

Explore Shetland's Norse Heritage with your GPS



The Renwick family of Cuckron enjoy Geocaching.

©THING Project/Frank Bradford

Fans of Shetland's Norse Heritage now have a new way to explore some of the islands' fascinating historic landscapes using geocaching, an outdoor treasure hunting game played using a GPS or an app on a smartphone. Players seek hidden items by downloading coordinates from www.geocaching.com

A number of geocaches have been hidden at thing sites throughout the North Atlantic Region, including 7 in Shetland, as part of the Thing Sites GeoTour.

The tour, which is the first of its' kind outside of the US, has been developed as part

of the Northern Periphery Programme funded THING Project, and brings together sites in Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Shetland, Orkney, Highland Scotland and the Isle of Man to highlight our shared cultural roots.

For our Norse ancestors the thing sites would have been a central location within their landscape. Today the only indication we have that many of them existed is through place names. The Thing Sites GeoTour encourages people to go out and explore their local landscapes, and think about how people may have used and experienced it in the past.

Once you've explored the sites, you can upload comments and images to the cache pages on geocaching.com, and share your experience with other geocachers. The pages also contain additional historical information about the site, and links to resources on www.thingsites.com. If you're really lucky, you may even find one of 100 limited edition Thing Sites GeoTour trackables. These items each have their own special mission to complete, such as to travel around all of the Thing Sites GeoTour caches, or to travel further than the Vikings, but they need your help to get them on their way.

Why not start your Thing Sites Geocaching adventure by visiting www.geocaching.com/adventures/geotours/thingsites and downloading the coordinates today?

Lauren Doughton

Place Names Assistant



Hiding a geocache in the Faroe Islands.

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Local Events Listings

For information on local events please visit www.shetland.org to view listings. To add your own event to this site please call 01595 989898 or complete the online form at www.visit.shetland.org/submit-an-event

Visit
www.shetlandamenity.org/unkans
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2 Unkans

Two ferries but it's more than worth it!

As with so many others, the Unst Heritage Centre sprang from the enthusiasm of a small local History Group. In 1983 they organised an exhibition of old and ancient artefacts in the Baltasound Hall. Then, in 1986, were given the use of the old Mouat shop at Haroldswick to put objects on permanent display where they were curated by Joan Mouat and May Sutherland. With many generous contributions the shop rapidly filled to overflowing and became, for those of us who were lucky enough to have visited it, a real-life Old Curiosity Shop.

It soon became clear, however, that the old shop was not large enough nor exactly what was needed for the long term. So, when in 1997, the Haroldswick School closed the History Group seized the opportunity. It was impossible for such a small group of volunteers to find the finance to purchase the building but the Shetland Amenity Trust stepped in on their behalf, bought the school and leased it back to them. At the same time as the move, the Unst Heritage Trust was formed which brought together the two heritage

attractions of Unst; the new Heritage Centre and the Unst Boat Haven.

The Boat Haven grew out of the life-long love of Duncan Sandison for Shetland boats and it was he who was instrumental in seeing it opened in 1994. It now houses 20 boats representing a wide range of fishing and sailing craft from throughout Shetland and beyond, these include a Ness yoal, Burra haaf boat, sixern, a Norwegian 'faering' and a Faroe boat. This is an ideal place to see them all together, demonstrating both their lineage and the great skill and ingenuity of Shetland's boatbuilders in meeting the demands of fishing and sailing in difficult and often dangerous waters. But the Boat Haven is not just about the boats, there is in addition an incredible collection of equipment used in the fishing industry down the ages including written records of its history.

But, to return to the Heritage Centre: in addition to containing agricultural and domestic artefacts from the past and access to local census figures, it has some wonderful examples of the unique



Some of the textiles displayed at the Centre.

lace making of Unst. Because of this and the Centre's link with today's expert lace makers, people come from far and wide, not only admire the craft but to study it in its homeland. Unst, of course, also boasts one of the most diverse and unique ranges of geological outcrops for its size, anywhere in the world! It is the site par excellence to see these rocks and their clear effects on the landscape and vegetation. To help the visitor appreciate this the Centre has a wonderful collection of samples and explanatory maps.

If you are one of those reluctant to take a child to a museum, have no fears of either site in Unst as both are family friendly. Last year there were over 3000 visitors to each and during the Hamefarin in 2010, 4000 visited the Boat Haven! These are amazing figures considering there are two ferries to take from Mainland. When the Shetland Amenity Trust longhouse is open, beside the lonship Skidbladner at Haroldswick, this will bring another substantial attraction to Unst, complementing the existing Centres and surely bring many more visitors to them.

Both the Heritage Centre and the Boat Haven are accredited by Museum Galleries Scotland so you can be sure that the facilities and information are of the highest quality. You will be more than pleasantly surprised by your visit ... take two ferries!

