

Lerwick got off to a bad start, being burned to the ground in 1614 and 1625 by indignant dignitaries from Scalloway (then the Shetland capital) who resented competition and deplored the alleged wickedness of Lerwick's seasonal inhabitants - who gathered there every Midsummer, partying with the thousands of Dutch fisherman and selling them warm woolies, fresh provisions and, it must be admitted, a good time. In 1702 French warships burned Lerwick again, along with its fort and much of the Dutch herring fleet.

The picturesque *lodberries* (from the Old Norse word for loading rock) at the South End mostly date from the 18th century. Commercial Street winds north along the original shoreline of Leirvík (Old Norse:muddy bay).

All the buildings on the seaward side of the street once stood with their foundations in the sea but, since Lerwick Harbour Trust was formed in 1877, most of the waterfront has been reclaimed to build the Esplanade, Victoria Pier and the docks to the north.

*...being informit of the great abominatioun and wickednes committit yeirlie be the Hollanderis and cuntrie people godles and prophane persones repairing to thame at the houssis of Lerwick quilk [which] is a desert place To the venteris of beir [beer sellers] thair quha [who] as appeiris voyd of all feir of God and misregarding all civell and ecclesiastical governement in thair drunkenes and utherways committis manifest bludshed... also in committing manifold adultrie and fornicatioun with women venteris of the said beir and utheris women Inclyned quha resortis thither under pretext of selling of sokis and utheris necessaris to thame... [ordered the houses of Lerwick to be demolished].*

Sir John Buchanan, Sheriff Principal of Orkney and Shetland, 7th November 1625.



Lodberries, Lerwick

## Maritime Heritage

### Some Useful Information

Shetland Museum and Archives:	Hay's Dock, Lerwick, Tel: 01595 695057
Unst Boat Haven:	Haroldswick, Unst
The Swan Trust:	Orfasay, Gulberwick, ZE2 9JX
Dim Riv Trust:	Harry's Department Store, The Esplanade, Lerwick, ZE1 0LL Tel: 01595 693097
NAFC Marine Centre:	Port Arthur, Scalloway, ZE1 0UN Tel: 01595 880328
Visit Shetland:	Market Cross, Lerwick Tel: 08701 999440



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# Maritime Heritage

heritage  
Shetland  
culture

## A seafaring tradition for an island community



### Introduction

For thousands of years the sea has been the central fact of Shetland life - a source of food, employment, timber, fertiliser and, before the late 19th century, the main means of getting around the archipelago. Until the 1930s the sea was also the only way to travel to and from the outside world.

When glaciers melted over 10,000 years ago, the sea created more than a hundred Shetland islands, flooding a range of ice-worn hills and valleys rising from what is now the bed of the North Sea. From space, the archipelago looks like a giant jigsaw of interlocking fingers of land and water. Nowhere is more than five km from the sea and even sheltered inland valleys feel the influence of salty gales.

The varied coastline has everything from high cliffs to sandy bays and sheltered inlets - even salt marshes. As a result there is a wide range of habitats for fish, seals, otters, birds, plants and insects. Being on the overlap between the temperate and sub-Arctic climatic zones adds to the natural variety, as does the fact that in winter Shetland is the warmest place on latitude 60°N - the sea never freezes over.

The geography also makes Shetland ideal for summer sailing: there are dozens of sheltered, natural harbours - many now boasting good piers, slipways and marinas; most of the coast is "steep-to", with deep water close to shore and nearly all dangers clearly visible if there's a swell running; the coast is well-charted and visiting yachts have the reassurance that local search and rescue services are first-class.



The rugged coastline of Eshaness



A wonderland for diving enthusiasts



Traditional boatbuilding



The Dim Riv sailing with two Shetland yachts

### Submerged Splendour

Exceptional underwater visibility makes Shetland perfect scuba diving country. In addition to the profusion of historic wrecks, the submarine scenery is a major attraction for sport divers. Some of the most spectacular views are below the waves - in the cliffs, stacks and caves of long-drowned shorelines.

### Prehistoric Stepping Stones

On clear days you can see Orkney from Caithness, Fair Isle from Orkney and Shetland from Fair Isle. Given time, the patience to wait for settled weather, and the courage to venture on the ocean, prehistoric people could have reached Shetland repeatedly. The first to discover Shetland, perhaps 7,000 years ago, may have been seasonal visitors, attracted by the vast abundance of fish and seals. Their boats could have been similar to Irish currachs, made from animal skins stitched over frames of branches. The islands were inviting because they had extensive scrub woodland and rich pastures, probably ungrazed for thousands of years after the Ice Age.

