

Unkans

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

FREE

November 2010
Issue 23

museum
Shetland
archives

Successful memorial lecture

Andrew Wawn, professor emeritus at the University of Leeds, gave the third Shetland Museum and Archives memorial lecture on 4 November.

Andrew is author of *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2000). In his paper he discussed how three scholars of the 19th and early 20th centuries dealt with sagas such as Orkneyinga Saga and Færeyinga Saga.

The first of his scholars was Þorleifur Repp, an Icelander who almost translated Orkneyinga Saga. Repp, based in the Advocates Library in Edinburgh in the 1820s, was approached by Scottish bibliophiliacs to do the job, but he charged too much, and the project fell through.

Repp was an admirer of Shetland and its booming fishing economy: he thought that we had flourished as part of the United Kingdom, unlike his compatriots in Iceland and the Faroes, who had (he said) suffered under oppressive Danish monarchs.

Another Icelander, Jón Hjaltalín, came to public notice in Britain in the 1860s, when he was received by Queen Victoria, and recited a long poem in his native language in her honour. Soon afterwards he too moved to the Advocates Library, and collaborated with the Shetlander Gilbert Goudie on the first translation into English of Orkneyinga Saga.

Andrew's third scholar, Sabine Baring-

Gould, translated sagas in his spare time, as a sort of reference-bank for his own writing on folk-lore. Andrew read an extract from his manuscript translation of

Færeyinga Saga, never published: a very lucid piece of work.

Andrew Wawn is a humorous speaker, and his Shetland audience was delighted with his witty accounts of scholars who were sometimes eccentric. His lecture will be published in the near future.



Professor Wawn, who is an expert on Sir Walter Scott's *The Pirate*, at Jarlshof.

Opening Hours

Museum

Monday-Friday 10am-4pm;

Saturday 10am-5pm;

Sunday 12pm-5pm

Archives

Monday-Friday 10am-4pm;

Saturday 10am-1pm

Hay's Dock Café Restaurant

Daytime **Monday-Thursday** 10.30am-

3.30pm; **Saturday** 10.30am-4.30pm;

Sunday 12-4.30pm;

Evenings November **Friday-Saturday**;

December **Tuesday-Saturday**

Please phone 01595 741569

to book a table.

The Museum and Archives and Hay's Dock Café Restaurant will be closed on 25th and 26th December, and 1st and 2nd January.

What's On Guide

November

24th: Introduction to Maritime History workshop, with Archivist Brian Smith and Ph.D student Bobby Gear, 7.30pm at NAFC Library, free, no booking required.

25th: 'Women's Suffrage in Shetland', lecture by Marsali Taylor, 7.30pm, free, no booking required.

26th: 'Rebuilding the Archdiocese of Nidaros: The Catholic "North Pole Mission" in Orkney and Shetland, 1860-1869', lecture by Dr Andrew Newby, Aberdeen University, sponsored by Centre for Nordic Studies, free, no booking required.

27th & 28th: Christmas Creativity. Kick off your festive celebrations by visiting the Museum to create Christmas cards and decorations in our drop-in workshop. Visit any time between 11am to 3pm on Saturday and 1pm to 4pm on Sunday, suitable for all ages, free.

December

4th: Festive Woolly Wonders. Use wool to make decorations in the shape of puddings, robins, reindeers and penguins. Workshop led by Jennie Bradley. 11am to 1pm, suitable for ages 5-8, cost: £5, booking essential.

4th: Dangly Decorations. Use felt to create hanging decorations featuring Santa, reindeers, angels and Christmas trees. Some sewing involved. Workshop led by Jennie Bradley. 2pm to 4pm, suitable for ages 9+, £5, booking essential.

5th: Felted Christmas Workshop. Join Jennie Bradley and Johan-Mary Pearson to create a felt Christmas tree, Santa or angel. 12pm to 2pm, or 2.30pm to 4.30pm. Maximum of two children (any age) accompanied by one adult, £8 per family, booking essential.

11th: Festive Songs, featuring Shetland Choral Society, Bell's Brae School Choir, and the ffancytunes Ensemble. 12-1, 1.45-2.45, 3-4pm, free, drop in.

12th: Woollen Tree Decorations. Make your very own snowman and sheep to hang from your Christmas tree by sing the traditional method of carding to prepare wool. Basic sewing skills required but support can be given. Suitable for ages 7+, £5, booking essential.

18th: Christmas Willow Lanterns. Take part in a family Christmas workshop where you can work together using dried willow, art tissue and latex to make your own sculptural Christmas lantern. 10am to 1pm, maximum of two children (any age) accompanied by one adult, £8 per family, booking essential.

18th: Willow and Felt Christmas. Use willow to make a selection of festive decorations for your home. If you have attended this workshop before bring your old decorations for a 2010 makeover. Workshop lead by artist Jo Jack. 2pm to 5pm, adults only, £8, booking essential.

All events are held at the Shetland Museum and Archives and are free, unless otherwise stated. To book call 01595 695057. No booking is necessary for drop-in events.

