



Brightwater by Jon Pope

Production Information and Support Pack

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Introduction

The purpose of this information and support pack is to provide background material to accompany Mull Theatre's production of Jon Pope's play *Brightwater*.

It is primarily intended for senior school students, studying Higher Drama, Geography, Modern Studies or English. It will be useful to anyone studying drama at any level.

The pack breaks down in to three areas:

Notes on the artistic process behind *Brightwater*:

- Jon Pope on how he came to write the play
- Biographies of Jon Pope, Alasdair McCrone and Mull Theatre
- A short essay on the processes of making theatre, by Alasdair McCrone, Artistic Director of Mull Theatre

Contextual Information:

- A biography of Gavin Maxwell
- A timeline of Gavin Maxwell's life
- Short biographies of two of the characters figuring in the play, Wilfred Thesiger & Kathleen Raine
- The Otters - who were they and when did they come in to his life?
- The SOE - What did they do?
- Basking Sharks - Some facts
- A look at isolation and dropping or opting out

Points for Discussion:

- Issues arising from the text.

This pack can be used in the class room, for private study, or for personal interest.



Brightwater

Jon Pope

The genesis of BRIGHTWATER came from a body of work that I have been developing over the last 10 years. The idea of ‘verbatim theatre’ is now very fashionable but the idea of using actual or ‘real’ events as the material for drama is not new. I became interested in dramatising real lives in the late 1990’s. So I secured the rights and staged a play in 2001 based on the biography of Marianne Faithfull. I then used the text of the trial of Oscar Wilde to develop a multi media stage work in 2002.

This was complemented by a realisation that, for the most part, contemporary drama is essentially urban in its setting and subject matter. There are, of course, exceptions; David Harrower’s KNIVES IN HENS, Sue Glover’s BONDAGERS and THE BEAUTY QUEEN OF LEENANE by Martin McDonagh are great examples. However, if one thinks about the theatrical documentation of recent issues and events, rural life seems overlooked. I have yet to watch a major play about the catastrophe of the Foot and Mouth epidemic of 2001. The collapse of the Scottish fishing industry and the decline of its communities seem to be passing us by. Just this summer we hear that the tragic island of St Kilda is now littered with the corpses of starved puffin chicks.

I, like many, had read the book and seen the film of THE RING OF BRIGHT WATER as a child. I was enchanted. I read all the other books. However, it was only with the publication of Douglas Botting’s brilliant biography of Gavin Maxwell that we were able to really begin to understand the complexities and eccentricities of this great man. His life’s journey was one extraordinary leap in the dark after another. Perhaps, like John Muir, he was one of the first true environmentalists.

He seemed ideal subject matter for a play. I hope you enjoy it.



BRIGHTWATER, From Page to Stage

by Alasdair McCrone

When Jon Pope first approached me with the idea of a new work based on the life of Gavin Maxwell I was intrigued, but if I'm honest I'd confess I was also unsure whether it was a good thing for Mull Theatre. I like to get involved with projects I can really care about, and I wasn't sure if I cared enough about Maxwell the man, or about his writings. Thankfully, Jon was very persuasive and I embraced the idea.

Like most people of my age (mid-40s, more or less) I was well enough aware of Gavin Maxwell, or I thought I was. After all, there was that film about him back in the 60's, "Born Free" wasn't it? No, that was the other one...

Confusingly, there were two very well known "Humans with Animals" films shot in the late-60s, both starring the same two actors, Bill Travers and Virginia McKenna, both with strong appeal to children and both with memorable theme songs. But only one of those songs was sung by Val Doonican ...

"Ring of Bright Water" was a legend among the under-10s, if for nothing else for the traumatic scene in which the star of the show (as we thought) was deliberately splattered by a roadman with a big shovel. That otter's death scene was burnt into our collective memories. The otter in question was Mij - no, not Tarka, that's the other one, the one in the book by Henry Williamson - also, confusingly, a film made around the late 60s.

I think I read the book back then as well. I know that my mother had all 3 of Maxwell's "otter books" in the house and loved them. What, as 9 year old, I didn't quite work out was that the film, apart from the title and the prominent life and death of an otter, has virtually nothing in common with the book, or books. I dare say if I'd been a little older and wiser I'd have worked this out and become more intrigued by the actual story as written by Maxwell. The film focused on an opting-out insurance broker called Graham Merrill who moves to the West Highlands with his pet otter and falls in love with the local lady GP. This story is about as far away from the truth of Maxwell's life as one could imagine and considerably less intriguing and extraordinary.

Of course I know all that now, since I've seen the film, read the books, read the biographies, looked behind the scenes and worked on the playscript.

