

# Unkans

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

FREE  
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museum  
Shetland  
archives

## DNA: Conference on Health and History

DNA is often associated with solving crime and medical use, so it is an unusual topic for a Museum and Archives conference. But DNA is used more and more as a tool that can help us find out about the past.

The conference opens on Friday 14th May with an evening lecture by keynote speaker, Dr Jim Wilson from the University of Edinburgh, who will talk about his current health research.

Saturday 15th May sees a full

day of lectures by experts on a range of topics, including papers on DNA and surnames, health, and the movement of peoples in prehistory.

Brian Smith, Shetland Archivist, has organised the conference and hopes it will appeal to a wide range of islanders. He said; "whether you are interested in unravelling mysteries from a scientific or historical perspective this conference will be of interest. Speakers come from a variety of backgrounds and are giving a range

of papers. A science qualification is *not at all* necessary to enjoy this conference."

Following the conference, some male delegates will be invited to give Dr Wilson DNA samples and, in due course, will receive detailed genetic information.

The conference programme and booking forms are available from Shetland Museum and Archives from the 16th April. The conference fee is £15. Please phone 01595 695057 for details.

### 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

Please phone 01595 741569  
to book a table.

### What's On Guide

#### April

**To May 2010: Shetland Suffragists' Centenary.** Items from the Shetland Women's Suffrage Society between 1909 and 1919, Archives display case.

**27th March-26th April: Warm Leveret,** natural history paintings and sculptures by Edward Summerton RSA, Da Gadderie.

**1st April: Scarecrow Workshop,** learn about the crops that are sown at this time of year, then make your own scarecrow. 10.30-11.30am P1-3, 2-3pm P4-7, £3, booking essential.

**6th April: Kale Planting,** learn about kale and plant your own crop. 10.30-11.30am P1-3 and 2-3pm P4-7, £3, booking essential.

**8th April: Jessie M.E. Saxby's Shetland,** Mark Ryan Smith talks on this Unst-born author. 7.30-9.00pm, doors open 7pm, free, drop in.

**10th April: Voar Celebrations Day,** Easter crafts and family activities. 11am-3pm, free, drop in.

**29th April: Mootie Mice – Musical Mayhem,** activities, story telling and music designed for the under-5s. Children must be accompanied by an adult, 10.30-11.30am or 2-3pm, free, booking essential.

**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.**

## Old Research inspires new work

A new painting of the *Research* LK62 berthed at Måløy, by Richard Wemyss, was donated to the Museum last year and is now on display.

Richard was curator of the Scottish Fisheries Museum in Anstruther until 1988. There he helped look after the wooded zulu class *Research*, which was to be the inspiration for the Mackerel Seas Project, documenting Shetland's fishing fleet.

The sea and the people who work on it have always fascinated Richard and, after moving to Shetland in 2000, he soon found a rich source of inspiration in the local fishing industry.

Intrigued by the success of the Whalsay pelagic fishermen, he made a study of the fleet from an artist's perspective and, between 2000 and 2001, had 'been aff' with all the pelagic boats in the Whalsay fleet.

The project also involved pupils at Symbister Junior High School and incorporated writing by local poets and bairns. All the paintings done for this project capture a point in time as, since Richard produced this work, all the boats have either been altered or replaced.

The oil on canvas of the *Research* can be seen near the entrance to Hay's Dock Café Restaurant.

## Lerwick to Leith and back

Two speakers from the Shetland Museum and Archives took part in a day conference on the theme 'From Leith to Lerwick', organised by the University of Edinburgh on 6 March.

Speakers discussed literary figures and others who made the journey from Shetland to the city and back again, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They discussed how Edinburgh affected emigrants' work, and their experiences of exile.

Mark Smith spoke about Jessie M.E. Saxby's not very well-known novel *Rock-bound*, published in Edinburgh in 1877. He pointed out that it appeared in the same year as James Stout Angus's dialect poem 'Eels' and George Stewart's *Shetland Fireside Tales*, and was thus a pioneering work in the new Shetland literature of that time.

