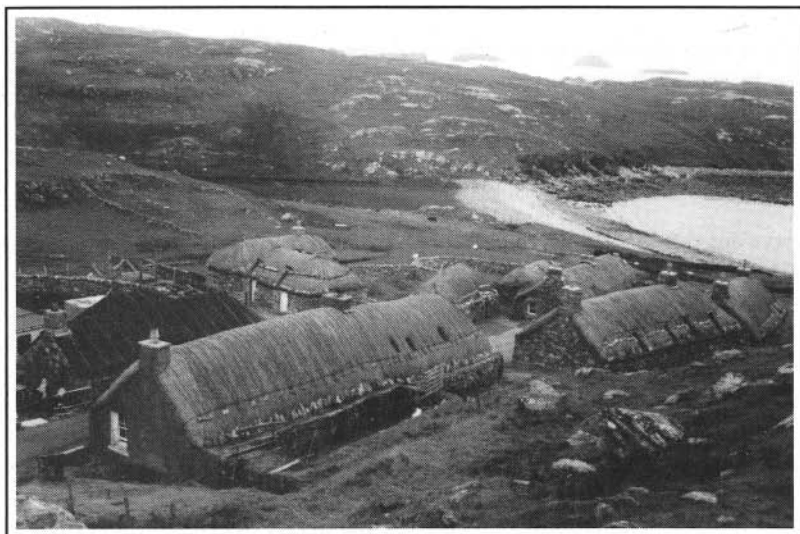




Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

newsletter 31

DECEMBER 2000



Garein Hostel seen recently following completion of the re-thatching work (Photo: Arthur Meaby)

Jim McFarlane stood down from his duties as Newsletter Editor and Maintenance Officer for the GHHT at this year's AGM, on 14th October. I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Trust, to thank Jim for all the hard work he has put into the hostels over the years and to wish him and Sandy all the best for the future.

During the past few months, prior to taking on the task of newsletter editor from Jim, I have received some feedback with regard to the kind of material our members would like to see in these pages in future. More emphasis is placed on the work actually being carried out by the Trust on the hostels and topics discussed at meetings. I hope that this will meet with everyone's approval. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any further ideas and suggestions for future editions.

AGM - 14th October 2000 - Liverpool YH

It was very encouraging indeed to have ten members of the Hebridean Hostellers at the AGM. The cautious decision had been taken to hold the meeting outside of Scotland, choosing instead to host it at the new YHA in Liverpool in order to make it more accessible for members in North West England and North Wales. It is likely that this idea will be repeated for future AGM's.

There was a full discussion on the Annual Report with most questions focusing on the withdrawal from the Barra project and what might happen next. The meeting then discussed the Gatliff Difference.

The quality of the stay at our hostels is now the Committee's top priority, and this is driven by the focus on the Gatliff Difference. But what did members think constituted the Gatliff Difference?

Each member was asked to write down five things which constituted the Gatliff Difference for them. Each individual's thoughts were then collated, the resulting key words and phrases including, to name but a few:

Safe. Character of buildings. Simplicity. In tune with surroundings. Informal. Meet like minded people. Beautiful natural locations. Remoteness. Not commercial. Small, friendly. Price.....

.....and so the list goes on!

Feedback is very important as we plan the direction and future of the hostels. So why not email or write to one of us with your own list of the five most important characteristics which constitute the "Gatliff Difference".

Gift Aid

If you have not yet signed a Gift Aid form please read the following and request a form from Peter Clarke.

Under the Government's new Gift Aid Scheme, which has been introduced from 6 April 2000, the GHHT will be able to reclaim the tax paid on all charitable donations. In the current tax year the amount we can claim is 28 pence per £1 donated. As members do not receive any major benefits in kind from their membership fee, the Trust can also claim the tax paid on membership. (e.g. the £5 membership fee is worth a further £1.40 if this declaration is signed - at no extra cost to you.)

If you pay tax (Income or Capital Gains), would like the GHHT to benefit from this new initiative and have not yet signed a Gift Aid form, please request one. This will enable us to recover UK Tax on any donation in the future and any donation made since 6 April 2000. Gift Aid can be retrospective back to this date.

