

Unkans

The newsletter of the Shetland Heritage and Culture Community

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heritage
Shetland
culture

Shetland ForWirds

Promoting Shetland Dialect



Da next date Shetland ForWirds haes on da calendar is fir Settirday 10th January fir a fjaana wi stories, poems, music an funs, tae an tabnabs, ta celebrate Auld Newerday. Dat's juist whit we did last year when we gaddered in da Baila Room at da Soond Haal ta launch 2014 as da Year o Shetland Dialect. Wir hoopin folk'll join wis in da sam place fir dis nixt fjaana ta mark da end o whit's been a very interestin year. We'll be advertising ticket sales shortly.

We'll present da trophy ta dis year's winner o da Rhoda Bulter Award dat night. Da theme o da annual competition will be different every year an fir 2014 we axed folk ta create picters inspired by Rhoda's poetry. Shö loved draa'in an pentin, doin aal da illustrations fir her ain books. Da Bulter faimly pickit a linocut be Lucy Wheeler as

Rhoda back in print wi *Hairst is Coosed* at brings her Shetland poetry tegeddir. O joy, at aa dat wark is been collected inta wan book along wi a lovely collection o photos o Rhoda. An still tinkin about Rhoda, Shetland ForWirds is hoopin ta go ahead wi da Rhoda night in da Vidlin haal at hed ta be pitten aff last simmer.

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At ony year's end it's important ta look ahead an hae plans – bit at da end o wir Year o Dialect it's needful tō ta look back an tink about whit hit's meant an whit wir maybe achieved. Da original aim as da year began wis ta pit da emphasis on how da dialect wis bein used aa trow Shetland no juist afore da fire, bit in public tō. Hit wis a wye ta celebrate wir tenth birthday an hit wis meant ta turn da spotlight on whit idder folk an groups wir doin ta keep wir dialect a livin tongue.

da winning entry fae an impressive selection o wark at cam in fae aal ower Shetland. Nixt year's competition will be fir writin.

a project we wir pairt o along wi Shetland Library an Living Lerwick, is still up in shop an office windows. I love reading dem as I geng by.

Dey wir a lokka happy faces da night da Shetland Times an wirsels launched *Mirds o Wirds*, a peerie booklet givin some insight inta da wirkins o da dialect, makkin serious points bit light-hearted tō. A good freend o Shetland an a someen at did sterlin linguistic research wark lang fae syne, Gunnel Melchers fae Sweden, made a flyin visit back ta celebrate da occasion wi her freend an colleague Doreen Waugh at wis wir leader in creatin *Mirds o Wirds*.

I enjoyed *WirdCraft*, a project we got involved in along wi Shetland Arts. Early in da year an invitation guid oot axin aabody at wis interested in creatin craftwark at used da dialect ta get in touch wi der ideas. In *hairst*, da eight folk at completed da challenge hed der wark displayed in da Bonhoga café. Whit amazing variety folk cam wi – jewellery, skirts, scarves, bags, a chair, a creepie, mood boxes, cairds, picters, cushions an mair – aa demonstratin how dialect can be a aacht ta hae when it comes ta makkin boannie things ta decorate yoursel an your hoose, ta wear an use.

Aa trow da year, der been wark goin on tae improve wir website bit laek maist idder voluntary groups in Shetland, wir aye needin mair members so we can dö aa we wid laek ta dö.

I wis plaesed when Shetland ForWirds got da chance o a regular column in *Unkans* durin dis Year o Shetland Dialect bit it's time ta sign aff, remindin you at if we dunna use, we'll loss wir distinctive Shetland tongue. In da *wirds* o wir 2014 slogan, *Spaek It an Laek It*.

Mary Blance, Shetland ForWirds.
www.shetlanddialect.org.uk

When I tink about highlights, der far ower mony ta mention dem aa – fae da variety concert fir peerie bairns at da Folk Festival ta ha'in wir muckle mascot, Dratsi, takkin pairt in Disability Shetland's Peerie Birl, der Commonwealth Games event.

