

Important book collection comes to archives

The most comprehensive and valuable private collection of Shetland books in existence is currently being transferred from Shetland Library to the archives. The books were collected by local antiquarian E.S. Reid Tait, whose papers are already in the archives. Reid Tait was a draper who had a deep interest in Shetland's history and spent his life gathering every record and publication he could find which threw light on the subject. His books are being moved to the archives because of the excellent storage conditions, and to create more space at the library.

The collection, which contains almost every work written about Shetland up to the late-1950s, includes many rare and unique items. There is an original 1711 copy of Robert Sibbald's *Description of the Isles of Orkney and Zetland*, the first copy ever



seen by archives staff. There is also a notebook compiled by antiquarian Gilbert Goudie. This notebook includes transcripts of rare documents, notes on folklore and legend, and genealogical information about several Shetland families.

As the books are incorporated into the archives catalogue, staff have found a number of letters from authors placed within their pages. For example, there are several letters from writer Peter Jamieson, founder of the *New Shetlander*, asking

for a review of his book *The Viking Isles*. Reid Tait reviewed the book so savagely that several local writers leapt to Peter's defence! There are also letters from early 19th century authors such as Arthur Edmondston and Dorothea Campbell. These letters give fresh and unique insights into the composition of many Shetland books.

The books will be arriving from the library during the next few months. Please ask in the archives searchroom for further details.

Opening Hours

Note: all services closed 25-26 December and 1-2 January.

Museum

Monday-Saturday 10am-5pm;
Sunday 12pm-5pm

Archives

Monday-Friday 10am-4.30pm;
Saturday 10am-1pm; **Sunday** closed

Hay's Dock Café Restaurant

Daytime **Monday-Saturday** 10.30am-4pm; **Sunday** 12-5pm;
Evenings **Thursday-Saturday** 7-9pm

Hay's Dock Café Restaurant has special holiday opening hours during December and January. Please phone 01595 741569 for more information or to book.

What's On Guide

November

Nov to May 2010: Shetland Suffragists' centenary display, archives case.

7th Nov-6th Dec: Shetland Schools Art Exhibition, selection of artworks from primary 1 to secondary 6 pupils, Da Gadderie.

19th: Drifters to supertrawlers: Shetland's pelagic industry from 1945, illustrated talk by Bobby Gear, 7.30pm, free, drop in.

28th: Songs from Bells Brae Primary School Choir, suitable for all, 3pm, free, drop in.

29th: Christmas advent ring workshop, make an advent ring for your Christmas table using woven willow and candles. With Jo Jack and Ana Horne. Bring along decorations or other materials to incorporate in your decoration, adult workshop, 1.30pm - 4.30pm, £12, booking essential.

December

3rd: Sea kayak adventures in Greenland, illustrated talk by Martin Rickard, 7.30pm (Doors open 7pm), free, drop in.

6th: Christmas door wreath workshop, make a Christmas wreath for your door using woven willow, natural materials and any of your own decorations. With Jo Jack and Ana Horne, adults, 1.30pm - 4.30pm, £12, booking essential.

12th Dec-11th Jan 2010: 'Sikurluk', exhibition focusing on landscape and environmental change faced by northern communities, Da Gadderie.

12th: Festive fish decorations, sew a festive fish decoration for your Christmas tree, primary 3-7, 11am-12, £3, booking essential.

19th: Carols and songs from Shetland Choral Society, suitable for all, 12-12.40pm, free, drop in.

All events are held at the Shetland Museum and Archives and are free, unless otherwise stated. To book call 01595 695057. No booking is necessary for drop-in events.

Recent accessions: toy quernstone



The museum is very grateful to Mr Ivor Tulloch of Cullivoe, Yell who recently donated a rare item which he found in the yard dyke outside his house. This Viking-period toy quernstone is one of only 15 found in Shetland to date. A

small, perfectly-formed replica, it has a slot for the sile on its under face and a small perforation for the handle. It measures 85mm in diameter which is similar in size to the ones found in Sandwick, Unst. These toys were probably made for children, perhaps to learn them skills required for later life.

Jarlshof was the first place in Shetland known to produce this type of artefact. Other examples of quern- and millstones have been found in Whalsay, Olnesfirth, Aith and a further 6 from Viking sites in Unst.

As no examples have been unearthed in other communities colonised by the Vikings such as Greenland, Iceland, Faroe Islands and Orkney, it was thought these were unique to Shetland until recent research by Steffen Stummann Hansen and Anne-Christine Larsen¹ located 8 examples from Trondheim, in Norway. This poses an interesting thought that it was perhaps a family of immigrants from Norway who took these toys with them to Shetland, where they readily caught on as something to keep bairns amused.

