

Newsletter - May 2023

Nurse's Cottage

The Cottage will open for the season on Monday 15th May.

The Cottage is open from 11am to 3pm on weekdays until August. A volunteer covers each two hour slot, 11 to 1 or 1 to 3.

Some volunteers cover the same slot most weeks and other volunteers cover the gaps that occur when someone is unavailable. We need about twenty volunteers each year.

Volunteers don't need to know a lot about Berneray's history; the displays are largely self-explanatory. Our visitors appreciate a warm, friendly welcome.

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, or hand in to Berneray Post Office during opening hours.

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.

Comhairle Grant

The Historical Society receives an annual grant of £350 from the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. This makes a big difference and we are most appreciative.

Berneray Historical Society

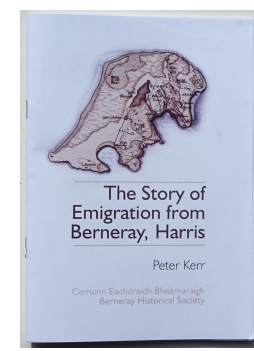
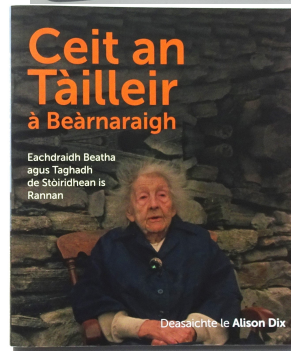
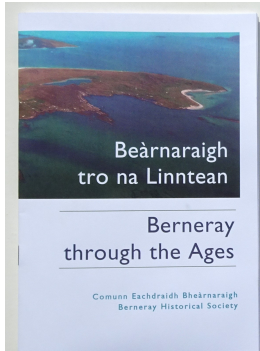
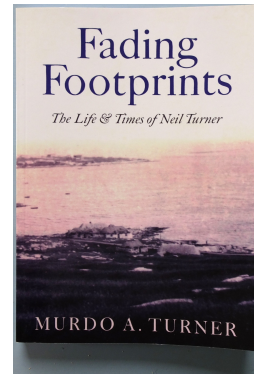
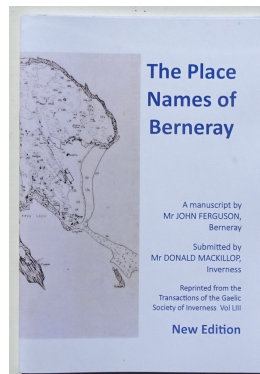
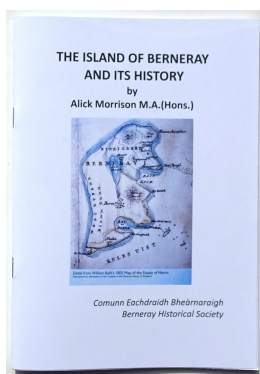
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Berneray's History and Heritage

Berneray is fortunate in having very good historical records thanks to the work of many people over several generations recording, collecting, researching and photographing the life and work of the people.

Books about Berneray

We have for sale in the Nurse's Cottage a range of books about the history of the island and its people.



Photographs and Films

There is also an excellent photographic record thanks to the many people who have donated their photographs to the Historical Society. Berneray life has also been captured on film thanks to the work of Allen Moore and Jack Shea who filmed "The Shepherds of Berneray" in 1978/79 and to the work of Andy Mackinnon and Kirsty MacDonald who directed "Dùthchas" based on cine film taken by Bill Scott in the 1960s and 1970s.

A New Book

There will soon be a new book about Berneray. The Islands Book Trust will publish "Berneray – Voices of the Hebrides" written by Susanne Barding. Here are the first lines of her introduction.

It is now almost half a century since I, as a young Danish anthropology student, first set foot on the small Hebridean island of Berneray. It was June 1970, the machair grasslands were in full bloom, and the island was at its most attractive. I was 23 years old and from a big city, so there was plenty I had to learn.