It's splendid ta see at poems written for Bards On Da Street,



Wirdcraft Exhibition. Courtesy of Shetland Arts.

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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A brief note on Shetlanders with the Hudson's Bay Company: an area for further study

In 1805, only ten years or so after Alexander Mackenzie had crossed Canada, the *King George III*, a British merchant ship involved in the North America maritime fur trade, was ordered to stop in Lerwick to recruit Shetland men for the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). The ship was to '... take on board all such men as may be engaged' under the supervision of Francis Heddle, Writer and Controller of Customs, before proceeding to Stromness, the usual port of departure from Britain to Hudson Bay¹. It has not yet been ascertained how many went.

Up to that point by far the greatest number of British men involved with the HBC were Orcadians. However, the pay and conditions were not good and the men of Orkney were becoming less enthusiastic for the trade. In addition they were being sought for service in the Napoleonic Wars, so further recruits for HBC had to be found elsewhere. The Company turned to other areas of Scotland, notable the Highlands, the Western Isles and Shetland. Before this date there were probably very few Shetlanders, if any, involved in the fur trade in Canada.

Just how many Shetlanders joined HBC is unknown. The most extensive source of information lies in the HBC archives in Manitoba. A cursory search through the online archive of names with a Shetland connection, plus a few other sources reveals some 76 individuals, ten of whom cannot be definitively identified and may have been Orcadians. There can be little doubt, however, that this is far from a complete list. For example, Isaac Cowie (1848) from Lerwick noted in his fascinating and very readable book² that there were 12 Shetlanders aboard the ship he sailed on from Stromness to York Factory in Hudson Bay in 1867, none of whom have I been able to identify. However, with the limited information that is readily available several facts and assumptions can be drawn.

The earliest individual to join HBC so far, appears to be Dr Forbes Barclay (1807) who contracted in 1839 while the last were in the 1950s. Five years was the standard length of contract for which two thirds of Shetlanders signed on, returning home when the contract ended. A third stayed on for at least a further five years, of which around ten stayed for 30 years or more, some marrying First Nation Canadians and settling.

Most the contracts were from 1840s to the 1870s with just a few individuals contracting sporadically after that. During the busiest time the taking up of contracts was not evenly spread over the years and there appears to have been peaks around 1850 (25), 1861 (8) and 1870 (8). Perhaps there were recruitment drives or some event that sent men looking for employment. There are two cases of Shetland men breaking the contract on the sailing date. In 1849, Robert Sandison (1819) reneged after receiving an advance of £5 to buy clothing³. In the second half of the 19th century, most Shetlanders probably signed on through Dr John Cowie (1813), the agent in Lerwick and father of Isaac Cowie above. Another Shetlander in an official position with HBC at this time was Archibald Barclay (1786) who was secretary of the company in London from 1843-1855. He was an uncle to Forbes Barclay above.

Those who joined HBC did not become trappers or voyageurs, but were generally initially employed as labourers, from which many moved 'up' to become clerks, storekeepers and Post Masters. Several were employed as the crew of canoes from the unskilled 'middleman' (often a labourer), 'bowman' or 'steersman'. Some brought their skills with them and became carpenters and blacksmiths. Of the 66 or so Shetland men identified, four were seamen, or 'sloopers' as they were known. But it is likely that there were very many more who served in this capacity.

About one fifth of Shetlanders stayed to work where they landed at York Factory on the southwest shore of Hudson Bay, while another fifth made the journey to British Columbia. The remaining three fifths spread out north to trading posts in Churchill and south and west to the likes of Norway House on the northern end of Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba, Cumberland House in Saskatchewan, and into Ontario and western Quebec. Some made it west to Oregon and northwest to Fort Mackenzie.

There are of course many stories attached to those adventurers including those of Isaac Cowie and Dr Forbes Barclay. Both feature, along with a few others in *A Kist of Emigrants*⁴. While others can be found in *Undelivered Letters to Hudson's Bay Company men on the Northwest Coast of America*⁵ and there are a handful of references in the Shetland Archives as well as a few other sources.

