



MANCHESTER CRUISING ASSOCIATION

A Trip Round Ailsa Craig

9 March 2006 David Brind

The steam yacht *Lady Torfrida* was built at the Fairfield shipyard on the Clyde and was to be owned by the Russian royal family. However, on 6th September 1883, when she made her circumnavigation of Ailsa Craig, she was the property of Sir William Pearce and on board were the actors Henry Irving and Ellen Terry with Ellen's son, Edward Gordon.



The events of the day were recorded by Bram Stoker, Dracula's inventor, also aboard. The trip and the island made a lasting impression on the party, not least because they almost drowned in a gale getting to the yacht the night before. The effect was so great that Edward Gordon, a successful theatre designer, changed his name by deed poll to Edward Craig soon after. His sister Edith, a radical actress and producer, was moved enough by the experience to adopt the stage name Edith Ailsa Geraldine Craig and became generally known as Edy Craig.

David, a professional artist and theatre set creator, took us graphically through the traumatic sea-tossed trip in the dinghy out to the steam yacht. Huddled against the wind and spray, the party were distracted by Irving's "casual remarks he could have made at his own fireside". But the boatman hissed to Stoker "This is really



bad ye know!". It's a situation sailors will recognise only too well. But neither Irving nor the haunting Eleen Terry were the star of the tale. That was Ailsa Craig itself (or maybe herself). We were brought via David's childhood from around Rye in Kent, when he spent his holidays on Dungeness, to this island which has been an obsession since. His honeymoon was spent in the area and he has been drawing and painting the island ever since. It has inspired varieties of onion and tomato, was the source of kerb stone for many years and is still reckoned as the producer of the best curling stones in the world.

David has painted it in most lights and conditions and it has figured as a background in many of his studies. He has a special fondness for the two old fog-horns at the north and south of the

island. Illustrated with slides, theatrical models and enormous plans of the Lady Torfrida, David's talk took us to the fringes of a world out of our grasp. And so far it's out of David's too: he's never managed to set foot on the island himself.

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