

THE CORNCRAKE

April 2016

Land Reform Meeting

COMMUNITY TO GAIN NEW LAND POWERS.

More than 40 island residents gathered in the Village Hall on Tuesday, 23rd March, to hear all about new powers granted to them by the Scottish Government. Land ownership is currently a burning issue on the island, as CCDC is trying to build much-needed social housing units for the 10 or so young people who are either entirely homeless or are inadequately housed. Attempts to purchase land owned by Colonsay Estate in Scalasaig have so far failed.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE!



The new laws in question are the Community Empowerment Act and the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill. Ailsa Raeburn, Head of Community Assets at Highlands and Islands Enterprise, explained that, for a successful sale, there had had to be a willing seller unless it was crofting land which was in question; in that case, the owner would be obliged to sell to the community.

As of April 2017, if the community can prove that a particular piece of land has been neglected or abandoned, and that the current landowner is not using it for the purposes of sustainable development (e.g. social housing, business units) they have a case. If they have a particular social purpose for the land, can convince the authorities of the viability of the project and demonstrate the backing of their community, the landowner will be obliged to sell the land at the valuation stipulated by the District Valuer.



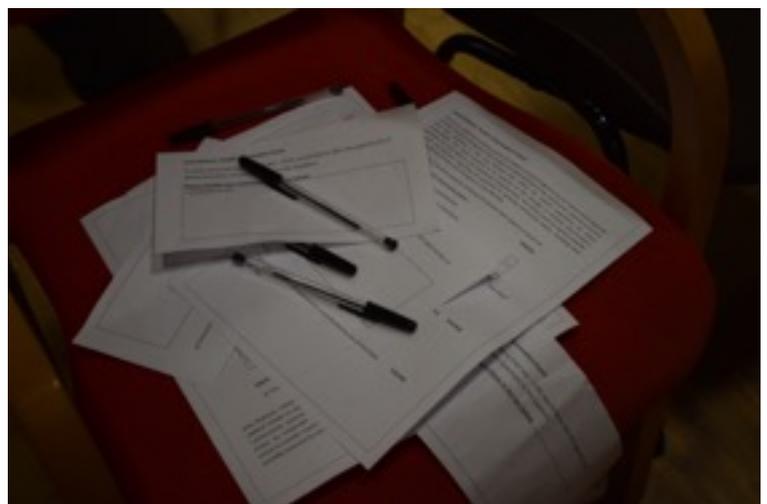
COMMUNITY LAND SCOTLAND

COMMUNITY*
LAND SCOTLAND

David Cameron travelled from his base on the Isle of Harris to tell us about the 8-step process of purchasing land and about the support that Community Land Scotland could offer rural communities like ours. He described the North Harris project, in which he has been involved; before community purchase, there were 130 people living in the community; there were zero business premises, zero privately rented houses and zero community facilities. To date, the population has risen to 170 and three business units, a pontoon and a wind turbine have been built. Other innovations being considered included hydro-electricity schemes, polytunnels, hook-ups for motor-homes and caravans, and a caravan site.

THE COMMUNITY SAYS “YES” TO LAND TRANSFER

The Public Meeting was an excellent chance for local residents to learn about their land rights as a community; it also offered CCDC the chance to ask those attending (around half of the active adult population) what their preferences were. At the time of writing, these results had not been publicised. However, early indications are that not a single respondent was happy with the current situation. Almost all were in favour of attempting small-scale purchases, such as land for housing, or existing amenities e.g. the hotel or possibly the shop. What was remarkable was the clear majority in favour of a community buyout of the entire island (excluding private/Council/HIE etc property) from Colonsay Estate.



So we are living in exciting times: the thrust of the presentations by CLS and HIE was that the time is ripe for community buyouts: the legislation is there, political support has been offered and the Scottish Land Fund has grown from £1m to £10m.

So.... will the community take advantage of the opportunities offered, or will the status quo be maintained? Keep reading the Corncrake to find out!

43 residents attended the meeting and were invited, if they so wished, to inform CCDC of their attitudes and preferences by completing a brief questionnaire.

25 completed forms were received.

The breakdown of the responses is as follows.

