

# FAIR ISLE TIMES

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## Ander and Luca Turn Quizmasters

Seeing as we've just had our first rainy and windy weekend of the summer, what better way to spend an evening (if one occurs again - hopefully not) than with a quiz. Luca and Ander have produced a School Quiz just for you! Feel free to send us your answers to [jonathan.pye@shetland.gov.uk](mailto:jonathan.pye@shetland.gov.uk). We would love to see how you got on. You're most welcome to set us a bonus question too, if you want to be adventurous. Ander says no cheating!



### Fair Isle Round!

1. True or False. Fair Isle is getting a new ferry.
2. How many Good Shepherds have there been?
3. How many miles away from mainland Shetland is Fair Isle?
4. Rounded to the nearest hundred, how high is Ward Hill in metres?
5. What plant with a lovely smelling flower is very common in the north of the Isle?
6. What do you call a Fulmar in Shetland dialect?
7. Which famous pair of brothers designed and engineered the lighthouses on Fair Isle?
8. Unjumble these letters to spell out an important building on Fair Isle: LACKLUSTER SHOOTs.



### General Knowledge Round!

1. How many countries border Brazil?
2. What landlocked country would you find inside South Africa?
3. How many football teams play in the Premier League?
4. Who painted the Mona Lisa?
5. Who wrote the children's book George's Marvellous Medicine?
6. What are the Northern Lights called in Shetland and Orkney?

*What an inventive quiz, boys. Answers to follow in next week's issue.*

Please note there will not be a Fair Isle Times next week (6<sup>th</sup> June) as the school bairns are going on an adventure to Italy. We are sure they will write all about it the week after!!

## ISLE NOTICES

**Worship this Sunday** will be an informal gathering at Utra (John's house) not the Chapel due to the visiting cruise ship. All welcome to join at 11am.

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Thanks again to Matthew Blake and Corinna Rayner of Nottingham University, part of the 'Ragna's Islands' project for the interesting pieces on historical Fair Isle. I had asked Matthew about the source of these excerpts and of what the kelp was gathered for, which he kindly explained here:

"It is a volume to be found at National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh called *James Stewart of Burgh. Trust sederunt book* (RS. CS96/1729), all part of that estates management which Fair was part of, the Westray connection I think.

I think the tone of the document is fairly benign compared to say what happened in Rousay for example but it was still a form of Victorian lordship, a place to be milked of any profits.

There is a nice recent blog on Kelp making on North Ronaldsay

here <https://archaeologyorkney.com/industrial-heritage/north-ronaldsay/kelp-industry/>

It was a big Orkney industry, from memory the burning of the kelp brought with it some real health issues as the product was a sort of arsenic, including for pregnant women."

### **Report of the Archives. Part 3: 'Much attached to their native soil' - Fair Isle (1803)**

In our third extract from the report about Fair Isle from 1803 we will look at the numbers given for both people and beasts. Here we read that lovely phrase that islanders are 'much attached to their native soil'. It is interesting to note that although Fair Isle had not reached its peak in terms of population it is reported here that numbers had doubled since the 1770's.

*The population has nearly doubled within the last 30 years, it at present amounts to 119 males and 111 females. The inhabitants are a Hardy honest sober, religious set of people, much attached to their native soil. There have been no instances of theft and but very few if any of emigration within the memory of man. This attachment to the island should be encouraged by every possible means as the interest of the proprietor and the prosperity of the island altogether depend upon its population.*

*There are about 80 head of cattle and 70 Shetland horses on the island. The last are never employed in any of the purposes of agriculture but solely for bringing home peats for firing, there are no horses reared on the island. The island also produces some poultry and ducks with abundance of wild fowl but no geese.*

*The number of sheep at present on the island does not exceed 400 of which 100 belonged to the proprietor. It is certainly got pasture [for] double that number.*

*Besides the sheep already mentioned the proprietor had upon the island in June 1803 about 120 bushels of salt for fish curing. 3 fish vats and some oil casks all in very bad order. With a large boat employed in transporting the produce from the island to Orkney and carrying back such articles as are required for the use of the inhabitants.*

Matthew Blake and Corinna Rayner (Ragna's Islands)

