

Comunn Eachdraidh Scalpaigh  
Exhibition – Calanas  
9 July to 30 August 2018

Calanas, working with wool, told the story of Scalpay's homespun industry in pictures, interviews, articles, artefacts and music.

“During the winter months the women of Highland households are up late and early at CALANAS – this comprehensive term embracing the whole process of wool-working from the raw material to the finished cloth. The process is an important factor in the internal economy of a Highland family. The industry of these women is wonderful, performed lovingly, uncomplainingly, day after day, year after year, till the sands of life run down. The life in a Highland home of the crofter class is well described in the following lines:

In the long winter night  
All are engaged,  
Teaching the young  
Is the grey-haired sage,  
The daughter at the carding,  
The mother at the wheel,  
While the fisher mends his net  
With his needle and his reel.”

During the Second World War the herring fishing, on which the island depended, went into decline. Knitting and weaving had always been activities in the home, and now it became a very important source of income.

What a beautiful sight greeted visitors to the island back in those days. Gavin Maxwell visited Scalpay in 1952 and describes it so well in his book “Harpoon at a Venture” .....“swathes of brilliantly dyed wool drying in the sun, and on the hillsides one may see hundreds of yards of bright woven tweed stretched like rainbow pathways. .... Here the old women do not drag their spinning wheels from the house for the attraction of the tourists; they sit here naturally in the sun, with a shy and perhaps suspicious glance for the stranger...”