Our Maxwell was a complex and complicated man. He was born into the aristocracy and embraced the opportunities that were afforded him with both hands. His was not a long life. He was only 54 when he died, but already he had crammed in a few careers and a great many



adventures. It's intriguing now that we remember him as an otter conservationist because that did not look likely for many years. In fact he wasn't really a conservationist in any modern or orthodox sense of the word. If he had been, then it's doubtful he'd be remembered as he is; doubtful too that his books would be in print as they still are.

Maxwell was much more of an individual, a pioneer who somehow touched on the zeitgeist of the 50s and 60s. When he "opted out" to the west coast he was in the vanguard of what almost became a movement. I've spoken to many people who regarded Maxwell as an inspiration, both through his writing (which can be very beautiful) and his adventurous spirit. The highlands and islands today are well populated with people whose life choices and opportunities brought them to embrace such an "alternative" lifestyle. There may be a few of them in the audience tonight. Maybe they're you! Not many of these people will have led quite such a colourful life as Maxwell, and for their sakes, that's probably a good thing.

If you talk with people who knew him, or read the opinions of those who were around him, it's impossible not to conclude that he was a 'difficult' man, at times very troubled, prone to severe mood swings, a heavy drinker and very dedicated smoker, someone who attracted people to him and repelled them from him in equal measure, he fought bitterly with close friends and confidants. He was, however, an 'A-list' celebrity, a regular feature on the house-guest lists of high-society and royalty, definitely someone you'd want to be at your party. Look at the photos of him in his books and the biographies and you see a very stylish and sophisticated man-of-the-hills. He owned up to being a part-time opter-outer, never quite able to eschew the travelling and the social whirl, or for that matter the classic Bentley.

Opinion about him in the West of Scotland is wide ranging. For many, as I've said, he was an inspiration. To many others, he gave great offence. His shark-fishing enterprises on Soay remain controversial and one can imagine the reaction he may have provoked among local people when he arrived with his, for that time, very unorthodox ways. His personal life was complex as well. Perhaps had he been born 50 years later, many of these complications would have been avoided, such as society changed. However, that is by no means certain as the true story is far from straightforward. Certainly it can now be acknowledged that although Maxwell was briefly married and had a long and painful relationship with the poet Kathleen Raine, he was to all intents and purposes homosexual. In 2007 almost every parish in the Highlands is holding same-sex civic partnership ceremonies and celebrating people's right to be with whomsoever they chose. Half a century ago, this would have been almost unforeseeable anywhere in Britain, when being gay was still illegal. I'm not suggesting for a moment that this change in the law or in public opinion would have made one jot of difference to Maxwell's outlook on life, but it would be disingenuous to ignore such a central part of someone's being altogether. Having said that, we pretty much do so in this play as its prime focus lies elsewhere.



For anyone coming along to see a cosy story about one man and his otter, think again. Jon Pope started out to write what he calls a “portrait” of Gavin Maxwell. I think what we now have is actually more of an exploration of the man, by the man himself. And that is much more interesting and challenging. It's a tricky job to write a play on the true story of any real person, such are the complexities of all of our lives - what do you put in, what do you leave out? It's far more of a task when your central character has written eleven books of what are, essentially, autobiography, and has himself been the subject of at least two major biographical works. Sum all that up in less than two hours, please! Oh, and make it quite entertaining as well, if you don't mind. Some task.

Well, that's the task that Jon and I agreed upon and have been working towards with this production. Jon was and is keen to bring Maxwell's life and work to the attention of a new generation who may not know anything about him, his aspirations or the way of life he embraced. Of course it's impossible to tell the whole story or to even approach that, but what we can do is to give a flavour of the man and of what drove him, and what stopped him in his tracks.

Jon chose a particular method of telling the story which offered an opportunity for Maxwell's life to be explored and investigated as if by a reporter, or a biographer. We find Maxwell near, or at, the end of his life, alone on Eilean Ban, with only his whisky and his headaches for company, when an unexpected visitor appears before him. Is this some reporter here to write another scurrilous article about his fall from grace? Curiously this man seems to know more than most reporters or biographers, and even more curiously he seems to be remembering it as he goes along. And so we have the dramatic twist that this biographer, the man trying to understand the complex series of events which have made up Maxwell's life, is in fact a younger version of the man himself, who has just popped into the head of the dying man to confront him with a lot of occasionally uncomfortable truths.

Of course what makes a piece of theatre such as this so special is that it is the result of a lot of different people looking at the same thing from their very own points of view and trying to agree on an approach which they hope will tell the story in the best and clearest way. As I've said, it started with Jon and then I got involved. We talked a lot about it and occasionally agreed, which was a good beginning. Jon is a vastly experienced theatre practitioner and has an innate understanding of the practicalities of mounting a production and of the steps which have to be taken to get an idea onto the stage. In other words, he wasn't too precious about his creation. This, and Jon's open and agreeable personality, made the process of script development and rehearsal a joy. Subsequently a lot of other people have made their contribution, and continue to do so. All of them have immersed themselves in the material, the script, the background reading, etc., have thought about it and talked about it long and hard. Lee Hendrick's set and costume



designs and Martin Low's music and sound designs are borne out of an understanding of what we're all trying to achieve, two vital elements in the melting pot of this production. Mick Andrew's lighting is designed also to compliment and to drive the production. As director, I work with them all and with the rest of the artistic and stage management team, attempting to forge a coherent approach and a challenging, watchable and entertaining production.

