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## Punk drummer shines light on crumbling crofts



HAUNTING: John Maher's photographs have inspired the Carnegie Trust to return the buildings to use

HUNDREDS of abandoned island houses are on course to be given a new lease of life – thanks to the former drummer in a punk band.

John Maher's haunting pho-

tographs of the deserted crofts have become the catalyst for a project to make them homes again and lure people back to the Hebrides.

The former Buzzcocks musician's

pictures inspired one of the world's biggest charitable trusts to start drawing up plans to rescue the derelict properties and return them to use.

There are about 1,000 empty properties "frozen in time" in the Western Isles, many of which have been empty since their owners died or moved to

Continued on Page 3



Max: 11c  
Min: 3c

Weather in full: Page 4

### Ambition to make more of historic waterway

The historic Caledonian Canal could be developed to lure more visitors.

Scottish Canals' Steve Dunlop outlined a vision to transform the Inverness end of the Caledonian Canal into a national gateway for Scandinavian tourists, facilities to encourage the 300,000 annual visitors to Fort Augustus to stay longer, and new attractions at the Fort William end.

Full story, Page 2



### SPORT

#### Raven's final countdown

Caley Thistle defender David Raven is hoping his dramatic semi-final winning goal against Celtic will help inspire Inverness to Scottish Cup glory in tomorrow's final against Falkirk at Hampden Park.

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## GOLFERS LOOK AT WHAT'S HAPPENING!

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### Tour couple towed back to safety

Two tourists visiting Shetland had an unexpected end to a three-hour boat trip when they broke down in deep water and had to be towed five miles back to safety.

Tour operator Jim Dickson, from Brae, had taken the pair on a jaunt around Muckle Roe in his motor launch Tak Hunter when they came to a sudden stop just south of the isle of Linga in Swarbacks Minn.

He called the coast-guard who sent the Aith lifeboat to the rescue around noon and towed them back to the Brae marina.

### Illegal driver punished

A Wick motorist caught driving without a licence and insurance for the second time was fined and banned yesterday.

Sheriff Andrew Berry at Wick told Donald Gunn that, given his previous convictions, he should have known better.

Gunn, 27, of 27 Loch Street, Wick, was fined a total of £540 and banned from driving for 162 days.

### Shop brawl man fined

A man was fined £500 yesterday for brawling in the foyer of a Lerwick shop.

Nathan Robertson, 18, from Da Gaets, Culswick, Wester Skeld, set upon another man in the Co-op in Holmsgarth Road on 30 December last year.

Lerwick Sheriff Court heard he repeatedly punched his victim and kicked him on the head to his injury.

### Teen grew cannabis

A Shetland teenager yesterday admitted cultivating cannabis in his Lerwick home.

Police found seeds, plants and equipment at 17-year-old Larri Goodlad's house at 1 Hillgrind.

Goodlad told Lerwick Sheriff Court that he was growing marijuana for himself and his friends. Sentence was deferred.

# Photos spark crofts revival

**Community:** Crumbling buildings could help Hebrides housing problem

Continued from Page 1  
the mainland. Meanwhile, there is a big housing problem in the islands, with about 1,000 people waiting for a home.

Pictures taken by Mr Maher and Fife vet Ian Paterson, showing the crofts slowly rotting away, persuaded members of the Carnegie Trust to act after they were exhibited at Stornoway.

A housing agency now plans to renovate the first properties this autumn in a scheme which could save the islands' dwindling rural communities.

Brian Whittington, project manager at the agency Tighean Innse Gall, said the photographs were "the catalyst" for the ground-breaking idea. He said the

**"A housing agency plans to renovate the first properties this autumn"**

exhibition of photographs – first shown in 2013 – had a "profound effect".

He added: "People thought, 'how can we not do something with these?'."

"There are 1,000 of these empty properties in the Western Isles and there around 1,000 people waiting for housing in the Western Isles."

So far the agency has been given £50,000 to get the project started, and hopes to raise hundreds of thousands.

Last night, the scheme was welcomed by community leaders in the Western Isles.

The local authority no longer has any housing stock after its council houses were transferred to the Hebridean Housing Partnership in 2006.

Councillor Alasdair Macleod, the chairman of the sustainable develop-



ROTTING AWAY: John Maher's photographs show the empty properties 'frozen in time'

ment committee, said: "I would welcome any initiative that will increase the housing stock."

He added that the reasons for the houses being left vacant were complex and that each croft had "a different story" behind it.

