



# 60 North

## EXPLORE JIMMY PEREZ'S SHETLAND

BBC Drama of Ann  
Cleeves novel starring Dougie  
Henshall comes to Shetland

## A Crofter's Life For Me!

Olivia Abbot reflects  
on the changing nature  
of indigenous agriculture

## Forty Years of Thoughtful Design

The work of Richard  
Gibson Architects

## PLUS

Rare Breeds  
Geocaching  
Fair Isle Christmas  
Shetland Books in 2012  
Henry and The Waxwings

## TRACKING SHETLAND'S OTTERS

With Brydon Thomason



www.SHETLAND.org

Editor: Misa Hay

Cover image: Brydon Thomason, Shetland Nature

Contributions and suggestions are more than welcome. Submissions can be made directly to the Editor by email to [misa.hay@promoteshetland.com](mailto:misa.hay@promoteshetland.com)

Disclaimer: Although Promote Shetland has taken reasonable steps to confirm the information contained in the magazine at the time of publishing, it cannot guarantee that the information published is and remains accurate.

The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Promote Shetland. Events can be subject to change, we recommend you check details before travelling.



Like Shetland on [www.facebook.com/promoteshetland](https://www.facebook.com/promoteshetland)



Follow us on Twitter @promoteshetland

# Contents

## 4. Discover Ann Cleeves's Shetland

*Ann Cleeves talks about her special relationship with Shetland.*

.....

## 7. Mystery of Wartime Plane Crash

*Paul Riddell tells the story of the unfortunate loss of two airmen.*

.....

## 9. Reform Lane

*Elements of design.*

.....

## 12. Forty Years of Thoughtful Design

*The partners let Alastair Hamilton into some of the secrets of their success.*

.....

## 17. A Crofter's Life for Me

*Olivia Abbot reflects on the changing nature of indigenous agriculture.*

.....

## 20. Shetland's Unique Breeds

*Alastair Hamilton is impressed by the non-human natives.*

.....

## 24. Tracking Shetland's Otters

*There's nowhere better to see this adorable mammal, says Brydon Thomason.*

.....

## 26. Henry and the Waxwings

*How feeding the birds had some unexpected results.*

.....

## 29. 10 Questions With Jon Dunn

*The naturalist and guide on his favourites, from bird to kit.*

.....

## 31. Frightful Weather, Fair Isle Christmas

*Liz Musser reflects on "The Holidays" and the rhythm of island life.*

## 34. The Thing Sites GeoTour

*Lauren Doughton points the way towards a new history-related treasure hunt.*

.....

## 36. Shetland Books in 2012 Twelve of the Best

*Jordan Ogg looks back on the year past's most notable books.*

.....

## 38. My Shetland Wishlist

*A selection of inspirational contemporary and traditional hand crafted finds.*

.....





## Drama in Shetland!

Welcome to the first edition of 60 North in 2013. There's been a great deal of excitement over the new BBC crime drama *Shetland*, based on Ann Cleeves' book *Red Bones* which stars Scottish actor Dougie Henshall. This was heightened by her arrival for the launch of her fifth Shetland book *Dead Water* in January. With Ann's support and input, we have produced a map of some of the real locations in the books (and other places that were the inspiration for fictional locations), which we have reproduced here.

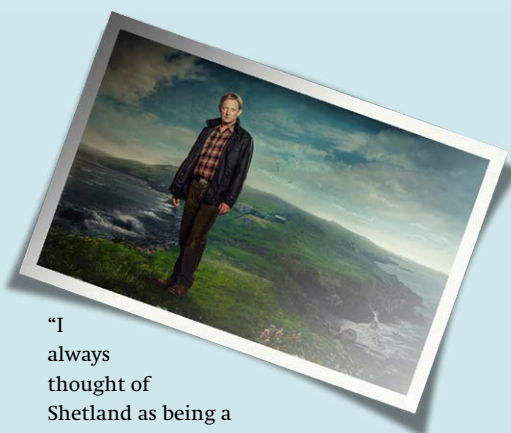
Elsewhere, Alastair Hamilton hears some of the secrets of the success of award-winning Richard Gibson Architects. Brydon Thomason argues that there is no better place to see otters than in Shetland. Hungry Waxwings also feature in this issue, as do rare Shetland breeds and the best 12 books of 2012.

All in all, a plentiful supply of gripping reads to get you in the mood for the lighter nights and better weather (we hope!).

Happy reading!

Misa Hay,  
*Promote Shetland*

[misa.hay@promoteshetland.com](mailto:misa.hay@promoteshetland.com) | [www.facebook.com/promoteshetland](http://www.facebook.com/promoteshetland)



"I always thought of Shetland as being a place that was so remote it was always in a wee box during the weather. Sometimes I wonder if people really know where it is or what it's like, what the people are like and what goes on there. As a curiosity it's worth taking a look at Shetland and you'll discover it's a truly beautiful place." Dougie Henshall who plays Jimmy Perez in the BBC Drama *Shetland*.



# Explore Jimmy Perez's Shetland

ANN (LEEVE'S) TALKS ABOUT HER SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH SHETLAND

X first came to Shetland in the mid-1970s. I'd dropped out of university and quite by chance I was offered the job of assistant cook at the Bird Observatory in Fair Isle, the most remote of Shetland's islands. I arrived in the wake of gale force winds, very seasick and wondering quite what I was doing there; after all I couldn't cook and I knew nothing about birds. But it was spring, the cliffs were raucous with seabirds and pink with thrift, and from the moment I stepped ashore I was enchanted. I met my husband in Fair Isle. He was one of the visiting birdwatchers who arrive with the migrants in the autumn. He returned the following year to camp and to work on a friend's croft in return for food and homebrew. He proposed while we were riding back to the croft on a trailer of hay after a day in the fields.

All very idyllic. But it was a time of dramatic change in Shetland. Oil had been discovered and on my rare visits to Lerwick it felt like a gold rush town. There was an influx of people, executives and workers on the rigs and people who saw the chance to make money quickly. Shetland has a history of strangers arriving from outside though, and it managed the time of transition well. You have little sense of the oil industry now unless you come across the terminal at Sullom Voe. And Shetland still welcomes visitors with grace and hospitality, whether they're tourists or a BBC film

crew. I love writing about the islands just because they're dynamic, changing and energetic. Don't come to Shetland imagining a place fixed in the past. History is important here, but the community looks to the future, to developing sustainable energy and to producing even more wonderful food. It encourages artists and crafts people to take the traditions of knitting and spinning to create magnificent new textile designs. Young musicians play old tunes and write their own music. The islands are bleak and beautiful and very alive.

## Raven Black

Raven Black was written after a mid-winter trip to Shetland, a time of long nights and the famous Up-Helly-Aa fire festival. When a teenage girl's body is found in the snow, it's a difficult and emotional case for Inspector Jimmy Perez.

Ravenswick, where Catherine's body is found and where Perez's girlfriend Fran Hunter lives, is on the east side of Shetland Mainland, somewhere between Sandwick and Levenwick. I imagine the pier at Lee-bitten, Sandwick, where the Mousa ferry is moored, but I picture the community and the fabulous beach at Levenwick. In my mind Fran's house is on higher land, next to Magnus

Tait's croft. So the place is a fictional mixture of both places and my own imagination.

Jimmy Perez lives in The Lodeberrie, a house right on the water in Lerwick. I love the texture of rock and weed, rope and chain on the beach below it and wish I was an artist. Lots of other places and events in the town appear in the books, including Monty's Bistro and of course the magnificent Up-Helly-Aa, which takes place on the last Tuesday of January. Walk up the street (as Commercial Street is known) and have a coffee in the Peerie Shop Cafe to follow in Jimmy's footsteps.

Duncan Hunter's house is based on the Busta House Hotel in Brae. This stunning building is a former laird's house and stands right on the water at Busta Voe. There are stories of a ghost there, and sitting in the long room with a dram or a glass of Unst beer it's easy to convince yourself that she'll appear.

## White Nights

White Nights is a mid-summer book, a time of flowers and seabirds and long, light days. Locals speak of the "simmer dim", the summer dusk, because in June it never really gets dark. A stranger gate crashes a party in The Herring House, an art gallery. Later the man is found hanged in a boat shed on the beach. Murder is too close to home for Jimmy Perez, because his girlfriend Fran is one of the exhibiting artists.

Most of the settings in White Nights are in North Mainland – Northmavine. Bid-



dista could be Hillswick, though in fact it's completely fictitious. The cliffs and the Hole of Biddista are based on the breathtaking scenery at Eshaness. Drive to the lighthouse and then take a very bracing walk. This is a great place to watch seabirds. I've seen a raven's nest on the cliff, and an otter hunting here too.

When Peter Wilding decides to buy a place in Shetland, he finds a derelict house to renovate and I was thinking of the south-west of Mainland around Maywick. There are beautiful places to explore in this part of the island. Go a little further south to see Spiggie Loch and the beach at Scousburgh. Then south again to visit the water mill at Quendale.

The Herring House, the art gallery in Biddista, is loosely based on the Bonhoga, a converted mill near Weisdale. There are touring exhibitions and you'll have a chance to see and to buy local art too. The Bonhoga is also a great place to stop for coffee or lunch if you're visiting the area.

## Red Bones

Red Bones is my spring book. It's about a new birth and family secrets, hidden in the ground. I'm interested in digging into the past, a kind of psychological archaeology that reveals tensions and feuds of the present. The novel starts with the apparently accidental death of Sandy's grandmother, Mima, and much of the action is seen from the young police officer's point of view.

Red Bones is set mostly in the friendly island of Whalsay. Take the ferry from Laxo or Vidlin to find out where Sandy Wilson grew up and visit the graveyard at the Houb, where Mima was buried. See the Hanseatic Booth at Symbister and find out about the trade between the Hanseatic League countries around the North Sea and the Baltic. History provides a background to the novel and to the TV adaptation and Shetland is famous for its archaeology. Check out Jarlshof and the settlement at Scatness or take a trip to Mousa, to climb

the broch there.

In the novel Jimmy is assisted by Shetland archaeologist Val Turner – a real person who helped both with the book and the BBC film. In one scene in the book, she meets Jimmy in the Hay's Dock Restaurant, which is in the new Shetland Museum. I visit the museum every time I come to Shetland and always find something new to see – and the food in the restaurant is pretty spectacular too.

The background to the book is the Shetland Bus, the fleet of small fishing boats that carried resistance fighters to occupied Norway during the war. To find out more about these brave Norwegians visit the museum at Scalloway.

## Blue Lightning

The fourth Shetland book takes place in the autumn, a time of dramatic storms. Jimmy Perez has returned to Fair Isle, the island of his birth, to introduce his fiancée Fran to his friends and family. He has a strange name and dark colouring because his ancestors were shipwrecked from the Spanish Armada boat, El Gran Grifon. The wreck is still there and legend has it that Fair Isle knitting derives from the bright colours and Catholic images that were seen onboard.

In the novel the warden of the Field Centre is murdered at the height of bird migration. For ornithologists Fair Isle is famous because it attracts rare migrants from east and west depending on the wind, and because of the research studies into seabirds. In the spring it's a wonderful place to get close to puffins. Visitors are welcome to stay at the grand new Fair Isle Bird Observatory near to the North Haven – you don't have to be a birder – or you could rent Springfield, the self-catering cottage that was the model for Jimmy's parents' house in the book. It's possible to get B&B in the South Lighthouse, which provided the image for the jacket of the novel, and from the observatory it's an easy walk to the North Lighthouse, the setting for the

fictitious Field Centre. Fair Isle has fantastic walks, a small museum and a creative population of knitters, musicians, boat builders and poets.

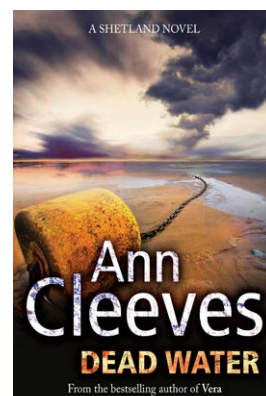
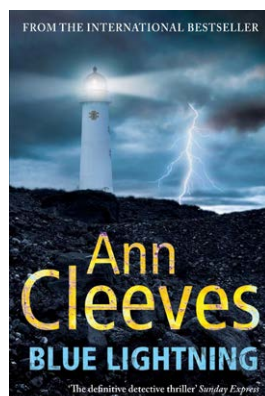
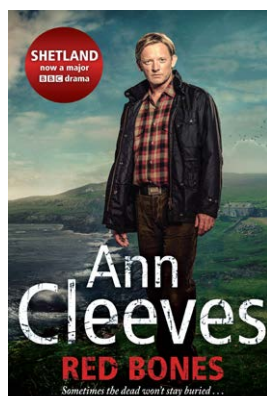
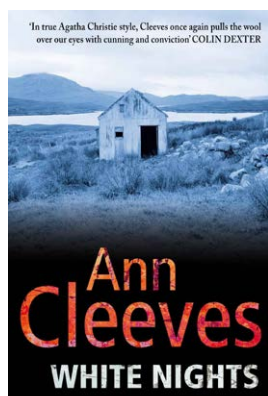
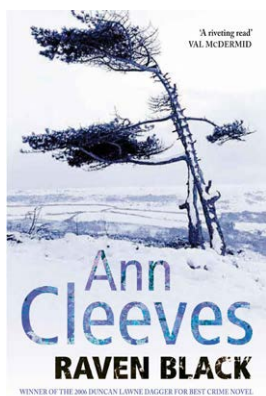
Travel to Fair Isle, either by the mail boat, the Good Shepherd, from Grutness at the south of Shetland Mainland, or by small plane from Tingwall airstrip.