Shetland Heritage Association



A peerie visitor enjoying the Muckle Flugga boat.

Your Paintings 8th- 24th February

Throughout the building we will be exhibiting a selection of the oil and acrylic paintings from our collection. This is part of a BBC lead initiative to highlight their online catalogue, 'Your Paintings' which encompasses the entire UK national collection (www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/).

The web site catalogue is made up of paintings from thousands of museums and other public institutions around the country.

Twelve other organisations from Shetland participated in the project, and their paintings are also available. Dr. Christiansen says, 'it's fun to explore the website, there are so many amazing images of Shetland. And there are many little-known local artists represented, whose work can now be seen by everyone. Using the website is truly an easy way to become familiar with the art of Shetland'.



If you would like to see any of Shetland Museum's paintings in person, contact Dr. Christiansen at carol@shetland-museum.org.uk.

Kevin Dagg 23rd Feb - 31st March 'Surface Tension'

An exhibition of paintings and sculpture which on first glance appear unrelated.

With this series of paintings produced specifically for Shetland Museum and Archives Kevin is concerned with the more subtle, ground level aspects of the Shetland Biome. The focus is on the lichen habitats, rock formations, local fauna and the resultant colour combinations which elevate the everyday to the extraordinary.

In contrast the sculptures physically translate newspaper images of people caught in the political spotlight. This is the human face of conflict, revealed through the painstakingly handcrafted nature of the process.

How Shetland won the war

A bold title, I'll grant you, but in the upcoming centenary commemorations for the First World War, we should recall our own crucial role in Britain's epic struggle. Thousands of men served on sea and land away from our shores, but these very islands were vital to national strategy because of our geographical position. The Allies couldn't win the war by combat on sea and land alone, and a crucial aim was to wreck their enemies' war economy. A blockade meant the Central Powers couldn't get supplies to clothe, transport, equip and feed their own war machine, and thus be fatally weakened. The Royal Navy operated a force, the 10th Cruiser Squadron, to implement this blockade, and Shetland was at the forefront because its forward base was here.

Our colossal Navy had debarred German merchant ships from the North Atlantic, but supplies could slip through on vessels from non-combatant nations. Britain intercepted every neutral ship on the seas, and cargoes were liable to be confiscated if it was thought the onward destination was Germany. Although the neutral trade was legal, the British unilaterally declared all manner of goods "contraband", to give the impression companies were smuggling: war was psychological. Trade was disrupted, but prices for goods soared, so the shipping companies' business was lucrative.

Liners at war

The 10th Cruiser Squadron was a group of commandeered ocean liners,



Teacup from H.M.S. Digby, dredged up from Busta Voe.

which were more economical on coal than regular warships, and could cover longer distances. They were commissioned into the Royal Navy, and most had Shetlanders in their crew. Although they were H.M. ships, armed for combat, they still essentially resembled liners, and the larger ones retained their original luxurious fixtures. The cruisers worked along patrol lines south-west and north of Shetland, every three weeks they resupplied at Busta Voe, and periodically went to Glasgow for maintenance. When neutral cargoes needed to be checked, those craft were sent to Lerwick, under command of a prize crew.

The squadron needed regular supplies of coal and food, so the base was as near to the patrol area as possible, in Shetland. There were two dozen cruisers, plus colliers, minesweepers, destroyers, and many other craft, and there was only one place large enough to accommodate it – the seaways inland from Vementry and

Muckle Roe. It was a huge operation, a feat of logistics and organisation, with naval and mercantile craft on the move around the clock, protected by boom defences and a gun battery to guard the approaches, and daily patrols eliminated mines laid by enemy submarines. The command centre was at Busta, and the bay was set with designated anchorages. At Busta Voe and Olnafirth ships took on food supplies, coal, mail, and sick crewmen were transferred to the hospital ship. Trade at the local shops boomed, and women sold as much knitting as they could make.

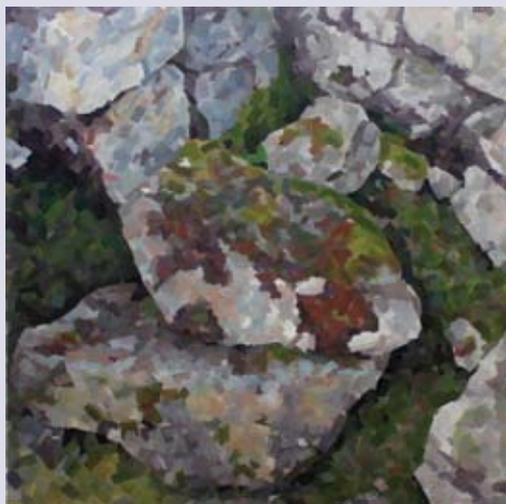
Do you have cruiser squadron mementoes?