Oh, and then there's the actors. Clearly you could have the best script, set, music and lighting in the world, you could even have the best director in the world (maybe you do???) but without actors who are both talented and in tune with the idea and the material, you have nothing. We most definitely have something. Casting two actors called Richard to play two characters called Gavin was almost a classically Shakespearean act of comic opportunity. Not, however, an act of folly. Both fine, energetic and inquisitive actors, they have embraced the challenge of this script and have risen to it. Neither of them were very familiar with Gavin Maxwell's work, nor do they bear any physical resemblance to the man, but that is not in the least important. What's essential is that they are actors with tremendous creative and imaginative abilities, who can conjure up a man's life, creating a unique piece of theatre in your very own village hall.

I started in this process being unsure whether I was sufficiently interested in Maxwell to justify this project. Having lived with it for some time now, how could I not be. In an increasingly homogenised and overdeveloped world where people get most of their experiences behind glass - a TV or computer screen or through a car window, Maxwell was someone who would have a go at almost anything. The man was fascinating and diverse; you might say an enigma. He was capable of greatness and exquisite thought and writing, he had a sense of adventure that would put most of us to shame and he influenced, positively, a great many people. They may not all have agreed with him or even liked him, but they would have found it hard to ignore the man who was Gavin Maxwell.

The Wee Islands Tour

If you're seeing this production on Skye, Shetland, Mull, Islay or the Uists, don't be offended. If you're seeing it somewhere on our neighbouring island (I'm writing this in Tobermory) of Britain, don't be offended. We've styled this Mull Theatre project as The Wee Islands Tour; this is primarily because we're taking it to a lot of islands and many of them are quite wee. While this may seem a bit trite and obvious, consider the difficulty and the cost of taking a fully professional theatre production around the country even when no islands are involved.

Mull Theatre tours to more cities, town and villages than any other theatre company in Scotland and it is committed to bringing exactly the same show to each and every venue it plays, whether



it be the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow, the Royal Lyceum in Edinburgh or the village hall, Eilean Beag. Sometimes this is quite hard, when the show has a large cast or demands a complex set, and we've often defaulted to playing more regular and established venues because they have the infrastructure, not to mention the population and the wide doors, to cope with the show.

This tour is attempting to set the record straight. The set is fairly small and so are the cast - not the individual actors, they're about standard size, but there are only two of them. This means we can take the show to a far greater range of venues than any previous tour. Of course we're still touring an elevated stage as well as a full lighting and sound rig, and a stage management and technical crew of four to do all the real hard work, so the undertaking is still considerable and requires two vans. Nevertheless, by the time the tour ends on 10th November, BRIGHTWATER will have been seen on nineteen islands. This, as far as we can gather, is a record for a continuous theatre tour. Many of these islands see shows fairly regularly (let us not forget, especially in the midst of Highland 2007) that the Highlands and Islands is a hotbed of cultural activity), some fairly seldom and some not at all. For our company, this will be a challenge, an adventure, perhaps not as risky as some of Gavin Maxwell's enterprises, but one which we hope will bring great rewards to all involved, as participants, as promoters and as audiences.

Enjoy the show.



Biographies

Jon Pope - Writer

Jon Pope was for twenty years associated with the Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow. He made his debut playing a blind soldier in HEARTBREAK HOUSE in 1985. He directed over 20 plays including FRANKENSTEIN (1986), the British premiere of Craig Lucas's THE DYING GAUL (1998), THE BOOKS OF BLOOD (1999) by Clive Barker and his own adaptation of Henry James' THE ASPERN PAPERS that marked the first return to the stage in over ten years for Moira Shearer. He collaborated with Giles Havergal on the International and West End hit adaptation of Graham Greene's TRAVELS WITH MY AUNT (1989).

From 1990 to 1993 he was Artistic Director of the Duke's Playhouse, Lancaster.

He was shortlisted for a Creative Scotland Award in 2004 and took part in the first season of A PIE, A PINT AND PLAY Season at Oran Mor in Glasgow in 2005.

He recently trained as a teacher and has been leading a course in Creating Drama Scripts for Argyll College, in association with Mull Theatre. He is currently working on a script about the renowned daemonologist, HP Lovecraft.

