

# Northern Lights

## INSIDE

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Duncansby Head Lighthouse,  
Caithness

## PLUS

.....

The Dim Riv

Lunna Ness

Orkney Ice Cream

George Mackay Brown



Discover more at [www.northlinkferries.co.uk](http://www.northlinkferries.co.uk)

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# Welcome



**As we make steady steps on the route to recovery from Covid-19, and the impact it has had on all over the last eighteen months, I once again hope that you, your family and friends are safe and well.**

We still have a range of Covid-19 risk management protocols in place and look for your, and your fellow traveller's co-operation in helping us make travel with NorthLink Ferries a safe and enjoyable experience. We all look forward to the future when once again we can travel without constraints, whether in the shape of distancing, facemasks or restrictions.

2020 and 2021 were styled to be the years in which we celebrated Scotland's Year of Coasts and Waters. Covid-19 conspired against us and many other organisations in showing off what is so special about our operating area and its array of lochs, sea routes, islands and communities. However, 2022 takes us into Scotland's Year of Stories, and indeed one could be forgiven for thinking that these wonderful

initiatives are planned almost with only Orkney and Shetland in mind. Scotland's Year of Stories 2022 will provide great opportunities to celebrate and showcase stories inspired, written and created in Scotland and we look forward to playing our part.

Whether your travels are as a consequence of watching the 'Shetland' series on the back of Anne Clevees' wonderful run of Shetland based novels from 'Raven Black' and 'White Nights' – introducing us to Jimmy Perez and the Lodberries in Lerwick – or for those arriving in Stromness, the home town of George Mackay Brown, with his weekly tales from Under Brinkies Brae, his stories and poetry steeped in Orcadian symbolism. My thanks to Magnus for his contribution remembering his Great Uncle. Indeed, Northern Lights itself was named with an eye on GMB's own similarly titled collection of writings on the places, people and legends that formed his vision and his work.

COP26 will have been and gone by the time you are reading Northern Lights 13. NorthLink Ferries has been active on environmental awareness now for a number of years, and indeed were at the forefront of eliminating plastic where possible from our supply

chain, we harvest rainwater for reuse at our lairage facility, we have embarked on a large-scale LED lighting project across our contract and it is great to see both bicycles and EV cars using our Aberdeen charging facilities within our port facilities.

We continue to review our route passage planning and engine optimisation to deliver fuel efficiencies, both in terms of fuel consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> emission control. Finally, we were delighted to enable our MV Hamnavoe to connect to shore power in Stromness, delivering both a marine gas oil saving and at the same time reducing particulate emissions. More on our environmental strategy will follow in further editions.

Please continue to travel cautiously, follow all government guidelines, test before travel and please assist us all by wearing your face covering when within our port facilities or onboard our vessels.

In the meantime, I hope you have a great sailing with us today and thank you for your custom. If you are travelling on the Hamnavoe you may see George O'Neill, our Sous Chef on duty. George who is featured on page 6, has provided us with his traditional Cullen Skink recipe, enjoy!

My colleagues are here to assist at every stage of your journey, and if you receive a post journey survey, as part of our follow up with you, then in advance can I thank you for your input.



*Stuart Garrett*  
**Stuart Garrett**  
 Managing Director  
 Serco NorthLink Ferries

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# Exploring Lunna Ness

## If you're looking for a beautiful place to explore that's off the beaten track, why not consider a visit to Lunna Ness?

This secluded part of Shetland is a peninsula that sits under Yell on the map. Lunna's sheltered coast is breath-taking and it gave the area its name, from the Old Norse 'hlunnr' meaning a roller to help beach boats.

The area that contains Lunna Ness is called Lunnasting. To reach it, visitors need to travel 16 miles northwards from Lerwick, along the A970 road and just before Voe, turn east onto the B9071 road which skirts the Loch of Voe, signposted to Laxo and Vidlin.



### Laxo

Laxo is a little crofting township where the ferry to Whalsay sails from in good weather. At the head of Laxo Voe there is an ayre and a wide area of salt flats. Laxo Burn, fed by water from hill lochs, tumbles in here. For keen fishermen, the area is perfect for catching sea trout. Laxo Voe comes from the Old Norse 'laxavagr' which means salmon bay.

### The Cabin Museum

Driving on towards Vidlin, there is a sign for The Cabin Museum, which sits just off the road. The museum was started in 1978 by one man and is now run by his family. It is filled to the brim with wartime memorabilia. Andy Robertson had served during World War II in the Royal Navy. His interest in militaria led to a collection of medals that soon outgrew the confines of his house, then his shed (the first 'cabin'), and into the large building it presently occupies.



The Norwegian flag is a reminder of WW2 when the country was occupied. Visitors love the war uniforms on display, the vintage motorcycles, and the picture of Shetlander James (Jimmy) Leisk on Sword Beach during D-Day. There are very impressive exhibits relating to Shetland knitwear and fishing, but for those interested in wartime history The Cabin Museum will be open again soon and is a must-visit.



### Vidlin

The next stop on the road is a little town along the edges of the head of Vidlin Voe. As visitors approach Vidlin they will encounter a General Merchant and Vidlin Hall first. Following the road downhill, visitors will arrive at a marina, Lunnasting Primary School, and the ferry terminal for the Out Skerries, and for Whalsay when the sea conditions are too poor to sail from Laxo.

There is also an ayre here (a spit or tombolo formed of shingle) with Vidlin Voe on one side and Vidlin Loch on the other. The road crosses it and disperses to remote and peaty parts of Shetland. The ayre gave Vidlin its name, from the Old Norse 'vadill' meaning shallow or ford. Back up at Vidlin Hall there's a

signposted road to Lunna. Follow this road to embark down the six-milelong peninsula of Lunna Ness.

