

THE BATON GOES TO ORKNEY

*The journey of Eco-Congregation Scotland baton started on 25 April at Falkirk since when it has been taken to the top of Ben Lomond and toured widely across Scotland. It carries the message: **Time for climate justice, churches in Scotland demand a deal in Paris in December 2015.***



The baton visited Orkney over the first weekend of September 2015. Its first stop, after a rather bumpy passage by ferry from Aberdeen, was to the studios of BBC Radio Orkney for an appearance on the early morning news programme, then to meet pupils in the primary school on the Isle of Shapinsay. The baton was accompanied to Shapinsay by Rev. Julia Meason, minister of the parishes of Kirkwall East and Shapinsay.

The baton was on display at family day of the Orkney Science Festival Family Day in the King Street Halls, the building that houses Kirkwall East Church. Several hundred people passed through the halls and many had the opportunity to play the Foodprint game and see and hold the baton. The Foodprint game challenges players to think about where their food comes from and how big a carbon footprint it gathers on its journey from farmer to plate.



Neil Gordon of Kirkwall East Church leads participants in the Foodprint Game at Orkney Science Festival

Sunday morning saw the baton on another bouncy boat from Kirkwall to Westray and the morning service led by Rev. Ian MacDonald. The baton was passed around the congregation, who sent a postcard to Aileen McLeod, Scottish Government Environment Minister, telling her of the baton's



Rev. Iain MacDonald carrying the baton between Westray and Papay

journey to the north. The service was followed by a brief trip on a 'peedie'¹ boat to the neighbouring island of Papay. Papay has a small but active congregation and like its bigger neighbour Westray an ancient history of Christian and pre Christian settlements. Excavations at Noltland on Westray have recently revealed the remains of neolithic farmhouses, with evidence of cattle farming from 3000 BC, a way of life that still sustains many of the population to this day. Christian remains include St Boniface Church from the 9th century on Papay.

¹ Peedie: Orcadian word for small.

Equally impressive on the islands are the commitment of eco-congregations who have led the way in energy management and awareness of climate change. Shapinsay Church has installed an efficient low energy air heat pump to warm the church and on Westray and Papay congregations have been early adopters of wind energy and heat pumps. Members of the Westray congregation have been closely involved in the development of a community energy company that installed a 900kw wind generator on the island; and the congregation has installed wind turbines and heat pumps at the church and manse. Across the island there are now over 60 wind turbines.



Rev. Julia Meason and Jan Buchanan with the baton at Shapinsay School

The islands and the surrounding seas are famous for bird life and farming. The soil is good in the lowland parts of the islands and beef cattle are everywhere. There are occasional conflicts between different interests on the islands with more geese now resident than farmers would like but on the whole the islands present an impressive picture of an ancient form of agriculture, cattle rearing, co-existing comfortably alongside twenty first century wind power technology. And the churches and members of the congregations have been at the centre of this transition to a lower carbon future.



Pupils from Westray Primary School with the baton (by permission of the Headteacher)

Westray has a care centre, Kalisgarth, with seven residents and the baton made a visit there for a joint evening service with Westray Baptist church. On Monday the baton joined the pupils of Westray Primary school, already famous for its environmental work having won the Stevenson prize for the environmental project 'Pierowall Reflections'. Children prepared a leaflet for visitors to the island suggesting a guided walk around the island village of Pierowall with spiritual reflections at different stops along the way. The school and congregation have developed close links with Chitengu School in Malawi and the Church

magazine carried an article on the recent flooding in Malawi and its impact on the communities there. As in many other churches it is stories and visits from countries affected by climate change that are most effective in helping eco-congregations learn about climate change.

The ultimate destination of the baton is Paris for the climate talks to be held there in December. There it will join pilgrims from around the world, all part of the pilgrimage of justice and peace inspired by the World Council of Churches. The message the baton carries is being amplified by every adult and child who holds it and reads the same message and by the time it reaches Paris it will be charged with the prayers, hopes and aspirations of thousands across Scotland.

With thanks to the members of the eco congregations of Kirkwall East, Shapinsay, Westray and Papay who made the journey of the baton to Orkney possible.

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