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Shetland and the Great War

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**Doctor of Philosophy
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2012

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that it is my own work. It has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

ABSTRACT

The Great War was an enormous global cataclysm affecting the lives of all inhabitants of the combatant countries and many others. The effects were not uniform, however, and, by assessing the experience of the people of Shetland, this thesis shows how a local history can enhance understanding of the nuances of an international event.

The Shetlanders' experience was similar in many ways to that of other communities, but had aspects that were unusual or even unique. Both local and national sources are used to investigate how the Shetland experience fitted into historiographical discourses on the war. These include: contrasting depictions of the pre-war era as a 'Golden Age' or a period of upheaval and conflict; the extent of militarism in pre-war British society; the putative reasons for volunteering for armed service and the controversy about conscription; reactions to the outbreak of war and attitudes towards the enemy and the Government's handling of the war; the situation of women; and the extent of change and continuity at the re-adaptation to peace.

In addition, the thesis explores two related and recurring themes. One of the profound influences on Shetland was its geographical location, which is related here to theories about local and regional history and concepts of 'islandness', 'peripherality' and 'place'. Assertions of a Shetland communal consciousness and identity related to a distinctive local experience are also scrutinised.

The disparate effects of the war are studied through the experience of different sections of the population. Despite their perceived remoteness, Shetlanders were aware of pre-war international antagonisms, especially as their islands became important for Britain's defence and war strategy and their patriotism came under suspicion. This resulted in recruitment, deployment and casualties for the local armed forces being atypical in the UK. Servicemen's contemporary writing showed both conformity to prevalent themes and affirmations of local identity. Shetland provided a base for naval operations important to Britain's victory; relationships between the Navy and Shetlanders were sometimes difficult and visiting servicemen perceived Shetland as remote and different. Examination of the economic consequences of the war and the reactions of Shetland society illustrates how the community's identity was expressed in the war effort and strengthened, even when national interests were paramount. Finally, commemoration is recognised as both a national movement and an expression of local identity and pride in Shetland's contribution to victory.

SHETLAND AND THE GREAT WAR

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List of Abbreviations

BoA	Board of Agriculture for Scotland
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
FBS	Fishery Board for Scotland
HoC	House of Commons
IWM	Imperial War Museum
LFO	Lerwick Fishery Office
LHT	Lerwick Harbour Trust
LTC	Lerwick Town Council
PP	Parliamentary Papers
SA	Shetland Archives
<i>SN</i>	<i>Shetland News</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Shetland Times</i>
TNA: PRO	The National Archives Public Records Office
WMJC	War Memorial Joint Committee
ZCC	Zetland County Council

Used in Royal Navy correspondence

COS	Chief of Staff
CinC	Commander in Chief
CO&S	Commanding Orkneys and Shetland
DAC	Deputy Air Commander
DCAS	Deputy Chief of Air Staff
i/c	in charge
O&S	Orkneys and Shetlands
Lt. Col	Lieutenant Colonel
RMLI	Royal Marines Light Infantry

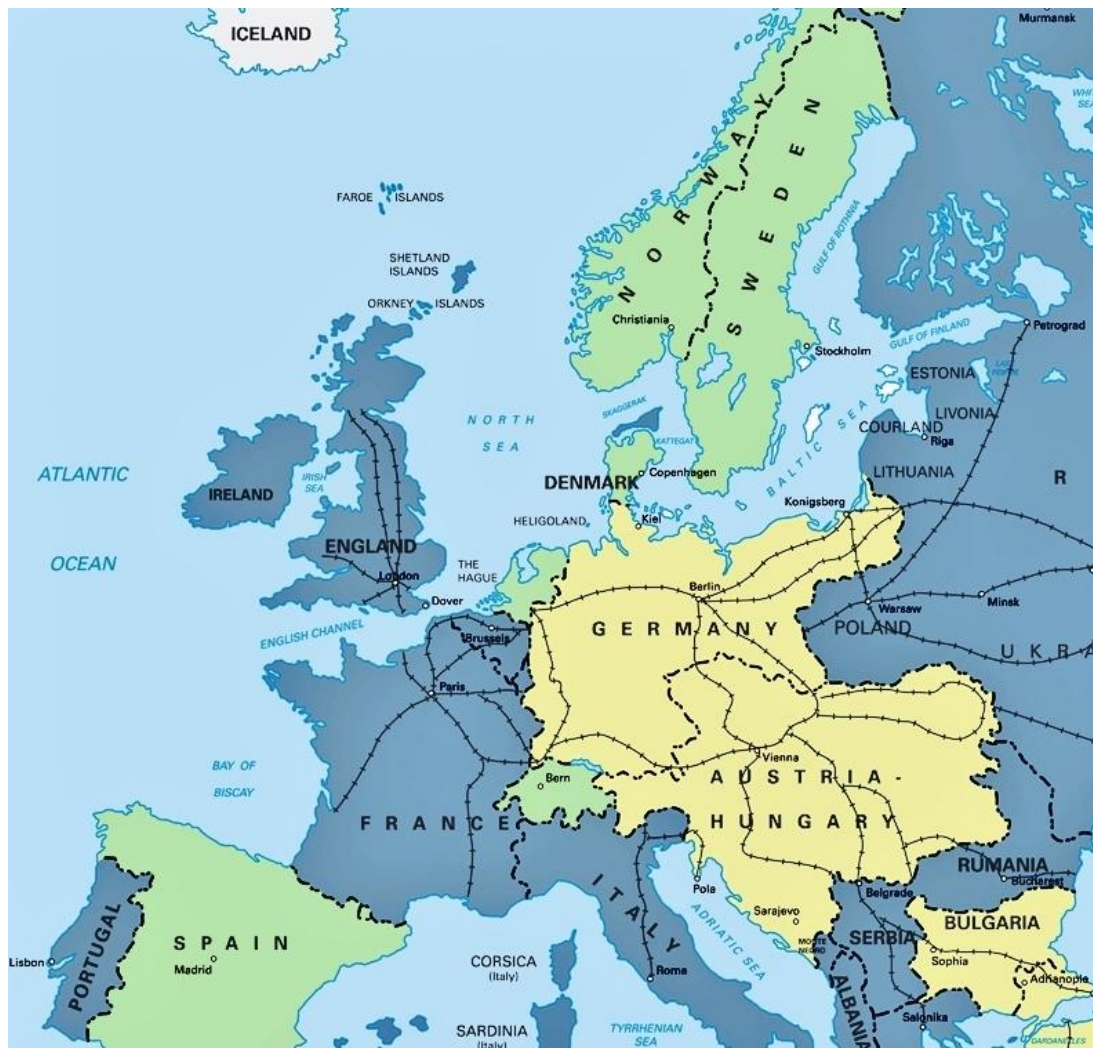


Figure I Europe in 1914

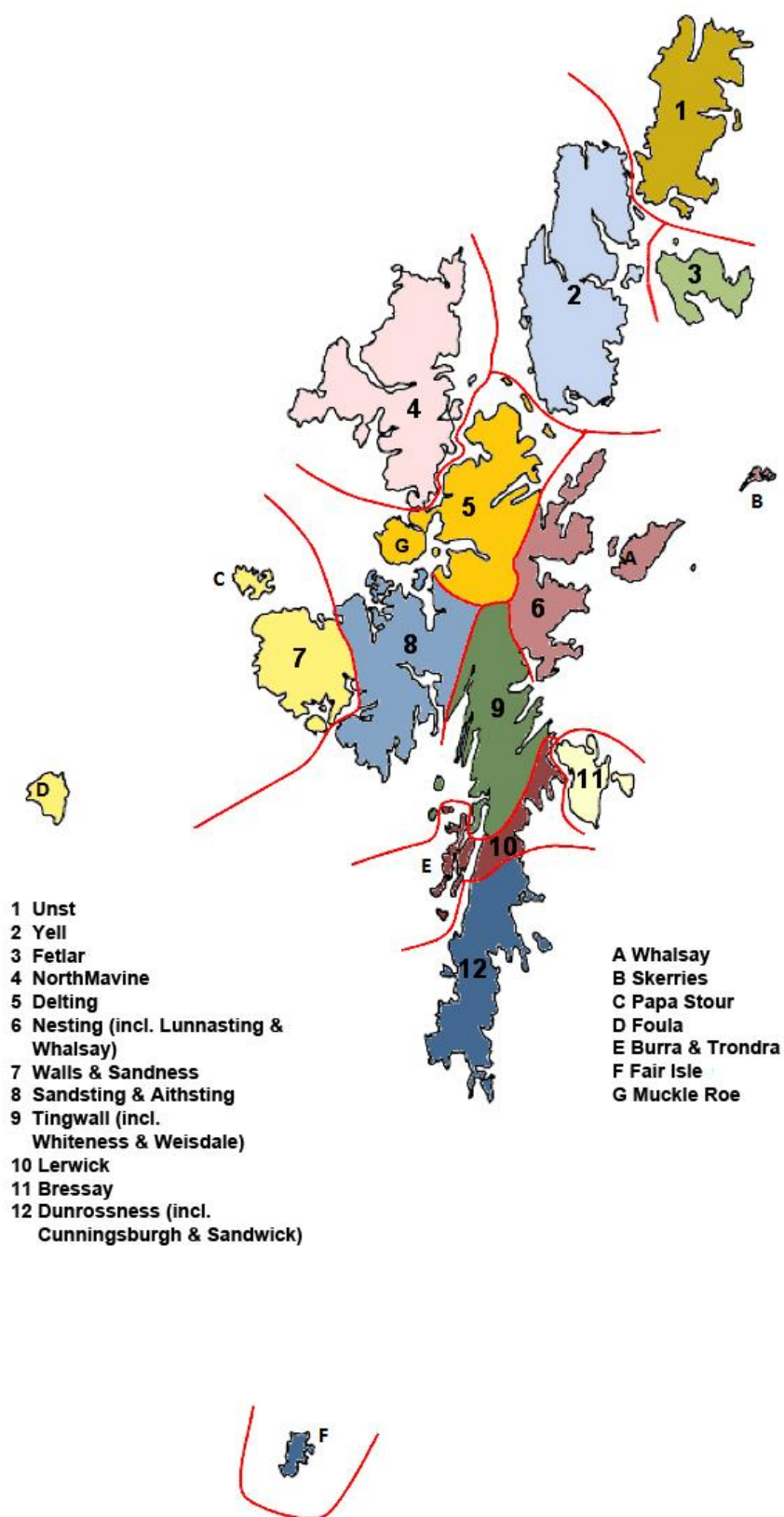


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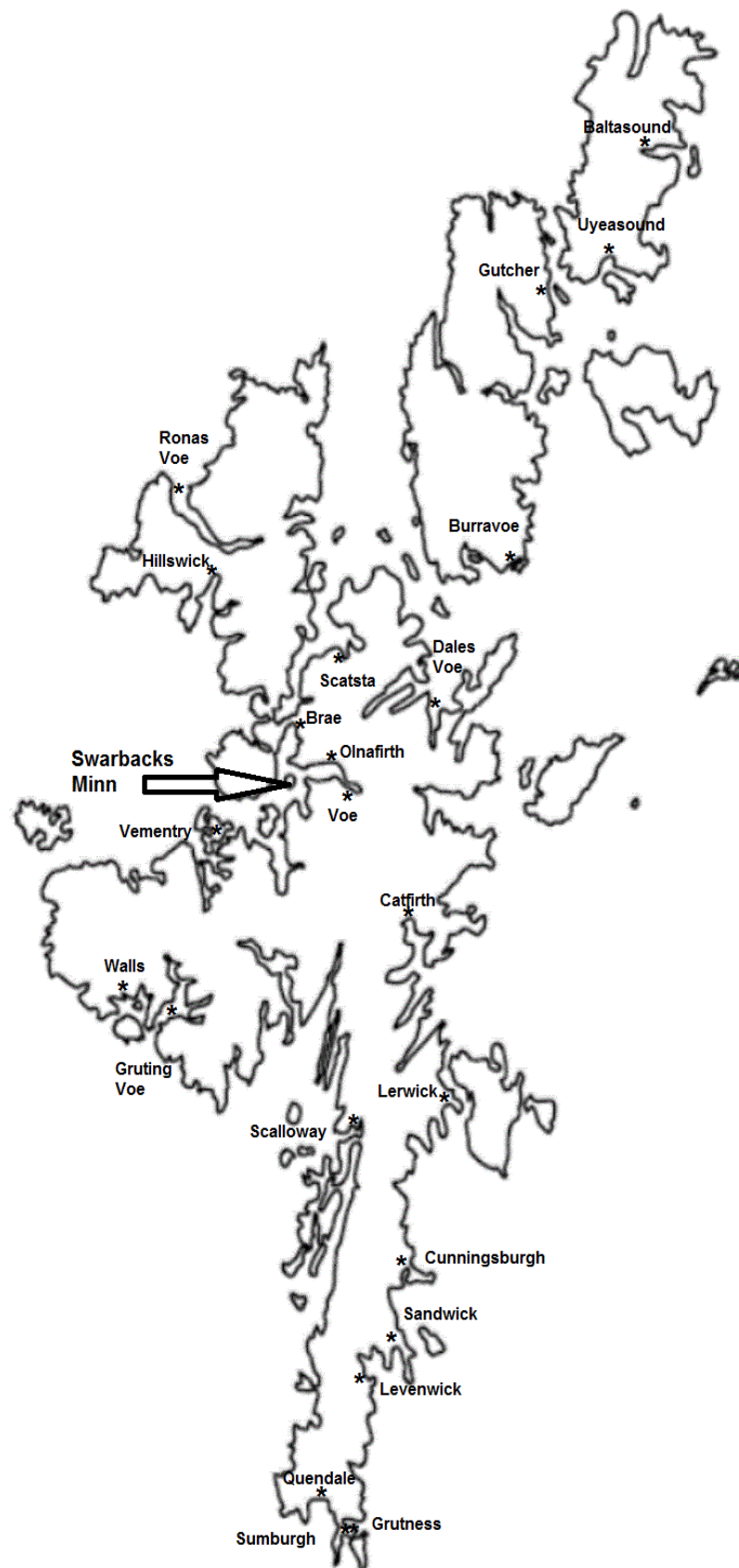


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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: LOCAL HISTORY AND IDENTITY AND THE GREAT WAR

This thesis assesses how the people of Shetland experienced the Great War. In many ways that experience was similar to that of many other communities in the UK, and indeed elsewhere. On the other hand, the enormous global cataclysm impacted a small but distinct community in particular ways which may have been unusual or even unique. This is therefore an essentially local history and an example of how local history can add to understanding of the nuances of an international event.

As well as investigating the extent to which the Shetland experience fitted into several historiographical discourses on aspects of the war, the thesis contains two other related and recurring themes. First, it is evident that one of the factors which affected Shetland's experience was its geographical location. In addition, the thesis considers the extent to which the idea of a Shetland communal consciousness and identity features in the contemporary sources. This introductory chapter explores issues of local history and the influence of geographical location, before turning to the particular case of Shetland and its community identity at the start of the twentieth century.

Local History

In the UK, there have been many attempts to define local history. In 1979, the National Standing Conference for Local History offered, 'the study of man's past in relation to his locality, locality being determined by an individual's interest and experiences.'¹ Rodgers suggested, 'the study of the past of some significant local unit, developing as a community, in its context and compared with other such units'.²

The theory has mainly been debated in the context of England, and originally focussed on reservations about the academic validity of local history, supposedly the preserve of amateurs and antiquarians. In the 1950s and 1960s, local history was given recognition by Hoskins, Finberg, and others. Finberg's work related mainly to

¹ John Beckett, *Writing Local History* (Manchester, 2007), 188

² A. Rodgers, *Approaches to Local History*, 2nd ed. (London, 1977), viii

pre-industrial communities, with the theme of ‘the Origin, Growth, Decline, and Fall of the local community’, defined as:

a set of people occupying an area with defined territorial limits and so far united in thought and action as to feel a sense of belonging together, in contradistinction from the many outsiders who do not belong.

He believed that local history was a distinct discipline, worthy of study in its own right. In an often-repeated phrase, he claimed, ‘The nation is not the same as the village or the town writ large’, and conceived place-related history as a series of concentric circles of relationships, widening from family to nation: ‘Local, national, and ecumenical history, then, deal with three interrelated but distinct forms of social life, each with its own chronology and its own spatial extension’. He did, however, consider it important to know the national context, though the nature of the relationship of such small-scale studies to larger themes was not made clear.³

As well as the validity and definition of the discipline, the debates concerned methodology and historiographical perspective, in particular whether the purpose of local history was to provide case studies to test in microcosm an idea developed at a national level, or to generate an idea that could be aggregated with other localities to produce a national picture.⁴

Phythian-Adams objected to the study of local history ‘simply in order to illuminate broad socio-economic trends that consequently tend to disguise what is richly variegated or even unique’, not as a valid discipline. For him, local history was about building up from the local to the national and identifying from local situations themes of national significance, accepting the need for theoretical frameworks as well as comparative material. He believed that studying social issues in local contexts contributed to greater understanding, and regarded local history as ‘integrative’, ‘to do with the fluctuating development of recognisable social entities in the round’, more multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary than the ‘disintegrative’

³ H. P. R. Finberg, ‘The Local Historian and His Theme’, 1 – 24, 10; ‘Local History’, 25 – 44, 33, 39; ‘Local History in the University’, 45 – 70, 59 – 60, all in H. P. R. Finberg and V. H. T. Skipp, *Local History: Objective and Pursuit* (Newton Abbott, 1973)

⁴ Martin Shurer, ‘The Future for Local History: Boom or Recession?’, *Local Historian*, 21, 3 (1991), 99 – 108. G. Sheeran and Y. Sheeran, ‘Discourses in Local History’, *Rethinking History*, 2, 1 (1998), 65 – 85 surveyed the debates and the alleged failure of local historians to contribute to wider discourses.

or thematic approach of studies into, for example, demography, class, or gender. He was concerned with developments over long timescales, and proposed the unit of study should be 'congeries of communities' with enough in common to be recognised as local societies. In his view, a 'local society of the past' required four characteristics: a geographically coherent territory, a concordance between the territory and social organization, a shared cultural association and carriers of tradition, such as indigenous families.⁵ Other writers have agreed that place is not simply a matter of a geographical entity but also about 'human perception and recognition'.⁶

This was part of a trend to widen the perspective of local history by introducing the geographical concepts of 'region', which not only extended the size of the area of research but also emphasised the complex environmental, socio-economic, administrative and cultural nature of boundaries. There was no consensus, however, as to how the size and nature of the subject unit affected the methodology required. There is a sense in which the attempt to enlarge the subject areas of sub-national history and differentiate 'regional' from 'local' history harked back to the contention that only large-scale history had value, as if national or state-related history was not subject to the same variety of approaches and disparity in quality as history focussed on people or events in a smaller area.

The burgeoning interest in family history has been extended into studies of 'community', with multiple definitions of this concept.⁷ It has also been recognised that 'communities' of people with like interests were not necessarily contiguous and that any boundaries are artificial and have meanings that are contextual and fluid. Marshall, who objected to the use of local history merely as 'instrumental', as a source of examples for more general theories, thought the drive to define 'community' was limiting: the fundamental aim should be to not impose boundaries or unity on people and places but to try to 'discover how contemporaries saw their

⁵ Charles Phythian-Adams, *Re-thinking English Local History* (Leicester, 1987); 'Local History and National History: the Quest for the Peoples of England', *Rural History*, 2, 1 (1991), 1 – 23

⁶ J. D. Marshall, *Tyranny of the Discrete: a Discussion of the Problems of Local History* (Aldershot, 1997), 97

* The French word 'pays' is also used, mainly in agrarian contexts.

⁷ W. T. R. Pryce, *From Family History to Community History* (Cambridge, 1994)

own regional social groupings'. Geographical boundaries were less important than perceptions, which moreover were not fixed; the interactions of groups of people varied over time; image, civic pride and sentiment were important in their self-identification.⁸

Although studies in local history have moved into more modern periods and industrial and urban contexts and local history is generally not now regarded as a separate discipline, the debates about the validity, purpose, perspective and methodology continue. More recently, Kammen, an American, again challenged the view that local history was merely national history writ small, and was valuable only for seeking confirmation of the larger picture. Preferring a simple definition: 'the study of past events of a of people or groups in a given geographical area', she also thought local history should not be confined to pre-modern periods; in her view, much of twentieth century history was perceived as 'national' rather than 'local' history, when it could be both. Local history could be of particular benefit when it was 'differential', illustrating disparities between the national and local or between two localities.⁹ In England, Beckett recognised the enduring hostility of some academic historians, but reiterated: 'Local history can and should make a contribution not only to our understanding of national history, but also to our appreciation of our own communities.' The definition of the subject area, he contended, was less important than a focus on questions and issues rather than place, the analysis of a variety of sources and the testing of more widely held historical ideas from local evidence.¹⁰

In these debates, particularly in England, 'nation' has been equated with 'state'. The history of Scotland introduces the complication of the 'stateless nation' or nation within a state.¹¹ Scottish historians, perhaps concerned to avoid accusations of parochialism and classification of their nation as a 'region', have been less apt to differentiate between the 'local' and 'regional' definitions.¹² In 1990, Smout

⁸ Sheeran and Sheeran, 'Discourses', 71; Marshall, *Tyranny of the Discrete*, 14, 100 – 01, 84

⁹ Carol Kammen, *On Doing Local History* (Oxford, 2003), 4, 68, 70

¹⁰ Beckett, *Writing Local History*, xii, 197 – 98

¹¹ David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Nation*, 2nd ed. (London: 2001)

¹² Alexander Murdoch, 'Local History Societies and "Scottish Life and Society: Compendium of Scottish Ethnology"', *Scottish Local History*, 74 (2008), 49 – 51

declared, ‘Gone are the days when historians ... felt they had apologise for their interest in locality’. In his view, studying the community rather than the nation enabled a more thorough understanding of social history than was possible by generalisation at a national level. He maintained that: ‘Local history is not a rusty old tool of the backwoodsmen of historical studies, but the true cutting edge of our discipline’ and:

The most manageable and rewarding tasks in community history could be arrived at by taking a place at a certain period in its development and studying it in great depth, using every available source to get inside the sense of time and place.¹³

Linking the study of local history to the related discipline of ethnology, Mulhern wrote:

The grand constructs of ‘nation’ and ‘state’ are composed of many localities and within these localities are communities composed of individuals. It is the purpose of local history to integrate the experiences of these localities into wider historical analyses ... this work[local history] has additional value in that it provides accounts of the history of places that can be compared with elsewhere, thereby allowing for the synthesis of historical analyses of wider society. Indeed, without a proper understanding of local history, it is not possible to form complete or reliable histories of wider society.¹⁴

While this exaggerates the possibility of forming a complete knowledge of local variations and discounts the difficulties of synthesising coherent and useful social history from minutiae, it stresses the necessity, especially in the areas of social and cultural history, of recognising that not all localities have the same characteristics and experiences. What is imperative is to challenge generalisations.

Although the debates have not been resolved, what all these commentators have in common is a desire that history, whether termed ‘local,’ regional’ or indeed ‘national,’ ‘international’ or ‘supranational’ is studied and written to rigorous standards. There is no obvious reason why the place-referenced label should affect that aspiration. It is not necessary to share the sociologist Furedi’s concerns about the failure of historians to address the larger controversies of historiography, to heed his warnings about some of the pitfalls of local history. He thought that to focus on the local and particular led to excessive emphasis on complexity and detail, the loss

¹³ T. C. Smout, *The Cutting Edge: Prospects for Local History in Tayside and Fife* (St. Andrews, 1990), 2, 8

¹⁴ Mark Mulhern, ‘Compendium of Scottish Ethnology’, *Scottish Local History*, 74 (2008), 46 – 48

of context and perspective, the exaggeration of peculiarities and differences and the elevation of local factors and individual actions to undue explanatory significance.¹⁵ It is therefore necessary to avoid myopia, relate events and trends in a local study to a wider frame of reference and aim for ‘good history with an analytical focus and awareness of methodological issues, based on sustained engagement with relevant primary sources’.¹⁶

The Great War and Local History

In the context of the Great War, local studies have been part of a trend towards seeking more detailed, shaded and human information to complement the wider but impersonal accounts of military operations, international politics and macro-economics. Highlighting how complex and ambiguous the experience was, Constantine et al suggested that geographical units were one of the groupings of society useful for assessing the impacts.¹⁷ Local studies can be combined into an analysis of the effects on, and responses in, society. They can also challenge generalisations based on limited evidence mainly from large urban areas.¹⁸ According to Braybon:

There is much more ... for us to discover about the response to war in different geographical areas, even within the United Kingdom. Reactions may well have varied between town and country as well as regions.¹⁹

Although in war national identities came to the fore, it is also recognised that at this time, people still thought locally and related to their village, parish, town or county as well as nation and empire. Robbins maintained that Britain was a society where local identity was still very important and that ‘the very term “Britishness” implied the existence of cultural, and to some extent, political diversity’.²⁰ There were

¹⁵ Frank Furedi, *Mythical Past, Elusive Future: History and Society in an Anxious Age* (London, 1992)

¹⁶ Murdoch, ‘Local History Societies’, 51

¹⁷ Stephen Constantine, Maurice W. Kirby and Mary B. Rose, ‘Introduction’, in Stephen Constantine, Maurice W. Kirby, and Mary B. Rose, (eds), *The First World War in British History* (London, 1995), 1 – 8, 6 – 7

¹⁸ E.g., Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2012), 6 10

¹⁹ Gail Braybon, ‘Introduction’, in Gail Braybon, (ed.) *Evidence, History and the Great War* (Oxford, 2003), 1 – 29, 12

²⁰ Keith Robbins, *Great Britain: Identities, Institutions and the Idea of Britishness* (London, 1998), 263; *History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain* (London, 1993), 262 – 67

perceived differences between small-scale localities, what Shurer called ‘extremely parochial behaviour’, perceptions that the war may have influenced.²¹

Pennell called for community-centred studies ‘that allow room for the detail of the multifaceted experience of wartime society’. McCartney claimed that the experience of ‘citizen soldiers’ could only be satisfactorily studied ‘at the microlevel’. Gregory highlighted local differences, for example in recruitment and investment in war loans.²² Purseigle also encouraged local studies of responses to the war, which he thought were particularly complex and variable. Mobilisation of the war effort was implemented at local levels, drawing on local images and feelings of belonging, and the effects of the war were often recognised at community level. Besides testing national interpretations, local studies could, therefore, show how specifically local factors built the intricate national picture.²³

Local histories related to the Great War take many forms. Finn’s article on Liverpool, for example, showed how newspaper reports and letters about war conditions ‘formed the community’ and sustained the war effort, but it did not examine the imagined nature of the community or how it related to other aspects of wartime experience.²⁴ Purseigle studied reactions to the war in Northampton and the French town of Beziers, to compare the ‘relationship between the war culture and local cultural codes’.²⁵ On a different scale, in order to prove that ‘total war requires total history’, Chickering’s study of the city of Freiburg in Germany covered topics commonly found in social studies of the war, such as reactions to the outbreak, economic changes and the effects on local government, but also the pervasive material, cultural and perceptual effects. He concentrated only on the city and made to claims to typicality or representativeness.²⁶ On the other hand, Pitsula’s study of

²¹ Schurer, ‘Future for Local History’, 105 – 06

²² Catriona Pennell, ‘British Society and the First World War’, *War In History*, 16, 4 (2009), 506 – 18, 518; Helen B. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials In The First World War* (Cambridge, 2005) 3; Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2008), 81 – 89, 220 – 33

²³ Pierre Purseigle, ‘Beyond and Below the Nations: Towards a Comparative History of Local Communities at War’, in Jenny MacLeod and Pierre Purseigle, (eds), *Uncovered Fields: Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden, 2004), 95 – 123

²⁴ Michael Finn, ‘Local Heroes: War News and the Construction of “Community” In Britain, 1914 – 18’, *Historical Research*, 83, 221 (2010), 520 – 38

²⁵ Purseigle, ‘Beyond and Below the Nations’

²⁶ Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany* (Cambridge, 2007)

Regina, Canada, was criticised for uncritical use of sources and lack of comparative material.²⁷ Several popular publications have also studied aspects of the war in relation to particular British localities, as have numerous doctoral theses.²⁸

Townsley, in her study of voluntary recruitment in Hull, returned to the debate about the difference between ‘regional’ and ‘local’ history. She rejected the latter as lacking a separate methodology as well as a lack of agreed purpose. Defining regions as ‘areas of economic and social cohesion and cultural identity’, she thought them, ‘not a fixed concept, but a feeling of sentimental attachment shared by a like-minded people’, but with economic or political institutions. More important than this debate about labels, was her recommendation of interdisciplinary methods, and place-centred rather than place-based (or place-limited) research. She emphasised the importance of exploring the region before the war, why it was ‘a socially significant spatial unit’ and how it was perceived by its inhabitants, in order to aid understanding of how regional identities were used and changed over time.²⁹ This counteracts the tendency for histories to end or start at the war, viewing it as a cut off point or watershed. Purseigle also stressed ‘the importance of the pre-existing social fabric’; as Braybon commented, ‘there was a time before 1914, and attitudes to the war were moulded by this.’³⁰

A Shetland columnist in 1916, defending his local focus, wrote:

Just as the ‘little drops of water’ and ‘little grains of sand’ swell and expand into this visible world of ours, so it must be recognised that the thoughts and aspirations of the individual become those of the community, the ideas of the community the hopes of the State, and the hope of the State the strong unalterable determination of the Empire.³¹

²⁷ Jody Perrun, Review of James M. Pitsula, *For All we Have and Are: Regina and the Experience of the Great War* (Winnipeg, 2008); H-Canada, H-Net Reviews, (November 2009)

²⁸ E.g., Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Hell’s Foundations Quiver; a Town, its Myths and Gallipoli* (London, 1992); Keith Grieves, (ed.), *Sussex in the First War* (Lewes, 2004); David Bilton, *The Home Front in the Great War: Aspects of the Conflict 1914-1918* (Barnsley, 2003); James G. M., Cranstoun, ‘The Impact of the Great War on a Local Community: the Case of East Lothian’, unpublished PhD. thesis, Open University (1992); Stephen Gower, ‘The Civilian Experience Of World War 1: Aspects Of Wolverhampton, 1914 – 1918’, unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Birmingham (2000); Helen Townsley, ‘The First World War and Voluntary Recruitment: a Forum for Regional Identity? An Analysis of the Nature, Expression and Significance of Regional Identity in Hull, 1900 – 1916’, unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Sussex (2007)

²⁹ Townsley, ‘First World War’, 1 – 60

³⁰ Purseigle, ‘Beyond and Below the Nations’, 96; Braybon, ‘Introduction’, 12

³¹ *Shetland Times* (hereafter *ST*), 13 May 1916, 5

In focusing on Shetland and Shetlanders at the time of the Great War, this thesis investigates the experience of the people of a particular place over a short timescale in relation to events that were likely to have affected them immensely, not just as individuals, but also in relation to their perceptions of their community and interaction with other groupings. Shetland is an appropriate case for such a study: in some ways, it bypasses some of the issues raised about local history. As a group of islands, it is set apart with clear physical boundaries; its remoteness encouraged it to be perceived as distinctive. For centuries, it had had local institutions; it was an administrative unit – a county – whether or not it was a ‘region’. It was often distinguished as an entity in sources. It is studied as a topic of interest in its own right, and comparison of the local with the national and with other similar localities identifies consistencies and inconsistencies between Shetland and the more common experience.

The Influence of Geography

‘Geography is an important influence on history’. Marwick chose these words to start his groundbreaking work about the social consequences of the Great War.³² They are apposite to this thesis since it focuses on the people of a geographical entity, one where the effects of location, topography and insularity (in its literal sense) are very strong. It is a study in local history in two senses; as well as focusing on a place, Shetland, and its people, it shows how significant location was for Shetland in the early twentieth century and then on how it experienced the war.