At one green stop in the journey, where the land thins to only a third of a mile wide, is Lunna Kirk, tucked away in the landscape.



### Lunna Kirk

Lunna Kirk was built in 1753 on the site of an earlier chapel, and it is the oldest building in Shetland still in use for Christian worship. Lunna Kirk has a peephole in the wall which was historically used by lepers so that they could hear and see the sermon without coming into contact with the congregation. Unusually, the upper floor is accessed by a stair on the exterior of the building.

Below Lunna Kirk on the shore of East Lunna Voe there is an old fishing booth and artificial beach where fish was laid out to dry. The rocky shores around Lunnasting are ideal for spotting otters. The area has countless streams where they wash the salt from their fur and soft peat banks ideal for building holts. Best stay quiet and still to see them!

### Lunna House

On the opposite shore there is a pretty little harbour with a storehouse, lime burning kiln and a pier. In the past, vessels sailing to Lerwick from the North Isles would often shelter here in the natural harbour of West Lunna Voe.

On the hill above Lunna Kirk stands Lunna House, a mansion with a fascinating history. In 1940 it was requisitioned by a secret section of the War Department as a training base for spies and saboteurs. It was here, in Lunna House, that the wartime 'Shetland Bus' operation began.

Brave sailors in converted fishing boats sailed in darkness from the sheltered harbour at Lunna Ness to Nazi-occupied Norway for raids and clandestine visits, helping refugees escape and delivering supplies for the resistance, including radios,



ammunition, and explosives. Some of the crew members who lost their lives during the Shetland Bus operation are buried in the graveyard at Lunna Kirk.

The Shetland Bus moved its operation to Scalloway, where it was easier to repair vessels, in 1942.

### The Stones of Stofast

Feeling adventurous enough for a hill climb? A walk to take in the Stones of Stofast is highly recommended. On the road, visitors will notice a signpost for the stones next to a cattle grid and layby (around two miles from Lunna House). Unfortunately, the stones are on the opposite coast, so visitors need to park in the layby, climb to the top of the hill, avoiding boggy ground, and cross for two miles to where the stones are, between Fugla Water and the Loch of Stofast.

It is hard to describe how impressive the stones are. This was once a 2,000-tonne boulder, and 10,000 years ago it was transported a short distance by glacial ice and dumped here. In the years since, frost has split the house-sized boulder in two – and the Stones of Stofast are quite something to see.

It's a delight to have found such a unique and atmospheric corner of Shetland – enjoy exploring Lunna Ness too.



# Staff Profile - George O'Neill



## Tell us a bit about yourself?

I am originally from Aberdeen, however, I moved to Orkney more than 10 years ago. I settled into island life and have happily lived and worked here ever since. I have been employed by NorthLink Ferries for a little over seven years. I have been posted for five of those years as a chef on the passenger vessel MV Hamnavoe.

## How did you get into your career/current job?

My parents encouraged me to get a part-time job whilst still at school, for extra pocket money. I found a weekend job as a kitchen porter at a restaurant close to home. Like lots of chefs, that was my introduction to the hospitality industry.

After leaving school I applied for an apprenticeship within a hotel group as a trainee chef. I qualified as a chef after three years with blended learning between the workplace and Aberdeen Catering College.

Before joining NorthLink Ferries, I added to my qualifications at Orkney College studying for a diploma in professional cookery. After graduation, the college's hospitality lecturer recommended I apply for the seasonal chef position with NorthLink Ferries.

## What do your day-to-day responsibilities include?

My primary responsibility with NorthLink Ferries is to deliver the food offering to our passengers. My main duties include ordering stock, food production and preparing for service.

The ship is scheduled to sail 361 days a year and the galley is operational from 5:00am to 8:30pm each day. During peak months we serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner in the Feast restaurant. We serve in excess of 50,000 customer meals over the course of the year.

To give a few examples of the volume of produce that we use onboard the MV Hamnavoe; on average, during peak periods, we use 52 litres of semi skimmed milk a day, 34 dozen free range eggs a week and 28 boxes of fresh haddock fillets a month.

We work closely with local suppliers and take pride in sourcing the vast majority of our food from local suppliers. The produce you will find on the ship is supplied from trusted Island suppliers such as J.W Gray's, Williamson's butcher, Argo's bakery, The Island smokery and Crantit dairy.

## What is it about your job that you enjoy the most?

There are loads of things that I enjoy about my job. Working for a company that cares about the communities it operates in and with a skilled workforce. But the particular thing I take the most enjoyment from would be when the ship is full to capacity with hungry passengers having a comfortable journey using the ship's facilities and experiencing fantastic coastline views from the MV Hamnavoe. It really is a special place to work!

## What might people find interesting about your job?

The question I get asked the most is: how is it possible to cater for so many people when the boat is sailing? The answer is of course it can be occasionally challenging, especially in the winter months! But the ship's galley has resources such as heavy weather checklists, specialist marine equipment and additional safety measures that you would not find in a shoreside kitchen. Safety is and will always be the first priority when working onboard a ship.

## When you're not working, what do you like to do in your spare time?

One of the many benefits of working at NorthLink Ferries is the great work/life balance. During my leave, I like to get back home to Aberdeen as often as I can, to see the family and watch my football team. I also love to travel and especially to take city breaks with my daughter, Eva. We love to explore the cities we visit, check out the farmers markets and enjoy the street food.