OPTION	YES	NO	DID NOT RESPOND
I am happy with the way things are and don't want or see the need for change.	0	21 (84 %)	4
I believe that it would be good for Colonsay to consider their options in terms of small scale ownership of community assets. *	24 (96%)	0	1

I would like to explore the potential for a community buy-out of the island	17** (68%)	1 (4%)	4**
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*Five examples were given and were responded to as follows:

OPTION	YES	NO	DID NOT RESPOND
A community shop or hotel	17 (68%)	0	8
Renewable energy	19 (76%)	0	6
Land for social housing	23 (92 %)	0	2
Other e.g community-owned farms, business units.	13 (52 %)	0	12

** There were 17 “Yes”, 3 “Maybe”, 1 “No”. 4 did not respond. SW

Syria Fundraisers

On the 10th and 12th March two fundraisers were held, organised by Rosalind Jewell, to raise money for Positive Action in Housing & Syria Relief. The former was a cake sale in the pantry, with delicious and plentiful homebakes kindly donated by the community. Folk drifted in and out between 1pm and 4pm - some even coming back for a second go at the table overflowing with varied cakes - and difficult topics came to discussion with compassion and gentle gratitude; food for thought for some who said they “take the safety and security of island life for granted at times”

The latter of the fundraising events was a showing of the film ‘The Good Lie’, starring Reece Witherspoon (although she didn’t make an appearance for 38mins). The film depicted the journey of a group of Sudanese children that were driven from the home to a refugee camp in Kenya by a



ruthless militia. The group are then selected to be moved to Missouri where they struggle with their traumatic past and adapt to their new lives in America.

The film did not beat around the bush with its portrayal of the atrocities of war. It was disturbing but deeply thought-provoking and although the tragedy of the refugees situation was never dismissed in favour of Hollywood humour, there was a lighter side that showed the refugees in a poignantly human way; young people searching for security and belonging in a world very different from their own. The ties of family, friendship and faith in the existence of good people win out for the main characters and viewers are reminded that the global community must not play into the hands of those who try to dehumanise refugees.

Netting: The Play

“A father and his two sons are lost at sea. Keep busy, eh? Hope we’ll get a body, mebbe. The widden spoon. A knock on the door wi a wooden spoon. Three women adapt to their lives as widows. Kitty can’t stop knitting. Alison needs looking after. Sylvia wants to forget. Then, one day, a knock on the door. A body has been found. One body, three women. Who does it belong to? Set in the north of Scotland, “Netting” is a moving story about finding closure after unimaginable loss.”



This month we were very fortunate to be visited by Morna Young and the cast and crew of her play “Netting”. The play was put on in the hall with a simple backdrop. The audience were presented the plight of these three women through clever dialogue and simple but effective musical sections. Although some of the audience admittedly struggled slightly with bits of the language (the characters spoke in a strong North-East Scots dialect) the emotion was undeniable and the good humour and strength of these women despite their situation was uplifting.

After the show the audience were treated to wine and nibbles and a chance to catch up with the cast and crew - many will have recognised the Colonsay-connected director of the show, Alice Butler.

The show has since headed to Barra, Easdale and Luìng. To find out more about the show and find out where you can see it check out the website: www.nettingtheplay.com

Shoot!

On the 26th March Colonsay Gun Club held the first shoot of the year at Machrins with a good turnout despite changeable weather.



Les Robinson, Ned Wyndham and Paul Summers all took home trophies and the overall winner was Chris Nisbet.



Church Exhibition

On Wednesday 16th March the community was warmly welcomed to a preview of the Arts & Crafts Exhibition at the Parish Church, Scalasaig with refreshments provided by Gavin & James at the Pantry. All of the exhibits were donated and will be sold towards the cost of the Belfry Restoration. The Exhibition will run until May 14th – please enjoy the exhibition and encourage your friends to visit it as well. Open any day from 4pm - 6pm. We hope to re-erect the Belfry in June, so support is very welcome.

Spring Festival



The 2016 Colonsay Spring Festival

Mon 25th April to Sun 15th May 2016

This will be the sixth year that the Spring Fest has been staged ...which means to date we have had 15 weeks of Spring frivolities on Colonsay!

