



Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust

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newsletter 37

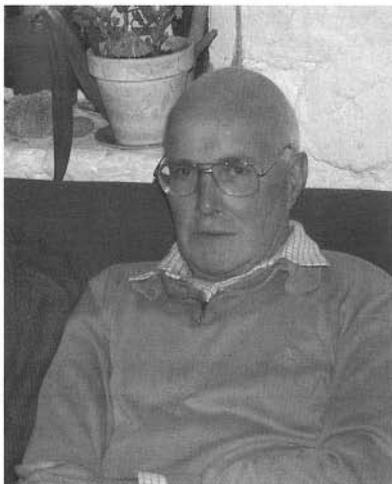
DECEMBER 2003



The Gatliff Hostels have an open door policy evident on Scarp, some 33 years after closure !

Arthur Meaby 1935-2003

Honorary Secretary and Treasurer of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust



Arthur Meaby, the Honorary Secretary, Treasurer and Maintenance Organiser of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust, died, at the age of 67, on 19 September 2003 following a short illness. He will best be remembered within the GHHT for the improvements, which greatly enhanced the quality and comfort of the accommodation, at the four Crofters' Hostels in the Western Isles.

Born in Chelsea in 1935 into a large family, Arthur Meaby found himself in Brighton as a teenager after, first his mother, then his father died. He was taken to Brighton by his stepmother, his father's second wife. Fortunately for Arthur she, in order to help the family budget, took in lodgers, one of whom turned out to be a Mr Curry, an influential youth hosteller from Northern Ireland. In 1951 Curry encouraged the young Meaby to visit a youth hostel in County Antrim. A wooden hut set in a wood, with all mod cons, it proved to be the starting point for his lifelong involvement with hostels. Back at home Arthur visited Arundel hostel and joined the Brighton Local YHA group. There he met Derek Hanson, who went on to become YHA National Treasurer for five years and National Chairman for eight years. Arthur became a member of the YHA Southern Region Countryside Committee, where he met Herbert Gatliff (1897-1977) in 1957. For six years he served as Regional Chairman of the YHA's Southern Region and was Chairman of London Region for many years in the 1980s. He was a member of the National Executive of the Youth Hostels Association of England and Wales from 1970 to 2002. He chaired the City and International Hostels Committee of the Association, responsible for hostels in places such as central London, Oxford, Liverpool, Manchester and York. He was also a member of the Ramblers' Association, the Long Distance Walkers Association, the Cyclists' Touring Club, the Austrian Alpine Club, the Council for National Parks and the Society for Sussex Downsmen. He was a member of the congregation of St John the Baptist, Colwick, Nottinghamshire. He never married.

In 1980 Arthur Meaby became a Trustee of the Gatliff Trust and, in 1988, a founder Trustee of the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust. He took on the unglamorous role of Maintenance Organiser. He became Secretary in 1995 and took on the role as Treasurer first in 1997 and again in 2000. He was also Vice-Chairman of the Gatliff Trust, a post he held since 1990.

Arthur Meaby's life epitomised the guiding mission of the youth hostels' movement - 'To help all, especially young people of limited means to a greater knowledge, love and care of the countryside, particularly by providing hostels or other simple accommodation for them in their travels and thus to promote their health, rest and education.' To the young Arthur, youth hostels represented freedom and adventure that were beyond the ridge of the South Downs, which so enclosed his home in Brighton and his work at the Southern Region Lancing Carriage and Wagon Works.

By profession Arthur Meaby was a Rolling Stock Engineer. He began his career with the Southern Railway at the age of 15. He trained as a Body Maker at Lancing Works. His phenomenal memory made him a valued colleague. Upon the closure of the Lancing Works he transferred to Southern House, Croydon, and went on to Derby in 1988. After railway privatisation he was employed as a contractor beginning with the drafting of instructional and reference manuals of safety and maintenance procedures for the new rail companies.

