

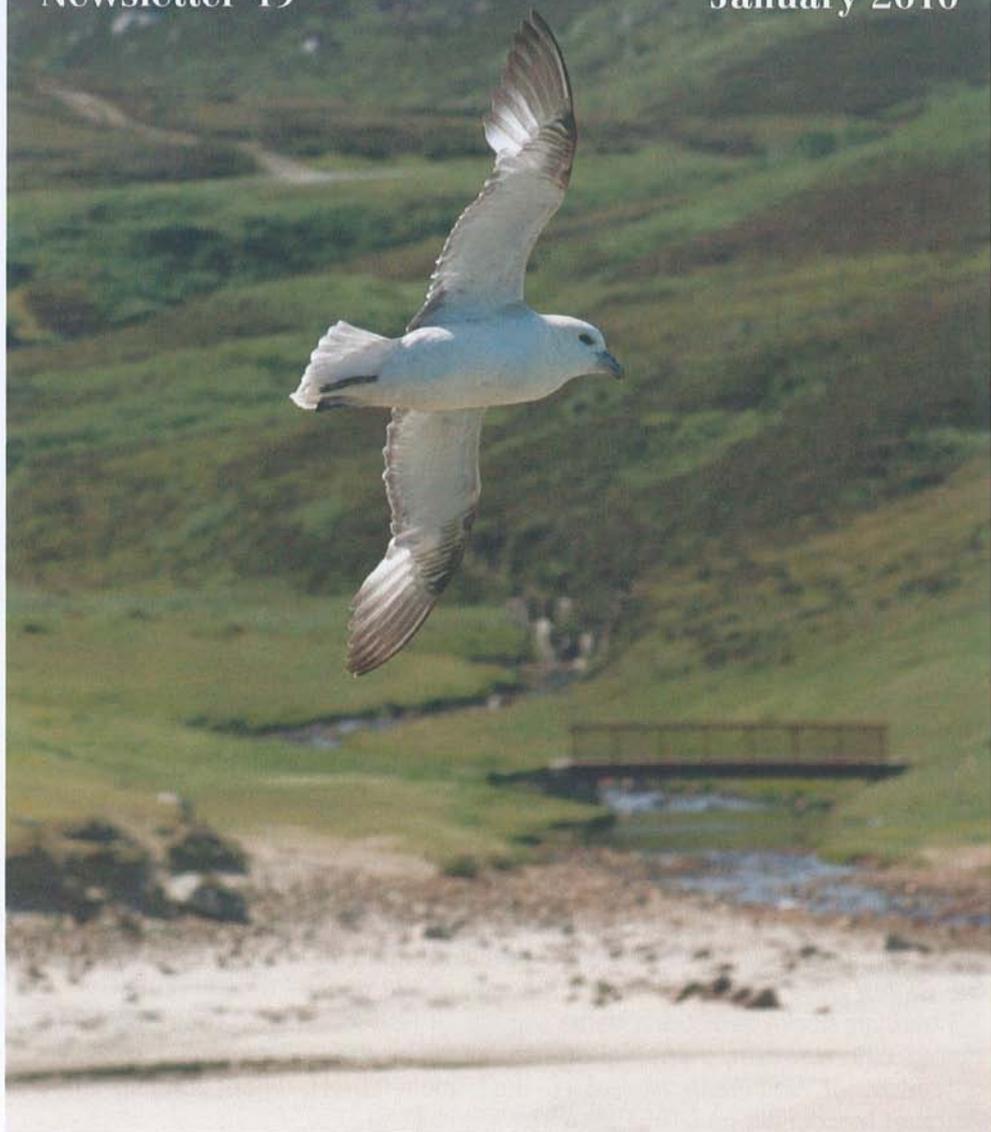
Hebridean Hostellers

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

Newsletter 49

January 2010



A Fulmar's-Eye View of a Beach on Harris

Consider What's On Offer

The Islands Book Trust has announced details of a **record 29 events** organised for 2010 covering Lewis, Harris, Uist, Benbecula, Barra, Skye, and Raasay. Consider the highlights and then check the details at www.theislandsbooktrust.com

