

The Corncrake June 2015

THE LATE ANGELA SKRIMSHIRE

It is with great regret that we record Angela's passing, 1st June 2015, after some nineteen years as a much-loved and appreciated resident in Colonsay. Angela was a constant source of surprise and inspiration, self-effacing to a remarkable degree yet a lady whose talents outshone the vast majority of people. Angela was an acknowledged and published expert on the German Arthouse Movement (see her *Appreciation of Edgar Reitz' Heimat Films*), played and actually built her own spinet (a form of harpsichord) and created one of Colonsay's finest gardens in the least promising site imaginable. Her extraordinary analytical mind enabled her to make insightful written contributions upon almost any subject of debate, a gift that was wonderfully belied by her self-acknowledged difficulty with public speaking. Angela had a particular sensitivity and feeling for the natural world, appreciated and helped to protect our island environment and was a generous and loyal friend to all who were privileged to know her. Funeral arrangements are to be notified.

THE STEVENSON LIGHTHOUSE

The magnificently restored Stevenson Lighthouse is a triumph for the Colonsay & Oransay Heritage Trust, and is attracting attention from on high. On Saturday 6th June, it is to be visited by the Lighthouse Commissioners and members of the executive of the Northern Lighthouse Board, who will also visit the Rubh a' Mhail lighthouse lens, which is preserved in the gardens of Colonsday House. It is now securely sited in the Glebe and will hopefully be an additional feature of interest to persons enjoying the 2km wildlife trail which has been established in recent years.

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM COLONSAY RECENT PAST

The AGM of the Colonsay & Oransay Heritage trust will be held at 7.30 pm on Tuesday 16th June in the Village Hall. This will be followed by an illustrated presentation entitled "People, Places and Projects" to give a glimpse into Colonsay's recent past based upon post-WWII photographs in the COHT archive.

JOHN de VERE LODER, 80th Anniversary Symposium, 27th June 10.30 – 6.30, Village Hall

John de Ver Loder's *Colonsay and Oransay in the Isles of Argyll* was published in 1935 and remains an essential reference work for any future study. On the 80th anniversary of its publication Colonsay and Oransay Heritage trust is sponsoring a workshop to discuss the significance of this work, and how later work has deepened our understanding of the history of the islands. The Trust is grateful to Colonsay Estate for financial support towards to cost of this event. Contributors will include: Prof. Steven Mithen, on Colonsay and Oransay in prehistory; Richard Hill, on the life and times of John Loder; David Jardine, on Loder's bird list and subsequent research; Prof. Colin Breen on recent archaeological work in Colonsay; Alastair Scouller, on John Loder's debt to the work of Murdoch McNeill; Tanis Hinchcliffe on the McNeill lairds of Colonsay in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

All interested persons are invited to attend. Cost, including lunch and refreshments, is £7.00. For further information email [r37hill\[at\]btinternet.com](mailto:r37hill[at]btinternet.com) substituting @ for [at].

Ceòl Cholasa 2015

Once again the organisers of Colonsay's 8th Folk Festival have been lucky to attract some of the top names in Scottish Traditional music to the festival. Jointly topping the bill are the legendary **Blazin' Fiddles** and internationally acclaimed **Breabach**.

The incredibly busy **Kris Drever** will be making his 4th appearance at the festival, this time with fellow guitar virtuoso **Ian Carr**; (Previously with John McCusker and Roddy Wooble, Megan Henderson and Eamonn Coyne and as part of the unforgettable LAU).

Also appearing are the astounding **Jenn Butterworth and Laura-Beth Salter**, guitar, mandolin and beautiful singing and stalwarts of the folk scene **Ian Walker and Ian Bruce**.

The younger generation are well represented by the award winning **Mischa MacPherson Trio** (Radio 2 young folk singer of the year 2014), **Canach** –featuring Caitlin McNeill from Colonsay and newcomers **Ross Hull and Cameron Grant**.

Local singer-songwriter **Donald MacNeill** will be showcasing his new album, a collaboration with Sardinian multi-instrumentalist and producer **Roberto Diana** who will also be playing a solo concert.

As always there will be a locals' concert, featuring among many the **Machrins McNeills**, lunchtime and late night sessions and a ceilidh with the **Jen MacNeill ceilidh Band**.

