



## THE ARDTORNISH NEWSLETTER, SPRING 2014

### Greetings from Ardtornish,

where at last we have more than just the rarest fleeting glimpse of spring. We can't pretend it's been an easy winter. I'll leave the statistics to Angus, below, and desist from complaining lest we offend our friends in the south with troubles far greater than ours. Please allow me to say just that the sun has been in short supply. It's been good for hydro.

Better for the spirits is our anticipation at being joined very soon by a new colleague. Kathryn McLaughlin comes in late April to take up our new post of Holiday and Hospitality Manager. She's been in a senior position, managing visitor services, at the magnificent Mount Stuart House and gardens on the Isle of Bute - with a substantial team of staff and visitors in the tens of thousands a year. Things are a bit different here, but the opportunities just as great. We're really thrilled to welcome her.

The new job title reflects the changing balance of visitors to Ardtornish, between the holiday-makers - who we love - and those who come for an event, who we like very much too! In our next newsletter you'll hear from her direct. It's been almost a year since MacI moved up the Sound of Mull to Drimnin, during which Isobel, Janet and Alan have covered that job as well as doing their own. A thousand thanks to them.

Changes you might notice on your next visit include a new fire alarm and emergency lighting at Ardtornish House, and discreet changes to some historic doors to bring them up to current fire standards. The biomass boilerhouse is rising beside the lower lawn, and we've taken that opportunity to create alongside it some overspill guest parking.

Another exciting addition, nearing completion, is the Studio - an exceptional new build 120 square metre live and work space opposite the steading at Old Ardtornish. On the site of the 18th century farm



Loch Tearnait in the Spring



Rose Cottage

house that was demolished in 1907, its design and construction responds to the landscape: its history, people and materials.

The core structure is of European larch and Douglas fir, found, felled and processed within a short radius of the site. A curvilinear form echoes the shape of stone boundary walls and sloping terraces of farmland towards Ardtornish Castle and the Sound of Mull. The seamed metal roof and a metal-clad wall, pieced together on site, reflect use of both lead and corrugated iron as vernacular building materials. A woodstove and solar panel will provide heat.

Design and production was by Matthew Maier, of Brocklehurst Architects, and a team from across the UK - for Mandy Raven, chair of the Andrew Raven Trust. It's a remarkable building, in an extraordinary place - a striking enhancement to Ardtornish, a talisman to a time of house-building at Ardtornish.

At the other end of the Sound of Mull, we have a new ferry - from Drimnin to Tobermory. Gemini Cruises will run a weekly crossing, with a flexible timetable. Full details will be available when you get here - but why not plan to visit Tobermory without needing to take the car?

I could not omit to mention the loss, during the winter, of two friends very dear to Ardtornish. John Buxton and Jacky Shaw Stewart, in different but equally important ways, were big figures in the life of this place. They will be hugely missed. An appreciation of them both is on our [website](#).

### Hugh Raven

### Energy News

We feel so sorry for all who have suffered the devastation caused by the wet spell in parts of the south this winter. It's been wet in Morvern too, with over four feet of rain in 100 days either side of Christmas. December at 457mm and January at 450mm were the wettest months since our own rainfall records began in 1987. February, at 379mm, comes fifth.

The saving grace for us is that the water runs off quickly to the sea, generally without doing much damage. And of course we now have a wonderful set of hydro schemes - operating at full tilt since the autumn, and exceeding all expectations.

Rannoch dam and Lochan Lub an Arbhair were designed to withstand a one in a thousand year flood. They looked magnificent in the worst of the wet spell. The road to and landscape around Loch Tearnait are settling in well, and it becomes hard to remember what it was like before.

After a frustrating period negotiating finance, we've started the next phase of developing renewable energy. The biomass boiler room for Ardtornish House is coming on well, and should be commissioned in May. We'll use our own timber, as wood chip, to provide hot water to heat the house.

The new Uileann hydro scheme (800 kw, run of river) started construction in the White Glen at the end of February, and we hope to commission it within a year. The water will run down a penstock from three high level intakes, through the conifer plantation to a power



The Studio - almost finished



Jake milling



Wedding in Ardtornish House



Mist descends on Ardtornish



house at the back of Uileann House. It will raise our hydro output to 3 MW.

**Angus Robertson**

### Spring awakenings

I felt my telephone vibrate. A text from my daughter Vaila read 'Look what I found in my bedroom!' A moment later the image of a butterfly opened on the screen. I fired back a quick response (I was at Murrayfield watching Scotland's narrow defeat to France) congratulating her on finding a Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglaisurticae*) that must have been hibernating in some dark recess. In Scotland, where only one generation of adults appears each year in July, the ubiquitous small tortoiseshell hibernates and reappears in March. They particularly like using human habitation to overwinter.

