

The Oceanic Chair

Unkans editorial team were approached recently with some tantalising information about a chair which had been made out of wood from the wreckage of White Star steam liner, RMS Oceanic. The ship was built as a transatlantic passenger liner in 1899, but had been commissioned as an armed merchant vessel on the outbreak of World War 1. She had been patrolling waters around Foula when she floundered there on the 8th of September 1914.

The chair had been gifted to Mr William E Bryce, a woollen manufacturer, by one of the

Shetland loom weavers whom he employed. At the time that Mr Bryce took ownership of the chair, which his daughter believes would have been sometime during the 1940s, he co-owned 'Andrew Stuart's Woollen Mill' which was based at The Bridges in Edinburgh, in rooms belonging to the Scotsman newspaper. Hand loom weavers operated out of these rooms, but the weaver who gifted Mr Bryce with the chair worked from his own home in Shetland.

Mr Bryce would visit Shetland once a year to visit the people that he employed, and it was presumably during one of those visits that the chair was presented to him. His daughter, Anne Tonkins, can remember the chair from her very early childhood, but sadly, she has no other information regarding the chair's manufacture, or history prior to it coming to her family. The Bryce family moved to Galashiels after the Second World War, where Mr Bryce started another big woollen mill and lived for the rest of his life.

This is the only information that Anne has regarding the history of her chair. It remains in her family home, and has been used by herself, her children and now her grandchildren. If anyone has information that might help us to find out who made the chair, or who the loom weaver was that gifted the chair to Mr Bryce, we would be delighted to hear from you. Please contact Michele Deyell at michele@shetlandmuseumandarchives.org.uk



Chair gifted to Anne Tonkins (née Bryce) in the 1940s.

Sharing Shetland Surname of the Month

Following the Ancestral Tourism Event held at the Shetland Museum & Archives in November 2013, members of the Shetland Family History Society met with Veronica Rocks of Busta House Hotel to consider the possibility of creating a campaign to promote Ancestral Tourism.

Shetland is well placed to offer excellent service and information to both locals and visitors interested in investigating their family roots. In order to maximise the opportunities which could be generated from such visitors, it was thought that Sharing Shetland Names throughout the islands and beyond would increase the awareness of Shetlanders as to what is on offer to our visitors in search of their roots.

From June to September the society will select a Shetland name to be featured each month. The chosen name will be promoted in various locations on the island and on the internet. A short synopsis of the name, its origins, frequency in the census and some famous folk will be printed. There will also be a display each month in the Society's premises at 6 Hillhead, Lerwick, and a talk or get together at a suitable location.

The four names chosen this year are: Gifford for June; Anderson for July with a lecture in the Museum on Patronyms; Inkster for August and Bolt for September, the latter to reflect that the first Shetlander killed in WW1 was Robert Bolt. If this venture proves successful the Society hopes to feature more names next summer.

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
to sign up for your electronic copy

Shetland ForWirds

Promoting Shetland Dialect



Time for annidder scoit ahead an look back as da Year o Shetland Dialect passes da half wye mark.

Fae da last time I wrot fir *Unkans*, **Shetland ForWirds** is launched a peerie book. *Mirds o Wirds* is been published be da *Shetland Times*. Hit's most definitely not a dictionary – ta get dat you'll need ta look at mair serious volumes. Redder, hit's a light-hearted introduction tae da Midder Tongue an a glimpse o da Shetland we live in noo. A book ta keep in your pooch, tae refer tae, tae hae a fun wi. Wi some fine photos tae geng wi da wirds, hit's a colourfil production. I winder if onyeen'll

bigg a seggie boat usin da instructions Doreen Waugh an Laureen Johnson provided.

