

Unkans

The newsletter of the Shetland Museum and Archives
and the Shetland heritage community

FREE

September 2007
Issue 4

museum
Shetland
archives



Emmie Ratter, Laurie Goodlad and Bobby Gear at the Store (missing: Jake Watt).

Museum's student dream team

One sign of summer for staff at the Shetland Museum and Archives is the annual return of our placement students. This year we have five working for us, one from as far away as the USA (see article by Emma Lang, page 2). Bobby Gear and Emmie Ratter have worked at the museum for a total of 10 summers between them, while Jake Watt returns for a second summer and Laurie Goodlad joins us for the first time.

The students undertake a variety of important behind-the-scenes tasks. A large part of the action takes place at our store, where objects not on display are kept. There, the students measure, describe and number the artefacts, enter information into the catalogue database, and update

inventories. This job of cataloguing new objects is ongoing as the collection grows. Now that the new museum premises are open, we began a project to rearrange the store. Besides cataloguing, Bobby, Emmie and Laurie have been emptying shelves, re-organising the arrangement of objects, re-packing boxes, and labelling boxes and shelves. Jake has been based mostly at the museum, where he has been updating information onto the photographic database and working on our new calendar, but he's regularly called up to the store when more hands are required. Our efficient student team are doing a superb job, ready to be carried on next summer!

Museum opening times:

Monday-Wednesday, and Friday 10am-5pm
Thursday 10am-7pm Saturday 10am-5pm Sunday 12pm-5pm

Archives opening times:

Monday-Wednesday, and Friday 9.30am-4.30pm
Thursday 10am-7pm Saturday 10am-1pm

Hay's Dock Café Restaurant opening times:

Day Time: Monday-Saturday 11.00am-5pm Sunday 12pm-5pm
Evenings: Tuesday-Saturday 7pm-10pm. To book call 01595 741 569

What's On Guide

September

Wed. & Sun. afternoons: Film 'The Tower People of Shetland'.

Every Mon. & Thurs: Guided tours of Museum displays. Mondays at 11am, Thursdays at 11am and 6pm. Meet at reception.

7th Sept-1st Oct.: Exhibition, 'Clippit Cloots and Steekit Stitches' by the Shetland Needleworkers. Da Gadderie

8th: Embroidery for beginners workshop with Shetland Needleworkers. Age 14 plus. 10:30am-1:00pm. Booking essential. £10

10th: 'Viking Unst - The story so far', lecture by Val Turner and Robina Barton. 7:30pm.

11th: Introduction to researching your family history, in partnership with Shetland Family History Society. 2:30-4:00pm. Booking essential.

15th: Fire and Survival Workshops. Learn ancient survival skills including fire making, using stone tools and rope and cordage making. Three separate workshops, booking essential, £5 each.

16th: 'Survival - Fire and Shelter'. 10:00am-4:00pm. Learn ancient and modern survival techniques including making shelters. Booking essential, £20.

19th: 'When Did Shetland Become Part of Scotland?: a contribution to the debate', lecture by Archivist Brian Smith. 7:30pm. Booking essential.

22nd: Fabric folding workshop with Shetland Needleworkers. Age 14 plus. Booking essential, £10.

October

October holidays - see local press for activities for children over the holidays.

6th: 'Bound to remember'. A poetry and artistic workshop for adults in partnership with Shetland Library. £10.

13th: 'The Big Draw'. Art event, suitable for all ages. FREE.

All events are held at the Shetland Museum and Archives, unless otherwise specified. There may be a charge for some events. For more information phone 01595 695057, pick up a copy of our What's On Guide brochure, or just pop in.