His knowledge of engineering and his 'All Stations Pass', which gave him free first-class travel over the entire UK rail network, brought Arthur's influence to bear on myriad hostel projects. This was especially so in the Outer Hebrides, where he was a lifelong supporter of the Crofters' Hostels. For over twenty years he was a Gatliff Trustee serving in a variety of roles until the time of his death.

The Crofters' Hostels were a world away from the City Hostels of the YHA and 750 miles away from southern England. Arthur was enthusiastic in promoting Herbert Gatliff's mission for these hostels. These simple hostels, three of which are thatched black-houses, exist for the prime purpose of giving young people a unique insight into Gaelic culture and life as well as the natural environment of this remote and beautiful chain of Scottish islands. Remoteness was no excuse for denying hostellers the convenience of running water, hot showers, electric kettles, toasters, fridges, microwave ovens, duvets and storage heaters. Arthur oversaw the renovation of Rhenigidale in 1988/90 and the extension of Berneray in 1988/89. He also organised the re-thatching of Garenin by Jim Crawford in 2001 and the improvements to the shower/washrooms completed in October 2003. Arthur also organised the re-thatching of the Berneray Annex by Neil Nicholson of Locheport in 2002.

Arthur was especially proud of the extension and improvements at the Howmore hostel. This work involved turning a derelict byre into a new common room, kitchen, shower and washroom and dormitory, all with disabled access. He chose Brian Wilson of Achlunachan, Inverbroom, as the craftsman to carry out the work on the byre and to re-thatch the roof in the days before Brian's reputation had spread throughout Scotland. The

removal of the old roof was carefully recorded and photographed by Historic Scotland. Here marram, loch reed, and heather were revealed to have been used as thatching materials, heather rope to bind the old roof and even an oar as a roof-stay. The plan was to construct a new timber roof on top of which would be laid turfs and marram. But when marram could not be found in sufficient quantity heather was used, giving a beautiful and durable roof. When completed in 2001, it became the only traditionally thatched roof in the islands to be slept under on a regular basis ... and for only £7.50 per night or £5.50 if under 18 !

The year Arthur became a Trustee of the Gatliff Trust, 1980, the hostels recorded just over 1100 overnights. The year before his death, 2002, they recorded over 5200 overnights. Significantly many of these visitors are students training for professions or prominent positions in public or business life, thus creating a long 'after-glow' of loyalty and repeat visits to the islands.

Towards the end of his life he may have hankered for a home in the isles. Found with his papers were details of a number of island properties for sale.

His spirit and inspiration will live on in the islands at the hostels and in the hearts and minds of his many island-friends.

Arthur James Meaby - 5 October 1935 to 19 September 2003. He is survived by three brothers and two sisters. One brother pre-deceased him.

Peter Clarke

Ways of Looking at the Islands, Highlands and Borders

W H Auden's line, 'Look, stranger, on this island now' could well apply to the resources available at a collection housed at the Port of Ness, a crofting township near the northern extremity of Lewis. For here at 10 Callicvol, the alternative name for Ness, is a location for books, maps, documents and photographs. These focus not only on the Scottish islands, but on the Highlands and Borders as well. It is a private collection brought together by Michael Robson and is now available for public access, consultation and research. Full details are available through the web-site www.10callicvol.com

In the Summer of 2002 the Islands Book Trust was formed to advise and promote use of the collection at 10 Callicval. It became responsible for planning programmes of events, including talks, exhibitions and seminars. It has a complementary web-site www.theislandsbooktrust.com Several members of the GHHT are supporters of the Trust and recommend its recent publication, *Curiosities of Art and Nature*, a new, fully-annotated and illustrated edition of Martin Martin's *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland*. A conference held last September at Ness attracted over 60 delegates to celebrate the tercentenary of the original publication of the book in 1703 and the contributions of the man who, probably above all others, put the Hebrides on the map.

