Jill Jones & Mike Vardy respond: Thank you for the newsletter of the Crofters' hostels. It is a couple of years since we spent the summer in the Outer Hebrides - but certainly intend to head that way this year and use all three hostels. A couple of anecdotes always come to mind when we see pictures of the hostels.

Berneray: the hot summer (in the Hebrides) of 2012. Partner Mike and I, both retired and away from home for six weeks, sitting on a seat outside the hostel in the morning sun. A slightly younger couple passed us carrying their gear and heading for their car and the ferry back to work. "So how much longer are you two intending to stay in paradise?" was their parting quip, with not a little envy creeping into their body language.

Howmore: a few years earlier. Another sunny spell, Mike and I had been joined by his teenage son. After two weeks camping and walking we decided a rest day would be a good idea. No one else was staying in the hostel, so I spent the day cleaning and doing the washing. At one point we were all outside in the sun and Mike was playing folk music on his fiddle. Son Tom was sitting on a bench reading and I had sleeves rolled up, arms in a bowl full of soapy water and washing. Then a coach drew up and out piled large numbers of tourists, many from North America. They trooped past the hostel towards the ruins. We smiled and said hello and continued with our activities. As the group headed back to the coach one chap (had they appointed him as their spokesperson?) asked in a broad American accent "Gee, is this a re-enactment and can we look around the homestead?"

Garenin: on our last visit to this lovely hostel. Just a few other visitors were staying. On our third or fourth day we came home mid-evening from a lovely walk interrupted by an afternoon on the beach because it was so hot. Several more people had arrived at the hostel, but it was still relatively quiet. We prepared some supper, then took our gin and tonics outside to the seat which had its back against the hostel and faced the sunset. To our surprise the seat was not occupied. We settled down to watch the sun dip into the sea. A few minutes later one of the newly-arrived hostellers came along. "You must be Jill and Mike," he said and introduced himself. When asked how he knew our names, he said "Oh, the others said I couldn't sit on that seat because Jill and Mike would need to sit there when they had their gin and tonic".

Happy days! Roll on this summer

Note: the seat on which Jill and Mike sat at Garenin has been relocated to Rhenigidale. Upon learning this Jill tells us that they look forward to another 'Gin and Tonic' moment at Rhenigidale, far from their Devon home.

From the *Hebridean Hostellers Issue of Five Years Ago*

'The retirement of Liz Gatliff as a Trustee of our parent trust, the Gatliff Trust, was noted and a tribute to her concluded, 'She looks forward to observing how the present committee members continue to pursue her father's interest.' (Editor: John Humphries) [*The genes of Herbert continued to be evident*]

and of Ten Years Ago ...

'A permanent exhibition (on Arthur Meaby) is being prepared for display at the Lea Valley Youth Hostel at Cheshunt in Hertfordshire. Arthur was involved with the planning of this new hostel, opened in 2002, within a park of 10,000 acres that is relatively close to the capital.' (Editor: John Humphries) [*There was a permanence about his work for the Gatliff Hostels*]

and Fifteen

'It is with great regret that the GHHT announces its withdrawal from the project to create a 20-bed youth hostel at the old school, Brevig, Isle of Barra.' (Editor: Jim McFarlane) [*As it turned out, a shrewd move*]

and Twenty ...

'Recent visitors to Lochmaddy will have noticed the refurbishment of a large building situated by the slipway of the old harbour ... now opened as the new Museum and Arts Centre for North Uist.' (Editor: Jim McFarlane) [*Taigh Chearsabagh continues to thrive*]

Twenty-five ...

'Amateur thatcher though he may be, Jim Souness displayed all the opportunism of a true professional in organising the re-thatching of Howmore during a spell of calm, clear and mild weather that marked the first ten days of December.' (Editor: Richard Genner) [*Fortune favours the fearless?*]

... and now Thirty

'Andrew Gannon's work party at Easter took off the thatch and roof timbers (of Berneray). The ceiling of the sitting room collapsed. Later the ceiling of the passageway collapsed.' (Editor: Peter Clarke) [*Berneray is fully intact and thriving*]