

Book Reviews by Bookworm

Charles Hunter, Oban

There has been something of a pause this last year in new publications of local interest. A new novel by Alan Warner is due out in May and is eagerly awaited. To be called '*The Stars in the Bright Sky*' it will be a fictional sequel to his hilarious and riotous '*The Sopranos*' which was, as are all his novels, loosely and recognisably set in the Oban area. Waterstone's also tell me that Norman MacLean's autobiography '*The Leper's Bell*' which was quickly sold out, is coming back soon in paperback.

'*Lismore the Great Garden*' by Robert Hay, 2009, Birlinn, £20. Robert Hay, who is not long retired to Lismore, has written an excellent history of the island from prehistoric times to the present day. Robert, an agricultural and environmental scientist by profession, has researched widely and also fully acknowledges the contribution of Donald Black and other members of Comann Eachdraidh Lios Mor - the Lismore Museum and Historical Society - as well as the letter archives of Valerie and the late Alastair Livingstone, Baron of Bachuil. There is also an excellent index: Those who thought that the Reverend Carmichael had said it all in '*Lismore in Alba*' should think again.

'*A MacBrayne Album*' by Alistair Deayton & Iain Quinn, 2009, Amberley Publishing, Chalford, Glos. £14.99. A nostalgic sail down memory lane, this book of illustrations is based on a collection of glass slides and negatives belonging to Captain Alex Rodger, with the addition of many colour photographs, posters and other ephemera. The four ships mainly featured are the paddle steamers Iona, which was in service for 71 years, her successor the Columba and the turbine steamers Saint Columba on the Royal Route and King George V, which made the Oban to Staffa and Iona route its own -with wartime interruptions- from 1936 to 1974.

'*The Story of the Oban Lifeboat*' by Willie Melville, 2009 (reprint), Pen Press, Brighton, £9.99. Willie Melville helped to set up the first Oban lifeboat station in 1971, after a keenly-felt local tragedy. He was one of many volunteer crew members over the years and is currently Station Chairman. Painstakingly researched and well told at first hand, excitement is tempered

by good natured banter, with lives saved and the occasional baby born afloat. Through all the changes over the years, standards have been maintained and records set.

Footnote

All the above books, and many more, are obtainable off-the-shelf at Waterstone's in Oban. It has dawned on me that the staff have quickly become part of the community and should be encouraged. The 'Out and About' service and in-school Book Fairs serve remote areas. In addition, the Oban staff produce a free booklet called *Gateway* which is full of information for booklovers in Oban, Argyll and the Islands. Therefore I have decided it is not necessary to give web-sites, full addresses of publishers or ISBN.