

## From the Croft to the Palace



The Shetland Textile Museum at the Bød of Gremista (one time home to P&O Shipping founder, Arthur Anderson) has chosen to explore the story of how Shetland knitting emerged from the croft, to be displayed at exhibitions such as 'The Great Exhibition' of 1851, and ultimately worn by Royalty. It is an interesting story indeed, and the Museum's beautiful new display cabinets are packed with items ranging from the 1700's to the present day.

The exhibition in the Crofthouse room explores Shetland knitting's earliest beginnings, showing how the Hanseatic merchants, who had been coming to Shetland from the middle of the 1400's, traded items such as beer and linen for knitted stockings at booths which they set up all over Shetland. Indeed the development of Lerwick itself is said to owe its existence partly to the thousands of Dutch fishermen who followed the herring there during the late sixteenth century. Shetland women sold them knitwear in exchange for rum, tobacco and even money. The 'Arthur Anderson' room tells the story of lace and Fair Isle and here we can learn about the ingenuity and philanthropy of merchants such as William Standen, Arthur Anderson and Provost Jimmy Smith (Ooie Jeemie) who each had a significant part to play in discovering markets for Shetland knitwear during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Above all, the exhibition affords an opportunity to view some of the finest of Shetland's knitting heritage and celebrates

the skill and imagination of Shetland women who knitted to sustain their families through difficult times. The rich legacy of knitting lives on, and this summer the Museum hosted an exhibition by students of the National Certificate in Art and Design and the BA (hons) in Contemporary Textiles of the Creative Industries Department of the Shetland College and University of Highlands and Islands. The shop too is bursting with colourful scarves, gloves, brooches and some wonderful contemporary knitwear as well as beautiful traditional items such as haps, shawls and jumpers.

Demonstrations, talks and knitting evenings have been held throughout the summer, and in conjunction with Shetland Arts, the Textile Museum is organising a Faroese and Swedish inspired event called 'Own our own time', which will be held at 6pm on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> of August with 84 knitters knitting in a circle for about an hour within the Textile Museum grounds. The 'Shetland Open Textile Inspired Competition' will be held during 'Wool Week' (7<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> of October). Entry forms can be obtained from Brita at the Textile Museum and should be returned by mid-September.

The Textile Museum has developed an ambitious and exciting development plan for the next three years and is looking forward to a bright and interesting future.

The Bød is open from Tuesday to Saturday, 12noon to 4pm, until 13th October.

*Michele Deyell*



From top: **Jennie Atkinson, volunteer demonstrator shows her spinning skills; new Paparwark cabinets in the Arthur Anderson Room displaying Fine Lace; Lace garments including a bed jacket.**

### Local Events Listings

For information on local events please visit [www.shetland.org](http://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](http://www.visit.shetland.org/submit-an-event)

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# Hitra Returns



The 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of one of the most significant events in Scalloway's World War II heritage is being commemorated at the end of August this year. The donation of three sub-chaser vessels to the Shetland Bus operation based in Scalloway by the United States Navy saved lives and impacted substantially upon the war efforts in occupied Norway.

The Shetland Bus was the name used for the secret transport operation between Shetland and Norway while

our Scandinavian neighbour was under Nazi occupation. By this route commandos, resistance fighters and armaments were some of the crucial deliveries made into the depths of the Norwegian fjords, while refugees and returning military special operations personnel were ferried to safety in Shetland.

The Shetland Bus operation began using small vulnerable fishing vessels, forced to sail across the treacherous North Sea on moonless nights and in poor

weather to avoid detection by Nazi marine or airborne aggressors. The heroic masters and crews of these vessels sometimes paid the ultimate price and those who died are remembered at the Shetland Bus Memorial on Scalloway's Main Street. The plaques upon the memorial name the 44 who perished.

The donation of three sub-chaser fast attack craft by the American Navy to the Shetland Bus operation in August 1943 saw an end to further fatalities and it is this that will be highlighted through this year's event. The sub-chaser KNM Hitra is the only surviving vessel of the three and has been fully restored and serves as a training and museum ship for the Norwegian Navy. The Hitra will travel to Scalloway on the 30<sup>th</sup> August to take part in a number of events to mark this pivotal point in Norwegian, and local, history. It is hoped that a number of other Norwegians are to travel across separately.

There will be the chance for school children and the public to view and tour

the vessel and several hospitality events laid on by the Shetland Bus Friendship Society. The key to the whole weekend will be a wreath laying at the Shetland Bus memorial on the morning of Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> August and the public are invited to attend as the local dignitaries and those from Norway come together to remember the fallen and celebrate this significant American gesture in Norway's time of need.

