

P164 Newspaper article on the *Sutherland Magazine*

RECORDS' IDENTITY STATEMENT

Reference number: P164

Alternative reference number:

Title: Newspaper article on the *Sutherland Magazine*

Dates of creation: 1931

Level of description: Fonds

Extent: 1 sheet

Format: Paper

RECORDS' CONTEXT

Name of creators: John Mowat

Administrative history: JOHN ROBERT MOWAT, VICTORIA HOUSE, JOHN O'GROATS, CAITHNESS

By Bill Mowat, Inverness

Vegetable grower; joint-founder of a substantial locally-owned tourism business; finest exponent of Scotland's most ancient craft and a community activist.

With the sudden death of John Mowat on Tuesday October 3rd 2006, at the age of 66, the community of John O'Groats (popn. 250) lost its living link between the old 'subsistence-style' of crofting and modern consumer-conscious agriculture suitable to the soil and weather conditions on the Pentland Firth shoreline.

When he was born in 1940, as the only child of Donald and Annie Mowat, the landscape of John O'Groats consisted of a (diminished in size) Mains farm (The Ha') surrounded by a patchwork of over family 40 crofts, averaging only 20 acres of in-by land, plus two large common grazings, where hundreds of sheep roamed. Crofters regularly took crops of oats and bere (a early-ripening variety of barley) to the local water-powered meal-mill for conversion to oat-meal (for porridge and cakes) and bere-meal for baking traditional bannocks of unleaven brown bere-bread.

By the time of the onset of Multiple Sclerosis a decade ago, John had turned much of this land, extended as appropriate by lease or purchase, (and in one case by reclamation) into a substantial vegetable producing unit with modern specialist machinery and buildings, one having to employ staff to supplement the work of his sons Don and Steven.

Bags of his 'John O'Groats tatties' (with the community's 'End to End' signpost as logo), root-crops such as swedes and other brassicas of the cabbage family, became well-known to customers at Co-op branches in the Far North and independent convenience retailers in Wick, Thurso and rural villages.

As stated by Church of Scotland reader Ms Esme Duncan at his funeral service at the historic Canisbay Parish Kirk, the entrepreneurial spirit took hold of John at an early age, although his choice of a full-time career in (initially) small-scale agriculture was unpopular in the area at a time when Sir David Robertson M.P. was hailing the experimental Dounreay Fast Reactor project as the 'dawn of a new Industrial Revolution' for Caithness and the Far North. The UK Atomic Energy Authority was offering training locally to teenager for previously unobtainable professional engineering and administrative long-term careers in their local area.

But John went instead to Inverness for a college study of agriculture; a practical education that he was soon to put to life-long use.

John's concepts of entrepreneurial activities, the importance of customer relations and rigid quality control were formulated in his early teens as a John O'Groats 'shore seller'; his was the final group of a generations-long tradition of local lads who hand-made necklaces from sea-shells called locally 'groatie buckies', found on John O'Groats's Shell Beach.

Part of a longer article which can be accessed via the following link –

http://www.caithness.org/obituaries/john_robert_mowat.htm

Custodial history:

RECORDS' CONTENT

Description: Newspaper article, in Highland News, on the Northern publishing venture, the Sutherland Magazine, by John Mowat

Appraisal:

Accruals:

RECORDS' CONDITION OF ACCESS AND USE

Access: open

Closed until:

Access conditions: Available within the Archive searchroom

Copying: Copying permitted within standard Copyright Act parameters

Finding aids: Available in Archive searchroom

ALLIED MATERIALS

Related material: See John Mowat Collection held by the Caithness Archive Centre, available in searchroom

Publication:

Notes:

Date of catalogue: October 2011

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P164	Newspaper article on the <i>Sutherland Magazine</i>	1931
P164/1	Newspaper article, in Highland News, on the Northern publishing venture, the Sutherland Magazine, by John Mowat [1 sheet]	1931