

1971 was the year of Holland Park and the population survey. I only kept a brief diary and I have a couple of letters and some postcards that I wrote, excerpts from which follow below.

I can't recall the precise terms of the Holland Park School involvement, but someone must have had a contact who thought the sixth formers would make suitable labourers, I mean, diggers. I don't remember them doing much digging – surprisingly they preferred to travel round the islands and see the sights. They travelled north in the school minibus – and I hitched a lift from London with them. We stopped for the first night at the house of the parents of one of the teachers in Catterick. I wasn't quite sure where I fitted in – the school kids were too young, and the teachers too clannish. We certainly didn't travel fast enough for my taste, as they insisted on sightseeing on the way up, for example stopping off in Aviemore to visit Loch Morlich, while all I wanted to do was get to Orkney. At least I could navigate into Scrabster and then from Stromness to the school in Deerness.

Saturday 17th July. Train to London (from Haslemere). Taxi to Holland Park. Departed from school at 10.00 am. Arrived Catterick 6-7 pm. Supper in Richmond. Camp beds in cottage in grounds of Liz Wrangham's parents' house.

Sunday 18th July. Breakfast in cafe in Catterick. Departed 9.30 ish. Arrived Aviemore 7.00 pm despite puncture in Dunkeld. Posh Youth Hostel, hot showers! Ate in eve in Aviemore Centre.

Monday 19th July. Drove around Aviemore, went to ski slopes, and then to Loch an Eilan [Morlich?]. Then on to Inverness for lunch, and then on to Helmsdale Youth Hostel. Fish and chip supper. Walked along beach on a lovely evening, and found a whale's skull.

Tuesday 20th July. Departed Helmsdale, and arrived in Scrabster for lunch (well coffee & biscuits) in Upper Deck. Boat left at 1.30, and it was quite a calm crossing. Pleased to meet my friends again: Geoff, Alan, Clare and Trevor.

Friday 23rd July. Scorching hot day (by Orkney standards). Digging all morning. Half day and spent pm on beach at Newark with Alan and Clare. Swam and dried off in the sun, fell asleep and tanned.

Saturday 24th July. Poured. Damp plans, and worse still, muddy plans. Not too depressed digging.

Sunday 25th July. Poured.

Tuesday 27th July. Yorkneyites revolt. Down to site early to get things moving at last. Really cleaned lots away. I found a skelly, my first ever, skull first. Wrote the following letter:

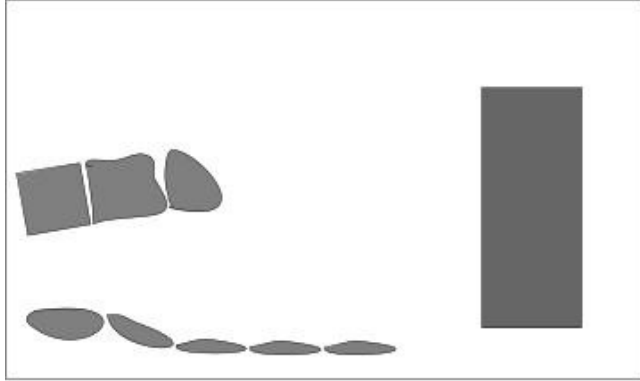
"... have really been quite busy, evenings not spent tidying up notes etc have been spent at Don's cottage[Mossquoy] helping him clear up and just being social ...

"There are two factions here – THEM ie Holland Park, and US the sturdy bunch of Yorkists yesterday augmented by the arrival of Helen ...

"Digging is fine, back to the good old muddy conditions since the torrential rain of Sat. and Sun. Tunnel is as usual being far from regular! I'm getting quite good at drawing. Not many stiffs so far but Duncan and Thomas (remember Duncan and Jason from last year?) have come across several baby bones south east of the chancel. Tunnel Probe Hole 1 is covered with polythene held down by railway sleepers and is the York stronghold where HPS believe we play cards all the time. In TPH1 we

have found where tunnel appears to widen and also double back on itself as there is fill outside tunnel walling...

“Last Friday was a gorgeous day – and a half day, so we went swimming and fell asleep in the sun – my nose is still peeling!”



Tunnel Probe Hole 1 (1971) showing tunnel starting to widen and the large slab on top of tunnel between TPH1 and TPH2. Not to scale.

Saturday 31st July. And the tunnel goes on. It always has had a habit of heading straight towards our spoil tips.

Sunday 1st August. Sunny off and on. Name-taking with Veronica in Skail [Deerness] churchyard. [This was part of the other parallel project, the population survey, previously referred to as the Living Orcadians Project, which also included the Dead. Don and some of the York diggers had been collecting names from graveyards for the last couple of years – I wonder what happened to all that data – I’m sure there’s some family historians would love to get their hands on it!] After a swift lunch at 2.30 Don drove us to Stromness – Alan, Clare, Duncan and Thomas off to Hoy. I met Tony off the Ola at 4.00pm.

