

Hebridean Hostellers

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

Newsletter 76

Autumn 2024



Go, Dream of Bed & Breakfast at Berneray

Photograph by Stephen Rooney

From the Chair

Peter Clarke writes: ‘As the Chair, I am pleased to announce that the Board of Directors, at its meeting in Edinburgh on Saturday 2 November, co-opted **three** new directors. They are: Dave Fisher of North Yorkshire, Nick Hughes of Chorley, Lancashire and Neil Milton of Edinburgh.

Dave Fisher, who joined the GHHT in 2004, was involved on the support panel committee of Skiddaw House hostel in the Lake District and also served as Chair. He was for four years on the board of the **YHA (E&W)** and is a quantity surveyor with his own independent practice.

Nick Hughes joined us in 2008 and took part in this year’s Rhenigidale **work-party**. He worked for over 30 years in local government and latterly was responsible for road safety and cycling schemes before running a small cycle-repair and refurbishment workshop. He was a scout leader, enjoyed providing experiences of the outdoor environment and now looks forward to promoting the hostels to a wider audience.

Neil Milton is a retired commercial surveyor who first visited the hostels in 2011. He told our Board that the hostels have made a **“profound impression”** on him. He was Chairman of the Edinburgh All Year Ramblers, has been the secretary of a rugby club and served on a parish council in Sussex.

Annual General Meeting 2024

The 2024 AGM in Penrith was an enjoyable event with 14 members attending. Including proxy voters, 64 members took part in all. The business on the agenda was overwhelmingly **approved**, including the adoption of new Articles of Association deleting all Gatliff Trust controlling provisions.

The new Articles have been filed at Companies House and with OSCR. The Gatliff Trust’s investments have now been **transferred** to GHHT and final accounts need to be prepared to enable the dissolution of the Gatliff Trust to be actioned by the end of the year. A copy of the new Articles is on our website. Please let me know if you would like a paper copy.

Annual General Meeting 2025

I am pleased to announce that the 2025 AGM will again take place in the Parish Rooms in the centre of **Penrith** on Saturday 12 July, starting at 10.00.

Registered Office

Please note that we have **changed** our Registered Office. Its new address is now 26 Lewis Street Stornoway Isle of Lewis HS1 2JF. The home addresses and contact details of the Trust’s Officers remain unchanged and are, as usual, given on the back page of this newsletter.’

An April Activity

The adjacent Hebridean Way poster indicates much infrastructure, obviously requiring maintenance. Howmore is the hostel that the GHHT will be focusing on for its maintenance **work-party** from 7 - 11 April 2025. Please contact either Alan Busson (alanbusson@hotmail.com / 07771 974874) or Linda Davis (davisjal@aol.com / 07855 926465) for further details and/or to secure your place in the team.

The hostels have benefited from work-party activities throughout their existence. Supervision has to be more rigorous these days to ensure that regulated standards are achieved. So do not worry - professional expertise supplied; individual **commitment** needed.



Feet On Ground: Food Online

There have been innovations in delivery services throughout the Hebrides. No one benefits more than the hostel guest who has come on foot. **Groceries** can be delivered by the Co-op and Tesco at reasonable rates in remarkably fast times. Look up their website details and make a note of the hostel postcodes of Rhenigidale - HS3 3BD; Berneray - HS6 5BQ; Howmore - HS8 5SH. Let the van bring the jam!

Innovations in Their Time

Significant events took place in the same **decade** when both the road to Rhenigidale (1990) and the causeway to Berneray (1999) were officially opened. Then back in 1858, Captain Henry Otter published his work on the tidal waters of the eight-mile long Sound of Harris, giving safer access to Berneray. In the same year, Howmore Church was built and its tower served as a landmark for fishermen in the Atlantic.

Go Seaforth

John Humphries writes: 'While on my way to Berneray, I was sent a message by Marc Calhoun, the American authority on so much of the Hebrides. It concerned the spot of greenery marked on the OS Sheet 14 map at the head of Gleann Lacasdail. My eyes scanned the coast of The Pairc to what must be one of Scotland's most **isolated** houses, at Mulhagery (OS Grid Ref. NB 36633 06571).



