KIST'66

Crew of 'Scotia' off Coatsland 1903

THE KIST

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Contents

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Editorial

In this issue we celebrate mid-Argyll's maritime and seafaring past and its rich marine life.

We have articles by Dr. Chris Parsons, Scientific Director of the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust, and Phil Johnson of the Bottlenose Dolphin project.

Dr. William Laing tells us of the rich vein of historical information to be tapped in Scotland's old Admiralty Courts.

The Hebrides are a unique part of our seascape and we include reports of two expeditions by Society members: this year's one to Barra and last year's to Colonsay.

Thanks again to Jonathon Arnot for doing much arduous computer work and to Ann Thomas for her artistic help.

Finally, an appeal to save me work. If you're planning to send me an article please phone me first (01880 820656) so I can send you formatting details etc.

Note on the front cover

An exhibition is being held at the National Museums of Edinburgh to celebrate the 100th anniversary of William Spiers Bruce's expedition to the Antarctic. This photograph, courtesy of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, features the crew wearing woollen jumpers supplied by James Coats, who helped finance the expedition and is the subject of an article on p. 10.

Correction to Kist 65

Due to a textual omission in Kist 65, the impression was given on p.29 that the 10th C. cross, found in the chapel enclosure on Eilean Mor, was not the original. This is not the case. The cross is, indeed, the original one.

There is also a second cross – a concrete replica one – on the high point of the island (the original is in the National Museum of Edinburgh). It stands in the original socket.

"ANOTHER" ADMIRALTY.

William Laing

Introduction

Historians, both amateur and professional, are forever seeking new, untapped sources of primary information. Several decades ago, historians took a great interest in the huge Customs and Excise records for fresh information on our maritime history; this article is intended to introduce the readers to a new source of Scottish maritime history, namely "Another" Admiralty.

First a short word of explanation; we will not be talking about the Admiralty you will all be familiar with, that is the Admiralty associated with the Royal Navy, Marble Arch, Dartmouth, and all the other aspects of the Grey Funnel line. The word "Admiralty" has, in law, a precise and simple meaning; Admiralty is the sovereignty of a nation at sea. It is all about legal control and behaviour within both the territorial waters of a nation, and in international waters. This maritime jurisdiction still exists, for the United Kingdom, in the shape of the Admiralty Court of the United Kingdom, which operates in London; this Court is based on Roman Law, and to this day has a Scottish dimension in that current detailed knowledge of Roman Law only exists, within the United Kingdom, in the Scottish law system. Before the 1820`s, there were separate Admiralty Court systems, on the one hand, for England, Ireland and Wales, and for Scotland, on the other. This article is about the old Admiralty Court system of Scotland, and the voluminous records of that system that are stored either in West Register House in Edinburgh, or are to be found in lesser, but still dusty, archives in those parts of Scotland that march with the sea. In these days, when we see efforts all around us to establish concepts of International Law, it may be of some value to contemplate the workings of the old Scottish Admiralty Courts, as these were, in their day, an attempt to create an early form of International Law.

Little is known about Admiralty law before the 13th C.; but after that time, as international trade by sea developed and became

established, local arbitrary schemes of sea trade governance became established in the Western world. The first was the "Laws of Rhodes" which controlled trade in the Mediterranean; as trade spread beyond the Pillars of Hercules, or what we now call the Straits of Gibraltar, the next system of rules, the "Laws of Oleron", named after an island off the northwest coast of France, became accepted as the sea rules for northwest Europe; and, finally, for the Baltic trade, the "Laws of Visby" were proclaimed. These three systems were developed from the laws and accepted customs of individual countries or areas to allow settlement of arguments that might arise when, for example, an English trader chartered a Basque merchant vessel to convey a cargo of Gasgony wine to Ayr in Scotland, and there was an argument at the quayside at Ayr.

Turning now to Admiralty governance within Scotland, a system of Admiralty Courts came into being in Scotland, probably in the early 16th. Century; the earliest surviving records of these Courts are dated 1557, and the following quotation is a summary of a case from that date, and demonstrates what interesting maritime information can be derived from such a document.

Scottish Court of Admiralty, held at Leith on 11th December 1557, by Richard Trohope, Vice-Admiral; the court being properly constituted.

[A statute concerning the annual herring fishery.]
This statute is concerned with a serious complaint made by these seafaring men, who go to the annual herring fishery; namely that they can in no way pursue the said occupation because of the theft, robbery and oppression that is perpetrated against them by evil persons, plain enemies and damagers of the common weal, who are enemies to loyal workers, and who come, both by day and night, when the situation is opportune, to where loyal men's nets are set for the catching of herring, and cut the buoys and floats from these nets, for little or no profit, causing both the nets, and any herring caught in these nets at the time, to fall to the sea bed, thus causing hurt to both the common weal of the realm, and damage and loss to

the owners of the nets; And unless such offences and outrages are really punished, loyal men do not have the opportunity to work and make their living by their honest work and just labours.

Therefore it is decreed and ordained by my Lord Admiral and his deputies that no manner of person shall, in the future, cut the buoys, bladders or ropes from any other man's nets, or make fast to his neighbours nets or ropes, so damaging them, while stealing or taking herring or any other fish from these nets, either by day or by night, under the penalty of a fine of ten pounds to be taken from every person who acts in contravention of this statute.

And every master of a boat shall answer for his crew, and if a wrongdoer is found in his crew, he shall either answer for him or present the wrongdoer to my Lord Admiral or his deputies to suffer, for his misdeeds, the punishment outlined above; And whoever shall reveal these offences to my Lord Admiral or his deputies shall be honestly rewarded.

And it is ordained that this statute shall be made public by open proclamation at the ports of Leith, Kinghorn, Kirkaldy, Wemyss, Anstruther, Pittenweem, Crail, St. Andrews, Musselburgh, North Berwick, Dunbar, and all other places requiring such a proclamation.

From this single document, quite a lot of useful historical information can be deduced;

- there was an senior Admiralty Court operating in Edinburgh/ Leith in 1557
- this Court could not only pronounce on cases, but use its executive role to create new statute law
- herring fishing in the Forth was by means of drift nets, and not lines or stake nets
- individual shoals of herring attracted many boats, so there was room for confusion, and so for mal practices
- the skipper was held responsible for both the actions of his crew as well as his own
- disputes could be taken direct to the High Court of Admiralty, so bypassing the local Court, and thus setting these Courts against one another.

The ports specifically named in the promulgation of the new statute were all on the Forth, but the new statute was for the whole of Scotland; however one gets the feeling that the Firth of Clyde was a long way from Edinburgh!

The System of Admiralty Courts in Scotland

We do not yet know in complete detail how this Court system worked, but a general account can be given. There is just the possibility that the nature of the Courts was such as to make the following of detailed procedures a hindrance to the operation of the Court; and as will be explained, the Court officials may have wanted as many degrees of freedom as possible!

