

## Lighthouses, sport, and baskets at Shetland Museum and Archives this winter

This winter sees a wide range of topics discussed and explored at the Shetland Museum and Archives. From lighthouses and meids, to regency boxers and baskets, there should be something that takes your fancy. Details of all events mentioned can be found below.

Winter sees a range of events for adults from the formal to informal. Our popular afternoon Sheeksin sessions are an opportunity for staff and visitors to chat and have a look at a project, object or piece of research that staff have been working on. In November, Brian Johnson will be Sheeksin about his work with the Northern Lighthouse Board and on the restoration of the Sumburgh Lighthouse. From the mundane to the dangerous, and some eerie encounters in between, he has many a tale to tell. In December, Museum and Archives staff will be Sheeksin about "My perfect Christmas Present", as they show the objects, that would make it onto their Christmas list. You may be surprised by what some of them would like to take home!

Dus du Mind? Is an opportunity to meet with old friends and new to share your memories on a topic. Kirsty Clark and Angus Johnson will bring some old photos, objects and archival material related to the theme.

This event is in partnership with Alzheimer Scotland and everyone is welcome.

Our evening lectures in November and December are more formal events and typically include a 45minute lecture followed by a question and answer session. Our annual memorial lecture on Thursday 8th November is dedicated to Rob Anderson, who gave 45 years' service to Shetland's local authority as



Dr Ian Tait will give a talk on basket making in December.

both an employee and a councillor. Most people remember him for his success, dedication and contribution to the local badminton scene and his role, with John Nicolson, in the creation of the leisure centre network. Professor Holt's lecture is entitled "Sport, History and British Culture, 1700-2000" and he will explore the creation of modern sport from Regency boxers to Sky Sports celebrities, using images and extracts from the recent BBC series 'Sport and the British'.

Local author and historian Charlie Simpson, will be giving a talk at the end of November on Shetland's Meids. Before electronic devices, fishing ground locations were worked out using the position of natural features like hills, headlands etc. Charlie's lecture is in partnership with the Nautical Institute (Shetland branch) and sponsored by the Lerwick Port Authority.

Finally Dr Ian Tait will be discussing traditional Shetland baskets, their types, function and construction. Basket making was a traditional craft in Shetland and our collections contain many examples of this, which was done in nearly every home. Dr Tait will be answering the questions "What were all these baskets for?"

### Tuesday 13th November – 2.30pm

Free, no ticket required

*Sheeksin: Lighthouses with Brian Johnson*

### Thursday 8th November – 7.30pm (doors open at 7.00pm)

Free but ticketed

*2012 Annual Memorial Lecture dedicated to Rob Anderson Sport, History and British Culture, 1700-2000 by Professor Richard Holt*

### Thursday 22nd November – 7.30pm

Free, no booking required

*'To Mark a place': 6000 years of meids by Charlie Simpson*

### Wednesday 28th November – 2.30pm

Free, no booking required

*Dus du Mind?*

### Thursday 6th December – 7.30pm

Free, no booking required

*What were all these baskets for? With Dr. Ian Tait*

### Tuesday 11th December – 2.30pm

Free, no booking required

*Sheeksin: My perfect Christmas Present, with Shetland Museum and Archives staff*

## Local Events Listings

For information on local events please visit [www.shetland.org](http://www.shetland.org) to view listings. To add your own event to this site please call 01595 989898 or complete the online form at [www.visit.shetland.org/submit-an-event](http://www.visit.shetland.org/submit-an-event)

**NEW WEBSITE**  
[www.shetlandamenity.org](http://www.shetlandamenity.org)

## Light goes out on Bressay



The Bressay lighthouse has been shining a light over Lerwick harbour for the past 154 years. Last month on the 11th September the light shone for the last time before it was switched off at dawn to be replaced by a new smaller, less powerful light.

