

The Shetland Times

South Mainland Notebook

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Illuminations location

Back in July Cunningburgh Hall played host to three of the Light Labs which took place throughout Shetland, as part of Shetland Arts' Mirrie Dancers project. Under the supervision of cross-media artists Roxane Permar and Nayan Kulkarni, folk made their own light creations, designed to be part of temporary installations planned to illuminate a South Mainland location during the winter.

At the time of the Cunningburgh Light Labs, which were the best attended in all of Shetland, that location had still to be chosen. Now it has been named as the listening station at Garths Ness, which was one of three sites short-listed after the organisers, and nine others who participated in the site selection, had looked at a total of 36 possibilities.

Various criteria were brought to bear on the choice, one of which was the kind of meaning the site would hold, and how that could become a talking point once it was illuminated. Storyteller Elma Johnson, who was part of the group, was able to give insight through her narratives into the poignant Garths Ness clearances. The site is also near to where the *Braer* oil spill took place, and it was important during the Cold War period when the listening station was used to intercept Russian radio communications. All of these focal points in South Mainland's history helped to put it at the top of the list.

The listening station is visually appealing too. It is one of the most complex sites to be lit up, and the fact that it is made up of a number of buildings means the artists will have to choose which to highlight, and from which directions. The range of visibility is also of importance, and they are hoping that the lights might be able to be seen from Fair Isle, thus extending the audience and including those who might otherwise not get to witness the results of the project. It was necessary as well to bear in mind the other sites in Shetland that had been chosen, in order to ensure variety and balance across the isles.

February 6th is the date on which the Garths Ness illuminations are currently due to be switched on. Thereafter they will run every evening from sundown until 11pm for 2-3 weeks, though all these arrangements are weather dependent and still subject to final confirmation.

Plans for Up-Helly-A'

"I am still overwhelmed by the level of interest shown in the event, and appreciate all the good wishes I have received," says Guizer Jarl David Smith, who is busy making preparations for the South Mainland Up-Helly-A', which will take place in March.

Plans are coming on apace. David himself has been contacting head teachers in order to try to organise the programme of visits during the Up-Helly-A' day, and some of the committee and interested helpers recently attended a torch-making master-class, courtesy of the Lerwick Up-Helly-A' torch boys.

"A fascinating insight into just what goes into making a torch was gleaned," says David, "and we hope that those attending will have remembered all that was learned on the night. Thanks to Richard Wemyss we have managed to locate premises for the torch-making, so that ought to be starting shortly. We still need volunteers for torch-making and for painting the galley, which continues to take shape, and there may be a need for more volunteers for yet-to-be-determined tasks, so anyone who wishes to play a part should get in touch. We also still plan to launch a South Mainland Up-Helly-A' logo competition."

If you would like to get involved, or are interested in advertising in the official programme, please contact committee secretary Dale Smith on (01950) 431419 or email him at dalesmith419@yahoo.co.uk

A tribute to Hilda

Hilda Flaws has now retired after over 30 years as youth leader for the Junior Club at Sandwick Youth and Community Centre, though she still volunteers at the Peerie Club. The event was marked by a celebration party with fiddle music, attended by children and families and the South Mainland Cheerleaders, who did a special Hilda cheer.

"Hilda will be terribly missed by co-workers, children and parents alike," said Wendy Lowe, youth development worker for South Mainland, who described her as the "backbone" of the Junior Club. Always eager to learn new techniques and pass them on, Hilda is particularly known for her skills in crafts and baking, and over the years she has taught young people a lot about the pleasures of making things, cooking and healthy eating. "She was always there when needed," said Wendy, "and she brought energy, creativity and humour to the post." Such were Hilda's efforts, in fact, that when the club looked for photos of her to put into a collage of their activities they found hardly any. She was always working in the background to ensure that things ran smoothly. What a special lady.

Gulberwick meeting

Gulberwick Together, the lively community group which works so hard to make Gulberwick a safe and pleasant place to live, is holding its annual general meeting on Thursday at Gulberwick Hall. The meeting starts at 7pm.

Fish and chip night

Fish and chips plus other main courses and sinful puds are available from 5.30-8pm tomorrow evening at Cunningburgh Hall, either to take away or to eat in the hall. There is also a bar.

Gift Bazaar

With Christmas just around the corner, it's the ideal time to go along to the Gift Bazaar which takes place at Cunningsburgh Hall on Sunday from 2-5pm. Cards, jams, sheepskins, beauty products, photographs and much else besides will be on sale. There will also be a tombola, teas and homebakes. For more details phone Sheila Fowlie on (01950) 460790.

Sandwick is set to get digging

The economic downturn and our increasing awareness of the ecological damage human beings are doing to the planet have had some positive consequences. In a bid to save money and become more self-sufficient, folk throughout Britain are turning back to the land. Fresh produce and fresh air bring health benefits too.

