

# NESS INFORMATION SERVICE

## NESSLETTER 139

April 2001

### ABBEY

The 260 year old Abbey at Fort Augustus has a new owner. Late last year, 2000, it was announced that it had been acquired by Terry Nutkins. This is a name which many of you may recognise, he has appeared on television for the past 25 years; best known for the programmes *Animal Magic* and *The Really Wild Show*. He owns, and runs, as a family business, The Lovat Arms in Fort Augustus. He has an unusual background. More or less running away to work at London Zoo at the age of 11. While there he was introduced to Gavin Maxwell, before 'Ring of Bright Water' was written, who was looking for a young, dedicated person to help in caring for otters. Terry, who had been living at the zoo at weekends, went to spend a holiday at Sandaig. He liked it so much he wanted to stay. Gavin became his legal guardian, schooling him at home, and Terry was there for 18 years. In the early '70s he was noticed by Johnny Morris, who, seeing someone who knew animals and with a similar approach to his own, took him into *Animal Magic*, on BBC TV. They got on very well forming a strong friendship and Terry became co-presenter of the programme. So strong was the bond that last year when Johnny Morris died, Terry was his sole heir, inheriting the veteran TV presenter's home. Johnny's portrait hangs in a room at the Lovat Arms. Terry lived on Skye while working on *Animal Magic*, and frequently did the journey south to the studios with his sea lion, Gemini, sitting on the front seat of the car. He still has a home at Glenelg, just over the water from Skye.

He has been worried for some years over the decline in the tourist industry. Fearing that if there is no employment for the younger generation, they will leave the area, leading to a modern version of the Clearances. His aim, vision, is to put new life into Fort Augustus and the North, which he considers as one of the natural wonders of the world. He believes that the Abbey is one of the best buildings in the Highlands, its situation on Loch Ness unsurpassed, and it was shameful to have it lying empty. His decision to put an offer in for the Abbey was triggered after a presumed buyer stayed at his hotel earlier in 2000; then left, leaving the £6500 bill unpaid. Forming the Abbey Millennium project, he is managing director and major shareholder, the majority of the cash in the scheme being his own. He plans to have the ground floor open early this year, as a visitor centre. Hoping to restore it to former glory, hunting down and re-purchasing original furniture and paintings. Plans for the rest of the building include, restaurant, conference facilities and TV studios. I did hear that there could be an exhibition concerned with the 'Monster'. He hopes the grounds can be developed to include a maze, a tropical world for exotic plants, butterflies and humming birds, with the old cricket pavilion turned into a tea room and cricket played again. All this will take large amounts of capital. He hopes to be able to interest investors, even getting the Disney people interested. If that makes you wonder about Mickey Mouse and theme parks, Terry is adamant that he will be in charge, and investors will have to accept his plans and visions for the Abbey's future. The initial stages should provide employment for up to forty with, it is thought, up to 200 being employed within five years. Ever since the early Nessletters, in fact before the NIS was formed, I was an advocate for the Abbey, and its facilities, as a worthwhile place to spend time. When the Abbey closed I was very concerned that such a haven of peace was to be denied to us, as well as other visitors and locals. With Terry's background, he thinks of himself as a local, and his attitude, he says, "I may be the owner of it but at the end of the day I don't class myself as the owner, it belongs to Fort Augustus and the Highlands. It is something we can be really proud of." He also intends to consult Historic Scotland about his plans. It would seem that the Abbey is set to become, once again, a valuable asset to the community, the local area, as well as the Highlands in general. Perhaps more so than other high profile developments in the Loch Ness area.