Local Admiralty Courts seem to have been established in the main seaports of Scotland. Original Court documentation has been unearthed from Glasgow, Ayr, Logan, Campbeltown, Inveraray, Orkney, Caithness, Sutherland, Aberdeen, Dundee, and several Forth ports. The senior officers of these Courts were appointed in two distinct ways, depending on whether the local Court was a hereditary Court, or was appointed from Edinburgh. This accounts for the name Logan appearing in that list of major ports. Logan is situated half way down the Mull of Galloway, in the feifdom of the McDougalls, and the hereditary local Admiralty Court was simply an extension of the local Barony Court, through which, with the blessing of the King, the lieges of Logan were controlled. The officers of the local Admiralty Courts situated in the major ports were appointed by the Lord High Admiral, nominally based in Edinburgh; such appointments were filled with "placemen", or friends of the High Admiral. The Lord High Admiral's position was of a hereditary nature up to about 1680, when it became a Royal appointment. Virtually none of these senior officials would have had any knowledge of maritime law, or of the established ways of the sea, but they, in turn, could appoint deputies who did understand the system.

These knowledgeable deputies could, in turn, appoint the lesser officials of the Courts. All appointments to this system of Courts were eagerly sought after, as the cashflow through the Courts was

huge, especially during war time, when prize ships were taken, and, along with their cargoes, disposed of through the Courts. By way of example, the Lord High Admiral, who headed up the total system, received 10% of all takings of his own High Court, and 10% from the takings of most of the local Courts. By the time that every layer of the system had extracted its 10%, there was very little left for the Exchequer! The life style of the Lord High Admiral was unbelievable, as was that of his cronies in the lesser Court, and the Court records, and other related documentation, that dealt with the recompense of these senior officials, are full of interesting detail of what their uplift was, how they spent it, and the rather lurid details of their private lives.

The whole system was so legally lucrative that other Court systems constantly tried to muscle in. The local Dean of Guild Courts were for ever trying to get back into legal maritime matters, now that it was seen to be so valuable; and even the Court of Session tried either to take over the whole system, or put a judicial layer above the Admiralty Courts that would open up the cash distribution system. This approach also failed, except that the Court of Session was granted the right to review certain findings of the Admiralty Courts.

This split of the cash flow through the Admiralty Courts, while appearing to be rapacious to us today, was nevertheless quite legal, but not all of the court procedures were. The Cromarty Court was particularly twisted during the series of Dutch Wars in the 17th. C.; these Court officials, when handling prize money, were in a unique position, in that they owned the privateers, ran the Court, and took the prize money; and it was not unusual for a prize to be taken several times in one day by a series of privateers, and have to pay up in the Court for each seizure. The gross mismanagement of this particular Court led Lord Stair to tighten up the Admiralty Court procedures as part of his reformulation of the total Scottish law system.

The Business of the Local Courts

To get a feel of the wide range of maritime legal business that these local Admiralty Courts could handle, we can consider the hereditary Court at Logan, which was located at the Barony of Logan and Clanyard, situated in the Parish of Kirkmaiden, right at the south end of the Mull of Galloway. This Barony was within the fiefdom of the McDowalls, one of the oldest families in the land, with direct connections to both the English and Scottish royal families, the Lords of the Isles, the Kingdom of Man, and the native tribes of Galloway. Such connections make one realise how, in the days when only sea transport was available, the Mull of Galloway was a crossroads of the West.

With their heritable rights, the McDowalls could claim the proceeds arising from the sale or disposal of all and everything that was washed up on their shore. This involved the odd body, and in one occasion there was real trouble with the local tenantry, who found a well-dressed corpse, purloined the deceased effects, and smartly buried the body, without informing the senior McDowall. Needless to say, this eventually reached the ears of the Laird, and the miscreants were subject to examination in the local Admiralty Court, and appropriately punished. On another occasion, a whale came ashore on the McDowall coast, refloated itself on the next high tide, and subsequently came to rest on an adjoining jurisdiction. This raised the question as to who legally owned the whale, which was very valuable as a source of lamp oil. The High Court in Edinburgh decreed that the whale was McDowalls ; the fact that the Laird`s younger brother (Lord Bankton) was a member of the Court of Session had, of course, nothing to do with the outcome!

Finally, in the mid 1700s, there was a real bonanza; a whale and a large keg of brandy came ashore, and were swiftly dealt with by the McDowalls. Word of this reached Edinburgh, and the Lord High Admiral, always trying and usually failing to get a gratuitous "cut" from the heritable local Admiral, demanded the details of disposal from the McDowall laird. His answer was simple and direct: "I cut up

the whale, rendered it down, and sold the oil in the Glasgow market; as for the brandy, I with some help, drank it!"

I will now consider Admiralty court proceedings within Argyll. A Vice- Admirals court was centred in Inverary, probably using the legal will infrastructure of the well-known Sheriff Court located in that place. Other "back to back" court arrangements have been uncovered in other areas, revealing that court officials could operate in both Courts. It is fortunate that a recent transcription of some of the documentation of the Argyll Admiralty Court, covering the period, 1711 to 1825, has become available, and so it is possible to see the range of local maritime problems that were tackled by this Court. My interest in the life and activities of James Watt, senior, father of the developer of the steam engine (see Kist no. 59, 2000) led me to see if Watt senior, with his maritime business connections, had been involved with Argyll Admiralty Court. It turns out that he was, and that those persons whom he was pursuing were deeply into the local maritime matters of the day.

On the 25 December, 1755, Watt senior appealed to the local Admiralty Court to settle a debt, which occurred through Watt using a vessel named the "Mary" of Glasgow to convey some of his goods to London. The goods were partly cargo, and partly fitted equipment, such as rope blocks for the ship. The vessel owner was one Neil Campbell, and the master of the vessel was Archibald McLarty. This bit of documentation confirms that Watt senior was, amongst other things, a maker of equipment for vessels, and that, as well as trading locally, had business connections with London.

There are no more references to Watt in this particular transcription, but there are several relating to both Campbell and McLarty. Neil Campbell, the owner of the "Mary" of Glasgow, is shown by the Argyll records to have been in severe financial difficulties in the period 1754/5. His ownership covered a voyage to North Carolina, including a diversion to Jura, before crossing the Atlantic, and in 1755 he was contracted to buy and pack herring in the Western Isles, but, in fact, never left the Clyde area. While in the Clyde, his crew managed to run up a substantial drinks bill in Greenock, and this unpaid bill, along with other bills due to several Campbeltown merchants, led Campbell to be indicted in the Argyll

Court. He was also due money to the Port Glasgow Rope Works, and to Archibald McLarty, the master of the "Mary".

On the other hand, McLarty was probably "more sinned against than sinning"; he had outstanding wages due to him for a period as master of the Campbeltown brigatine "Friends Desire"; he had wages due from the trip to Carolina in the "Mary"; but he seemed to get ensnared in the Watt senior affair, concerning unpaid goods during a trip to London.