Late March is the time to start looking out for queen bumblebees as they emerge from the winter covered up somewhere safe, usually underground. Having mated the previous summer the fresh queens are now ready to start nest-building and laying eggs to start a new colony. Of the 25 species known in Britain, here in Morvern we have the commoner ones - the Garden (*Bombushortorum*), White-tailed (*Bombuslucorum*), or Early (*Bombuspratorem*) bumblebees. The buzzing of a solitary bumblebee as it gathers strength for the task ahead is one of the most welcome sounds of early spring.

**Alan Kennedy**

### The Ardtornish Garden

We've all heard in the media how so many flat areas of Britain are covered in flood water - and so are grateful that a steep, hilly site was chosen for the Ardtornish Garden, where the surplus water runs freely away. Despite the extreme rainfall there has been little damage.

The snowdrops have flourished about the Front Drive, and early crocus gave good colour, but are now fading, replaced by daffodils on the lawns. Many date from the early and mid-twentieth century, but we have added to the variety, so now have colour from February to May. This has been an early flowering year in most gardens, so we'll have to wait to see whether our Poet's Eye Narcissus will last that long. Easter is late this year, so our usual shrubs for decorating the church may be over. The pink flowered camellia on the veranda is a special favourite. I'm hoping some buds on the back of the bush will still be at their best.

A spring walk round the garden emphasises the importance of the large leaved rhododendrons, with the deciduous trees not yet in leaf. They were planted to stand sentinel in the amphitheatre, and though we enjoy their flowers, it's the pattern of leaves that gives character. The silver indumentum catch the rays of spring sun.

Ian Lamb and Allan Davidson did valuable clearing work in the Rockery last autumn and our new plantings will be coming into flower, near the cercidiphyllum on the drive with its smell of burnt sugar. There has been some tree damage from gales and there will be clearing to do below the Old Kennels - but that fits the need for



**A grey shrike - a rare visitor to the Highlands**



**Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglaisurticae*)**



**Lenten Rose**



**Early crocus gave good colour**

more light in this part of the garden. It gives a chance to choose new shrubs.

**Faith Raven**

### News from the Whitehouse

We open on April 4th - Mike and Lee are winging their way back as I write. Jade Shaw is returning from college to work with us again, and our catering team have a lovely line-up of weddings and parties at Ardtornish this season.

We've working to find an exclusive supplier of prawns. Despite the collapse of the Spanish market, they remain difficult to get. There is something about the Lochaline ones that is unlike those we see elsewhere -their sheer, massive size.

Lesley, our 'Head Gardener', (with assistance from Eadie (4) and Archie, now 8), reports that she is going to try globe artichokes and celery for the first time this year, alongside the salads and vegetables she always produces.

We have completely overhauled our wine list and are moving towards a fully organic / biodynamic list. We aren't quite there yet but organic wine has improved a staggering amount from when we first opened (and tried having an organic list). Your feedback would be very helpful.

**We also need your help.** *The Good Food Guide* is holding its annual awards for best restaurants, and if you think we justify it please would you go to [www.thegoodfoodguide.co.uk](http://www.thegoodfoodguide.co.uk) and nominate us. It is a bit of a pain as you need to register, which takes a couple of minutes, but if you were willing to do it we would be very grateful indeed. This type of award is vital to us. Not only does it help raise our profile, but it brings justly deserved recognition for Mike and Lee's cooking.

Please don't forget we can cook a meal for you and have it waiting in your accommodation for your arrival or any time during your stay. Either call us on 01967 421777 and ask Mike what's available, or email: [info@thewhitehouserestaurant.co.uk](mailto:info@thewhitehouserestaurant.co.uk)

**Jane Stuart-Smith**

We hope to see you at Ardtornish soon.

**From all the team at Ardtornish**

### News Flashes

Recent news items on the website which you may have missed ...

Farm recruitment ●●● John Buxton 1927 – 2014 ●●● Jacky Shaw Stewart 1929 – 2013 ●●● Wedding glamour at Ardtornish ●●● Morvern community energy first ●●● Dennis Overton receives New Year honour ●●● Rare bird puts in brief appearance ●●● Top business plaudit for Ardtornish Estate Company chairman ●●● Twelfth Night. On twelfth night. ●●● Ardtornish – haunt of film stars, supermodels...

We regularly post news from Ardtornish on the [website](#) and our [Facebook page](#) - so please remember to drop by or follow the links



Narcissus Jenny



Narcissus Tete-a-Tete



The White House reopens on 4 April!



Lochaline prawns on the menu...



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below. There are also some good new images on the property pages of the [website](#).



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