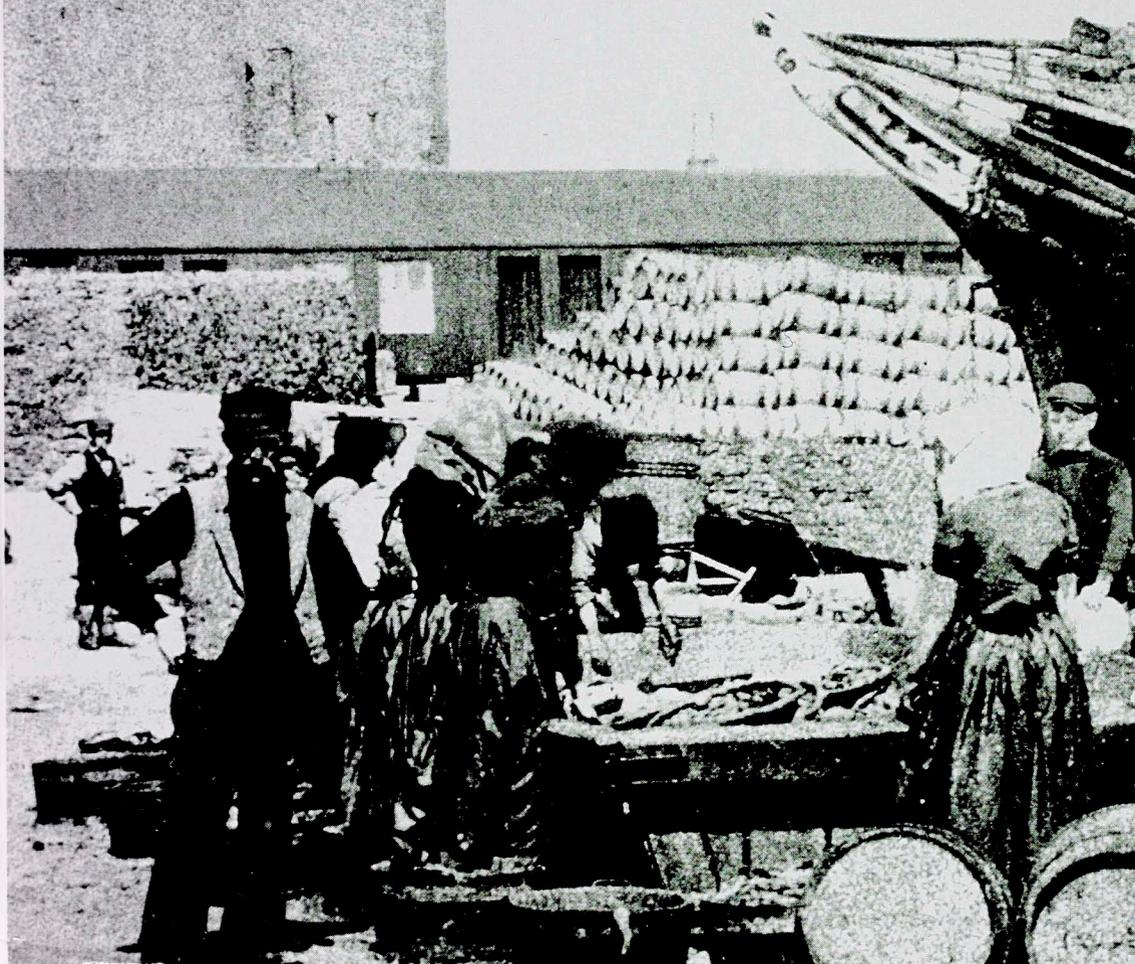


# VERNACULAR BUILDING 23

## Shetland Special Issue

Scottish Vernacular Buildings  
Working Group

1999



**VERNACULAR BUILDING 23**  
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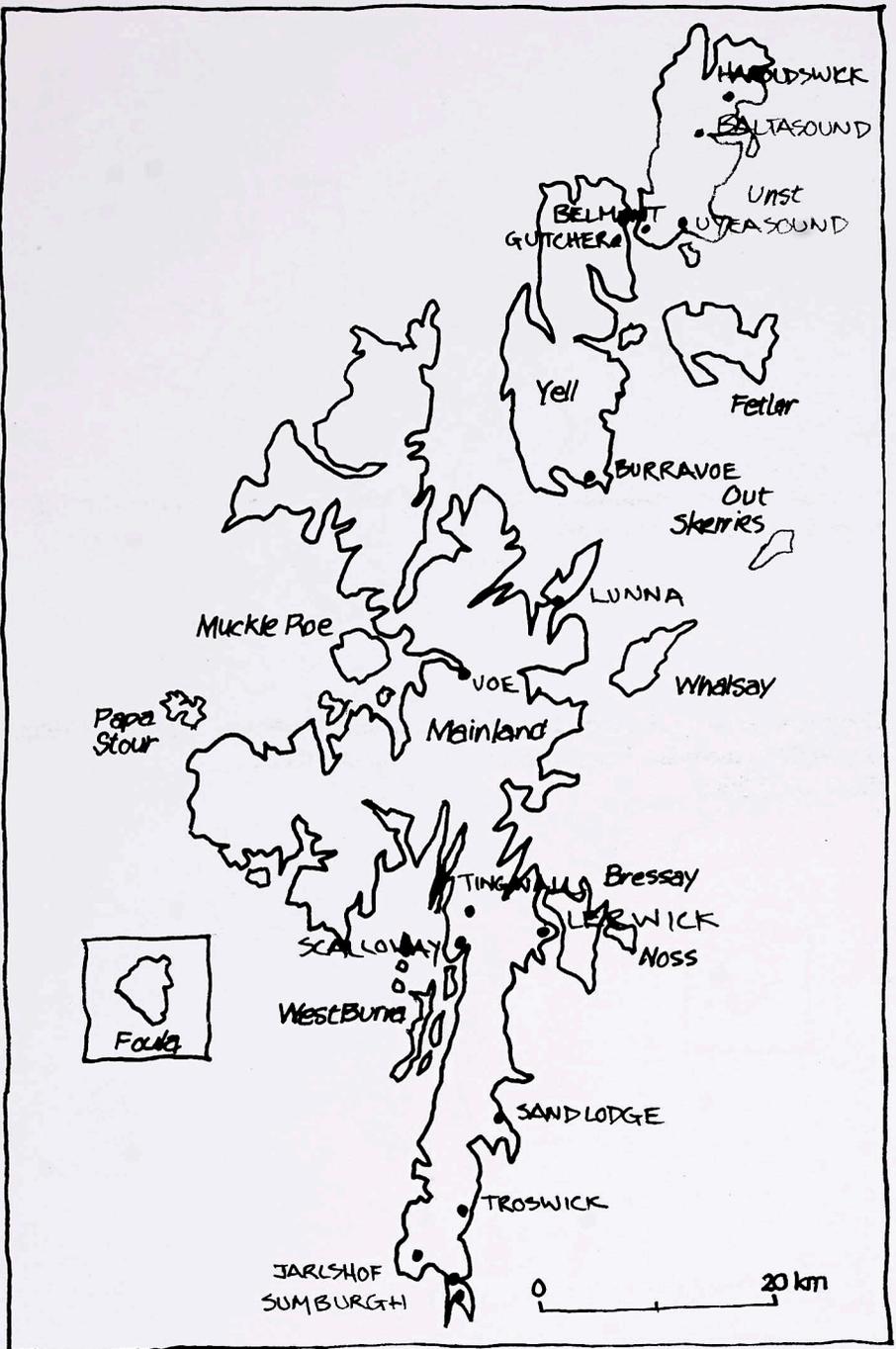
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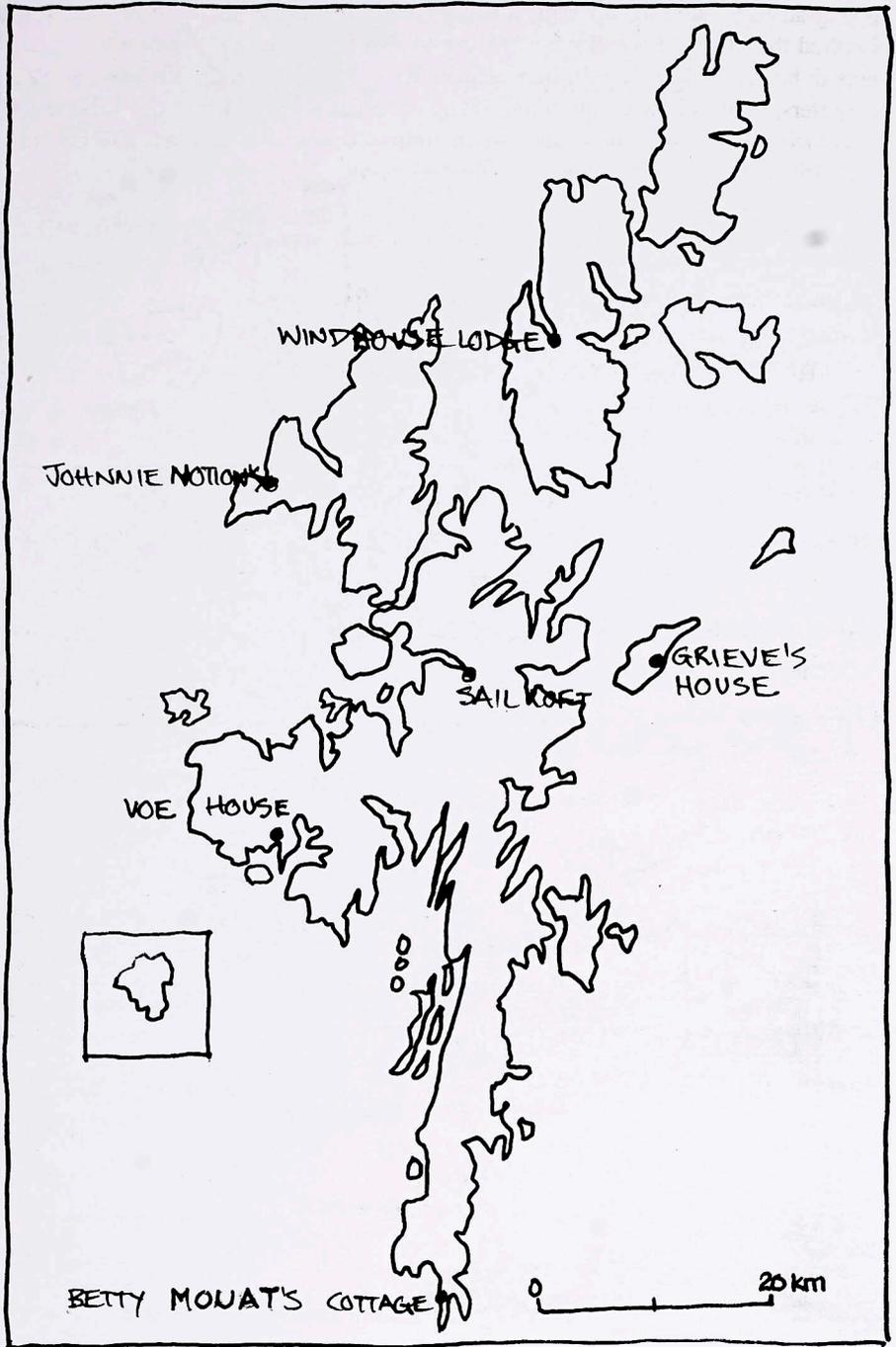
**1999**

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*Opposite: The Shetland Islands*





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*Opposite: The location of Shetland's Camping Böds (see p. 54)*

## PREFACE

The papers in this Shetland issue of *Vernacular Building*, the annual journal of the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group, stem from the memorable annual conference located in Lerwick and Unst in May 1997, celebrating the Group's twenty-fifth anniversary. Besides site visits, our President, Professor Alexander Fenton, gave a lecture entitled 'Shetland life in the 1960s, time of transition and change' and there was a day seminar devoted to 'Building traditions and traditional buildings in Shetland', to which Mike Finnie, Brian Smith, Ian Tait, Bruce Walker and Simon Green contributed. These well-attended public meetings were jointly sponsored by the University of Aberdeen Centre for Continuing Education and the Shetland Amenity Trust. This issue of *Vernacular Building* results from some of these events, from lectures given and sites visited; particularly associated with the latter are Ronnie Robertson, Nick Brown and Chris McGregor, who squeezed photography and note-taking into a tight expedition schedule yet always arrived at the next site on time! We thank them all.

Publication offers a renewed opportunity to express gratitude to others who contributed to the rich and varied programme, particularly Dennis Coutts, Mike Finnie, Alastair Hamilton, Anna Purdy, Ian Tait and Tommy Watt.

An article by Mike Finnie devoted to Shetland Haa Houses and another jointly with Alastair Hamilton on Belmont House, Unst, were published in *Vernacular Building* 20 (1996). Contributions to future issues of VB from Shetland, as from elsewhere in Scotland, are always welcome. With ongoing changes in construction methods and materials, population movements and much else, these papers are also a timely record of fast-disappearing buildings, not only the structures themselves but also the lifestyle of those who lived and worked in them.

We are grateful to Beth Ingpen, VB Editor, for her work in the preparation of this number and to Ronnie Robertson for preparing maps. Papers to appear in the next general issue of *Vernacular Building* (VB24, for the year 2000) should be sent to the Editor, preferably in early spring 2000: Beth Ingpen, Editor, Vernacular Building, 10 The Square, Fochabers, Moray IV32 7DF. We also welcome publications for review; these should be forwarded to: Veronica Steele, Reviews Editor, SVBWG, c/o RCAHMS, 16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 9NX

*Elizabeth Beaton, Chairman SVBWG*

# FOREWORD

## Professor Alexander Fenton

I first got to know Shetland in the early 1950s, in the days before the advent of oil, when a multitude of the old traditional ways still survived or were known in memory. During many subsequent visits, I was able to record a great deal, not least about buildings. Since the present volume, in the space available, can only deal with certain relatively modern aspects of the story of Shetland's buildings, it is appropriate to reflect a little on the course of their development over a longer time span.

There is an increasing amount of evidence from the prehistoric period. Between 4500 and 5000 years ago, in the Neolithic, there were houses at the Scord of Brouster that were oval in shape, with a relatively well-built inner wall face and a more casual exterior, perhaps of turf. One of the houses was 23 ft long by 18 ft wide (7 x 5.4 m) internally. In the centre was a spread of hearths, suggesting that the position of the fireplace had not yet become fixed, and that there was a disregard for smoke. Radiocarbon datings indicate that one of the houses was occupied for about 500 years, or over 20 generations, without any particular structural modifications. After that, for the period 2500–2000 BC, however, there was some structural remodelling, but only to the interior.<sup>1</sup>

An example from the Ness of Gruting, from about 2000 BC, was also oval in shape, with thick walls similar to those at the Scord of Brouster. A hoard of carbonised barley was found at the base of a wall, and the contents of the floors included stone plough-shares. The inside measured 33 ft to 36 ft (10–11 m) long by 13 ft (4 m) wide, and it was dug 3 ft (1 m) into the ground. The side walls included benches or bed-spaces (which could readily double up), and there was a broad shelf at one end.<sup>2</sup>

It is known that timber structures were also being erected, for during 2000–1500 BC a small settlement at Sumburgh, near Jarlshof, was first set up in this way, though subsequent buildings were of stone (not surprisingly in a treeless environment) and, of course, turf.<sup>3</sup>

The period of the Vikings brought the transition from the old days to what were to become the new. About the mid-9th century the first Norse farmstead was erected at Jarlshof, stone-built and sub-rectangular, with a gable-end door and two opposing openings in the long walls towards the other end. It was quite big as compared with the earlier buildings mentioned: 70 ft by 20 ft (21 x 6 m), with an internal width of 18 ft (5.4 m). The walls had both inner and outer faces, with an earthen core; the inner wall was of coursed stonework, and the outer skin of one of the walls consisted of alternating courses of stone and turf, though this technique was not common otherwise. There were in essence two rooms, a large

living area with a central hearth, and a kitchen area with a central fireplace and an oven partially built into the wall. There were separate, smaller, buildings for a possible bath-house, smiddy and byre. Life was becoming more sophisticated.<sup>4</sup>

For the late Norse period, evidence is available from a number of sites, such as Jarlshof, Underhoull in Unst, Sandwick in Unst and Biggings in Papa Stour. Without going into too much detail, it is clear that from or by about AD 1100 many changes in buildings were taking place. The most notable of these, foreshadowing later days, was the appearance of farm houses with the byre included as an integral part of them. This, however, did not mean that freestanding byres disappeared. The variety of separate outbuildings remained, but it may be that cows, the providers of a great part of the food supply of milk and derived products, with their young calves, were privileged to share the home, whilst the bigger beasts were housed elsewhere. An alternative, though possibly less likely interpretation, is that the internal byres went with smaller farms holding fewer stock.<sup>5</sup>

The inclusion of a byre gave the character of a 'longhouse', or 'byre-dwelling' (as Irish colleagues prefer to call it, for the building need not be very long), and another architectural addition that seems to characterise this period is the outshot. An example is the Norse house at Sandwick, which has four zones within its main body: a byre, a food preparation area, a cross passage linking a front, rear and internal doorways, and a living room, and an outshot divided into two rooms that are of unknown use, but in all probability served as a store for dry fodder such as hay or straw and also as a grain processing area.<sup>6</sup>

There was also some change in the arrangement of the living quarters. The elongated hearths that had been characteristic of Norse houses began to be replaced in the Late Norse period by central fireplaces that were round or square in shape, such as survived in, for example, Foula, into the 20th century. This was the 'roond fire', and though the archaeological evidence does not tell us what kind of smoke extraction arrangements existed, we can reasonably guess that the smoke hole, the 'liora', was not unknown.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, large benches or daises were constructed at the gable ends of living rooms. These were additional to the side benches that doubled up as seats and beds alongside the hearth. Gable daises have been found at Jarlshof, Sandwick and possibly at Underhoull, and it is of interest to note that concentrations of artifacts—linesinkers, loomweights and whetstones—have been found in these areas.<sup>8</sup> Incidentally, it may be suggested that the more recent equivalent of such daises or benches is the wooden settle or 'restin chair', which could also serve as a temporary bed.

Though the bulk of the buildings were of stone and turf, timber was undoubtedly used. A wooden floor was found at the Biggings in Papa Stour, which has been radiocarbon dated to AD 1013–1156.<sup>9</sup> The timber was in all likelihood imported from Norway, as it certainly was in the 16th to 18th centuries,

when deal planks and split oak were frequently mentioned, and probably shaped logs for groundsills and uprights were brought in also. Of course, only the better off could afford such luxury, and it seems that they did indeed construct timber-framed houses, even if the timbering constituted an inner framework around which there stood stone walls, as also in the Faroe Islands.<sup>10</sup> In 1581, the minister of St Ola had his manse repaired with materials that included eight dozen fir boards, four dozen 'Rinns (Rhenish) spar', and 18 fir joists, which was said to be timber enough to build and repair a manse for any minister in the country. But at lower social levels, roofing timbers, doors and window frames were also needed. In 1580–81, two people were in trouble for casting down two houses and taking away the stones and timber; and timber was required too for barns and byres, as made clear in a notarial instrument for 1590.<sup>11</sup> And according to a Shetland minister in the first half of the 17th century, some houses were roofed with deal boards, and only a very few with slates.<sup>12</sup> Wherever the timber came from, it formed an important structural element in Shetland buildings.

From the late 18th century, economic circumstances led to the creation of numerous outsets that gave families a foothold on the land whilst at the same time providing a source of manpower to satisfy fishing interests. In these, byre and dwelling house were often combined, end on or in parallel, with the entrance through the byre, and there was probably an expansion in the numbers of 'long-houses' at this period, though they were on their way out by the first half of the 19th century.