## Dead Water

Dead Water is the first novel in a new quartet. While the first books had colours in the titles, these will be named after the four elements. Here journalist Jerry Markham is found dead drifting in a traditional yoa! in Aith marina. A Shetlander by birth, he now works on a national newspaper. Has he returned to the islands to follow a story – perhaps about the development of renewable energy – or is his reason more personal?

There are lots of real places in Dead Water. You can visit the marina at Aith and a lot of the action takes place in the oil and gas terminal at Sullom Voe. The regatta in which the fiscal Rhona Laing takes part is at St Ninian's Isle, a beautiful and unusual tombolo on the west side of the Mainland. There really are ferocious currents around the island of Samphrey, between Shetland Mainland and Yell. The island of Fetlar, where Francis and Mary Watt live, is very much worth a visit, especially if you're a birdwatcher hoping to catch a glimpse of the red-necked phalaropes. But allow plenty of time, because you'll need to take two ferries!

There are some fictional places too. Hvidahus is made-up but I picture it somewhere close to Ollaberry in the north mainland. The crofting museum at Vatnagarth is based on the one at Boddam, but moved a long way north. In fact the North Mainland is one of my favourite areas of Shetland and I'd certainly recommend a day spent exploring in the area. You'll find your own beaches and bays, and your own models for Evie Watt's croft, and John Henderson's house. And you probably won't see any other visitors.

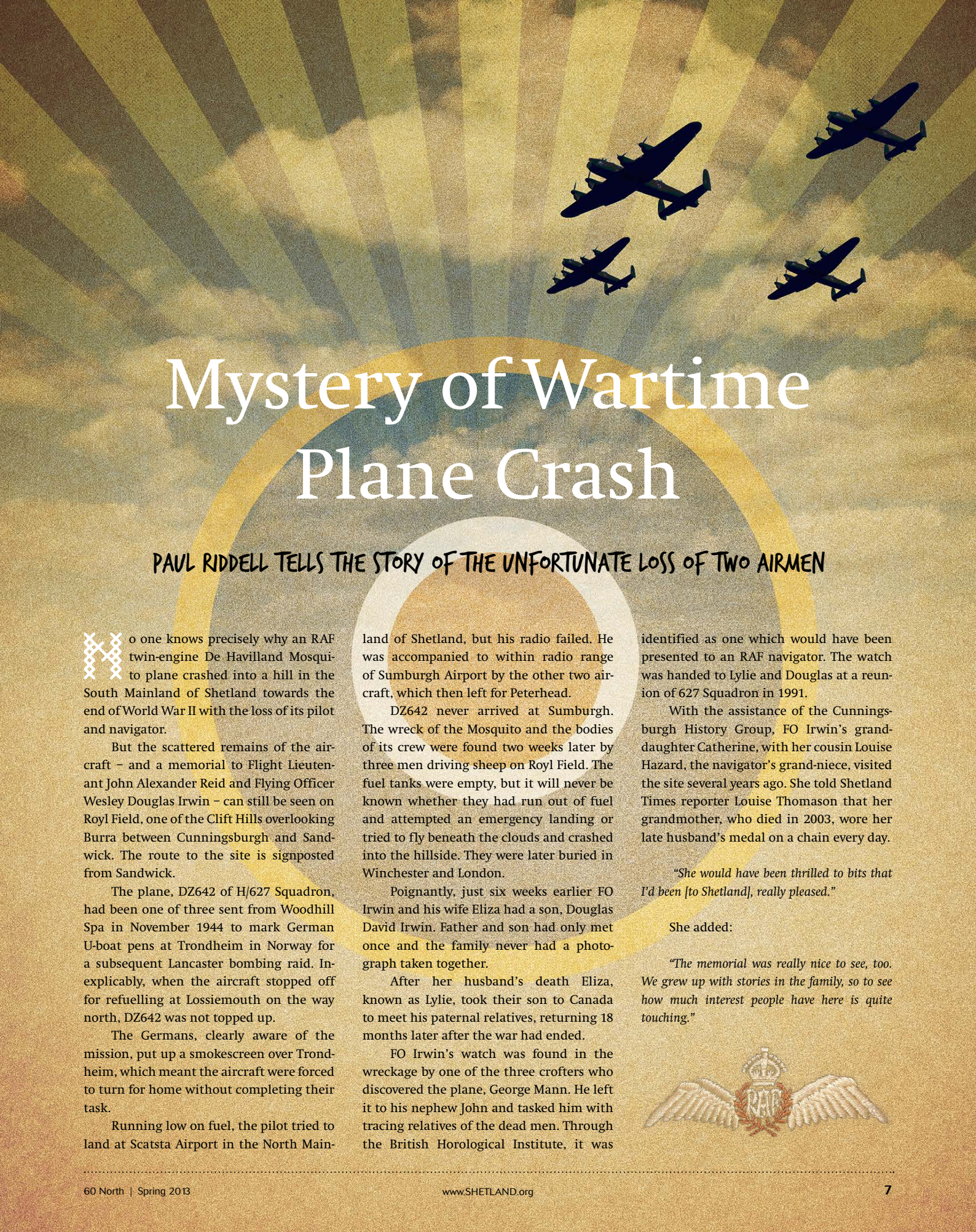




# DISCOVER THE MYSTERY OF SHETLAND







# Mystery of Wartime Plane Crash

PAUL RIDDELL TELLS THE STORY OF THE UNFORTUNATE LOSS OF TWO AIRMEN

**N**o one knows precisely why an RAF twin-engine De Havilland Mosquito plane crashed into a hill in the South Mainland of Shetland towards the end of World War II with the loss of its pilot and navigator.

But the scattered remains of the aircraft – and a memorial to Flight Lieutenant John Alexander Reid and Flying Officer Wesley Douglas Irwin – can still be seen on Royl Field, one of the Clift Hills overlooking Burra between Cunningsburgh and Sandwick. The route to the site is signposted from Sandwick.

The plane, DZ642 of H/627 Squadron, had been one of three sent from Woodhill Spa in November 1944 to mark German U-boat pens at Trondheim in Norway for a subsequent Lancaster bombing raid. Inexplicably, when the aircraft stopped off for refuelling at Lossiemouth on the way north, DZ642 was not topped up.

The Germans, clearly aware of the mission, put up a smokescreen over Trondheim, which meant the aircraft were forced to turn for home without completing their task.

Running low on fuel, the pilot tried to land at Scatsta Airport in the North Main-

land of Shetland, but his radio failed. He was accompanied to within radio range of Sumburgh Airport by the other two aircraft, which then left for Peterhead.

DZ642 never arrived at Sumburgh. The wreck of the Mosquito and the bodies of its crew were found two weeks later by three men driving sheep on Royl Field. The fuel tanks were empty, but it will never be known whether they had run out of fuel and attempted an emergency landing or tried to fly beneath the clouds and crashed into the hillside. They were later buried in Winchester and London.

Poignantly, just six weeks earlier FO Irwin and his wife Eliza had a son, Douglas David Irwin. Father and son had only met once and the family never had a photograph taken together.

After her husband's death Eliza, known as Lylie, took their son to Canada to meet his paternal relatives, returning 18 months later after the war had ended.

FO Irwin's watch was found in the wreckage by one of the three crofters who discovered the plane, George Mann. He left it to his nephew John and tasked him with tracing relatives of the dead men. Through the British Horological Institute, it was

identified as one which would have been presented to an RAF navigator. The watch was handed to Lylie and Douglas at a reunion of 627 Squadron in 1991.

With the assistance of the Cunningsburgh History Group, FO Irwin's granddaughter Catherine, with her cousin Louise Hazard, the navigator's grand-niece, visited the site several years ago. She told Shetland Times reporter Louise Thomason that her grandmother, who died in 2003, wore her late husband's medal on a chain every day.

*"She would have been thrilled to bits that I'd been [to Shetland], really pleased."*

She added:

*"The memorial was really nice to see, too. We grew up with stories in the family, so to see how much interest people have here is quite touching."*





*Scattered remains of  
WW II RAF twin-engine  
De Havilland Mosquito  
aircraft.*







# Reform Lane

## Sarah Laurenson

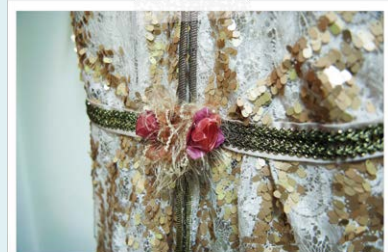
### ELEMENTS OF DESIGN




Sun on beach



Ruby



Wedding Gown

 eform Lane is a clothing and accessories label that captures the light, mood and movement of Shetland's coastal landscapes in beautiful printed, dyed and draped textiles. Owner and designer Sarah Laurenson tells us how the sea influences everything she designs.

The first Reform Lane design was an accident. I was on the Sands of Sound beach in Lerwick walking Ruby, my mum's dog, in early April. A series of incidents that day meant that I was out in the late afternoon, just as the sun was starting to slip away. I was relaxed. Ruby was happy. The light was beautiful, like it was piercing the sea.

As I wandered, taking pictures and

throwing seaweed for Ruby, I thought about how amazing it would be to run my own business. That thought had been niggling at me for a few months, since a trip to Paris to buy fabric and trims for a bespoke wedding dress I was making in my spare time. At this point I was working in a full-time marketing job for the wool industry, which I loved. But I just couldn't shake off the idea of starting out on my own, creating beautiful pieces every day. I wanted to be able to take the colours and light that I saw around me on my walks, and harness them in fabrics for other people to wear and treasure.

I didn't know it at the time, but the

photos I absent-mindedly took on the beach that day would become a geometric print design which kick-started the first Reform Lane collection. I shuffled the images around on my computer and had the results digitally printed on silk, cotton and linen. From there, I started pulling fabrics out of my stash and messing around with paints and dyes. After about a month of thinking and designing, full of optimism and creative fervour, I quit my job. Everyone around me had a miniature heart attack – not least my boyfriend, Jordan. We had bought a house in Lerwick's old town, in Reform Lane, the year before and here I was, giving up my job. I didn't have any

products yet, or even a proper plan. I just knew I had to do it.

It would be a couple of months before I set up the business, finished up at my day job and launched the first collection. During that time several things happened: I got a freelance contract to edit a book on the history and culture of Shetland textiles (due to be launched later this year) and we moved from our little house in Reform Lane after Jordan was offered a new job in Edinburgh. Needless to say, life was a bit crazy for a while. Everything changed.

The one thing that has remained constant throughout all the upheaval is the influence of the sea. The constantly changing colour and texture of the water is always on my mind; even more so when I'm far away from it. The experience of the city makes the ocean seem larger in my head, a pulling force with an influence that's impossible to avoid – the way it moves, the weird

stuff it throws up, how light bends and bounces on its surface and how it distorts the landscape and fragments colour in its reflections.

Since launching Collection #1, a line of scarves and home accessories, Reform Lane pieces have found their way all over the world: mostly to Canada and USA, but also to Sweden, Japan, Russia and throughout the UK. I love hearing from customers about how they connect with the pieces (especially the hand-dyed silk scarves) as little slivers of Shetland's waves, and how they think of them as timeless treasures or pieces of jewellery imbued with a sense of place. The Sands of Sound print, which features the photos I took on the beach that afternoon last April, is the best selling line so far. It twinkles, just like the sun on the sea.

Reform Lane will continue on a path of happy accidents, with planning that would have made my former self as a marketing

professional weep. It's early days, but if there's anything I've learned from the last six months, it's to follow your instincts to the point that you terrify yourself. I also learned to fully appreciate the beauty of my home, and how infectious it can be. I still have moments where I realise how lucky I am to be able to share Shetland, the way I see it, with other people through Reform Lane.