On July 15th, we wir hoopin ta hae wir lang-lippened celebration o

da life o poet Rhoda Bulter in da Vidlin Haal. Less a dule, hit wisna ta be. Da concert is been pitten on hold eenoo an aabody involved is juist waitin in da wings fir a new date. However Rhoda's 85th birthday didna slip by unnoticed. Dat wis da day we launched da first o da annual competitions fir da Rhoda Bulter Award. It's a visual art competition dis time roond. Folk might winder why we sood hae dat theme for a competition in honour o a writer. Da answer is at Rhoda drew an painted aa da illustrations fir her poetry books an da faimly haes fond memories o der Maam wi pencil or

paint brush in hand. Da closin date fir da competition is da 15th October so der plenty o time ta seek inspiration fae da poems an create a picter.

Finally, wir film festival Screenplay is supportin Da Year o Shetland Dialect wi two films. *Dis Quiet* is been written by Bruce Eunson wi music by London John. Bruce acts in da film alang wi Ria Moncrieff Bruce. Da rest o da production team is Andrew, Les an Robert Lowes. Da idder film is *Nort Atlantik Drift*. It's no juist a Shetland film, it's a Sandness film. Since it's based on da poems Robert Alan Jamieson wrot inspired by growin up dere, hit's onnly fittin at da first screenin o *Nort Atlantik Drift* in Shetland will be in da Sandness Haal on 29th August.

So yun's some o da unkans fae **Shetland ForWirds**. I'll hae mair news next time.
Mary Blance

Three exhibitions at the Shetland Textile Museum

This year's lace exhibition at the Shetland Textile Museum has been curated by Michele Deyell and tells the story of how the two World Wars saw big changes in the Shetland hand-knitting industry, and explores some of the reasons why these changes may have occurred. Four fine lace shawls have been selected to be the centre piece for this exhibition. There is a beautiful traditional lace shawl from the late 1800s, knitted by Julia Sutherland from Unst, and three exquisite fine lace shawls knitted by a mother and two of her daughters during the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

The 'Arthur Anderson Room' has the Fair Isle exhibition, which this year interprets the oil boom era of the mid 70s to the late 80s. Curated by Ella Gordon, this exhibition shows some of the Fair Isle knitwear that may have been

Have a go on the loom at the Textile Musuem. Image by Brita Hövenmark.



worn in Shetland at that time. There are children's items, Fair Isle yokes, all-over Fair Isle gansies, scarves, mitts and caps – all displayed creatively to reflect the effect, not always for the better, that the emergence of a more affluent society in Shetland had on the knitting industry.

Downstairs on the ground floor the 'Loom Room' has a small exhibition called The Glove Compartment. This is a delightful exhibition curated by the Textile Museum's custodian, Brita Hövenmark. This small exhibition displays gloves and mittens from sub-arctic Northern Sweden, and Shetland; two Northern European areas which have harsh climates. The Glove Compartment shows the similarities and the differences between the mittens and gloves from these two areas.

The working 'Adies' loom at the Textile Museum has been set up by Brita this year to enable visitors to see weaving in action – you can even have a shot! And feel free

to 'tak dy sock' and sit for a while in a relaxed atmosphere with expert knitters and spinners who are there most days demonstrating.

Housed at the Bød of Gremista, the Museum is open Tuesday to Saturday, from 12pm – 5pm and until 7pm on Thursdays. www.shetlandtextilemuseum.com tel: 01595 694386, and we are also on Facebook.

Michele Deyell

Shetland Wool Week 2014

woolWeek

The fifth year of Shetland Wool Week kicks off on Saturday 4th October with the Flock Book at Shetland Marts and the start of a varied and exciting programme of classes, exhibitions and events.

Held in locations all over Shetland, from Sumburgh Head to Unst Heritage Centre, the events being held through the week attract hundreds of Shetland Wool enthusiasts from all over the world – and give local folk an opportunity to show off their skills or learn new ones.

There are still spaces left for several classes through the week, including spinning classes at Hoswick, learning to knit a modern Dutch Gansey and making your own Shetland Teddy Bear. The Opening Ceremony on Sunday 5th still has availability, and there are many opportunities to drop-in to open studios and demonstration sessions throughout the week.