Busy school holidays

Heritage holiday gifts

The Museum hosted a variety of new Lifelong Learning events in October, which saw young people experiencing Shetland's history through art and craft activities. Textile experts Jennie Bradley and Verinia Fraser kicked off the autumn holiday diary with two workshops – Fashion Fix and Bags of Bling. Both activities were linked to the *Building Scotland* exhibition and participants created a T-shirt or bag featuring either a Shetland building or stained glass window decorated with rhinestones.

Artist Jo Jack held a landscape modelling and broch building workshop using the techniques of papier maché and clay modelling. Two Halloween workshops were fully attended by 20 children who created sparkly pumpkins, Halloween spiders and scary ghosts. At another workshop, children got their hands dirty as they constructed clay crofthouses with tekkit roofs. Some children even made sheep and rabbits for their croft. The school holiday activities ended with four more Mootie Moose sessions where children aged 2½ to 5 learned about castles, how rich and poor people lived, and how Halloween has been commemorated in the past. All children created a spooky castle to take home.

Matt Arnold
Lifelong Learning Officer



Dylan Morrish with his tekkit-roofed crofthouse, planticrub, sheep and sailboat.

The Museum and Archives Shop has a number of new products in stock, just in time for the holidays! There are two series of greetings cards, each with six different black and white images from the Shetland Museum Photograph Archive. One series shows snow scenes from across Shetland; the other suggests Christmas themes with charming or comical photographs of children. Each series can be purchased as a box of six for £6.50 per box, or 2 boxes for £12.00. The 2011 calendar is 'Bygone Days', and costs £6.50. A new range of jigsaw puzzles have been created, using images of historic hand-made maps of Shetland from the museum's collection. The high quality wooden puzzles are attractively packaged and come in two sizes, 200 and 250 pieces, and sell for £20.00 and £25.00 respectively. Drop by the shop for interesting and unusual gifts for all ages.



Ken ony guddicks?

With Yule approaching and the nights draain' in it's time to think of pastimes to wile away the long nights. Laying up guddicks – or asking a series of riddles – was a familiar and integral part of a winter's night 'in about da fire'. Family, friends and neighbours would meet to mend fishing gear, caird and spin wool and make kishies and other implements for the croft. As the night wore on, work turned to light-hearted entertainment. Stories were shared, games, music and poetry were enjoyed, and often a dram or two was passed around. Guddicks were common, some more difficult to solve than others. They were

applied to most things around the croft, from the kettle to the crook and the cow to the cat. See if you can solve these two guddicks: "Roond laek a millstone, Lugged laek a cat, Staandin apo tree legs, Can du guess dat?" and "What is it 'at tears een anidder a'day, An' sleeps in een anidders airms a' nicht" (answers below).

Writers such as John Spence and James R. Nicolson have recorded some guddicks, but I would like to collect more. If anybody can recall any guddicks please contact Laurie Goodlad on 01595 695057 or laurie@shetland-museum.org.uk.

Answers: the kettle; wool cairds.

Using collections to explore maritime history

Are you interested in maritime history? Would you like to use the archives to explore Shetland's nautical past? If so there will be a chance find out more at the North Atlantic Fisheries College later in the month. Shetland Museum and Archives are holding an 'Introduction to Maritime History' night when you can learn how our collections could help with your research. The event is suitable for those who have never used the archives before as well as more regular visitors.

The evening will be hosted by archivist Brian Smith, who will explain what sources are held in the Shetland

archives and how they can be used to learn more about maritime history. Bobby Gear, a Ph.D student studying post-war pelagic fishing in Shetland, will give a short talk on how he has used the archives collections in his work.

The evening will be informal with lots of opportunity to ask the speakers questions.

The event is in the NAFC library at 7pm (for 7.30pm start). There is no need to book, please just turn up if you are interested. You can phone Joanne Wishart for more information on 01595 741553.

Tell us about your favourite object

The Museum is conducting a pilot project to find out visitors' favourite objects. Is there an artefact you especially like, above all others? One that possibly evokes a memory, catches your imagination, or fills you with wonder or admiration? If so, we would like to invite you to take part in the pilot phase of our new project called 'My Favourite Object'.

We are asking visitors to have their thoughts about their favourite object recorded during a museum visit. The long-term plan is to develop an audio-visual presentation to be shown in the museum in the future. At this stage, we are trying to gauge the level of interest. If you like the idea, please come and speak to us. Staff members involved in the project are Zuzanna O'Rourke, Linda Fox and Honor Clubb and they are available all day every Saturday and Sunday as well as Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 10am and 2pm.

As you walk through the galleries, is there anything you especially like to look at? Something that evokes memories, catches imagination, fills you with wonder ('how weird') or admiration ('how lovely')? We would like to invite you to take part in the pilot phase of our new project called 'My Favourite Object'. Come in and share your thoughts with us. We would like to record your answers as the long term plan is to develop an audio - visual presentation to be shown in the museum in the future. At this stage, we are trying to gauge the level of interest so if you like the idea, please come and speak to us.