MULL THEATRE

Mull Theatre is one of Scotland's foremost touring theatre companies, producing accessible and more challenging theatre, new work, revivals, children's theatre, contemporary and classic Scottish and international theatre. It makes a significant contribution to the cultural life of its own island community and throughout Argyll and Bute as well as to the overall provision of theatre activity within Scotland. Its productions tour extensively throughout Scotland, particularly within the Highlands & Islands and particularly in Argyll & Bute.

Established in 1966, Mull Theatre aims to increase access to and participation in live theatre, both within its island community and beyond, and to create an environment which fosters creativity in the performing arts. It has been core funded by the Scottish Arts Council since 2001 and in April 2007 entered a 2-year flexible funding agreement.

The company commissions a new play each year and supports new writing through developmental workshops. It responds to increasing demand for its work from venues and promoters. Its work is seen in all the major theatres of Scotland. It aims to support and collaborate with artists and other professional organisations.



Mull Theatre has an Education and Participation programme with a range of classes, courses, workshops, support materials for all the company's productions, work with schools and community groups and a further education drama course in association with Argyll College.

The famous Mull Little Theatre closed at the end of 2006 after 41 years of continuous summer repertory activity. The company has started building a new home on the island which will open in early 2008. Through this new theatre production centre at Druimfin just outside Tobermory, Mull Theatre aims to be a hub of creative opportunity.

Druimfin will be an artistic oasis where work will be produced, new shows tried out, great projects conceived and developed. We will work with and support artists across the range of theatre activity, offer the facilities to other companies giving them the space and time to develop, rehearse and produce new work in an outstanding location with facilities and practical support on hand. We will encourage creative partnerships with other theatre companies and artists with whom it may be possible to develop collaborative projects, combine strengths and tour more widely.

We will provide creative opportunities and facilities for writers, directors, designers, musicians & composers, filmmakers, choreographers, actors, etc, and to provide creative apprenticeships for emerging and/or graduate actors, technicians and stage managers, as well as directors, designers, lighting, sound and costume designers, and others, to work alongside experienced theatre practitioners on Mull in a professional development project. The company supports education and community theatre, new writing, creative apprenticeships and a diverse range of opportunities for individuals and groups to realise their potential.

In October 2006, "KATIE MORAG", a new play commissioned and produced by Mull Theatre, was nominated as Best Show for Children and Young People at the TMA National Theatre Awards in London. KATIE MORAG returns this year when the production will run at the Byre Theatre in St Andrews throughout December. In 2008 the show will tour in Scotland.

Mull Theatre's tour plans also include the newly commissioned SWINDLE & DEATH by Peter Arnott, and a revival of Mull Theatre's acclaimed production of MACBETH.

Mull Theatre, Druimfin, Tobermory, Isle of Mull, Argyll, PA75 6QB

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www.mulltheatre.com



Gavin Maxwell

Some Facts



Gavin Maxwell, the main character in Mull Theatre's *Brightwater*, led a diverse life, tackling all manner of jobs in his life time.

- Gavin Maxwell was born on July the 14th, 1914, the grandson of the Duke of Northumberland. He never really knew his father, Aymer, as he had been killed during the 1st world war, when Maxwell was nearly 3 months old.
- He was raised at the family home in Elrig, Dumfriesshire.
- His childhood fostered in him a love of wildlife. Whilst a child he had various pets including dogs and jackdaws.
- As a young man he excelled at country based pursuits, such as hunting and shooting.
- Maxwell was schooled at Stowe and Oxford, where he studied Estate Management, which was not his first choice.
- Throughout his youth Maxwell suffers from various serious health complaints.
- During the 2nd world war Maxwell joins the Scots Guards and then due to his skills in field craft acquired during his youth, he joins the Special Operations Executive [SOE].
- Maxwell never served in active service abroad, because of his health, and a broken ankle which he acquired after a practice, indoor parachute jump.



- At the end of the 2nd world war Maxwell establishes Isle of Soay Shark Fisheries, hunting basking sharks for the oil in their liver. The venture fails because of several factors including lack of capital, lack of sharks, the physical difficulties of landing large sharks from small boats and difficulties with refrigeration capacity.
- After the collapse of the sharking business Maxwell tried to make his way as a society portrait painter in London.
- Whilst travelling to Sicily to investigate claims over a relative's estate Maxwell becomes aware of the story of Salvatore Guiliano, a Sicilian politician who stood against corruption, and was assassinated by the mafia. Maxwell then writes about this in his first book *God Protect Me From My Friends*. To get enough money together to return home from Sicily, Maxwell has to sell the land rover he was travelling in.
- Given the lease of the house at Sandaig after a friend, with whom he had been staying, commented that there was an abandoned property on his estate that Maxwell was welcome to.
- In 1956 Maxwell travels to Iraq with the explorer Wilfred Thesiger, with the intention of writing a book on the life of the Ma'dan Marsh Arabs. On this trip he survives a close encounter with a wild boar and is introduced to the joys of otter ownership that were to mark the rest of his life.
- Maxwell details his life with the otters in three books, *Ring of Bright Water* (for which he is best remembered), *The Rocks Remain* and *Raven Seek Thy Brother*.