*Mark Burgess*



**Shetland Bus Memorial in Scalloway.**

## North Atlantic Native Sheep and Wool Conference 2013

The North Atlantic Native Sheep and Wool (NANS&W) Conference is an international project held annually in venues in the North Atlantic region. Previous meetings have been held in Orkney (2011) and Hordaland, Norway (2012). Shetland will host the 2013 Conference over four days in October, to coincide with the annual Wool Week festival. The theme is Sustainability.

The conference will attract an international audience, with delegates already booked from Iceland, Germany and Australia. Conference Speakers will also bring a range of international expertise, travelling from Norway, Iceland, the United States; and Cumbria and North Uist in the UK. Local speakers will also be delivering lectures including Dr Carol Christiansen from Shetland Museum and Archives who will discuss sustainability through the ages, and Ronnie Eunson and Lyall Halcrow who will speak about 'Carbon Kind Lamb'

The North Atlantic region shares common cultural, environmental and natural heritage. The indigenous sheep breeds in each area are historically and biologically related. Sheep production in the region shares common concerns and challenges of sustainability, promotion, markets and diversification. The aim of



these conferences is to bring together beneficiaries and stakeholders in native sheep and wool production to collaborate and develop new projects and initiatives. Holding the conference in different venues throughout the North Atlantic each year allows the host area to highlight initiatives and challenges in their own area.

In addition to lectures and an opportunity to share ideas, the conference will also include a day at the Marts with a visit to the abattoir, a day trip to Unst and Yell with visits to the Heritage and Creative Industries Centres, and a delegate meal. Tickets are available for the full conference at £150 per person (including meals and transport) or for the Monday lecture day only at £25. Both are available through Shetland Box Office.

For further information and the full programme, see the website at [www.shetlandwoolweek.com/conference](http://www.shetlandwoolweek.com/conference) or call Emma Miller, conference organiser on 01595 694688.

# Hoswick and Sandsayre

What better place to take a newly arrived visitor at Sumburgh for a cup of tea or bowl of soup before making for home than the Hoswick Visitor Centre? Like Shetland's many other Heritage museums it was initiated and is entirely orchestrated by local volunteers. It is perhaps best known for its wonderful and varied collection of old radios and communications equipment, for information on the natural and cultural history of Sandwick and as an outlet for local crafts. However, there is much more to it than that. In fact the Centre is only a third of what became an ambitious ten-year project set up in 2001 by the Sandwick community under their Sandwick Social and Economic Development Company.

Back in the early 1980s the building was a weaving shed converted by the local knitwear business into a café to attract visitors to Hoswick, but by the turn of the millennium it was no longer paying for itself. It was at this point, with its imminent closure, that the community stepped in. The history and the results of this local effort is an extraordinary story of perseverance and effort that has been repeated, in some form or another, throughout Shetland and is a testament to the health and vigour of our rural communities.



**Vintage car visits the centre in 2006.**

First, a business plan was commissioned to look at the opportunities at Sandwick for providing information and services for visitors and tourists. In addition to the potential of the building itself, this identified the need for a waiting room and interpretation at Sandsayre for those taking the boat to Mousa, a workshop for the local sailing boats and dinghies, and the desperately needed repair and maintenance of the historic 1854 Stevenson Sandsayre pier. The goals that the newly established Development Company therefore set itself, in order to obtain external funding, were – the purchase and refurbishment of the old café to become the Visitor Centre, the restoration of the dilapidated buildings at Sandsayre and finally, repairs to the pier. The whole was a complex partnership with the Shetland Islands Council, Shetland Amenity Trust and several local organisations including the Mousa ferry business, the Sailing Club and the Guides; while the funding came from nine different sources. For example, the initial step of the purchase of the old café was achieved with a grant from the Scottish Land Fund.



**Inside the Hoswick Visitor Centre.**

The Hoswick Visitor Centre opened its doors in 2002, the information centre at Sandsayre in 2005 and last year (2012) saw the completion of the restoration of the pier. In the case of the Sandsayre pier it was in the nick of time, for in December a storm flattened walls above the beach while the pier stood firm. Without the restoration the pier might very well have gone! (for the whole story of the pier visit <http://www.sandsayrepietrust.com/>)

The Hoswick Centre is now in its 12<sup>th</sup> year and as well as serving as a focal point for tourists it is a community facility where the Sandwick History Group meet and where workshops and talks can be held. It is perhaps often overlooked that the fascinating displays in the Centre (and at Sandsayre) on the likes of the Hoswick Whale Case of 1888, the Sandlodge copper mine and miners' houses, local textile production, the broch of Mousa, radio equipment and craftwork, are not just for visitors but also an opportunity for local residents and children to learn about their own history.

