



Newcastle Family History Society Inc

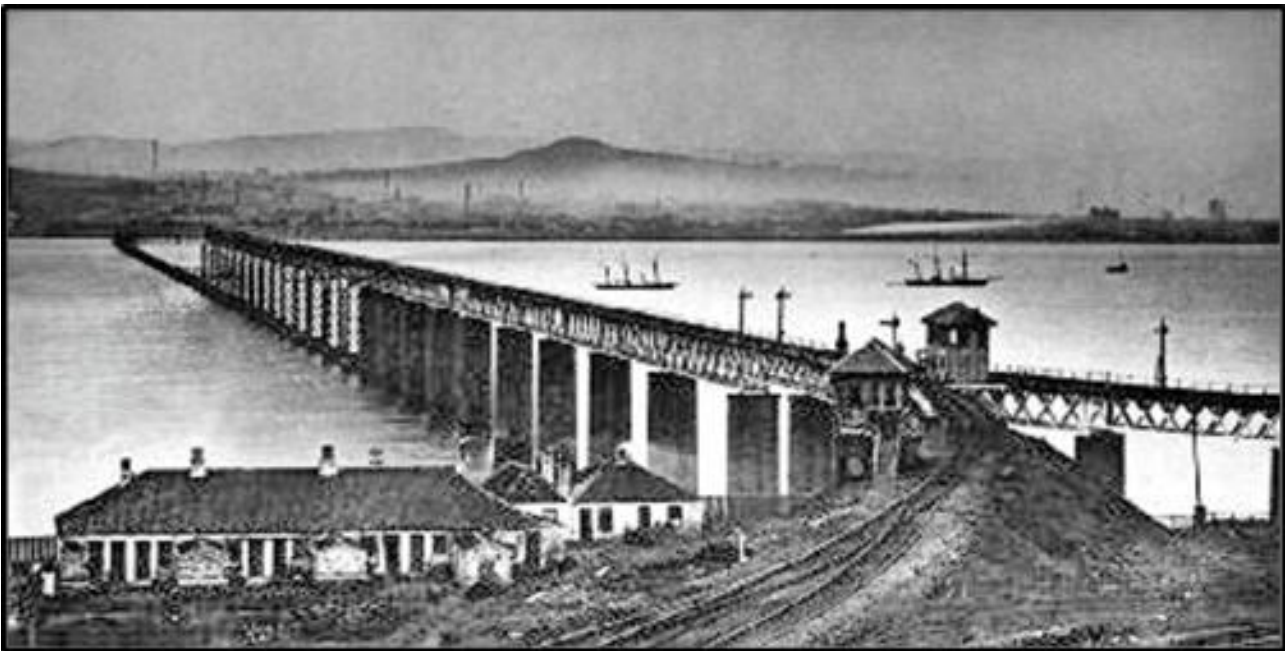
Newsletter of the Scottish Special Interest Group

No 11

Candlemas 2026

Failte !

Welcome to this Candlemas newsletter!



Dundee - The original Tay Bridge (from the south) the day after the disaster. The collapsed section can be seen near the northern end.

See pages 6-9 for more information on Dundee

Den Finella Waterfall

Submitted by Marilyn Bridges – article from *The Scots Magazine*, October 2024, author Pauline Cordiner

THE KING KILLER

In 10th century Kincardine lived Lady Finella, daughter of Cuncar, Mormaer of Angus, a descendant of Pictish royalty.

While Lady Finella frequently brushed shoulders with the royalty of the day, this would change when her son, Cruthlint, came along.

Cruthlint grew into a reckless teenager, fighting, thieving and raiding across the country. In a bid to stamp out rebellion among his people, the then-monarch, Kenneth II, ordered Cruthlint to be killed.

After his execution, Finella was heartbroken at the loss of her son. Her anger brewing, she plotted to avenge him. Inviting King Kenneth to her castle, she gained the king's trust by telling him she had information about a conspiracy to kill him. She lured him to her chamber where she had planted a trap.

Offering him a gold ring, as the king lifted it, crossbows were triggered, firing arrows at him. Fatally injured, the king lay in a pool of his own blood.

Finella fled, riding to the coast on her horse. However, the king's army pursued Finella and, after a dramatic chase, Finella was cornered. She had no choice but to attempt to jump a waterfall on her horse. She was seen falling, supposedly to her death. However, many say that moments later, Finella rose from the water, having sprouted wings. The legend claims she was, in fact, a witch, who used her powers to escape this fatal fall, and flew across the sea to safety in Ireland.

The waterfall, now known as Den Finella, can be found in Montrose for those brave enough to go on the hunt for Finella's ghost.

*“Moments later,
Finella rose from
the water”*

The waterfall at
Den Finella

Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo

Article by Lea Harris

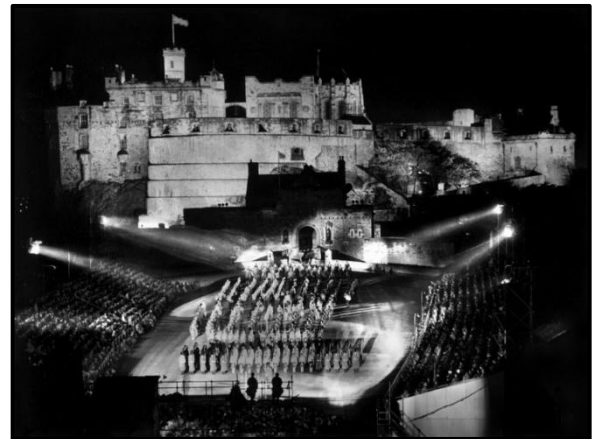
The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo is an annual series of military tattoos performed by British Armed Forces, Commonwealth and international military bands, and artistic performance teams on the Esplanade of Edinburgh Castle. The event is held each August as one of the Edinburgh Festivals.

Etymology

The term tattoo derives from a 17th-century Dutch phrase *doe den tap toe* ('turn off the tap'), a signal to tavern owners each night, played by a regiment's Corps of Drums, to turn off the taps of their ale kegs so that the soldiers would retire to their billeted lodgings at a reasonable hour. With the establishment of modern barracks and full military bands later in the 18th century, the term 'tattoo' was used to describe the last duty call of the day, as well as a ceremonial form of evening entertainment performed by military musicians.