Writers of general histories, both local and national, have often started with a geographical description in recognition of the influence of geography on human experience. In Shetland, that influence is particularly apparent. The archaeologist Renfrew, for example, pointed out:

how the basic conditions of life shape (or permit) specific modes of exploitation, and how levels of population density and patterns of settlement distribution shape the social organization as well as being shaped by it.³³

³² Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, Re-issued 2nd ed. (Basingstoke, 2006), 55

³³ Colin Renfrew, ‘The Auld Hoose Spaeks: Society and Life in Stone Age Orkney’, in Anna Ritchie, (ed.), *Neolithic Orkney in its European Context* (2000), 1 – 20, 3

Sunde, writing of more recent times, even considered geographical location a historical source in itself, necessary for the understanding of the subject matter, but warned, ‘location, in all its particular uniqueness, is contextual’, that is subject to interpretation.³⁴

Location affected the natural resources available for Shetlanders to build their economy. The poverty of the rocky terrain, the peaty, acidic soils and the frequently inclement weather meant that exploiting the comparatively rich resources of the sea was essential for food, and trade was necessary to supplement the limited range of agricultural produce. The Islands’ position, to the north of Scotland yet less than 200 miles from Scandinavia, influenced settlement and political affiliations. Invasion by Norse raiders led to incorporation in the Norwegian mediaeval kingdom until 1469. Shetland was then transferred to Scotland at the marriage of James III to Margaret of Denmark, and thereafter, remoteness from the political centre left Shetlanders practically at the mercy of local landowners for several centuries. The sea was the transport link and facilitated a variety of occupations in fishing, whaling and the Merchant and Royal Navies, which brought Shetland men into contact with other parts of the world. From the late 1870s, the expansion of the British herring fishing industry into Shetland waters, coinciding with improvements in transport and communication and a number of Government interventions, meant that the Islands became less isolated and less self-sufficient. Long before the Great War then, the history of Shetland had been affected by geographical location.

Geography was fundamental in the Great War. It contributed to the origins through Germany’s desire for colonial territory, which it saw being annexed to other countries, and its feeling of encirclement by hostile powers, and Britain’s dependence on the Empire and trade. The proximity of Britain and Germany has even been cited as one of causes of the conflict.³⁵ Geography influenced how the war was fought on land and sea. Both sides’ need for resources from overseas led to naval blockades and counter-strategies that were critical to the outcome.

³⁴ Jørn Øyrehaugen Sunde, *From a Shetland Lairdship to a Norwegian Barony; the Mouat family and the barony of Rosendal* (Lerwick, 2009), 32

³⁵ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860 – 1914* (London, 1980), 465

The geographer Baker stated, 'localities, whatever their size as communities and/or as places, are connected to wider worlds'.³⁶ The war was an example when that connection was particularly apparent. On the other hand, as already discussed, it is also possible to find specific place-based narratives of the war; perhaps, because it was such a huge and unprecedented event, people found it unfeasible to comprehend in its totality and so related it to their own community. Writing of Sussex, at the opposite edge of Britain, Grievess wrote, 'in the history of British society in the Great War locality matters alongside the dimensions of nation, class and gender'.³⁷

Three further concepts warrant discussion in this context. One is the theory of core-periphery, developed in an international perspective by social scientists, especially Wallerstein. Adapted to a national situation, it proposed a relationship of inequitable dependence between 'core' and 'peripheral' regions with an appropriation of surplus commodities from the periphery, which relies on primary production, to the core. The core dominates and retards the development of the periphery; the periphery loses manpower and resources to the core; and the core becomes involved in the periphery only when it is advantageous, and then usually in an exploitative relationship. The perception of peripherality is particularly relevant to Shetland's location at the northern edge of Scotland, far from centres of large-scale economic and political decision-making and perceived as remote and archaic.³⁸ Discussing the shifting and relative nature of the concept, Smout used the example of Shetland, peripheral to Scotland, in turn peripheral to England, but including outer islands, which themselves feel peripheral to the Shetland mainland.³⁹

Black investigated the perception of peripherality in her thesis on the impact of the two World Wars and the oil industry on Shetland, and found the applicability of the theory problematic. Citing the work of historians, such as Hance Smith, Richard Smith and Brian Smith, she stressed that Shetland had wider external links and a

³⁶ Alan R. H. Baker, *Geography and History Bridging the Divide* (Cambridge, 2003), 190

³⁷ Grievess, *Sussex*, ix

³⁸ Barbara Anne Black, 'The Impact of External Shocks upon a Peripheral Economy: War and Oil in Twentieth Century Shetland', unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Glasgow (1995); Silke Reepke, 'The Uttermost Part of the Earth: Islands on the Edge ... and in the Centre of the North Atlantic,' in Jodie Matthews and Daniel Travers, (eds), *Islands and Britishness: A Global Perspective* (Newcastle, 2012), 207 – 17

³⁹ T. C. Smout, 'Centre and Periphery in History; with Some Thoughts on Scotland as a Case Study', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, XVIII, 3 (1980), 256 – 71

more mobile population than other similar places, and the nature of Lerwick as a centre of population and busy port did not fit the characteristics of a peripheral area.⁴⁰ Questioning whether economic peripherality necessarily led to an insular, static, dependent and exploited society, she concluded that the experience of twentieth century Shetland was much more complex than the core-periphery relationship implied, and that the 'periphery' could be resilient in the face of change. Core-peripheral theory also does not take account of sudden changes in circumstances such as brought about by the Great War; nevertheless, ideas about remoteness and peripherality recur in sources of the time.

Another related concept is island studies or nissology. Loosely defined and incorporating a wide array of disciplines, including history, geography, economics, sociology, ethnology, literature and environmental studies, this is based on the idea that there is an intrinsic commonality among islands, however disparate in terms of location, size, political affiliation, economic and social development, population and culture. Islands are envisaged as metaphors or 'representations' as much as real geographical features.⁴¹ Rather than the proximity to the sea, (which varies with the size of the landmass and is shared with other coastal communities), the common factor is the 'boundedness' of islands, perceptions of which influence both the inhabitants and people who study them. It is natural, therefore, to seek comparators (perhaps misleadingly) in other islands rather than mainland locations. The fact that Shetland is a collection of islands added to the perception and reality of remoteness, militated against integration, increased problems with communication and transport and encouraged the development of a separate identity. As debates about local history have shown, however, the boundaries of communities can be fluid, and the boundaries of Shetland, in the sense of who might be termed a Shetlander, could be, sometimes controversially, elastic.

⁴⁰ E.g., Hance D. Smith, *Shetland Life And Trade 1550-1914* (Lerwick, 1984); R. Smith, 'Shetland in the World Economy: A Sociological Perspective,' in D. McCrone, S. Kendrick and P. Straw, (eds), *The Making of Scotland: National, Cultural and Social Changes* (Edinburgh, 1989), 91 – 107; Brian Smith, 'Shetland, Scotland and Scandinavia, 1400 – 1700: the Changing Nature of Contact' in G. Simpson, (ed.), *Scotland and Scandinavia* (Edinburgh, 1990), 25 – 37

⁴¹ Rod Edmond, and Vanessa Smith, 'Introduction', in Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith, (eds), *Islands in History and Representation* (London, 2003), 1 – 18; Godfrey Baldacchino, 'Islands, Island Studies, Island Studies Journal', *Island Studies Journal*, 1, 1 (2006), 3 – 18

Despite being centred on a geographical entity, this is not a work of geographical determinism. Baker suggested that the fundamental difference between history and historical geography is history's focus on periods and geography's on places, 'fully recognising that both the periods and the places were (and are) peopled and were constructed and experienced by people'.⁴² The third concept incorporated here is that of 'place', intrinsic to ideas of community experience and identity. In this context, history and geography are inter-linked, views of the present character of a place being dependent on interpretations of the past:

The description, definition and identification of a place is [sic] thus always inevitably an intervention not only into geography but also, at least implicitly, into the (re)telling of the historical constitution of the present.⁴³

The recent *History of Everyday Life in Scotland 1800 to 1900* contains three chapters that link people to their environment, their 'place', highlighting how important it was. Morris showed how the uses and perceptions of 'spaces' transformed from the traditional 'anthropological', to the functional 'modern' and the contradictory, ambiguous 'places of memory'. Morton argued that identity, though related to an idealised past, was rooted in place and 'embedded in the everyday', not just linked to specific situations.⁴⁴

Concepts of 'place' are often conflated with ideas of 'home', with implications about belonging, childhood and family, comfort – both physical and psychological –, local knowledge and 'speaking the language', literally and figuratively.⁴⁵ At times of dislocation and rapid change, home is often seen as a constant; this has been termed 'the defensive reaction of place-bound identities' and is particularly apposite for wartime conditions.⁴⁶ Images of place are used to construct identity. Perceptions of places are articulated in terms of relationships, not only those linking them internally

⁴² Baker, *Geography and History*, 3

⁴³ Doreen Massey, 'Places and their Past', *History Workshop Journal*, 39 (1995), 182 – 92, 190

⁴⁴ Mairi Stewart and Fiona Watson, 'Land, the Landscape and People in the Nineteenth Century'; R. J. Morris, 'New Spaces for Scotland, 1800 to 1900'; Graeme Morton, 'Identity out of Place'; all in Trevor Griffiths and Graeme Morton, (eds), *History of Everyday Life in Scotland 1800 to 1900* (Edinburgh, 2010), 23 – 59, 225 – 255, 256 – 287

⁴⁵ Gillian Rose, 'Place and Identity: a Sense of Place', in Doreen Massey and Pat Jess, (eds), *A Place in the World?: Places, Culture and Globalization* (Oxford, 1995), 87 – 132, 88 – 92; Lewis Holloway and Phil Hubbard, *People and Place: the Extraordinary Geographies of Everyday Life* (Harlow, 2001), 71 – 76, 81 – 86

⁴⁶ Doreen Massey, 'The Conceptualization of Place', in Massey and Jess, *A Place in the World?:* 45 – 85, 48 – 49

but also those separating them from elsewhere. Their boundaries are conceived as where ‘otherness’ starts, and provide the distinctiveness necessary for community identity. Defining that distinctiveness, however, requires knowledge of what is beyond. The next section will show how these concepts applied in the perceptions of Shetland’s community identity.

Shetland Community Identity

Within many of the debates on local history, there is an assumption that the people of a particular place have some kind of common identity, that they form a ‘community’, involving something more than just geographical proximity. Matthews and Travers went as far as to propose that islands in particular, because of their self-containment, can be perceived as having a quasi-national identity, analogous to Anderson’s definition of ‘imagined community’.⁴⁷ Shetland’s population was small and for centuries, the inhabitants had been identified as Shetlanders. In the early twentieth century, Shetland had a distinct identity beyond the basic fact of its geographical boundaries.

Scottish history and geography often divides the country in two: Highlands and Lowlands. Shetland did not fit with either, lacking the Gaelic culture but, since the Crofters’ Act of 1886, part of the crofting counties. It shared its Norse heritage with its nearest neighbour, Orkney, with whom it formed a parliamentary constituency, but their economies were different, Orkney relying much more on agriculture and Shetland on the sea. Shetlanders preferred their transport links to be directly with the ports of Aberdeen and Leith. Shetland’s economy had more in common with the Western Isles, particularly Lewis, but there was no cultural affinity. The herring boom meant that Lerwick had similarities to the fishing towns of northeast Scotland, but links to the rest of the Islands were stronger. Shetland’s incompatibility may have encouraged the development of its local identity.

If identity is of importance to history, history in the sense of perceptions of the past is fundamental to identity. Shetland’s Norse past, if sometimes undervalued, was never

⁴⁷ Jodie Matthews, and Daniel Travers, ‘Introduction’, in Matthews and Travers, *Islands and Britishness*, 1 – 13, 3; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 2006)

unrecognised. After the transfer to Scotland, change came gradually: the royal lands and administrative power passed to Scots, the distinctive laws were abolished in 1611 and the system of landholding changed gradually. Around 1700, the earliest detailed accounts differentiated between the gentry, who claimed Scottish descent, and the common people, a mixture of Scottish and Norwegian.⁴⁸ Norn, the local Norse language, died out in the eighteenth century, and links with Norway declined until the import trade in timber ceased in the 1800s.⁴⁹

During the eighteenth century in Britain and elsewhere, interest in Norse history and mythology developed, and received huge impetus when Walter Scott set his novel, *The Pirate*, in late seventeenth century Shetland and Orkney.⁵⁰ In the following decades, scholars, such as Jakob Jakobsen and Gilbert Goudie, sought evidence of Norse roots in archaeology, history, language and placenames.⁵¹ Shetland's recent history was bypassed and Norse inheritance emphasised. Local novelists wrote books with titles like *The Viking Path* and *Viking Boys*.⁵² Norse identity found expression, for example, through the celebration of Norse heroes in the stained-glass windows of Lerwick's Town Hall and street-names, such as St. Magnus Street and King Harald Street. The best-known demonstration of this Norse heritage is the festival of Up-Helly-Aa, which evolved in the 1870s and 1880s from Christmas and New Year celebrations involving rowdy behaviour, burning tar-barrels and guizing (entertaining in disguise). Norse imagery, such as Viking costumes, the burning of a

⁴⁸ John Brand, *A Brief Description of Orkney, Shetland, Pightland Firth and Caithness* (Edinburgh, 1701), 69 – 70; Robert Sibbald, *Description of the Isles of Orknay and Zetland* (Edinburgh, 1711), 4; Thomas Gifford, *Historical description of the Zetland Islands in the Year 1733* (London, 1786), 31

⁴⁹ M. P. Barnes, *The Norn Language of Orkney and Shetland* (Lerwick, 1998), 21 – 28; Brian Smith, 'The Development of the Spoken and Written Shetland Dialect: A Historian's View', in D. J. Waugh, (ed.), *Shetland's Northern Links: Language and History* (Shetland, 1996), 30 – 43, 31 – 35; Smith, 'Shetland, Scotland and Scandinavia'

⁵⁰ Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2000), 80 – 81; S. Seibert, *Reception and Construction of the Norse Past in Orkney* (Frankfurt and New York, 2008), 74 – 85

⁵¹ Bronwen J. Cohen, 'Norse Imagery in Shetland: an Historical Study of Intellectuals and Their Use of the Past in the Construction of Shetland's Identity, with Particular Reference to the Period 1800 – 1914', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester, (1983); Seibert, *Reception and Construction*, 85 – 162; Jakob Jakobsen, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland*, (London, 1928, 1932); *The Place Names of Shetland* (London, 1936); Gilbert Goudie, *The Celtic and Scandinavian Antiquities of Shetland* (Edinburgh and London, 1904)

⁵² J. J. Haldane Burgess, *The Viking Path* (Edinburgh, 1894); Jessie Saxby, *Viking Boys* (London, 1892)

longship and songs extolling Viking traditions, were incorporated.⁵³ Originally a Lerwick festival, Up-Helly-Aa was also celebrated in rural districts such as Hillswick, Lunnasting, Ollaberry, Burravoe and Uyeasound.⁵⁴



Figure 1.1 Guizer Jarl and Vikings, Up-Helly-Aa, 1906

As both historians and geographers have pointed out, the perception of what makes a community distinctive is often based on ‘otherness’, on feeling different from, even opposed to, another group. Shetlanders did not see themselves as ‘Scottish’. In his study of heritage, Lowenthal claimed:

Minorities construe their heritage by negating the mainstream ... Orcadians and Shetlanders know little of their Norwegian roots but know well they are not Scots, not Gaelic, not Highland Chieftain’s churls.⁵⁵

Moreover, they held an aversion to Scotland. Scottish immigrants were believed to have disinherited native landowners. Their descendants’ exploitation of their tenants with fishing tenures, truck systems and debt, was construed as ‘Scottish tyranny’.⁵⁶ Picking up ideas from Scott about ‘the interface between cultural margins and centres of authority’, antiquarians:

⁵³ C.E. Mitchell, *Up-Helly-Aa, Tar Barrells and Guizing Looking Back* (Lerwick, 1948); Callum G. Brown, *Up-Helly-Aa: Custom, Culture And Community in Shetland* (Manchester, 1999); Brian Smith, ‘Up-Helly-A – Separating the Facts from the Fiction’, *ST*, 23 Jan. 1993, 24 – 25; Brydon Leslie, *Borgar Jarl: J. J. Haldane Burgess and Up Helly Aa* (Lerwick, 2012)

⁵⁴ *ST*, 7 Feb. 1914, 4, 5; 21 Feb. 1914, 4, 5

⁵⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge, 1998), 234; also Massey, ‘Places and Their Past’, 183; Matthews and Travers, ‘Introduction’, 7

⁵⁶ Brian Smith, ‘Rents from the Sea’, in Brian Smith, *Toons and Tenants: Settlement and Society in Shetland, 1299 – 1899* (Lerwick, 2000), 65 – 80; Smith, *Shetland Life And Trade*; Cohen, ‘Norse Imagery’, 392 – 422; Seibert, *Reception and Construction*, 97 – 102

composed an identity for their people that denied their Scottish heritage, and polished their folk tales and fragments of Shetland history into the story of how Scottish oppression overturned the idyllic life of Norse udallers.⁵⁷

Scotland was blamed for ‘the wounds which were inflicted during the dark centuries of neglect and oppression which followed upon her acquisition of the isles’.⁵⁸

Shetlanders’ sense of shared history with the Scots was, therefore, limited by a dislike of what they had brought to Shetland. A visitor pointed out: ‘It seems rather strange to hear the inhabitants of one of the counties of this northern kingdom speaking of their fellow-countrymen as if they were an alien race.’⁵⁹ In addition, Shetlanders resented being lumped together with Highlanders and Western Islanders, for whom they may have shared a racially based contempt, Norse ancestry being represented as genetically superior to the lazy, feckless Celt.⁶⁰ They were keen to disown the nostalgic ‘tartan and bagpipe’ images with which Scots built their traditions and identity, and which ironically are also attributed to Scott.⁶¹ The availability of an attractive alternative Norse history and culture, clearly connected to Shetland’s geographical position, supported the rejection of this national identity in favour of the local.

This was not the whole story, however, and the picture of a society looking nostalgically to a largely mythological past is questionable. It is impossible to ascertain the extent to which most Shetlanders felt themselves to be ‘Norse’. Probably most people knew of Shetland’s Norse past; they had been told about it in the newspapers and perhaps at school. They used words, place names and artefacts with Norse origins; but Shetland was not part of Scandinavia and they knew that. The heritage was perceived as having aspects worth celebrating, but was considered ‘past’. Seibert, writing about perceptions of the Norse past in Orkney, emphasised the smallness of the group that fostered this heritage. This was even more the case in

⁵⁷ Wawn, *Vikings and the Victorians*, 67; Cohen, ‘Norse Imagery’, 391

⁵⁸ W. F. Clark, *The Story of Shetland* (Edinburgh, 1906), 13

⁵⁹ William Munro, *To the Shetland Islands through Kilmarnock Spectacles* (Kilmarnock, 1901), 17

⁶⁰ T. M. Devine, *To the Ends of the Earth: Scotland's Global Diaspora, 1750 – 2010* (London, 2011), 118; Cohen, ‘Norse Imagery’, 87 – 113, 432–43, Lowenthal, *Heritage Crusade*, 128 – 29

⁶¹ E.g., Charles Withers, ‘The Historical Creation of the Scottish Highlands’, in Ian Donnachie and Christopher Whatley, (eds), *The Manufacture of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1992), 143 – 56; Stuart Kelly, *Scott-land: the Man who Invented a Nation* (Edinburgh, 2010)

Shetland, and many of them were not residents.⁶² It has been suggested that the idea of ‘otherness’ based on ‘geographical isolation and Norse influences’ may have come more from outsiders than Shetlanders.⁶³

Like many identities based on ‘retrospective utopianism’, Shetlanders’ imagined Norse past bore little resemblance to contemporary society. The creation of heritage is often ascribed to periods of rapid change, and interest in Shetland’s ‘traditional life’ and history may have been partly inspired by the perception that it was threatened by economic developments and government intervention.⁶⁴ Cohen described the context: the international perspective, the increasing intellectual and political aspirations of a prosperous merchant class, better communications and availability of books in a period of social and economic transformation and political debate. From the 1870s, the herring ‘boom’ brought new immigrants at the same time as increased emigration. She argued:

The assertion of a Norse identity would in these circumstances be a unifying process, a means by which the islands’ traditional exploiters could be presented as alien, an expression of solidarity directed against past and present immigrant elements.⁶⁵

Such formation of heritage has been described as ‘often part of an attempt to evade historical time’, and as the result of the distancing of people from both everyday processes and a sense of place. Shetland’s Norse heritage evolved at a time of disruption of the old ways of life, and the identity promoted blurred both historical and current reality, but it did not involve spatial dislocation; it was a local heritage.⁶⁶

Shetlanders did not always treat their Viking heritage with respect, particularly in relation to Up-Helly-Aa. It is very difficult to explain the strange mixture of significance and humour with which the people of Lerwick regarded their festival: much of it was a joke. A good example was the earliest surviving Up-Helly-Aa document, a notice of 1877, calling for the return of old Norse religion: ‘The time

⁶² Seibert, *Reception and Construction*, 14; e.g., Clark, Saxby and Goudie were Shetland natives but wrote mostly in Edinburgh.

⁶³ Lynn Abrams, *Myth and Materiality in a Woman’s World: Shetland 1800 – 2000* (Manchester, 2005), 5

⁶⁴ David Brett, *The Construction of Heritage* (Cork, 1996), 28 – 29; Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-Modern World* (London, 1992), 11; R. Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London, 1987), 98 – 99

⁶⁵ Cohen, ‘Norse imagery’, 177 – 78

⁶⁶ Brett, *Construction of Heritage*, 35; Walsh, *Representation of the Past*, e.g., 12, 67, 4

has come when the Ancient Norse Faith of Shetland in all its sublime and rugged simplicity should be revived ...'.⁶⁷ This was far from serious. So there was ambivalence about 'Vikingry'; it was not always taken in earnest.

Finally, there was no political aspect to the Shetlander's Norse identity. Attempts by Alfred Johnston of the Udal League to interest Shetlanders in home rule failed.⁶⁸ In 1906, a writer (who lived in Edinburgh) claimed, 'Shetlanders still have a kindly feeling towards Norway, and look back with unfeigned regret upon the time when the isles were under the wing of the mother-country'.⁶⁹ This was a romantic and unrealistic view. When the Norwegians gained their independence from Sweden, Shetland's local Councils sent a congratulatory address to King Haakon, which claimed, 'Shetlanders continue to look upon Norway as their old Mother-Land', but also mentioned Norway's 'foreign' flag. They did not suggest that Shetland should rejoin that 'old motherland'.⁷⁰

On the contrary, many Shetlanders were seriously annoyed with Norwegian whaling companies operating in the Islands, and blamed them for the decline in the herring fishing. In 1907, Shetland's MP, Cathcart Wason, raised the question in the House of Commons:

whether, in view of the fact that the King of Norway has a moral and legal claim on the Shetland Isles, and that the people of the islands are menaced with starvation owing to the failure of the herring fishing ... [the Prime Minister] will consider if the material well-being of the Shetlanders would be better under Norwegian than British rule?

When Campbell-Bannerman suggested that he was not serious, Wason asked:

Is it not the case that if the spirit of the people had not been ground between the upper and the nether millstones of Scottish Land Laws and Scottish tyranny they would have protected themselves as the Norwegians did?⁷¹

⁶⁷ Mitchell, *Up-Helly-Aa*, 207 – 10

⁶⁸ The Udal League was a society aiming to rectify Orkney and Shetland's alleged grievances. Cohen, 'Norse Imagery', 384 – 91; W. P. L. Thomson, 'The Udal League', in *Orkney View*, 2 (1985), 15 – 17; Colin Kidd, 'Race, Empire and the Limits of Nineteenth Century Scottish Nationhood', *Historical Journal*, 46, 4 (2003), 873 – 92, 890 – 91; Seibert, *Reception and Construction*, 128 – 32

⁶⁹ Clark, *Story of Shetland*, 13

⁷⁰ Shetland Archives (hereafter SA), D1/135/285, James Shand scrapbook, Zetland County Council and Lerwick Town Council to Haakon VII of Norway (1906)

⁷¹ *House of Commons Debates* (hereafter *HoC Deb.*), 4th Series, 5 Aug. 1907, 179, cc. 1562 – 63. Whaling stations in Norway had been burnt down.

In this case, however, the point was being made for economic not political purposes.

While they may not have wished to secede from Britain, Shetlanders asserted their Norse heritage and identity when they wished to differentiate themselves. Nevertheless, at this period, they felt themselves to be very much part of the British Empire. Three inter-related aspects are important when looking at the ‘Britishness’ of the Shetlanders. One was that life for most Shetlanders had improved towards the end of the nineteenth century, from the Truck Commission in 1872 which had publicised their economic plight; through the Education Acts of 1872 and 1889; the Crofter’s Act of 1886, which had brought security of tenure and reduced rents; and the Works Act of 1891, which helped build road and piers. The first decade of the new century brought improved medical provision, National Insurance and Old Age Pensions. Shetlanders were grateful for these improvements and, crucially, these benefits had come from the British Government. Incidentally, this also challenges the idea that ‘peripheral’ Shetland was exploited by the core.

In addition, Shetland had seen a period of unprecedented prosperity, based on herring fishing, which was an international not merely a local industry, and the Merchant Navy*, which was tied in with the British Empire and the trade that sustained it.

Finally, Shetland’s self-sufficiency was decreasing and interaction with other places becoming more frequent with scheduled steamer services and postal and telegraph facilities. Literacy had improved and two local newspapers established. With the extension of the franchise, more people were involved in politics. Both locals and visitors commented on the cosmopolitan nature of Lerwick in the herring season. Employment in the Merchant Navy meant many Shetland men travelled the world and there were Shetland emigrants in the UK and abroad. The Provost even told Lerwick Town Council that ‘In our time Shetland is quickly being transformed and Scottish sentiment and manners increasing through the influence of population from outside’.⁷²

* The term ‘Merchant Navy’ has been used here though ‘Mercantile Marine’, ‘Merchant Marine’ and ‘Merchant Service’ were also commonly used at the time.

⁷² *ST*, 9 Dec 1905, 5

At this time, Britishness, the Empire and patriotism were widely promoted through education, newspapers and books.⁷³ Shetlanders participated in Empire, professed (with some misgivings) loyalty to the monarchy and took advantage of the opportunities provided by Britain's interests abroad. In addition, the ideals connected to Shetland's Norse past fitted well with the ethos of Empire, with concepts of courage and showing a stiff upper-lip; maritime skill, exploration and the settlement of new lands; self-reliance, liberty and egalitarianism. As described by Wawn, Vikings were very popular in Britain as a whole and claimed as British ancestors, and it was quite possible to hold extremely Romantic notions about the Norse past and still extol the greatness of the British Empire.⁷⁴ This duality is well illustrated in the first and last verses of 'The Norseman's Home', which was sung at Up-Helly-Aa:

The Norseman's home in days gone-by
Was on the rolling sea,
And there his pennon did defy
The foe of Normandy.
Then let us ne'er forget the race
Who bravely fought and died
And never filled a craven's grave
But ruled the foaming tide.

The Norseman's power is past and gone,
Their courage, strength and pride:
For now Britannia's sons alone,
In triumph stem the tide;
Then may Victoria rule the land,
Our laws and rights defend,
One cheer then give with heart and hand –
The Queen! – the people's friend.⁷⁵

The idea that community identity is not simple, and can be layered and varied according to time and occasion, is not new.⁷⁶ Smout, postulating a pattern of concentric rings of identity, particularly mentioned how Shetlanders repudiated the

⁷³ John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: the Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1860 – 1960* (Manchester, 1984); Esther Breitenbach, 'The Impact of the Victorian Empire', in T. M. Devine and Jenny Wormald, (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History* (Oxford, 2012), 533 – 50

⁷⁴ Wawn, *Viking and the Victorians*

⁷⁵ Mitchell, *Up-Helly-Aa*, 128

⁷⁶ Paul Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (London, 2004), 1 – 9 summarised the debates about British identity.

‘national’ or Scottish level but recognised the British and Empire identities.⁷⁷ In any case, according to Mason:

To talk of the Scots – or the Scottish nation – is often misleading as local loyalty and regional diversity have more frequently characterised Scotland than any sense of ‘national’ solidarity.⁷⁸

Reeploeg saw Shetland’s identity as arising from its position at the centre of an ongoing dialogue between neighbouring cultures, and its Norse heritage as ‘a continuous chorographic activity that resists, or subverts, being a British or Scottish “national outpost”’.⁷⁹ This characterises as constant something that has been intermittent and variable, but recognises the significance of geography and the shifting nature of the interpretation of cultural influences over time.

It may seem grandiose to speak about a place as small as Shetland having a distinct ‘place in the world’; nevertheless, at this time Shetlanders were aware of their unique position.⁸⁰ They developed an identity round the ‘Old Rock’. Never defined, the ‘Old Rock’ expressed the geographical reality of a sea-girt homeland, suggesting barrenness, a hard way of life, durability and resilience; there may have been religious connotations. The phrase was widely used in the local newspapers and the sentimental literature of the period, and adopted as the title of the editorial column in the *Shetland Times*.⁸¹ It was based on the idea that all the ‘exiles’ (emigrant Shetlanders) were deeply interested in Shetland and longed to be back there, which, though at odds with the reality of the conditions and lack of opportunity that induced people to emigrate, was backed up by reports about ex-Shetlanders in places such as Wellington, Chicago and Vancouver. No doubt a means of increasing the newspapers’ circulation, it also extended the community of Shetlanders to include emigrants in distant places and even their descendants:

The sons of the “Old Rock” are scattered far and wide and ...there are no more loyal subjects to be found anywhere, and many of them have settled in distant lands, who have proved themselves true Empire builders, giving of their best to

⁷⁷ T. C. Smout, ‘Perspectives on the Scottish Identity’, *Scottish Affairs*, 6, 1(994), 101 – 13

⁷⁸ Roger Mason, ‘The Totality and Diversity of the Scots’ Historical Experience’, preface to Ewen A. Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle: Scotland Since 1880* (Edinburgh, 2010)

⁷⁹ Reeploeg, ‘Uttermost Part of the Earth’

⁸⁰ Smith, *Shetland Life and Trade*, 1, 288 – 89

⁸¹ It was associated with the author, J.M.E Saxby whose first book was *Lichens from the Old Rock* (Edinburgh, 1868)

the land of their adoption, and remaining true to their allegiance to the Homeland.⁸²

Shetland had an alternative romantic byname, that of ‘Thule’, given by writers of the ancient world to a semi-mythological land lying to the far north.⁸³ Again, this refers both to location and to the past – albeit a different past – but did not appear to carry implications other than a desire to place Shetland ‘on the map’.

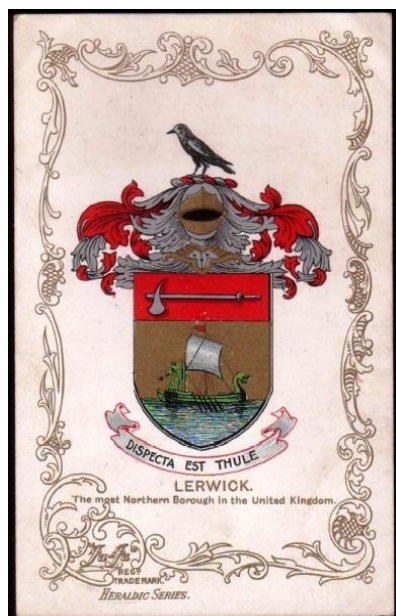


Figure 1.2 Postcard of Lerwick's coat of arms

Smith wrote that ‘during the final quarter of the 19th century, Shetland changed utterly’, and called the years around the turn of the century the ‘years of self-confidence’. Shetlanders, having been emancipated by ‘a revolution from above’, were starting to do things for themselves.⁸⁴ Much of this change was shared with other parts of the UK and other countries; some was specific to Shetland. It included the end of the haaf and smack fishings* and North Atlantic whaling; the herring ‘boom’; crofting legislation; improved mail and shipping services; the provision of free elementary education; the extension of the franchise; the reorganisation of local

⁸² *ST*, 4 Jan. 1913, 5

⁸³ The application to Shetland is discussed at <http://shetlopedia.com/Thule>

⁸⁴ Brian Smith, ‘18th and 19th Century Shetland: the Historical Background’, *Vernacular Building*, 23 (1999), 11 – 20, 18

* Long-line fishing for cod and ling, ‘haaf’ from open rowing /sailing boats, within 40 miles from Shetland; ‘smack’ from larger sailing boats in Faroese and Icelandic waters

government and the loss of population through emigration. There had also been a host of more mundane improvements to the lives of ordinary Shetlanders: for example, housing, furniture, household equipment such as paraffin lamps, crockery and cutlery, a greater variety of foodstuffs, clothing, books and newspapers and leisure activities. The story was generally one of increasing opportunity and standard of living; concomitantly, Shetland became less self-sufficient.

