

Bairns knitting classes kick-off 2015

The first of many Shetland Wool Week knitting classes began in the Shetland Museum and Archives on Sunday 11th January 2015. Twenty-four young Shetland bairns, aged between seven and eleven, took part in two sessions of beginners knitting classes, set to continue for the next 6 weeks.

Shetland Wool Week, supported by a range of public and private sector organisations with an interest in Shetland heritage and wool, pledged to organise the classes to ensure the next generation of children learn about one of Shetland's important industries, as well as find out more about the Isles' heritage.

Nan Smith, knitting tutor said: 'These classes provide a place for young Shetlanders to learn about their heritage and acquire a new skill as well as being able to have fun.'

Maddison Reynolds (aged nine) taking part in the class was said: 'I thought the knitting classes would be a really great thing to do, and it was my first time knitting. Learning to knit was hard to start off with, but I really enjoyed it in the end. I thought it was also good to meet new people, but at the same time being able to learn.'

India Reynolds (age 11) was also excited about taking the class: 'It was so great to be able to talk to bairns from all over Shetland and to meet new people, I really enjoyed it and would like to be able to teach my children to knit too one day.'

The classes have proved very popular, with sessions selling out within a few weeks of going on sale. Due to the demand, the next set of beginners classes are already on sale on the Shetland Box Office and will begin starting from Sunday the 22nd of February.



The Bairns knitting classes have been very successful. One group shown here with tutors Sandra Manson and Ella Gordon.

Selina-May Miller, Shetland Wool Week Coordinator said: 'It really is encouraging for me to see so many young people interested in learning the traditional Shetland knitting skills. The classes went absolutely brilliantly today, everyone had so much enthusiasm and I cannot wait to see what they make in the following few weeks.'

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What's on this Summer?

Every year hundreds of volunteers and staff work hard to prepare new or existing exhibitions and venues to showcase Shetland's heritage and culture for local and visitors to our islands. The diversity of material, artefacts and stories is astounding and covers every aspect of Shetland life, history and folklore. From Sumburgh Head to Haroldswick, and everywhere in between, the visitor centres and

community museums provide a wealth of opportunities for days out and a chance to learn something new about Shetland.

Every one of these places deserves to be highlighted and *Unkans* is an ideal place to promote what's happening for Summer 2015. If you are involved with setting up a new display please get in touch with details of what you have planned for this Summer. The

next issue of *Unkans* is due out in early April and will be an ideal time to put your museum or exhibition in the spotlight.

Send a description and an image to emma@shetlandamenity.org by the next submission deadline of 23rd March. If you would like to submit a more in depth article relating to an area of Shetland's heritage, or research you are doing please get in touch.

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

Significant archive donation

On 9 November 1862 27 gentlemen met in the Religious Institute in Buchanan Street, Glasgow. They were natives of and exiles from Orkney and Shetland, and they formed a society. They called it the Glasgow Orkney and Shetland Literary and Scientific Association.

The Association still exists. They recently decided to deposit their records and library in the Shetland and Orkney Archives. The archivists in Orkney and Shetland conferred, and decided to keep most of the collection intact in Shetland. It is a most interesting addition to the Shetland Museum and Archives collections.

The Association's minutes have survived, without any gaps, from that first meeting in 1862 until the present. A series of dedicated secretaries chronicled the members' day-to-day activities, through good times and bad. Sometimes they pasted in newspaper cuttings and documents about the Association, thus



Mark Smith with some of the material from the Glasgow Orkney and Shetland Literary and Scientific Association.

preserving material that might easily have gone astray.

Almost from the beginning the members formed a magazine committee. They produced a magazine eventually called *The Pole Star*, with literary work by budding writers. Some of these early books have survived, and in due course were succeeded by typed magazines up till the 1950s.

At the same time, members and visitors were giving lectures to packed meetings. Nearly fifty texts of lectures are still to the fore, apparently typed up by Association officials. W.J. Anderson spoke about his relative Basil Ramsay Anderson, the Shetland poet, in November 1925; John Tulloch about the growth of Glasgow two years later; R.T. Sutherland at length about St Magnus Cathedral in 1928.

Williamina J. Macintosh asked members 'Can education end war?'; Mrs L.H. Thomson discussed 'Some modern Scottish poetry'; and, in 1976, Olivia D. Scott spoke about 'Sir John Sinclair and the Statistical Accounts of Scotland'.

Ms. Scott was a librarian by trade, and for years during the mid and late twentieth century she looked after the Association's growing library. Established in 1862, it comprises many rare works, some presented by members from time to time. The Shetland novelist Jessie Saxby donated her novels, and Gilbert Goudie, another Shetlander, bound up and presented a volume of his antiquarian papers.

There were outdoor activities as well as indoor meetings: a rambling club, for instance. The Association commissioned and kept photographs of some members' outings, sometimes with names pencilled on: a valuable record.

In 1911 the Association held a jubilee reunion. Four of the original members from 1862 were still alive, but only one, Thomas Stout, could attend. Fifty years later Jerry Eunson and Olivia Scott, an Orcadian and Shetlander respectively, produced a little booklet on the Association's first 100 years: a rather rare item today.

The Shetland Museum and Archives wishes the Glasgow Orkney and Shetland Association well. We are very grateful for its deposit of material in the Archives.

Brian Smith, Archivist

Shetland's sunken treasure – unveiled!



A new exhibition has been unveiled at Shetland Museum and Archives. The two displays, located outside the archives showcase finds from the wreck of the *Drottningen af Sverige*. Wrecked in 1745 off the Knab and within the confines of Lerwick harbour, the *Drottningen af Sverige* (Queen of Sweden) offers a fascinating snapshot of life onboard an 18th century trading vessel.

