

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

Orkney's only regular councillor newsletter.

James Stockan MBE is stepping down as Leader of Orkney Islands Council and retiring as councillor for the Stromness & South Isles Ward. We've had our differences over the years, but we've also had our agreements, and, on the whole, I'd say we've enjoyed a good working relationship. I first met James in the early 2000s, when he was contemplating standing for the Council. He told me he'd been inspired to do so by my article (published in *The Orcadian*, 6th March 2003, p.31) on Sanday's radical Free Kirk minister, the Rev Matthew Armour, who represented Lady at Orkney County Council from 1890 to 1899. I wish James all the best for the future.

What will 2024 bring? In 1967, Enver Hoxha's New Year message to the Albanian people warned: "Ky vit do të jetë më i vështirë se viti i kaluar. Por nga ana tjetër, do të jetë më i lehtë se viti i ardhshëm." In English: "This year will be harder than last year. But on the other hand, it will be easier than next year.!" Will this be the same for us in 2024? (I did not visit Albania until Hoxha's reforming successor Ramiz Alia was in power. We shared a plane between Tirana and Zürich, and he kindly autographed a copy of his photo I'd bought off a street vendor.)

The 1st January marked the 100th anniversary of the shipping forecast being broadcast by the BBC. In Orkney we live the shipping forecast, dwelling on small patches of land surrounded by the Atlantic on one side and the North Sea on the other. Storms Gerrit and Henk brought the North Isles disruption, damage, flooding and power outages. And then, to paraphrase James Joyce, "Snow was general over all the islands, falling thickly upon all the living and the dead." We must acknowledge the unstinting help of our farmers with digging us out of this.

On Christmas Eve, with those of my family home for the holiday, I attended the watchnight service at Sanday's Cross Kirk. I hope this won't be the last, for the Church of Scotland has now closed the kirk. I regard this closure as representing the renunciation of the Church of Scotland's "distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry", enshrined over a century ago in *Article Declaratory III* of its constitution and the *Church of Scotland Act 1921*. Last year, I wrote in support of a funding application to the Scottish Land Fund by the Friends of Sanday Kirk to purchase the kirk building. This has been successful, so fingers crossed for the church being in community ownership by next Christmas.

Congratulations to Nancy Scott for being awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) in the King's New Year's Honours List for her services to the Westray community. If you wish to nominate somebody to be considered for such an award in recognition of their service and commitment to their community, details on how to do this can be found on the following webpages: www.gov.uk/honours and www.orkneylieutenancy.org.uk/honours. The important thing is that the nomination has to be submitted while the nominee is still actively involved in what you are nominating them for. I suspect quite a few deserving cases have slipped through the honours net because folk only think about nominating them after they have retired. Congratulations, too, to Maurice and Jean Soord of Sanday for each receiving a Benemerenti medal from the Pope.

Since my last [Letter](#), I have attended a couple of confidential members' briefings, and I was at a very interesting joint session held for OIC and NHS Orkney to meet with Public Health Scotland (at which I was able to remind them that Orkney has populations living in the Isles needing healthcare, too).

I shall close with a reminder that the **deadline** for registration in *The Register of Persons Holding a Controlled Interest in Land* (RCI) is the **31st March**. It is a requirement that all persons with controlling interests in land or property be recorded in this register by this date, after which it becomes a criminal offence punishable with a fine of up to £5000 not to be registered if required to be so. Persons requiring to register include individuals subject to contractual or other arrangements, partnerships (e.g. where not all partners are registered as owners), trusts (e.g. where not all trustees are registered as owners), and unincorporated bodies (e.g. voluntary groups, clubs, associations and faith groups). Guidance can be found online at <https://kb.ros.gov.uk/>.

My New Year's resolution as a councillor is summed up by the words of Protestant theologian Rienhold Niebuhr: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Incidentally, in the end, my festive season reading was "The Pilots of Pomona" by Robert Leighton—a ripping boys' adventure story set in early Victorian times, and taking place mainly in Stromness and the West Mainland.



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Letter from School Place is also available on-line at clackson.info