**A glimpse into Fair Isle 40 years ago...** I found the FIBOT report from 1985 recently, while looking for photos of a well-known Fair Isle couple's wedding for a ruby wedding anniversary. I thought it would be nice to share a few of the island reports in the Fair Isle Times over the next few weeks. Forty years may not feel like long, but much has changed in that time – although much is the same as you will see. This first piece is the island report written by the late Alec Stout of Barkland; husband to Margaret, father to Michael and Kenny and grandad to writer Jenny, Magnus, Freya and Liam. Eileen

## A View from the Isle

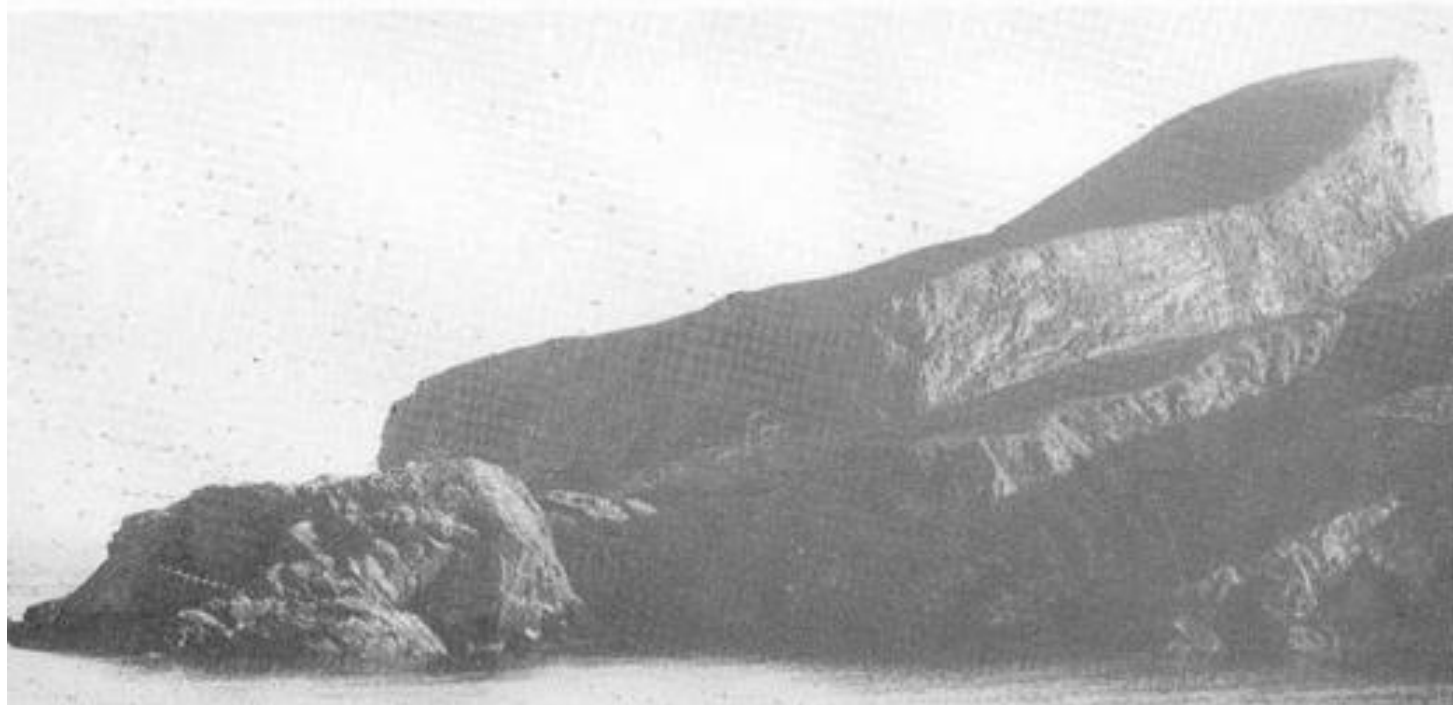
Fair Isle is more than just a place to watch birds. An increasing number of visitors are attracted by other aspects, including the warm and friendly community spirit which has always been a hallmark of the isle. Some visitors whose first visit has been solely in search of birds, have returned time and again, drawn by that extra dimension which island life offers. For them the single page of the report usually devoted to island events is simply not enough — though the weekly island newspaper, *The Fair Isle Times*, has done much to keep them informed in recent years. This new series, *A View from the Isle*, will I hope accede to requests to read more about the Isle. The following contributions, all written by Islanders, are a fascinating contrast of old and new, the account of establishing the bird observatory and the desire to interpret Fair Isle past and present through its artefacts and displays lead easily on to the technological approach of modern island life.

