

Unkans

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

FREE

July 2008
Issue 9

museum
Shetland
archives

Launch of the *Vaila Mae* and *Laura Kay*



The Shetland Museum and Archives launched two new boats, based on traditional vessels, from the slipway at Hay's Dock on 21st June. The boats are the first to be made in the refurbished boat sheds, and the second and third boats made as part of the NORCE project.

The sixareen, built by Jack Duncan and Robbie Tait, has been named the *Vaila Mae* following a

public competition. The name commemorates *Vaila Mae Harvey*, a Dunrossness lass who passed away recently after a short illness. The second vessel, a haddock boat, was built by Malcolm Hutchison. It has been named *Laura Kay*, and is based on a similar boat from Whalsay in the Unst boat haven. Both boats will be available for the public to row throughout the summer.

Summer Hours

The Museum is still looking for volunteers to help.

Museum opening times:

Monday 10am-5pm, **Tuesday-Thursday** 10am-6pm,
Friday 10am-7pm, **Saturday** 10am-5pm, **Sunday** 12pm-5pm

Archives opening times:

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

Hay's Dock Restaurant Café opening times:

Daytime: **Monday** 10:30am-5pm, **Tuesday-Friday** 10:30am-5:30pm, **Saturday** 10:30am-5pm, **Sunday** 12pm-5pm

Evenings: **Tuesday-Saturday** 6:30pm-11pm.

To book, phone 01595 741569

What's On Guide

July

Until Jan. 2009: Focus display: 'German merchants', trade between Shetlanders and Germans for 260 years.

Highlights Tours: daily from 2:30-3:15pm, free

From 1st: Film: 'Shetland- A few Aspects' filmed by Theo Kay, c1934-1956, daily, duration- 44 mins, free

From 1st: Storytelling with Davy Cooper, every Tues & Thur, 1:15-1:45pm, free

From 2nd: Storytelling and music at Crofthouse Museum, with Elma Johnson, every Wed., 7-9pm, £12, under12s £5, booking essential.

4th-11th August: Exhibition: Adam Robson retrospective.

4th- 6th: St Ninian's Isle Conference.

6th-27th: Demonstrations: 'Traditional spinning and knitting', Guild of Spinners, Weavers, Knitters and Dyers, Sundays, 2-4pm, free

From 7th: Tour: 'From Picts to Vikings', St. Ninian's Isle Treasure, Mon-Sat, 11:30am-12pm, free

9th: Workshop: 'Going Pictish', 10-11am, for P1-4; or 2-3pm, for P5-7, £2, booking essential

12th: Open day: Guild of Spinners, Weavers, Knitters and Dyers.

From 13th: 'The origins of Up Helly Aa' Tour: every Sunday, 4:00-4:20pm, free

18th: Workshop: 'Bruck Weaving', with Jo Jack and Ana Horne. 12-5pm, 9-12 yrs, £3, booking essential

19th: Workshop: 'Weaving friendship bracelets', with Jo Jack and Ana Horne. 10am-4pm, 9-12yrs, £5, booking essential

20th: Workshop: 'Going Potty', 3:00-3:30pm, 3-4 yrs (but with adult), free but booking essential

21st: Workshop: 'Knitting phone and ipod socks', with Jennie Bradley and Verinia Fraser, 10am-4pm, 10-13 years, £5, booking essential

22nd: Talk: 'From koli to tilley' the impact of imports, by Dr. Ian Tait, 3-4pm, free

23rd: Workshop: 'Felting Treasure', 10am-12:30pm, 7-10 yrs, £3, booking essential

25th-29th: Exhibition: 'Mail boats', a collaborative project with poets and artists from Orkney and Shetland

29th: Film: 'The Hollywood Librarian', librarians in film, with Shetland Library, 7:30pm, free

31st: Talk: 'Internet resources for family history' with Alan Beattie, 7pm, free

August

Highlights Tours: daily from 2:30-3:15pm, free

From 1st: Tour: 'From Picts to Vikings', St. Ninian's Isle Treasure, Mon-Sat, 11:30am-12pm, free

From 1st: Film: 'J.H. Johnston Collection', Shetland scenes c1932-1933, daily, duration- 48 mins, free

From 3rd: Tour: 'The origins of Up Helly Aa', Sundays, 4:00-4:20pm, free

From 3rd: Demonstrations: 'Traditional spinning and knitting', Guild of Spinners, Weavers, Knitters and Dyers, every Sunday, free

2nd: Storytelling: 'Peerie Mootie and her Muckle Buits' with Valerie Watt, 11:30am-12pm, 3-9yrs, free but booking essential

6th: Workshop: 'Papier mâché treasure' with Emma Blain and Amy Fisher, 10am-4pm, 8-12yrs, £5, booking essential

6th&13th: Storytelling and music at Crofthouse Museum, with Elma Johnson, Wed, 7-9pm, £12, under12s £5, booking essential

8th: Workshop: 'Silk painting' with Sarah Hoseason. 10am-4pm, P7-S2, £6, booking essential

13th: Workshop: 'Going potty', 10-11:30am, P1-4, 2-3:30pm, P5-7, £3, booking essential

16th-29th Sept.: Exhibition: Robert Callender, installation and photographs.