The festival runs from Thursday 17th September to Sunday 20th and is held in the village hall and the local hotel. A great chance to meet local Colonsay people, sample local Colonsay Ale and bask in the (almost) guaranteed autumn sunshine. While the formal concerts are invariably sublime, the late night pub sessions are almost as good. Punters and professionals can be found mingling in the hotel with at least three sessions (and possibly three pints) running concurrently.

Tickets can be obtained from ceolkeith@yahoo.co.uk or by contacting Donald (Pedie) on 01951200157. www.ceolcholasa.co.uk

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND RENOVATIONS

Following an architect's inspection, two Georgian windows at the church were condemned, creating a serious financial challenge for the tiny congregation. It was decided to launch an appeal for funds, but also to completely change the approach to ongoing maintenance. In the past, work has been commissioned as and when required but this is now recognised to be inefficient. Instead, an ongoing Fabric Fund has been established and maintenance is moving onto a proactive footing – each autumn, necessary work will be anticipated and contracted to be undertaken in the following springtime. See www.colonsaychurches.org

Fundraising commenced in February and the magnificent total of £15,000 has been raised or pledged, for which the congregation is truly grateful. Contractor Gregor Deans arrived with his team on May 27th, together with the new hardwood windows, and work has continued apace despite appalling weather conditions. Richard Hill, our locally resident architect, has kindly monitored the work and there has been wonderful progress. The contractors will return in August to complete this phase of the work, which has been extended to include certain additional items e.g. renewal of the south window and of the vestry doorjambs and lintel.

Unfortunately one new challenge has been identified. The attractive "birdcage" belfry is now in a parlous condition; it is clear that the iron pins that hold it together have rusted and burst the

pillarstones. Historic Scotland are to be approached for advice, Richard Hill has kindly agreed to be associated with the resolution and the parish will shortly identify suitably qualified masons to undertake the restoration. Progress will be reported here – doubtless this will be an expensive project, but when it is complete we will be able to ring the bell! Another excuse for a celebration.



REBUILDING THE ARCHIVE

Owing to an error by the hosting company, the archive of the first 100 editions of *The Corncrake* was wiped from the record. Owing to the kindness of a number of individuals, especially Melanie McKellar and Angela Skrimshire, it will be possible to recreate that archive. It will take a wee while, but work will start fairly soon.

Incidentally, Melanie is researching her Colonsay connections and visited the island recently. Melanie has kindly left a copy of her extensive research, centred upon the lines of descent from Rebecca Blue (b. 12 April 1801) who died 1859, Riasgbuidhe, also Alexander McNeill 1800-1862, Rebecca Blue, Duncan Blue and Duncan McFadyen. It is hoped to use her comprehensive information in an article at a later date, but anybody wishing to refer to the material or to contact Melanie should contact Kevin Byrne.

DOCTOR IN THE WILDERNESS

It would be good to be fit and healthy for as long as possible, and any pointers in the right direction might be of value. Many Colonsay folk will remember that the late Dr. Walter Yellowlees had some theories on the subject, and that he seemed to be living proof of their validity. His book, *Doctor in the Wilderness*, is unfortunately no longer in print, but a copy was obtained online for £0.01 plus postage – a brilliant investment. It is an excellent book, thoroughly enjoyable in its own right, and it transpires that Dr. Yellowlees was considerably ahead of his time. Suffice to say that virtually everything that he advocated or predicted has been thoroughly justified in the light of subsequent

experience, with the exception of a couple of things which remain uncertain. If you have yet to take a stance on sugar, refined foods, organic vegetables or The Ultimate Question of Life, this book is for you. He does not suggest faddish diets or peculiar regimens, but he does cover a lot of ground and draws attention to numerous conditions that might well be avoided by a little common sense.

PUTTING THE WORLD TO RIGHTS

What an extraordinary month! There are 64 SNP members of the Scottish Parliament, out of 128 in all; then along came the General Election and 56 SNP members were elected to the UK Parliament, out of a possible 59. From a purely objective point of view, it seems that Scotland is the most united part of the United Kingdom and that the other members should maybe watch and learn.