# Traditional Cullen Skink Soup - Serves 6



## Ingredients:

- 2 x large smoked haddocks (naturally smoked)
- 2 x small onions
- 1 x large leek
- 500g x baby new potatoes (these potatoes hold their shape)
- Good splash of vegetable oil
- 1 tbsp. of butter
- 1 tbsp. of plain flour
- 1 litre of light vegetable stock (hot)
- 300ml of double cream
- 1 x large lemon
- 20g of chives
- Sea salt and white pepper (to taste)

## Method:

1. Heat a heavy bottomed large casserole dish on a low heat with the good splash of vegetable oil.
2. Chop the 2 onions to a medium dice and add to the casserole dish and sweat down gently for a few minutes.
3. Chop the 1 leek to a medium dice and wash really well in a colander under cold running water, to remove any dirt.
4. Add the leek to the casserole dish and continue to sweat the vegetables on a low heat, stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon for another few minutes; you don't want any colour on the vegetables.
5. Increase the heat to a medium level.
6. Add the tbsp. of butter to the casserole dish and melt into the vegetables.
7. Once the butter is fully melted add the tbsp. of plain flour and stir with a wooden spoon to make a roux; it's important to cook out the flour for a few minutes.
8. Boil the kettle, add the vegetable stock cubes to a measuring jug, then the boiled water, and stir using a whisk to make a litre of light vegetable stock.
9. Start very slowly, adding the light vegetable stock a bit at a time to the vegetables and the roux, stirring continuously with a wooden spoon in the casserole dish, until a soup is achieved; once all the vegetable stock is used the soup will have a double cream consistency.
10. Wash the 500g of baby new potatoes really well in a colander under cold running water to remove any dirt. Chop the potatoes to a medium dice then carefully drop into the soup.
11. Reduce the heat to low, place a lid on the casserole dish and gently simmer the soup stirring with a wooden spoon occasionally until the new baby potatoes are just cooked; this should take about 10-15 minutes of cooking.
12. Add the double cream to the soup, then increase the heat to a medium heat and continue to stir occasionally.
13. Chop the smoked haddock to a medium dice and add to the soup carefully, and continue to stir occasionally, being careful not to break up the fish, until the fish is cooked; this should take no more than a few minutes. You don't want to overcook the fish, you will know the fish is just cooked when it turns opaque in colour.
14. To finish the soup, chop the chives fine or snip with scissors, add to the soup, squeeze the lemon juice, and also add to the soup. Finish with sea salt and white pepper to taste; be careful with the sea salt as the smoked haddock is naturally salty.
15. Ladle the piping hot soup into warm bowls to serve. Enjoy!

# Discovering Duncansby Head Lighthouse

**Many visitors to Caithness travel to the famous landmark John O'Groats. It's a pleasant place, with a small harbour, gift shops and cafes... and a signpost pointing towards Lands' End, 874 miles away. On your visit we'd advise a small diversion along the way, taking the road another two miles east to Duncansby Head. Here there is an impressive lighthouse and some breath-taking coastal scenery.**

Duncansby Head, at Latitude 58°38.646'N Longitude 003°01.526'W, is the most north-easterly point of the British mainland. Duncansby Head Lighthouse was constructed in 1924. Although the site was considered as a potential lighthouse location in 1830, planners opted to build at Noss Head near Wick instead.

In 1914, during World War I, a fog signal was built at Duncansby Head. Shortly after, a lighthouse was constructed by David Allen Stevenson. He was the last member of this family, who designed most of Scotland's lighthouses between 1799 and 1938, to be linked with lighthouse building. The most famous member was Robert Louis Stevenson, the author of *Kidnapped* and *Treasure Island*, whose stories were inspired by trips to remote lighthouse locations.

Painted white with a buff trim, black lantern and castellated parapet, the square tower at Duncansby Head Lighthouse is only 11 meters high. The lighthouse stands on a cliff 67 meters above sea level though, so its light is clearly visible to shipping,

flashing white every 12 seconds, and shining 21 nautical miles out to sea.

This is very much required as the cliffs at Duncansby Head guard the south-eastern entrance to the Pentland Firth, where the currents can travel at up to 10 knots. The waters of the Atlantic and the North Sea meet in the Pentland Firth, often flowing and ebbing in opposite directions, creating strong tidal streams.



When visiting Duncansby Head, can you spot the local tidal race, known as the Duncansby Bore? You will be able to see six operating lighthouses nearby, highlighting the dangers of these waters.

The view from Duncansby Head is a fine panorama, looking north to Orkney, and across Caithness and Sutherland too. Local lore tells of an important Iron Age fort that once existed here. Close to the cliff edge, the outline of a circular building nearly eight metres in diameter could once be traced.

## A hard and dangerous job

Duncansby Head Lighthouse once provided accommodation for the principal lighthouse keeper and two assistants. Lighthouse keepers' jobs were demanding as they had to ensure the light flashed to character at night, and they had to tend to other duties during the day. Duncansby Head Lighthouse served as a communications hub for the remote lighthouses on North Ronaldsay, Stroma, Pentland Skerries, Copinsay and Sule Skerry. The keepers also needed to keep the premises neat and tidy, and occasionally apply a coat of paint.

However, it was suggested during World War II that Duncansby Head Lighthouse was too well-painted and should be camouflaged! The white lighthouse became an attractive target for enemy aircraft. In 1940, a frustrated German pilot, returning from a failed bombing run on Scapa Flow where a fellow pilot in a Junkers Ju 88 plane had been shot down, fired a machine-gun burst at two trawlers on the approach to Duncansby Head and also strafed the lighthouse. Later in 1941, an enemy aircraft dropped a bomb on the lighthouse, but it fell into the sea 100 meters away. In both cases the lighthouse and those caring for it were thankfully unharmed.

Over the years there have been many changes to Duncansby Head Lighthouse. In 1968, a high-powered radar beacon was installed to aid ship navigation. In 1997 the light became automated,

so a light sensor, monitored remotely, triggered the lamp on and off, meaning the lighthouse no longer required keepers. Whilst empty, the keepers' accommodation fell into disrepair and because it contained asbestos, it was demolished in 2005. In 2019 the optic lamp was replaced by a power-saving LED, and in 2020 the former foghorn from Duncansby Head Lighthouse became part of a memorial for those lost at sea at John O'Groats. This was particularly poignant as in 1959, 13 men lost their lives when an Aberdeen trawler, *George Robb*, foundered on rocks near Duncansby.

