

FAIR ISLE TIMES

VOLUME 48 ISSUE 56

PUBLISHED SINCE 1978

14th FEBRUARY 2025

A busy weekend

On Saturday we went to the hall to play football. We played for a while and after that we went to Kenaby to borrow the last Harry Potter book, *The Deathly Hallows*.

On Sunday we went to chapel. It was a special service with lots of songs. People had been asked to choose their favourite hymn. Then we went Pat and Neil's house. It was a sunny day so we played football in the garden for a while. After that, mum picked us up to go to the boat. Edie, Freyja and Grace were all there. We went with them to get limpets to eat. Edie and I prepared the limpets then mum fried them in garlic butter. They were yummy.

Luca (9)



A good weekend

I had a good weekend. I had lots of fun. We went to tea at Triona's on Saturday. I went straight to bed when I got home.

On Sunday my friends came to my house. We played upstairs then came downstairs and painted our nails. I used five different colours of nail varnish.

Ander (7)

Thanks to Jimmy at Skerryholm for this insight into the first tractors which came to the isle and also the final years of bulls – both playing a significant part in our crofting culture...

I only just remember back to the time before the tractor, to when oxen were the beast of burden and also the tiller of the soil. I remember clearly the Shirva men ploughing with two oxen west by the Midway byre. They had a young beast, from Leogh I think, and their own older one, and things were not going to plan! We never did have oxen at Midway, always sharing with the Eunsons at Leogh, and later, when tractors came, with Uncle Jimmy at Schoolton as tractors, in that generation, did not come to Leogh. The only other ox that I remember clearly was a red animal at Schoolton - sick and then dead in the byre. Such a job they had getting him out and dumped, after which - depending on the tides - he became more visible than he was in life!

The first tractor in came to Taft, the first of the British Anzani which were two-wheeled machines, and universally known as the Iron Horse. I don't know if it was new or not, but it would never plough straight, and so required much manpower to make a decent job. Similar, but better Iron Horses came to Busta and Stoneybrek, while the Andersons at Setter purchased a BMB, which was similar to the Iron Horse, but lighter built, and very low geared. BMB was designed by British Motor Boats of London, but sold through a different company.



Stewart Gray with the Iron Horse at Field 1973



Jim Wilson on the Gunsmith 1973

All these machines had iron wheels when purchased. Had they changed to rubber wheels, they would have become so much more adaptable and very similar to those running around in Cyprus and the Greek Islands some thirty years later. Iron wheels left them very restricted.

A bit later Jimmy Wilson bought a Gunsmith, three wheeled tractor which did have rubber tyres. It was good for certain jobs, but the single wheel at the front was not handy. All these tractors had petroleum engines, the Gunsmith having a Briggs and Stratton engine, and with a few amendments, could have been very good.



Leogh Jerry then purchased a Trusty four-wheeled tractor. This was potentially a much better machine which unfortunately came with iron wheels when purchased, which of course never got changed. Tradition is often a harsh master! This again was a petrol engine, and the tractor was made by Tractors London Ltd who were involved with the Norton company, famous in the motor bike business. *Left: Sandy, Aggie and Jerry Stout setting tatties at Lower Leogh*



Jimmy Stout and Bill Murray on the tractor and binder at Field, near Hesswalls 1975

When Gordon and Perry Barnes came to Setter in 1966, they brought with them the first diesel Ferguson tractor here. With it he also had a reaper and binder, which unfortunately was not PTO (power take off) driven, but rather automated by the speed of the large ground wheel, governed by the speed of the tractor. This worked well on dry flat ground, but was often, on our land and in our climate, a source of serious grief!



Harvesting corn (oats) 1975

The tractor was, however, a great leap forward, being a work horse on the road as well as in the field, where Gordon undertook reseeding and improvement of places which had previously been dormant. Gordon and his infestation of rabbits at Setter were never on good terms, and so he ploughed up, (or down, depending on how you see it) the fealy dyke, which ran the length of the Hill dyke, on his croft. Imagine the reaction of SNH or Historic Scotland if such was even suggested half a century later. He restricted his actions to his own croft, leaving the old dyke intact on the Hoini scattald and in the Bull's Park up to Heswalls.

As for the Bull's Park, it was as it was - the Bull's Park, so whoever looked after the communal bull, kept him in that park and received a fee for services given! In my young days Busta Jerry looked after the bull. I remember being advised to give him a wide berth if we were in that region. He was, however, in the Busta byre when the roof was blown off in the great gale of January 1953. He survived intact, but was chained to

an iron rod fitted to the wall and the roof; this rod went with the roof, all never to be seen again, but the bull must have felt the strain for a bit!

