

The Journals of Einar Seim

In May 1934 four Shetlanders visited the island of Kinn in Norway in a yacht. There they met a Norwegian who was keen to visit Shetland.

Einar Seim asked them question after question about the islands west over the sea. He had already been in touch with Shetlanders by letter about linguistic matters; now he wanted to see the land that he had heard about. On the day of the yachtsmen's departure he rushed down to the harbour to ask if he could accompany them back home.

Seim visited Foula and Fair Isle. He came back to Shetland on two further occasions. He kept a detailed diary and took photographs of what he saw here.

Magnus Torvanger has now edited Einar Seim's Shetland journals, and gave a lecture in the Shetland Archives in June about the man and his journey. He is pictured here following his lecture. Behind him are Edvin Helgheim, director of culture in the principality of Florø, Snorre Seim, grandson of Einar, and Torkjell Djupedal, manager of 'Selja Forlag' who published the book in Norwegian. Discussions were held during the visit to Shetland regarding a translation into English of this publication.



Edges and Extremes

A new exhibition opened in Da Gadderie at Shetland Museum and Archives in August. Edges and Extremes: Shetland and Cornwall – People, Place, Industry – by visual artist, Sally Booth and poet, Evlynn Sharp began its life four years ago in Scalloway and now returns back to Shetland after a visit to the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, Tate Modern in London and Geevor Tin Mine, Pendeen.

The artworks and poetry from the Shetland phase of the Edges and Extremes project emerged from Evlynn and Sally's month-long visit to Scalloway when they immersed themselves in the community and culture. Davie Robertson invited the artists to watch his work and the scallop workers at Hunters Fish; the artists also visited Annie Henry's house to witness the fantastic knitting practice of Annie and Emma Isbister, along with her daughter, Alice.

Sally's images and Evlynn's poems focus on key themes such as fish processing, knitting and fishing. The Shetland book features an introduction by Mary Blance, Shetland ForWirds, who notes: "It's a welcome aspect of the project to see the emphasis placed on working lives. Knitting, fishing and fish processing have been vital to survival here for centuries and the writing and the pictures bring the skills, ancient and modern, to life on the page."



Annie Knitting by Sally Booth, 2012

Cast Off A Loop (extract)

*Annie never changes her tongue,
Even for a lass afore she was a seed,
Her hands are skating the wires this morning,
And now she is spretting it back...*

Evlynn Sharp

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Inaugural Shetland Boat

The first Shetland Boat Week has been hailed as a success, after hundreds of people attended planned events and activities during the second week of August.

Despite unseasonal gales at the beginning of the week, which forced the cancellation of several planned boat trips, all indoor events went ahead with good attendances at tours, lectures, demonstrations, family activities and music sessions.

Shetland Museum boats were well used with Brian Wishart and Jim Tait expertly skippering the *Vaila Mae*; demonstrating the dipping lug sailing technique with their experienced crew.

Trevor Jamieson and Peter Fraser took the helm of the *Pilot Us* for trips, while Trevor, and Ailish Parham, also took the *Haddock Boat Laura Kay* out on the water. In total, 91 people were able to enjoy boat trips through the week.

The boat trips concluded on Saturday with a small parade of boats which took passengers out. This included all the Museum boats alongside the *Press On* motor boat under charge of Tammy Duncan. Also taking part in the parade was the *Tommy Isbister* built, *Stavalu*. With only three crew members on board and a combined age of 189 (Erik Isbister, 37; Tommy Goodlad, 72 and

Tommy Isbister, 80) this boat had an exciting trip, dealing with two tears in the sail and eventually rowing back from the Bressay side in a fresh wind.

Hay's Dock was busy with visitors for the parade, many of whom

stopped to inspect the array of boats on display – some restored or replica craft belonging to Shetland Museum and some on loan for the event. The oldest of these was the *Clinkslack*. Built pre-1880 by Andrew Peterson of Skeld, the fourareen is now owned by Andrew Tait. Other boats on display included the *Skadan*, a Walter Duncan snr boat from 1920s owned by Andrew Stout; *Thetis* by William Slater of Papa, circa 1909 and now owned by Gibbie Fraser; *Venture*, built for racing in 1952 by Alex Johnson and now owned by Morgan Goodlad and *Eclipse*, a 1940 fourareen made by J. Bruce of Whalsay, owned by Alistair Rendall.

Shetland Boat Week was the perfect setting to launch the re-print of Adrian Osler's 1984 monograph, *The Shetland Boat: South Mainland and Fair Isle*, which is now available to buy from Shetland Museum and Archives and online at www.shetlandheritageshop.com following the lecture by the author.

