

PREFACE

Shetland has changed in numerous ways in recent years. Most of the old houses, much of the old dialect, many of the old traditions and forms of employment have disappeared. First the modernised fisheries and now the oil industry, linked to a new age of mass media and communications, have introduced a new prosperity and a new pace and style of living to the islands.

To suggest that Shetland's Scandinavian heritage involves simply 'an ongoing tradition', would be to ignore the passage of time and to forget that contemporary Shetland, Orkney, Caithness, Lewis or Man, no less than contemporary Norway, Sweden, Faroe or Iceland, are worlds away from their Norse prototype. Nonetheless, the apparently more positive and successful attempts of modern Scandinavia to come to terms with present-day problems have encouraged many a Shetlander to look with some interest, tinged with nostalgia perhaps, at the idea of a revitalised Nordic relationship – a kind of relationship that, on a wider scale, has not entirely escaped the notice of the Scottish Mainlander.

To what extent may the old Scandinavian relationship still be found in Shetland life? To what extent can new Scandinavian dimensions be identified?

These papers, delivered in Lerwick in April 1975 at the third conference of the Scottish Society for Northern Studies, touch on a range of topics, historical, ethnological and contemporary, many of which have been little researched hitherto and many of which have been little publicised.

Viking and Norse periods are reflected in studies of boats and sheep husbandry both in Shetland and in Norway; increasing Scottish influence in mediaeval times may be seen through the career of Sir David Sinclair of Sumburgh; change in the very nature of the Scandinavian relationship, particularly over the last two or three centuries, is discussed both in the specific context of the Faroe Islands and in a broader Northern context. As for the present day, the impact of North Sea Oil is examined from the point of view of Shetland's distinctive culture rather than in overall economic terms.

Contributions are grouped into two sections – one broadly historical, the other broadly ethnological; and since authors have approached their material in rather different ways, there has been no attempt to edit out apparent 'overlaps'. That boats, fishing and livestock re-appear in several contributions merely serves to underline the major role that the sea and the hill have played, and will still play, in the life and economy of such a small island group with poor agricultural potential.

We hope that this modest little book will instruct and entertain. We hope that it may also stimulate many in Shetland, Scotland and beyond, to explore further the many varied facets of 'Northern Studies'. Such has been the Society's aim since its inception in 1968. This is its first 'Occasional Publication.'

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The Society would also like to record its sincere thanks to each contributor for permitting his/her material to be included. Maps and diagrams have been drawn for publication by E. Helen Jackson and Ian A. Morrison, and unless otherwise stated were prepared by the author of the paper they accompany. Fig. 1.1 by courtesy of Dr. Marinell Ash.

All photographs are from the Editor's own collection, with the exception of:

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R. Baldwin's survey map of Shetland, dated 1752, by courtesy of L.A. Holbourn.

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