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Song Project meets Fortress Orkney on Flotta

By Leah Seator

Pupils from Flotta School went back in time at the weekend, performing some old Orkney Wartime Songs as part of a Big Orkney Song Project collaborative event, with Fortress Orkney.

Brian Cromarty, a member of folk band The Chair, and the Song Shop leaders, Aimee Leonard, Emily Turton and Sarah Jane Gibbon performed with children at the show on Saturday, March 14.

They performed a selection of long forgotten and newly penned Orkney songs, including My Islands Home, which was written in Orkney at the end of the war.

This was followed by an informal workshop where people learned another historic Orcadian song.

Fortress Orkney, which runs until September this year focuses on the period from 1939 until 1957 — the Second World War and post war period up to the closure of Lyness Naval Base — as experienced by Orkney and Orcadians.

The project looks at the impact that the war and its aftermath had on ordinary day-to-day civilian life in Orkney.

Recorded interviews were illustrated by photographs and documents edited to form a series of mini-exhibitions to coincide with the Songshop event.

Singing was an important part of life during the war and with many stationed on Flotta, the

troops would often have rousing musical recitals. Numerous leading entertainers came to entertain the servicemen and women based on Flotta and Hoy, from Norman Wisdom and George Formby to Dame Vera Lynn, in addition to many stars direct from London's Drury Lane Theatre.

Widely recognised as maintaining morale they provided a wide variety of music, which proved hugely popular with the troops.

Aimee Leonard of the Big Orkney Project visited the school to teach the song.

She said: "The children were full of enthusiasm and looking forward to being a part of the Flotta Songshare event."

"My Islands Home was written to raise funds for the returning soldiers and their families, so is very relevant to their forthcoming Fortress Orkney project."

"They will also be learning a large selection of wartime songs popular in Orkney during the Second World War, with their music teacher, Elaine Geddes."

Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the Big Orkney Song project is organised by Orkney Singers, and holds events all over Orkney to share songs and gather old and new ones for their archive.

Commenting on the concert, Fortress Orkney co-ordinator, Rebecca Marr said: "It's great

that two projects focused on preserving people's memories, their stories and songs can come together."

"This concert sees the start of a summer term project when the pupils will be gathering local wartime memories. Maybe their singing will jog a few recollections."

Flotta head teacher, Fiona Grahame said: "It's very important that the children of today understand the contribution their great grandparents made during World War Two and the part their local community played in that."

"This is particularly true of Flotta, where the remains of buildings from that era can still be seen."

"This project is a fantastic opportunity for pupils to be engaged in active learning which has a real purpose and involving many different skills."

People with their own Flotta and Hoy memories of entertainment during the Second World War are invited to become part of the project or share their living histories.

Contact Jude Callister or Lewis Munro, custodians at Scapa Flow Visitor Centre and Museum on 791300, or contact project co-ordinator Rebecca Marr on 850430.

Fortress Orkney is part of a wider Museums Galleries Scotland initiative involving 13 museums called *Their Past Your Future* Scotland phase 2.

Funded by the Big Lottery, the aim of the project as a whole is to increase young people's knowledge and understanding of the



Big Orkney Song Project leaders worked with Flotta pupils at the weekend, breathing new life into some old Orkney wartime songs. The concert was part of a collaborative project with Fortress Orkney.

Song Project leaders are from the left, Amy Leonard, Emily Turton and Sarah Jane Gibbon. Brian Cromarty from award winning band The Chair, is pictured on the far right, supporting the group.

impact and legacy of the Second World War through the collection of oral histories — recorded interviews with people who have memories of this era.

Their Past Your Future will culminate with the launch of a website in 2010 which will feature some 300 online mini-exhibitions or "vignettes."

For more information about

the project and to view a sample exhibition, visit www.tpyfscotland.org.uk.

The vignettes and related historic objects will be available as a classroom teaching aid via Learning and Teaching Scotland's new Scottish schools' intranet, Glow.

This ensures that these projects become a rich educational

resource from teachers and a global legacy for young people and the wider community involved.

The Fortress Orkney exhibitions appeared on the *Their Past Your Future* Scotland website and will form part of a permanent exhibition at the Scapa Flow Visitor Centre and Museum in Lyness.