Collection #1 is available from the Reform Lane online shop:

[www.reformlane.co.uk](http://www.reformlane.co.uk)

See behind the scenes at Reform Lane on the blog:

[www.reformlane.blogspot.com](http://www.reformlane.blogspot.com)

Contact:

[studio@reformlane.co.uk](mailto:studio@reformlane.co.uk)



Sands of Sound Print



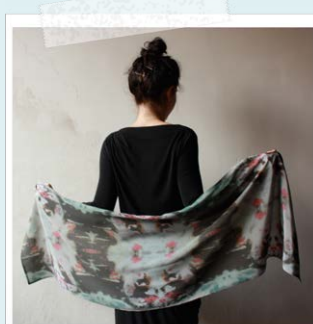
Sands of Sound Circle



Seaward Scarf



Navir Mantle



Legeron Silk Wrap



Ruby





OWNER AND DESIGNER  
SARAH LAURENSEN  
TELLS HOW THE  
SEA INFLUENCES  
EVERYTHING SHE  
DESIGNS



## Forty Years of Thoughtful Design

# The Work of Richard Gibson Architects

### THE DIRECTORS LET ALASTAIR HAMILTON INTO SOME OF THE SECRETS OF THEIR SUCCESS

What makes a place? The obvious ingredients include the landscape and the buildings, both of which are influenced by climate, culture and tradition. People make places too, of course, altering them physically to meet their needs and filling them with life and personality.

Buildings help define the identity of a place, whether it's a planned city, a floating oriental market or a Shetland crofting township. Buildings may convey an impression of power or poverty, welcome or hostility, sensitivity or arrogance. They're a living record of the lives, needs and tastes of the people who created them. They certainly help to shape a visitor's first impression of any community.

Here in Shetland Richard Gibson Architects have been creating new buildings and breathing new life into old ones for many years.

Richard was born in London and decided to study architecture after being inspired as a lad by a visit to the Festival of Britain in 1951. He trained at the Archi-

tectural Association along with his friend Richard Rogers who went on to establish an international reputation. Richard Gibson chose a different, northerly path. He worked as an architect in London for a few years but, in 1968, was tempted to Shetland to work for the Shetland Islands Council. He had seen an opportunity to tackle a range of projects, some of them quite ambitious given the size of the design team. As he recalls,

*"They were building the library and museum, the swimming pool and Bell's Brae Primary School."*

It was a chance to gain a wide range of experience in an interesting place.

Richard set up on his own in 1972 taking on a range of work for private clients. His decision to establish his own firm in Shetland coincided with the arrival of the oil industry and he soon became involved in the excitement of speculative oil-related projects. One of these was a rather embry-

onic proposal to develop what was known as "Nordport" oil terminal in the North Mainland, another was Hudson's offshore service base at Sandwick, a job which turned up "out of the blue" while he was still working out his notice at the council. Richard recalls with amusement that this firm "didn't take any advice, ever", not least about the chosen location, which local knowledge clearly indicated was unsuitable.

He designed a new knitwear factory, too. A little later, the first of many council projects came along, in the form of a new primary school in the village of Hamnavoe. All of these larger projects were leavened by some smaller scale work, for example the restoration of houses in the Lerwick lanes, an Outstanding Conservation Area.

Housing and schools formed an important part of the firm's workload, with the number of houses designed for the Scottish Airports Housing Association and its successor, the Hjaltland Housing Association, running well into the hundreds



of homes. Richard remembers them as “really interesting projects”. However, at the government’s insistence, the very early developments had to be built on very tight budgets. “Everything was cut right down to the bone.” Subsequently, the funding of such projects has been put on a better footing and developments such as the award-winning 34-house Grodians in Lerwick attain excellent standards within the homes and with the care in designing the external environment.

Among these projects was a housing development in the Lerwick Lanes, at John Jamieson’s Closs. That job was made more challenging, says Richard, because some- one from the housing association

*“had used the wrong scale when he measured up the site and said how many houses he wanted! So it is very, dense!”*

Fitting the required number of homes onto the site was, challenging, however the development was accomplished so successfully that the scheme won one of the four Saltire Society Awards that have so far come to Shetland.



The firm’s workload gradually expanded and, at one especially busy period, eight staff were employed. Today, it’s run by Richard himself and by two co-directors, Nick Brett and Adrian Wishart, both of whom have been Architects with the practice for some time.

Their work mix has changed in recent years. Housing remains important with a notable increase with the number of private clients looking for well crafted individually-designed homes.

Have buyers been inspired by television programmes such as Grand Designs? Nick thinks that such series have been “quite enlightening” for both clients and architects. Adrian adds that it’s re-assuring to see that many of the same issues tend to arise in house-building wherever the project is located.

Adrian, Nick and Richard clearly gain a great deal of satisfaction from their work and running a practice in Shetland brings some interesting challenges and opportunities. Nick points to the importance, for a Shetland firm, of understanding the logistics of building in the islands and the impact of logistics on running contracts.

*“It’s significant in terms of getting jobs done on time. Some Contractors and Architects from outside Shetland have faced difficulties because they didn’t understand how these logistical issues might affect large and complex buildings.”*

Adrian likes the variety of work that’s available. “As an architect,” he says,

*“you can specialise, but I feel that, in Shetland, you get a shot at every kind of job, which I think is a good thing for any practice.”*

He adds that achieving durability is essential:

*“Quite often, what we’re doing up here is a bit more belt and braces than what they’re doing on the mainland. It’s about specification of materials and sticking to things that you know work, while cautiously trying out new ideas to remain progressive.”*

## TALKING WITH THE CLIENT, IDEAS ARE CONSIDERED AND REJECTED, REFINED AND IMPROVED, UNTIL THERE’S AN AGREED SOLUTION.

Certainly, the firm’s portfolio is impressively broad, ranging from the restoration of listed buildings like Lerwick’s Harbour House to innovative, “off-grid” houses.

So, what can an architect do for his or her client? For Nick, the clear benefit is the quality of design and the creative thought that goes into every project; his job begins with

*“working through what they initially want and helping them develop an understanding of what they’re going to get. We have ways of looking at things that can quite quickly get to some of the core issues and aspirations”.*



The firm takes time to analyse and understand the client’s requirements, then suggests some options which would meet those needs and wants. Adrian makes the point that getting the design right is “a journey”. Talking with the client, ideas are considered and rejected, refined and improved, until there’s an agreed solution.

*“You often find that they get something beyond what they thought they would get; but it is a joint effort.”*

Nick adds that they can sometimes have a wider impact on projects. For example, they may identify a way in which a building can be run with fewer staff, or can be designed in such a way that it doesn’t need a lift, either of which can reduce costs enormously.

The firm explores how the client will use the building at different times of day, or suggest how a house can be designed so that it adapts easily to different stages in the family’s life. They have a clear focus on practical issues. As Adrian says,

*“people are realising that bigger houses cost a lot to heat, and often a great deal to paint”,*

an issue that has become more prominent with the use of Scandinavian-style timber cladding on many Shetland homes. In fact, according to Nick,

*“we spend a lot of time trying to persuade people to make their houses smaller”!*

Adrian adds that it’s often possible to reduce the size, reduce the cost and come up with a design that is better suited to the family’s needs and budget. It’s about

*“Good, sensible design, not having acres of corridor space. People sometimes come to us expecting that we’ll produce a design with a central corridor, which is the standard kit house*





solution, but there are many other ways, often more efficient ways, of arranging things”.

Cost control is an essential part of any project. Clients may come from well beyond the shores of Shetland, in which case jobs are managed for them remotely. They might make only a couple of visits to the islands during the design and building process. At present, Richard Gibson Architects are working on Shetland projects with clients based in Aberdeen and Glasgow.

Another client, a Shetlander now working in Houston, Texas, is developing an ambitious project on the uninhabited island of Linga near Walls, in Shetland’s West Mainland. It involves the restoration of various old buildings to form high-quality, environmentally-sound self-catering accommodation. Energy will come entirely from sources in the island, via wind and heat pump technology. Energy conservation will be a priority, so there will be exceptionally high levels of insulation. Water will need to be captured from rain and drawn from a well. A new loch will be created, too, and the development also requires a new jetty and breakwater. For Richard, Adrian and Nick, it’s a fascinating project, not least in dealing with the logistics of running a project in a small island where there are no existing services of any kind.

A very different set of challenges was involved in Da Vadill, a development of housing for Hjaltland Housing Association. The site, formerly occupied by a fish factory, is located at a busy road junction, exposed both to heavy traffic and a potential risk of tidal flooding. The solution involved raising the development well above road level and taking access from the higher level to the rear. Small garden areas were used to soften the frontage and the development achieves good levels of privacy. Overall, it’s a particularly thoughtful design, making excellent use of a difficult site. The development won the Saltire Society’s 2012 Award for new building and also picked up an award from the Inverness Architectural Association.

Shetlanders have a strong interest in local history and the islands have a remarkable network of very active local history groups. These groups operate a number of local museums, one of which, in Scalloway, had long outgrown its cramped accommodation. It has always drawn many visitors, not least because it tells the heroic story of the “Shetland Bus”, the service which used small fishing vessels to sustain the resistance in occupied Norway during the Second World War.

A former knitwear factory next door to Scalloway Castle became available and Richard Gibson Architects was appointed to design and oversee the conversion, which has been very successfully achieved. Steel cladding was replaced with unpainted larch, which echoes the grey walls of the castle. A striking new glazed entrance opens up the view of the castle and its surroundings. Inside, underfloor heating operated using heat pumps and a very high level of insulation have created the right environment for the exhibits, which are now very effectively displayed.

**IN SHETLAND, YOU GET A SHOT AT EVERY KIND OF JOB, WHICH I THINK IS A GOOD THING.**

Sometimes, a building needs to be discreet. In the public park in the centre of Lerwick, the main feature is the wonderful floral displays which the ground staff create for much of the year. The old park shed needed to be replaced and the chosen solution was a larger pavilion offering space for equipment storage and hire, a meeting room and public toilets. Users include the bowling club, whose green is immediately adjacent. The resulting building is an elegant response to those diverse needs; the carefully-chosen shade of green manages to look just right at every season of the year.

Adrian and Nick explain that the approach of their private housing is evolving, but they always take full account of the qualities of the site and pay particular attention to getting the proportions of the house right. Sometimes, a client may be a self-builder; others prefer to employ a building firm to undertake the whole job. Either way, Richard Gibson Architects work closely with the client to develop the design. The

scale of these new houses in the landscape appears relatively modest, yet they offer a surprising amount of accommodation and storage, with spacious, open-plan layouts, often partly double-height. Insulation levels are high and heating and hot water may well be provided by heat pumps or other modern means. These houses are designed to offer flexibility in the use of space over the long term.



Richard Gibson, Nick Brett and Adrian Wishart can look back on a very impressive track record of successful design, based on a commitment to quality and a desire – as Adrian puts it

*“to be sure that clients will still be happy many years down the line”.*

Nick sums up the approach:

*“I think we try to deliver good buildings that are interesting and thoughtful and well developed; and I think we do that.”*

This small rural practice has repeatedly won national design awards through creating good new buildings in which people live, learn and work, conserving the heritage and strengthening the sense of place. It was thoroughly fitting that, in 2010, Richard Gibson was presented with Scottish architecture’s highest accolade, a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS). There’s no doubt that the practice continues to make a very positive impact on Shetland.







1



2



3



4

- 1 Scalloway Museum Interior, RGA
- 2 Interior of the Tresta House Under Construction, RGA
- 3 Harbour House, RGA
- 4 The new Scalloway Museum, Promote Shetland
- 5 Da Vadill (overleaf), Phatsheep Photography










# A Crofter's Life for Me!

OLIVIA ABBOT REFLECTS ON THE (HANGING NATURE OF) INDIGENOUS AGRICULTURE

 Crofting is as much a part of Shetland's history, landscape and culture as are the land and people themselves. Of course, things have changed a lot since the bad old days before the Crofting Act of 1886 when people rented their houses and bits of land from the laird without any security.

Crofter and amateur historian James Tait explains: "People had a few sheep, a cow – maybe two if your land could sustain it – you might have had a pig to eat, and basically what you had was what you had to feed yourself."

It was very much a subsistence lifestyle.

*"People grew various crops for themselves and their animals – Shetland oats, bere (an old kind of barley), potatoes, turnips and cabbage, a variety of things – and then there was the sea," continues James. "Folk here could not have survived without the sea in the old days – the land couldn't have sustained everybody. And, of course, they had to pay rent in some form or another to the laird."*

Nowadays, of course, it's a different picture – the majority of crofts in Shetland

are given over to sheep, and very few crofters depend entirely on the land for their living. But there are some out there who are doing things a little bit differently.

## Woolly-headed ideas

Colin and Philly Arnot had been thinking about moving north for some time, so when Colin was offered a post in Shetland – although "it was a bit more north than we'd intended!" – they decided to take a leap of faith. The only proviso was that Philly's beloved alpacas had to make the journey up from Dorset too.

IT WAS VERY MUCH A  
SUBSISTENCE LIFESTYLE.

Was it a daunting prospect, bringing an animal more at home in the Andes to Shetland?

*"Well, we'd been having some terrible snowy winters down in Dorset, so the weather's not really that different," says Philly. "Daylight levels are just as much an issue down south, so we were already giving them vitamins for that, and they've been very fit and healthy."*

Bringing it all together to get 10 alpacas to Shetland and find land and somewhere to live required some juggling, but after a temporary stay in the south of the island, Shetland Alpacas now has a permanent home in North Roe.