**great atmosphere | great variety of events | great place to be
what's not to like....?**

A typical couple of days at the festival might look like this: –

10am Guided Nature Walk to Colonsay's most westerly point (tickets £5)

10.30am Book Binding Workshop (tickets £12 inc materials)

2pm Etching Workshop (tickets £12 inc materials)

8pm Foraging for Wild Foods - an evening talk (tickets £4)

10.30am An Introduction to Drystone Walling (tickets £8)

10.30am Basket Weaving (tickets £12 inc materials)

2pm Farm Walk (tickets £5)

2pm Colonsay Ferns - a guided walk (tickets £5)

8pm Wild Colonsay - sound pictures of the Island (tickets £4)

The full 3 week programme can be viewed at www.colonsayevents.co.uk

Monday May 2nd will be an evening to remember on Colonsay. For the first time we're hosting a very special **dinner and auction** in aid of the many events and activities we strive to offer each year. We've got the much admired and respected Auctioneer John Mackie from Lyon & Turnbull to guide us through the Lots on the night. There'll be a selection of interesting, fun and unusual Lots to bid for – everything from a day on a fish farm with salmon producers Marine Harvest, a Hebridean sky flight with the Alex Howard, and trying your hand at sheep shearing - to name but a few. There'll also be a Silent Auction with hampers and artworks and alcohol, and a buffet dinner produced with Colonsay salmon and beef, wine, coffee and live music from our very own musicians. Look out for the flyer with details of all the Lots. It promises to be a fabulous night.

Come along; eat, drink and be merry!

Tickets are £15.00, so if you want to book contact Sarah Hobhouse on 01951 200318 or springfest@isleofcolonsay.org.uk



Jane Smith - Wild Island

"WILD ISLAND. A year in the Hebrides" by Jane Smith.

Have you ever listened to Corncrakes calling on a star-lit night? Have you crossed the Strand to Oronsay, wading through the reflection of the huge Hebridean sky? Did you know that cuttlefish fly through the water here like winged pink elephants? And have you seen the swooping flight of red-billed choughs as they play in the sea breeze?

If you have, this new book "Wild Island" will remind you of all the reasons that you love Colonsay and Oronsay. If these experiences are yet to come your way, discover them in the company of the wildlife artist Jane Smith, who spent the last

four years travelling to the islands to draw and paint there. Her book is full of humorous accounts of island life, and is illustrated with her colourful paintings and prints.

Jane was lucky enough to stay on Oronsay with the RSPB, as she learned how they farm the island to encourage traditional Hebridean wildlife, using old techniques and new machinery. She visited the cliffs at Pig's Paradise to paint the spectacle of many thousands of nesting seabirds. And she became very familiar with the CalMac cafeteria menu.

This book is now available from all good book sellers, including those on Colonsay. At £20 it makes an ideal gift for anyone who loves this place.

Extract from *Wild Island*.

"I cross from Colonsay to Oronsay at night under a half moon, and the still air is full of corncrakes craking. The calls are insistent, rhythmic and loud, all slightly out of sync with each other, so the rhythm of one gradually overtakes its neighbour. When another deeper, more determined voice starts up even closer, merging into the head-filling buzzing, I can't help laughing at the madness of it all. Corncrakes seem to call near walls and buildings so the vibrating bass is amplified and bounces off the stone. No wonder the people who farmed here one hundred years ago considered them pests. Flora spoke of her mother chasing after them in her nightgown when she couldn't get to sleep.

I hope to draw the corncrakes, and I settle down in the early morning sun at the field edge. The early cover of nettles and cow parsley is now well grown and other species are benefiting from it too. A whitethroat is singing energetically and hunting for insects amongst the nettles. Sparrows are peeling strips from last year's dried plant stems to thread into their nests. Swallows are collecting mud from the tractor ruts in the road. Some bring dry grass in their beaks and use the mud as cement.

I think the crakes must be sleeping after their busy, buzzy night. There's no sound from them. I go in for coffee and Mike tells me of one night when he saw strange clouds shimmering over the corncrake fields. Closer inspection revealed thousands of ermine moths dancing in the moonlight. "It was just magical," he says, "and just think how many insects those fields are growing. All good corncrake food."