Refurbished, Re-opened and Eco-friendly

Alan Sidaway represented the Gatliff Trust at the September opening of the refurbished SYHA hostel at Loch Ossian, on the edge of Rannoch Moor. This former boathouse, first leased to the Association in 1931, is one of Scotland's oldest hostels and is now, perhaps, the most eco-friendly accommodation in the UK. The £130k programme provides a new dry toilet system, composted material from waste, processed used-water from wash-hand basins and sinks, and power provided by a wind turbine. Food waste is trapped and transferred to on-site compost bins and later used as mulch for new trees planted in the surrounding areas. Alan met other representatives at the fine buffet at Corroul Station and heard Cameron McNeish, *Editor of The Great Outdoors*, speak at the opening of the hostel, which is about a mile away. The editor referred to the SYHA's commitment to saving traditional hostels and how no commercial organisation would venture to make such places profitable.

Framed and Featured

Two hostels now display the work of people who have been influenced by the islands and the accommodation provided. Artwork by the late Bill Johnston, of Islandmagee, County Antrim, hang in Berneray and Howmore. The family of Bill, a committed member of the Trust, contributed towards the cost of re-thatching the annex of the former hostel in his memory. The photograph of Berneray by the YHA *Triangle's* 'Photographer of the Year' Norrie Phillips, has also been framed and is displayed in the most appropriate of settings.

Compare and Contrast

Several features evident on the Ordnance Survey Sheet 14 are worth considering. Most of it consists of the lonelier parts of Harris and Lewis. A major dividing line is the penetrating Loch Seaforth. The most expensive projects are on the left side of the map - the Golden Road, so-called because of its costs, in the rocky Bays area; the bridge to Scalpay; the road to Rhenigidale; the North Harris Estate. The land to the right is dominated by the Pairc area of Lewis, where settlements and people have drained away. Here some 68,000 acres contained, at one time, ten villages and five schools, each with rolls climbing to 100 pupils. The new Park School built in 1974 to replace the five has only about 30 pupils. Some of the villages, like Calbost, which appear to have residents, are actually depopulated. It is good to realise that the Rhenigidale hostel is part of a community that has survived clearances and population drift. Even the nearby Molinginish has come back from the deserted with the building of a new house. The investment of resources in this area of the islands has reflected both the desire for and the encouragement of habitation.

Web-watching

By the end of the year the GHHT website www.gatliff.org.uk should have attracted over 3000 visitors. By 30 November, 2833 site visits had been recorded at an average of eight per day. Monday continues to be the most popular day of the week for this activity and July was the month when there was the highest level of interest. By far the most popular search-engine directing enquiries to the site is Google and it is good to know that people from such countries as Turkey, Brazil, Luxembourg and Russia are learning about us. Most visitors are situated on this side of the Equator, but 42 came from the Southern Hemisphere.

Ancient and Modern

About five thousand years ago a circle of stones was erected by a group of people for reasons that were either sacred or social or both. They were propped up by stones encircling their bases and when these foundations were eroded, the large stones fell. Their presence was first noted in 1928, but it was only during the past Summer that the extent of this circle, called Na Dromannan (The Ridges), was revealed by University of Manchester archaeologists excavating close to the famous standing stones of Callanish. Work will continue next year and visitors to Garenin are advised to take the opportunity to visit.

At some time in the future, visitors to Berneray may be able to walk from South Harris. That is, if the attractions of wave-generated electricity lead to the building of a special type of causeway across the Sound of Harris. The pressure for alternative and renewable energy certainly increases as fossil fuels are exhausted. Perhaps this is a question of tide and time actually waiting for man ?

Taigh Mo Sheanair

Gatliff Trust hostels, together with many others, have come and gone. The ruin at Claddach Baleshare testifies to a Gatliff hostel that survived until ten years ago. Individuals and parties looking for accommodation in the immediate area could proceed a little further towards the sea and visit a renovated traditional croft-house on a working croft. It is at Carnach, set in an idyllic location with a cockle strand and safe swimming. Taigh Mo Sheanair, a family-run hostel, was literally 'My Grandfather's House' although renovations do not give the impression of anything archaic. Across the nearby causeway is Baleshare, the East Township, where the Hebridean kelp industry started in 1735. West Township was swept away in the 16th Century by the exceptional tide that widened the Sound of Pabbay and isolated the Monach Isles. As ever, some distinctive features appear and remain, others disappear.