### SAD NEWS

The news that Fr Gregory Bruscy died on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2001 is a sad footnote to the above good news about the Abbey. Born in London on Dec 30<sup>th</sup> 1912; he was educated at the Fort Augustus

Abbey School, where he showed early talent as a musician, especially the organ. He left the Abbey School in 1931, entering the novitiate at Fort Augustus. Professing as a monk in 1932, Brother Gregory was sent to Edinburgh to help in one of the schools, but also to study music at the University. After graduation in 1938 he spent a year in Budapest, based in the Benedictine monastery, studying theology and the organ. He returned to Fort Augustus, where he was ordained priest in August 1941. For the duration of the war he taught music at the Abbey School, moving on, as Master of Music, to the newly opened Carlekemp Priory School in North Berwick, at the end of the war. He was there for a number of years before returning to the Fort Augustus Abbey, where he taught generations of pupils at the Abbey School, which closed in '93. Fr Gregory became known to the rest of the world after he appeared on a television programme in '71. He gave his account of the sighting he, and a friend, had of one of the Loch Ness animals in October of that year (NIS135). He had a long association with the Loch Ness Monster but was always somewhat of a reluctant witness. Fr Francis Davidson, a former Prior of the Abbey recalled that, the business bored him and after some time he found it an imposition, the way the media always wanted to interview him for programmes. Fr Gregory was quite content to see Nessie remain an enigma. He once said, "We ought to leave the Monster alone. In this technological age we've placed a label on everything. I am a champion of the unknown. Mystery intrigues people, and so it should remain". In '99, upon the closure of the Abbey, Fr Gregory took up residence at Ampleforth Abbey near York. He died there, peacefully, on March 30<sup>th</sup> 2001, in the company of his fellow monks.

I had the pleasure of meeting him on a number of occasions, he was a delightful person. I was never there to hear him play the organ at the Abbey, which I understand was a moving experience. He was the type of person that makes the world a better place, just by living. A sad loss, God Bless.

#### CODE

The announcement in January '01, by Jan Sundberg, that he intended to return to Loch Ness with the GUST team, with plans to net one of the animals, has caused some concern. Not only for the well-being of the mysterious animals, but also for the environment. Hearing of this Scottish Natural Heritage, the agency which protects the loch, brought forward outline plans for a code of practice, which they hope future expeditions will abide by. Inverness West area officer, Jonathan Stacey, said, "This Swedish explorer has proposed putting a trap into the loch to capture the creature, but we feel this has to be assessed as to how suitable the trap is and that it will not damage other life-forms in the loch". Going on to say, that if such a creature as Nessie exists they must be sure that it will not be harmed. Scottish Natural Heritage already has informal links with other interested groups which use the area, fishery boards, conservation groups and tourist business. They hope that future research groups will follow certain guidelines that are laid down. I know that in the '80s teams working with Adrian Shine and the Project, caught, and identified species of shrimp and flatworms, that originate in North America. These were well established in areas of the loch. It seems certain that they, or eggs and larvae, were brought to the loch by one of the number of American teams who visited the loch in the 60s and 70s, despite care being taken. Thirty years, on and we are much more conscious of the environment, and how easily the balance can be upset. I think this move by Scottish Natural Heritage is a step in the right direction. One problem will be the implementation, I believe a committee has been set up, Adrian Shine being among the members. The enforcement of such a code of conduct could be another major problem. I do not know if Scottish Natural Heritage has 'teeth' and is able to take strong action against anyone failing to follow the code. I hope it has.

ANDREAS As a post script to the Code of Practice.

After an enquiry in a previous Nessletter on existing laws to protect the unidentified creatures in Loch Ness. Andreas Trottmann found, and sent, this report from the Inverness Courier, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1976.

#### **The Loch Ness Monster-Official Protection**

In view of recent speculation about the presence of unspecified large creatures in Loch Ness, Mr Russell Johnson, Liberal MP for Inverness, felt it was desirable to have from the Government an indication of the powers that at present existed for the protection of such creatures, were they to be discovered and what action the Government might be prepared to take in such circumstances.

