

A History of the Mobile Library Service

The Orkney Mobile Library Service was established in the spring of 1963 with the aim of providing readers who lived in rural areas of the Orkney mainland with the same access to library books as those living in Kirkwall or Stromness, or those living in the islands being served by the Family Book Service which had been established in November 1954.



The first mobile library

Prior to the commencement of the service every household on the mainland of Orkney outside Kirkwall and Stromness received a visit by library staff so they could be offered the new service. The households that accepted were marked out on maps so that the routes of the Mobile Library could be planned efficiently. The service immediately proved popular and on the first trip around the mainland of Orkney the Mobile Library visited over six hundred homes plus seven village stops over a period of seven weeks. The vehicle carried around 2000 books plus a selection of gramophone records and in the first two years it travelled over 20,000 miles and issued almost 124,000 books.

News of the service quickly spread and the number of users began to increase; the second trip around the mainland saw a fifty percent increase in books borrowed and more households were added to the route. In a very short time the Mobile Library was stopping at 750 households on each trip around the mainland and with the inclusion of those who were using the village stops it meant there were well over one thousand families being served by the Mobile Library Service. The growing success of the service meant that the route had to be extended twice over the next few years and by 1983 each trip around the mainland was taking nine weeks with an average issue of 70,000 books each year. This meant that 40% of the total rural population of Orkney was registered with the Library and in households served by the Mobile Library Service over 84% of the adult population were regularly reading library books.



The second and third mobile libraries



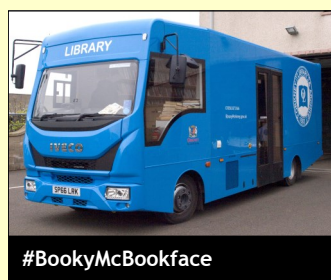
The first Isles mobile library

The first Mobile Library vehicle served for nine years before it was replaced in 1972 by a second vehicle which served until 1981. When the third vehicle entered service in 1981 the old Mobile Library was sent to Basilicat in the south of Italy to provide a temporary school library service following the devastating Irpinia earthquake in November 1980 which killed 2,483 people and left 250,000 people homeless. The third vehicle was replaced in 1990 but instead of being taken off the road it was used to extend the Mobile Library Service to the islands of Orkney for the first time.

In November 1990 following the introduction of roll on/roll off ferries to the south and inner north isles of Orkney, it became possible for the Mobile Library to travel to the islands giving the islanders the opportunity to choose their own books for the first time. It was another resounding success for Orkney Library and eventually another new vehicle was ordered to operate solely on the isles service. In August 1994 the Mobile Library Service was extended again to serve the remaining outer north isles meaning that for the first time ever the majority of the rural and island population of Orkney had direct access to Orkney Library through the Mobile Library Service.



The second Isles mobile



#BookyMcBookface

In 2013 the Mobile Library Service celebrated its 50th Anniversary.

In January 2017 a new custom built Mobile Library was delivered ensuring the continuation of the service throughout the mainland and islands of Orkney.

ORKNEY MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICE

Established 1963

