

THE CORNCRAKE

The Isle of Colonsay News Letter

Issue 288 - 31st May 2017

The Front Page

On the Front Page this month:

- a busy start to the season,
- the Heritage Trust's new home,
- a briefing of island news, and
- our Postman retires.

This Month's Articles & Reports:

- Easter on Colonsay
- Easter eggs in church by Alastair Scouller
- The 6th Annual Colonsay Book Festival,
- The 2017 Spring Festival – the first half

Busy start to the season

On Colonsay the season starts with Easter, and this year the weather was fair and and there was as a lot going on, including Easter Egg hunting. Read more in the Corncrake article on Easter: [Easter on Colonsay](#) and Alastair Scouller's fine piece on the Easter church service: [Chocolate eggs in church](#). Easter was late this year so there was not long to wait until the annual Book Festival at the end of April. This year's Book Festival saw an excellent bevvy of authors, including Alexander McCall Smith who was returning for a second appearance. See the report on the Book Festival: [Book Festival Report](#) for more details. As the Book Festival closed its literary doors the Spring Festival opened the barn doors on a cornucopia of three weeks of events, walks and tutored workshops. The Spring Festival was again popular, busy and much enjoyed by its participants. The Spring Festival is now so large that the Corncrake report has been split into two. The first half of the report on the Festival: [Spring Festival - the first half](#), is below, and the report on the second half of the Festival will follow soon.

Heritage Trust's new home

The Colonsay & Oronsay Heritage Trust newly homed in the Baptist Church has re-opened its doors informally, with a grand opening to be scheduled. Look for a full article on the Trust's new home in a future Corncrake.



Informal opening of Colonsay & Oronsay Heritage Trust's new home at Colonsay Baptist Church

Also during May the Heritage Trust held an event celebrating 100 years on Colonsay through an audio-visual presentation of a diverse collection of photos, narrated by David Binnie, with songs from Pedie McNeil. A report on this should be appearing soon in the Corncrake.

News Briefing

A few news lines:

- both the CCC and CCDC held meetings in May; please refer to the official minutes for details,
- the Coastguard conducted exercises on Colonsay in early May,
- Jasmin and Liam's baby, Thalia Dairon, was born on 22nd April,
- a baby basking shark was reportedly saved on the beach at Kiloran Bay (photo anybody?), and
- Keith, our Postman, had his final delivery round, well in a way...

Our Postman Retires

Keith, our Postman, on reaching the fine age of 70 and having served us rain and shine for over 30 year, has retired from the role of full-time Postman, though he will continue as Relief Postman and be seen once a week doing the rounds on Wednesday evenings. Keith will also continue to man the counter at the Post Office, and being stuck inside more, will likely be glad of some company.



Young at heart. Postman Keith Rutherford visits Walter Williams, on his final round as Colonsay's Postman

Easter on Colonsay

Eastertide and the island throws off its Winter weeds, welcomes regular and new visitors, and sees the year's first flush of social sporting events, set of course in the context of its religious festival. For the outdoor events the weather was seasonally mixed, with showers on Saturday giving way, before the weekend ended, to a flourish of warm sun, well suited for basking.



Seals Basking at Ardskenish on Easter Sunday

Easter Shoot

Colonsay and Oronsay Gun Club held their annual Easter Shoot on the Saturday 15th April. Blustery April showers made for challenging conditions for the shooters, though spirits kept high amongst the modestly numbered but able and experienced party, and prizes were well spread:

Angus & Ella McFadyen Memorial Cup to Donald MacAllister
David Clark Cup to David Binnie
Morag Paris Basket to Donald MacAllister

Championship cup to Chris Nisbet
Milican Cup to Chris Nisbet
Hester McAllister Cup (Double Rise) to Donald MacAllister

Alasdair McNeill Memorial cup (Aggregate) to David Binnie

Ladies Cup to Kirsty MacAllister
Boys Cup to Ewan McFadyen
Visitors Cup to Freddy Onn.

The event was sponsored by the Colonsay Brewery & Wild Island Botanic Gin. The second shoot of the year is traditionally in September, though this year's date has yet to be confirmed. Watch the Corncrake for news.