Maritime Connection Shetland & Eastern Seaboard of America

Why did I come to Shetland? Why travel 3000 plus miles to work in a museum you've never been to? I cannot count the number of times people on both sides of the Atlantic have asked me this question, even the customs agent and the chatty bar man on Northlink looked at me strangely when I said I was heading for Lerwick for two months after only graduating from university a week before. The answer lies in the place where I grew up, the city of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Cambridge was built on money from the maritime trades. She produced two items vital to the Massachusetts North Atlantic maritime industries—glass, and hard tack: the dry, salt biscuits that kept men alive for months at sea. The trans-Atlantic trade and whaling industry were the lifeblood of Cambridge and other cities in New England from their founding in the 1600s until the beginning of the 20th century, yet today, that tradition has been all but forgotten. Few people depend on the ocean for a livelihood and even fewer know that the ocean created the place we live.

I came to Shetland looking for a place that also would not exist without the maritime trades. A place where people feel a strong connection to the ocean and understand its impact on their lives; but most of all a place where the history of this connection was not forgotten.

I suppose I was hoping that it would be a window into the past of my city. I found what I was looking for and a bit more. I found a community where collective memory is valued and where history is



Emma Lang

a part of daily life. I found a place where despite a more diversified economy the money from the sea trades that built the community is not forgotten.

And I found a place where I could learn about one more of the puzzle pieces that fit together to create the history of North Atlantic maritime economy, linking the history of where I come from to the history of this wonderful archipelago.

Emma Lang, Museum and Archives Summer Placement Student

Inspiration from Adie's Tweed Research Collection



Double cloth tweed from Adie's of Voe
Technical notes from the Adie's research collection

As the current weaver-in-residence at the Centre for the Creative Industries (CCI) on Yell, I have been commissioned to create a new 'Shetland' textile. The brief was to take inspiration from the Isles and their traditional textiles heritage to create a textile product to raise funds for craft workshops at the Centre.

Initial research at the new Museum and Archives revealed evidence of the once thriving weaving industry in the Isles: the display cabinet with artefacts from Adie's mill at Voe is backed up by paper records of trade, barter and export of hand-

and machine-woven tweeds to worldwide destinations.

At the Museum's store, pattern books and woven lengths from Adie's demonstrate the vast range of designs that were produced, the older ones mostly in natural, native fleece colours with brighter colours and more complex designs introduced over the years, probably due to availability of chemical dyestuffs and more advanced looms.

Whilst looking through some technical notes one design stood out from the others. It was a double cloth structure – more complex than most traditional tweeds – but there was no textile sample with it. Luckily I found a sample to match the notes and was intrigued to find it was not only a different pattern on both sides but a different colour too.

Using this concept I returned to the design studio to create my own double-sided tweed design, with one side in a natural fleece colour and the other in coloured stripes inspired by images of the landscape, environment, geology and industry which make up the Shetland Isles. This design is going to be woven at the last remaining mill, Jamiesons of Shetland, in their range of 100% Shetland wools and lambswool and will be available soon.

Angharad McLaren

Royal recognition

Many Shetlanders did well after they left their native islands, but Yell man Frank Stewart was one of the few to obtain royal recognition. He was from Northavoe, and was a seaman all his life, becoming a Master Mariner. Captain Stewart settled in Leith when he got a job as a pilot on the Firth of Forth. In 1962 H.M. King Olav V undertook a state visit to Britain, travelling onboard the Norwegian royal yacht *Norge*. As the vessel came into the Firth, a pilot, Capt. Stewart, was taken onboard to guide the ship in.



The Erindringsmedalje

An experienced mariner himself, the King later personally presented Captain Stewart with a medal of thanks for his work in piloting the royal yacht. The *Erindringsmedalje* is a special, personal award from the sovereign. It has the king's portrait on one side and his monogram on the other. The medal is the kind gift of Colin Stewart, Fetlar, the son of Captain Stewart.

