

Stephen Clackson's Letter from School Place

Reporting back to the folk of the North Isles of Orkney, the "cool place" to be.

Given the state of drought over most of the rest of the country, I shouldn't really complain about the weather during the councillors' recess, when I usually manage to get many outstanding outside jobs done. I remember the Great Drought of 1976. (It was also the year of the Great Ladybird Plague.) Back then, I was a teenager living on the edge of the Somerset Levels, normally a very damp place, but the rivers and rhynes were depleted of water revealing World War II relics and huge fishes I'd never dreamt were there to catch. We had a wild fire in our village churchyard, which threatened the house of my uncle and aunt, and which my friends and I helped put out. My aunt showed her gratitude for our saving her home by telling the vicar she thought we'd been responsible for starting the fire!



The partial solar eclipse on the 12th August was disappointing for me (see photograph above, taken at home in Sanday). The situation made me think of the Joni Mitchell song *Both Sides, Now*: "But now they only block the sun - They rain and snow on ev'ryone - So many things I would have done - But clouds got in my way." (In contrast, on the 20th March 2015, I did manage to get a good pinhole image on our white-painted doorjamb of the previous partial solar eclipse observable in Orkney.) The only total solar eclipse I have ever witnessed was from a hill near the village of Ochsenwang on the Swabian Alb on the 11th August 1999 under similar cloudy conditions but with sufficient reprieve at the right moments.

The Clackson family had successes at this year's Sanday Show. Our black cock "Satan" won 1st *Light Breed Cock/Cockerel* again, and some of our other chickens got prizes. After their enforced absence last year, the Anseriformes were back, and all the geese we entered won something, including the trophy for *Best Goose or Gander* (for our gander "Gozilla"), but the poultry judge was clearly not a fan of Muscovy ducks. We also got some prizes for our eggs.



At the end of our recess, I enjoyed a day at the Stronsay Massive Weekend. It was a grand opportunity to catch up with Stronsay constituents (and also Eday, Sanday and Papay constituents who'd come along for the day).

Back at School Place we were treated to seminars on budget strategy and transport. At our 6-monthly Internal Transport Forum (attended by the island community council transport reps), we were informed that, from when it was introduced on 1st April 2025 to June this year, the number of free journeys undertaken by under-22-year-olds (all funded by the Scottish Government) on Orkney Ferries has amounted to some 64,000. (To give this figure some context, it is over three times the number of episodes there have been of *The Archers* since the BBC radio series started in 1951 !)

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



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