The *Drottningen af Sverige* was the flagship of the Swedish East Company. Sailing with the *Stockholm* both vessels left Gothenburg on 9th January 1745. They quickly ran into trouble a few days later, as the weather deteriorated. With high winds, blizzard conditions and poor visibility the ships struggled to maintain course. The *Stockholm* floundered and was lost off Braefield, Dunrossness – nothing now remains of the ship. The *Drottningen af Sverige* continued, her Captain made the decision to

run for the safety of Lerwick. Unfortunately, as she came into sight of safety, the weather deteriorated and she struck rock just hours after the *Stockholm*. All the crew from both vessels made it to shore safely.

The Swedish East India Company, established in 1731, following several failed attempts, was inspired by the success of the Dutch East Company. Sweden was the last prominent European nation to become involved in the Eastern trade. The Company was the largest in Sweden and was dissolved in 1813.

Under the command of Captain Carl Johan Treutiger, the *Drottningen af Sverige* of 147ft and 950 ton, carried 130 men and boasted 32 guns. Built in Stockholm in 1741 for £12,500 (over £1 million today) she was the largest vessel in the company's fleet. She was a trading vessel to China for the Swedish East India Company.

The *Drottningen af Sverige* was partially loaded, en route to Cadiz (Spain) for more supplies before heading to Canton in China.

The display also features an extremely rare chart, dating to the 1740s which was created by Dutch cartographer Joannes Van Keulen. Used as a navigational aid, this chart contains information about the sea and coast, including tides, anchorages and dangerous rocks. Charts, unlike maps contained hill profiles to help mariners recognise landmasses. Marine atlases adorned the chart table onboard vessels such as the *Drottningen af Sverige*. Dutch cartographers were prolific map-makers – unlike the British, they made many maps of Shetland and this recent acquisition is one of the rarest of all Shetland charts.

This exhibition is set to run throughout 2015.



Cannon from the *Drottningen af Sverige*, photographed on the seabed by Donald Jeffries.

PhD research into the Shetland boat: history, folklore & construction

What is the research about?

This three year, full-time, PhD research project is being funded by Shetland Amenity Trust and Lerwick Port Authority. The academic provider of the PhD is the University of the Highlands and Islands through the Centre for Nordic Studies at Shetland College.

Over the years there has been a lot written on specific Shetland types of boats such as the Fair Isle and Dunrossness yawl and the sixareen, but there has been no in-depth work that has brought all the elements of Shetland's, double ended, and clinker constructed boats and their use together. The boats themselves are slowly disappearing, and some, such as the sixareen are almost gone with only two replicas, and two, or possibly three, original examples remaining.

Shetland's boats it must be remembered existed because there was a need for them, they were the cars and lorries of their day, and the sea and voes were the roads upon which people transported themselves, their goods, livestock, and by which they also earned a living through fishing. A friend emphasised this to me recently by pointing out that some graveyards in Shetland cannot be reached by car, but are easily reached by boat!

Like all everyday objects the value of these boats was not recognised until they, and the people who used and built them began to disappear. The boats as objects are of huge cultural importance, as are the people who built and used them. On their own, the boats can be appreciated for their design and construction, but it was the people that imbued the boats with life through their own individual stories and experiences.

New evidence

As well as personal experiences; the historical facts are equally important. This winter I have spent the majority of my time in the Shetland Archives examining the Bruce of Symbister collection of papers, and these are a few of the interesting things that I have found. It is known that up until the mid nineteenth century timber and wood products came to Shetland from Norway. I was therefore surprised to find that during the eighteenth century large amounts of barrel staves, timber deals, and at least two consignments of oars (one of 48 and the other of 120) came from Hamburg. Another discovery is that boatbuilding in Shetland began earlier than previously



Sixareen Industry racing under square sail at Walls.

Photo: Shetland Museum & Archives

thought. It has generally been accepted that boatbuilding began as a consequence of a British trade embargo against Norway, which was imposed between 1807-1814 and prevented the import of timber and boats to Shetland. This I am beginning to think is a myth, as a letter dated 23rd April 1771 illustrates. In this letter, John Mitchell requests Christopher Tullock to be released from Stenness to come and build some boats at Sandhouse, as the boatbuilder from Walls who was supposed to be coming was unable to leave his sick wife. Mitchell goes on to ask that if Tullock cannot come then please send another good boat builder who can be spared. So, it seems there were people called boatbuilders as opposed to carpenters, which makes sense. I am fairly certain boatbuilding has been going on in Shetland for a very long time, I just need to find the evidence.

Would you like to contribute?

So, over the forthcoming months I intend to be continuing my search through Archives, and this spring and summer I will be examining and measuring boats. As I have already mentioned, stories and experiences are equally important, and I would like to record these, which will be used in my PhD and then donated to the Archives. So, if you have a story, or stories related to Shetland boats that you don't mind sharing, or you have some documents, or photographs, or a boat that I could examine then please get in touch.

Marc Chivers

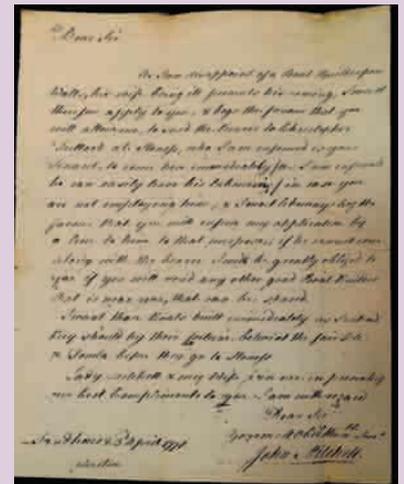
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Letter from John Mitchell to unknown dated 23rd April 1771 requesting Christopher Tullock to be come and build some boats at Sandhouse.

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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 FRIDAY 23rd MARCH 2015.