Mulhagery from above

Then, on the CalMac ferry from Uig, I fell into conversation about island life with a crew member. I mentioned my interest in that house. To my astonishment, he told me that his grandmother-in-law had been born there, her birth aided, perhaps, by the skills of her father, a shepherd. My curiosity became a minor compulsion and I appealed in these columns for **fellow-enthusiasts** wanting to visit.

The project Go Seaforth was launched, one thing led to another and last May eight of us set off from **Rhenigidale** on the fishing vessel, the *Maranatha*, belonging to Finlay & Donald Macleod, brothers from Scalpay. We viewed Molinginish, just along the coast, and reflected on how a settlement of 40 inhabitants in the 1880s diminished to two, before being abandoned in 1964.

Mulhagery, our next point of call, features the amended Norse prefix 'mol' - meaning a beach of stones and shingle rather than of sand and gravel - which still applies. In 1820 four households were recorded. Habitation barely made it until the 1940s, but two inhabitants of the 19th Century, Norman and Isabella Macdonald, had 11 children here between 1851 and 1878 and all, bar one, survived.

Adam Nicolson's *Sea Room* is a chronicle and celebration of island life, particularly of The Shiants, which he inherited as a 21-year-old. We circled the three islands in the group before our call at the ruins of **Bhalamus**, from which, in 1802, the Pairc Sheep Farm was set up with crofters throughout the area being cleared. There is a paradox in that this tranquil setting had been a hub of human deprivation and the inhumane treatment of people from townships 222 years ago.

Near the mouth of Loch Seaforth we passed **Gearraidh Mhurchaidh** and the finely constructed rail system which brought building supplies from sea to site during the reconstruction of the house. Many memories of the one-day 'expedition' linger, particularly Finlay and Donald's outstanding skills as navigators, guides and commentators. The party of enthusiasts / 'islomaniacs' they led had a real treat.'

When the Sea Meets the Road

John Macdonald, born and bred in Lochmaddy, North Uist, was fascinated from childhood by ferries and has, over the years, amassed an archive of material about CalMac, for which he worked. His collection, together with company artefacts, accounts and photographs, feature in an exhibition 'When the Sea Meets the Road' at **Taigh Chearsabhagh** Museum & Arts Centre, Lochmaddy, until Saturday 31 January 2026.



Caledonian MacBrayne was a local steamship company established in 1851, which 20 or so years later undertook daily mail deliveries to the Outer Hebrides. When Herbert Gatliff used CalMac to explore the islands, its ships had not been transformed by today's roll-on/roll-off facilities which help transport millions. Do complement your experiences of sailing by gaining an **historical** perspective at this exhibition.

MV Loch Portain at Leverburgh and MV Hebridean Isles, recently withdrawn from service on many routes after almost 40 years, off Colonsay. Julian Paren photographed both ships.



The Miranatha that took us close to Molinginish en route for Mulhagery

Diane Nightingale MBE (1936 - 2024)

One of the straplines on the website of the Queen Elizabeth Girls' School, Barnet, attended from 1948 until 1954 by the young Diane Cunningham, is **'Encouraging Excellence'**. Throughout her long, committed, cheerful and engaging life she fulfilled this precept for herself and for those who worked with her and those who were taught by her.



Diane worked briefly for Barclays Bank before enrolling at Wall Hall Teacher Training College, Hertfordshire. She interspersed teaching in the Barnet area with travel, including a year going overland to India and back by public transport. Then for two years she taught in Germany, returning to take up the post of Field Officer (later **Youth & Community Officer**) with the Youth Hostels Association.

Her great passion was promoting the outdoor education of children and it was appropriate that she met Herbert Gatliff during her 33 years with the YHA. He warmed to her setting up **Postellers** in 1968 encouraging young people, including the disadvantaged, from in and around London to learn about and enjoy the countryside through youth hostelling.

The Gatliff Trust gave grants to help set up this group and maintain it financially throughout its existence. For this work she was awarded the **MBE** in 2001. Walking, cycling and independent adventurous travel, taking in some 55 countries, were among her many interests, including an affinity with rural Britain and, in particular, the Outer Hebrides. She was a member of the YHA's Southern Regional Council.

