

NORSE INFLUENCES IN SHEEP HUSBANDRY ON FOULA, SHETLAND

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After colonisation, and as raiding gradually died away, Norse settlers in the north Atlantic looked to a seasonal pattern of farming, herding, hunting and fishing. The balance of activities obviously varied according to environment — the further north the settlement, the greater the emphasis on pastoralism and hunting, and the lesser the emphasis on arable cultivation.

A look at the historical Faroes will show that they were on the very fringe of adequate barley cultivation, and that oats were a little beyond effective cultivation (Landt 1810. 286). Consequently, although arable was important to the Faroese and there was always a little domestic fishing, traditionally they have looked more to livestock husbandry, sea-bird fowling, and hunting the small ca'ing whale for basic survival (Coull 1967. 160).

Shetland, however, had a somewhat kinder climate. It was a little further south, less mountainous, and had better grass and moorland. Cultivation has generally played a larger role there, though to nothing like the same extent as in Orkney; and fishing has been particularly important. This has meant a markedly smaller dependence on e.g. fowling and whale-hunting — food sources that became valuable mainly just at certain times of the year, in late spring, summer and autumn, before the harvesting of the new season's crops (Baldwin 1974. 96, 98). Nonetheless, certain parts of Shetland bear a close resemblance to the Faroes — e.g. parts of Northmavine, Unst, Fair Isle and Foula.

Foula [Fig. 10.1] is some 27 miles west of Scalloway; 16–17 miles from the nearest point of Shetland's Westside. The island is about 3 miles x 2 miles, has 3 peaks over 1000 ft. and sea-cliffs up to 1220 ft. high along its west side. All the cultivated and inhabited ground lies on the east side, and when we read of early records of cultivated land on Foula, these refer primarily to the settlement at the Hametoun — at the south end of the island and the oldest historical settlement, as far as we can tell. In spite of traces of prehistoric settlement as far north as Harrier, available evidence — mainly from place-names — would suggest that the northern settlements were not much settled in the Norse or immediate post-Norse period; probably only a little at Ham, by the small harbour, and possibly a little at Harrier. Thus the 54 to 60 merks of infield land we are told existed in the 18th century (Gifford 1733. 18; Edmondston 1809. II. 131) is essentially Hametoun land — probably less than the 65 acres cultivated there in the 1870s, several decades after the re-division or *planking* of the land and near to the time of peak population (Cowie 1879. 197). These 65 acres still form the approximate total of potential cultivable land at Hametoun (Rollo 1958. 11–12). By way of contrast, whilst Foula had 60 merks of potential arable in 1809, Skerries had 30–40 merks, Fair Isle 100 merks, Papa Stour 220 merks — Foula being the largest of these islands

FOULA, SHETLAND

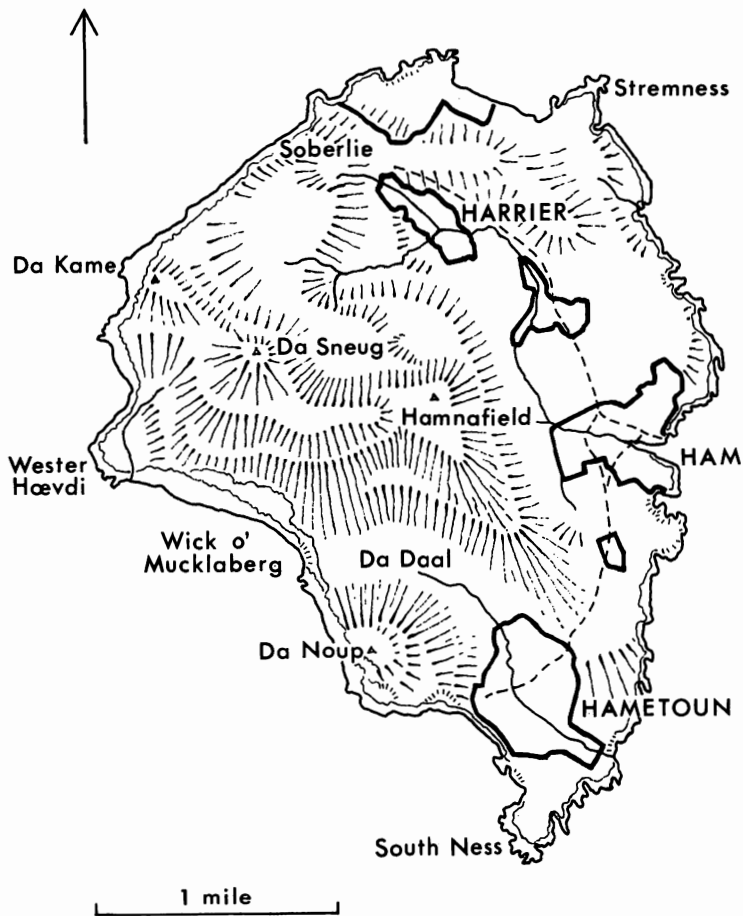


Fig. 10.1. —Foula has two main settlements — Hametoun, the most extensive, and Ham with its harbour.

physically (Edmondston 1809. II. 131).

Foula, therefore, was in a paradoxical situation. It was often said to have some of the most fertile arable land in Shetland, but had relatively little of it (Sibbald 1711. 31). Consequently, as the population grew during the 18th and 19th centuries, it had to rely to a considerable extent upon the export of stockfish and feathers to provide cash for extra meal; and upon birds, eggs and fish for a sizeable part of its diet (Brand 1701. 779; Gifford 1733. 18; Baldwin 1774. 96). At the same time, there was regular grazing of both cattle and sheep on what was considered to be excellent hill pasture (Thomson 1798. 99–100).

Sheep and cattle ratios were not what they are today, however. Even in the mid-1950s, with less than 3 dozen beasts, Foula was self-sufficient in milk and butter (Svensson 1954. 50). Cattle numbers dropped to 10, however, in 1969; to 4 in early 1974; to 0 by autumn 1974 — from a turn-of-the-century figure of around 300 (Rollo 1958. 9). As cattle have decreased, sheep have increased, helped in no small way by subsidies.

Early mid-17th century records for Shetland show individual families owning 1 cow to $1\frac{1}{2}$ – $2\frac{1}{2}$ sheep in reasonably fertile areas like Tingwall; in less attractive Yell, the ratio was 1:3–4. Certainly uninhabited grassy holms were set aside for more intensive grazing, but even then the overall Shetland ratio seems not to have been more than 1:3. By the 1870s it had not yet risen to 1:4, but by the 1930s had climbed to 1:20 (Donaldson 1958. 16–18).

On Foula, an uncorroborated estimate for 1973 suggested a total of 2,100 ewes and a ratio of 1:525 (Graham & Bowes 1973. unpub.); in 1974 another estimate gave a total of some 1,600 and a ratio of 1:400. Even the latter may be rather high; nonetheless it is clear that sheep numbers have risen sharply in recent decades. Earlier in the century there were probably around 1,000 — which were, of course, shared amongst a much greater number of families. Then, when every croft was occupied, every house had a small number of sheep, though a few crofts (e.g. Quinister and Breckins) are known to have had far more than the average.

In looking at Norse influences on Foula sheep and sheep-husbandry, three main topics will be examined:-

1. the sheep themselves, their appearance and habits,
2. grazing and the rounding-up of sheep,
3. the identification marking of sheep.

The evidence collected to date forms part of a long-term project; discussion should, therefore, be considered in this light.

THE SHEEP : COLOURS AND CHARACTERISTICS

First, the sheep themselves. Sibbald (1711. 7) described Shetland sheep as of sundry colours, generally black and speckled; Shirreff (1814. 62) stated not only that the native breed was the only breed in Shetland until the 1770s, but that it was generally accepted as cousin to the sheep of Norway, Sweden, Russia, and elsewhere in North Scotland — i.e. to the Caithness, Orkney and Hebridean sheep of more recent times (Fenton 1969. 208–209) and to the more primitive Soay sheep (Jewell 1974. xi, 1, 28–33, 121, 360–2): The Norse colonists would

doubtless have brought with them at least part of their sheep-stock, and it is likely that these animals were ancestors of our later, so-called 'Shetland' sheep.