By this time, the influence of the Scottish mainland was making itself felt in the form of the but and ben, with a living room and bedroom, and a closet between. Wooden canopy chimneys, 'hingin lums', also appeared under Scottish influence, and house walls were of single thickness, not double with a layer of earth between the two skins, as in much earlier times. Where once the roof ridge of house, byre and barn had been of similar height, now house roofs were being raised to form an attic bedroom. The 19th century saw a major facelift, though archaic features have remained to be studied by ethnologists and architectural historians in recent times.<sup>13</sup>

In this volume, Brian Smith provides a three-period socio-economic background against which building changes can be assessed. It is likely that there has been a levelling in the variety of building techniques with the coming of modern times, but new factors have also come into play that have brought a different kind of diversity. The temporary accommodation herring gutters' bothies for women discussed by Bruce Walker and Chris McGregor show the impact of herring fishing, just as the earlier fishing lodges for men marked the days of the haaf fishing. Such lodges also clearly influenced the construction of the peat-houses at Lambhoga in Fetlar, and it is in such temporary forms of housing that older traditions sometimes remain. And Alastair Hamilton's discussion of Shetland camping böds for incoming visitors marks a new kind of invasion.

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# 18th AND 19th-CENTURY SHETLAND:

## The historical background

### Brian Smith

In this paper I discuss the history of Shetland during the 18th and 19th centuries. I consider both the economy and the society of Shetland, defined in the broadest way to include poetry as well as Presbyterians, population figures as well as poor relief. The paper is divided into three sections:

- (1) the period 1700 to 1790: in these decades Shetland's development changed gear and broke completely with what had been happening in the 17th century;
- (2) the 90 years from 1790 to 1870, when the Shetland economy and society seemed to be changing, but, against all expectations, eventually continued in the direction in which it had been going in 1770;
- (3) the three decades at the end of the 19th century, when Shetland did finally change and the islands began to become the kind of society they are today.

The story I will tell has a beginning and an end. In 1700, Shetland society was in crisis. In 1900 (or so it seemed then) Shetland had come through fire and was heading for perpetual prosperity. But this is not a tale of a gradual and inexorable movement from serfdom to liberal democracy. Shetland society went through a series of crises and ruptures during the centuries discussed, and it was not until

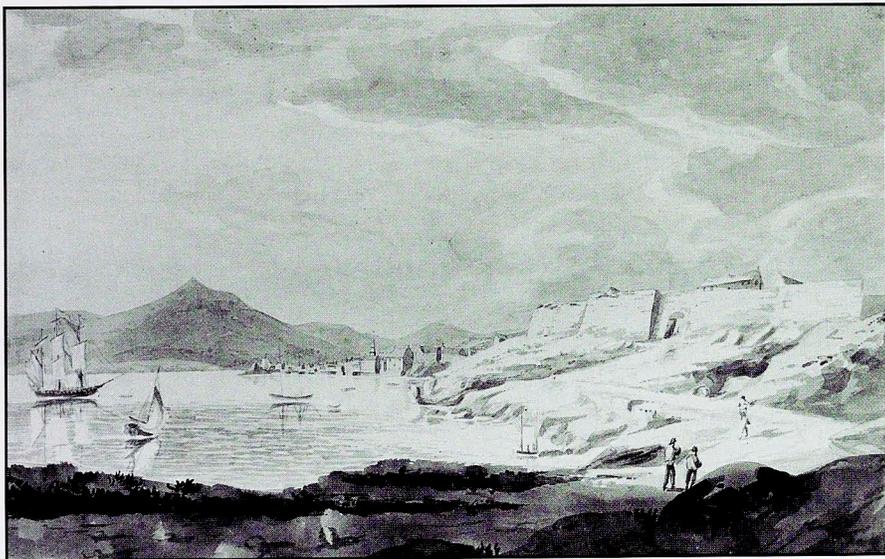


Figure 1 A general view of Lerwick c. 1801, taken from the Skene Sketchbook (Crown copyright: RCAHMS).

the very end of the period that emancipation from the islands' manifold problems looked feasible.

In 1700 Shetland was a poor country, with a very small amount of arable land, and two small villages, Lerwick and Scalloway. The islands had a population of about 12,000. Everything in Shetland, not least its buildings, was small. The economy of the islands was in real trouble. For nearly 300 years, German merchants had been coming to buy the Shetlanders' fish, paying them with money, so that the Shetlanders could pay rent to their rather feckless landlords. However, in the late 17th century the Germans were coming under pressure: French privateers had harried them and stolen their gear, and rival merchants from Scotland had wooed some of their Shetland clients. By 1700 most of the German merchants had given up Shetland for a bad job, and it seemed that there was no one left who could play the major part the Germans had played for so long in the commercial life of the islands.

Another important reason for the departure of the Germans, as well as a result of it, was the general economic situation in Shetland. The famines of the 1690s were the last straw. Tenants were weakened in health, and as a result they ceased to be energetic fishermen. Many Shetland landlords became bankrupt overnight; the Bruces of Muness, for instance, had to mortgage their large estates to a merchant in Lerwick; the Mouats of Heogaland lost nearly every acre they owned; the Cheynes of Vailla had to sell everything they had. Another member of the Cheyne family was so impoverished that he had to apply to his kirk session for a loan out of the collection plate.

Finally, there was disease. Famine usually coincides with serious illness and there was almost certainly an increased death rate at the end of the 17th century. To make things as bad as they could possibly be, smallpox suddenly arrived on the islands in 1700. Shetlanders of that period had no immunity to this awful disease, and young and old, poor and rich, fell like flies. There was no cure, and at that date no hope of one. In Lerwick and Tingwall there was devastation. In later years the survivors calculated their ages from before or after the year of the Mortal Pox, as they called it.

A bleak picture. But Shetland was resilient, like most societies. Her big advantage was fish. Since the 12th century Shetland had been involved in commercial fisheries of one kind or another. There were people, even in those depressed days, who saw the continuing promise of Shetland's fisheries. During the first two decades of the 18th century a few small landowners and officials combined to become exporters of fish to the continent. I call these men 'merchant lairds': people like Thomas Gifford of Busta in Delting, and Arthur Nicolson of Bullister in Nesting. One of their main concerns, as the depression gradually faded, was to make sure they had plenty of fish. The best way to do that was to create a captive group of fishers, by making their tenants fish for them

and gradually building up bigger estates with fishing tenants. Indeed, they implied that it was a condition of tenure to fish for them, and expected the tenants to be grateful. After all, they argued, they were providing a service, as fish exporters, to the whole community. When the tenants complained, or, worse still, sold their fish to other merchants, the merchant lairds were furious. During the next 150 years or so it was the rule in Shetland (rarely enforced, and not often written down, but still effective) that the tenants fished for their landlords, or for merchants chosen by their landlords. There were always Shetlanders who jibbed, or broke the rules, but in many parts of Shetland, as we shall see, especially the peripheral parts of the islands, it was not until the 1870s that the system finally broke down.

Those merchant lairds of the first part of the 18th century were successful, despite disastrous smallpox epidemics in 1740 and 1760. By the 1750s there were about 15,000 Shetlanders, and the reason for this big population increase was that the merchant lairds were encouraging their tenants to marry and procreate at an early age, and were also splitting up their already tiny farms to make space for additional fishing tenants. After 1770, the arrival of inoculation in the islands, and growing smallpox immunity among the population, allowed the population to increase even more rapidly.

But the negative side of these developments was indebtedness and increasing unhappiness among the growing population. Shetlanders were having to row



Figure 2 'A Shetland Farmhouse' c. 1801, taken from the Skene Sketchbook (Crown copyright: RCAHMS)

further and further into the ocean, in small open boats, in search of fish. This fishery was the so-called *haaf* or home fishery. At the same time, the merchant lairds established 'truck shops' on their estates, where the tenants had to take payment in kind, instead of receiving money for their labours. From one point of view these shops were extremely useful to the tenants, truck being a kind of social security system for them. But they were places where the customers almost invariably fell into debt.

From the 1770s onwards, visitors to the islands, and some local clergymen, began to comment on this local system of slavery, as they called it. They wrote pamphlets on the subject, much to the fury of the merchant lairds. The lairds replied in kind, stating that no other system was feasible in the islands, given their poor natural attributes. In the 1770s and later decades a few landlords 'emancipated' their tenants. John Bruce of Sumburgh, for instance, gave his tenants in Cunningsburgh and Dunrossness permission to fish for whom they wished. (He raised their rents at the same time, of course.) Most did not, however. The Shetland merchant lairds were proud of their successes, and regarded Shetland as a model commercial society.

However, that was doubtful. In the late 1770s and early 1780s there was severe famine in the islands again, and clear signs that the population was slowly outstripping the island society's ability to feed itself. Shetland was far more prosperous in 1780 than in 1700, but was not self-sufficient. The merchant laird system of fishing tenures had created major problems. Shetland was still an overwhelmingly rural society, organised according to an archaic method of economic control; Lerwick, the only town, still had fewer than 1,000 inhabitants. There was no radical mercantile class in the islands. Visiting naturalists and geologists deplored the situation, but could not and did not do anything about it.

It took war to make a significant change to 18th-century Shetland society. For 20 years after 1793 Shetland's markets for fish, especially those in Spain, were disrupted by events on the Continent. At the same time, thousands of Shetland fishermen found themselves, willingly or (more often) unwillingly, in the Royal Navy. In these circumstances Lerwick became far more important than it had been previously, not least as a base for smuggling. A new merchant class, clever and increasingly self-confident, came into existence. These men used their wits to exploit the new economic situation; some of them became shipowners, and organised a thriving import trade; others became agents for whaling companies in the south, and arranged for Shetlanders to go to Greenland. Money began to flood into the islands. Arthur Edmondston, writing in 1809, calculated that whaling was bringing in £7,000 a year to the islands, and remittances from naval men another £3,500.

Naturally, there was tension between the new class of merchants and the old class of merchant lairds. But they had to co-operate with one another. More and

more frequently the merchants began to act as agents for the landlords, undertaking to dispose of their tenants' fish on the new home markets that had grown up during the wars. Other merchants were enterprising enough to bargain directly with the fishing tenants, and that caused tension. During the Napoleonic Wars the pamphlet controversies about Shetland's fishing tenures reached their height: the old class of merchant lairds continued to argue, fiercely and rather desperately, that no other system could work in Shetland, while the new class of merchants chuckled in the background, and went on making money and building up their little town.

War had another important result in Shetland. The key characteristic of Shetlanders of the 18th century was docility. Despite all the arguments about Shetland's fishing tenures, the tenants themselves did what they were told. Although this situation did not change radically during or after the war, the attitude of the young men who came back to Shetland, and the new influences that came with them and others, were important. This is particularly true of the religious life of the islands. Up to 1790 Shetlanders had been docile members of the Church of Scotland, just as they had been docile fishing tenants. From that date onwards, nonconformist religion made itself increasingly felt in Shetland. Methodism was especially popular, to the extent that missionaries of the 1820s could expect to have congregations of hundreds at open-air meetings. It became clear quickly that a very theoretical kind of Protestantism was congenial to Shetlanders: later, they would approach political matters in a similar way.

If Shetland's landlords were losing some of their influence by the 1820s, they still owned most of the arable land in the islands. Another of the ideas that now arrived in Shetland was that of agricultural improvement, and some landlords got quite interested in the subject. However, the difficulties of 'improving' a rural landscape like Shetland were vast. Shetlanders were very attached to the runrig method of agriculture, where it seemed that everyone had a fair share of the arable land, and they appreciated unfettered access to Shetland's large amount of common grazing land. As a result, there was little progress towards division of runrig land until the late 19th century, and there is even in the late 20th century a large amount of undivided common grazing. One or two landlords cleared tenants off their estates in the 1820s and 1840s, with a view to making large sheep farms; but transport in and out of Shetland was still not efficient enough to enable export of those animals.

Thus there were changes in Shetland in the first half of the 19th century, some of them major. The economy certainly burgeoned; but much of the social background remained the same. Certainly the new class of merchants did not remain radical for very long. Men like James Hay, by far the most prosperous merchant of the wartime period, had spoken out fiercely against fishing tenure and its disadvantages. During the period from about 1810 to the 1830s the bonds

of that tenure loosened slightly, under the influence of people like Hay. But when famine arrived again, in the 1830s, the cycle of debt and dependence began again in Shetland, and the merchants willingly let the landlords reimpose those bonds. Naturally, the landlords saw this as a compliment to their old, tried way of doing things. They regained some of their old confidence. This is how one of them described the events of those years:

For a few years all went pretty smoothly; but the tenants had now fallen into the hands of a set of shopkeepers, whose interest was not to secure their rents, or have regard to the permanent prosperity of the tenant, but to exhaust his means in shop advances ... Thus the tenants fell into habits of profusion and heavy arrears, and, bad seasons supervening, the hollowness of the scheme became manifest ... The eyes of most people are now opened to the necessity of resuming the principle of the old system.

The 1840s is another interlude in this complicated story. For the second time since the Napoleonic Wars the State made its influence felt in Shetland, and it has gone on doing so ever since. The famines during the second part of the 1840s resulted in extensive public relief schemes in Shetland. Shetlanders built long stretches of road, called in Shetland the 'Meal roads', in exchange for food. But even in that operation truck reared its head. Frequently merchants and merchant lairds doled out the food from their own truck shops, and pocketed the public money. Mid 19th-century Shetland had a diverse and booming economy, but truck made itself felt in every corner of it. For Shetland merchants and merchant lairds, the period from about 1855 to 1865 was a golden age. Shetland's population was at its height—well over 30,000 by 1861—and every able-bodied person had a job to do.

The old haaf fishing operation continued, and still dominated the economy, but more and more it was becoming confined to the periphery of the islands. In places like Unst, Northmavine and Dunrossness, fishing tenures and truck might still be the order of the day, but there were new developments elsewhere in Shetland. Several family companies emerged which exploited the cod banks west of Faroe, and these operations were based in places like Sandsting and Whiteness. Men who participated in this fishery did not have to endure fishing tenures, but they still had to put up with truck. The cod fishing merchants had truck shops which were identical to those in the haaf fishing areas. Similarly, Shetlanders who went to the Greenland whaling also had to endure truck.

Worst of all, a new class of hosiery merchants in Lerwick, who began to flourish in the mid-1840s, exploited the Shetland women who knitted for them. They paid them in goods, frequently trash. In 1871 an observer described what went on as follows.

The knitters, he said, go to the store, and the man there tells them what price he will give them for (their knitting): 1s or 2s. Then he says, What

are you going to take? The woman says she will take two or three yards of cotton, and that leaves 9d. He says, What will you take next? and comes at last to 2d. or 3d., and he asks, What will you take for the balance? She says, Sweeties; it finishes up with the sweeties. That is the system.

So Lerwick was full of women, sometimes starving, who were clad in frills and fine hats from the merchants' shops. In 1872 a Lerwick doctor testified that there was

an utter disproportion between the clothing and food of these knitters ... Many of them are clothed in a very gaudy, showy manner ... I have reason to know at the same time that their food is utterly insufficient.

And he gave as an example 'a family who were on the verge of starvation, and unable to get medical comforts for their dying parents', while 'the daughter, who was a knitter, was I might almost say magnificently dressed'.

### *Late 19th-century reforms*

So by 1865 or so, there was a kind of stability in Shetland, built around truck. Despite new developments in the centre, however, very little had changed in the outer isles for a century. Fishing tenure still flourished everywhere there, and such areas could still be in danger of destitution, because of the pressure of population on scarce resources. In the late 1860s there was famine in the North Isles of Shetland, especially in the north of the bleak island of Yell. Naturally, some people disapproved of this situation, and longed to reform it. There were two such attempts to change Shetland, around 1870. Interestingly, and this says something about the strength of Shetland's traditional economy, none of them was finally successful. The first reformer was John Walker, a native of Aberdeen who had been a gold prospector in Australia, and had set up shop here in the early 1860s. Walker was a brilliant and impulsive man, keen on 'improvement', and he directed a baleful eye at rural Shetland. He was unimpressed with Shetland's vast, undivided common grazings, and he reckoned that a sheepfarmer could make more of them than their feckless native occupants. By evicting such lazy Shetlanders, and replacing them with sheep, he reckoned, Shetland society could be much improved. Walker acquired leases of some Shetland estates, and put his ideas into practice. At the same time, he infected some Shetland landowners with his enthusiasms. During a very short period these enthusiasts evicted many hundreds of Shetlanders from their homes, or at least severely restricted their access to grazing land, which in the last analysis had a similar result. Between the censuses of 1871 and 1881 the population of Shetland fell by around 2,000, as dispossessed tenants left to seek their fortunes in the colonies. In the final analysis, however, Walker was not successful in changing rural Shetland. He made his mark in specific places, but both his victims and the old merchant and landlord

classes of Shetland detested him. They called him, bitterly, the ‘Director General of Shetland’. In the 1870s he went bankrupt, and eventually headed for South Africa to found a railway company. He had done damage in Shetland, but the rural society remained more or less intact when he left.

Before he went, Walker tried to inaugurate a second reform movement. In 1871, almost entirely by his own efforts, he persuaded a Royal Commission on the Truck System to come to Shetland. Walker wanted to strengthen the Shetlanders’ backbones by emancipating them from the social security system of truck. William Guthrie, a Glasgow sheriff, presented a report on Shetland truck to Parliament in 1872. It contained 200 pages of evidence. But, although it was satisfactory from an academic point of view, Guthrie’s report had no reforming results at all, since he failed to link Shetland’s truck with its fishing tenures, except in a very abstract way. ‘I have not thought myself at liberty’, he wrote on his final page, ‘to enter upon the land question in Shetland as a substantive part of the enquiry.’ Yet chronic insecurity of tenure was at the very heart of Shetland rural life. Guthrie knew it, but he did not dare spell it out. Challenging it would have meant questioning the Shetland landlords’ right to do what they liked with their property. No legislation followed the Guthrie report. Despite the 17,000 questions he had asked about the truck system in Shetland, it seemed as immovable as it had been a century previously.

Yet, during the final quarter of the 19th century, Shetland changed utterly. During the 1880s fishing tenure ceased to exist, and the old class of merchant



Figure 3 ‘Packing herrings, Holmsgarth, Lerwick’, photograph taken by George Washington Wilson in the 1880s (Crown copyright: RCAHMS).

lairds faded into the background. By 1900 Shetland was a land of relatively free fishermen and crofters. The key to these events, as so often in Shetland's history, was fish, and the way that different classes and groups controlled it. In the 1870s the haaf fishery began to disintegrate, thanks mainly to competition by Norwegians and Faroese interests. At the same time, Shetland became a focus of the great Scots herring boom of the 1880s. Herring stations sprouted in every corner of the islands, and vast numbers of fish were landed and cured. In this new situation, where control of the fisheries had passed abruptly out of the hands of local merchant lairds, fishing tenures were completely unworkable and inappropriate.

Almost by coincidence, another event of the 1880s eased the transition from the old society to the new. Lord Napier's Crofting Commission came to Shetland in 1883, to enquire into the problems of tenants; and the Crofters Act, promulgated in 1886, finally gave the Shetlanders security of tenure, although they still had to wait a few years for the benefits of it. At precisely the same time Shetlanders seemed to experience a revulsion against the subsistence agriculture of the townships, and the fishing methods of earlier times. Many of them moved to Lerwick, and further afield, and a great fishing disaster of 1881 prompted many of them to cease fishing in the open boats that had been the mainstay of fishing tenure.



Figure 4 Freefield, Lerwick c. 1890 (Crown copyright: RCAHMS).

The herring fishery by no means solved all the Shetlanders' problems. Less than a decade after the beginning of the herring boom there was an equally remarkable slump, from about 1886 to 1896. During those years the Shetlanders who had not emigrated, and there were thousands of them, got to grips with the remaining problems of their land tenure. Fishing tenures had gone, but rural Shetlanders still suffered from insecurity of tenure, and the chronic debt that was an apparently inextinguishable aspect of life in the islands. As a result there were more fair rent applications per head in Shetland than in any other part of the crofting regions. Sheriff Brand of the Crofters Commission presided over tribunals in 1889 and 1892, delighting the Shetlanders with his liberal decisions, and discomfiting the landlords. The events of those years, in spite of the economic depression, went a long way towards curing the psychological wounds inflicted on Shetlanders by fishing tenure and truck. In 1897 the herring fishery picked up again, and by the end of the century it was booming beyond the Shetlanders' wildest expectations. Shetlanders felt secure in their tenure, and secure, for the time being, economically.