It would be fascinating to know a bit more but it would involve a little time digging in the Hudson Bay archives in Winnipeg! However, before I pass the details that I do have to the Shetland Archives I would be happy to add further information from others. Please contact me at laughton.johnston@gmail.com or 01595 870266.

Laughton Johnston

Notes

- 1 Rigg, S (2011) *Men of Spirit and Enterprise: Scots and Orkneymen in the Hudson's Bay Company 1780-1821*. John Donald
- 2 Cowie, Issac (1913) *The Company of Adventurers. A narrative of seven years in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company during 1867-1874 on the Great Buffalo Plains*. William Briggs, Toronto
- 3 SC12/6/1849/102
- 4 Johnston, J L (2010) *A Kist of Emigrants*. Shetland Times, Lerwick
- 5 Beattie H J & Buss H M edits. (2003). University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver

140 year old Sumburgh map discovered in the Sand Lodge Estate

Local property lawyer, Robert Bell, discovered an old map while in his cellar, at Sand Lodge, last year. The large map displays the land and coastline around Sumburgh.

Mr Bell has kindly donated the map, which measures an impressive 5 feet by 15 feet, to the Shetland Archives, explaining how it had been part of the Sand Lodge estate at some point.

The main road from Virkie to Grutness, including the road leading to Sumburgh Head Lighthouse, is clearly visible on the map with detail showing the Sumburgh light tower and east and west pavilions. Robert commented: *'I am glad that it is in good hands now and that it has been conserved, which was fitting following the recent restoration of the Sumburgh Head Lighthouse buildings'.*

Archivist, Brian Smith, noted the importance of the map which was personally delivered by Amenity Trust Architectural Heritage Project Officer, John Mackenzie, to Louis Valentine of the Carronvale Bindery in Falkirk for conservation. Louis' family led firm have been conserving and restoring documents for the Archives for many years.



Brian Smith examines the large map.



The distinctive lettering gave Brian the clue as to the author of the map.

The map was extremely frayed in places and may have been subject to damp conditions from time to time however, miraculously, this had not affected the majority of the drawing. Brian was able to identify that the map had been drawn by Andrew Dishington Mathewson from East Yell due to the distinct, round, ornamental rendering of the Sumburgh plan title at the top of the map.

A. D. Mathewson, who featured in the last edition of Unkans, was a school teacher in East Yell, who augmented his income by completing many surveys around Shetland during this period. It is highly probable that the map was created in 1873, evidenced by a letter written by Mathewson to his son dated 23rd October 1873 in which he states: 'I left Sumburgh House the southern-most house in Zetland at 1pm'. Brian thinks it unlikely there would be any other reason why Mathewson would have been at Sumburgh during this time.

The map would have presumably been commissioned by John Bruce Senior of Sumburgh, who may have wanted a nice big map of his main property to hang up in his house. It does not appear that the work is finished, as there are no names on the map and limited detail to the main buildings displayed, although the whole outline of the coast is present.

Many of Mathewson's works including highly detailed maps and letters relating to his extended family are available to view at the Shetland Archives.



Louis Valentine who carried out the restoration of the map.

T. M. Adie & Sons – supplying the demand for knitwear

T.M. Adie & Sons Limited were a Voe based business whose surviving records are now held by the Shetland Museum and Archives. We can see from these records that they had their fingers in various pies. In the collection we have fishing agreements and slaughterhouse licenses, rent books and bread recipes. However, by far the largest volume of records are concerned with their tweed and knitwear production. These include beautiful sketches for designs for garments and samples of cloth, as well as the leftovers of the day to day running of the business, such as order books, invoices and customers' letters.

Adie's was one of those who benefited from the big increase in sales of Shetland garments in the twentieth century. There are many reasons cited for the boom, including the popularity they gained when various members of royalty wore items.

Undoubtedly one of the reasons for the reputation of Shetland wool was down to Adie's themselves. They made the gansies worn by Edmund Hillary and the rest of the team who successfully climbed Mount Everest in May 1953. We can see from the frenzied correspondence over the order that it was made trickier because more items were added at the last minute and poor weather was hampering delivery.