Shetlanders had a real love and pride in their isles, and were gratified when they were noticed, for example in the press. Their identity was generated from geographical isolation, a distinctive ethnic background and history, a sea-faring way of life, memories of oppression, a strong dialect and community ethic. It was being reinvented and written about at a time when they were experiencing rapid change and increasing external contact, and it embraced both their Norse past and their British present. It was strongly asserted, particularly in the newspapers and by the local authorities, who were not reluctant to badger senior politicians about grievances. This thesis examines the effects of the war on the cohesion of the community and its relationship with the country and Empire of which it was part.

Structure and Contents

As well as linking the Shetland experience to relevant contemporary events and historical discourses, each chapter explores these themes of the importance of geography and community identity in relation to the local circumstances of the war.

Setting the scene in pre-war Shetland, Chapter 2 evaluates contrasting perceptions of this period in an analysis of the demography, economy and social conditions and reviews tensions in society. This material provides context for later discussion of the reactions to, and effects of, the war. Chapter 3 investigates how Shetland's location involved it in pre-war international antagonisms and how these preceding circumstances conditioned reactions to the outbreak of war.

The next four chapters focus on the war experience of different groups of people, concentrating on areas where the Shetland experience was distinctive and where local identity was asserted. Chapter 4 is concerned with Shetlanders in the armed forces. Chapter 5 explains how, because of Shetland's geographical position, naval

activities brought war to Shetland. Chapters 6 and 7 analyse the civilian experience, the economic consequences and the reactions of Shetland society to the enemy, hardships and casualties, especially how the community's identity was expressed in relation to the war effort.

The two post-war chapters examine the period after the Armistice, including the adaptation to peace and commemoration, which is identified as both a national movement and an expression of local identity and pride in Shetland's contribution to victory.

The concluding chapter reaffirms the themes of the thesis, in particular, how geography had profoundly influenced Shetland's war experience and how Shetlanders had been proud of the efforts and achievements of their community. In showing how local identity remained robust even at a time when national interests were paramount, this demonstrates the value of local history even in the context of an event of such worldwide significance as the Great War.

Sources

Contemporary sources

A key part of the approach here has been to discover not just what was happening in Shetland and to Shetlanders but also what people thought, or at least wrote, about the events. The most prolific local sources were the two weekly newspapers, the *Shetland Times* and the *Shetland News*. As a source, newspapers are complex; a newspaper is:

a text, a record of historical event, a representation of society and a chronicle of contemporary opinions, aspirations and debates ... also a business enterprise, a professional organization, a platform for advertisements and itself a commodity.⁸⁵

The newspapers published both reports and editorial commentary not just on local events; they reported national and international news and copied relevant articles from national newspapers. They included fiction and poems as well as notices and

⁸⁵ Stephen Vella, 'Newspapers', in Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann, (eds), *Reading Primary Sources: the Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century History*, (London, 2009), 192 – 208, 93 – 94. For an endorsement of newspapers as a source for the Great War, see Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, 6

advertisements from a range of businesses, both local and Mainland-based. They are rich sources for social and economic conditions, particularly in the summaries published at the end of each year.

The fact that there was competition provides a check on the accuracy of information published; indeed, there are rarely major discrepancies between the newspapers. During the war, both ran daily newsheets but, unfortunately, only a few have survived. Because of the naval operations in the area, there was more rigorous censorship in Shetland than in the national press. There was never any account of the nature of the censorship and so it is not possible to uncover what had been suppressed, except that most of the naval action was not reported at the time. This was illustrated by a series of articles on ships that had been in Lerwick during the war, published in the *Shetland Times* in 1919.

Newspapers, however, are ‘not the neutral conduits of information, but rather gatekeepers and filterers of ideas’, and therefore sources for contemporary attitudes.⁸⁶ Using them for this purpose is not without difficulty. Local newspapers were produced by a small number of people and it cannot be assumed that they reflected the views of the entire population. They were, however, embedded in the local community, their staff knew the community and the local people knew them. Although the Shetland papers carried reports from rural districts, they were published in Lerwick and there was a certain bias towards the ‘town’, the main business and administrative centre. Some features widened the range of opinion expressed. Both newspapers separated their editorial comment from general reporting and the content was influenced by the political views of the editors, which were different. The *Shetland Times* was Liberal, the *Shetland News* Conservative, supporting the Liberal Unionist candidate when no Conservative stood, and often following the ideas of the right-wing national press, such as the *Daily Mail* and *John Bull*. These different stances led at times to some lively debate.

Besides the editorials, both newspapers often carried opinion columns: the *Shetland News*, ‘Day by Day’ and the *Shetland Times*, ‘Current Topics’. These purported to be written by a number of people and be independent of the editorial view. Most of

⁸⁶ Vella, ‘Newspapers’, 193

the evidence for public opinion comes from letters to the newspapers and it is difficult to judge how representative this was. The use of pseudonyms for both letters and columns concealed the context, though the identities of some pseudonym-users were known at the time. It is also likely that sometimes letters and columns were written either to provoke a reaction or with tongue very firmly in cheek.⁸⁷

In the early twentieth century, there were many newspapers and there has been debate about the extent to which they reflected public opinion and/or shaped it.⁸⁸ According to Strachan, 'it was the printed word which in 1914 possessed a power which it had never had before'.⁸⁹ Despite so much overlap, both newspapers were supported, and it is very likely that the great majority of the local population was aware of the content. To develop their readership, newspapers appealed to local affiliations and created 'imagined communities'.⁹⁰ The newspapers reflected how Shetlanders thought about themselves, and, because they were read outwith the Islands, how they wished to present their community to the outside world. Their role as a medium of identity has been particularly interrogated in the context of the war.

Other local sources include the minutes of the local government authorities, Lerwick Town Council and Zetland County Council, and Lerwick Harbour Trust, bodies that were involved in both routine administration and the additional requirements of the war. The minutes are brief and formal and the livelier newspaper accounts are required for any appreciation of the decision-making process.⁹¹ The only business papers that survive in any quantity are those of Hay & Company, the most extensive Shetland business, with premises in several rural districts as well as Lerwick. Besides being the major supplier of building and agricultural materials and coal, the firm had shipping, fishing and boat-building interests, was shipping agents and the

⁸⁷ E.g., Brian Smith, 'The History of Socialism in Shetland to 1945', unpublished paper; Marsali Taylor, *Women's Suffrage in Shetland* (UK, 2010)

⁸⁸ A. J. A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: the Advocacy of War and Rearmament 1896—1914* (London, 1984)

⁸⁹ Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (Oxford, 2001), 143

⁹⁰ Catriona M. M. , 'Race, Riot and Representations of War', in Catriona M. M. Macdonald and E. W. McFarland (eds), *Scotland and the Great War* (East Linton, 1999), 145 – 71, 146

⁹¹ SA, TO/1 Lerwick Town Council Minutes, (hereafter LTC mins.); CO/3/1, Zetland County Council Minutes, (hereafter ZCC mins.). James R. Nicolson, *Lerwick Harbour* (Lerwick, 1987) is largely based on the Harbour Trust records.

local consul for several countries. Their records provide useful information on both general conditions and wartime activities.⁹²

Other useful contemporary sources include Government reports. The annual reports of the Registrar General for Scotland and the Census Reports for 1901, 1911 and 1921 provide demographic material, including on occupations, family and living conditions. The detailed records for 1921 are not yet available. The annual reports of the Fishery Board for Scotland provide a wealth of data, especially statistical, about fisheries, while the records of the Lerwick Fishery Office also include details and opinions on a variety of social and economic aspects. For agriculture, the reports of the Board of Agriculture include detailed statistics. Until 1912, Shetland was included in the area covered by the Crofter's Commission and the Congested Districts Board. Thereafter, the Land Court took over some of their responsibilities and visited Shetland in 1913 and 1914. Before the war, several Parliamentary Committees and Commissions visited Shetland, including those on Truck, Medical Services, North Sea Fishing, Highland Home Industries and Housing the Industrial Population. Their reports contain evidence, often verbatim, from people with first-hand knowledge, but who, it must be borne in mind, had an interest in influencing the outcome of the enquiry. In addition to information and opinion on the topic concerned, they can provide evidence about other circumstances and attitudes towards them in the Islands.

The records of the Admiralty, War Office and RAF in the National Archives, Kew have a vast amount of detail about activities before and during the war, particularly in ADM 116, 137 (records used for the official histories) and 186 (naval monographs). Unfortunately the records of the naval bases at Swarbacks Minn and Lerwick have been severely pruned; of the 135 'packs' or files sent from the Lerwick Base in 1919, only eight survive.⁹³ The records considered most important by the Royal Navy focused on their operations and were not necessarily those most useful for the social historian, but sometimes provide a helpful external or 'official' view.

⁹² SA, D31, Hay & Company Papers; James R. Nicolson, *Hay & Company, Merchants in Shetland* (Lerwick, 1982) is based on these records.

⁹³ The National Archives: Public Records Office (hereafter TNA:PRO) ADM 137/2249, Admiralty paper no. HSA 451

At the national and international level, the most detailed published sources for the war are the ‘official’ histories, written soon after the war and funded by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The authors generally were men who had been closely involved in particular activities and therefore tended to present a positive view of their contribution to the successful outcome. The most relevant to this study are those on the Royal Navy, the Merchant Navy and rural Scotland.⁹⁴

A number of the officers in command of naval activity in Shetland waters wrote accounts of their wartime experiences. They had detailed knowledge, though potentially also a bias towards amplifying their personal involvement, but were understandably more interested in the naval action than the effects on Shetland.⁹⁵ There are also a few references to Shetland in surviving diaries and letters of men who visited in the course of their war service (chapter 5). Writing by serving Shetlanders is discussed in Chapter 4. The only substantial surviving correspondence by a civilian is that between Tom Sandison, a well-to-do businessman in the island of Unst, and his brother, a clergyman in Croydon; written with censorship in mind and probably not representative, the letters do, however, provide evidence about wartime life in a rural area.⁹⁶

Thomas Manson, editor of the *Shetland News*, produced an annual almanac, which includes statistics and information about many aspects of the Shetland economy and society such as fishing, local government and businesses. His post-war *Shetland's Roll of Honour and Roll of Service*, listing the Shetlanders in the armed services, is discussed in Chapters 4 and 9. Manson's article in this volume gives a useful résumé of the Shetlanders' war effort and naval activities in Shetland.⁹⁷

Shetland Museum has photographs of the period, some of which have been reproduced here. Finally, there are the records, in stone, wood and metal, of the

⁹⁴ Julian S. Corbett, *History of the Great War: Naval Operations*, I – III, (London, 1920, 1921, 1928); Henry Newbolt, *History of the Great War: Naval Operations*, IV and V (London, 1928, 1931); A.S. Hurd, *The Merchant Navy* (London, 1921, 1924, 1929); D. T. Jones, J. F. Duncan, H. M. Conacher and W. R. Scott, *Rural Scotland during the War*, (London, 1926)

⁹⁵ E.g., D. R. S. De Chair, *The Sea is Strong* (London: 1961); H. R. C. Brocklebank, *Tenth Cruiser Squadron* (Dorchester, 1974); R. G. O. Tupper, *Reminiscences* (London, 1929)

⁹⁶ SA, D1/123, Sandison Family papers

⁹⁷ Thomas Manson, *Shetland's Roll of Honour and Roll of Service* (Lerwick, 1920)

names of Shetlanders who died in the war in the numerous memorials discussed in Chapter 9.

Later secondary sources for the Great War

Thousands of books and articles have been published on the Great War and it is outwith the scope of this thesis to attempt even a limited survey.⁹⁸ Those listed in the bibliography have been used first to provide context of the events, national experience and contemporary opinion; and secondly as sources of discourses against which to compare local material.

Since this is a local study, high-level political, economic, diplomatic and military themes have not been discussed in detail. The emphasis has been on social history and four books have provided the general background against which the Shetland experience has been set. In *The Deluge*, Marwick opened a debate about social change consequent upon the war, which he argued had been extensive. In *Blighty*, DeGroot included more cultural themes and took the view that continuity was more important than change. Gregory's *The Last Great War* combined local and regional with national evidence to give a more nuanced picture of the stages of involvement or mobilisation in the war, and the diversity and complexity of experience. Most recently, Simmonds' *Britain and World War One* aimed at including areas that he considered had been neglected, such as rural society, the mobilisation of industry and reactions on the 'home front' to the intervention of government.⁹⁹

Scotland has not featured prominently in the literature on Britain. Interest has focused on 'Red Clydeside' and the longer-term negative effects on Scotland's industrial economy.¹⁰⁰ Royle in *The Flowers of the Forest* concentrated mainly on the armed conflict, while the articles in Macdonald and McFarland's *Scotland and*

⁹⁸ Jay Winter, and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2005) provides a useful historiographical analysis to that date; John Horne, *Companion to World War I* (Chichester, 2012) has an extended bibliography, 601 – 33.

⁹⁹ Marwick, *The Deluge*; Gerard, J. DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War*, (London, 1996); Gregory, *Last Great War*; Alan G. V. Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, (London, 2012)

¹⁰⁰ E. W. McFarland, 'The Great War', in Devine and Wormald, *Handbook of Modern Scottish History*, 553 – 68, 554 – 55

the Great War covered several economic and social aspects as well.¹⁰¹ Cameron described the difficulty of identifying a distinctive Scottish experience in the war and concluded that, although ‘contemporaries interpreted the war through a Scottish lens’:

The totems – recruiting levels, losses, the martial tradition, the Highland regiments – cannot bear the weight of interpretation, either because they are insufficiently divergent from wider trends or because they are artificial constructs.¹⁰²

McFarland’s recent article concentrated on these same ‘totems’, which are among the themes challenged here in the Shetland context.¹⁰³

Local secondary sources

Smith’s *Shetland Life and Trade* has been praised as a fine example of the impact of environmental and international conditions on a locality, but ends at 1914.¹⁰⁴ Black’s thesis provides the only detailed account of the war years, and used Marwick’s framework to concentrate on the economy and the social changes. Shetland Archives holds papers compiled by Dennis Rollo for a military history of Shetland that was never completed. His published volume contains only a fraction of the material.¹⁰⁵ His notes and drafts are repetitive and incomplete, but informative about the local reserve forces and naval operations. The information was unfortunately not referenced, but, where the sources have been identified, appears to be mainly accurate.

Among other books that have provided useful material are: Irvine’s, *Lerwick*; the four volumes by Nicolson; Fryer’s, *Knitting by the Fireside and on the Hillside*; and *Spy Fever* by Flaws.¹⁰⁶ A number of articles in local periodicals, *New Shetlander*

¹⁰¹ Trevor Royle, *The Flowers of the Forest; Scotland and the First World War* (Edinburgh, 2006); MacDonald and McFarland, *Scotland and the Great War*

¹⁰² Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle*, 102 – 24

¹⁰³ McFarland, ‘The Great War’, 553 – 68

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *Shetland Life and Trade*; Elizabeth Foyster and Christopher A. Whatley, ‘Series Editors’ Foreword’, in Griffiths and Morton, *History of Everyday Life*, ix – xvi, xv, n. 4

¹⁰⁵ SA, D50, Papers of Dennis Rollo; D. Rollo, *The History of the Orkney and Shetland Volunteers, 1793 – 1958* (Lerwick:1958)

¹⁰⁶ James W. Irvine, *Lerwick: the Birth and Growth of an Island Town* (Lerwick, 1985); James R. Nicolson, *Traditional Life in Shetland* (London, 1978); *Shetland*, 3rd ed. (Newton Abbott, 1979); Hay & Company; *Lerwick Harbour*; Linda G. Fryer, *Knitting by the Fireside and on the Hillside* (Lerwick, 1995); Margaret Flaws, *Spy Fever: The Post Office Affair* (Lerwick, 2009)

and *Shetland Life*, have also proved helpful. There is, however, a gap in the literature that this thesis aims to fill.

CHAPTER 2 PRE-WAR SHETLAND

The period before the Great War used to be perceived as a ‘golden’ era: ‘in popular imagination it remains the last brilliant phase and expression of a golden age of peace and prosperity ... an Indian summer of stability and imperial splendour’.¹ The *Shetland Times*’ year-end review of 1913 supported that view:

The search will be a long one if one sets out to find a parallel to the year, whose closing days are now with us, ... seldom has any year performed better ... the harvest of the sea and the harvest of the land have yielded far above the average, and has [sic] brought comfort and plenty to all those depending on these sources for a livelihood.²

It is easy to be nostalgic about this period when the lairds had been disempowered and relative prosperity brought material improvements to Shetland’s traditional culture.

This ‘Golden Age’ description, however, has long been discredited; in Gregory’s words, ‘Edwardian Britain contained not one, but several worlds in it’.³ Although it ‘seemed in retrospect to have been ordered, prosperous and sunny’, it was ‘a period of discontent and violence, of bigger extremes of wealth and poverty, of radical change and conservative reaction’.⁴ It has been portrayed as a time of tremendous contrast, challenge to old ideas, extremes of disruption, discomfort and turmoil: ‘the age of upheaval’, ‘an era of tensions between extremes’, ‘a turbulent meeting of old and new’ and ‘like the English Channel, a narrow place made turbulent by the thrust and tumble of two powerful opposing tides’.⁵ Shetland had its problems; many were common across the UK. This chapter reviews the improving opportunities and standard of living on one hand, and the continuing or emerging problems on the other, in relation to the demographic composition, the economy and living conditions. Then it assesses the extent of inequality, tension and change in society.

¹ David Brook, *The Age of Upheaval: Edwardian Politics 1899 – 1914* (Manchester, 1995), 1

² *ST*, 27 Dec. 1913, 4

³ Gregory, *Last Great War*, 278

⁴ C. W. Hill, *Edwardian Scotland* (London, 1976), 1, 2

⁵ Brook, *Age of Upheaval*; J. B. Priestly, *The Edwardians* (London, 2000), 84; Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London, 1991), vii

Demography⁶

The 1911 Census showed 27238 people in twenty-seven islands, 71 per cent on the Mainland. Yell, Unst and Whalsay had over 1000 people; fourteen islands had less than 100 and eight less than ten. The population had been decreasing from the 1860s. Most districts were losing people, the west-side parishes over 12 per cent, Fetlar and Papa Stour about 20 per cent since 1901. Lerwick was growing at the expense of the rural areas and Dunrossness, Whalsay, West Burra and Skerries also grew. These movements reflected economic changes.

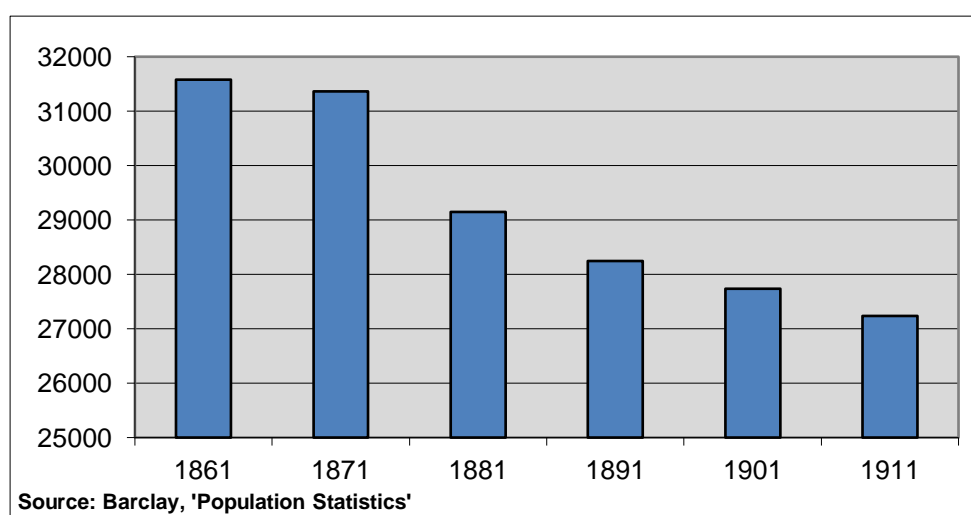


Figure 2.1 The population of Shetland

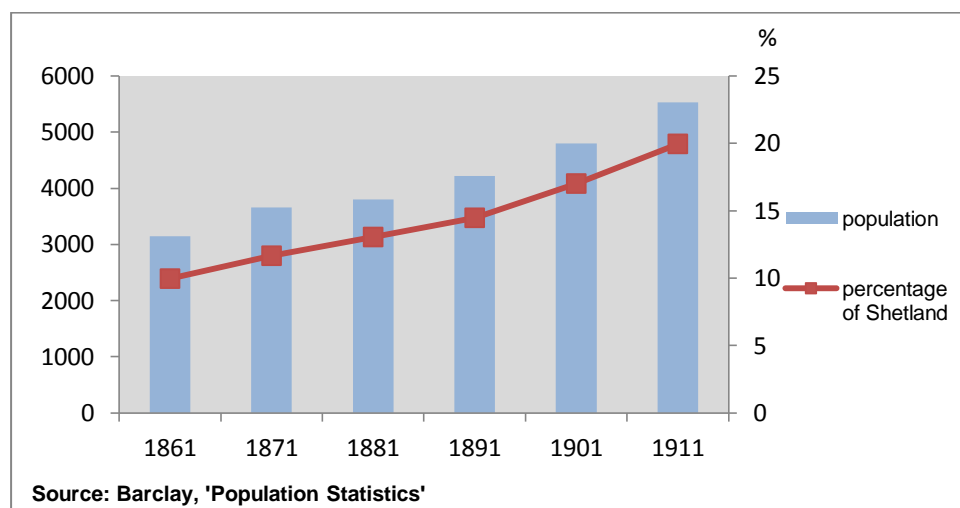


Figure 2.2 The population of Lerwick

⁶ Appendix I

The population decline was due to emigration. Shetland's birth rate, 17.5 per thousand, was much lower than Scotland's at 25.5, and was falling slightly; the death rate, 17 per 1000, was rising slightly but was in line with the Scottish average.⁷ There was very little immigration; over 90 per cent of residents had been born in Shetland. The proportion of native Shetlanders who migrated within Scotland was low, only about 20 per cent of both men and women, but in 1911, there were some in most counties of Scotland, with a concentration in Edinburgh.⁸ There were also many Shetlanders in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Emigration was commonest among young men, but the proportion of women emigrants was rising, often to domestic service on the Scottish Mainland.

There was concern that emigration was increasing. In 1913, the *Shetland News* reported that emigration was 'assuming serious proportions in Shetland', and a *Shetland Times* columnist referred to 'the present craze for emigration'. The County Council debated the situation, judged 'appalling' by one leading businessman and councillor. Indicators included the loss of membership in such diverse organisations as the Church of Scotland and the Territorial Army.⁹ This was by no means unique; 13 per cent of Scotland's population emigrated between 1904 and 1913.¹⁰

The reasons were complex. There had been no mass or enforced emigration but there was a shortage of available land. The newspapers blamed the lack of opportunities: the *Shetland Times* claimed it was 'due to the critical state of fishings', and that, when young people left 'their native land where their opportunities are hampered and where their field of operation is cramped and narrow', it was not 'because of choice but under the stern whip of necessity'.¹¹ Nevertheless, people were also attracted away: many people had families and friends abroad and Shetland seamen visited other countries. The newspapers published recruitment advertisements and information (not always positive) from the colonies. Travel had

⁷ *Annual Report of the Registrar General for 1913*, PP. 1914 – 1916, X, lxix

⁸ R. S Barclay, 'Population Statistics', in A. T. Cluness, (ed.), *The Shetland Book* (Lerwick, 1967), 45 – 56, 52 – 53; *Report on the Twelfth Decennial Census of Scotland, 1911*, I, PP. 1912 – 13, CXX, 2099; II, PP. 13, LXXX, xcii, xcvi – xcvi

⁹ *Shetland News* (hereafter *SN*), 1 Mar. 1913, 4; *ST*, 4 Jan. 1913, 5; *SN*, 6 Sep. 1913, 5; *ST*, 3 May 1913, 5; 18 Apr. 1914, 5

¹⁰ M. Anderson and D. J. Morse, 'The People', in W. Hamish Fraser and R. J. Morris, (eds.), *People and Society in Scotland*, II, 1830 – 1914, rep. (Edinburgh, 1990), 8 – 45, 15

¹¹ *ST*, 1 Mar. 1913, 5; 4 Jan. 1913, 5

become easier. The attitude to emigration was different from that in the Highlands, where depopulation has been described as ‘associated with enormous resentment: stamped with the word “clearance” with overtones of violence, oppression and hopeless suffering’.¹² There was, however, regret at both a personal and a community level for the loss of young people, often those with broader outlook and ‘bigger ideas’: when ‘elbowed out of the Homeland’, people left ‘with bitterness in their hearts’.¹³

Emigration had social implications. Scotland had more females than males. The ratio in Shetland, 128 to 100, was particularly high, though falling.¹⁴ The marriage rate was lower than the Scottish average – in 1913, 5.1 per thousand as compared to 7.1. Men were more likely to be married than women: in 1911, 42.6 per cent of men and 51.5 per cent of women were unmarried compared to 46.1 and 44 per cent in Scotland as a whole.¹⁵ The average age at marriage was 31.5 for men and 27.8 for women, both over the Scottish average.¹⁶ There were many extended households containing several generations and single adults, and in Lerwick there were many single women.¹⁷

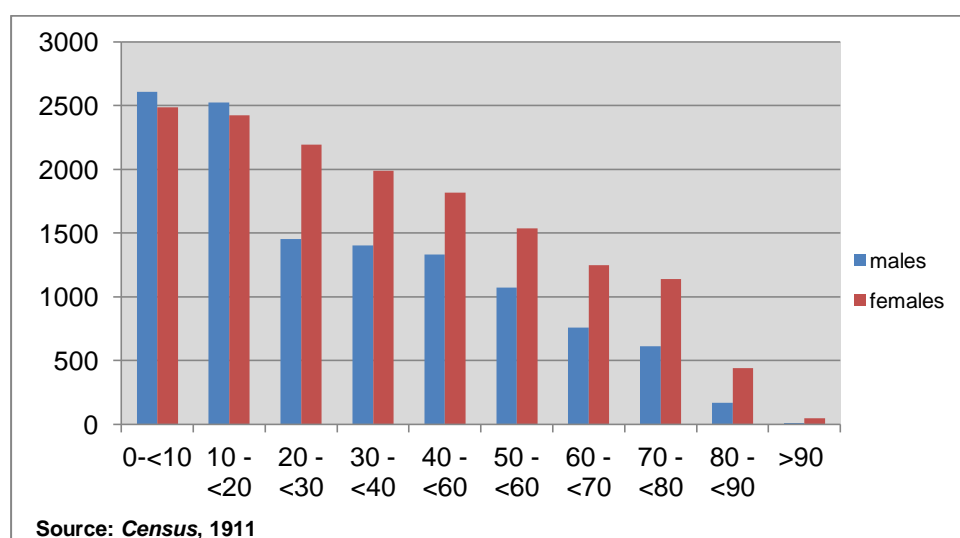


Figure 2.3 Age Distribution, 1911

¹² T. C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830 - 1950* (London, 1986), 59

¹³ *ST*, 8 Mar. 1913, 5

¹⁴ Barclay, ‘Population Statistics’, 50 – 51

¹⁵ *Census, 1911*, II, xix, lxiii – lxiv

¹⁶ *Registrar General’s Report 1913*, lxxxii – lxxxv

¹⁷ Abrams, *Myth and Materiality*, 74 – 77

The situation of Shetland women has been claimed to be unusual and less subordinate than in other communities, due to the imbalance of the sexes and the absence of men at sea. Visitors commented on how they worked on the land.¹⁸ The rural way of life did not lend itself to an ideology of a division into public and domestic spheres.¹⁹ Young women also worked at herring gutting and as domestic servants. The 1911 Census showed 11.7 per cent of married women in employment, a higher proportion than in any other rural county though perhaps this only meant that they were more willing to state their occupation.²⁰ A report on Home Industries asserted, 'It is impossible to escape the conclusion that the men work less steadily and consistently than the women'.²¹ Women did not, however, play much part in business or the local authorities; in Lerwick, they organized 'appropriate' activities such as fund-raising and social events. Abrams, perhaps over-emphasising the absence of men, thought that women governed the home, and linked this to the barter economy.²² Before the end of fishing tenures, powerlessness had been the lot of men as well as women, but it had always been easier for them to leave; now they had more economic resources and more had the vote. In this scenario, the relative position of women might have been declining; this was still a male-dominated society. Christina Jamieson, a contemporary feminist, wrote in 1910 that the women of Shetland 'adored' their menfolk, and dread of the loss of men at sea was 'a sub-current of the whole course of their lives, to which it imparts an intense and religious pathos'. She deplored the monotony of women's lives and maintained that agricultural methods would not improve because women did the work and had 'no access to other than the teachings of tradition'.²³

The Economy

Shetland's economy was based on both the sea, which provided the majority of the income, and the land, the basis of family life. There were a few sizeable estates and

¹⁸ Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society*, 2nd ed. (London, 1992), 67; Abrams, *Myth and Materiality*, 56 – 57

¹⁹ Eleanor Gordon, 'Women's Spheres', in Fraser and Morris, *People and Society*, 206 – 35, 206

²⁰ Thomas Ferguson, *Scottish Social Welfare 1864 – 1914* (Edinburgh and London, 1958), 34

²¹ *Reports to the Board of Agriculture for Scotland on the Home Industries in the Highlands and Islands*, PP. 1914, XXXII, 142

²² Abrams, *Myth and Materiality*, 206, 217 – 18

²³ *SN*, 22 Jan. 1910, 5; 29 Jan. 1910, 5

a large number of rented smallholdings. The Crofters' Holdings Act had granted security of tenure and the Crofters Commission reduced rents to an average of £6 per year. With increases in local taxation, the large estates were becoming less profitable. Some large sheep-farms had been created by enclosing the common grazing, known as scattald, and sometimes by evicting or moving tenants. Nevertheless, in 1913 the average size of holdings was only 10.9 acres; nearly half were of five acres or less and nearly 90 per cent fifteen or less, too small to sustain a family without other income.²⁴

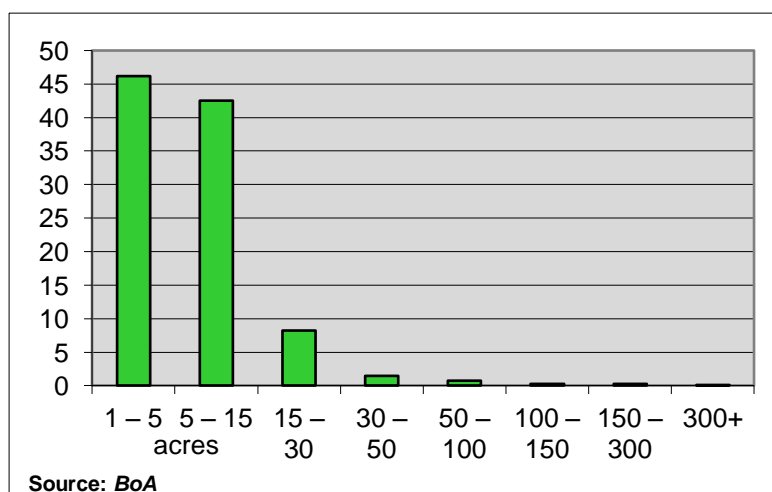


Figure 2.4 Number of agricultural holdings of different acreage, 1913

The Crofters' Act had not solved all grievances. Crofts were delineated as they were in 1885. Applications for enlargements and new crofts were dealt with by the Congested Districts Board, which had limited funds and no powers of compulsory purchase, and so concentrated on areas of greatest need and protest in the Western Isles. The only new crofts created in Shetland were twenty-eight in Whalsay in 1903.²⁵ There were therefore many families without crofts, termed 'cottars' or 'squatters', depending on whether if they lived in a township or on a scattald.

