

BORDERS NEWS ITEMS

HAWICK FLOODING

Hot on the heels of the massive flooding that hit Carlisle in January 2005, now the Scottish Borders town of Hawick has been affected. In October, the River Teviot burst its banks, causing millions of pounds of damage as water poured into the town's streets. A Scottish Parliament Minister who visited the stricken area said she could not believe the devastation that had been caused. Talks are now underway about flood prevention schemes and the river has been dredged to try to get rid of a build up of silt and stones. (Note from the Editor, who lives between Hawick and Carlisle, two of the areas hit by flooding. 'It is getting wetter here in the Borderlands! It may be global warming, but the rain is coming more frequently and the weather is much milder... a sign of things to come perhaps?')

ANNE REDPATH – SCOTTISH BORDERS' ARTIST

Anne Redpath was born in 1895 in Galashiels, the daughter of a tweed weaver. She was educated in Hawick and Edinburgh and she's been making the news because some of her paintings have been up for auction. A Redpath is now most collectable – and pictures like A Blue Tablecloth show some of her favourite subjects, which were cups, jugs and flowers. Anne Redpath became President of the Society of Women Artists and was the first female painter to be made a full member of the Royal Scottish Academy. She married an architect, travelled the world and later returned to live in Edinburgh. Her fame is worldwide and she came from what was then sleepy Gala! Ten years ago, you could get one of her paintings for just a few thousand dollars. But in a sale this summer, her still life, 'Pink Lilies' fetched ten times that sum.

ALIENS – THE DREADED CRAYFISH

We've mentioned before about the Giant Hogweed plant that runs riot in the Scottish Borders and the Japanese Knotweed that's taken up residence in Dumfries and Galloway – and now, beneath those submerged river rocks is another creeping invasion. It is a small but aggressive omnivore called the American Signal Crayfish and it's become so widespread that a leading fisheries organisation is calling for urgent action to control it. The Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland, or Rafts, as it's known, says the crayfish explosion is having a devastating impact on the country's young salmon and trout populations. Present in at least ten Scottish rivers, these alien creatures eat the native juvenile fish and fish eggs and they compete with them for food and habitat. They multiply at an alarming rate – as seen in the poor old River Dee in Galloway. Ten years ago, scientists there found two crayfish in a tiny stream. Now they've taken over sixteen miles of the water system. Ten years ago the Dee saw a fair few salmon coming up to spawn... now the returns are pitiful.

RECORD TURNOUT AT SCOTTISH BORDERS TOURISM FORUM

Tuesday 29 November saw the first Scottish Borders Tourism Forum Meeting which replaces the Scottish Borders Tourist Board AGM with a record number of tourism businesses in attendance.

A Scottish Borders Tourism Action Plan is being created for the Scottish Borders in order to increase tourism by 50% in the next 10 years. Professor John Lennon from the Moffat Centre, Glasgow Caledonian University is leading on the project and gave feedback on his findings thus far. John said, "The Scottish Borders has some of Scotland's most enthusiastic and innovative operators. Combine this kind of enthusiasm with outstanding scenery, classic heritage and world class activities and you have a very strong product".

THE DUMFRIES MIDSTEEPLE

Dumfries is indeed the Queen of the South town – once voted the best place in the UK for quality of life, it boasts a long and proud history and it is rightly proud of its Midsteeple building which has graced the centre for centuries. Now experts say the edifice is unsafe and they are having to start work on repairing it. It has meant a great deal of inconvenience for shoppers and traders... how long it will be before the centre of Dumfries gets back to normal is not yet known...

THIRLESTANE CASTLE ART

Thirlestane Castle is more than five hundred years old and has just moved into the 21st century to embrace some rather modern art. The new Sculpture Garden has taken months to prepare but it now boasts a number of remarkable works from 20 local sculptors. The castle's owner, Gerald, or 'Bunny' Maitland-Carew has the right idea. 'We are not a museum' he says. 'We are a working site with ideas and energy'. Like other borderland strongholds, Thirlestane Castle at Lauder has a colourful past. The seat of the Earls and Dukes of Lauderdale, in the sixteenth century it was rebuilt as a Maitland family home. The Maitlands came over to England from France with William the Conqueror and they proceeded to make their way north, first to Northumberland and then across the border to Scotland. Here they married well and worked cleverly, becoming rich and powerful. The second Earl of Lauderdale was Secretary of State for Scotland – and this wealth allowed them to build what can only be described as a magnificent fairytale castle. At the right time of year the rose garden is exquisite and every year Thirlestane also hosts a large and popular horse trials.

FROM THE CRADLE TO THE GRAVE...

Yes, this autumn, babies in the Borders became the first infants in Scotland to be fitted with new electronic devices to stop them being snatched from hospitals... But also in the Borders, there's been a much concern about a lack of cemetery space. It may be a great place to live but when it comes to being buried, there's no room. Now plans are underway to try to find more burial grounds and even perhaps to build a crematorium...

A WINDFARM, AN ANNIVERSARY AND A FESTIVAL...

There's a massive wind farm proposed for the north of Stranraer in Dumfries and Galloway. It's bad news for those who hate the idea of those giant turbines blighting the view on Scottish hillsides. But as summer goes on, our thoughts turn to happier tales – like the story of Borders couple Bill and Peggy Fleming who are celebrating 70 years of marriage in Galashiels. Their secret is not the invigorating Scottish Borders air - they say it's never having had a serious family problem (lucky them!). 70 is a Platinum anniversary – and anyone who reaches it has done jolly well! And finally, the Borders has staged its annual Banquet festival, with dinners and fine foods being eaten at all corners of the region. Local produce includes the famous organic Borders chicken and the spicy and buttery cake cum bread, the Selkirk Bannock... there's also a delicious local dish called Rumbledethumps which is made of leftover potatoes and vegetables... Tourist numbers to the Borders region were up by forty percent this year – the region is good at marketing itself and it uses some unusual ways of doing it, including once dressing local lambs in local cashmere. What a sight that was for the photographers!