Origins

The first public military tattoo in Edinburgh was entitled 'Something About a Soldier' and took place in 1949 at the Ross Bandstand in the Princes Street Gardens. The first official Edinburgh Military Tattoo, with eight items in the programme, was held in 1950. It drew some 6,000 spectators seated in simple bench and scaffold structures around the north, south, and east sides of the Edinburgh Castle esplanade. By 2018, the stands were able to accommodate a nightly audience of 8,800, allowing 220,000 to watch the multiple live performances. Prior to Covid, the Tattoo had sold out for 22 consecutive seasons beginning in 1998. The 2020 ticket sales indicated that 30% of the audience were from Scotland and 32% from the rest of the United Kingdom. The remaining 38% were international visitors from 69 countries.



1950 Edinburgh Tattoo



Interior view of the stands set up for the 2022 Edinburgh Tattoo

Performances



2010 Edinburgh Tattoo

The Tattoo performance takes place every weekday evening and twice on Saturdays throughout August and, to date, has only been cancelled once due to inclement weather on 4 August 2025 when *Storm Floris* hit the United Kingdom. However, in 2020 and 2021 the performances were cancelled due to Covid. In 2010 the event became the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo after HM Queen Elizabeth II awarded the Royal title in celebration of its six decades of existence. Although there were fireworks at the 2010 performance, since 2012, each performance

has included a fireworks display. From 2005 to 2015, a *son et lumière* (sound and light show) element projected on to the facade of the Castle. In 2016, the projection technology on the castle was upgraded to utilise modern projection mapping technology. In 2018, laser technology was used for the first time.

The Edinburgh Military Tattoo has also toured overseas, visiting New Zealand in 2000 as part of the Tattoo's 50th anniversary celebrations. It visited Australia in 2005 and returned to the Sydney Football Stadium in February 2010 as part of the Tattoo's 60th anniversary celebrations. In February 2016 the Tattoo sold 240,000 tickets when it was staged in Wellington, New Zealand and Melbourne Australia. In Australia the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) traditionally telecasts the Tattoo on the evening of New Year's Eve, although there has been the occasional break with tradition.



2024 Edinburgh Tattoo

In 2025, the Tattoo celebrated its 75th anniversary with a special performance honouring the 'Heroes who made us'.

Each performance begins with a fanfare, usually composed for that year's show. The Massed Pipes and Drums then perform, marching through the gatehouse of the castle and performing a traditional pipe band set. Then, the show's featured acts perform individually.

Each service is usually represented by bands from the British Armed Forces, along with drill and display teams as well. On special occasions, the Tattoo will feature bands from more than one service at the same time. In both 2002 and 2012, bands from all three services were featured to mark Queen Elizabeth II's Golden and Diamond Jubilees.

From 1950 until 1994, the show mainly featured acts from military organisations. However, the show began to diversify and feature civilian acts beginning in 1995. By 2018 performers from 48 countries had appeared in the tattoo since its inception. Officer Cadet Elaine Marnoch was the first female lone piper in 1977.

Since 2014, a house pipe band was introduced to allow individual pipers and drummers from not only Scotland but across many parts of the world to play in the Tattoo. Known as The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo Pipes and Drums, they join in with the massed pipes and drums each year and are the first pipe band with no military connections to play in the Tattoo.

The show concludes with a march down the Royal Mile.

And finally ... around 35 miles of cabling – the distance from Glasgow to Edinburgh – is required to power the Tattoo each year!

Charitable Activities

The Tattoo contributes a large portion of its profits to charities helping people such as the RAF Benevolent Fund, the Soldiers Charity, and many more to help alleviate those fighting poverty, stress, unemployment or coping with disabilities and sickness. In 2017 it was estimated that over the years, the Tattoo has given £10 million to the arts, military and civilian charities and organisations. The event also generates up to £100 million in revenue for Edinburgh's economy annually, according to estimates by the Tattoo itself.

References:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Edinburgh_Military_Tattoo

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Do you know the answer?

See last page to find out if you're right



Roughly, how many golf courses does Scotland have?

250

350

450

550

List of Things Dundee

An interesting overview of things invented, pioneered, discovered, inspired or delivered from Dundee.

Submitted by Ken Shilling

LIST OF THINGS DUNDEE

INVENTED, PIONEERED, DISCOVERED, INSPIRED OR DELIVERED

ABBEY ROAD PHOTOGRAPH
ADHESIVE POSTAGE STAMP
AMORPHOUS SILICON THIN-FILM
TRANSISTOR
APPLICATION OF X-RAYS TO CLINICAL
MEDICINE
ASPIRIN DEVELOPMENT
ATM DEVELOPMENT
AVIATION
BAR GRAPHS
BIOMATHEMATICS
CLIMATE CHANGE RESEARCH
COINING BEATLEMANIA
EV INFRASTRUCTURE
ELIMINATED HEPATITIS C
FRANKENSTEIN
GRAND THEFT AUTO
HECKLING
INCANDESCENT LIGHT BULB
INDUSTRIALISATION OF JUTE
JACKIE MAGAZINE
LEMMINGS
LINE CHARTS
LOCOMOTIVES
MARMALADE
MINECRAFT CONSOLE EDITION
OCEANOGRAPHY

OOOR WULLIE
PIE CHARTS
PROTEIN DEGRADATION
RADIUM FOR CANCER TREATMENT
RRS DISCOVERY
SCOTLAND'S FIRST DESIGN MUSEUM
SCOTLAND'S FIRST ESPORTS COLLEGE QUAL
STAR CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM
STEAM-POWERED MILLS
THE BEANO
THE DANDY
THE HORSEHEAD NEBULA
THE UK'S FIRST PURPOSE BUILT PUBLIC
OBSERVATORY
THE UK'S FIRST UNESCO CITY OF DESIGN
THE UK'S ONLY COGNIZANT CITY OF THE
FUTURE
TORONTO
WHITE DWARF STARS
WORLD'S FIRST COMPUTERS GAME DEGREE
WORLD'S FIRST ETHICAL HACKING DEGREE
ZX SPECTRUM



Dundee

Inspired by Ken's List of Things Dundee on the previous page, I have put together a bit of information on Dundee
Lea Harris



Dundee (Scottish Gaelic: *Dùn Dè* or *Dùn Dèagh*), is the fourth-largest city in Scotland. The 2020 mid-year population estimate for the locality was 148,210. It lies within the eastern central Lowlands on the north bank of the Firth of Tay, which feeds into the North Sea.