- The literary success that Maxwell enjoyed after the publication of *Ring of Bright Water* brought an end to the idealistic isolation that he sought, as flocks of tourists deciphered the location of the mythical *Camusfearna* and descended upon Sandaig in their droves.
- After the destruction of Sandaig by fire in 1966 Maxwell moves to Eilean Ban, where he had purchased two lighthouse keeper's cottages, and knocked them into one. Here he hoped to establish a zoo, but dies before it reached completion.
- On the 7th of September 1969 Maxwell dies in Inverness.



- Asked in his last days what he thought his greatest achievement was, Maxwell responded that 'having a new species of otter, *lutrogale perspicillata maxwelli*, named after me.' Wilfred Thesiger maintained that he thought that the otter should have been named after him, as it was he who introduced Maxwell to Mijbil, the first zoologically classified Maxwell's Otter.
- Eilean Ban now forms one of the feet of the Skye bridge.



Gavin Maxwell - A time line

- 1914 1st World War begins.
Gavin Maxwell born - July 15th.
Aymer Maxwell, Gavin's father, killed in Battle at
Antwerp - 4th of October.
- 1918 1st World War ends.
- 1939 2nd World War begins.
2nd Sept - joins the Scots Guards Regiment as a 2nd Lieutenant .
- 1941 Joins SOE - after training first posting in London, aiding Czech SOE agents.
- 1942 January -Travels to Arisaig to work as trainer for SOE agents.
August - Made Captain & Group Instructor.
- 1943 First visit to Soay.
- 1944 SOE operations wind down.
November - Returns to the Scots Guards, but is declared unfit for military
service on health grounds.
- 1945 February - invalided out of service, given the honorary rank of Major.
2nd World War ends.
Establishes Isle of Soay Shark Fisheries.
- 1948 Resigns from the failing Isle of Soay Shark Fisheries, which then closes down.
Begins work as a portrait painter.
October - First visit to Sandaig.
- 1949 Moves to London.
August - first meets Kathleen Raine.
Moves to Sandaig.
- 1952 *Harpoon At A Venture* published.
- 1953 Travels to Sicily.





- 1956 Tours Iraqi Marshland with Wilfred Thesiger.
 Acquires Chahala, who dies soon afterwards.
 Acquires Mijbil.
 God Protect Me From My Friends published.
- 1957 *A Reed Shaken By The Wind* published.
 Mij killed.
- 1959 *The Ten Pains Of Death* published.
 Acquires Edal.
- 1960 *Ring Of Brightwater* published.
 Acquires Teko.
- 1962 February - Marries Lavinia Renton.
 The Otter's Tale published.
 Divorced from Lavinia Renton.
- 1963 *The Rocks Remain* published.
 Buys Eilean Ban cottages.
- 1965 *The House Of Elrig* published.
- 1966 *Lords of the Atlas* published
- 1967 *Seals Of The World* published.
- 1968 On the 21st January Sandaig is destroyed by fire.
 Moves to Eilean Ban.
- 1969 Maxwell invites John Lister Kaye to join him in a joint venture, writing a book
 on animals and to establish a zoo on Eilean Ban.
 7th September - Maxwell Dies, in Inverness.





Kathleen Raine

Some facts

The poet Kathleen Raine and Gavin Maxwell had a tempestuous, unfulfilled relationship over a period of several years.

Raine was a regular feature at Camusfearna / Sandaig in the early years of Maxwell's time there. In her poem *The Marriage of Psyche* she refers to the physical situation of Sandaig as being a "ring of bright water". Maxwell later employed this quote for his own use.

Mijbil, Maxwell's second otter died whilst in the care of Raine.

- Born in Ilford, Essex in 1908
- Moved to Bavington, Northumberland during the 1st world war.
- As a young woman she had a series of traumatic romantic experiences which alienated her from her parents.
- Raine knew since childhood that she wanted to be a poet.
- Received a scholarship to study Natural Sciences and Psychology at Girton College, Cambridge.
- Was very much inspired by the poetry of William Blake and W B Yeats, seeing poetry and religion as the same thing.
- Raine's thinking was very much influenced by the work of C K Jung.
- Although raised a Christian, Raine felt more at home with Eastern religions and the philosophy of Plato, Plotinus and Thomas Tyler.
- Raine was deeply scornful of the literary establishment and society.
- As critic and scholar she lead a course at Harvard University, and spoke on several topics at the Yeats School in Sligo, Ireland.
- In 1980 Raine founded *Temenos*, a review periodical that grew in to the *Temenos Accademy of Intergral Studies*, which was to be a "new school of wisdom" in 1990. The word 'temenos' means the sacred area outside of a temple. This work was to dominate the last part of her life.





