

Arctic Convoys Remembered

Shetland Museum has recently received a rare medal which was awarded to Charles Andrew Mouat (b. 1913–d. 1996), Stennestwatt, Walls. This medal has been kindly donated by Meg Simpson (pictured below with Laurie Goodlad, Collections Assistant) who claimed it on Charlie's behalf. This is the only Arctic Convoy medal held in the Museum collection.

The Arctic Star medal is a retrospective award which was formally approved by the Queen and began production early in 2013. The medal recognises the service by those in the forces who were serving north of the Arctic Circle, predominantly those who were involved in the Arctic Convoys. Many Shetlanders' served in these Convoys during the war and these medals in their honour can now be claimed in recognition of their contribution to the war effort.

The Arctic Convoys of the Second World War were notoriously dangerous, oceangoing convoys. They sailed between the United Kingdom, America and Iceland to northern ports in the Soviet Union, delivering essential supplies. There were a total of 78 convoys, involving 1400 merchant ships, between August 1941 and May 1945. 85 merchant vessels and 16 Royal Navy warships were lost during these

convoys with a great loss of life. Charlie served on the merchant vessels involved in these convoys; he was torpedoed three times and saw several ships destroyed by enemy submarines. Until now, these brave men were unsung heroes of the war and it is fitting that at long last their huge contribution to the war effort has been recognised.



Laurie Goodland, Collections Assistant at Shetland Museum and Archives accepts the medal from Meg Simpson



Landscape by Ingálvur av Reyni

Additional Artwork on Display

Four additional paintings from the Shetland Museum's art collection will be on display from February onwards. Two landscapes by Faroese artists Hans J Glerfoss and Ingálvur av Reyni, which were presented to the Shetland Islands Council by the town council of Torshavn, will be on show in the Café Restaurant foyer and at the entrance to the Upper Gallery. A watercolour by Forbes Hogg will also be displayed in the Upper Gallery while an oil painting by Scottish artist Michele David will be shown in the Lower Gallery. As the collection comprises nearly 200 oils and acrylics and many more prints, drawings and watercolours, it is not possible to make them all accessible to visitors but Museum staff are delighted to be able to exhibit selected works on a temporary basis.

Local Events Listings

For information on local events please visit 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

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www.shetlandamenity.org/unkans
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Dat's da Year o Shetland Dialect 2014 launched in traditional style at a Auld New Year Fjaana – yarnin ower eight o clocks, wi tae, bannocks an flesh, an fancies. Dey wir stories, poems an sangs tö – an Laureen Johnson hed wis marshalled ta deliver a choral verse arrangement o Auld Mansie's Crö . Some o wis wisna dön da laek fae we wir bairns at da schule. Hit wis a hearty night, wi plenty o gaffin an lightsomeness.

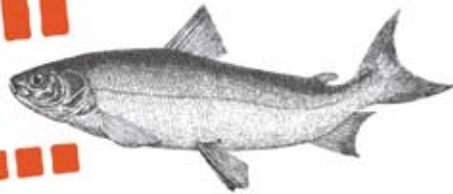
As dis tenth birthday year fir Shetland ForWirds begins, hit's important ta emphasise at hit's no about wis – hit's about da dialect itsel. Wir hoopin ta wirk along wi idder folk, no steer a coorse be wirsels.

Da first een o dat projects is da latest version o Bards in da Bog at's taen shape noo as Bards on da Street. Shetland Library an Living Lerwick teamed up fir dis, wi wirsels pittin up judges. Copies o da winnin poems is been laminated ta appear in shop windows fir a start. Watch oot fir aa da poems appearin in da Shetland Times.

It's been kinda fine ta get involved wi da new Scots Language Radio at's been launched on da Scots Language Centre website: www.scotslanguage.com. Da body at's set dis up'll be weel kent in Shetland fir shö haes a family connection – dat's broadcaster an singer Frieda Morrison. Wi a remit ta include voices fae aa ower Scotland in her montly programme, Shetland ForWirds wis bidden aboard, an we'll hae a coarn a news fae Shetland every second mont, startin noo. Tune in fir a listen.

Mind, if we dunna takk tent, we'll loss wir Midder Tongue so we need ta Spaek it an Laek it afore it's ower late.

SO MUCH TO SEA...



Shetland's seafood industry will be in the spotlight in February and March when it launches its 'So Much to Sea' project in the community.

The aim of the project is to highlight just what this powerful industry means to Shetland and its people – and will focus on its social and economic impact.

A series of community events will kick off in February and March at six halls throughout the isles and feature a mini exhibition which will celebrate the history of the industry, as well as focusing on its value to Shetland and its future. There will also be screenings of a specially commissioned film which presents a fascinating insight into the various personalities involved with the

industry and the work they do which is helping to shape the industry.

Shetland Museum and Archives will also be attending some of the events, and are inviting the public to come forward with stories of their seafood-related experiences. It may be that your great-great grandfather was at the haaf, or perhaps you have tales to share of what life was like for the women and families waiting back home. Dig out any photographs or items that you think would be of interest and we'll record your story for the archives and they may also appear on the new 'So Much to Sea' website.

There will be something for everyone including music with a flavour of the sea, performed by local school

bairns; seafood tastings and cooking suggestions, and more. The events will tie in with regular fish and chip nights, so come along and get your tea whilst finding out more about what this vital industry means to you.