For full details and links for booking classes, visit the website at www.shetlandwoolweek.com

Robert Bolt at Aisne 14th September 1914

The next four years will see many anniversaries related to World War One, with recurring large commemorations, and coverage in the national media. Some will be smaller, yet no less important. One significant local story, of many, is that of Lance Corporal, Robert Lawrie Bolt, 1st Battalion, Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders. His story was intertwined with the developing position soon to become known as the Western Front. Robert, aged 29, was the first man with Shetland connections to be killed in France and Belgium. Many were to follow.

Little mention was made in the local press during the summer of 1914 about the implications of the assassination in Sarajevo of 28th June. Following the British declaration of War on Germany on 4th August, local Royal Naval Reserve and Territorials mobilised. Preparations for what lay ahead began. As time went on, men volunteered, and then were conscripted into the Services; the largest number from Shetland serving at sea.

Many also served on land within the army. Their loss as proportion of service, was to be significant. Although a resident of Lochgelly, Fife, Robert was born on 9th October 1884 in Lerwick. Son of James and Jessie Bolt, the family were formerly of Gulberwick. At the time of the 1891 and 1901 Census, they stayed in Leith. Robert married Barbara Walker on 3rd January, 1908, in Auchterderran, Fife. The Cameron Highlanders were in Edinburgh when war broke out. Robert had enlisted there and was a regular soldier.

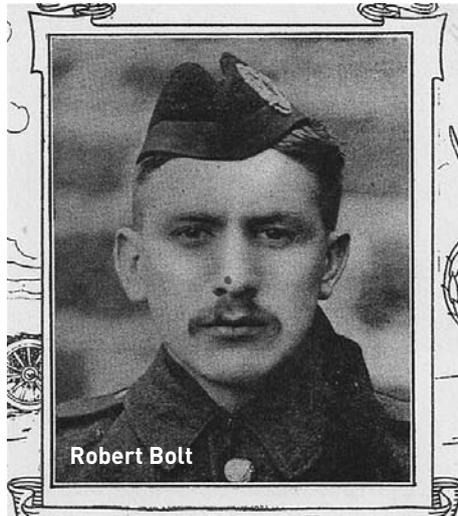
The early phases witnessed a war of movement; within months becoming one of trench stalemate which we are today so familiar with. Six infantry divisions and one cavalry division of the British Expeditionary Force began its embarkation for France, on 11th August. The 1st Camerons left, landing at Le Havre on 14th August. Robert's Medal card shows this as the date of entry into the Theatre of War.

The British army role at this stage was small. Across a battle line of 150 miles, it was along a central fifteen mile sector that the British were engaged. The Battle fought astride the canal at Mons on 23rd August was the first major confrontation with the German First Army. Out manoeuvred and outnumbered they pulled back south of the Marne where Robert's Battalion saw action.

After the famous 'Retreat From Mons', the BEF was involved in various 'rear guard actions'. A gap then opened up between two wings of the German Second Army, with an advance over the Marne. Through it, the BEF advanced towards the River Aisne in north eastern France, setting up for the battle which began on the 13th of September.

That day, a bridgehead had been established across the River. But, the countryside provided little protection. When morning sun arrived on the 14th, much of the BEF were hit by fire.

A German capture of a sugar factory, and machine gun fire resulted in further casualties. Robert's Regiment formed up for a counter attack under the cover of a wood. At 7am, they advanced from trees going through rifle and artillery fire. One Company to the right was shattered, but they managed to storm German trenches on the plateau



above them. At this point, they had lost more than half their force and were low on ammunition. They moved back to their start line.¹

This day, Robert's short war ended. In all, 600 officers and men of the Cameron Highlanders were lost on this day.² They were relieved on 19th September and went into reserve. Fighting was abandoned on 28th September. It became clear that neither side would be able to penetrate well-entrenched positions. A sign of things to come.