## The Duncansby Stacks

Though the lighthouse and the panorama are a compelling reason alone to visit Duncansby Head, there's a treat to be had if you walk one mile south from the car park at the lighthouse, following the footpath to the Duncansby Stacks.

350m down the footpath is the Geo of Sclaites, a deep cleft in the cliff, which opens a large area of seabird cliff to be easily seen. You could be fortunate to see fulmars, guillemots, kittiwakes, razorbills, shags, and even colourful puffins nesting on cliff ledges during the summer.



Proceed further on to see the impressive Duncansby Stacks, which resemble massive fangs protruding from the sea. Over thousands of years, the sea has eaten away at the soft rocks of the cliffs around them. There are two 60-meter-tall stacks and a third stack that is still attached to the cliffs. This has a rocky arch called the Thirle Door.

The Duncansby Stacks look spectacular in all weathers, and seals can often be spotted hauled out on the shore below. Don't forget your camera!

We hope you enjoy your visit to Duncansby Head; a dramatic place with some fascinating stories to tell.

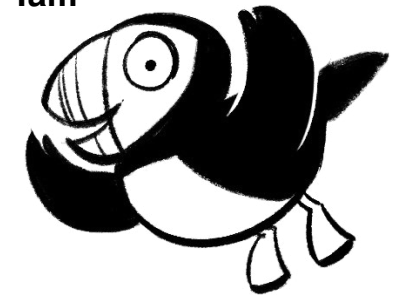
# Colour in with the new NorthLink Ferries Viklings

We would like to introduce you to our new Vikling family! Follow NorthLink Ferries on social media and read future issues of Northern Lights to find out more about them and their adventures in Shetland and Orkney.

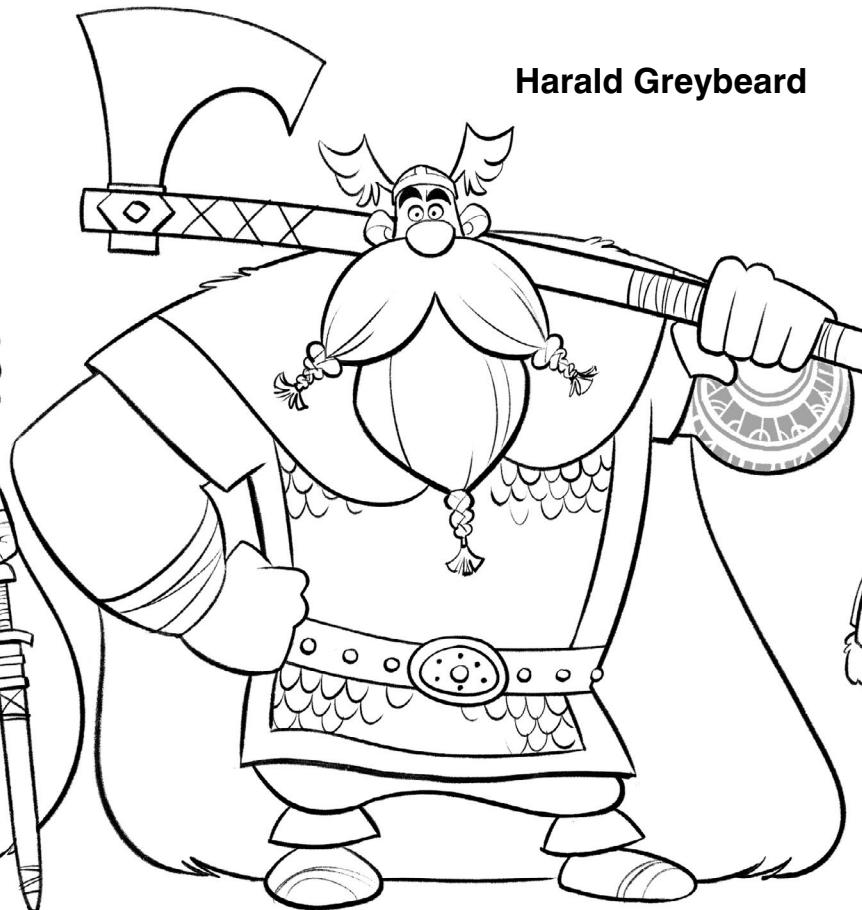
We hope you enjoy colouring in the Viklings!

When you are finished, take a photo to send to the NorthLink Ferries Facebook page, and we'll display the best artwork.

