

# Unkans

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

FREE

September 2010  
Issue 22

museum  
Shetland  
archives

## Knitting past, present and future

Shetland Museum and the University of Southampton collaborated to bring the second In the Loop 2 conference on knitting to Shetland at the beginning of September. The conference was fully booked, with 122 delegates from 10 countries travelling to Shetland to discuss knitting traditions and its future over the 5 days. Keynote speakers were: Susan Crawford, author and knitwear designer, who discussed the idea of nostalgia and how it is used in her work on vintage knitting design; Deirdre Nelson, artist, who showed her various projects with communities, using knitting to bring people together and raise money for charities; and Annemor Sundbø, author and historian, who discussed the research for her latest book, charting the history of knitting in

Norway through how it is portrayed in Norwegian art forms. Other papers addressed subjects as diverse as knitting in wartime New Zealand, to product development with villagers in the Himalayas. Eight of the 22 papers were presented by Shetland residents.

There was discussion about knitting in Shetland, including the loss of knitting tuition in the schools and the amount of pay knitters receive within the local industry. Local businesses reported a boost in sales over the week, as

delegates from afar purchased Shetland textile goods. Due to the success of the conference, there will be discussions about further textile-related events to be held in Shetland. It is hoped the conference papers will be published, as they were for the first In the Loop conference held in 2008. Museum curator Carol Christiansen and her colleague Linda Newington at the University of Southampton are hoping to present In the Loop 3 in 2012, probably at Southampton.



Andrea Wong demonstrates a Portuguese method of knitting.



Susan Crawford, Carol Christiansen, Annemor Sundbø, Deirdre Nelson and Linda Newington.

### Winter Opening Hours

#### Museum

**Monday-Friday** 10am-4pm;

**Saturday** 10am-5pm;

**Sunday** 12pm-5pm

#### Archives

**Monday-Friday** 10am-4pm;

**Saturday** 10am-1pm; **Sunday** closed

#### Hay's Dock Café Restaurant

Daytime **Monday-Thursday** 10.30am-

3.30pm; **Saturday** 10.30am-4.30pm;

**Sunday** 12-4.30pm; Evenings **Friday-**

**Saturday** 7-9pm

Please phone 01595 741569

to book a table.

## What's On Guide

### September

**1st August – January 2011: Display**, cannon from the EL Gran Grifon, Spanish Armada ship wrecked off Fair Isle in 1588. Foyer.

**24th August – 3rd October: Photographic exhibition**, to accompany the In The Loop 2 : Tradition and Innovation conference. Four other focus displays around the museum highlight knitting.

**4th September – 10th October: Exhibition, Islesburgh Photographic Club.** Focusing on Shetland subjects, this photographic exhibition shows the broad interests of the amateur enthusiasts. Da Gadderie.

### October

**16th October – 22nd November, Exhibition,** 'Building Scotland: Scotland's Traditional Building

Materials'. Touring exhibition by Historic Scotland. Da Gadderie.

**21st October, and 22nd Mootie Moose– 'Creepy Castles'**. Pre-school craft, storytelling and music. The second in our Autumn series. 10.30-11.30am or 2.00-3.00pm, £6 for three sessions, booking essential. Limited places.

**29th: Talk 'The Growth of Royal Power in Scandinavia 800-1200 AD'**, by Dr Frode Iversen, director of the Department of Archaeology at the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo. Part of the Nordic Seminar. Free, no booking required. Auditorium 7.30pm (doors open at 7pm).

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.

# Gaming piece found by young archaeologist

Ten year old James Cockerill was exploring the ruins of Eastshore broch near the Ness Boating Club when he found a round, flat stone with markings on it. The stone is very similar to Iron Age gaming pieces we have on display in the Early Peoples section of the galleries. James has donated the artefact to Shetland Museum. However, according to Scottish law, the find must be brought before the Treasure Trove panel in Edinburgh, who will assess its importance and value. The stone has been sent south, along with Shetland Museum's bid to retain it for our collections.