### A Living Tradition

Modern Shetland boatbuilders use similar designs and methods to their Viking forebears - and identical technical terms. *Hinnisport; kabe; humlibaand; taft; tilfer*: these old Norse words continue in daily use for the parts of Shetland boats, 1,200 years after the islands became part of the Norse empire. The distinctive, double-ended skiffs are still hand-built here for rowing, sailing and sea-fishing.

You can watch these beautiful craft racing at our many summer regattas, or take a turn as an oarsman for the day aboard Shetland's replica Norse longship, *Dim Riv*.

### A Watch on the Waterfront

From the battlements of Fort Charlotte there's a grand view over the harbour and Bressay Sound. There's always something to watch on the Lerwick waterfront. Unlike many harbours these days, most of it is accessible to pedestrians. The coming and goings of ships and seafarers are a constant source of interest, particularly around the Small Boat Harbour, with its visiting yachts, local small craft and Lerwick's new Severn-class RNLi lifeboat, and *oot ower* at Morrison Dock, where the inshore fishing fleet is based.



Voe Marina, Delting



Small Boat Harbour, Lerwick

## “An immense concern...”

Garthspool (1815) and Hay’s Dock (1820) were the first harbours in Shetland where ships could lie alongside to work cargo.



The wreck of the tanker Braer, Garth's Ness



The remains of a once proud sixareen, Fetlar

In 1841 a visitor described “Messrs. Hay and Ogilvie’s great stores, building yard, and curing houses...” and marvelled that “This seemed an immense concern, containing within itself the means and materials of every kind of work, and rather resembled a small self-contained colony than a private establishment, so numerous and complete are its docks and harbours, ships, quays, and other commercial conveniences”. It is fitting therefore, that the Shetland Museum and Archives has been built at Hay’s Dock. As part of the project the historic dock, the pier store and the boat sheds have been faithfully restored to form an integral part of the overall experience. Visitors can see the museum’s floating collection in its most appropriate setting and watch skilled craftsmen at work in the boatsheds, repairing, restoring and building traditional boats. The main building itself has a superb range of displays which chart key chapters in Shetland’s maritime story. One of the most striking features is the boat hall which contains a number of vessels from the boat collection suspended from the roof so they can be examined from all angles. The Archives have a huge range of maritime records which

provide a fascinating insight into the development of maritime trade and the fishing industry in Shetland.



The Bremen Böd at Symbister, Whalsay

### The German Connection

For over 600 years Shetland was part of the Scandinavian realm. Most trade was in sturdy wooden knurrs and havskips via Bergen, where the merchants of the Hansa League became dominant. By the early 15th century Hanseatic traders from German ports were sailing direct to Shetland, cutting out the Bergen trading post, or kontor. Each trader was allocated an anchorage by the authorities in Shetland, who also enforced agreed prices. The story of these German merchant families is told in the Bremen Böd museum in Whalsay.

### “Herringopolis”

In the first decade of the 20th century Lerwick and Baltasound were the centres of a huge herring fishery by steam drifters. Dozens of smaller ports around the Shetland coast had their own curing stations, attracting tens of thousands of migrant workers every summer. The First World War destroyed the Russian and East European markets but gutters, packers and coopers lasted into the 1960s, when drifters became obsolete and were replaced by purse-seiners and, in the 1990s, by pelagic trawlers.



Restored drifter the Swan

In the 19th century the great-grandfathers of today’s Shetland trawler crews rowed and sailed to the *far haaf* a longline fishery for cod, ling and tusk, up to 40 or 50 miles from land.

The six-oared *sixareens* used in this fishery were highly effective at their job but could be deadly in summer storms. Casualties were high and safer, decked boats like the Swan replaced *sixareens* as soon as Shetlanders could afford them.

In the past hundred years the technology of boats and gear has changed repeatedly but the intimate connection between Shetland and the sea remains. At Scalloway the NAFC Marine Centre continues this tradition, training the next generation of fishing crews and seafood workers, and carrying out research into fish stocks, processing and marketing. Taking fish, fish farming and fish processing together, seafood is still Shetland’s largest industry, employing more people than oil.

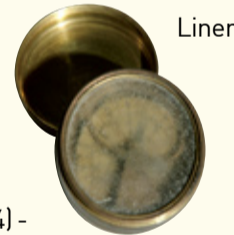
### The Red Fleet

Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Bloc fishing fleet made regular calls at Shetland. The early 1990s saw the peak of the “klondykers” when up to 80 fish factory ships anchored in Bressay Sound, processing summer herring and winter mackerel on board. The collapse of Communism was soon followed by the bankruptcy of the klondykers and now most of the fish is handled in modern plants onshore.