Crofter Murray MacLeod also welcomed the scheme.

He said that economic decline had led many people to abandon crofting over the years.

He added: "Any new source of funding that will help either the crofting tradition or crofters themselves is very welcome."

"Certainly there is a big issue at the moment with sources of assistance through the government and Common Agricultural Policy."

Mr Maher, who is now based in Harris, said: "The pictures had quite an impact with the people in the Carnegie Trust."

"If it results in some people moving into a renovated home it can't be looked at in any other way than positive."

Jim Metcalfe, head of practice and development at Carnegie UK, said the trust has been involved in the project for about six months and was now on the steering group.

"It could be a very profound contribution to the sustainability of the islands," he said.

"It's a really intriguing and very unusual project." The Carnegie Trust is a charitable foundation founded by Scots industrialist Andrew Carnegie in 1913.

He was born at Dunfermline in Fife in 1835 and emigrated with his family to America when he was aged just 13.

He went on to lead the enormous expansion of the American steel industry and gave away the equivalent of £3 billion to charity.

His life has often been referred to as the original "rags to riches" story.



The crofts could solve the housing problem

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# Letters to the editor

Write to: **Letters to the editor**, The Press and Journal, Lang Stracht, Aberdeen, AB15 6DF. E-mail: [pj.editor@ajl.co.uk](mailto:pj.editor@ajl.co.uk)  
Letters are subject to editing and must include your full address and daytime telephone number for verification. Thank you

## Clapping in the Commons

SIR, – Our elected representatives at Westminster have embarrassed Scotland by clapping in the House of Commons. This comes after being told that this was not acceptable when they first arrived, only to be castigated by the Speaker for doing so again on Wednesday.

As the SNP controls its party with a rod of iron, one can only assume that this behaviour is condoned by the leadership.

Would it not be better for the sake of Scotland's reputation and to encourage tourism, inward investment, and so on, that, rather than thumb their noses for cheap point-scoring at the institution that they promised to work constructively within, they actually made us proud of them?

*Stuart Robertson,  
Barclay Park, Aboyne.*

## Representing voters' concerns

SIR, – In her letter (the Press and Journal, May 26) headed "Delivering 'robust opposition'", Regina Erich was being unfair in placing the burden of ensuring political plurality at Holyrood on the shoulders of Scottish Labour and the Scottish Lib Dems.

There is much to be challenged on the SNP record at Holyrood, but how can other parties demonstrate their ability to represent voters' concerns if the electorate is not prepared to listen?

During the general election campaign, disaffected Yes voters were encouraged to wreak vengeance on the pro-Union parties, particularly the Labour Party. As a result, decent, hard-working and conscientious MPs were crushed under the SNP juggernaut.

If the process is repeated at the 2016 Holyrood election, SNP hegemony and the lack of political plurality will leave Scotland in a very unhealthy situation.

The SNP claims that its 56 MPs will produce "a stronger voice for Scotland", but Scotland does not speak with one voice. Scotland has myriad voices, but they are increasingly being drowned out by the raucous voice of the SNP.

O tempora! O mores!

*A. McCulloch,  
South Street, Mintlaw.*

## 'Double majority' in referendums

SIR, – During the recent debate on the wording of the question for the EU referendum, Alex Salmond was quoted as saying: "If you want to embrace a positive vision of staying in Europe, you want to be Yes."

On the same issue, Nicola Sturgeon was quoted (the Press and



## New intake to House of Commons

SIR, – Writing as someone who has spent many years as part of the press corps at Westminster, may I offer a cautionary word to the current block of new SNP MPs? Do not be so naive as to think you will change the place; it will change you.

Parliament is an overwhelming force. During my time there, I saw firebrands elected, only to become pussycats within a year or two.

Membership of this exclusive club offers delights and temptations that can be difficult to resist.

Those who find themselves in receipt of an unexpected substantial salary, along with generous allowances and expenses for the first time, are

entering a world for which they are totally unprepared.

To deal with this effectively calls for a level of maturity which is clearly absent in some of the new intake. The SNP chief whip is likely to have his work cut out keeping order in the ranks.

Some may reflect on the proposition that they are where they are, not on their individual merits, but as representatives of an election result brought about by a nationalistic fervour which could evaporate quickly.

*Jack Ward,  
Lawson Crescent, Banchory.*

“Scotland does not speak with one voice. Scotland has myriad voices, but they are increasingly being drowned out by the raucous voice of the SNP

Journal, May 27) as favouring a “double majority”, so that all parts of the UK had to vote “No” before an EU exit could happen.

