

## Restored Sumburgh Head Lighthouse Buildings are officially opened

The opening ceremony for the newly refurbished Sumburgh Head Lighthouse Buildings took place recently. HRH The Princess Royal was there to declare the world class facility at the southern tip of mainland Shetland officially open.

Hundreds of invited guests attended the event, during which, Her Royal Highness was given a tour of the new facilities and refurbished Engine Room, Foghorn and Radar Hut. As patron of the Northern Lighthouse Board, Her Royal Highness has visited Sumburgh Head Lighthouse many times and Shetland Amenity Trust was very proud to present the high standard of work which has transformed these buildings into an outstanding visitor centre.

Her Royal Highness was presented with a real Shetland wool numnah and a specially commissioned 'Burra Bear' with a nautical theme design.

The Sumburgh Light is the first point of mainland Shetland seen by those arriving in Shetland by boat. It's an iconic and welcome view for those seeing it for the first time, or returning home. The work that has been done during the restoration project will turn what was already the most visited outdoor attraction in Shetland, into something even more special. The restoration of the engines and foghorn means that the foghorn will be able to sound once more. Indeed, visitors can go into the Engine Room and press the button to sound the replica horn and even flash the light.

Sumburgh Head Lighthouse is the oldest Stevenson designed Lighthouse in Shetland, built in 1821 after Robert Stevenson surveyed the area on a trip to Shetland in 1914 with his friend Sir Walter Scott.

Lightkeepers faced many challenges living and working at Sumburgh over

the years until the light was automated in 1991. There are many stories of family life at the Head which are told in the Smiddy. There were several babies born at Sumburgh Head during the time the station was manned. During the opening event, James Watt, son of Lighthouse Keeper James Thomson Watt, came along to have a look around the place he was born – 43 years ago to the day!

Sumburgh has been a significant strategic defence point for as long as there have been people in the area. There are signs of an Iron Age Fort on the site, with excellent lines of site up the coast to other archaeological sites at Jarlshof, Scatness and Mousa. This continued through into contemporary war times with the addition of the radar huts during WWII. These helped Sumburgh play a very important part in deterring a potential Pearl Harbour scale event – a sizeable German air raid was detected in time to warn the British Home Fleet, recently returned to Scapa Flow in Orkney, and defensive manoeuvres were put into place. This story is told through interpretive displays in the East Radar Hut, which transports the visitor back to the evening of April 8th 1940.

Sumburgh Head already receives around 30,000 visitors a year. One of the main reasons most people have, up to now, always visited Sumburgh Head is, of course, the Puffins! And a plethora of other breeding seabirds. More information on the feathered population of Sumburgh Head, and the visiting whales, and other marine life, can be found in the wonderful Marine Life Centre.

The self-catering accommodation at Sumburgh Head has always been very popular and fully booked for the majority of the year before it was closed



HRH The Princess Royal looks through the book of Lighthouse Keepers in the Smiddy.

for renovation. There is already a surge in bookings for the coming year through the website at [www.shetlandlighthouse.com](http://www.shetlandlighthouse.com)

A new website for the visitor centre will be launched in the coming weeks at [www.sumburghhead.com](http://www.sumburghhead.com). This will include a range of downloadable materials with ideas for activities during a visit.

The site is open daily from 10am to 4pm between May and August to coincide with the bird breeding season. There are opportunities for private hire of the Education Room, or the full visitor experience at any other time of year. To enquire, contact Angela Hunt, Operations Manager at [angela.h@sumburghhead.com](mailto:angela.h@sumburghhead.com) or telephone 01595 694688.

### 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)

Visit  
[www.shetlandamenity.org/unkans](http://www.shetlandamenity.org/unkans)  
to sign up for your electronic copy

## Shetland ForWirds

Promoting Shetland Dialect

Der been mony a fun fae we launched da Year o Shetland Dialect 2014 in January. Wir been hameaboot, maist recently wi da Shetland version o Alice in Wonderland at da Shetland Jazz Festival, bit wir been tae da Suddard anaa, takkin dialect ta da Glasgow Film Festival.

Wir mascot Dratsi is proved his wirt fae he made his debut. He wis a graet favourite when he appeared at da bairns variety concert at da Folk Festival last mont.