Under the name of Dundee City, it forms one of the 32 council areas used for local government in Scotland. Within the boundaries of the historic county of Angus, the city developed into a burgh in the late 12th century and established itself as an important east coast trading port. Rapid expansion was brought on by the Industrial Revolution, particularly in the 19th century when Dundee was the centre of the global jute industry. This, along with its other major industries, gave Dundee its epithet as the city of 'jute, jam and journalism'.

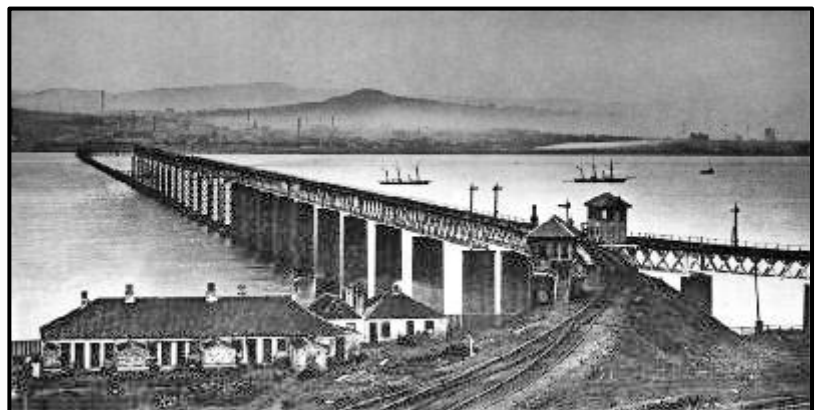


Dundee Coat of Arms

With the decline of traditional industry, the city has adopted a plan to regenerate and reinvent itself as a cultural centre. In pursuit of this, a £1 billion master plan to regenerate and to reconnect the waterfront to the city centre started in 2001 and is expected to be completed within a 30-year period. The V&A Dundee – the first branch of the Victoria & Albert Museum to operate outside of London – is the main centrepiece of the waterfront project. Today, Dundee is promoted as 'One City, Many Discoveries' in honour of Dundee's history of scientific activities and of the RRS Discovery, Robert Falcon Scott's Antarctic exploration vessel, which was built in Dundee and is now berthed at Discovery Point.

The name 'Dundee' is made up of two parts: the common Celtic place-name element *dun*, meaning 'fort'; and a second part that may be the genitive of a personal name *Daig*, which in turn derives from an old Celtic element meaning 'fire'.

The town was also the location of one of the worst rail disasters in British history, the Tay Bridge disaster. The first Tay Rail Bridge was opened in 1878. It collapsed



The original Tay Bridge (from the south) the day after the disaster. The collapsed section can be seen near the northern end.

some 18 months later during a storm, as a passenger train passed over it, resulting in the loss of 75 lives. The most destructive fire in the city's history came in 1906, reportedly sending 'rivers of burning whisky' through the street.

The jute industry fell into decline in the early 20th century, partly due to reduced demand for jute products and partly due to an inability to compete with the emerging industry in Calcutta. This gave rise to unemployment levels far in excess of the national average, peaking in the inter-war period, but major recovery was seen in the post-war period, thanks to the arrival first of American light engineering companies like Timex and NCR, and subsequent expansion into microelectronics.

Dundee was the first city in Scotland to gain official city status, after Queen Victoria signed a patent announcing the transition of Dundee from a royal burgh into a city. Dundee would officially gain city status on 26 January 1889. The patent still exists and is kept in storage in the city archives.

Some research on some of the items listed on Ken's List of Things Dundee revealed:

Aspirin Development

Scottish physician Thomas MacLagan played a key role in the development of aspirin precursors by conducting some of the first clinical trials of salicin (from willow bark) in the 1870s. In early clinical trials in 1876, Thomas MacLagan, a physician at the Dundee Royal Infirmary, began experimenting with salicin as a treatment for acute rheumatism. He published his findings in *The Lancet*, reporting considerable success in reducing fever and joint inflammation. He even tested the substance on himself first to ensure its safety. This was the precursor to Aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid), an organic compound that does not occur in nature, becoming first synthesised in 1899.

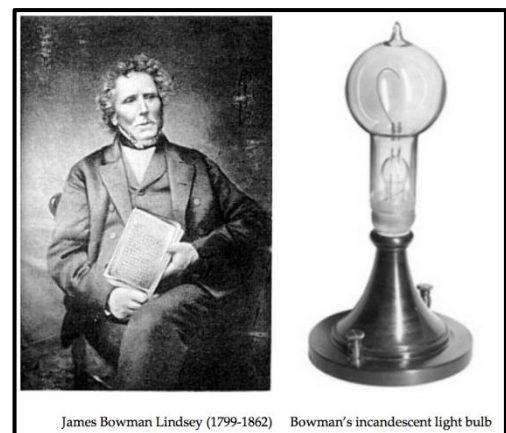


ATM Development

Over many years, one place that's been central to the ongoing development of the ATM globally is Dundee in Scotland. It was here that National Cash Registers's first ever ATM was designed and built in the 1960s, and millions of machines have since been shipped from Dundee and other NCR locations to financial institutions all across the world.

Incandescent Light Bulb

Dundee, Scotland, was the site of a significant early development in incandescent lighting when Scottish inventor James Bowman Lindsay demonstrated a practical, constant electric lamp in July 1835, allowing him to 'read a book at a distance of one and a half feet'. This breakthrough, using a platinum filament in a vacuum, predated Edison by decades but wasn't further developed by Lindsay, though it paved the way for later inventors like Joseph Swan and Thomas Edison.