Amidst all the excitement, it had been learned that Hebridean Air Services had been obliged to terminate their schedules and had refunded fares to pre-booked passengers. There had been a difficulty in agreeing details of an ongoing subvention via Argyll & Bute Council – happily, that problem was swiftly resolved and the invaluable service has been restored. To avoid doubt – air services to and from Colonsay are now operating as normal and are secure for at least three more years.

In April, the ferry services to and from Colonsay had been disrupted to an extent that was unprecedented since the Seamen's Strike, some 40 years ago. Unsurprisingly, the community had been very concerned and – unhappily – had found it impossible to establish any meaningful communication with the operator. The Chief Executive Officer attended a meeting in Colonsay in May, at which various issues were raised – CalMac are preparing to bid for the retention of their business in competition with a rival contractor, SERCO (“the most powerful company you have never heard of”). The purpose of the meeting was to establish closer links between the company and its customer base and to clarify the relationship between the operating company (CalMac), the asset owners (CMAL), the regulatory body (Transport Scotland), the overall owners (Scottish Government) and the funding body (EC). From the Colonsay side, the community does appreciate that CalMac has established excellent methods of communication as regards specific ferry movements but made it very clear that an additional level of communication is required when any sort of extraordinary disruption arises; if any ongoing problem arises, management needs to communicate with ALL of the affected communities.

NATURE NOTES RSPB

May was largely dominated by Northerly winds which slowed down spring migration, it felt more like autumn at times!



We heard our first corncrake of the year on the 22nd of April and they really started making themselves known on Oronsay during the first few weeks of May with their distinctive 'crex crex' bring heard throughout the day and night. An initial survey here has found at least 13 calling males, which is a fantastic start to what will hopefully be another successful breeding season.

During our daily livestock checks, two colour-ringed twite have been spotted. Both the birds were ringed Heysham near Morecambe. These are very interesting records as they will likely be breeders on Oronsay, here for the season and then moving south for the winter. Twite are a small member of the finch family, closely related to the linnet. Males develop a striking pink rump during the breeding season. They feed on seeds the year round.



The waders have been held up with the poor weather, a flock of approximately 500 dunlin and 300 ringed plover being seen on the reserve. Additionally, there have at times been up to 20 whimbrel stopping off before completing their journey to breeding grounds. Cuckoos have been heard across Colonsay with the first on Oronsay heard on the 8th of May.



This striking ruff was seen on the 14th, a very interesting sighting as it is just moulting into breeding plumage. This bird was seen on the south end pools

During May two white-tailed eagles have visited Oronsay. The first was spotted as it tried to fly off with the last remaining barnacle goose. The eagle was mobbed by just about every bird in the area, and eventually flew off towards Islay. The second was spotted on a breeding wader survey late one evening. Other species which have been seen on Oronsay recently include four dotterel, a pair of garganey, arctic terns, a pair of little terns and an arctic skua.



In other news the islands flora has now belatedly begun to add some colour to the land. The yellow flag iris has started to flower, common spotted orchids are beginning to emerge and carpets of beautiful bluebells can now be enjoyed. Butterfly sightings have included green-veined white, peacock, small tortoiseshell and green hairstreak. Unfortunately the weather has not been good enough to make moth trapping worthwhile, however a glaucous shears was found inside one of the cottages. This species feeds on a wide range of moorland plants including heather and occurs sparsely throughout western and northern Britain.

What to look out for in June

With warmer temperatures hopefully on the way there should be an emergence of summer butterflies, including the extremely beautiful marsh fritillary. Chicks will be starting to fledge in larger numbers and there will be an increase in flowers to add some colour.

Finally, I would like to take a moment to introduce myself. My name is Luke and I am the newly appointment assistant warden on Oronsay. Izzy has now left for a new job on Islay after an amazing four years with us on Oronsay. All of us at the reserve, and I am sure many of the people of Colonsay, would like to wish her all the best in her new adventures.