Shetlanders, while attached to their land, did not express the depth of sentiment common in the Western Isles. There was no history of clanship to imbue the

²⁴ *BoA Statistics 1913*, II, i, PP. 1914, XCIX, 82 – 85, 104; Brian Smith, 'What is a Scattald?', in Smith, *Toons and Tenants*, 37 – 57

²⁵ Ewen A. Cameron, *Land for the People? the British Government and the Scottish Highlands, c.1880 – 1925* (East Linton, 1996); James Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 2000); *SN*, 28 Nov. 1903, 4

landowner-tenant relationship with bonds of family and interdependency.²⁶ It was perceived as exploitative, as shown in evidence to the Crofters Commission, but the loss of ancestral lands was not perpetuated so bitterly through the generations. There were no land-raids. With men at sea, a family might only manage a small arable area; crofts provided somewhere to live and subsistence. Nevertheless, the difficulty in obtaining land even for housing was a vexatious issue and contributed to emigration:

Until the land of these islands is opened up to the people, and every possible facility granted them to get back to the land, we will remain face to face with a decreasing population and a discontented people.²⁷

Shetland's MP pursued legislative change, but his bill of 1908, like other attempts, failed. In 1912, the Land Court assumed responsibility for reviewing rents and creating new holdings with increased powers and funds, but was no more effective.²⁸ A visit in 1913 dealt with 559 applications. Rents were reduced (by 29.2 per cent for new applications and 17.6 per cent for revised) and arrears cancelled. However, with 781 applications outstanding, there was no sign that the demand for land would be satisfied.²⁹

Some scattalds remained enclosed, and on the common scattalds, problems included overstocking, grazing on neighbouring scattalds, the joint ownership of ponies, peat-cutting and use by cottars and squatters. After 1908, the Land Court had the power to initiate the appointment of management committees and make regulations. In 1913, some committees submitted proposed regulations, but they were disallowed and other regulations applied instead.³⁰

In 1913, the 3445 agricultural holdings, extending to 37581 acres, had 14055 acres under crops, mostly oats and potatoes with some turnips and hay. Arable acreage was reducing, as stock was more profitable and less labour-intensive. Cattle

²⁶ Smout, *Century of Scottish People*, 67 – 68; Cameron, *Land for the People?*; Hunter, *Making of the Crofting Community*; Eric Richards, *Debating the Highland Clearances* (Edinburgh, 2007), 93 – 95; R. H. Campbell and T. M Devine, 'Rural Experience', in Fraser and Morris, *People and Society*, 46 – 72, 50 – 51

²⁷ *ST*, 21 Jun. 1913, 5; *SN*, 1 Mar. 1913, 4

²⁸ Cameron, *Land for the People?*, 136, 141, 163

²⁹ *Report of the Scottish Land Court, 1913*, PP. 1914, LXXVIII, 317 – 20

³⁰ J. P Day, *Public Administration in the Highlands and Islands* (London, 1918), 197 – 98; *Land Court 1913*, 226

produced beef for market and milk, while pigs were only for family eating. Sheep, providing both wool and meat, were the only stock that was increasing, though many were lost in bad winters, perhaps 2000 in 1913. Poultry were also widely kept and the sale – or barter – of eggs was considered specifically ‘women’s business’. The *Shetland Times* frequently quoted that, while the fishing would be poor once in ten years, there would be a good crop once in ten years; nevertheless by its own assessments, crops were satisfactory in about half the thirteen pre-war years. Stock generally met with a ready market, either in Shetland or on the Mainland, and in 1913, the price of cattle was said to have doubled in four years.³¹

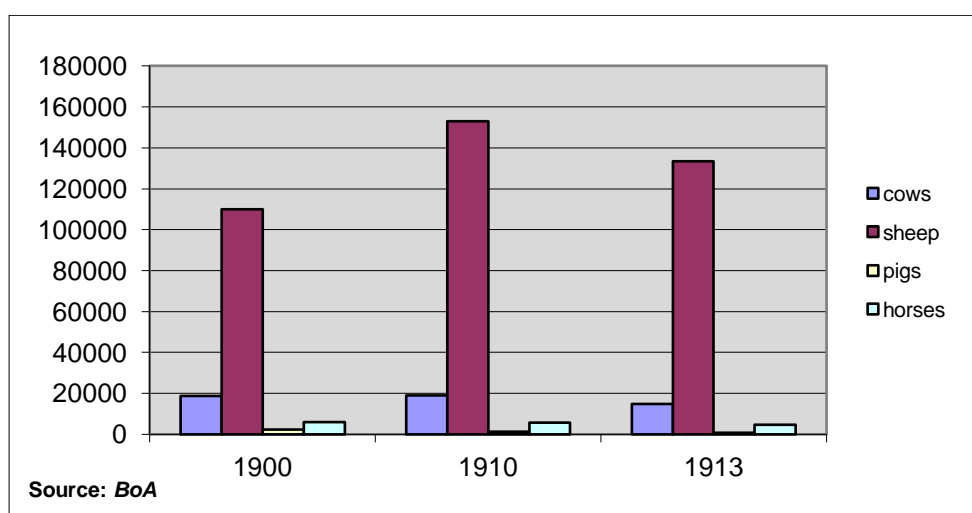


Figure 2.5 Livestock

Agriculture, though suffering from adverse weather, poor soil quality and distance from markets, had benefitted from increased urban demand, improvements in transport and the lower cost of grain. Other than on the large farms, it had been hardly touched by improved methods and mechanisation. Crop yields were well below the Scottish average.³² In 1910, a Departmental Committee investigating the Congested Districts Board’s record on improving agriculture, heard evidence from twenty delegates, mostly not ‘ordinary’ crofters but men with local knowledge. It reported ‘a rather primitive and backward system of agriculture in the Western

³¹ *BoA Statistics 1913*, II, i, 45; Andrew C. O’Dell, *The Historical Geography of the Shetland Islands* (Lerwick, 1939), 198, 74; Smith, *Shetland Life and Trade*, 182 – 85; *ST*, 27 Dec. 1913, 4

³² *BoA Statistics 1913*, II, ii, PP. 1914, XCIX, 139 – 40

Highlands and Islands and in Shetland'. The units were small, often lying runrig* and unfenced, drainage was inadequate and agricultural practices primitive; for example, there were few ploughs, no crop rotation or seed-change; common grazings were unregulated and overgrazed and stock quality was poor. Shetland had two unique opportunities; the wool of the small native sheep was 'probably the finest grown in Britain' and ponies were in demand for children and as pit ponies. Sheep quality could have been improved by judicious breeding, but trading in ponies had been monopolised by outside interests. The County Council encouraged a new studbook society and the Shetland Cattle Herd Book Society was also formed in 1911.³³



Figure 2.6 Digging with Shetland spades

The Congested Districts Board had attempted to improve stock by supplying bulls and stallions. Efforts to sell corn and potato seed were less successful for cost reasons, but eggs were distributed from thirteen centres. Grants for fencing to separate arable from pasture were worthless where runrig prevailed. Lectures, on butter-making and poultry-rearing for example, were provided and agricultural shows encouraged; in 1913 there were shows in several districts.³⁴ In 1910, the

* A system of allocating arable land worked in communal fields

³³ *Evidence to the Departmental Committee on the Congested District Board*, PP. 1911, XIII; *Report of the Departmental Committee on Live Stock and Agriculture in the Congested Districts of Scotland*, PP. 1910, XXI, 8, xli; O'Dell, *Historical Geography*, 84 – 85, 105; Smith, *Shetland Life and Trade*, 184 – 85, 203 – 04

³⁴ O'Dell, *Historical Geography*, 66; *ST*, 16 Aug. 1913, 4, 5, 8; 23 Aug. 1913, 5, 8; 6 Sep. 1913, 8

Board of Agriculture took over and continued much the same tactics, still hampered by deficiencies in funds, restrictions in how they could be used and the lack of officers. Overall, these measures generally failed to improve agriculture or keep people on the land.³⁵ The small scale of Shetland's agriculture limited marketable produce and opportunities for specialisation, while lack of capital precluded improvement. A columnist asked rhetorically, 'What is the use of improved stock or crops to the landless man?' and decided that, despite legislation and better conditions, it was not possible to make a living from agriculture: 'I am unable to foresee the day when it will not be "the forlorn hope" in the army of labour'.³⁶ Crofters, paying regulated rents and only five-eighths of the assessed rates, were better off than cottars: one commentator said, 'The crofter is a wealthy man; the cottar is the poor man'.³⁷ According to the Fishery Officer, it was becoming easier for older men to depend entirely on their crofts.³⁸

Many Shetlanders, however, turned to the sea for their main income. The Shetland summer herring fishery, successful since the mid-1890s and often with the highest landings of the Scottish fishing districts, was important nationally and internationally. The statistics on the value of fishing have to be treated cautiously, but contemporaries firmly believed that herring was the economic mainstay, for example: 'That particular industry is the key-stone of the whole commercial arch, which bridges the seasons over disappointment and disaster, and brings the community into realms of peace and prosperity'.³⁹

Besides fishermen, the herring season provided work for curers, coopers, gutters, seamen, labourers and clerical workers. In the peak year of 1905, over 20000 people were directly employed, and in 1913, over 11000. The *Shetland Times* claimed that

³⁵ Cameron, *Land for the People?*, 83 – 163

³⁶ *ST*, 21 Jun. 1913, 5; 7 Feb. 1914, 5

³⁷ *Evidence to the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 1921), I, 493

³⁸ SA, AF 29/253, 822 – 23, Lerwick Fishery Office (hereafter LFO) letter, 27 Mar. 1915

³⁹ Appendix II; *ST*, 30 Dec. 1905, 4; C.A. Goodlad, *Shetland Fishing Saga* (Lerwick, 1971); James R., Coull, 'The Boom in the Herring Fishery in the Shetland Islands 1880 – 1914', *Northern Scotland*, 8 (1988), 25 – 38

all sections of the community benefited and ‘most of the able-bodied of both sexes who are willing to work, can find ready employment.’⁴⁰

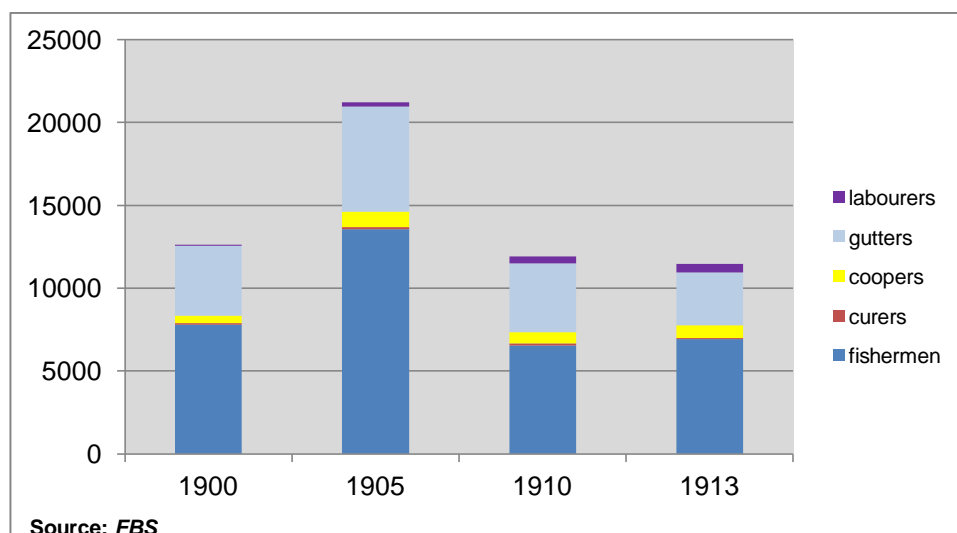


Figure 2.7 People employed in the herring fishing (maximum in one week)

Because the number of boats and the price of herring varied, the total amount paid to fishermen concealed great discrepancies in income. The steam drifters achieved the highest catches and incomes, though with far higher expenses. In 1913, they earned over £1500 gross, while the best sailboat earned £1200 and the average less than £500.⁴¹ There were only eight locally owned steam drifters in 1914.⁴² Many of the visiting boats left at the end of July and so, if the late fishing was profitable, local fishermen benefited. So in 1913, the *Shetland Times* said:

Although the actual value of the fish landed in Shetland is almost two hundred thousand pounds less than it was in the previous year, the earnings of local fishermen are considerably ahead of what they have been for a considerable number of years.⁴³

⁴⁰ *ST*, 30 Dec. 1911, 4

⁴¹ *FBS 1913*, PP. 1914, XXXI, 219

⁴² SA, AF 29/253, 676 – 82, LFO letter, 12 Aug. 1914

⁴³ *ST*, 27 Dec. 1913, 4; *FBS 1913*, 219

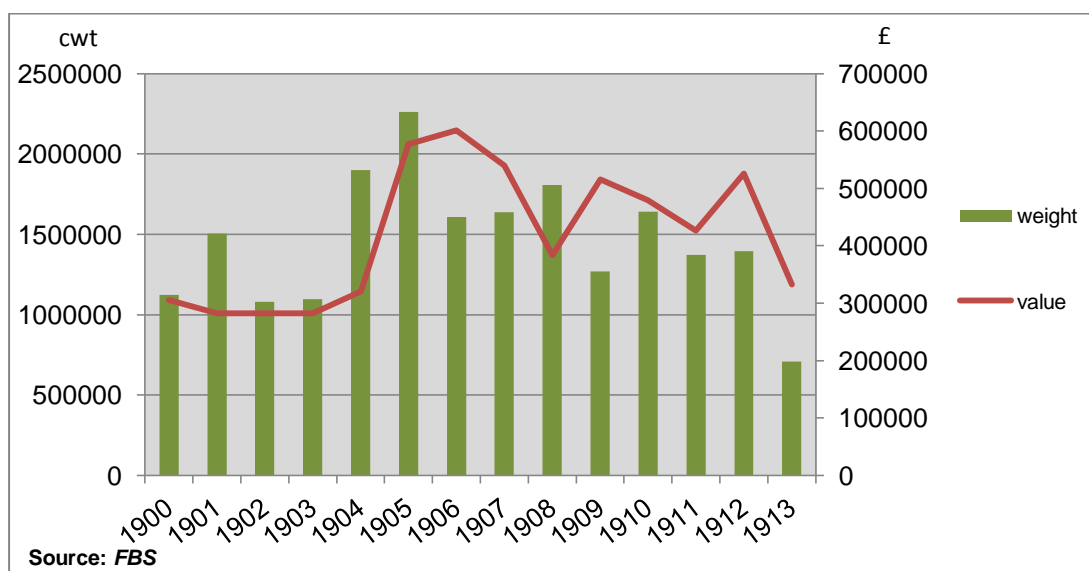


Figure 2.8 Weight and value to fishermen of herring catch

Though there was some kippering, herring were mostly salted and sold in the Baltic ports of Germany and Russia. Stations* were situated in several places; in 1913 there were eighty-two at thirteen locations, a big reduction from 174 at twenty-six locations in 1905.⁴⁴ As well as the amount and price of herring caught, the curers' profitability depended on the price paid for cured herring. In this period, demand was brisk, though there was competition, particularly from Norway and Holland. The average price of cured herring fluctuated between 18s per barrel in 1904 and 36s in 1913. Curers had to employ workers and purchase materials and herring in advance of sale and did not always fare well, 1913 being a poor year.⁴⁵

* Shore facilities where herring was processed

⁴⁴ Thomas Manson, *Shetland Almanac 1914* (Lerwick, 1913), 102 – 03; *1905* (Lerwick, 1904), 96 – 97

⁴⁵ *FBS 1913*, xxxix, 220



Figure 2.9 A herring station

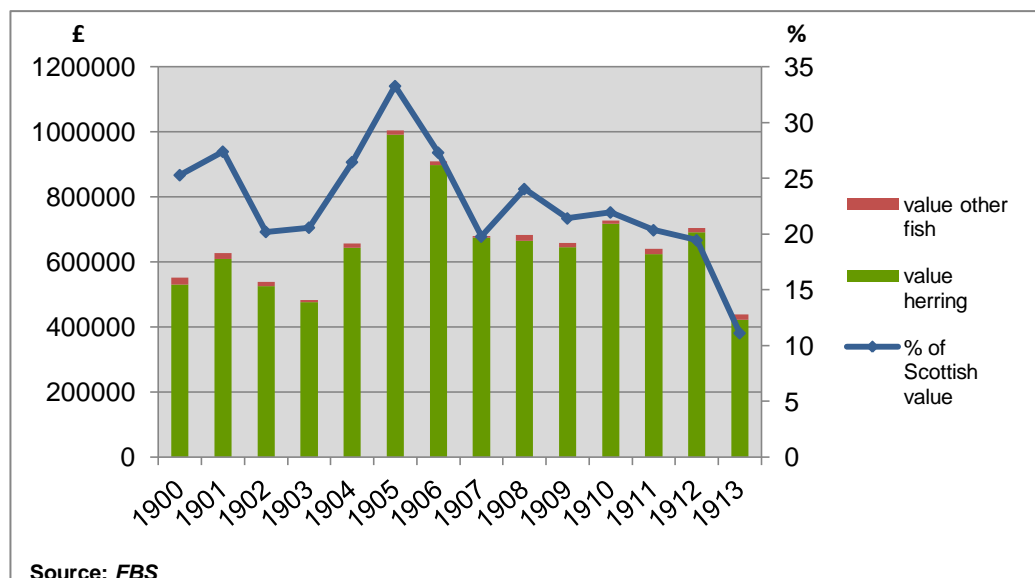


Figure 2.9 Value of cured fish

Although perhaps as much as 90 per cent of the revenue generated directly by fishing left Shetland, trade benefited from the influx of workers, particularly in Lerwick.⁴⁶ Harbour income rose steadily from £2351 in 1900 to £6617 in 1913, when one Sunday in June, there was a record number of 803 vessels in harbour.⁴⁷ The socialist James McDougall described the surprising sight of ‘the belching smoke and the forest of funnels and masts belonging to the drifter fleet crammed into Lerwick

⁴⁶ *ST*, 25 Dec. 1912, 4; 30 Dec. 1911, 4; *SN*, 12 Jul. 1913, 4

⁴⁷ Thomas Manson, *Lerwick during the Last Half Century*, rep. (Lerwick, 1991), 261; O’Dell, *Historical Geography*, 217

Harbour.⁴⁸ Coal for shipping was profitable, though not entirely in local hands; water was ‘the best financial asset the town possesses’ and shipping paid half the total rates.⁴⁹



Figure 2.11 Drifters in Lerwick

The herring season was extending into the late winter and there were other kinds of fishing; great-line fishing for cod and ling in spring and summer, and a small-line haddock fishery using smaller boats mainly in winter. Haddocks were sent south in ice and so this fishing developed in areas with good transport links: Scalloway, Burra, Whalsay and Lerwick.⁵⁰ These fisheries were always secondary to herring, which constituted over 90 per cent of the weight and value of the catch.

The fishing industry was always risky and problems were transpiring. As in Scotland generally, it was becoming more centralised, due to selling by auction and the lack of harbour facilities. The number of fishermen was declining, particularly in some areas: between 1900 and 1913, by 45 per cent in Northmavine and 40 in Yell and Fetlar. Conversely, some crews from the northeast coast of Scotland, moved to Lerwick.⁵¹ In 1913, 2431 resident Shetlanders engaged in fishing.⁵²

⁴⁸ Smith, ‘Socialism’

⁴⁹ Nicolson, *Lerwick Harbour*, 71 – 72; Manson, *Lerwick*, 108

⁵⁰ *Report of the Departmental Committee on North Sea Fishing*, PP. 1914, XXXI, 214; Smith, *Shetland Life and Trade*, 204

⁵¹ *Report on North Sea Fishing*, 212 – 13; SA, AF 29/3, 821 – 23, LFO letter, 27 Mar. 1915

⁵² *FBS 1913*, 21

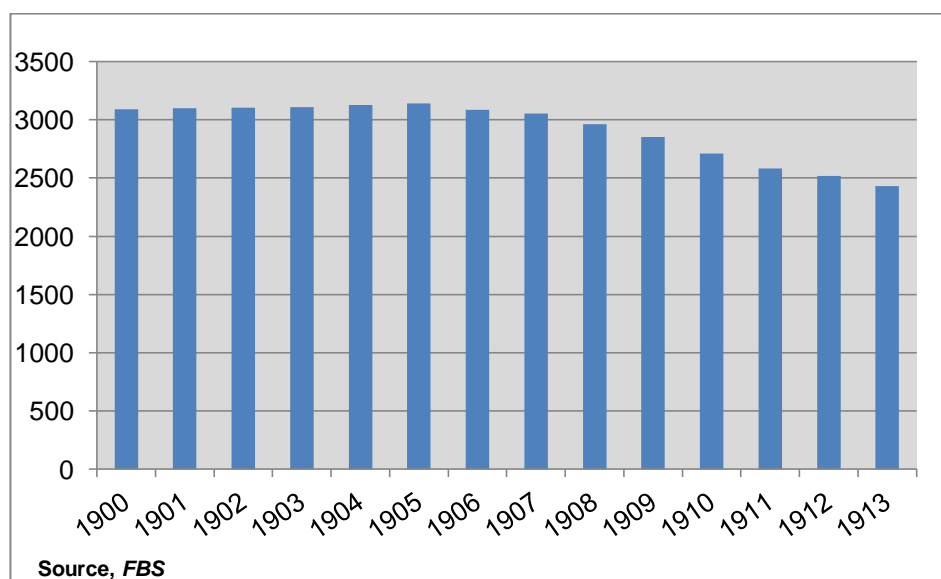


Figure 2.12 Resident fishermen

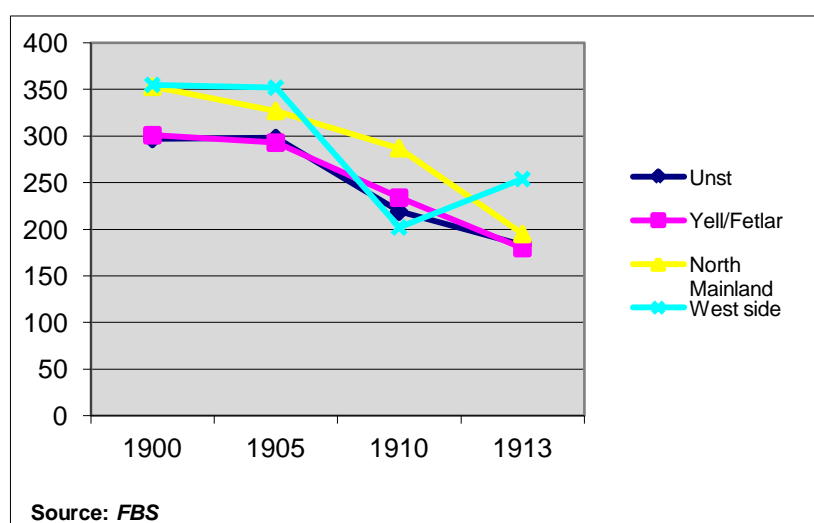


Figure 2.13 Decline in fishermen in some districts

The failure of the west-side fishing was blamed on the four Norwegian whaling stations in the north Mainland, licensed by Central Government despite an appeal to the Prime Minister and a Commission of Enquiry.⁵³ After initial success, the size and number of whales decreased, though the value of the products was rising. Whaling provided employment; in 1913, 270 men were employed ashore including 141 British, but the best-paid jobs at sea were held by Norwegians.⁵⁴ Although

⁵³ James R Coull, 'The Whaling Controversy in Shetland and the Hebrides in the Early Twentieth Century', *Northern Scotland*, 14 (1994), 55 – 68

⁵⁴ *FBS 1913*, liii, including a station on Harris

whaling had been banned in Norway, there was no evidence other than synchronicity to support the contention that it caused the herring to avoid the neighbouring waters.⁵⁵



Figure 2.14 Whaling Station at Ronas Voe, 1910

A Departmental Committee investigating the Scottish fishing industry in 1912 confirmed that ‘these islands do not lend themselves to the organisation of life in specialised callings’, and the Merchant Navy was often combined with fishing. It identified two major problems. First, the sailboats were becoming obsolete. Secondly, the lack of harbour facilities restricted the use of the larger boats in winter. Steam drifters cost about £3000; outside financiers were reluctant to invest and the maximum of Government loans had been set at £312 on the assumption that a boat cost £350.⁵⁶ Zetland County Council tried to obtain government assistance without success. The Congested Districts Board provided some aid for minor lighthouses, telegraph stations and piers, but not loans to fishermen. The majority of the Committee recommended no assistance as fishermen were ‘holding their own’ and a larger fleet was unnecessary.⁵⁷ Although the *Shetland Times* claimed, ‘The returns to

⁵⁵ O’Dell, *Historical Geography*, 141

⁵⁶ *Report on North Sea Fishing*

⁵⁷ *ST*, 27 Sep. 1913, 5; *Report on North Sea Fishing*, xxviii – xix, 213; Day, *Public Administration*, 278

fishermen – taken as a whole – were never better; certainly the earnings of fishermen were never greater’, local opinion supported a loan scheme.⁵⁸

As this report suggested, without the Merchant Navy, Shetland’s economy was probably unsustainable, though that is not evident in the newspapers. Men were opting to ‘sail’ rather than fish.⁵⁹ There is no way of knowing the numbers employed but they have been estimated at between 2000 and 3000.⁶⁰ The 1911 census recorded nearly 700 Shetlanders as seamen but omitted those at sea. There is also no way of calculating income, but earnings compared favourably with those on land in Shetland, particularly after the 1911 strike.⁶¹ The downsides were time spent away from home and uncomfortable, dangerous conditions, but it was a flexible employment and could be combined with agriculture, fishing or other seasonal work. ‘Sailing’ had important social effects so that Shetland was a less restricted society than its insular position might suggest. It offered prospects for able men to advance as officers, but cheaper foreign crews were restricting opportunities.⁶²

While seafaring was ‘men’s work’, practically all women, except the affluent, knitted for sale.⁶³ Hosiery* was a major contributor to the islands’ trade, but it is impossible get an accurate picture of this fragmented industry. In the 1901 census, 5045 of the 7445 employed women were hosiery-workers. In 1911, this reduced to 2782 but the number of agricultural workers increased: these occupations were not mutually exclusive.⁶⁴ Knitting was not weather dependent and it was fitted in or combined with other tasks; the ubiquitous picture of women carrying peats and knitting was a reality. Single and widowed women might live entirely by knitting, especially in Lerwick:

In not a few cases it may be regarded as the entire means of livelihood, while there is scarcely a home in Shetland, but looks to the returns from hosiery as a substantial help to family exchequer throughout the year.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ *ST*, 11 Jan. 1913, 8; *SN*, 10 Jan. 1914, 5; 14 Mar. 1914, 4

⁵⁹ SA, AF 29/253, 822, LFO letter, 27 Mar. 1915

⁶⁰ Smith, *Shetland Life and Trade*, 159

⁶¹ Arthur Marsh and Victoria Ryan, *The Seamen* (Oxford, 1989), 57

⁶² Smith, *Shetland Life and Trade*, 159; Nicolson, *Shetland*, 173; *SN*, 10 Jan. 1914, 5

⁶³ Fryer, *Knitting*

* ‘Hosiery’ included all knitted goods.

⁶⁴ *Report on the Eleventh Decennial Census of Scotland, 1901*, III, PP. 1904, CVIII, 28; *1911*, I, 2138

⁶⁵ *ST*, 27 Dec. 1913, 4



Figure 2.15 Woman knitting and carrying peats

A wide range of knitwear was exported: gloves, underwear, stockings, shawls. Demand fluctuated, influenced by both fashion and weather. Fine lace garments had enjoyed popularity but not every woman could knit them. Trade had expanded, partly due to the parcel post, which enabled women to by-pass local merchants, but competition had developed from spurious ‘Shetland’ garments machine-made elsewhere.⁶⁶

The hosiery trade still operated under a truck system, described in a report based on interviews with merchants and knitters, produced by Isobel Meiklejohn, a childhood resident of Bressay.⁶⁷ Since the Truck Act of 1887, the money was usually ‘laid on the counter’, but about 25 per cent had been deducted from the hosiery prices and, if the knitter purchased goods rather than taking cash, the same was deducted from the price of the goods. There were various reasons why women accepted this. The merchant often held a monopoly and knitters still might require credit. A sense of ‘fairness’ also operated: the merchant took the market risk and often had to retain stock for some time during which it could deteriorate. In Lerwick, where the hosiery dealers were usually drapers, there was potentially a more competitive situation. The report found that the Act, for which the local authority was responsible, was ‘practically a dead letter’. In 1909, the *Shetland News* thought truck ‘seriously curtailed

⁶⁶ Fryer, *Knitting*, 101; O’Dell, *Historical Geography*, 159

⁶⁷ *Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops, 1909, Appendix on Truck in the Shetlands*, PP. 1910, XXVIII; *ST*, 25 Jun. 1910, 4

the volume of trade', but the *Shetland Times* claimed that, because 'cash value must, of necessity, always be less than barter value', stopping it would decrease the knitters' earnings and 'be seriously felt by the whole population of the country districts as a hardship'.⁶⁸ Wason expressed the same view in the House of Commons.⁶⁹ Meiklejohn, while recognising that some merchants could not function if the money was taken out of the shop, thought the Act was 'undoubtedly beneficial'.⁷⁰ Her enquiry resulted in a flurry of prosecutions, and the *Shetland Times* commented:

The enforcing of the Truck Act, even in the spasmodic and uncertain manner which has been adopted during the past two years, is injurious to the industry, damaging to the knitters and beneficent to no one.⁷¹

In 1914, a report on Home Industries concluded that knitters thought the Act was detrimental and truck would disappear only when the economy improved.⁷²

The hosiery trade had other problems. According to Meiklejohn, it suffered from over-production and depression: 'I do not think a knitter could with present prices easily maintain herself exclusively by her knitting'.⁷³ The quality was uneven and, with mill- and home-spun wool costing the same, women were less willing to spin. Wool from mixed breeds lost some of the softness of the native product. She recommended quality control through a cooperative system or trademark, but it was no part of her remit – or anyone else's – to organise this. The *Shetland Times* also yearly reminded knitters that the remedy was in their hands but made no concrete recommendations. The Home Industries Report envisaged an inspectorate of local women coordinated by an 'exceptionally well-qualified inspector'.⁷⁴

This report found it difficult to assess the knitters' earnings. The Congested Districts Board reckoned in 1901 that Shetland knitwear was worth between £10000 and £12000, but in 1911, an estimated value of over £30000 was considered low; it may have been as high as £50000. The report, while recognising 'the social concomitants' of communal carding and spinning sessions, considered the hourly

⁶⁸ *SN and; ST*, 2 Jan. 1909, 4

⁶⁹ *HoC Deb.*, 5th Series, 31 Mar. 1909, 3, c. 465

⁷⁰ *Truck Report 1909*, 168

⁷¹ *ST*, 1 Jan, 1910, 4

⁷² *Home Industries Report*, 91, 161 – 62

⁷³ *Truck Report 1909*, 167

⁷⁴ *Home Industries Report*, 101

earnings, perhaps only a halfpenny, to be the lowest in the county and deprecated the very long working-time involved. It was no wonder that women preferred to spend the summer gutting herring when they might earn a pound a week.⁷⁵

The staples of the economy, therefore, had difficulties, but they provided some flexibility if any one 'string to the bow' gave way. Because of Shetland's geographical position, they were all dependent on transport and communications. By 1909, there were five steamer services a week in summer and four in winter from the Scottish mainland to various locations, subsidised by the mail.⁷⁶ This was still considered inadequate and there were petitions for a daily service and improvements for country districts. By 1913, there were fifty-seven post offices, which allowed the export of hosiery and import of goods by mail order. Telephones were available only in Lerwick, Scalloway and Sandwick, but there were forty telegraph stations, mainly for the herring fishing.⁷⁷ Roads were poor and the cost a constant concern, but the Congested Districts Board had provided nearly £13000 in grants.⁷⁸ Roadworks continued most years and provided welcome employment. From 1905, motor vehicles arrived and in 1913, the County Council debated a proposal for a motor service to rural locations.⁷⁹ With the advent of larger fishing boats, piers became more important; the Congested Districts Board provided grants of over £9000 for six. An extension to the harbour facilities at Lerwick, including a fishmarket, was completed in 1908.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ *Home Industries Report*, 88 – 90, 38, 53; O'Dell, *Historical Geography*, 159; Fryer, *Knitting*, 102

⁷⁶ Smith, *Shetland Life and Trade*, 259

⁷⁷ Manson, *Almanac 1914*, 56; Nicolson, *Shetland*, 113

⁷⁸ *Report of the Congested Districts Board for Scotland 1912*, PP. 1912 – 13, XVII, xxi; Day, *Public Administration*, 327 – 28

⁷⁹ *ST*, 26 Jul. 1913, 5

⁸⁰ *Congested Districts Board 1912*, xx ; Irvine, *Lerwick*, 186



Figure 2.16 Lerwick fish market

Lerwick entrepreneurs were very active. New commercial premises were built including shops, banks, offices, the gas works, a cinema and a garage.⁸¹ Besides demonstrating business prosperity, building was an important employer, and every year the newspapers commented on the work in hand and planned. The valuation of the county rose from £47831 in 1900/01 to £64980 in 1913/14.⁸²

Even so, with Britain's economy slowing and foreign competition increasing, Shetland was vulnerably located in a tough geographical environment; weather conditions were still crucial as well as markets. While transport was improving, many areas were still difficult to access. Herring was notoriously fickle – there being ‘nothing quite so certain about the herring fishing as its uncertainty’ – and the west-side fishing had already failed.⁸³ Fishing was hampered by underdeveloped technology, agriculture by out-of-date methods and shortage of land. There were potential opportunities but people were still emigrating to seek better prospects. Capital investment was scarce. State aid had become important, both to individuals in the form of pensions, and in subsidies for education, medical services and transport.⁸⁴ Shetland's economy was dependent on external conditions in two very

⁸¹ Irvine, *Lerwick*, 176 – 184; Nicolson, *Lerwick Harbour*, 63 – 69; 78 – 80

⁸² Manson, *Almanac*, 1901 – 1914

⁸³ *ST*, 30 May 1914, 4

⁸⁴ For local government finance see Day, *Public Administration*, 345 – 70

direct ways – on markets for produce, especially the Baltic herring market, and on global trade for the Merchant Navy.