When they arrived three-and-a-half years ago, Philly was surprised to discover that she was the only person with alpacas in Shetland, but soon turned this to her advantage, trading on her uniqueness. Finding herself in an established textile-producing community has been a great boon – always a knitter, she now spins, and makes felt accessories from the alpaca fibre to sell at shows and through the website.



*"I'm deliberately doing things that are a bit different," she says, "because it's not Shetland wool, I don't do Fair Isle patterns or anything like that."*

Colin and Philly feel they've been welcomed into the community in North-mavine and have no regrets about their move a bit further north than planned. Philly balances caring for the alpacas with her work as a nurse, but ultimately plans to concentrate full time on the animals. Ideas for the future include working with autistic children – there is evidence to suggest that spending time with alpacas can be very beneficial – and offering "Paca Picnics", where you take an alpaca on a walk, stopping for a picnic on the way.

They are also planning to breed alpacas to sell, and have already had some interest from crofters and craftspeople.

*"They're so easy to look after compared with sheep, for instance," says Philly. So it may be that she is not the only alpaca farmer in Shetland for much longer.*

[www.shetlandalpacas.co.uk](http://www.shetlandalpacas.co.uk)

### Living off the land

Alan Robertson and Penny Armstrong have been at their croft on Turrie field since 2008, and to say they are rooted and grounded in the soil there is not entirely a poetic exaggeration. The couple came – in Alan's case, back – to Shetland from Edinburgh intent on expanding their already pretty self-sufficient lifestyle.

Not many crofters these days can live entirely off the land they own, but this is what Alan and Penny plan as part of their unique vision for the croft (although at the moment both are having to work part-time

as well in order to make ends meet).

"We want to be self-sufficient off the land by making a living off it rather than eating off it, I suppose," says Alan, who originally comes from Lerwick.

"We believe everybody should have access to fresh veg," says Penny, which is why the couple established "Transition Turrie field" as a community interest company – meaning all money made goes back into the business or into the community – with the aim of providing the local community with organically grown fresh vegetables.

The couple set up a veg box scheme – something more familiar to the middle classes in genteel Edinburgh than to crofters and mill workers in Shetland, but they were confident that, using all their own produce, it could work.

*"We knew the market in locally produced goods was strong," says Alan. "Shetlanders are very loyal to locally produced stuff!"*

Indeed, the couple's main problem has been keeping up with demand – they have a waiting list of customers for the box scheme and the honesty box at the end of the road where passers-by can help them-





selves to produce is always emptied almost as soon as it is filled.

But they are working hard to keep up with demand, while at the same time sticking to one of their main principles: to be as fossil fuel-free as possible. "All the land out there has been cleared by pigs or by hand," says Alan. The croft also has sheep, turkeys, geese, ducks and hens, for meat and eggs. And once the pigs have done their job, they become bacon, sausages and pork chops to feed the workers.

"We've now got twice as much ground cleared as we had last year, so we've more room for planting," says Alan. "Each year we try to expand what we're doing."

There's no doubt Alan and Penny work hard, but they clearly love it.

"We have volunteers – local people and visitors who come from all around the world to help out – who would love to change the way they live, but they have no way to start," says Penny. "We feel very lucky."

[www.turriefieldveg.co.uk](http://www.turriefieldveg.co.uk)

### Juggling sheep and tourists

James Tait is the sixth generation of his family to farm the croft at Ireland in the south of Shetland. Born and brought up there, he remembers "as peerie boys my brother and I always helping my dad out" and now the croft is run as a business by his father, his brother and himself.

Like most crofters these days, the Taites keep sheep, though rather than native Shetland sheep, they keep a hardy Welsh breed called Lleyns crossed with a Suffolk ram. Gone are the days when James's dad kept cattle, though James himself remem-

bers the "hoose coo" that they kept for milk long after the rest of the herd had gone.

James and his brother, though, cannot rely on the sheep entirely for their income and so both have other interests. Cecil, the younger of the two, makes furniture in Scalloway, while James has thrown himself wholeheartedly into that most modern of industries – tourism.

"It wasn't something I planned," he explains. "I knew Elma Johnson, who ran Island Trails – she was my dad's second cousin – and I started taking people on walks round St Ninian's Isle for her, and things just grew from there."

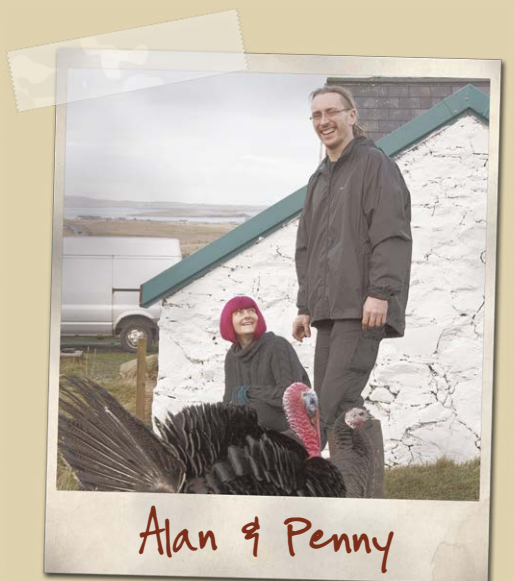
James was soon doing lots more walks and tours and also taking part in Elma's "In About Da Night" evenings, giving him the opportunity to demonstrate his knowledge of the history and culture of the islands. "And I loved it," he says. So much so that, when Elma sadly died early last year, James took on Island Trails as his own business.

Fitting running a croft around a busy summertime tourism business isn't necessarily easy, but James shares the work with his dad and brother. "The proportion of time I spend on the croft and Island Trails varies from month to month, depending on the needs of the different things," he says.

Looking to the future, James has plans for Island Trails but it has to fit in around the sheep.

"I'd like to be able to broaden out the season a bit," he says. "Of course, I can't do much earlier – in April or May – because of the lambing, but I'd like to do more in September and October!"

[www.island-trails.co.uk](http://www.island-trails.co.uk)





## From cattle to bumblebees

# Shetland's Unique Breeds

ALASTAIR HAMILTON IS IMPRESSED BY THE NON-HUMAN NATIVES

As Charles Darwin realised during the voyage of the Beagle, islands often harbour rare species or sub-species. In the Galapagos and elsewhere, his analysis of the indigenous animal and bird life led him to develop his theory of natural selection, the foundation for all subsequent scientific thinking about evolution.

Shetland is, of course, far less remote than the Galapagos, but there are island variations in both domestic and wild species of plants and animals. Around the world, children have been captivated by Shetland ponies, and the Shetland sheepdog is probably commoner outside Shetland than in the islands. However, the islands host a whole range of other unique breeds, some of them very rare indeed.

### The iconic pony

There's no question that the best-known of the islands' special breeds is the Shetland pony. It's been present in the islands from prehistoric times and may have distant cousins in Scandinavia. In Shetland, it was typically used for carrying peats home from the hill or for pulling a plough. The ponies are remarkably strong for their size and they are, of course, very hardy.

It was their small size and strength that led to Shetland ponies being extensively used in coal mines. In 1842, it became illegal to employ boys under the age of 10, or women, for underground work in British pits. The pony was the ideal replacement and, during the latter part of the 19th century, pony studs were established in Shetland for the purpose of breeding suitable animals. At the Marquis of Londonderry's stud, established in the adjoining Shet-

### THE SHETLAND COW VERY NEARLY DIDN'T SURVIVE.

land islands of Bressay and Noss, the aim of breeding was to produce ponies with "as much weight as possible and as near to the ground as can be got", an instruction which may well have had some influence on the breed up to the present day, no doubt accentuating the animal's stocky character.

Today, it's still possible to see groups of ponies all over Shetland and, in summer, the presence of a coach by the roadside often indicates that the driver has found a herd which his passengers can photograph.

Several breeders are active in the islands, though prices for ponies tend to be quite low. The Shetland pony breed today is supervised by the Shetland Pony Stud-Book Society.

These days, Shetland ponies are kept mostly as riding animals for children and they often feature at gymkhanas. One of the high points of the year is the Shetland Pony Grand National, held every December during the London International Horse Show at London's Olympia. Their popularity ensures that the breed, probably the islands' most potent symbol, will be around for many generations to come.

### Shetland cattle numbers recover

Ronnie Eunson, who farms near Scaloway and has patiently promoted native breeds, explains that the Shetland cow was "the dominant domesticated animal" in Shetland until 19th century landowners began to realise the profits that could be made from introducing large numbers of sheep. There would once have been tens of thousands of cattle in Shetland, he says, yet today there are probably no more than 2,000 of all breeds. Of those, only 200-300 are of the Shetland breed, which – as Ron-



nie points out – is about half the world population. That makes them, he says, rarer than “endangered” Bengal tigers. Shetland cattle are classified by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust as “at risk”, with between 450 and 750 animals in existence.

In fact, the Shetland cow very nearly didn’t survive. At one point, there were only a couple of dozen left and Ronnie explains that “agricultural fashion, and demands from the markets and from government, dictated that the cows were too small and weren’t suitable for modern agriculture”.



In Shetland, Ronnie continues, that was the position

*“Right up until the opening of the slaughterhouse, and it’s only now that folk are able to see any value back from them again. We’ve been selling them down in London this past season for the first time and as far as we can tell the reports are very good”.*

But, as he explains, the smaller carcass isn’t something that butchers are used to working with, and very few shops so far sell Shetland native beef, despite its excellent flavour.



The Shetland cow resembles breeds in Norway, Faroe and Iceland and may well be quite close to them, genetically. There was once an Orkney breed, too, but it has disappeared. Indeed, says Ronnie,

*“I suppose if you go back far enough, and you shave some of the hair off the Highland cow,*

*they would probably look very similar to them as well. Descendants of wild cattle were domesticated and then several strains were maintained over the years, because they happened to be the best for whatever the conditions were”.*

Ronnie says that analysis has shown that the animals here are ‘fundamentally different, inasmuch as their profiles are more characteristic of wild animals rather than domesticated or modern commercial breeds, which tend to have a very narrow genetic base based on some aspect of production, whereas the Shetland breeds’ genetic base is founded on survival”.

## SHETLAND NATIVE LAMB IS RECOGNISED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A UNIQUE REGIONAL PRODUCT.

### The efficient Shetland sheep

Like Shetland cattle, the native Shetland sheep almost certainly has close relatives elsewhere around the Atlantic periphery. Ronnie says that on the Scandinavian edge, Iceland, Faroe and the Hebrides, “the short-tailed sheep breeds all exhibit similar characteristics”. Again, it’s a breed that has become hardy through surviving in a hard climate and subsisting on rough vegetation, even on seaweed. That has made it, in Ronnie’s view,

*“Probably the most efficient herbivore that exists in Britain, because of their capacity to cope with the environment and the weather. If they’re now seen as the basis of several cross breeds, it’s because of their ability to survive”.*

The number of Shetland native sheep hasn’t varied as much as the number of cattle. There was a peak in total sheep numbers in response to high levels of government or European subsidy, but recent years have seen a decline to a more realistic level.

Shetland lamb and mutton enjoy an excellent reputation and Shetland native lamb is recognised by the European Union as a unique regional product in the same way as Melton Mowbray pies, Champagne or Parmigiano Reggiano cheese. Analysis of Shetland lamb has indicated that it has noticeably greater amounts of omega 3 and omega 6 – the healthy fatty acids – than other breeds.



The fine wool, too, is highly prized for its softness. As discerning customers focus more and more on provenance and integrity, there has been increasing interest in exactly the kinds of high-quality products – like native lamb, native wool and artisan products made from wool – which Shetland can offer.

### Ducks and hens almost disappeared

Over centuries, Shetland crofters have kept many kinds of poultry. However, like the cattle, the species most closely associated with Shetland had begun to disappear. On their croft in the island of Trondra, Mary and Tommy Isbister have been involved, for more than three decades, in trying to ensure the survival not only of poultry but also of the Shetland cow. They keep sheep and ponies, too.

Mary thinks the Shetland duck probably has Norwegian ancestors, but in any event the number left in Shetland had dwindled into single figures by the 1980s. She and Tommy have been breeding them for many years, having rescued them from extinction. They tracked one down in Foula and found two others in Nesting and Muckle Roe, so that all the Shetland ducks now alive have come from that original, tiny group.

The jury is still out on whether the Shetland hen is or is not a unique breed. However, older people recall these small, black, pigeon-like birds being kept on crofts and farms early in the 20th century. As with the ducks, Mary and Tommy had to put a great deal of effort into locating surviving birds and building up a breeding flock.

There have been suggestions that the Shetland hen is closely related to South



American birds, the theory being that they were brought back to Spain by the conquistadors and that they were then carried aboard the galleons that found their way to Shetland after the defeat of the Armada in 1588. Mary says:

*"It may be a fairy story, but I know that old folk on the west side of Shetland called them 'galleon hens' and that story goes around a lot. Caithness has similar stories. It would be interesting to go to Spain and see if there are any details of what the galleons did carry to Shetland."*



Unique varieties of plants, animals and birds

It's not only in its domestic animals that Shetland has unique species or sub-species. Among plants, Edmondston's Chickweed is unique not just to Shetland but to the island of Unst, and several species of hawkweed are unique to the islands. The Shetland Red Campion is also recognised as a distinct sub-species.