Tam



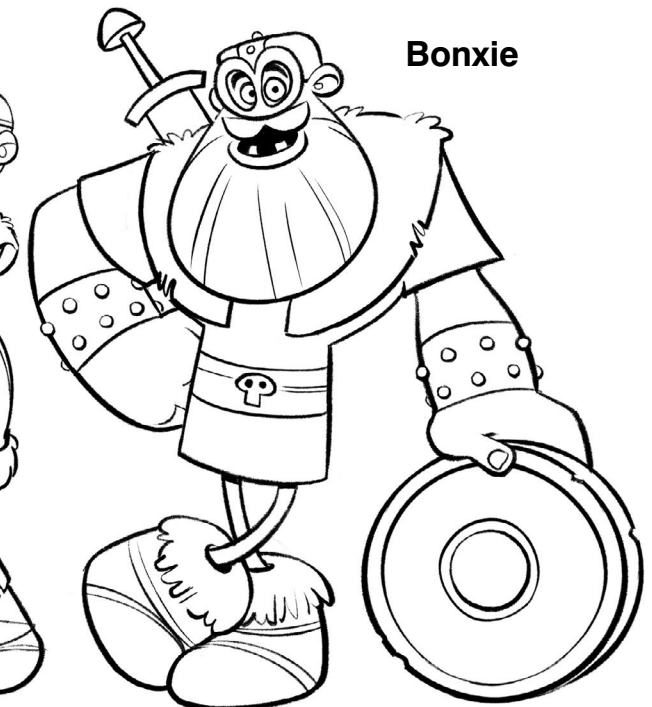
Harald Greybeard



Mara



Bonxie

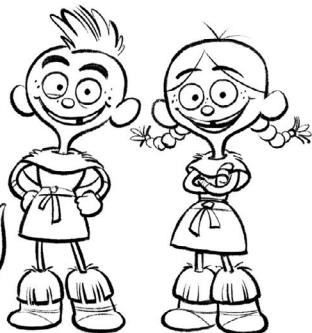


Olga the Unstoppable



Torben

Runa



Olander



# Remembering George Mackay Brown



**George Mackay Brown was one of Scotland's best poets, who lived in the waterfront town of Stromness, Orkney for nearly all of his 74 years. 2021 marks what would have been his 100th birthday.**

**This introduction to George Mackay Brown was written by Magnus Dixon from NorthLink Ferries.**

George Mackay Brown was born in Stromness on 17th October 1921, the youngest of six children. His father, John Brown, was a postman and tailor. His mother, Mhairi Mackay, was from Strathly in Sutherland. She was a lovely lady known for her great generosity.

From his family, George inherited his mother's Calvinist work ethic and his father's talent for storytelling. In the tailor's shop where his father worked, George listened to the men's tales about the past and present folk of

the town. Other influences came from George's brother Norrie, my grandfather, who shared George's love of poetry, and George's sister Ruby, who taught him Scottish Ballads when he was very young.

Hamnavoe was the old name for Stromness and George's poem follows his father on his postal round:

## Hamnavoe

*My father passed with his penny letters  
Through closes opening and shutting like legends  
When barbarous with gulls  
Hamnavoe's morning broke*

*On the salt and tar steps. Herring boats,  
Puffing red sails, the tillers  
Of cold horizons, leaned  
Down the gull-gaunt tide*

*And threw dark nets on sudden silver harvests.  
A stallion at the sweet fountain  
Dredged water, and touched  
Fire from steel-kissed cobbles.*

*Hard on noon four bearded merchants  
Past the pipe-spitting pier-head strolled,  
Holy with greed, chanting  
Their slow grave jargon.*

*A tinker keened like a tartan gull  
At cui-the-hung doors. A crofter lass  
Trudged through the lavish dung  
In a dream of corn-stalks and milk.*

*Blessings and soup plates circled. Euclidian light  
Ruled the town in segments blue and gray.  
The school bell yawned and lisped  
Down ignorant closes.*

*In 'The Arctic Whaler' three blue elbows fell,  
Regular as waves, from beards spumy with porter,  
Till the amber day ebbed out  
To its black dregs.*

*The boats drove furrows homeward, like ploughmen  
In blizzards of gulls. Gaelic fisher girls  
Flashed knife and dirge  
Over drifts of herring,*

*And boys with penny wands lured gleams  
From the tangled veins of the flood. Houses went blind  
Up one steep close, for a  
Grief by the shrouded nets.*

*The kirk, in a gale of psalms, went heaving through  
A tumult of roofs, freighted for heaven. And lovers  
Unblessed by steeples lay under  
The buttered bannock of the moon.*

*He quenched his lantern, leaving the last door.  
Because of his gay poverty that kept  
My seapink innocence  
From the worm and black wind;*

*And because, under equality's sun,  
All things wear now to a common soiling,  
In the fire of images  
Gladly I put my hand  
To save that day for him.*

After leaving school, George worked in the Post Office until, aged just 20, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Recovery took him several years, but whilst he recuperated, George spent much of his time reading and writing. He discovered the Orkneying Saga during that time and in Saint Magnus, George found a fascinating figure. Magnus was a Viking Earl who had sacrificed himself to end a bitter civil war in Orkney.

George became a journalist for 'The Orkney Herald' in 1944, however, like many young Islanders, he felt a longing to leave the confines of Orkney and, in 1951, he travelled to Edinburgh to study at Newbattle Abbey College. The warden there was the Orcadian poet, Edwin Muir. As his studies progressed, George discussed poetry with Norman McCaig and other Scottish poets in the Rose Street pubs. He also fell for a girl called Stella Cartwright.

George converted to Catholicism in 1961. Then in 1964, George returned to Orkney, determined to make a living from writing and mindful that his island home was his inspiration.

This was not an easy choice to make. Stella was left behind in Edinburgh, and in Stromness, George was acutely aware of being seen as a layabout who lived with his mother and drank a little too much.

In 1967 Mhairi passed away and a year later, George moved to a new house at Mayburn Court, which looks beyond Stromness Museum to the sea. He began to write novels and short stories as well as poetry. In Greenvoe, his first novel, an island community is invaded by an outside force (possibly North Sea oil or uranium mining) which threatens to destroy the island's landscape and culture. This fear appears frequently in George's work. His second novel, Magnus, told the story of the Viking Earl and how this peaceful man stood

apart from his community, sacrificing his life for a greater good.

Over the years George became more prolific and well-known as a writer, but he remained a familiar face around Stromness who enjoyed time with family, friends and well-wishers. He liked outings to different parts of Orkney. Rackwick in Hoy was a favourite destination.

