

## Norman Cooper

### ***Norman Cooper MA – (1924 – 2006)***

Everyone who knew Norman Cooper was greatly saddened at the news of his sudden passing on Sunday, November 19.

He had been ill for just about 6 months. Right from the start of his illness he accepted the situation and maintained that he had had a good and fulfilled life. This made things easier for his family.

Norman had spent most of his life in Westray, but had been born in Kirkwall.



He was one of 5 of a family who lived in Anchor Close and would have been one of a group of boys known as the “Shoricks” and had a very happy childhood playing in the shore area of Kirkwall in the pre-war years. He was the popular winner of the New Year’s Day Ba’ in 1939.

When he left the school he volunteered to join the RAF giving up his earlier ambition to go to university.

He saw active service as a navigator flying in bombers such as Lancasters and Wellingtons. He married Ella Rendall from Midhouse in Westray in 1944. They were a devoted couple and celebrated their diamond anniversary 2 years ago.

On being de-mobbed Norman was accepted for admittance to Edinburgh university and they moved there until he finished his training. He graduated as a teacher in 1949 and was appointed to Pierowall School, Westray.

Norman and Ella stayed in the Midbea Schoolhouse, close to Ella’s parents until 1957 when he was appointed head teacher of the school and moved to the schoolhouse there. Their 3 children Linsey, Michael & Alan were born at Midbea.

His subject was English which he loved to the extent that it could also be said that it was his hobby. It didn’t stop at the Queen’s English as he encouraged “English as the Orcadian has spoke”.

His classes looked forward to getting their work done on Friday “ Mr Cooper” would then read from *The Orcadian Sketch Book* by Walter Traill Dennison,



Norman Cooper 1924- 2006



Norman & Ella 1944

or *A Peculiar People and Other Orkney Tales* by J T Smith Leask

As a head teacher, his concern for his pupils, of whatever ability, always came first. Many of his staff too, can testify to his consideration and encouragement when help was needed. His teaching day did not always stop at 4pm. Sometimes he gave tuition to people who had left school and needed help in order to acquire a qualification of some sort.

He was well qualified to take navigation classes for sailors and fishermen and these were sometimes hilarious evenings. On one occasion he had a class of 5 or 6 who wanted to fly. One was already a pilot and 2 very proudly went on to take their private pilots licence.

In his long career he taught 3 generations of children. On his retreat, he was presented with a gift from the granddaughter of one of his first pupils.

Over the years, Norman became more of a Westray man than many born in the island. First he was involved in the Drama Club, as a scriptwriter and an actor, and anything else that was needed.

He also wrote verse. Perhaps his most famous offering here was the *Westray Love Song* which epitomised his love for the island. He wrote it to be sung to a tune composed by a Westray soldier, John Rendall (Johnny o' Kenties), as he lay in the trenches in the First World War. The Harcus family (descendants of Johnny) sang it with feeling at the funeral service.

After a time Norman spent his energies in community groups. He was chairman of the Community Council and on the School Council. He was also a teacher's representative on the OIC Education Committee, flying to Kirkwall for meetings.

Perhaps his most enduring love was the Westray Sailing Club. He had been one of the leading lights as chairman, convenor and commodore, since the time it was reconvened in the early 1960's, until recently. Not only was he an active committee member, he was a sailing competitor and raced in one of four Enterprise dinghies which he and some of his friends had built. His was called the *Jenella*.