The Bressay light was first lit on the 31st August 1858 and a “new” machine, installed in 1940, can now be seen on display in the Museum. The light became powered by electricity on the 17th July 1967 but it was not until it became automated in 1989 that the Lighthouse keepers were withdrawn.

The men who closed down the Bressay Lighthouse tower light were Richard Holmes, NLB Area Maintenance Engineer, and Brian Johnson Retained Lighthouse Keeper, Shetland (pictured). Brian has donated the last one of the eight bulbs to be removed from the tower light to the Museum collection.

# Archives treasure trove

The Westminster government has recently announced plans to commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of World War 1. At a national level, this will include the refurbishment of the First World War Galleries at the Imperial War Museum in London, and the funding of an “enduring educational legacy”. But at a local level, what a treasure trove of information and education is to be found in the Shetland Archives, as I have recently begun to discover.

Following on from the work of Graduate Placement, Liz Brown, plans are in place to index The Shetland News, and currently a small band of volunteers is beavering away at the issues covering the years of World War 1. What an eye-opener this is. Whatever level of historical knowledge we might have, however familiar the verses of the war poets, it is the reality of events set out in the newspaper that affect the reader: the Deaths in Service, often supported by gentle and

respectful extracts from letters sent by serving comrades to the grieving families; the tragic losses of so many to battle wounds or to drowning, but also to pneumonia following measles; the family who had four sons serving in the army and a further four in the mercantile marine; the impact on the small community of Muckle Roe of having no fewer than forty four men away serving their country. Many other aspects of the war effort are also of interest: the Sandwick schoolchildren gathering moss for war dressings, the fund-raising for Scottish Soldiers’ huts in France and elsewhere, for Belgian orphans, and many other causes, the efforts to obtain additional land for food production, and so on. This source of material is an education in itself.

But of course there is more to be found in The Shetland News apart from news of the War. It is sometimes impossible not to be side-tracked by other fascinating stories that invite further investigation – the Burra

man, Halcro Umphray, whose adventurous career in the Hudson’s Bay Company in the 19th century led to being part of the British Expedition in search of Sir John Franklin’s Arctic Discovery ships – and how his name over time came to be recorded as Halcourt Humphrey; and another very different Halcrow man, whose interest in education in Shetland in the 19th century included an order that children should not be taught writing until they reached the age of 13!

You may have gained the impression that I find this project interesting and compelling, and you would be quite right. Not only is it contributing to what will become a valuable resource, but also it is a fulfilling voluntary role. And I am learning so much!

**Isabel Wilmot**

*Newspaper Indexing Volunteer*

*Editors note: The work done by the volunteers will soon be available to search online, via the Archives catalogue.*



# Peerie Vikings Up Helly Aa



Budding Jarls and peerie Vikings are invited to a family fun day ahead of Lerwick's Up Helly Aa. Bairns can visit the learning room's galley shed to make their own helmet, shield and torch prior to joining a procession through the museum at 2.30pm. There is also an opportunity to weave a Viking wrist bracelet using traditional methods with Jane Outram. Come along on

Sunday 27th January from 12.00pm-2.30pm to join in this free family drop-in event.

Adults won't miss out either, with a change to listen to Brydon Leslie's talk on the 'Borgar Jarl: J. J. Haldane Burgess and Up Helly Aa' on Saturday 26th January starting at 2.30pm. This event is free and will be in the Auditorium. No booking is required.

## Old friend will be missed

James W. Irvine, an old friend of the Museum and Archives, died recently in his 95th year.

Jeemie, or 'Brains', as he was affectionately known, was a native of the Ness, and had a distinguished war career from D-Day until 1946. Afterwards he threw himself into the development of Further Education in Shetland, encouraging the arts and community activities of all kinds; he eventually became a headmaster, and was noted for his gentle teaching methods.

On his retirement, which lasted nearly 35 years, Jeemie took up his pen. Asked by the Education Committee to write a small book on Shetland in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he got a taste for writing. He wrote 22 books, many of them published by his son Alan.