George relished collaborations with others, including the composer Peter Maxwell Davies (a resident of Rackwick), the photographer Gunnie Moberg, and his nephew, artist Erlend Brown. His later novels included the epic Vinland and the Booker prize nominated Beside the Ocean of Time. Every week George wrote a column for 'The Orcadian' newspaper called Under Brinkie's Brae and these thoughts, now collected across three books, are a joy to read.

My own memories of George are that of a gentle, kind, great uncle with a wonderful sense of humour. He was fabulous with children; imaginative in a way few adults can manage. My grandfather and George's brother, Norrie, passed away in 1964, and George occupied that role in his absence. I still miss George very much.

George passed away on 13th April 1996 and his funeral took place on St Magnus Day three days later. George dedicated his final collection of poems Following a Lark to me, but it was published shortly after his death and I never had the chance to thank him. In it is a beautiful poem:

## A Work for Poets

*To have carved on the days of our vanity  
A sun  
A ship  
A star  
A cornstalk*

*Also a few marks  
From an ancient forgotten time  
A child may read*

*That not far from the stone  
A well  
Might open for wayfarers*

*Here is a work for poets —  
Carve the runes  
Then be content with silence*

Poems reproduced by permission of the Estate of George Mackay Brown.



*George Mackay Brown*

# Rule the waves like a Viking aboard the Dim Riv



Photo credit to Terri Mackay

**Boats have always been part of life in Shetland, and when the first Vikings arrived in the ninth century, Norse culture irreversibly changed the islands. Over forty years ago, a replica Viking longship was built, called the Dim Riv. Since then, it has been a focal point along Lerwick's waterfront, offering trips around the harbour and giving people a chance to sail on a Viking longship. It is run and crewed by volunteers.**

We interviewed Graham Nicolson, the current chairman of Da Longship Committee, the first chair being his father, Jim Nicolson.

**When was the Dim Riv built? We would love to hear some of the history of this beautiful longship.**

The Dim Riv was launched in June 1980 and was originally conceived by the Up Helly Aa committee

in the late 70s who sought to build a water-going replica Viking longship.

As word spread, the newly formed Longship Committee was approached by a local boat builder called Alan Moncrieff, who asked the committee if he could build the longship. Up until then the largest boat he had built was a sixteen, so called as it has six oars. These boats were originally used in the past for commercial fishing, long before the advent of today's modern fishing vessels; nowadays they are used primarily for rowing races around Shetland.

Alan came up with the design based on the Gokstad Viking Ships and he built it in his workshop in Burgess Street in Lerwick. She is 40ft in length, the size of his shed, and the head and tail were only put on after she came out of his shed, as there wasn't room in Alan's shed for them to be fitted before she was launched!

**What does Dim Riv mean?**

The Committee ran a naming competition with local schools throughout Shetland and the name Dim Riv was chosen, submitted by a Janice Jamieson, an eleven-year-old girl from Unst. It means the dawning of a new day... the rip of light when the sun rises over the horizon.

**Who made/carved the head of the Dim Riv?**

The head was also made by Alan Moncrieff – a man of many talents.

**Have you had any special guests on board the Dim Riv?**

Cliff Michelmore, a television presenter who was up in Shetland doing a travel programme; Griff Rhys Jones, whilst filming a programme for Channel 4; and the writer Chris Browne, famous for the character Hagar the Horrible, has been onboard while visiting Shetland on a cruise. The Dim Riv has also featured in adverts for Harp Lager and Murphy's Irish Stout. She was taken to the Guinness estate in Southern Ireland for filming the Harp Lager advert and was taken to the River Thames for the Murphy's advert.

**The Dim Riv offers short trips in harbour waters in the summer, can you tell us a little more about the trips and give people an idea of what they can expect?**

The Dim Riv usually offers short trips around Lerwick Harbour throughout the summer, but with the current pandemic we have been unable to do any trips yet, but we hope to offer group trips in the near future. As for what to expect, we are the only chance that people have to take a tour of Lerwick Harbour aboard a replica Viking Longship. If weather conditions are suitable, we hoist the sail and enjoy the scenery in peace and quiet, with only the noise of the water lapping the vessel as we sail through Bressay Sound.

**What would you like a visitor to take away from the experience of sailing on board the Dim Riv?**

Visitors will experience Lerwick's waterfront close hand, and they might even get to see the local wildlife close up. Visitors will also gain a better understanding of how the Vikings ruled the waves and take away memories that will last a lifetime.

**How does a visitor go about booking a trip on the Dim Riv? (depending on whether they are doing trips this Summer?)**

We are hoping to offer group trips in the future. We have a Facebook page "Dim Riv Harbour tours", where we take bookings.

**What is the longest journey made by the Dim Riv?**

The longest trip The Dim Riv has done would be in 2005 when we sailed from Bergen to Kalvag, a small town on an island called Froya, which is south of Maloy. We set off from Bergen at seven o'clock in the morning and did not stop until 10 o'clock in the

evening. We took the Dim Riv across to Norway on a ferry called Norrona and made our way up to Maloy, Lerwick's twin town in Norway for the Maloy Dagen, an annual festival held in the town.

Before that, we sailed the vessel around the mainland of Shetland, which was done in four legs; the first was from Lerwick to Brae, then from Brae to Aith, then Aith to Scalloway, and then from Scalloway to Lerwick. This was done over three weekends and the trips were enjoyed by all who took part.

**How do you ensure the Dim Riv looks spectacular year after year?**

The Dim Riv is looked after by a group of volunteers who are immensely proud of her, and it is this group that make sure that she always looks her best. She is stored in her own boat shed in the town during the winter months and any repairs/renewals are carried out during this time. It must also be noted that thanks to the help and dedication of these individuals and Mr Alan Moncrieff's expertise and skill in the first place, she is looking as good today as the day she was launched in 1980.

The Committee would also like to thank the Lerwick Port Authority and LHD Ltd for their continued support and assistance throughout the years.