- a major international four-day conference - on the Historiography of **St Kilda** - in Benbecula in August to mark the **80th Anniversary of the Evacuation**. This will include a boat trip to St Kilda
- **first-time trips** to the Flannans, Borera (North Uist), and the Eilean Glas light-house on Scalpay
- a **new series of walks** and excursions to historic locations throughout the islands, introduced mainly through the medium of Gaelic
- a visit to the **Grimersta sporting estate** in Lewis following a talk by David Jones
- talks by Professor Donald Meek, Iain Roy, Greta Mackenzie, Ian McHardy, and Ruairidh Maclean on a **wide range of subjects** from Hebridean Shipping Services, Greenland, Patagonia and Callanish to Gaelic on Signs and Maps

Here's an idea – either for personal pleasure or present-giving – in which a series of the IBT's books are purchased. They are linked with a geographical and social thread. The core book is ***Suas Gu Deas*** - in Gaelic and English - by the prize-winning author, Angus Peter Campbell and the leading photographer, Cailean Maclean. Their brilliantly-illustrated account is of a walk down the spine of the Western Isles, from the Butt of Lewis to Barra Head.

Dolly Doctor is a series of photographs, mainly from the 1930s, showing a bygone way of life, in the north-west of Lewis and beyond. ***The Village Names of Lewis*** is a reprint of the 1956 penetrating analysis by Magne Oftedal. He looked at the Old Norse influences, having lived for a time in the Leurboast area of Lewis. ***A Unique and Precious Culture - Dualchas àraid agus prìseil*** considers the Changing Face of South Uist and Eriskay and is based on the photography of Dr Kenneth Robertson. His images capture the liveliness of past, but vibrant, communities.

In ***Calvinism, Literature and the Imagination***, Professor Donald Macleod assesses, in his thought-provoking manner, how the alleged suppression of artistic expression has been misrepresented and has caricatured island attitudes. Many books have been published on the St Kilda group, in which Hirte is the largest island. A 'classic and vivid overview of history and culture' is Mary Harman's ***An Isle Called Hirte***, a well-illustrated hardback of 338 pages

These six books depict and detail aspects of Hebridean life. Their original price totalled £99. However, a **special offer** of all six for £69, postage paid, is available to readers of *Hebridean Hostellers*. Just quote GHHT when ordering through Margaret Macdonald on 01851 880737.

Walk the Walks

The Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society (www.scotways.com) has finalised a map leaflet that will show the longer, more important historic routes throughout Scotland. Its production has been supported by a generous grant from The Gatliff Trust. The cartography is dependent upon a Bartholomew base map through Harper Collins, which now owns the copyright. Its purpose is to provide an historic context for Scotland's longer paths. It is possible to see what historical use the paths have had and how they are linked. The planning of **long distance walks** is aided by being able to see alternative routes.

For those looking for **shorter excursions** within the vicinity of one hostel, there are still copies available of Neil Pinkett's booklet on walking routes around Rhenigidale. One for £3; two for £5; five copies for £10 – all including postage and available from the Editor

Observations and Observance

In 1965 the Revd Angus Smith lay down on the slipway in an unsuccessful attempt to stop vehicles from leaving the then new Sunday ferry from the mainland to Skye. 41 years later, cars could reach Lewis on the Sabbath via the North Uist service to Harris. In 2002 planes used Stornoway airport every day and, back in July 2009, **a Sunday ferry came direct to the town** from Ullapool. One argument used by Cal Mac concerned its being unlawful to discriminate goods and services on grounds of religion and belief.

The community was divided, although observations were made that a secret ballot of islanders would have produced approval for the service objected to by the Lord's Day Observance Society. However, a significant number of individuals with secular views wanted to see the **cultural differences** of Lewis, Harris and North Uist preserved. The social historian and journalist, John Macleod, saw matters in his distinctive way – 'If we were a rare species of corncrake, we'd be up to our neck in legal protection.'

Taming the Wild

A chance encounter on a rain-swept road to Rhenigidale led to **Stephen Graham**, and his girl-friend Hazel, getting a lift to the hostel. They were on a wild-camping expedition, but were persuaded to stay in what is, by comparison, the luxurious accommodation provided by Herbert Gatliff's first establishment. However, two nights later they once more heard 'the call of the canvas' and continued their trek through the islands. Some of their adventures and insights will appear in an article to be published in the March / April 2010 issue of *Scottish Islands Explorer*. Stephen is a journalist who, as they say, took copy from his jaunt.

Conditional Causes

If ... things go according to plan, all our four hostels will be **attracting approval** by the beginning of the British Olympic Year. Berneray is getting accolades now for the roofing work that is completed. Garenin's visitors already feel better with the fitting of a new stove. Rhenigidale's improvements continue to be on-going, while Howmore should see significant new work undertaken and completed within the next two years.

