

Hands-On Orkney– Thank you!

Dear everyone,

Thank you so much for making the Hands-On Orkney summer school such a great experience.

Here are some memories:



Monday: After an interesting lecture by Alex Sanmark on Orkney's archaeology and history, we headed out to build a drystone dyke, under expert supervision by Billy Scott from the agricultural department, Orkney College. Glorious sunshine, Billy almost had sun stroke. And the dyke looked fab by the end of the day!



Robert is getting into the swing of things here!



Tuesday, we started off at Corrigall Farm Museum, where Neil Leask taught us how to make simmans (straw rope used on thatched roofs). He also gave a super tour of the museum and told lots of stories from his grandad's time as a cowherd, and showed us how to make a "lover's knot" out of rushes. Photo by Jim Chalmers, who was kind enough to drive us all day.



Afterwards, we went to the Orkney Furniture Maker's workshop to see how strawbacked chairs are made. Then we finished the day with a very enjoyable tour of St Magnus Cathedral with Kim Burns. I tried taking the group to the museum then, but everyone was too tired to take in anything else, so we went for a cup of tea at The Reel instead.



Wednesday, we started with a lecture on Orkney folklore, with some storytelling thrown in. Then, we went up to Orkney College, where the Hospitality Department had kindly let us use their professional kitchen - and treated us to some very welcome tea! Here, we learned how to make our own cheese! It was squeaky farmcheese - Very tasty! Elizabeth Herdman from Sandwick showed us how to do it in the way that she had learned from her mother. She also gave us some insight into life on an Orkney dairy farm then and now. I will certainly appreciate my milk and cheese after this! And never complain about high cheese prices, either!

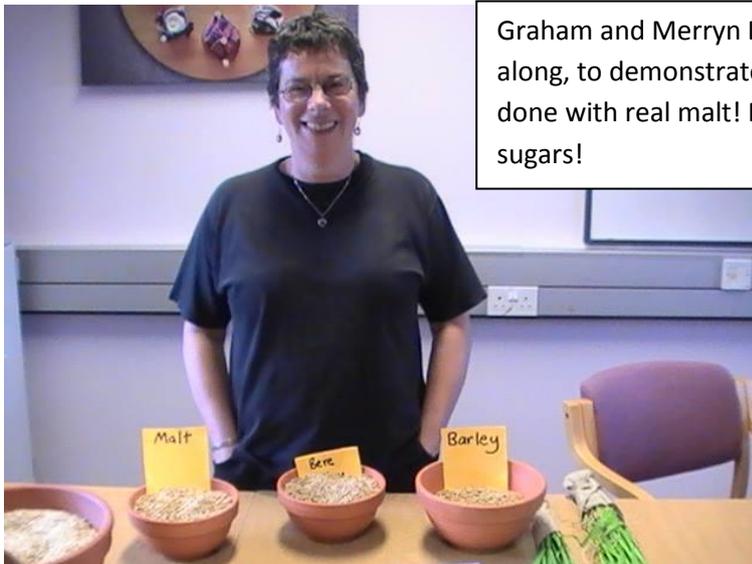


Thursday, the theme was food and grain. Sarah De Rees shared her research into Orkney food customs, which everyone found very interesting. Afterwards, Ragnhild Ljosland veered off topic by talking about runes and Norn. In the afternoon, Peter Martin from Agronomy at Orkney College told us about their exciting bere barley projects, and brought some bere to show us.

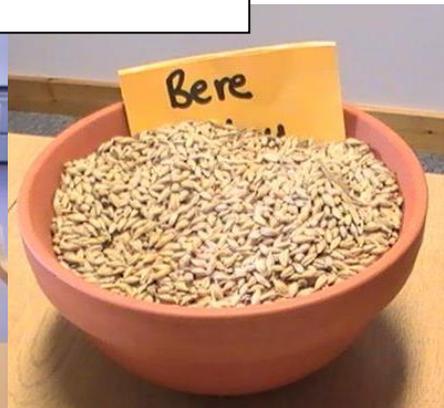


Then we came to the baking. Ingrid from Hospitality taught us how to make proper bere bannocks in the old way on the griddle - plus a modern version in the oven.

They tasted lovely with real butter and the cheese we made yesterday!



Graham and Merryn Dineley also came along, to demonstrate how brewing is done with real malt! Mmm, those sugars!





Friday was the last day of the summer school, and we started with a visit to Barony Mills, Birsay, where Brian Johnston told us all about how this traditional mill works. The machinery makes a lovely sound. Some of us were dancing to the rhythm. None of us managed to guess how many gallons of water from the millstream is needed to power the wheel. Mansie got the honour of starting the mill, and was appointed apprentice to Brian. A big thank-you to Ishbel Fraser, who drove us all day.



Lastly, we cut peat by the Lithe Road with Harvey Johnston. Unfortunately, the rain prevented us from getting to "Kit Huntlin's". But we still got a nice finish to the summer school with some tea, biscuits and stories from Harvey around the peat fire at Corrigall.

Thank you, all, for making it a memorable week!