Co-coordinator of the event, Emma Miller, said "We're just delighted with how the first Shetland Boat Week has gone. There were lots of folk about who attended events and the feedback

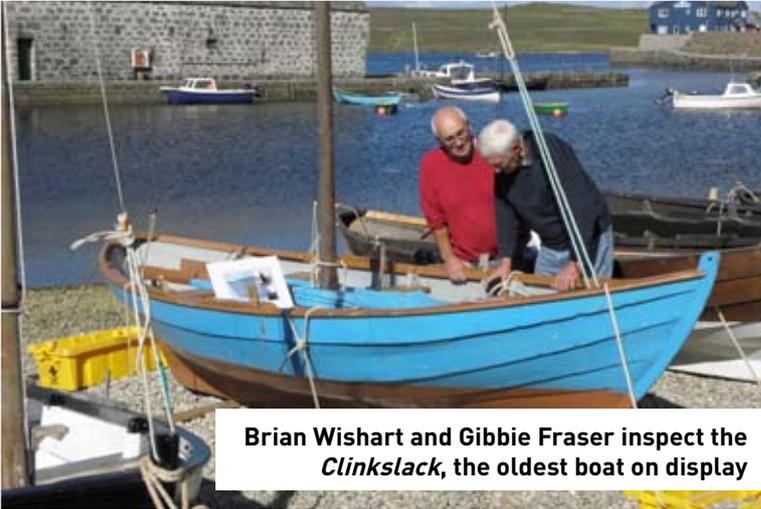


Participants on the Unst Day trip inspect the new boat under construction in Willie Mouat's shed



Boats on display: *Quantus*, *Wilma* (formerly *Snoriben*), *Venture*, with *Pilot Us* in the Background

at Week hailed a success



Brian Wishart and Gibbie Fraser inspect the *Clinkslack*, the oldest boat on display

we've had has been excellent. Everyone I've spoken to is asking if we are going to do it again and the answer is definitely yes.

"We couldn't have done it this year without the financial assistance and support from our sponsors, Ocean Kinetics and NorthLink Ferries and I would like to extend a huge thanks to them and all the staff at Shetland Museum and Archives who have pulled out all the stops this past week to make everything run smoothly."



***Vaila Mae*, replica sixareen under full sail**

The Fall of the house of Vaila

I wonder how many Shetlanders have read a long short story by M.P. Shiel, called 'Vaila', published in 1896 in his collection *Shapes in the Fire*.

Shiel was a native of Montserrat. He moved to England in 1885, and began to write horror and science fiction tales. I think he must have visited Shetland. His best-known novel, *The Purple Cloud* (1901) has a passage where the hero, at sea in the north, spies a group of sixerns.

Writing about 'Vaila', a contemporary reviewer said that '[Never] did [Edgar Alan] Poe ever conceive such a galaxy of sea-horrors'. There is no doubt that Poe and his *House of Usher* were the model for it.

The story is about a young man who meets a Shetlander, Haco Harfager in Paris, and twelve years later visits him at his ancestral home. The House of Vaila makes the House of Usher look bland.

'[F]rom many points near the top of [its] brazen wall huge iron chains, slimily barbarous with the trailing tresses of ages, reached out in symmetrical divergent rays to points on the ground hidden by the flood: the fabric had thus the look of a many-anchored ark'.

Not surprisingly, it has strange inhabitants. Harfager himself has deteriorated since his Paris days. Like Roderick Usher he suffers from extreme sensitivity to sound. 'His attire was a simple robe of bauge, which, as he went, waved aflaut from his bare and hirsute shins, and he was shod in those soft slippers called rivlins.'

He has a servant called Aith, 'the skeleton of a tall man, wrapped in a winding-sheet. ... Of ears, he showed no sign.' Aith claims that 'he had once suffered burning, almost to the cinder-stage, but had miraculously recovered.'

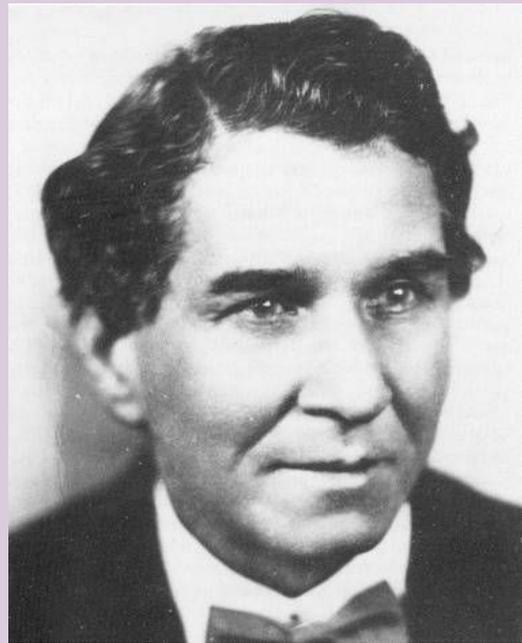
And Harfager's mother is 'osseous, scimitar-nosed. Her head shook with solemn continuity to the vibration of the house. From each ear trickled a

black streamlet; the mouth was ridged with froth.'

I needn't say that the house comes to a sorry end. What happens is rather obscure, but it's as final as the fate of the *House of Usher*. 'Observing the same wild glow about me which had blushed through the broken dome into the mansion,' says the hero, 'I glanced backward—and saw that the dwelling of the Harfagers was a memory of the past; then upward—and lo, the whole northern sky, to the zenith, burned one tumbled and fickly-undulating ocean of gaudy flames.'

'Vaila' is one of the great curiosities of Shetland literature. It is available in Roger Luckhurst's collection *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, Oxford 2005..

Brian Smith
Archivist



M.P. Shiel

This page is dedicated to research on all aspects of Shetland's history and heritage. Contributions are welcome.

Get in touch

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

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