Dundee Marmalade

One of the most iconic contributions Dundee has made to the world of gastronomy, is undoubtedly Dundee Marmalade. Dundee Marmalade traces its roots back to the late 18th century when it was first created by Janet Keiller, a resourceful Dundonian grocer's wife. The story goes that in 1797, a Spanish ship carrying Seville oranges found itself stranded in the port of Dundee due to adverse weather conditions. Keiller, recognising an opportunity, purchased the entire cargo of bitter Seville oranges at a bargain price. Determined not to let them go to waste, she decided to transform them into a preserve. Using her family's recipe for jam, Keiller carefully cooked the oranges, sugar, and water together, creating a thick, chunky marmalade with a distinctive bitter-sweet flavour. This preservation method, which involved maintaining the peel of the oranges, gave Dundee Marmalade its characteristic texture and appearance. Keiller's creation was an instant success, and her marmalade quickly gained popularity both locally and beyond.



The Beano

The Beano (formerly *The Beano Comic*) is a British anthology comic magazine created by Scottish publishing company DC Thomson. Its first issue was published on 30 July 1938, and it published its 4,000th issue in August 2019. Popular and well-known comic strips and characters include *Dennis the Menace*, *Minnie the Minx*, *The Bash Street Kids*, *Roger the Dodger*, *Billy Whizz*, *Lord Snooty and His Pals*, *Ivy the Terrible*, *General Jumbo*, *Jonah*, and *Biffo the Bear*. The Beano was planned as a pioneering children's magazine that contained mostly comic strips, in the style of American newspaper gag-a-days, as opposed to the more text-based story papers that were immensely popular before the Second World War. In the present, its legacy is its misbehaving characters, escapist tales and anarchic humour with an audience of all ages. Beano is a multimedia franchise with spin-off books and Christmas annuals, a website, theme park rides, games, cartoon adaptations, and a production company.



The Beano issue 1678, cover dated 14 September 1974

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The Shetland Islands

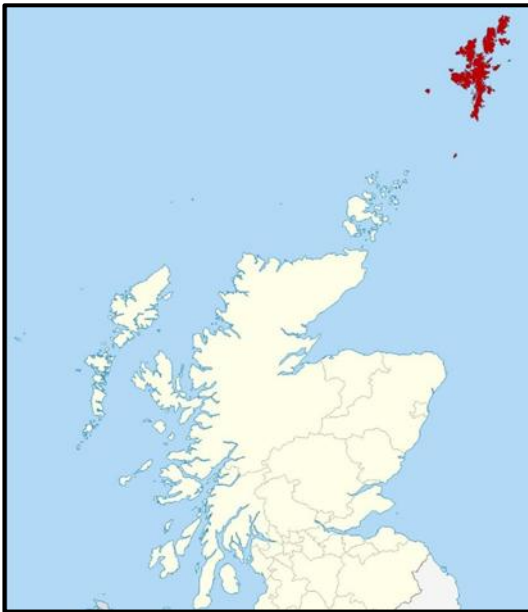
Article by Kirstie Carrick

The Shetland Islands are an archipelago to the far north of mainland Britain, about 170 km (110 miles) from the northern tip of Scotland and 80 km north of the northern islands of Orkney. The Shetland Islands lie 220 km (140 miles) west of Norway. The Faroe Islands (Danish) are a couple of hundred kilometres to the north west, about halfway to Iceland. The largest Shetland island is Mainland, where most of the population live. There were 23,190 inhabitants in 2024, according to Wikipedia, across all the Shetland Islands. The overall land area is 1,467 km² of which Mainland takes up 967 km² (about two-thirds of the total). There are about 100 islands in the archipelago and only 16 are inhabited. Fair Isle is the most



UK, Scotland and Shetland flags

southerly of the islands, 39 km south of Mainland, and is owned by the National Trust for Scotland.



The Shetland Islands (in red)

According to Wikipedia, ‘in October 2018, legislation came into force in Scotland to prevent public bodies, without good reason, showing Shetland in a separate box in maps, as had often been the practice. The legislation

requires the islands to be “displayed in a manner that accurately and proportionately represents their geographical location in relation to the rest of Scotland”, so as to make clear the islands’ real distance from other areas’.

Geologically complex, with many folds and faults, the islands are mostly metamorphic rock, but there are red sandstone deposits and granite intrusions. Off-shore oil-bearing



The Shetland Islands (but not Fair Isle)



View from the top of Ronas Hill

deposits are crucial to modern Shetland's economy. There is an oil terminal at Sullum Voe, near the northern tip of Mainland.

Shetland is much more rugged than Orkney, with taller hills through the islands and the coast is deeply indented with sea lochs or fjords, called *voes*. The highest point is Ronas Hill (450 m or 1480 ft).

The climate is considered mild for being so far north, because of the moderating influence of the North Atlantic Current, an extension of the Gulf Stream, bringing warmer

water northwards. The average night-time low in winter is 1° Celsius and the average midsummer high is 14° Celsius, although temperatures in the high 20s have been recorded. The general weather is windy, cloudy and wet, average annual precipitation is 1,252 mm or 49.3 inches.

The main town and administrative centre is Lerwick, and over half the island's population lives within 16 km (10 miles) of the town. Scalloway is the next largest town and was the capital up until 1708.

History: the Pleistocene glaciation completely covered the islands and during their retreat left boulders in unusual places, such as the Stanes of Stofast, a 2,000-ton rock, deposited on a hilltop in Lunnasting. In terms of human population, there are over 5,000 archaeological sites, from prehistoric periods; the earliest is probably a midden dating to about 4300 BC. The numerous remains are probably due to the islands being almost treeless, so domestic construction used stone.

In the south of Mainland, the important site of Jarlshof has evidence of fairly continuous occupation, and successive buildings, from the Neolithic through to the Viking occupation, and after that a medieval manor house was in use until the 17th century. The site is now open to visitors.

