

Unkans

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

FREE
March 2009
Issue 13

museum
Shetland
archives

Archives acquire Vagaland rights

The Shetland Archives often receives gifts of papers, and sometimes these papers have been the collections of poets: W.J. Tait, Rhoda Bulter and Basil Ramsay Anderson, for instance. In 1999 the late Mrs Pat Robertson donated the papers of her husband, T.A. Robertson, the poet 'Vagaland'.

Mrs Robertson died last month, and she has generously bequeathed all rights in her husband's work, and her own work, to the Archives.

T.A. Robertson was born in Westerwick in Sandsting in 1909. A shy man, he was a founder member of the New Shetlander magazine in 1947. He began to write poems for it – and contributed at least one to each issue until he died, 27 years later.

He was a fine poet in the Shetland dialect, and his work inspired other local writers. Poems like 'Da Sneug wal', 'October poppy' and 'A Skyinbow o Tammy's' rank among our finest verse.

Laeves fae Vagaland appeared in 1952, and *Mair Laeves fae Vagaland* in 1965. His *Collected Poems* was published posthumously in 1975, edited by his widow.

Pat Robertson, daughter of a Shetland minister, was Vagaland's collaborator in several projects, notably in the work called *Da Sangs at A'll Sing ta Dee*, a carefully assembled collection of



From left: Poet T. A. Robertson, Mrs Pat Robertson, George Mackay Brown, and Mrs Janette Marwick in 1967. Archives D22/1/1/2

Shetland songs, published in 1973.

Assistant Archivist Joanne Wishart said: 'This is a very unusual and welcome bequest. T.A. Robertson's work has been out of print for many years, and we shall now investigate the possibility of reprinting some of it. It is a very great honour for us to receive these rights.'

What's On Guide

March

Ends 16th March: Jim Tait/ Bobby Robertson exhibition. Da Gadderie.

18th: Lecture 'The Brochs of Shetland: recent controversies and new ideas' by Brian Smith. 7.30pm (doors open at 7pm) Free – but booking essential.

14th: Music: New Tradition. Come along and listen to the fantastic young fiddle group New Tradition. 2pm, Free, drop-in. Boat Hall.

21st March–20th April: Exhibition 'Facing the Sea', by Paul Bloomer. Da Gadderie.

27th March–27th April: Exhibition 'Instant Karmra', by Nick Brett, Eve Eunson, Hazel Walker. Corridor outside Auditorium

29th: 'Journeyman'. An illustrated talk by Paul Bloomer on his art produced during the last twenty years. 2.30pm. Free, drop in. Auditorium

forecast designs. P1-3: 10:30am–12pm; P4-7: 1:30 – 3pm. £4, booking essential

1st April–1st October: Focus display: Walter Scott's Herbarium. Lower gallery

2nd: Kale Planting. Learn about kale planting and why it was so important to crofters. Plant some kale and decorate a pot to take home. P1-3: 10:30–11:30am; P4-7: 2:30–3.30pm. £3, booking essential

3rd: Print-making: Be inspired by Paul Bloomer's exhibition, 'Journeyman'. Design and create your own prints. P5-7: 10:30–12:00am; S1-2: 2:00–3.30pm. £3 booking essential

25th April – 25th May: Exhibition: 'Oil Works' by Sue Jane Taylor. Da Gadderie

Plus lots to do for all ages throughout the holidays! Easter Scavenger Hunt, Trails, Story Sacks

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.

April

1st: 'Borrowing Day' Kites. Forecast summer weather using traditional Borrowing Days technique. Make a kite with

Opening Hours

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** 11am-4pm,

Sunday 12pm-4pm

Evenings: **Friday-Saturday** 7.00pm-11pm, last orders 9pm.

To book, phone 01595 741569

Aunt Mabel's allover

Our Textile Collection was recently enhanced by the donation of a beautiful allover cardigan thought to have been knitted by a Burra wife in the 1930's or 40's.