Involvement with local community groups and an environmental action team at her church featured in her activities, which included becoming a school governor focusing on special needs. Her husband, Chris, shared her interests as do her two children, Ben and Torsie, from her first marriage. Her keenness for sports cars (she owned three during her lifetime), cycling and dogs was distinctive.

Diane, who became a Gatliff trustee in 2000 and Vice-Chairman in 2003, could be relied upon to bring **visionary** ideas, common sense and individual judgment to the causes being promoted. She was, with many years of service in an established organisation, the YHA, an influence in the Outdoor Movement that has brought many permanent, much appreciated features to British social life.

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

'Peter Clarke writes: 2019 has been one of the most important years in the history of the Crofters' Hostels to date. Thanks to you, our members and supporters, Berneray hostel is now ours and we have been **gifted** almost all the funds required for improvements.' (Editor: John Humphries) [*Acquired permanently*]



Lights captured by Lachlan Macmillan

and of Ten Years Ago ...

'Work is progressing on the initial stages of the **Hebridean Way** ... The Gatliff Hostels will undoubtedly benefit from increased footfall and pedal-turning.' (Editor: John Humphries) [*Things come to pass*]

Fifteen ...

'Two girls from the French-speaking part of Canada entered the Howmore Hostel, saw what was on offer and made sounds that suggested delight. A seasoned visitor in the Common Room advised caution with the remark, "This place is not that **fancy**." The reply was immediate and decisive - "The time has come to break away from fanciness!" ' (Editor: John Humphries) [*Le mot juste*]

Twenty ...

'I (Susan Morrison from Glasgow) have stayed in hostels all over the world but my night spent here (**Claddach Baleshare**) in 1989 remains the best ever. I have fond memories of the warden, Catrina Tosh, who enlightened us to the fact that she had been born in the hostel and that it had been built by one of her ancestors.' (Editor: John Humphries) [*Tenacity is a Hebridean feature*]

Twenty-five ...

'Discussions are being held about having our own website on the **Internet**. At present it is possible to access information about the GHHT hostels through the SYHA website.' (Editor: Jim McFarlane) [*Things come to pass*]

Thirty ...

'The good news for anyone travelling the islands this winter (including Orkney) is a British Airways / Loganair deal called a **Highland Rover** ticket. This comprises five single flights for the price of £179.' (Editor: Jim McFarlane) [*A bargain?*]

Thirty-five ...

'Plans are now well advanced to ensure that the fifth crofters' hostel is opened for use on 1 June 1990 at Garenin, west Lewis. This is a prime position only eight miles from Callanish Stones, said to be second only in importance to **Stonehenge**.' (Editor: Richard Genner) [*Luxurious compared with Stone Age accommodation*]

... and Forty

'The Rhenigidale **Land Rover** track will be started in the near future.' (Editor: Peter Clarke) [*Now a permanent way for all vehicles and cycles*]

Rhenigidale – North Harris
Berneraay – North Uist
Howmore – South Uist



A Summer Weekend in Cumbria

The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust and the former Gatliff Trust have customarily held their AGMs at attractive urban venues in London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester, Bristol, Stirling, Berwick-upon-Tweed. Why not follow the GHHT to Cumbria for a summer's weekend in Penrith, a major town in Cumbria, that has plenty to offer visitors?

Penrith, for the 2025 AGM on Saturday 12 July, is part of historic Cumberland and some three miles outside the Lake District National Park. It is where the Roman road that traversed the Pennines met the one from Manchester to Carlisle. Now it is close to the M6; on the West Coast Main Line; served by two National Express coach services; and on and adjacent to the National Cycle National Routes 7 and 71.

Testing a Trend

Space has long been at a premium and attractive locations increasingly difficult to find. These aspects of the property market have meant that tiny houses, cabins, eco-homes and bothies now feature in searches for distinctive places to purchase. Our simple hostels have much to offer for testing the appeal of **compact** living. Take a search-engine to discover the building of bothies - 'Hebridean Spaces' - on Lewis.