

Gunnister Man returns to Shetland

Clothing and tools from the Gunnister Man find, on loan from National Museums Scotland, will be exhibited in Shetland for the first time since their discovery in 1951. The displays are based on the mysterious burial, which occurred probably in the first decades of the 18th century, near Gunnister, in Northmavine.

The exhibition includes a reconstruction of the garments and implements, which will be displayed permanently in the Shetland Museum and Archives. The reconstruction project began in 2007 when the original garments were studied in the Textile Conservation Dept. at the National Museum of Scotland by Curator Carol Christiansen and two textile specialists from Sweden, weaver Lena Hammarlund and tailor Martin Cizuk. Carol returned to Edinburgh, along with Curator Ian Tait, to study some of the smaller pieces of textiles and the bone,

wood, and horn implements. The tools are being replicated by craft specialists in Norway, coordinated by Ian Tait and Amy Lightfoot.

A conference will be held 18th-19th September, beginning with a keynote address by T. C. Smout, Historiographer Royal in Scotland. Specialists will discuss the period in which he lived, bog body finds in Scotland, the Gunnister finds and the reconstruction project. The loan of the Gunnister Man artefacts, and the detailed study undertaken on them for the reconstruction, has been made possible through a partnership



agreement between Shetland Amenity Trust and National Museums Scotland.

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** 10.30am-4pm;
Sunday 12-5pm;

Evenings **Thursday-Saturday** 7-9pm,
To book, phone 01595 741569

What's On Guide

September

12th to 1st Nov: Gunnister Man: a life reconstructed, exhibition, Da Gadderie.

18th to 18th Oct: Shutters open, showcase of photographs from Shetland Doors Open, upper foyer.

18th: The Economy and Society of Scotland and Northern Europe, 1680-1720, lecture by Professor T.C. Smout, Historiographer Royal in Scotland, 7:45pm. FULLY BOOKED.

19th: Gunnister Man: a life reconstructed, conference, 9am-5pm. FULLY BOOKED.

27th: Gunnister jewellery workshop [for adults]; make felted jewellery inspired by the Gunnister Man's buttons. TBC

28th to 9th Oct: See Me, exhibition of pictures and thoughts about mental health and wellbeing, auditorium corridor.

October

2nd: G-Man contemporary craft project, illustrated talk led by Deirdre Nelson, 7:30pm, free, drop-in.

9th: John Graham memorial lecture, Professor Michael Schmidt of Glasgow University explores the poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid, 7:30pm, free but booking essential.

10th & 11th: A beginner's weaving course from

start to finish, learn how to lay warp, weave, correct mistakes, and finish woven piece. TBC

13th: Gunnister Jewellery Workshop [for children], make felted jewellery inspired by the Gunnister Man's buttons. TBC

15th: Papermaking, make your own paper and try writing with a quill, P1-3, Time: TBC, £3, booking essential.

15th: The Textiles of the Gunnister Man find and reconstruction, illustrated talk by Dr Carol Christiansen, 7:30pm, free, but booking essential.

18th: KitKnit: knit some simple swatches to help design our new knitting kits. Suitable for all ages and abilities, free, drop-in.

20th: Scary Spiders, make a felted spider for Halloween, P3-5, 10am-12noon, or 2-4pm, £4, booking essential.

21st: Knitted scarves, a workshop for children inspired by the Gunnister Man, P6-S2, 10am-4pm, £8, booking essential.

22nd: Gunnister felted smucks, create your own slippers inspired by the Gunnister Man, P6-S2, 10am-4pm, £8, booking essential.

24th: Gunnister Man day, try writing with quills, weaving, quiz the curators and see 17th century documents in the Archives, 10am-3pm, 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.

