

# Newsletter - November 2021

## Nurse's Cottage open again

The Cottage opened to visitors on 7<sup>th</sup> June. This was later than usual but much better than in 2020 when we did not open at all. The season was a little quieter than usual which was no surprise given the anxiety about Covid.

## Card Payment

With people tending to avoid using cash, we had hoped to be able to accept card payments in the Cottage but the poor mobile phone signal made that impossible. However, despite sales being "cash only", income per visitor from sales and donations was higher than in previous years.

## Income and Expenditure

Our biggest sources of income are membership subscriptions, sales and donations and our biggest costs are electricity and insurance. This year we had our first income from the Gift Aid scheme.

## Membership

Berneray Historical Society welcomes new members.

Membership, Standing Order and Gift Aid forms can be printed from our website. Please post to the Secretary, address overleaf, or hand in to Berneray Post Office during opening hours.

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

## Eighty years ago

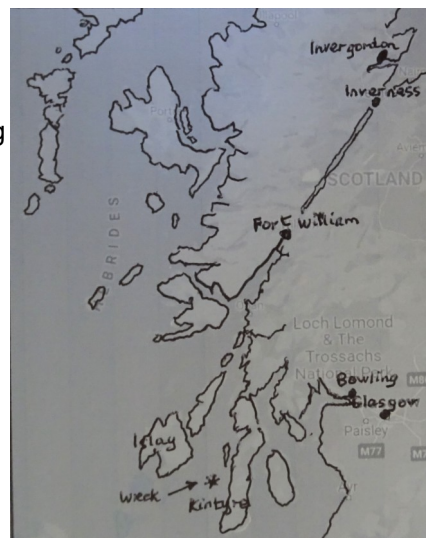
In November 1941, during the Second World War, two Berneray merchant seamen perished when their ship, the Ben Hann, was lost.

The Ben Hann was a small coastal tanker, 128ft long and weighing 298 tons. She left Fort William on 10th November 1941 heading for Bowling in Glasgow for repairs. She was seen off the Kintyre coast on the 11th but nothing after that until wreckage started coming ashore near Port Ellen in Islay a few days later.

All ten crew were lost. Five bodies came ashore on Islay including two men from Berneray; first cousins Ruairidh MacLeod from Trealigarry and Angus Macaskill from

Rhuvanish. Angus was born at 6 Borve where his parents stayed with his grandparents while they built the house at Rhuvanish.

Ruairidh is buried in Berneray and Angus in Islay. Both are named on their parents' gravestones in the Old Cemetery.



It seems the Ben Hann had sailed from Invergordon through the Caledonian Canal to Fort William. Angus sent his mother a letter from Invergordon but he was lost before the letter arrived in Berneray.

It was known that the Ben Hann was lost somewhere between Islay and Kintyre but the exact site of the wreck was identified only in 2012 when divers went to explore a wreck. The divers had expected to find the wreck of a German U-boat but were able to identify the Ben Hann from ironwork bearing the name of the shipyard where the Ben Hann had been launched in 1940.

## 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 donations made by visitors to the Cottage.

## Internet

The Cottage no longer has an internet connection. It was costing a lot and had very little use.

## This Newsletter

Donald MacLean suggested the article about the loss of the Ben Hann and provided information.

The source for "An Inconclusive Voyage" was a paper that the late Alick Morrison submitted to The Gaelic Society of Inverness in 1980.

## Thanks

There are so many people to thank for their contribution to the Society that it becomes difficult to thank everyone individually.

Thanks to the committee, the Cottage volunteers, everyone who became a member, everyone who made a donation in cash or in kind, everyone who supplied information and everyone who gave their time to help in so many ways.

**We thank Comhairle nan Eilean Siar for their support.**

## Berneray Historical Society

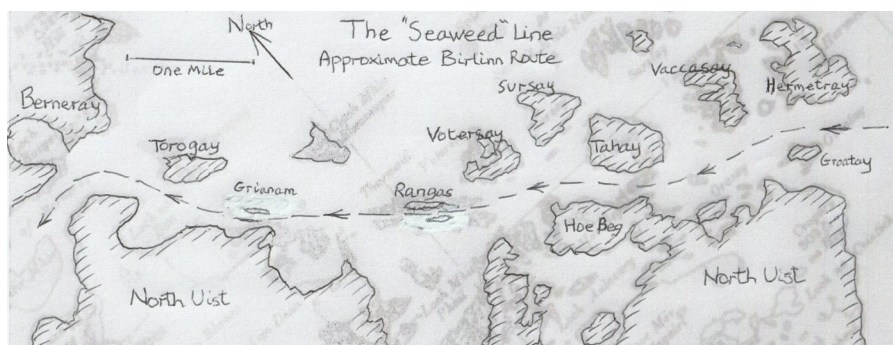
Nurse's Cottage  
Backhill  
Berneray  
Isle of North Uist  
HS6 5BD

[www.bernerayhistorical.com](http://www.bernerayhistorical.com)  
SC047024

## An Inconclusive Voyage II

In the last newsletter there was an article, "An Inconclusive Voyage". It was about the "seaweed line", the border between Harris and North Uist. The line threaded its way between the shore of North Uist and the little islands of the Sound of Harris. The islands were part of the tack of Berneray held by Donald MacLeod, known as the Old Trojan.

The value of the islands had once been for their grazing but they had become increasingly valuable as a source of seaweed which was burned to make kelp and sold in England for the manufacture of glass and soap among other products. The issue of the border had supposedly been settled in 1736 when the chiefs of the MacLeods of Dunvegan and the MacDonalds of Sleat had sailed close to the shore of North Uist and agreed the dividing line.



However things did not stay settled largely because Donald MacLeod also had a lease of some land in North Uist at Trumisgarry and later at Kylis on the north shore of North Uist. He allowed his North Uist tenants access to the offshore rocks, part of his Harris tack. At the same time, Alexander MacDonald, an ambitious and aggressive man, held the tack of Baile MhicPhaill and he unilaterally gave his tenants permission to cut seaweed on Rangas, an island that was part of the Harris tack belonging to Donald MacLeod.

The dispute went to arbitration. The initial decision was that Rangas could be used by Berneray and Baile MhicPhaill in alternate years. This proved unsatisfactory and North Rangas was given to Berneray and South Rangas given to Baile MhicPhaill. There followed a series of confrontations in the 1750s and 60s between men from Berneray and North Uist.

Things came to a head on the little island of Grianam, part of the Berneray tack held by Donald MacLeod. After one heated exchange there in 1765 involving Donald MacLeod of Berneray and Donald MacDonald of North Uist as well as the men cutting seaweed it was decided they would have to go to court to settle the dispute once and for all.

In 1770 the Court of Session in Edinburgh favoured Donald MacLeod of Berneray. Sir James MacDonald of Sleat, the clan chief, appealed but in 1772 the Inner Court of Session confirmed the decision. Sir James then took the case to the House of Lords in London. In 1781 the House of Lords rejected his appeal and awarded costs against Sir James and in favour of Donald MacLeod of Berneray.

At long last the boundary between Harris and Uist was settled.