Overlapping Areas of Interest

Small circulation magazines are not readily stocked on the shelves of big retailers and, consequently, have to rely on recommendations. The number of readers of *Scottish Islands Explorer* is growing steadily and this is understandable. The publication is informative, focused and brilliantly illustrated. It is also absolutely authentic in that it is exclusively about the places featured in its title and in that it is published on Fair Isle, set between the Orkneys and Shetlands. There are over a dozen articles in each issue and the chance of there being nothing on the Hebrides is remote ! For subscription rates of this bi-monthly magazine phone 01595-693380 or access www.scottishislandsexplorer.com One particular feature promoted by the publishers is a compelling range of books and videos on the islands that interest members of the GHHT.

Around the Hostels

The hostels may attract significantly more visitors as time goes by, but this means more work for wardens and more potential issues for the Trust. The much-appreciated, stalwart efforts of our Maintenance Officer, Alan Sidaway, continue with his organisation of projects for work-parties and his eye for cost-effective schemes of improvement. He has undertaken the provision of a new toaster and microwave for Berneray as well as supervised the tightening of the fence wire. With the help of Meg Richards and Dan Sailor, new mattresses have been delivered to Howmore and spare beds taken to Garenin. Here the ceiling has been painted, with special thanks for Jurgen Kammer's assistance. Roof holes were filled with bitumen and the skylight windows made more weatherproof with replacement putty. The fire-escapes have been painted at Rhenigidale and the perimeter fencing tightened. Alan looks forward to recruiting an effective team for an 'end-of-season' work-party around September / October 2004.

Henke Munneke, from the Western Isles Enterprise, has visited Rhenigidale to make a feasibility study into the possible use of renewable energy. Solar panels, a windmill and a water turbine were considered. It was felt that solar panels would be the least intrusive to the environment, but costing would be a key issue in the follow-up investigation that is to be made.

When Tao Tammes and Rose Wilson married at Howmore Church on Saturday 27 September, they were within a stone's throw of the hostel that has a significant place in their lives. They had moved to South Uist in April 1996 when they were both members of a work-party there. After assisting the GHHT, they moved temporarily into a caravan across the road and started renovating the thatched cottage. It is now their home.

Peter Clarke recently received an e-mail requesting membership as a gift for the husband of a member. For here was a couple that looked back with particular affection to the facilities provided by a Gatliff hostel where they had spent their honeymoon. Herbert Gatliff maintained that the buildings should be regarded as 'hostels of destination, not transition.' In these cases of marital significance, the term 'hostels of destiny' may be more applicable.

What's in a Name ?

The answers to this time-honoured question can involve much about history and linguistic tradition. Mention that the Ordnance Survey has Gaelicised place-names in the revisions of its Landranger series and larger-scale Road Maps was made in the last issue. The 2003 GHHT leaflet has incorporated the references to Na Gearrannan, Reinigeadal, Bearnaraigh and Tobha Mòr as well as to the SYHA hostel at Cearsiadair. A number of further changes to other place-names in the text will be made in the 2004 edition.

Bernard Selwyn, who drew the attention of the Trust to these matters, also gave some helpful advice to those considering the purchase of maps. The new Explorer (1:25000) series for the Western Isles consists of nine maps (nos 452-460) with some printed on both sides - at £6.99 each. The total cost is therefore £62.91. This compares favourably with the Landranger (1:50000) set of six maps (nos 8, 13, 18, 22 & 31) at £5.99, totalling £35.94. So double the detail for only 1.75 times the cost !

