

## A DOUBLE LAUNCH IN DALRY

Around a hundred people gathered in Dalry Town Hall on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> October for a double launch: the inauguration of the Dalry Bird Town Initiative and the launch of Donald Watson's last book *In Search of the Harrier*

Chris Rollie gave a marvellous evocation of Donald's work as bird observer, writer and artist. Louise Watson, one of Donald's daughters, gave us a wonderful insight into her father and quoted some key passages from the book. Some original paintings reproduced in the book, along with more of Donald's paintings, were lent for the day and adorned the walls of the Town Hall. Copies were bought and duly signed by both Louise and Pam Richardson, another of Donald's daughters. It was a happy event as many Dalry folk met Louise and Pam for the first time in many years.

It is a singular occasion when books by father and son are published, albeit posthumously. The second edition of Jeff Watson's seminal work *The Golden Eagle* also being available for the first time in Scotland. Des Thompson, who led production of the second edition, introduced it. We were delighted that Vanessa Halhead, Jeff's widow, was with us.



Left to right: Vanessa Halhead, Roger Crofts, Pam Richardson, Cathy Agnew, Louise Watson and Des Thompson

The Dalry Bird Town Initiative was introduced by Roger Crofts. At its heart is the Watson Bird Centre to provide opportunities for new writers, artists and all interested in any aspect of birds, arts and landscape, which was the core of Donald's work. Roger outlined current thinking on the conversion of the Watson family home at Barone on Main Street: Donald's original studio, archive and library, offices for bird organisations, exhibition space, accommodation and work space for artist in residence and caretaker. In addition, the garden would provide space for sculptures, trails and an open air studio.

The initiative is being taken forward by a steering group including Dalry residents, the Watson family, bird, arts and science interests. Andrew Mellor, a long-standing Dalry

resident and one of its members, spoke of the need for new vitality in the village and his enthusiasm for this project.

It has been agreed that the Glenkens Community and Arts Trust shall provide the charitable home for the initiative as it is a Glenkens wide charity, and is ready to take on new initiatives beyond the transport project, the Glenkens Gazette and The Catstrand. Cathy Agnew, chair of GCAT, spoke of the Trust's enthusiasm for the initiative. We will benefit from its successful track record in fund raising, its credibility in the arts world, and obviate us from starting from scratch with charitable status etc, all of which are time consuming and costly. It means that we make more rapid progress.

There is a great deal to be done and lots of funds to be raised. All of this will take time. We have already applied for funds to employ a Project Development Officer and to set up base in Dalry: the first job to result from the initiative; we hope for others in the future.

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