If you can visualise yourself as part of these **refurbishment projects** at the heart of the Gatliff cause, please contact our Project Manager, John Joyce, whose details are listed with the Names and Addresses. A variety of skills is needed – from cleaning work to construction expertise; from strategic planning to finishing touches. One specific task involves nuisance vegetation that has colonised areas close to the Rhenigidale Hostel. Advice and action are needed.

Going Up

By the end of the Summer of 2009 the number of visitors to the Western Isles came to **220,000**, an increase of 11% over the previous year. In fact the figure for August saw a remarkable 15.5% rise. The factors behind this surge were probably the weakness of sterling that attracted overseas travellers and deterred travelling overseas; the lower vehicle fares on the mainland crossings; and the so-called 'staycation' trend to holidaying in the homeland.

More visitors certainly used the Gatliff hostels. The previous record of 6746 overnights achieved in 2006 was within reach after ten months of 2009. The **7000** figure should be attained, but there is, as ever, a downside. The greater the use, the more wear and tear. Maintenance matters will remain constantly on the agenda as, perhaps, a new phase opens, during which Hebridean holidaying becomes genuinely popular.

GAMA Goes On

The work of Laura Helyer, the winner of the 2009 GAMA Award celebrating the achievements of Herbert Gatliff and Angus Macleod, is featured separately. She appropriately chose the achievements of Angus Macleod and the creation of his Collection and Archive as her subject. Her booklet, ***Paper Cairns***, is to be published early in the New Year.

The funding for the 2010 Award has been secured from the Gatliff Trust and the Islands Book Trust. Take a look at www.gama.gatliff.co.uk website and pass on the news that **£2000** worth of accommodation, travel, spending money and publishing is there to be won. It is an attempt to fulfil Herbert Gatliff's vision of encouraging people to take an informed look at the islands that inspired him.

Donald 'Splash' MacKillop (1931 - 2009)

Donald Alick MacKillop (78), who died on 30 July 2009 after a long battle with cancer, was a great supporter of the Gatliff Hostels, in general, and of the Berneray Hostel, in particular. He was known to everyone as 'Splash' – a nickname he claimed to have originated from his love of jumping into puddles as a boy, although islanders have offered different explanations.

Splash lived all his life on **Berneray** and tended a 92-acre arable croft. Although he was rooted in the locality, his



wife, Gloria, came from Australia. Together they ran Burnside Croft as a bed-and-breakfast establishment where visitors from all over the world received great hospitality and shared the genial humour of their host and hostess.

The most famous visitor to the house was the **Prince of Wales** who stayed with the MacKillops in 1987 and learnt some of the crofters' ways by planting potatoes and trees, lifting peat and dipping sheep. The Prince returned in 1991 to make the BBC documentary programme *A Prince Among Islands* with Selina Scott.

Prince Charles found his time there to be both **inspirational and practical**. Some of the techniques learnt on Berneray were transplanted to the workings of his organic farm at Highgrove in Gloucestershire. He was saddened to learn of Splash's death and commented, 'People like him are very hard to replace.'

When the causeway was opened in 1999, many more people arrived to enjoy seeing and staying. Those who ventured down the road to the Community Centre, close to Burnside Croft, were, in one sense, going to a building. In another they would probably see 'Splash', a person who embodied the good-will of the **community** at the **centre** of island-life.

Web Site Upgrade

The Gatliff Hostels website (www.gatliff.org.uk) has benefited from Hugh Lorimer's work on providing an improved web content management system. News items and details of changes can be posted quickly. If you have a **story** which you think would appeal, why not email it to editor@gatliff.org.uk for consideration? The statistics for the site show that around 1500 visits are being made per month and that's in the off-season. When serious planning for the peak-periods takes place, then there will be a large virtual crowd logging on.

A Lifelong Connection

In 1980, three years after the death of **Herbert Gatliff**, his daughter, **Liz**, became a committee member of the Gatliff Trust. She held this position for almost 30 years until deciding to retire in 2009. She admired the ways in which her father had a passion for so many aspects of life and, indeed, has that sense of enthusiasm herself.

She was brought up in Surrey and recalls the accompanied walks on the Downs to which she and her sister became accustomed. Her schooling – both as a boarder and a day-pupil – was for ten years at that most **progressive** of schools, Dartington Hall.