The story at the Hoswick Centre does not end here of course. The volunteers of the Sandwick Development Company are now preparing a report on the energy efficiency, or rather 'inefficiency', of the old building, in order to apply to the Climate Challenge Fund for finance to be able reduce their energy costs by such sustainable means as solar power and biomass heating.

It is hard work for the volunteers at all Shetland's Heritage centres but it brings much satisfaction to those involved as well as to visitors and, equally importantly, it brings cash into the community. The triplex of the Centre at Hoswick, Information display and pier at Sandsayre need your support. Next time you take a run to Sumburgh, stop in for a cuppa and a snack, learn some of the history of Sandwick and enjoy the displays.

*Shetland Heritage Association*



**View of the "Green Shed" at Sandsayre used by sailing club and Guides.**

## Shetland Fine Lace Dressing Jackets and Gossamer Blouses

For many, the mention of Shetland fine knitted lace brings images of beautiful shawls and stoles to mind, pleasing to the eye, soft to the touch and fine enough to pass through the smallest of wedding rings. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century Shetland fine lace shawls and stoles were high fashion items, and fitted perfectly with women's dress styles of the day which highlighted the silhouette of the mature, full-figured body accentuating low busts, curvy hips and small waists. However times and fashions change and the 20<sup>th</sup> century heralded a new modern era, one in which the fashion for shawls and stoles did not disappear but certainly declined. As Shetland fine knitted lace contributed significantly to the Shetland economy, to ensure that it maintained this position the fine lace knitters needed to continually innovate and adapt to changing needs, technologies and interpretations of the world of fashion.

The 1910s and 1920s saw a streamlining of fashion with the introduction of long lines and dropped waists, using delicate but highly decorated fabrics. The appearance of these new modern styles in department stores and fashion magazines and the rise in popularity of Fair Isle knitwear could easily have heralded the end of the fine lace knitting industry if not for the tenacity and fashion forward thinking of many of the fine knitters. Imitating the new fashions, the fine lace knitters adapted the original design aesthetics of the fine lace to conform to ever changing consumer demands and create new and wonderful articles. The imaginative symmetrical designs composed of the elaborate motifs so famed in Shetland fine lace

shawls were recreated in an extraordinary display of masterful Shetland-style design which included bed and dressing jackets and delicate gossamer blouses. Satin lined Shetland lace dressing jackets were sold as far afield as Perth Australia, where the Western Mail declared in 1929 that a Shetland lace dressing jacket trimmed with swans' down was the 'choice lingerie for the modern girl'.

Gossamer blouses could be made from an allover pattern of hand knitted Shetland fine lace or with a finely knitted plain body and lace collar, cuffs and



**Three Fetlar women, one wears a Shetland Lace gossamer blouse. © Shetland Museum and Archives**

base. They could be snugly fitted or tunic style and in many instances the gossamer blouses were bespoke items, where the consumer requested a specific pattern, length of sleeve, depth of V for the neck or requested the blouse with a tie or a tassel or a fringe. The soft feminine style perfectly suited the mood and fashion shapes of the day and Shetland lace gossamer blouses and tunics became hugely popular. Indeed '*Femina*' a Paris fashion magazine which marketed at bourgeois and upper class French women actively promoted Shetland gossamer blouses throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Regrettably very few gossamer blouses survive. These beautiful items were made to be worn and this, unfortunately, is most likely why there are so few for us to appreciate today. However, recently a photograph of three women from Fetlar was given to Shetland Museum and Archives. One of them is wearing a Shetland lace gossamer blouse: a beautiful black knitted lace blouse in da print o' da wave pattern. It is one example of the various styles of gossamer blouse that was produced in Shetland during the 1920s to 1940s.

Shetland fine knitted lace is an integral part of Shetland identity. Without doubt a Shetland gossamer blouse, lace tunic or dressing jacket is testament to the entrepreneurial inventiveness and ingenuity of the fine lace knitters of Shetland.

There may of course be many more photographs of women wearing these blouses. Do you have one? If so, I would love to hear from you. I can be contacted at: r.chapman.1@research.gla.ac.uk, (tel: 07941 484 380) or via the Shetland Museum and Archives, Hay's Dock, Lerwick.

**Rosalyn Chapman**  
PhD Student, University of Glasgow



**Lace jumper worn by Agnes Dalziel.**  
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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 20 SEPTEMBER 2013.**