

Unkans

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

FREE
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Issue 26

museum
Shetland
archives

An' dan dey made tae...

Shetland Museum and Archives' major exhibition of 2011 marks the Tall Ships visit, themed on tea clippers – the ships that ensured everyone could enjoy Britain's national cuppa!

Tea was imported into Britain from around 1650, but it was then a taxable luxury. After the end of the Napoleonic War in 1815, the tax was lowered and tea became more popular, even in remote Shetland. A big change occurred in the 1840s-1850s, when China opened ports to Western merchants, ending the East India Company's monopoly. But it could take up to a year for a ship to carry a cargo of tea crates from China to London. Newspapers announced the arrival of the cargo of "best new tea", which fetched high prices.

As demand for tea grew in the 19th century, a new, faster ship was built. The clipper could get from the Far East to Britain in four months, sometimes less. But the heyday was to be short, because the new Suez



A proper picnic, c1940: no vacuum flask or plastic mugs! Lowrie Petrie pours, with Bobby and Mary Urquhart minding to keep their feet off the picnic cloth.

Canal of 1869 meant steamers could make quicker passages than sail, and the era of the clipper ended around 1875.

Our exhibition covers Shetlanders' bartering of goods for tea, and the poor opinion outsiders had of our tannin addiction. We feature photos of "hill-tae" and genteel parlour tea,

plus familiar artefacts we couldn't be without, like cosies, caddies, and strainers. Best of all, children can make their own tea party as part of our learning programme. What could be more British than this Chinese drink?

Dr Ian Tait
Curator

Opening Hours (Summer)

Museum

Monday –Friday 10am–5pm
Saturday 10am–5pm
Sunday 12pm–5pm

Archives

Monday–Friday 10am–4:30pm
Saturday 10am–1pm

Hay's Dock Café Restaurant

Daytime:
Monday–Saturday 10.30am–4.30pm
Sunday 12pm–4.30pm

Evenings:

Until 28th May: Friday and Saturdays only,
Beginning 29th May, Tuesday–Saturday,
6:30–9pm (last orders)
To book: 01595 741569

Croft House Museum

Daily: 10am–1pm, 2–5pm

What's on Guide

May

3rd–1st June: Exhibition: Focus Environment,
Chevron School Photo Competition, Foyer
corridor, free.

7th–5th June: Exhibition: 40 Years of Art at
Shetland Museum, Da Gadderie, free.

7th–5th June: Exhibition: Makkin' Sail, new work
by Diane Garrick, Pier Store, free.

14th: Felted Animals: workshop, 10.30am–
12.30pm, P5+, booking required, £3.

14th: Perfect Pouches: workshop, 1.30–3.30pm,
P7+, booking required, £3.

19th & 20th: Brilliant Boats: Mootie Moose
workshops, ages 2–5, 10.30–11.30am (spaces
available); 2–3pm (fully booked), £6 for series.

27th: CNS Lecture: 'Nordic Roots of the
Orkney and Shetland Broonie and other Mount
Dwellers', by Prof Terry Gunnell, University of
Iceland, 7.30pm, free.

31st: Film: Shetland–A Few Aspects,
12–12.45pm, Auditorium, free

June

5th: Film: Shetland–A Few Aspects, 3.15–4pm,
free.

7th: Film: Shetland–A Few Aspects, 12.15–1pm,
free.

10th–6th July: Exhibition: Maritime Paintings
from the Shetland Museum Art Collection, Foyer
corridor, free.

11th–24th July: Exhibition: From High Seas to
High Teas, Da Gadderie, free.

14th: Film: Shetland–A Few Aspects, 2–2.45pm,
free.

22nd: Film: Shetland–A Few Aspects,
12–12.45pm, free.

24th: CNS Lecture: 'The Viking Guide to Surviving
in the North Atlantic: traditional technologies
in Norse colonisation', by Prof Christian Keller,
Univ. of Oslo, 7.30pm, free.

27th: Film: Shetland–A Few Aspects, 11.15am–
12noon, free.

Tickets for both CNS lectures are available
from museum reception.

40 Years of Art at Shetland Museum



Watercolour of Vidlin harbour by Josephine Ann Longmuir, 1986.

The first purpose-built art gallery in the islands was part of the Shetland Museum, opened in 1966. Since those early days, the Museum has collected pieces by exhibitors, many of whom were local

artists. This show reflects an eclectic mix of art purchased for the permanent collection, and charts the changing style of art over forty-plus years. The show runs from 7th May to 10th June in Da Gadderie.

Old Haa Inukshuks Open Day

The Old Haa in Burravoe, Yell will celebrate the launch of a new geology exhibit on Saturday 4th June at 2.30pm. The exhibit includes six large stone figures in the style of Inukshuks, traditionally used by the Inuit as place-markers or navigation aids, similar to Shetland's meads. Each figure in the Museum's garden is made from a different type of stone found in Yell. A display inside the Museum includes small Inukshuks made by local school bairns and Inuit artefacts collected by filmmaker Jenny Gilbertson. Her film about the Inuit will also be shown. The exhibit is part of Geopark Shetland and the event is funded by Scotland Islands Programme. All welcome!



