

Unkans

The newsletter of the Shetland Museum and Archives
and the Shetland heritage community

FREE

January 2011
Issue 24

museum
Shetland
archives

The Lewis Chessmen, Unmasked



Dr Irving Finkel and Beserker Chesspiece.

The Lewis Chessmen visit Shetland for the first time in a new travelling exhibition created by National Museums Scotland and the British Museum. The exhibition reunites much of the medieval hoard of 93 playing pieces, discovered on the island of Lewis in the 17th or 18th century. The 12th century figures have undergone recent research into their origins, craftsmanship, and significance. The display will delve into these issues and the wider context, looking at the history of chess and other board games. A number of events and activities will take place during the exhibition, including an evening lecture by Dr Irving Finkel of the British Museum, a specialist in early board games. See What's On, below, for details of this and other events.

The exhibition in Shetland has been made possible through the partnership between NMS and Shetland Amenity Trust. It runs from 21 January to 27 March.

Opening Hours

Please note the Museum Galleries and Hay's Dock Cafe Restaurant will be open until 6pm on Tuesday, 25th January for Up Helly Aa.

Museum

Monday-Friday 10am-4pm;
Saturday 10am-5pm;
Sunday 12pm-5pm

Archives

Monday-Friday 10am-4pm;
Saturday 10am-1pm

Hay's Dock Café Restaurant

Daytime Monday-Thursday 10.30am-3.30pm; **Saturday** 10.30am-4.30pm;
Sunday 12-4.30pm

Evenings: Friday and Saturdays, 6:30-9pm (last orders)

To book: 01595 741569

What's On Guide

January

daily, 21 Jan.-27 March: Voices of the Lewis Chessmen, radio drama by Charleston Primary School, Aberdeen, Da Gadderie listening post.

Lewis Chessmen Guided Tours, please ask at Museum reception desk for times.

15th: Viking Axe workshop, 11am-12noon, ages 5-11, £3, booking essential.

20th & 21st: Fearsome Vikings, Mootie Moose workshop, 10:30-11:30am & 2-3pm, ages 2-5, fully booked.

22nd, 23rd, 24th, & 26th: Origins of Up Helly Aa gallery tour, free, no booking required, check at reception desk for times.

26th: Thor's Hammer workshop, 2.30-3.15pm, ages 5-11, £2, booking essential

New focus displays: A conserved 18th century waistcoat, and an Edwardian screen.

February

5th & 6th: Hnefatafl drop-in sessions, learn and play the Viking game of strategy; 5th: 10am-1pm, 2-4:30pm, 6th: 12-2pm, 3-4.30pm, free.

17th: Lecture: 'The Best Chessmen in all the World', by Dr. Irving Finkel, Assistant Keeper, British Museum, 7.30pm, free, but booking essential.

19th: Lewis Chessmen clay model workshop, 10:30am-12noon, ages 7+, £3, booking essential.

20th: Giant Chessmen family workshop, 2-3.30pm, children must be accompanied by adult, free, but booking essential.

24th & 25th: Pirate Adventure, Mootie Moose workshop, 10:30-11:30am & 2-3pm, ages 2-5, fully booked.

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.

Goudie donation

In December the Archives received one of its most important collections for years: extensive papers of Gilbert Goudie (1843-1918). A native of Clumlie in Dunrossness, Goudie went to Edinburgh when he was ten, and became a banker and the foremost expert of his day on Shetland's history and prehistory.

The papers have been at Braefield in Dunrossness since Goudie's death, and their owners, Mr and Mrs Gilbert Mouat, recently decided to give them to the Archives so that researchers can use them in future.

A key part of the collection is Goudie's manuscript autobiography, in four volumes. He began to write an account of his life in 1901, and had taken the story up to 1915 a few years before he died. It contains a detailed account of his early life in Shetland, impressions of Edinburgh when he arrived there in 1853, and pen portraits of many friends and colleagues, at home and in the city.

There are also 24 diaries and journals, from 1858 to 1915. They deal with 'Trifling memoranda of passing life and incidents', and sometimes give detailed accounts of tours he made, at home and abroad. There are 'Notes of adventure in the City of London in the Great Exhibition year' (1862-3), and 'A Zetlander's experiences of Germany, Italy and France, being memoranda of a visit to Rome by way of these countries', from May 1872.



Gilbert Goudie in his library, 1905

Goudie was a great writer and receiver of letters, and the collection contains extensive correspondence, both academic and social. In addition there are several letter-books where he kept copies of letters he had written.

Archives staff are delighted with the new acquisition. 'It is a splendid collection,' said archivist Brian Smith. 'We have Goudie material already, but this is a huge addition to it. We are very grateful indeed to the donors.'

Give us a clue!



This photograph was taken about 1900, by one of the Marcus family of Scalloway. It was possibly taken in Tingwall. The house has a tar roof and an extension off the left gable end. Do you know the name of the house, or the two women standing by the water barrel?

Please contact Ian Tait if you have information for us! 01595 695057, info@shetlandmuseumandarchives.org.uk

Mootie's first year!