Dr Ian Tait, Curator of Collection

Museum achieves national standard of service

The Shetland Museum service has achieved a national standard of quality assurance through the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council Accreditation Scheme. The scheme is voluntary, but is considered a necessary standard for professional service. It ensures that museums meet specific requirements for collection care, user services, visitor facilities and overall management of services. The new Shetland Museum and its satellite sites, The Crofthouse Museum and the Bød of Gremista, were included in the

assessment and all three have received full accreditation status. The museum was congratulated on the opening of the new museum and in its standards of forward planning and staffing arrangements, which were put in place to provide a high quality facility for Shetland. In 2008 and 2009 the scheme will assess Britain's smaller independent museums. A number of Shetland's community museums are expected to participate and will be assisted in the process by the Shetland Museums Service.

Felting Fun!

Two felting workshops were held this summer in the Learning Room as part of the Museum and Archives' Summer Learning Activities. The popular workshops were led by Jenny Bradley and Verinia Fraser. The afternoon session was for young adults where they made a variety of colourful and stylish scarves, pictured. Several more felting workshops for adults and children are planned for the winter months. The first will occur during the school holidays in October, where children will be encouraged to make felted objects with a scary Halloween theme.



Photo: Felting Workshop

Missing person

Here is *Unkans'* first "missing person" appeal. This painting of a young seaman was, until recently, in Shetland but its present location is unknown. The Museum knew nothing of the portrait until this July, when it was brought to our attention by Jennifer Perry, Weisdale. Jennifer first came to Shetland in 1991 when she was researching her family tree. Her investigations took her to the Westing, Unst, where she was shown the painting at Crosbister by its owner, Allan Fraser. All Allan knew was that it depicted a Fordyce ancestor, and it is fortunate that Jennifer photographed the picture at the time, because Allan died in 1999 and the contents of Crosbister, including the painting, were dispersed.

The portrait shows a young man holding a telescope, with a brig under sail in the distance. The style of the costume, with short patterned waistcoat and large necktie indicate a date around 1840. Allan's great-grandfather was Captain William Fordyce senior. From the age of the sitter, I wonder if the person in the portrait is William's son, also called William Fordyce, who was born in 1826. William junior also qualified as a captain, and died at sea in 1869.

Does any reader know where this painting is now?

Dr Ian Tait



Portrait of William Fordyce jr.

Archaeology Month dates.

Focus on Archaeology

Throughout September, Shetland Amenity Trust is offering a number of activities related to archaeology.

Saturday 8th September

An archaeological walk along Sandwick beach, Unst.

Meet at Hannigarth car park at 1pm. Explore over two millennia of archaeological evidence with SAT and Unst Archaeology Group. Free. 1pm-4pm (approx). Contact: 01595 694688

Sunday 9th September

Textile workshop at Old Scatness.

Practical workshop on use of spindle whorls, tablet weaving, warp-weighted loom weaving, with Elizabeth Johnston. Cost: £20. 11am-4pm. Bring lunch. Contact/to book: 01950 461869

Sunday 9th September

An afternoon of tales and folklore at Old Scatness with Davy Cooper. Free. No booking required. Contact: 01950 461869

Monday 10th September

'Viking Unst - The story so far', lecture by Val Turner and Robina Barton. 7.30pm, Shetland Museum and Archives

Sunday 16th September

Drystone workshop at Old Scatness.

Explore prehistoric drystone building techniques. Includes the erection of orthostats, scarcement ledges, and corbelling, with Jim Keddie. Cost: £20. 10am-5pm. Bring lunch, outdoor clothing, knee pads, & sturdy (steel toe-capped) boots. Contact/to book: 01950 461869

Sunday 23rd September

Craft workshop at Old Scatness.

Prehistoric craft techniques with bone and horn. Chance to make amulets, needles and pins, with Stevie Wark. Cost: £20. 10am-5pm. Bring lunch, outdoor clothing (gloves and sturdy footwear). Contact/to book: 01950 461869

Sunday 30th September.

Textile, drystone and craft workshops at Old Scatness.

Theoretical and practical sessions with Elizabeth Johnston, Jim Keddie and Stevie Wark. Cost: £20. 10am-5pm. Bring lunch, outdoor clothing (gloves and sturdy footwear). Contact/to book: 01950 461869

New calendar for 2008

The 2008 Shetland Museum and Archive calendar is now for sale. The calendar takes its inspiration from the themes within the displays and includes an object, quote and archive image from each of the twelve themes. Priced at £6 and is available from the reception shop.



