

## Newsletter - May 2019

The summer season at the Nurse's Cottage started on 1<sup>st</sup> May and the Cottage is open as usual from 11am to 3pm, Monday to Friday.

Entry is free but visitors are encouraged to make a donation.

Last summer sixteen people volunteered to cover two hour sessions in the Cottage. More volunteers would be very welcome for this season. Some people choose a two hour session that they cover most weeks while others are able to help out less often. If you don't know much about Berneray's history, volunteering is a great way to learn.

Last year was a record year for visitors to the Nurse's Cottage. There were nearly one thousand visitors from the UK and seventeen other countries.

You can support the Society by

- being a volunteer,
- getting involved in a project
- becoming a member. Subscriptions are a vital part of our income.

### Annual Membership

Annual membership, open to over 16s, is £10; or £5 for additional adults at the same address.

You can join or renew in the Cottage or email [info@bernerayhistorical.com](mailto:info@bernerayhistorical.com)

### Hebridean Connections

There are now records of almost 4000 people linked to Berneray on Hebridean Connections. [www.hebrideanconnections.com](http://www.hebrideanconnections.com)

### Causeway



*The causeway nears completion. The first crossing on foot was in August 1998.*

It's now twenty years since the opening of the causeway, undoubtedly one of the most significant events in Berneray's history. There is a very informative display in the Cottage



*Prince Charles at the official opening in April 1999*

### The lolaire

In last August's newsletter we remembered two young men from Berneray who died in the tragedy one hundred years ago. Donald Paterson, 5 Borve, and Norman MacKillop, 11 Borve, were both just 18.

Two hundred and one men drowned when the lolaire struck the rocks at the Beasts of Holm so close to a joyous return to Stornoway at the end of the Great War. The impact of these deaths on families and communities from Berneray to the Butt of Lewis was dreadful.

Seventy nine men survived. In those days post traumatic stress disorder and "survivor guilt" were unknown. The survivors deserve our sympathy.

One survivor with a link to Berneray was John MacKinnon. His connection is through Kirsty Ann Ferguson, born in Berneray in 1884. She was the daughter of Roddy Ferguson and Mary Paterson.

At the time of the 1901 census, Kirsty Ann was 17 and a pupil teacher. In the 1911 census, she was  
PTO

## New Publication

### *Ceit an Tàilleir à Beàrnaraigh*

This Gaelic book is a collection of stories, songs and photographs from the life and times of Ceit Dix (NicLeòid). There are also references to recordings on Tobar an Dualchais. The material for the book was collected and edited by Ceit's granddaughter Alison Dix.

This is an excellent publication and not to be missed by anyone who can read Gaelic. It's on sale in the Cottage.

## Thanks

- Mike Rosedale for arranging the telephone connection to the Cottage and for his advice and support.
- Peter MacAskill for fixing the telephone bracket to the chimney.
- Rev Donald MacQuarrie for lending the lolaire model.
- Gloria MacKillop for donating a computer and for looking after the volunteer rota.
- George Simpson for everything he does to keep the Cottage computers running.
- Malcolm Turner for being, all too briefly, Chair of the Society.
- Alison Dix for letting the Society sell her new book and so make a valuable contribution to the Society's finances.
- Ian Hoyle for quick and efficient printing.
- The committee and volunteers without whom the Society could not run.

## Berneray Historical Society

Nurse's Cottage  
Backhill  
Berneray  
HS6 5BD

SC047024

[www.bernerayhistorical.com](http://www.bernerayhistorical.com)

a lady's companion and living in Tigh na Hearadh, beside the surgery in Lochmaddy. This was the home of Thomas Wilson and his wife, Christina (Paterson), who was Kirsty Ann's cousin. Thomas Wilson was a solicitor and a supporter of the people's right to regain the land from which they or their ancestors had been evicted.

In Thomas Wilson's house in Lochmaddy on the night of the 1911 census was a visitor, a young law clerk named John MacKinnon from Tarbert. Two years later, in December 1913, John MacKinnon and Kirsty Ann were married and in 1917 he enlisted in the Royal Navy.

*He was 32 when he survived the wreck of the lolaire, making it to the rocks alone thanks to his strong swimming skills. He then walked home from Stornoway but the effort of survival badly damaged his health – he was hospitalised and was too unwell to attend the inquiry the following month.*

*(from the excellent book "The Darkest Dawn – The Story of the lolaire Tragedy" by Malcolm Macdonald and Donald John MacLeod)*

After the war John, Kirsty Ann and their daughter Flora lived in Uig in Skye, where Thomas Wilson now lived. John's health never fully recovered and he died of pernicious anaemia in 1924, leaving a widow and young daughter.

Kirsty Ann returned to Berneray where she looked after her father, Roddy Ferguson, at 16 Borve, until his death in 1935. She later moved to Tarbert where she regularly welcomed visitors travelling between Berneray and Stornoway. A widow for forty six years, she died in 1970.

## Archaeology

We hope to have an archaeology project this summer. Details later.

## Volunteer Needed

### Would you like to be involved in managing the Historical Society website?

If you'd like more information about this opportunity, or other volunteering, please leave your name in the Cottage or email

[info@bernerayhistorical.com](mailto:info@bernerayhistorical.com) .