

Hebridean Hostellers

Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

www.gatliff.org.uk

Newsletter 55

January 2014



Cyclists at Rhenigidale - Peter Clarke

Three Hostels - Many Happy Memories

What is the essence of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust and why do those who are Trustees find it so fulfilling to be involved? The core is that running three Crofters' hostels, in partnership with islanders is a joy. The feedback is great. For example Ruth Gilbert wrote, 'Had an amazing week on the islands. Stayed in Howmore and Rhenigidale hostels. Loved every minute. The hostels were just what I'd hoped for, had everything I needed and the company was great. Would recommend to anyone going there. Hope to be back.'

Thanks to our three wardens (Jackie Macleod, formerly West, at Berneray; Betty MacDonald at Howmore; Kate Langley at Rhenigidale), memorable visits are enjoyed at the hostels. Rhenigidale was recognised by VisitScotland as a Two-Star hostel, a great achievement for Kate and John Joyce's work party team.

Rhenigidale provided the venue for a very comfortable stay I enjoyed in August 2013 and a happy evening in front of the cosy coal-stove. Seven hostellers (two Scots, two Englishmen, two from the USA and a Kiwi) played 'Snap.' Luckily the hostel is far enough away from the nearest house to avoid complaints about the noise!

An equally hilarious evening is reported from Berneray. Hostellers staying one weekend in the summer agreed to visit the Community Association's bric-a-brac sale. Each agreed to spend up to £3 on an item in the sale and explain to the other hostellers why it was the 'Must Have' item for the hostel. The winner's trophy was a splendid multi-coloured plastic flower. The 'Must Have' item was an electrical screw driver with a built-in torch and spirit level, because the torch could help hostellers find the way back on a dark night and the spirit level would help them judge the steepness of hills.

I visited Howmore just before Christmas. The hills of south Uist were etched with snow. The isles had been lashed by winter gales. Thanks to the fantastic response to our Howmore Appeal, great progress is being made with the improvements. Of the £47,000 required for the project, £22,000 has been raised (including Gift Aid). A new shower has been installed in the thatched cottage. This completes the refurbishment of the historic hostel building giving three cosy, shared sleeping-rooms and facilities. The enlarged kitchen is taking shape as part of the new common room layout. Work has started on a new shower and toilet adjacent to the common room.

Thank you to all who have given so generously. Please consider making a donation in the New Year to help us raise the other £25,000 required for the hostel.

You too could get involved with the Trust, if you wish.

Peter Clarke - Chairman of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust



Berneray - Peter Clarke

Transforming Howmore

The small dormitory in the main building was decommissioned and the kitchen and common room were cleared. The wall between the kitchen and dormitory was demolished and once the other wall was built up the space was developed into the new galley kitchen.

Two stainless steel sink units with twin-lever deck-mixer taps for hot and cold water were fitted along with other stainless-steel food preparation tables. A further work-top was installed around the corner with new electric sockets over and under for kitchen equipment, together with a stainless steel shelf on the wall for a microwave and toaster.

Along the back wall one of the gas hobs was refitted between the stainless steel work tops and the other gas hob remains in situ until both are renewed in the Spring. New lighting has brightened the kitchen space along with a heat sensitive alarm.

Further work is needed on the kitchen and by Easter the hostel should have a well laid out, hygienic kitchen with improved work-surfaces which will be both more practical and easier to use than the existing cramped one. Common room space should increase too.

Along with a new electricity supply much of the electric wiring has been renewed. New pendant lighting is now in the common room area along with a new storage radiator. Other switches and lighting systems in the hall and inside and outside the porch were rewired.

The old immersion heater, water storage tank and plumbing were removed from above the shower room. The shower room and all fixtures were stripped out. This space has been partitioned to create a separate shower room and toilet / wash room. Much of the preparatory construction work has been started, but the new shower and toilet facilities will not be ready until the Spring.

A new more powerful shower was installed in the annexe shower room to provide a hotter and more constant water flow. The driveway from the road has been repaired and extra gravel has been laid down to extend the hard area of track.

Where possible all useful materials from the renovation were reused or set aside and stored. All timber retrieved was sawn up and stored in an outbuilding for hostel use. The site was cleared and all waste materials were removed to the local council recycling site for processing to minimise any environmental impact.

Thanks are due to everybody who contributed to the Appeal enabling us to carry on with the improvements, and particularly to Eddie Webb, Rob Plaister and Stuart Colley for all their hard work. Anybody interested in helping out in 2014 should contact John Joyce.



Howmore - Peter Clarke

The Man and His Trust

Herbert Gatliff was born in the 19th Century (21 September 1897) and witnessed some momentous events and changes - in conflicts, politics, society, transport, housing and the sheer inventiveness that characterised the 20th Century. His upbringing in vicarages; schooling at Rugby; higher education at Balliol College, Oxford; military service in the Coldstream Guards; a career in the top levels of the Civil Service - all suggest a conventional Establishment figure. He was far from that.