The jumpers were bought by the Everest team through a 'knitted sportswear' specialist shop in Bond Street. After the successful ascent, Adie's wrote to them asking if they could advertise that they had made the jumpers used by the climbers. The shop objected as they felt that Adie's would then be approached direct by customers, losing them business. The shop had already invested in promoting themselves as merchants for the Everest jumpers and felt that they had told Adie's that they were for the Everest team "in confidence."

Despite this knock back they continue trading cordial, peppering their correspondence with the usual compliments on the quality of items and easy dismissals on both sides for any mix-ups with shipping or mistakes in invoicing. Over the decades this style of jumper is still referred to as an 'Everest.'

There is believed to be a letter from Edmund Hillary in existence complimenting Adie's on their goods. However, we have not, to date, found such a letter in the archive. When cataloguing a collection it isn't often feasible to read every item (this collection consists of 24 large cardboard boxes, which on average can hold 2,500 pieces of paper each). Once you have looked in the obvious places for a specific item, you have to hope that the more a collection is used, the higher the chance there is that a reader will stumble across it.

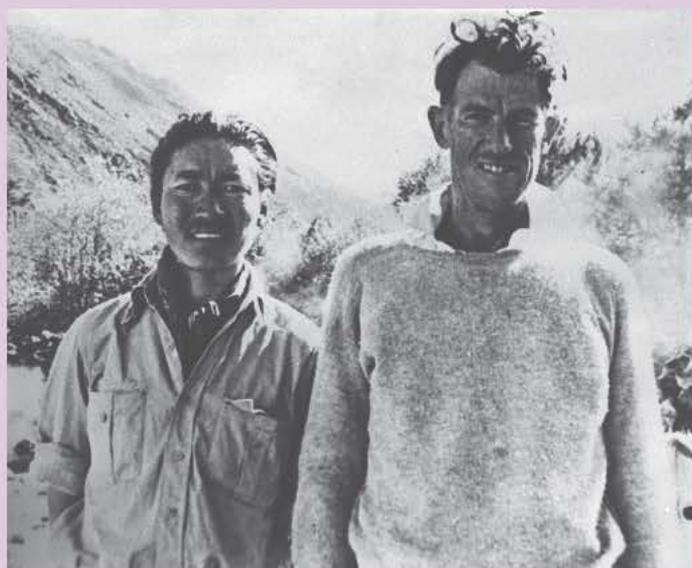
Amongst the collection we do have evidence of the huge worldwide demand for Shetland knitwear. Aside from

bundles of order sheets, we have a box of custom made labels to be sewn into clothes that proclaim "Made in Shetland" for various shops including Brooks Brothers and Bloomingdale's.

We can only guess the discussions that went on amongst staff and management in light of this popularity. One clue that is left behind is a small bundle of documents about how to increase Adie's productivity to meet demand. (Helpfully for dating purposes these notes have been written on the back of a 1952 appeal for funds for Voe kirk.)

The writer ponders, "The problem is whether to increase our own production to make the 3000 pieces per year which Lawrence believes he can sell for us ..." They estimated that they would need to spend £3,180 (a third of their profit for 1952/3) on machinery and £5000 or £6000 on wool and yarn to meet this target. Page four of the notes lists points in favour of this venture, including the obvious potential financial boost for themselves and for Shetland in general. While points listed against it on page five were the risk involved, what if demand dried up? Would they be able to find more weavers? Would their crofter-weavers "broken time" due to the demands of crofting affect them meeting their delivery deadlines? Page six is numbered but otherwise left blank, meaning we have to look elsewhere for evidence of whether they took the plunge.

Vaila Holbourn
Archive Volunteer



The Everest Jumper.

Courtesy of Shetland Museum and Archives.

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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Email: info@shetlandmuseumandarchives.org.uk Telephone: 01595 695057 Fax: 01595 696729

Post: Newsletter, Shetland Museum and Archives, Hay's Dock, Lerwick, Shetland ZE1 0WP

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DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FOR NEXT ISSUE IS FRIDAY 23rd JANUARY 2015.