'Shetland' characteristics include short tails; soft and fine, many-coloured fleeces that can be plucked off; small sweet carcasses; and sometimes 2 or 4 additional horns.

Present-day Foula sheep cannot be claimed as 'pure Shetland', as they reflect several crosses during the past century with Blackface, Cheviot and latterly Jacob sheep, as well as with selected Shetland Flock Book rams (just prior to the 1914—1918 War moorit wool was selling well and so most of the sheep were bred to moorit). But the southern sheep and their cross-lambs were kept wherever possible 'in the toons' — i.e. on the now generally uncultivated but fenced infield land. Very few were likely to be 'in the hill'; very few have bred 'in the hill'. Indeed, Foula experience to date suggests that only hill sheep (essentially 'Shetland' sheep) can survive 'in the hill'. In spite of imports, therefore, the hill sheep have remained largely untouched.

In any case, we should remember that without continued crossing, a large sheep population will revert quite quickly to the underlying type (Jewell 1974. 31), so it is not surprising that Foula sheep still betray real Shetland characteristics. Four-horned skulls have been found, it is said, amongst the less accessible cliffs within the last 80–90 years, whilst fleeces can generally still be plucked, and colours still suggest close links with e.g. contemporary native Faroese sheep, though with a greater concentration of darker shades (see above). Anyone going on to the island today can identify sheep as white, grey, bluish-black, light brown, dark brown, speckled white on brown or black, or vice versa. And Foula folk still talk of e.g. *sneedled sheep* (black-sneedled or moorit-sneedled) — black or moorit with a white line down the middle of the face. *Fleokit sheep* are mostly white, with patches of colour — moorit or black; moorit and black. *Shaela ewes* are a mixture of grey and black.

Such terms suggest a rather optimistic picture of Norse survival. *Sneedled* (ON *snúdr* : snout, muzzle), *shaela* (ON *hela* : hoar frost — greyish white), *moorit* (ON *mórauðr* : reddish brown or peat brown) are all of Norse origin (Jacobsen 1928 & 1932). *Fleokit* is also ON (*flekótt*), though perhaps influenced by Lowland Scots/English; *black* is standard English.

Yet, even so, the number contrasts starkly with Jacobsen's collection of Norn words relating to fleece colour in the late 19th century. He recorded 45–50 in Shetland as a whole; 13 as known definitely on Foula. He does not credit *sjela* (*shaela*) or *flekkitt* (*fleokit*) to Foula, but then Jacobsen does not always specify localities for commonly-used words. All these words can be traced back either to an Old Norse root or to parallels in e.g. Modern Icelandic, Faroese or Norwegian.

Such a high concentration of terms helps indicate the strong use of colour as a factor in identification, with its implication of a very precise observation and therefore knowledge of individual sheep. Used as a device for locating lost sheep, it links in with the vast number of minutely-detailed hill names, present for all of inland Shetland.

Colours apart, a good pastoralist will also recognise individual animals by other characteristics. If Foula sheep had *bonnie skjórd horns*, these had fine edges;



Fig. 10.2.—The triangular wooden frame, roughly nailed together and known on Foula as a *grind*, helps prevent sheep breaking through fences and dykes. Eshaness, Northmavine. 1975.
(*Photograph: J.R. Baldwin*)

Fig. 10.3.—Two *kaddie-lams* tethered by a rope around the neck. South Biggins.
(*Courtesy of Mr. & Mrs. R.W. Isbister*)



if *ill skjórd*, they had ugly edges — an ON word meaning ‘notched’ (Jacobsen 1928 & 1932). Alternatively, a sheep might be *kjud* or feeble, probably suffering from dropsy. Or a ram might be non-prolific. Such a *trollkollin* or *trollhollin* of 19th century Foula would seem to link directly with Norse legend and superstition — from ON *troll kerling* or female troll (Jacobsen 1928 & 1932). An *almark* — a word still commonly used — was a sheep given to breaking through a hill dyke or other enclosure. In parts of Shetland it was often referred to as a *tun tief* — clearly a Lowland Scots phrase which had ousted the Norn. To defeat the *almark*, a *grind* could be put round its neck — three sticks nailed or tied together in the shape of a triangle [Fig. 10.2]. *Kaddie lambs*, on the other hand, (cf. Eng. dialect *cade-lamb*: orphan; ON *kati*: boy, male; O.Sc. *cady*: wanton, cf. *cadge*) are tame lambs, often orphaned, that will come to the owner when called — ‘*kaddie, kaddie, kaddie lambs; come here lambs; kaddie, kaddie, kaddie lambs*’ being still a current Foula call. This is particularly useful at round-up times, or when feeding sheep by hand during the winter [Fig. 10.3]; and it may represent a practice much more common when sheep numbers per croft were far fewer.

A final point concerning the sheep themselves — their ages. Nowadays, the usual appellations for new-born lambs are *gimmer lambs* and *wedder lambs*; second and fourth year females are *gimmers* and *yowes* respectively. Here is the influence of the southern sheep trade and marketing arrangements in the Northern Isles, linked to an increasing use of Lowland Scots. Certainly, an ON *gymlr* existed, but modern *gimmer* is almost inevitably coloured by Scots, if not a direct borrowing. Yet older terms have survived. A *willi*, for a male lamb, was still used in the 19th century (ON *vedra*). Today, Foula still talks of: *seans* — lambs born very late in the year (cf. Icel. *síðungur*: animal born late; Far. *síðlembingur*, *síðlembingur*: lamb born late); *settnins* — 1st year females ready to be put to the hill after a winter in the lambhouse (cf. Nor. *setning*: setting, place); *adneseds* — 3 year old females (ON/Icel. *annars vetrar* : of the 2nd year). It is significant that these terms refer very much to localised activities on the island and not to commercial activities. The latter are relatively new trends, for which no local vocabulary existed; the former have changed but little since the Norse colonisation and there has, therefore, been no need to change the original terminology or to coin new phrases.

GRAZING AND ROUNDING-UP

Grazing:

Grazing on Foula, as indeed normally in Shetland, has been quite unrestricted, except that the gates to the infield (in common with Northern practice generally) are still closed from April to November — during what is by now very much a purely ‘theoretical’ growing season. Beyond the township dyke is the *skattald* which, under udal law, gave to all, e.g. peat for fuel, turf for thatching, mould for byre litter, and grazing for livestock — rights extending ‘*fra den effste stein i fælde til den neste stein i fioren*’ (cf. Goudie 1904. 87–90, 295–297: referring to Shetland deeds of e.g. 1544, 1551). Unlike the Hebrides and most of the Faroes, with their fixed quotas of livestock per family dependent upon the amount of infield land owned (cf. Williamson 1948. 52), on Foula each can keep as many sheep as he wishes. Any reference to *skattald*, therefore, relates

not to areas divided as between townships or individual owners (cf. the Faroese *hagar*), but much more loosely, to the common hill.

Flocks tend to stick to their own territory — a fact that might suggest easy husbandry. However, what happened to a man's sheep on his death? In recent years many elderly islanders have taken steps to phase out their sheep over a year or so — by not putting ewes to the ram, and by selling or killing off any lambs that chanced to materialise. This seems to be a relatively recent practice only, based largely on the knowledge that they had no family left on the island. ('Age' also explains why there are nothing like as many sheep in physically remote and difficult areas, e.g. the Waastin, as even twenty years ago). Previously, a man's sheep would be divided amongst his heirs or relatives at his death, or left en bloc to one individual. In practice, therefore, each family was likely to have sheep in any part of the island. It is this situation that, in early times, presumably encouraged the development of a clearly defined system of identification marks and certain other practices associated with sheep husbandry — developments and practices largely common to the Scandinavian North.

Rounding-up:

Sheep are rounded up for various reasons. Before the introduction of dipping on Foula (just prior to 1914 Foula was allowed to dip only once a year, on condition that no new sheep were brought in), and before lambs were drawn off for market, round-ups were necessary to mark and castrate lambs, to pluck fleeces and to take off animals for slaughter — generally three separate operations per year.