Val tells me the best time to see corncrakes is after rain or dew, when they come out of the damp undergrowth to dry off in the sun. It's a day of sunshine and showers so I persist in my quest. I settle on the verge again and start to paint nettles and plantain. After half an hour there is a flash of orange and a bird like a small chicken emerges from the undergrowth. It crouches, low and circumspect, crosses the track on long strides, and disappears into the vegetation again."



Jane will be giving a talk at the Spring Festival. See the Spring Festival website for more details. - - - - -

Book Festival



23 - 24 April 2016
conversations @ the edge

Not long now until the fifth Colonsay Book Festival which will take place on Saturday 23rd and Sunday 24th April. Opening with our first ever Fringe event, rapper and performance poet Ewan McNicholl (son of Liz and Mike) will be on in the Hotel on Friday 22nd, at 9pm.

The main business of the festival starts at 1.30 on Saturday in the village hall, with nature writer and poet Jim Crumley, followed at 3pm by eminent military historian Hew Strachan, who has written widely about the First World War. The final session of the afternoon, at 4.30, has noted Tartan Noir writer, Denise Mina, in conversation about her many crime books, including the latest - 'Blood, Salt, Water'.

The Saturday evening entertainment again takes place in the Hotel; we are bringing back our literary pub quiz, which was memorably won by the authors' team in 2014.

Sunday sessions open at 10.30 in the hotel lounge, with a workshop run by writer Mike Smith entitled "Hearing Your Words/Reading Your Listeners". Participants are asked to bring along three pieces of writing of any genre, 4-6 copies of each. (Prose 250-500 words, poetry max. 40 lines.)

Travel writer Julie Davidson opens the afternoon session at 1.30, with a conversation about her book 'Looking for Mrs Livingstone'; that is Mary, wife of the missionary David. At 3pm, the Cumbrian poet Jacob Polley will read from his three collections of poetry, and also some new, unpublished work. Finally, the festival ends with the veteran broadcaster and journalist, now novelist, James Naughtie discussing his latest book, 'Paris Spring', which will be published just before the Festival.

We close with our now traditional 'Conversations @ the End', when audience and authors chat over a glass of wine or beer, kindly provided by the Colonsay Brewery, before heading for the ferry.

We look forward to seeing many of our regular audience members again, as well as welcoming new ones. Tickets can be bought at the door, but accommodation is booking up fast, so don't miss out!

Dilly Emslie

You can find out more about the Book Festival by visiting their website:
www.colonsaybookfestival.org.uk

Colonsay at Night

I think most peoples perception of the undoubted beauty of Colonsay is limited to daylight , but, as a semi-nocturnal person by way of profession, I have always enjoyed being outdoors during the hours of darkness.



I always soaked up the tranquility of a Colonsay night, with very little in the way of manmade disturbance, and through this I became interested in Astronomy. I don't think any Mainlander can be anything other than gobsmacked at the starry skies on a clear Colonsay night, and I began to look at ways to try and capture something of that atmosphere.



So armed with a camera and tripod, and very little knowledge, I starting experimenting with settings and timings, and gradually got results that although not perfect, encouraged me enough to keep trying.

The equipment I use doesn't cost a fortune, and through reading articles such as http://www.astropix.com/HTML/I_ASTROP/QUICK.HTM , good results can be had with most modern cameras. The trick is perseverance, and personally find having

good company, a nice warm BBQ and maybe, just maybe, a small tippie helps the evening along nicely, as your Editor can testify!

I hope these pictures may encourage others to try, and I if can offer any help when I'm on the Island, I would be glad to!

Gary Hamilton.

Thanks Gary for some stellar pics!

Peggy Clark 1940 - 2016



A beautiful church service was held in Colonsay Parish Church on Thursday, 4th February, to give thanks for the life of a very special Colonsay lady, Mrs Peggy Clark. It was followed by the funeral, during which her devoted family laid her to rest in Kilchattan Cemetery, next to her husband, Angus, who had passed away in 2009. There was a wonderful turnout for the much-loved Peggy, which included many of the close family and friends of the Clark clan and her much-adored grandchildren, all of whom called her Granny Peggy.

Alastair Scouller conducted a service that included several very moving moments; he welcomed us in Peggy's native tongue, Colonsay Gaelic; the hymns chosen were the same as those sung in the same church in 1960, on the occasion of Angus and Peggy's wedding; Esme read "My Love Is Like A Red, Red Rose" beautifully, then Caitlin and Seumas delighted all present with their rendition of the Skye Boat Song (which Peggy used to sing as a lullaby for her children, Morag, Dugie, Donald and Gavin).