Colonsay Gun Club's Easter Shoot

Easter Church Service

The Easter Day service at the Church of Scotland in Scalasaig was led by Rev Mitchell Bunting with a good-sized, adult congregation, sadly bereft of bairns, as explained by Alastair Scouller in his excellent piece [“Chocolate Eggs in Church”](#). Perhaps the children were at the Hotel where an Easter Egg hunt was reportedly in full spate.

Easter Golf

The Colonsay Golf Club Easter “double-header” was reduced to a single round on Monday morning, when David Binnie led off the first of two teams in a “Texas Scramble”.

For those, likely the vast majority, uninitiated in the dark arts of golfing lore, a “Texas Scramble” is not some form of Trump-era political scrimmage, but rather a format where players in a team each play a shot, and the best shot is taken as the starting point for the whole team for the next shot. With this pattern repeated hole by hole, a team has a shared score for each hole and the round. If the reader is confused and still interested, a more intelligent and intelligible explanation can be found here: <http://www.golf-monthly.co.uk/features/the-game/texas-scramble-64802> .



David Binnie preparing to tee-off to start Colonsay Golf Club's Easter event

The result of this Easter "Classic" was that the first team (Messrs: Binnie, McAlistair, Emslie) beat the second team (Messrs; Hutton, Bell & Buttrick) by one shot, with Derek Emslie taking the prize for the nearest shot to the pin on the short 17th hole.

There are regular, informal golf gathering on Sundays at 10am and an even more informal gathering on Wednesday around 5pm, with green fees of £5 per round or the remarkably good value annual membership at £30. The annual Colonsay Open takes place on the third Saturday in August, which this year falls on August 19th.

Community Garden

Where would Spring be without a first blush of flowers and blossom? In the Colonsay Community Garden the hard work of loyal volunteers is showing a real return on their investment. Here is a brief update on progress from Jan Binnie, with more to follow in a future Corncraek.

"The garden is now well established and maturing nicely as we approach its fourth anniversary. The shelter-belt is now functioning well to reduce the worst impacts of the westerly winds. The spring bulbs in free standing tubs have been a glorious success and hopefully will still be in full bloom for the Book Festival at the end of April. Some of the beds have struggled to flourish, mostly due to water-logging and so we have made modifications to the designs and plantings to accommodate our site.

We now have a mini orchard thanks to the generosity of a grant from the Tree Council's Orchard Windfall Fund. We joined the children with their apple tree planting sessions in the autumn and now look forward to seeing the bearing fruit in the years to come. If you are down by the

hall do come and have a look around the garden, or come and join us at our Saturday morning gardening sessions; look out for notices at the shop.”



Colonsay Community Garden showing off its Spring bounty

CHOCOLATE EGGS IN CHURCH – by Alastair Scouller

Easter is not really for the children ...

So runs the second verse of a poem by Steve Turner, comparing the two great Christian festivals of Christmas and Easter. And this year, in the parish church at Scalasaig, Colonsay appeared to have got the message. Not a wean in sight! Which was a pity, because the visiting minister, Rev. Mitchell Bunting, known to his friends as 'Bungie', had turned up early and secreted chocolate eggs around the building for them to hunt for after the service. For many years now, the Easter Day service on Colonsay has been held in the Baptist Church at Kilchattan. Indeed, the entire alternating pattern of services in the island's two churches was made to hinge on the date of Easter – a notorious variable and arcane calculation, as the Rev. Bungie explained to us during his sermon. But now that the Baptist Church has been born again as the island's Heritage Centre, all services are held in Scalasaig. Was it the change of venue that discouraged families from turning out for this Family Service? Or was it the distinctly un-springlike weather? Work on improving the disabled access to the parish church was sadly not completed in time for Easter as planned, but this did not deter the island's oldest resident, Betty Galbraith, who was safely driven to the end of the existing level pathway by the Session Clerk, Kevin Byrne.

With around 40 worshippers present, there was a kind of reverential buzz about the place, although the absence of background organ music threatened to discourage conversation. True, the Buntings' son was seated at the organ console, but as I remarked to my neighbour, his skills did not appear to extend to playing a 'voluntary' before the service began. The reason became evident during the first hymn, when the 'organist' stood up to sing, while the organ continued to play. The young man's keyboard skills, it transpired, were being deployed on a cunningly concealed computer, and the music was all recorded. If only he had stayed sitting down, we would all have complemented him on his musical ability.