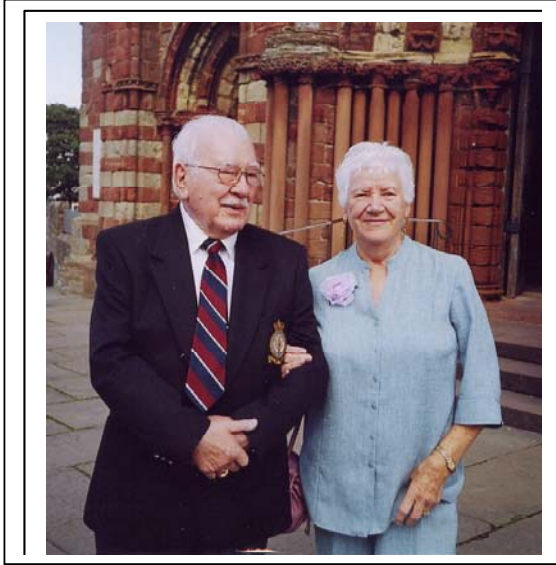
Norman had a gift for choosing names "for anything that stands still for 2 minutes", as the Reverend Iain MacDonald put it at his funeral service. As one walks along the Pierowall road, one will see names that he chose. Howanbreck, Kalisgarth and the aptly named Haff Yok café all will bring back memories of Norman.

He was an outgoing person, full of humour, but could be reserved on occasion, and had a soft caring heart. If he had a difference of opinion with anyone, he continued to have respect for them as did they for him.

One pupil recalls a Lancaster bomber flying over the school during the 1970's. Norman looked out of the window and exclaimed: "I did not know they were still flying." He removed his glasses and the pupil detected tears in his eyes.

He is going to be missed by many especially the close family, Ella, Linsey and Andrew, Michael and Elsie, Alan and Anne, The Grandchildren and the Great





Grandchildren. He adored them all and he would have been proud to hear Grandson Barry play during the service a waltz tune that he had composed for his Granddad on the fiddle. Sympathy is also extended to his sister Peggy, brother Davy, sister in law Isobel and brother in law Billy.

After the lovely service by Reverend Iain MacDonald, in the Westray Parish Kirk and the Committal at Pierowall cemetery, friends and family gathered in the Pierowall Hotel for lunch, to reminisce and to celebrate the long and interesting life of Norman Cooper.

(Text, Nan Scott – Obituary Orcadian  
30<sup>th</sup> Nov 2006)

## Westray Love Song

*To far Northern Islands where auks make their nests,  
Where wild cliffs are frowning and seas never rest,  
Fond memories take me to bright summer skies,  
With peace never ending and day that never dies.*

*Chorus:*

*Away from my island in strange lands afar,  
My heart beats with yearning to see the Northern Star,  
A seat by the fireside in my own but and ben,  
The warm glow of friendship with neighbours that I ken,*

*Grey seals are basking on rocks by the shore,  
The lapwings protesting as I wander o'er,  
The seaweed strewn beaches no thought in my mind,  
But pleasure in living and wars are far behind.*

*God guide my footsteps and safe in thy hand,  
Return me I pray thee, to my own native land,  
Content with my ain folk no more need to roam,  
Just back home in Westray my own my island.*

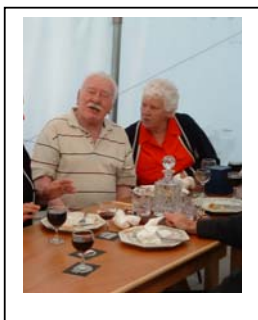
*Words by Norman Cooper.*

## Norman Cooper – Early Memories of Sailing

In the very early 60's a feeling seemed to develop that it was high time that organised competitive sailing was revived in Westray. Skiffs that had sailed pre-war were moulding in the sheds, sad reminders of pleasant days under summer skies.



However the spark was ignited, it soon burst into flame due to the enthusiasm of men like Jack of Skail, Jim Mowat of Cleat and Jeemsie of Saverton. Mrs Henderson, widow of Col. Henderson of Tirlot, encouraged the new Westray Sailing Club by providing a sum of money to pay for lapel badges to identify club members.



The early H.Q. of the Club was Hewisons Pier where decisions were made to sail or not to sail. In the early days, too, the old gunter rig was still in evidence, with old canvas sails. This soon changed to Bermudian-rig with terylene sails and hollow masts!