Those were years of self-confidence, yet it had been a revolution from above that emancipated the Shetlanders, and their descendants have been thanking the Liberal Party ever since. The question as to why islanders of the 18th and 19th centuries did not revolt against their serfdom is interesting. I suspect it had something to do with the kind of conservative nonconformism that many of them affected: the Free Kirk, much more radical, had few adherents in Shetland. However, during the 1880s and 1890s Shetlanders did become more self-confident, and started to do things for themselves. A few of them made political statements: the people of Sandwick, for instance, took their landlord to court over the ownership of whales that they had captured on his shore. When they won, the whole of Shetland erupted in bonfires and song. And those were years when the first Shetland poets and novelists began to write, sometimes in the Shetland dialect. Academics and interested local people began to explore the medieval history of the islands, which seemed far more attractive to them than their more recent history; and folklorists and philologists carried out research, with eager co-operation from local informants. Shetland in 1900 was a far happier, livelier place than in 1700, or even in 1870. I will leave it there, but should stress that Shetland had trials to face in the present century. Shetland is not, and never will be, paradise. There would be wars; there would be depression: trials faced and endured and overcome by communities everywhere in the world.

## **WARMING THE KIRK:**

### **18th-century heating (?) at Lunna Kirk**

**Ronnie Robertson**

Lunna Kirk is said to be the earliest building in use for Christian worship in Shetland. The present building dates from 1753. For some years (1855–1927) an assistant minister or missionary was located here. It was annexed to the Quoad Sacra parish of Whalsay, when that was established in 1868, and since 1977 it has been linked with Nesting and Delting as a single charge. This paper concentrates on the unusual former heating arrangements of the church, rather than its undoubtedly interesting ecclesiastical and architectural history.

#### ***History of Lunna Kirk***

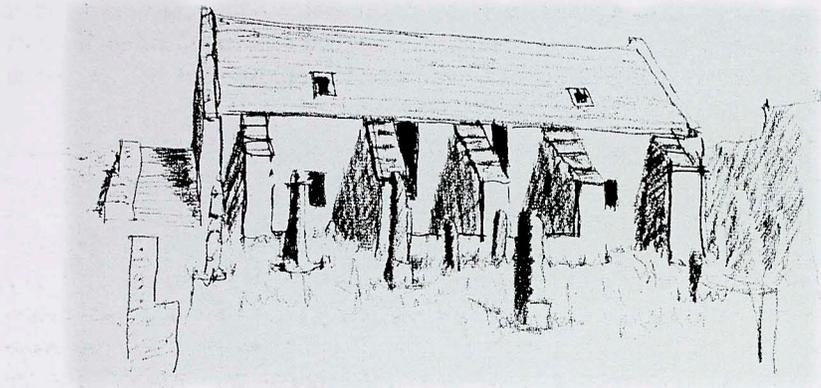
Though Lunna Kirk is now essentially an 18th-century rural church, older fabric is incorporated in the building and said to include towards the east ‘a squint, not for lepers but, as in many churches, to enable the priest to supervise the altar from an adjacent sacristy’.<sup>1</sup> This presumably survives from the medieval chapel, a ‘head’ or parish church later used as a family mausoleum, for in 1753 the Presbytery of Shetland authorised the construction of a new church at the site of the ‘tomb of Lunna’.<sup>2</sup> When re-built, Lunna was a supplementary place of worship, a chapel-of-ease: as such it was not subject to the provision deriving from litigation at Tingwall, that it must be able to accommodate two-thirds of the examinable population (adults and older children). In the case of Tingwall, this led to the destruction of its historic ‘steeple kirk’ in 1788 and in the following years to the replacement of every other medieval church in Shetland not already superseded.<sup>3</sup>

#### ***Church building***

On plan Lunna Kirk is a simple rectangle, orientated approximately east–west, the proportions and orientation consistent with medieval precedent. This suggests re-use of foundations and perhaps some walling: the heavy boulders projecting at the base of the south-east corner appear earlier than 1753. Four small windows light the south front, the smallest (later lengthened) flanking the pulpit. An external forestair against the west gable serves the gallery and a subsequent vestry gable was later naively gothicised with a porch-like doorpiece from Lunna House as an architectural focus.

The interior of the kirk retains its reformed layout for a ‘gathered congregation’, grouped around the fine pulpit with domed sounding-board, traditionally set midway against the south wall, and long communion table. Further seating was provided by the galleries against the west, north and east walls. All furnishings appear to date from c.1830–40.

Five substantial buttresses project from the long south elevation (see Fig. 1), with two more against the north wall. This paper explores the function of these buttresses, suggesting that they are evidence of a peat-fired heating system based on similar warming methods used in Shetland grain-drying kilns, and also in intra-mural warming of walled gardens and glass-houses.



*Figure 1 South elevation of Lunna Kirk (all illustrations are by the author).*

### ***Buttresses***

The five buttresses are symmetrically distributed along the south elevation, the two outer projecting 1200 mm from the wall, and the three central ones projecting 2600 mm. These three central buttresses are linked at ground level by a low rubble wall. The buttresses and linking wall are harled, which seems contemporary with the rest of the church and the rear vestry and probably of this century. The outer buttresses are protected at wallhead with large, finely dressed coping of interlocking ashlar slabs; the central one is crowstepped below the coping on its east face. Raggles (grooves) are cut into the inner faces of all three buttresses and seem to indicate the line of some form of roof structure, the pitch of which is shallower than the pitch of the copings.

The existence of such extensive buttressing along a 13 m length of wall indicates that if the buttresses were structural, the original church wall must have been in such a poor condition as to have been on the point of collapse to require this level of support. It would surely have been more likely that a wall in such condition would have been demolished and re-built as a more economic option.

The south wall does not display any signs whatsoever of being out of alignment, either now, or at any time in the past. This realisation, together with the 'designed' detailing of the coping, suggests that the buttresses are not buttresses in the true sense, but are lateral walls, erected for some practical or decorative purpose.

The raggles on the inner faces of the buttresses are very regular, suggesting the roof of a lean-to structure. They are not, however, of sufficient depth to accommodate a conventional timber roof complete with slate or thatch covering. Where the raggles meet the east wall of the church, there are deep sockets in the inner faces of the two outer buttresses, and a thick corresponding socket running through the complete thickness of the central buttress. This could have allowed timber beams to run along the face of the church wall and support a light timber roof without interfering with the existing church wall (see Fig. 2). Such a roof could well have comprised nothing more than timber-boarded hatches which would have given easy access to both 'chambers' beneath.

Given that these central buttresses, linked by a low front wall, might be all that remains of a lean-to extension to the church, what was the purpose of this extension? The clue comes from a large rectangular opening on the north face of the central buttress (see Fig. 3). This opening does not pass through the buttress, but seems to extend vertically up through its core towards the church wall. The ground level within the lean-to enclosure has clearly risen with the accumulation of debris over the years, but it seems possible that this aperture was a fire opening, and with the flue seeming to run towards the church, the possibility that the

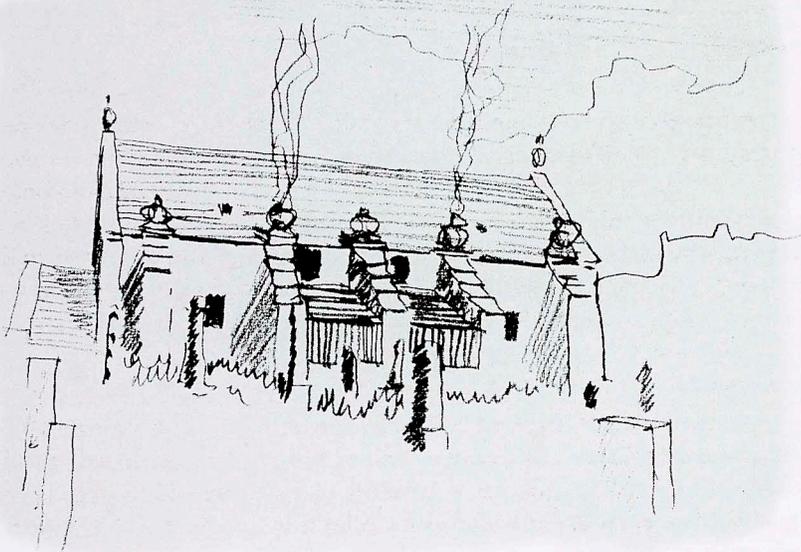
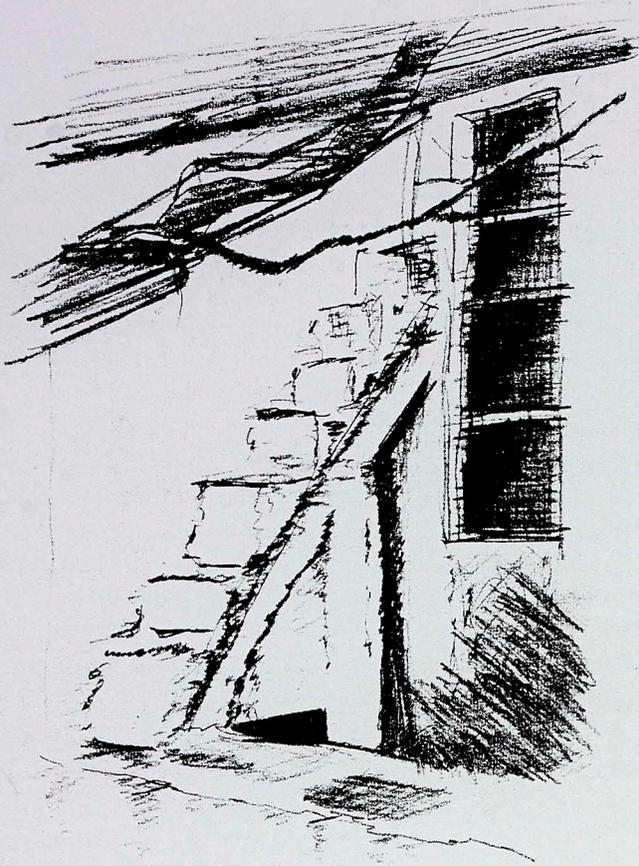


Figure 2 Conjectural south elevation with 'lean-to'.



*Figure 3 Central buttress with crow steps and fire opening.*

ing, and with the flue seeming to run towards the church, the possibility that the enclosure was some form of heating chamber and peat store seems realistic.

Such a theory, in terms of a roof structure, causes immediate problems with the two narrow windows which flank the central buttress externally and the pulpit internally. Any lean-to roof would mean that at least the lower two-thirds of these windows would be masked by the roof. There is, however, clear evidence that these two windows were originally shorter in length, with a much higher sill level. Close examination of the windows internally reveals a chamfered (cut off square edge) angle margin to the upper third section of both windows only, consistent with the detailing of the other windows on the west and gable walls. The point at which this margin stops internally aligns with the line of the top of any

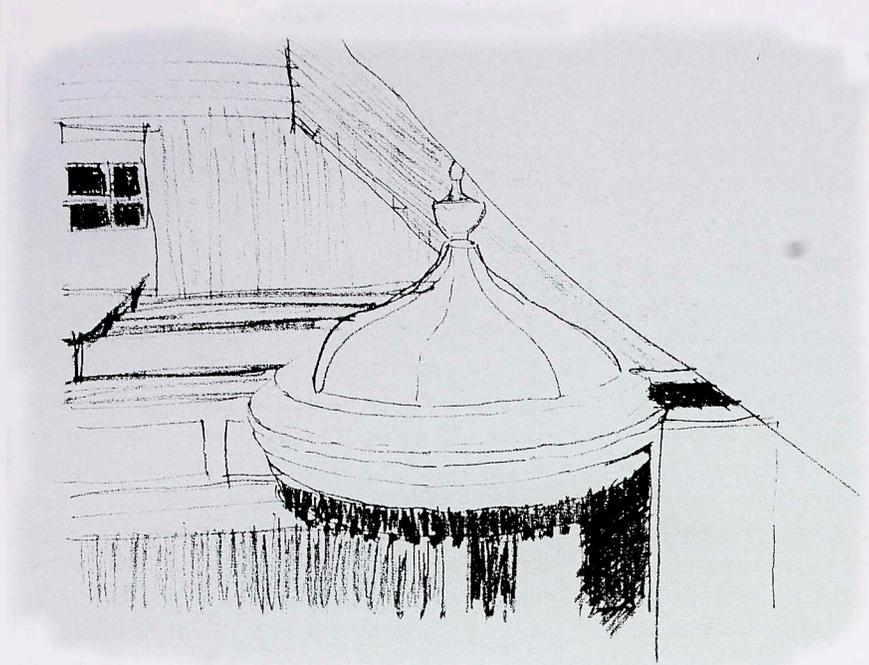


Figure 4 Duct behind sounding board.

roof structure which had sat within the existing raggles. It seems certain that the two windows were elongated after the external chambers ceased to be used for their original purpose. Furthermore, the present internal wall surface flanking the lower two-thirds of these windows is extremely irregular, inconsistent with the regularity and simple sophistication of most of the interior.

### *Evidence of heating usage*

If the central buttress contains a hearth and a flue, the question is, what was being heated, and how were the flue gases vented? It seems reasonable to assume that a fire opening would have been designed to heat more than the lean-to chamber in which it is located. If this is a heating chamber for the church, how could the hot air have been distributed to the interior? Examination of the south wall from the gallery provides evidence to support the heating function. Firstly, a substantial duct is located behind the pulpit which could have allowed hot air to be distributed into the interior of the church from behind the domed sounding board (see Fig. 4). The existence of the duct also explains the unusual effect of the sounding board appearing visually detached from the south wall. This duct, together with the irregular thinning of the internal wall on either side of the windows, suggests the existence of a false internal wall skin, creating a cavity wall each side of the pulpit which would allow warm air from the external fire source

to heat the church interior, in effect a 'hot wall' construction more commonly found in walled gardens and glasshouses. Secondly, there is a void behind the mural monument on the south wall, and extensive damp staining on the coomed area of the ceiling and at the base of the internal wall, in locations exactly in line with the two outer buttresses of the lean-to. This internal staining is consistent with the modern problems of disused, capped, non-ventilated flues.

### *Vented flues*

Without evidence of chimneystacks, some other smoke exit requires to be identified. If the exit for the flue gases is too close to the heat source, the effectiveness of the 'hot wall' system is likely to be reduced. If the two outer buttresses, of the central group of three, were vented, then hot air would be drawn more effectively along the ducts before exiting, thereby maximising the effectiveness of the system. There is no evidence of any flue exit at roof level, apart from the internal damp staining, and it seems likely that the roof has been re-slatted in relatively modern times, thereby destroying any evidence. On the north elevation, the vestry chimney breaks through the roof in line with one of the buttresses on the south elevation. The coping stone for this chimney is a large square piece of ashlar, with tooling to match the coping stones of the buttresses on the south elevation. It is possible that each of the buttresses on the south elevation terminated in this way, either with or without chimney pots.

Vents exist through each of the outer buttresses of the lean-to chamber, the one on the west being at a higher level than that on the east. Internally, both openings are rectangular, with bases of downward-sloping slabs into which have been cut regular square openings. Below these openings, on the outer face, the wall has been formed as a dished, curved niche. The nature of the sloping sills and the carefully cut apertures suggests that the vents could easily have been opened or closed by means of a timber board or paddle. Similar mural vents are found in large grain-drying kilns, both square and circular, as respectively at Sandside and Square of Sibster, both Caithness. This form of draught control/ventilation may have been equally serviceable at Lunna, where vents set at different heights could minimise downdraughts and the flow of air could be controlled with adjustable timber slides, which could even be completely closed when the heating system was not in use.

### *Vestry*

The later vestry built against the long north elevation of the church, its catslide roof continuous with the roofing of the kirk, suggests that it may replace or incorporate a similar extension to the supposed heating chamber against the south wall. It is flanked by two buttresses mirroring those of the south elevation, and its width

is identical to the area of the 'lean-to' on the south side. Close examination of the stone skewers reveals the same detailing as on the buttress coping stones, though re-cut for vestry use. The chimneystack at the east corner probably served a later boiler—superseding the earlier heating system?

### **Conclusion**

Lunna Kirk, as we see it today, is essentially a small, 18th-century rural church overlooking the sea and the curve of East Lunna Voe. The additions of buttresses and finials are consistent with other picturesque 'Gothik' embellishments on the estate of c.1830. Whether this gothicisation was devised as a means of providing a heating system harnessing local traditional usage of peat-fired warmth, common in grain-drying kilns all over Shetland, or reflecting lairdly horticultural interests, might be revealed by further research and site visits. Has warm-air ducted heating been identified in other churches, in Scotland or elsewhere? The antecedents of warm-air ducts are ancient: the use of the hypocaust heating system was well known to the Romans, and recorded by Robert Adam in his publication on the Imperial Palace at Spalatro in Illyria.<sup>4</sup>

The visit to Lunna during the 1997 SVBWG conference was necessarily short. Further examination of the fabric, together with documentary research, may substantiate the thesis of this paper. Meantime, Lunna Kirk presents a fascinating puzzle for the late 20th-century architectural historian.

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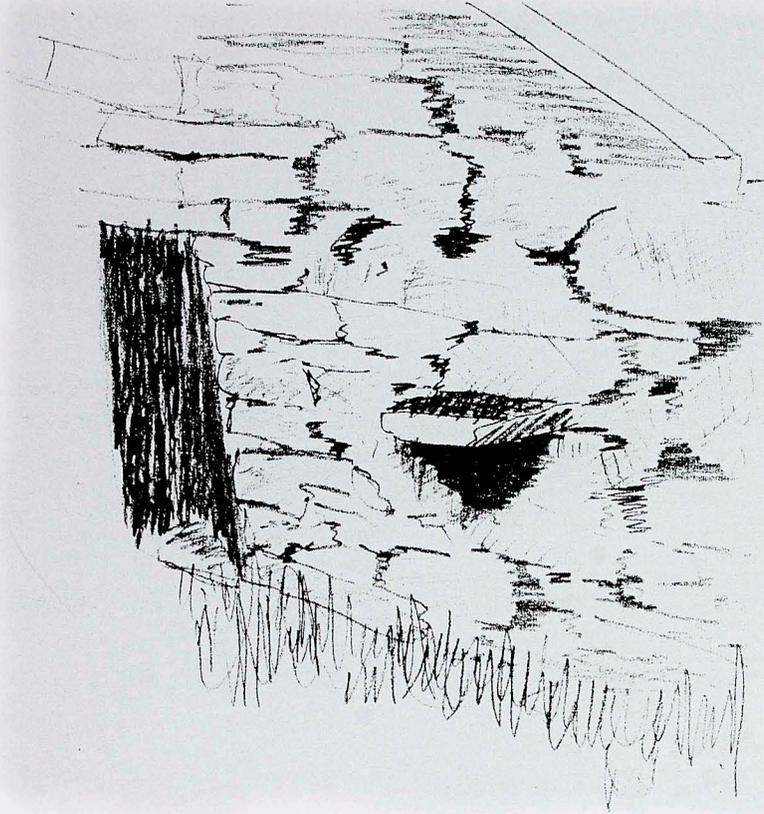
### **Addendum**

Sadly Dr Ronald G. Cant died in early January 2000, when this publication was already in the press. He was generous with his knowledge of Lunna and much else. An appreciation will appear in VB24.

## LUNT STANES

Resting or lifting stones at the Clumlie Burn horizontal mills,  
Troswick, South Mainland, Shetland

Elizabeth Beaton



*Lunt stane, Clumlie Burn horizontal mills.*

In Shetland there is a notable survival of horizontal mills, so-called because the water wheel turned horizontally. These small grain mills are each motivated by a water-powered vertical wheel or paddle, the simple mechanism giving rise to a clicking sound with each revolution, resulting in the name 'click' or 'clack' mill; few are now in working order. <sup>1</sup> Exceptionally, eight of these structures straddle a quarter-mile stretch of the Clumlie Burn flowing from Loch of Clumlie to the sea. Some of these were jointly owned, others associated with a single farm, all sited a little way from the burn. The lower mill belongs to Troswick Farm, on a

rise overlooking the valley; it was restored sometime before 1904 and is maintained and worked by Ian Smith of Troswick.<sup>2</sup> When visited, the interior of the building was swept clean, the tiny unevenly flagged interior whitened with flour dust.