Her first major move was from school in Devon, in 1943, to working in a day nursery in Hackney. The contrasts were marked. Then she trained as a **nurse** and her work in Canada, Australia as well as Britain means that she has been employed in three continents and travelled in all five. Her time as a health visitor in Oxfordshire means that she continues to be recognised long into retirement.

Liz much enjoys the many **sociable** aspects of living in Horley, a village near Banbury. Her much appreciated contributions to the Gatliff Trust have indicated how she is aware of these particular qualities of life and how they have been promoted by the charity founded by her father. She looks forward to observing how the present committee members continue to pursue his interests.

Eighty Years On

It was 80 years ago that the St Kildans' wish to be evacuated was granted. There was relatively little argument about their going. Now there is an argument about where in the Western Isles the **St Kilda Visitors' Centre** is to go. Three possible sites were selected: Cleitreal, in North Uist, the nearest suitable point to the outlying island-group; Leverburgh, South Harris, from which most people now travel and which had close cultural ties; and Mangersta, Lewis, which has the greatest geographical similarities. The appointed consultants have made their choice and gone for the remote Mangersta where the road beyond Uig finally ends. However, it's not the end of the matter for a council decision has still to be made.

Make It Local

The guga, the seafowl caught on Sula Sgeir and landed at Port of Ness, has been called various things despite its unique status. It was recently referred to as 'that horrible bird' by Clarissa Dickson-Wright, the television celebrity cook. Are any of our readers able to provide an opinion, having sampled it? Are there any dishes, local to the hostels, which could be recommended? **Recipes** are welcomed and will, if suitable, be presented on our website.

From the *Hebridean Hostellers* Issue of Five Years Ago

'At the end of 2004 Scotland's largest photovoltaic project was installed at the Sir E Scott School in Tarbert. 120 panels were fitted on the roof to capture **energy** from daylight and to power the solar water heating system.' (Editor: John Humphries) *[New technologies included the first use of colour in this issue of the newsletter]*

and of Ten Years Ago

'There is serious debate taking place at the moment to **change** the Skye port for the Uig / Tarbert / Lochmaddy service to Loch Dunvegan. The proposal has been put by Macleod Estates who state that the waters are more sheltered, and the crossing to North Uist would be shorter, with the service to Harris remaining the same. The service originally used the Dunvegan Loch as its terminal, but was moved to Uig in 1964.' (Editor: Jim McFarlane) *[Uig, the shortest of terminal names, remains]*

and Fifteen

'Negotiations are still ongoing regarding the site for the new **Barra** hostel. I hope to be able to give you more details and a definite location in the May newsletter.' (Editor: Jim McFarlane) *[Much time and trouble were avoided by the outcome]*

and Twenty

'Plans are now well advanced to ensure that the fifth crofters' hostel is opened on 1 June 1990 at Garenin, West Lewis. This is a **prime** position only eight miles from the Callinish Stones, said to be second only in importance to Stonehenge.' (Editor: Richard Genner) *[The opening was delayed but, with the closure of Claddach Baleshare, Garenin became the fourth hostel in the group]*

and now Twenty-five

'The Land Rover track (to Rhenigidale) will be started in the near future. The first part of the contract, we understand, has been let. Some time ago a cast iron stove was taken to the hostel, but it has proved unsuitable. It needs to be shifted, possibly to Berneray or Howmore. Any volunteers at Easter – with transport ideally.' (Editor: Peter Clarke) *[A case of carrying the stove ... or the can?]*

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Garenin	-	Lewis
Rhenigidale	-	North Harris
Berneray	-	North Uist
Howmore	-	South Uist



Dr John Macleod (1935 - 2009)

The establishment of the hostel on Berneray in 1977 was through the endeavours of the Revd Canon Roger Clifton, the current Treasurer of the Gatliff Trust, assisted by his brother-in-law, **Dr John Macleod**. Dr Macleod, who had taken over from his Father as the doctor in Lochmaddy, North Uist, in 1973, died on 2 September 2009.

John Macleod became something of a **legendary figure** in the ways in which he promoted causes in the Western Isles, the role of the rural doctor in society, the safety of fishermen, in particular, and the training of young medical practitioners, in general. Not only were his contributions recognised in Britain, but in many parts of the world.



