



Going, Going... Gone

We could be referring to the year just passed, which many will be happy to see the back of, but we're actually talking Cromarty beards. Jeremy Price reports:

Boxing Day morning saw the end of two Cromarty features that have been nurtured, trimmed and admired since the start of lockdown all those months ago. Perhaps in the belief that the initial lockdown would only last a matter of weeks, a competition was opened to see who could grow the longest beard and a few gallant men (yes, sadly no women rose to the challenge!) threw away their razors, trimmers and cats' tongues and set to fertilising their stubble in the hope of rapid growth.

As the months passed, contenders dropped out until finally only Nige Shapcott and Bob Maclean remained, their five o'clock shadows turning to stubble, to whiskers and finally full, luxuriant beards. They became daily features in the town and a lot of folk wondered when the weight of their appurtenances would cause either a frightful accident or the bearers to topple forward and be unable to stand up!

Finally, it was announced that a grand shave-off would be staged on Boxing Day in aid of charity. James Support Group, a local charity started and administered by Patrick and Wendy Mullery for the benefit of families affected by suicide, was chosen and preparations were put into place.

Unfortunately, the new Covid-19 regulations came into force just a few hours before the due time so alternative arrangements had to be made. The trimming and shaving took place at the respective homes of the contenders and was streamed live on Zoom. Rachel Shapcott, Nige's daughter, worked technical magic from her London home

and Jeremy Price provided a commentary from his studio (front room) in Cromarty!

Nige became Nigella the White Wizard and Bob became The Barbarian. Their wives, Corrie and Christel, wielded scissors and trimmers and set to, snipping and ploughing through the mass of tresses. Nigella's beard, decorated with baubles, revealed a small mouse living within, such was its decrepit state.

Meanwhile, a veritable stadium-full of online watchers cheered on the proceedings, laughed at the witty commentary and voted via a series of thumbs-up interludes for a variety of categories including style, whiteness, masculine image and bushiness. After the event, it was level pegging in the categories and the final stage was weighing the beard clippings.

Nigella's weighed in at 4g whereas Bob's was a colossal 12g and he won the prize of bubbly for his tonsorial expert and malt whisky to numb his own pain.

The current amount raised for James Support Group is nearly £1300 after an initial target of £500. Patrick Mullery, the charity's trustee, said "Wendy and I are blown away with the generosity shown by everybody. We are extremely grateful, especially in these difficult times"



Two hirsute gentlemen take the weight off their... chins, on Boxing Day

Development Trust AGM And More

The Cromarty Community Development Trust is looking for new blood – at least one new director and a working group of trust members to deliver the motorhome campsite at Whitedykes, and make it work for the community.

At its annual general meeting (AGM) on December 16th (conducted online) three directors resigned as the standing orders demanded. Sheila Currie and Greg Fullarton did so, but were re-elected and agreed to return to the trust board. David Ross is leaving Cromarty in two months and therefore will no longer be a director. He will, however, continue to help the CCDT.

It means that there are now seven directors. Under the trust's articles of association, there can be 10 with a maximum of eight coming from the CCDT's membership. Another two can be co-opted by the directors. We are looking for anyone who would be willing to help the development trust in its work to improve the community life of Cromarty.

Age should not be a barrier. In March 2019 the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust elected Brandon Clements just 19 to its board of directors. The following year he was shortlisted for the prestigious Young Director Award by the Institute of Directors Scotland. The minimum age to become a director is 16, so younger residents should consider it. It would make a good entry on your CV/personal statement.

Anyone interested should contact one of the directors – jacquie.ross44@gmail.com sheilacurrie15@gmail.com nigel.shapcott@gmail.com dfrasermackenzie@gmail.com 57degn@gmail.com (Estelle Quick) moresteammacphail@yahoo.co.uk (Ronald Young) greg.fullarton@gmail.com

[Whitedykes](#)

We are just waiting for the Highland Council to finalise the sale of the site at Whitedykes to the CCDT for £1, as a Community Asset Transfer (CAT).

As we reported last month the council finally granted the Cromarty Community Development Trust (CCDT) planning permission for a motorhome campsite at Whitedykes. The permission arrived in time for the CCDT to secure the final tranche of its Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund award, worth £100,000. Originally the plan had been to have capacity for 14 motorhomes, but because of issues over access and the impact on the trees at the site, there will now be only 10.

Negotiations are currently underway with the Beaulieu-based building firm Simpsons, to build the facility. The company stepped in to take on the upgrading of the ferry slipways at Nigg and Cromarty, which was completed on time and on budget.

Fraser Mackenzie suggested at the AGM that the Whitedykes project might struggle without a local authority by-law, effectively outlawing overnight stays for campervans elsewhere within the town. It was agreed that the Highland Council should be approached about this.

With planning permission granted for the site, we now need a group of local residents to take the project forward making it happen, working with contractors and also deciding how it should be run. A group can do this better than one director. If you are interested in working on this project, please contact a board member.

This follows a suggestion made at the AGM by Jon Palmer that the CCDT should try to rekindle the significant local interest, which was evident in the early months of the development trust. At that time there was no shortage of volunteers happy to join working groups to take forward the different areas of work.

Jon congratulated the directors on what had been achieved in the last year, but thought it would be good to encourage the wider participation seen earlier. The directors agreed that this was indeed a worthwhile goal.

[Gin, A Potential Tonic](#)

CCDT chair Jacquie Ross brought the AGM up to date regarding the approach by representatives of the Tain-based Sutors Gin company, that would like to establish an operation in Cromarty.

Jacquie and other CCDT directors met the owner and the company accountant. It was a socially-distanced meeting held in Nigel Shapcott's back garden. It was confirmed that the company would like to establish a small tasting/retail outlet somewhere in Cromarty with a distillery operation attached.