The secret of a good round-up, both on Foula and in Faroe, is still the accurate deployment of man-power, and adherence to a well-tryed plan of campaign. Individuals take up their positions, often from early morning, and gradually move in on the sheep [Fig. 10.4]. Towards the end of the round-up, the sheep are hemmed in on most sides by men, by natural features such as the sea or a cliff, and ultimately by the projecting walls of the fank. Such a round-up experienced in Gásadalur (Faroes) took about 5 hours; one on Foula $2\frac{1}{2}$ –3 hours — after which roo-ing, lug-marking and dosing took place [Figs. 10.5; 10.6; 10.7] This gave an overall working day of over 14 hours (Faroes, 2 round-ups) and perhaps 9 hours (Foula).

It is not difficult to see, therefore, why a fit and balanced population is needed to look adequately after the sheep. To cover fully Foula's flocks, an immense amount of work is necessary [Fig. 10.8] The island was still operating 9 different round-ups or *krús* (spelt locally *crues*) in 1973 (Graham & Bowes 1974. 111), and at least 12 fanks or enclosures (some being post and wire replacements for stone) have been used within living memory [Fig. 10.9]. In 1973, therefore, theoretically at least, there would be 27 round-ups (9 in July-August, 9 in August-September, 9 in October-November). Theoretically, 27 days over 5 months needed to be allocated solely to sheep-based activities. And at least for the shearing *crues*, dry weather, following a few days' dry weather, is essential.

Even so, although Foula is only a small island, until recently the different settlements still held their *crues* independently. The Hametoun people held



Fig. 10.4. — Nowadays dogs are used to help round up sheep, but the *crues* still depend to a large extent on manpower. 1969. (Photograph: J.R. Baldwin)

their own *crues*, as did the Ham people and the North folk respectively. Even some thirty years ago, only one Ham woman participated in the Hametoun round-ups, and that because Mrs Mima Gear had sheep amongst those of North Biggins, whence she originated. But first the North population became so small that those remaining needed help, then a Ham man (John Holbourn) was invited south because of his dog, and in the end every able-bodied islander participated in all *crues*. Necessity, therefore, has modified earlier patterns, encouraging both use of a dog and a co-ordination of effort formerly practised in the context of individual settlements on the island, rather than of the whole population.

Why not more use of dogs earlier, instead of the emphasis on manpower? Some have suggested that the sheep were too wild, but dogs have been used elsewhere on Shetland for many hundreds of years. This is supported not just by the old Shetland Country Acts and various Court records (in Donaldson 1958. 20–21), but by 13th century Norwegian and Faroese records. The *Seydabrævið*, prepared in Norway, allowed the Faroe Islands to retain their own regulations dealing with farming and household matters [Fig. 10.10]. It dealt mainly with sheep farming. And that the Shetland (and Orkney) Country Acts sound strangely similar is perhaps not surprising when we learn that to make his authority clear to the Faroese in 1298, Duke Hákon Magnússon (son of the Norwegian King Magnus) had the document countersigned by Erlendr, bishop



Fig. 10.5.

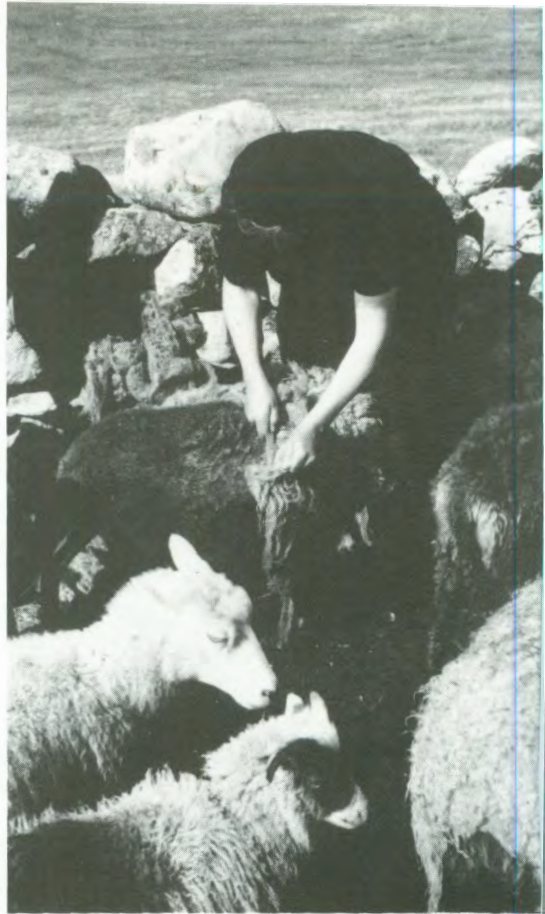


Fig. 10.6.

Fleeces from Shetland sheep are sometimes cut off with shears or a sharp knife. They can generally still be plucked off or *rooed*. Soberlie *crue* at Mucklegreind, North End of Foula. 1969.

(Photographs: J.R. Baldwin)

in the Faroes, and Sigurdr, lawman in Shetland ([1298] 1971. 45, 52). Dogs are mentioned frequently in the document (e.g. Magnússon [1298] 1971. 46, 48–9, 52, 55), and dogs were much used in Shetland too (Sibbald 1711; Donaldson 1958. 20).

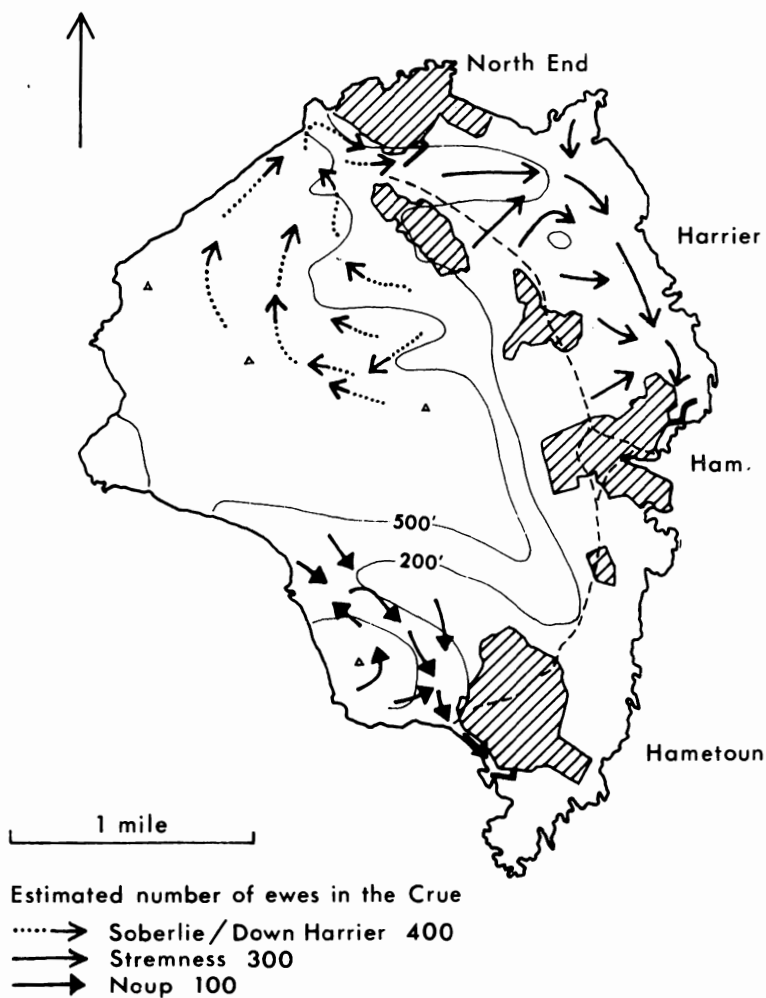
Not necessarily, however, as we might think. For the familiar Scottish Border methods of herding are inappropriate where many individuals have small shares in communal flocks, unless one man be appointed shepherd — not a traditional Shetland practice. And although individual crofters have dogs and use Scottish methods today, even in the late 19th century '[The sheep] run wild in the scatholds, are never housed, herded, or fed by hand ... When any individual sheep in the flock is wanted by its owner, it is hunted down by a dog.' (Cowie 1879. 76). It may be that the dogs referred to were once trained to take hold of a sheep — by e.g. the off-foot, the nose, or the ear. This is a technique formerly known e.g. on Ailsa Craig, on St. Kilda, in the Nordland area of Norway and in Faroe, for the catching of sea-birds — mainly puffins —



Fig. 10.7. —Sheep are still rounded up on foot through the Mucklaberg (upper left) and back across the Ufshins (top right) to the new post and wire crue by the Sneck o' da Smallie. 1969. The older, stone-built Crue o' da Lamatuns, in a grassy hollow part-way down the cliff, suggests an area where at one time lambs were gathered.