To the Islands on the Edge

Those who wish and need to fly around Scotland are recommended the timetables and fare-schedules of the Inverness-based, Highland Airways. This company, started in 1991, flies people, newspapers, mail and freight on routes that link Inverness, Glasgow, Stornoway, Benbecula and Sumburgh. Its fleet of three Jetstream 31s plus one Shorts 360 and its staff of 58 provide services on which information is provided via www.highlandairways.co.uk There are attractive discounts and interesting holiday packages to be discovered both on the web and through the telephone - 0845 4502245.

International Exchange

There is a long tradition of the hostels being appreciated by visitors from overseas, in general, and from Europe, in particular. There has been a strong endeavour to maintain links with international users and this is evident in that some members of the Trust now pay their subscriptions in euros. The number of paid-up members hovers around 266 and it would be so encouraging for that total to move significantly towards the 300 mark as the year 2003 draws to a close.

Revenue Matters

From April 2004 there will be a new facility available through the Inland Revenue's Self-Assessment forms. Tax-payers may opt for tax repayments to be made as a direct charitable donation. This could benefit the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust considerably and, consequently, it has registered as a potential recipient. The reference number to note is XAA70JG.

A Case of Happy Returns

Whenever problems occur, there are usually solutions to remedy the situation. They are, however, not always immediately available. The Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust has certainly been fortunate in being able to secure quickly the services of Alan Busson as Secretary, following the death of Arthur Meaby.

This is a case of a man who happily returns to play a vital part in an organisation. When Alan first visited Howmore, it was in 'the long hot Summer of '76' and he was intrigued by a place that was, and remains, 'different'. He returned with three friends to the islands in the early '80s and came across the 'old' Berneray hostel. His fellow-cyclists were somewhat repelled by the conditions, but he felt an affinity with the aims of the Trust and became conscious of an ambition to become involved.

His work as Company Secretary with Burmah Castrol was demanding and the eventual take-over by BP presented challenges. Redundancy and a career break resolved these. For a time the rotations of his cycle wheels replaced the cyclical turns of the oil industry. Now he works as a deputy company secretary to a firm of financial advisers in Swindon.

Alan, who grew up near Leek in Staffordshire, is married with three children and lives in a village situated between the M4 and the Marlborough Downs. Outdoor pursuits are on his doorstep, but like many of us he looks to the Western Isles with particular affection. The prospects of scenic walking and cycling by day, followed by the convivial, informed company in the hostels during the evening, are appealing.

His biographical details for the recent AGM began as follows: 'After a gap of seven years without a visit to the islands, 2002 saw me cycling around the islands again to see if the magic was still there. It is ! Another cycle ride with two friends in September / October 2003 confirmed that there is still a lot on offer and many things to see and do.' These are the words of an Honorary Secretary who realises that there is much to do for a cause that has much to offer. This is a case, indeed, of many happy returns.

Hostel Charges - 2004

The various charges from March 2004 have been set as:

Overnight fee: £8.00 (+50p) Overnight fee Under 18: £5.50 (no increase)
Overnight camping fee: £4.50 (+75p) Day charge: £1.00 (+10p)
Hire of sheet sleeping bag: £1.50 for up to 7 nights use (no increase)

Four features are included: accommodation founded and maintained by enthusiasts; the social pleasures that come with the company of like-minded travellers, a wealth of information about, and many places to visit in, the surrounding areas; a contribution to preserving a distinctive group of hostels.

Capital Attractions

The AGMs of both the Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust and the Gatliff Trust took place at the Holland Park Youth Hostel in London on Saturday 29 November 2003. The attendance of 17, and proxy votes of 46, were considered to show a significant level of involvement.

The report of the directors and the GHHT's annual accounts for the year ending December 2002 were accepted. Matthew Bruce, Joanna Burgess, John Humphries, Alan Sidaway and Lawrence Washington were re-appointed as directors and Mann Judd Gordon, Chartered Accountants, as auditors. Alan Busson, Peter Clarke and Philip Lawson were appointed directors by the Gatliff Trust

The hostel overnights for 2002 increased by 17%, representing a recovery in numbers to 1999 levels. The Directors recorded their thanks to the wardens and their families - Alison Gibbs (Berneray), Colin Macleod and D R Macleod (Garenin), Betty Macdonald (Howmore) and Alasdair Mackay (Rhenigidale).

