

East Hynish Lighthouse Cottages

It is six thirty and I have the Hynish flutters this morning. Opening both bi-fold front doors to let out the dog for her morning pee there is a real carpet lifter resisting her exit over the worn to a basin sandstone step. He must be from the north east, louping the garden wall of immense Mull granite blocks with ease; a low apricot glow where he was born streaking south to the coming sunrise.

Must be a Monday. Even the signalling tower, stood on the green like some unarmed dalek, seems to shiver in the freezing blow; the stay wires of its flag pole whine discordantly. How many lighthouse keeper's wives have wished that dread noise away over these last sixteen decades while eleven miles to the south west their perilously stranded husbands manned the now emasculated Skerryvore?

The start of spring at Hynish feels like the onset of winter if you grudge what the day brings before it unfolds; if your to do list is so long and unjeweled that it rolls from the sea past tea into the evening; if your heating has to be shovelled and bucketed to the grate; if your washing has to be coal boiled in a steel tun, stirred, mangled and lined; if your cooking has to be made good with fire and ash. So it was in these now defeminised cottages.

And why Mull granite to build signalling towers, lighthouses, barracks and piers on the Isle of Tiree? Because the local Lewissian gneiss remains so hard that those nineteenth century stonemasons broke their tools and their hearts trying to work it. The bottom three courses of the lighthouse were enough for them. Stevenson shipped the rest of the rock all the way from Mull, even on Mondays. Can I really imagine that?

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