Doing research, he haunted the old Archives in King Harald Street. His best achievement was the work he did on Shetland's relationship with Norway during the Second World War. We miss discussions with him about mutual interests.

**Brian Smith**, Archivist

## Progress at Sumburgh Head

Good progress is being made at Sumburgh Head as the new education room takes shape – foundations have been laid and walls are going up. Restoration of the roofs and chimneys has begun and there is a lot of building activity inside the former Principal Lightkeeper's house as the new RSPB office is prepared. The gathering of content for the site's interpretation continues across the topics of lighthouse, marine life, World War 2, archaeology and geology. Two former Sumburgh keepers, Tommy Eunson and Lawrence Tulloch, have been telling stories and anecdotes to help with the interpretation and have visited the site to see how their former place of work is changing.



## Anderson revels in ‘greatest spectacle in Eastern Europe



**James William Anderson of Burravoe.**

*Image courtesy of the Old Haa.*

‘...I am afraid the only job offers we have right now are in Shetland’. Shetland? Sounds exciting. ‘Of course I’ll go to Shetland’, I said to the incredulous woman on the other end of the line. The conversation took place in Łódź Poland, in December 2002. It is amazing how human stories sometimes run parallel courses. Nearly eighty years beforehand a Shetlander, James William Anderson from Burravoe was applying for a job as an English teacher abroad. ‘There was an apologetic note in my interviewer’s voice: the only place I can offer you is Łódź Poland. But if you care to wait...’

The quote comes from a memoir by Anderson, which only recently came into possession of the Shetland Archives. It is a 226 pages long typewritten manuscript, and it’s great fun to read. The author was obviously set on writing a story rather than just documenting events. It is written with flair, vigour and a marvellous sense of humour. The young man’s dream had been to become a journalist but his hopes to conquer Fleet

Street came to nothing and he was forced to look for work abroad. His first impressions of Łódź weren’t too promising. ‘The cab turned into Piotrkowska Street, (...), which runs straight as a die through the heart of the town. What with the clanging tramcars bells and the clip-clop of horses’ hooves I felt I had slipped back half a century in time’. However, after a good meal in one of the city’s restaurants, he concluded: ‘I now had the feeling that I would be happy in a country that could cater so effectively and so elegantly for my needs’. So it is perhaps not too surprising then that Anderson ended up staying in Poland for over a decade and after a few years’ work at the Berlitz School of Languages in Łódź eventually set up his own school.

The city life doesn’t feature much in the manuscript. Anderson is more interested in the countryside, weather, harsh Polish winters and the way people coped with severe temperatures, beautiful autumns, which he describes as ‘the greatest spectacle of Eastern Europe, compared to Canadian Fall’, hot summers spent swimming in rivers and kayaking, and local customs. I couldn’t help wondering if this interest in nature, boats and weather could be accounted for by his Shetland roots! He himself only rarely mentions Shetland. In Poland all British would be commonly thought of as English, especially in those days. Davis, a fellow teacher advises him: ‘I notice you have a bit of an accent but you’ll soon get rid of that!’ Anderson continues: ‘I had not thought of this. I would be teaching my pupils English with a Scots accent! The fact that I was born in the Shetland Isles, and, therefore, did not consider myself as Scot, would have meant nothing to Davis’.

Following the German and Soviet invasion of Poland, he and his Polish fiancée Helena had to find their way out of the war stricken country. Nearly half of the book describes their desperate journey through the mayhem of enemy fire, army camps and streams of refugees. One of his Polish friends reflected: ‘It is good that you came to Poland when you did... You have seen us at our best, happy, full of plans for the future and above all, free... This may very well be saying goodbye to a way of life we have loved... When you think of us, remember the good times’.

Anderson and Helena managed to get back to Britain, got married in December 1939 and spent the rest of their lives in London.

**Zuzanna O’Rourke**  
Visitor Services Assistant

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

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**DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FOR NEXT ISSUE IS FRIDAY, 11TH JANUARY, 2013.**