Mark showed, with telling quotations, that Saxby used *Rock-bound* to deal sensitively with the plight of a young woman in Shetland at that time – not a subject that any previous Shetland writer had chosen. Saxby had been widowed with a large family, not long before she wrote the novel.

Brian Smith discussed the career of Gilbert Goudie, from Clumlie in Dunrossness, who left Shetland for Edinburgh in 1853, aged ten. Goudie did well in the city – he became a banker. Brian showed how his upbringing as a Shetland Baptist moulded his life until he died in 1918. Goudie's great achievement, as far as Shetland was concerned, was to write numerous articles about antiquarian subjects: prehistoric, Scandinavian and early modern. Goudie's approach to the subjects he chose was modern and penetrating. His book *The Celtic and Scandinavian Antiquities of the Shetland Islands*, published in 1904, was the first connected history of Shetland.

Other speakers discussed a wide variety of subjects. Penny Fielding from the University of



Speakers Penny Fielding, Brian Smith, Mark Smith, and Carla Sassi.  
Photo Robert Alan Jamieson.

Edinburgh spoke about Dorothea P. Campbell, a Shetlander who wrote poetry and a novel, *Harley Radington*, in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Alex Thomson dealt with work produced by the poet Hugh MacDiarmid in Shetland between 1933-42. Donna Heddell from Orkney spoke about the women who came to Shetland, and others who traveled south from the islands, to gut fish, and widened their horizons in the process.

The Italian writer Carla Sassi spoke about her theory that islands and archipelagoes can generate fruitful thinking about politics and society. Her paper was the subject of lively discussion.

A most successful day was rounded off by readings from Shetland poets and musicians, arranged by Robert Alan Jamieson. Lauren Johnson, Lise Sinclair, Christie Williamson, Christine De Luca and Paolo Ritch read and performed with aplomb.



# Recent accessions: 19th century fine lace stole

The museum received a very welcome addition to the textile collection from a lady whose grandparents were both from Shetland. Mrs Betty Cuthill explained the stole has been in her family for about one hundred years and she wanted to return it to the Islands.

Mrs Cuthill's grandmother, Elizabeth Sinclair, was born in Clousta in 1862 and moved to Edinburgh to look for employment at the tender age of 14. She worked as a servant for some years in a big house near Canonmills and often went to Prince's Street gardens on Saturday afternoons. It was here she met her husband-to-be while watching a Punch and Judy show. The man

laughing so heartily next to her turned out to be Shetlander Robert Henderson. Born in Lerwick in 1860 Robert was a purser on the Leith to Lerwick ferries. They married and settled in Edinburgh where their granddaughter still lives.

The stole has a striking openwork tree or leaf pattern in the border. Similar motifs can be found in stoles in the collections of Unst Heritage Trust and Shetland Museum and date as early as 1870.

We are very grateful to Mrs Cuthill for sharing her family history with us ensuring the information remains intact with the stole for future generations to appreciate.



**editors note: Museum and Archives staff recently attended a workshop on Visitor Evaluation, arranged through our partnership agreement with National Museums Scotland. We plan to initiate further evaluation like Zuzanna's valuable research below, to help us improve our services to you.**

## Lurking in the galleries

Did you come across a museum staff member hanging around the gallery for hours, lurking behind cases, armed with a clipboard and pen? Yep, that was me two summers ago working on a dissertation for my postgraduate degree at Perth College. The course I chose was Interpretation: Management and Practice and my dissertation subject was a visitor study.

Did it ever strike you that the Upper and Lower Galleries in our museum are so totally different, that they nearly constitute two separate worlds? Well, I thought it would be interesting to find out

how it affects our visitors' understanding of the 'Shetland story': does it excite them, enrich their experience, and make them more aware of some more intangible aspects of the story? Or does it only confuse them?