In particular, he states, it had long been understood that there was a specific police protection role dating from the 1930s and recently the editorial of the 'Inverness Courier' again referred to this on 23<sup>rd</sup> January. "From what the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, Mr Harry Ewing, says in a letter dated 3<sup>rd</sup> March, it would appear that these powers are not so specific as people imagined. "Mr Johnson adds, "However, the subsequent legislation does create some protection although it is pretty clear to me that if monster do live in Loch Ness, the discovery and apprehension of one of them would cause such a world wide excitement that the prospect of a £100 fine is hardly likely to be any deterrent." Mr Ewing's letter began by "explaining the basis of the reference in the 'Inverness Courier' of 23<sup>rd</sup> January to an order' made in the 1930s by the then Secretary of State placing the Monster under police protection." Reference has often been made to that but there was in fact no statutory power available to the Secretary of State at that time to make a formal protection order, he continued. What happened was, that a letter had been issued by the Scottish Office to the Chief Constable of Inverness County Constabulary, suggesting that the police might warn resident and visitors for the purpose of preventing an attack on the animal if it was sighted.

#### SUNDBERG

Reports were that Jan and the Gust team were to return to the loch in March '01. Bringing with them a 20ft by 15ft trap, made of fishing net with one and a half inch mesh. Unperturbed by the fact that eye witnesses report the creatures to be bigger than that, Jan said, 'we are aiming for a baby' (!!) They have been corresponding with SNH and have seemingly allayed their fears, so permission has been given for the expedition. Among the conditions, they will immediately release any salmon caught, and the trap will be placed in shallow water so no air-breathing animals could be trapped underwater. COMET (Co-operative Monster Eel Trap) secretly manufactured by a Norwegian firm, has an inner net that closes over the entrance to trap the (*baby!!*) monster. To try to avoid the accidental capture of otters or seals, the trap will not be baited with live fish. After trapping, the animal will be fully recorded, a skin sample taken, for extraction of DNA, then released unharmed back into the loch. At this time it is difficult to know what to say, cats in hell, and their chances of survival, come to mind. However work is being proposed that could provide us with some of the answer we are all waiting for, the truth, so we should hope that the expedition is more substance than hot air, and wish them good fortune.

#### ANOTHER TRAP

In February there were reports in the newspapers that someone else was planning a trip to the loch to trap Nessie. From Luton, Neil Rackley, an unemployed factory worker, said he was going to visit the loch in August, setting up camp at Fort Augustus. He would have a net weighing one tonne, (and valued at, he said, £100,000) which would enclose an area of 18,000sq ft. This he intends to place in the loch some 50 metres offshore. It will be baited with 1,000 brown trout, costing about £2 a fish, to lure Nessie into the enclosure, where it will be filmed and photographed before release. He claims not to be doing this for fame, or for the money, but just for the satisfaction of finding the monster. He believes that Nessie is a marine creature that has remained elusive simply because it lives in a large stretch of water in a remote area, and even if it surfaces three times a day, people are rarely going to see it.

Once again one wonders what kind of background research has been done. Anyone who has visited the loch, or even read a book or two, should realise that Loch Ness is not in a remote area. It is possibly the most looked at, watched over, piece of water in the world. 'Marine creature', Loch Ness is fresh water, perhaps what he said was not fully, or accurately, reported. I wonder how Neil, unemployed as we are told, is going to raise the large amounts of cash needed for this project. While I am not aware of anyone actually placing a net baited with fish into the loch, with the intention of trapping an animal. There have been fish filled nets in the loch for a number of years, the fish farm between Dores and Inverfarigaig. Much to my disappointment, these have not had the bottoms torn out as Nessie made an easy meal of the contents! There are other questions to be raised, the new code of practice, the various Wildlife Acts? I feel that perhaps the little bit of media coverage Neil Rackley got, could be the last we hear of him.