Steven and the beastie



Visitor Services Assistant Steven Christie found a colourful insect relaxing in the Boat Shed recently. The bug has been identified as a type of longhorn beetle (*plagionotus arcuatus*). They are wood-boring and lay their eggs beneath the bark of deciduous trees. Longhorn beetles are particularly partial to oak forests throughout Europe. The bug is just one of many long-distance visitors enjoying the Museum and Archives this summer!



Victorian tourist snap

Many tourists found their way to Shetland a hundred years ago, and its fortunate that quite a few took photographs during their stay. Often things caught an outsider's eye that local people with cameras would not think of picturing. These pioneers were the first to depict the now-ubiquitous Sumburgh Head, Broch of Mousa, Dore Holm, and so on. Most visitors had an antiquarian interest, and they captured activities that were

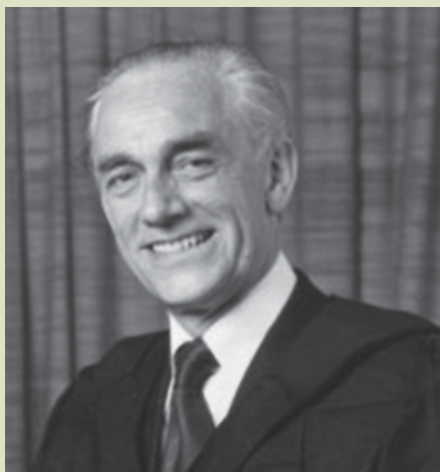
once characteristic of Shetland, but are now lost forever. Alas, we don't always know where such pictures were taken, and here is one such: a bridge over a stream, with mill at the roadside. Farmsteads and arable fields are in the distance. It was taken around 1880, but where? One thing is likely, the road will be much wider and both bridge and mill will be gone.

If you know where this is, please contact ian@shetland-museum.org.uk

John Graham Memorial Lecture

Every year the Museum and Archives hold a memorial lecture in honour of a deceased Shetland scholar. This year the lecture will celebrate the late John Graham. The speaker will be Professor Michael Schmidt of Glasgow University. He will investigate the work of poet Hugh MacDiarmid, who lived in Whalsay from 1933-1942.

John Graham made an enormous contribution to Shetland's culture. He was instrumental in the creation of local archives and museum services and was an inspirational teacher of English, introducing generations of children to the delights of literature. Along with brother Lollie, he was editor of the *New Shetlander* for over 40 years



John Graham 1921-2008

and was an accomplished writer, producing two novels and a detailed account of education in Shetland. Professor Schmidt is the author of

several books, including *Lives of the Poets* and *The Story of Poetry* and, like John Graham, has been the editor of a literary magazine, *PN Review*, for decades. He is also managing director of Carcanet Press, who have recently republished many of MacDiarmid's works. Professor Schmidt said about coming to Shetland that 'even more than the Northern Lights I want to hear the language of people rooted there, and maybe catch a glimpse of the northern sunlycht an shedow.'

The lecture will take place on Thursday, 9th October, at 7.30pm. Tickets are free but should be reserved at the Museum and Archives Reception Desk or by phoning 01595 695057.

Wool labels donated to archives

An unusual set of records, which give a glimpse into the Shetland knitting industry of the 20th century, has recently been donated to the Archives. With no local mill available, hundreds of people sent their wool south for spinning. Fiona Cumming of Stromness, granddaughter of Inverness mill owner James Pringle, donated a large number of labels which were attached to packages of wool sent from houses all over Shetland. These

labels tell us who sent the packages and when they were sent, most dating from the 1950s. In some cases the weight of the wool, often just a few pounds, has been written on the label at the mill. Originally salvaged for the stamps, the wool labels show us how seemingly mundane records can give us a unique perspective on a small scale industry which helped support hundreds of households in Shetland.



An unexpected find



Six-year-old Dougie Smith was delighted to find a clay pipe whilst in search of fossils and dinosaur bones earlier this summer. The young palaeontologist and his father David were walking through a recently ploughed field beside their house in Levenwick when they uncovered the pipe. Amazingly, it still had soot in it! Decorative pipes like this were

common during the 19th century from around 1825. This pipe dates from the 1860's or 1870's and is a welcome addition to the Museum's collection.