So Points Racing having been established the idea of Regattas became important to the Club, especially the idea of encouraging visiting craft. With this in mind I was appointed to approach the Manager of the North Isles Shipping Company, Mr Donald Bertram to explore possibilities. "Owld" Bertram as he was called, to distinguish him from his son Donald, gave very strong support. Not only did he offer to put on a special trip for the event, but stated that all vessels would be carried free of charge.

So began a long, happy and still continuing relationship with the Kirkwall, Holm & Stromness Clubs.

The large variety of craft that began to appear at the Regattas – Snipes, Rockets, Albacores, Catamarans etc – began to pose a problem to the "office – staff", in the matter of calculating handicaps by the Portsmouth Yardstick! At an early date another happy relationship developed. Three gentlemen from the Mainland became our voluntary officials – Davie Lennie, Ewan MacGillivery and Sandy Firth. This happy relationship still exists.



Norman - presented with a retirement gift

The Westray fleet was increased in number and given more variety when over the winters of 1963 and 64, four Enterprise dinghies were built by Dr. Haywood, of Trenabie House, Billy Brown of Myrtle Cottage and myself. They were built at Trenabie House and named "Jenela" (Norman Cooper); "El Diablo" (Billy Brown) and "Skua" (Neil Haywood). The fourth was sold to John P Drever of Saintear and



named the “Myrlyn”. A year later Jim Burgher at the Ness joined the fleet with the “Diana”.

These boats provided entertainment for spectators in their early days, being subjected to frequent capsizes! One of the skippers says he holds to this day a special trophy – the cup for “cupping”!

The idea of modern centre-board dinghies took root, and within a few years two were built in the Technical Department of Pierowall School. These were Mirror Class boats, ideal as training vessels for youngsters. They were named “Ingi” and “Sula” and were later joined by another one called the “Whiteen”, a gift from the Shapinsay School.

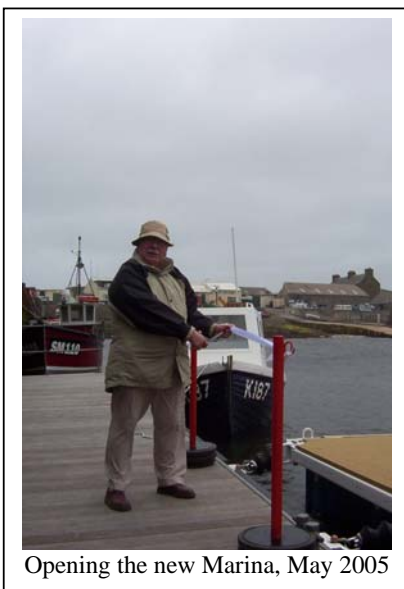
This made a competitive group and were sailed by older school pupils and Sea Cadets under the instruction of Harcus Scott, Deputy Head at the School, whose skills extended far beyond the teaching of History, Geography and French.

From very small beginnings in the early 60’s when the only boats were Skiffs and lug sail dinghies from both Westray & Papay, the Regatta has grown to be a major event in the Orkney sailing calendar. Last year (2005) there were 54 vessels ranging from “Pico” dinghies sailed solo by teenagers to large yachts, some from far afield.



Norman at the blessing of the new skiff - “Aanno”

A very important part of the Westray Regattas could easily be over looked. From its earliest days, the RNLI sent the Lifeboat to the Westray Regattas. The Lifeboat escorted the boats around the course providing reassurance to sailors and spectators alike.



Opening the new Marina, May 2005

In due course, both Kirkwall and Westray Clubs obtained fast rescue craft of their own, and it became custom that the Lifeboat would take people for pleasure cruises around the bay. Unfortunately due to an incident elsewhere, the RNLI was forced to cancel social events such as these, but fortunately the Lifeboat still supports the Regattas by appearing at Gill Pier every Regatta day where folk can go aboard for a look and be amazed at the modern technology piled up beside the steering wheel! The RNLI and all rescue boats deserve deep gratitude from all the seafaring communities, not only for their committed tasks, but also for the caring involvement in local activities.