From this very short two-year period, the Court records can produce the following general deductions;

- James Watt senior of Greenock was trading, not only in Greenock and the Clyde area, but also with London; he was supplying chandlery both for local vessels, and for resale in London.
- Clyde vessels were making well documented voyages, not only within Scotland, but to North America, France, and Norway.
- These Clyde based vessels were multipurpose; the "Mary" was involved in fishing, "klondyking" (buying and packing other vessels catches), and in carrying general cargo about the United Kingdom and Europe.
- There were problems arising with the payment of wages, probably exacerbated by the lack of even rudimentary banking facilities; transactions seemed to centre on what would now be called commercial paper, with outstanding sums being falsely "paid", using promissory notes, and other discounted, transferred debts.

Conclusion

To date, very little use has been made of the voluminous papers of the Admiralty Courts in Scotland. The examples quoted above show, however, that these records are capable of both producing new insights into Scottish maritime history, and substantiating related information from other sources. The Scottish High Court of Admiralty papers are being currently indexed, and researchers are

tracing, collecting, and indexing the records of the local Courts. These records are often found bound up with the records of the local Sheriff Court, because it was often the case that the same people served in both Courts.

These Admiralty Court papers are full of historical detail of the time; data on trade, trade routes, working conditions, communication problems, harbour operations, the curse of piracy and of privateers, details of commercial fishing, and other maritime topics. These preserved records also give us an insight into the life of ordinary mariners, merchants and trades people, and into the style of the favoured few, and how they made their fortunes, and how they spent them!

The author wishes to thank several fellow researchers for unstinted help given in the past; to Sue Mowat for first introducing me to the wonders of West Register House, to Frank Bigwood for his work on the Argyll Vice-Admirals Court, to Marion Stewart for unfolding the details of the wee Court at Logan, and to Robert Urquhart for further insights to the early Scottish fishing scene.

JAMES COATS AND THE VOYAGE OF THE SCOTIA TO THE ANTARCTIC

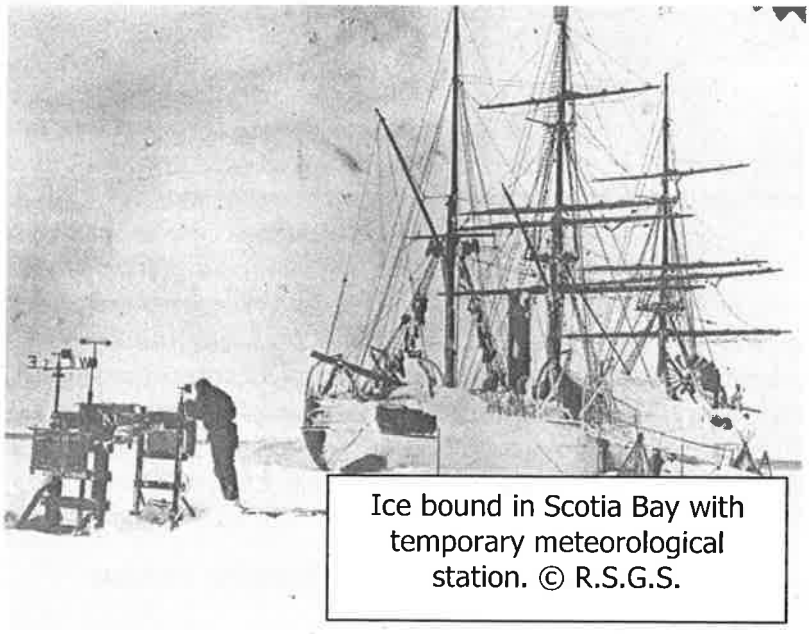
Fiona Campbell Byatt

An exhibition to commemorate the voyage of the Scotia under the command of Captain William Bruce was held in the National Museum of Scotland this spring. William Spiers Bruce was a well-known scientist and explorer who had already been to the Arctic and had great hopes of being chosen to accompany a British expedition which was due to visit the Antarctic in 1902. Scott, who was to become famous in later years, was a member of the expedition, but Bruce, however, was not selected to join the crew. He came back to Scotland saying he would try to mount a Scottish venture to explore the South Arctic seas. Previously, Bruce had joined James Coats and his brother Andrew on a voyage to Spitsbergen and he found to his delight that James was interested in financing the purchase of a boat and helping with the necessary arrangements.

He also had the interest and support of the Prince of Monaco and the Royal Scottish Geographical Society. Things moved fast, a suitable ship was found and the firm of GL Watson on the Clyde undertook to convert and strengthen her to withstand the pressure of the ice floes.

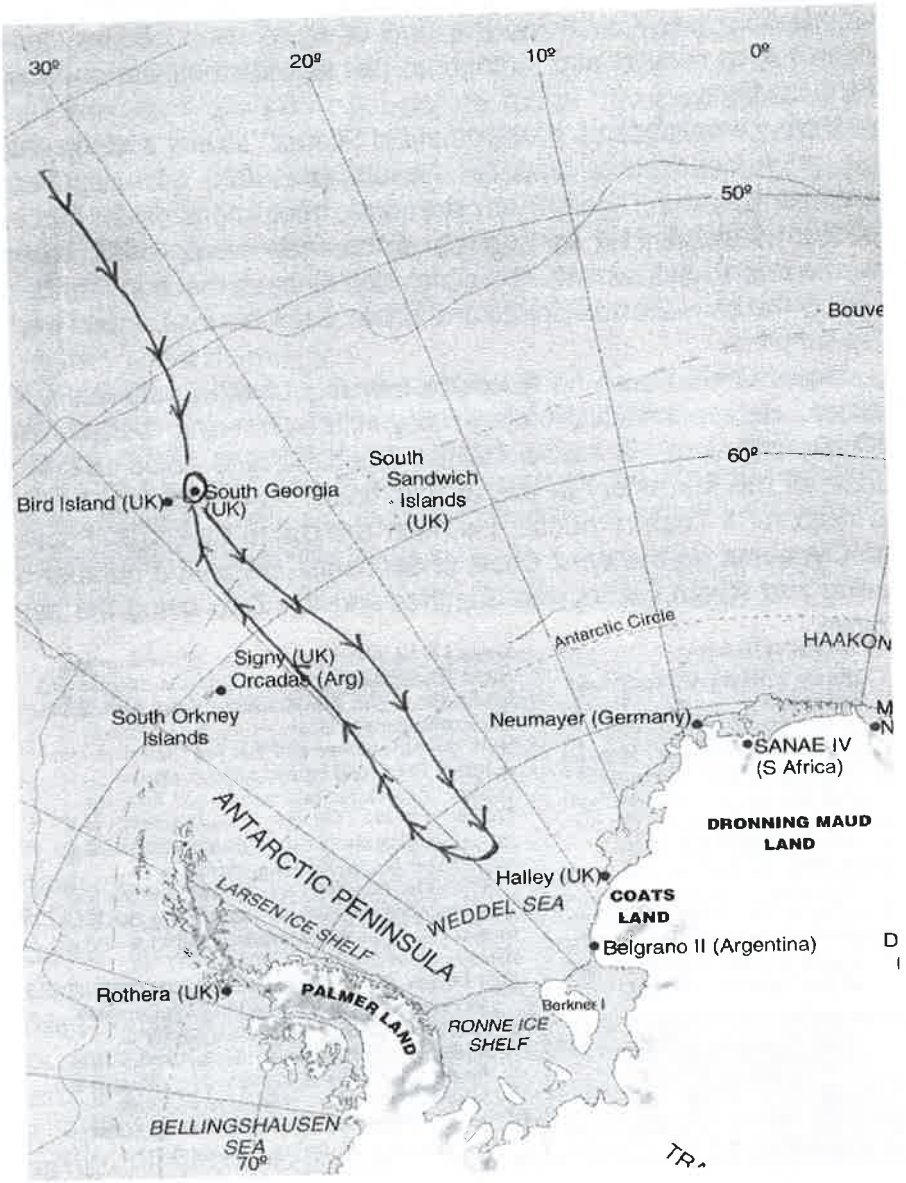
A crew was made up of experienced Scottish sailors and the ship was provisioned; she sailed in November 1902. James Coats accompanied the "Scotia" as she had been named as far as Southern Ireland. He had arranged for each crewmember to be given a jersey, hat, gloves, etc. which had all been made in Fair Isle. Finding the ship short of spirits and other small luxuries, these were also supplied.