COMMUNITY HERITAGE NEWS

SHA Website

The Shetland Heritage Association's website draws near to completion! The initial concept was to prepare a booklet to advertise the membership and their activities. But to make it easier and cheaper to update each year, it was decided to make the booklet into a website. Funding was gained from *Awards For All* and the site is now almost ready.

Incorporated into the layout is the SHA logo designed by Mike McDonnell. There will be printable pages about each organisation, which can be made into a booklet or used as leaflets for display. For further information contact Pat Christie on 01950477372 or Barbara Anderson on 01595 820368.

Training opportunities

Museums Galleries Scotland has announced their winter training programme. They cover Housekeeping for Museums, Collections Care Planning, Introduction to Oral History, Environmental Monitoring, and Creating E-Learning Resources. Travel bursaries are available. For more information, contact MGS at 0131 550 4131 or www.museumsgalleries.scotland.org.uk. However, if there is enough demand locally, we will sponsor a course here – contact Carol Christiansen at 01595 741560.

Rough justice

On the west side of Fetlar there is a hill, 100 metres high. It's called the Gallow Hill. On the crest of it is an enclosure, 25 yards square, whose knee-high walls are formed from turf and stone. One of Shetland's most impressive archaeological monuments, it is a grim reminder of the islands' medieval system of justice. As Billy Thomason, formerly of Velyie in Fetlar, said to me when I first saw it, 'Yun's whar dey hanged da fokk.'

If you want to see the gallows enclosure, leave the main road a mile or so east of Brough Lodge, and head for the television mast. Look south-east, and you will see an excrescence on the horizon. It's visible from the main settlements in the island, especially from Velyie, and also from as far away as Vatster in Yell.

We can only guess exactly what went on at the Fetlar site, but it was something formal. The enclosure was the place where the executions were carried out, of course; but the function of the dyke is unclear. Was it to keep observers out? Because observers there must have been.

Just as Gallow Hills were positioned where they could be seen from great distances, there is plenty of evidence that in medieval and modern societies the general public liked to see an execution. It wasn't until 1868, for instance, that the British parliament passed the Capital Punishment within Prisons Bill, ending public hangings, and requiring executions to be carried out behind prison walls. I strongly suspect that what we see in Fetlar is the enclosure where the



people watched their neighbours hang.

In the middle ages there were more than a dozen Gallow Hills in Shetland, from Unst to Dunrossness and from Waas to Whalsay. The islands had a very local system of justice, backed up by very public executions.

Here and there in Shetland we sometimes see a link between the place name Herra, which refers to an old judicial district, and the Gallows Hills. There is an interesting example of it in an oral source, the utterance of a Fetlar woman hundreds of years after the event. In the 1890s Jakob Jakobsen visited Fetlar. 'During my stay ...' he wrote, 'an elderly woman living there told me that, according to an old tradition, the Isle ... was formerly divided into three small districts, each with its own thing, the present "Herra" being one of them.' The Fetlar

Gallow Hill overlooks the district in the isle called Da Herra.

In the sixteenth century, probably under Lord Robert Stewart, Shetland's justice system became more centralised. The central law court moved to Scalloway, and the hill at Houll, west of the village, became the Gallow Hill for the whole of the islands. The local places of execution fell out of use.

But the Fetlar enclosure is still well-worth seeing. Writing in 1964, the great Fetlar folklorist Jeemsie Laurenson said that 'the hole in the Gallow Hill where the gallows stood can still be seen'. It is still there, in the very centre of the enclosure. Of course, the gibbet has long gone, but the hole is a chilling reminder of the very rough justice that was meted out there, 800 years ago.

Brian Smith
Archivist



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
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DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FOR NEXT ISSUE IS FRIDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2009