All events are held at the Shetland Museum and Archives, unless otherwise stated. There may be a charge for some events. For more information, phone 01595 695057 or come by.

Fishing records come home

Shetlanders now have the opportunity to research all aspects of the local fishing industry in great detail, thanks to more than 500 volumes of records which have recently arrived from Edinburgh.

For the past thirty years the Shetland Archives has had an arrangement with the National Archives of Scotland (NAS) whereby some classes of government records have returned to the islands. Since 1978 Shetland's sheriff court, justices of the peace and customs records have been devolved in this way. The records of the Lerwick Fishery Board Office, which run from 1809 to 1971, are the latest to return under this special agreement.

Instead of remaining in Edinburgh, such records have come back to Shetland under the 'charge and superintendence' of the Keeper of the Records of Scotland. The Keeper still has responsibility for the records, but he is happy for them to be in a local record office, where they are likely to be used more.

The records came to Shetland on a Northlink ferry by van on 23 May, accompanied by staff from NAS. Deputy Keeper Dr Peter Anderson handed them over to Archives staff in the searchroom the following day. The collection contains daily, weekly and monthly reports on Shetland's various fisheries over a long period. It gives a meticulously detailed picture of Shetland's main industry in times of boom and bust. A list of the new records is available in the Archives, or at

<http://www.nas.gov.uk/catalogues/default.asp> under the reference number AF29

Recent acquisitions: Luxury afloat

Wrecked in 1914, the *Oceanic* is the most opulent ship to meet its end on Shetland's shores. Most vessels passing the islands have been coasters, fishing boats, passenger steamers or warships, but the *Oceanic* was a transatlantic liner. How did she come to be in local waters?

The reason was the First World War, when the peacetime White Star Line's *R.M.S. Oceanic* became the Royal Navy's *H.M.S. Oceanic*. The Admiralty requisitioned big passenger ships during wartime, and converted them into merchant cruisers for patrol purposes. Liners and long-distance cargo ships were designed to stay at sea for long periods, so were perfect for the job. *H.M.S. Oceanic* was quickly converted, including armament, and she entered service in August 1914. However, only a month later she ran aground off Foula, the victim of a navigational error, and was abandoned without loss of life. Attempts to tug her off the rocks were unsuccessful, and some weeks later she was destroyed by the sea.



Throughout Autumn the wind was generally westerly, and much debris from the wrecked ship came ashore in Dunrossness and elsewhere. The flotsam was of better quality than Shetlanders had seen before, and many houses had a piece of the erstwhile luxury liner. Many donations have come to the Museum from the *Oceanic*, but these seldom turn up today. A year ago we acquired a cabin washstand, washed ashore at Ireland, Dunrossness, and in a nearby house for 90 years. Last month we were donated a large, carved wooden panel from one of the state rooms, which had been in a house at Scatness since the wreck. It is decorated with a garland of fruit and flowers, with

painted background and gilded detail. The object was gifted by the late Robbie Young, latterly of Twageos, who was a good friend of the Museum. Following his wishes this superb item has been kindly passed on by his wife, Jemima.

Dr Ian Tait
Curator of Collections

Old Scatness uncovered!

Consolidation work has been continuing at Old Scatness Iron Age village over the winter, and now for the first time in many years you can see the whole site permanently uncovered. Come along for a look and have one of our costumed guides show you around. Living History staff will be demonstrating various hands-on activities. Open through September, Sunday to Thursday, 10am-5pm. Admission: £4 Adults, £3 children, £10 family ticket. Phone 01950 461 869 for more information.



Winner of popular vote

The Lightbox Museum and Gallery in Woking, Surrey was this year's winner of the Art Fund Prize. Shetland Museum and Archives, one of four shortlisted finalists, were the winners of the popular vote. The 24 Hour Museum People's Choice went to SMAA, with 49.3% of the vote, with the Lightbox receiving 25% of the popular vote.

The **ArtFundPrize** 2008
for museums and galleries

New pavers feature at Museum and Archives



Stonemason Bruce Clubb laying the new pavers.

Next time you visit the Shetland Museum and Archives, take a look outside the Boat Hall at the new Enviroglass recycled glass pavers.

Shetland Amenity Trust developed this exciting initiative through the Shetland Place Names Project and Enviroglass, working with local artist Alan Hart. Forty-six pavers incorporate place names inlaid with crushed serpentine mixed with resin (similar to those with boat terms in the foyer). The pavers feature coastal names moving up the steps from sea to land, with a wave pattern using green serpentine for the sea names and red for the land ones. On the terrace, the land names take you on a geographic tour of Shetland from Finniquoy (Fair Isle) through to Hamar (Unst) at the top.

The place names were carefully selected from maps, documents, lists and oral information, to link with themes in the Museum displays. They incorporate unusual place names (e.g. Winyadepla, Houlastongas and Veltamatas) and names common throughout Shetland (e.g. Swarta Skerry, Loomishun, Gorsendi Geo and Linga).