### When the Bird Observatory Opened

When Nick Riddiford asked me to write an article for this report, I started to recall memories of how we converted the naval huts into the Fair Isle Bird Observatory.

Materials to do the job (timber, plasterboard, etc.) were the first priority, so stripping the army huts at the Ward Hill was the start of the conversion plans. Quite a few of us were employed to do this; the wages were not good, but very welcome. The plasterboard presented the worst problem. Removing it as whole as possible and transporting it to the Haven huts were fraught with breakages. However we managed to save enough to do what was necessary. Floor sections were used as passage wall linings. They were approximately 8' x 4' and fairly heavy to carry, especially from the nissan huts at the back of the Ward Hill. These nissan huts were the quarters for the

Sheep Rock, an outstanding landmark.





Royal Artillery soldiers manning the "Bofors" anti-aircraft gun station on the north side of the Ward Hill summit. The Artillery also manned one "Hispano" cannon at the back of the hill along with a "Maxim" machine gun. All these memories stay clear in my mind because, as schoolboys during the war, guns, planes, etc. were very interesting to us.

Back to my story: the floor sections from the two nissan huts were carried down the back of the hill to the Dronger peat road where we got them loaded on a truck. I remember clearly that one hut floor was hardwood and, believe me, the sections were really heavy. The day we carried them down was fairly windy; it was a case of one man with one section on his back, literally staggering down the hill. It would have appeared rather amusing from the air — half a dozen wobbly sections with no sight of the human transport!

One of the timber huts at the hill was ninety feet long. We had removed all the plasterboard and partition timber and transported them to the Haven. That night the weather deteriorated and the wind increased to severe gale from approximately west by south. The following morning there was no sign of the hut apart from a few bits of firewood over the back of the hill! The ninety foot hut had completely vanished and had obviously blown right over Wirvie and into the sea.

Copper piping from the hill camp was used to plumb the rearranged naval huts. I remember doing the plumbing with Pat Robertson, learning as I helped him. The old pipe caused us a lot of problems at times. It was a case of 'making do' as best we could. All this work was done sometime during the years after the war and before 1948 when the Fair Isle Bird Observatory was first opened.

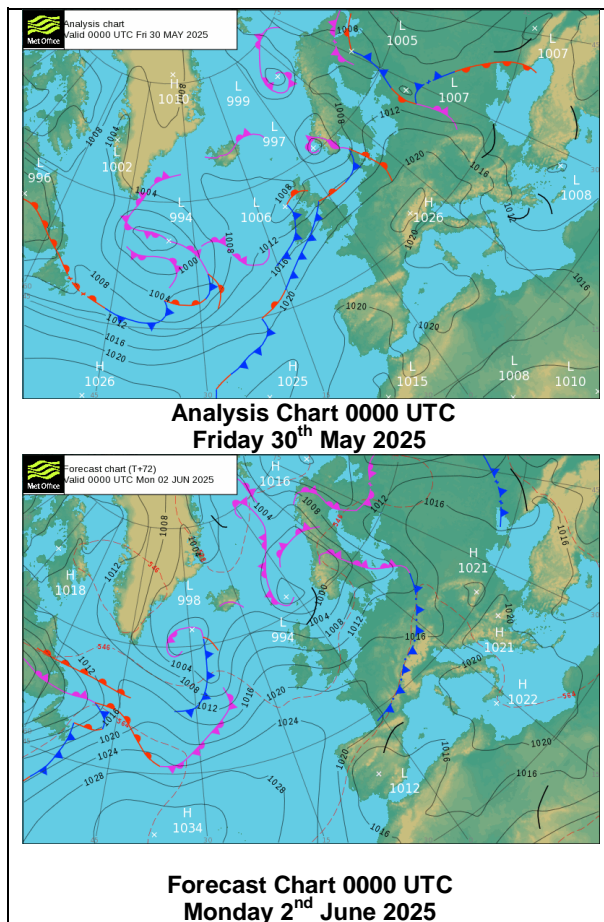
Ken Williamson was the first Warden and, with his Faroese wife Esther, opened up a new phase in the life of Fair Isle. Of course the added attraction of blonde Faroese girls as maids did not go unnoticed!!! We became very friendly with Ken and Esther Williamson, and one night when one or two of us 'young men' were invited to their flat to play the card game "500", we discussed the future of our island. We explained how we thought the way of life as it existed then was really reaching a very serious state. There was no power winch to haul the *Good Shepherd*, no deep water pier, we had to use flit boats to take passengers and freight ashore, the roads were in a poor state, the average age of the population was fairly old, and there were no young unmarried women. I am afraid that we startled them, for we told them we were going to leave the island and join the merchant navy as we could see no future here. As a result of this discussion Ken Williamson, when in Edinburgh for the winter, reported the whole situation to George Waterston and the 'powers that be' down south. Interest was aroused in no uncertain way, and in the next two years we were promised a deep water pier, power winch, etc. This being the case we stayed on, and I am still here; but it took that decision of ours to leave, so many years ago, to start the wheels in motion in the right way to save Fair Isle. I honestly believe that. The fact that the Bird Observatory had just opened, and outside interest was aroused, did the trick. Otherwise the island situation would have lain in the 'doldrums' for years and who knows what might have happened and who might have left?