(Photograph: J.R. Baldwin)

THREE SHEEP CRUES — 1973



After Graham & Bowes 1973

Fig. 10.8. —The ground covered by islanders on three particular crues.

CRUE SITES

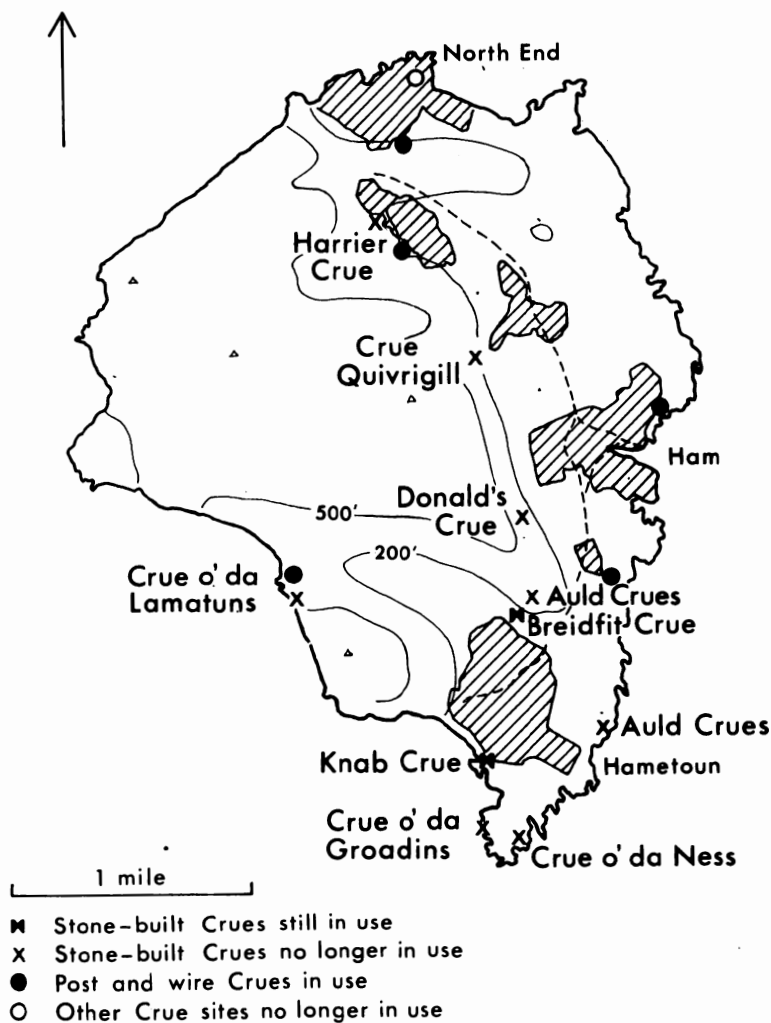


Fig. 10.9. —Distribution of *crues* or sheep fanks on Foula, used to contain sheep after rounding up.

ferriske Ketterbóter Voude brætt

Íttlo binnu Laft Gritung Gangan ^{at} þórnium

Margrússon Þýðent Lærdi Jagan at er m þui mest att þorur
 Þýðent & Gangan þýðent & Gangan
 Íttlo binnu Laft Gritung Gangan at er m þui mest att þorur
 me þýðent þýðent þýðent at er m þui mest att þorur



At ep mæðr ggr brott i hagði annars mæm t
 æcker brot þænad hns sua at hm vðz skadi at
 Sa er halprar mkrar vðz. galdi þullætti þi er
 þa hag ca þænad aa ept þui s hi er mdr till
 t halp mkr s: kgi t bati apt þænad þi sem
 aa Jam godan sem adr var.

Om nokk m ggr m: hnd i annas hja

En ep mdr keimr þt m. at hn hpi vit
 m3 hndi i hagði h3 t gt hm m3 þui moti
 Skada bati ept' saga domi ep vitni e till.
 En ep hi quæðr mei vð. Sym ept' legu.
 t at þriu dagu se adr þi til sagd t stegð þui
 Sem sæðr ægior ada hagladi saqua til samræðis

Fig. 10.10. —From the *Seyðabrévið* (AM 316 fol. 391), as reprinted in 1971 by Føroya Fróðskaparfelag. The original 'sheepletter' was issued in 1298; this post-Reformation manuscript once belonged to Niells Helliesson, an official in Bergen, Norway.
 (Courtesy of Føroya Fróðskaparfelag)

on the cliffs and in burrows (Baldwin 1974. 74–5). There was doubtless a degree of cross-fertilisation, with the technique being applied both to birds and to sheep in parts of the northern Norselands.

There were some places, however, where dogs could not be used with sheep — Sheep Craig on the Fair Isle for instance (Sibbald 1711. 23); over much of the outfield of Gásadalur, Vágur, Faroes; and over much of western Foula [Fig. 10.11]. The danger was that, however well-trained the dog might be not to bite or to chase, it would tend merely to panic the sheep into self-destruction where there were steep slopes and cliffs — compare a 17th century court case from Walls in which Agnes Laurencesdochter had to clear ‘hirselt’ and hir [admittedly seemingly untrained or ill-trained] dogs of the baiting and hunding of twa lambes of Andraw Stewartis ower the crage.’ (Donaldson 1958. 21).

On Foula, therefore, tradition says that dogs were never used. It was far more satisfactory to have 10 or 20 humans working methodically across an area than their 10 or 20 well-trained dogs. Thus, all those families in a settlement with sheep in the *skattald* were expected to provide manpower for the drive, the *crue* usually being called, it would seem, by those islanders with the largest stake in that ground. Those with no sheep did not attend.

Fig. 10.11. — From the Ufshins and Mucklaberg (bottom left), past the Sneck o’ da Smallie to the Lamatuns (centre) and round the back of the Noup. These are the rough areas on Foula — unstable cliffs interspersed with grassy ledges — where today’s sheep are half-wild and where the place-names in *gripster* and *rett* are found.
(Photograph: J.R. Baldwin)



In Faroe, similarly, when a round-up takes place over a particular *hagi* on the island of Vágur, only those with sheep allocated to that grazing need be present — but these families must be represented. And if they have allocations in other *hagar*, they must send representatives to round-ups there also.

The thinking behind these systems is quite clear — to provide adequate manpower certainly, but also to ensure that there are no arguments later as to the ownership of sheep, lambs or fleeces, and to eliminate the possibility of re-marking sheep, or plain stealing. No one person on Foula even yet is allowed, or at least supposed, to *caa the hill* on his own.

Enclosures:

Krø or *crue* has been mentioned several times — it is a term used both for the actual rounding-up of the sheep and for the fank into which the sheep are driven. Leading into the fank there are normally one or two projecting stone (nowadays wire) dykes, built to prevent the sheep from scattering when being driven [Fig. 10.12]. These dykes have a variety of names in Shetland, all primarily of Norse origin, and no doubt betraying, in part at least, the differing homelands and dialects of the old Norse settlers — *retta-dike*, *rekster(-dike)*, *sodin-dike*, *sodiskrødiike*, *sota-dike*, *stillers-dike*, *stukki*, *stiggi*, *stoggi* or *stjagi* (Jacobsen 1928 & 1932). Foula has *stjagi* or *krø-stjagi*, where *stjagi* represents ON *stjaki*: pole or stake.

Foula *steggi* can still also refer to an opening in any dyke, an alternative word for a *grind*; whilst *to stand i da stiggi* signifies standing in the opening of the *krø*, between the dykes. The Dunrossness form *sodiskrødiike* incorporates the ON word for sheep, *sauðr*, a word which in Foula is found in the hill-name *Soberlie* (sheep-mountain slope) and possibly in the name *Sjobel*, said to have been a place in the outfield which served as night quarters for sheep. (The latter name, however, may incorporate ON *sjár*, *sjór* [sea], particularly as the site is close by the low sea-cliffs on the east side of the island and away from the main hills where most other such shelters, *buils*, are to be found — see below, and cf. Jacobsen 1936. 26, 96).