James Coats was a hardworking member of the Coats family in Paisley. He spent his life in the Paisley Mills overseeing the spinning of cotton thread. He was a trained mechanic and could use and repair all the machinery in use at that time. As a bachelor, he felt no need for a country house; his main recreation was to sail down the Clyde and up the West Coast of Scotland. He built a number of sailing and steam yachts, the Gleniffer and the Zara being the best known.



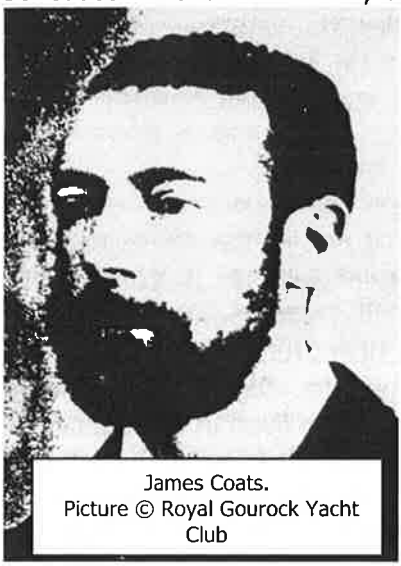
Ice bound in Scotia Bay with temporary meteorological station. © R.S.G.S.

Route of Bruce's Expedition to the Antarctic 1902-03



Map courtesy of the Australian Antarctic Division

On his travels in the West he liked to visit the lighthouse keepers and he set up a fund to provide them tobacco and other small comforts. He also sent a library of books in a specially made folding bookcase to each lighthouse and would replace the books on each of his yearly visits. The Gleniffer was a regular visitor to the Outer Isles and other harbours on the Scottish mainland. James Coats found that the local schools were poorly supplied with books, so he set about sending a bookcase to almost every school in the Hebrides. There are still books and bookcases in local museums, a good example can be found in the Port Charlotte Heritage Museum on Islay. Argyll and Bute District Library still has about 80 Coats books in Dunoon.



James Coats.
Picture © Royal Gourock Yacht Club

We can imagine the interest and pleasure which James Coats derived from following the progress of the Scotia expedition, and the pride with which he greeted the news of the naming of Coats Land, a hitherto unknown part of the Antarctic.

The expedition was a scientific success, many notable specimens were brought back to Scotland and many experiments – including charts and logs of the coastline – were concluded successfully.

But as everything had been well managed and ran without a hitch – he only lost one member of the crew – and the ship arrived home in the Clyde without incident, it has been somewhat overshadowed and forgotten in comparison to the excitement and high drama of the Scott expedition. Nevertheless, it stands as a great achievement in the field of Scottish exploration and as a memorial to the faith and courage of the man who helped finance it.

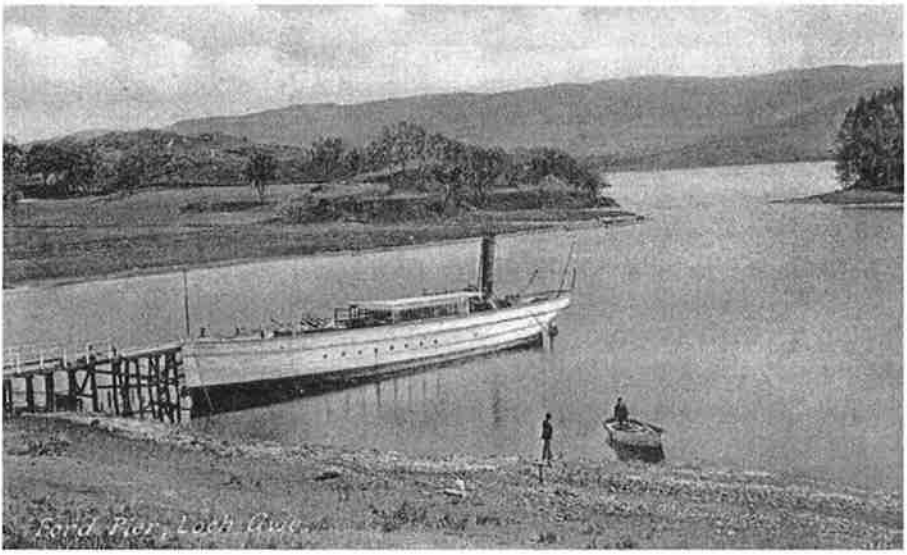
STEAMING UP LOCH AWE

Michael Davis

Few, if any, readers will be able to recall seeing the SS Loch Awe in service on the Loch, since she last sailed during the First War. In fact the very idea of steamers having plied their trade on this long narrow loch may be news to most Argyll folk. News or not. Loch Awe was home to no fewer than 14 "steamers" or steamships between 1861 and the thirties. Around 1900, for example, seven of them were in service at the same time, ranging from various cargo steamers and the Mona, a small steam launch operated by the Lochawe Hotel, to the Countess of Breadalbane, with saloons fore and aft and natty yellow and black painted funnel. The Caledonia, in fact, had "a spacious promenade deck nearly the full length, and the saloons fore and aft upholstered in a tasteful and elegant manner." The Loch Awe was the third of these passenger steamers of fair size to operate on the Loch around 1900.