Monday 2nd August. Damp and misty. Caught 8.00am bus into Kirkwall to go shopping and stock up on food as commune has now descended into anarchy thanks to independent HPS. Hitched back to school with G.P. [Doctor?]. Spent pm on site drawing aerial view of tunnel and chatting to one of the Mr Deldays. Hitched to pub in Kirkwall in evening, got a lift back with Don.

Tuesday 3rd August. Misty. HPS tripping again. Me, Don and Tony battening down site in morning. I drew lengthwise section of tunnel [why don’t I remember this??] Lunch at Mossquoy, and into Kirkwall for the bank. In eve Don, Tony and I finally closed down site. Cleaning up school and boxing up bods. [So when did HPS leave? And did Alan and Clare ever get off of Hoy?]

Wednesday 4th August. Up at 6.30, left school at 8.20 and caught 9.30 boat to Sanday from Kirkwall Harbour. Nice crossing, smooth but misty. Settled into schoolhouse on Sanday. [There was no mains power on Sanday back then. So dusk was greeted with the sound of generators starting up.]

No diary entries for the first few days on Sanday. We spent our time with large scale maps of the island, driving round and visiting every property. We were surprised at the number that were empty especially up at the North End, and quite a few as the property adverts now say, ruinous. We needed

to visit every islander, collect some details on them and persuade them to come along and be subjected to some tests. I suppose nowadays we'd find all we needed with a DNA test, though getting people to agree to that might be difficult. As it was we had a doctor and nurses to take blood samples, we tested for colour blindness, took fingerprints, checked for hairs on the back of fingers, ptyalin tested and watched which way people folded their arms. It all sounds a terrible intrusion now, and there were some people who not surprisingly didn't want to cooperate. After all who knew what carefully buried secrets might be unearthed. Another surprise was the hippy colony on the island (or 'happies' as the locals appeared to say).

Saturday 7th August. Evening trip to Tresness – huge empty farmhouse, with large unexcavated broch. Seals and a fulmar chick. Splendid beach with sand dunes.

Sunday 8th August. Beautiful morning but rain by evening. In morning with Don, Veronica and Jennie to see Quoyness chambered cairn and explore neighbouring mounds on Elsness.

Monday 9th August. Very windy and heavy showers. Out with Tony Boyce to Burness to fix up second visits and arrange times for them to come to school. Moderate success at persuasion. Met Doctor [Hilary] off Islander at lunchtime, and out again all pm. Brief stop to look at rough seas. Fixing up school in eve, doing notices to guide visitors.

Tuesday 10th August. In school waiting for customers. Kettletoft [Hotel] in evening, darts.

Wednesday 11th August. Clients arriving quite well.

Thursday 12th August. Very good day for people, over 30 came.

Saturday 14th August. Windy but fine. Day off. Most of the islanders and Don, Hilary and Jennie off to Kirkwall for the County Show. Tony & I on borrowed bikes cycled up to North End against wind to look at ruined chapel. Then blown down to The Wart to view a hazy Sanday – bad visibility.

Sunday 15th August. Dull & damp. Trek out for picnic lunch to the Holms of Ire. Ruined Celtic chapel and planticrues. Fulmar chicks everywhere. All 9 of us sheltered behind a wall for lunch. Back for prospective customers at 3, but no one came for rest of day. In eve with Tony Boyce and Joy, and Tony L and Elaine and Tony H to Kettletoft Hotel, farewells etc.

Monday 16th August. Tony left on Islander aeroplane at 1.45 to begin trek homewards. Spent pm working on plans [of dig I presume]. In school in eve coping with customers then out with Brothwells to ruined chapel and whale skull and vertebrae on beach near Seater.

Tuesday 17th August. Moderately fine, mild wind. Score so far 75. Sorting out maps in morning, one customer at 10. After lunch Jennie and I went to Thorness to clean it up a bit. [Thorness was a deserted traditional Orkney croft just about in the middle of Sanday. Jennie, who was a nurse I believe, introduced me to the concept of damp dusting with diluted Dettol – and Thorness needed it. We had to move out of the comfort of the schoolhouse as term was about to begin.] Customers at 3. Swimming at Elsness 4.30-5.30 quite warm when you got used to it. Lots of customers all evening.

Letter started August 17th 1971, Thorness, Sanday, Orkney.

I'm sitting in the school at the moment and we are in the midst of the evening rush ... we are also up to the number 86, so slowly, but surely the people are coming. This morning we went out on a final round-up – not quite equipped with nets and lassoes we attempted to persuade as many as possible to come along. I got a complete brush-off at Skelbrae, surprise, surprise, but the people from Lochend Stores were very nice, and I convinced one tiny lady that I towered over (me!) that she really should come along.