Deeds of Covenant signed on 6 April 2000 or afterwards are no longer valid for reclaiming income tax. In order for us to reclaim the tax paid on the donation it is necessary for a Gift Aid form to be signed. (All Deeds whether signed before or after 6 April 2000 are still valid in law: the Inland Revenue will continue to allow GHHT to reclaim tax on deeds signed before 6 April 2000.) No new Deeds of Covenant will be issued by GHHT. When existing Deeds expire donors will be asked to sign a Gift Aid Form. A few members did, in fact, send in Deeds signed after 6 April 2000. They will be contacted direct and asked to sign a Gift Aid Declaration.

HOSTEL MAINTENANCE FOR 2000

Berneray - As many visitors to Berneray this year have been all too aware the shower has been out of action since last December. The problem arose through overloading the power supply to the annex. The original cable was not designed to support a shower and storage heaters. As a consequence the fuses were tripping out every time the shower was used! The installation of a separate mains supply to the annex itself has now been carried out by the Hydro Board, so providing adequate capacity. All being well, the shower should now be back in full working order!

It has also become increasingly apparent that the thatch on both buildings is reaching the end of its life, particularly on the annex. It is hoped that both roofs will be re-thatched during 2001, for which substantial contributions have been very kindly donated by the relatives and friends of Len Westerdale (see HH 30) and Bill Johnson. The Seven Pillars of Wisdom and Gordon Fraser Trusts have also agreed to contribute. Our grateful thanks go to those concerned as this support is much appreciated. In addition it is planned that the landward end of the annex will be dug out of the sand dunes. The dual benefits of this work will be keeping the damp out of the end wall and the sheep off of the roof!

Garenin - The thatching work is now complete thanks to the master craftsman Jim Crawford. Until 50 years ago thatching was done communally, and as part of the crofting yearly cycle. Barley thatch was cut and the grain stored in autumn for milling. The time for thatching was autumn. This is one thing we have been able to do according to tradition.

Jim Crawford who lives on Lewis is one of the very few who can do it well. Jim also worked on the "big" contract in Garenin for the big builder, so he has thatched about six houses this year.

The work done to the hostel includes checking the old felt and wall head, fitting battens to alter the change in level in the roof of the building, and then putting the thatch on the roof with a net over the top and roping down the thatch with stones. Put that way it sounds easy. A doddle. Anyone could do that. Well they did in the past and when you glance at the building nothing jumps at you because it all fits together. It looks right. Then when you look at the work carefully you start to notice the details of how the straw and the net, the rope and the stone sit on the walls. It's a work of art, and we have now got a hat that fits a hostel. The hostel is also a lot warmer.

Matt Bruce

Howmore - Progress with the renovation of the old hostel has been a little slow up until now, though there are now more promising signs apparent. The roof had its thatch applied by Brian Wilson, our contractor, during early Autumn. This brings the original hostel building a step closer to seeing life inside its walls again. Due to a shortage of marram bent in the islands heather has been used for the thatch. This is a traditional thatching material but used more rarely than marram. It was particularly nice to hear that the building was 'launched' with a traditional ceilidh attended by many of the local people and the hostel echoing to the sound of bagpipes and banjos! This included the burning of the waste heather. Unfortunately the Autumn weather prevented any good photos being available of the completed roof. However, the picture, above right, shows the timbers in place prior to the thatch being applied.



Howmore hostel seen earlier this year complete with new roof timbers (Photo: Arthur Meaby)

Rhenigidale - Over the course of the year some work has been carried out here with regard to raising the standard of the hostel within the criteria of the STB Hostel Grading Scheme. This includes new light fittings in the kitchen, a hot water heater in the toilet/washroom, curtains in the dormitories and new floor coverings in the kitchen, toilet and dormitories. In addition the common room now has new chairs to replace the life expired benches at the table, and the kitchen has been recently furnished with a fridge and microwave. These are each relatively small additions but together help towards making the visitor's stay at the hostel a little more comfortable.

One outstanding issue is the shower, which is awaiting refurbishment. It is hoped that the use of a plastic shower base will be replaced by a purpose built masonry base with non-slip tiles.

GHHT Website

The GHHT website is now up and running and can be found at 'www.gatliff.org.uk'. Initial reaction has been very encouraging. The pages will be continually improved and updated over the coming months. Our thanks go to Hugh Lorimer for all the excellent work which he is putting into this particular project. Anyone with ideas and inspiration for the website should contact myself at the address overleaf.

Toddun Visitors Book - Mystery Solved!

