

# ***Hebridean Hostellers***

**Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust**

**[www.gatliff.org.uk](http://www.gatliff.org.uk)**

**Newsletter 52**

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**The Call of the CalMac Ferry**

## Ways of Seeing

The Islands Book Trust and the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust have much in common. They both present visitors - either real or virtual - with **opportunities** to get to know more of the Western Isles. Their portals are there to take you places via [www.theislandsbooktrust.com](http://www.theislandsbooktrust.com) and [www.gatliff.org.uk](http://www.gatliff.org.uk)

The IBT website gives full information on its events, visits, conferences as well as publications and research facilities. Two forthcoming presentations stand out. Professor Boyd Robertson will give the **Angus Macleod Memorial Lecture** at An Lanntair, Stornoway, on 17 October as part of the Royal National Mod.

His talk - *Language, Community and Culture* - will be delivered in Gaelic, with a simultaneous translation. At the same venue, on 15 November, Angus and Patricia Macdonald will present - *Over the Hebrides: Using Aerial Photography to Portray a Cultural Landscape*. Their **brilliantly-illustrated book** has recently been published by Birlinn and has been highly-acclaimed.

The Gatliff website has a new feature which enables introductions to be made to the hostels as well as to have memories revived. These are **Virtual Tours**, to be found on the left-hand menu of the home-page. Berneray, Howmore and Rhenigidale come to life, thanks to the production work of Alistair Barclay of Alba Virtual Tours.

## Closing and Opening

The adage - one door closes and another opens - applies, in many ways, to a sequence of recent events on the Isle of Lewis. The Gatliff Hostel at Garenin, in the Carloway area, ceased to open for the Summer season; the **Ravenspoint** Community Hostel at Kershader, in the South Lochs, became part of an increasingly vibrant complex.

The Old School at Kershader has been **transformed** over the years. With a new extension opened in June, it now provides modern facilities for its shop, café, meeting rooms, archive, offices and hostel. Its enhanced position at the side of Loch Erisort gives fine views and a conducive setting. Here is refreshment, research and retail as well as accommodation.

## Take to the Hills

The Rhenigidale Hostel will be a focal point during the last full week of September. The North Harris Trust will be promoting its Inaugural **Isle of Harris Mountain Festival**. Here there will be a range of events - from guided walks to a five-peaks-challenge, mountain-themed film nights to photographic workshops, kayacking to a ceilidh, and guest speakers, Cameron McNeish and Laurie Campbell.

The **full programme** can be easily accessed at [www.harrismountainfestival.com](http://www.harrismountainfestival.com) However, the local physical gradients, which may also be accessed with comparable ease, will not be surmounted in effortless ways! If you want a bed at Rhenigidale, get there early.

## Work at the Hostels

2011 has been another year of change and a time of progress in the upkeep and improvement of the hostels. Kind weather helped in April; rain hindered in May. **John Joyce** thanks all the volunteers and workers involved.

The thatched-dormitory building at **Howmore** was plaster-boarded, altering the internal configuration and covering the insulation. Partitions were built to make three rooms, giving more flexibility, privacy and cosiness. Complete electrical rewiring took place, with power-socket additions, emergency lighting and smoke alarms. Some decoration was done; paths and drainage were renewed.

At **Berneray**, a new gas-hob, electric water-heater and storage radiator have been fitted in the kitchen/common room. Most of the outside has been painted and internal improvements/decoration have continued. At Rhenigidale improvements were made to the main building, the outbuilding and the sewage system, but bad weather hindered work and it still needs finishing.

Further remedial work is needed to the **Rhenigidale** roof, rendering and drainage system. The steps up to the hostel were cleaned and vegetation cut back to improve access. Garenin hostel, following its permanent closure, will need to be cleared, cleaned and any necessary maintenance carried out in preparation for its return to the Gearrannan Trust.

Projects will be spread over the coming years, although work-parties will take place from 25 October -12 November 2011. Do contact John Joyce (details in the Address Section) with comments and suggestions about improvements and the provision of facilities. Above all, please **volunteer** talents and time.

