

## Recent accessions: weird and wonderful

No matter how much we modernise museum services, the 16th century idea of museums as 'cabinets of curiosities' still rings true at times, especially when weird and wonderful objects are donated. We recently received an otter-skin cape, which probably dates from the 19th century. It had been made by piecing together many small parts of de-haired otter pelts and was designed so the animals' feet hung from the outer edge, forming a scalloped border. In total, 15 front and back paws dangle from the edge, some complete with claws. The other side of the cape was lined with rust-red satin. Between the lining, whose stitching has come away, and the sewn pelts, is the remains of a small, fine-lace shawl. The shawl had been cut to the shape of the cape,



then turned under and stitched around the edges. It is unclear what benefit the lace interlining would have provided. The cape was purchased in the 1980s at an auction of objects from the Reid Tait family. It may have

belonged to Miss Martha Johnson, E.S. Reid Tait's aunt. We are grateful to Joan Robertson for donating this exceptional garment and for Freyja Clarkson for providing information about the cape's probable provenance.

### Opening Hours

#### Archives

Monday-Friday 10am-4pm

Saturday 10am-1pm

#### Museum

Monday -Friday 10am-4pm

Saturday 10am-5pm

Sunday 12pm-5pm

#### Hay's Dock Café Restaurant

Daytime:

Monday -Friday 10.30am-3.30pm

Saturday 10.30am-4.30pm

Sunday 12-4.30pm

Evenings:

Friday and Saturday 6.30pm-9pm

(last orders)

To book call 01595 741569

### What's on Guide

#### March

**daily -15th March: Exhibition:** 'Spreading the Word', Church of Scotland Records, Archives.

**daily -18th March: Exhibition:** 'Rags to Riches', work by Shetland Needleworkers, Da Gadderie.

**2nd: Thing Lecture: 'Laws in Early Scandinavia'**, by Professor Stefan Brink, University of Aberdeen, Auditorium, 7.30pm, tickets at reception, free.

**13th: Sheeksin: "Restoring the gig"** 2.30-3.00, informal talk by Erik Erasmuson and Sonny Morrison: Learning Room, no booking required, free.

**22nd-23rd: Easter cards and crafts: Mootie Moose workshops,** 10.30-11.30am & 2.30-3.30pm, ages 2½-5, £7.50 for three Mar-May sessions, booking essential.

**24th-29th April: Exhibition:** 'Colouring in Shetland', paintings by Kristi Cumming, Da Gadderie.

#### April

**daily -29th: Exhibition:** 'Colouring in Shetland', paintings by Kristi Cumming, Da Gadderie.

**3rd-29th: Exhibition: 'The Methodists' Handwritten Bibles'**, Foyer corridor.

**3rd: Workshop: Scarecrows!** 10.30-11.30am ages 7-12, £3.50, booking essential.

**4th: Lecture: 'Faroe Smacks', by John Goodlad,** Auditorium, 7.30pm, tickets at reception, free.

**5th: Easter on the Croft:** 10.30-11.30am, ages 5-7 - £3.50, booking essential.

**9th: Going Potty:** 10.30-11.00am, ages 2½-5yrs, booking essential, free.

**9th: Easter on the Croft:** 2-3pm, ages 5-7, £3.50, booking essential.

**10th: Sheeksin: "New Donations"** 2.30-3.00, informal talk by Dr Ian Tait: Learning Room, no booking required, free.

**12th: Kale Planting:** 10.30 - 11.30am, ages 8-12, £3.50, booking essential.

**19th-20th: Fantastic Fiddles: Mootie Moose workshops,** 10.30-11.30am & 2.30-3.30pm, ages 2½-5, £7.50 for three Mar-May sessions, booking essential.

**20th: Thing Lecture: 'Sagas and things', by Professor Judith Jesch,** University of Nottingham, Auditorium, 7.30pm, tickets at reception, free.

All events are held at Shetland Museum and Archives. To book, or for more information please contact us on 01595 695057.

## Sex, slander, and charity work in Kirk records

Archives staff were pleased to welcome a good turnout in February to an event promoting new online access to Church of Scotland records. Shetland Church of Scotland records began in 1675 and give an unrivalled insight into life in the islands. There are cases of adultery, fornication, and accusations of witchcraft, alongside the Kirk's religious, charitable and education work.

Digitised records of the Shetland Synod, the three Presbyteries (Lerwick, Burravoe and Olnafirth), and many volumes of Kirk Session minutes from parishes are now available on computers at the Archives.