Gaming piece found at eroding broch.



James Cockerill with gaming piece.

## Victorian Vikingism and saga translators

The E. S. Reid Tait memorial lecture will be given by Prof Andrew Wawn in November.

In his lecture Prof Wawn will discuss two Victorian scholars, both of whom came close to translating the Orkneyinga Saga but were beaten to publication by Shetlander Gilbert Goudie. The main focus of the lecture will be Rev. Sabine Baring Gould (1834-1924), who Andrew describes as 'an influential folklorist and Victorian Britain's greatest and least-known Icelandic scholar'. He was a parish minister in Dartmoor who was fascinated by the old north and intrigued by pagan magic and mystery.

Andrew will also speak about Icelandic philologist Þorleifur Repp (1794-1857), who was a friend of Sir Walter Scott, and Advocates' Librarian

in Edinburgh for a stormy decade from 1826.

Andrew Wawn is emeritus professor of Anglo-Icelandic Literature at the University of Leeds.

Each year the Shetland Museum and Archives hosts a lecture in memory of a Shetland scholar or antiquary. Edwyn Seymour Reid Tait was a Lerwick draper who collected records and artefacts in his spare time. Shortly before his death Tait donated his impressive collections to the council and they are now housed in the Shetland Museum and Archives.

The lecture is on Thursday 4th November and tickets will be available nearer the time. Please contact us for more information.

## Burra place names night

Burra History Group will hold the first of a series of Place Names Open Nights, on Friday 1st October at 7pm, at Easthouse, Papil, Burra. The isles off Burra, Oxna, Papa, Hildasay, Cheynies, South Havera, etc. will be covered on the first night. Large scale maps and aerial photos of the areas will be available, with other areas of Burra to be covered on later dates. The group are concentrating on a place names project this winter, with a view to publishing a map and history of the place names of Burra. If you have knowledge of, or an interest in, the place names of the isles, please come along. Tea and homebakes will be served, all welcome; phone Adalene on 859 623 or Sylvia on 859 209, or email: [s.jamieson209@btinternet.com](mailto:s.jamieson209@btinternet.com) for more information.

# Plethora of new archives donated over summer

The Shetland Archives is crammed with items that kind people have donated. As the years pass, we get more and more of them and this summer we have acquired dozens of items.

We have received 31 documents by the military authorities addressed to the warder of the jail in Lerwick, about the post office employees who were imprisoned there in 1914. It is remarkable that papers are still coming to light about that famous event, dealt with by Margaret Flaws last year in her book *Spy Fever*.

The same donation contained a 177-page transcript of evidence in a dispute of 1914 between a local fishcurer and a herring merchant in Germany. This book-length document throws light on Shetland's booming fishing industry before the First World War.

There are other gems. One generous donor has given us two scrapbooks kept by the author J.J. Haldane Burgess in the 1890s, and a mass of miscellaneous printed material from the 19th and 20th centuries, some of it rare. One of the books that he donated was a copy of Ivar Aasen's Norwegian dialect dictionary of 1850, inscribed by its original owner, the saga-scholar Gudbrand Vigfusson. It also contains pencil notes by a later owner, the Shetland scholar W.W. Ratter.

Yet another deposit of papers contained some important early material. A document fragment from the early 1640s contains valuable new material about the Sinclairs of Quendale, and the problems that the head of the family had in providing for his sons. We hope the other half of it turns up later! There is also a letter by the factor for James Mouat at Stenness, dated 1721, with a list of all the men that had been fishing there for Mouat during the summer.

And there's a 13-page letter by the inveterate controversialist Dr Arthur Edmondston, from 1832, addressed to the inhabitants of Lerwick, about attempts by the government 'to get possession by fair or foul means, of the barracks of Fort Charlotte, to be used as a hospital for the reception of patients that might be seized with cholera'.