... We are now up to number 91 and I have filled in the page of the notebook to the magic number 100 ...

Am now back at Thorness writing this by the light of a calor gas lamp. No electricity at this place, so no lights. Heating is by means of paraffin heaters and a driftwood fire in the room I share with Jennie. (Well chosen!) We have constructed a little paraffin lamp for the bathroom out of a jar, a tin lid and a wick, it's really quite efficient, about 1 candle power. There are no candles on Sanday, stocks were all ordered south for the power cuts last winter and have not yet been replenished, believe it or not. All hot water has to be boiled on gas rings, so when the light is in operation that means using the rings in the Dormobile outside.

... The weather has been lovely all this week, hardly a cloud in the sky. We all went swimming last Tuesday evening at Elsness. It was cold at first but once one was used to it, it almost felt warm! I've been grabbing every opportunity to sit in the sun, in between visits and examinations of Orcadians I'm even getting tanned.

... I've come to the conclusion that the only chance I get to write letters is early in the morning – it is now 7.30 am on Friday 20th August. We leave a week today hopefully catching the 1.30 boat. There is a muddle of dockers at the moment and the cars could not be loaded onto the Saturday boat, so we hope to get through all the school kids on Tuesday pm, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday am, to finish before the boat leaves. We leave Deerness/Mainland on Thursday 2nd September (or Friday 3rd) and will be camping in the school at Deerness in the interim (memories!) I bet that place will be freezing in late August. There appears to have been a touch of frost overnight during the last bit of fine weather, still I hope it holds on for a bit longer.

... So everything continues smoothly. I am now waiting for a kettle to boil in order to wash, not being as spartan as Veronica who appeared to have a cold bath this morning. She's very welcome.

... I've taken two families – the Boyces and Brothwells – to look at the whale, and each time we've come away with a couple more vertebrae. No one has yet tried to take the skull.

Saturday 21st August. Walk with Don in evening to inspect a cairn (possibly stalled) about to fall in the sea.

Sunday 22nd August. Beautifully fine. Day off. Swimming at Backaskaill in the afternoon with Veronica, Hilary and Jennie.

Monday 23rd August. Last few adults (131). Then in the evening moved all our stuff to the Gym.

Tuesday 24th August. Started school kids in the afternoon.

Wednesday 25th August. School kids.

Thursday 26th August. Last day on school kids, finished by 3 in spite of midday removal to library. 96 of them done. Drinks in Kettletoft.

Friday 27th August. Sunny basically, stiff breeze, scudding clouds. (!) Clearing up Thorness and packing stuff away. Lunch standing. Brief visit to 'Broch' at Howe farm. Caught boat at 1.30 arrived Kirkwall 4-4.30. Jennie, Hilary, me and the Boyces to Deerness School. Into Kirkwall for fish and chip supper.

Saturday 28th August. Generally fine and sunny. Bought lunch in Kirkwall for all of us and took it to Cuween cairn to eat. Then to Mill by Maeshowe (being done up) [Tormiston], then to Maeshowe - Onstan Cairn - Stromness book shop – Rennibister Earth House – Grain Earth House. High tea in St Magnus Cafe and to Don's [Mossquoy] for supper.

Sunday 29th August. Damp. Walked to look at site with Jennie and Simon. Spent rest of day working on plans. Walk with Jennie to Mossquoy for bath in evening.

Monday 30th August. Out all day. Boat at 9.30 to Egilsay, St Magnus Church, at 12.20 to Wyre, Cubbie Roo's castle at 2 to Rousay, and Midhowe Broch and cairn by car [hired on Rousay?]

Tuesday 31st August. Last minute shopping in Kirkwall. Lunch with Jennie and Hilary in Torvhaug. Party at Don's in evening, housewarming.

Wednesday 1st September. Very windy, showers, but lovely later. Boyces left at 6.00am or so for the Ola. Jennie, Hilary and I hired a car from Laughtons and drove down barriers to St Margaret's Hope. Kirkwall for lunch and Broch of Gurness – Birsay, but tide in – Skara Brae – Yesnaby coast (briefly – gale blowing). In eve Jennie and I moved to Mossquoy, and Hilary to Kirkwall Hotel.

Thursday 2nd September. Fine, moderate swell. Mad rushed departure from Mossquoy by 7.00, made Stromness in record time. Managed to get on boat, despite no booking. Lunch in Thurso, Inverness by 6. [Travelling with Brothwells in Dormobile]. Steak and wine in Caberfeidh – less than £1.00 a head. [Did we stay in Youth Hostel?]

Friday 3rd September. Inverness to Jedburgh. Spent most of morning waiting for Don who was wandering with his children around Ness Islands. Stayed at Ferniehirst Castle Youth Hostel.

Saturday 4th September. From Jedburgh all the way down to Dorking – departed 9.00 am and arrived 8.30 pm. Lunch in play park in Boroughbridge.