Photo supplied by Susy Macaulay

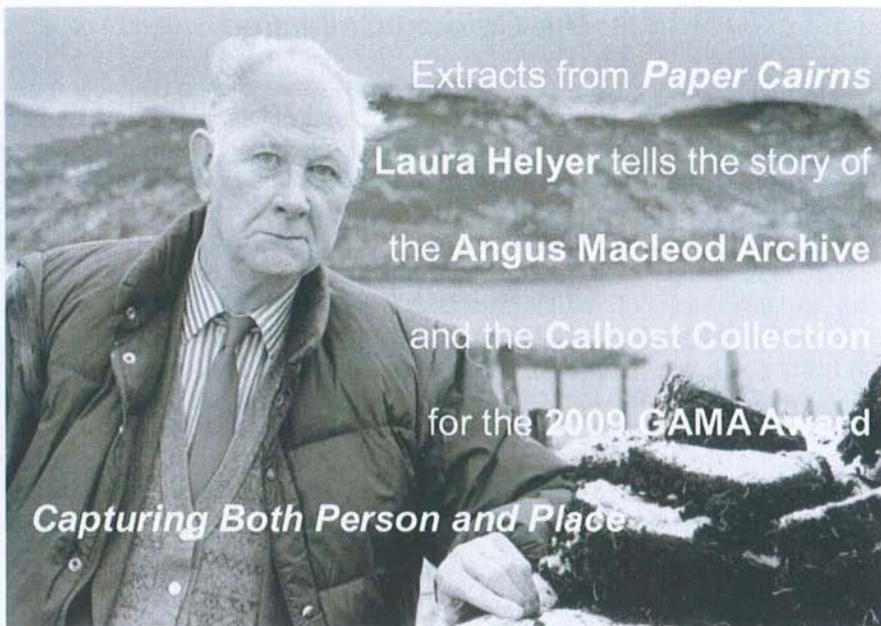
When his parents, Alex and Julia, both GPs, first arrived at Lochmaddy, distant calls involved rigorous journeys, often on horseback and foot. John sometimes had to walk over the heathland as well as navigate by motor boat in order to see patients. As facilities improved, **he brought people together** through educational meetings to raise awareness of care in the community.

He was born in Stornoway, brought up in Lochmaddy, trained at the University of Glasgow, undertook national service in the Royal Navy, and married **Lorna**, who became his Practice Nurse. John enjoyed being a member of groups, including the World Organisation of Family Doctors. He was delighted to host its most remote meeting, on Berneray in 1998.

His **local interests** included the Scottish Association for Marine Studies, the North Uist Games and Comann na Mara (Society of the Sea). He was keen to show the vital role of the sea in the life of the Western Isles and to protect sea-farers in practical ways. A particularly successful campaign of his involved the provision of lifejackets for fishermen.

His achievements in life were marked by the Queen appointing him as her **Deputy Lord Lieutenant for the Isles** and his being awarded the MBE in 2002. In 2007 the influential trade journal, *Fishing News*, named him as 'Personality of the Year' citing his influence on law-making bodies at both Holyrood and Westminster.

When visitors approached his house near Lochmaddy harbour, they would often be delighted to see an appropriate flag flying as a **sign of welcome** for them. At his funeral there was a **remarkable sign** of people's respect for him, with over 165 cars bringing mourners. He leaves Lorna, two sons and a daughter.



'*Paper Cairns* is intended as a personal account of the research I have undertaken in the process of writing a sequence of poems - of biographical verse based on the life and work of **Angus Macleod MBE (1916-2002)**. It records some of the underlying themes, concerns and voices behind the poems as I discover them through my reading and research in the archive. I have also sought to capture a sense of place.'

The Angus Macleod Archive at Kershader

'I see **Angus Macleod**, known to his friends and family as '**Ease**', is a hoarder like me. He has a magpie eye for the potentially interesting. What I am finding here is the gatherings of a curious, scholarly mind - newspaper cuttings, letters, pamphlets, photographs, manuscripts from academics, songs, stories, maps, recipes, instructions on net making, essays, family histories... But it is his handwriting, the abundance of his writing that I am attracted to most. The steadiness of this blue biro-inked hand thinking, recording, reflecting on cheap, yellowing lined paper torn from exercise books or on A4 sheets layered with tippex or revisions pasted over with new paragraphs, writing extended, cramped into the margins, still flourishing though, symbolic of an excited mind spilling over, out-running itself and the hand not able to quite keep up. Later, when I visit his adopted daughter Elizabeth McGowan, she tells me there were always papers and books everywhere, spread out across the living room floor and the quiet patience of her mother who watched over and said nothing, *who never complained once*.'

