

Newsletter - November 2024

Cottage Season

The 2024 summer season at the Cottage was good, with 504 visitors.

We opened for two weeks at Easter and then from 27th May to the 24th August, a total of 85 days.

Our normal pattern is to be open for four hours; one volunteer covering 11am to 1pm and another covering 1pm to 3pm. However we were short of volunteers and some days we could open for only two hours. Sixteen people volunteered during 2024 with eight of them on duty on ten or more occasions.

We would welcome more Cottage volunteers. At its simplest being a volunteer involves being in the Cottage to welcome visitors. To find out more about being a volunteer, please get in touch via our website.

From the entries in our Visitors Book, we can tell where about half our visitors come from

In 2024, 38% were from Scotland, 30% from England with the rest from sixteen different countries. Germany and France were well represented but we also had visitors from Wales, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Switzerland, Spain, Hungary, USA, Australia, New Zealand and possibly our first ever visitors from Zimbabwe and Belarus.

Donations

Visitors donated £466 in the Cottage during the 2024 season.

One couple from the Netherlands sent a donation of £40 after they returned home and we also received a £200 donation from visitors who were on holiday in Berneray.

We are very grateful for all donations.

Website

Our website is
www.bernerayhistorical.com

Gaelic - some dates for your diary

Tuesday 14th January is the date of a **Gaelic conversation evening** being planned at the Cottage. Details in the New Year.

Seachdain na Gàidhlig or Gaelic Week is taking place from **24th February to 2nd March** with events all over Scotland. Berneray is hoping to take part too, with Gaelic lessons on two days followed by a Gaelic Cafe or Coffee Morning on a third day. We hope that Gaelic native speakers and learners will come along to enjoy Gaelic conversation over coffee and cake. More details in the New Year!

Visitors with a Historical Connection

We open the Cottage on request after the end of the summer season. One such request was from the Neumann family from Australia who visited the Cottage in October and made a generous donation of £100. They are descendants of Neil Macleod of Pabbay and Marion Macaskill of Ruisgarry who emigrated to Australia in 1855. Neil was a tenant in Old Borge farming 12 acres but became a cottar after the 1854 clearance.

Marion, her husband Neil, and their four children left Plymouth on the Royal Albert on 15th August 1855. Their youngest child, aged two, died four weeks into the voyage. The vessel reached Port Adelaide on 1st December. Their emigration was supported by a grant of £20 16s 10d from Lady Dunmore, from 1845 the owner of Harris and famous for her promotion of Harris tweed.

The Grave of the Indian - Uaigh na Innseanaich

In June 1917 the body of a young man was cast ashore on the west sands of Berneray at Corran, opposite Pabbay. From his appearance he was thought to be Indian but this is not certain.

His black hair was plaited in the style of seafaring men. Due to fear of a cholera type fatal illness, rife at the time, his body was laid to rest on the machair near where it was found. His death certificate, signed by Dr Hotham Christian, describes him as "*supposed seaman, male, supposed from 25 to 30, drowned*".

The grave was originally marked with just two stones, one at his head and one at his feet. Over the years the grave became very difficult to find but, in its remote, peaceful setting, it is now marked with a post. We are grateful to Jim Smithdale for accurately recording the exact position of the site.



O/S Map sheet 18 Grid Ref 907 828
 What 3 Words Torch/Beep/Ducks
 GPS coords N 57° 43' 40.8", W 7° 11' 56.06"

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.

Membership

Membership Numbers

Membership of Berneray Historical Society has grown steadily over the last few years.

Subscriptions

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).

Forty members now pay their subscription by standing order.

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.

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.

Completed forms can be posted to the Secretary, or handed in to Berneray Post Office during opening hours.

Berneray Historical Society

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Berneray's History and Heritage

The Inverness Courier of 27th January, 1847 makes for very interesting reading, in particular as it includes an article about the arrest of eight men from Berneray. What crime were they accused of? Thinking about conditions for poor people at the time helps to provide an explanation for what they were alleged to have done.

"An old and worn-out man" Scotland 1846

1846 was a terrible year for many people in Scotland and elsewhere in the British Isles. Potato blight had had a devastating impact in Ireland and the Highlands and Islands where potatoes were the main food crop. Alternatives, wheat, barley and oats, were scarce and expensive. Sometimes merchants hoarded their stock in order to benefit as prices increased. The price of grain was kept high by tariffs on imports known as the Corn Laws.

Many people had little money and few ways to earn any. Under the Scottish Poor Law, land owners had a responsibility to the poor on their lands but in these grim times that was sometimes not enough.

The Sound of Harris, 21st November 1846

In November 1846, a sailing ship, the barque Superb, entered the Sound of Harris. The Superb had been built nine years earlier, was 38m long and weighed 635 tons. She was sailing from New York to the Clyde. Her cargo included a large number of barrels of flour and lard. It is not known exactly where, but somewhere in the Sound of Harris the Superb struck rocks and was wrecked. The report says-

"In attempting the Sound of Harris 21st inst., got on a rock and remains, having sustained much damage: part of cargo landed."

There is no record of casualties and some of the cargo was recovered from the reefs.

Berneray, 18th December 1846

On 18th December, eight men from Berneray retrieved barrels of flour and lard from the wreck. In these grim times this would have been a godsend and entirely understandable for the men to take food which would otherwise be lost to the sea.

Inverness, 20th January 1847

Somehow or other the matter was reported and the eight men were arrested for theft and imprisoned in Inverness to await trial. One was described in the Inverness Courier as *"an old and worn-out man of sixty"*. The Inverness Courier goes on to record that on 26th January the men were liberated on bail, *"Sheriff Tytler having kindly provided employment for them."* The Sheriff was clearly sympathetic to the men trying to provide for their families in desperate times.

Records of a trial have not been found so it's not known if there ever was a trial or what the outcome was for the eight Berneray men.

Sources

Canmore, the website managed by Historic Environment Scotland, has more information including the report of the incident.