The cardigan belonged to Mabel Fisher (1912-2008) from Ayrshire. Her niece, Mrs. Margaret Dunbar, kindly donated it to the museum. She explained that her Aunt Mabel travelled extensively and came to Shetland more than once, her final trip being in 2002. As a young woman she had taken her mother's advice to travel light with a heavy purse, travelling throughout Europe, being one of the first British people to go behind the Iron Curtain following the war.

Mrs. Fisher visited Shetland in the 1930's and 40's and bought the cardigan

at that time. The bright, rich colours, the moss stitch button band and tailored fit are typical of this period. Alas the name of the knitter has been forgotten, but Mrs. Fisher's niece thought the jumper was purchased in Burra. We'd be keen to hear from anyone with information about who may have knitted it.



Mabel Fisher in allover, with her husband.

A sail for *Vaila Mae*

Following the successful launch and rowing season of the Museum's sixareen *Vaila Mae*, we spent the winter making a few alterations. Jack Duncan and Robbie Tait have made an inboard pump, auskerrie, owsin scoop and haulin kabe. They also have improved the oars and rowing positions, making it easier for less-experienced rowers to use the boat.

The main task has been to put a sail on her. Robbie made the mast and yard using a 50 year old Sitka spruce from the Sullom Woodland Plantation. The difficult job of designing the sail was entrusted to Brian Wishart from Sandwick. Brian has spent many hours drawing different sail shapes using a variety of sources in an attempt to get a sail that works well, reflects the sixareen's Westside heritage, and looks right for the boat itself. He has also designed a smaller sail which will allow sailors of all abilities to have a go.

The sixareen and other boats will be afloat again in May, ready for another busy season.



Brian Wishart at work.

Andy Robertson, 1925-2008



Shetland's heritage community was saddened by the death in late December of Andy Robertson of The Cabin museum.

Andy joined the Royal Navy during the Second World War and served on tank landing craft to Belgium and in the clean-up in the Far East, stationed in Sri Lanka. Before he went away to war, he met his wife Babs in Voe. They renewed their acquaintance in May 1946 on his return from Australia.

Andy could turn his hand to most things and during his working life he had many careers, from weaving tweed to lobster fishing. On his retirement in 1989, Andy began to devote his energy to the collection of war memorabilia he had amassed. The Cabin collection began as a hobby, eventually outgrowing Andy's original porta-cabin, and is now housed in a modern Nissan hut next to his home in Vidlin. The growth of his collection attests to the interest and support of visitors, many of whom became donors over the years. In some ways, however, Andy himself was the star attraction of The Cabin. His informal guided talks and his knowledge of the collection captivated visitors and brought out the stories the objects had to tell, for schoolbairns and war veterans alike.

Andy was a one-man tour de force. He will be sorely missed by everyone involved in local heritage, as well as by the many dedicated visitors to The Cabin.

An interview with Andy by Mary Blance, recorded 12 April 1989, is available in the Shetland Archives. [BBCRS/1/9/57]

Staff Profile: Craig Gauld, Assistant Archivist



Assistant Archivist Joanne Wishart is going on maternity leave this month. We hear from her replacement Craig Gauld. Craig comes from Paisley and has recently completed his Ph.D in Information Management and Preservation at Glasgow University.

Q. What are you looking forward to most about your new job?

I am really looking forward to working in an archive that is so rooted in the community and plays such a prominent role within it. The archive comes alive at a local level when it is accountable to those whose heritage we hold – the collections we hold should be seen as every Shetlander's very own private collection.

Q. Why do you think archives are important?

The archive must be at the centre of a community that is forward-looking yet learns from its past. We preserve. We hold our records in perpetuity in order that they can inform and educate those who wish to access them.

Q. What do you enjoy most about working with archives?

I love the sense of personal fulfilment and knowledge-gathering that occurs from any gateway into the records – when a new collection comes in that you can investigate or when a user makes a request that throws up some unexpected snippet of information. In addition I love the sense of public service – the archive serves its users and can bring personal development and knowledge to the individual.