For more information about the Dim Riv, please visit [www.facebook.com/dimrivharbourtours](https://www.facebook.com/dimrivharbourtours)







## Wild Swimming with Sarah Norquoy

**Sarah Kennedy Norquoy moved from Cambridge, England to the Orkney Islands with her two children in 2008, where she now lives with her husband and dog Hope. She is often described as hilariously funny, honest, and relatable: 'A sheer drop of positivity and happiness'. When she's not doing her day job as a support worker, you will probably find her swimming in the sea or dreaming about it.**

### How long have you been wild swimming?

I started in January 2019; I was approaching 50 and I gave myself a list of 49 things to do while I was still 49 and one of them was wild swimming. That's how I ended up in the water in January – the water was six degrees – really cold. I hadn't intended for it to be in January, but someone had lent me a wet suit at the time (now I just go in my swimsuit.) They lent me this wet suit and said, OK well I will meet you on Saturday and I was like, WHAT?! I think I was too embarrassed to say I can't go through with this, so shame made me go along. By the time Saturday arrived I was really pumped, it was just going to be a one off, I had no intention of making it a habit. I was so excited to do it, the thought of it being cancelled because of weather would have really disappointed me. That made me realise I was ready to do it. My first swim was at the first barrier, it was quite sheltered, and it was brilliant, so memorable, I loved it! The barriers are particularly special too with the landscape there, the Italian Chapel overlooking where I was swimming – that's what I love, being among history as well as the landscape and water.

### What attracted you to wild swimming?

I had a friend who kept talking to me about it and suggesting that my husband try it out because he has an autoimmune disease and she said it would be good for him. Then she said you should try it too and I just remember thinking 'never going to happen!'. I don't know what made me think I am going to give it a go, but I was hooked on it from the first time I tried. I never expected to love it so much. I would see photos online and found myself feeling a little jealous that other folk could do it.

### Do you have any favourite locations in Orkney for swimming outdoors?

I have three favourite places. I love Inganess – the shipwreck there gives it an interesting backdrop, so I go to Inganess when I work in the town but because I am working from home now, I don't go there as often. I use the point of Ness in Stromness a lot. There's easy access to the water from the slip, plenty of parking and the most wonderful backdrop of the historic fishing town as well as plenty of fishing boats sailing by. I'm also a regular at Marwick Choin, a

massive low-tide lagoon that lies between the beach and the open sea. It is quite a safe spot, sheltered from the winds and tides as you have a reef that protects you a bit.

### How do you fit your swims around your day-to-day life?

My preferred time is to go in the morning before work, so I am up, usually about 6:45am. It really gets me focused and sets me up for the day. Nothing starts the day better than running into freezing cold water. Because I enjoy it so much, I prioritise it over housework! I tend to do it before work but if there is somewhere near enough like Skail or Choin I can nip down in my lunchbreak. In summer when the nights are lighter, we can even go after tea. I make it a priority because it's such an enjoyable thing for me and really helps me cope with difficulties in my life.

### Have you had any particularly memorable experiences?

I always come back to the one I did on the 1st May 2019, my first ever May Day swim. We had to get up at 4:20am to be in the water for sunrise. We went to Evie and I absolutely loved it – it was a magical time because everyone else was still asleep and it was hazy, calm, and serene. There was a curious seal there bobbing his head up. It is particularly memorable because of the ambiance and everything – it was just lovely. The sense of empowerment that I had done it too... that I could get up that early in the morning is a miracle! That one really sticks with me as being extra special.

### You mentioned a seal – have you had any other close encounters with wildlife?

The wildlife has been such a bonus. I think it is important to stress that we are in their territory, they're not in ours. I have seen beautiful wildlife, beautiful birds like oyster catchers, cormorants, and swans as well regular sightings of seals, who are very playful and curious. Sometimes you can see groups of them all bobbing their heads up. Trying to get a photo of them is like a game of whack-a-mole! I saw an otter once, the first and last time I have seen one and I wasn't in the sea... it was when I was driving home from a swim. I know people who have seen dolphins and whales, I haven't though. That is still on my bucket list.

### Where's the most unusual place you've enjoyed a wild swim?

At Yesnaby when you walk south to where there is a little bay. You can be in the water there and it will be

completely flat and calm, but you can look out and see the waves absolutely crashing against the rocks further out. It was an interesting, scenic, and beautiful experience.... craggy rocks and spectacular waves. It was a very memorable and unusual spot.

### Could you share some essential tips and essential equipment for all those new to wild swimming?

The RNLI says it best when they say respect the water and I really agree with that. From a safety point of view when you are trying it for the first time or even the first few times, don't expect too much out of yourself and go with somebody or have someone nearby watching you if you don't have anyone to get in the water with you. Just respect the fact that although there are lots of happy smiley faces and people in bobble hats doesn't necessarily mean that your body is going to respond in the same way. So, respect the cold, the water, the tides, undercurrents and pulls. It's really important because it comes with risk. It is a lovely activity, but it can be unsafe. There's no swimmer stronger than the ocean.

Personally, I believe in wearing a tow float as it makes you more visible to others using the water, particularly from boats, there are other vessels using the water – not just swimmers. It also provides you with something to have a wee rest on if you get tired. Having local knowledge about where is safe to swim is important too.

Have lots of loose-fitting clothes. Get layers on as quickly as you can when you leave the water. A warm hat, scarf and people often take a hot water bottle and a flask of warm drink. It's important not to stand around talking but to focus on getting dressed as quickly as you can.

### What inspired you to write your book?

My book was written in response to wild swimming and how it helped me cope with my Mum's dementia diagnosis. It was such a profound year for me, those two things running parallel that I wanted to get that message out there. I have been overwhelmed with how well it's been received.