So much to sea events:

- Bigton: Saturday 15 February**
- Burra: Saturday 22 February**
- Walls: Saturday 1 March**
- Vidlin: Saturday 8 March**
- Cullivoe: Friday 21 March**
- Whalsay: Saturday 29 March**

Find out more about the industry, upload your stories and pictures at: www.somuchtosea.co.uk

The project is supported by Axis 4 of the European Fisheries Fund.

Project Partners: Seafood Shetland, Shetland Aquaculture Trust, Shetland Shellfish Management Organisation, Hunter & Morrison Trust, Shetland Fish Producers' Organisation.



Up Helly Aa 1914 – The last before the Great War

Lerwegians held Up Helly Aa in 1914 just like any other year. The festival was settling down into something we recognise today, because a century ago there was a single longship, a Jarl to lead proceedings, themed squads in disguise, and – of course – the dramatic burning at the finale. Those guizers 100 years ago didn't know their revel was to be the last for several years, so pictures of the event have a special poignancy. A small show of photographs now on display in the foyer corridor at Shetland Museum and Archives looks at some of the topical themes of 1914. [runs to 17th February] From this distance of time, we can now see big changes were afoot.

The proclamation referred to controversies like the costly Foula pier, but many in-jokes are now lost in the mists of time. One feature is very familiar, the so-called galley (the term actually denotes a Mediterranean rowing boat!), which in 1914 met its fiery doom at Victoria Pier. The Guizer Jarl, the master of ceremonies, was Laurence Sandison, who was, like all the Jarls thenadays, clean-shaven because that look was so conventional that men didn't grow Viking whiskers for the occasion, and Laurence's long hair was a wig. A century ago, popular culture was making an impact, to the detriment of intellectual squad topics: in Edward VII's reign guizers often depicted historical characters, mythology, or the arts, but the onward march of popular culture was eroding that bedrock of creativity. This was the beginning of what later led to squads enacting television programmes and pop stars.



Jarl, Laurence Sandison.

Courtesy of Shetland Museum and Archives

Outside influences had really taken hold in Shetland, and entertainment inspired many guizers. The North Star Cinema had opened a few years before, and the "Comedians" squad depicted slapstick comics they'd seen in films. Like picture-house comics, the squad depended on movement for gags, because films were silent. American influence infiltrated Lerwick just as much as anywhere else in Britain, hence the "Ragtime Rex" squad. Ragtime was a fast piano music that was very popular at the time, but, like most fads, it was out of fashion by the 1920s.

A more standard act for the era was "Swiss Dancing Girls". National costumes were a favourite, because they offered bright outfits unique to a foreign land. In 1914 national costumes were still worn everyday all over pre-industrial Europe, and guizers could easily find imagery on cigarette cards and postcards. Britain was at the peak of her power, and patriotism inspired the squad "Britannia", this classical figure being the embodiment of Britain's imperial pride. The sarcastic "Fashions for Men" squad mocked men who wanted fashionable clothing. It was acceptable for women to follow such things, but, for reserved Shetlanders, it was effeminate. Hence their skirts contrived as trousers!



Fashions for Men' Squad.

Courtesy of Shetland Museum and Archives.

Dr Ian Tait
Curator

Thelma Blance: an appreciation



Courtesy of Shetland Museum and Archives.

From an early age, I have been besotted by the magic of old books. I remember as a schoolboy rummaging in Saturday market stalls looking for that elusive find. These days the equivalent search is the internet, which is where I came across in a Dumfries secondhand bookshop, a book entitled "The Economy of Shetland 1930-1952" by Thelma Blance. Intrigued by the subject matter and the high probability (from the surname) that the author was herself a Shetlander, I promptly bought the item.

On arrival, my interest was piqued by finding that the book was one of the copies of Thelma's Thesis presented for her MA Honours in Geography at Aberdeen University in May 1953. It gives a fascinating insight into how

she interpreted the then current economic situation and future outlook for Shetland in a pre-North Sea Oil & Gas world which is now increasingly hard to imagine. At that time, "the economic situation in the islands gives rise to serious misgivings about that future, with depopulation, declining basic industries, rising unemployment figures, and one quarter of the population having reached pensionable age, the islands are at a most critical stage in their history."

Naturally after this time elapsed, some topics have been somewhat overtaken by events, for example a suggestion that pressure on the fishing industry could be eased by building larger trawlers to fish in Icelandic waters(!), but others resonate equally strongly today. For example, how Lerwick pulls in population, jobs and amenities away from the outlying communities. What would she have to say about current concerns, I wonder?

I resolved to find out more about Thelma herself. After all, in the immediate postwar period, a young Shetland woman gaining a Master's degree would not have been a common achievement. I discovered that she was born in Lerwick 1930, the daughter of Andrew and Joan Blance who I believe owned the Alexandra Bakery where Cee & Jays now occupy. I also found a wonderfully evocative photograph of her in her student days from the

Shetland Museum Photo Archive, standing in front of the St Clair.

Thelma went on to gain a PhD and became Senior town planner in Aberdeen. She maintained an interest in Shetland, being a committee member of the Caithness, Orkney & Shetland Association of Aberdeen as in the photograph below, from 1988. She was also a long serving officer in the reserve forces, and active in cultural affairs locally. She died in 1999 and is buried at Springbank Cemetery, Aberdeen.

I gained the impression from her thesis of a forthright young woman, not afraid of stating her views, and in today's terminology, determined to be a "high achiever".

Trevor Gray



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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.

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