## Hostelling History

**John Martin**, the Archivist for Hostelling Scotland, is in the final stages of producing a long and valuable history. His intention is to hand over the archive on a long-term loan to the National Library of Scotland by December 2012. For some brief insights into the quality of his work, go to [www.syha.org.uk](http://www.syha.org.uk) and type Treasure Trove into the website's search box.

*An Illustrated Survey of SYHA Youth Hostels 1931 - 2011* is ready for all members and supporters. Here, on a **DVD** at the very reasonable charge of £5.00 including UK postage, are featured 250-plus establishments with over 1000 illustrations running to some 600 pages. Availability is through the SYHA's website mentioned above.

## GAMA Award

**Monique Watt**, who graduated this Summer from the University of Aberdeen, secured the 2011 GAMA Award. She researched aspects of the economic and social history of the Isle of Lewis in the period immediately after the First World War. Her work will be published early in 2012 and featured here in the next issue.

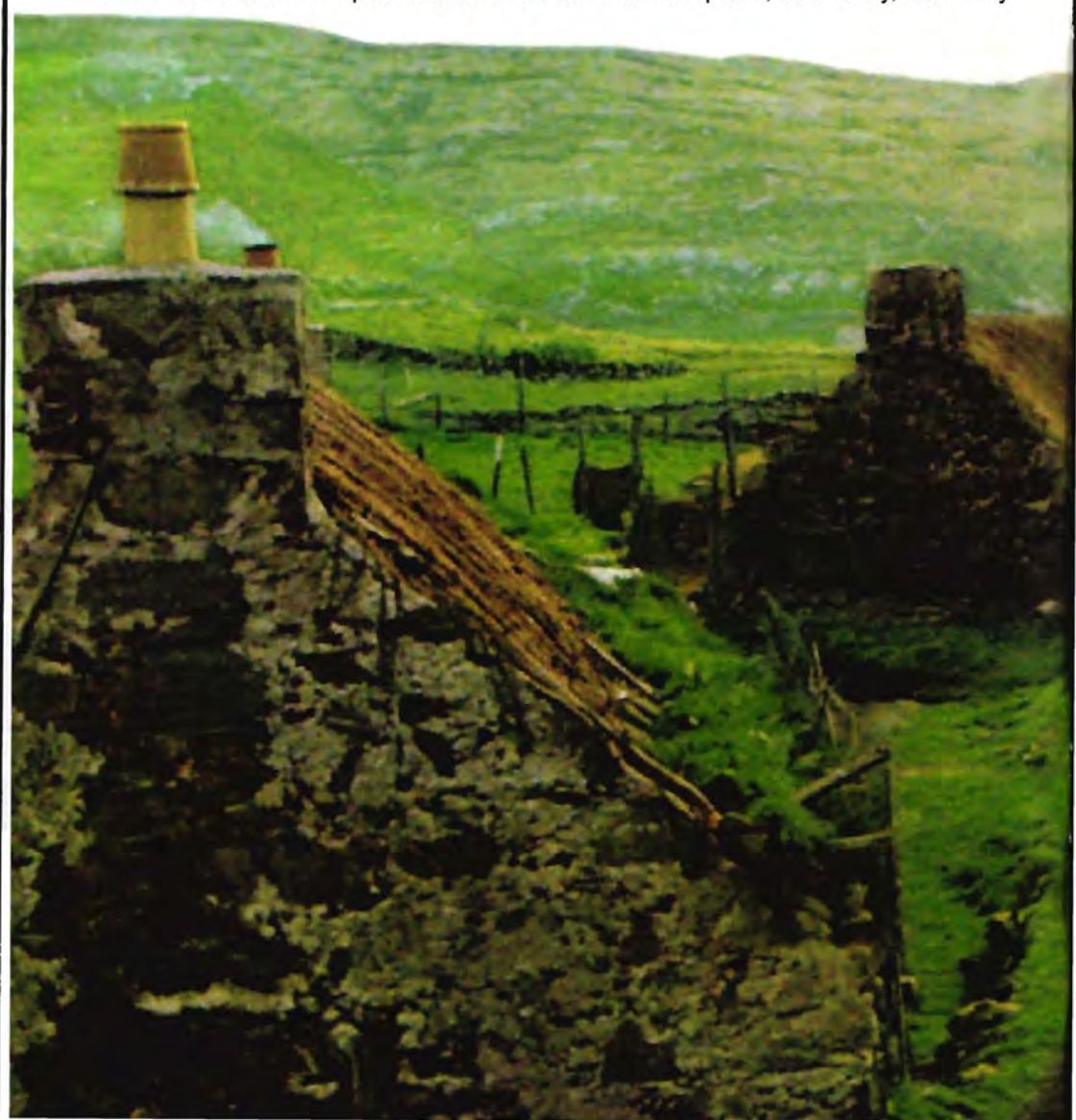


## Garenin - A Score of Years

Life at Garenin has never been easy. This *National Geographic* photograph, taken with one of its last permanent residents, indicates something of the hardship as well as the communal aspects of the settlement. In 1973 the Council provided accommodation close by and the village became depopulated.

Plans to revive it - for heritage and tourist purposes - were soon mooted and in 1987 Peter Clarke visited Garenin in the company of councillors and local government officials. Cllr Angus Graham liked the Gatliff **model** of hostelling and his view obviously prevailed. Late in 1988 Comhairle Nan Eileen gave the go-ahead and the hostel was to be the first building to be restored.

Plans were made to open in June 1989 and this took place, eventually, on 1 May



1991 with John and Pat MacGregor as wardens. Work-parties were employed to make the shell of a building into a **functioning hostel**. John acquired a traditional wooden Lewis settle to give the Common Room that local feel.