Copies of Sarah's book 'Salt on my Skin' are available from bookstores and her website at [www.sarahkennedynorquoy.com](http://www.sarahkennedynorquoy.com)



# Maker of the famous Orkney Ice Cream...

... the Orkney Creamery is also the main producer of milk on the islands.



Owned by the Bichan family and run from their farm at Crantit near Kirkwall, the Orkney Creamery produces high quality luxury ice cream available in a range of delicious flavours. We spoke to Graham Bichan, the Production Director at Orkney Creamery to find out a bit more...

## The Orkney Creamery is the main producer of milk in Orkney – can you tell us about when you branched out to make Orkney Ice Cream?

We started making ice cream in 1995 – I still think of it as being relatively new, but time goes so fast. It was the year I finished school – it was all new and exciting and so when I went to university I did food science, and all of my projects were geared towards ice cream. I could then tailor everything towards coming home and working in the business. I was in a lucky position where I had access to the industry through my family when I was studying. It meant that I specialised in what I was always going to do after university, which was great, as I had always intended on coming back to Orkney to produce ice cream.

## What do you think makes Orkney Ice Cream so special?

The quality of the milk is one of the biggest factors. The milk is heavily dependent on the grass; when you think that Orkney is famous for its beef as well, ultimately it all stems back to the grass. I think that really is the secret. With our ice cream recipe being as simple as it is with minimal ingredients, the quality of the milk is so important. The ice cream is really reliant on the milk for the flavour, especially the 'original' flavour when it's the only thing providing the flavour – we don't add vanilla as we consider it a flavour. So the 'original' Orkney Ice Cream really lets the quality of the milk and cream do the talking and it has won a lot of awards.

## How many flavours of Orkney Ice Cream do you have?

There are 17 flavours available now. Original, Apple Crumble, Banoffee, Chocolate, Coconut, Coffee, J Gow Rum Soaked Raisin, Lemon Curd, Mint Choc Chip, Peach Melba, Raspberry, Rhubarb & Custard, Strawberry, Toffee & Orkney Fudge, Toffee Swirl, Vanilla, and Vanilla Honeycomb.

## Do you have a personal favourite?

It changes. It tends to be the newest one because it's nice to have a change. However I am really enjoying raspberry at the moment which is one of the first flavours we ever did, but it is one I really enjoy and keep going back to, along with vanilla honeycomb.

## Do you develop the flavours?

Yes, that is one of my favourite parts of my job! It's good fun when an idea just pops into my head. It's a little harder if you are asked to develop new flavours though. It's so much easier when inspiration just comes to you – that's how all the best flavours have come about.

## Do you use local ingredients?

Obviously the milk and cream is local and we've had great success with adding Orkney Fudge and J Gow Rum. I'm really keen to use more local products in

our ice cream. We have such a great variety of food and drink in Orkney and I'm proud to be a part of that community.

## Were there any ice cream flavours you tried that didn't make it to the shops?

I've had a few but the one that really sticks in my mind which just didn't work was bubble-gum. It's one we kept getting asked for, but it doesn't really fit with anything else we do – for a start it's blue and I am dead against anything that's artificial. However, I did manage to find some bubble-gum flavouring that is all natural. You make the mix to start with, it's kind of like a milkshake – so you process the ice cream mix first, milk, cream, sugar and skimmed milk powder – then you add the flavours, then it goes to the second process where it goes from the milkshake mix and frozen into the ice cream. We made up the mix, added the bubble-gum flavouring and I didn't even freeze it. It went straight to waste – it tasted so artificial! It was a disaster never to be repeated, but I still get people asking for bubble-gum flavour!

## What products do you produce as well as Orkney Ice Cream?

At the moment we produce milk, double cream and we also make butter, although not everyone knows that as we don't make it for retail. It goes into a 25-kilo box and is sent south where it gets made into other products. We do that through the winter months because ice cream is seasonal. We are left with a surplus of cream in the winter months, so we make butter. We have spoken several times about putting it into retail packs, but as yet it hasn't happened. We've also been developing a Skyr yogurt – we started doing trials in 2019, which went very well, but the pandemic threw us off our stride and presented enough challenges without developing new products, however we are keen to start focusing on this again now.

## What are the most rewarding and challenging aspects of the industry?

The most rewarding thing is seeing people enjoy the product – you forget the products you are making are good as you get caught up in the numbers, production and getting it out the door. You worry about stock levels, how many cases you have in the freezers, how many cases is that customer ordering and that's what you concentrate on. It's then when you go away to do the shows and you see people raving about the product, coming back three times during the course of a show saying how amazing the product is and being keen to buy it. It really reaffirms

that our product is good, and it feels fantastic! I still get a kick when we are driving down on the Scottish mainland, and you see one of our signs on the roadside saying 'we stock Orkney Ice Cream'!

Challenges, there have been plenty this last year but overall, it's quite tricky keeping up with all the regulations and legislation in the food industry. This covers very strict things like allergens, ingredients, how things are listed on packaging – it's a legal requirement to do these things, for important reasons, so you don't want to get it wrong.

## Where could I buy Orkney Ice Cream – is it available out with the islands?

Because we supply to wholesalers who then distribute the product it is hard to give numbers or specific locations, but it is widely available throughout Scotland!

## Do you have any new ice cream flavours on the horizon?

At the back end of 2019, we started speaking to some local food producers and getting their permission to develop some new flavours. They have all been on the back burner since then, so I am starting to get them all moving now. It's been a struggle to get some ingredients recently, making things more Orkney and using as many local ingredients as possible will definitely be a benefit to us. I am very excited about some of the new flavours we are developing but can't say anything yet!

To find out more about Orkney Ice Cream, visit the website at [www.orkneyicecream.com](http://www.orkneyicecream.com)





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