Some Shetland sub-species are darker in colour than those found elsewhere, a tendency known as melanism. This may stem from an evolutionary trend towards a shade which absorbs more warmth from

the sun. One example is the Shetland Wren, which is slightly larger than its southern relatives, perhaps also to help conserve warmth; it has a different, slightly louder, song, too. There is also a further sub-species of wren in Fair Isle, a little more like the European Wren but still distinct. Young Starlings are also a little darker in colour than their counterparts elsewhere.

Shetland also has at least three sub-species of Field Mouse, found in Fair Isle, Foula and Yell, each of which differs in small ways from their British or European cousins. There are unique sub-species of moths, bumblebees and other insects, too.

### The future of Shetland's rare breeds

As the Rare Breeds Survival Trust points out, the United Kingdom lost 26 rare breeds of farm animal between 1900 and 1973, a decline which the trust and many farmers such as the Isbisters and Ronnie Eunson have succeeded in halting. The loss of more rare breeds would diminish the gene pool and we'd lose breeds which, like the Shetland cow and sheep, are perfectly adapted to their environment and are outstandingly efficient. Indeed, Shetland used to have a distinctive pig, the reputedly quite fierce grice, but it disappeared during the 19th century and all that now exists is a reconstruction in the Shetland Museum.

Mary Isbister and Ronnie Eunson would agree that the future of rare breeds lies in their gaining greater commercial popularity. As Mary says,

*"I don't think you can ever have a future with rare breeds. They have to have a place in the marketplace. And I tend to disagree with the idea that something is only special if it's rare."*



Ronnie emphasises the appropriateness of the native breeds.

*"If you're a crofter and you want to keep some cattle, to feed you and your family, or to sell a few, then you have a breed that doesn't undergo the same degree of stress when it's facing the same rigours. I see it as a potential way of increasing the cattle numbers in Shetland."*

These days, people increasingly question the standardisation, centralisation and over-processing that have become so closely associated with food production. That opens up an opportunity for the farmer or community offering produce that has authenticity, integrity and great flavour. If the Shetland farming community can seize that opportunity and give the customer beef and lamb that comes with those guarantees, the future of Shetland's native breeds of cattle and sheep will be that much more secure. At the same time, the islands' identity as a source of first-class food will be greatly strengthened.





DUCKS AND  
HENS ALMOST  
DISAPPEARED IN  
SHETLAND







# Tracking Shetland's Otters

THERE'S NOWHERE BETTER TO SEE THIS ADORABLE MAMMAL, SAYS BRYDON THOMASON

There has been much focus on otters in the media over recent months, and very rightly so. Thankfully this is built around the very wonderful success story of the gradual and ongoing recovery of otter populations in Britain today. All across the nation animals are being seen once again where they had all but disappeared.

Here in the Shetland Islands a similar success story for otters was being told some 40 to 50 years ago when, after many generations during which otters were hunted for their highly prized pelts, the population slowly started to grow. By the early 1980s, when they became protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, the Shetland otter population was stable. Since then Shetland has been the place that otter enthusiasts and experts alike either return to again and again or dream of someday travelling to so they can be alone with wild otters.

Of course the west coast of Scotland and Western Isles are also renowned for otters, and most certainly these are very

special places for them. But nowhere else in Britain (and indeed most probably the entire range of the Eurasian otter) has so much study been done of these captivating semi-aquatic mammals.

## SO WHAT MAKES SHETLAND SO SPECIAL FOR OTTERS?

From the legendary and some might even say revolutionary TV documentary, *Track of The Wild Otter* by wildlife cameraman Hugh Miles way back in the late 1980s, to *The Springwatch Guide To Otters* just a matter of weeks ago, Shetland's otters have featured in countless TV documentaries and tantalised viewers across the globe.

So what makes Shetland so special for otters? Here they adapted and evolved to be much more at home along the salt-water shores where their daily routine essentially revolves around the rhythm of the tides. It is a combination of this high density, the geography of the remote stretches

of coastline they inhabit and the fact that they hunt during daylight hours that make the islands the best place to see otters in the wild.

Though killer whales are a very close contender for the status of ultimate icon to attract visitors to Shetland, they are realistically a "pot luck" or "stroke of luck" spectacle for visitors. To be in with a chance you cross your fingers and hope that you are in the right place at the right time and that you get connected to the local grapevine. With otters, however, with planning and making the right choices and often a great deal of patience, encounters can be predicted when you know when, how and where to look. Of course one would be hard-pressed to compare the two. If you are lucky enough to enjoy either or perhaps both, your life will never be the same again!

Few experiences can compare to the thrill of tracking an otter family along a beautiful and remote Shetland shoreline. Watching a mother and her cubs go about their daily routine in the undisturbed natural environment is a very special, exhilarating



rating and often emotive experience. There are few creatures that have the ability to encapsulate both the “aw” and the “wow” factors like otters do. They have many qualities which make them attractive and popular to us, from their stealthy hunting and predatory abilities to the intimate, adorable and playful antics of a mother and her cubs. For a mammal to be so supremely adapted to be such a master of its aquatic environment further enhances our awe and appreciation.

My story with otters began before I had ever seen one. My fascination for them had a hold of me even before I first recall seeing them at just seven years old. Growing up, I was tantalised and enthralled by tales of otters and their superior wits and abilities as hunters – and of course hunted! Before I was 10 years old I was exploring their world by reading their signs, finding spraints and following runs and locating

holts. Nearly 30 years on the thrill has never left me, and I consider myself extremely fortunate to have built a career around my passion for them.

By nature otters are known to be shy and complex animals, and to enjoy good and unintrusive encounters with them in their natural environment much care, caution and consideration is needed. Generally speaking knowledge and awareness of when, where and how you search will usually affect how good your encounters are. As is the case with tracking most elusive carnivores, common sense is perhaps the most valuable commodity, and smell, sound and sight should always be considered. Wind direction is the most important as their sense of smell is remarkably sensitive; making as little noise as possible, even by choosing every footstep tentatively, especially on pebbly beaches or wet ground; wearing earth-coloured clothing and keep-

ing below the skyline so as to avoid making a silhouette.

Of course there are exceptions to this and many often learn to tolerate human activity such as in and around ferry terminals and fishing ports. Often visitors and islanders alike may enjoy an encounter while waiting for a ferry to arrive or depart as an otter fishes close by, or perhaps crosses the terminal car park seemingly unaware or unperturbed by human activity. It should always be remembered however that even in such circumstances these animals are still wild and should be treated with the same sensitivity as they would be in a remote location far from the daily presence of man.

If you would like to see otters in Shetland you may be interested in Brydon’s otter watching and/or photography trips at [www.shetlandnature.net/otters/](http://www.shetlandnature.net/otters/)



THERE ARE FEW CREATURES THAT HAVE THE ABILITY TO ENCAPSULATE BOTH THE “AW” AND THE “WOW” FACTORS LIKE OTTERS DO.



## Shetland Nature

Wildlife, Birdwatching & Photography Holidays & Tours  
Local Knowledge, World Class Encounters  
Tel: 01957 710 000







See recommendations from Simon King and many more  
[www.shetlandnature.net](http://www.shetlandnature.net)





# Henry and the Waxwings

## HOW FEEDING THE BIRDS HAD SOME UNEXPECTED RESULTS



he sun rose to blue skies with scattered light clouds. It was a nice sunny morning, almost warm and with no wind. I'll always remember 25th October 2010 as the day I hand-fed Waxwings. The past few days had been grey, windy, rainy, and there had even been some hail. It was often blowing a gale. Though I was amazed, I had also felt sorry for the 12 to 16 Waxwings that had been feeding in our garden for the past few days. Waxwings are not seed eaters, they eat bugs, but rely on fruit and berries in the winter months. So dad and I kept putting old fruit out on bushes in the garden.

The Waxwings were very hungry and would eat any type of fruit we would put out for them. They ate apples, oranges, plums, strawberries, cranberries, grapes, raisins, currants, even a nectarine and a pomegranate. They ate every piece of fruit we had in the house! The Waxwings acted like they were starving. We bought more apples every time we went to the shop, feeding four to six apples a day. We put them on a stick just outside our window and it would be mobbed and cause a fight, exploding in flashes of bright red, yellow and white from these mostly grey birds. The bullies looked bigger and had more col-

our on their wings and tails; I've been told these are the older, more dominant birds. The Waxwings also wear a black mask over their eyes, a black beard under their beaks and a tuft of feathers on top of their heads like a shark's fin. A beautiful brick red can be seen on the forehead and under the bird's tail. Now when you see a mob of 12 hungry birds all wrestle and flap for one bit of apple, it is hard to tell one bird from another.

One of the reasons I think the Waxwings are so hungry is because of where I live, Fair Isle, the most remote inhabited island in the UK. The birds must have just flown in across the North Sea from Norway or Scandinavia because of lack of food. I have since learned this is called a Waxwing invasion or an eruption. Whatever you call it, these birds were hungry! They didn't mind dad and I watching and taking photos just two feet away on the other side of the window. Dad would even tap on the glass but they wouldn't fly away or even turn their heads or look up from the food for a good photo.

Dad remembered seeing a photo of a friend with a really long branch with oranges on it feeding Waxwings and thought maybe we could do it too. That is how it all start-

ed. He used a stick I had recently found on the beach, because Fair Isle has no trees. It wasn't very long, in fact it was short, considering. The stick had two places to poke half an apple on. The plan was to open the door near the window and hold it out the doorway and wait for the birds to come to feed on it so dad could take a photo not through the glass window. I thought it wouldn't work. Dad opened the door and I could hear all the birds fly away ... But soon the hungry birds came back to mob the apple in the window. It didn't take long for the first bird who couldn't find room to feed at the other apple to land on the stick I was holding in my hands, and then four more! It was like fishing for birds! They quickly got used to us and I moved out the door and into the garden. Dad took photos as they fed. I was very excited watching them so close, but I had to move slowly and whisper at first as the birds came and went freely. It looked to me as if the young, less colourful birds took the greater risk of feeding on my apples.

I laughed when a Waxwing landed on dad's outstretched arm while he tried to take my photo. I totally cracked up when dad was lying on the ground so he could get the blue sky behind me and one landed on his belly and



# HENRY FEEDING THE BIRDS







searched him for food. I started giggling and tried not to scare the birds. I let dad hold the stick for a while and I started taking some photos of him too. The birds ate till the apples fell from the branch. Dad replaced the apples on my stick and the birds soon came back. Then dad picked up the remaining apple skin and core from the ground and held it out at arm's length. Already totally amazed, I couldn't believe it ... a Waxwing was now feeding out of Dad's hand! "I want to do that too!" I said, but I didn't have much luck at first. Not to be outdone, I went into the house and cut the last apple in half and went back outside double-handed. Soon I had more birds than I could handle. It was like juggling Waxwings. Some of the birds nipped my finger tips thinking they might be berries. I cried with laughter, more surprised than hurt. At one point we had to drive to the shop to buy more apples. Dad and I spent the whole day feeding the birds, it was awesome! The most I hand fed was eight or nine at a time. The most we saw in our garden at one time was 39 a few days later.

Waxwings are really beautiful birds. They get their name from the red bits on the end of their feathers that look like old-time red sealing wax melted onto letters with a family crest stamped in them, but it's not really wax on their feathers. They

have a lot of personality and seem fearless. Hand feeding the Waxwings only happened that one day, though we fed them in our garden for a few weeks. That night dad put some of our photos on Facebook and his Fair Isle blog. They went viral! No one had ever seen anyone hand feeding a Waxwing before. Soon we had thousands and thousands of views from all around the world. Our photos have been published in newspapers and magazines and featured on the BBC's Autumnwatch. For me, it is something I'll never forget. I thought it was a once in a lifetime event.

Waxwings are not that common here. We had a few come back again that Christmas and during the winter of 2011. They must have been the same ones we had fed before because we found them in our window box looking for apples and we had not put any out for a while. We even had one eating from the stick again, but no hand feeding. In autumn 2011 all of Fair Isle saw only two or three Waxwings, but I hardly got a look. None of them found the food we put out for them before the starlings and blackbirds gobbled it up. In spring 2012 dad and I hand fed a siskin some peanuts! When dad went out to refill the feeder this bird didn't fly away. So we held out our hands full of nuts! Also that spring dad saw one Waxwing briefly in our garden while I was in school. I was disappointed as that was the only Fair Isle sighting till mid-October.