The bull then went to Schoolton for lodgings and may have stayed for some time, but by 1970 was cared for by Stewart Thomson, who, with Annie and their young family, had moved to Shirva from their temporary home at Springfield.

Looking after the bull could never have been a profitable business, and even worse as the number of cows on the Isle decreased, and so Gordon Barnes, who now had breeding cows, took over, and kept a Galloway bull at Setter. Then, when the Barnes family left the Isle in 1975 or 76, the bull transferred to Field where by this time Dave and Jane were setting up a herd of cows producing enough milk for all the Isle, including the Bird Observatory. A bull remained in their good keeping for the next ten years, finally departing on the Islander to Orkney in 1986, after which Dave trained to AI cows, and the Bull's Park became rented as an addition to Field croft, a situation which continues to the present day.

There the story of bulls on the Isle sadly comes to an end. The story of tractors could continue - Jerry's Trusty got shipped off the Isle. Most of the others fell by the wayside, as they say, although one - I think the Stoneybrek Iron Horse, came to Shirva where it continued to run, as they say, again, like a clock, for many years thanks to Stewart's care and love of such things (*Editor: for those interested, this same iron horse can be seen in the Shetland Museum in Lerwick, just look for the bright yellow iron horse!*)

But enough for now.

Jimmy.

Romancing the Scone

The quest for the best cheese scones, plus coffee, in the Scottish Borders continues. Co-researcher, Charlotte, suggests a busy looking café near to the abbey in Melrose. A table for two is secured and menus brought to us. We have no need for menus. We do not deviate from the quest.

Coffee arrives swiftly followed by the largest, cheesiest scones we have encountered so far. Two questions arise:

1. *How did they get the scones to rise with so much cheese incorporated into the mix?*
2. *Do we eat them, or climb them?*

As they say '*it's a hard job, but someone has to do it*'.

Charlotte tackles hers admirably, I opt for a partial climb and save the final ascent for later. Meanwhile, the table for two next to us becomes occupied. Charlotte catches my eye, stares at me with amusement. But then averts her gaze momentarily to the couple next to us with that slight nod that says, 'look over there'. Still laughing about being unable to complete the scone mission. I look over and see a young couple obviously totally besotted by each other. Both so well groomed. She, a young elegant, demure blonde. He, dark haired with immaculately trimmed beard and surely arrived straight from the Turkish barber's around the corner. He has her well-manicured hand gently cradled in both of his on top of the table, and so it remains even when their coffee arrives.....if they even noticed it had. Charlotte puts her hand over her mouth to stifle any utterance or scone splutterance. I say, 'Don't worry, to them we do not even exist at this point in time.' I think to myself, 'Long may their sincerity last'.

Two days later I catch a bus to go and collect my car from the garage a mile along the road. The bus driver is a young woman and obviously under the watchful eye of an inspector/trainer seated nearby. Another couple appear at the bus shelter laden with large, heavy, carrier bags. They look unsteady. She, wearing very ripped jeans, way past the point of being fashionable. He smoking a 'cigarette' and she yelling at him like a demented wildcat as he seems to have lost their tickets. The 'cigarette' remains in his mouth while he checks all his pockets. She then grabs the 'cigarette' from his mouth and kisses him almost aggressively before he has time to exhale. He wipes his mouth with the back of his hand and finds a replacement cigarette. She takes the bags and half smoked 'cigarette' towards the bus. Failing to find tickets in one of the bags, she puts that bag on the bus while screeching something at the driver, then gets off the bus again to finish the 'cigarette' in as few draws as possible as if leaning into it while looking around frantically everywhere, and at everyone, with a demented stare. Her man brings another of the bags over and tells the driver they will find the '....ing tickets, but there is a problem. The inspector steps in as their behaviour edges further towards being more abusive and could appear to be due to some substance dependency. I avert my eyes as any acknowledgement might escalate things.

While travelling the mile to the garage, I briefly ponder what the outcomes may be for both couples.

Perhaps couple No.1 were just playing out an Instagram dream. A random swipe over a phone screen could change things for both by the end of the day. Couple No.2 may have been on their way to rehab and thereafter go on to have a successful lifelong relationship. Who knows?

Even scones can be unpredictable, and cheesy!

Kathy, Upper Leogh

ISLE NOTICES

Accommodation wanted - My name is Heike Burkert, I am the knitting designer from Germany who has been on the isle often over the last years and I think, many of you know me from my visits. I want to come again this year in spring and I would like to ask if anybody has a space for me this year, ideally in April or May. I can help with house sitting or something like that, maybe a little bit with animals: cats are very welcome, friendly dogs are welcome, but I don't really have experience with sheep, sorry ☺

Furthermore I can offer a home exchange with my home here in Germany: so if any of you want to explore Germany here is a great opportunity. I live in Northern Germany in the Hanseatic city of Rostock on the Baltic coast. We have a wonderful wide sandy beach, great brick Gothic architecture and you can get to Berlin and Hamburg via highway or to Denmark via ferry in around 2 hours. My flat is in the city centre and there is room for 2-4 people.