The North Mainland form *retta-dike*, where *retta* signifies an enclosure, also has parallels in Foula. It comes from ON *rett*, an enclosure for sheep or cattle. *Rætt* is the usual word in modern Faroese for a sheep-fank, and on Foula also it has a specific 'sheep' sense. Long obsolete, apparently, as a common noun. it survives only in the place-names *Da Rett*, *Da Rettins*, *Da Get o' da Rettins*, *Da Flør o' Gamlarett* (cf. also Jacobsen 1928 & 1932; 1936). Indeed, in *Da Flør o' Gamlarett*, (nowadays abbreviated to *Gamlet* or *Gamlir*) it is referring only to an (?) old (*gamla*) sheepfold — perhaps disused, that is, at the period when the name was coined, and paralleled in more recent times by the relatively new hybrid name *Auld Crues* for stone enclosures formerly used with sheep elsewhere on the island [Figs. 10.9; 10.13].

We already have, therefore, two Foula terms for 'enclosure', *krø* and *rett*. *Gripster* is a third, though unlike the others appears not to have been known elsewhere in Shetland in this sense (Jacobsen 1928 & 1932). However, to *grip* = to catch sheep, was used in other parts of Shetland (ON *grípa*: to seize — with hand, claw, beak, etc. DOST). We may also compare with a Dumfriesshire dog, *free from grip* — i.e. that does not hold on to sheep with its teeth; also with a

SOME STONE - BUILT FOULA CRUES

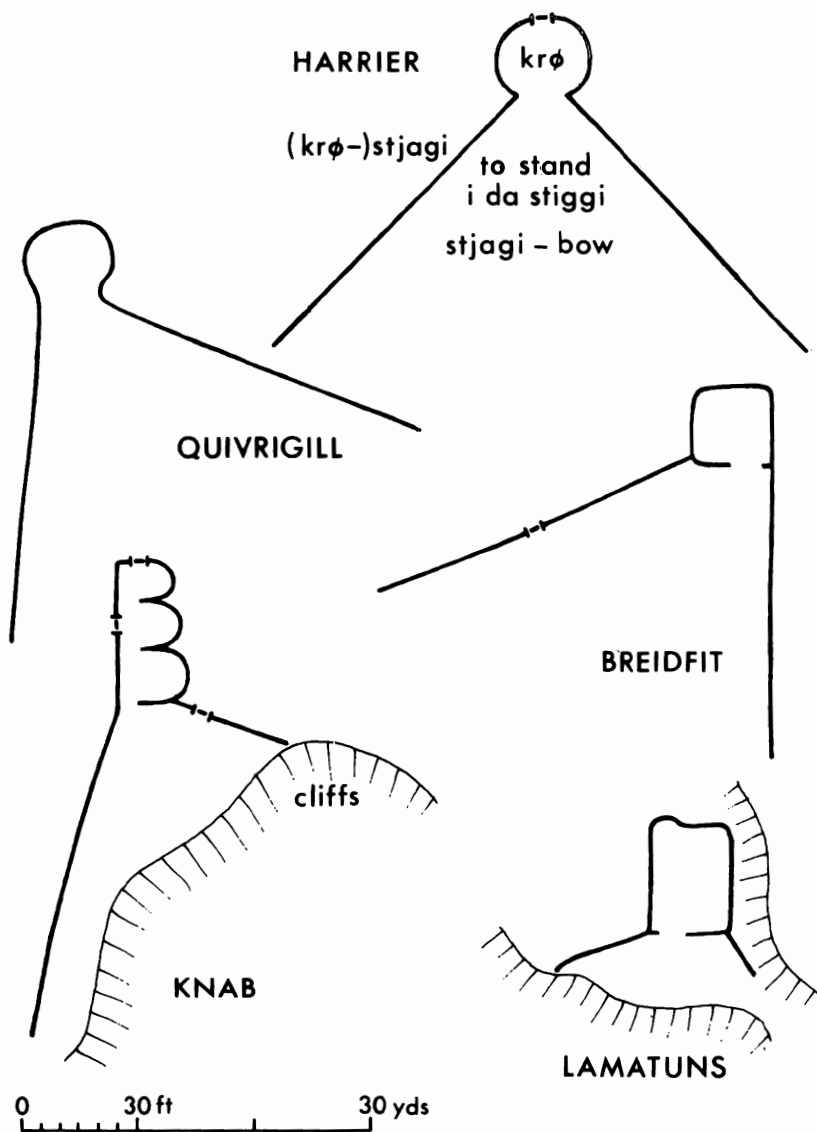


Fig. 10.12. —The shape of some older stone-built crues.

GRIPSTER, RETT, BUIL

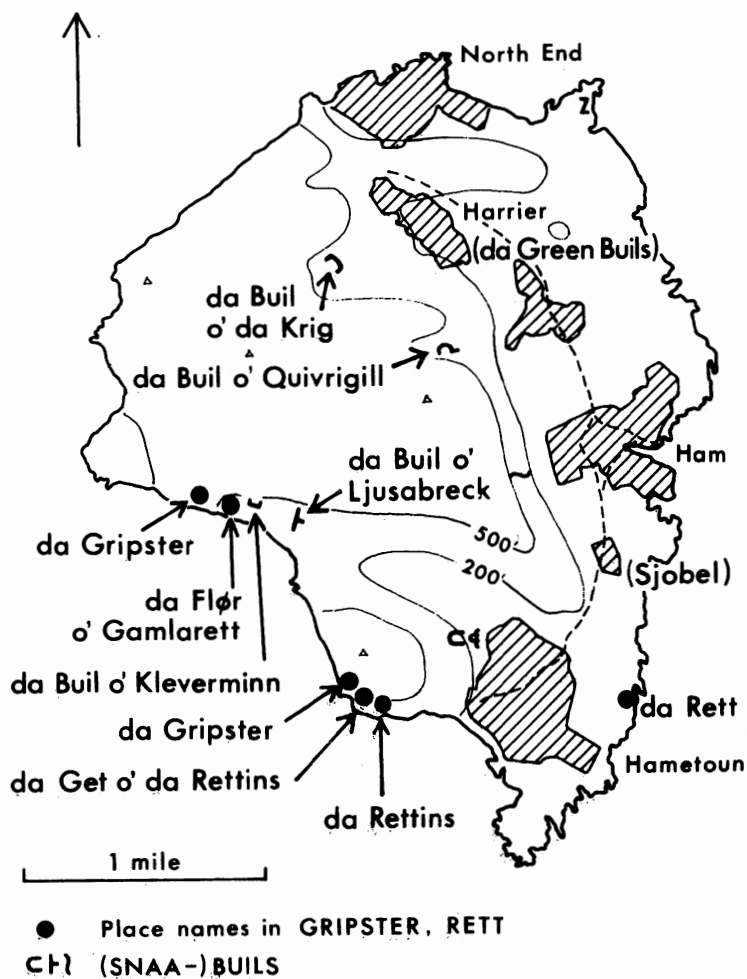


Fig. 10.13. —Distribution of place-names incorporating *gripster*, *rett* and *buil*.

Kirkcudbrightshire *grippin' bucht* — a pen or fold in which sheep were caught and held for shearing. Though true that Old Scots has *grip* from the 15th century, various Norse words have survived in this distant corner of South-West Scotland, on the Viking route to Ireland, Man and North-West England — not least the *haaf-net* for salmon or sea-trout fishing (ON *hafn*: see Sanderson 1968. 132–140. Cf. eg. Ork. *heevie*; Shet. *høvi*; Gael. *tabh, amh*; and modern Nor./Icel.).

The two named Foula *gripsters* nestle amongst the cliffs on the south-west side of the island [Figs. 10.7; 10.11; 10.13]. They were certainly used for sheep. Could they indicate places where, in times long past, and in spite of present-day oral tradition, dogs seized or at least cornered individual sheep in the manner previously suggested? If not dogs, human beings certainly took hold of sheep there, present-day informants suggesting that only a very few sheep at a time could be caught in such places, so small were they. Perhaps they provide a dim reference to a one-time hunting of 'wild sheep', after the manner known in e.g. the Faroes and a few West Norwegian islands (Bergsaker 1978. above: cf. also Landt 1810. 324)?