The Loch Awe is thought to have been built in 1876. Her lack of superstructure, with a rear funnel and a low awning-like saloon gave her an elegant look. She had a dining saloon below deck. Her Captain lived in the equally elegant "crinkly tin" cottage built by him a few yards above where this photo was taken. The trip along Loch Awe was a favourite with tourists holidaying on the shores of the Loch as well as with those "doing" the West Coast. From Ardrishaig, the tourist could go north to Oban using the Loch Awe route, and return down the coast to Crinan on the return journey - or the other way around. The extent to which the Great War hit tourism is reflected by the collapse of the Loch Awe steamer trade after the war. The Caledonia was disposed on in 1918, the Loch Awe simply never resumed sailing and the Countess of Breadalbane soldiered on until 1936. By this date, the Countess had outlived even the Loch's familiar cargo steamers, the Eagle and the Glenorchy. Although steamers do not appear to have been built on the loch side, they were almost certainly taken in pieces to Loch Awe station and assembled nearby. One can only guess at the rail fare for a steamer!

SS Loch Awe at Ford Pier; taken from postcard held in archive of Argyll and Bute Council Library Service



WHALES AND DOLPHINS IN WEST SCOTLAND

Chris Parsons

'He crossed in ships the whales' shrine.'

So wrote poet Beccan mac Luigdech in 677 AD about St. Columba's voyage across the Sea of Hebrides to the Isle of Iona. The early Scots inhabitants of Southwest Scotland, as can be seen, were very aware of the cetaceans that inhabited the region's waters. In fact, St Columba is recorded meeting a whale on boat trip between Iona & Tiree. Further historical links in SW Scotland with cetaceans include several Gaelic place-names that allude to the presence of cetaceans, most notably the Isles of Muck (porpoise) and Canna (small [minke?] whale). The coastal waters of both are still inhabited by sizeable numbers of cetaceans even to this day.

In 1716, Martin Martin in his description of the Western Isle of Scotland recounted how on one occasion *'about one hundred and sixty little whales ran themselves ashore on the island of Tiree, and the natives did eat them all'.* The same author describes the hunting of pilot whales elsewhere by driving an individual or a small group into inlets and then ashore. The whale(s) would be wounded and the other members of the group would strand themselves. A very similar form of hunt still conducted in the Faeroe Islands today.

The first zoological information on cetaceans in SW Scotland was reported about fifty years later, when, during his travels, the naturalist James Robertson identified several species of cetacean, including harbour porpoises, whales (probably minke whales) and dolphins in the waters around Mull, Arran and Bute. He also reports seeing dolphins or 'loupers' as they were called in the local dialect, in Loch Fyne in 1768 – from the colouration he described, and their behaviour, this is probably one of the first records of bottlenose dolphins in Scotland.

Since these early sightings of cetaceans information on the whales and dolphins of the area was non-existent until 1989, when an angling boat operator on the isle of Mull realised that whales and dolphins were being encountered on almost every trip, but little was known about the variety, number or behaviour of these animals: the west Scotland cetacean populations largely having been overlooked by marine biologists.
As the operator realised more money could be made taking tourists to watch whales than through angling trips, so the Scottish whale-watching industry began. Scientists realising that these whale-watching trips were a useful platform to get access to and study cetaceans began developing research projects that could be conducted on the back of these whale-watching trips. The organisation conducting this research eventually became (in 1994) the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust.

We know that there are records of 24 species of cetacean from Southwest Scotland waters, several of these species are resident all

year round, such as the harbour porpoise, killer whale and bottlenose dolphin, others are only resident during the summer months, such as the minke whale and common dolphin, while others are visitors: such as humpback whales swimming through coastal waters on their way to feeding or breeding grounds.

Some species are only known, however by historical information, such as narwhal (known as *Biand na aroguig* in Gaelic) reports from the isle of Skye. Other species are also only known from single records of recently stranded animals, such as the normally equatorial and tropical-dwelling Fraser's dolphin that stranded on the island of South Uist in 1996. The records of these two species do help to illustrate the diversity of cetaceans in West Scotland, a warm water tropical species found in the same area as a species normally associated with the edge of the pack ice in the Arctic circle.

Because of the diversity and abundance of cetacean species in West Scotland, it has been argued that this area is one of the most important habitats for whales and dolphins in Northern Europe. Certainly the plethora of cetaceans in the area has led to a booming whale and dolphin-watching industry worth an estimated £7.8 million a year in 2000, which is expanding at a rapid rate and draws thousands of tourists into the region every year.

Despite this, the majority of the general public in West Scotland is largely unaware of the diversity and abundance of cetaceans inhabiting local waters. A recent survey on marine environmental awareness showed that only 57% of the public could correctly name a whale or dolphin species occurring in local waters. Moreover, only 19% of the public could correctly identify a photograph of any of the most commonly occurring species. Cetacean and marine environmental awareness in the fishing community was low, and virtually non-existent in the city of Glasgow.

To improve the public's awareness of cetaceans and marine conservation in Western Scotland, an ambitious and innovative educational programme has been launched by the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust and the NADAIR Trust. This programme involves

a marine environmental roadshow that is visiting schools and community groups throughout Southwest Scotland via a 65' yacht (the *Silurian*). The yacht is also offering berths to university and college students to take part in cetacean and basking shark surveys, to get first-hand experience of marine mammal research and learn the latest scientific monitoring techniques.

Cetacean research in Western Scotland is still in its infancy, but as scientific and public awareness of the diversity and abundance of species in this area increases, and the growing economic importance of cetaceans as an economic resource in tourism becomes realised, so it is hoped that the UK government and the Scottish executive will realise the importance of West Scotland's cetacean populations and increase efforts to protect and conserve this valuable part Scotland's natural heritage.

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Editor's note – I would like to draw readers' attention to Angus Martins' book The Ring-Net fishermen, which contains fascinating information about the maritime food chain, of which plankton, herring and cetaceans are a major part.

Our coast also gets a special mention in the BBC publication The Blue Planet – a natural history of the oceans: "in coastal areas, tidal

currents may act as agents of nutrient recycling. Such currents can reach speeds of up to 15 knots... these manifestations of water power are found in places such as the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia, the west coast of Scotland, Norway and British Columbia. Their effect is to create tremendous local mixing of nutrients and to prevent thermoclines forming, so that the nutrient supply is unabated during the summer. This ensures that tidal areas have a localised abundance of wildlife." (p.161).

A further species is also worth a mention – the basking shark (not a cetacean). These spectacular creatures are also to be found around our coast during the summer – one is regularly seen by the ferryman of the Tarbert-Lochranza ferry. Sightings please to Phil Johnston (see below).

DOLPHINS ON YOUR DOORSTEP

Phil Johnston

The west coast of Scotland is blessed with a diversity of fascinating marine life from sea squirts to basking sharks. But of all the life thriving in the coastal environment on our doorstep, the most charismatic is undoubtedly the bottlenose dolphin. This species is familiar all over the world from films, TV shows and aquaria, and known for their acrobatic displays, intelligence, ability to communicate and apparent affinity with humans. It comes as a surprise to some that bottlenose dolphins can often be seen within a few metres from shore around the British Isles.

The Hebridean Bottlenose Dolphin Project is a programme of research and education dedicated to the bottlenose dolphins of West Scotland.