Its formal opening took place on 3 July 1992, nine years ahead of the Princess Royal coming to the official opening of the Gearrannan Black House Village. By then, getting on for **15,000 overnights** had been recorded at the hostel. Many visitors enjoyed seeing the weaving sheds of wardens, Donald Roddie ("DR") MacLeod from 1997 - 2002 and Colin MacLeod from 2002 - 2008.

The final phase of wardening started in 2008 with Sue Boyd, and her husband Leigh. They had to deal heating supply problems from late 2009. Within 18 months it was obvious that the basic needs of hostellers could not be provided. The GHHT decided that the closure was inevitable despite the lease continuing to 31 March 2012. Twenty years of **hostelling history** was over.



## Frank Martin (1942 - 2011)

Every organisation founded by a dynamic individual needs key pivotal people to see that a transition takes place. Herbert Gatliff was a driving force, but his creation could so easily have collapsed when his energies ceased. It is thanks to **Frank Martin** that the Gatliff Trust and its hostels continue to thrive 50 years on. He died, aged 69, in Bristol, after a long illness on 3 August.

Frank grew up in south London and became aware of the challenges and pleasures of scouting and youth hostelling. The 'Outdoor Movement' of the 1920s and 30s had revived after the war years and once again attracted young people. His **primary commitment** was to the British countryside and to increasing access to it.

He loved walking, mountain climbing and trees and had that passion to share these enthusiasms with others. Here were interests that became **inspirational**, leading to his becoming committed to environmental causes somewhat ahead of his time. His concern for national parks and, in particular, the wild landscape of Britain led to voluntary involvement.

The organisations to which he applied his **energies** were the Youth Hostels Association, the Council for National Parks, the International Youth Hostels Federation and the Gatliff Trust. He rose to become Vice Chair of the YHA from 1982 - 84 and served as Chair of the YHA Services Management Committee.

This latter appointment involved overseeing the commercial operation that returned its profits to the YHA each year. His **experience** in the shipping industry was particularly significant here. In 1992 he presented the youth hostel movement's Environmental Charter to the IYHF Conference in Copenhagen.