The Calbost Collection

'It is from an increasingly urgent fear of losing what was once distinctive about Lewis history and culture that Macleod begins to archive and collect, constructing a history through his personal perspective. He wrote he wanted: **to start collecting everything that people were throwing out and all the things that I myself would have been throwing out if I had not cared for preserving evidence of our history...** And yet Macleod was not nostalgic in his outlook. His vision for the archive and the Calbost collection was motivated, I believe, primarily by a desire to know, to make sense of and to remember a way of life in order to know how best to proceed in the present and future, as well as to create a meaningful relationship with history. He was an independent-minded scholar, having left school at fourteen as was typical, who thrived outside of the approval or support of a university or institution, and yet academics frequently corresponded to consult with him. He was serious and uncompromising in his efforts to familiarise himself with their work and the discipline of history in particular. In this sense, he was an appropriately self-conscious historian of his own people and locality, he was aware that the archive and his writings represented just one possible version of events.'

A Resource for the Future

'I am not sure Macleod ever claimed or wanted to be such an authority on his community but he certainly enjoyed being provocative. He died in 2002, some time before I came to know about him or visited Lewis. Even his daughter, Elizabeth, had not been left any instruction in his will on what she should do with all the material he had collated and written. I was further fascinated by this – the immensity of the task and his dedication to the work undertaken, and the concentration and effort that is visible there in the archive itself - and yet there was this incredible lack of thought or desire for recognition, at least during his lifetime. But had he not spoken out or acted then, just in time as he did, there would not be this wonderfully **rich historical resource** and memory bank for others.'

Kershader Community Hostel

'I'm back in the hostel dorm and hoping I will have the room to myself again tonight. I like to sleep with the blinds open so I can have the light on me all night and if I lift my head only slightly off the pillow I am reassured to see the sea still there. My head is thick with questions and I think I won't sleep but I do. It is too quiet not to.'

The **GAMA Award** is funded by the **Gatliff Trust** and the **Islands Book Trust** to encourage research, particularly by young people, into the culture and conditions of the Outer Hebrides – the home of **Angus Macleod** and the islands that inspired **Herbert Gatliff**.

The 2009 Award was won by **Laura Helyer**, a graduate of St Andrew's University. She is an Associate Lecturer for the Open University and is working on a first collection of poetry and a novel.

Calbost

Calbost under a silent sky
emptied but for a single villager
hearing voices in the walls
of roofless houses
where only birds play now
pushing light into the wet crevices.
Weather passes silently through
windows, doors, or a cold memory
of them. Grass and lichen brighten
the grey crumble where a home
might be mistaken for a pool
of patterned stones someone gathered
there once: a naming with smooth
head-sized rocks, a sign.

Here it is the mood of ravens
flying their heavy shadows
over fallen ewes – eyes
pecked away to bloodied cups.
The lambs gone too.
At night the sky is moonless
and the stars barely take up
their shaky reflections
scattered out at sea.

No one will come out of the waves now.

Sometimes he mistakes glistening
foam breakers for faces,
the finery of weathered, salted skin.
He hears talk – rumours
in peatsmoke and wind,
tightly spun, dense as the darkness,
strong. He hears and he doesn't hear.
He will not leave, but still
he will not go home.

Macleod was born in Calbost in 1916. During his lifetime he saw it become a ghost village, from a population of around two hundred in the early twentieth-century to one villager by the time of Macleod's death in 2002.

Dannsa rathaid

dannsa rathaid - dancing
at the crossroads

This is where I grew up, you say:
here I played alone,
kicked a makeshift football
against a wall.
And this, the family croft
with a sweeping arm and a glance
across peats, lazy beds, sheep,
moorland, heather, childhood sky...
This was your bedroom tucked
into the roofspace. The small square
of skylight telescoping stars,
the sparkling calm of the Shiants,
the blue men.

It is easy to imagine you here -
child listening in the dark...
In the distance the twitching torchlights
bob leisurely home.
You are still too young
but in the long nights of late summer
you hear them gathering
dancing at the crossroads
the music and the laughter,
dannsa rathaid.

end poem

For copies of ***Paper Cairns***, the complete biographical
essay on **Angus Macleod** with its full range of poems,
by **Laura Helyer**, please contact:

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