At Jarlshof, early round houses were succeeded by wheelhouses (at the bottom of the photo), then a Viking settlement of rectangular buildings (upper of photo). The sequence of builds looks like each used the previous structure



Remains of a round house

as a barn and then a midden, filling it up rather than

pulling it down. After the manor house was built (middle right), the old buildings were gradually covered by sand. A series of storms in the 1880s revealed stone walls, and archaeologists have been studying the site ever since. The earliest form of building was the roundhouse, thick stone walls provided insulation and small internal buttresses sometimes divided the interior space.



Aerial photo of Jarlshof

Later wheelhouses had narrower interior divisions that from above look like the spokes of a wheel, although not quite reaching the central hearth where a communal fire was kept alight.

Jarlshof also had a broch, a round tower-like building of the iron age, although not much is left of this one. There are a fair few brochs on the Shetland Islands, probably the earliest to be found in Scotland. More on them later.



Inside a wheelhouse



Remains of a broch

Rectangular buildings replaced round ones about 1,200 years ago, in the eighth century, very similar to the shape of Norse houses of the time, and archaeological finds support the contention that Norse settlers took over the area. Long houses, byres, a smithy and other out-buildings have been identified.

The manor house is said to date from the 1300s, and it evolved over the following 300 years until destroyed by a fire, after which a new house was built across the valley. Later still, in the 1850s Sumburgh House was built, coincidentally right beside the archaeological site, and is now a hotel.



Walls from the Norse settlement buildings



Remains of the medieval manor house

The Jarlshof site shows an amazing sequence of settlement in Shetland all in one place, and there are other examples of each type of building elsewhere in the islands.

Let's talk about brochs.

The iron age brochs were built all over the north of Scotland between 400 BC and 100 AD, the earliest being in the north. There are various theories about them. Our guide suggested that they

were simply defensible grain stores, rather than communal living spaces, because of the lack of smoke staining and lack of wear on the internal stairs, as well as the presence of contemporaneous round and

wheel houses outside the brochs. There is also evidence of burnt grain in a ruined broch in the south of the islands.

Mousa is the best preserved of the brochs, probably because it is so remote that it wasn't worth the effort of stealing the stones for other constructions. It is still almost full height, at 13 m tall. Unfortunately, we were unable to visit the Mousa Broch, due to rough seas (visitors can only get there by boat). However, we did go to the Clickimin Broch, near Lerwick.



Mousa Broch



Approach to Clickimin Broch

This broch is not nearly as tall as Mousa, but may have been when first built. The promontory on which the broch is built juts into Clickimin Loch, and is protected by a wall across the isthmus.



The access tunnel

This broch has several layers of defence, including the low roofed access tunnel with a gap above it, allowing a defender to stab downwards into the neck or back of someone crouched over to get in.

Once inside, the broch features include a

stairway between the inner and outer skins of the double wall. These stairs are considered to be a detail of construction rather than an access stair due to the lack of wear that would be expected from extended use.

There are also tunnel-like entrances, as there are in most brochs, and inside, what could be storage alcoves and threshold stones between sections of wall.



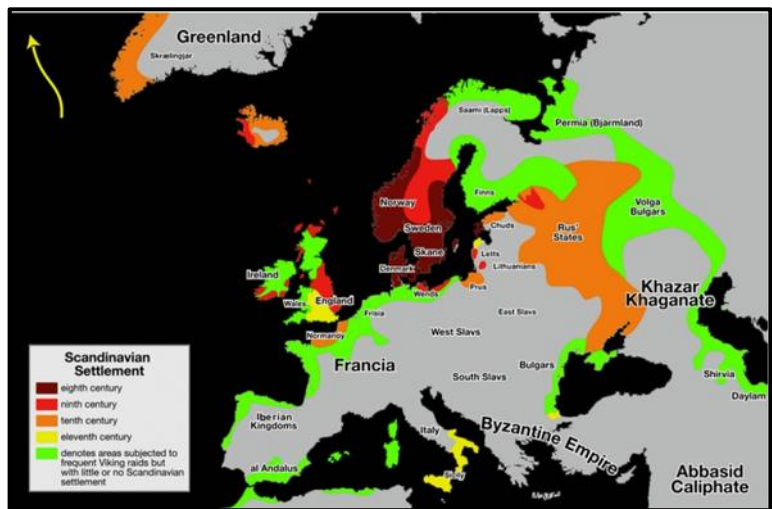
Stairs between the inner and outer walls of the broch



Inside the broch

Brochs apparently fell out of use well before the arrival of the Norse in about the 7th century.

It is not certain what happened to the Picts who had inhabited the islands, when the Norse decided to settle, rather than just raid coastal villages. Perhaps they simply interbred. The population of Scandinavia was growing and arable land was limited, hence the outward expansion and settlement in the islands of the North Atlantic and coasts of Scotland and Ireland. By the 9th century, Orkney and Shetland became a single Norse Earldom, that also included parts of Caithness and Sutherland on mainland Scotland.



Map of Viking expansion

Christianity was officially adopted in the late 10th century. As Wikipedia reports: ‘King Olaf I Tryggvason summoned the jarl Sigurd the Stout during a visit to Orkney and said, “I order you and all your subjects to be baptised. If you refuse, I’ll have you killed on the spot and I swear I will ravage every island with fire and steel”. Unsurprisingly, Sigurd agreed, and the islands became Christian at a stroke’.



St Ninian's Isle and linking tombola at left



The Chapel remains

Early Christian presence on Shetland is evidenced in the chapel of St Ninian. St Ninian's Isle is connected to Mainland by a large tombola (sand spit) although it may have been a true island in the

past. There are ruins of a 12th century chapel on the island as well as neolithic graves near the chapel. The cemetery was in use into the 19th century.



Information board with pictures of the hoard

During excavation in 1958, a hoard of 8th century silver was found in a wooden box under a stone slab in the chapel (by a schoolboy helper). Walls of an earlier church were found under the 12th century chapel. The hoard is now held at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. There was a promise to return the hoard when a suitably secure museum was built, but so far, despite secure facilities being built, the promise has not been kept. Replicas are held at the Shetland Museum and Archives. The island is now occupied only by rabbits.