- Raine married twice, after leaving Cambridge, first to Hugh Sykes Davies, then to Charles Madge, with whom she had 2 children, James and Anna.

- After her disastrous relationship with Maxwell, whom she first met in 1949 Raine gave up on personal emotions. In her autobiography she states that she placed a curse on Maxwell, at the Rowan Tree beside the cottage at Sandaig, which to her symbolised the timeless nature of their connection. The curse was, simply “*Let Gavin suffer in this place, as I am suffering now*”. Maxwell details this in his last book on his West Coast experiences, *Raven Seek Thy Brother*.

- Raine died in 2003 at the age of 95.



Wilfred Thesiger

A Short Biography

Wilfred Thesiger was a traveller and explorer with whom Maxwell travelled in Iraq in 1956. It was Thesiger who introduced Maxwell to his first Otter, Chahala and arranged for him to take possession of his second, Mijbil.

- Born in Addis Ababa, Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) 1910, where his father was the British Minister.

- Schooled at St Aubyn's, Rottingdean, Sussex; Eton and Magdalene College, Oxford.

- During his student holidays Thesiger once worked on a Hull based trawler off the coast of Iceland.

On another occasion he travelled from England to Istanbul on a tramp steamer, returning by 3rd class train. Most remarkable was his exploration of the Danakil country in Abyssinia whilst still an undergraduate.

- Boxed at Oxford, and gained a *blue* for his pugilist skills.

- After leaving Oxford Thesiger took up a position in the Sudan Political Service as District Commissioner, a job with whose politics he didn't necessarily agree.

- Also worked in the Darfour region as a shooter of troublesome lions.

- Whilst travelling in the Tibesti region of the Sahara he fell in love with the desert.

- During the 2nd world war Thesiger distinguished himself as a junior officer in the Sudan Defence Force and received the DSO for fighting under Italian fire for the liberation of Abyssinia. Thesiger was eventually promoted to the rank of Major, and worked with the SAS in north Africa.

- After the war Thesiger worked with the United Nations food and agricultural organisations to look in to the breeding grounds and habits of the Locust.

- In his book *Arabian Sands* Thesiger recounts his exploration of the empty quarter of Arabia, being the first 'European' to fully do so.





- Throughout his life Thesiger found a common bond with tribes living in extreme circumstances.
 - He was accepted by fearsome Danakil nomads, when exploring Abyssinia's Awash river for some 23 years.
 - He lived with the canoe-borne marsh men or *Ma'dan* of Iraq for some time. He gained the acceptance of the marsh men by the unusual skill of circumcision. He wrote of his experiences in Iraq in *The Marsh Arabs* in 1964 and in *Desert, Marsh and Mountain* in 1974.



- A life long cynic about the continuing advance and bland influence of Western Civilisation over the world, Thesiger was reluctantly brought back to the UK towards the end of his life, as a result of a series of personal tragedies and failing eyesight.
- In 1995 Thesiger was knighted.
- Sir Wilfred Thesiger died in 2003 at the age of 93.



Otters in Maxwell's Life

1. Chahala Whilst travelling in Iraq in 1956, Maxwell acquired Chahala, who dies shortly after she comes into his hands.
2. Mijbil Acquired later in the same Iraqi trip. Maxwell writes extensively about Mijbil in Ring of Bright Water.
3. Edal Given to Maxwell by a Doctor and family, who were moving back to Nigeria, from where Edal originated.
4. Teko Given to Maxwell by the Davin family, who were returning to Sierra Leone after a period in the UK.
5. Mossy I Caught by a local game keeper's terriers, Mossy had an injured jaw. Died after receiving surgery to save her jaw, in Inverness.
6. Monday Monday's mother had been shot on the island of Skye, and she came to Maxwell as a pup.
7. Mossy II Given to Maxwell by a gamekeeper from the south of Scotland. Bred with Monday and eventually lived in the wild, with their brood.
8. Tibby Formerly owned by a gentleman from the island of Eigg, who required crutches to get around. Tibby would frequently escape from Maxwell and be found trailing strangers with crutches in a nearby village.
9. Mala Found in Caithness in a poorly way. Malla was to be a part of the proposed Eilean Ban zoo.



Note: It is feared that Mijbil's species, *lutrogale perspicillata maxwelli*, is now extinct, the marsh area in which they originated, in Iraq, having been largely drained for irrigation by successive Iraqi regimes and subsequently for political reasons by Saddam Hussein.