Susanne lived with the Fergusons of 16 Borve for ten months over three years. Her affection for them and for Berneray and its people is clear. This book will surely be an important addition to Berneray's historical record.

Berneray on Television

Berneray has appeared on TV several times in recent months.

Just after Christmas there was “Dùthchas” followed by “Miann na Maighdinn-mara/ Mermaid Tales”. The Berneray episode is not on iPlayer at the moment but it is sure to be repeated.

“Iain Robertson Rambles”, the series about the Hebridean Way, episode 2 is still on iPlayer and well worth a look if you haven’t seen it.

David Attenborough’s series “Wild Isles”, episode 3, Grasslands has a few minutes of the Berneray machair near the start.

Cottage Roof

You may have noticed a change to the appearance of the Cottage. In recent years there has been a succession of leaks associated with the chimneys.

The chimneys were no longer in use so it was decided to solve the problem once and for all by having them removed.



Before



After

The 1921 Census

The long awaited 1921 census finally became available in November 2022 and a transcript of the census is in the Nurse’s Cottage.

The transcript makes for interesting reading, a portrait of the island one hundred years ago. This newsletter covers much of the information about Berneray. However, there is more, eg about people’s occupations, and this will be examined in the next newsletter.

One Hundred Years Ago – The 1921 Census

While “The Shepherds of Berneray”, “Dùthchas” and Susanne Barding’s new book were based on the Berneray of fifty years ago, the 1921 census gives an insight into Berneray fifty years earlier.

In the ten years since the previous census in 1911, the country had been through the first World War and the Spanish Flu epidemic. Berneray’s population was beginning to decline, from 538 in 1901 to 501 in 1911 and 447 in 1921. The decline was caused by people leaving as there were still more births than deaths on the island.

Population

The total of 447 refers to the people on Berneray on Sunday 19th June but more people than this would have regarded Berneray as their home, for example seamen and summer workers on the mainland. These population figures provide a dramatic contrast to the Berneray of the present day and even to the Berneray of the 1970s when the population was about 130.

Exactly 400 of the 447 were born on Berneray. All the others were born in Scotland; several were children born elsewhere but being raised in Berneray following the death of a parent.

Children

Another perhaps even more dramatic change is in the number of children. In 1921 there were 152 children aged 14 and younger.

The census asked if a child’s parents were alive or dead. For 24 children, their mother was dead and for 19 children, their father was dead. Two children had lost both parents. Almost one third of the children on Berneray had lost a parent.

Old People

Although the average age was 32 there were plenty of old people. There were 23 aged 75 or more. In their childhood some would have experienced the clearance of Borne. One old man, aged 82, was born on Pabbay and would have been about seven when Pabbay was cleared. The oldest were born less than twenty five years after the Battle of Waterloo and less than a century after the Battle of Culloden.

Language

According to the census 113 spoke Gaelic only, 315 spoke Gaelic and English and 19 were too young for either language. Nobody spoke English only.

Names

The census recorded people’s names in English and used English equivalents of Gaelic names. Surnames could be Mac or Mc and there appears to have been some inconsistency in converting forenames to English. In counting surnames here there has been no distinction made between Mac and Mc.

Surnames

Of the 447 people, there were 119 Macleods, 68 MacAskills, 38 MacKillops, 27 Macdonalds, 26 Patersons, 23 Munros, 19 Campbells, Macleans and Morrisons and 15 Shaws.

Forenames

When counting forenames, someone called, for example, Donald John is counted under Donald but not John. Here are the most frequent male and female names.

46 were Donald, 33 John, 18 Alexander/Alick, 16 Roderick, 15 Norman, 14 Angus, 14 Kenneth, 13 Malcolm and 12 Neil.

32 were Christina/Christy, 31 Mary, 30 Marion, 23 Kate/Katie, 20 Ann/Annie, 12 Margaret and 12 Catherine.