Wikipedia tells us that 'in 1194, when Harald Maddadsson was Earl of Orkney, a rebellion broke out against King Sverre Sigurdsson of Norway. The Eyjarskeggjar ("Island Beardies") sailed for Norway but were beaten in the Battle of Florvåg near Bergen. After his victory, King Sverre placed Shetland under direct Norwegian rule in 1195 as the "Lordship of Shetland", removing it from the earldom of Orkney'.

Both Orkney and Shetland ended up under the control of Scotland in 1468. The islands became the dowry of Margaret (daughter of Christian I of Norway) when she married King James III of Scotland. Originally the islands were posted as a sort of bond until a cash dowry could be paid, but since that never happened, the islands became Scottish.

As noted in the talk on Orkney, in 1564 Lord Robert Stewart (illegitimate son of James V, half-brother to Mary Queen of Scots) was created sheriff of Orkney and Shetland, becoming Earl of Orkney in 1581, under James VI. Robert's son Patrick inherited the title. Both had an impact in Shetland as well as Orkney. At the time, Scalloway was the 'capital' of the islands and between 1599 and 1604 Earl Patrick had the castle at Scalloway built. Scalloway Castle fell into disuse after Earl Patrick's disgrace and execution. Graffiti found inside suggests that the castle quartered troops of



Scalloway Castle



Scalloway Castle Great Hall

Cromwell later in the 17th century and was also a garrison during the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19th century, although by then the roof and upper floors were gone.

During the Napoleonic Wars, Shetland was a source of personnel for the Royal Navy, not always voluntarily, Press Gangs were rife. Estimates are that up to 3,000 men served in the wars. As one example, 120 men were taken from Fetlar, and only 20 returned.

Nonetheless, the population of Shetland reached its peak in the census of 1861, with 31,670 people registered. By the end of the century, 90% of the land area was owned by only 32 people. Between 1861 and 1881 at least 8,000 Shetlanders emigrated. With the passing of the Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act of 1886, crofters were freed from the rule of their landlords. The Act enabled those who had effectively been the landowners' serfs to become owner-occupiers of their own small farms.

There is a Croft Museum in the south of Mainland. It is a real croft house, only vacated in the mid-1960s, but is fairly modern, dating to the 1880s. The croft is the left side in the photo. The entrance is in the centre. The right side was a barn and workshop, which may have been an earlier dwelling.



Croft House Museum



A bed with sliding door

It is a two-room croft, having a living and cooking room and a second room for sleeping, which had enclosed wooden cupboard-like beds. The custodian had a small peat fire going, which actually put out quite a comfortable amount of heat



Peat fire in the croft

despite being quite small.

The walls were thick and built of rock, with a couple of small windows, but it also had skylights in the lower roof – gaps left in the turf and thatch roof, currently glazed with glass to keep out the weather, but originally one would keep on hand enough turfs to stop up the gap if required. A net weighted down with flat stones helps to secure the roof against storms.



The croft roof

There are 55 lighthouses in the Shetland Islands, most built in the 19th century. The first built in Shetland was that at Sumburgh Head, the most southerly tip of Mainland.

This lighthouse was designed by Robert Stevenson (grandfather of Robert Louis Stevenson) and was his eighth lighthouse. Stevenson had visited the site in 1814 with Sir Walter Scott, who set his novel *Pirate* in the nearby area. Built in 1821, the lighthouse complex included the tower, accommodation for the keeper and an assistant, a workshop and further accommodation for visiting keepers above it. The lighthouse was automated in 1991 and it now provides holiday lets. The area around the lighthouse was declared a nature reserve in 1994.



Sumburgh Head Lighthouse

The tower does not have to be tall, because it sits on a cliff top, it is actually at 91 m elevation.

Incidentally, to get to Sumburgh Head, one has to cross the runway of the airport. The only other airport where the main runway is crossed by a road is in Gibraltar. There are flashing lights and a drop bar, the same as for a railway crossing.



Looking down from Sumburgh Head



Runway crossing

Moving on to the 20th century, many Shetlanders served in WWI in the Gordon Highlanders and in the Navy. A Cruiser Squadron was stationed in the Shetlands and convoys taking supplies to Russia (I think) left from Lerwick. In WWII an operation nicknamed ‘the Shetland Bus’ took supplies and intelligence agents into Norway and extracted refugees. There were more than 200 trips made. The bus was based in Scalloway and there is a memorial on the quay.



Shetland Bus memorial

What happened, was that when Norway surrendered to the Germans (in June 1940), about 300 small boats set out westwards from Norway, most ended up in Shetland. It was then that it was realised that if it worked in one direction, the boats could sail to and fro gathering intelligence, taking supplies and bringing back escapees. This operation, using fishing boats, continued until by 1943 stormy weather and German patrols led to the loss of 10 boats and 44 crew.



Close up of the boat

Operations were suspended, but then three American sub-chasers were donated and these, renamed *Hitra*, *Hessa* and *Vigra* and manned by Norwegian crew, made a further 115 round trips without further losses. Only about 300 Norwegians took part, no more than 100 at a time. No British servicemen could take part in case they blew the cover of being 'fishermen'. They never lacked for volunteers. The importance of the Shetland Bus was out of all proportion to the numbers

involved. It helped boost the morale of the Norwegians and the activity led the Germans to believe that the Allies intended to invade via Norway so large numbers of troops were diverted to Norway. The memorial itself is made up of stones from Shetland and Norway, to quote an information board: 'the Norwegian stones have been lovingly gathered from the home area of each of the 44 men who paid the supreme sacrifice. Together they symbolise the enduring ties of kinship and friendship between Shetland and Norway'.



Leif Larsen Memorial in Bergen

The Norwegian leader of the Shetland Bus was Leif 'Shetland' Larsen, who was the most highly decorated allied Naval Officer of the war. Apparently, he had a picture of Hitler in his office and one always knew when he had his lunch break because he would shoot at the picture on his way out. He was awarded the DSO, DSC, CGM, DSM and bar from Britain and the War Cross with two Swords, St Olaf's Medal with three stars and a WWII participation medal from Norway. He survived the war, passing away in 1990. There is a statue of him in Bergen. He played himself in a movie about the Shetland Bus (1954).