They had a walk around the town looking at various sites, but they came back to Townlands Barn and the surrounding land. They expressed a serious interest in the site, and undertook to conduct further research and open discussions with Historic Environment Scotland. There could also be an opportunity for local businesses to work on associated projects.

Jacquie said that one thing was clear from the meeting that there was a determination to develop a 'Cromarty Gin' brand which would only be available locally or online. There was also a firm commitment to involve the local community in this.

She said "It is an exciting prospect, which could establish an income stream for the CCDT. But everything is at an early stage and no decisions have been taken."

Housing

News that Albyn Housing will not now start work on its housing development in the field beside the park until 2023 at the earliest, has been a major blow. The CCDT and the Cromarty and District Community Council had both been working with Albyn at different times to try to make early progress. Not least to try to stem the decline in the primary school roll – families need houses.

David Ross told the AGM that he had been commissioned recently by Community Land Scotland, to write a report on how different communities across Scotland had been manging to address their housing needs. There were examples of communities smaller than Cromarty. They had won financial support from the Scottish Land Fund to buy local land, and from the Scottish Government's Rural

and Islands Housing Funds to build houses. He said that the housing funds provided early professional advice on the viability of such community schemes.

With this in mind the CCDT has approached Albyn's senior managers, asking if they would be interested in selling their land in Cromarty in a community buyout. This would be on condition the Scottish Land Fund helps finance the purchase.

Although the community council has been taking the lead with Albyn latterly, its limited statutory powers would not allow it to lead a community buyout. The CCDT, like local community development trusts across Scotland, is however appropriately empowered.

Money For Guyana

More fundraising efforts were announced this month as Simon Evans confirmed that £4,015 had been safely delivered to the All Saint's Developmental Centre in Berbice. This should cover the costs of refurbishment of the kitchen and help to provide regular school meals for local pupils. In a letter to David Alston the Rev. Dr. Selby Ross wrote:

'I hereby send sincere thanks for the monetary contributions received to refurbish the kitchen of the All Saints' Developmental Centre. On behalf of the Kirk Session and the members of the All Saints Presbyterian church, we wish you a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.'



The Presbytery buildings in Berbice that have direct links to Cromarty, Highlands.

Business News

With the change to Covid-19 levels **Sutor Creek** has made the decision to stay open during their usual January holiday period - providing take-away meals and pizzas. Details on the website: www.sutorcreek.co.uk

After their busiest pre-Christmas period ever **The Cheese House** will be closed from 1st-22nd January for an annual break. A 'knock on the door' service will be in operation for locals and all being well they will be continuing to get deliveries of Dutch cheeses in 2021.

Harbour News

Despite the challenges we have all faced, the harbour finishes the year in much better physical shape than it started although slightly slimmer in terms of its cash balance. We are delighted with what we have been able to do and whilst next year won't quite be the same production number, there are further improvements in the pipeline which we will share as we go. If you are interested in the detail, the Trustees have published an annual report which can be found at cromartyharbour.org. Finally, my thanks to all those who have helped us along the way with card and jigsaw purchases and practical help. Activity such as this, together with other donations all help directly in the restoration effort and in our dealings with potential funders. I should also thank our small volunteer team who provide their time and energy generously and without (much) complaint; the harbour would not be able to operate without them, thank you.

Wishing everyone a Happy Christmas and a better New Year.

Colin Dickie Chair, Cromarty Harbour Trust

An Injection of Funds For The Courthouse

Mary Bowers writes:

'We are delighted to share that we have secured funding from Museums Galleries Scotland (the national development body for the Scottish museums sector) to make sure that our museum continues to be a flourishing part of Cromarty, both as a focus for local history and culture and also as a visitor attraction in 2021 and beyond.

As a result of this injection of funding:

- We will be WARMER by upgrading to a more efficient and responsive heating system - better for staff, volunteers, visitors and the environment
- We will be investing in a digital sound system, enabling us to retell trials and present fresh stories as well as reimagine the use of sound throughout the building
- We will be developing the potential of our links with the theme of justice - cultivating engagement with schools, through visits and online learning
- We will be commissioning a new website that permits media to be easily managed, the content to be simply indexed and will also support online learning, online sales from our shop and the collection of donations

One of our first tasks will be the recording the spoken roles from the trial scenes in the courtroom as well the other characters in the museum. Would you like to play a part? Local accents are particularly sought after!

If you are interested in getting involved to support our new projects in any way, please get in touch and help us celebrate our 30th year as a museum: courthousecromarty@gmail.com '

And Finally...

Five Things We Learnt In 2020

1. Broadband speeds are actually not too bad, and many have discovered that working from home IS possible.
2. Instead of taking unwanted items to the dump there are plenty of folk who will make use of stuff you might otherwise 'throw away'.
3. With so much variety on our doorstep there's no excuse not to keep fit and active – a network of interesting pathways, cycling routes, wild swimming and even outdoor table tennis.



A small band of hardy souls even managed a game or three on Christmas morning.

4. With a bakery, post office (not to forget our hard-working posties) and an incredibly well-stocked local store one can survive for weeks (if not forever) without leaving town.

5. In an emergency there's an army of people who will rally round, roll up their sleeves, do what's needed and make things bearable – but we knew that anyway.

A big thank you to you all for making Cromarty what it is. Here's to a New Year that builds on our strengths and continues to make our wee town special.

We hope you've found this an interesting and informative read. Please let us know what you think, or send suggestions and ideas for articles via editor@cromartylive.co.uk

The Cromarty Live Newsletter team is Jon Palmer, Jeremy Price, David Ross, Laura Shepherd

The Newsletter is currently sponsored by Sutor Creek. Printed copies are available at the Stores for those unable to access the online version.

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