Living Conditions

Nearly every aspect of living conditions showed recent improvements but continuing problems. Britain was prosperous but the wealth was divided very unequally and there was widespread poverty. Smout regarded the first decade of the twentieth century as the start of a ‘marked upward trend in all the indicators of social amelioration’, and there seems to be a consensus that wages were increasing although not keeping pace with the cost of living.⁸⁵ There were regional differences; Thompson described a ‘gradient of poverty’ from the south to the north of the country and a ‘geographical distribution of inequality’, though he thought that crofters, while far from affluent, had a better standard of living than the average working class family.⁸⁶

Shetland was not a subsistence economy but incomes were low. In 1913, tradesmen’s rates at 6d to 8d an hour were among the lowest in Scotland; wages in Lerwick for unskilled workers averaged 15s a week and for skilled £1. A hired man on a fishing boat might earn £2 a week and seamen £5 10s a month.⁸⁷ Earnings from crofting and fishing were variable and much employment was seasonal. Women earned less; the main alternatives to knitting were gutting and domestic service. Prices of basic foodstuffs such as oatmeal, flour and tea had fallen during the nineteenth century but were rising.⁸⁸ Transport increased costs and Shetlanders now

⁸⁵ Smout, *Century of the Scottish People*, 131; Ferguson, *Scottish Social Welfare*, 63; Hill, *Edwardian Scotland*, 101, 167; T. R. Gourvish, ‘The Standard of Living, 1890 – 1914’, in Alan O’Day, (ed.), *The Edwardian Age: Conflict and Stability 1900 – 1914* (London and Basingstoke, 1979), 13 – 33; Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society*, 2nd ed. (London 1992) 152, 265; Roy Hattersley, *The Edwardians* (London, 2004), 70; George R. Boyer, ‘Living Standards 1860 – 1939’, in Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson, (eds.), *Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, II, Economic Maturity 1860 – 1939* (Cambridge, 2004), 280 – 313, 283 – 85; Simmonds, *Britain and the World War One*, 16

⁸⁶ Gourvish, ‘Standard of Living’, 19; E. H. Hunt, *Regional Wage Variations in Britain 1850 – 1914* (Oxford, 1973); Thompson, *Edwardians*, 22, 26

⁸⁷ *Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Industrial Population of Scotland*, PP. 1917 – 18, XIV, 841; *ST*, 12 Apr. 1913, 5; 25 Jan. 1913, 5

⁸⁸ Smout, *Century of the Scottish People*, 125

bought a much greater range of imports. Credit still sustained the lives of many families.⁸⁹

It is difficult to assess the standard of living of most Shetlanders; certainly, it had improved over the past half century. The pessimistic views given to commissions in the hope of generating government assistance were balanced by the more optimistic year-end reports of the newspapers, which perhaps wished to avoid blighting the Festive Season. They frequently mentioned that destitution was unknown, for example in 1905:

Substantial advancement has been made. There has been no scarcity, no poverty, no want ... Here no 'unemployed problem' vexes the community. Poverty, as it [is] known in other places, does not exist here ... Many of those things which were regarded as luxuries a generation ago are now in everyday use; people are better fed, better clad, and better housed than their fathers were.⁹⁰

One visitor commented, 'There are poor people ... but there is no real poverty, and a beggar is unknown'; there was 'always some kind of work to be had ... some kind of existence may be eked out'.⁹¹ This was scarcely a glowing report. The Poor Law Commission reported that in 1906, 21.4 per cent of the population was 'ordinary poor', about average for the crofting counties but much higher than the Scottish average of 12.9.⁹² Nearly 70 per cent of the poorest were old and infirm. In 1909, people over seventy (with certain exceptions) became eligible for a pension of 5s a week. The *Shetland News* reckoned that there were 1946 pensioners, 686 men and 126 women, over 7 per cent of the population compared to Scotland's 1.28 per cent, and 30 per cent more than in Orkney.⁹³ That there had been only 591 paupers testified to the stigma of parochial relief or the independence of the elderly or both. In 1913/14, the total spent on poor relief was £7704 and there were 410 paupers with 152 dependents, among the lowest concentrations in Scotland.⁹⁴ Only a few of these, thirty-three in 1911, lived in the Lerwick Poor House where, according to the *Shetland Times* they were 'surrounded by all comfort and care'.⁹⁵ Poor relief cost a

⁸⁹ *Evidence to Departmental Committee on Congested District Board*, 99, 104, 105

⁹⁰ *ST*, 30 Dec. 1905, 4

⁹¹ Munro, *To the Shetland Islands*, 15 – 16

⁹² Day, *Public Administration*, 139

⁹³ *SN*, 9 Jan. 1909, 4

⁹⁴ Manson, *Almanac 1916* (Lerwick, 1915), 22

⁹⁵ *Census 1911*, I, 2132; *ST*, 13 Nov. 1909, 8

considerable proportion of the rates, but most supported patients in mental hospitals on the Scottish mainland.

The worst social problem, as elsewhere in Scotland, was housing. Overcrowding was apparent in the censuses, and in 1911, 43.7 per cent of people lived more than two per room and 7.8 per cent more than four. This was better than the Scottish average and was improving, with 1.6 people per windowed room in 1911 compared to 1.8 in 1901 and 3.2 in 1861. There were only four windowless houses, compared to 107 in 1901 and 1016 in 1861.⁹⁶

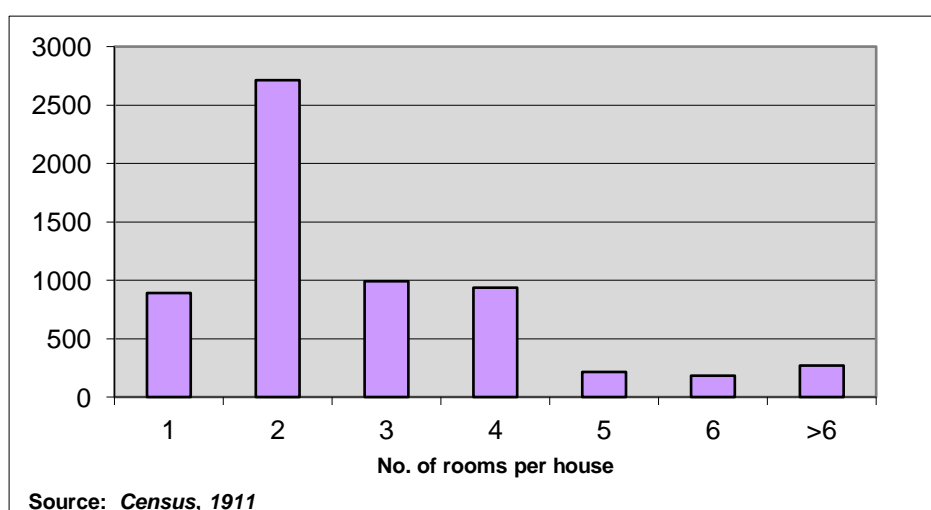


Figure 2.17 Sizes of houses, 1911

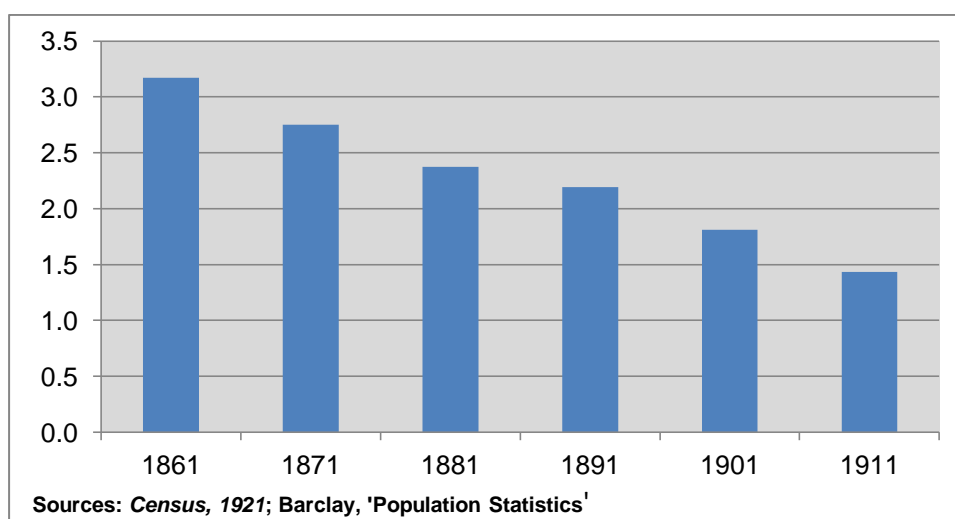


Figure 2.18 People per windowed room

⁹⁶ *Census 1911*, I, 2110

Improvements were reported by council officials, the Crofters Commission and the Royal Commission on Housing, which visited in 1913.⁹⁷ Since the Crofters' Act, crofters were responsible for their houses, most of which now had felt roofs and some wooden floors and upstairs rooms. The worst houses, in Foula, still had central fires and in three cattle and people shared the entrance.⁹⁸ The County Council did not regulate house-building but in 1913, an inspector found thirty-two of forty-one houses were 'injurious or dangerous to health', the problems being lack of sanitation, dampness, defective light and ventilation, smoking vents, unlined walls and occasionally general dilapidation.⁹⁹ Housing was, however, of a higher standard than the black houses of the Outer Hebrides.¹⁰⁰



Figure 2.19 The interior of a croft-house

Lerwick had the worst conditions, not because of greater over-crowding but because of the urban situation. The Socialist manifesto for the 1906 Town Council elections stated:

A large number of the working-class of Lerwick ... are compelled to live in houses which have long ceased to be habitable, being ill-lighted, badly ventilated, and devoid of necessary sanitation.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ *Report of the Crofters' Commission, 1911 – 12*, PP. 1913, XIX, xxvi; *Report on Housing*, 572

⁹⁸ *Evidence to Housing Commission*, 482 – 83, 488, 496

⁹⁹ *ST*, 17 May 1913, 8

¹⁰⁰ Day, *Public Administration*, 294 – 96, 306 – 07; Ferguson, *Scottish Social Welfare*, 127; *Report on Housing*, 371

¹⁰¹ Smith, 'Socialism'

The Council had powers to build houses and compel landlords to make improvements, but lacked funds and, despite many discussions, built only one twenty-four apartment tenement, the Workmen's Dwellings, in 1911.¹⁰² The old part of the town was bad but the worst area, where the Scottish fishermen lived in wooden huts, was outwith the burgh boundary, and so caused conflict between the Lerwick and County Councils. The Commission heard that two-thirds of the houses were old and not up to habitable standard or had no space for a water closet. The water supply was mainly from shared standpipes; thirty-five tenements housing seventy-four families had no sanitation and, where no outside ground was available, fishing lines were baited indoors. At least fifty houses were needed here; twenty-seven families occupied nineteen houses that had been declared unfit; it was pointless to condemn more.¹⁰³ The Chairman of the Local Government Board told a conference that he had seen 'human beings, huddled together in circumstances which made comfort impossible, and the sweetness and sacredness of home life a ghastly mockery' – which caused some offence.¹⁰⁴

Rural Scotland was healthier than the cities and, despite the poor housing, Lerwick's Medical Officer of Health judged the general health as 'remarkably good'.¹⁰⁵ Infant mortality, at 59.6 per 1000, was much lower than the Scottish average.¹⁰⁶ The main causes of disease were 'the damp and sunless climate, the rigours and exposed life of the men, over-crowding, bad drainage, and the over-use of purgative medicines and headache powders'.¹⁰⁷ Tuberculosis was rife but was reducing in some areas, due to improved housing. Every year there were a few cases of diseases such as diphtheria, scarlet fever and measles. Water-borne infections were common, blamed on defective wells and poor hygiene.¹⁰⁸

The diet in Shetland was similar to that in other parts of the Highlands and Islands; it included nutritious items such as oatmeal, potatoes, milk and fish but was short on vegetables and high on salt. Shop-bought items were becoming more common,

¹⁰² Irvine, *Lerwick*, 189

¹⁰³ *Report on Housing*, 436; *Evidence to Housing Commission*, 488

¹⁰⁴ *SN*, 6 June, 1914, 8

¹⁰⁵ *ST*, 17 May 1913, 8

¹⁰⁶ *Registrar General's Report 1913*, xix; Day, *Public Administration*, 132

¹⁰⁷ *SN*, 5 Apr. 1913, 8

¹⁰⁸ *Report on Housing*, 581 – 82

particularly tea, sugar and bread. The nutritional standard was declining, again not uniquely in Shetland.¹⁰⁹ Dr. Saxby of Unst remarked, ‘One marvels that life can be sustained and work got through on a diet composed of bread and tea’. He also commented on the lack of knowledge about cooking and of proper appliances.¹¹⁰

Medical provision had improved. Since 1897, legislation had conferred certain duties and powers on local authorities, including sanitary inspection, but there was no school medical officer. There was a crisis when doctors originally refused to cooperate with the National Insurance Act. A Medical Commission took evidence from doctors in 1912. Under the Poor Law, they were funded from the rates to attend paupers and the mentally ill, and this subsidised services to the rest of the community.¹¹¹ Some doctors said people could generally afford to pay fees; others disagreed; although they often treated patients free, cost deterred people from seeking medical aid. In some areas, transport was a problem and in others, herring workers added to the workload. Boat-owners and curers provided some funds, particularly for the Gilbert Bain Hospital in Lerwick, opened in 1902 with eight beds and extended to twenty-two in 1912. It treated 148 cases in 1912/13, mostly from Lerwick but including some foreigners. Patients were also sent to mainland hospitals.¹¹² In 1914, the Medical Services Board found that services were still considered very inadequate.¹¹³

Another service that had improved was education, which, until the Education Act of 1872, had been generally inadequate or non-existent. The Act was implemented with difficulty due to the large number of schools established, but the advent of free elementary education in 1889 was hailed as great benefit: besides encouraging school attendance, it brought in government money. By 1913, there were seventy-six schools with 127 teachers, though the Anderson Education Institute in Lerwick

¹⁰⁹ Smout, *Century of Scottish People*, 128 – 29; Hill, *Edwardian Scotland*, 103 – 04

¹¹⁰ Ferguson, *Scottish Social Welfare*, 225; *ST*, 20 Dec. 1913, 5

¹¹¹ Day, *Public Administration*, 308 – 12; 128 – 33; *Report of the Commission on Medical Services in the Highlands and Islands, 1912 – 13*, PP. 1913, XXXVII, 144 – 71

¹¹² Irvine, *Lerwick*, 176; Nicolson, *Lerwick Harbour*, 78; *ST*, 20 Dec. 1913, 5; *Commission on Medical Services*, 152

¹¹³ *SN*, 27 Jun. 1914, 6

provided the only secondary education.¹¹⁴ Continuation classes were run at a number of localities, mainly in navigation.¹¹⁵ A report by an Educational Institute of Scotland commission in 1912 gave a fairly good impression: ‘We found the school buildings, as a rule, clean, fresh and well-equipped’, but there were problems with overcrowding, poor teaching, harsh discipline and attendance of about 70 per cent due to the difficulties of getting to school and the need to work at home. The curriculum was limited and not related to local conditions and there were difficulties in recruiting qualified teachers.¹¹⁶ Similar deficiencies existed in other rural parts of Scotland.

One problem that Shetland lacked was serious crime. The Chief Constable’s annual reports on crime in Lerwick showed breaches of the peace, theft and minor assaults constituted the bulk of the incidents. In 1913, 119 men and twenty-three women were prosecuted, about half of them native Shetlanders, mostly young.¹¹⁷ About two-thirds had been under the influence of the alcohol, and, just like elsewhere in the country, alcohol was blamed for poverty and other social ills. Temperance was a popular cause, attracting both those who disapproved of alcohol in principle and those who wished to see social conditions improve.¹¹⁸

Opportunities for organised leisure activities had expanded, reflecting more resources as well as incoming ideas. Many were run by the churches, such as concerts, socials and children’s parties, or by Temperance associations, including P.S.A (Pleasant Sunday Afternoon). There were reading rooms, debating societies, lectures, whist drives, choral singing, Boy Scouts, Boys Brigade and Girl Guides; also sporting events, such as football, cricket and annual sailing regattas. Several public halls had been built where events such as weddings, concerts and dances could be held. New kinds of music and dancing were imported. Lerwick had a greater variety of opportunities than the rural districts, including from 1913, a

¹¹⁴ John J. Graham, ‘*A Vehement Thirst After Knowledge*’: *Four Centuries of Education in Shetland* (Lerwick, 1998), 136 – 42, 184 – 85; Ferguson, *Scottish Social Welfare*, 554; Manson, *Almanac 1914*, 65 – 79

¹¹⁵ *Report on North Sea Fishing*, 120 – 27

¹¹⁶ Graham, *Vehement Thirst*, 142 – 47, 187 – 88; Day, *Public Administration*, 166 – 72; Clark, *Story of Shetland*, 162

¹¹⁷ *ST*, 21 Feb. 1914, 8

¹¹⁸ Smout, *Century of Scottish People*, 146 – 47

cinema. The largest social event was Up-Helly-Aa, involving preparatory meetings as well as the festival itself.¹¹⁹



Figure 2.20 Spectators at the Lerwick Regatta, 1905



Figure 2.21 The Star Picture Palace, 1913

Overall, then, the picture shows improving circumstances, but there were still significant problems, not unique to Shetland, and mainly the result of poverty. Living standards were maintained only by hard work and Government assistance.

¹¹⁹ Mitchell, *Up-Helly-aa* ; Irvine, *Up-Helly-Aa*; Brown, *Up-Helly-Aa*

Peace and Prosperity or Conflict and Change?

If this was not a 'Golden Age', neither did Shetland fit the picture of a society in upheaval. Conflict is a recurrent theme of this paradigm, over issues such as female suffrage, working conditions and the Highland land problem.¹²⁰ Thompson, whose book includes some evidence from Shetland, identified four issues that determined social inequality: class, town versus country, gender and age, and these will be used to review the stresses and changes in Shetland society.¹²¹ Shetland, however, appeared comparatively stable.

Class in the widest sense was hardly applicable; there were no aristocrats; the Marquis of Zetland owned land but was never resident. Many landowners were absentees; few were prominent in public life. Land was the most obvious class issue, but there were other disparities. In country districts, as well as the laird's family, shopkeepers (who still dealt in credit), ministers, doctors and schoolteachers, were treated with deference – their houses would have been distinctive.¹²² In Lerwick, the large villas of the 'New Town' were very different from the crowded tenements or the huts of the immigrant fishermen. The men who ran the town were a small group, 'tightly knit and all important'; many were members of the Masonic lodges, Morton and Viking. The 'Feuars and Heritors', who managed the town land, the local councils and Lerwick Harbour Trust were dominated by businessmen.¹²³

People experienced a variety of circumstances, but at the lower end of the socio-economic range, conditions had improved. The fact that crofter-fishermen were not directly dependent on employers may have made society more egalitarian.¹²⁴ It was also possible for men who started a business to become a force in the community. Economic inter-dependency was recognised: Shetland was said to be 'a community where each class is dependant one upon another, and where the interests of one is bound up in the other.' Nevertheless, some claims, for example, 'if we have no great

¹²⁰ Hunter, *Making of Crofting Community*, 195; Hattersley, *Edwardians*, 1, 241; O'Day, *Edwardian Age*

¹²¹ Thompson, *Edwardians*, xv

¹²² Thompson, *Edwardians*, 93

¹²³ Irvine, *Lerwick*, 174, 180 – 83; Smith, 'Socialism'

¹²⁴ Thompson, *Edwardians*, 94

wealthy class, we have no abject poverty among us', over-emphasised social equality.¹²⁵ There was no overt industrial strife, though there were branches of the Sailors and Firemen's Union and the Coopers' Section of the Workers Union. In this context, the views of the newspapers were broadly similar: while supporting the progress of working people, both were very opposed to strikes. There were several socialist groups in Lerwick and one in Mid Yell. The Lerwick Working Men's Association, formed in 1905, became a branch of the Social Democratic Federation with a membership of around 200. Socialism was disseminated by distributing literature, writing letters to the newspapers and public speeches, including some from well-known figures such as John Maclean. A few Socialists were vociferous members of the Town Council and the Lerwick School Board.¹²⁶

Otherwise, politics was not very controversial, except perhaps in the local newspapers, which kept Shetlanders well informed about current issues and debates in Parliament. The combined constituency of Orkney and Shetland was determinedly Liberal, due probably to the popularity of the crofting legislation and old-age pensions. Political meetings found mixed response, dependent, in the country districts, on whether men were home from the fishing. At the 1906 election, a correspondent from the *Daily Express* found Shetlanders unwilling to share their political opinions with inquisitive reporters:

It is worse than bad form to mention politics here, especially in an airy way. The election is looked on as a religious rite of the sacred order, and matters of conscience are not discussed with casual visitors.¹²⁷

Only about 4000 Shetlanders had the franchise; voting could be difficult due to the location of the stations, but the turnout, though low by national standards, rose from 54.9 per cent in 1900 to 71.8 in 1910. None of the candidates was a Shetlander. John Cathcart Wason won in 1900 as a Liberal Unionist, was re-elected in 1902 as an Independent Liberal and thereafter, as a Liberal, increasing his majority from 40 in 1900 to 3123 in January 1910, and unopposed in December.¹²⁸ In council elections, most candidates stood as independents and seats were not hotly contested. One

¹²⁵ *ST*, 12 Jul. 1913, 4; 29 Dec. 1907, 4

¹²⁶ Smith, 'Socialism'

¹²⁷ *SN*, 17 Feb. 1906,

¹²⁸ Manson, *Almanac 1914*, 24; F.W.S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1885 – 1918* (London, 1974), 553, 582 – 83

member ‘strongly deprecated the council degenerating into a political debating society’.¹²⁹

It may seem unlikely that in such a small population, the city/country issue would be relevant, but there was a divide between Lerwick and the country districts. According to Irvine, ‘a busy, cosmopolitan town, Lerwick at the turn of the century was going through the most important and the most interesting slice of its history’. With a fifth of the population, it was the main port, and fishing and ancillary trade were becoming centralised there. Since the 1880s, besides the ‘New Town’, public buildings had been erected; new streets were laid out, paving and drainage improved and a second water scheme completed. There was talk of extending the burgh boundaries and installing electric lights.¹³⁰ During the summer, the population was boosted by fish-workers from Britain and the Continent. A description applied then and since was ‘cosmopolitan’. Around 1900, the Rev. David Johnstone was struck by Lerwick’s cosmopolitanism and how it drew people from the country. Munro described how at weekends in the season, ‘the whole scene becomes most animated and exhilarating ...the scene one of vivacious sprightliness ... streets being overcrowded at night with a mass of spirited humanity’. ‘Current Topics’ exclaimed, ‘What cosmopolitan crowds jostle each other through the streets of Lerwick on Saturday night’; no similar-sized town experienced such ‘diverse styles of dress’ or such a ‘polyglot nature of conversations’. As in any town, the best and worst of conditions were to be found. Abrams rather overstated the case when she described it as ‘metropolitan’, ‘combining the atmosphere of a major sea port with the ostentation of a provincial town and the squalor of an industrial city’.¹³¹

The Lerwick-based newspapers may be misleading, but most countywide organisations were also located there; it was the administrative capital and increased government meant increased influence. Most county councillors lived in Lerwick and one visitor commented that the county was ruled from there.¹³² Prosperity was geographically uneven; Smith wrote that, ‘the old haaf and “crofting” areas

¹²⁹ *SN*, 6 May 1911, 7

¹³⁰ Irvine, *Lerwick*, 163, 177; *SN*, 8 Mar. 1913, 5

¹³¹ Abrams, *Myth and Materiality*, 63 – 64; Munro, *To the Shetland Islands*, 16; *SN*, 7 Jun. 1913, 5

¹³² *ST*, 28 Aug. 1909, 5

languished', communities were becoming more segregated and 'district' consciousness increased.¹³³ There was little contemporary discussion of this trend: it became significant only with hindsight.



Figure 2.22 Lerwick, 1911

Gender and age were not causes for conflict (except perhaps on an individual level). Thompson saw Shetland as unusual in terms of both gender and class, 'the two most important concepts around which Edwardians understood their own society'. He claimed Shetlanders' attitudes towards children were enlightened and family structure was particularly cohesive.¹³⁴ The prevalence of extended family households and the communal nature of much work encouraged the continued involvement of older people and even the indigent were afforded a level of respect. Younger people were more apt to emigrate and the *Shetland News* thought they were not content with the old simple life and wanted 'a more complete existence', 'the amenities, the joys, the amusements and the recreations of life'.¹³⁵ As already discussed, women were respected without taking an overt role in public life. Suffragism, a major issue nationally, was less so locally. There was an active Shetland Suffragist Society in Lerwick, formed following a visit from Chrystal Macmillan in 1909. Despite lively argument in the newspapers, opinion seems to have been generally supportive; both local councils endorsed the Female Suffrage Bill in 1910, though Wason voted against it. The tactics of the militant Suffragettes were, however, condemned; the *Shetland Times* calling them 'unsexed hooligans'.

¹³³ Smith, *Making of Modern Shetland*, 56 – 57

¹³⁴ Thompson, *Edwardians*, 191; 47 – 48

¹³⁵ *SN*, 20 May 1911, 4

The local society restricted itself to non-violent activities; in 1913 it ‘held one whist drive, distributed literature, petitioned Parliament, sent contributions to the Scottish Federation, and held quarterly meetings’.¹³⁶

Another area that aroused little conflict was religion, which, though important, was less dominant than in the Western Isles: ‘The Shetlander as a rule makes little outward profession of religion’. The Church of Scotland had the largest membership but most parishes also had United Free and Methodist congregations, and other denominations had a smaller presence.¹³⁷ There is little evidence of sectarianism and people might attend the services or social events of several churches. There was debate in the correspondence pages of the newspapers about religion and socialism in 1906, the building of the Roman Catholic Church (for visiting workers) in 1910 and religion and female suffrage in 1911, but in 1913, a columnist commented, ‘How very feebly the fires of religious intolerance burn in Shetland’.¹³⁸ This period generally in Scotland saw more tolerance and the start of a decline in church allegiance.¹³⁹ In Shetland, the churches did not appear to be socially repressive, and, while some ministers participated in public life, they did not dominate. Nevertheless, religion was still a force in the community and in 1901, a visitor wrote, ‘The Sabbath is held with rigid observance, and there are few places that could show such a number of long faces in proportion to its size’.¹⁴⁰ Between 1905 and 1914, there was intermittent, sometimes fierce, controversy in Lerwick over Sunday opening, not of public houses but of ice-cream shops. The Town Council referred the matter to the Sheriff, who rejected it. The *Shetland Times* commented, ‘Seldom or never had a public matter so stirred the public mind ... for almost twelve months it has been the topic of discussion’.¹⁴¹ Though there was often lively debate and disagreement, there was rarely open conflict about the most important issues facing the community.