A small but interesting and eminently practical feature of the Troswick mill and its immediate neighbour upstream is a projecting stone slab close to the doorway (see illustration). The ledge measures approximately one and a half inches wide by nine to twelve inches deep (46 cm wide by 23–30 cm deep), the slab incorporated in the drystone masonry walling at the time of construction. These are ‘lunt stanes’, set at a height to support a sack as an aid when lifting or setting down on or off the bearer’s back.<sup>3</sup>

Lunt is a derivation of the Old Norse word *lint*, *lin*, meaning to sit down, rest, rest upon or lean against, the ledge a ‘resting stone’.<sup>4</sup> Are these ledges found elsewhere in Shetland? Would not this traditional feature be a boon to backpackers if incorporated in Camping Böd walls? As with the böds themselves, this would be a new use for a traditional fitting.

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Professor Alexander Fenton for the function, name and linguistic source of the lunt stane; to Ian Smith, Troswick for permission to visit his farm on 2 May 1997; to Wendy Loates and Joanne Jamieson, Shetland Library, Lerwick; and to Ronnie Robertson, who prepared the illustration.

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# HERRING GUTTERS' BOTHIES IN SHETLAND

Bruce Walker and Christopher McGregor

The herring gutters' bothies of the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland form the last glorious stage of a tradition stretching back for centuries and known in all the coastal areas of northern Europe. From the time when fishermen first realised that there were particularly lucrative seasonal fishing grounds, usually providing a specific type of fish, but too far away from their home port to permit daily journeys, they set up temporary camps at the nearest convenient landfall to allow them to tap the resource. These camps had a dual purpose. Firstly, they provided a fishing station where the fishermen could sleep between trips to the fishing grounds, shelter during inclement weather and store spare fishing gear. The second function is all too often ignored but is even more important: the camps served as fish-curing stations where the catch could be processed, cured and packed prior to transport to the home port or to a suitable market. For some obscure reason, the fish-curing element is seldom mentioned in contemporary documents, probably because many of the early curing crews comprised the fishermen's wives and families rather than paid workers. Over the centuries many different arrangements functioned, one of the best documented being the Dutch factory-ship system that involved the catching, processing and exporting of herring from the Shetlands in the 17th and 18th centuries.<sup>1</sup> The Shetland haaf-fishing is another variant, where the catch was contracted, or sold, to a merchant who in turn employed beach-boys to air-dry the fish and pack it for export.<sup>2</sup>

The fishermen's huts can be considered flimsy, as they were re-roofed every season prior to use, in the same way as sheiling huts were re-roofed each spring and stripped in the autumn. In many areas, particularly in the Western Isles, the fishermen's camps were known as fishermen's sheilings. At the time of the plotting of the first edition of the Ordnance Survey there was no different designation for agricultural sheilings and fishermen's sheilings, resulting in a confusing legacy of coastal sheiling sites with no defined purpose. Those abutting the arable land of the machair are easy to recognise as fishermen's sites as there is no agricultural reason for their presence, but those abutting rough grazing must be examined more carefully to establish the original purpose. In Shetland, the salt, curing barrels, equipment and the dried fish were stored in the merchants' *böd*, a house-cum-storeroom that forms the principal structure on any haaf-fishing station. Other types of fishermen adopted variants of the system. These include the salmon fishing stations of the east coast of Scotland, where the fish were originally either dried, pickled, kitted or kippered and, from the 19th century, iced, before being transported to markets in England or Europe.<sup>3</sup> Although not strictly fishing, whaling was also carried out from shore bases in the Northern

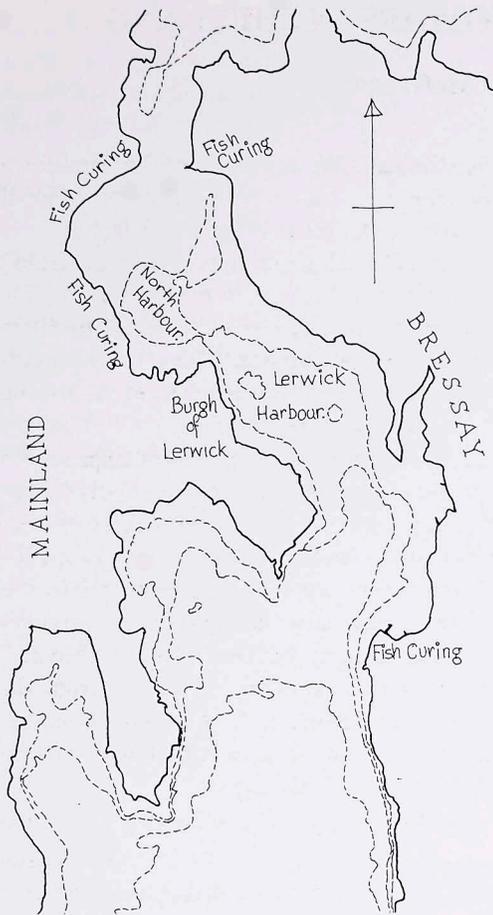


Figure 1 Late 19th-century fish curing locations around Lerwick and the Bressay Sound.

and Western Isles and provided a considerable number of shore-based jobs.<sup>4</sup> Although the total number of fishing stations was high and the value of the fish caught was significant, the early fishing stations made little impact on the environment as a whole.

The exception to the above statement was the 19th-century herring stations, particularly those in the Northern Isles. The complete herring fishing season lasted for nine months, starting on the west coast of Scotland in the spring, then following the shoals of herring northwards through the Minch to the Northern Isles, then southwards down the east coasts of Scotland and England to close in East Anglia, at the ports of Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth. The part of the season based in the Northern Isles appears to have been particularly lucrative in the second half of the 19th century, and attracted more boats and more merchants than any other venue. This, combined with the fact that the Northern Isles, particularly

the Shetlands, was one of the most sparsely populated venues, resulted in significant accommodation problems for the shore-based section of the fishing. The enormous influx of fishermen, gutters, coopers, chandlers and merchants at that time equalled or exceeded the entire population of the Shetland Isles, thus forcing the fish merchants to construct semi-permanent fishing stations to supplement the permanent provision of piers, storage and dwellings. This solution was also adopted in Orkney and the Outer Hebrides, but usually on a much smaller scale. Round the rest of the coast of Britain, the existing harbours, warehouses, fish-curing premises and accommodation generally coped with the demand without the need for massive additional investment.



Figure 2 Sketch map of Baltasound.

In Shetland it was the practice for each fish merchant to take a stance for their fishing station and to erect piers, trackways, farlans (wooden bins to contain the fish ready for gutting), cooper's yards, offices, barracks for the workers and ancillary buildings. The two largest concentrations of fishing stations in Shetland were in the Bressay Sound (between Mainland Shetland and Bressay, see Fig. 1) and at Baltasound, Unst (see Figs 2 and 3). Both sites produced spectacular developments.

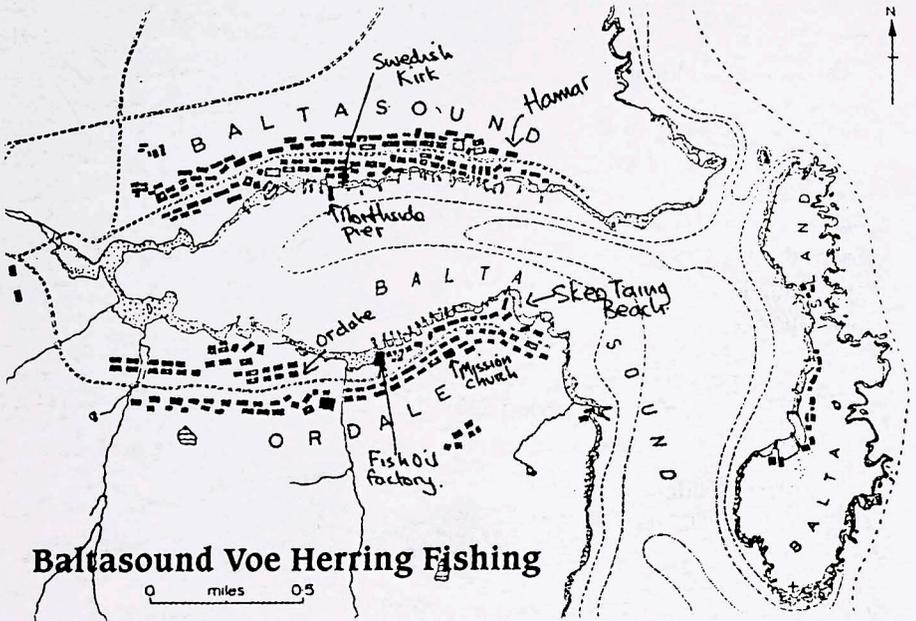


Figure 3 Baltasound Voe herring fishing stations.

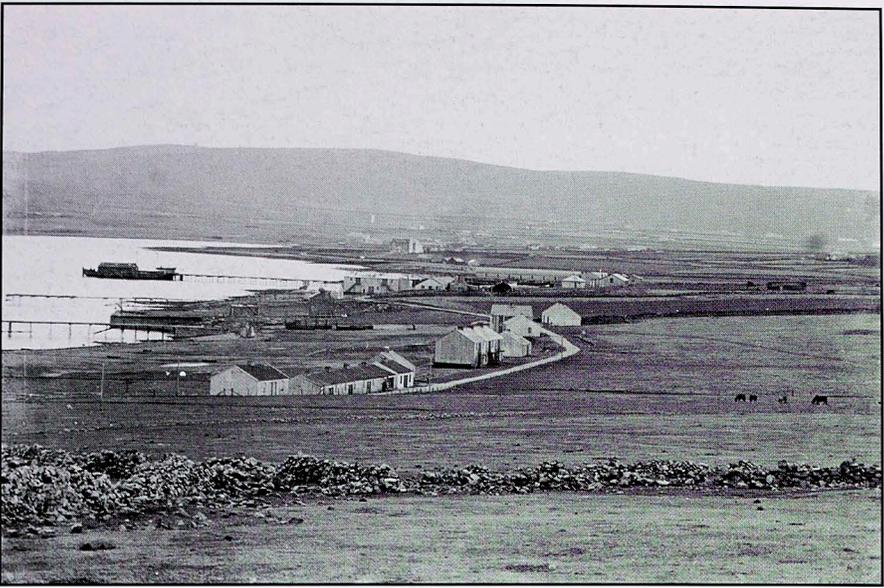


*Figure 4 Mitchells Station, North Ness, Lerwick in the late 1940s (copyright Shetland Museum).*

The Bressay Sound is the channel between Mainland Shetland and the island of Bressay. Lerwick occupies the south end of the Mainland section. The fishing stations were situated round the shore of the Sound from the North Ness, Lerwick (see Figs 4 and 5), northwards to Gremista on the Mainland side of the Sound and along the corresponding shoreline on Bressay. Sadly the expansion of Lerwick Harbour, since the introduction of North Sea oil drilling, has destroyed most of the evidence from the most concentrated area of fishing stations to the north of Lerwick, and although the foundations of piers and buildings still survive on the Bressay side of the Sound, this too appears to be under threat from new shipping installations.



*Figure 5 Holmsgarth herring stations, Lerwick (photograph: J. D. Rattor, copyright Shetland Museum).*



*Figure 6 Baltasound, Unst from Hamar c. 1930 (copyright Shetland Museum).*

Baltasound on Unst is something of a misnomer, in that the main development is to the north and south of the *voe* that is entered from Baltasound proper, i.e. the channel between the mouth of the *voe* and Balta (see Fig. 6). There was also a limited development on the west shore of Balta facing into the sound and the *voe*.

The extent of the developments at both the above-mentioned sites can be clearly seen in the plans of the fishing stations.<sup>5</sup> The stations close to Lerwick were the most congested and incorporated two-storey barrack blocks, whilst the remainder tended towards single-storey development. Initially the accommodation requirements would have included sleeping accommodation for those fishermen still working from open boats, but since the Scottish herring fishery developed in parallel with the development of fully decked Fifie and Zulu sailing drifters<sup>6</sup> with cabins and bunks below deck, the bulk of accommodation was for shore-based operatives. These operatives included not only the gutters but the fish merchants and their families, office workers, coopers, cagers and the laundry girls (girls aged between 12 and 14 who worked under an overseer called 'the madam' laundering the fishermen's clothes).

The gutters worked in teams of three; two girls gutting and the third packing the split herring into barrels. This team size is reflected in the accommodation provided: there were originally two teams to an apartment, but after the turn of the 20th century each team was provided with its own apartment, comprising a living room/kitchen and a bunk room. The living room/kitchen contained a



*Figure 7 Interior of barrack block c. 1900; note the wallpaper, the highly polished stove and the kist.*

table, chair, stools and cooking stove (see Fig. 7). The bunk room contained three bunks and space for the gutters' kists or chests in which they carried their clothes. Internal decoration was originally left to the individual teams and ranged from limewash and distemper to oil paint and wallpaper. When wallpaper



*Figure 8 Single-storey block c. 1900, with timber cladding and tarred paper roof.*

became fashionable amongst the girls from the rich fishing communities of the east coast of Scotland, those from the Hebrides often used newspaper as a substitute.

The exact form of the earliest temporary accommodation is not known. Early photographs show interiors of what could be converted croft buildings, but there would have been insufficient of these to form a significant contribution to the accommodation problem. It is unlikely that the girls were asked to provide their own turf-built accommodation, as was often the case with gangs of navvies at that time.<sup>7</sup> The early solution was probably closely related to those structures that survived into this century, that is, timber-framed sheds with timber, tarred paper, or corrugated iron cladding (see Fig. 8). What might have been different was the space allowed to each gutting crew and the standard of the internal finishes.

Barrack-type structures, only used for a few months of the year, were obviously uneconomic and methods of amortising the costs were sought. This was done by utilising the structure for other purposes during the closed season. One such structure has been located at Lubba, Ollaberry, Northmaven. This had been purchased by the farmer from a fishing station in the vicinity of Lerwick on the decline of the herring fishing, and had been moved to his farm. This move has preserved a type of gutter's hut that does not appear to have survived or been

described elsewhere. At first glance it appears to be a fairly standard timber shed with the normal gutters' hut characteristic of alternate doors and windows along one of the two long walls. The internal partitions, between the individual crews' accommodation, have been removed, accentuating the different approaches to interior decoration practised in the individual compartments. Closer inspection reveals that the internal partitions, stoves and the front panels to each individual crew's accommodation have been designed to be readily removable to allow the structure to be used as an open-fronted cooper's shed during the bulk of the year but to be convertible to gutters' accommodation during the fishing season. The shed walls and roof comprise a single skin of timber boarding on a light wooden frame, a form of construction commented on in various sanitary inspectors' reports of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The comments refer to inadequate space standards in relation to the amount of ventilation available, but the sanitary inspectors responsible for the reports appear to have allowed the buildings to continue being used on the grounds that the doors were seldom shut and the joints in the timber boarding opened in warm dry weather.<sup>8</sup>

Little appears in print regarding the construction and space standards of the early accommodation. The earliest description located is dated 1911 and describes the temporary camps as 'out-stations' and the accommodation provided in the following terms.

'In the matter of house accommodation provided for the workers on these stations there has been much less uniformity than in the construction of wharves. All curers, however, appear to be agreed that the dwellinghouses should be built on the highest part of the ground, and that their sites should be made as dry as possible. If there is much excavation to be done to bring the station ground to the desired gradient, the sites of the dwellinghouses are usually left at the original elevation, the ground being drained and levelled, and, if the surface is mossy, a hard foundation is laid to keep the floors dry.

'Some curers run a row of single-room huts across the upper side of their ground. In other cases there may be found substantial two-storey wooden buildings of double width, with eight rooms above and eight below. The principal objections to a house of this design are that it is likely to be too noisy for comfort, and that the upper rooms are less convenient for the storage of stock left over at the end of the season than rooms on the ground flat. In addition, these houses are often built in exposed situations, and a low building is less likely to be damaged in very stormy weather than a high one.

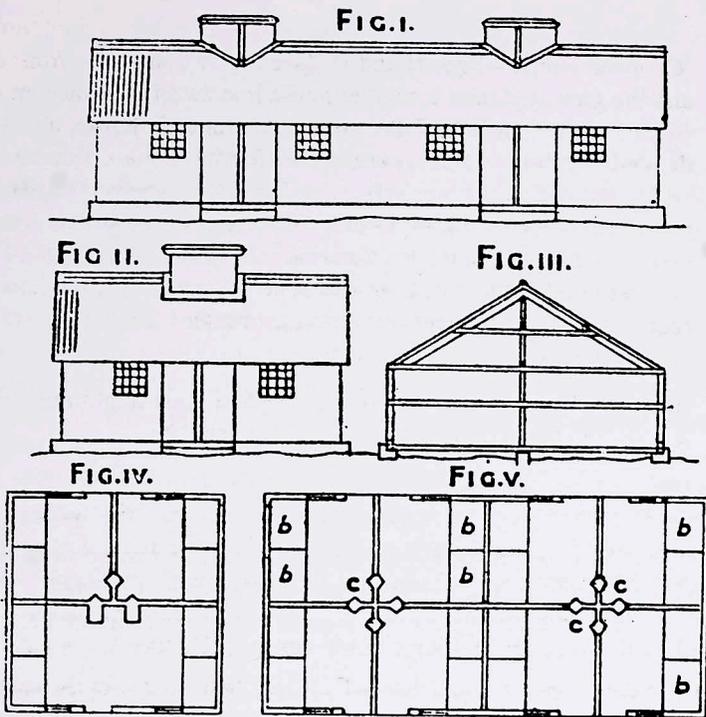


Figure 9 Plans and elevations for barrack blocks, 1911.

'Women's House - Plan B [see Fig. 9] shows plans of houses that have been growing in favour with curers of recent years. Fig. I shows the front elevation, and fig. V the ground plan of a dwelling house for women, with accommodation for sixteen crews. The house is double, with four rooms on each side, and fitted to accommodate six women in each room. The walls are made of good seven-eighths ploughed wood, stoutly nailed upon a framing of battens 6 inches by 2 inches. There is a substantial  $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch flooring, resting upon 6-inch by  $2\frac{1}{2}$ -inch sleepers. The roof is of wood covered with corrugated iron. The chimneys are of brick, each room having a separate vent (Fig. V.c) otherwise the house would probably be smoky. The partitions between the rooms are of seven-eighths ploughed lining. In each room these are two large beds made of strong deals, as shown at b. Fig. V. Round the eaves there are heavy gutters, with barrels at each gable to catch the rainwater, as water is often scarce, and not of the best quality. Fig. III shows the framing of the gable. If the pitch of the roof is fairly high, a room 14 feet by 12 feet, with 9 feet of a side wall, may give the necessary space of 400 cubic feet for each person occupying the room. A room 14 feet square with a 9 foot wall will certainly be large enough.

'Coopers' House - Figs. II and IV [see Fig. 9], show the front elevation and the ground plan of a smaller house intended for the accommodation of the coopers. It is half the size of the women's house, and is usually divided into three rooms. A large room for the coopers occupies one-half of the building. The other half is divided in the same way as the women's house, one room being fitted up as an office and bedroom for the manager, and the other being the housekeeper's room ... Closets are generally erected at the sea wall, on each side of the wharf, one closet being required for every twenty-five workers of either sex.<sup>9</sup>

'Cost ...The dwellinghouse for women described might cost from £160 to £180, and the coopers' house half that sum.'<sup>10</sup>

The author, R. J. Duthie, goes on to discuss the advantages of building a roof over the farlans where the gutters worked, but there is not much evidence of this practice in Shetland. The construction of the piers, trackways and farlans will be discussed in a forthcoming paper on the architecture of the herring industry to be published by the Scottish Buildings Study Group at Dundee University.