We learnt much about Peggy's very full life, working in nursing, catering and education in numerous parts of the country, including Glasgow, Inverness and Edinburgh. Her last port of call was her beloved Isle of Colonsay, on which she had been born. She leaves a tangible legacy behind for us all in the form of The Colonsay Pantry, which she set up with her sister May, in 1988; her loving son,

Gavin, now runs it. Many of us remember the welcome that Peggy and Angus would extend when they were in charge of the hotel, from 1974 to 1979. Gavin is keeping up the family tradition of warm hospitality originated by Peggy 28 years ago. We also saw it afterwards in the Village Hall, where we enjoyed a lovely meal, the recipes of which may well have been dreamt up decades ago by herself.

The family would like to express their deep gratitude to all those who helped them in countless kind ways.



A message from Mike Russell MSP

With regards to the upcoming Scottish Parliament election the Corncrake will attempt to feature statements from different candidates. This month we have a short piece from current Argyll & Bute MSP, Michael Russell.

Five years ago, during the 2011 Scottish Parliament election, I spent a few hours campaigning in Colonsay. I knocked a few doors, visited the shop and had a drink in the hotel bar. Even that visit brought home to me that there were things that needed to change and that the Council and the Scottish Government needed to get on with changing them.



Now, after a first term as the Argyll & Bute MSP I think I know a bit more about most of the area and I have been back to Colonsay on a regular basis to hold surgeries and to discuss key issues with people who are still affected by poor broadband, ferries that don't run and the need for housing so that the community can stabilise and hopefully expand.

The Scottish Parliament constituency of Argyll and Bute has 23 inhabited islands within it, and a big chunk of the western seaboard of mainland Scotland. It is an area that is losing population faster than almost anywhere else in our country and which is very dependent on communication links - physical and digital - and on Council and Government policy. Cutbacks from Westminster have not helped the Scottish Government but progress has been, and is being, made.

Over the past five years I have taken up a whole range of issues for local people but my priority now is to ensure continued delivery of improvements in the ferry service and in the telecommunications infrastructure. RET has been helpful but until we have more ferries built (and two are now under construction on the Clyde) and a more reliable service then there will still be grounds for complaint. That is also true of the broadband and mobile phone services but the good news is that both of those issues have been and continue to be the subject of huge investment by the SNP Scottish Government after many years of neglect. The effect of that investment will, I am sure, be clearly seen in the coming few years.

Colonsay has also needed support from HIE and a range of other bodies as the community considers how it can invest in its own future and particularly how it can secure more housing and retain and build its population. I have been involved in that process and want to go on supporting it.

The job of the constituency MSP is to make him or herself accessible to every person in the area and to speak up for them and their community in Parliament and to public and private bodies that are not delivering. I hope I have done that for Colonsay and for the whole of Argyll & Bute and I further hope to go on doing it with the support of Colonsay after the 5th of May.

Thank you Mike for your contribution.

Water Pressure in Kilchattan



Island residents will recall the catastrophic house-fire which occurred in December 2013 in the house occupied by Trevor and Yasmin Crowe. One of the issues raised after the calamity was the weak water pressure in the area. Neighbours expressed concern that, if a fire was to start in another house in the area, the low pressure would, once, again, hamper the valiant efforts of our fire-fighters.



Scottish Water have now written to local residents with a solution. Trish Wilson, Communities Advisor, writes: “We are now in a position to deliver a project which will alleviate these issues....The proposed work involves installing a small pumping station, which will be housed in a kiosk”.