Geoff Lowe, chairman of the recently formed Sandwick Allotment Association, came to Shetland from his native Liverpool over 30 years ago. He fell in love with the islands and has been here ever since. The only downside to Geoff's life in South Mainland is that his garden is badly situated for growing any plants or vegetables. "It's short of soil," he says. "And of course you get high winds all over Shetland, but here they really whip in. In order to grow things you need shelter and soil."

As a result Geoff had been thinking about the possibility of allotments in Sandwick for a long time, and so he says had other folk. "It was an idea that occurred to a lot of people simultaneously. There was a great deal of interest." This enthusiasm meant that as soon as the council allocated Sandwick an allotment site at the foot of the Houlland road, the project really took off.

"We're going to bring in soil," says Geoff, "and lay it out in terraces. There will be about 20 allotments, measuring 7.5 by 15 metres. At the moment we are applying for planning permission to have small polytunnels. Supermarkets bring in fruit and vegetables from all around the world. Big carbon savings can be made by growing your own, but in order to save carbon in Shetland you need polytunnels. They are cheap and easy to replace if they get blown away, and they are necessary if you want to plant things such as peas, peppers and strawberries, and even some herbs. We are also applying for planning permission for a shed. It will be a meeting place. We would like to raise traditional Shetland crops, such as the black potatoes, and we hope to get people who know about old crops to give workshops on growing them. Our ambition is to set an example of what can be produced in Shetland."

The project aims to be very inclusive, and folk with special needs are being consulted about a plot with raised beds of different heights that will enable them to join in. "We want everybody to get involved," says Geoff. "Any age from nursery to seniors. All are welcome. We believe in community strength, and this is going to be community driven. We see this as a long-term project. There are lots of ideas and it could evolve into something very good."

If you would like to get involved in the Sandwick Allotment Association listen out for details of their meetings on Radio Shetland.

Proud moment

Last week Dunrossness Primary School received its second Eco Flag – a tremendous achievement, which involved a massive amount of work, thought and creativity on the part of the school's pupils, teachers and parents. I was invited along to meet the eco committee, which is made up of pupils from each age group, who organise and make decisions about the various components of the Eco-School project.

In order to receive their second flag the pupils had to demonstrate and implement initiatives in five different areas. The ones chosen from a list of nine were litter, waste minimisation, school grounds, biodiversity and health and wellbeing.

"We go round and check the floors and the playground, and if we see any rubbish we tell the janitor," said one of those in charge of litter. "Waste put into special fruit bins is made into compost," another told me. That is then used in the polytunnel where the pupils grow their own vegetables, which go to the school kitchen to make healthy dishes.

From what the pupils were saying it quickly became clear that it's impossible to look at one area of this project in isolation from all the others. "Ecology is embedded in learning throughout the school," said head teacher Lesley Simpson. "It's integral to everything we do," said Gina Scanlan, who oversees the project. She showed me as an example descriptions of recycling translated into French, and explained how the health committee draw up accounts sheets for the fruit snacks they sell on Fruity Fridays. On the curriculum are topics such as climate change and alternative energy. To mark the bicentenary of Darwin's birth the entire school was involved in a survey of local plant species.

Ms Scanlan and some of the committee took me on a tour of the school and its grounds, during which I was shown the boards which inform everybody about what is going on. Among the subjects covered were road safety and plans for a grassy play area. Bags of shredded paper were waiting to be recycled and the school also collects old batteries. Outdoors there are raised beds for growing more vegetables, and lots of trees and bulbs have been planted. The pupils excitedly talked about plans for putting out a log to encourage insects and constructing a shelter for watching birds.

Throughout my visit I was struck by the pupils' enthusiasm, self-confidence and sense of responsibility. It seems that leading them to an early awareness of their duty towards the planet results in a high degree of maturity and eloquence. One of the other good things about the project is the way in which it brings people together. Ms Scanlan and the children talked a lot about the wonderful parental involvement.

The larger community can help out too. On Thursday 12th November the school is having a fund-raising coffee evening from 6.30-8.30pm, which is open to the public as well as families and friends of the school. Any local businesses able to donate prizes for the raffle should phone Lesley Simpson on (01950) 460488.

Vision meeting

All are welcome at the Shetland South Vision meeting tomorrow at the Bruce Memorial Hall, Virkie, from 11am-1pm. The topic is leisure, recreation, art and cultural heritage.

Fireworks at Quarff

Quarff Hall is having its bonfire night tonight, starting at 6.30pm. The hall will be open and folk can buy drinks from the bar, chips, tea, coffee, juice and biscuits.

Cathy Feeny

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