I soon realised what a big task I had set for myself. Not only did I spend months trying to work out visitors' movements around the gallery; I also carried out a number of interviews with tourists and locals. While the first job was very time-consuming, interviewing was actually quite enjoyable. I would like to thank everyone who helped: those who

were kind enough to talk to me but also those whose comings and goings I painstakingly recorded. In the end I learnt a lot about the way visitors use the galleries, which displays are visited more than others and which are passed by. Thanks to my wonderful interviewees, I found out how they feel about the museum layout and how it affects their experience.

If you would like a copy of the report please contact me at Museum and Archives Reception.

**Zuzanna O'Rourke**  
Visitor Services Assistant

## Shetland lace in 19th century published sources

In July 2008, a 3-day conference on knitting was held at Winchester School of Art (WSA). Naomi Tarrant, retired Curator of Textiles at National Museums Scotland, presented an inspiring paper on Jane Gaugain, knitter and author, who published knitting pattern books in Edinburgh between 1840 and 1860. Handknitting experienced a sharp rise in popularity beginning in the late 1830s, due in part by the nation's focus on its new, young Queen, herself a knitter and fashion icon of the day. Knitting patterns were published as books, and in Victorian ladies' newspapers and magazines. Shawls, scarves, stoles, veils, pelisses, cuffs, collars, handkerchiefs, anti-macassars, and baby bonnets were knit in fine lace stitches, and some of the patterns for these garments were attributed to Shetland. It is not yet clear whether they were written by Shetlanders, or, more probably, written by knitters who came in contact with Shetland garments exported to the British mainland. Gaugain's patterns were aimed at the more experienced knitter and she included patterns for many Shetland lace garments. But she was not alone. The Knitting Reference Library at WSA contained four archive boxes of 19th century knitting patterns by many authors. I discovered 25 sources for 'Shetland' garments that day.

Museums Galleries Scotland generously awarded a research travel grant, which enabled me to spend 10 days in Edinburgh and London looking at every 19th century published knitting pattern I could find for references to Shetland knitting. The National Library of Scotland had most of Jane Gaugain's books and valuable online resources for locating references in Victorian newspapers and magazines. These contained many adverts for Shetland knitwear, the earliest found so far dated 13 January 1841 in the *Aberdeen Journal*: 'Large Knitted Shetland SHAWLS, 5s. 6d. to 7s. 6d.'

The British Library held the largest collection of patterns, ranging from cloth-bound books to small



paper pamphlets. All of the authors were women, many unmarried. Some books were published anonymously, or by 'A Lady'. The same authors tended to publish patterns over a period of many years, possibly creating a valuable source of income for themselves. From adverts in the books, it was clear that some authors also imported wools or managed wool shops. They made recommendations about types of wools for specific garments, including Shetland wools: 'The wool with which the real Shetland knitting is done is peculiar to these islands and spun by the peasants; the particular race of sheep from which it is produced is said to resemble those in the mountains of Tibet, more than any other European breed' (Miss

Lambert, *The Handbook of Needlework*, 3rd ed., 1843, p.356). There was a ready trade in hand-spun Shetland wool for knitting, no doubt exported directly from Shetland, but about which very little is known.

The National Library of Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum also holds knitting pattern books, and the Great Exhibition of 1851 archive. Shetland lace knitting was displayed in 7 different booths at the Great Exhibition, and one which also included Fair Isle garments. A Lerwick Committee also had a booth, but as yet, very little information has been found about who comprised the committee and what they exhibited. I hope to continue research on these topics later this year.

I have created bibliographies of the sources I consulted, and have copied patterns attributed to Shetland. I plan to collate the information in a report, to be held in Shetland Archives. In the meantime, if you are interested in examining any of the information I have gathered, please get in contact.

**Dr. Carol Christiansen**  
Curator and Community  
Museums Officer

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](mailto: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 APRIL 2010**