Da young eens loved ha'in der photo taen wi da muckle otter. He'll pop up here an dere ower da simmer. June is aye important in da **Shetland ForWirds** calendar becis o wir AGM.

Wir haddin it on da 11th dis year. Wir lukkin folk alang wi da promise o tae an tab-nabs so's eftir da business is by we can hae a yarn. Sometimes, wi packit agendas ta get trow, der nae time juist ta spaek.

Laek maist idder voluntary groups, **Shetland ForWirds** is aye lookin fir new members ta get involved an share da wark. An, also laek idder voluntary groups, wir aye keepin an eye oot fir younger eens at might be interested. So if you wid laek ta meet wis, an fin oot mair about wis, come alang ta da AGM.

Lately wir been plannin da details fir da Rhoda Bulter night in da Vidlin Haal on whit widda been her 85th birthday – Tuesday 15th July. Wir been wirkin alang wi da Lunnasting History Group ta organise it. Tickets'll be gyain on sale at da end o June. Wir bookit Maurice Smith as wir compere – him an Rhoda wis a very popular duo on Give Us A Tune an, wi dat personal connection, we towt he wid makk a fine MC. Rhoda's ain family will be very much pairt o it – her dowters, Dorothy an Margaret, will be on da concert programme, joinin

idders laek Laureen Johnson an mesel. Dey'll be twartree tunes ta hadd wis oot a langer an da music will be Vidlin music in mair wyes as wan, wi baith da tunes an da musicians fae Lunnasting.

An event ta celebrate Rhoda is also planned later on in Waas whaur her faider's family cam fae. While her Lunnastin poem Macarism will be pairt o da Vidlin Haal concert programme, we'll need ta get soomeen ta read Röt an Blade in Waas.

Fir a braa start noo, da Bulter faimly is been wirkin on a collection o her poetry, some o it never seen in print afore, an it sood be comin oot shortly. Fir me, dat book promises ta be a highlight o dis Year o Dialect fir Rhoda did so much ta keep wir Midder Tongue alive.

Finally, watch oot fir Wirds on Da Street in June an July. Living Lerwick's got twartree ploys fir raisin da profile o Shetland dialect underfit an in shop windows. I'm enjoyed da poetry in Bards on da Street an I'm lookin forwird ta seein whit comes nixt.

Mary Blance

## The Incoming Project

An exhibition based on the recent Incoming project will be held at the Shetland Museum and Archives from 25 June-20 July.

Who is an 'incomer'? What does being an 'incomer' mean in Shetland? And what does 'incoming' mean to 'incomers'?

The Incoming project reflected on some of these questions, gathered the voices of present day incomers to Shetland and has put their experiences and contributions alongside incomers to Shetland from the past. The project is funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

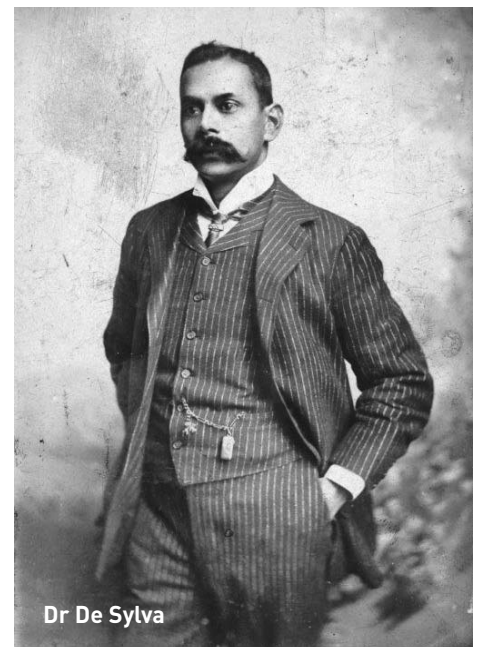
The exhibition presents some of the work done and interviews collected

during the residency of Leverhulme Artist in Residence, Raman Mundair, at the Shetland Archives, with related objects from the Shetland Museum and Archives collection.

A book on the project by Raman Mundair, Brian Smith, Ian Tait and Rosa Steppanova alongside photographs from the Shetland Museum and Archive collection is out now.