The Presbyteries ordained ministers and looked after their welfare, examined discipline cases from the Sessions and heard appeals. They also dealt with Church buildings. For example in 1831 the Burravoe Presbytery visited the North Yell kirk and found that the building 'has long been in a state of miserable dilapidation and now has come to pass that neither Minister nor

people can enter without much danger to their health'. The Kirk was then condemned.

The Kirk Sessions made sure Church rules were obeyed, and disciplined those who broke them. They also dealt with education and poor relief. The earliest volume comes from Tingwall and gives several fascinating examples of life in the parish. Some services were held in Scalloway Castle, as the Tingwall Kirk was in a state of disrepair. There are accusations of theft and slander and even one woman accusing another of witchcraft. The Session also set out the rules regarding the Sacred Sabbath day. All fishing, begging or travelling was banned on Sunday.

Those who broke the rules were punished, sometimes by paying a fine or by standing in front of the Congregation, admitting their guilt. Some transgressors had to 'stand in linen', wearing a course linen shirt, adding to the humiliation.

The fines paid, along with collections made at Church, often were given to the elderly, sick and destitute in the parish. In Lerwick



**Archives Assistant Angus Johnson shows visitors how to use the digitised Church of Scotland records.**

in 1759 money was distributed to dozens of individuals. It was usually given as a small sum of cash but occasionally as a loan to be repaid. Sometimes there were conditions attached, such as the money had to be used to buy a specific item like clothes or shoes.

There are many other types of information in the records. Details about education and church schools, the punishment of misbehaving ministers, and lists of those who received communion are all recorded. The records are a wonderful source for family historians – particularly if your ancestor misbehaved! But they also can be used to find out about buildings, schools, and the work of the Church in each parish.

The records have been digitised as part of a joint project with the National Records of Scotland and the Church to scan Kirk records from all over Scotland, not just those from Shetland. These scans are now available to view in the Archives. The NRS plan to make the records available through the ScotlandsPeople website later this year.

Joanne Wishart  
Assistant Archivist



**Readers examine original Kirk Session minute books.**

# Staff go for Masters

Three museum staff members have begun a two-year postgraduate Masters in Museum and Gallery Studies at the University of St Andrews. The coursework covers all aspects of museum operations, including collections management, learning, and exhibitions. Laurie Goodlad, Yvonne Reynolds and Jenny Murray also spent a week in St Andrews, which included visits to museums to see and discuss the work of other professionals.



Laurie Goodlad at the helm of the Discovery in Dundee.

## Care of paper course

SMAA staff recently offered a session about caring for paper collections to volunteers from community museums. Assistant Archivist Joanne Wishart discussed and demonstrated how paper artefacts should be handled, cleaned and stored. She also advised the group on equipment and suppliers. Curator of Collections Jenny Murray and Collections Assistant Laurie Goodlad demonstrated methods for flattening paper artefacts using simple methods and basic, inexpensive supplies. The Museum and Archives are happy to offer other courses to heritage volunteers. Please contact Carol Christiansen (01595 741560; [carol@shetland-museum.org.uk](mailto:carol@shetland-museum.org.uk)) if there is course you would like to see offered.

## New website launched

Hay's Dock Café Restaurant has launched its new and improved website, [www.haysdock.co.uk](http://www.haysdock.co.uk). It features current menus and daily menu updates, a live view from the restaurant, courtesy of Promote Shetland webcam, and downloadable information packs for corporate and social functions, including weddings. It also provides a link to Facebook, where customers can sign up to receive daily updates of lunch specials. To book, call 01595 741562.

## Adopt-a-Monument is back!

Archaeology Scotland have re-launched the Adopt-a-Monument scheme for another four years, giving local groups help with saving and enhancing historic or archaeological monuments in their area. The scheme was instrumental in carrying out archaeological work at Sandwick in Unst, and the Cruester Burnt Mound in Bressay. If your heritage group knows of a ruin in your area that you'd like to save, and not sure where to start, contact the AaM team: [www.scottisharchaeology.org.uk](http://www.scottisharchaeology.org.uk).

## Searching for funding?

Shetland Islands Council has developed a new website to help you find sources of funding. The Shetland 4 Community website contains an ever-expanding list of funding bodies and links to individual websites. What I find most helpful is being able to create my own profile through the website, which then chooses those funding bodies most likely to fit my projects. I can also receive regular updates of new funding streams, based on my professional profile. This is a huge help to those of us who struggle with the complexities of funding searches. Give it a go! at [www.open4community.info/shetland/Default.aspx](http://www.open4community.info/shetland/Default.aspx).