The economy of the Shetland Islands includes agriculture, aquaculture, fishing, petroleum industry, renewables, creative industries and tourism. There is evidence of all these industries, except perhaps petroleum, across the islands. On our first day on Mainland we went to the north, coming across some peat cuttings on the way. Peat is still used as a fuel source, but there is some effort involved in cutting, stacking and transporting the peat bricks.



A peat cut and drying bricks



Voe

Shetland has inland glacial lakes, called 'vatter'. It was in one of these that we saw a mussel farm, a bit like oyster farms but instead of trays, long ropes with horizontal grooved pegs hang down into the water. We stopped at a lookout above the town of Voe, which gives a good impression of the town tucked into folds in the landscape.

Voe was the home town of M. Adie and Sons, makers of woollen gear for mountaineering – they equipped the expedition of Edmund Hilary in 1952, and there is a picture of Edmund and Tensing Norgay on an information board.

On the hillside, there was also a WWI Memorial to the men of the parish who fell.



War Memorial



Mavis Grind

We crossed a narrow isthmus called Mavis Grind, which connects Mainland to Northmavine – technically all the same island. The isthmus is about 50 m wide, and people would often beach their boats here and drag them across, thus moving from the North Sea to the Atlantic Ocean without having to sail an extra 30 km or so round the tip of Northmavine. The North Sea is on the left and Atlantic on the right (when the tide is in...)

The sea around Shetland has many sea stacks, and we saw one called ‘the drinking horse’.

The coast of Northmavine is quite rugged, and includes a deep cleft leading to the largest sea cave in the UK, but only accessible by boat on calm days.



Drinking horse



Inlet to a sea cave

We stopped off at a small cemetery where ‘Johnnie Notions’ was buried – he was an early pioneer (18th century) of inoculation, with no medical training, but had an impressive 100% success rate.

Smallpox had a devastating effect in Shetland, especially the 1740 epidemic. John Williamson collected smallpox puss, dried it with peat smoke then buried it with camphor between glass sheets for several years. Then it was uncovered and inserted into an intradermal cut (shallow, no blood) in a person’s arm, which was then bound up with cabbage leaves. Apparently, this is similar to the ‘Suttonian Method’. It is thought that Williamson had heard about this method somehow and developed his own version. I wonder on whom he first tried this.



Headstone of 'Johnnie Notions'



Of considerable interest to family historians was our stop at Tangwith Ha Museum. It had an eclectic collection of paraphernalia, but also a room with a microfiche reader and all the records the heart could desire, along with copies of other people’s genealogical research. So well worth visiting if one has family from the area.

Tangwith Ha Museum



Lighthouse on Bressay

On another day, we were taken across to the island of Bressay, by ferry from near Lerwick. There was a community 'Bide da day in Bressa' family fun day to raise money for the Community Association. I went on a mini-bus tour round the island, involving a stop at Ham, a former herring fishing village, which went out of business when quotas and large trawlers were introduced. The village had no harbour as such, the boats were pulled up onto the beach, known as a *noust*. We were told about a severe storm in (I think) 1852, which blew in while the herring boats were out, resulting in the loss of 105 men from a village in Northmavine. It was not an

easy life. There is another Stevenson designed lighthouse, on Bressay.

We visited a lookout over to the island of Noss, a bird sanctuary island, and the Bressay Heritage Centre, also well set up for family history research. Finally, we were taken back to the Community Centre for tea and bannocks, and some entertainment from a contingent of fiddlers who had come over from a Fiddle Festival in Lerwick.

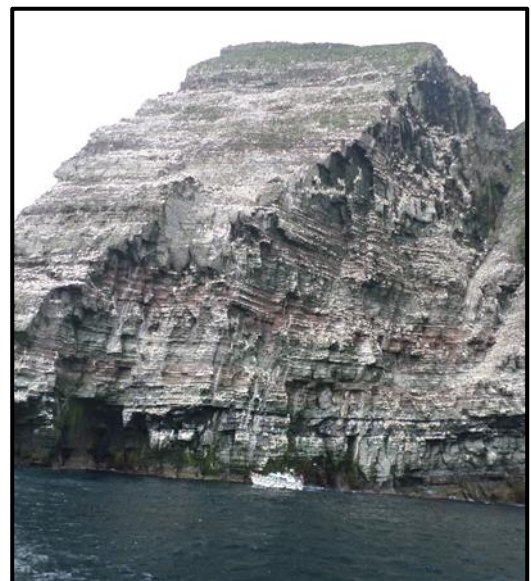


Fiddlers in the Community Centre

We made it onto the last ferry back to Lerwick. Overnight a cruise ship came in and three couples from the ship joined us on a boat trip out to Noss to a huge cliff, the Noup of Noss, 181 m tall, where many birds were nesting. That certainly added a tang to the salty air.



Lerwick from the harbour



The Noup of Noss



Cannon at Fort Charlotte

In the afternoon, we walked up to Fort Charlotte, built to defend the town in 1665 during the Second Dutch War, then rebuilt in 1781 during the American War of Independence.

We visited the museum on the waterfront with some very interesting exhibits, that I did not photograph, and a comprehensive book and gift shop. We wandered through the town, as well.



The museum and some boats



Replica Viking boat in the harbour



The main street in Lerwick



Clock Tower, Lerwick



The ferry back to Aberdeen



The Shetland Family History Society webpage

If you have family from Shetland, then you might find the Shetland Family History Society to be of use to you.

To quote from the website: ‘The members’ area gives access to a range of transcriptions from records including censuses, monumental inscriptions, wills and much more. Members also receive a copy of the society’s quarterly journal “Coontin Kin”, and you will be able to contact our research secretary and Shetland-based members for help researching your family. If you visit Shetland, a warm welcome awaits at our offices where you can browse our growing collection of records and books.’