In early November 2012 I heard some Waxwings fly over! Could this be a start of another eruption? Dad and I gathered fallen grapes from the floor of my neighbour's greenhouse and poked them on the leafless shrubs out in the garden and put a couple of apples out. The starlings ate most of it at first but after two days of redeploying fruit a Waxwing finally found it. Soon a small flock of 10 to 12 birds followed, eating everything they could. A flock of Waxwings

is called a chorus. People say they sound like bells, but there is really nothing quite like it. You should have heard them sing or shrill the one evening that we had over 50 Waxwings flying about devouring our apples. Luckily for me we had school holidays so I could see it all. One day we had calm wind with sun. The weather was just right, so dad and I were able to do it again. Hand feeding Waxwings! The same way as before

**IF YOU SEE A WAXWING  
PUT SOME FRUIT OUT, IT'S  
PROBABLY HUNGRY AND HAS  
A LONG WAY TO GO.**

but this time mom was home and she took some video, which was good because last time some people thought our photos were photoshopped or faked. I guess I can understand that because it really does seem unbelievable when I think about it. The last of the Waxwings left our garden by mid-December. There are still occasional sightings in Shetland and Fair Isle but most have now gone further south for the winter. Mom's video was shown on the BBC's Winterwatch and I got congratulated by people all over and told it takes a special person to win the confidence of wildlife. Dad says it creates awareness, but all the fuss? I sort of like it, but it also makes me embarrassed. I now know that it is very important to feed the birds, because we live in a special place on the migration route where there is very little natural food for them, and that many birds would have died on the way to mainland Britain while crossing the North Sea. So, if you see a Waxwing put some fruit out, it's probably hungry and has a long way to go. Plus, I want to see them again!







# 10 Questions for Jon Dunn

THE NATURALIST AND GUIDE ON HIS FAVOURITES, FROM BIRD TO KIT

## So Jon – what is your favourite Shetland bird?

My favourite Shetland bird is definitely the Great Skua, or Bonxie as they're locally known. Unloved by many – they're certainly not the prettiest birds we have here (one of my guests once described them as having a face only a mother could love!) and they have some fairly unsavoury habits – but for all that, they've got masses of attitude and character. Whether they're mugging seabirds for their sand eels, dive-bombing sheep foolish enough to wander too close to their nests, or waiting patiently outside Puffin burrows to get an easy meal – they always seem like adaptable, charismatic and intelligent birds. Seeing them at Hermaness with their wings outstretched and barking that aggressive “ag-ag-ag!” call is always a thrill.

## And your favourite Shetland wild flower?

It's got to be the Frog Orchids at Keen of Hamar for me. As a self-confessed orchid fan, I love how different they are in pretty much every respect to the Frog Orchids I used to see down in the south of England. They're so much smaller, their flowers have a stunning deep burgundy cast, and they're growing in the “wrong” habitat. Awesome.

## Your favourite Shetland mammal?

That would be Risso's Dolphin. I remember seeing my first Risso's back in 1994, and since then I have had many memorable encounters with them in Shetland waters. They seem to exhibit a greater range of activities than most other British dolphin species – I have even seen them playing with pieces of Sea Lettuce, bringing

BETTER TO LIVE FOR  
THE MOMENT, AND LOOK  
FORWARD TO ALL THE GOOD  
THINGS THAT ARE GOING TO  
HAPPEN IN THE FUTURE.

it to the surface in their mouths, and flicking it through the air with their flukes. They're often really photogenic too, so they do it for me on several levels.

## What is your favourite part of Shetland?

Easy! That'd be Whalsay. It's a great place to live, and I can't imagine anywhere I'd rather be.

## What is the best wildlife encounter you've ever had in Shetland?

This is a hard one ... there are so many to choose from! The rollercoaster emotions of being the first to hear about an ultra-rare North American Veery found by my friends on Whalsay when I was leading an Autumn Gold tour would be hard to beat for sheer drama – we were looking for migrants in Walls out in the west of Mainland Shetland when I took the call. The next hour or so was a bit of a blur – getting the news out to the other Shetland Wildlife groups, the run back to our vehicle, the dash across Shetland to catch the next available ferry ... and then the heartbreak of the bird going missing for 30 minutes. Woe! And finally the joy of all of our guests seeing the bird well, and the kindness of the householders whose gardens it frequented in allowing us access to watch the bird. Then again, watching a party of four Killer Whales from the comfort of the Dunter III while they hunted seals along the shore of Bressay was an incredible experience – especially when they came to check us out on the boat, swimming straight towards us before diving beneath us, circling underwater and looking up at us, and then surfacing again to head across towards Gulberwick. It was hard to know who was more curious about whom!





## Shetland Wildlife

**5% OFF** all 2013 Shetland based holidays

To choose from over 30 dedicated wildlife-watching holiday departures go to [www.shetlandwildlife.co.uk](http://www.shetlandwildlife.co.uk)

Please quote voucher PS2013. Valid until 30/06/13.

- 1 Risso's Dolphin
- 2 Frog Orchid
- 3 Veery
- 4 Great Skua

*All Photography by Hugh Harrop, Shetland Wildlife*

### What is your favourite music and band?

My CD collection defies categorisation! There's everything from Hank Williams to PJ Harvey there, via Aphex Twin and our very own local Fiddlers' Bid. I am currently listening to Die Antwoord – a slightly scary mix of Afrikaans, Xhosa and English rap with a kind of techno flavour. The video for "I Fink U Freeky" is strange but rather beautiful.

### What is your favourite sport and team?

Tempting as it is to say "the English rugby union team" just to wind up Shetland Wildlife boss and Welsh rugby aficionado Hugh Harrop, the truth is that I'm a lifelong Arsenal football fan. The trophies might have been a little thin on the ground in recent years, but short of adding a new bird species to my house list there's nothing else more likely to get me punching the air with delight than seeing Arsenal beating Spurs. (Come to think of it, the last time they won a trophy was back in 2005 – the FA Cup final against Man Utd – and just as the game went to penalties my wife called me from the TV to see "a big brown bird outside". I tore myself away from the unfolding drama, rushed to the window and saw my first – and to date, only – Marsh Harrier in Shetland, and then returned to the game to see Arsenal take the laurels. Happy days!)

### What's your biggest regret?

I don't have any, not really. I think life's too short to look back and feel sorry because you didn't do something, or things didn't work out the way you hoped they

might. It's far better to live for the moment, and look forward to all the good things that are going to happen in the future. There are no second chances!

### Which Shetland Wildlife trip do you like to guide the most?

I love guiding all of the Shetland tours as I always get such a buzz out of seeing people enjoying the wildlife I am lucky enough to live among every day of the year. But perhaps selfishly, the one I enjoy guiding the most in Shetland is my annual pilgrimage to Fair Isle to lead the Fair Isle Autumn Migration Tour. It was Fair Isle that first drew me to visit Shetland 21 years

## LIFE'S TOO SHORT!

ago, and it's got a very special place in my heart to this day. The people there are wonderful, our hosts Tommy and Liz Hyndman are good friends and fabulous cooks, the island itself is stunning, and the birding can be absolutely remarkable – the island has a magnetism for migrating birds that is unrivalled. Only last autumn, on our way to the airstrip to leave the island and while watching the Bird Observatory team trapping and ringing an Arctic Warbler, I heard a familiar call and found a Citrine Wagtail dropping down from high overhead to land on a nearby dry-stone dyke. As they say, only on Fair Isle!


### What is your favourite bit of kit?

This would be my old pair of Leica 10x42 Trinovid binoculars. Not the lightest model, but they're optically superb, and built like a brick privy – in the 19 years

I've had them, mine have been dropped onto granite rocks, immersed in seawater, covered in mud, and run over by a car ... and have travelled the world with me from Cuba to Iceland, Hungary to Mexico, and many points in between. And they still work perfectly.

### Name one thing that travels with you everywhere.

That'd be my Leicas again. I get a little panicky when I don't have them with me!

 To keep up to date with wildlife news and sightings as they happen, follow Shetland Wildlife on Facebook [www.facebook.com/shetlandwildlife](http://www.facebook.com/shetlandwildlife)

For more information on dedicated wildlife holidays in Shetland, visit Shetland Wildlife [www.shetlandwildlife.co.uk](http://www.shetlandwildlife.co.uk)

The company has been running wildlife and birding holidays in Shetland for nearly 20 years and offers week-long fully guided trips to all corners of Shetland. As well as offering organised group holidays, Shetland Wildlife also offers a bespoke guide service for individuals and small private groups. Fully bonded with the CAA: ATOL 9151.





# Frightful Weather, Fair Isle Christmas

LIZ MUSSER REFLECTS ON "THE HOLIDAYS" AND THE RHYTHM OF ISLAND LIFE

**H**enry plays at the piano, practising the first several bars over and over again, the tune familiar, "Oh, the weather outside is frightful ..."

Winter storms were in Gale Force – wind ripping at slate roofs, sending shingles whirling through the air, gripping the sea so tightly that our ferry the Good Shepherd hadn't slipped into the raging waters for 14 days. Stockpiles of frozen milk have run out at our house and at Stackhoull Stores, our only shop. This morning, the wind and the sea have settled, so while the sun and most of the island still slept, our four-man crew set out to cross the notoriously challenging two-and-a-half hour stretch of water between Fair Isle and Sum-burgh. Fair Isle's ferry is our lifeline, once a week carrying mail and bringing in vital supplies like food, fuel and coal.

"The fire is so delightful ..." Henry continues playing, but we gotta get going. So, in utter darkness, at 3.45 in the afternoon, my husband Tommy, 11-year-old son Henry and I jump into our car and head north to meet the returning Good Shepherd. Along the way other cars join us, like a string of red and white Christmas lights.

Just beyond the North Haven harbour, the lights on the Good Shepherd's mast tilt hard left then hard right; it couldn't have been a very nice day at sea. On the pier, about 30 people, nearly half the island's population, waits as the boat rounds the breakwater; anticipation builds.

**FAIR ISLE'S FERRY IS OUR  
LIFELINE, ONCE A WEEK  
CARRYING MAIL AND  
BRINGING IN VITAL SUPPLIES  
LIKE FOOD, FUEL AND COAL.**

The hull of the boat opens, port to starboard, completely full of boxes, food and, "Oh my gosh, Christmas trees," Henry rejoices. Kenny, the Good Shepherd's engineer, hoists the platform of trees and several open top cargo boxes onto the pier.

"Auld Haa," Darren shouts and hands me a cardboard box concealing a Christmas present. Different voices reach in, pulling out house names, "Setter, Barkland, Stoney-

brek, Skerryholm, Busta, Schoolton ..." Like generations before us, our home is part of our name – Haa Liz, Busta Barry, Quoy Stewart. We form a chain – passing milk, cheese, canned goods, wine and spirits, bananas, lettuce, jars of mincemeat for pies – from one set of hands to another, filling two vans and a lorry.

Laughter and good cheer carry us down isle to Stackhoull Stores, where Sue finishes the joke she started on the pier. We unload the vans, collect our fresh fish and milk; then the morn's morn, we'll be back emptying the shop's shelves, to replenish our own, making sure we've stored enough food for holiday dinners and parties.

Threatening winds kick up. "It doesn't look good for planes at the end of the week," our teacher says; he's going to leave tomorrow morning to be sure of catching connecting flights back to his native Canada. The Children's Panto will go ahead as scheduled tonight, a week before Christmas. I give Henry an amateur haircut, sharp scissors gliding across his neck, "you better sing loudly in Love Me Do. I mean it Henry, the whole island looks forward to this night". He is the oldest of the six stu-





dents in Fair Isle's primary school, still he finds any kind of love song "embarrassing". I'm certainly not gonna show him his new haircut.

Top hat, pressed shirt and trousers, he takes his place in front of the audience, no sign of nerves. Wasn't he listening to my bit about island expectations? But what Henry sees is a Community Hall filled with familiar faces – Stewart who takes him fishing, Nick who helps him correctly identify insects, Anne, Ruth, Iain, Florrie, Jimmy, Mom, Dad ... He doesn't let us down. We cheer, laugh, clap, appreciate. This is his last Children's Panto. Next year, he's at the Anderson High School in Lerwick, boarding at the Janet Courtney Hostel on campus. No family claims the separation is easy, bairns flying home only every third weekend and holidays.

The eight-seat Islander plane approaches the gravel runway, leading with its right wing; a fluorescent orange wind-sock blows horizontally against a grey sky indicating a strong south-east wind. It's an ok direction for the returning high school students, bringing them home a few days earlier than expected, no doubt happy to be home, but still disappointed at missing their Beanfeast, the biggest event of the high school year. One student, however, decided to stay in Lerwick, hoping the weather forecasters' hint at a possible short break on Friday will allow flights.

By that Tuesday afternoon, the wind direction and speed have picked up. There are no more planes that day, or Wednesday, or Thursday, or Friday. The general fear

in Fair Isle is the high school student and some of the other family and friends will be stranded in the Shetland Mainland for Christmas. The weekend passes with neither a plane nor the boat able to travel; visiting friends and family from afar can't make the last and most important part of their journey. What's needed is a weather window to open on Christmas Eve before noon, because after that even if the weather is perfect, there won't be any planes.

