

# Authentic or not? 'Shetland' knitting patterns 1840-1880

*'...written solely to instruct ladies in the pretty make-believe industry, or elaborate idleness, of knitting...'*

Tait's Edinburgh magazine, 1840

Knitting pattern books were first published in Britain in the 1840s. They appealed to middle class ladies with leisure time, for whom knitting was a growing hobby. At the same time, garments in Shetland knitted lace became fashionable. English and Scottish authors included instructions for patterns they called 'Shetland', but how authentically Shetland were they? The books contain few images so patterns must be knit to understand their design.

We chose 35 patterns identified as 'Shetland', published between 1840 and 1880. The samples on display were made by knitters across the world, following our appeal to knitters at the University of Glasgow. 137 knitters made nearly 300 swatches, from which the display samples were selected.

Some designs are similar to motifs used in traditional Shetland lace knitting. The Victorian authors may have copied designs from real Shetland lace sold on the British mainland. Other published designs are not found in Shetland historical garments and the authors' description as 'Shetland' remains a mystery. Shetland lace knitters did not use written patterns, but created motifs 'on the wires' and knitted them from memory.