Names are of natural features (geos, taings, stacks and skerries) and man-made ones (houses, böds, streets and villages). They give us clues about Shetland's early inhabitants and the habitats of birds, animals and plants. Like most Shetland place names, almost all those featured have their roots in Old Norse.

Some interesting names include Hegary's Böd on Gunnister Voe, named after the 16th century German trader Simon Harratstay or Hagaraskilde; Diggers Rest in Yell built by Andrew Anderson of Cunnister on his return from the Australian gold mines; and Harley Street in Scalloway, where today you'll find the Scalloway Health Centre. The look and sound of each name was also considered in the selection of this fascinating collection, which we hope will lead to a wider interest and understanding of the complexity of Shetland's place names.

Eileen Brooke-Freeman
Project Officer, Place Names
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COMMUNITY HERITAGE NEWS

SHA Executive develop plan

On 31st May, SHA Executive took part in a productive 'Away Day' at Saxavord in Unst. The all-day session was designed to help members discuss and create a 'Development Plan' for the association in an informal setting. The resulting plan will help shape the way forward for the group and its membership.

Access to Old Haa garden

When 17th century buildings were designed, no consideration was given to disabled access. At the Old Haa Museum & Gallery in Yell, visitors with mobility difficulties are limited to the ground floor. Now access to the public garden behind the Old Haa is being made easier by a 35 metre paved path. Funding for the materials was given by Yell Community Council and Yell.com. The work has been done by Old Haa volunteers and a squad from Community Service Scheme, supervised by Brian Robertson and Frank Gilfillan. Community Services Supervisor Andy Alderman is happy to consider applications for assistance from other heritage and community groups. You can contact him at the Criminal Justice Department on 744 448.

SHA awarded grant for booklet

The Shetland Heritage Association has been awarded a grant of £4500 by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The grant will enable the group to publish its 'Members Booklet' containing information about Shetland's history groups, heritage centres and museums. The booklet should be available soon and will be widely distributed.

Cruester project underway

The Bronze Age Bressay! Adopt-a-Monument project is now underway. Since the start of June, the Bressay History Group has opened the burnt mound site, removing soil from a previous excavation. Specialist stonemasons are labeling and photographing stones, and archaeologists are dismantling the structures. The stones will be transported to a new site adjacent to the Bressay Heritage Centre where the mound will be reconstructed. Over the coming months there will be open days for visitors to gain skills. The completed reconstruction will be used for experiments into ancient technologies. A full events programme can be viewed at www.shorewatch.co.uk/cruester

Heritage event being planned

The SHA Executive is planning a 'Heritage Event' to be held later in the year. A provisional date has been set for 8th Nov. This follows the very successful members' 'Open Day' held in August 2007. More details will follow.

Investigating the lives of Shetland's earliest people

Researchers at the University of Bradford are investigating Shetland's earliest known inhabitants. Their bones were found in a cist uncovered during construction works at Sumburgh Airport in 1977. The facial reconstruction of a skull from the cist now provides a spectacular introduction to the Shetland Museum's ground floor gallery.

The Bradford research follows on from the discovery at West Voe of a sequence of middens that had built up between 4300 BC and 3250 BC - the oldest archaeological site in Shetland. The West Voe middens were dominated by marine shells but included large numbers of seal and seabird bones in

studying this transition in the Northern Isles.

Isotope analyses of the human remains are being used to provide direct evidence of the origins and diets of the early farmers. The results then can be interpreted in the context of the environmental and economic evidence from the middens. In 2007, isotope analyses of teeth from the cist provided important information on the diet of the Early Neolithic population, currently being prepared for publication. A series of radiocarbon dates obtained from the same samples indicate that the cist was in use during the period 3500 BC - 3100 BC. It is, therefore, contemporary with deposits of the uppermost of the West Voe middens.

This year, a re-appraisal of the skeletal remains from the cist is being carried out to look at the health of these individuals. In addition, the post-mortem processes that have affected the preservation and fragmentation of the remains will be examined for evidence of Neolithic mortuary practice. Additional isotope analyses will be undertaken to investigate the origins of the people buried in the cist.

The research is being undertaken by Drs Nigel Melton, Janet Montgomery and Chris Knüsel, and post-graduate students Katie Keefe and Samantha Walsh. The team at the University of Bradford are grateful to Tommy Watt and Dr Carol Christiansen at the Shetland Museum for allowing them access to the skeletal material from the cist and for their support and advice, and to the University of Bradford, Historic Scotland and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland for

funding the project. Samantha Walsh's post-graduate degree is funded by the Natural Environment Research Council.

Dr Nigel Melton
Archaeological Sciences
School of Life Sciences
University of Bradford



Student Samantha Walsh working on the Sumburgh bones in the museum stores.

the pre-3600 BC layers, and a few bones from domesticated animals after 3700 BC. They span a critical period in the development of human society: the transition from Mesolithic hunting-gathering to Neolithic farming. In the 1970s a bone from the Sumburgh cist was radiocarbon dated at around 3200 BC, so that the two sites, closely related both in location and date, present a unique opportunity for

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. Deadline for the next issue is Friday 15th August. If you would like to stock our newsletter or distribute copies to your group, let us know.

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