Shetland Island-Names – a dynamic group

Since Shetland is situated in the middle of the North Atlantic, islands, holms and skerries are central to local life. In our minds they are constant and unchanging – also with regard to their names. Several Scandinavian researchers have stated that islands are among the first localities to be named, and thus belong among the oldest name layers.

To a great extent this also seems to be the case with the Shetland island-names, where names like *Unst*, *Yell* and *Fetlar* appear to have pre-Norse roots. Otherwise, a great deal of the island-names have – like most Shetland place-names – a Scandinavian origin, whose original

of minor islets and holms, are, however, of a much younger Scots origin. Names like *Black Stacks*, *Dunrossness*, *Holm of Gruting*, *Sandsting* and *The Foot*, *Sandness*, can only have been coined after the introduction of Scots in the late Middle Ages. But appearances may also be deceiving – names such as *The Cleiver* and *The Stab*, Northmaven, have actually merely been ‘updated’ from Old Norse to Scots. Their ultimate origin is ON *Klaufir* ‘Clefts’ and ON *Stabbi* ‘Stump’, names which have been bestowed them owing to their form (see photos).

On closer inspection, the island-names of Shetland display a greater age spread than has hitherto been

recognised and contain coinages of Pictish, Norse and Scots origins. This shows that the Shetland island-name material is rather dynamic, where renaming of especially smallish island units appears to have been relatively common. Having been of importance for the local community in terms of navigation, utilisation and ownership, it is unlikely that even relatively small holms and skerries did not have a name in Norse, and even in pre-Norse times – they almost certainly did.

Unfortunately, the source situation of Shetland does not allow us many glimpses of what may have been before the present name of an island or a holm. – One or two clues have survived, however. For instance, the

Holm of Sandwick was earlier called *Claiholm* (1581 *Claiholm*) as was the *Isle of Stenness* previously known as *Sailla* (1624 *Salue*), but such instances are exceptional.

Whatever the origin of the islands, holms and skerries of Shetland, together they display a remarkable complexity, where ‘language updates’ and occasional renamings add to the dynamic nature of Shetland place-names.

Dr Peder Gammeltoft
Institut for Navneforskning
University of Copenhagen

Peder recently spent two weeks in the Museum and Archives researching old documentary forms of Shetland’s Island-names.



Views from Long Ayre revealing the naming motives behind the local stacks: The clefts are clearly visible in the sideways profile of *The Cleiver*, as is the stump-like appearance of *The Stab*.

meanings can be readily decoded. Thus, island-names enable us to tell us something about what the islands and holms were used for, as with *Bigga*, *Yell*, whose origin is Old Norse *Bygg-ey* ‘Barley Isle’, or who originally owned them as with *Egilsay*, *Northmaven*, whose first element is the Old Norse male name, *Egill*. That the entire stock of islands, holms and stacks were named early on seems to be reflected in some of the names of minor stacks, such as *Stackan Gro*, *Unst* and *Stackana Gruna*, *Lunnasting*, which reflect the ancient Scandinavian noun + adjective/adverb word-order. The origin is *Stackinn grái* ‘The Grey Stack’ and *Stackinn græna* ‘The Green Stack’.

The majority of island-names, in particular the names

This page is dedicated to research on all aspects of Shetland’s history and heritage. Contributions are welcome.

Get in touch

We are keen to include contributions from anyone who has something interesting to share about Shetland’s heritage. Deadline for the November issue is Friday 12 October. If you would like to stock our newsletter or distribute copies to your group, let us know.

Email: info@shetlandmuseumandarchives.org.uk Telephone: 01595 695057 Fax: 01595 696729

Post: Newsletter, Shetland Museum and Archives, Hay’s Dock, Lerwick, Shetland ZE1 0WP

