

Newsletter - May 2020

Nurse's Cottage

Last year the Nurse's Cottage opened to visitors on May 1st. This year we may not open at all.

This will significantly reduce our income from sales and donations but our running costs will be largely unchanged.

Our two largest costs are insurance and electricity. The electricity is used in the winter months to protect the Cottage and its contents from the effects of cold and damp.

Membership

Membership subscriptions are an important part of our income. Annual membership, open to over 16s, is £10 (£5 for additional adults at the same address).

Payment can be by cash, cheque or standing order made out to Comunn Eachdraidh Bheàrnaraigh sort code 80-05-60 account. 00108189

Membership, Standing Order and Gift Aid forms can be printed from our website. Please post to the Secretary, address overleaf.

Gift Aid

If you pay income tax, then completing a Gift Aid form is an extra benefit to the Society at no extra cost to you.

We can claim £2.50 from HM Revenue and Customs making your membership worth £12.50.

If enough people complete a Gift Aid form then the Society can claim 25% of the small donations made by visitors to the Cottage.

Looking Back ...

A hundred years ago Berneray School could be closed for weeks at a time to avoid spreading illness in the community. In early 1919, the school closed for six weeks because of the Spanish flu pandemic. **2020 History repeats itself.**

Have Berneray's tides changed?

A stray reference in Bill Bryson's book "A Short History of Nearly Everything" that linked the first president of the Royal Society with the tides in the Sound of Harris prompted a search for more information. Can anyone say if the description of the tides from over 350 years ago still holds?

The tides in the Sound of Harris and around Berneray are of interest to many in the island today but it may not be well known that they fascinated a very distinguished visitor as long ago as 1654 when Berneray was visited by Sir Robert Moray (or Murray), a friend of Sir Norman MacLeod of Berneray.

How did the two men become friends and why did Sir Robert come to Berneray? They met while fighting for King Charles II in the Scottish army he raised against Cromwell and the English Parliament. When Charles was defeated in 1651 at the Battle of Worcester they eventually returned to Scotland but despite the danger to themselves, they remained loyal to the king and their exploits were not yet over. They both took part in an unsuccessful uprising against Cromwell and the English in 1654 and then, as a fugitive, Sir Robert came to Berneray with Sir Norman.

Writing about his stay in Berneray, Sir Robert identified its location, as part of "*The Long Island*".

In that Tract of Isles, on the West of Scotland, called by the Inhabitants, the Long-Island, as being about 100 miles long from North to South, there is a multitude of small islands, situated in a Fretum, or Frith, that passes between the Island of Eust and the Herris; amongst which, there is one called Berneray, some three miles long, and more than a mile broad, the length running from East to West, as the Frith lyes.

Sir Robert stayed in Berneray for over two weeks before he escaped to Holland.

Sir Robert was a soldier and a diplomat but this Scot was also a distinguished scientist with an enormous range of interests, including having his own chemical laboratory. He was living at a time of unprecedented scientific exploration and discovery in every area of



Sir Robert Moray

1608 or 09 Born in Perthshire.

1630s Joined the French king's elite regiment, the Garde Ecosaise.

1639-40 Quartermaster of the Scottish army controlling the north of England in the Bishops War.

1645 Held prisoner in Bavaria following the defeat of a French army.

1647 Ransomed by Scots.

1651 Served in a largely Highland army defeated at Worcester by Oliver Cromwell.

1653-54 Took a leading part in unsuccessful uprising against Cromwell's rule in Scotland. Took refuge in Berneray for 17 days.

1665-1660 Exiled in Holland. Diplomat for Charles II, also in exile. Pursued wide interests in science, particularly chemistry.

1660s In London following Restoration of Charles II. Discussed scientific matters with leading scientists. Became first president of the Royal Society which gained its Royal Warrant thanks to his friendship with Charles II.

1673 Died. Buried in Westminster Abbey on orders of Charles II.

Berneray Historical Society

Nurse's Cottage
Backhill
Berneray
Isle of North Uist
HS6 5BD

www.bernerayhistorical.com
SC047024

human knowledge and in this he played a leading role by becoming the first President of the most famous society of all - the Royal Society. Early members included Sir Christopher Wren, Sir Isaac Newton and Robert Boyle. At this time, understanding the tides was an intriguing scientific problem as well as being of importance at a time of great expansion of trade. While Sir Robert was in Berneray he noticed the peculiar tides of the Sound of Harris and, in London on Monday June 5 1665, he presented a paper to the Royal Society "A Relation of some extraordinary Tydes in the West-Isles of Scotland". Here is part of what he wrote:

At the East end of this Island, where I stayed some 16. or 17. dayes, I observed a very strange Reciprocation of the Flux and Reflux of the Sea, and heard of another, no less remarkable.....

So what was "very strange"? During the day, the flow of the tide would be expected to go eastward, from the Atlantic to the Minch, for 6 hours and then the ebb to go westward for 6 hours followed by the same pattern for the night time tide. However, Sir Robert was a fascinated "Eye-witness" to the fact that for about four days on either side of each of the month's two Quarter moons the day time tide both flowed and ebbed eastward for 12 hours and then the night time tide both flowed and ebbed westward for 12 hours - "very strange". Sir Robert observed this in August and he was reliably informed that this happened every year between the Spring and Autumn Equinox.

Sir Robert respected local knowledge. He wrote:

"... the Gentleman, to whom the Island belongs at present, and divers of his Brothers and Friends, knowing and discreet persons, and expert in all such parts of Sea-matters, as other Islanders commonly are, ..."

They told him about "yet another irregularity in the Tides, which never fails, and is no less extraordinary". The pattern is reversed for 6 months between the Autumn and Spring Equinox i.e. each month for about four days on either side of the Quarter moons "the Current runs all day Westward, and all Night Eastward".

Sir Robert considered this phenomenon to be of sufficient significance to be brought to the attention of the most distinguished scientists of his time.

It would be very interesting to know if his description matches the experience of modern day "experts in all such parts of Sea-matters".

For Sir Robert Moray's full account of the tides in the Sound of Harris see https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Philosophical_Transactions/Volume_1/Number_4

Looking Ahead ...

Look out for a new edition of "The Place Names of Berneray" which is in preparation. It will include maps and photographs.