Da Gripster at the back of the Noup was used until earlier this century by the crofts of South Biggins and Shoadals. Its use was finally discontinued in the early 1940s after the birth of the Isbisters' only son, about which time the family also took over the running of the island's now-defunct shop. The change left the sheep in the lower Noup without regular human contact so that nowadays they are even more wild and difficult to catch than formerly — in contrast to those more accessible to the croft which have been deliberately tamed as lambs and with sheep nuts to make for easier handling both in winter and at rooing, marking and dipping times.

Access to the area of the *gripster* was by a 'very steep, narrow and nasty path', *Da Get o' da Rettins*, which led down from a small rectangular lambhouse built in the cliffs by the Isbisters as recently as 1929. It passed under an area known as Swalbar to Da Murnateugs. Sheep gathered from Da Leerie Heids were *ca'ed* to the south side of Da Murnateugs, whence they were driven back into the *gripster* — just a large hole through the rocks that the sheep used anyway but which, after one end was blocked with stones, served to prevent their getting through. It took 4–6 individuals to gather and drive the animals towards the *gripster*; just one or two, or up to 8 or 12 lambs might be trapped there at a time. The islanders were not collecting the sheep together for rooing or marking, merely to *grip* them and then to carry them on their shoulders up *Da Get o' da Rettins* to safer and more accessible ground. It was a difficult and dangerous job — and sooner or later the sheep always filtered back to the lower ledges and slopes.

A *gripster*, then, was a very small specialised sheep-fold in comparison with a larger *rett* or *krø*. Of these three terms, only *krø* is still in use as a common noun and only the *krø* is in normal use for sheep-based activities. *Krø*s are found all over Foula; the *gripsters* and *retts* occur almost invariably only in a certain type of terrain, and only in those parts of the island closely associated with the Hametoun (the most likely centre of the original Norse settlement and continuously occupied since then).

We should not forget that early in the 18th century a smallpox epidemic almost obliterated the old Foula population — which was replaced, save for five or seven survivors, from the Shetland mainland (Holbourn 1938. 73). Words new to Foula, but nonetheless Norn, could easily have come in at this period, for it was still previous to the final demise of Norn as a live, albeit restricted, language. More realistically, at some much earlier point in time was *krø* introduced as the usual word in Norn for a sheep-fold — perhaps accompanying an increase and spread of the population that required a wider use of the land available and some change of emphasis in techniques. (Indeed, the quite recent, deliberate taming of most of the South Biggins sheep as a means of eliminating the need for round-ups might be seen as an example of the process in reverse).

Krø — or rather the earlier Shetland form, given by Jacobsen as *kru* — is, in fact, one of a handful of particularly interesting words. It is found in e.g. Norwegian and Icelandic (*kró*) as well as in Shetland; it is also found in Irish and Gaelic (*crò*). An ON form *kró* certainly existed, but many believe that this betrays early Norse contact with the Celtic west at a period before the end of the migrations; that the Celtic word was assimilated into the Norse tongue and carried northwards by Norsemen who had first settled in the Hebrides or Ireland but later migrated to e.g. Faroe and Iceland (cf. Matras 1962. 7–14; Small 1968. 2; Foote & Wilson 1970. 148). In which case, *kru/krø* — synonymous in current meaning with Faroese *raett* — could have replaced or co-existed with *rett* at a relatively early date in the Norse occupation of Shetland and have reflected a new influx of migrants. Relationships are obscure, however, and require further analysis.

A *ból* (ON *ból*: a lying place for beasts) is another sheep-related enclosure. It refers to a structure described in the Faroes (where it was called *stovur* or *boul*; *ból* in modern Faroese) as 3–4 ft. high, of stone and turf, semi-circular, with the open diameter generally facing south since snow seldom came from that quarter (Landt 1810. 318–319). Such an enclosure was also known in e.g. Iceland, Ireland and much of Scotland. In Gaelic it was termed *buaile*; in Border Scots, a *stell*.

A Foula *buil* or *snaa buil*, shaped more like an open horseshoe [Fig. 10.14], is a place where sheep were gathered during severe winter weather. The opening normally faces east or west, but this rather depends on the position of the *buil* relative to the lie of the hills and to the direction of the strong winter gales and snows. Some therefore face north-south; some incorporate two or three compartments and may be T-shaped, S-shaped or Y-shaped. One is rectangular; others appear merely as short straight lengths of dry-stone dyke. All are on the *skattald*, outwith the enclosed settlements, and the majority are on the lower slopes of the steep, rough hills. In bad weather, a person from each croft would go out to collect the sheep, and feed them hay at the *buil*. Such practice reflects the usual habit, where the climate allowed, of out-wintering all sheep (Cowie 1879. 76; Small 1968. 7–8, 15), except for the lambs [Fig. 10.15]; and though it has become modified in more recent times, with increasing provision of extra feed and shelter, it emphasises the close interaction of man and nature and the need to come to terms with a harsh physical environment.



Fig. 10.14. —The croft of Broadfoot (Breidfit), with the ruins of Stoel by the hill-dyke. Beyond the infield, on the slopes of the Noup, two *snaa- buils* or bad weather shelters for hill sheep. 1970.
(*Photograph: E.F.D. Acland*)

Fig. 10.15. —Lambs were generally brought in during the winter, even though the rest of the sheep were left on the hill. Lambhouses were built just as any other outbuilding and after the fashion of the old dwellings. Boldersburn, c. 1968.

(*Photograph: I.F. Tulip*)



On Foula, the word *bøll* features in the old place-name *Sjobel* already mentioned [Fig. 10.13]; also in *Da Green Buils* — an area of relatively sheltered *skattald* where sheep gather of their own accord. As for man-made structures, there is a large and a small *snaa-buil* west of the Hametoun dyke on the side of the Noup [Fig. 10.14]. The word is also found in *Da Buil o' Ljusabreck* and *Da Buil o' Kleverminn* up past the head of the Daal; and in *Da Buil o' Quivrigill* below Ouvrafandel. That it has been applied to structures built within the last hundred years (*Da Buil o' da Krig*, beside a steep burn in the hills west by Harrier) is not entirely surprising, since the word still survives more generally in common speech — a dog's *buil* is his bed; a ram's *buil* is that corner of the barn where the ram is tied in winter; *I will buil me down* is a light-hearted way of indicating an intention of going to bed. At the same time, active understanding and use of the term in the more specific sheep context correlates strongly with the fact that the practice of using such winter enclosures for sheep continued on the island as long as cattle were kept in any quantity and required infield grazing.

Ewe-Milking:

To conclude this discussion on the rounding-up or pounding of sheep, a fleeting reference to the milking of ewes is appropriate. On the South Ness of Foula are the low hummocky remains of at least five lines of dykes, not including the head or hill dyke of the present settlement at Hametoun [Fig. 10.17]. Foula people still refer to former times when their predecessors would enclose the animals at night between the dykes, separate sheep and lambs, and *kevel* the lambs. *Kevel*, from ON *kefla* (to provide with a bit), refers to the practice of putting a wooden peg, a *kavellin' tree*, into the lamb's mouth to prevent it

