

‘...a book of fashionable amusement to the higher ranks of society...’

Jane Gaugain, 1842-1862

Edinburgh-based Jane Gaugain published the earliest knitting books in Victorian Britain. Her patterns are also the most authentically Shetland. She may have had ready access to real Shetland knitted lace compared to some authors in England. The complexity of her patterns and their accuracy to Shetland construction methods suggests she may have learned details from Shetland knitters living in Edinburgh.

Gaugain created her own complex coding system for patterns, which was not for the faint-hearted. Her later books include many illustrations of finished patterns to aid knitters. She also provided information about washing and dressing ‘Shetland’ shawls. Her books were aimed at the serious knitter who wished to create garments on par with real Shetland lace. Gaugain’s patron was the Queen Dowager and she had hundreds of subscribers, mainly noble and wealthy Scottish women.

‘Pattern XXIV, Handsome Square Knit Shawl’, 1842

Gaugain claimed ‘This Shawl is exactly in appearance like the Shetland Shawls, only the centre stitch is more novel than any of them I have ever seen’. The centre stitch is called ‘Da Print O’ Da Wave’ in Shetland. It is not clear if Gaugain is presenting a variation of the Shetland stitch or claiming it as her own invention. The edge stitch in diamonds is less elaborate than diamonds found in Shetland lace.

Knit by Liesel Annible on 3.25mm needles with Paton’s Fairytale Dreamtime 2-ply wool.

‘Pattern XLIX, Very Handsome Shetland Scarf’, 1857

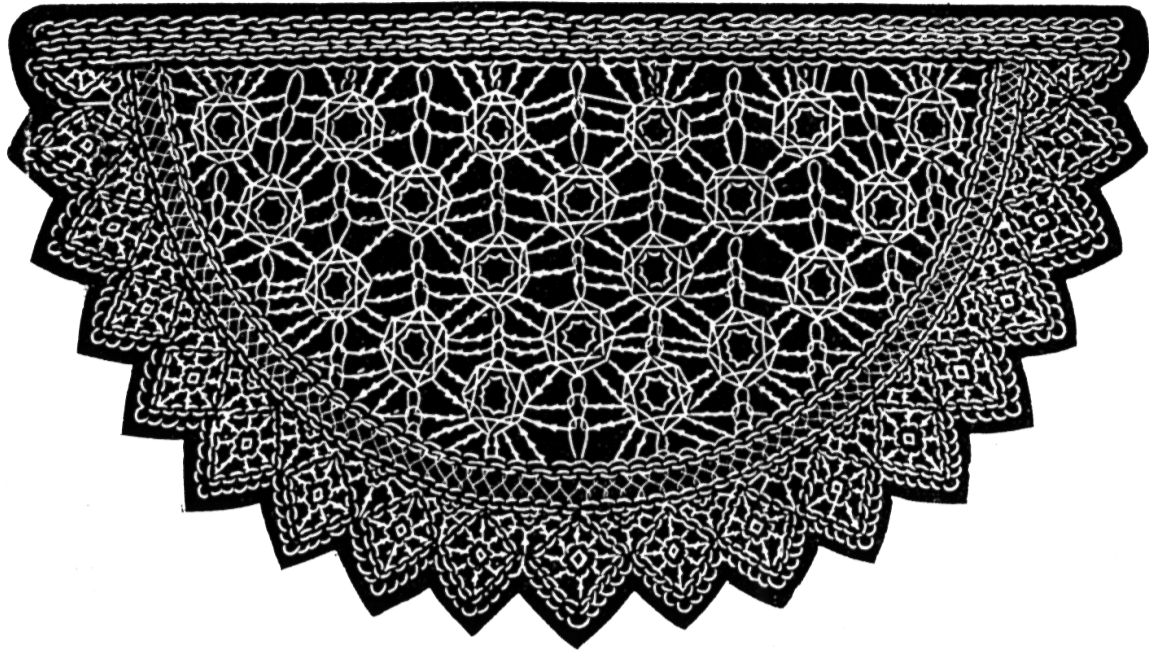
The scarf incorporates a number of stitches and motifs, typical of real Shetland lace. The square border is a series of diamonds, while the ends of the border are worked in what Gaugain described as a ‘sort of Gothic arch pattern’. The centre of the scarf is a variation of tree or branch motifs, which are common in Shetland lace.

Knit by Alison Evans on 2.75mm needles with vintage 2-ply wool.

‘Pattern VI, Elegant Small Square Shetland Neckerchief’, 1857

The pattern is a type of shell or feather stitch but this variation is not commonly found in Shetland. Colour was important in Victorian knitting and Gaugain specified making stripes in pink and white, as has been knit here.

Knit by Heather Borthwick on 3.5mm needles with 2-ply 100% wool.



'Round Shetland Veil', *The Abergeldie Winter Book*,
by Mlle Riego de la Branchardière

Mlle Eléonore Riego de la Branchardière, 1846-1848

Mademoiselle Reigo, of New Bond Street London, called herself an 'authoress and designer'. At age 23 she won a prize medal at the Great Exhibition for her crochet work. Like Gaugain, Riego de la Branchardière published patterns which were closer to authentic Shetland motifs than other authors. She advocated the use of 'the best' Shetland wool and provided information about suppliers. Her patterns were complex, but written narrative style instead of code.

'Shetland Shawl', 1846

A leaf patterned centre and diamond border completes this 'Shetland' shawl. Although diamonds are common motifs in Shetland lace knitting, the leaf pattern was not. The leaf pattern is similar to Copley's Pattern 110 and Lambert's Pattern 2.

Knit by Susan Freeman on 3.0mm needles with Jamieson and Smith's 2-ply lace.

'Centre for Shetland Shawl', 1848

A combination of two motifs worked simultaneously, which was more in keeping with authentic Shetland lace. The diamonds and openwork branches or tree motifs are also typically Shetland.

Knit by Elizabeth Quarmby Lawrence on 2.75mm needles with Texere pure new wool 2-ply.

'Round Shetland Veil', 1867

The centre stitch in the image above appears to be the classic Shetland 'Bird's Eye' pattern, but it does not resemble the knitted article, nor is the image to scale. Such inconsistencies must have vexed even the most skilled knitter.

Knit by Alison Evans on 2.75mm needles with 3-ply wool.