Duthie describes a change that had already taken place in the standards set for the women's accommodation and is accurate regarding Baltasound and Bressay, but it falls short of the provision existing in Lerwick at the demise of the fishing when the rooms were only expected to hold three girls. The overall dimensions of the accommodation block illustrated by Duthie are approximately 17.40 x 7.50 m. The foundations of similar types of accommodation have been surveyed on the island of Balta and are larger than the sizes recommended by Duthie. On Balta, a four-room accommodation block measures 9.20 x 7.70 m overall. Unfortunately, the decline of the herring fishery and the remote location of the Balta and Baltasound stations doomed these buildings to neglect and all that

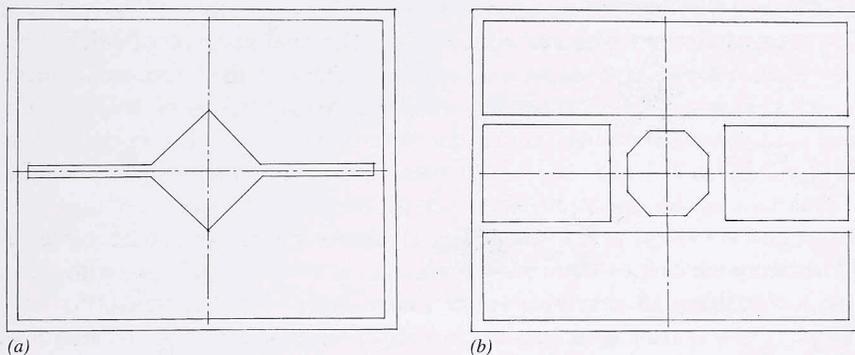


Figure 10 Four-unit blocks, Balta: (a) Foundation A; (b) Foundation B.

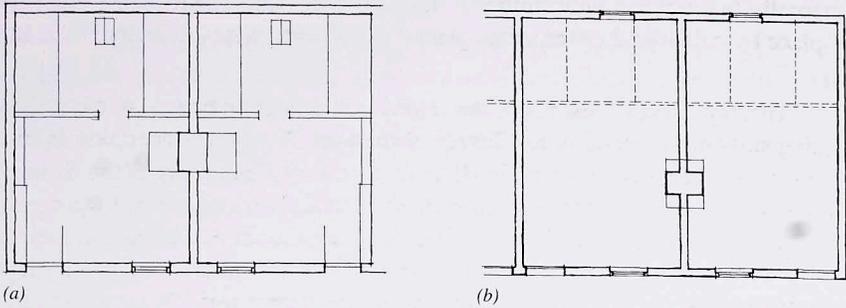


Figure 11 Single-storey gutters' huts at (a) Shearers Station, Lerwick; (b) Gremista (Hut 2).

remains are foundations. These are constructed using shuttered mass concrete for the foundation walls. Some have obviously been intended to carry timber floors, whilst others are filled with hardcore and carry a mass concrete floor slab. All are designed to accommodate corner fireplaces backing onto a four-flue chimney stack set on the diagonal at the internal corner of each room (see Fig. 10 (a) and (b)). Similar blocks of four, eight, twelve and sixteen rooms are to be observed along the south shore of Baltasound and photographs located in the Shetland Museum, Lerwick confirmed that these huts originally looked the same as those illustrated by Duthie (see Fig. 9).

The single-storey gutters' huts surveyed in Lerwick and Gremista are quite different in concept. These are designed for crews of three girls and have a living space to the front of the block and a sleeping space to the back. The overall dimensions of each crew's quarters vary from 5.90 x 4.06 m at Shearer's Station, Lerwick, to 6.13 x 3.80 m at Gremista. In each case the sleeping space is approximately 2.30 m deep by the width of the room and the bunks are set against the internal gables (see Fig. 11 (a) and (b)).

At Shearer's Station, Lerwick, there is a door and shuttered window to the front of each unit and a cast-iron rooflight to the sleeping room. The original stoves were 'Enchantress No 7' but these have been replaced by 'Columbian'. According to local sources the stove was kept burning all day, one of the girls being responsible for stoking it. The beds are single-sized timber bunks with a straw-filled bed-bag as a mattress. Contrary to the sanitary inspector's reports, the girls slept with the door and window shutter closed. New wax cloth was provided each year for the floor. The rooms were lined with V-jointed matchboarding, originally varnished or painted but later wallpapered. There is no ceiling and the internal gables stop short of the apex of the roof. The first gutters to visit Shetland are known to have brought their clothes in a barrel but later generations had trunks or suitcases. There are a number of shelves on the wall opposite the stove but no other fixed furnishings or fittings. This block is roofed and clad externally with corrugated-iron sheeting. The Gremista gutters' huts are similar

internally but are clad with timber sarking covered with black tarred paper held in place by half-round cover straps placed to coincide with the joints in the sarking.

The two surveys described above may or may not be typical of the Lerwick fishing stations. According to Close,<sup>11</sup> there were 37 stations operating in 1910. These were: 1. Gray and Smith; 2. MacDonald & Co; 3. Deuchart & Co; 4. Mitchell & Son; 5. Michell & Son; 6. John Brown; 7. More's Pier, Hay & Co; 8. Hay & Co; 9. A. Smith; 10. T. Brown; 11. Mackenzie & McIvor; 12. P. & J. Sutherland; 13. Davidson & Pirie & Co; 14. A. Bremner; 15. A. Wood; 16. A. Wood; 17. D. D. Gray & Co; 18. John Mair; 19. John Mair; 20. James Mair; 21. David Slater; 22. Wm Slater & Son; 23. P. R. Paterson; 24. T. Jenkins; 25. A. Stephen & Son; 26. J. Flett & Son; 27. Still & Co; 28. A. Hill-Low & Sender & Cos; 29. J. Donaldson; **Bressay** 30. More; 31. British Curing Co; 32. Mackenzie & Bain; 33. Duthie; 34. Stewart, Duthie & Co; 35. Duncan & Jamieson; 36. Stephen & Co; 37. Milne (R). A more complete list of herring stations appeared in Manson's *Shetland Almanac and Directory 1907*.<sup>12</sup> The curing stations in 1906 are listed in the Appendix to this paper. The reason for including these long lists of fish merchants is to allow readers to check on the activities of these companies in their local newspapers' archive, check company records, if these are available, compare with similar lists for other herring ports, and check publications by individual fish curing companies.

Fragments of some of these stations still survive. But in 1989, when the main survey was carried out, many of the buildings were found to have been altered, some to act as military barracks during World War II, others to convert them to storage or office accommodation. Saga Seafoods, Brown's Road, Lerwick, has some army-type barrack huts erected during the war, that had been used by herring gutters after the military moved out. These provided accommodation for 16 women in one hut. Each hut had toilet and WC facilities at one end of the structure. This type of accommodation was much less desirable and less popular than the three women to a room at Shearer's Station and Gremista.

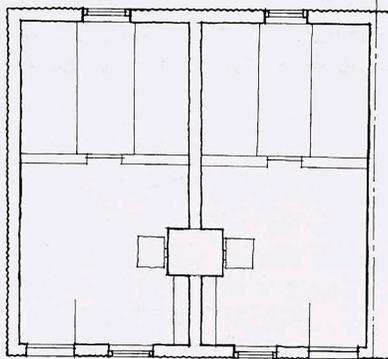
The only other significant survivals to be surveyed were the Hay & Co's two-storey corrugated-iron gutters' huts at the North Ness, Lerwick (see Fig. 12). These are similar in concept to the single-storey huts at Shearer's Station and Gremista, but provide accommodation on two floors with an external access gallery to the upper level. Each unit of accommodation measures approximately 5.86 x 3.05 m, making these the most compact quarters recorded. Similar two-storey accommodation has been recorded by Stuart Bagshaw, Architect, Stornoway, at Scalpay, Harris, but that building is in a much poorer state of repair.

The principal Hay & Co block measures 24.47 x 5.86 m on plan and is 3.05 m from floor to ceiling. The internal partitions have been stripped out, but paint shadows on the walls indicate that the living space was 3.09 m deep, the sleeping



Figure 12 Exterior and floor plan of two-storey huts erected for Hay & Co. at North Ness, Lerwick.

space was 2.38 m deep, and the two were separated by a modest partition 10 cm thick and approximately 2 m high. Not all of the apartments were available for survey, but those on the upper flat, furthest from the sea, are painted internally. The V-jointed matchboarding is painted dark-green to form a dado to approximately sill level. Above this the walls and ceiling are painted white. The change from green to white is achieved by painting a band of dark-green 1.5 cm deep to correspond to the window sill over a band of white of equal depth over the dark-green dado. At the other end of the building the ceilings are painted white, but over a formerly varnished finish, and the walls are varnished. The rooms at the seaward end have additional windows facing the sea and are known to have been used as offices, as they had a view of the remainder of the yard. The office use is recent, as these rooms accommodated the original toilet facilities.



A postcard of the North Ness, published in a 'National Series' by 'M & L' and entitled 'Herring Gutters, Lerwick 12', shows two-storey gutters' accommodation in the background, but not the same buildings as survive today. The huts in the North Ness postcard are more reminiscent of the two-storey gutters' huts

on Scalpay, Harris, than of the two-storey structures described above. A postcard of the James Flett Sons & Co yard also shows two-storey gutters' huts. P. R. Paterson's fishing station at Lerwick is the subject of a postcard by H. Morrison, Lerwick. This illustrates a type of single-storey gutters' hut not noted elsewhere. These huts have very shallow monopitched roofs, small windows and stove-pipe chimneys at regular intervals along the roof. These give the impression of being particularly utilitarian and comfortless in their construction and the flattish pitch of the corrugated iron roofs would maximise the drumming effect in heavy rain or hail storms. The majority of old photographs show single-storey gutters' huts in timber or corrugated iron designed to give the impression of traditional single-storey single-room cottages, built in terraces.

The huts themselves are interesting, but it must be remembered that these are only part of the architecture of the herring fishing. The authors intend to produce an A4 volume covering all the types of structure found on the Shetland fishing stations and to publish this through the Scottish Buildings Study Group at Dundee University.

It is also important to remember that the former occupants of the huts, the herring gutters, were one of the first groups of emancipated female workers in modern Britain. These were women who earned as much as, if not more than, their menfolk. Jessie Sinclair, a Scalloway woman interviewed for the Shetland publication *Ahint da Daeks*, states:

'I did work in fish, in herrin, in Scalloway, whin I was aboot sixteen. I used ta work at da herrin in da summer. And we'd long days: we'd start sometimes at six in da mornin, and I can remember one Saturday night dat we'd worked well into Sunday morning and we'd earned, believe it or not, thirty shillings dat day: dat wis a big, big day! It wis piece rates at da gutting and packing. I wis a packer. In the morning you went oot and did whit dey caaed filling up: you fill on layers where de barrels had settled doon after a couple o' days. Now dat wis hour's work. I think we got ninepence an hour, an we used ta work on dat fae six to nine in da morning.'<sup>13</sup>

The gutting and packing piecework started when the boats returned from the night's fishing and continued until the catch was gutted, cleaned, salted and packed. Cooking, housework, laundering and socialising had to be carried out after the piecework was finished for the day. Jessie Sinclair and some of the other Shetland women worked only for the summer, but many of the east coast and Hebridean girls worked for nine months of the year, moving from station to station as the shoals of fish made their way round the coast. Agnes Halcrow remembers:

'We gutted doon here at Blackness and Port Arthur, oot yonder at da point. There were three hundred gutters dat came fae sooth den, and day bade in huts, and dere were eens fae Sandwick, and Cunningsburgh, and North Roe.'<sup>14</sup>

'Da huts, dey were aaright, rude huts. We got a barrel o corn [oats] in for da week ... A crew wis three women, an every een hed a hut ta demselves.'<sup>15</sup>

The forthcoming publication will not only cover those structures omitted from this paper, but will develop the descriptions of the gutters' huts and place these in a wider context.

### **Appendix: curing stations in 1906.**

**Baltasound:** 1. J. & D. Fraser, Helmsdale; 2. Wm Slater & Sons, Hopeman; 3. F. R. Murray, Aberdeen; 4. S. Duthie & Co, Aberdeen; 5. Ritchie Bros. Aberdeen; 6. J. Dickson, Fraserburgh; 7. Bain & Co., Fraserburgh; 8. P. R. Paterson, Fraserburgh; 9. S. Robb, Fraserburgh; 10. J. R. Nutman, Gt Yarmouth; 11. Stephen & Co, Fraserburgh; 12. Gunther & Co, Fraserburgh; 13. J. Trail Stephen, Peterhead; 14. Robert Bisset, Fraserburgh; 15. Robert Gordon, Fraserburgh; 16. I. & J. Dunbar, Fraserburgh; 17. W. & J. Burnett, Fraserburgh; 18. Wm Low, Fraserburgh; 19. Bisset & Co, Fraserburgh; 20. Wm Downie, Sandhaven; 21. A. Sandison & Sons, Baltasound; 22. Lewis Thomson, Fraserburgh; 23. Jas Gerry, Buckie; 24. A. Bruce & Co, Fraserburgh; 25. Thos. Burnett, Fraserburgh; 26. A. R. Noble, Fraserburgh; 27. McKenzie & McIver, Stornoway; 28. A. Brown & Co, Peterhead; 29. Ritchies & West, Rosehearty; 30. Wm Miller & Co, Fraserburgh; 31. Johnston & Co, Fraserburgh; 32. E. Gordon, Fraserburgh; 33. J. McK. Stephen, Peterhead; 34. J. Flett, Sons & Co, Buckie; 35. Robert Melville, Anstruther; 36. P. & J. Sutherland, Portsoy; 37. Scottish Russian Co., Peterhead; 38. W. Lumsden, Peterhead; 39. Sinclair & Duncan, Fraserburgh; 40. P. Davidson, Fraserburgh; 41. Cruden & Stevenson, Fraserburgh; 42. John Ewen & Sons, Fraserburgh; 43. A. Watt, Fraserburgh; 44. A. Noble & Co., Fraserburgh; 45. Duncan & Jamieson, Wick; 46. Thos. Jenkins, Burghead; 47. John Mair & Co, Peterhead; 48. A. Wood & Son, Peterhead; 49. R. M. Stephen & Sons, Peterhead; 50. Wm Davidson & Coy, Peterhead; 51. A. Stephen and Sons, Peterhead. **Boddam:** 1. James Maitland. **Bressay:** 1. James More, Wick; 2. Robert Milne, Aberdeen; 3. S. Duthie & Co, Aberdeen; 4. John D. Duthie, Aberdeen; 5. Marshall & Co, Aberdeen; 6. Mackenzie & Bain, Stornoway; 7. British Curing Co., Lowestoft & Aberdeen; 8. Stephen and Co., Fraserburgh.

**Burra Isle:** 1. George Couper, Helmsdale; 2. Fraser & Co., Scalloway.

**Burravoe:** 1. D. & G. Kay, Lerwick. **West Burrafirth:** 1. A. Christie, Aberdeen.

**Cullivoe:** 1. Alexander Wood & Son, Peterhead; 2. William Masson, Peterhead; 3. James Mitchell & Sons, Fraserburgh; 4. John Mair & Co., Peterhead; 5. R. Sandison & Co., Cullivoe; 6. R. Ritchie & Co., Rosehearty. **Grutness** 1. Isbister & Co, Grutness. **Hannavoe:** 1. G. Couper, Helmsdale; 2. J. More, Wick.

**Hillswick:** 1. John Anderson & Sons, Hillswick; 2. John Brown, Lewick.

**Lerwick:** 1. Gray & Smith, Lerwick; 2. E. Charleston, Lerwick; 3. H. McDonald & Co., Lerwick; 4. Duchart & Co., Wick; 5. Jas. Mitchell & Sons, Fraserburgh; 6. J. Brown, Lerwick; 7. J. More, Wick; 8. Hay & Co, Lerwick; 9. L. Stewart, Lerwick; 10. J. Harper, Wick; 11. Duncan & Jamieson, Wick; 12. Marshall & Co, Aberdeen; 13. Williamson & Co, Aberdeen; 14. Ritchie & West, Rosehearty; 15. A. & J. Q. Corner, Wick; 16. D. Waters, Wick; 17. Moir, Wilson & Co, Aberdeen; 18. Gorden T. West, Peterhead; 19. A. Duncan, Aberdeen; 20. C. Simpson & Sons, Lerwick; 21. J. & R. Tait, Lerwick; 22. Dower & Sinclair, Wick; 23. R. & W. Hutchison, Peterhead; 24. James Nicol, Peterhead; 25. Thos Brown & Co, Lerwick; 26. Mackenzie & McIver, Stornoway; 27. P. & J. Sutherland, Portsoy; 28. Davidson & Pirie & Co, Leith; 29. Andrew Bremner, Wick; 30. A. Wood & Son, Peterhead; 31. D. D. Gray & Co, Leith; 32. J. Mair & Co, Peterhead; 33. James Mair & Co, Stornoway; 34. A. McKenzie, Hopeman; 35. Jas Slater, Hopeman; 36. Still & Co, Aberdeen; 37. Wm Slater & Sons, Hopeman; 38. P. R. Paterson, Fraserburgh; 39. T. Jenkins, Burghead; 40. A. Stephen & Sons, Peterhead; 41. James Flett, Sons & Co, Buckie; 42. A. Hill, Low, Fraserburgh; 43. Sandler & Co, Stettin; 44. J. Donaldson, Portknockie; 45. A. Morrison & Co, Stornoway. **Levenwick:** 1. John Brown, Lerwick; 2. T. Black & Coy, Dunrossness. **Mangister.** 1. James Mitchell & Sons, Fraserburgh. **Mid Yell:** 1. John Brown, Lerwick; 2. A. Bremner, Wick. **North Roe:** 1. John Brown, Lerwick. **Ronas Voe:** 1. George Couper, Helmsdale; 2. Wm Stephen, Jr, Peterhead; 3. P.R. Paterson, Fraserburgh; 4. A. Stephen & Sons, Fraserburgh; 5. John McAulay, Helmsdale. **Scalloway:** 1. Hay & Co, Lerwick; 2. A. Ronaldson, Wick; 3. S. Prager, Libau; 4. Andrew Christie, Aberdeen; 5. Robert Christie, Aberdeen; 6. Alex Wood & Son, Peterhead; 7. Garriock & Co, Scalloway; 8. J. Harper, Wick; 9. James Nicol, Peterhead; 10. Fraser & Co, Scalloway; 11. Gray & Smith, Lerwick; 12. Gordon Dower, Wick; 13. G. & D. Cormack, Wick; 14. J. R. Tait, Wick; 15. A. Morrison & Co, Stornoway; 16. C. Simpson & Sons, Lerwick; 17. D. A. Wares, Wick; 18. R. W. Davidson, Lossiemouth; 19. C. & J. Summers, Port Erroll; 20. Watt & Co., Fraserburgh; 21. Jas Wood, Fraserburgh; 22. Trail & Webster, Fraserburgh; 23. T. D. Will & Co., Fraserburgh; 24. T. Jenkins, Burghead; 25. J. McK. Stephen, Peterhead; 26. G. McRobie, Portsoy; 27. C. McDonald, Fraserburgh; 28. Jos Stephen, Fraserburgh; 29. Mitchell-Hughes, Pittenweem; 30. Wm Stephen Jr, Peterhead; 31. J. M. Davidson, Glasgow.