If anyone is interested and has space for me, please feel free to contact me for more information. My email is heikebkt@web.de. Looking forward to see all of you again soon.

Thank you and many greetings from Germany. Heike

NOTICES CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...

Chapel – All very welcome to join for worship in the Chapel this Sunday at 11am. John will be leading.

Change to Good Shepherd sailing – w/c 3rd March. The scheduled sailing to Grutness on Tuesday 4th of March will now take place weather/crew permitting on Wednesday 5th March.

Thanks,

Ian - Master, Good Shepherd IV

Islands and *Islandness*: a Poetry Workshop

with

Charlotte Eichler

Thursday 20th February, 7:30-9:00 pm, online

This workshop is aimed at beginners and experienced writers alike, as well as the merely curious. It will be a friendly and relaxed session with plenty of writing time and the chance to meet people with a shared love of writing and islands, nature and place.

There will be writing exercises and prompts designed to kickstart new poems, and an opportunity to share and discuss your work with the group (if you would like to). In this workshop we'll look at poems that explore islands and *islandness*, especially the islands of northern Scotland.

We will take inspiration from poets writing today, such as Jen Hadfield, Christie Williamson and Niall Campbell, as well as poets of the Viking Age whose works survive in *The Saga of the Earls of Orkney*, and many others in between. If you have previous island poems that you've written and would like to share with the group, please do bring these along. Equally, if you'd prefer to just listen without sharing work, that's fine too.

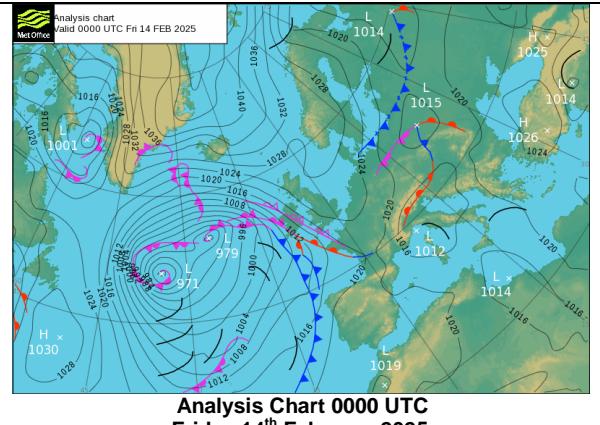
To book a slot or if you have any questions please email charlotte.eichler@gmail.com



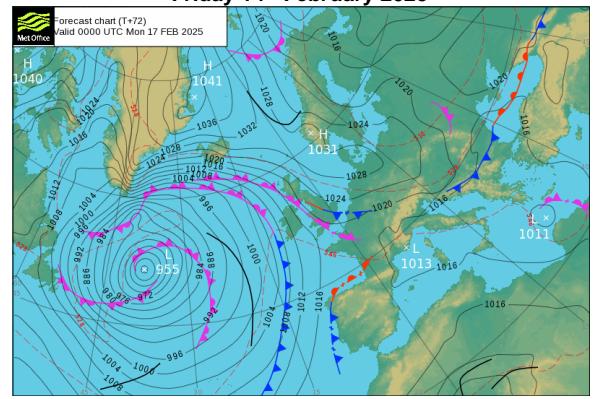
Charlotte Eichler is a poet based in West Yorkshire, UK. Her first collection, *Swimming Between Islands*, was published by Carcanet in February 2023 and shortlisted for the Seamus Heaney First Collection Poetry Prize. She is poet-in-residence for the Ragna's Islands project, and is working on new poetry inspired by the islands of North Ronaldsay, Papay and Fair Isle.