A selection of interviews and materials can be found at the incoming project website [www.shetlandamenity.org/the-incoming-project](http://www.shetlandamenity.org/the-incoming-project)

The full interviews and texts can be accessed at the Shetland Archives.



Dr De Sylva

# Shedding light on the past

Drawn by the promise of finding ancient traditions in Britain's most isolated county, the ethnographer Dr Arthur Mitchell must have been delighted when his work with the Royal Lunacy Commission took him to Shetland. He visited the islands on different occasions in the 1860s, and he was fascinated to find ample evidence of centuries-old practices still followed in everyday life. The best place to find such things was the far geographical fringes, and Mitchell found the Highlands and Islands his richest source, where he learned first-hand from the inhabitants about their homes, farms, and beliefs.

Some years after his field trips, Mitchell formulated his ideas into *The Past in the Present*, published in 1880, that showed how elements of the primitive could survive in advanced society, but did not necessarily mean such societies were any the more cultured. He could see that urban life brought squalor unknown in rural communities, and he realised high culture was the preserve of a minority no matter how advanced wider society was. In considering the artefacts he'd seen, Mitchell determined that a crudeness of manufacture was no clue to archaism, and people perfected objects that did the job best, and "continued use of what we choose to call a rude mechanical arrangement is not necessarily evidence of mental incapacity in the user". In the 19th century such things were eroding as outside influence marred indigenous forms; as Mitchell put it, "native art and skill are sickened".

One thing that interested him was lamps. Most of the ones he saw were made from iron, but the most picturesque one, which he picked up in Shetland, was made from a whelk. He encountered it at the fishing station at Fedeland, Northmavine, and of it he said "every one will admit that the lamp is elegant and pretty. Nothing, however, but the fact that it is easily obtained leads the deep-sea fisherman at his station on Fetheland Point to employ a shell for a [lamp]. His doing so does not prove the existence in him of a sense of the beautiful, nor, on the other hand, does his coarsely made sinker prove the reverse". What he meant was, Shetlanders were being practical in all things, sometimes making things that outsiders might find nice to look at, but this was entirely unintended by the makers.

Such a lamp wasn't just a one-off, for they were once in regular use. Skerries man Peter Johnson knew of the existence of a lamp made from a "buckie", having learned about them from his father, who'd seen or heard of them in the early 20th century. Recently inspired to make one, Peter took a whelk, carefully bored a hole at its rim and through one side, where knotted cords hold it, and seized a loop at the shell's tip to provide the necessary third suspension point. The glossy inside of the shell meant the lamp was perfectly oil-tight, and the hollow where the creature once lived was a space where a curved length of wick could lie in, and the natural groove at the end of the whelk provided a slot for the burning wick to sit. Peter used a bit of uncutched line, as this is softer and more pliable, and the suspension cord is a "bak snød" (individual cord to the hook) from a haddock line, thinner than the wick.

To get it going, Peter teased-out the end strands of the wick, and allowed time for the fish liver oil to absorb into it. Although the flame isn't quite so bright as a modern paraffin-wax candle, it wasn't smoky at all, contrary to



what I expected. We discussed the idea of such lamps, and as Peter observed, a "buckie" wouldn't normally be found around our shores, as they live in deeper water, but they were sometimes brought up on fishing lines, the whelk having scavenged on a bait then become ensnared on the hook's barb. Sixareen fishermen would have seen them often, and such a lamp was free, so, for all that they look centuries-old, whelk lamps may only go back to the days of deep-sea line fishing in the 18th century, not the Middle Ages.

The lamp that Arthur Mitchell spotted in use at Fedeland nearly 150 years ago still exists, and is on display today in the museum gallery – as Mitchell would have observed, the past in the present.

**Dr Ian Tait**  
Curator



**Top:** Peter Johnson has known about the existence of shell lamps since his father mentioned them, and the one he made is probably the first one anybody's made for a century or more.

**Above:** Fuelled by fish-liver oil, the hemp line makes a wick, held in the notch at the end of the whelk. We'd joked that it would probably make "more reek as light". Not at all; it was a steady, but not all that bright, flame.

# Furious Radical

## John Sands in Shetland 1883-1893

In the summer of 1883 a middle-aged man wrote a poem in which he bade farewell to the Lothians. 'I pant for the wild ocean shore,' he said, 'And I start for Shetland to-morrow.' John Sand had been an inveterate traveller: a prairie farmer and teacher in the United States in the 1860s, and an emigrant to Buenos Aires in the seventies.