Q. What are you looking forward to most about living and working in Shetland?

It is a great opportunity to enhance my knowledge of such a rich and diverse culture, to take on new activities and challenges, and to become, hopefully, part of a community both in the workplace and outwith.

Correction!



We would like to apologise for wrongly identifying one of the donors of the sheep mark book in the last issue of Unkans. He is, in fact, Christopher Halcrow (not Christopher Jamieson), shown here with the book just before it went south for conservation.

COMMUNITY HERITAGE NEWS

Is your heritage group working on a special project? Why not tell us about it. Contact Carol Christiansen on 741560, caroll@shetland-museum.org.uk

Community Archaeology conference

The first Scottish Community Archaeology conference will be held at Queen Margaret University in Musselburgh, 16-17 May 2009. Three of Shetland's community archaeology projects will be featured: excavations at Sandwick in Unst by Unst Archaeology Group, reconstruction of a Norse stofa by Papa Stour History Group and relocation/reconstruction of Cruester burnt mound by Bressay History Group. For more information, see

www.eastlothian.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?categoryID=844&documentID=940

Geology course

An introductory Shetland geology course is planned for late spring, for heritage workers who may want to boost their knowledge of this subject. If you are interested, please contact Robina Barton at Shetland Amenity Trust, 01595 694688,

robina@shetlandamenity.org

Organisation help

Two organisations which may be of help to volunteer groups are the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO):

www.scvo.org.uk and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR): www.oscr.org.uk, which is particularly helpful for groups who are considering charitable status.

Churchill research fellowships

Funding is available from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust toward overseas travel costs for research projects. Fellowships are available to British citizens in the U.K. of any age and occupation. Projects must benefit the community and the U.K. For more information, visit www.wcmt.org.uk/index.php.

The wheels on the bus . . .

The 1910s was the golden age of shop marketing, and it was also the era when mass-produced toys became available. We were pleased to receive a splendid item that was a bit of both: a tin for Victory Gums and Lozenges, in the form of a bus. The tin would have functioned as a display container on the shop counter, until the lucky child who was in the shop the day all its sweets were sold got to take it home as a toy. No such fun with a cardboard box.

Unfortunately the Edwardian road wreck had a bent and rusted body, and all wheels were detached. Artefacts in the collection have very tight restrictions on what work can be carried out on them, because we have to protect all original features. Luckily, the bus is for our Learning Collection, where objects are to be handled, and don't have the same restrictions as artefacts. In his role of Museum Attendant, Trevor Jamieson has turned his hand to most things, but not car mechanics. It was possible to use filler and tiny bolts, and a discreet re-paint. Nothing more was required, because we still want the toy to look like it is 90 years old, and over-restoration would ruin its authenticity.

The bus will once more be used by children, as one of the objects in our Toys From the Past sessions. These popular sessions are held for children from nursery to primary two, and involve a tour of the displays, looking at toys from the Viking to the Victorian periods. The children then do a workshop in the Learning Room where they look at the differences between a modern doll and a straw duckie, and get a chance to handle some old toys – which will now include the bus.

At this stage in their education the children are just beginning to learn about concepts such as time and history. This fun session is a way of looking at materials, describing objects, and working out the similarities and differences between toys in the past and today. It's really important that they get a chance to touch objects, as there is so much more they can learn through touch – especially at this young age. The whole visit aims to develop key skills such as enquiry and observation, as well as being good fun.

Many objects that have no special background story might still be useful to our Learning Service. We use objects on tours, in workshops and for our Discovery Boxes that are loaned to schools, care homes and community groups. If you have items please contact Kirsty Clark, on 01595 695057 or email kirsty@shetland-museum.org.uk

Dr. Ian Tait, Curator of Collections
Kirsty Clark, Lifelong Learning Officer



Although the bus was battered, all the bits were there.



Spokes painted, and ready for the road.



The restored bus in use.

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

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DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE IS 17 APRIL 2009