## NIS AT THE LOCHSIDE

Helen Gray and her boyfriend, from London, visited the loch in November '98. They stayed in Gavin and Mary Finlay's self-catering flat in Dores, from a bay-window there is a view all the way down the loch. 100 yards from the Dores Inn, they recommend it to anyone who wishes for a restful break, and a splendid vantage-point for watching. They were kitted out with suitable cameras and binoculars, but Helen says they spent a lot of time getting faintly excited by wave patterns. Since then they have been whale watching in Alaska with the same equipment. It occurred to them that when something the size of a bus jumps out of the water beside you, such equipment is not terribly useful! They managed to get lots of pictures that were mainly black (when the whales were too close) and a lot of water splashes (when they were not!). She thinks that in order to produce any decent pictures, zoom lens cameras are in order, also that she must find a way to control her excitement.

They were to return to the loch, and the Finlay's, for a spell, the week before Christmas '99. Life in central London is hectic and they had recently moved house, so were looking forward to the break. She was also anticipating taking a look at the new exhibition. She said she was not overly impressed with the old ones, had not expected to be, having been warned that they were somewhat short and to the point, a point that was not theirs!

John and Davina Cooper spent a few days at the loch early March '99. Staying a couple of days at Dores and Fort Augustus. They had looked for Steve Feltham but found his van empty, and partly dismantled. While dining at the Dores in they heard that Steve was most likely 'holed up' with a nearby female friend. As the weather was, to say the least, wet, cool and uninviting, they agreed that he was in the best place. A short stay without any excitement. On a return trip to Scotland in June '99, their 17 year old Volvo had "an attack of the vapours" and basically stopped, so the journey had to be aborted.

Almost as far back is a note I received from John Holmes. John is a Sculptor and Illustrator from St Austell, in Cornwall. He and his wife, Sue, were at the loch for a week at the beginning of July '99, they rented a charming little cottage, called Hazlegrove, on the fringes of the Inverfarigaig Forest. There were nice views overlooking the loch, however they were too far away to spot anything on the water. He did film a Roe Deer eating some Dog Rose, from the kitchen early one morning. Another morning he had a fleeting glimpse of an Osprey. Apart from seeing some large concentric ripples and a very brief sighting of a small low hump, nothing else was seen. He collected the odd bones from the shores, to take home and identify, just in case. I have collected a few old bones from time to time, they usually turn out to be from sheep, once I did get one from a deer.

St Austell is 'Morgawr' territory, and John also included a bit of news from there. It was on 1<sup>st</sup> August '99, at around 6.40pm. He was watching Sue have a swim in a small cove, between Pendower beach and Portscatho, the weather was very hot, something caught his eye: his first thoughts were that it was a Basking Shark or perhaps a Killer Whale. Raising his video camera he shot two very short sequences before the animal sank from view. Viewing the results he is now fairly sure it was some type of diving bird, Great Northern Diver he suggests, the movement on tape was rather bird-like. The area is very close to where Sheila Bird had the classic Morgawr sighting, just off Portscatho. He sent me two photos taken from the video, they are very much 'classic head and necks', but undoubtedly a bird of some type. They would have undoubtedly qualified for the 'Hill's' prize cheque, had they been taken at Loch Ness.

Graham Hazelwood, Tonbridge Kent, dropped a line about his visit. He was at the loch side for four days at the beginning of October '99, staying in Drumnadrochit, Invermoriston and Fort Augustus. Day one was windy and the loch too rough for watching. The wind dropped overnight and he enjoyed three days of overcast, calm, weather, with no rain. He watched at different times of the day, from different locations, particularly the grass pier at Inverfarigaig, and the shore west of Invermoriston. He has a pair of 12x25 binoculars, and a camera with a lightweight 500mm mirror telephoto lens. His only sightings were of boat wakes and ducks.

He called on Steve Feltham twice, finding him in good spirits and optimistic about spending more time observing the loch from the micro-light. With some trepidation he also visited the revamped Loch Ness 2000 exhibition. He agrees that the presentation has been improved, but was disappointed with the manner in which the eyewitness reports were treated. The exhibition is a series of 'rooms', in

which visuals are shown with narration (by Adrian Shine?) and backing music. When the subject of eyewitnesses was covered, certain hoax photographs were shown, and explained away, the music becoming jolly and frivolous. Very subtly giving the impression that these reports are not to be taken too seriously. Graham asks, if Adrian Shine is so dismissive of the idea of anything unusual in the loch, why has the exhibition logo such a striking resemblance to the 'Surgeon's Photo'?