Robert was awarded the 1914 Star, the British War and Victory Medals. He is buried at Vendresse Churchyard, Aisne. His wife Barbara passed away on the 16th of January, 1938 in Edinburgh. They had four children: James Lawrie, Margaret Brooksbank, Robert Lawrie, and Jemima Thomason.³ There is a memorial stone to Robert in Lochgelly.

Jon Sandison

Various projects are underway to record and share information on those lost in the Great War:

Faces of the First World War (IWM),

Scotland's War Project, 'Shetlands War', (Edinburgh University)

Every Man Remembered (Royal British Legion).

Also, stories about local service in the army via various local Heritage Centre displays, as well as on Facebook via *Shetlanders on the Western Front.*

Shetland Museum and Archives will host a photography exhibition entitled "Blockade: 1914 – 1918" from 23rd August to 12th October. The collection of archive images will tell the story of the 10th Cruiser Squadron which patrolled the waters to the north and west of Shetland, searching and halting ships – a dangerous task with high risk of attack from submarines.



Vendresse Churchyard, Aisne, where Robert was laid to rest.

- 1 1st Battalion Cameron Highlanders War Diary, 4th to 16th of September, 1914.
- 2 Aisne 1914, by Jerry Murland, Battleground Europe, Pen & Sword, 2013, p105.
- 3 Shetland Family History Society Robert Bolt File.

Queen Victoria's socks

What links the tragic Shetland fishing disaster of 1832, Queen Victoria and a Prussian Princess? Believe it or not the answer is underwear!

Living conditions in Shetland during the 1830s and 1840s were desperately deprived. Failed harvests, potato famine and poor fishing caused extreme difficulties for a population that was already impoverished due to the harsh realities of the Truck System imposed upon them by heartless feudal landlords. To make matters worse, the Dutch fishing vessels which had been coming to Shetland

during the herring seasons since the 1600s had dwindled by this time and the market for Shetland hosiery that they provided had all but disappeared. Paid work for women was virtually non-existent.

A cruel consequence of the Truck and Feudal Systems in Shetland was that men had to fish for their landlords, sometimes up to 50 miles out to sea and in all weather conditions. Not to do so could in extreme cases lead to the eviction of their family from the croft; and loss of lines and damage to boats often incurred charges to the fishermen too, making them even more beholden to their masters. The system was heartless and inhumane, but families of men were compelled to abide by it.

In 1832 a tragic fishing disaster devastated many families, reducing them to abject poverty and despair. 105 men and boys, consisting of fathers and sons, uncles and nephews, all drowned at sea as a consequence of a fatal storm on the 16th of July 1832. Many widows were left with several children under the age of 14. A Fetlar boat was lost leaving a widow with five children under the age of 14; it was reported at the time that the widow became deranged. A Yell boat sank taking with it three brothers, who were each of them fathers, along with two of their sons. A tragedy indeed, and one that came to the notice of the Prussian born Duchess of Kent who

'came forward to aid the subscription for the destitute families of the Shetland fishermen who perished in the gale of 1832' (North Devon Journal, 1837).

This act of kindness and compassion was not forgotten by Shetlanders, and in 1837, Shetland women presented the Duchess of Kent and her daughter, Queen Victoria, with Shetland hosiery consisting of fine lace stockings and gloves. The woollen items were reported at the time to have been amongst the finest ever knitted in Shetland (North Devon Journal, 1837). The North Devon journal suggests that the knitters were anxious to know the size of the queens foot, and reflects that with winter drawing close, Her Majesty would be so grateful for her warm stockings that she would surely acknowledge that 'among all her subjects, none have afforded a more delicate ... a warmer proof of their attachment to her Majesty's person than the loyal females of Shetland'. As a consequence of this gift, the Queen ordered 12 pairs of the finest lace stockings for her own use. Patronage by the Queen caused the creation of an eager market for Shetland fine hosiery amongst wealthy and fashion conscious Londoners. A much needed boost to the hand-knitting industry had been created, with jobs for Shetland women at a time of great hardship.

Michele Deyell



Stocking on display at the Shetland Textile Museum.

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 FRIDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2014.