So far, the project has primarily focused on the waters around the islands of Islay and Mull, but I'm very keen to find out more about the dolphins seen from the Kintyre peninsula; also from the shores of Loch Fyne and the Knapdale coast. Piecing together information I've already received has raised more questions than answers! Are there any 'dolphin hotspots' in these areas? How many dolphins have been seen?

I've already received sightings from: the caravan site near Kilberry; off Skipness; from the Claonaig- Lochranza and Tarbert-Portavadie ferries; and up the Loch Fyne coast as far as Inverary. These dolphins are highly mobile and it is likely that the same dolphins are travelling throughout the west coast – usually within just metres of the coastline. Working on knowledge gained from previous studies, I suspect that the dolphins seen around Kintyre could well be the same animals seen around Islay, Arran and in the Clyde. The population may even range further afield -down the Irish Sea, further north or around the coast of Northern Ireland. But exactly where they go, and how many dolphins there are, will hopefully become clearer in time. As our knowledge of these charismatic dolphins grows, we will be more able to ensure their well-being.

To make some of these mysteries a little clearer, I need your help! I would love to hear from anyone who has spotted these dolphins or has any photos or video footage of them. If you would like to know more about the project, visit the website; www.projectdolphins.co.uk, or contact me on 07879 264 044 or phil@projectdolphins.co.uk. I can supply you with identification sheets and sightings forms.

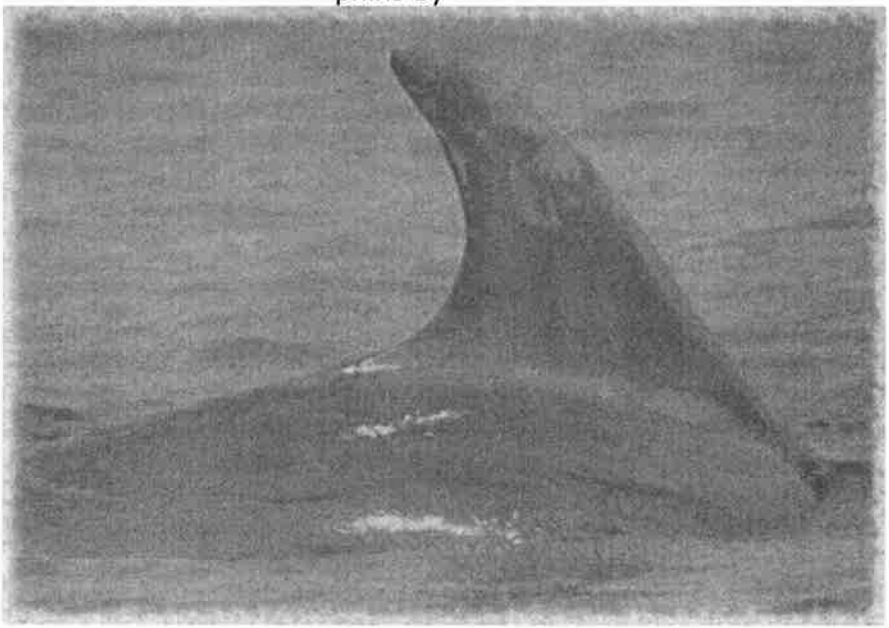
Editor's note

Phil will also accept any sightings of cetaceans and basking sharks and will forward them to the relevant projects. Although based on Islay, he makes trips to the mainland and can give talks to interested groups.

You can also contact the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust at their Mull office. A community sightings programme for all cetacean species is based there; address – 28 Main Street, Tobermory, Isle of Mull, Argyll PA75 6NU.

Note that the lower photograph on the next page shows markings on the dorsal fin – this enables an individual dolphin to be recognised.

Photoes of bottlenose dolphins by Phil Johnston



N.H.A.S.M.A. on BARRA –JUNE 2003

A. O. M. Clark

As we joined the queue on Oban pier for the ferry to Barra the rain began to fall. It fell steadily all through the rather choppy voyage, and intermittently all evening. Next morning dawned with sunshine and clear skies leading to a perfect day. In fact the weather was very kind to us throughout - plenty of sunshine, fresh breezes, some but not much rain, and only one particularly vicious downpour which caught a small intrepid band at the furthest point of a long walk.

Douglas had booked the whole Barra hostel (15 places) and thirteen of the party stayed there; five opted for the Castlebay hotel, of whom two took their evening meals at the hostel. These meals were certainly one of the high points of the holiday.

On Wednesday morning, after admiring the three-master "Tenacious" moored at the pier - she travels the world giving sailing experience to the disabled; each disabled person is assigned to a regular crew member and takes full part in sailing the vessel - groups as usual went their different ways. Four cars were available to take us to chosen spots, for example starting (and finishing!) points for walks. We enjoyed Barra in all our different ways. The beaches were long and white or pale gold, the rocky shores spectacular with brilliant white breakers crashing in from a sea that varied from blue to green to purple to angry grey. The machair was a great spread mainly of green, gold and white, the grassy slopes, hay meadows and hillsides full of what seemed the full range of West Highland flora - there are said to be 400 species of wild flowers on Barra, and we must have seen a good proportion. One small delight was the finding of large patches of tiny 2 inch tall orchids snuggled down to avoid the Atlantic winds; in less exposed areas there were lots of orchids of normal size.

On Wednesday evening in the Barra Heritage Centre the Countryside Ranger for Barra, Jonathan Grant, told us about the island, its environment, flora and fauna, its history and archaeology, illustrating his talk with a series of excellent slides. This enormously increased our appreciation and understanding in the next few days.

There are four main walks on the island, each covered by its own "Self-guided Heritage trail" leaflet which gives details of the marked route, notes on points of interest, and ways of shortening it if required; all leaflets specify "stout footwear should be worn". The Vatersay trail "three hours of easy to medium going" begins on the machair behind Bagh Siar, passing the monument commemorating the emigrant ship "Annie Jane"

out of Liverpool bound for Canada which was wrecked at Bagh Siar in 1853; about 350 passengers and crew drowned; the bodies were washed ashore over many days, a fact noted by the monument which quotes Rev. XX 13 "and the sea gave up the dead which were in it". This walk, like all the others, affords wonderful views, and is good for birds and flowers. The Cuither trail is the longest walk and partly difficult; it passes the Iron Age fortress of Dun Cuier (occupied up to the 6th century AD, and again by Redcoats in 1746), several deserted habitations (Iron Age aisled farmhouse to black house) and the impressive Dun Bharpa, which is not a dun but a neolithic chambered cairn and still in good condition despite stone robbing. The Tangasdale trail is a pleasantly varied walk above the coast, its furthest point the spectacular Dun Ban on its dominating headland above the sea; the day was hot, the small up-and-down hills en route steep, and I regret to say that only a small and select band made it to the dun, the others seating themselves on comfortable smooth grey rocks at various stages, content to enjoy the view. The Eoligarry trail is a mainly level walk with one (optional) steep climb up to Dun Scurrival, a galleried dun, and a gentler one up Ben Eoligarry. This walk passes Cille Bharra, St Barr's Chapel, with remains of three chapels dating from the 12th century, in a burial ground which may go back to the 9th century; the writer Compton MacKenzie is buried in the upper part of the cemetery, beneath a plain granite cross giving only his name and dates. In spring the graveyard is so thick with primroses that it is impossible not to walk on them.