**Snarraness Voe:** 1. Alex. Ronaldson, Wick. **Uyeasound:** 1. A. Sandison &

Sons, Uyeasound; 2. Jas. Livingstone, Aberdeen; 3. P. & J. Sutherland, Portsoy; 4. A. H. Low, Portsoy; 5. Scottish Russian Co., Peterhead; 6. A. Mearns, Montrose. **Walls:** 1. T. Brown & Co, Lerwick; 2. G. & D. Cormack, Wick; 3. John Harper, Wick. **West Sandwick:** 1. James S. Wood, Peterhead. **Whalfirth:** 1. Andrew Bremner, Wick. **Whalsay:** 1. Hay & Co, Lerwick; 2. George Couper, Helmsdale. **Sandwick and Dunrossness:** 1. Thomas Tulloch, Sandwick; 2. James Smith & Sons, Hoswick; 3. William Thomson, Hoswick; 4. James More, Wick; 5. G. R & W. Jamieson, Sandwick; 6. Gray & Smith, Lerwick; 7. Wiseman & Co, Gardenstown; 8. T. Smith, Hoswick; 9. J. F. Halcrow, Hoswick; 10. J. Mitchell & Sons, Lerwick; 11. P. & J. Sutherland, Portsoy. **Skerries** 1. George Couper, Helmsdale. **Papa Stour** 1. T. M. Adie & Sons, Voe.

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# SAND LODGE DOOCOT, SANDWICK, SHETLAND

Nick Brown

The doocot at Sand Lodge at Sandwick on Shetland main island is one of the four most northerly pigeon houses in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> (The others are the ‘little rubble drum doocot’ at Busta House on the west mainland, a ‘tall castellated doocot’ associated with Symbister House on the Island of Whalsay and a 19th-century doocot within the roofspace of a range of outbuildings at Seafield, Lerwick.<sup>2</sup>) It is located on the coastal edge overlooking the North Sea about 80 m to the north of the much-altered three-and-a-half storey 17th-century mansion at Sand Lodge<sup>3</sup> (see Fig. 1). The house itself was bought by John Bruce around 1770 from the Sinclairs of Quendale, and now has a classical elevation complete with flighted step entrance facing directly towards the doocot.<sup>4</sup> ‘At some time the old house was given parapets, with an unusual use of red brick for eaves and string courses’ and this is now evident on the doocot also.<sup>5</sup>

The doocot is approximately 3.5 m square in plan and is constructed using good-quality rubble stone with an external lime harling composed largely of seashell material (although part of the wall around the southern doorway is bulging outwards). The existing stone boundary wall is about 3 m high and abutts the ground floor of the doocot, suggesting that the doocot was once free-standing, probably in the late 18th century<sup>6</sup> (see Figs 2–5).

The doocot doorway which faces the mansion house is approximately 1700 mm high x 700 mm wide (the door, probably timber-boarded, is now missing) and



*Figure 1 View from the main house showing the doocot as a focal point at the end of a garden path with the Wick of Sandsayre beyond.*

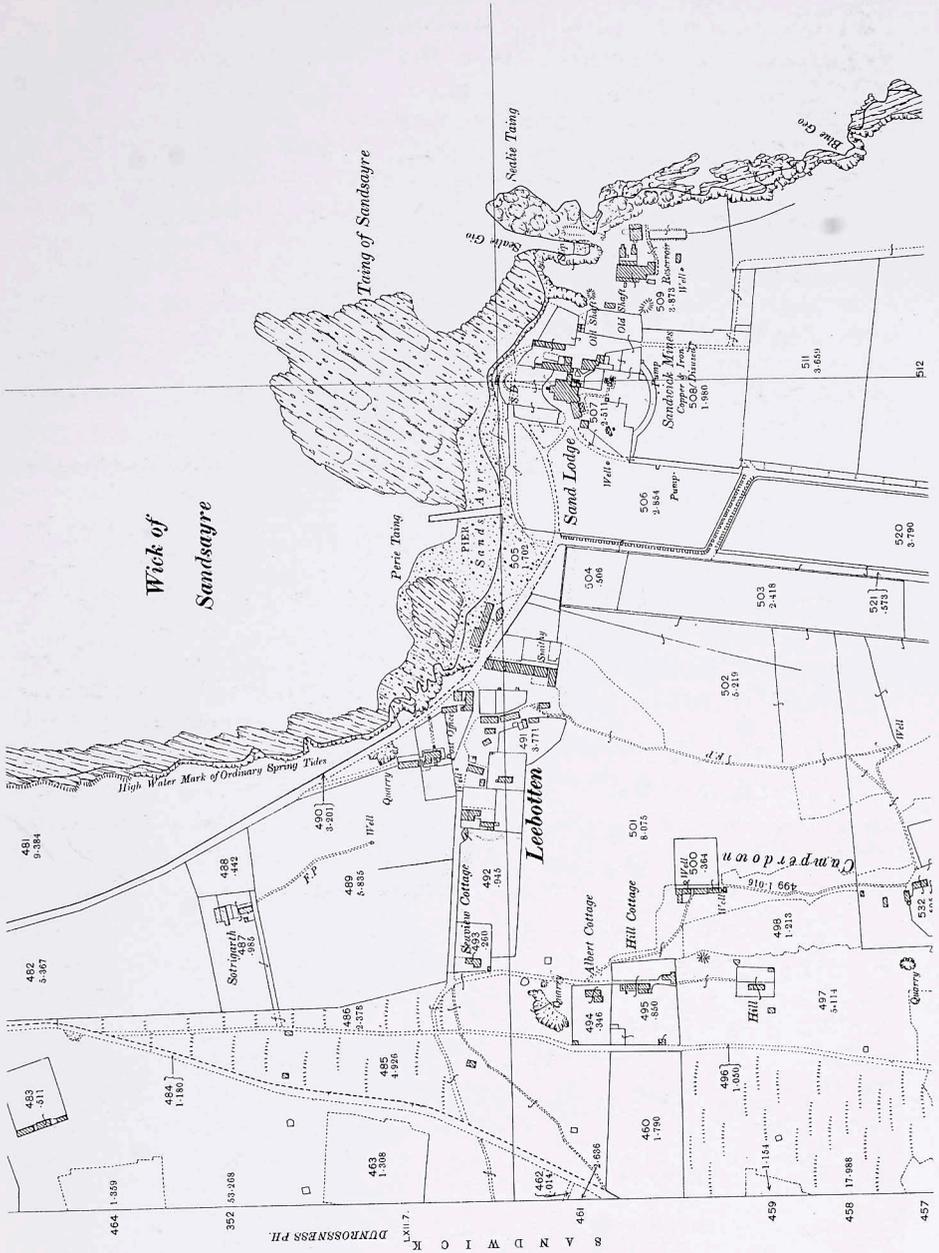


Figure 2 Extract from 1901 Ordnance Survey map showing Sand Lodge much as it is today. The doocot is the most northerly building of the Sand Lodge complex and its formal axial relationship with the main house is clear.

gives access to the debris-filled ground-floor chamber. Three central slit windows on the east and west walls approximately 170 mm wide x 1100 mm high have once been repaired in brick but are now blocked. The ground-floor chamber was possibly used at one time to house an animal such as a pig, or fowls, although it is more likely that it was used for human purposes involving food storage and preparation, tending of ill birds, or collecting and killing birds. The slit windows built to provide ventilation were probably blocked to increase storage provision, prevent vermin entering the building and discourage vandalism.

Wall markings in the north-west corner of the ground-floor chamber indicate that the doocot had a steep stair access leading to the upper chamber, and it is obvious from joist pockets in the masonry in the opposite direction from the current floor that an earlier floor has been replaced. The original structure probably possessed only hatch access to the pigeon chamber rather than the more convenient later version.

A deep but narrow ledge (approximately 250 mm x 75 mm) surrounds the structure and although its function is not altogether clear, it is noted that many mixed-use doocots elsewhere have ledges or band courses delineating floor levels.<sup>7</sup> It appears that the first floor of the doocot has been devoted entirely to pigeons; the current internal fixtures and fittings are obviously 20th century and according to the present owner, the pigeon house was still functioning during the 1960s. The entire internal area of the upper chamber has received a smooth gypsum plaster finish and only two rows of (comparatively large) 300 mm wide x 300 mm high x 300 mm deep nest boxes constructed in dressed but untreated softwood boarding surround the chamber at high level. Pigeon access to the chamber was gained through six 125 mm-wide arched-top wooden flight holes inserted centrally in the south-facing wall looking towards the north frontage of the mansion. The [doorway?] aperture of the doocot is surrounded with bricks and may be an enlargement of an earlier opening or even a new one altogether.

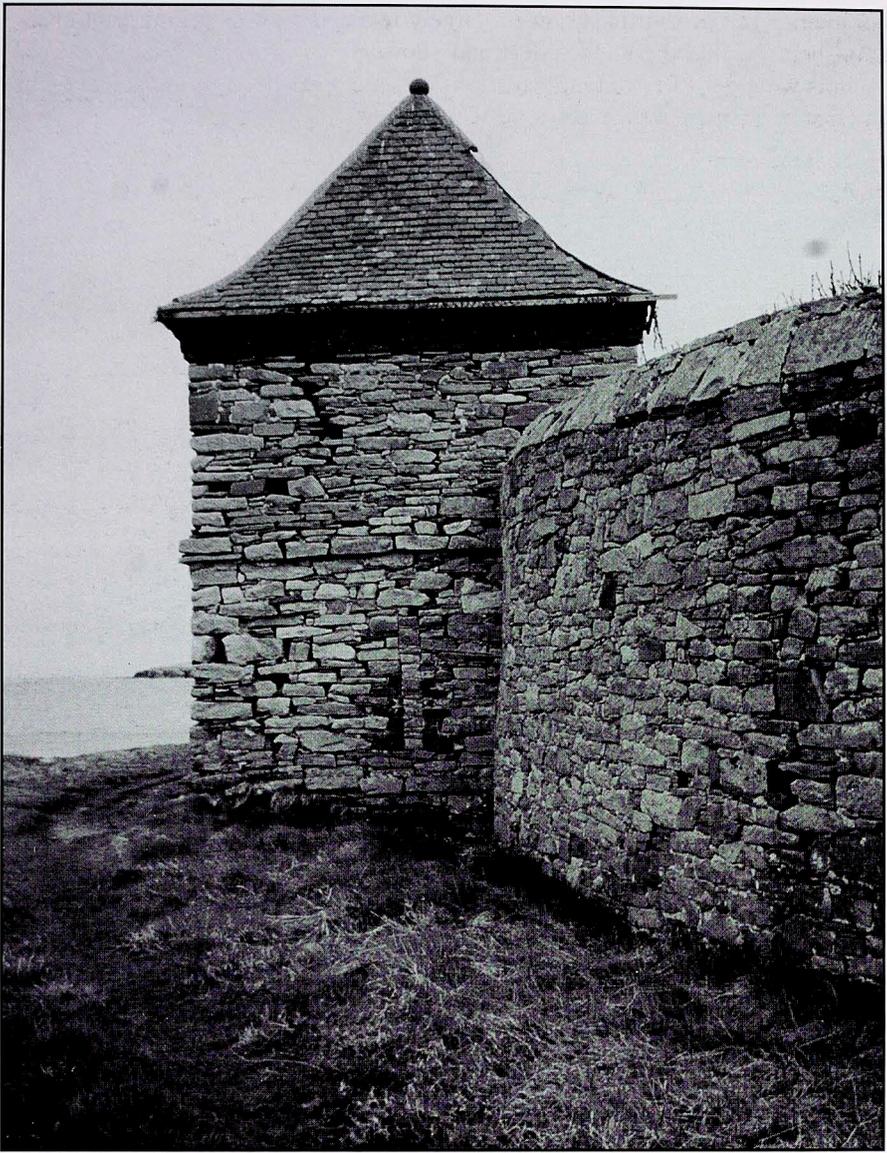
The 55° pyramidal slate roof with lead hips and swept eaves is evidently a later replacement, perhaps coinciding with the decorative Victorian brick eaves which corbel out with dentil work and give the building a good overhang for shedding water. The original roof to the structure was probably simpler than the existing one, but its form is uncertain. It may at one time have possessed a stone finial or metal weathervane, since doocots of this period were often 'topped out'.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately the existing roof is deteriorating and many of the slates are now missing, so the demise of the exposed timber roof will probably be rapid unless remedial action is taken quickly.<sup>9</sup>

The doocot at Sandwick is not dissimilar to those at Crathes in Aberdeenshire and Urquhart Manse in Moray.<sup>10</sup> (Both of these comparable structures are small-scale mixed-use structures of square plan with pyramidal roof now forming focal points in later garden plans.) Larger square doocots can be found





*Figure 4 South elevation, showing the narrow but tall central ground-floor door for human access, with the brick-edged aperture containing timber flight-holes for pigeons above. Although the structure is rapidly deteriorating, much of the harling finish on the upper chamber wall is still visible between the dentilled brickwork eaves and the stone bandcourse.*



*Figure 5* View from the west, showing the relationship between the doocot and the later garden wall. The sweep of the pavilion roof is very evident, but the blocked slit window on the ground floor is barely visible. Sadly, cracks in both the doocot and garden walls are beginning to develop.

on the island of Stroma (between Caithness and Orkney) and also at Stemster in Caithness.<sup>11</sup> However, square-plan doocots with pyramidal roofs are more commonly found in England and certainly the brick dentil features are not common on Scottish vernacular buildings.<sup>12</sup> This coincides with current thinking that Sand

Lodge would have been occupied at some time by a fishing merchant migrating from the British mainland.<sup>13</sup>

To summarise, Sand Lodge Doocot may not be a spectacular example of pigeon house design in national terms, nor encapture the vernacular spirit of the Shetland Islands. Yet it demonstrates well the alteration processes to which such buildings were subject as a result of changing practices, attitudes and needs. Simple buildings such as these can therefore inform us of historical development and, for this very reason, they should either be protected and/or recorded.

## Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to Mr Bell, owner of Sand Lodge, for permission to view and photograph the Doocot; and to Mike Finnie for permission to reproduce the scale drawings of the Doocot which he prepared.

## References

1. In his national gazetteer based on research carried out by Dr Niven Robertson in the 1950s, Dr Grant Peterkin (*Scottish Dovecotes*, Coupar Angus: Wm. Culross & Son, p. 65) cites 'Sand Lodge, a voe, square brick; Ogee pyramidal roof', as the only doocot in Shetland.
2. M. Finnie. *Shetland, An illustrated architectural guide*, pp. 46 and 64. Edinburgh: RIAS Publications, 1990.
3. M. Finnie, *op. cit.*, p. 46. J. Gifford in *Buildings of Scotland—Highlands and Islands* (Edinburgh: Penguin Books, 1992, p. 505) refers to the doocot merely as 'pavilion with a brick eaves course'.
4. The Secretary of State's 1971 Statutory Listing for Area Zetland, Item 7, p. 2 suggests that the 'oldest part of Sand Lodge is believed to have been used by Bruce family as a halfway house between Sumburgh and Lerwick' before the Sinclairs took ownership. The doocot is listed along with the mansion category B.
5. M. Finnie, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
6. It seems probable that the doocot was built soon after Bruce's take-over of the mansion in 1770.
7. Such as at Inveraray, Argyll; Lesmurdie, Elgin; and Mounthooly, Buchan. The ledge at Sand Lodge has been altered to incorporate a bellcast fillet. This might be to improve its ability to shed water.
8. Such as Megginch, Tayside; Bowerbutts, Fife; and Denbie House, Dumfries.
9. The current owner intends 'patching up' the doocot in the near future: M. Finnie, pers. comm., 23 June 1997.
10. See P. and J. Hansell, *Dovecote Heritage* (Bath: Millstream Books, 1992), p. 72, and E. Beaton, *Dooocots of Moray* (Elgin: Moray Field Club, 1978), p. 28.
11. A. O. Cooke, *Book of Dovecotes* (London: T. N. Foulis, 1920), facing p. 276, shows an illustration of Stroma, and E. Beaton, *Dooocots of Caithness* (Dundee: SVBWG, 1978), p. 10, shows sketch of Stemster by B. Walker.
12. There are, however, other examples of brick used for decorative features throughout Shetland. The mines to the south of Sand Lodge also have brick buildings and there is a popular tradition that bricks were imported as ships' ballast.
13. Professor Alexander Fenton, Public Lecture, Lerwick, 2 May 1997.

# **SHETLAND'S CAMPING BÖDS**

## **Alastair Hamilton**

Shetland often seems to surprise those newly arrived on her shores. On closer inspection, that tiny and often misplaced splash of cartographer's ink turns out to be a group of islands stretching 100 miles from Fair Isle in the south to Unst in the north. There is a great deal to engage the visitor, but tourism in Shetland remains low-key; it is much less visible and rather less significant in the local economy than in Orkney or the Hebrides. The main reason for this is almost certainly the higher cost of travel to Shetland whether by air or sea; but accommodation, too, has sometimes been priced to suit business rather than holiday travellers. One of the driving forces behind the Camping Böds project from its inception around ten years ago has therefore been the belief that more people should have the opportunity to experience what Shetland has to offer. For many years, there have been excellent youth hostels in Lerwick and Unst, but there was virtually no basic accommodation elsewhere. Camping sites were few and far between.

Perhaps there were lessons to be learned elsewhere. The Peak District National Park had made impressive progress in the provision of what were called Camping Barns, which, with the active co-operation of local farmers, enabled people to stay in what was effectively a stone tent. There were similar initiatives elsewhere in England, indeed the Countryside Commission appointed a member of staff simply to promote such developments. In Scotland, there was a long tradition of walkers' bothies. For Shetland, we had in mind basic accommodation that would offer spaces to those with an airbed or sleeping mat, with simple kitchen facilities, toilets and possibly showers. More elementary and considerably cheaper than the two existing youth hostels, they were intended to complement them rather than compete.

We needed a network which could be properly marketed, with a booking system which would guarantee a place to sleep and, in the longer term, might be built into some kind of package. Early investigations suggested that management and marketing would present no insuperable problems. The principle found favour with the council and with the local tourist organisation. However, the key to progress with the project lay in the existence of the Shetland Amenity Trust, a voluntary body set up in 1983 which was funded from the council's Charitable Trust. With aims that included the conservation of Shetland's built heritage and the promotion of access and interpretation, the Trust was ideally placed to take the development of a hostel network in hand. The Trustees agreed to do so.

## *Appropriate buildings*

The concept and approach having been established, it was nevertheless obvious that our solution would have to be tailored to local circumstances. Agriculture in most of Shetland means crofting, and buildings were correspondingly small. There were few surplus croft sheds and steadings; most were in active use, or had been crammed over generations with artefacts that were bound to come in handy one of these days. However, buildings of other types badly needed a new use. For many of these, there was little or no active market: they were at risk. Then there was the question of a name: after considering various options, *böd* was suggested. In Shetland, a *böd* was a seasonal shelter used by fishermen or itinerant traders, and borrowing the term for visitor accommodation did not seem too improbable a leap.

We began to identify potential buildings and likely sources of funding. Two essential criteria were established at the outset. Firstly, all buildings considered for *böd* conversion would have to be situated where they would form a logical component of a Shetland network attractive to visitors. Secondly, they should be of demonstrable architectural or historic interest, though they need not be 'Listed', particularly given the imperfect Statutory List then in force. Applying



Figure 1 Sail Loft, Voe.

these rules would mean that the network should make a positive contribution both to preservation of important parts of Shetland's heritage and to expansion of an under-developed sector of our visitor market. In turn, the project stood a good chance of appealing to funding organisations operating in both the conservation and economic development fields. Each böd would employ a part-time caretaker and the price would reflect the basic nature of the facilities; it is currently £3 per person per night.

### *The first böd—the Sail Loft, Voe*

Work began on the first camping böd, the Sail Loft at Voe, in 1990 (see Fig. 1). The building fitted our selection criteria admirably. It was an ideal staging post, located 20 miles north of Lerwick, just off the main routes to the north mainland and the islands of Whalsay, Yell, Fetlar and Unst. It also had good access to the West Mainland. Situated right on the waterfront in a picturesque, partly wooded village, its surroundings could hardly be more appealing. The lower, stone part of the building dates from the mid-19th century, when it was constructed as a salt store for the fish curers who served the fleet of sail fishing smacks based in Voe. Later, as the fleet grew, it became necessary to have more storage space for sails, masts and rigging. A timber frame clad in corrugated iron was erected on top of the stone walls, producing a store and workshop of generous proportions. Indeed, it was the most prominent building on the waterfront, an impression that its rich dark-red colouring enhanced. Comparisons with Norwegian coastal settlements were irresistible.