## CHRISTMAS DAY, THE SKY IS AS CLEAR AS THE RINGING KIRK BELL'S CALL.

Up at Field, Dave Wheeler our weatherman and airstrip manager, is busy on his phone all morning. Over the two-way radio, the voice of the pilot can be heard, "nine souls on board". After he drops off the first eight, he heads back to pick up the remaining passengers. At choir practice on Christmas Eve, the soprano and alto sections have their missing voices. I look over at Henry singing soprano, and I feel the music he will remember when he's my age.

Christmas Day, the sky is as clear as the ringing Kirk bell's call. We don't all share the same faith or beliefs, not all worshippers or islanders; but on this morning we come together guided by a nearly 100-year-old tradition. At one time, Fair Isle was sharply divided between the Methodist families and Church of Scotland families,

east and west, us and them, but war and measles do not discriminate. Most of the "island sons" called up for service during WWI lost their lives. The last thing the few returning young men and island families wanted was conflict. Chapel and Kirk elders proposed worshipping together, meeting at the Chapel one Sunday and the Kirk the next, a practice that continues to this day. This year Christmas at the Kirk, Easter at the Chapel.

Weather defies tradition and time. This year the island Christmas Party has been moved from 27th December to after New Year's Eve. "That's the way of it." A saying I picked up from old Stewart, having two meanings – there is nothing to be done about it, and this is how it's done.

Five roving bands of guizers plot their route, visiting 14 houses all before midnight, an amazing feat even in a 3km by 5km island. Kenny and Sue, from Brecks, race our first performers into the Auld Haa, taking their seats next to us on the couch. Faces hidden behind photo masks of islanders, the guizers launch into a skit about the Olympics. Team Fair Isle – in rowing represented by our best fishermen, in fencing hard working crofters, etc. We guess the identity of the college and university students, share a chat over reested mutton soup and a dram. Then they're off. More drams, more guizers: they get funnier as the night moves toward midnight.

"That's Myres Jimmy, Annie, Anne. I canna mind who the man is." The photographer captured the movement of the Lancer's dance, the women spinning so fast they





levitate. Their smiles make me smile. Four decades of photos, displayed on our hall walls, document the island's Christmas Party. Forgotten photos. While we wait for folk to arrive and the panto to start, I eavesdrop on reflections, the misidentification of father for son. I recognise the children's games, the traditional dances and the family island musicians that will play, when we join hands at the end of the night and sing Auld Lang Syne.

I wave goodbye, the second plane carries the last holiday visitors away. As I head back to my car, I hear the news, Myres Jimmy died moments ago at his care home in Shetland, six weeks before his 102nd birthday. In a couple of days, the Good Shepherd will bring its former skipper home to be buried.

The men of the island carrying spades meet at the Kirkyard, the cemetery where the Kirk once stood. In front of a headstone carved a decade ago and another where wind, salt and water have erased the

names. They dig. Myres Jimmy will lie with his grandparents, parents, wife and two sons. The earth is heavy with rain and human remains. It's a difficult job, but every available man is present.

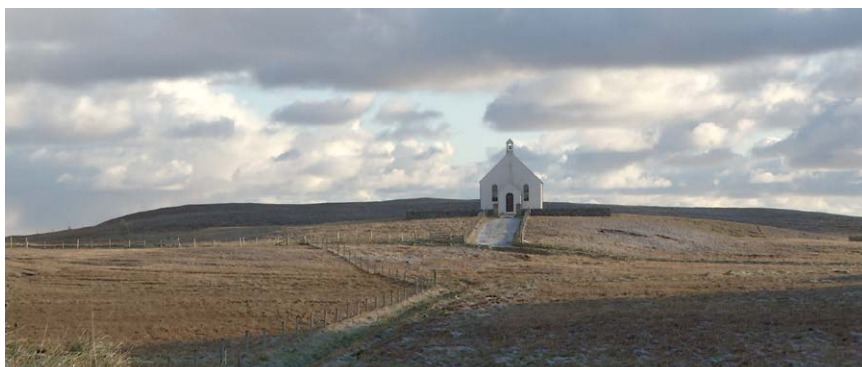
At the North Haven, Kenny lifts Jimmy's coffin from the Good Shepherd onto the pier. Three generations of two families, descendants of early Methodists and Church of Scotland, lift the coffin into the vehicle which will take Jimmy down to the Kirk. His body will stay there until after the service.

Men carry the wooden box on two long sticks, that to me resemble oars, four men in the front, two on each side of the coffin and four more at the back. It's a long walk. There's time to talk about him, his playful nature, his love of birds, his 99-year presence in the isle. Different men move in helping to shoulder the burden; one set of hands passing to another. The community follows in procession, croft land on one side, the sea on the other, until we reach

the gentle sloping hill of the cemetery. The men in the family lower Myres Jimmy's coffin into the hole.

The January cold numbs my toes. A person behind me, not living in the isle, whispers, "they should pay someone with a digger to do this". We all wait, a collective what's next? Almost without being noticed, Kenny hands a fist-full of dirt to Jimmy's oldest son, who throws it onto the coffin. Then he picks up a spade, Tommy and the others join in, moving earth back into place until the grass can be rolled over the black. This is the way of it. Daughters, grand-daughters and other women lay flowers down.

My thoughts drift. Over the Kirkyard wall, "the skerries are getting a good washing," as Myres Jimmy used to say. And I think to myself I wouldn't want to be on the sea today; I wouldn't want to be anywhere but here.







# Follow in the Footsteps of the Vikings The Thing Sites GeoTour

LAUREN DOUGHTON POINTS THE WAY TOWARDS A NEW HISTORY-RELATED TREASURE HUNT

Walkers in Shetland may already be familiar with GPS (Global Positioning Service) devices as a means of finding their way around some of the islands' spectacular scenery, but did you know that they can also help you explore some of the secrets of our Viking past? Using geocaching, a high-tech global treasure hunting game, a brand new GeoTour has been developed linking thing sites in Shetland with locations in Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Orkney, Highland Scotland and the Isle of Man. The trick is, you've got to find them first!

Despite being famous for their fearsome reputation and their skills in raiding and looting, the Vikings were also responsible for introducing one of the earliest forms of parliament or law court, the thing. Things, from the Old Norse þing, are early assembly sites, and are found throughout Northern Europe as a result of our shared Norse heritage. When the Vikings and early Norse settlers arrived in a new place they brought with them their customs and legal systems. Thing sites were places where people came together to deliver justice and to trade. They are often described as the Viking cradle of democracy, and their legacy can still be seen throughout Scandinavia

and beyond.

We know from early documentary evidence that Shetland's main thing once met in Tingwall, on the small promontory at the end of Tingwall Loch known as Tingaholm. Parish names such as Aithsting, Delt-ing, Lunnasting, Nesting and Sandsting suggest that there were also smaller local things held throughout the islands. For our Viking and Norse ancestors the thing sites

THERE ARE CURRENTLY  
OVER 100 CACHES HIDDEN  
IN VARIOUS PLACES AROUND  
SHETLAND.

would have been a central location within their landscape, but today the only indication we have that many of them existed is through place names. The Thing Sites GeoTour encourages people to head out into the landscape, and rediscover some of these fascinating locations.

So what is geocaching? Put simply it is a treasure hunting game played using GPS enabled devices. Players download co-ordinates online at [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com),

and then seek out hidden locations within the landscape. There are currently over 100 caches hidden in various places around Shetland. Once you've located the cache you can then log your find online, and share your experience with other cachers. Geocaches can come in a range of sizes, from large containers to small magnetic "nano" caches. They can also be found in a variety of locations, from urban settings and roadside "park and grab" locations to wild and isolated landscapes – some "extreme" caches even require specialist skills like scuba diving or rock climbing to find them!

Caches often contain "treasure" which players can swap for other materials on finding the cache. They can also contain "trackables" – specially produced items with a unique code which can also be logged on the website. These can be assigned an individual mission, such as to travel to all caches in a particular area, or travel a particular distance, and players can track their movements on the website.

The Thing Sites GeoTour currently contains 29 individual caches, seven of which can be found in Shetland. Geocaching is becoming increasingly popular as a tourist attraction, and a number of states



and organisations in the US have set up GeoTours in their areas. The Thing Sites GeoTour is the first of its kind to be set up “on the other side of the pond”, and is the only one to link caches in several countries together. It is already proving to be popular, with one cache located in Thingvellir National Park in Iceland already clocking up 61 finds.

Each of the caches has its own page on [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com), where players can learn about the background of the site, and delve deeper into the history of the thing sites and their shared cultural links. If you're really lucky, you might even come across one of the 100 limited edition Thing Sites GeoTour trackable tags which have been released into caches throughout the regions. These special items have individual missions, such as travelling around each of the caches on the Thing Sites GeoTour, or journeying to locations even the Vikings never dreamed of, and need your help to spend them on their way.

Trying to locate the Shetland caches will take you out to corners of the islands you may never have explored before. Many of our thing sites were located on or near older settlements, or near parish churches, and your search will take you past a number of ancient and historical sites. On your journey take time to enjoy the spectacular views, and think about how our ancestors lived and travelled around. Once you reach the caches it is easy to see why many of these locations were chosen as meeting places. Many of them are located near to sheltered harbours, with excellent access to the busy sea routes up and down the coast, and clear views across the neighbouring region.

We took the Renwick family from Cuckron out to test drive the tour and see what they thought. “We have just started

geocaching and are all really enjoying it, even our two-year-old loves looking for ‘treasure’,” said mum Esther.

*“I thought I knew Shetland pretty well and am familiar with its archaeology but this has taken us off the beaten track and makes a great little adventure for the kids. They've really enjoyed their time pretending to be Vikings, and it's made them think about how people in the past used the landscape in a new way.”*

The Thing Sites GeoTour has been developed as part of the THING Project, a three-year EU Northern Periphery Programme funded project exploring the links between thing sites in Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Shetland, Orkney, Highland Scotland and the Isle of Man, as a method for generating awareness, and promoting the sites as a focus for sustainable tourism. As well as the GeoTour the project has produced a website, [www.thingsites.com](http://www.thingsites.com), leaflet and book, where you can find out about the history of the sites involved in the project, and explore their links with other thing sites in the Viking world. The website has a range of resources on the topic, including educational materials and activities, and a news feed of all the events taking place at sites across the regions.

Over the coming year players can look forward to new geocaches being added to the tour, including one at a brand new thing site in Nesting, being developed by staff and pupils at Nesting Primary School as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund “All Our Stories” project “The Thing at Nesting in Nesting Primary School”. Pupils have already been taking part in the Thing Sites GeoTour, and have logged “First to Finds” at several of the caches in Shetland and Orkney. Inspired by the THING Project, the school is working to create a story garden celebrating the history of the sons and



daughters of Nesting, with its very own thing site and Thing Sites GeoTour geocache at its centre. You can also keep your eye out for a Viking themed geocaching event, being held this summer – but you'll need a GPS to find us!

The Thing Sites GeoTour offers the chance to explore some of the hidden locations of Shetland, and to follow in the footsteps of our Viking ancestors. With so many caches available in a range of locations, there's something for everyone, and geocaching makes an excellent day out for the family. If you're feeling adventurous you could even make it your goal to visit all of our locations, and recreate your own Viking journey – but just watch out for those muggles (that's non geocaching folk to you and me)!

To start your Thing Sites Geocaching adventure visit: [www.geocaching.com/adventures/thingsites](http://www.geocaching.com/adventures/thingsites)



Found It!



Nesting Primary School



Hidden “Treasure”





## Shetland books in 2012

# Twelve of the Best

JORDAN OGILBY LOOKS BACK ON THE YEAR PAST'S MOST NOTABLE BOOKS

### Colours of Shetland, Kate Davies

This is an essential book for anyone interested in Shetland's iconic craft. Davies is one of the most influential hand-knit designers in the world. Not only that, she is a fine writer and talented photographer. These qualities are brought together in *Colours of Shetland*, which explores the contemporary possibilities of knitting in the distinct shades and hues of the isles, and delves into the rich heritage that makes Shetland one of the top destinations for knitters across the world.

### Death on a Longship, Marsali Taylor

The latest home-grown offering in the burgeoning Shetland Noir genre follows the story of troubled heroine Cass Lynch. She's been long estranged from the isles after running away as a child, but returns to skipper a Viking longship, which is being filmed for a Hollywood movie. It doesn't take long before a body turns up on-board and Lynch's troubled past is wrenched from the deep by the canny Detective Inspector Macrae.

### Shetland Rambles, Mairi Hedderwick

Throughout her career, artist and writer Mairi Hedderwick has demonstrated a keen understanding of place and space in Scotland's islands. The same concern is evident in *Shetland Rambles*, both in the author's characteristic watercolours and through the recalled conversations she shared with local people on her travels. The result is a tranquil presentation of Shetland old and new, in a fine volume that covers the length and breadth of the isles.