This walk also includes Traigh Mhor, the cockle strand which serves as Barra's airport, the arrival and departure times of the daily flights for Glasgow and Benbecula controlled by the tides; it is the only commercial beach airstrip in the world. The airport building is a small pleasure in itself - a comfortable airport lounge, and a cafe serving tea and coffee with home baking, and a selection of snacks. One wall of this space is decorated with a beautiful shell mosaic depicting birds to be seen on Barra. Alison, Norman and Morag, and also Jean and Rebecca, took the flight to Benbecula and back, enjoying a magnificent 'map' view, the clear sunny air with just the occasional cloud showing off the brilliant colours of islands and sea. Sheena and Creena took the ferry from Eoligarry to Eriskay and "were glad of a lift to the village in the Post Bus as it's quite a long incline". They visited St Michael's Chapel, built in 1903, with its memories of two World Wars: the Angelus is rung on a bell which comes from the German battle cruiser "Derfflinger" scuttled at Scapa Flow, and the altar base is made from the bow of a lifeboat from the aircraft carrier Hermes". Sheena noted that the flowers in the chapel, all wild, had been beautifully arranged. They then

proceeded to the Politician Hotel where they landed in just as a guest was about to photograph her husband holding two bottles of whisky from the SS "Politician", whereupon Sheena promptly whipped out her camera and got a photograph as well.

Everyone went to Allt Chrisal, a remarkable site discovered in 1990 during the archaeological survey carried out before the building of the Vatersay causeway and its approach road, and excavated over a period of ten years by a team from the University of Sheffield; it proved to have a history of habitation from about 3,800 BC up to 1991 AD when the causeway builders sited their Portacabins there; the cook grew potatoes on the lazybeds dug by the occupants of the black house abandoned in 1835 (see separate report).

We all (three boatloads) went out to Kisimul Castle. The promised guided tour for some reason did not materialise, but Douglas had a short guide which he read out to us, after which we made our own way round, not difficult as there are identification boards and notes, as well as frequent injunctions to "mind your head". The castle had the enormous advantage of a supply of fresh water from a spring feeding into a well in the courtyard. We noted the fish trap beside the small beach where galleys were drawn up, and found the tour round the buildings (which date possibly from the 12th or 13th century to the 15th and were abandoned in the mid 18th) fascinating. As seen today they are as far as possible a faithful restoration of their appearance before abandonment, carried out after careful research by Robert Lister Macneil, of a branch of the family which had emigrated to Canada; most of the work was done between 1956 and 1970. The skipper of the boat which conveys people to the castle completes the circuit by returning on the seaward side so that the site can be seen from all angles.

Catherine compiled the following list of the birds seen: fulmar, Manx shearwater, gannet, cormorant, shag, grey heron, mute swan, greylag goose, shelduck, mallard, tufted duck, eider, kittiwake, buzzard, golden eagle, corncrake, oystercatcher, ringed plover, golden plover, lapwing, snipe, redshank, common sandpiper, great skua, black-headed gull, common gull, lesser black-backed gull, herring gull, greater black-backed gull, Sandwich tern, common tern, Arctic tern, common guillemot, puffin, rock dove, cuckoo, skylark, swallow, meadow pipit, rock pipit, pied wagtail, wren, dunnock, stonechat, wheatear, blackbird, song thrush, sedge warbler, hoodie crow, raven, starling, house sparrow, corn bunting. Our voyage back to Oban produced sightings of minke whale, bottle-nosed dolphin, and porpoise.

We all appreciate the immense amount of work put in by Douglas in arranging the trip, and offer him our heartiest thanks for such an enjoyable six days.

This account is an amalgam of information from several members of the party, to whom I am very grateful.

ALLT CHRISAL

About 3,800 BC the first settlers built an artificial platform to extend a natural shelf on the hillside and provide a flat area about 14m by 16m for the erection of timber and turf structures. Two rectangular stone hearths from this neolithic period have been left for visitors to see. The area produced evidence of working of skins and wool, of stone tools and pottery; there were remains of at least 580 pots, both large storage jars and smaller bowls and cups; the flints included scrapers for cleaning skins, small knives and awls, and arrowheads. C14 dating from the finds gives a date of about 2,700 BC, the later period of use of the platform. Nothing can be found on the front area of the platform, as the builders of the black house in the 18th century had cleared the ground down to the neolithic stone floor and used it as their own. The stone huts further up the burn were built about 2,000 BC; pottery and flints were found in their midden downslope. High on the hill above is a neolithic paved burial cairn with a kerb, incurved entrance, and a monolith, now fallen, before the entrance.

There is now a gap in the evidence of perhaps 1.500 years, till a large stone roundhouse was built farther down the hillside from the stone huts but above the level of the platform. This was superseded probably about 100BC - 100AD by a wheelhouse, a roundhouse divided internally into seven sections by free-standing stone piers with a large (1.5 m. square) stone hearth in the middle, which when found was full of ash to a depth of 40cm. After a long period of occupation the piers were extended to meet the walls and a smaller hearth made, the floor level raised and a new door inserted. This in the main is the stage whose remains are preserved today. In the 5th or 6th century AD this house fell into disrepair and was abandoned, used as small temporary shelters for shepherds. Then came a small structure dated to the 9th or 10th century by a spindle whorl typical of Norse sites, and later a larger stone and earth building; probably mediaeval, 13th to 16th century, associated with a garden patch. These later structures were removed so that the wheelhouse could be excavated and its metre-high walls displayed. (Archaeology necessitates destruction). The last major buildings at Allt Chrisal were a black house of the 18th century built on the neolithic platform, and its

byre and drying shed; a small house at the back of the wheelhouse; and a little hut used by a kelp burner. The long narrow stone-edged trenches where he burned the kelp can still be seen.

The source for this much-abbreviated report is the information leaflet published by the Southern Isles Amenity Trust Barra Ranger Service.

N.H.A.S.M.A. ON THE ISLE OF COLONSAY, 2002

John Dyment

The majority of the party stayed in the "backpacker's lodge", situated on the edge of the Colonsay House estate. The lodge accommodates up to 16 in two separate blocks and possesses a spacious kitchen/common room in a further separate building.

Day 1: After an informative introductory chat with Georgiana most members visited the Colonsay house gardens in the morning; particularly noticeable were the eucalyptus trees, the bark of which peeled to reveal a reddish brown underbark, rather than the more usually seen grey. I followed the signposted path to Loch Fada, which wound with many convolutions about 3/4 of a mile through the rhododendron forest. Of interest to those with a feeling for the physical sciences (viz. optics) was the centrepiece of one of the formal gardens - the lens system from a lighthouse off Islay.