Luke, Assistant warden Oronsay Reserve

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RSPB office – 01951 200 367

MacPHEE-BAGGING

The MacPhee Bagging project on May 4th was a great success – lots of people were there for the start and even the youngest children conquered the first three peaks. Support dwindled a little thereafter, but three people (and a dog) completed the full 21 miles and 21 peaks of the circuit. The event was to raise funds for Educational Travel for the Primary Schoolchildren, and a total of slightly more than £700 was raised, thanks to the very generous support of the sponsors. During the course of the day, the missing Direction Plate from the cairn on Beinn nan Gudairean was unexpectedly discovered, some 200 metres to the south of the cairn. Many hours had been spent in fruitless searching and there was a no-questions-asked reward still on offer in the sum of £1,000. By great good fortune, the plate was actually discovered by the person who had offered the reward, so there may even be a tax advantage! After all, the offer was as goodwill advertising and possibly a legitimate expense, whereas the receipt of it was perhaps a simple windfall... maybe we need to ask

an MP for advice. Anyway, the plate is not badly damaged and Alex Howard is arranging for its restoration and re-instatement (an excuse for a great rededication ceremony in memory of David Todd and the Honourable Society of Colonsay Thiefs!).

COLONSAY FESTIVAL OF SPRING

The Festival was a huge success, thanks to the support of the sponsors including Hebridean Air Services, Colonsay Estate and CalMac, and the services of all our experts, artists and guides, and in particular sue to the sterling efforts of Sarah Hobhouse. The text of a proper appreciation of the splendid three week long programme of events has gone missing in the ether, so it is hoped that a few photographs in this issue will speak for themselves. Next year's festival is already being planned and will be even more unmissable, if that be possible. See <http://www.colonsayevents.co.uk/>

HAZEL ROSE

Hazel is one of 3 finalist for "Graduates In The Spotlight" competition! This is through Nude Jewellery which is a gallery in Mayfair London. If she wins she gets the opportunity to show her jewellery in the gallery and get lots of publicity. Winning relies upon getting the most votes so if anyone would like to do this follow this link or go to the Nude Jewellery website and go onto the blog. It requires logging in first using either a facebook account or email. Once this is done then return to the blog page and a drop down box opens under 'vote for your graduate in the spotlight'.

Hazel's home is Colonsay, she trained at the School of Jewellery in Birmingham and has a BA Hons. in Jewellery and Silversmithing. She was awarded the Birmingham Assay office 'Most Commercial Design' in June 2014. She now has a workshop in the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham. If you would like to see more of her jewellery go to her website.

http://www.nudejewellery.co.uk/blog/read_127549/graduates-in-the-spotlight-time-to-vote.html

Hazels website: <http://www.hazelrosejewellerydesigns.co.uk/>

MARINE HARVEST

There is good progress – the shorebase application for Planning Permission has gone through, the 60ft service vessel has been built (in Holland?) and is to be named Beinn Eibhin, at least one Colonsay member has attended a successful induction course, the manager has been appointed and moorings for various craft are being finalised. Colonsay looks forward to welcoming this exciting new venture, a fish farm to be operated to the highest environmental standards by a major international company providing employment and skills within our community. The farm should be operational by autumn and we wish it and everyone involved a warm welcome and the greatest of success.

ON THE GRAPEVINE

We had a nice start to the year, with the highest temperature to date being recorded on 9th April at 16.0 C. but unfortunately we then encountered a bitterly cold period lasting 6 weeks (so far) – the second highest temperature was only 14.7 degrees, recorded on 24th May and only on ten days in May did the temperature reach or exceed 12 degrees; Kevin retires as schoolbus driver at the end of

term, and a new contractor has been appointed, rumoured to have a bigger and certainly a better bus; Gavin has taken delivery of a luxurious caravan and with much help from friends and neighbours has established himself in the former silage pit at Mull Dubh , a veritable suntrap which now has a faintly Moroccan look, since Scott whitewashed all the walls; the Pantry has new doors and a very swish electronic till, able to hold almost unlimited takings; John and Diane have moved to a modern house in Glen Odhran, and Glen Cottage is to be a holiday let, renamed as Harbour View, and there are rumours of a Blue Placque to mark it as the childhood home of Danny Alexander; Ella has celebrated her ninth birthday; Grace and Keir are safely home from their expedition to Grenada, probably glad to get away from the heat; we hope to have news of a new baby later this month, and there are rumours of another before Christmas!

Letters etc.

No letters received.

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 Kevin Byrne, as a temporary editor, and any comments will be welcomed if addressed to byrne@colonsay.org.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. Please note that we are **still looking for a new editor** – any candidate should contact any member of the CCDC Board (which happens to own the publication and to be the ultimate governor).