As has been mentioned in previous newsletters the visitors book on the summit of Toddun, by Rhenigidale, had gone missing some time ago. Readers will be pleased to know that I can now bring a happy end to this strange tale. On my visit to Rhenigidale in July, during which I installed a new book on top of the mountain, it became apparent that a few weeks previously a man from Stornoway called on Alasdair with a bag containing a very tired looking visitors book. Some months beforehand, whilst out walking, he had found it on the mountain in a pretty bad state and soaking wet so had taken it home to dry it out - and then inadvertently forgotten about it!

The book is now in safe hands and I hope eventually to publish some of its curious tales on the GHHT website.

Volunteer Work to help GHHT

GHHT is a truly volunteer organisation. We have no full time paid staff. (In recent years we have paid a small amount for admin/finance backup.) All members of the Executive Committee, including the Chairman and Secretary/Treasurer are volunteers who carry out the work as a labour of love. We love the hostels and the islands.

The fact that we are a volunteer based organisation means we keep our overheads low. It is also a vital ingredient in maintaining the "Gatliff Difference". But fulfilling the responsibilities of delivering a service at four locations in the islands to the standard laid down by the STB Hostel Grading scheme, not to mention completing projects such as Howmore, a growing membership and increasing interest in developing a GHHT web site, define new requirements for volunteer effort.

We need a lot of "making it happen", project management, sort of skills. We also need administrative skills. We need enthusiastic input to think through and deliver the Gatliff Difference. It would be excellent if people came forward to organise events at the hostels - how about a musical weekend to welcome the spring at Berneray hostel or a few days walking from Howmore hostel? Our hostels can become living windows on Hebridean life and culture if a few knowledgeable hostellers were willing to come forward.

There is still a need for volunteer effort at the hostels. There is nothing like the companionship and sense of satisfaction experienced on a work party involving physical effort which makes a real difference at the hostels. Painting and 'spring cleaning' are the major physical tasks to be carried out at all the hostels. Volunteers could, for example, clear cobwebs from roof beams, give kitchens and toilets a really thorough clean, and clean down grubby walls or surfaces at least twice a year at most hostels. These are not the most popular or glamorous jobs but they add a lot to the enjoyment hostellers get from their stay.

For some time we have recognised that a balance has to be maintained in work parties between the "work" and the "party". Five is the maximum viable number. Easter and September (beginning and end of the season) are the best times for work parties. Lone volunteers, or in pairs, moving from hostel to hostel, or staying at one hostel have sometimes achieved more than a group. They also remove the 'overhead' of having to organise the group; this is often a labour in itself, especially with last minute changes to plan.

But a lot of the thinking/admin/project management work also makes a lot of difference at the hostel, because it doesn't matter how good an idea is, someone has to deliver it!

OTHER NEWS FROM THE ISLANDS

Lingerbay Superquarry Proposal Turned Down

The ten year debate over the plans of Lafarge Redland Aggregates to develop a superquarry at Lingerbay, South Harris, has finally come to an end with the proposal being thrown out by newly appointed Environment Minister for the Scottish Executive, Sam Galbraith. The decision was made on the basis that the "social and economic benefits likely to derive from the proposed development do not clearly outweigh the significant adverse effects on the quality for which the area has been designated (as a National Scenic Area)". Local opinion is one of great disappointment at the loss of what some saw as a potential economic boom for the island. Councillors are now looking to what the future holds for the people of Harris, and are calling for the Comhairle, the Enterprise Agency, Harris Development Ltd and other agencies to work together in providing a future for the island. Lafarge Redland plan to appeal against the decision.

Western Isles make Record Visit at the Dome

A production recently staged at the Millennium Dome by young people from the Western Isles has been praised for its great success, and for attracting a record number of visitors in a single day. Arranged by An Lanntair, and written by Lewisman John Murray, the production was called 'Eileanaich', meaning 'Islanders', and was a celebration of Gaelic language and culture.

walks from the gatliff hostel at reinigeadal - neil pinkett

This beautifully illustrated guide to walking in the Rhenigidale area of North Harris is now available from GHHT at just £3.50 including p+p. Orders should be sent to: **Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust, 30 Francis Street, STORNOWAY, Isle of Lewis, Western Isles, HS1 2ND.**

Cheques should be made payable to '**Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust**'.

The book will also be on sale at Tourist Offices in Tarbert and Stornoway, as well as at Rhenigidale Hostel.

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