Writers have commented on the amount of change since the 1870s, this ‘period of oscillating and intermittent progress towards a modern Shetland’ with ‘a modestly

¹³⁶ Taylor, *Women’s Suffrage*; *ST*, 4 Feb. 1913, 4; *SN*, 1 Nov. 1913, 8

¹³⁷ Clark, *Story of Shetland*, 133, 148

¹³⁸ *ST*, Feb. – Nov. 1910; Mar. – May 1911, 15 Nov. 1913, 8

¹³⁹ Smout, *Century of Scottish People*, 191 – 92, 202 – 07; Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh, 1997), 147 – 54

¹⁴⁰ Munro, *To the Shetland Islands*, 10

¹⁴¹ Irvine, *Lerwick*, 195; *ST*, 12 Apr. 1913, 4

prosperous economy emerging'.¹⁴² Smith saw this as the end of the 'traditional society'; there were more opportunities, speedier communications and social and economic repercussions. He concluded that Shetland did not develop the commercial initiative necessary to keep pace: 'A characteristic theme which runs through these changes is that of increasing problems in island development as a whole'.¹⁴³ Although Edwardian Britain, it has been claimed, 'teemed with the excitement of innovation and change', arguably in Shetland there was less change in the early twentieth century than in the later decades of the nineteenth.¹⁴⁴

Thompson saw Shetland as exemplifying the different time-spans co-existent in Edwardian culture; 'caught up in the European market economy' it had 'escaped the direct impact of the main forces moulding social change on the mainland', in the 'curious halfway position' of the crofting communities. While thinking the countryside was 'economically and socially moribund', he saw Shetland as being different.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps Shetlanders who, for perhaps the first time, were able to initiate change, expected it, were too realistic about the past to be nostalgic and considered most changes for the better. Nevertheless, Laurence Williamson wrote in 1913, 'We stand in a great transition time, such as not been since the end of the Middle Ages'.¹⁴⁶ The newspapers oscillated between complacency and concern for the future. Smith, discussing the *Shetland Times*' remark that fishings had come and gone 'yet Shetland has not suffered very much', commented, 'It must have seemed so, and the eruption of the Great War must have seemed corresponding climactic'.¹⁴⁷ When at the end of 1913, the *Shetland Times* was looking forward to the year ahead, the only anticipated storm clouds on the horizon were of rain, not war:

Although it is impossible to forecast with anything like certainty what the future may reveal, there is no reason to regard the immediate future with anything but confidence ... in a county like Shetland where climatic conditions mean so much, it would be folly to speak of the future. Yet, so far as that can be seen at present, it looks quite bright.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² Fryer, *Knitting*, 93

¹⁴³ Smith, *Shetland Life and Trade*, 199, 206

¹⁴⁴ Hattersley, *Edwardians*, 1; Thomson, *Edwardians*; Priestly, *Edwardians*, 83 – 84

¹⁴⁵ Thompson, *Edwardians*, 26, 94, 48, 24

¹⁴⁶ quoted in Paul Thompson, *Living the Fishing* (London, 1983), 353 – 54

¹⁴⁷ Smith, *Shetland Life and Trade*, 206

¹⁴⁸ *ST*, 27 Dec. 1913, 4

CHAPTER 3 PRECURSORS OF WAR

With hindsight, it is now generally accepted that the hostility that led to the Great War had been accumulating for years. This chapter first investigates how aware Shetlanders were of the international situation and how they might have been influenced by newspapers and other media. It then describes the local pre-war membership of the reserve sections of the armed forces. In this context, Shetland's geographical position became important in two ways: the naval rivalry with Germany meant that Shetland gained strategic value for Britain's defence and war strategy, but, in a probably unique way, its Norse heritage and Continental trade links led to doubts about the patriotism of the islanders. All of this was significant in how they were to experience the Great War, particularly their involvement in the armed forces and the Admiralty's operations in Shetland. Finally, the chapter looks at how the reactions of Shetlanders to the outbreak of war were conditioned by the preceding events.

Prophecies and Scares

The events that triggered the war have been depicted in an atmosphere of suspicion and antagonism between the 'Great Powers', rooted in economic competition, imperialism and militaristic attitudes. In the preceding years, there was much debate about Britain's role in the world and Germany's intentions. The naval rivalry, in particular, was publicised in newspapers and caught the public imagination: 'perhaps never before or since have naval affairs been of such interest to the citizens of the great powers'.¹ Britain's defence strategy depended on the Royal Navy to protect not only the country but also the shipping that carried the Empire's trade. Its pre-eminence was a focus of national pride and perceived as both a necessity and a right; so Germany's naval ambitions were seen as both a threat and an insult. The Navy

¹ Paul G. Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I* (London, 1994), 1; Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1904 – 1919, I, The Road to War, 1904 – 1914* (London, 1961)

promoted British identity, particularly through events such as fleet reviews and ship-launches, celebrated in the press and popular culture.²

The national newspapers published articles, letters and reports of lectures on the need to prepare for war, perhaps deliberately trying to manipulate public opinion for political and commercial motives.³ While it is difficult to ascertain to what extent Shetlanders read the national press, these issues were also discussed in the local newspapers. There were other sources too; for example, in 1906, a Lerwick Headmaster told the Literary and Debating Society that ‘distrust of Germany and dislike of Germans are becoming very distinct features of British public life’ and, despite finding much to admire in Germany, feared that the ‘supremacy of commercial spirit’ would lead to war.⁴

In fiction also, a potential war – not always but most often with Germany – became a favourite subject, with themes of spies, invasion and naval battles.⁵ Shetland figured prominently in *The Invasion of 1910*, by William Le Queux, ‘the tireless exploiter of any scare or anxiety that would “make a story”’. Published originally as a serial in the *Daily Mail* in 1906, it was a huge success, greatly increased the newspaper’s circulation, sold over a million copies in twenty-seven languages and was analysed by the German naval and military staffs. It purported ‘to illustrate our utter unpreparedness for the war’; in it, Shetland was captured by the Germans and ‘solemnly annexed to the German Empire by proclamation’, before being liberated by the Royal Navy.⁶ This book was evidently well known in Shetland because it was the subject of a spoof article, attributed to ‘William La Kew’, in the *Shetland Times* in early 1909. At this time, war-scares were particularly rife, with a fierce debate on the naval budgets and concerns about espionage that led to the establishment of the

² Jan Rüger, ‘Nation, Empire and Navy: Identity Politics in the United Kingdom 1877 – 1918’, *Past and Present*, 185 (2004), 159 – 87; *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, 2007)

³ Morris, *The Scaremongers*; Cate Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning: Propaganda in the First World War* (London, 1977), 5 – 20

⁴ *SN*, 17 Mar. 1906, 7

⁵ David French, ‘Spy Fever in Britain, 1900 – 15’, *British Historical Journal*, 21, 2 (1978), 355 – 70; I.F. Clarke, (ed.), *The Great War with Germany, 1890 – 1914: Fictions and Fantasies of the War-to-Come* (Liverpool, 1997), 65, 122

⁶ I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars, 1763 – 3749*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1992), 122; Holger H. Herwig, *“Luxury” Fleet: the Imperial German Navy, 1888– 1918*, rev. (London, 1987), 51; William Le Queux, *The Invasion of 1910* (London, 1906), vi

Secret Service Bureau.⁷ Locally, such matters were in the news; the *Shetland News* had reprinted an article from the *Deutsche Review* about the possibility of war, the Town Council were keen to have a naval base in Lerwick and there had been a recruitment drive for the Territorial Army.⁸ The humorous article, ostensibly a typical invasion story, incorporated all this, and the force that easily routed the German Navy consisted of local volunteers, suffragists and temperance enthusiasts – this nightmare being blamed on indigestion following a supper of ‘stap’.*⁹ Obviously not everyone took Le Queux’s forecasts seriously. The following year another book, *The German Invasion of England* by ‘a French Staff Officer’, investigated the possible capture of an island by the Germans: although ‘One of the Shetland Isles, Mainland with its seaport, Lerwick, might do’, Orkney was considered more likely. The *Shetland Times* discussed this but concluded that the inferior German Navy would be incapable of holding the islands.¹⁰ However unlikely, Shetland’s potential involvement in an invasion was widely recognised, and spy fiction was influential, perhaps more in political and naval circles than in Shetland.¹¹

The differing views of the local newspapers about the likelihood of war kept the issue alive. The *Shetland News*, sharing Conservative concerns, ran cartoons aimed at the Liberal policy of free trade and depicting Germany as Britain’s main rival. It also published warning articles, such as one on the naval rivalry, headlined ‘The German Menace’.¹² The *Shetland Times* portrayed the war scares as a Tory ploy; for example, an article in 1909, entitled ‘The German Invasion is it possible?’, decided it definitely was not.¹³ Nevertheless, it still viewed Germany with suspicion, for

⁷ David Stafford, *Churchill and Secret Service* (London, 1997), 26; Thomas Boghardt, *Spies of the Kaiser: German Covert Operations in Great Britain during the First World War Era* (Basingstoke, 2004), 27 – 35; Christopher M. Andrew, *Secret Service: the Making of the British Intelligence Community* (Sevenoaks, 1987), 67 – 102

⁸ *SN*, 23 Jan. 1909, 7

* Stap = a dish of fish livers

⁹ *ST*, 27 Mar. 1909, 4; Linda Riddell, ‘“The Great Invasions of 1910”: Alternative Versions of the Glorious Liberation of Lerwick’, *New Shetlander*, 251 (2010), 32 – 35

¹⁰ ‘A French Staff Officer’, *The German Invasion of England* (London, 1910), 79 – 80; *ST*, 14 May 1910, 7

¹¹ Nicolas Hiley, ‘Decoding German Spies: British Spy Fiction 1908 – 18’, in Wesley K. Wark, (ed.) *Spy Fiction, Spy Films and Real Intelligence* (London, 1991), 55 – 79, 56 – 62

¹² *SN*, 23 Apr. 1909, 7

¹³ *ST*, 23 Oct. 1909, 7; 1 May 1909, 4

example in an article about the ‘conquest of the air’: ‘The people of Germany seem to be anxious to assist the kaiser to help Germany to take her proper place in the sun – whatever that may mean.’¹⁴ War with Germany was clearly considered a potential outcome of the economic rivalry.



Figure 3.1 Anti-free trade and anti-German cartoon (*Shetland News*, 19 Apr. 1913, 22)

In this context, the origins of the war have been ascribed to the militarism of society. Militarism, while not having an agreed definition, has generally been typified by a popular prevalence of military ideas and ideals and a political dominance by a military class and its values.¹⁵ Pre-war Britain had some of these characteristics. Newspapers, advertising, fiction and educational literature bombarded people with forecasts and misleading, idealistic depictions of war.¹⁶ War was represented as ‘a positive event, both for nations and individuals’ and an answer to social problems and concerns about Britain’s ability to maintain its world position, especially after the initial defeats in the Boer War.¹⁷ A significant proportion of government revenue was spent on the Navy. Marwick thought that a ‘will to war’ existed in many European countries; in Britain it had two strands, one realistic – seeing war as the

¹⁴ *ST*, 19 Apr. 1913, 8

¹⁵ V. R. Berghahn, *Militarism: the History of an International Debate, 1861 – 1979* (Cambridge, 1984), 2 – 3

¹⁶ Michael Howard, ‘Empire, Race and War in pre-1914 Britain’, in Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Valerie Pearl and Blair Warden, (eds), *History and Imagination* (London, 1981), 340 – 69; Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War*; Glenn R. Wilkinson, *Depictions and Images of War in Edwardian Newspapers, 1899 – 1914* (Basingstoke, 2003); DeGroot, *Blighty*, 31 – 42

¹⁷ Anne Summers, ‘Militarism in Britain before the Great War’, *History Workshop*, 2 (1976), 104 – 23, 111 – 12; Wilkinson, *Depictions and Images*, xi, 16, 42, 70

almost inevitable outcome of rivalry with Germany – and the other idealistic, based on concepts of patriotism and the cleansing power of war.¹⁸ Reader described how war was accepted as part of life: it was ‘difficult to maintain that the national mood was altogether peaceful’.¹⁹

Nevertheless, militarism in Britain has been described as different from more conventional and obvious forms, with the British working class ‘the least militarized in Europe’.²⁰ Unlike many European countries, Britain had no conscription, there was resistance to the encroachment of the state upon society and Britain was certainly believed to be less militaristic. Public opinion may not have been as susceptible to suggestion and manipulation as is sometimes assumed. Howard concluded that, although war was considered a necessary activity, even a force for good, militarism as such existed only in ‘mild solution’ and there was ‘no rancour or fanaticism’.²¹ In Scotland, Harvie and Walker claimed, romantic militarism had ‘long been a fixture of Scottish folklore and a symbol of the country’s history’. Gregory, however, pointed out that ‘although popular militarism may have existed as a stronger potential cultural resource in Scotland, this should not be taken as a simplistic stereotyping’, and a strong anti-militarist strain was also discernable.²² Certainly, it is difficult to view Shetland as a society dominated by militaristic ideas.

Picking out references to the possibility of war in the newspapers over several years may over-emphasise the sense of impending conflict. Neither of the local newspapers was pro-war. The *Shetland News* advocated continued expenditure on the Army and Navy, but as a deterrent. In 1913, it claimed, ‘The British people will never consent to dishonour their past and imperil their independence by “economies”’. On the other hand, it quoted Norman Angell, author of *The Great*

¹⁸ Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War, War, Peace and Social Change, 1900 – 1967* (London, 1968), 47 – 48

¹⁹ W. J. Reader, *At Duty’s Call: a Study in Obsolete Patriotism* (Manchester, 1988), 55

²⁰ Summers, ‘Militarism’, 105; Ilana R. Bet-El, *Conscripts: Lost Legions of the Great War*, 2nd ed. (Stroud, 2009), 6; J. M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War* (London, 1989), 179

²¹ Howard, ‘Empire, Race and War’, 352; also I. F. W. Beckett, ‘The Nation in Arms, 1914 – 18’, in I. F. W. Beckett and K. Simpson, (eds), *Nation in Arms: a Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester, 1985), 1 – 36, 4 – 7

²² Christopher Harvie and Graham Walker, ‘Community and Culture’, in Fraser and Morris, *People and Society*, 336 – 57, 344; Gregory, *Last Great War*, 84

Illusion, who argued that to spread the knowledge that ‘a victory in war can bring no advantage to the mass of the people achieving it’ was as important for national defence as maintaining the Army and Navy.²³

Germany provided the main export route for the Islands’ staple product, herring, and at the very least, a war would seriously disrupt that trade. In January 1912, Lerwick Town Council discussed a circular from the Lord Mayor of London asking if it could do anything to remove the cause of misunderstanding between Britain and Germany. The Council expressed most friendly sentiments towards the German nation. One member declared, ‘No part of the British Isles is more loyal in its duty to keep up cordial relations between the two nations.’ Another remarked, ‘We want to live on the best terms with them, but we also want to be armed’.²⁴ The following year the Boy Scouts sparked a debate in the *Shetland Times* about militarism and military preparation as a deterrent against war. One correspondent claimed:

False ideas of patriotism, and the competition in armaments among the great nations of Europe, threaten, if not checked, to plunge the whole of Europe into a war compared with which the horrors of the recent Balkan slaughter will pale into insignificance.²⁵

The main sources for influences on the Shetland public are the local newspapers; irrespective of the many references to the threat of war, romantic or enthusiastic militarism was not at all obvious in them.

The Reserve Forces

In the early twentieth century, despite pride in Scotland’s military tradition, Scots were under-represented in the Army and even more so in the Royal Navy.²⁶ This applied particularly to Shetlanders. They did not share the heritage of warfare from clan feuds to imperial armies, which was fundamental in the history and imagery of Scotland, particularly the Highlands.²⁷ Shetlanders had fought in Britain’s naval battles but rarely on land. Memories of the press-gang had still been strong in the

²³ *SN*, 8 Mar. 1913, 4; 26 Apr. 1913, 6; see Berghahn, *Militarism*, 19 – 21 and Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London, 1998), 21 – 23 for a discussion of this work.

²⁴ *SN*, 13 Jan. 1912, 5

²⁵ *ST*, 27 Sep. 1913, 5

²⁶ Gregory, *Last Great War*, 84; Brian Lavery, *Shield of Empire: The Royal Navy and Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2007), 152 – 53

²⁷ Stuart Allan and Alan Carswell, *Thin Red Line: War, Empire and Visions of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2004), particularly T. Devine’s foreword.

1880s and Shetlanders preferred the flexibility of the Merchant Navy to the rigid discipline of the Royal Navy.²⁸ There were very few Shetlanders in the regular armed services; there were, however, local volunteer forces.



Figure 3.2 RNR gunnery drill at Lerwick, c. 1905

The Royal Naval Reserve [RNR], established in 1861, had been regarded more as a ready source of income than as a preparation for war. The payments, including retainer fees, wages during annual drill, pensions and gratuities, were calculated in 1910 to bring over £20000 annually into Shetland.²⁹ Training at Fort Charlotte in Lerwick could be readily fitted in with crofting, fishing and the Merchant Navy. The gatherings of young men, who brought welcome business to the town in winter, were treated as something of a holiday.³⁰ So popular was the RNR that, when the Registrar was asked if a small fee should be paid to men who recruited friends, he answered, ‘No need at Shetland for any stimulus’.³¹ In 1910, despite representations from the County Council, the training was relocated to warships and naval shore stations.³² The announcement of this move in 1906 led to a decrease in reservists from over 1100 to 429 in 1913, considered by the *Shetland Times* to be ‘a mere

²⁸ Lavery, *Shield of Empire*, 153

²⁹ Lavery, *Shield of Empire*, 166; Article from *People’s Journal*, reprinted in *ST*, 19 May 1900, 8; SA; D50/1, Rollo, ‘Military History’, I, VII

³⁰ *ST*, 2 Apr. 1910, 4

³¹ Lavery, *Shield of Empire*, 165

³² SA; D50/1, Rollo, ‘Military History’, I, VII; SA, CO/3/1/5, ZCC mins., 18 Dec. 1906

handful whose usefulness is questionable in time of peace, and who could not be counted on in times of war'.³³

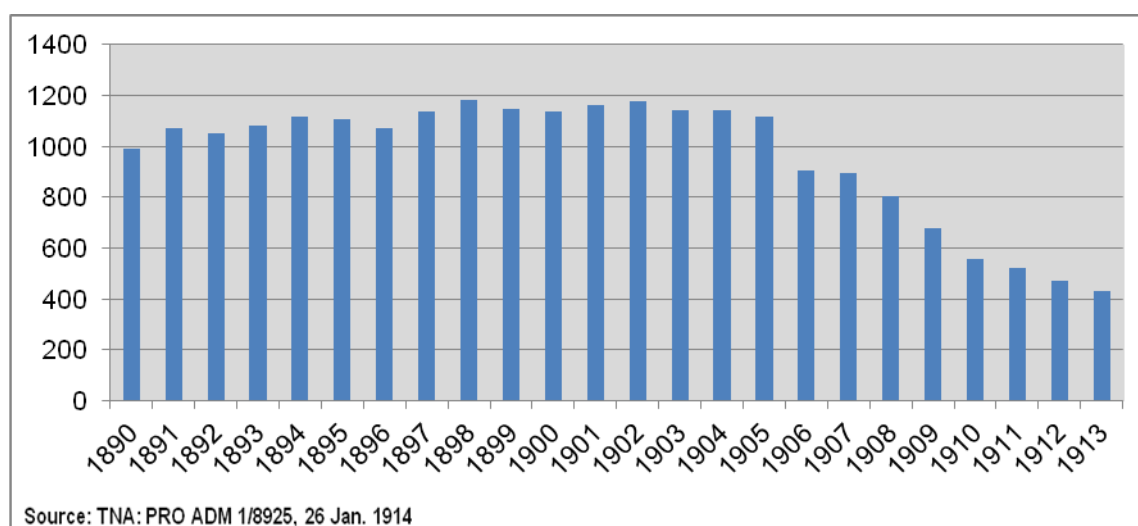


Figure 3.3 Numbers in the Shetland RNR

The popularity of the RNR was not surprising and was similar in other fishing communities, but there was also a keen volunteer army force in Lerwick. After a gap of some eighteen years, the Seventh Volunteer Battalion Gordon Highlanders was formed in 1901.³⁴ Almost 200 recruits joined immediately and crowds turned out to see the public parade. A new drill hall was opened in 1904. There were local drills, camps on the UK Mainland, shooting competitions, a New Year march with the RNR and royal visits: detachments of about seventy men went to Edinburgh and Glasgow in 1903, Edinburgh in 1905 and Aberdeen in 1906. Despite some misgivings about wearing the kilt, the uniform was changed from a khaki jacket and trousers to Gordon tartan.³⁵

When the Territorial Army [TA]* was founded in 1908, units were linked to regiments of the regular Army on a geographical basis, leading to strong local connections with particular regiments.³⁶ Northern Scotland was allocated to the Seaforth Highlanders and the military authorities intended that Shetland would be

³³ TNA: PRO ADM 1/8925, Evans to Admiralty, 26 Jan. 1914, 10; *ST*, 1 Nov. 1913, 4

³⁴ *ST*, 4 Aug. 1908, 4

³⁵ SA; D50/1, Rollo, 'Military History', I, VIII, 166 – 89; Rollo, *History of Orkney and Shetland Volunteers*, 21

* Officially the Territorial Force

³⁶ Allan and Carsell, *Thin Red Line*, 111

included. This ignored not only the Shetlanders' lack of affinity with the people of this area and their transport links with the east coast, but also previous disputes about this in 1884 and 1900. Local opinion prevailed again, and the link to the Gordon Highlanders, based in Aberdeenshire, was maintained. G and H Companies (later the Shetland Companies) of the Fourth Battalion Gordon Highlanders were formed with three officers and 117 other ranks each. The Zetland Territorial Association, under the presidency of the Lord Lieutenant, was responsible for buildings, uniforms, etc.³⁷ In 1909, the *Daily Record and Mail* sponsored a competition to increase recruitment, and by March, the Shetland Companies were at 95 per cent of authorised establishment. Despite this unequalled success, the unit was ineligible for the competition as it was not a full battalion. (This was the recruitment drive mocked by 'William La Kew' in the *Shetland Times*.)³⁸ Another high point was in 1911, when a detachment of Territorials in doublets and kilts went to London for the coronation of George V.³⁹



Figure 3.4 The Territorial Army detachment for the coronation of George V

The TA was a social organization, with recreation facilities and events such as dances and 'smokers' as well as military activities. Membership was almost entirely from Lerwick; a half-company originally recruited from Scalloway was abandoned

³⁷ Rollo, *Orkney and Shetland Volunteers*, 27; SA; D50/1, Rollo, 'Military History', I, VI, 146; VIII, 165; IX, 187

³⁸ SA; D50/1, Rollo, 'Military History', I, IX, 191 – 95; Riddell, 'Great Invasions'

³⁹ SA; D50/1, Rollo, 'Military History', I, IX, 193

in 1914, and a proposal to have a volunteer company in Unst failed. There was, however, a National Reserve with fifty members in 1912, men too old for military service but available for sedentary duties.⁴⁰ The purpose of the TA was to form a link between civilians and the military and encourage support for volunteering, but in Shetland, enthusiasm for the local force did not translate into choosing the Army as a career.⁴¹ A recruiting party for the Seaforths in 1912 told audiences in Lerwick, Scalloway and Baltasound that ‘Shetland was not doing its full share to support the British Army’. One person challenged why it was outside its proper area trying to recruit ‘Scandinavian’ Shetlanders, but accepted the argument that Shetland was part of the British Empire.⁴²

The TA lost numbers due to emigration, many to that Empire, only partly replaced by recruits.⁴³ In 1914, some members were featured at camp in ‘Life in the British Army’, advertised by the local cinema as ‘a film that every patriot will want to see’. By then, there were about 165 in the companies, said by an inspecting officer to be well trained but poorly equipped.⁴⁴ Both volunteer services were therefore declining in numbers before the war. Men may have joined the reserves for social and/or economic reasons but they must have been aware that, if war occurred, they could be required to fight. There is no way of knowing whether they really anticipated being called for active service or what form they envisaged it would take. Though the purpose of these forces was to augment and support the regular forces, they were perceived as primarily defensive.

⁴⁰ *ST*, 18 Apr. 1914, 5; SA; D50/1, Rollo, ‘Military History’, I, VIII, 171; I, IX, 198

⁴¹ David French, *Military Identities: the Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, c. 1870 – 2000* (Oxford, 2005)

⁴² *ST*, 12 Oct. 1912, 5

⁴³ *ST*, 18 Apr. 1914, 5

⁴⁴ *ST*, 6 Jun. 1914; 18 Apr. 1914, 5

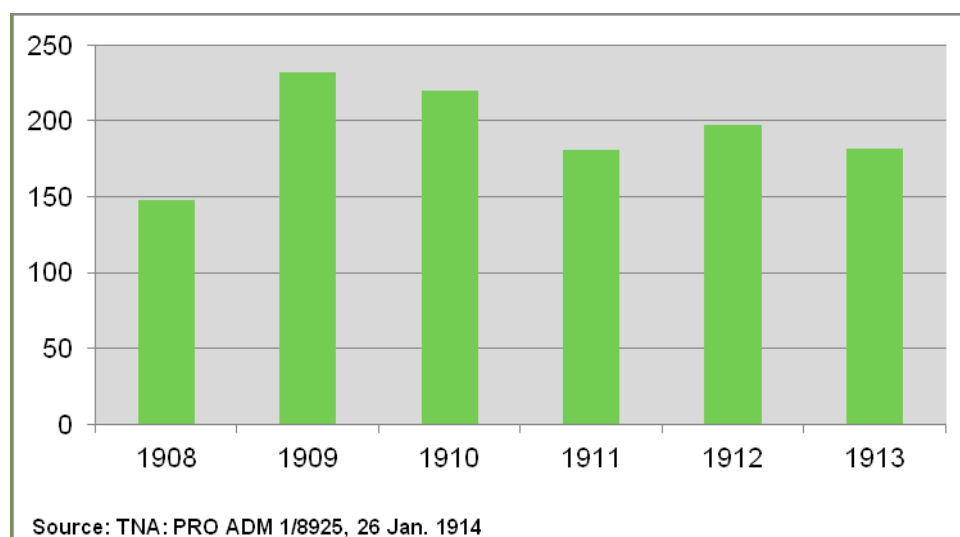


Figure 3.5 Numbers in the Shetland Companies, Territorial Army

The Defence of Shetland

Until the ‘Entente Cordiale’ in 1904, Britain’s traditional enemy had been France and Russia was regarded as a threat to Britain’s power in the East. Although the United States’ economic power was increasing rapidly, it was not perceived as a military rival. Germany’s competitive edge, imperial ambitions and burgeoning Navy, however, meant that the Admiralty, whose strategy had been concentrated in the Channel, had to react to new alliances and potential enemies. The defensive focus moved to the North Sea and Shetland acquired strategic importance.

The Germans appeared to become aware of Shetland’s potential usefulness more quickly than the British. Squadrons of the German fleet visited in 1894, 1895 and 1900.⁴⁵ In 1900, Shetland’s MP asked the Admiralty to arrange a visit of the Channel Fleet, ‘so that the Royal Naval Reserve men of Shetland shall have an opportunity of seeing a British fleet, and not derive their ideas of a Navy solely from foreign fleets’.⁴⁶ Then in 1904, over thirty German warships, homeward bound from a review at Plymouth, visited Lerwick Harbour. Some were open to the public and there were searchlight and fireworks displays, a football match and social gatherings. Shetlanders reacted with interest and hospitality, but suspected there was a sinister reason for the visit – to gather information. The Germans had accurate knowledge of

⁴⁵ SA; D50/1, Rollo, ‘Military History’, I, VII

⁴⁶ *HoC Deb*, 4th Series, 18 Jun. 1900, 84, c. 285

the harbour and ‘camera and pencil were plied with a diligence too zealous to be wholly aesthetic’.⁴⁷ There were rumours of landings in remote place and sailors taking an over-keen interest in their surroundings. Complaints were made to the Vice Consul about the opening of an old powder store and the German Admiral promised restitution. A request to visit Fort Charlotte met with refusal; Crocker, the officer in charge, ‘buckled on his sword, closed the gates and informed them that “he wasn’t having any, thank you”’. Also refused was a plan to stage a night attack on Lerwick; the Admiral was said to have expressed amazement that he was not allowed to take a small town that ‘could not possibly be of any use to Germany, even in case of war with Britain, which, of course, was unbelievable’. Instead, he sent ships unlit at night through the harbour via the narrow north entrance. The townspeople heard action in the distance and were left ‘wondering whether in the course of the night-battle ... Lerwick was taken by the Germans or not’.⁴⁸ Not much of this was reported in the local newspapers and it was later claimed that the Government had suppressed accounts of the Germans’ activities.⁴⁹ The *Scotsman* published a letter and later, an article claiming, ‘Startled islanders, abroad in the nighttime met bands of Germans traversing the country silently and swiftly like companies of the dead.’⁵⁰ Thomas Manson gave a fuller version in *Lerwick during the Last Half Century* but at the time, the *Shetland News* merely reprinted the letter from the *Scotsman* and an article from the *Daily Mail* about ‘German Dislike of England’.⁵¹

⁴⁷ SA, D50/26/3, Rollo, ‘British Naval Strategy’, 2; D50/1, Rollo, ‘Military History’, I, VII, 14; *SN*, 30 July, 1904, 5; 13 Aug. 1904, 8; *ST*, 30 July 1904, 4, 24 Sep. 1904, 4

⁴⁸ Manson, *Lerwick*, 54, 74, 76; *ST*, 30 Jul. 1904, 5

⁴⁹ D50/1, Rollo, ‘Military History’, I, VII

⁵⁰ *Scotsman*, 28 Jul. 1904, 7; 16 Nov. 1904, 7

⁵¹ *SN*, 30 Jul. 1904, 5



Figure 3.6 The German High Seas Fleet at Lerwick, 1904

This time a request in Parliament resulted in a visit in September from the Channel Fleet under Lord Beresford. The local authorities, anxious for Britain not to be outdone (and for a slice of naval business), made lavish preparations but, due rough weather, only three battleships and one cruiser arrived. Local people were not impressed; Lerwick was said to be ‘smarting under a sense of injury and disappointment’. The Royal Navy was held to have made no effort to learn about Shetland, unlike the Germans, who, it was suspected, intended to use it as a naval base.⁵² The *Shetland Times* published a sarcastic editorial headlined ‘The Phantom Fleet’:

The Channel Fleet ... The people of Lerwick have heard of it ... But not having been convinced by optical evidence of its actual existence they are inclined to be in some dubiety as to its actuality ... A polite request to the Germans might get all the information needed to use the harbour for battleships.⁵³

Beresford’s memoirs included a lengthy description of entertaining the Kaiser in 1904 with great ceremony and rockets but did not mention his visit to Shetland.⁵⁴ He wrote to the Admiralty about the German fleet’s visit but unfortunately, his letter has not survived.⁵⁵ He was also a Member of Parliament and, after he retired from the Navy, his criticism of naval matters made him a thorn in the side of the Admiralty.

⁵² SA, D50/26/3/1, Rollo, ‘British Naval Strategy’, 2; SN, 24 Sep. 1904, 4

⁵³ ST, 17 Sep. 1904, 4

⁵⁴ Charles Beresford, *The Memoirs of Admiral Lord Charles Beresford* (London, 1914), II, 493 – 94

⁵⁵ TNA: PRO ADM 12/1395, Index, 1904

Rüger described how displays such as those in Shetland as ‘naval theatre’, staged events that served to impress the population with the might of the Navy and the symbolism of nation, Empire and monarchy. His view was that, in Britain, though not in Germany, the participation of civilian authorities in the organisation and the emphasis on popular entertainment meant that such spectacles were not necessarily ‘militaristic’. They did, however, foster rivalry and mistrust between the two countries.⁵⁶ On these visits to Shetland, the Germans did not dispel suspicion, nor did the Royal Navy inspire patriotic pride.