In 1977 he had become Chair of the Gatliff Trust. His knowledge of the cause, of its eccentric founder and of the way in which organisations, both charitable and commercial, can thrive, was of inestimable value. Here was a person who combined experience of industry with enthusiasm for such activities as staying in the Gatliff hostel on Scarp ... and **enjoying** it.

His work in shipping led to settling in Bristol. He and his wife, Katherine, set up home in Hotwells. Their family, with Sarah and Carrie, became established in the community, of which he was a loved and respected member. His gentle ways, sense of fun, infectious laugh, quiet perseverance and contributions to cherished causes will long be **remembered and appreciated** by many.



## **From the *Hebridean Hostellers* Issue of Five Years Ago .....**

'Peter Clarke's recently-published *The Outer Hebrides: The Timeless Way* is informative, readable and crusading. It considers the route that traverses the stunning landscapes from the Temple at Europie, across the Lewis Moors, through Kinlochresort, down the Golden Road, criss-crossing Benbecula, along the old machair tracks of South Uist, over Eriskay, around Barra to its destination on Vatersay.' (Editor: John Humphries) [*The book is still in print through [www.outerhebridesway.org](http://www.outerhebridesway.org)*]

## **and of Ten Years Ago .....**

'The **Garenin Black House Village** restoration project was completed during the summer and was officially opened by HRH The Princess Royal in June. Peter Clarke represented the GHHT at the ceremony, on a particularly cold and windy day.' (Editor: Lawrence Washington) [*She did not reside at the hostel that night.*]

## **and Fifteen ....**

The new £2.2 million ferry which started sailing in May of this year between Leverburgh and Otternish is having problems due to low tides. **Concerns** have been expressed by hostellers regarding the noise of the exhaust from this ferry as it passes the hostel and the crew have been obliging by turning the boat so that the exhaust passes on the other side.' (Editor: Jim McFarlane) [*Both facts are true!*]

## **and Twenty ....**

'The Outer Hebrides are facing a most **uncertain time** as winter approaches. Economic problems have been compounded by political difficulties caused by the loss of £23 million by the local council, Comhairle Nan Eilean, in the failed bank, BCCI.' (Editor: Richard Genner) [*Banks come and go.*]

## **and now Twenty-five**

'After lunch we will hear from **Frank Martin** and Roger Clifton about their trips to the islands. These reports will provide the basis for planning the final stages of the Berneray project.' (Editor: Peter Clarke) [*The project mentioned refers to the second dormitory being constructed*]

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



## The Foliatè Portfolio

It was in June 2001 that **Neil Pinkett's** *Walks from the Gatliff Hostel at Reinigeadal* was first mentioned here. Copies are still available at £3 including postage and packing with a cheque to GHHT sent to the Editor. He re-appeared in the second issue of that year with a



piece on his experiences of wardening at the Athabasca Falls Hostel in Jasper National Park, Canada.

Neil and his Canadian wife, Krista, live and work as artists in British Columbia. Their company, Foliatè Face Artworks, has an impressive website at: [www.foliatèface.ca](http://www.foliatèface.ca) He specialises in works of art; she in clothing. The paintings and prints that may provide ideas for seasonal gifts are to be found under '**British Scenes**' on the Portfolios Page.

*The Thatched Croft house by Vallay Strand*, shown above, is of oil on stretched canvas. It is one of a gallery of paintings with scenes from the Western Isles as well as the Highlands, Yorkshire, Shropshire and Dartmoor. The logo at the top of this page was designed for the Trust by Neil.

## A London Weekend?

The **AGM of the GHHT** will be held at the Holland Park Youth Hostel, London, on Saturday 22 October 2011. Coffee will be served from 10.00 am and the morning session will include a Members' Forum. So here is an opportunity to come to the capital for the weekend, to use the YHA hostel facilities, to meet old friends or to make new ones, and to share your interests in the Gatliff hostels that are located at the other end of the nation.