## Did you know?

Each issue of Unkans is available in .pdf format from the Museum and Archives website. Go to [www.shetland-museum.org.uk](http://www.shetland-museum.org.uk) home page and click on the Downloads tab to the left, then Unkans.

## One tragedy, two versions

*Editor's note: The following story was submitted by Lol Anderson several months ago and we are pleased to run it now. In the interim, we came across another version of this tragedy, published in the Inverness Advertiser on 23 December 1856, who picked up the story from the Northern Ensign, a Caithness newspaper. Both versions have important details about the unfortunate victims and their families, and we felt compelled to run both stories together.*

### Tragedy in Bressay Sound, 29 November 1856

Shetland has a long list of grim boating tragedies, and some are quite famous. But an accident in Bressay Sound, in which five folk from two families lost their lives, is less well known. The sad events of that awful day, 150 years ago, are as follows: In the morning, several boats left Bressay for Lerwick, which was a regular occurrence since there was no regular ferry service at that time. One of the boats left the Hoversta noost, and its six occupants were William Duncan, aged 63, a Hoversta crofter; his two sons, James, 34 (who only had one arm), and Francis, 26. There was also a neighbour, Peter Hunter, and sisters, Margaret Smith, 31, and Ann Smith, 23, both from the croft of Globa.

The main reason for their trip was to enable Ann and Francis to buy their wedding clothes. They intended to marry in Bressay on Christmas Eve, and since Christmas was celebrated according to the old

calendar, the date of the wedding was 4th January 1857. Just before 4pm the party left Lerwick for Bressay with their purchases. All went well with the boat until she was off the brough of Laraness, when a blinding shower of sleet accompanied by a particularly heavy squall struck the small craft and overwhelmed her. Of the six occupants who had left Bressay that morning, only Peter Hunter made it back alive, clinging to the keel of the upturned boat. The tragedy was made even more shocking because James Duncan left a young widow, Agnes, who he married on 12th July 1855, and a baby daughter, Elizabeth.

Needless to say, it was one of the saddest Yuletides ever experienced in the island. The accident having happened so near to the Bressay shore meant that the bodies were recovered and were laid to rest in the Mail and Gunnista churchyard. The five deaths were all registered by William Duncan's third son Peter, in Bressay on 8th December 1856.

*L. F. Anderson  
Bressay History Group*

Melancholy Occurrence in Shetland – Five Persons Drowned. – Particulars of a most lamentable catastrophe, mainly occasioned by intemperance, which occurred in Shetland, on the 29th ult., and by which five individuals have been drowned, have just reached us. It appears that, on the day in question, a boat belonging to Bressay left Lerwick about half-past three in the afternoon, on its return to that island. There were six individuals on board, four men and two women – viz., William Duncan, fisherman, Hoverstay, his two sons James and Francis; Peter Hunter, sailor, and two girls, Margaret and Ann Smith, cousins of

the Duncans'. In whatever condition the other parties on board were, it appears that James Duncan was in a state of intoxication, and being very passionate and quarrelsome when in that state, the deplorable calamity we now relate was occasioned thereby. According to the testimony of the only survivor, it appears that after the boat had been at some distance on its homeward voyage, James Duncan discovered that he had forgotten a basket and some other things in Lerwick, and immediately ordered his father to put the boat about and return to Lerwick. This he refused to do. The young man then attempted to pull the boat back, against the efforts of the others, but, of course, failed. Peter Hunter then got hold of him, and held him down for a few minutes; but immediately on letting him go he sprung towards his father, and attempted to strike him. In the commotion then occasioned, the boat was upset, and, sad to say only one of the six on board the boat was saved. William Duncan was several times on the bottom of the boat; James, greatly sobered by this time, also held on, but in vain; one by one of the unfortunate individuals sank to rise no more, till Peter Hunter alone remained. By and by the boat righted, and Hunter succeeded in getting on board. She was full of water, and the oars being lost, he had patiently to wait till she was drifted from Laraness to Ham, the time occupied being upwards of two hours. The body of James Duncan was dragged on the 1st, William's on the 3d, and Ann Smith's on the 5th. The others had not been found up to the date of our informant's letter – the 6th [Dec]. – Northern Ensign.

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](mailto:info@shetlandmuseumandarchives.org.uk) Telephone: 01595 695057 Fax: 01595 696729

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

heritage  
Shetland  
culture

**DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FOR NEXT ISSUE IS NEXT ISSUE IS FRIDAY, 13 APRIL, 2012.**