1. Stummann Hansen, S. and A-C Larsen, 2000, 'Miniature Quern- and Millstones from Shetland's Scandinavian Past', *Acta Archaeologica*, v.71.



Staff profile: Gena Garson, Administration Assistant

Editor's note: before the new Museum and Archives joined forces, neither service had a dedicated administration assistant. Gena was our first, and started in Feb. 2006. Now we don't know what we would do without her!

What does your job involve?

I provide admin support for all parts of the Museum and Archives service. I deal with a wide range of things including processing staff timesheets; keeping holiday records; typing letters; and producing reports, menus for Hay's Dock Café Restaurant, and minutes of various meetings. In addition, I handle enquiries for facility

bookings and ensure all the necessary booking forms are completed. I am a point of contact for everybody who works here, so I am involved to some degree with every aspect of the service.

What aspect of your job do you enjoy the most?

I enjoy the busy nature of working in the museum and archives – there's always something different happening. It is good being part of a team of people with very different interests and backgrounds.

Are you interested in the historical element of working here?

Yes. I have always been interested in museums in general and that's what attracted me to apply for this job as well as the fact that it is a fantastic facility. Although I am not involved in working with artefacts or ancient documents directly, there is some satisfaction in working in a job where I feel I am contributing to the care and preservation of Shetland's heritage and culture in some small way.

What parts of the museum and archives do you like the best?

I especially like the temporary exhibitions in Da Gadderie. It's really good to see something new in there every month. The Gunnister Man display, which was here recently, is one my favourites of all the shows we've had so far. It was quite amazing to see at close hand how well preserved the 300 year old clothes and artefacts were.

For the record

For the last 25 years the sound archive at the Old Haa Museum & Gallery has been steadily growing, and now includes around 300 recordings and videos. Most of the collection was put together as part of an oral history project organised by the Old Haa Trust, and other material has been donated by individual collectors. Most of the original recordings are on cassette tapes and badly in need of restoration.

Signs of oxidisation were found on routine inspection – hardly surprising since most of the collection was getting well past the normal shelf life. Once the tell-tale signs of fine brown powder appeared, the tapes could no longer be used: any attempt to play a recording in such a condition would result in the tape being scraped while running over the metal spindle, and result in irreparable damage and loss. Fortunately, Museums Galleries Scotland has come to the rescue just in time.

A grant was awarded to the Old Haa under the Small Grants Scheme. The scheme allows accredited museums to apply for 66% matched funding up to a maximum of £2000, and more than one application can be made each year. Once the Old Haa had raised the balance, Dave Sinton from Unst agreed to start restoration work. He has had years of experience as a recording engineer, including the preservation of at-risk material, and has a range of equipment in his studio to enable him to tackle any archival project.

The first 50 recordings have now been rescued and transferred to CD format, and the potential applications are obvious. Selections from the restored material can be released as commercial CDs, and many merit consideration as potential radio productions or used in listening posts within the museum. Two copies have been made of each recording: one of top quality archival standard, and a second for everyday use. Public access to the collection can again be arranged, and in a more readily accessible format.

Although a start has been made, further fund raising will be needed to complete the project and tackle the even more difficult task of video restoration – another challenge for which Dave Sinton is well equipped.

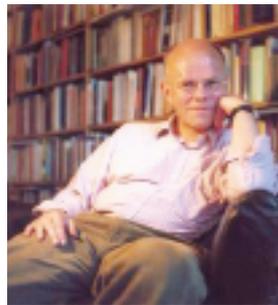
Mike McDonnell
Old Haa Trust

MacDiarmid's tea-chests' lecture

The second Shetland Museum and Archives memorial lecture took place on 9 October. It was in honour of John Graham, the great Shetland teacher and writer who played a major part in the arrival of both museum and archives services in the islands in the 1960s and 1970s. Before the lecture Mark Smith of the Archives gave a moving account of John's life and work.

Professor Michael Schmidt of the University of Glasgow gave the memorial lecture, and chose for his subject the career of the poet Hugh MacDiarmid in Whalsay in the 1930s. Michael began by considering the likely contents of the tea-

chests, crammed with books and papers, which MacDiarmid took away with him when he left Shetland in 1942. He then discussed in detail the change between the poet's lyrical work of the 1920s, comparing it with the scientific and intellectual poetry that he wrote while in Whalsay. The lecture gave rise to lively discussion.



Michael Schmidt

Professor Schmidt's text will be published in due course. Last year's lecture, by Prof. Jørn Sunde of Bergen, on connections between Shetland and Norway in the seventeenth century, is still available at £4.50 from the Museum and Archives shop.

COMMUNITY HERITAGE NEWS

Website launch

Shetland Heritage Association is about to launch its website and is hosting a meeting and luncheon for members at Aith Hall on Saturday, 5 December, from 11am to 3pm. Groups can view the entire website, including their own page. Feedback about the look and user-friendliness of the website is welcome! Future ways it can be used to benefit the membership will be discussed. For more information, contact Pat on 745 364 or Barbara on 820 368.