But in the second half of his life he took a liking for Scottish islands. He had already lived in St Kilda – he was the inventor of the famous island mailboats, launched in a period of isolation and famine – and Tiree. Now he headed for Shetland, and he stayed here for a decade.

His first port of call was Foula. He stayed there for three months, camping out in the schoolhouse and tramping round the isle with his archaeologist's spade. He dug up an ancient bog body.

But he also got interested in the tribulations of the Foula people. Sands was a radical, the son and grandson of radicals, and he objected strongly to the system of 'truck' that enmeshed his new neighbours. He bombarded the Scottish press with stories about it, much to the annoyance of Garriock & Co., the truck-firm that had a monopoly of trade with the island.

At the end of the summer Sands moved to Vaila, and eventually to the little croft called Clubs in Waas. He was popular – one Vaila man named a boat after him – and he continued his newspaper campaigns. In 1885 he attacked a minister who, Sands said, had been responsible for the death of a teacher in Waas. A few years later he suggested that half-a-dozen Shetland merchants should be hung from the ring

in the chimney of Scalloway Castle.

But his main loves were archaeology and ethnology, and he spent most days investigating and examining ancient sites all over the Westside. At one point he dug up the little broch at Burgawater, a not-very-accessible loch in the hills between Waas and Sandness. He wrote to the local and Scottish press about his discoveries. 'I am strongly of opinion', he told the *Shetland News* in 1888, 'that the best Antiquarian Society is a newspaper, to which everyone, irrespective of purse and position, is free to contribute'.

John Sands left Shetland in 1893, shortly after spending a month in the Faroes. He wrote a sparkling article about his sojourn in that farthest-flung group of islands. Sands didn't succeed in abolishing Shetland truck; but his

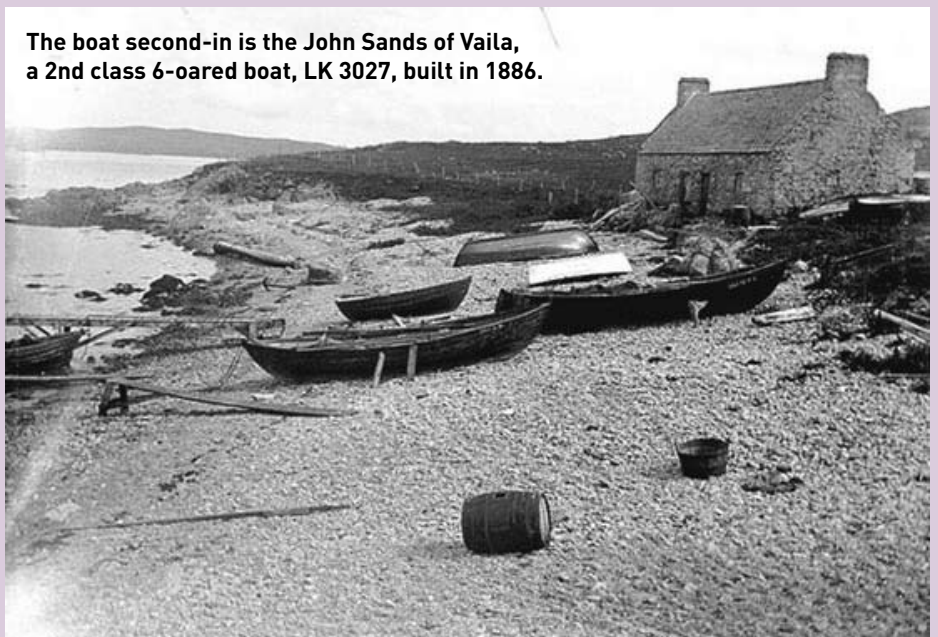


**John Sands on an expedition, drawn by his friend Charles Keene in 1888**

articles on the subject, and about Shetland antiquities, are as fresh today as when they were written. They deserve to be reprinted.

**Brian Smith  
Archivist**

**The boat second-in is the John Sands of Vaila, a 2nd class 6-oared boat, LK 3027, built in 1886.**



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 25 JULY 2014.**