10th CENTURY 'KEVEL' JARLSHOF, SHETLAND

1 cm

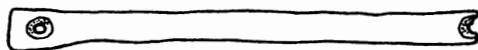
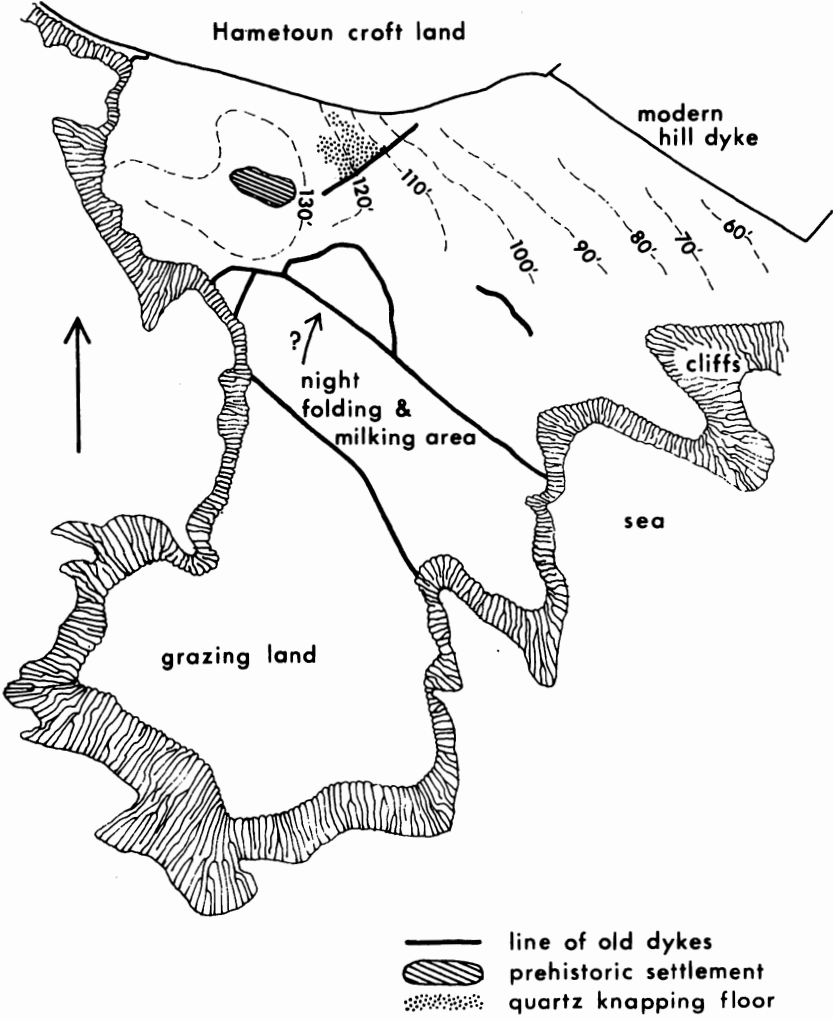


Fig. 10.16. —No *kevel* survives from Foula. What is thought to be a Norse *kevel* (HSA 265) was recovered from Jarlshof, at the southern tip of the Shetland Mainland. It is probably of 10th century date, and is of bone with a small hole either end to take a thread or thin cord which held it in position. One end is broken off.
(Courtesy of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland)

sucking (cf. Bergsaker 1978. above). This practice seems to have become obsolete 'several' generations ago now — indeed it had apparently disappeared from the Faroes well before 1800 (Landt 1810. 326) — but traces of dykes still remain, together with the outline of a roughly semi-circular pound abutting. And hereabouts, according to tradition, milking of the ewes took place each morning.

FOULA — SOUTH NESS SHEEP FOLDING & MILKING



After Simpson 1968

Fig. 10.17. — From a preliminary archaeological survey of the South Ness by Gavin Simpson, University of Belfast, with additions from oral tradition.



*Fig. 10.18. — Remains of the old, pre-Norse stone dykes crossing the South Ness. Oral tradition links them with ewe-milking. In the cliffs behind are *da Rettins* and *da Gripster*. 1969.*
(Photograph: J.R. Baldwin)

It would be wrong, however, to equate these dykes with e.g. later mediaeval times or even with the period of Norse habitation [Fig. 10.18]. Evidence of a stone implement 'factory' has been discovered hard up against one: close by is a series of interconnected oval or circular hollows marking a settlement reminiscent of late neolithic Skara Brae in Orkney or late Bronze Age Jarlshof in the south of Shetland (Simpson 1968. 317–8, 325). The various dykes and structures may not be contemporary with each other, but they would certainly appear to pre-date the Norse period. What we appear to have is a secondary use, in the context of sheep husbandry and ewe-milking, of much older structures.

LUG MARKING

To identify sheep and to provide proof of ownership, some form of marking has been practised in all pastoral or partly pastoral societies.

Cuts:

Because of the system of ownership (cf. Williamson 1948. 52; West 1972. 12–17; Baldwin 1973. 21–24; 1974. 94), a Faroese settlement such as Gásadalur or Mykines has only a limited number of lugmarks. Gásadalur has 3 outfields or











LUG MARKS — CUTS		
	Foula	Faroe
	hole	HOOL
	shear	soylt, SUJLT
	kleep	
	ri(f)t	oriva, RIVA HAJLT
	half a lug	HAALVT
	biddie, BRAGD	bragdt, BRAGD
	two biddies	
		Tvey Bragd (N. Isles) Tveir Bitar (S. Isles)
	bit piece } aff	stoyft, STUJOT
	draa	
<p>LETTERING KEY</p> <p>hole — 1960s–1970s</p> <p>BRAGD — 19th century, obsolete (Jacobsen)</p> <p>oriva — 1970 Gásadalur</p> <p>Tvey Bragd — 19th century (Rasmussen)</p> <p>SUJLT — 18th century (Svabo)</p>		

Fig. 10.19. —Sheep lug marks for Foula, Shetland, and some from Faroe.

hagar — to 1 of these, there were formerly 4 community herds; and 2 to each of the other 2. Marks existed, therefore, for 8 flocks, even though a greater number of individual villagers might each have 100 or more sheep. Not surprisingly, only 4 basic cuts were known in Gásadalur, used in 8 combinations — the equivalents of the Foula *piece off* (*stoyft*), *rit* (*oriva*), *shear* (*soylt*) and *biddie* (*bragdt*).

Foula, however, with no herds, had 9 basic cuts, used in at least 22 different combinations at the present day [Fig. 10.19]. The present population (1974) is 35 in 15 crofts; in 1884 it was 276 in 43 crofts, so the number of different combinations once current may be imagined — particularly as houses did not necessarily contain just one household. Indeed, the local factors that led to the population explosion of 19th century Shetland would appear to have developed an ancient practice into something far more complicated than probably once envisaged.

It is not the shapes themselves that are unique to areas of Norse influence, of course; rather the names of so many of the shapes. *Ri(f)t*, *twa ri(f)ts*, *shear*, *kleep*, *biddie*, *draa*, *half a lug*, *piece aff/bit aff*, *hole* — these are the Foula cuts. Of these, only *piece aff* is fully English, though some others are heavily influenced by Lowland Scots/English.

Shear, for instance, should be compared to Icelandic and Faroese *sylt* (Fenton 1969. 231) as well perhaps as to Norwegian *skjerda* (Jacobsen 1928 & 1932). And though a *shül* (*shül shear*, in mainland Walls opposite to Foula, referred to a rectangular piece out of the middle top of the ear) seems never to have been a Foula cut, a *biddie* appears formerly to have been known as (or perhaps to have resembled closely) a *bragd*. Neither 19th century *bragd*, nor a cognate *avbregget* (denoting the altered mark on a sheep's ear occasioned by a change of owner — Jacobsen 1928 & 1932) is now recalled on the island, but they do echo the Faroese North Isles *tvey bragd*. The Faroese South Isles used *tveir bitar* (in Rasmussen 1968. 78) — cf. Foula's *twa biddies*; opposite, however, rather than adjacent semi-circular nips.

Such has been the linguistic breakdown on the island in recent decades, linked to the breakdown of the old social-economic patterns of community life, that we might suspect *biddie* of having come up from the South (cf. *bit* = *nip*, common enough names for this mark throughout much of Scotland — e.g. Barrie 1912. 0.). For once real decay sets in in a small community, change is considerably more rapid than in larger communities better able to preserve a balance. At the same time, modern Faroese and Icelandic, like Old Norse, have *biti*, so Foula's *biddie* is most likely a straight cousin.

Drams:

Knife cuts are only one way of lug-marking sheep. Foula, no doubt on account of its once high-density population, had also a highly-developed system for marking newly-born lambs.

A lamb whose mother could not be found would have a tuft of other-coloured wool tied into its fleece, so that it would be identified if seen running at a later date with a ewe [Fig. 10.20 left]. Otherwise, newly-born lambs were *drammed* — i.e. caught before they were a day old and a thread sewn through the ear about $\frac{1}{8}$ in. — $\frac{1}{4}$ in. from the edge and knotted [Fig. 10.21]. About $\frac{1}{4}$ in.