The service focussed on a series of readings from all four Gospels, telling the story of how Jesus rose again from the dead on the first Easter Day. These were interspersed with a selection of Easter hymns. The folkly cadences of 'Now the green blade riseth' were unfamiliar to some, but the more traditional strains of 'Jesus Christ is risen today' evoked a jubilant 'Alleluia' from the assembled congregation.

Bungie, who is a regular visitor, to Colonsay, was attired for the occasion in a white habit, with a matching stole embroidered in sand-coloured Palestinian needlework. The same needlework was used to drape the pulpit and lectern – almost literally pinning his colours to the mast, one felt. Amongst more weighty theological issues, the sermon considered such profound questions as 'Why is Easter all to do with chocolate?' A foil-wrapped, suitably 'fair trade' Easter egg was solemnly broken and passed around the congregation. And at the end of the service, in the continued absence of children, concealed Easter eggs were duly hunted down by the grown-ups. Which is appropriate, because the line from Steve Turner's poem actually reads:

*Easter is not really for the children, **unless accompanied by a cream filled egg.***

Colonsay Book Festival 2017

As the doors closed on the 6th Annual Colonsay Book Festival on the last Sunday in April, it marked the end of another successful chapter in life of what has become one of Scotland's literary treasures. At the same time it was a poignant moment because, as Dilly Emslie, at the helm since the Festival's inception, closed the festival she also stepped down as its Director. Once again Dilly led her hard working festival committee to produce an outstanding event for such a small community, as a star-studded array of authors delighted the appreciative and enrapt audience filling Colonsay's community hall, a venue as austere and rugged on the outside as it is warm and welcoming within.



The authors at the 2017 Colonsay Book Festival

The authors this year included Alexander, "Sandy", McCall Smith, returning to the festival to bring the joy, wit and humour of the galaxy of his creation of characters. Then, in a contrast to Sandy, and indeed to each other, there were two poets, Edinburgh Makar, Christine de Luca and Glasgow Makar, Jim Carruth: the lilting soft spoken rhythms of Shetland matched against the modern pastoral, plain speaking life of Lowland farming. The diverse mix continued with the cookery writer, now novelist, Sue Lawrence, historian Jim Hunter, and modern fiction writer Karen Campbell. Karen Campbell was introducing her two most recent works, which continue to differentiate her style from the traditional Crime genre, with which she is sometimes associated. Sue Lawrence delighted the audience in her conversation with Pru Irvine, as she described blending the food world she knows and has written about for so long and so well, into a fictional setting as she has successfully transitioned to writing dual narrative novels, with a historical

thread set alongside a modern one. James Hunter's new account of the Sutherland Clearances has unsettling present day resonances with its vivid description of the forced displacement of families from long loved homes to the unknown and uncertain future of resettlement as often unwelcome refugees. Jim also sparked a lively debate about the future of land use in the Highlands and Islands, by prompting discussion about the re-population of "wild" land, and pointing to the potential synergy between wild raptor populations and land being under cultivation.

The "Festival Fringe" has grown this year, with 3 free events taking place at the hotel and parish church over the weekend.

There were two book launches with Eilidh Scammell and Dr Jacob King introducing "Gaelic in the Landscape: Place-Names of Colonsay and Oronsay" at the hotel on Friday night, and on Saturday night Dion Alexander entertained a packed parish church with readings from his memoir "The Potter's Tale", which recounts vivid stories from Colonsay in the 1970's. The lounge at the Hotel was full too on Sunday morning to hear Hugh Andrew describe the role of the publisher in Scotland, and his personal journey from book purveyor to first establishing and then building the now highly successful Birlinn publishing, a journey that has already included, as Hugh recounted, many amusing and memorable moments.



Dion Alexander

So, the festival continues to entertain and inform, to bring mirth, and bring thought provoking subjects relevant to locals and visitors alike, thanks in good part to the valued, continuing sponsorship of Caledonian MacBrayne, Marine Harvest, the Colonsay Bookshop, the Colonsay Brewery, the Colonsay Hotel and Estate, the Colonsay General Store and the Pantry.