Figure 3.7 A Dreadnought - a model made by boys for Up-Helly-Aa, 1907

The Admiralty, having devised a war strategy of close blockade of German ports, was not convinced about the need for coastal defence, though enquiries were held into the likelihood of invasions in 1903, 1907 and 1913. Nevertheless, there was concern about the Germans’ intentions and in 1905, the entire Channel Fleet visited Shetland. In the following years, there were several visits by British and German ships and several scares about German surveillance.⁵⁷ In 1908, the Admiralty awarded a victualling contract to a local firm, and in 1909, Lerwick Town Council wrote proposing Lerwick as a naval base, but received a discouraging reply that the Navy knew its advantages and would use it as required. Four cruisers called in

⁵⁶ Rüger, *Great Naval Game*

⁵⁷ *ST*, 8 Aug. 1914; D50/1, Rollo, ‘Military History’, II, I

March 1910 but in 1911, the Agadir Crisis roused further anxiety in Shetland where the only naval ships nearby were two fishery protection vessels.⁵⁸

Just after this, Churchill became First Lord of the Admiralty and set about reorganising war plans that now involved Shetland. The unrealistic strategy of close blockade was abandoned in favour of enclosing the German fleet in the North Sea and forcing battle with odds favourable to Britain. In 1912, trials showed that in this scenario the Navy could not control the North Sea, so the idea of patrols in ‘sweeps’ was adopted.⁵⁹ Some of the exercises were based at Lerwick and raised further speculation about its use as a naval base. Rear Admiral de Robeck, in charge of coastal patrols, visited Shetland in July with submarines and other ships, followed in August by the Civil Lord of the Admiralty, and in September by the Second Destroyer Flotilla.⁶⁰

All this activity led Beresford to ask Churchill in the House of Commons in October whether he was aware that the German fleet had surveyed Lerwick Harbour in 1904 and that a German gunboat had been surveying in Baltasound the previous month. Churchill replied that he knew of Beresford’s letter of 1904 and that recently HMS *Endeavour*, surveying in Shetland, had been mistaken for a German vessel.⁶¹ This appeared to have resulted from a rumour started by the *Daily Graphic* about the German fishery cruiser *Zeiten*, termed by the *Shetland News* as a ‘spasm of Germanism in certain London newspapers’. It had been taken seriously by the Navy who had searched harbours in Shetland, but Shetlanders were unlikely to be alarmed by the presence of the *Zeiten*, a frequent visitor, as were fishery cruisers from other countries.⁶²

Churchill, however, was already on the case. Despite being advised by the Director of Naval Intelligence in 1911 that German influence was not strong in Shetland, he had developed a notion that Shetlanders were sympathetic towards the Germans and not to be trusted. In June 1912, he made enquiries about the strength of the Shetland

⁵⁸ SA; D50/1, Rollo, ‘Military History’, II, I; *ST*, 6 Mar. 1909, 5; 8 May 1909, 5

⁵⁹ Halpern, *Naval History*, 21 – 22; Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, 369 – 72; Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1911 – 14* (London, 1923), 147

⁶⁰ *ST*, 14 Jul. 1912, 4; 27 Sep. 1912, 4; *SN*, 24 Aug. 1912, 8; SA; D50/1, Rollo, ‘Military History’, II, I

⁶¹ *HoC Deb.*, 5th Series, 10 Oct. 1912, 42, cc. 508 – 09

⁶² *SN*, 14 Sep. 1912, 4; 12 Oct. 1912, 4; *ST*, 14 Jul. 1912, 4

TA and in September, having learnt that the Director of Military Training proposed to disband it, expressed his concerns strongly:

It appears to be of special importance that the Territorial Forces in the Orkneys, and particularly in the Shetlands, should be cultivated and developed ... As large a number of the male population in the Shetlands as possible should be associated with the British Forces both by uniform and retaining fee ... It is essential that the nationality of the Shetlanders should be strongly impressed upon the Islanders.⁶³

The Admiralty wrote to the War Office explaining the importance of the Northern Isles in a war situation; because access to the Atlantic would be closed at the Dover Straits, the Germans would go for a northerly route.

The Orkneys and Shetland are at the present time invested with a high degree of strategical significance. In the Shetlands particularly, the detached situation of the islanders has tended to weaken their sense of British nationality. The Germans have in the past few years been paying them a great deal of attention. Frequent visits of squadrons and of individual vessels have taken place; and German influences are already sensibly at work in the islands.

Britain's superiority at sea meant that fortification was not necessary but the Admiralty intended to erect a wireless station, which the TA would be required to guard, and:

It is probable that other steps will be necessary in the near future in order to secure the Shetlands and, in a lesser degree the Orkneys, against an attempt at seizure by a coup de main before the actual outbreak of a war ... The first essential is that the population itself should be organized for the defence of the islands.⁶⁴

The War Office recommended that the Navy should assume responsibility for the defence of the islands. The Territorial Force, currently nine officers and 188 men, was decreasing, unlikely to increase, not capable of repelling an invasion and less efficient than other units, because training was restricted by the herring season. It would be impossible to send reinforcements from the Mainland. In addition, the War Office had no power to call out the TA should the Germans strike before a general mobilisation.⁶⁵ The Admiralty accepted the Army Council's opinion that the TA was insufficient but argued that, since in the event of an invasion the Army would have to play a part in recovering the islands, and 'this might be such a project as the enemy

⁶³ Flaws, *Spy Fever*, xv, 26; ADM 116/1293, COS to First Sea Lord, 5 Sep. 1912; Memo to Sea Lords and COS, 7 Sep. 1912

⁶⁴ TNA: PRO ADM 116/1293, Admiralty to War Office, 4 Oct. 1912

⁶⁵ TNA: PRO ADM 116/1293, War Office to Admiralty, 14 Feb. 1913

would undertake with a view to delaying the departure of a portion of the continental expeditionary force', the garrison should remain under Army control.⁶⁶

Discussions continued, including the possibility of using Royal Marines. In April 1913, the War Office suggested referring the issue to the Committee for Imperial Defence, adding:

From special enquiries which they have made, the Council are convinced that there are not sufficient grounds for assuming that the loyalty of the Shetland Islanders has in any way been undermined.⁶⁷

The Admiralty agreed with their proposal, if not their view of the Shetlanders.⁶⁸

In May, the Ninth Flotilla investigated harbours in Shetland and concluded that it was unlikely that an invading force could establish and hold a base. The Navy repeated its views on Shetland's strategic position for communications, a submarine base and coaling depot: 'It may be assumed that the Germans appreciate this and have plans for the capture of these Islands prepared'. What was needed was 'a permanent local defence instantly available in peace or war', but the TA 'would be of little use'. Any invasion was likely to be of armoured cruisers and military forces and take place before general mobilisation. Permanent shore batteries in Shetland would be prohibitively expensive given the numerous potential harbours.⁶⁹

For the naval exercises in 1913, Churchill devised two scenarios called 'The Timetable of a Nightmare' and 'A Bolt from the Grey', which he described as 'imaginative exercises in a half-serious vein ... designed to disturb complacency by suggesting weak points in our arrangements'. He identified Shetland as 'a strategic position of the highest importance, totally undefended and unorganised', and that 'Baltasound in the Shetlands, and those islands generally would be of the greatest value as a flotilla base to the Germans', which would render blockade futile. Admiral Jellicoe tested the possibility of invasion with some success, despite two of his ships running aground, but he did not 'capture Shetland'; Churchill nevertheless still maintained that 'The Shetlands are quite unprotected'.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ TNA: PRO ADM 116/1293, Minute, 20 March, 1913

⁶⁷ TNA: PRO ADM 116/1293, War Office to Admiralty, 30 Apr. 1913

⁶⁸ TNA: PRO CAB 3/2, Admiralty to War Office, 4 Jun. 1913

⁶⁹ TNA: PRO CAB 3/2, Memo to CID, 58A, 7 Jul, 1913

⁷⁰ Churchill, *World Crisis*, 154 – 55, 161, 147; SA; D50/1, Rollo, 'Military History', II, I

The Committee of Imperial Defence discussed the defence of Shetland at some length on 5th August, 1913. Churchill repeated his view that Shetland ‘might constitute an objective for attack immediately on the outbreak of war’, and his doubts about the loyalty of the Shetlanders:

The inhabitants had in recent years seen a good deal more of German and Norwegian warships than of British, and the Admiralty had been led to believe that their attachment to Great Britain was somewhat weak.

The Admiralty, looking to the War Office to protect the islands, were concerned about plans to disband the Territorial Force. Churchill was backed up by Price Louis of Battenberg, who said that the islands ‘contained a number of excellent little harbours which might be useful to an enemy’. At the War Office, however, Lord Haldane and Sir Arthur Wilson thought that an invading force would soon be forced to surrender, and were reluctant to establish an expensive precedent by increasing defences. Churchill claimed that there was ‘scarcely any place so tempting to the Germans’. A diversionary raid might be made and ‘it was significant that in all the naval war games played by British officers the enemy always seized the Shetland Isles’. He did not intend to erect fortifications but to provide a land and sea force and an effective system of intelligence and communications, particularly to defend the telegraph station. The Committee decided that the defence should be improved at once; it was left to Admiralty to decide whether to provide a coastal patrol, but the nature and extent of land forces would be discussed between departments and the TA would not be disbanded.⁷¹ Churchill was not convinced that this was enough and recommended a secret committee to examine the whole subject of defences including Shetland.⁷²

All of this was in the context of Churchill’s opposition to the Army’s strategy of continental warfare, which would reduce the role of the Navy, and his dislike of the CID.⁷³ It is not clear whether he really distrusted the Shetlanders or merely voiced these suspicions to encourage improvements in Shetland’s defences. He did not explain what initiated his concerns. Some of those Shetlanders who championed the

⁷¹ TNA: PRO ADM 1/8925, CID Minutes, 5 Aug. 1913

⁷² TNA: PRO ADM 116/1293, Handwritten note, 11 Aug. 1913

⁷³ Nicolas D’Ombrain, ‘Churchill at the Admiralty and the Committee of Imperial Defence, 1911 – 14’, *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* (1970), 38 – 43

Norse heritage liked the idea that Teutonic brotherhood might extend to all Germanic nationalities, but this was not likely to be a majority belief.⁷⁴ Churchill's suspicions may have been at least partly based on the sarcastic editorial in the *Shetland Times* in 1904.⁷⁵ A more thorough reading of the local papers around that time would have shown that Shetlanders were very keen to see the Royal Navy – indeed to have a naval base in the Islands – and were suspicious of the Germans' intentions. After Churchill became responsible for naval defence, his love of intrigue, fed by previous experience at the Home Office and a vivid imagination, verged on spy mania.⁷⁶ He ignored the willingness of Shetlanders to enrol in the reserve forces and the views of Naval Intelligence and the War Office. Although he visited Orkney in 1913, he did not go to see Shetland for himself.⁷⁷ Even when he published his account of the war in 1923, he did not set the record straight, although by that time the patriotism of Shetlanders was beyond question.

His views were shared by other people; an earlier article in the *Dundee Advertiser* said that Shetlanders did not mind Germans spying, implying that Shetland, 'only some ninety miles distant' from Scotland, was not part of Britain.⁷⁸ A letter published in the *Shetland News* in 1919 stated that during the war Shetlanders had been spoken of as "disaffected" because of "foreign origins", supposed to be pro-German, and accused of giving harbour and supplies to enemy submarines.⁷⁹ This was, of course, completely without foundation. Although there were numerous scares about spies and large numbers of Germans in Britain preparing for an invasion, it seems unlikely that the inhabitants of any other part of Britain, as a community, were viewed with such suspicion. Orkney, for example, which shared Shetland's Norse past and northerly location and was to be a major base for the Grand Fleet during the war, was not mentioned in this way, possibly because it had fewer trade links with Germany. Ireland, on the brink of Home Rule in 1914, was perhaps the only comparable situation, but there a long and very different history of disaffection meant that the people were unlikely to be trusted by British politicians;

⁷⁴ Cohen, 'Norse Imagery', 308 – 09; 424 – 42

⁷⁵ Flaws, *Spy Fever*, 24, 155 – 56

⁷⁶ David Stafford, *Churchill and Secret Service* (London, 1997), 1 – 81

⁷⁷ Flaws, *Spy Fever*, 24, 33

⁷⁸ SA, D6/292/7, Reid Tait scrapbook, article from *Dundee Advertiser*, 10 Sep. 1910

⁷⁹ *SN*, 20 Mar. 1919, 5

nevertheless, a potential link with Shetland was postulated.⁸⁰ Despite being unjustified, Churchill's prejudices and his subsequent actions were crucial to the deployment of Shetland reserve forces during the war.

Churchill had his way and the Admiralty began to improve its plans for defence. The TA's first responsibility, should war occur, was to guard the eight telegraph cable landing-points, including the cable to Iceland, and ships caught carrying contraband. In 1913, the Port War Signal Station in Bressay was opened and manned in summer. The wireless station near Lerwick was completed in early 1914, 'to give an alternative means of reporting the presence of hostile ships or of a sudden attack' if the telegraph cables were cut.⁸¹ In October 1913, the Admiralty sent Lieutenant Colonel H. C. Evans and Lieutenant H. S. Lecky to Shetland to draw up a scheme for an intelligence system commanded by a Marine Officer. They were to recommend whether it would be manned by a force of RNR under special regulations or of Royal Marine Volunteers, to be formed instead of the TA. The force would be intended to ensure security for the lookouts and communications, 'to harass and delay a hostile force' trying to establish a base and 'to bring gun fire from mobile guns ... to bear upon any hostile vessels attempting to coal in the harbours'. Provisional approval was also given for stationing a light cruiser, a depot ship, six destroyers and three submarines.⁸²

Evans and Lecky reported in January 1914 that to overlook every potential anchorage would take 150 lookout stations, but careful location on high ground could reduce the number to thirty-three. The stations would 'need to be very sturdily built' to withstand the Shetland weather and various types were suggested at various costs. They also recommended 4-inch guns on movable platforms in principal positions and 4-inch and 12-pounder field guns to be drawn by steam tractors. The three possible forces were assessed. The TA was rejected as being 'nearly all merchants and clerks in Lerwick'; they 'would not suit the purpose at all'. It would be 'a very unwise proceeding to connect the Admiralty with such a force', which would involve dealing

⁸⁰ Article from *Naval and Military Record*, copied in SN, 26 Oct. 1912, 5. Pennell, *Kingdom United*, 88 discussed the lack of routine surveillance of potential dissidents except in Ireland.

⁸¹ SA; D50/1, Rollo, 'Military History', I, IX, 200 – 03, II, I ; TNA: PRO ADM 1/8366/11, Minute, 11 Nov. 1912

⁸² TNA: PRO ADM 1/8925, Instructions to Evans and Lecky, 13 Oct. 1913

with the War Office and the County Territorial Association. Disbanding the TA was not recommended, but neither was a new force of marines, as this would cause delays and confusion with the TA: 'the Militia system had already failed in these Islands'. The RNR was endorsed: 'The Royal Naval Reserve is the most popular force in the Islands, and we recommend that it be used for the Admiralty purposes'. Being seamen, the men had 'an aptitude for the work of picking up ships at sea, and the distinguishing of such ships would only be a matter of instruction'. The drop in numbers was blamed on the new training system; recommendations were made to counter obstacles to recruitment, which should be actively pursued, with no maximum limit but the expectation that the force might reach 2500.⁸³ The plans for coast-watching and defence were approved by the Admiralty in January 1914. The thirty-three lookout stations would be built and manned by 'a special force of R.N.R. raised under special conditions for service in the Shetland Islands'. Age restrictions were to be raised and the training was to be held in Shetland. The lookouts would not be armed but would be trained to use rifles and some to use the field guns.⁸⁴ In case of war, the plan was for a patrol flotilla of a light cruiser and fourteen destroyers to be based at Dales Voe.⁸⁵

Shetland was very much part of the Admiralty's war plans because of Churchill's opinions. While much of the planning would have been kept secret, it is likely that the purpose of the signal and wireless stations would be public knowledge. It seems unlikely, though, that Shetlanders lived in fear of an imminent invasion and, despite all the discussion and planning, there appeared to be no special urgency. Even the Navy was not well prepared for war. Although Admiral De Chair, the wartime commander in Shetland waters, later recalled that 'as 1913 passed into 1914, the certainty of war became more and more evident', he also wrote that, at the test mobilisation in July 1914, 'little did we think' that this was preparation for imminent war.⁸⁶ Marwick summed it up: 'war was widely expected as an eventual probability,

⁸³ TNA: PRO ADM 1/8925, Report, 26 Jan. 1914

⁸⁴ TNA: PRO ADM 1/8925, undated

⁸⁵ Churchill, *World Crisis*, 161; *ST*, 8, Aug. 1914; SA; D50/1, Rollo, 'Military History', II, i

⁸⁶ De Chair, *Sea is Strong*, 142, 146

but it was scarcely visualized at all as an immediate contingency'.⁸⁷ At the end of 1913, the *Shetland News* was confident:

It need not be repeated to Shetlanders that it is extremely unlikely that anything will ever happen in the course of 12 months which would materially affect one way or another the life and work of the people of the county.⁸⁸

The Outbreak of War

This forecast was, of course, completely wrong, but after the naval activity in 1912 and 1913, the summer of 1914 was much quieter. The *Shetland Times* reported the assassination of Arch-Duke Franz Ferdinand on 28th June but did not mention any expectation of war.⁸⁹ Nor was there any intimation of potential hostilities during the five weeks of diplomatic activity and military mobilisations across Europe, until the 1st August. Then the *Shetland News* announced that 'A European crisis of a very grave nature has arisen', but the Government was trying to contain it. The *Shetland Times*' editorial, under a headline of 'War in Near East', stated rather tortuously:

There is no ground upon which anyone could take up his stand today, and declare that the Austro-Servian War has not opened up an avenue which could not do otherwise than lead to a European war'.⁹⁰

In their detailed and lively descriptions of reactions to the outbreak of war, the Shetland newspapers give indications of whether it was expected, and welcomed or dreaded. Many writers have claimed that it was popular; for example, Marwick declared, 'British society in 1914 was strongly jingoistic and showed marked enthusiasm for the outbreak of war'.⁹¹ More recently, these claims have been challenged, for example by Gregory and Pennell.⁹² While there were scenes of great enthusiasm in large cities and men flocked to enlist, this eagerness may have been exaggerated by contemporary writers wishing to emphasise popular support for the war. This picture did not apply all over the country; also, public expressions may well have concealed private concerns.

⁸⁷ Marwick, *Deluge*, 69

⁸⁸ *SN*, 27 Dec. 1913, 4

⁸⁹ *ST*, 4 Jul. 1914, 8

⁹⁰ *SN* and *ST*, 1 Aug. 1914, 5

⁹¹ Marwick, *Deluge*, 349

⁹² Adrian Gregory, 'British "War Enthusiasm" in 1914: a Reassessment', in Braybon, *Evidence, History and the Great War*, 67 – 85, 67; Gregory, *Last Great War*, 25 – 39; Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 35 – 36; Pennell, *Kingdom United*

Sunday 2nd August opened with a startling development. The Customs and Excise staff were called in to work, and between 5 and 6 a.m. sent out instructions to Royal Naval Reservists to report for duty in Lerwick. This was common knowledge hours before the general order was published in London at 8.30 p.m. According to the *Shetland News*, awareness of the European situation had generated an expectation that Britain would be drawn into the hostilities. An erroneous report that two British vessels had been captured by Germany increased this belief. The *Shetland Times* commented:

Never since the days of the unwelcome visits of the press gang to remote Shetland districts, has there been such widespread feeling of consternation struck into the hearts of the people of these islands.⁹³

This does not suggest that enthusiasm was the immediate reaction.

Monday was ‘another very exciting day in Lerwick and there were many happenings of a kind that have never been witnessed before and never likely to happen again’.

The *Shetland Times* described it:

All along the piers and wharves, in the highways and thoroughfares, wherever two or three were gathered together, the sole discussion was the prospective war and its consequences. It was as though some electrical current had stirred the whole community and the all-absorbing topic was war.

Lack of real information led to rumour, distortion and exaggeration; ‘there was a perpetual tremor among the people’.⁹⁴ This atmosphere of excitement accords with Strachan’s view of the power of rumour at this time: ‘In the absence of news, gossip was preferable to silence; it was both a cause of communal feeling and its consequence’.⁹⁵ Other than the arrival of Reservists, the only official activity was the mobilisation of some of the TA. Subscriptions were raised and a full service of war telegrams ordered but only the usual messages arrived. Then, in the evening, a business received a telegram announcing that Britain had war declared war. This was posted in a shop-window and wired to country districts; soon ‘rumours of the most wild description were afloat’. There was a feeling of relief; since it was thought that war was inevitable, ‘public feeling had amounted almost to a demand that Great Britain should enter the field without delay. Instead of depression there

⁹³ *SN* and *ST*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

⁹⁴ *SN* and *ST*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

⁹⁵ Strachan, *First World War*, 105

was enthusiasm in the town'. According to the *Shetland News*, 'thousands of men, women and children' gathered at the pier where the *St. Rognvald* was preparing to sail. Fishworkers were leaving for home and English naval reservists for Chatham.

There was nothing apparent to indicate the serious view which some people were taking of the situation, for a more jovial gathering it would have been impossible to have found ... Bubbling over with laughter and good humour the people jostled each other, displaying all the characteristics of the best of humour.

The Reservists led the crowd in 'Rule Britannia' and English drifters sounded their whistles. Some of the crowd then dispersed, but many visited the newsroom during the evening, until another telegram scotched the rumour and left 'a state of uncertainty'.⁹⁶

After Monday's 'rampant feeling' and 'tense excitement', there was 'a distinct lull' on Tuesday though there was still keen interest in the news. A crowd gathered again in the evening to see the mail steamer leave crowded with passengers. During this 'great day in the history of the British Empire... the paucity of news was somewhat ominous'. Because war was declared at 11 p.m., confirmation arrived only on Wednesday morning. The *Shetland News* commented:

It was strange that the official intimation of war did not create quite as much sensation as the rumour on Monday evening but its significance was fully appreciated, and it was felt that the worst had happened ... there appeared to be an unnatural, uneasy feeling all round.⁹⁷

On the Friday morning, the first special war edition of the *Shetland News* was published, with accounts of naval engagements and the surrender of HMS *Amphion*. Although this was at 7.30 a.m. when 'few people were about', it 'created the liveliest interest'.⁹⁸ Naturally, the 8th August editions of both newspapers were dominated by the war. Although censorship meant 'the barest acts only being allowed to filter through', the *Shetland News* reported that a German plan to attack Shetland, to decoy the British Navy north and then attack from the Channel had been foiled by naval intelligence – it was not explained how. Gunfire had been heard but was assumed to be from British ships at practice. The *Shetland Times* carried information about military action in Europe and ships sunk or captured. Of more local relevance, there

⁹⁶ *SN* and *ST*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

⁹⁷ *SN* and *ST*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

⁹⁸ *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

were Shetlanders on the Leith steamer *Breslau*, which was briefly detained in Germany, and, when a Norwegian steamer carrying herring from Lerwick was captured, another discharged its cargo and went home. There had been a general exodus of strangers and foreign vessels. The herring fishing had closed down. There had been some disruption to steamer sailings and mails and the banks were closed but the Post Offices and the Customs House were hectic. Some events, such as the Lerwick Regatta and the Agricultural Show, were cancelled. There was ‘almost a panic in the provision market’, as rumours of increased prices coincided with low stocks near the end of the fishing season, though the *Shetland News* reckoned there were about 150000 sheep in the islands and between 300 and 400 tons of cured fish as well as herring.⁹⁹ It had been an eventful and exciting week.

There was no mention in the newspapers of any protest at the war and no published correspondence. The headlines announced ‘Great Excitement in Town and Country ... Extraordinary Scenes – Unbounded Enthusiasm’ and ‘Great Interest and Keen Enthusiasm all over Shetland’. The detail of the reports, however, suggested anxiety and uncertainty – ‘consternation’ is a word repeatedly used by the *Shetland Times* – followed by a strange relief when, once war was declared, support for Britain’s involvement was the expected response.¹⁰⁰ Neither newspaper welcomed the war. Even before the declaration, the *Shetland Times* thought, ‘The prospect is too fearful to conjecture, too gruesome to contemplate’; war would result in everyone being much poorer. The *Shetland News* called the war an ‘appalling cataclysm ... The Armageddon of the ages is being fought ... who can imagine, even dimly, the scenes of carnage that may yet be witnessed?’¹⁰¹

The columnist ‘Hamlet’ predicted ‘besides the sacrifice of thousands of human lives, and needless misery and suffering, the upsetting of all ordinary affairs of life’. Although it was paradoxical, ‘the brotherhood of man will be brought appreciably nearer through this twentieth century cataclysm’, as people would see that ‘war is simply a devil’s game’, ‘anti-social, barbarous, demoralising, and wicked’ and ‘join hands to prevent a similar catastrophe in the future’. He thought:

⁹⁹ *SN* and *ST*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

¹⁰⁰ *SN* and *ST*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

¹⁰¹ *ST*, 1 Aug. 1914, 4; *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 4

There can be little doubt that the war will clear the air of the thunder that has been hanging in the sky for a long time! The lightening had to come ... After the storm the air will be purer and fresher for all nations.¹⁰²

Strachan has stated:

The enthusiasm with which Europe went to war was therefore composed of a wide range of differing responses ... The common denominator may more accurately be described as passive acceptance, a willingness to do one's duty.¹⁰³

While not producing the 'atmosphere of panic and untempered emergency' that Marwick described, the immediate effects of the war in Shetland were negative:

It has resulted in hundreds of men being turned idle, of shipping being tied up, of fishcuring being brought to a complete stand-still, and the whole trade and commerce of the country being dislocated.¹⁰⁴

Although it was generally assumed that Britain would be victorious, there was nothing in the newspapers, other than the initial headlines, to suggest that Shetlanders welcomed the war or saw it as likely to bring anything but disastrous results locally:

The people of Shetland have displayed a most exemplary spirit over the outbreak. Without giving way to despair or, on the other hand, giving way to exuberance of feeling; they have faced the situation with calmness and fortitude, ready to endure the hardships they may be called upon to face, but equally determined to uphold the tradition of the British race, and having once entered in the fray risk all in the cause of home and duty.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Shetlanders were aware of the tensions between Britain and Germany that preceded the Great War; indeed, because of Shetland's strategic position, they were involved in defensive plans. The potential significance of Shetland's geographical position in a naval war with Germany was obvious. In this context, Shetland was not 'peripheral', but its remoteness from the political centre, its history, distinctive culture and trading links combined to foster suspicion of potential disloyalty despite the large membership of the reserve forces. This was one of the few occasions when Shetland was given individual attention and perceived as distinct from other island groups. These suspicions and concerns about a German

¹⁰² *SN*, 22 Aug. 1914, 5

¹⁰³ Strachan, *First World War*, 161 – 62

¹⁰⁴ Marwick, *Deluge*, 69; *ST*, 29 Aug. 1914, 4

¹⁰⁵ *ST*, 4 Aug. 1914, 5

invasion had important implications for how Shetlanders experienced the war. When the war broke out, Shetlanders reacted with some initial excitement and consternation, rather than enthusiasm; this was probably not unusual. There was no sign of the suspected disloyalty.

Chapter 4 SHETLANDERS IN THE SERVICES

This chapter explores the experience of Shetlanders in the armed forces. It shows how the pre-war membership of the Reserve Forces and the perceived need for local defence influenced the pattern of volunteering and meant that many servicemen were retained in the islands. It then considers how the pressures and motivation to enlist played out in the local context, and how conscription was implemented. The contemporary writing of Shetland servicemen is examined to illustrate both conformity to prevalent themes and assertions of local identity. Finally, the campaigns and battles where Shetlanders were most involved and the resulting casualties are identified.

Volunteers

The overwhelmingly familiar image of the Great War is of the Western Front and it dominates the historiography. Titles such *The Myriad Faces of War* and *Fighting Different Wars* signalled a move towards studying other experiences of warfare.¹ Still, understandably the popular imagination remains focused on the trenches, since over five million men fought in the British Army, the vast majority on the Western Front, compared to about forty thousand in the Royal Navy and much smaller numbers in the Air Force.²

The general pattern of recruitment is well known. Before the war, Britain had only a small army and six divisions went to France in August and September 1914. Lord Kitchener was appointed Secretary of State for War and authorised to recruit two million men; over a million had volunteered by November 1914.³ Enlistment then declined in 1915 it was clear that a different approach was needed. Conscription was introduced early in 1916, and applied to wider and wider groups of men by successive Military Service Acts.

¹ Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1986); Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge, 2004)

² I. F. W. Beckett, *The Great War, 1914 – 1918* (Harlow, 2007), 121

³ Keith Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914 – 18* (Manchester, 1988), 8, 11

There has been recognition of regional variations in voluntary recruitment. The patterns in rural areas might be expected to be different from that in major cities.⁴ Scotland's high rate has been ascribed alternatively to warrior traditions, both Highland and urban, associated with clans and the Scottish regiments, or to economic conditions.⁵ In Shetland, recruitment was strongly influenced by membership of the reserve forces, the majority, like fishermen elsewhere, in the RNR.⁶ Men employed in the Merchant Navy were not encouraged to volunteer. The most significant difference, however, was the perceived need for home defence to prevent the Germans using Shetland as a base.