Like other remoter fishing harbours, Voe lost much of its trade as sail gave way to steam and vessels could take their catch to Lerwick, Scalloway or indeed to the Scottish mainland. In the early 20th century the Adie family, who had managed the fishing, decided to transfer their interests to the expanding knitwear industry. The Sail Loft was converted into a factory manufacturing woollens and tweed. Large volumes of these were produced, but its most famous products were extra-lightweight sweaters specially produced for the first successful Everest expedition in 1953 and worn by Sir Edmund Hillary. Gradually, however, the trade moved to more modern premises and the Sail Loft fell into disuse. The corrugated iron began to decay and, in the late 1980s, the Shetland Islands Council Planning Department discussed the future of the building with the owners; in due course, the Shetland Amenity Trust acquired it for conversion to a camping böd. Funding came from the Countryside Commission for Scotland, the LEADER I programme, Shetland Enterprise and the Shetland Islands Council Charitable Trust. In the conversion, the exterior was re-clad and its appearance was restored to the original, with that wonderfully rich colour on the walls set off by white windows and a black roof. The Sail Loft became the second substantial corrugated-iron building in Shetland to be restored; it was 'listed' in 1995. The origi-

nal interior layout and finishes were largely retained, the only significant alteration being the insertion of toilets and showers in part of the entrance area. Visitors were delighted to find that it was close to a bakery, a restaurant and pub and that otters were frequently to be seen nearby.

### *The Grieve's House and Johnnie Notions*

The omens were excellent and, thus encouraged, the Shetland Amenity Trust moved to acquire and convert two more properties. The second böd to be completed was the Grieve's House on the island of Whalsay (see Fig. 2). Easy to reach from Voe, Whalsay is dominated by a modern fishing industry, but it has an interesting history involving the Hanseatic trade and there are some significant archaeological remains. The Grieve's House was so called because it was for nine years the home of Christopher Murray Grieve, otherwise the poet, writer and political radical, Hugh MacDiarmid (1892–1978), who moved here in 1933. Before he came north, MacDiarmid's life had taken an increasingly unhappy course and he was weighed down by a broken marriage, a fondness for strong drink, poor health and chronic poverty. Shetland seemed to provide the possibility of escape and recovery; certainly, he seems to have developed a deep affection for the islands. However, the respite was at best intermittent and, reluctantly conscripted to work in an armaments factory, he left in 1942. Nevertheless, he wrote much of his best work on Whalsay. The conversion of the house to a camping böd was supported by the same funding partnership involved in the Sail Loft. The building, a very plain single-storey cottage typical of the island, was refurbished and opened in 1992.



Figure 2 Grieve's House, Whalsay.

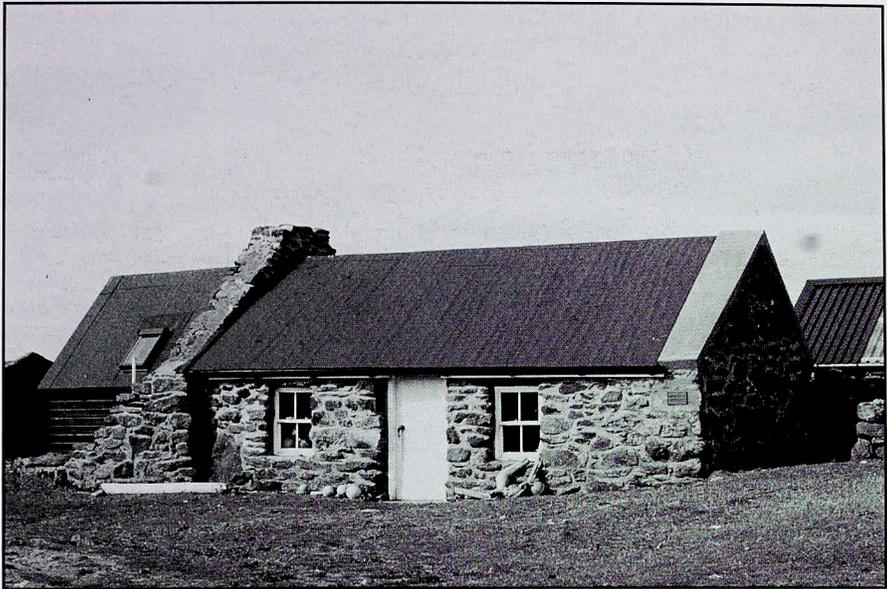


Figure 3 *Johnnie Notions, Hamnavoe.*

In the same year, the Trust completed a third böd at Hamnavoe in Eshaness, the northwestern tip of the Shetland mainland (Fig. 3). Over time, the idea had taken root that this tiny cottage had been, around 1740, the birthplace of John Williamson, a ‘lad o’ pairts’ whose skills included those of crofter, blacksmith, tailor, fisherman and watchmaker, but whose greatest claim to fame was his invention of a method of inoculating the people of the area against smallpox. He treated large numbers using a serum he developed himself, which was placed just under the skin of the patient. The local minister observed that his treatment had never failed, while a local physician wrote that

‘this uneducated empiric has left me speechless, and I can only meekly admit that he leads the way on a more advanced, and active, treatment, towards victory.’

His genius for invention led to his nickname, ‘Johnnie Notions’, the name by which the cottage is known. In fact, his real birthplace, now a ruin, was a short distance away but the name has stuck. Even by croft-house standards it is a diminutive building, the smallest böd so far opened, and it was necessary to site the cooking and toilet facilities in a timber extension to one end. The wood-lined interior of the house is a single room measuring about 20 feet by 10 feet (6 x 3 m) that forms a cosy sleeping and living area.

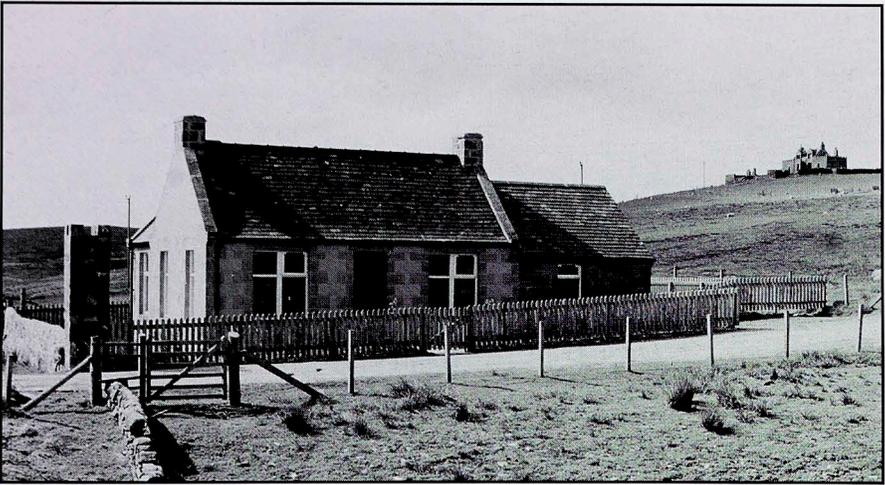


Figure 4 *Windhouse Lodge, Yell.*

### ***Windhouse Lodge, Yell***

Although the Sail Loft had helped bridge the gap of just over 50 miles between the existing youth hostels in Lerwick and Unst, there was a case for another böd to complete a more convenient chain. The island of Yell, between the mainland and Unst, lacked any sort of basic accommodation, yet its walking territory and its bird life were potentially appealing. The opportunity arose for the Shetland Amenity Trust to buy Windhouse Lodge (Fig. 4), the gatehouse for the stark, roofless and reputedly haunted ruin of Windhouse on the hill above. Right on the main road, next to an RSPB reserve and close to favourite places for spotting some of Yell's many otters, it was an opportunity too good to miss. The building, a simple T-shaped stone cottage with several small rooms, was altered very little during the restoration work, but was the first böd to be fitted with showers.

### ***Betty Mouat's Cottage***

Shetland's south mainland, a narrow strip of hill and farmland stretching 25 miles from Lerwick to Sumburgh Head, has a number of important archaeological remains, excellent bird-watching sites and some dramatic scenery including the remarkable tombolo at St Ninian's Isle. At Sumburgh itself there is the islands' main airport and, nearby, the ferry terminal for Fair Isle. No network would be complete without a böd in this area. Fortunately, an excellent candidate became available in the form of Betty Mouat's Cottage (Fig. 5), a generously proportioned rubble building on a knoll close to the sea and with views to Fitful Head and Sumburgh Head. The building is also immediately adjacent to what has become Shetland's largest and most exciting archaeological investigation, the

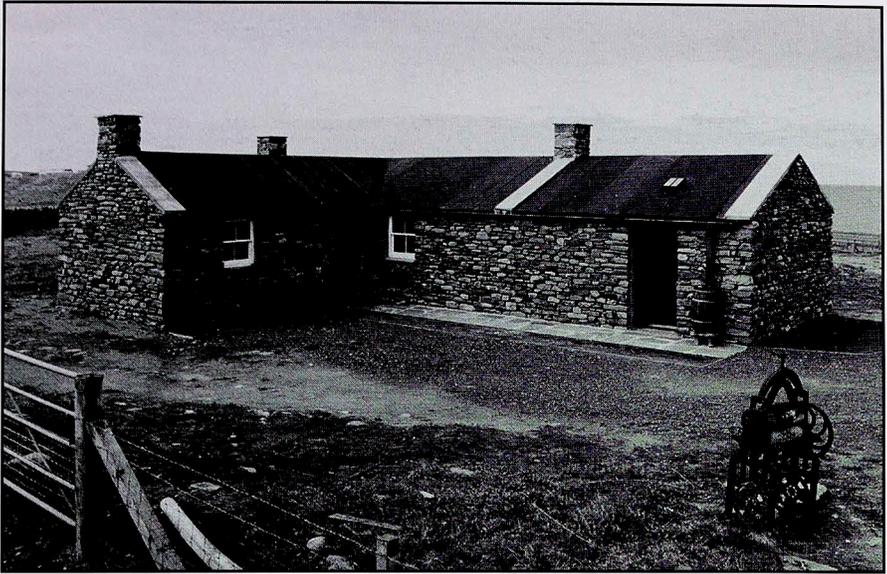


Figure 5 Betty Mouat's Cottage, Scatness.

excavation of the broch and settlement at Old Scatness. Its structure, notable for its particularly low-pitched tarry roof, turned out to be so fragile that substantial rebuilding was indicated, but the result is faithful to the original.

Betty Mouat (1825–1918) became a celebrity in February 1886 when the *Columbine*, on which she had set out for Lerwick, carried her, alone, right across the North Sea. Not long after they had set sail, two of the crew of three were flung overboard in rough seas. The skipper disappeared and the others launched the dinghy to look for him, leaving Betty alone. By the time they realised that the search was hopeless, the *Columbine* was heading rapidly north-eastwards and, eight days and nights later, Betty and her boat drifted ashore at Lepsøy in Norway. She returned to England, then came north to Shetland, where a huge welcome greeted her.

### ***Voe House, Walls***

With bōds available in the north and south mainland and two of the other islands, attention turned to Shetland's west mainland, an extensive area which again offers excellent walking and still more archaeological sites. The area is also the gateway to the islands of Papa Stour and, farther out, Foula. One long, two-storey Listed building overlooking the village of Walls (pronounced Waas) stood out as being of interest and at risk. In fact, there were two connected buildings; the older one was ruinous, but is thought to have been a 16th-century manse. Next door was another house, known as Voe House and thought to date from the mid-

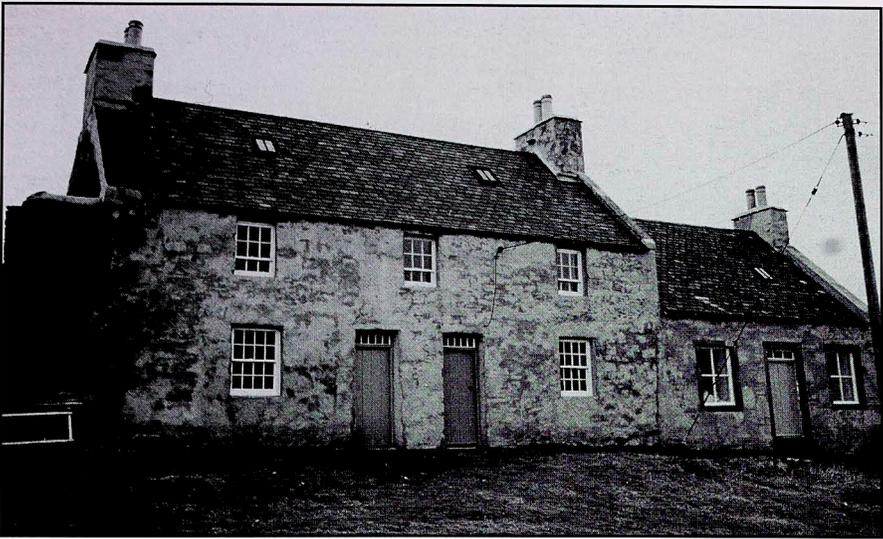


Figure 6 Voe House, Walls.

18th century, which had an extension formerly used as a shop. All this had lain empty for decades following the death of the last owner, the title passing to the Crown. It took more than two years of patient negotiation to acquire the property. The restoration was much the most ambitious so far in scale and complexity, for although it was a relatively plain building it was nevertheless a house of some substance. The Shetland Amenity Trust's skilled workforce brought all their earlier experience to bear on the work and the Trust also made a conscious effort to use recycled materials wherever possible. For example, part of the floor was laid in pitch pine recovered from the former Walls shop. Where concrete was used, it incorporated crushed glass from bottle-banks rather than quarried aggregate. Great care was taken in selecting all the details and the two front doors are painted in their former, different colours. The result is impressive both externally and internally (Fig. 6).

### *A successful project*

Recorded bednights in the böd network rose rapidly and have now reached around 1,500 a year. Reactions, recorded in visitors' books, are overwhelmingly favourable. Visitors have come from all over the world but the böds have also found a local Shetland market. Sample comments from the Sail Loft include:

'These böds are great. They do exactly what the leaflet says they'll do - and more.'

'A comfortable night - floor softened by several pints of Guinness from over the road.'

'Had a long peaceful sleep after a good meal in the restaurant. VG basic accommodation at a good price.'

'This is our third Camping Böd and we like them all!'

'A great place to stay and explore Shetland! Good luck with more böds in the future!'

'What a great place! Peaceful location. Fascinating building. Thanks for the info boards. What a history! What a brilliant idea to use it like this!'

There were, of course, some criticisms too. Lack of heating was mentioned by quite a few guests and this has now been remedied by the fitting of cast-iron pot-bellied stoves, inspiring one Australian to poetry:

'She stands tall and proud, high on her heels, elbow propping up the wall.  
She is chuckling, chortling, warm and friendly and we gather round  
Eager for her to touch us some more.  
Her sleek and curvaceous body entices many a man who will poke and  
kindle,  
Oblivious to the noisy rumblings of her stomach  
She eats well indeed, though her slenderness belies the fact.  
And she sucks up air through her bottom.  
Despite not-so-impressive manners we delight in her presence  
And when the noises emanating from her fade  
The room somehow feels a little colder...'

Showers have been added where possible and problems with such things as faulty door catches and locks have been fixed. However, as more than one visitor has pointed out, these are camping böds, and whilst everything needs to work properly, there is a limit to the upgrading which is appropriate. The Shetland Amenity Trust has been encouraged by, and is grateful for, the financial assistance provided by a range of organisations. Provided that further funds can be raised, there are plans for more böds, offering new opportunities for visitors, some extra tourist income for remoter communities and a secure future for some of Shetland's best-loved buildings.

## **Acknowledgments**

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Alan Blain and Jimmy Moncrieff of Shetland Amenity Trust in the provision of information for this article, and Shetland Amenity Trust and G. Sandison, 'Expressions', for the photographs in Figures 1-5.

# REPORT OF THE SVBWG ANNUAL CONFERENCE, WICK, CAITHNESS 23–27 APRIL 1999:

## Fishing, Farming and Flagstones

**Ronnie Robertson**

In order to make travel arrangements easier this year, we decided to take a coach from Edinburgh with pick-up stops en route, although many people decided to extend or curtail their visit to the North, and many brought their own transport. Following a lunch stop at Inverness, we journeyed north to Laidhay, where the longhouse and museum had been opened especially for us. Laidhay is an early 19th-century longhouse originally with common entry and passage for beasts and family: family turned left to the kitchen, and cattle right to the byre. The domestic portion is a three-roomed cottage consisting of kitchen, middle room and parlour. The collection of objects on display was stupendous and aroused great interest, especially the wooden breadboard complete with integral slot for the knife, or so we thought, and then decided that the board had simply cracked in an obligingly convenient position. Once again vernacular deduction dispels romantic thoughts! The gargantuan tea laid on in the café was a treat; sorry to those in their own cars who may have missed out. The sun shone as we arrived at Mackay's Hotel in Wick (shining on all except Margaret King who discovered that she had left her slides for her Saturday evening talk in her car at the Tore roundabout! The hotel manager, Mr Moray Lamont, came to the rescue and arranged car hire for Margaret for first thing on Saturday morning.) After dinner Lyndall Leet gave an illustrated talk on 'Vernacular buildings of Caithness', which was an excellent introduction to the conference.

On Saturday morning, Donald Omand talked on 'The Caithness flagstone industry' followed by George Watson on 'Caithness harbours', the latter explaining the development of harbour engineering, which gave a good grounding for our later walk to Wick Harbour and Pulteneytown. Named after Sir William Pulteney, former Governor of the British Fisheries Society, Pulteneytown was established by the Society in 1807, and laid out by Thomas Telford on a broad plateau above Wick Bay. Neat rows of two-storey houses, many with distinctive door detailing, are the norm. The exception is Breadalbane Crescent of 1860, which is not in fact a crescent, and is much grander with basements and substantial attics.

Following lunch at the hotel, we walked back to the harbour area, to the Wick Heritage Centre, housed in a terrace of properties c.1830 and opened in 1981 by the Wick Society. Walking around the centre we met Margaret King, who had returned from her enforced visit to Tore and was now clutching a carousel of slides which she refused to put down for any reason until she gave her presenta-

tion! The Lifeboat House was visited next; dated 1915, it superseded the earlier lifeboat house of 1848 in Lower Pulteneytown. The Lifeboat House is now leased by the Wick Society, and since 1998 the *Isabella Fortuna*, a 'fifie' fishing boat built in Arbroath, has been housed in it during its restoration by members of the Society. There was time later for members to stroll around Wick in the sunshine before dinner and Margaret King's illustrated talk on 'The role of women in the herring industry'.

Sunday morning was overcast, and by the time we arrived at Keiss we were in a thick haar. Keiss expanded during the early 19th-century fishing boom. The harbour was constructed between 1818 and 1831. A handsome three-storey, six-bay fishing store sits on the quayside with a gabled icehouse to the east. Freswick House was next on the agenda, and involved a short walk down the farm track past a 17th-century beehive doocot. Freswick presents a rather gaunt appearance and is in great need of some TLC. It nonetheless provided great scope for working out what was what.

Lunch was taken at the Northern Sands Hotel in Dunnet, and the party then had to split up into groups to visit Dunnet Church and Mary Ann's Cottage. Dunnet Church is partly medieval and has seen many alterations during its life. It was good to see such a strong feeling of local interest in the church, which stands low and strong in a crowded walled burial ground. Mary Ann's Cottage, or more correctly Westside Croft, was farmed by James and Mary Calder until the former's death. A single-storey linear complex with whitewashed three-bay cottage, it is remarkable for its variety of roofing materials and preservation of its contents intact. Most interesting was what appeared to be a narrow Victorian bookcase in the lobby, with turned column supports. On closer inspection, these columns turned out to be composed of wooden thread bobbins, carefully matched in sets and held together with metal rods. The shelves were pieces of fish boxes. If any of the Group took photographs of this item I would very much appreciate a copy. The property was acquired by the Caithness Heritage Trust and is now a visitor attraction. The shuttling of members to and from church to cottage looked like getting out of hand at one stage, and one Historic Scotland delegate, who shall remain nameless (Chris), decided to photograph some corrugated roofs and was almost abandoned in Dunnet.