### A Legacy of Shetland Lace, Shetland Guild of Spinners, Knitters, Weavers and Dyers.

Shetland lace knitting is known worldwide for its beauty and delicacy; so intricate is the work involved in crafting a Shetland lace shawl that a successfully made garment can be pulled through something as tiny as a ring. This gorgeous book, with stunning photographs, brings together 21 knitting projects and covers a range of garments, from scarves and stoles to wraps and tops. Each pattern is supported by a biography of its designer, charting their individual story with lace and knitting.

### Shetland Vernacular Buildings, Ian Tait

If you've ever wondered why Shetland's hills are home to so many mounds of old rocks and rubble, then this book is for you. It is the life-work of Dr Ian Tait, curator of the Shetland Museum and Archives; it is also the only book devoted to the unlikely topic of Shetland architecture. Yet, there is plenty to discuss, as Dr Tait does in great detail as he uncovers the distinctive qualities of Shetland's buildings. Dr Tait writes accessibly and deftly entwines Shetland's social and cultural history throughout his narrative.

### Small Boats of Shetland, Alison Munro

Shetland is known across the world for its seafaring heritage and this little book celebrates a small part of that story. Richly illustrated with old and new photographs, it uncovers the history of Shetland's small boats, from the Norwegian origins of the sixareen, the traditional fishing boat used by Shetland's herring fisherman, to the distinctive range of modern styles known under the collective "Shetland model" name. All profits from sales of the book support the Unst Boat Haven.

### Alice's Adventurs in Wonderlaand, Lewis Carroll, Laureen Johnson, et al.

The Mad Hatter, The White Rabbit, The Cheshire Cat, and of course Alice herself are brought back to life in this playful Shetland dialect version of Lewis Carroll's children's classic. Translated ("owerset") from the original 1865 text by dialect expert Laureen Johnson, the language may at first be confusing to those unfamiliar with the local tongue. However, after the first few pages, the style is easy to get to grips with. Best read aloud.

### Vikings, Neil Oliver

Not strictly a Shetland book, this work of popular history by the raven-haired Scots archaeologist and BBC presenter, is nevertheless close to the heart of Shetland's real and imagined cultural heritage. It traces the thousand-year-old story of the Vikings, back from their Scandinavian beginnings, through to the epic voyages that saw the creation of a powerful empire which stretched from America to the Middle East. Plunder, rape and pillage feature throughout, though so do accounts of Viking society and their skills as craft-people and farmers.

### Design for Life, Peter Jamieson

This ebook autobiography is a rare account of life on the very edges of Shetland society. Jamieson is a former drug addict and dealer who found salvation during a spell in rehab. The resulting book is big on God and offers an illuminating view on one man's experience of Shetland's drink and drug culture.

### Shetland Fireside Tales, George Stewart

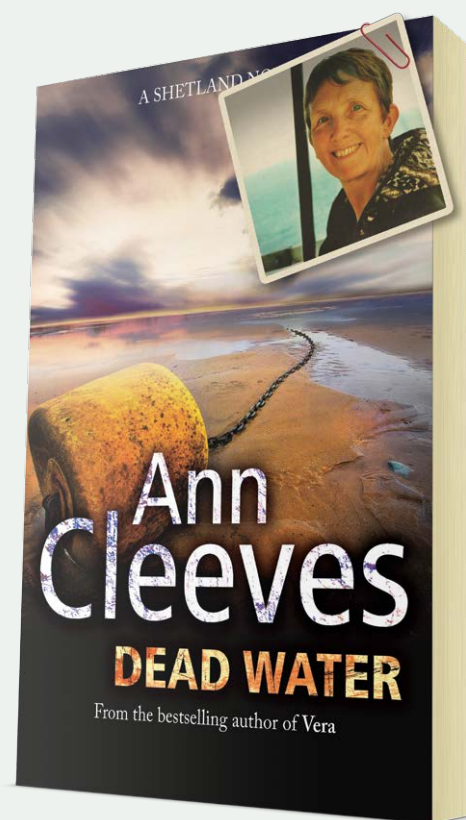
First published in 1892, this reprint is best read not for its literary merits but rather as a cultural artefact of a lost tradition that saw people gather "in aboot da night" by the fire, long before the invention of radio and television. Historians will take issue with Stewart's rendering of these tales; why, for example, are their sources not identified? Yet whether "true" or not, these stories of love, treachery and supernatural encounters provide plenty of entertainment.

### The Dark of Summer, Erik Linklater

First published 1956 and out of print for several years until appearing under Bloomsbury's "Readers" series, this is an intense thriller set around Shetland, mainland UK, Faroe and Iceland. The story begins at the onset of the Second World War and follows the journey of an army officer who is sent to Faroe to investigate allegations of Nazi collaboration with the Norwegians. Frozen corpses, terrific sea storms and wrought emotions feature heavily in this superbly crafted novel.

### Dead Water, Ann Cleeves

It only arrived in January 2013 but as the fifth instalment in Ann Cleeves' Shetland series Dead Water is too significant to leave off the list. Soon to be shown as a BBC1 drama, Cleeves' Shetland-based mysteries follow the investigations of detective Jimmy Perez. Dead Water finds him dragged out of mourning for his recently deceased fiancée, to help solve the murder of Jerry Markham, a Shetland-born journalist. The ensuing tale unearths a deadly web of corruption and subterfuge, making this the must-read Shetland book of 2013.





# Abby's SHETLAND WISH LIST

Abby's Shetland Wish List aims to bring you a selection of inspirational contemporary and traditional hand crafted finds, items you won't find on the high street, something a little bit different, interspersed with a story or two and a behind the scenes glimpse of Shetland's thriving creative community. After all, when you go shopping in Shetland – it's not just a unique keepsake you purchase, but an unforgettable memory too. Priceless.

Let's go shopping!

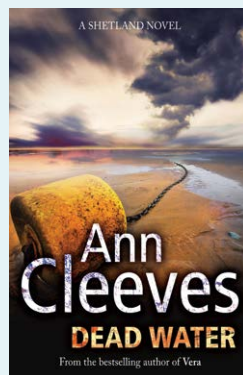
## A stylish off-duty carryall from 60North Bag Company

Will I ever have enough handbags? The answer is a resounding NO! I'm now coveting the perfect off duty carryall from 60North Bag Company. The designs are rooted in the traditional and iconic bags used around boat yards, harbours and aboard ship for hauling, lugging, loading and storing supplies. There is a select range of Limited Edition bags and Co-Design options (design your own unique bag!) Each bag is individually handcrafted from tough sailcloth or brightly coloured canvas and is available to purchase online (price range: £28.00- £36.00). Every bag is built to last a lifetime, is spacious enough for all your essentials and will instantly up the sartorial kudos of any look. Now what colour/style to choose?! [www.60n.co.uk](http://www.60n.co.uk)



## Dead Water – the latest Shetland spine-tingler from Ann Cleeves

What were you thinking Misa?! My PS colleague gave me a copy of Dead Water; the fifth book in the Shetland series featuring Detective Jimmy Perez, just before a deadline! Was it difficult to put down? Absolutely! I've been trying to work out who killed journalist Jerry Markham? Why was he back in Shetland? What is incomer, Rhona Laing hiding? So many questions, so many twists and turns, scandals galore and long held secrets yet to uncover. Get out your 'Do Not Disturb' sign, curl up in front of the fire – Dead Water is another must-read from award-winning crime writer Ann Cleeves



## Rising star: Shetland knitwear designer: Helen Whitham

I recently visited Shetland Museum to view the latest exhibition: New Shetland Graduates (on until 17th February). Helen Whitham's range of handcrafted contemporary knitwear, championing Shetland's tradition, culture and craftsmanship, made me stop in my wedge heeled tracks. I predict, after looking deeply into my fashion crystal ball, that Helen's knitwear will soon be a must have for every style maven's wardrobe. Get your order in now, before she gains a loyal following and a long waiting list! [helenwhitham.com](http://helenwhitham.com)



---

## Keep cosy with a Jamieson & Smith real Shetland wool rug

---

A Jamieson & Smith rug made from 100% real Shetland undyed wool was one of the first items I purchased when I relocated to Shetland from New Zealand. It came in very handy when my oil ran out and the oil depot's rescue mission had yet to reach me! However, my luxurious rug has been 'stolen' by Mo, the cat, she has decided it's now her rug and not mine! It's therefore time to buy another limited edition rug just for me! There are 4 stunning designs to choose from and all are based on original weavings by renowned Shetland company "T.M. Adies of Voe" - a company famed for the production, in the early 20th Century, of Everest jumpers worn by Sir Edmund Hillary and George Mallory. Each rug is named after an Adie's weaving shed and is priced at £82.00. Let's hope Mo doesn't decide to steal this purrfect rug too! [Shetlandwoolbrokers.com](http://Shetlandwoolbrokers.com)

---

## Fair Isle Knitting Card Set

---

I love to write letters and send postcards - snail mail is still my favoured means of communication to keep in touch with family and friends and I know the recipient will appreciate receiving a handwritten missive, rather than a quick email. Sometimes my cards serve a purpose - my mum-in-law uses my correspondence to cover up a drafty window! The Fair Isle Knitting Card Set (£6.50), printed in Shetland and comprising of 6 notelet cards and envelopes, depicts Fair Isle knitted garments from the collection of the Shetland Museum and Archives. Put the heart back into writing to loved ones - send a card and make someone's day. [Shetlandheritageshop.com](http://Shetlandheritageshop.com)

---

## My New Year resolution - get Seaweed Sprinkling

---

I don't know about you but I overindulged during the festive season: 'just one more slice of cake?' 'Oh go on then'. 'Another Quality Street?' 'Ummm yes please'. I didn't want to be rude! Anyway, it's a New Year and yup, I have to be honest - my bum does look big in this! It's time to get healthy. A friend swears by seaweed to keep her glowing and energized and fortunately Böd Ayre, located in Vidlin, produces organically certified edible seaweed. Cited as a superfood by health gurus, I too have joined the sprinkle movement and started to scatter seaweed on my food. Delicious! Choose from Seaweed Sprinkle in a 100g jar (£11.47), 100g bag (£10.97) or a 200g tub (£19.97). [Seaweedproducts.co.uk](http://Seaweedproducts.co.uk)

---

## Art from the heart at Shetland Gallery, Yell

---

Often people whizz through Yell to catch the ferry to Unst. A BIG mistake! Yell is a fascinating island with plenty to see and do, including a stop-off at The Shetland Gallery, curated by the charming Shona Skinner. 'The concept of the gallery is to showcase the best of contemporary Shetland art and high-end crafts to the world...' Shona brings together the best emerging and established artists from across the islands and their work and profiles can be viewed online, including my personal favourites: Ruth Brownlee - her dramatic and atmospheric landscapes are mesmerising, Mike McDonnell - his witty imaginative sculptures are on my arty wish list, and Sophie Whitehead's jewellery - what's not to love about her contemporary silver accessories (I heart the Butterfly Pendant, simple yet striking £125.00). Visit the gallery and discover Shetland's creative soul. [Shetland-gallery.com](http://Shetland-gallery.com)

---

## Stunning photographs of Northern Lights by Ivan Hawick

---

A friend got in touch with me the other day - 'have you seen the Northern Lights (known locally as the Mirrie Dancers) recently?' I replied I hadn't. However, when I am fortunate enough to catch the colourful sheets of lights transforming the night skies into natural lava lamps, it's always an incredible experience. Ivan Hawick must be one of the Shetland photographers to capture the Northern Lights in all their splendour. His breathtaking images are available to purchase online (£12.00). View Ivan's gallery and enjoy a spectacular light show. Pure magic. [Ivanhawick.com](http://Ivanhawick.com)

---

## Happy Browsing!

P.S. Don't forget to enter the monthly competition, featured in the Promote Shetland newsletter - a chance to win a treasured keepsake from Shetland. Good luck!





**SHETLAND IS  
ALIVE WITH THE SOUND  
OF MUSIC. THE RHYTHM  
OF THE WAVES ECHOES  
ALONG OUR DESERTED  
BEACHES & THE CLIFFS  
RING OUT WITH A CHORUS  
OF SEABIRD COLONIES.  
ANCIENT HISTORICAL SITES  
REVERBERATE WITH THE  
FOOTSTEPS OF THE  
PAST. THEN THERE'S  
OUR LEGENDARY  
FIDDLE SESSIONS, WHICH  
OFTEN GO ON TILL THE  
EARLY HOURS.**



**SOUNDS GREAT.**

Visit Shetland at any time of year and you'll be enchanted by the rugged beauty of the landscape. The place where Scotland meets Scandinavia and the North Sea meets the Atlantic Ocean. Whether arriving for the first time or returning you can be sure of a great welcome. To find out more or to request a FREE copy of our Shetland Pocket Guide visit [www.SHETLAND.org](http://www.SHETLAND.org)



Like Shetland on [www.facebook.com/promoteshetland](https://www.facebook.com/promoteshetland)



Follow us on Twitter @promoteshetland

**SHETLAND**  
PRIDE OF PLACE