It would be logical, therefore, that, should Mr Salmond and Ms Sturgeon get their wish for a second referendum on Scottish independence, that the question should be “Should Scotland remain part of the UK”, meaning that Better Together would be supporting a “Yes” vote, and that all parts of Scotland would have to vote “No” before Scotland exited the UK, meaning that the north-east, the Borders and Orkney and Shetland could not be bounced into a split because of votes in Glasgow and Dundee.

*Keith Shortreed,  
Cottonov of Gight, Methlick.*

## Decision on assisted suicide

SIR, – The late Margo Macdonald's Assisted Suicide Bill was defeated in the Scottish Parliament on Wednesday, May 27, 2015.

Such a cruel and bewildering decision after many days of media coverage sympathetic to vol-

untary assisted suicide will prove to be the day the Scottish Parliament became alarmingly and completely out of touch with the majority of the electorate.

The Scottish Parliament knows that many of those who are progressively terminally ill are living in poverty and cannot afford the numerous costs involved in travelling to Swiss or European voluntary assisted-suicide clinics.

The Scottish Parliament has abandoned to despair those who are now suffering long-term progressive terminal illness and those who will in the future become progressively terminally ill.

*Colin Campbell,  
Queensgate, Inverness.*

## Treatment of cancer victims

SIR, – I write in response to your piece (May 23) headed “Call for more detox beds”, in which you reported that recovering alcoholics were being “transferred to NHS Tayside or cared for privately at the expense of the north-east health board”.

I would like to highlight the plight of cancer victims who don't get offered private treatment at the health board's expense.

I and many others have been waiting months to get a TURP (prostate cancer) operation, my fourth one. I was in agony for weeks before I managed to get a cancellation which reduced the wait by a few days.

Surely a question of priorities must come into the equation. Alcoholism is self-inflicted; no one forces it down your throat. With cancer, you have no choice – you get it, end of story. Some are more life-threatening than others, but all need treatment of some kind.

Why don't we get offered private treatment to reduce the waiting list?

While I am on the platform, I would like to sing the praises of the girls in ward 209 at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. Nothing is too much trouble for them. One of them (I'm from Torry and dinna forget it!) seemed to go at 100mph all the time and was always there first if assistance was required. They are a marvellous crew.

*Ron Billing,  
March Street, Portgordon.*

The Press and Journal  
The Voice of the North

## Bringing crofts back to life

The history of Highland crofting is a turbulent one, with many trials and tribulations as the industry clung to the land amid various threats and upheavals.

The sad fact remains that there are still many abandoned crofts littering the Western Isles, in particular – where crofting accounted for more than half of the households.

An unusual sequence of events involving a former punk-rock drummer and one of the world's biggest charities, the Carnegie Trust, has triggered a concerted effort to bring 1,000 crofts back to life in the Western Isles.

Former Buzzcocks drummer John Maher, who resides in Harris, collaborated in producing some hauntingly beautiful pictures of former crofts which were slowly crumbling away.

His exhibition was spotted by the trust, which is pumping money into a project to help bring them back into use.

However, they might not necessarily come back to life as traditional crofts: coincidentally, there are around 1,000 people on the housing waiting list in the islands.

Even although traditionalists might prefer to see crofts becoming small-scale food producers again, this project would see them tackling another basic need which also threatens the islands' way of life, if ignored.

Lack of housing is a major reason for the flow of people leaving for the mainland and sucking the life out of local communities.

This is a novel way of dealing with a modern problem, while preserving these important cultural sites.

## Strong emotions over camp plan

Feelings were running high as councillors gave the go-ahead for a travellers' camp, a hydrogen fuelling depot and more housing at Cove, on the edge of Aberdeen.

It resulted in opponents accusing Aberdeen City Council of treating Cove as a dumping ground for unpopular proposals that other parts of the city did not want.

It is inevitable that the travellers' site will create strong emotions: this is one of the biggest urban-planning challenges and one with which councillors in the north-east are struggling to get to grips.

There is a desperate need for such sites, but councillors must be fair and consistent in their decisions.

## And finally

Gary Thain's lawyer said the oil worker's actions aboard a flight to Aberdeen were “catastrophic” for his work and home life.

What is more to the point is that Thain's drunken stupidity could have been catastrophic for his fellow-travellers.

Courts must continue to come down hard on those who cause alarm and fear in the air.

“Lack of housing is a major reason for the flow of people leaving for the mainland”