Staff on the go!

Museum, Archive, and Restaurant staff have been busy with training sessions and presenting lectures recently:

- 14 staff from the Museum and Café Restaurant undertook Disability Awareness Training provided by Disability Shetland in March. The training was aimed at challenging perceptions of disabilities, and promoting inclusive thinking and effective communication.
- Curatorial staff Jenny Murray and Laurie Goodlad attended a course in object handling, packing and storage at the National Museums Scotland in Edinburgh in April. The course covered all manner of materials, from delicate paper and textiles to metals.
- Brian Smith and Jenny Murray attended the St. Magnus Conference in Kirkwall, held by the Centre for Nordic Studies in April. Brian's talk was on 'Violent Vikings and Squeamish Scholars', and Jenny's paper was entitled, 'Cultivating the Divine: Ritual deposition of agricultural equipment in Shetland Peat bogs'.
- Carol Christiansen, curatorial advisor to the George Waterston Memorial Centre, travelled to Fair Isle to meet with the centre's trustees and discuss issues relating to their collection. She also gave a public talk on the Gunnister Man Project.
- Yvonne Reynolds travelled to Skerries to deliver workshops on 'Historic Toys' and 'Creating your own Exhibition' to pupils.



Relics from the Whaling

Shetlanders brought back many unusual and decorative pieces as reminders and gifts from their trips to the whaling. The two 'faces' are bookends, made from whale eardrums. These were donated by the late William and Elizabeth Anderson, who purchased them in 1938 on one of their many visits to Shetland. They were buying a Shetland collie pup which the breeder was reluctant to sell unless they bought something else – hence the purchase of these unusual objects!

The painted penguin egg, a common 'keepsake', says 'South Georgia 1937'. It was brought back to Shetland by whaler Addie Manson from Brae.

Forgery in the Museum

Visitors to the Museum boat shed will occasionally see artefacts other than boats under restoration. Sometimes items need conservation work, and the museum is fortunate to have Erik Erasmuson, a skilled metalworker, on its staff. Working on objects requires a high level of accuracy in skill and materials, and to this end we need to make our own authentic

fittings of wrought iron (steel is forbidden!). For this, we're looking to acquire a blacksmith's forge, allowing us to make repairs to agricultural equipment and boat fittings.

Does any reader have a coal-fired forge in reasonably working order? If so, please e-mail attendant@shetland-museum.org.uk, or telephone 01595 695057.

Monster Attacks Lerwick!



The death of actor Michael Gough in March was marked by many tributes. We can add ours by highlighting a unique artefact in the museum – a North Star cinema poster for *Konga*, in which he starred. Gough was a great British character actor who made countless appearances in film, television and theatre where his distinguished manner and voice made him a favourite for movie-makers looking for a well-bred villain. Herman Cohen, one of the producers of *Konga*, even called him 'the cheaper version of Vincent Price'.

Made at Merton Park Studios near Wimbledon and released in 1961, the film contains the usual B-movie bunkum: a mad scientist, a mystery formula, carnivorous plants, hypnosis being used to

make others commit murder, a love triangle, and a monster destroying a city.

The producers said audiences were impressed by the special effects and thought the film cost millions, but if that's the case my 'Action Man with eagle eyes' is positively *Star Wars* in 3D. *Konga* isn't available on DVD, although snippets are available on YouTube. I particularly recommend the climax, as Konga attacks London while clutching the scientist in his hand – or rather, a man in a loose-fitting monkey suit stands by a model of Big Ben holding a peg doll...

It all sounds a bit negative, but I love this genre of film, the type churned out relatively cheaply in the last decades of mass British cinema production. So long as



Courtesy of www.sci-fimovieposters.co.uk

you suspend belief for a time and don't question the story (when Konga is given the growth serum as a chimpanzee why does he turn into a gorilla and not a bigger chimpanzee?) you will be thoroughly entertained for an hour or so.

Many visitors simply assume our poster is for the 1933 classic *King Kong*; however, it is far more important to the museum because it is an item that has been 'localised' for Shetland. Charles Forret was an art teacher at the Anderson Institute and also worked using the pen name Pinto Forretto. He recreated the poster in watercolour for his friend Alec Greig, manager of the North Star at the time, to be used as a novelty item in the foyer. Forret substituted the Lerwick waterfront for London, and Konga stands with one foot in Commercial Street, the other on the Hillhead. I wonder if any cinema-goers came out disappointed when Konga failed to reach Shetland?

Paul Chivers
Visitor Services Assistant

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 Telephone: 01595 695057 Fax: 01595 696729

Post: Newsletter, Shetland Museum and Archives, Hay's Dock, Lerwick, Shetland ZE1 0WP

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DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FOR NEXT ISSUE IS NEXT ISSUE IS FRIDAY, 17 JUNE, 2011.