



WHERE THE WORLD ENDS



Sometimes history can be heartless and tight-lipped. It tells us the facts, but not the feelings, and we are left beating on its windows shouting,

“Yes, but what were their names? What did they say? What became of them?”

Those are the moments fiction swoops on, like a happy magpie. I certainly do.

The whole fabric of Scotland is a tapestry of ancient stories and histories, suffering and bravery, but the remote archipelago of St Kilda has a particular way of snaring the imagination. Harsh and beautiful, suspended beneath its flocking birds, it asks what YOU would find there – inner peace or terrible isolation? The simple life or a terrible familiarity with death? The lives of its islanders centuries ago are nigh impossible for the modern mind to grasp. But they flicker there on the rim of the imagination, demanding admiration.

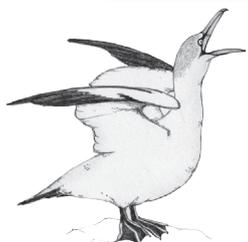
When I came across the story of the boys marooned on Stac an Armin in 1727, it tantalised with its lack of detail. A party of fowlers went out to harvest gannets, feathers and eggs, and no boat came to take them home again. What did they suppose had happened? What explanations crossed their minds? How did they cope? I thought I knew where I meant to take the story, but as usual the joy came in finding out as I went along. The novel is more guesswork than history, but the fact those men, those boys genuinely existed, certainly upped the ante.

Where the World Ends is aimed at the teenage reader – has more in common with *The White Darkness* and *The Stones are Hatching* than *Peter Pan* in *Scarlet*.

Grim and scary in parts, it aims to make you fret for the protagonists and keep on hoping for the best.

Crossings to St Kilda are rough and rarely made. But this one, I hope, is well worth making.

GERALDINE MCCAUGHREAN



ST KILDA. 1727