Wha does du tink du is?

Burra History Group will be holding a 'Who do you think you are?' open night on Friday 4th December, 7.30pm at Easthouse Croft, Papil, Burra as part of their preparations for the Hamefarin 2010. Come along and find out about your Burra ancestors; who lived in your Burra home before you?; did any members of your family emigrate from Burra? For further information telephone Adalene on 859 623 or Sylvia on 859 209, or e-mail: s.jamieson209@btinternet.com.

Ex-whalers reunion

A reunion of ex-whalers is proposed for September 2010. Invitations would extend from Shetland to Salvesen ex-whalers clubs in Edinburgh, Tonsberg and Fredrickstad. If you are interested in attending, helping to organise the event, or providing accommodation then please contact either Gibbie Fraser on 01595 809203 or Mitchell Arthur on 01806 242519.

What's in a number?

For the past 3 months I have been cataloguing vehicle records from 1921-1950, deposited in the Archives by the former Zetland County Council. The PS registration records are nearly complete for these years, allowing a comprehensive study of nearly 30 years of vehicle ownership in Shetland.

Vehicle registration was first required in 1921, resulting in a large number of registrations that year, since both new and existing vehicles had to be registered. Thereafter, a peak occurred in 1925, with a gradual decline in the 1930s, probably due to the depressed economy. Very few vehicles were registered during the war, but a significant increase occurred in the immediate post-war period, and especially in 1951-1952.

The number of motor-bike registrations mirror that for



The registration records for PS 222, a 1912 Albion mail and passenger van owned by Ganson Bros., Harbour Street, Lerwick, exist for the years 1921 to 1932.

other vehicles in the pre-war period. At its peak in 1925, 48 new motorbikes were registered, amounting to 53% of all vehicles registered in that year. This high percentage continued until the mid-1930s, but dropped to only 7% of all registered vehicles by 1950. The increased availability of smaller family cars and improved living standards

meant that the car was a more affordable means of transport following the war.

The difference between non-commercial and commercial vehicle ownership is stark: in 1921, non-commercial vehicles accounted for 70% of all newly registered vehicles. The surge in private vehicles in 1925 is contrasted with a decline in commercial vehicles at this time. Only after the war does the ownership of new commercial vehicles surpass that of the private motor-car, when 64% of new vehicles registered in 1947 were for local businesses. The acquisition of ex-military and government vehicles occurred between 1946 and 1950, reaching a peak in 1947.

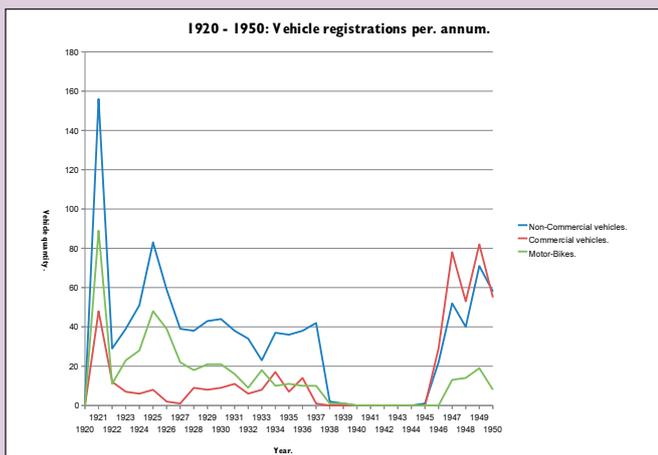
The majority of the former military vehicles were used for commercial purposes and

acquired by public auction. They were likely purchased at reasonable prices, and helped boost the efforts of local entrepreneurs keen to develop business opportunities immediately after the war.

With the onset of vehicle registration, there was, of course, the beginning of car tax. The government had rules which detailed how much tax vehicles were charged. This was calculated according to the size of the engine: the more powerful the vehicle, the greater the tax. Tax was levied at £1.00 for each horsepower. However, many vehicle manufacturers calculated engine size by another method – cubic capacity.

The government issued a ratio to convert cubic capacity to horsepower, but in Shetland, a simpler means was sometimes adopted: dividing the cubic capacity by 100. This gave inaccurate results, and meant local motorists often paid more than they should have. A 1700cc engine was re-calculated to 17 h.p. and the owner paid £17.00, instead of the true figures of 12 h.p. and £12.00 tax the government method laid down. The £5.00 overcharge equated to almost a week's wages in the 1920s.

Derek Jackson
Archives Volunteer



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 our newsletter or distribute copies to your group, let us know.

Email: 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 FRIDAY, 18 DECEMBER 2009