We were now running late, which curtailed time spent at Castletown and Castlehill. The village of Castletown was laid out from 1802 by Sheriff James Traill of Castlehill House; this energetic landlord developed and industrialised the flagstone quarry and constructed the harbour, besides initiating agricultural improvements. The harbour at Castlehill was built c.1825 to a design by James Bremner. It was fascinating to see how the nature of the local stone and the resultant slabs had been used to great effect in the design of the harbour walls. Returning towards Wick, we stopped at Square of Sibster, a large farm complex

with buildings of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. The kiln barn is amongst the earliest such structures, with its kiln built of slivers of rubble shale. A similar form of construction was to be found at the kiln at Hillhead Farm on the outskirts of Wick, which brought to an end an extremely full day with only dinner and the A G M to follow.

Monday morning saw the departure of a few members, before we set off for some more 'stone experiences'. The Spittal Quarry has been producing paving flagstones since 1850. It was redeveloped from 1949 by A. & D. Sutherland Ltd. Mr Alexander Sutherland guided us around the quarry and we witnessed the splitting of huge sheets of stone destined to pave Buchanan Street in Glasgow. The methods used to quarry slabs have changed little since 1850. Simple tools—mallets, wedges located in natural bedding planes and the application of slight pressure from a crowbar—break and move enormous areas of stone with apparent ease. Inside the workshops things were different, however: computerised saws and rollers slice the stone into the required sizes with the minimum of wastage. Members had to be forced away from the workshop back onto the bus. Morning coffee was awaiting us as we walked up the drive to Swiney House, a fine Laird's house of 1730–40. Five bays wide, Swiney has a curvilinear nepus gable with a chimney stack. The entrance door is heavily rusticated, surmounted by a simple pediment. This feature caused much discussion and debate, as ever on a SVBWG trip, as to whether these were re-used features, or later embellishments. The coffee and homemade biscuits laid on by Mr and Mrs Gunn were delicious, and it was very difficult to leave.

However, onwards and upwards, or in this case downwards we had to go: the harbour at Whaligoe is in a narrow cleft enclosed by steep cliffs remarkably exploited as a landing place and shelter for fishing boats. In 1640 it was recorded as being a fishing port with a corfhouse (salmon curing building). A platform landing stage has been constructed on a ledge above the sea: the boats were winched up or down and lashed down in bad weather. Allegedly 365 steps cut in the rock snake their way down the cliff face from the 19th-century cliff-top herring station to the landing place, with the occasional flagstone resting-place. We carried our packed lunches up and down these steps, many members attempting to confirm the number of steps, but all came back with different numbers! Mr Peter Isaac, the present owner of the fishing station, kindly provided soup and the use of his 'facilities', greatly appreciated.

We then travelled inland a little to Raggra, Thrumster and the farm of Roadside. Mr Willie Morrison is the fourth generation to live and farm at Roadside, and although he lives in a modern bungalow, he was brought up in the longhouse, of which the dwelling portion is roofless although the barn survives. A later parallel barn was built in 1897 and thatched by Willie in 1996 with rushes gathered nearby. Willie took great delight in demonstrating making rope from

straw and how to use various tools, whilst a minibus took members up to a remote longhouse at South Yarrows.

The final visit of the day involved another trip in teams by mini bus to the Ulbster Mausoleum. Ulbster was the ancestral home of the Sinclairs of Ulbster (later of Thurso Castle). The Ulbster burial ground occupies the site of the medieval chapel of St Martin. The Mausoleum, dated 1700, combines architectural fashion of the day with local building materials. The ogee roof, clad with heavy Caithness slates, is a triumph: it was repaired in 1995 by the Leet Rodgers Practice. A splayed flight of steps sweeps up to the entrance raised above the vault. The upper room was heated by a small hearth, probably burning peat, from where the smoke escaped (or not) through a cunningly concealed aperture below the eaves. The weather had brightened up for this last visit of the conference proper, and we were able to enjoy the sunshine while waiting for all members to be ferried back to the coach. As the coach prepared to leave for Wick, mist rolled in at a frighteningly rapid speed reducing visibility greatly.

Tuesday's departure from Wick was still encased in mist and when we stopped at Dunbeath to visit the large, two-chambered icehouse, bothy and fishing store, the headland across the river, where Dunbeath Castle should have presented a glorious sight, was hardly visible. The Dunbeath Preservation Trust made us very welcome at their visitor centre with coffee and shortbread. The final surprise treat was a visit to view the exterior of Dunbeath Castle itself. Not open to the public, Dunbeath is a very private residence. As the coach started down the long straight drive, the castle could not be seen, but out of the mist came a pony and gig driven by a lady in a large hat. She turned across the drive, presenting an appearance of a dream sequence or a film set. As the coach drew up outside the castle, the gig followed down the drive. This was Mrs Murray Thriepland, the present owner, who had set out to meet and welcome us in such style. As if by magic the mist cleared immediately, and we spent a glorious hour walking around the castle and its gardens. A fitting end to a packed and immensely enjoyable conference, for which thanks are due to Elizabeth Beaton, George Watson, Lyn Leet and Geoff Leet, who were entirely responsible for the programme planning.

### **Autumn Meeting 30 October 1999**

The Autumn Meeting was held on 30 October at West Wemyss in Fife, with an excellent attendance of 44 delegates. Following coffee and scones at the Belvedere Hotel, Norma Smith led the party along to the Tolbooth and the terraces of salters' and colliers' housing. The extent of the dereliction was only apparent when we ventured to the rear facing the Forth. The Fife Historic Buildings Trust has made a successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Townscape Heritage Initiative and will work with the Wemyss Estate to renovate the entire street. The diminutive Tolbooth will be included in the scheme,

although a satisfactory end use for this building has yet to be found. There was then time for a walkabout to examine the excellent early 20th-century housing erected for the Wemyss Estate by the Tod family, who have been the estate architects for three generations.

Sharing cars, we then travelled to Ravenscraig where we ate a picnic lunch in the cold, windy shadow of the castle built by James II, bristling with the latest ideas for fortification. Needless to say, vernacular picnics are always enlivened by one member or another. On this occasion Kenneth McCrae produced a portable stove, which burned wood, and proceeded to make hot soup! The nearby Doocot was unfortunately sealed up.

Dysart was the afternoon location, with St Serf's Kirk Tower c.1500 providing a spectacular, if somewhat dizzy view of Dysart and the Forth. The 1617 Tolbooth and its clock proved of great interest. Sadly, much of Dysart seems to have fallen victim to an award-winning rash of 1970s housing, but the fragments that have survived together with the photographic records show it to have been one of the great early Scottish Burghs. The autumn meetings are all too short due to the lack of daylight, and by 4 o'clock we had returned to the Belvedere Hotel for tea and coffee, just missing the squally shower of rain. Thanks are due to Norma Smith for planning and organising.

## REVIEWS

### **The Dovecotes of Suffolk**

John McCann. Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History, Suffolk. 1998. 128pp. £8.50 inc. p&p. ISBN 0 9521390 1 4.

John McCann, a former Inspector of Historic Buildings for Essex County Council and English Heritage, is one of Britain's leading authorities on the subject of dovecotes ('doocot' in Scots) and his latest work, *Dovecotes of Suffolk*, particularly demonstrates a strong awareness of the architectural features in relation to historical accounts of operational practice. Like all of his earlier publications (on dovecotes and other farm buildings) McCann's approach is based upon sound investigative research rather than anecdote and speculation. The result is an extremely well-structured book, based primarily upon a detailed survey of 30 individual buildings spanning over five centuries. The Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History is to be congratulated for the high standard of production of this A5-sized, soft-covered booklet which includes an array of relevant photographs (black and white and colour) as well as line illustrations and map diagrams.

Isometric or sectional drawings by Leigh Alston aid understanding and enrich the book, but McCann's own illustrations are more rudimentary. He confesses to lack architectural drawing skills (but at least has the courage to record important details where necessary, e.g. door details, sections of timber etc).

The general introduction and conclusion to the booklet will be of most interest to a Scots readership, although vernacular enthusiasts will enjoy observing the regional design and detailing differences between doocots in Scotland and those in southern England. For example, hipped roofs with ridge gablets and bird access/egress 'chutes' are features little known in Scotland. Specialists will appreciate the contents of the detailed survey and be able to reflect on McCann's classification technique based upon use of materials; 'timber-frames', 'brick', 'stone', and 'oddities'.

This book is therefore recommended to anyone in the Scottish VB circle who has a particular fascination for buildings which, to quote the book, 'illustrate the history of architecture in microcosm'.

*Nick Brown*

## **An Orkney Estate: Improvements at Graemeshall 1827–1888**

Gilbert Schrank. Tuckwell Press. East Linton, East Lothian. 1995. xii + 131pp. £8.99. ISBN 1898410 76 3.

*(Though this is not a new book, having been published in 1995, it was considered that its interest meant that it should be brought to the attention of SVBWG readers.)*

This is a detailed study of the process of agricultural improvement on the estate of Graemeshall in Orkney. It is a fascinating book because through its extensive and intelligent use of primary sources it succeeds in bringing the past to life. It looks at the factors of geography, history, economics, personal traits, tradition, and agriculture that shaped the ambitious improvement process and meant that the modernisation of the estate was a slow and difficult process that was a mixture of successful and failed initiatives.

Graemeshall is situated in the eastern half of Mainland Orkney, and is defined by hills which roll southwards to Holm Sound and Scapa Flow, where there were good landing places. At the beginning of the 19th century, it was a large estate for the islands, though of average size for Scotland; it had 13,034 acres and 72 farms. At that time the state of Orkney agriculture was several decades behind that of southern Scotland, and was still characterised by runrig and basic ploughs, using the good soil for little more than subsistence. Kelp production and the availability of labour kept the islands' economy reasonably buoyant until 1800, but throughout the first half of the 19th century the collapse of the kelp industry, a fall in demand for Orkney linen and straw hats, and the withdrawal of the Orkney garrison all forced the islanders to take steps to realise the agricultural potential of their land. The improvement of Graemeshall was part of a process which saw the islands developing into a model for the successful expansion of commercial agriculture in northern Scotland.

The main protagonists in the improvement of Graemeshall were the factor David Petrie (1788–1869) and the estate trustee, John Irving (1770–1850). The landlord, Alexander Sutherland Graeme (1806–94) was, like his predecessors, an absentee; Graeme visited the estate only three times and was almost a caricature of the extravagant debt-ridden landowner. He never met his factor and his trustee together, and the latter pair met only twice. It is due to the retention of almost all ingoing and outgoing estate correspondence by Petrie and his father, who had preceded him as factor, that such a complete history of the estate survives. The correspondence forms the Sutherland Graeme papers in the Orkney County Archives. The papers reveal the fascinating tension between tradition and innovation in the forms of the factor, Petrie, who was governed by the land, season, weather, religious convictions and the good of the people, and the trustee and lawyer, Irving, who was a product of Edinburgh Enlightenment rationality, seeing improvement as a goal in itself, and regional customs and practices as mere

ing improvement as a goal in itself, and regional customs and practices as mere obstacles.

While it would be wrong to portray the improvement of Graemeshall in the black and white terms of an estate manager wishing to wring profits out of the land at the expense of its workers, many mistakes were made in the process of modernisation following Graeme's inheritance in 1818 at the age of 12. John Irving took on the responsibility of the estate due to the landlord's minority, and was in effect to administer it for the next 32 years. In 1821 he wrote to Petrie from Edinburgh that: 'a very great improvement might be made on [the estate] by allotting the farms differently, inclosing and granting leases', and he proposed a professional survey of the land by Miller and Grainger of Edinburgh (the maps survive in the OCA). Thus the process of improvement began, but several important elements were overlooked. There was no ready access to southern markets; the estate consisted of many small, uneconomic farms; there was no coercive tradition which would enforce the changes; and there was no local model to emulate. In short, a scheme suitable for the Lothians was to be implemented in a situation of different geography and history. It was a brave, probably over-ambitious, scheme for the islands, carried out prematurely and without proper co-ordination between the principal characters; improvements on other estates did not begin until the late 1840s and 1850s, and were able to take advantage of government drainage and roadbuilding initiatives and a regular steamship service to the south. Unexpected problems were to dog it: the collapse of the kelp industry, and subsequent loss of income from 1829 onwards; the agricultural recession of the 1830s and the resulting arrears in rent; the personal debts of the landlord, who would draw upon the estate; and greater than anticipated expenses in implementing improvements. The personal tensions between the trustee and the factor were also important, as was the innate resistance of the tenants, who were still to be convinced of the advantages of change.

Despite all these elements, the pioneering estate survived. When the Orkney economy began to recover and boom in the 1840s, it was in a position to profit from its improvements, and was regarded as a vanguard estate. Its farms were never to achieve the dimensions of those of the south of Scotland as Irving would have wished; a report of 1873 shows that the majority were in the 30–60 acre range. Ironically the report shows that some properties which had been provided with new steadings were 'poorly' or 'not well' farmed, and other properties which had not had capital improvements were models of cultivation. This is an indication that capital had been badly directed, or prematurely spent. However, the rentals of the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s showed a steady rise, and the estate had benefited through the perseverance of all concerned, as well as through a profitable marriage in 1873 by Sutherland Graeme's son, Alexander Malcolm, who became resident on the estate and built a new mansion house. The slump in British agriculture in the 1870s, which was to affect the islands in the 1880s, led

to the Crofting Commission examining rents on estates such as Graemeshall, and began a process of landlords losing ultimate power over their tenants, who had carried the main burden of improvement.

This book is a fascinating study of an inevitable but difficult process; drawing upon the fortuitously retained estate papers and other contemporary accounts of the islands. The author has opened up an important episode in the development of Orkney and Scottish architecture.

*Veronica Steele*

## **Signals and Signal-Boxes of Great Britain**

David Hucknall. Sutton Publishing. Stroud. 1998. xv + 160pp. £19.99. ISBN 0 7509 1322 3.

This is an interesting study of an overlooked building type: the railway signal box, which is often only glimpsed from train or car, but served a vital role in controlling stations, sidings, junctions and level crossings. With the development of computerised signalling, the working practices that required the signal box are disappearing, so this is a timely examination of the varieties and similarities that occur. Indeed, many of the distinctive features, such as livery colours and the equipment of the boxes, refer to railway companies which ceased to exist at least 75 years ago.

The book covers all British railways, but has a chapter devoted to those of Scotland, dealing mostly with the Glasgow to Aberdeen line. Several of the boxes around Stirling and Larbert are featured. From the 1890s Caledonian Railways used contractors to build boxes to its designs, mostly of brick with a hipped roof. The signal box is an extremely functional building, and the examples featured in this book are variations on a common theme, each using the same limited vocabulary. The basic features are large windows and a balcony for viewing, placed above the locking room housing the signal equipment. Steps lead to the balcony, and there would be a chimney for the necessary warming fire. By their very nature, the structures are very plain, with occasionally wooden finials providing minimal ornament. Some of the English examples featured, particularly on the Great Eastern Railway, have bargeboard decoration. An unusual example is the Arundel box, constructed in the 1930s in a confident Art Deco style.

Brick and wood are the predominant construction materials, though the signal box at Knaresborough in Yorkshire is a stone-built addition at the end of a row of terraced housing. Sometimes necessity forced a change in style and materials; during the Second World War, the Air Raid Protection boxes were built with concrete roofs and substantial brick bases to minimise the effects of blast and debris to these strategically important structures.

As well as looking at the signal box, the book also looks at signal types in depth, and analyses location nameboards. The photographs also tell of the life of the signal man: the incongruous, comfortable armchair, and the hanging baskets of plants outside to while away the waiting hours in what was a lonely existence.

The photographs included in this book are of great value as many of them were taken in the 1960s and 1970s before considerable changes or deterioration took place in the often isolated structures. Several of the Scottish signal boxes are listed by Historic Scotland, and there are records of this building type in the National Monuments Record of Scotland. The small size of the signal box does mean that drastic methods can be taken to preserve them; the Walnut Tree Junction box on the Taff Valley Railway is to be dismantled when the line closes, and rebuilt at a Heritage Centre at Barry Island. As a timely study of an interesting building type, this book is to be recommended, and I must admit that since reading it I have realised how many signal boxes I have overlooked.

*Veronica Steele*

### **Monuments on Record: Celebrating 90 years of the Royal Commissions on Historical Monuments**

CD-ROM (£9.99 plus £1.00 postage and packing, free for educational purposes. Available from Yvonne Hillyard, RCAHMS, John Sinclair House, 16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh, EH8 9NX, Tel: 0131 662 1456, Fax 0131 662 1477, email [nmrs@rcahms.gov.uk](mailto:nmrs@rcahms.gov.uk))

This is an exhibition on CD to mark the 90 years of the Royal Commissions in Scotland, England and Wales. It consists of over 800 images and captions describing the work and collections of the Commissions and has been produced in English, Gaelic and Welsh. The images are arranged into 52 'photo-essays', and include historic and modern photographs as well as video clips and line drawings. Through an overview of the variety of Britain's built heritage, it describes the part that the Commissions play in recording that heritage and disseminating information.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Alexander Fenton.** After Directorship of the National Museum of Scotland, Professor Alexander Fenton became Director and Professor of Ethnology, School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh. He is the founder/director of the European Ethnological Research Centre, Edinburgh, and the author of *The Northern Isles: Orkney and Shetland* (1978) (East Linton, 1997).

**Brian Smith,** Archivist, Shetland Islands Council, has written widely on Shetland history.

**Ronnie Robertson** is Conservation Officer with The Moray Council and is Vice Convenor and Branch Representative of The Scottish Branch of The Institute of Historic Building Conservation

**Elizabeth Beaton** is a retired Assistant Inspector of Historic Buildings and is Chairman of SVBWG. She has published *Ross and Cromarty*, *Sutherland* and *Caithness* in the RIAS Illustrated Architectural Guide series.

**Bruce Walker** was an architect with Historic Scotland. He is a founder member and Vice-President of SVBWG and co-author with Alexander Fenton of *The Rural Architecture of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1981).

**Christopher McGregor** is an architect with Historic Scotland.

**Nick Brown** studied at Scott Sutherland School of Architecture. Having worked in private architectural practice, and with The Moray Council as a Principal Planner in the Environment Section, he is now working for Aberdeenshire Council.

**Alastair Hamilton** is a planner, and joined Shetland Islands Council in 1976, initially in charge of Development Control. He later became the Islands' first Conservation Officer and is currently Divisional Manager, Policy. He has contributed to various publications, including the *Rough Guide to Scotland*.

# SCOTTISH VERNACULAR BUILDINGS WORKING GROUP

The Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group was set up in 1972 to provide a focus for all those interested in the traditional buildings of Scotland.

To some, Scottish 'vernacular' may mean cottages, croft-houses and farmsteads; to others, its essence may be urban tenements or terraces, industrial water-mills and smithies, or even the older traditions of tower-house buildings. All—and more besides—find a place in SVBWG.

The Group embraces those whose interests are centred on general settlement social patterns, as well as those who have a specialised interest in building function, or in traditional buildings and crafts. The subject brings together architects, surveyors, archaeologists, historians, geographers, ethnologists, and above all, those who simply want to know how and why the traditional buildings of Scotland have such variety and character. The Group thrives on this refreshing blend of interests and attitudes, all of which are clearly evident in its activities.

Members of the Group are invited to attend annual conferences held at different venues in Scotland each year. The 27th Conference was held in the Spring of 1999 in Caithness (based at Wick), and the Autumn Meeting was at West Wemyss.

The Group's publications include *Vernacular Building*, an annual miscellany of articles issued free to members, and to which members and interested readers are invited to contribute.

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Copies of *Vernacular Building* 23 – Shetland special issue, may be bought (price £5.00 inc. p.&p.) from Frances and Munro Dunn at the above address. Previous issues of VB are also available from the same address.