He rounded off saying, during one of his vigils it occurred to him that a number of sightings report creatures with characteristics of, rough skin (often dark brown), pale stripe down the front, ugly head, oily wake and stubby horns. He has dozens of such creatures in his garden, slugs and snails. He wondered if there is a theory about giant freshwater slugs or snails in the loch, as he thinks they could be the explanation for some of the reports. He would be interested in other members views on this. It would seem that Graham has not come across Ted Holiday's book 'The Great Orm', and others of his work.

Stanley Jade wrote, from Lancashire, he had been to the loch for a weekend at early in May '00. He had been taken to the loch, or the Loch Ness area, as a four year old by his parents, too young to know much about it. Then as a fourteen year old who wanted to see the loch and get to know it, but who had been taken around by parents who were intent on spending time at various places away from it. The weekend had been his first holiday for a number of years, and first solo anywhere. So this had been his first chance to familiarise himself with the area. He said, "I had not realised how utterly beautiful the place was, there is a sense of heart and soul which I found quite moving, it felt like home and I did not want to leave." He stayed at the Motor Inn at the Drumnadrochit Hotel, next to the Loch Ness 2000 Exhibition. He had been surprised to find there were two exhibitions in Drumnadrochit, but did not visit either as he felt he is pretty familiar with most projects and major sightings. He was enjoying a cold beer when he saw Adrian Shine with a French (presumably TV) crew with a broadcast quality camcorder, and large inflatable Nessie. He did wonder what the thrust of the particular interview was. As he went around the shore he kept an eye open for Steve Feltham hoping to have a chat, without luck. He did not do any 'hard-core' watching, as he put it, but had been taken by the forest, and it's people, the deer and red squirrel. He said he knows where things are now, names providing a picture, and is certain he will return before too long.

Andreas Trottmann, Switzerland, sent word of a trip to his beloved loch, November 11<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> '00, based at the Ian Ross B&B, Inchnacardoch. Ian was the one who used to look after Andreas' boat. The weather and loch conditions were rather good, especially early mornings, and the autumn colours smashing! He concentrated his watching to the Fort Augustus area, with some from Foyers and Dores. Doug and Margaret Macfarlane, along with son Alan, visited him one day, Doug getting back on his own for a couple of days. They met Steve Feltham once or twice, spoke to Ian Cameron about his famous sighting, unfortunately a planned meeting with Dick Raynor had to be put off. Andreas visited the new Loch Ness 2000 at Drumnadrochit and was surprised by the intriguing multi-media effects. Adrian Shine, narrating the audio commentary, strongly refers to his opinion on the creature's existence; nevertheless Andreas thinks a well balanced 'Yin and Yang' situation is positive for a healthy and objective research climate.

He also has a great interest in the reports of 'Big Cats' in the area and heard of two pug marks being found on a sand-bank in the River Oich, near Fort Augustus. Before he had time to examine the site himself, the river level had risen and the footprints washed out. Which was a disappointment. He has since heard from Ian Ross of a Big Cat sighting on the Whitebridge to Fort Augustus road, on 8<sup>th</sup> December '00. He is following this up.

David Hastings, an eighteen year old from Walsall, sent a long letter of his first trip to the loch. A NIS member for four years David is very keen and has done much reading and research into the subject. He and his Dad did the journey by train. Spending almost as much time on the trip as they did at the loch. That may be an exaggeration, but they had a long delay before reaching Edinburgh, then, because of bad weather hold ups, had to wait four hours for the next Inverness train. They got into Inverness at 10.30pm 29th May, they stopped at a B&B, and although late, went to have a look at the River Ness. David says he knows it is silly but that built his excitement, and he was shaking like a leaf. I think many of us will appreciate how he felt. Next morning they bought their bus tickets for the final

step to Drumnadrochit. Finding they had an hour to wait David took the chance to visit the library, and do a bit more research. He found one or two books he had not seen before, but also, he was able to view, on micro-fiche I think, past articles from newspapers. Choosing Inverness Courier, he was able to see the first sighting report, and other articles from 1933. He noted that as the year progressed articles on 'the strange animal in the loch' became articles on 'the monster'.