FAIR ISLE WEATHER FORECAST



Analysis Chart 0000 UTC
Friday 14th February 2025



Forecast Chart 0000 UTC
Monday 17th February 2025

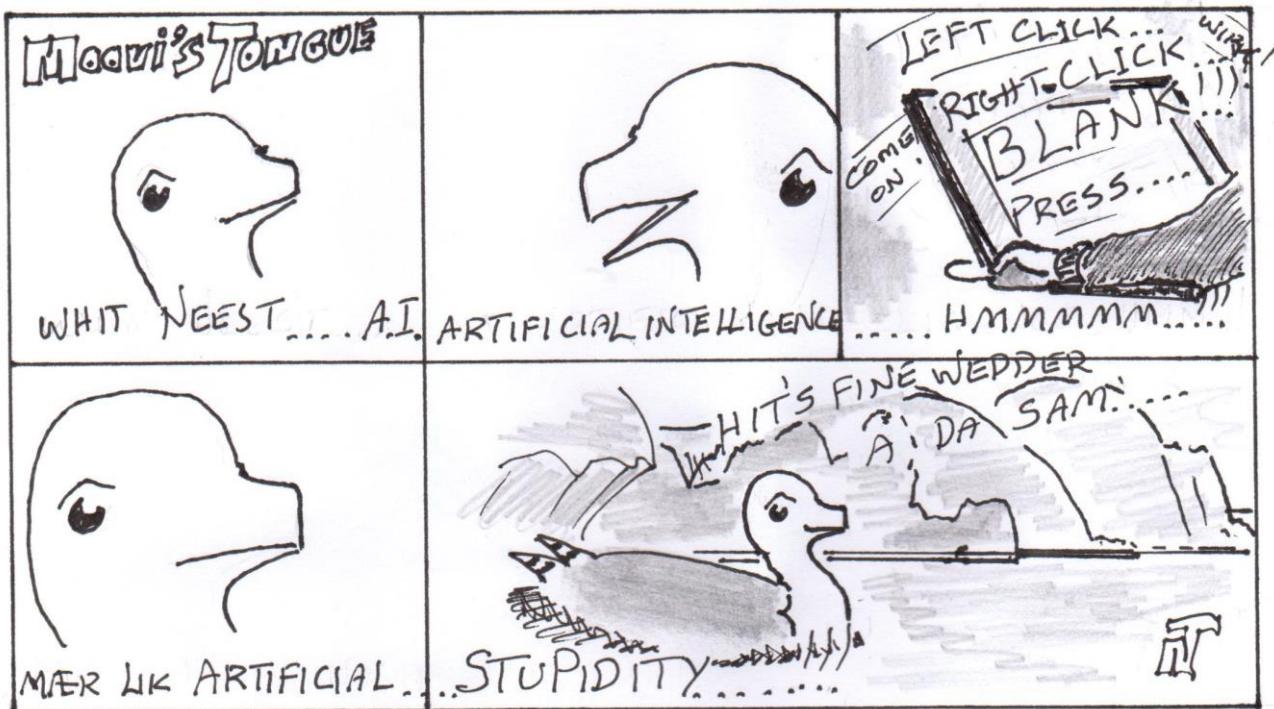
around 5° overnight.

MONDAY 17th: Dry, rather cloudy with some brighter or sunny spells at times. A fresh SE wind.

Sea State: Mostly moderate at 2 metre E or SE. **TUESDAY 18th:** Cloudy though mainly dry. Feeling rather chilly in a fresh occasionally strong SE wind. **Sea State:** In the west and south moderate or rough at 2 to 3 metre S. in the east and north mostly moderate at 2 metre N. **WEDNESDAY 19th – SUNDAY 23rd:** Wednesday cloudy though mostly dry with fresh occasionally strong SSE winds. The end of the week and weekend cloudy though mainly dry with fresh or strong S or SW winds. **Sea State Wednesday:** Mostly rough or very rough at 4 to 5 metre S.

Half way through the month and - despite a fair number of cloudy days - sunshine hours are currently 75% average February total. Rainfall presently just 30% typical February total. Also, daily mean temperatures almost 2°C above February average.

Dave Wheeler



GENERAL SITUATION Friday 14th February 2025

While Atlantic low pressure is driving weather systems north-eastwards towards the British Isles fronts are making only slow progress into western areas against high pressure to the east and north of the UK. A dry, chilly easterly airflow persists over the Northern Isles during the weekend then, early next week, freshens south-easterly as a depression deepens south of Iceland. During the latter part of the week, under the influence of Atlantic low pressure, a strong south south-easterly airflow tends south-westerly.

OUTLOOK FOR THE WEEKEND Temperatures 4° or 5° by day, 2° or 3° overnight.

FRIDAY 14th: A cloudy start with a small chance of a wintry shower with sunny spells developing by afternoon. Light F1-2 NE winds. Mostly cloudy overnight with chance of wintry showers.

Sea State: Mostly moderate at 2 metre N.

SATURDAY 15th: Some early wintry showers then mainly dry with brighter spells and a chilly F4-5 ENE breeze occasionally F5-6 E later. **Sea State:** Mostly moderate at 2 metre NE.

SUNDAY 16th: Dry, cloudy or partly cloudy with some sunny spells. F5 SE winds. **Sea State:** Moderate or rough at 2 to 3 metre SE.

FORECAST FOR NEXT WEEK Temperatures starting at 4° or 5° by day, 3° or 4° overnight. From mid-week 6° or 7° by day, around 5° overnight.