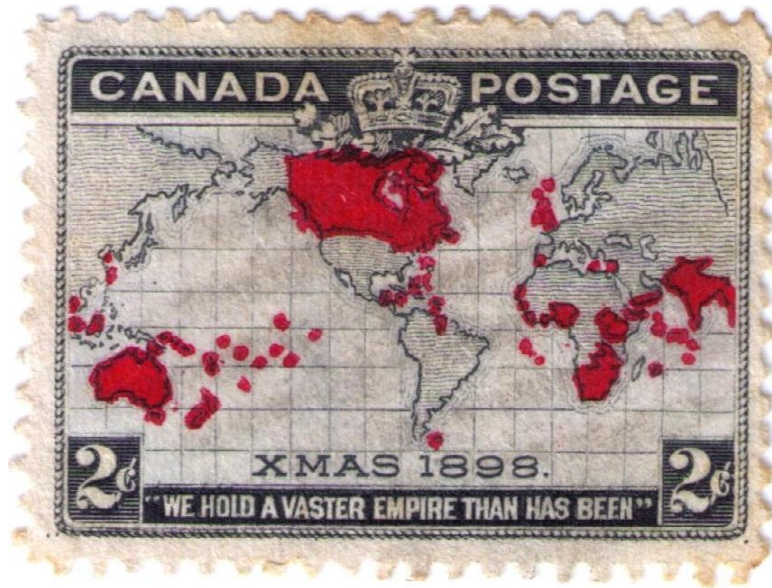


Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

A report from your councillor at the start of an uncertain year.



Above is shown (enlarged) the world's first Christmas postage stamp, issued by Canada in 1898 to inaugurate the Imperial Penny Post. It would cost you one penny (1d), or 2 cents in Canada, to send a Christmas card or letter (up to ½ oz) to most of the British Empire (but Australia & New Zealand had to wait until 1905), which is marked in red on the world map illustrated on the stamp. Today, the cheapest you can send a letter within the UK amounts to 208.8 times this figure; a multiple of 792 will get your Christmas card to Canada at the international economy rate, and you will be stung with a hefty factor of 816 to send it to anywhere in Europe! The penny post was discontinued in 1918, shortly before the British Empire reached its vastest.

2026 is the 250th anniversary of when thirteen British colonies on the east coast of North America took the decision to exit the British Empire. How wise that decision was (especially considering current events) can be judged by comparison with the control scenario to the north, where the colonies remained loyal and retained their ties with the United Kingdom (and still share our head of state, King Charles III). Now, where would you rather live right now, the USA or Canada? Forget the MAGA madness, sensible US citizens should be getting behind MAGBA (Make America Great Britain Again)!

Closer to home, 2026 is the year of the Scottish Parliament elections, which will take place on Thursday 7th May. (Why are elections always held on a Thursday?) To be eligible to vote in this election you need to be either a British or Irish citizen, or other foreign national permitted to enter or stay in the UK, and have reached the age of 16 on the day of the election. You also need to be registered to vote, so make sure you are on the Orkney Islands Area Register of Electors. If in doubt, you can contact our Electoral Registration Office by telephoning 01856-876222 or by e-mailing ero@orkney.gov.uk. You can also register on-line at <https://www.mygov.scot/voting-in-elections-in-scotland/register-to-vote>. Don't forget that there are no polling stations in the North Isles, so unless you are able and willing to travel into Kirkwall on the day, you'll need a postal vote.

On the council front, 2026 started quietly, beginning with a meeting of the UHI Orkney Stakeholder Group, at which I asked about ensuring that Orkney College's rodent management courses (an essential requirement if you wish to purchase professional-use rodenticides) are accessible to Isles residents. (For information, please e-mail ocshortcourses@uhi.ac.uk.) Other meetings I've attended recently include a seminar on the use of mobile digital devices in schools, a screening of the Scottish Government's budget announcement, an internal transport forum (with island transport reps), and a seminar by *Places for People* in relation to our Strategic Housing Investment Plan.

The Scottish Government's proposed budget (if approved) will be good news for our ferry replacement plans, with another £8,000,000 in the offing which we can put towards our Phase 1 (ships for Eday, Sanday, Stronsay & Westray) procurement. You can find full details at <https://www.orkney.gov.uk/latest-news/behind-the-headlines-ferry-replacement-programme/>.

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



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