The final words of course at the festival were, naturally, thanks to Dilly Emslie for her unmatched contribution to the festival that Alexander McCall Smith described as “superb”. Thanks also go to Diane Clark and Christa Byrne who have stepped down from the festival committee after long and dedicated service, and a welcome extended to Richard Irvine, Richard Buttrick and Neil Hutton who have joined.



Alexander McCall Smith in conversation with Dilly Emslie

The 7th Annual Colonsay Book Festival will take place on the last weekend in April 2018, and devotees can be confident that under new management the “small and intimate is good” ethos of the festival will remain and continue to attract high calibre authors, as Dilly Emslie though retired as Director, will continue to take an influential role behind the scenes.

Colonsay Spring Festival 2017

Colonsay's Spring Festival, which centres on the creative arts and nature, began as the Book Festival closed its doors on the last weekend in April, with the Old Waiting Room gallery opening its doors to a joint exhibition by renowned artists Alasdair and Andrew McMorrine. The exhibition of the brothers McMorrine included a diverse collection of works in various media. Oil and watercolours alongside pen and ink washes depicting scenes from Colonsay and other Hebridean islands. Amongst the varied array of other events and workshops in the first half of the Spring Festival were collage making, simple book binding and block printing, as well as nature walks exploring lesser and more well known parts of Colonsay.



Andrew and Alasdair McMorrine

The first full week of the Festival began on 1st May with a sponsored climb, which is more of a walk and clamber, up Colonsay's 22 "MacPhees". What the "Munros" are to the rest of Scotland the MacPhees are to Colonsay, though on a much smaller scale. The MacPhees are all (just) over 300 feet high, and the object of the sponsored trek is to climb them all in one day, which Kevin Byrne successfully led a group of stout walkers to do, raising money for charity on the way.



Carol Paterson's collage making workshop

More leisurely creative events started with a felting workshop run by Lotta Leahey and continued with collage making under the expert eye of Carol Paterson.

Through the week Alasdair McMorrine held a series of sessions making curiosity boxes to capture mementoes of a visit to Colonsay and simple block printing; whilst Andrew led a variety of walks exploring Colonsay's & Oransay's historical past.

The diary of things to do offered its usual range of choice and interest with also on offer:

- an exploration of the flora and fauna of Colonsay with David Jardine, first in an illustrated talk, and then for real in a guided walk
- simple bookbinding with Morag Tweedle
- plant and natural dyeing with Anne Ferguson and Morag Tweedle
- dry stone walling with Lotta Leahy and Dave Binnie
- a knitting workshop



Fi Martynoga

The exhibition at the Old Waiting room in the second week of the Festival included a combined showing of the works of Morag Tweedie, Anne Ferguson and Carol Paterson.

One of the more diverting events of the first half of the Festival was a supper by Fi Martynoga of 18th Century food, including bannocks, stovies and nettle soup. Fi also led a foraging expedition to find wild food on Colonsay to go into a shared lunch.

On the second Tuesday there was a special, fund-raising event with a meal of Brownings Bakers champion pies and an exotic mix of quiz formats whipped up into an extravaganza entitled "Universally Challenged", which was hugely enjoyable thanks to two willing and variously-abled teams, under the steady hand of Pedie McNeil, and the talented quiz making and the audio-visual presentational skills of Kier Johnstone.



The champion pie dinner

The event was sponsored by:

Colonsay Brewery
Brownings Bakers for their world champion pies
Tesco's in Oban
Eileen & Finlay Geekie – Wild Thyme Spirits
Gheasper, Kevin & Christa Byrne
Keir & the General Store
Penny Gill
Carol Paterson
Jane & Alex Howard
Pru & Richard Irvine
Gavin Clark & the Pantry
Balnahard Farm
Marine Harvest

and raised over £3000 for the Colonsay Tourism Marketing Group which backs the Spring and Autumn Festivals on Colonsay.



Pedie McNeil controls proceedings in the Universally Challenged quiz

Coming up on Colonsay and the Corncrake

As the island takes a breather after the hectic days of the Spring Festival, the Corncrake will be catching up with reports on the Festival and the Heritage Trust, which recently opened its doors at the Baptist church.

On the island we will soon be into the full swing of summer with Ceildh season and the Rugby Festival in July. The Music Festival is promising a bumper edition this year when the lights go up in September.



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