Mootie Moose, our pre-school mascot, has had a very busy first year! In January 2010 he began enticing children aged 2 ½ to 5yrs into the museum and has taken them on many magical adventures over the past 12 months.

Mootie and friends have explored Fearsome Vikings, Pirates, Musical Mayhem, Victorian Washdays and a festive Merry Mootie Christmas. Our resident mouse leaves a "cheese" trail, which the children follow into the galleries. Discussions take place between Mootie and the children, using artefacts to explain the topic. Then it's off to the Learning Room for related craft activities.

Following the overwhelmingly successful pilot project from January to June 2010, the number of children's spaces was doubled in September from 24 to 48 per month to deal with demand. Please note that Mootie Moose sessions are fully subscribed until February 2011. The next block of sessions will be advertised in the local press in early March.



Jarl Mootie

Sweetheart dining Archives closure

Hay's Dock Café Restaurant will offer a Valentine's Day menu February 11th, 12th and 14th evenings. The menu is available on their website, www.haysdock.co.uk, or phone 01595 741569 for information or to book.

The Archives will close for a week in February to allow staff to carry out stocktaking work. The collections are ever-growing and staff will use the time to re-arrange the archives' repository to ensure records are stored in the best possible way. The searchroom will be closed to the public from Monday 14th February and will re-open on Monday 21st. If you require any more information please contact 01595 741554

|| COMMUNITY HERITAGE NEWS ||

Accreditation kudos

Tangwick Haa Museum is the first community-run museum in Shetland to achieve the national accreditation standard. They were awarded full accreditation by Museums Galleries Scotland in November, after a 2-year process in which they had to show how they meet best practice standards in museum management, collection care, and visitor services.

Congratulations to the Tangwick Haa Trust for their success in achieving this award, in particular Anna Irvine and Ruby Brown for their diligence and dedication to the task.

Show Scotland to change

Museums Galleries Scotland has revamped Show Scotland, their annual weekend of museum events. Beginning in 2011, it will be called Festival

of Museums and will take place 13-15 May this year. The Festival of Museums is all about visitors finding something exciting, entertaining and surprising anytime during day or night at Scotland's museums. Grants are available for museums wishing to participate. For more information, go to the MGS website: www.museumsgalleriescotland.org.uk/the-programmes/festival-of-museums

E. S. Reid Tait: A Centennial Jarl (1911–2011)

Edwyn Seymour Reid Tait (1884–1960) was a notable Lerwegian who worked as a draper and also served as a Town Councillor. Shetland's history, however, was his passion, and to this he devoted his life, gathering an impressive assemblage of rare books and records. His collection is now housed in the Shetland Archives and is available to the public. Much has been said over the years about Reid Tait the antiquarian, folklorist, and historian, but there was one further interest in his life which appears to have evaded popular attention.

Reid Tait was an Up Helly Aa enthusiast, and presided over the annual fire festival as Guizer Jarl a century ago, in January 1911. In fact, he enjoyed the unique accolade of being Guizer Jarl twice, stepping in the following year for Harry Kay, who was unable to officiate owing to bereavement. Reid Tait may have been captivated by Shetland's history but he was not a romantic, bent on reviving Vikingism in the isles. For him, Up Helly Aa was purely a local Lerwick pageant with little or nothing to do with Norse mythology, or indeed the customs of that bygone Age.

It was around 1905 when he joined the Up Helly Aa Committee. At this time the festival was in its early stages of development and though just a young man he saw room for improvement. Describing the revelry as 'happy-go-lucky' and 'haphazard', he later wrote that it was a privilege to be a 'participant in the process of

rendering chaos into order'. An ardent Rechabite, Reid Tait was a man of temperance and decorum. Leading by example, changes were



E. S. Reid Tait

made gradually in spite of resistance from the Committee's 'Old School'. The reformers were ultimately successful and Up Helly Aa transformed into the highly organised institution we know today.

Under the pen name of 'An Old Guizer', Reid Tait recounts how Lerwick went through a period of dullness following the suppression of

the tar barrels. A revival of guizing, however, brought to life the 'great festival of Up Helly Aa'. The yuletide practice of dragging burning tar barrels through the streets of Lerwick was finally banned in 1874, after the malicious tarring of some buildings on Commercial Street. Ironically one of the victims was Reid Tait's father. George Reid Tait was one of the most eminent and refined figures in Lerwegian society; a wealthy merchant whose elite status obviously attracted the scorn of the Tarbarrelites.

It is rather ironic that an upstanding citizen like E. S. Reid Tait should be Guizer Jarl, the leading figure of a festival born out of disorder and lawlessness. He was of the opinion, however, that burning tar barrels in those days was regarded in no worse light than the later festival of Up Helly Aa. Early one January morning a group of mischievous guizers left a burning tar barrel blazing at the door of the Tolbooth, trapping the Police constabulary inside. Such a spectacle, Reid Tait said, 'must have indeed been laughable', and likewise, he considered it to

have been, 'quite an exciting morning'. As he suspected, there are undoubtedly many today 'who have sufficient of the old Adam left in them to wish devoutly they could have been there'.

Brydon Leslie
Postgraduate Student
UHI Centre for Nordic Studies

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 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, 18 FEBRUARY, 2011.