In the afternoon we dispersed into groups: I visited the natural arch at the southern end of Kiloran beach in company with Douglas and Val. Then crossing the river that flows down and along the beach I walked to the north end to find Ted and Adeline relaxing on a grassy patch, admiring flocks of terns wheeling over the shore and ringed plovers running over the sands. I then scrambled over the headland at the north end of the beach, eventually overlooking a further beach at the head of a cove, marked on the map as Port Sgibinis. From there it was a short walk back down the road to the foot of the highest point, Carnan Eoin, from the summit of which splendid views were visible to all points of the compass. Returning across the dunes behind Kiloran beach I searched unsuccessfully for the "hollow of the boat".

Day 2: Dawned wet. Accompanied by Zak I set off northwards along Kiloran beach in search of the caves at the far end. The lower cave went back a considerable distance, perhaps 50 yds. A torch would have been useful. The upper, or "ladies" cave is much shallower but shows signs of former habitation. There is a rough stone bench said to be probably of Victorian origin.

There is also said to be evidence of much earlier habitation (several thousands of years ago). Present habitants are rabbits. Skirting the ridge back to the road I happened on Creena and Mary contemplating an ascent of Carnan Eoin. With some encouragement and my fresh local knowledge from the previous day all 4 duly reached the summit. Sadly the view was not as good as the previous day. Having returned Zak to his awaiting owner despite the immense counter attraction of numerous rabbit burrows the sun unexpectedly appeared. I immediately set off for Balnahard beach at the north end of the island, on the way meeting a returning party. In my view this beach is tops out of all Colonsay beaches for beauty and isolation. In the brilliant sun you only seem to get after a sustained downpour I took a bracing dip, to the amazement of onlooking oyster-catchers. A solitary seal appeared 20 yds out and looked on in total astonishment.

Day 3: The Oronsay trip took place in indifferent weather conditions. Walter duly appeared with his tractor and trailer, which turned out to be not spacious enough for the whole party. Some crossed on foot, and those who had provided themselves with Wellingtons really came into their own. The rest of us walkers managed nearly but not quite to remain dry-shod. I found the Priory visit notable for the history on the gravestones, the corncrakes audible in the field opposite and the high density of midges in the otherwise admirable adjoining garden. After returning across the Strand I hitched a lift on Walter's tractor to the road junction with the circular road. I then setoff clockwise, stopping to lunch at the lookout and to look in at the bookshop, there meeting Ted and Adeline and Douglas and Val. The coast around the lookout and the roadside back to the hostel were rich in flowers, inter alia squill, thrift, butterwort, common orchid and somewhat less common brilliant crimson pyramidal orchid. That evening we ate Christa's pasta offering and a sweet course of which none could be saved for latecomers.

Day 4: Led by Kevin Byrne the group set off eastwards from the lodge across rough and boggy moorland. Two deserted villages were encountered; the inhabitants of the second one were said to have died from a smallpox epidemic. This had been brought on by the use of bedding found in a box on the beach, thought to have been jetsam from an infected ship. A nearby stone was said to have been where food brought up from the town was left for them ("fever stone"). This stone showed "cup marks". Further on we came to the old harbour (used before the building of Scalasaig). On the natural rock wall above the harbour were deep hollows (carricks?) formed in past years by fishermen grinding shellfish to make groundbait. Returning on a path north of our outward route we entered the

"Great Wood" where what appeared to be a headstone and footstone were seen.

Kevin informed us that a major cottage industry in the area in earlier times was the collection and burning of bracken, the ash from which was used to make soap. By this time most members had encountered sufficient of this landscape and returned to base by the shortest route.

Personally I spent the last half-day at Urigaig, where the grandest scenery on the island is to be found. The end of this peninsula is disintegrating into rocky islets, giving rise to spectacular cliff architecture with natural arches, caves, narrowly linked rock masses and a dense population of nesting seabirds, wheeling and diving. I was "dive bombed" at a cliff edge, probably by a LBB gull. Underfoot was that fine springy turf, close cropped by rabbits, decorated with masses of squill and thrift and below the continuous Atlantic surf.

Days on Barra

Time passes by on Barra in a warm and pleasant haze
So that memories co-mingle, and the days run into days

From Scurrival to Vatersay, from Kisimul to Cleat
We have gone our ways together or have parted but to meet

In the valley of Allt Chrisal, with all that it contains
From Neolithic cup to Black House, we have studied the remains

We have walked the walk on Vatersay, lined up the Bishop's Isles*
From the machair to the mountain we have walked the country miles

We have seen the spotted orchids and the tiny purple squills
We have watched the prim primroses dancing wildly on the hills

We have seen the eider surfing with their ducklings in the wake
We have seen the eagles soaring; we have heard the corncrake "craik"

Some have coffee'd in Benbecula – flown back again to land
Against the strong sou'westerlies on Barra's golden sand

Some have ferried off to Eriskay, the landfall of the Prince
And back 'across the water', they've been Flora's ever since

Some have heaved themselves up Heaval; some have beachcombed on the dunes
Some have brought the Barra T-shirt; some have sought the Gaelic tunes

Ah! The time passed by on Barra in a warm and pleasant haze
And memories *have* mingled; and days *were* perfect days

Rebecca Pine

* The Bishop's Isles- Sandray, Pabbay, Mingulay and Berneray (or Barra Head) were so known as they formed part of the Bishopric Estate in Norse times.

Letter to the Editor – from A.O.M. Clark

Lady Eileen Road
Tarbert

With reference to the letter from Mr Hubert Andrew in Kist 65 p. 27, concerning the existence or otherwise of an abbey on Colonsay, on 21st March this year our Society enjoyed a talk by Kevin Byrne of Colonsay, who is Calmac's Port Supervisor on the island; he is also involved In the Colonsay Bookshop and the House of Lochar publishing firm, runs the island website and newspaper, conducts sea trips in his own boat (and has a few other incidental occupations). His subject was "The Storied Stones of Colonsay" focussing mainly on the prehistoric and folklore. However on being questioned afterwards about "Kiloran Abbey" he said that there were certainly remains of a large ecclesiastical complex, perhaps a monastery, under Colonsay House and grounds, and evidence of drainage and land management attributable to the monks on that part of the island. It may not technically have been an abbey; "abbey" was a popular general term at the time when Colonsay House was built on the ruined site and partly from its stones. With regard to the "nunnery" the chapel to be seen today lies on an old main route to the north which was much travelled by ecclesiastics, and probably others. In view of the very strong local tradition, it may have been part of an establishment of nuns, or a retreat. The connection with St Catherine is also firmly established in tradition.

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Editor: Edward Tyler, Daisy Cottage, Big Brae, Tarbert PA29 6UQ. Tel. 01880 820656.
Although the Kist does not specialise in family history, it has been pointed out to the Editor that there may be cases where we have information that would be useful to readers in search of their forbears. Requests should be sent to the Editor, should give as much detail as possible, and should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope for reply.