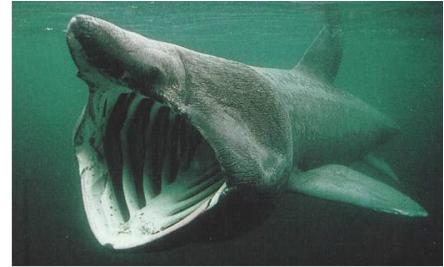


Basking Sharks

Some Facts

After the 2nd world war Maxwell moved to the recently evacuated island of Soay to establish a shark fishery.

- The basking shark is the 2nd largest fish in the world, after the whale shark.
- It gets its name from how it 'basks' near the surface of the water on warm days.
- The basking shark has been known by various names:
 - *Sailfish* - Because of its dorsal fin, which resembles a sail
 - *Sunfish* - As it is seen on sunny days
 - *Muldoan* - From Muldoanach, after the island near Barra, where pods were often seen.
 - *Cearbhan* - The Gaelic name
- The basking shark is migratory, moving between the deep waters of the Atlantic in the winter and more shallow, coastal waters in the summer.
- Like the Blue Whale the Basking Shark lives on Plankton, and poses little to no threat to man, and will actively navigate away from humans in the water. Still, tales of basking sharks following ships carrying a coffin persist in the sound of Mull...
- The Basking Shark is largely hunted for *squalene*, the oil in its liver. Squalene oil has many uses:
 - It is a precursor to steroids, and can be used in their development.
 - Squalene health capsules - a dubious trend to promote health and well being.
 - As a component of moisturising cream
 - As a component of haemorrhoid treatments
 - The most traditional use in the west coast of Scotland was for lamp oil. One shark would provide a whole winter's worth of lamp oil.
- Other parts of the shark are also sought by hunters:
 - The fin is used in shark's fin soup.
 - The cartilage from its bones is used in Chinese medicine, and in Japan it serves as an aphrodisiac.





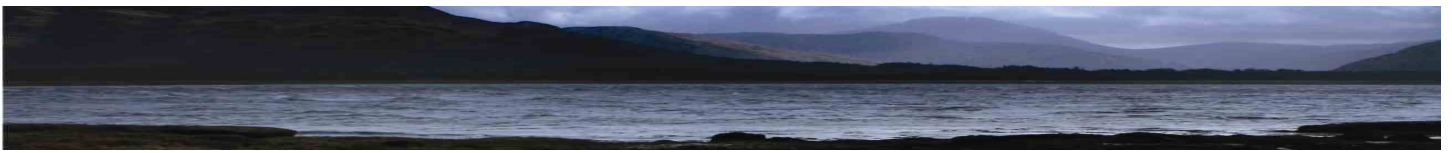
The Special Operations Executive

The Special Operations executive, or SOE, was an independent secret service for which Gavin Maxwell worked during the 2nd World War.

- Following the Allied retreat from Dunkirk and the surrender of France, Winston Churchill commissions the creation of the SOE in July 1940.
- The aim of the SOE was to “set Europe ablaze” by the use of subversive warfare techniques.
- The SOE co-ordinated and trained resistance fighters from occupied Europe and the far East.
- When it was fully operational the SOE is said to have had employed or controlled 13,000 people.
- The SOE employed a broad range of people from all walks of life, including Noel Coward and Sir Laurence Olivier.
- The SOE wound up its operations at the end of the 2nd world war.

Maxwell and the SOE

- Gavin Maxwell was a tutor for the SOE on the West coast of Scotland at Arisaig, Knoydart and Morar.
- An experienced huntsman Maxwell put his experience to good use, teaching:
 - Sniping
 - Camouflage
 - Weapons maintenance - Allied and other
 - How to shoot targets on sight
 - How to storm a room
 - Field craft - night vision, night hearing, how to use broken ground, double skylines, a low sun in front of the enemy and a full moon behind you and the reading of footprints.
- It was whilst working with the SOE that Maxwell first hunted Basking Sharks.



Dropping Out

Maxwell was well known for his desire to step away from conventional society, and to live in isolation with wild animals in a remote area.

By writing *Ring Of Bright Water* he brought the gaze of the public eye to his idyll. Despite disguising Sandaig, where he had chosen to live, as Camusfearna in his books, many members of the public still managed to locate Maxwell and his own personal Avalon. By the time he came to write the third of his books on life at Camusfearna, *Raven Seek Thy Brother* he gave openly acknowledged that Camusfearna was really Sandaig.



Throughout his life Maxwell was attracted to individuals who had turned their backs on the conventions of normal society.