### Storm and Wreck

Throughout history Shetland’s fickle weather has contributed to hundreds of wrecks, yet the earliest proper lighthouse was not erected until 1821 and most of the main Shetland lights date from the Crimean War when the Admiralty, worried about the Russian Navy, insisted on navigational aids for the Northern Approaches.

The earliest recorded wrecks were the longships *Hjolp* and *Fifa*, probably in Gulberwick, in the year 1148. Earl Rognvald Kali Kolsson survived the disaster and his tale is told in Orkneyinga Saga. Some 400 years later the Spanish Armada ship *El Gran Griffon* loomed out of a gale to be wrecked on Fair Isle and other famous wrecks abound including the 17th century Dutch ships *Kennemerland* and *De Liefde* on Out Skerries, the White Star *Oceanic* on the Shaalds of Foula, the German barque *Bohus* on Yell (1924), the mail steamer *St Sunniva* on Mousa (1930), the Russian factory ship *Pionersk* at Trebister Ness (1994) - and, most famous of all, the US-owned tanker *Braer* which stranded at Garth’s Ness on January 5 1993, on a voyage from Norway to Canada.



A compass from the wreck of the Kennemerland

### The Unicorn

On the east coast of Shetland a rock bears the name of the *Unicorn*, a ship lost in August 1567 while chasing Mary Queen of Scots’ husband, the Earl of Bothwell, who had fled to Shetland under suspicion of involvement in the murder of her first husband, Henry, Lord Darnley. At Sumburgh Bothwell commandeered two ships from German merchants. Just north of Bressay Sound the *Unicorn* had almost caught up with him when they both ran onto the reef. Bothwell’s damaged ship limped on to Baltasound in Unst but the *Unicorn* was a total loss. The fugitive sailed before a gale to Norway, where the King of Denmark rejected his offer to give back Orkney and Shetland to the Danish crown and clapped Bothwell in jail, where he died insane.

### Shipping Oil Safely

Since 1978 Shetland has been a major oil and gas exporter through the Sullom Voe oil terminal, which has set new global standards for minimising oil pollution. After several incidents in the first months of operation the council-run port instituted new regulations, enforced by its oil company partners, which have made this the cleanest tanker harbour in the world, with negligible spills attributable to Sullom Voe ships. The terminal’s environmental and other advisory groups were models for a citizens’ group set up in Alaska after the *Exxon Valdez* spill.

After a generation of decline in Merchant Navy employment, oil brought Shetlanders seafaring jobs on the Sullom Voe tugs, pilot vessels and workboats and greatly increased the amount of shipping around the islands, as oilfield supply ships, safety boats, seismic research vessels, pipelayers, drillships and rigs became regular visitors.

### Da Nort Boats

For hundreds of years Shetland was cut off from the outside world for most of the winter. The savage storms of the north-east Atlantic - and the lack of lighthouses - deterred skippers of sailing “packets” from venturing near Shetland in the darkest quarter of the year.

Until the invention of the steamship, mail might only arrive at Lerwick a dozen times a year and there was nothing like a regular passenger or freight connection with Aberdeen or Leith.

The first summer steamship sailings to the isles began in 1838 but not until 20 years later was there a regular, year-round shipping service.

One of the previous operators of the service, P&O, had a special local connection - one of the co-founders at its inception in 1837 was a Lerwick man, Arthur Anderson.

*Da Nort Boats* have a proud record in peace and war and the ships are still an important part of Shetland life. Since 1977 there has been a roll-on/roll-off ferry service to Aberdeen, currently a seven-nights-a-week service each way. Punctuality is well over 95 per cent.

### So Much to See

Throughout Shetland our museums and visitor centres provide fascinating insights into the islands’ maritime heritage, from the tiny museum on Fair Isle to the main Shetland Museum and Archives in Lerwick with its exquisite ship models. The Unst Boat Haven in Haroldswick is a must for anyone with an interest in traditional fishing craft; in Yell the Old Haa of Burravoe has a fine collection of sailors’ gear and marine artwork; and the Scalloway Museum displays the courageous and heart-warming story of the wartime “Shetland Bus” operation to Nazi-occupied Norway. Other centres well worth a visit include the Bressay Heritage Centre, Tangwick Haa in Northmavine and the Fetlar Interpretive Centre.



Loading cattle in the days before roll-on/roll-off ferries

Hay’s Dock in the age of steam drifters



The NAFC Marine Centre, Scalloway



Unst Boat Haven, Haroldswick