Fifteen minutes into the bus trip came the moment David had waited over seven years for, his first view of the loch. He says that his feelings and emotions at that time will never be forgotten. The bus took them to Castle Urquhart, where once again he was overwhelmed by just being there. Seeing it so often pictured in books, associated with so many things, the Macnab photograph, the Shiels photograph, the Rines expeditions of '72 & '75. They stayed at the Castle for three hours, much of it on the walkway that goes round the front. In that time he noted, as he had been told to expect, how deceiving the waters can be. Many wakes that seemed to form on their own, ducks on the loch as well. He realised how easily they could be mistaken as long necks from a distance. He is interested in the Shiels photographs at the moment, and spent time trying to work out the place they could have been taken from. Walking back into Drumnadrochit, they visited the Loch Ness Centre finding it quite informative. Then on to Loch Ness 2000. David spotted Adrian Shine in the loch with the floating monster, busily pulling out weed. He introduced himself, and had a nice chat finding him 'such a lovely man'. They then went round the exhibition, it was very good and very well presented. They arranged to stay in a B&B by the green, in Drumnadrochit, which they would recommend to anyone, David forgets the name but it is the one with the cricketing gnomes in the garden. They then made their way to the marina in Urquhart Bay and David spent over an hour watching. Next day they decided to go to Fort Augustus, taking the bus to Invermoriston, and walking the rest of the way. David says that he now knows that was a poor choice. A walk they thought may take an hour, took them about three. They found it a long haul, but were able to stop off at a number of quiet secluded places along the loch shore. It was sunny and calm with no boats in sight, beautiful 'monster' weather. Unfortunately no sightings to report, but wonderful, stunning views. Reaching Fort Augustus they had a meal and drinks, to keep going; then went a bit further finding the beach, and view, at Borlum Bay. David says that was a wonderful experience, books and photographs do not show the whole loch, and do not do it justice. You have to see at first hand to understand what you are dealing with. While on the shore they found some bones, which David took back to have his school science department have a look at.

Last day at the loch, Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> June. Went for a trip on George Edwards' boat. David was able to talk to George and was quite impressed by his accounts and ideas. It is just a shame that David did not get on a trip with Dick Raynor. They then went back to the castle, where David spent a further four hours watching. Friday morning they left early for Inverness, and having an hour to kill before the train, visited the library again. A memorable first trip to the loch for David. He hopes to be driving by next year, and to make the journey by car, which will make getting around at the loch much easier.

Jared Christie put a note in his Christmas card. He had managed a short visit over New Year, '99. No details, apart from saying he has found the skin of a deer on the shingle at Foyers. He is hoping to get back again in April '01. He had planned for April '00, but could not make it.

Other proposed visits, Val Smith and his son, Jonathan, hoping to be at the loch 30<sup>th</sup> June to 14<sup>th</sup> July. Andreas Trottmann, accompanied by a good Swiss colleague, as his wife Angela is not able to get, owing to business reasons; will be in the Fort Augustus area from June 30<sup>th</sup> till July 6<sup>th</sup>. Contact address while there, Mr Mrs Ross, Ashwood Steading, Inchnacardoch, Fort Augustus, phone 01320/366308.

That is it for now, must get this duplicated and out to you. Thank you, as usual, for your tolerance and for being part of the NIS. Please remember your news and views are always welcome and needed, my address remains:- R.R.Hepple, 7 Huntshieldsford, St John's Chapel, Weardale, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel: 01388 537359, subscriptions UK £2 75, N. America \$10.00, other areas by negotiation.

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