Sometimes we acquire items by purchase. We recently bought a tiny printed poem, by a young Shetlander, Rebecca Inkster of Burra, dated 1864. It is entitled 'An address to the friends of ardent spirits'. Like many at that time Rebecca was a member of the temperance movement. Her production is one of the earliest printed items to have appeared in Shetland.

These are a few examples of documents that we have acquired recently. Remember: if you find something that you think might be useful for historians of Shetland, don't hesitate to come to the Archives with it. We may have it already, but there's no harm in checking. If we don't have it we will accept it with gratitude, look after it, and make sure that it is available, free, to people who want to know about our common history.

Brian Smith, Archivist

## Like migrating birds...

One of the signs that summer has arrived is the return of our student helpers – home from university to work in the museum over a ten-week period. This year saw the return of Jake Watt and Helen Whitham, along with Cairi Jennings who joins the team for the first time. This year Helen and



Cairi Jennings and Helen Whitham.

Cairi reorganised the museum's art store, which is home to an extensive fine art collection. They spent the summer cataloguing, repacking and finding suitable storage space for new pieces received into the collection since 2007. Jake spent the summer in our boat sheds where he organised storage facilities and worked on boats. Three boats were taken out of storage for the first time in many years, and Jake began the painstaking job of scraping and painting so the boats can be put in the water at Hay's Dock. The work they achieved during their short stay is amazing and the museum seems much quieter without them! We look forward to their return again next summer.



Jake Watt

# Were they only fishermen?

I am doing a Ph.D on rural history in an insular context. One of the subjects that interests me is the perception of the island – and its agriculture – by insiders and outsiders. There are many beliefs about islands and coastal areas in European minds. One of them is that if a settlement lies less than 3 miles from the coast, the people living there are all sailors. Another one is that if a place has a “myth of creation” involving the sea, the people living there must have inherited their forefathers’ ability to sail. The “myth of creation” in Shetland is, to some extent, the Viking invasions. The same myth is also present in Normandy, where the emblem of the regional council of the southern part is the prow of a Viking longboat.



<http://www.cr-basse-normandie.fr>

This emblem doesn't represent the people living further inland – in Normandy it can be more than 125 miles from the coast – but it is a tourism tool. In Shetland you can't live more than 5 miles from the sea. However, people today, as in the 18th century, are not only sailors or fishermen. The complexity of the representation of a population is that it usually simplifies the situation and makes it unreal and symbolic.

In the 18th century Shetland people lived in what can be called an “archipelago economy” (Beatrice Möring, 1993). They cultivated the land; they fished; they crafted all sorts of objects. But the representation of the Shetland communities in the 18th century was just as imperfect as the representation of the communities in Normandy today.

One of the main sources of the representation of a territory and its communities in the 18th century is maps. There are numerous maps held by the National Library of Scotland and Shetland Museum and

Archives of the Shetland Islands during this century.

The study of the title blocks or cartouches of these maps allows us to say that the mapmakers, mainly outsiders, had a specific way of looking at the Shetland landscape and communities. They chiefly had two goals: mapping the British state and/or emphasising the wealth of the fishing resources. These two aims corresponded to the British context of the time. However they helped to establish a vision of the Shetland Islands as a place of great fishing industry where people are fishermen or merchants.

The title blocks represented merchants, fishermen, nets, fishing ships, oars and so on. The farming activities – and particularly the sheep breeding – and the crafts were never represented, reducing the Shetland communities' complexity to a unique practice: fishing.

If you are aware of maps dating from this period representing other specific activities, I would be interested to see them. You can contact me via Shetland Archives.

**Audrey Beaudouin,**  
PhD Student,  
Université Rennes



Thomas Kitchin, 1752 © National Library of Scotland, NG.1521.d.9.

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.

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heritage  
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**DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FOR NEXT ISSUE IS FRIDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2010**