They can't yet give a date for completion, as there needs to be a new layby constructed (for access); the Planning application for this is to be submitted in the next few months. Although the Scottish Water construction team will not appear for some time, local residents have expressed their gratification: “It's great that Scottish Water has taken our case seriously and that they have come up with a solution; it will take a weight off our minds”, said one of the affected parties. SW

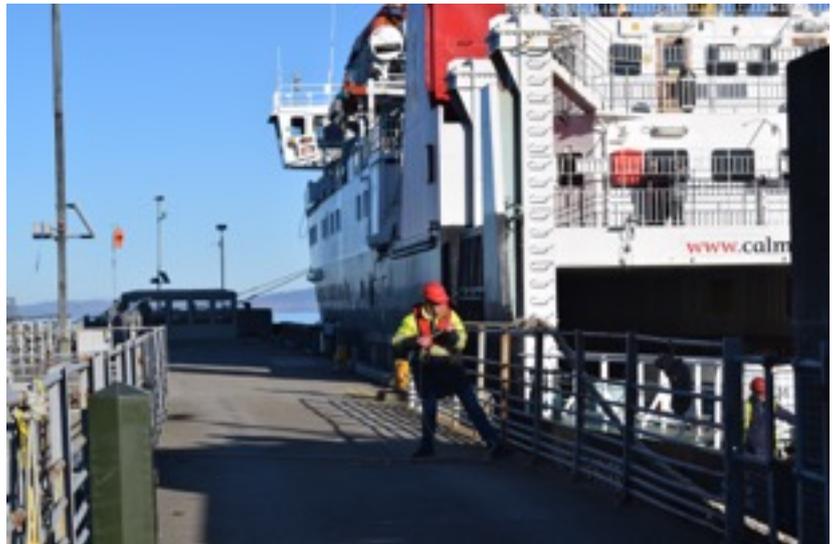
Calmac Update

PIER OFFICE: SUMMER OPENING HOURS



Caledonian MacBrayne
Hebridean & Clyde Ferries

Seumas McNeill, Port Supervisor for Caledonian MacBrayne Ferries, has announced the hours during which the Pier Office will be open:



DAY OF THE WEEK	OPENING HOURS
Monday/Diluain	09.00-14.00 and 16.30-19.30
Tuesday/Dimairt	09.00-14.00
Wednesday/Diciadain	09.00-19.00
Thursday/Diardaoin	10.00-12.00 and 16.30-19.30
Friday/Dihaoine	09.00-13.00 and 16.30-19.30
Saturday/Disathairne	11.00-14.00 and 16.30-19.30
Sunday/Didomhnaich	16.30-19.30



Photo of the Month

This month's photo comes from Morag Grant. Morag's Instagram account - @momag93 - has been growing a bit of a fan base over the last couple of years as she has documented her work on the farm. As Colonsay slips into lambing season, [Morag's insta](#) is looking particularly adorable. Check it out [here](#).

This photo was featured on the Visit Scotland social media feeds so lots of people have had an insight into lambing on Colonsay - well done, Morag!

Song of the Month

This month's song suggestion came from Seumas McNeill (*I know the word nepotism is coming to mind at this point but no one else submitted pictures or songs this month!* - Ed). Seumas has been listening to a lot of Face the West recently, but actually recommended a different band - he suggests a song by Scottish folk super-group, North Sea Gas. The song is called 'Fire in the Glen'.

Click [HERE](#) to listen to the song.

YouTube GB fire in the glen north sea gas

North Sea Gas / Fire in the Glen

Allan McMillan

Subscribe 1

4 views

Letters, etc.



Unicycle! - A full non-stop circuit of Colonsay by unicycle... has this been done before?! (OK, we own up, there was an ice cream stop at the shop). Uphill sections are hard work, but downhill is just as bad because there are no brakes and there is no option to freewheel. Three cheers to the group of German cyclists who stood and applauded before the descent down to Glassard and Scalasaig. But that final bend up to Uragaig

meant they couldn't quite reach Watty's without having to push!

You will see one photo shows a member of the back up team trying to keep up by using a strange contraption with two wheels. The other member - me - worked as the official photographer and supplier of midget gems.

This was last August but I'd been waiting for The Corncrake to come back to life!

Cheers,
Roger



In Conclusion

The Corncrake is published to keep all our friends in touch with life on the island and invites contributions. Brief genealogical and related queries are also welcome from Colbhasachs overseas, as are obituaries and family traditions relating to Colonsay emigrants. The current edition was produced Caitlin McNeill and any comments will be welcomed if addressed to caitlinmusic@hotmail.co.uk As usual, it is not intended to be completely anodyne, but any errors or omissions are regretted, and anything seriously annoying will if possible be suitably modified.