Visit Scotland (previously the Scottish Tourist Board) inspected the hostels to ensure that they met their minimum standards for youth hostels and bunkhouses. Each has a one-star rating.

The amount of income from all sources for 2002 was £39041 and expenditure came to £39439. The deficit of £398 compared with a surplus of £11930 in 2001, but hostel maintenance rose from £3004 to £12421.

The membership fee has now been increased to £10 (£7.50 for Under 18s), but the average subscription runs at about £14, thanks to additional donations. The membership remains steady at 266 and over 190 people have signed Gift Aid forms. 150 bankers orders are in place and this reduces the cost of membership administration.

The Trust reported the deaths of the following members since the last Annual Report - Jean Brazier of Bristol, one of the founder members of the Hebridean Hostellers' group in 1984; Des Denhard of Meopham, Kent; Arthur Meaby, our Honorary Secretary and Treasurer.

The first part of the Gatliff Trust's AGM consisted of tributes to Arthur Meaby. The Chairman, Frank Martin, noted the oral contributions and will be receiving written transcripts in order to produce a booklet on this great contributor to the Trusts as well as to a variety of organisations in the UK. This will complement the obituaries that have appeared in the national and regional press.

Arthur's brother, Roy, and his nephew, David, were present to hear these tributes and looked forward to conveying them to other members of the family. They approved the proposal of a Memorial Walk to take place from Seaford to Beachy Head on Sunday 16 May 2004. Full details of this event will be available on the website and members will be notified.

Manchester Venue

There is something geographically representative about the venues for Gatliff meetings. They are all over the place ! The Western Isles feature, of course, on those occasions unlikely to be disrupted by difficult weather conditions. Then London is a natural meeting-place, partly because it was the home of Herbert Gatliff. The following have either been selected or mooted - Oxford, York, Liverpool, Glasgow, Melrose, New Lanark, Stirling and Inverness. The Executive Meeting on 14 February 2004 will be held at the YHA hostel in Manchester. New ground to be broken.

Scarp & Claddach Baleshare

The now defunct hostel on Scarp has been featured in the past two issues of this newsletter. It prompted one member to visit the island and to photograph what is now a ruin. When the 'shells' of the school-house, mission and hostel are examined it reminds even the most casual of observers of how the weather intervenes so quickly. Once maintenance finished, these buildings were immediately exposed by the wind and rain. However, the cover photograph of the hostel may bring back memories to visitors, now almost 40 years on, of the 1965-70 era when there was a Gatliff presence on an island that was abandoned by its permanent residents in 1971.

The closure of the Claddach Baleshare hostel took place in May 1993. Its wardens Catrina and Tommy Tosh continue to live nearby and occasionally are visited by former-hostel users. Again the elements have altered the profile and features of the building, but any accounts of memorable stays, encounters, incidents and adventures would be appreciated for publication in these columns.



The ruined Scarp hostel overlooks the island's burial ground as well as distant Traigh Mheilein and the entrance to Lochs Cravadale and Resort.

From the *Hebridean Hostellers* Issue of Ten Years Ago

A report on the May work-party to Berneray reads: 'The majority of the volunteers were from Glasgow and Fife and we were joined by the Scottish Natural Heritage Officer for the Uists, Gail Campbell. With the volunteers working hard, the regrading of the dunes and the transplanting of marram grass were completed on time, despite two spade casualties and amorous fulmars. In addition the group carried out cleaning and painting work on the hostel. The day off was spent lazing in the sun, paddling in the sea and exploring local archaeological sites (i.e. hunting for the elusive souterrain). Glorious weather and abundant wildlife made for a most enjoyable week.'

..... and of Fifteen Years Ago

'By December 1988 the road, at least to Land Rover track standard, will have reached the village (of Rhenigidale).'

Arthur Meaby Memorial Walk
Seafood to Beachy Head
Sunday 16 May 2004

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