Even when he irked people, he could never be accused of being a hide-bound traditionalist. He was essentially a radical who embraced the liberal concepts of enabling individuals to develop in healthy, fulfilled and aspirational ways. He had been much influenced by the enthusiasms of the Revd H H Symonds, Head of Classics at Rugby, with their emphasis on the enjoyment of, and access to, the **countryside for everyone**, but especially for the young ... and young at heart.

Although a family man - married to Lois with two daughters, living in Surrey - he was essentially unconventional, a maverick among the mandarins of Whitehall. His enthusiasms were for activities that involved personal development and exercise, for organisations that preserved and promoted the countryside, for his concept of having '**a passion for landscape**', and for the fledgling Youth Hostels Association of which he eventually attained the prestigious position of national vice-president. He had a flair for getting things done.

The methods that he used to achieve his ambitions were compelling. He practised the techniques of putting pressure on people and groups by cajoling and wheedling, advising and admonishing, encouraging and congratulating. When, in the 1950s, he felt that the YHA (England & Wales) was 'going soft' he not only expressed himself forcefully, he endeavoured to do something about it. **The Gatliff Trust**, formed in 1961, was his own creation and underpinned the causes for which he cared.

He wanted to provide basic accommodation in remote places that would generate some income to assist the local communities. Small hostels had long appealed to him and a trip to the **Western Isles**, in the company of Sir John Cadbury, fused these interests. Throughout the '50s and '60s he followed the same route and routines annually by travelling across the Highlands and Western Isles in order to reach Iona. Many significant contacts were made and nurtured while on these journeys.

The result, within his lifetime, was the setting up of hostels at Rhenigidale, Howmore, Scarp and Berneray. They needed oversight and maintenance, equipment and publicity. These, as well his various commitments to other organisations and charities, were in the care of the Gatliff Trust which remained his inspiration until ill-health struck him, when 78 years of age. He did not celebrate an 80th birthday - for he died on **19 April 1977**. The Trust continued.

The Two Trusts

By eleven years after the death of Herbert Gatliff it had become clear that his hostels were operating successfully, but it was agreed to set up a **separate trust** to be responsible for the day-to-day running of the hostels. Under the Gatliff Trust deed it was very difficult to get new people involved, but this was much easier within the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust founded in 1988.

One reason for this achievement was that the newly-formed **GHHT** incorporated the Hebridean Hostellers Group, which had started in 1984. It has continued to attract those people who regularly visit and appreciate the hostels and has now grown in size to include over 265 individual members. Their generous donations and voluntary efforts are of great benefit to the cause.

The **Gatliff Trust** then focused exclusively on the charitable wishes of its founder. It has endeavoured to support the concept of hostelling, particularly in remote areas; to encourage people, especially the young with limited means, to explore the countryside; to promote and financially assist organisations connected with outdoor activities; to preserve rural values and the welfare of individuals.

Financial awards are made by the trustees, meeting twice a year, who decide on the merits of those charitable bodies applying for assistance. They also try to discover suitable projects or groups whose work fulfils the perceived aspirations of Herbert Gatliff. In the past three years about **30 organisations** have benefited either by way of general support or the underwriting of specific projects.

Breinton Church, Shropshire; Croydon Outdoor Pursuits and Social Events Club (COPSE); the Friends of the Bodleian Library are causes closely connected with Gatliff himself. Various **amenity groups**, such as the Campaign to Protect Rural England, the Council for National Parks, Historic Chapels and National Churches Trusts, Open Spaces Society, Ramblers Association and the Woodland Trust.

More of a **Scottish connection** appears in the awards made to the John Muir Trust, the National Trust for Scotland, the Scottish Churches Trust and the Scottish Council for National Parks. Specific projects include those of the Corsham Church Lads and Girls Brigade Camp, Gordon Rural Action, the Scottish Seabird Centre, Scotways Heritage Paths Project and the Wide Horizons Outdoor Education Trust.

The YHA Small Hostels Fund, the Skiddaw House Foundation, the Elenydd Wilderness Hostels Trust and the Glen Affric Youth Hostel have **received funding**. The GAMA (Gatliff /Angus MacLeod Archive) Award provided finance for three students whose research was published by the Islands Book Trust. Contributions have been made for aspects of the work of its sister trust, the GHHT.

One group whose work is monitored and supported on a regular basis is the **Postellers** YHA group, a youth movement of the YHA (England & Wales), founded in 1968. It provides the opportunities of adventurous escapes for young people, particularly for those from in and around London, and a range of activities associated with outdoor interests. Some 70 regularly take part.

The Trusts' Website

Nothing stands still in **website** technology and there has been a number of significant changes to www.gatliff.org.uk in recent months. The Howmore Appeal has taken centre-stage together with full information (including questions and answers) about visiting the hostels. Comprehensive information on each of the hostels, suggestions on how to get the best out of visiting them, together with a wide range of landscape, historical and cultural information are available on the site. Your responses to both the hostels and the website which promotes them will be appreciated.