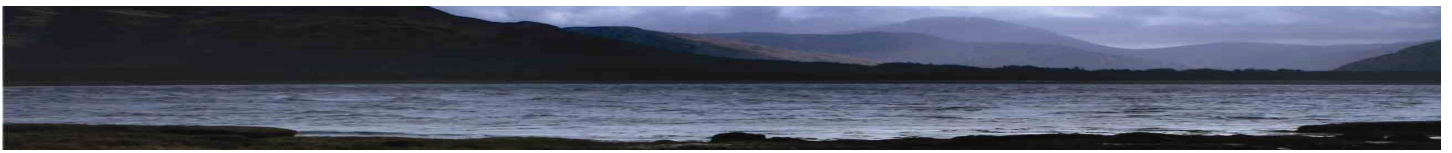
Wilfred Thesiger, with whom Maxwell travelled in Iraq was openly scornful of western society. Thesiger saw no hope for the future of human kind if the West carried on in the way which it has. He despised the growth of Western civilisation and its drive to homogenise the colour and diversity of the earth's peoples. The change in the nature of the Arab world after the exploitation of natural oil resources particularly disgusted him. The so called 'last of the great explorers' Thesiger lived for the majority of his life in the Middle East and Africa.

Kathleen Raine, with whom Maxwell had a very tempestuous relationship, also took a stance aside from the established norms of society and was deeply cynical of the literary world in which her work was viewed.

In *Ring Of Brightwater* Maxwell writes of two cave dwelling *pedlars* who lived not far from Sandaig, Joe Wilson and his partner Jeannie. Their end was an unhappy one, Jeannie having died in unfortunate circumstance and Joe being forced from his home by the locals as a result of her death.

So why 'opt out', or step away from society?

Maxwell's reasons are complex and provide a contradictory picture of a very complicated man.



In the introduction to *Ring Of Brightwater* he states that he was seeking:

...[F]reedom, whether it be from the prison of over-dense communities and the close confines of human relationships, from the less complex incarceration of office walls and hours, or simply freedom from the prison of adult life and an escape in to the forgotten world of childhood, of the individual or the race. For I am convinced that man has suffered in his separation from the soil and from the other living creatures of the world; the evolution of his intellect has outrun his needs as an animal, and as yet he must still, for security, look long at some portion of the earth as it was before he tampered with it.¹

Yet it should be borne in mind that Maxwell, being from a rich, noble family kept a powerful sports car for most of his adult life could, and frequently did return to London or go travelling around the world.

There are many other reasons for stepping away from society.

Many people choose to pursue a solitary path in search of religious fulfilment. Many religions promote spiritual enlightenment through isolation and contemplation of things greater than themselves.

Some people take a stance aside from society in protest at its norms and ways, choosing to teach their children at home, rather than in a state or private school system.

Popular culture frequently refers to hermits or societal drop outs as a means of telling a story. Consider Ben Kenobi in the original *Star Wars* movie, or *Salim Sinai*, balanced for years upon a tall pole in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Monty Python parodied the notion of hermitage and silent contemplation in *The Life Of Brian*.

Thomas Pynchon and J D Sallinger are two authors who have chosen to eschew the fame thrust upon them by their success in their chosen line of work. They have essentially dropped out of literary society, and little is known about their personal lives.

Stepping away from the dominant modes of society can lead to the creation of counter cultures and movements, such as Hippies, Goths and such like. The nature of the capitalist system more often than not finds a way to employ the totems of these counter cultures for its own purpose, and in the end the diluted forms of these



¹ Page 5, Maxwell, 2001



movements pay back in to the dominant societal form.

Most people who chose to step away from society, though, chose not to advertise the fact, that being the point.

The success of Maxwell's *Ring Of Bright Water* partly lies in commonly held romantic, rustic notions of the self that don't necessarily work, as if every body 'dropped out', society as a whole couldn't continue to function as it does now.

Which raises some interesting questions.

Maxwell's later books, *The Rocks Remain* and *Raven Seek Thy Brother* both deal with the crumbling realities of life after the wake of *Ring Of Brightwater*.

The fact that Maxwell wrote so successfully and well on dropping out from society and shattered his idyll in doing so suggests the very complex nature of this man.



Points for Discussion

- Maxwell brought a non-native otter in to the country, and had several more from other countries in his care throughout his time at Sandaig. What is your stance on importing different species of non native animals in to a country?
- If a large number of people drop out from society, such as Maxwell claimed to have done, could society continue to function?
- Should Maxwell have named the new otter species after Wilfred Thesiger? After all, it was he who introduced the otter to Maxwell. Or should it have been named after the Ma'dan tribesmen who originally had the otter?
- What do you think Gavin Maxwell's legacy is?
- After having viewed *Brightwater*, what is your stance on Gavin Maxwell, his life and legacy? Is this the opinion that you went in to the show with?
- Should wild animals be kept as pets?
- In the time since *Ring of Brightwater* was written the world has changed greatly. Can you identify some of the differences between Maxwell's world of the late 50's and '60's and our own?
- How do you think Maxwell's ideals would fit in with modern notions of conservation?





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Thank you to:

George Fagan, Leslie Hastie, Trish Hawarth, Sheena Miller, Ester Nailen & Linda Robb.



Funding Partners