Help needed

A recent enquiry to the archives about the education of James Robertson (1752-1829) from Gossabrough, Yell has inspired me to do a little research into his work. Robertson was the son of a Yell merchant but he followed his own career path and became a surveyor and mapmaker and later a member of the Royal Society. His work mapping the plantations of Jamaica is well known thanks to the writing of L. Alan Eyre but I am interested in the work he did in Scotland after his return.

He produced a map of Aberdeenshire, Banffshire, Kincardineshire in 1822 which can be seen here

<http://maps.nls.uk/joins/570.html> but he also did surveying in Orkney and Shetland and I am keen to find out whether he actually produced a map of the islands. There are no references to it in our own collection or in that of the National Library of Scotland.

If you know anything about Robertson's work in Scotland or his Orkney and Shetland map in particular I would be very pleased to hear from you. You can contact me at joanne@shetland-archives.org.uk or on 01595741553

Joanne Wishart
Assistant Archivist

COMMUNITY HERITAGE NEWS

Community Heritage Group visit

About 20 members of various community heritage groups visited Unst to experience two heritage walks developed by Unst Heritage Trust as a result of funding by SIC Economic Development Unit. The first walk about The Gutter Lasses was guided by Rhoda Hughson and Minnie Mouat along the north shore of Baltasound, where remains of huts and piers can be seen. The lives of the gutters came alive when members tried to wrap fingers in cloth strips, as the lasses did each day. The second walk is a self-guided tour from Greenbrake to Vord Hill and back along Sandwick beach. Group members 'tested' the walks and gave valuable feedback during a tasty lunch at Unst Heritage Centre. It was a very useful day to meet other heritage group members and see how the cultural and natural heritage of Unst has been developed for visitors.



Rhoda Hughson describes the Baltasound living quarters of gutter lasses.

Funding reminder

Full members of Museums Galleries Scotland on minimum subscription rate can apply for up to £600 towards equipment purchases. See <http://www.museumsgalleriescotland.org.uk/how-we-help-members/grants/purchase-fund-for-smaller-independents>. There is no deadline for this fund.

Getting inside knitting sheaths



The most decorative sheaths had a tasselled end, like this fine chevron-decorated example from Yell.

One reason why Shetland women can knit so quickly is because they anchor one needle at their side. Today many knitters use a makkin' belt for this purpose – a stuffed leather pad with holes, into which one knitting 'wire' is secured. Before the makkin' belt, knitters used a sheath or wisp to hold their wires. Shetland Museum is undertaking research, literally *into*, knitting sheaths, to understand these colourful and interesting tools.

Knitting sheaths were used in many cultures and usually made from wood or metal. Essentially they were tubes, worn tucked into a waistband, into which a single needle was placed to hold it there while the thread was worked. Sheaths were usually very decorated, and examples of intricately worked wooden and silver sheaths survive from Europe and North America. It was not unusual for these elaborate tools to be made

by men for their sweethearts.

Shetland sheaths differ from most others in that they were made of tapes or cord, bound around a core of bird feathers. One has a centre of thinly whittled sticks, but the rest were made from a bundle of large feathers, the quill end being where the needles were wedged. A reference to sheaths in the Shetland Archives says they were made using goose quills, but if many sheaths were made by seamen, the feathers may be from any pelagic or coastal bird in the world.

Although sheaths were functionally the same as makkin' wisps (a bundle of straw), they were a more decorative and elaborate art form, with strong links to the sailing tradition following the Napoleonic Wars. Of the 12 sheaths in the museum's collection, most employ knotting techniques typically used by sailors. Some sheaths are made with coach-whipping, either in

leather strips or cloth tapes. Two other sheaths are made of cotton cording, knotted into various patterns commonly found on sailor's gear, such as kist handles. For a few sheaths we know the makers, and invariably they spent many years at sea.

Knitting sheaths pre-date the makkin' belt, and Ian Tait and I have speculated they were used when knitting needles were made of wood, before steel needles were common. The length of the sheath was more appropriate for the shorter needles of wood or bone. Indeed, broken fragments of wooden knitting needles can be found still imbedded in some of the sheaths.

Shetland Museum was fortunate to receive help from Shetland College and Gilbert Bain Hospital into our study of sheaths. Medical specialists scanned three from the collection, so we could 'look inside', and gain a better understanding of how they were made. Scans were made through the objects, both horizontally and vertically, at 10mm 'slices'. It is possible to see the thickness of the quills down the length of the sheath, the inner binding

around the feathers, and in one sheath, a metal rod has been inserted into the lower third of the sheath, probably to make it more stable around the soft feather stuffing.

To complete the study of sheaths, we are asking for help from the community. We'd like to learn more about sheaths, how they were made, who made them, and who used them. We'd also like to look at more examples, to see how they compare with ones in the collection. If you are aware of knitting sheaths in private hands in the community, or information about sheaths in the history of your family, we would be grateful if you contacted us. A report on our research will be published in the new year.

Carol Christiansen,
Curator and Community
Museums Officer



Scan showing quill centre, metal rod at bottom, and knotted covering around edges.

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.

If you would like to stock Unkans, 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

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DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FOR NEXT ISSUE IS FRIDAY, 17 DECEMBER, 2010.