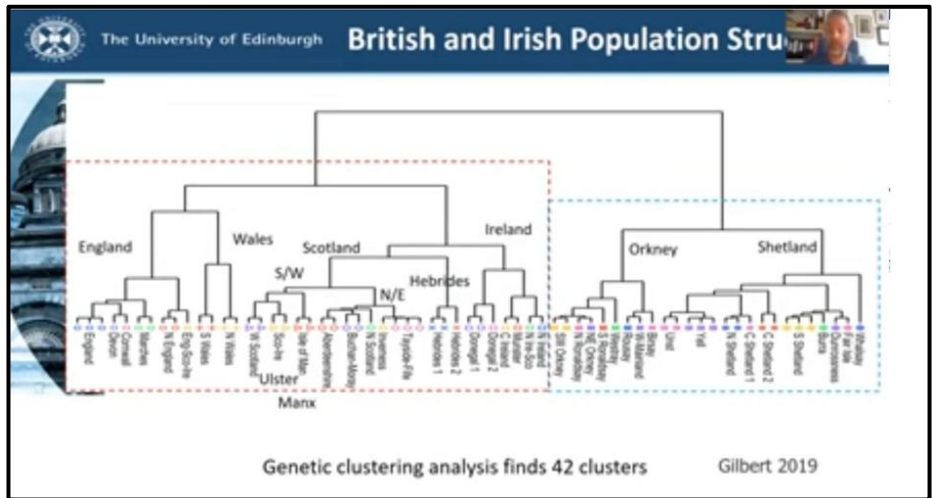
The Shetland Islands Council has a Family History section and will provide BMD images – but these are the same as can be found on Scotland’s People, and are more costly.

An interesting find was a website that holds an electronic version of ‘The County Families of the Shetland Islands’, genealogies compiled by F.J. Grant (Carrick Pursuivant of Arms, an important position in terms of heraldry) and published in 1893. It is hosted by Fiona M. Sinclair, a professional genealogist at <https://fionamsinclair.co.uk/genealogy/Grantsfamilies/index.html>.



From Fiona Sinclair's website

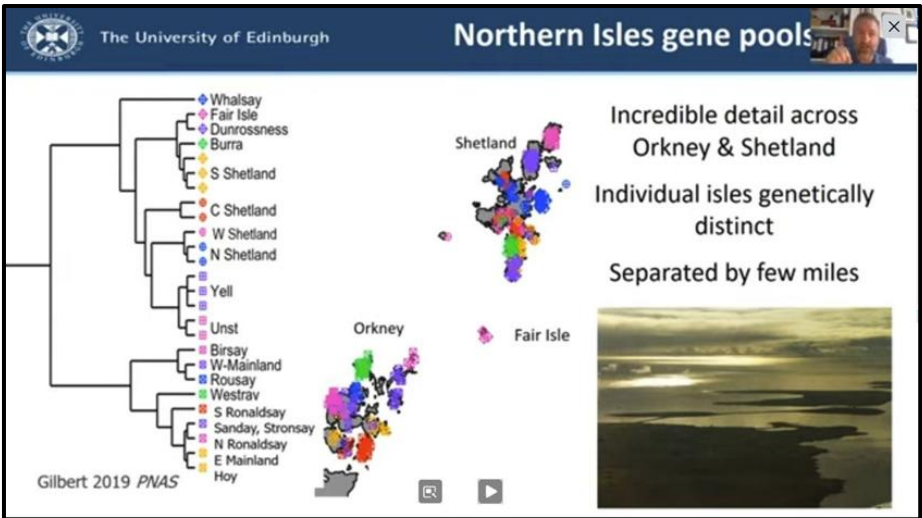
There have been some interesting genetic studies of Scottish islanders, one of which included the Orkney and Shetland Islands. It seems that the Shetland and Orkney islanders are a quite separate group genetically from the rest of Great Britain, and also differ somewhat from each other. There are comments made that the Shetland Islanders are closer to Norwegians than the rest of Britain, but I haven't seen any actual evidence of that, although it seems reasonable given the long period of Norse occupation.



Genetic cluster analysis

Even within the island groups, each island seems to have distinct genetic groups, more or less related to the populations of other islands in each archipelago.

Northern Isles gene pool



The Shetland Islands are wonderful to visit, although one has to plan ahead. The ferry can be very busy, especially in summer.

References

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Meet Your Scottish Ancestors

The following was published in the Scotland's People newsletter dated 9 January 2026

Meet your Scottish ancestors

Our biggest records release of the year is now live – with over 239,000 new entries online for the first time.

You can now search births in 1925, marriages in 1950 and deaths in 1975.

We've also added over 1,800 new cards to the Scottish Women's Land Army and Timber Corps records for 'Land Girls' born in 1925.

And you can now browse Scottish Cabinet records from 2010 and colourful Coats of Arms registered in 1925.

So this year, where will your family story take you? With millions of records online, there's no better moment to uncover your Scottish past.

To search the Scotland's People records, go to <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/search-records>

The Scottish wildcat is rarer than the Bengal tiger and considered Britain's only native wild feline.



Scottish Heritage Facebook page

Scottish Wildcat

Article by Mel Woodford

Scottish Wildcats, or Highland Tigers, have lived in Scotland for thousands of years but their numbers have declined over the past century due to the loss of their habitat as well as interbreeding with domestic and feral cats.

Wildcats are typically larger than domestic cats with flatter heads. They have thick, bushy tails with black rings and a black tip. They do not have white underbellies or paws like many domestic tabbies. The stripes on their cheeks and back legs are quite pronounced.

Scottish Wildcats are now protected.

Miscellaneous

Scottish Special Interest Group

2nd Tuesday each month at 1pm –
February to November:

10 March
14 April
12 May
9 June
14 July

11 August
8 September
13 October
10 November



All interested NFHS members are invited.

**New members to the group are always
welcome.**

If you would like to submit an article or pictures for a future issue of the *Caledonian*, please send them to nfhsresident@gmail.com

Our next *Caledonian* will
be the Whitsunday issue on
28 May 2026

Roughly, how many golf courses does Scotland have?

Answer

The correct answer is 550

Scotland has more than 550 golf courses.