Access for Otters

It is now over 15 years since the unofficial opening of the **Berneray Causeway** and the ending of the short-lived vehicle ferry to the island. It was appropriate that the Prince of Wales performed the official ceremony on 8 April 1999 for he had spent time on Berneray learning crofting techniques. The £6 million project is 951 yards long and begins at Otternish in North Uist. As part of the endeavour to promote wildlife, it includes barriers to keep out rabbits and culverts to allow access for otters.

The Rhenigidale Road

The population of Rhenigidale had, during the 1920s, numbered one hundred. A decline set in. The creation of the hostel in 1962 did not stem this trend, but it raised awareness. When the Schools Hebridean Society camped in the village in 1974, one of its projects was to survey a route from the direction of Maaruig. Things were happening and the EEC put aside £500,000 for the five-mile road. Work was interrupted, but eventually a Land Rover track was created and, then, in 1989 **the metalled road**. By that time the number of residents had fallen to eleven. The current increased count of 20 includes five children of school-age.

1250 Years On and Still Counting

We do not know when the first chapel was built at Howmore, but a stone slab incised with an outlined cross suggests a Christian presence since before the 9th Century. So, perhaps, **ecclesiastical interests** have been evident here in this complex of sites for 1250 years - with Dugall's Chapel, a tiny building of the Irish type; St Mary's Church, the parish church; St Dermot's and Clan Ranald Chapel, all ruined. To complicate matters, the staunchly Roman Catholic traditions of South Uist were not followed in the Howmore of the mid-19th Century. The Protestant Church of Scotland built its parish church there in 1858. It has been regarded as a landmark by sailors off the west coast and is often visited for its rare feature of a central communion table.

Come North ... or South

The next meeting of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust will be at **Berwick-upon-Tweed** on Saturday 22 February. Coffee will be served from 10.00 and there will be a Members' Forum during the morning. Please let us know if you are coming and are able to join us for lunch. Berwick is a fine place for a weekend visit. It has been an English town since 1482 and will assume more significance were Scotland to vote for independence in the forthcoming Referendum. House-prices will apparently soar in this case - for it will revert to its traditional role as a real border-town.

From Harris With Love

In the Autumn of 2013 BBC Alba screened *Chi m'in Tir - From Harris With Love* and chronicled over eight months the activities of several North Harris residents. There was sheep-searching and shearing, eagle-spotting, a fishing competition, preparing for the Mod, taking visitors to St Kilda, and walking on the beach at Luskentyre. One of the lives featured was that of **Kate Langley** - with her home and family-life in Rhenigidale, her hobby of singing in a Gaelic choir and her work of managing the Tarbert Community Centre as well as the wardening of our hostel.

Getting to Howmore and Berneray

There is a revived opportunity to make Lochboisdale, South Uist, a destination port from a different direction, at least until Tuesday 1 April. CalMac is trialling its service from **Mallaig**, passing but not calling at the Small Isles. Do some planning, remembering that it's sailing on Tuesdays and Saturdays only, to use that new fine road from Fort William or the outstanding rail journey, taking in Rannoch Moor and the Glenfinnan Viaduct. It is possible to take advantage of the connecting bus services from Lochboisdale to Howmore and Berneray. What a way to go!

Within Living Memory

The group of people with first-hand memories of the Second World War is beginning to decline in number. However, there will be individuals around still able to recall the **Berneray Airfield**. They are needed - for the Airfields of Britain Conservation Trust has recorded on its website that the facility, apparently used by the RAF and civilians, was on 'open land' and yet with a 'location unknown'. Perhaps this is a case for latter-day archaeologists able to detect the tell-tale signs of a piece of land once maintained with the foundations of an operating tower. Keep looking when exploring Berneray.

From the *Hebridean Hostellers* Issue of Five Years Ago

'One of **Herbert Gatliff's** interests was to encourage support groups for the YHA and he helped form the Croydon Group, known as COPSE, 75 years ago. (Ed: John Humphries) [*They continue his interests*]

and of Ten Years Ago

'**Arthur Meaby**, the Honorary Secretary, Treasurer and Maintenance Organiser of the GHHT, died, at the age of 67, on 19 September 2003 following a short illness.' (Ed: John Humphries) [*An awesome contribution to the cause*]

and Fifteen

'**Prince Charles** recently attended the first official shinty competition in the Western Isles since 1907 when he visited Berneray ... and donated a trophy called 'The Lord of the Isles'. (Ed: Jim McFarlane) [*Shinty still played*]

and Twenty

'**Howmore** renovation is proceeding very well. Most of the legal / local authority issues have been dealt with and difficulties over the historically defined and actual access have been resolved.' (Ed: Richard Genner) [*People make tracks*]

and Twenty-five

'You may have heard that there are plans for a hostel at **Garenin** in West Lewis. It is quite true that we are in discussion with the local council.' (Ed: Richard Genner) [*Things come and go*]

and now Thirty

'**John Joyce** is taking a work-party to Howmore at Easter. This will carry out decorating, minor repairs and cleaning. The front door will be altered to stop letting in the rain.' (Ed: Peter Clarke) [*John's contributions go on and on*]

Please Consider Joining the GHHT
Full Information Available at
www.gatliff.org.uk