I remember, when I was Observatory handyman for a short time, going along the traps on my way north in the morning. This was always very interesting, wondering what might be in them.

These are but a few of my memories of that time before and after the Bird Observatory opened. In my opinion Fair Isle needs the Observatory for the visitors it brings, for the staff who run it, for the friendships formed over the years; and the Observatory needs the friendship, the community spirit and help of an island that is unique in its way. So with each party forming a happy partnership, let us hope the success in the past and present will continue. Here's to the future!

*Alec Stout*

## FAIR ISLE WEATHER FORECAST



### GENERAL SITUATION

**Friday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2025**

A building ridge of high pressure brings a mainly dry fine 24 hours before a depression west of the British Isles drives fronts northeast during Saturday. As the low tracks northeast during the weekend a southeasterly airflow veers south-westerly then north-westerly later Sunday as the low moves away up the Norwegian coast. The airflow eases on Monday before strengthening SE overnight as an Atlantic depression approaches the British Isles. This is currently forecast to track northeast past northwest Scotland only to be followed by a secondary low bringing an unsettled week with periods of rain interspersed with bands of showers affecting the UK.

### OUTLOOK FOR THE WEEKEND

Temperature around 11° by day 8° or 9° overnight.

**FRIDAY 30<sup>th</sup>:** A bright mostly sunny day with chance of an isolated shower. F3-4 NNW winds becoming F3 W later. Dry with clear spells overnight, Winds easing light SW.

**Sea State:** Mostly moderate at 2 metre.

**SATURDAY 31<sup>st</sup>:** Dry, bright morning before clouding over with rain later as SE winds freshen F5. Rain dying out through the evening and mostly dry overnight with fresh S winds. **Sea State:** Moderate at 2 metre SSE.

**SUNDAY 1<sup>st</sup>:** Sunny spells between blustery showers. F5 WSW winds.

**Sea State:** Mostly moderate at 2 metre SW.

### FORECAST FOR NEXT WEEK

Around 11° by day, 9° overnight.

**MONDAY 2<sup>nd</sup>:** Mostly dry start with sunny spells, the afternoon cloudier with showers perhaps merging into a longer spell of rain. A fresh WSW breeze.

**Sea State:** Mostly moderate at 2 metre W.

**TUESDAY 3<sup>rd</sup>:** A rather cloudy day with rain or showers and a strong SE 29nd.. Mostly moderate or light winds variable in direction. **Sea State:** Mostly rough at 3 metre S.

**WEDNESDAY 4<sup>th</sup> – SUNDAY 8<sup>th</sup>:** Cloudy with rain interspersed by brighter showery conditions. Fresh or strong winds often from a SW quarter. **Sea State Wednesday:** Mostly rough at 3 to 4 metre W but moderate east of Shetland at 2 metre S.

**Dave Wheeler**