It is a mystery to me why the blockade fleet has completely faded from memory, despite the later "Shetland Bus" (a much smaller operation) continuing to preoccupy so many Shetlanders today. We have few items in either Museum or Archives, and would be grateful to hear of any more in the community. With hundreds of sailors at the base at any one time, local families got know crewmen well, and they exchanged gifts. Schoolchildren picked up interesting flotsam around the shores, and in recent years relics have been found in scallop dredges. If anyone has an item dredged up from the 10th Cruiser Squadron's base, be it a bottle or a gunshell, I would love to hear from you.

Dr Ian Tait, Curator



Carved decoration from H.M.S. Alcantara, sunk in battle off Unst in 1916. This flotsam came ashore at Norwick.



Hannah Frank

2nd February – 4th March

The work of the late Glasgow Jewish artist, Hannah Frank, which has travelled across the UK and in the United States, will appear in Lerwick for the first time featuring black and white drawings, prints and figurative bronze sculpture, which cover a 75 year-long artistic career.

Recent Acquisitions

19th January – 30th July

Since the museum opened 2007 there has been an influx of donations. Two cases have now been dedicated specifically to showcase a selection of these artefacts as well objects purchased by the Museum.

All exhibitions are at the Shetland Museum and Archives.



McGowan Scott: Worthy Chief Guizer Jarl



Mackie Scott as Guizer Jarl in 1913.

A century ago, in January 1913 the popular townsman, McGowan Scott, led Lerwick's annual Up Helly Aa celebrations as Guizer Jarl. Mackie Scott, as he was known, was very much a man of the community. He worked as an ironmonger on Commercial Street, was a notable fiddler, and member of the Lerwick Musical Society. Scott was also an Up Helly Aa enthusiast and thus heavily involved in the festival from an early age. In 1905 he took charge of proceedings as Worthy Chief Guizer, being the last to hold this title. The following year saw the introduction of the Guizer Jarl to Up Helly Aa. No particular theme had ever been assumed when it came to guizing. In 1906 however, the new Guizer Jarl and his squad, which included Scott, donned the now distinctive Viking costume for the first time.

Scott named his galley Thor, incidentally the first one to have been given a name. Up Helly Aa morning was a washout. However by the afternoon the rain

had dried up sufficiently, allowing the Bill to take its accustomed place at the Market Cross with its scathing jokes saved from the threat of smudging. A mention in the Bill is customary reward for anyone failing to contribute to the Up Helly Aa Collecting Sheet. On this occasion the Bill certainly achieved the desired effect. Mr Collier, Superintendent of the Inland Revenue, was furious and immediately threatened the Guizer Jarl with legal action for libel. Collier's lawyer demanded the names and addresses of all those responsible. Scott dutifully ignored the letter and no further action was taken. The story is told however that the lawyer charged Collier five pounds for his fee, and duly donated the money to Up Helly Aa funds.

The local ice cream war of 1905 to 1913 also featured in the Bill. Italian families had opened ice cream parlours in the town, causing moral outrage. The churches lamented that such sinful establishments were corrupting the youth of the town. These alleged 'dens of iniquity' attracted further evangelical wrath for opening on Sundays. Consequently ministers rallied their congregations to protest outside Corothie's ice cream parlour on the North Esplanade. Up Helly Aa did not escape moral scrutiny. In fact, an attempt was made to stop the festival on grounds of it being heathenish. Guizer Jarl Scott retorted in a speech from the galley, 'We are celebrating Up Helly Aa this year in as splendid style as ever, in spite of the efforts that have been made to throw cold water both on our torches and on our bonfire'. Such criticism, he said, 'is more heathenish than the festival, for it is an attempt to interfere with innocent and harmless enjoyment'. Up Helly Aa of 1913 would be, 'for downright, genuine, whole-hearted enjoyment, the greatest of them all'.

Scott pulled together a brass band in time for the Up Helly Aa celebrations of 1914. A report in the Shetland Times commented on how the bandsmen looked particularly smart in their dark blue uniforms with gold braid facings. Scott's positive innovation to the procession was noted and the reporter hoped that the band would become a permanent institution in the town. Scott played the cornet and indeed led the band as bandmaster for many years. At a mass meeting of guizers in January 1921 he conducted the first ever rendering of the Up Helly Aa Song to the familiar tune composed by Thomas Manson. It was later said that Up Helly Aa without the brass band would be unthinkable, a sentiment which can be echoed today. Indeed, our Up Helly Aa owes its success to the vision and resolve of pioneers like Mackie Scott.

Brydon Leslie

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.

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DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FOR NEXT ISSUE IS 22 MARCH 2013.