Fig. 10.20. —An owner's lug marks freshly cut with a knife (right) and a tuft of light-coloured wool tied into the moorit fleece of an unidentified lamb (left). Soberlie crue, 1969.

(Photograph: J.R. Baldwin)

Fig. 10.21. —A dram knotted into the ear of a Dykes lamb, 1969. It would later be replaced with a cut lug mark.

(Photograph: J.R. Baldwin)













LUG MARKS — DRAMS Hametoun, Foula		
Position of Dram	Croft	Material & Colour
right ear 	Dykes	white wool (→cotton) + black cotton
	N. Biggins	red wool
	S. Biggins	white wool
	Breckins	white cotton
	Niggards	white cotton
	Quinister	navy blue wool
	Steol (1)	black wool
left ear 	Punds	white wool
	Broadfoot	pink silk
	Steol (2)	black wool

Fig. 10.22. —Surviving Foula drams: all but one are obsolete.

was left between knot and ear to allow the ear to grow. This was always a temporary mark, before lug-marks were given in the autumn [Fig. 10.20 right]. The term *dram* has direct Scandinavian parallels, e.g. Icelandic *drambr*, a piece of knotty wool.

The *dram* has declined in use, not only because of a decrease in the number of owners, but because, if not properly placed in the ear, it was easily lost. Nonetheless, it could still be useful today, on account of the difficulty and messiness of marking accurately with a knife a young lamb's ear — useful in the absence, that is, of paint blobs, plastic ear tags, or a proper punch.

For a relatively small island, the system of *drams*, as of cut lug marks, was remarkably highly developed, and the range of possible permutations vast. About a dozen are still recalled, though only one (Dykes) is still in use [Fig. 10.22]. Not only were colours varied between owners, but also the type of thread used, the number of strands and colours in a thread, the position in the ear, as well as the ear itself.

Drams have also been used in e.g. Yell; and until recently on the Ness of Ireland, Dunrossness, in place of a *vass*, a kind of wool-thread 'collar' tied round the lamb's neck and incorporating 2 pieces of leather, each 'ear'-shaped and cut with the owner's proper lug-mark [Fig. 10.23].

'Collars' of coloured rope or incorporating wooden tags carved with an owner's initials, still survive in the Faroes — in settlements such as Gásadalur where they are attached to sheep sent away to market [Fig. 10.23]. Formerly, 'collars' of one kind or another were common enough also in other parts of Shetland. The word *dram* itself was applied to some of them (Papa Stour);

SHEEP IDENTIFICATION TAGS

Dunrossness 'Vass'
(Shetland 1972)

Gásadalur
(Faroe 1970)

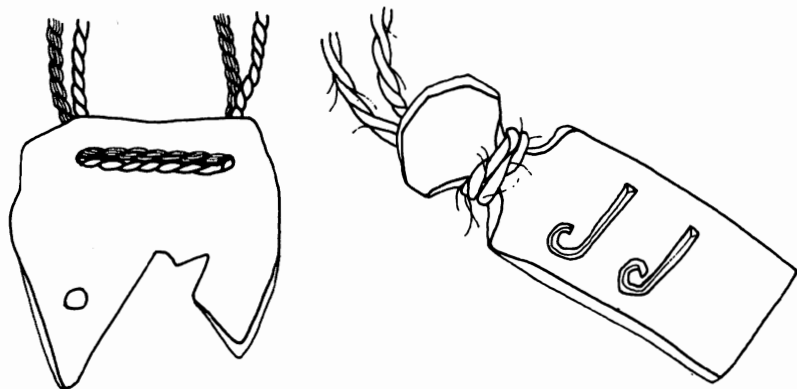


Fig. 10.23. — Shetland and Faroese tags that are tied around a sheep's neck, like a collar.

others were termed *caddles* (Whiteness) (ON *kaðall*, a rope; Far. *kadal*, a rope). *Kadel* can also refer to an ear thread (Yell, Fetlar) or even a tuft of wool or cloth tied into the fleece (Yell: see above) — all of which helps illustrate the development of language and the growth of dialect in small, self-sufficient communities not far distant perhaps but difficult of access one from the other. Under such circumstances, general words such as ‘a rope’ or ‘a scrap of wool’ can very soon take on specialised and differing meanings.

CONCLUSION

The wide Norn vocabulary associated with e.g. the quality of the fleeces, specific parts of the sheep (especially when slaughtered for food), and the preservation of mutton has not been discussed. Nor have sheep movements on the hill, tethering on the infield, the wool itself after it has left the sheep, or other seasonal activities linked to the keeping of sheep. Even those topics that we have been examining would repay considerably more study.

There is enough evidence, however, to identify the survival of many Norse influences in sheep husbandry on Foula well into the 19th century, and — in much more disjointed fashion — up to modern times. This is as valid for practice and technique as it is merely for terminology.

Increasingly, however, it becomes apparent that a thoroughly Norse foundation has been modified or overlaid, first by Lowland Scots importations, more recently by English. From a contemporary standpoint, not only has Foula’s rapidly declining population become very small and therefore under considerable threat; in addition, the oldest generations (born in the 1870s and 1880s) are now all but gone, and the older generation (from the 1900s and 1910s) is no longer active. The only active sheep husbandry is carried out by a quite literal handful of younger families, heavily spiced with Lowland blood and introducing what are largely ‘international’ practices — plastic ear tagging, drenching, even the use of dogs after the southern manner. Once actual practice and cultural factors change so drastically in such a small community, so also must many, if not most, of the techniques, tools and terminology.

On Foula, they used to say just a few decades ago to someone who had been away a long time, somewhere else on the island, perhaps at the sheep —

‘You’ve surely been to drunton!’

— Norwegian Trondheim, of course. And perhaps there is a touch of nostalgia — or maybe is it irony? — in a Dunrossness man’s recent claim (1974) that not only is the Norse language gone but that ‘We’re blown away Norwegians!’

The fortunes of sheep husbandry on Foula, seen in a Norse context, may perhaps be considered representative of what has happened in other areas of Norse Shetlandic life. Perhaps we should re-emphasise, therefore, that the Norse presence in Shetland (or Orkney, or elsewhere in Scotland and the United Kingdom) can represent only a phase in the history of these Islands, and that its associated culture could survive in any depth only so long as its ‘context’ survived.

Early man apparently came to Shetland through Britain, from Europe, whether mainly by land or by the western sea-routes. Here, to a considerable

extent isolated and no doubt conservative on account of environmental hostility and inaccessibility, traces have survived of successive waves. Historical accident, however, placed the Shetland Islands in a quite different relationship to a rising Norse presence whose expansion reversed the normal pattern of migration in Europe. The islands became a hub of activity for migrations south and west as well as north. But when lines of communication and trade routes began to disintegrate, and the colonised lands withdrew into their own separate elements, southern influences began once more to be felt, and Shetland once again began to experience migrations — more stealthy perhaps than hitherto — from the south. And once more decay set in as the islands reverted to their role as the northern outpost of a southern civilisation.

Whilst continued decay and withdrawal is no longer inevitable in the light of the Islands' strategic importance in the North Atlantic and the discovery of new natural resources linked to new technologies, nonetheless the specifically Norse inheritance, based on a subsistence economy, is bound to become even more remote as Shetland is pulled on to a late 20th century European stage by way of Scotland and England, rather than by way of Norway and Denmark.

Yet however remote it may have become, this inheritance — along with the many other later legacies of Scandinavian contact — has been an integral element in the moulding of modern Shetland. And in this respect at least, the 'influence' and 'tradition', if understood and appreciated, can continue — not as a fossilised relic, but as a grass-roots cultural base providing a sound yardstick against which to judge, select, reject or assimilate what is new, necessary or inevitable. In this way, it can help Shetland retain its individuality and cohesiveness in the modern world.

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Thanks are also due to those leaders and members of Brathay Exploration Group expeditions to Foula who have helped collect valuable information relating to sheep marks and sheep movements, and to Miss Helen Jackson who drew the maps and diagrams.

Dialect terms no longer current in Foula follow Jacobsen's orthography; terms still in use and collected during field-work are spelt according to local practice unless otherwise indicated.

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