When the fleet was mobilised, the RNR were called up, and on 2nd August, letters were sent instructing them to report to Lerwick. Over the next few days, some 239 arrived; about 200 were at sea and they might be intercepted on return to the UK and posted to a naval ship. Some of the TA were deployed as look-outs at the Bressay signal-station. On Wednesday 5th, the 'B' Company was posted to guard the telegraph cables.⁷ Given the Admiralty's concerns about the loyalty of the Shetlanders and enemy landings, the Army Council were 'particularly anxious' that there would be combined defence in Shetland.⁸ Accordingly, Lieutenant Colonel Evans arrived on 6th to take command of both the TA and RNR. A Shetland Division of the RNR was created and Evans announced that training would be in Shetland, a very popular decision. Ex-Reservists came forward, so that 'every Shetlander at home who has received training' enlisted. Advertisements encouraged volunteers for both forces; by 22nd August about sixty joined the RNR and thirty the TA, and every week the newspapers reported recruits.⁹

⁴ E.g., Beckett, *Great War*, 123; Gregory, *Last Great War*, 81 – 89; Clive Hughes, 'The New Armies', in Beckett and Simpson, *Nation in Arms*, 100 – 25, 102; Helen Townsley, 'First World War and Voluntary Recruitment'; Cranstoun, 'Impact of the Great War'

⁵ Gregory, *Last Great War*, 83; Derek R. Young, 'Voluntary Recruitment in Scotland, 1914 – 1916', unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Glasgow (2001); McFarland, 'Great War', 565 – 66

⁶ Jones, 'Scottish Fisheries during the War', in Jones et al, *Rural Scotland*, 23 – 119, 32

⁷ *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 4 – 5; *ST*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

⁸ De Chair, *Sea is Strong*, 168; Hurd, *Merchant Navy*, 2, 105

⁹ *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5; 22 Aug. 1914, 4



Figure 4.1 RNR training at Fort Charlotte, c. 1915

There is little evidence of the motivation of Shetland volunteers. Historians have analysed the reasons for volunteering and concluded that motivation was complex.¹⁰ Ferguson found five main reasons: recruiting techniques, female pressure, peer group pressure, economic motives and impulse.¹¹ This mixed ‘internal’ factors, the thought processes of the individual, with ‘external’ influences on him. In what he called ‘the move from spectatorship to participation’, Gregory concluded that most volunteers were bribed or forced by various pressures: employer action, unemployment, propaganda and public enthusiasm – much of it local. Volunteers were motivated by economic distress, fear of invasion and defeat, belief that ‘it was the right thing to do’ and to preclude potential censure or guilt or, in a quest for excitement and sociability, to avoid missing the action.¹²

The most straightforward reason was perceived economic necessity: men enlisted because they could see no other way of earning a living.¹³ In his thesis on enlistment in industrial Scotland, Young put forward a strong case that unemployment was the main driver, though McFarland suggested that, rather than being a coercive force, this was ‘a predisposing framework’ within which pressures shaped individual

¹⁰ Hughes, ‘New Armies’, 101 – 03; Reader, *At Duty’s Call*; Bourne, *Britain and the Great War*, 218 – 19; J. M. Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (London, 1994), 118; DeGroot, *Blighty*, 46 – 53; Gregory, *Last Great War*, 70 – 95; Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 42 – 45

¹¹ Ferguson, *Pity of War*, 204 – 07

¹² Gregory, *Last Great War*, 74 – 77

¹³ Gregory, *Last Great War*, 31 – 32; Hughes, ‘The New Armies’, 101

decisions.¹⁴ The collapse of the fishing left many Shetlanders in this position. In addition, the Services offered an income higher than many Shetlanders had been earning, and regular, unlike fishing or agriculture. The conditions offered were also attractive. Advertisements explained the requirements for the RNR: candidates had to be between eighteen and forty and be permanent residents, but need not have seafaring experience. They could sign up for between five and twenty years service, not just for the duration of the war. Initial training would be fifty-six days and thereafter fourteen days per year. The pay included gratuities, annual retainers and pensions. Crucially, war service could be only in Shetland, probably in their home area. The men based at Lerwick were paid separation allowances: 5s a week for a wife, 2s each for the first two children and 1s each for others.¹⁵ They were allowed leave for the spring agricultural work and harvest. Volunteers, therefore, were offered a positive economic incentive with few disadvantages. The *Shetland Times* remarked that the RNR were ‘handsomely paid’ and ‘to many of them this must be little more than a holiday, with the grim terrors of war very far removed’.¹⁶

In his research into the differential rates of enlistment for Scottish counties in the early months of the war, Coetzee suggested a number of possible influencing factors, including the proportions of single men, employment opportunities and pre-existing military connections. This work was based on a War Office memorandum produced in May 1915, which showed Shetland with the lowest rate of enlistment of the Scottish counties at 16.6 per cent of eligible men. Coetzee did not address the reasons for this apparent under-estimate or consider how the factors he suggested applied to Shetland.¹⁷

¹⁴ Young, ‘Voluntary Recruitment’; McFarland, ‘Great War’, 556

¹⁵ *SN*, 9 Jan. 1915, 1

¹⁶ *ST*, 29 Aug. 1914, 4

¹⁷ Daniel Coetzee, ‘Measures of Enthusiasm: New Avenues in Quantifying Variations in Voluntary Enlistment in Scotland, August 1914 – December 1915’, *Local Population Studies*, 74 (2005), 16 – 35; Dan Coetzee, ‘A Life And Death Decision: The Influence of Trends in Fertility, Nuptiality and Family Economies on Voluntary Enlistment In Scotland, August 1914 to December 1915’, *Family and Community History*, 8 (2005), 77 – 89



Figure 5 Soldiers of the Shetland TA, 1915

Some men volunteered for more active and dangerous service than home defence. The search for excitement has also been suggested as a motivator, though a life at sea had offered many Shetlanders adventure enough. They may well have been motivated by patriotism; though it has been pointed out that patriotism was not restricted to volunteers, volunteering was the strongest demonstration of it.¹⁸ Despite the Admiralty's concerns, the fear of imminent invasion or defeat was not apparent, but volunteers may have been inspired by a desire to defend their homes and families, or to support their country, or by the conviction that the war was in a just cause. All of these themes were promoted in the local as well as national newspapers, for example:

This is a struggle for our very existence, for the safety of our homes, for the whole future of our race. Moreover it is a struggle for the preservation of freedom and civilisation for humanity.¹⁹

Shetland could not have escaped the avalanche of posters and pamphlets published by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee.²⁰ Peer pressure probably played a part, but, unlike in some urban areas, there is no evidence of women playing an active

¹⁸ Gregory, *Last Great War*, 31, 73 – 75; Hughes, 'New Armies', 101; Bet-El, *Conscripts*, 19

¹⁹ *SN*, 1 May 1915, 4

²⁰ Reader, *At Duty's Call*, 113 – 16; Haste, *Home Fires*, 52 – 64; M. L. Sanders and Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914 – 18* (London, 1982), 104; Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 46 – 47, 229 – 31

role.²¹ The newspapers suggest that enough young men were expected to remain home to see to the crofts and family commitments. Social disapproval of those who did not volunteer may not have been very strong, at least initially.²²

It was not considered 'manly' or 'the done thing' to be reluctant to risk death or injury, and seafaring was dangerous even in peacetime, but early in the war, there would have been little awareness of what volunteers might experience.²³ There has been debate about the extent to which people at home were aware of the conditions of war. Some writers, for example Fussell, thought that censorship and euphemistic language concealed the true state of affairs and civilians were ignorant about trench warfare. Others, such as Gregory and Finn, have refuted this, although soldiers may have tried to reassure people at home of their safety or found it impossible to describe their experiences adequately.²⁴ Bourne thought that local newspapers were well informed through links to men at the front.²⁵ In Shetland, the newspapers were keen to interview servicemen home on leave. Some tended to diminish the dangers and discomforts. Private James Gray, recovering from frostbite, when asked about the trenches, 'laughed and remarked "I could not tell you how bad they are"', but added, the soldiers 'are always cheery with it all and keep their hearts up wonderfully'. Laurence Williamson had found the battle of the Falklands 'a very exciting experience, which he is not likely to forget'.²⁶

The newspapers also printed information and extracts from the letters of servicemen and -women and, although they were censored and did not describe the full horrors of war, they could be graphic. The Rev. Campbell wrote from Gallipoli 'Everybody has some vague idea of what actual war is like, but it is quite different from our imaginings.' Nurse Martha Aitken at the Seventh Casualty Clearing Station, complained: 'Oh! The mud – oceans of it! The trenches are full of water, and now I know what the men have to put up with.' A wounded soldier wrote 'It is hell all

²¹ E.g., Ferguson, *Pity of War*, 202 – 07; Reader, *At Duty's Call*, 114 – 20; Haste, *Home Fires*, 56 – 57; Nicoletta F. Gullace, *'The Blood of Our Sons': Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (Basingstoke, 2004), 73 – 97

²² Gregory, *Last Great War*, 89

²³ Gullace, *'Blood of Our Sons'*, 99 – 115

²⁴ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, rep. (Oxford, 2000), 174 – 75, 87; Haste, *Home Fires*, 4, 31; Gregory, *Last Great War*, 133; Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2009), 14 – 46; Bet-El, *Conscripts*, 87 – 144; Finn, 'Local heroes'; McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, 89

²⁵ Bourne, *Britain and the Great War*, 206

²⁶ *SN*, 6 Feb. 1915, 4

over, seeing your chums being killed ... When I was wounded and crawled over a mile ... over a foot of mud ... dead men, dying men moaning.' W. H. Jamieson of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force described shrapnel like 'rain falling on the surface of a pond'. After fourteen hours constant bombardment, F. Cannell suffered from being blown up by a shell, completely buried twice, slight shell wounds to hip and finger, a 'swollen face, severe headache and some boils' as well as a chill. Some letters tried to encourage volunteers: Martha Aitken, after reporting that 'Hell could not be worse' and 'ghastly tales of the cruelties of the Germans to our poor wounded and helpless men', declared that 'every man who can fight should be here to avenge the fallen.' Another letter stated 'it makes my blood boil to read of these slackers at home'.²⁷ By late 1915, nobody could have been in doubt that war was both nasty and dangerous.

Early in the war, very few Shetlanders joined the Army. There were few regulars and, according to the *Shetland Times*, only one Special Army Reservist* in Shetland, A.B. Jamieson, who left immediately: 'He knows it is not a picnic that is now on hand'.²⁸ Recruitment was focussed on the local reserve forces and in the early weeks, there does not appear to have been the kind of public pressure exerted as in other parts of the country: no exhortative church sermons or articles in the local newspapers, no employer encouragement or public meetings.²⁹ This may have been due partly to the scattered rural settlement and partly to the lack of people who might organise such events; the local MP did not visit, the few local landowners were not likely to have much influence and there is no evidence that they tried. On the other hand, the newspapers expressed the kind of civic pride that sustained recruitment elsewhere to 'Pals Battalions' and other local units.³⁰ The *Shetland News* claimed 'Shetland will not be behind when it is a question of patriotism and loyalty, or even something more'.³¹ The Territorials were 'really smart and workmanlike' while the RNR were

²⁷ *ST*, 27 Nov. 1915, 4; *SN*, 6 Mar. 1915, 1; 12 Jun. 1915, 4; 31 Jul. 1915, 4; *ST*, 28 Aug. 1915, 4; *SN*, 29 May 1915, 4; 2 Dec. 1915, 4

* Reservist for the regular Army

²⁸ *ST*, 15 Aug. 1914, 4

²⁹ Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda*, 102 – 04; Simmonds, *Britain and the First World War*, 46

³⁰ E.g., Gregory, *Last Great War*, 75; Reader, *At Duty's Call*, 108 – 11; Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 45

³¹ *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

‘a very fine body of men. Big, strong, well-knit and well set up ... Shetland may well be proud of them, as Lerwick is of her Territorials’.³² The town/country split in allegiance was thus evident, and the *Shetland News* encouraged rivalry between parishes and districts: ‘While every district is giving its quota there can be no doubt Whalsay, Yell and Unst are easily first in the Shetland "Roll of Honour"’.³³

Other than advertisements, there appears to have been no recruitment activity until November, when a visit from the recruiting officer in Caithness galvanised J. W. Robertson, the Vice-Convener of the County, into action. He described to the County Council the Central Recruiting Agency being established in Orkney with parish committees to produce a register of eligible men and encourage enlistment. The focus in Shetland was still local; 100 recruits were wanted for the TA and 500 for the RNR. In Robertson’s opinion, ‘That would be a very small contribution from Shetland, and I think we should see to it that at least that number is got from Shetland as quickly as possible’. He added:

I have heard of a particular house in Shetland – probably there are many others in the same position – where six eligible young men sit round the fire smoking their pipes and doing nothing

and quoted the example of Lewis, said to have eight men serving for every one in Shetland. He suggested enlisting the help of ‘the ladies’: ‘Our existence as a State is at stake and our Empire is threatened... we are also fighting for our hearths and homes, for our woman-kind and all we hold dear’. That same evening a joint meeting with the Lerwick Town Council appointed a recruiting committee.³⁴ Meetings were held in various locations, but did not rally the kind of public support described in other parts of the country. In Yell, the remarks of a visiting recruiter were taken as an insult to the island’s patriotism. The County Council wisely decided that the committee was unnecessary as recruits were coming forward so readily.³⁵

Although the number of Shetlanders in the Army was small, when the RNR were included, the number of volunteers was considerable. In January 1915, both local

³² *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

³³ *SN*, 2 Jan. 1915, 4

³⁴ *SN*, 28 Nov. 1914, 4

³⁵ Gregory, *Last Great War*, 75 – 77; *SN*, 26 Dec. 1914, 8; 27 Feb. 1915, 8

newspapers started publishing lists of servicemen: 'Shetland's Roll of Honour'. The *Shetland News* claimed:

If the patriotism of a people is to be measured by the number of its men prepared to sacrifice their lives in defence of their country ... then the people of Shetland are without question among the most patriotic in the UK ... No better answer can be given to the vindictive and unwarranted charge of disloyalty which was levelled against Shetlanders at the outbreak of the war.³⁶

In April, its list was published in book form in two versions, a paperbound one at 6d and a 'limited edition' at 2s.³⁷ Most of the servicemen were still in Shetland. Of the men listed, 100, most of whom had probably joined on the UK Mainland, were in the Army, over forty were in the Dominion Forces and over 200 in the TA. By far the majority, over 1300, were in the RNR, most in the new Shetland Section, though 213 of the 'old RNR' had left for Portsmouth on 26th October 1914.³⁸ Five nurses were also listed, one of whom was in France. Letters to the *Shetland News* asked for the inclusion of men in the Merchant Navy, at least those in ships taken over by the Royal Navy, but that was probably too difficult for the newspapers to record.³⁹ By this time, however, these men could find themselves in a new 'front line', as the Germans had commenced unrestricted submarine warfare.

Another group of fifty-six RNR left for Chatham on 1st May.⁴⁰ Unlike the RNR, the soldiers of the TA were not guaranteed a posting in Shetland, although they could not be drafted overseas without their consent. Having passed cable guard duties to the RNR, over 200 left Lerwick on 13th June 1915 on SS *Cambria*. About half joined the Second Provisional Battalion at Fort Matilda, Greenock, and were employed on guard duties at shipyards and munitions factories. Those who had volunteered for overseas service were landed in Thurso and continued by train to Scone to become the Shetland Companies Seventh Gordon Highlanders. About forty went to France later in the year and others early in 1916 to join the 153rd Brigade of the Fifty-first

³⁶ *SN*, 16 Jan. 1915, 4

³⁷ Thomas Manson, *Shetland's Roll of Service and Roll of Honour* (Lerwick, 1915)

³⁸ *SN*, 29 May 1915, 4; *ST*, 31 Oct. 1914, 7

³⁹ *SN*, 23 Jan. 1915, 8; 27 Feb. 1915, 4

⁴⁰ Manson, *Roll of Honour*, 276

(Highland) Division.⁴¹ Another detachment of the RNR, about 250 men, left on SS *Vienna* on 22nd July 1915.⁴²



Figure 6 The Territorial Army leave Lerwick, June 1915



Figure 7 Soldiers of the Shetland Companies Gordon Highlanders at a camp in Aberdeenshire

The general attitude in the local newspapers was that Shetlanders were ‘doing their bit’ and as many men as practicable were in uniform. In January 1915 the *Shetland Times* considered:

⁴¹ *ST*, 19 Jun. 1915, 4; 27 Nov. 1915, 4; SA, D50/26/1, Rollo, Captain Mitchell’s notes, ‘War Service of the Shetland Companies’; information from Jon Sandison and Caroline Morrissey

⁴² *SN*, 24 Jul. 1915, 4

It is quite gratifying to know that Shetland has done, and is doing, her fair share towards the righteous cause in which the British nation, and the Empire beyond the seas are now engaged.⁴³

In April, the *Shetland News* reported, 'Most country districts in Shetland are now pretty well depopulated of eligible men' and repeated this in November.⁴⁴ In July, it claimed, 'There is scarcely a battle which takes place by sea or land where the British are engaged, but some Shetlander is there to "do his bit"'.⁴⁵ Tom Sandison also commented, 'It is astonishing to find how very few men of military age are left'.⁴⁶ As 1915 progressed, recruitment declined. The enthusiastic, the patriotically dutiful and the impressionable had already volunteered, the economic situation improved and there were other employment opportunities.

Overall, the number of volunteers was dwindling. It became obvious that something more was required to appease the insatiable demand for soldiers. The Government took reluctant steps until confident that the public would accept conscription, which had been the subject of controversy for decades. Although practised by both Allies and enemies in peacetime as well as war, it was considered by many to be 'unBritish' and an infringement of the personal liberty for which Britain was fighting.⁴⁷ In July 1915, National Registration was implemented by local authorities. Men and women between the ages of 15 and 65 were registered, providing details of their occupation and skills. The concept of 'starred jobs', those judged to be indispensable, was introduced. The *Shetland News* published a strong editorial, stating that at this 'supreme hour' some people were not doing all they could.⁴⁸

The 'Derby Scheme' followed, requiring all men between eighteen and forty-one to attest their willingness to serve. The *Shetland News* explained, 'the British people have before them the plain duty which their individual circumstances may prescribe either to join the Army or to help others to join'. The word used to describe eligible men who would not volunteer was 'shirkers'; they had to be induced to enlist or they would 'be the means of

⁴³ *ST*, 2 Jan. 1915, 4

⁴⁴ *SN*, 24 April, 1915, 4; 11 Nov 1915, 4

⁴⁵ *SN*, 3 Jul 1915, 4

⁴⁶ *SA*, D1/123/8/19/30, Sandison, 15 Aug. 1915

⁴⁷ R. J. Q. Adams and Philip P. Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900 – 18* (Basingstoke, 1987)

⁴⁸ *SN*, 17 Jul. 1915, 4

saddling the nation with what every Britisher detests – Continental conscription.⁴⁹ The Town and County councils were again charged with implementing this scheme. On 9th November, they met with the TA Association to appoint the committees required. Sheriff Menzies portrayed ‘shirkers’ as ‘voting for the Kaiser’. The Councils unanimously resolved:

to give their full approval and support to His Majesty’s Coalition Government, and their unwavering determination to carry on the great war in conjunction with their Allies until a successful issue is realised.

The task of the local committees, to persuade men to attest and review the starred status of jobs, was acknowledged to be ‘a particularly delicate one – a duty calling for the exercise of much tact and knowledge of local conditions’.⁵⁰

It appears that they were not very successful. The *Shetland News* started to publish a new ‘Roll of Honour’ of the volunteers; on 11th November, thirteen were listed, on 18th only three and then the list was discontinued. Correspondents described a variety of circumstances; for example, ‘Scalloway Notes’ stated that there were ‘still many suitable young men available’, while ‘Whalsay Notes’ claimed, ‘There’s but few here now, with the exception of the halt, lame, and blind, and old men, but who are serving their country’.

The editor was very disappointed:

It is almost incredible that in certain cases the canvassers should have been met with the statement, from men eligible for service, that they would be quite content to live under the German flag, and that they intended to remain as they were.⁵¹

Churchill might not have been so surprised!

The position of the RNR changed at this time. The threat of invasion had decreased and the Navy needed men. From 19th November, advertisements stated that future recruits would be liable for service outwith Shetland. Nevertheless, twenty-eight volunteers joined in two days just after the first of these new advertisements. In February 1916 at the last chance for volunteering, another seventy came forward, presumably in preference to conscription to the Army.⁵²

⁴⁹ *SN*, 4 Nov. 1915, 4; 11 Nov. 1915, 4

⁵⁰ *SN*, 11 Nov. 1915, 4

⁵¹ *SN*, 11 Nov. 1915, 4; 18 Nov. 1915, 4; 25 Nov. 1915, 4

⁵² DeGroot, *Blighty*, 100; *SN*, 6 Mar. 1915, 4; 25 Nov. 1915, 1, 4; 2 Mar. 1916, 2

Conscription

Voluntary attesting ceased when the Military Service Act introduced conscription in January 1916. Captain Laurensen of the Gordon Highlanders was appointed Recruiting Officer.⁵³ The *Shetland Times* explained the regulations: all single men aged between nineteen and forty-one had to report by 2nd March or they would be conscripted.⁵⁴ Local authorities were required to appoint tribunals to hear appeals. Lerwick Town Council had some difficulty in finding people willing to serve. First, five councillors and two labour representatives were appointed. After several refusals and resignations, the Council decided to increase the membership to eight but not to re-appoint as long as five continued.⁵⁵ The County Council appointed a tribunal of ten members for the North Isles and another of twenty for the remainder of the county, which was to meet in at least five places to make things easier for applicants. Again not everyone consented.⁵⁶

The *Shetland Times* remarked on the difficulties of tribunal membership: under the Derby scheme, the committee of well-known and knowledgeable businessmen had done good work, ‘carrying out what cannot be but a difficult duty in a most satisfactory manner.’ That duty was ‘not to secure men for the army as some say but to consider cases on their merits’.⁵⁷ The *Shetland News* likened the tribunals to juries, the applicant facing a group, neither ‘official’ nor ‘bureaucratic’, but:

a carefully chosen body of his neighbours, men and women who are conversant with the local conditions, and who can enter with sympathy and understanding into the special circumstances of the individual who provides a just and reasonable claim.⁵⁸

This local nature could be both a strength and a weakness: it has been claimed that, because the tribunals operated in isolation, the criteria applied differed widely, even that they were ‘muddled, inconsistent, prejudiced and unjust.’⁵⁹ McDermott, however, showed how they struggled with imprecise and changing legislation to

⁵³ *ST*, 29 Jan. 1916, 4

⁵⁴ *ST*, 19 Feb. 1916, 4

⁵⁵ SA, TO/1/4, LTC mins., 10 Feb. 1916; 11 Feb. 1916; 21 Feb. 1916; 7 Mar. 1916

⁵⁶ SA, CO/3/1/7, ZCC mins., 17 Feb. 1916; 27 Apr. 1916; *ST*, 19 Feb. 1916, 4

⁵⁷ *ST*, 4 Mar. 1916, 4

⁵⁸ *SN*, 17 Feb. 1916, 2

⁵⁹ Beckett, *Great War*, 123; Gregory, *Last Great War*, 105

balance the interests of the Army, the economy and the applicants.⁶⁰ Gregory pointed out how local the focus was and how public the proceedings: ‘Every tribunal was a negotiation between a national pattern and local ways of doing things’.⁶¹ Rae claimed, ‘Their members represented above all the interests and attitudes of local government.’ The local councils appointed the tribunals, but their problem was finding competent and willing people. Nevertheless, it was probably true that ‘service on the tribunal was service for the country and there was no place for men who were not wholeheartedly behind the national cause’.⁶² There were no women on the Shetland tribunals.

The Shetland tribunals’ records have not survived – very few did – and, unlike in Orkney, the newspapers did not report the proceedings. Gregory asserted, ‘The usual response to conscription was not passive acceptance, but an appeal’.⁶³ That would be understandable, given that by that time recruits were unlikely to be enthusiastic, but there is no way of knowing the number. A few complaints about tribunals were published in the local newspapers.⁶⁴

Tom Sandison was chairman on the tribunal for the North Isles. Although he wrote weekly about the minutiae of his life, he gave no detail about the tribunal, presumably because of censorship. He was not enthusiastic: ‘I don’t like the job, but one does not like to shirk the duty because it is disagreeable.’ ‘I don’t like it. In a place like this where one knows everybody the work will be very disagreeable’. According to Purseigle, tribunals ‘represented a real burden on the people who took on the task’, and this tribunal was assiduous: the first meeting lasted for nine and a half hours and dealt with 120 applications. Sandison wrote:

That these applicants for exemption were really and truly the ‘outwales’*, the ‘tailings’, physically unfit and not shirkers, was very apparent to anyone who saw them alongside the gun’s crew of RNR men stationed here ...

⁶⁰ James McDermott, *British Military Service Tribunals 1916 – 1918, 'A Very Much Abused Body of Men'* (Manchester, 2011)

⁶¹ Adrian Gregory, ‘Military Service Tribunals: Civil Society in Action, 1916 – 1918’ in J. Harris, (ed.), *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2005), 177 – 90, 183

⁶² J. Rae, *The British Government and the Conscientious Objectors to Military Service 1916 – 1919* (London, 1970), 57

⁶³ Gregory, *Last Great War*, 102

⁶⁴ *ST*, 24 Feb. 1917, 5; 6 Oct 1917, 5

* Outwales = leftovers

The Military Service Act cannot sweep in many men from Shetland (from the country districts at any rate) for the simple reason that every fit man who could by any means get away from his family or occupation had already joined some branch of the service.⁶⁵

The tribunal met monthly and by August had seen all the married applicants except for a few waiting for medical certificates; the Military Representative did not appeal any of the married men. Sandison did not mention the tribunal again until July 1917, when it had thirty-nine cases for review plus five new. The local Military Representative and a visitor from the War Office were present, so some effort was being made to ensure the tribunal was working to the satisfaction of the authorities. Sandison spent a lot of time researching cases in advance. He mentioned one conscientious objector, a teacher in Unst who was sacked leaving a school without a qualified teacher for some time.⁶⁶ After 100 days in Wormwood Scrubs, he was sentenced to twelve months hard labour in a Glasgow prison. If there were other objectors in Shetland, they have left no record.

Initially, neither local newspaper was in favour of conscription. When the Derby Scheme was introduced, the *Shetland News* recognised that conscription was fairer than a voluntary system, but opposed it on practical grounds – it would disrupt trade and industry – and because it:

would be forging a very strong link in the chain of militarism which we wish for ever broken; it would make the manhood of the nation semi-slaves instead of being free men.

Following the failure of the scheme, however, it accepted that conscription:

has been forced upon the nation by the action of a number of young, unmarried men, most of whom have no responsibilities, many of whom are shirkers, and a number of whom frankly declare they don't care how the war goes.⁶⁷

In March, it declared that only Socialists and Radicals were opposing a measure that had popular support. The *Shetland Times* thought conscription was the 'setting aside of all the boasted freedom of the British people'. 'Current Topics' claimed that volunteers were better than pressed men, and that to suggest that Shetlanders

⁶⁵ Pierre Purseigle, *Warfare and Belligerence: Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden: 2005), 30 – 31; SA, D1/123/10/9, Sandison, 25 Feb.; /11, 5 Mar.; /14, 26 Mar. 1916

⁶⁶ SA, D1/123/10/37, Sandison, 27 Aug. 1916; D1/123/11/33, Sandison, 31 Jul. 1917; /35, 12 Aug. 1917; /39, 9 Sep. 1917

⁶⁷ SN, 11 Nov. 1915, 4; 13 Jan. 1916, 4

required conscription was ‘to utter rank treason against the manhood of the islands’, as only an ‘infinitesimal’ number of unmarried men were not serving.⁶⁸

Conscription caused a bitter argument between the editors. In May, another Military Service Act introduced conscription for married men and more stringent regulations. The *Shetland News* considered that conscription was necessary and fair, but the *Shetland Times* contended that it was ‘not a national necessity but a political manoeuvre’ and ‘quite in keeping with the ugliest features of Prussianised Government’.⁶⁹ The *Shetland News* editorial of 18th May accused the *Shetland Times* of ‘vicarious fighting’, encouraging others to volunteer, while appealing successfully for the exemption of its six staff, all unmarried and of military age, who had attested. This article pulled no punches: the Bill was the result of the ‘clear demand of the people of this nation, save a microscopic minority who cannot be called men’; the *Shetland Times* had opposed conscription first because it was ‘popular’ and then ‘to save its own skin’.⁷⁰

The *Shetland Times* responded by attacking the rival editor. His editorials, it was alleged, were usually written ‘by some poor literary hack in London, and bought at so much per column and palmed off as the real “opinion” of the “most progressive paper” in the county’. This time, however, it was clear that the editor had written his own column, as shown by ‘its utter poverty, its meanness, its utter lack of logic, and especially, its *vindictive spitefulness*’. The *Shetland Times* staff were in ‘starred trades’, the issue was ‘sub judice’ and Shetland had been ‘denuded of her manhood.’ The *Shetland News*, did not express the view of the community, but was the ‘verbiage of a man who is totally ignorant, not only of national affairs but of the local conditions among which he exists’.⁷¹

The following week *Shetland News* charged the *Shetland Times* of ‘telling a cold, calculated lie’ and ‘having done practically nothing, of never having tried to assist in the supreme national crisis, in the only way that counts, namely the releasing of men to fight’. It claimed that people, confused by the radical press, had not realised the

⁶⁸ *SN*, 2 Mar. 1916, 2; *ST*, 22 Jan. 1916, 4; 4 Mar. 1916, 5; 13 May 1916, 5

⁶⁹ *SN*, 4 May 1916, 2; *ST*, 13 May 1916, 4

⁷⁰ *SN*, 18 May 1916, 2

⁷¹ *ST*, 20 May 1916, 4

seriousness of the war and hoped to muddle through.⁷² Although the two newspapers often disagreed, this was possibly the most vituperative exchange ever and showed that the tensions of war could open rifts in even a close-knit community like Lerwick, though it is impossible to tell how pervasive this dispute was. The altercation was brought to an end when the death of Lord Kitchener and the Battle of Jutland diverted attention.

Exemptions were the subject of debate in the council chambers as well. In January, the Town Council had discussed whether to make representations for fishermen to be 'starred' on the basis that they helped maintain the food supply, but they could apply for a certificate to be considered a reserve for the Navy and appeal to the Fishery Board if conscripted.⁷³ The Council initially claimed exemption for a number of officials; in January 1917, they agreed not to oppose the conscription of one constable and the Surveyor, but could not dispense with any others.⁷⁴

The *Shetland Times* was perhaps premature when it claimed in May 1916:

Wherever the Flag is flying, wherever the fight is going on to uphold the right and to protect the weak against the strong, against the aggression of militarism and martial power (in other words brute force), there the sons of the "Old Rock" are to be found suffering, fighting, and dying, and doing all that in them lies to help forward the cause of Freedom and Liberty.⁷⁵

In the next few months, however, the number of Shetlanders involved increased. In April, the Government had changed some of the regulations affecting the TA; men whose term of service had expired now had to serve until the end of the war.⁷⁶ Territorials could also be transferred to any unit. Some of those who had been at Greenock went to Kent with the Scots Provisional Battalion and in early 1918, to France as part of the 21st Highland Light Infantry.⁷⁷

It was obvious that the RNR could be more useful elsewhere than in Shetland, and in May, the Admiralty ordered that those of military age must either volunteer for service outwith the Islands or be discharged and eligible for conscription. Lieutenant

⁷² *SN*, 25 May 1916, 2

⁷³ *ST*, 5 Feb. 1916, 4; SA, TO/1/4, LTC mins., 1 Feb. 1916; Jones, 'Scottish Fisheries', 38

⁷⁴ SA, TO/1/4, LTC mins., 1 Feb. 1916; 16 Jun. 1916, 8 Jan. 1917

⁷⁵ *ST*, 20 May 1916, 4

⁷⁶ *ST*, 29 Apr. 1916, 5

⁷⁷ SA, D50/26/1, Rollo, 'War Services of the Shetland Companies'

Colonel Phillips appealed for ‘volunteers’ and got an almost unanimous response; the *Shetland News* praised the Reservists’ ‘high courage and determination which distinguished their Viking forefathers’.⁷⁸ Two hundred left on 30th June for Chatham and Portsmouth and 100 on 2nd July for Plymouth. Another 200 left on 19th July and another 100 on 26th November.⁷⁹

A series of further Military Service Acts reduced exemptions and extended conscription to more and more men. In October 1916, fishermen were removed from the list of ‘starred’ occupations, though the Navy was keen that they should not join the Army.⁸⁰ In 1917 and 1918, there were complaints in Shetland that too many men were being ‘combed out’ from agriculture to the detriment of the economy.⁸¹ Bet-El has claimed that conscripts have been omitted from the myths of the war and been neglected in the historiography.⁸² This bias may have been rectified in recent years, and there is a contrary popular perception that soldiers were ‘victims’, either fooled into volunteering or conscripted against their will. Volunteers and conscripts were not treated significantly differently in the Army and, in Shetland at the time, no distinction seems to have been made; they were all described in heroic terms. It seems that the number of Shetland residents who volunteered for the army was comparatively small, and that many of them did not see active service until after conscription was introduced. Over half the British Army were conscripts; the proportion of Shetland soldiers was probably much higher.

The Servicemen’s Experience

Since servicemen were most affected by the war, it is important that their experience be described where possible from their own words. The major difficulty is the paucity of material; it is unlikely that many wrote detailed accounts and few have survived. It is possible, even likely, that those who wrote more than simple letters home were atypical; better educated, more articulate, even more sensitive. They can only be quoted as potentially unrepresentative examples. This section confirms that the accounts of war experience by Shetland servicemen are not substantially different

⁷⁸ *SN*, 25 May 1916, 2, 4

⁷⁹ *ST*, 1 Jul. 1916, 4; *ST*, 8 Jul. 1916, 4; *ST*, 22 Jul. 1916, 4; *SN*, 30 Nov. 1916, 2

⁸⁰ *SA*, AF 29/193, 113, *FBS* notice, 4 Sep. 1916

⁸¹ E.g., *SN*, 3 Jan, 1918, 4; 27 Jun. 1918, 4

⁸² Bet-El, *Conscripts*, E.g., vii—xiv, 14 – 15, 179 – 209

from those of others, as described for example by Meyer and Bet-El, but also highlights references to Shetland.⁸³

Two diaries, potentially more candid than accounts written for publication, have survived.⁸⁴ James Pottinger, a volunteer, wrote a very limited record often with one-line entries for several weeks. He only gave detail when he was in the trenches; the Ancre advance was a 'fearful experience' with 'most sickening sights'; Courcellettes 'a terrible place of mud and misery'; at Arras, he 'felt sick' at the 'most gruesome sights' and March 1918 was 'Hell let loose'. He was delighted to be sent home on sick leave but was posted to Italy, arriving after the Armistice.⁸⁵ A somewhat different account was written by Lewie Peterson, conscripted in 1917 into a Labour Corps. He faced discomforts similar to those experienced by front-line soldiers: cold, heat, mud, vermin, hunger, lack of sleep, hard, monotonous, physical work and dangers from enemy action, mainly from aerial bombardment. Perhaps crucially, however, he was not required to fight and did not become a killer. His verdict was different:

I hope I shall not have to take part in another war. I had some very rough times, and learned to know the fear of death by violence, but on the other hand had some very good times, so that the one balanced the other pretty well.⁸⁶

Servicemen may have known that their letters might be passed to the newspapers and read by people other than the addressee.⁸⁷ Lance Corporal Thomas Hardy wrote:

It is all right to stay at home and fill the papers with patriotic paragraphs, but really war should be reserved to fiends who are in the last stages of insanity.

He was dead by the time this was published.⁸⁸ Some confirmed the conditions and dangers; one wrote simply, 'I assure you it was terrible'; another described the painful choice of cold or mud, 'the frozen couch or the muddy bed'.⁸⁹ Others were more upbeat; J. Nicolson, wounded at Ancre, wrote, 'I think we can't grumble seeing that the attack was such a great success', and another wounded soldier, 'I wish it has

⁸³ Meyer, *Men of War*; Bet-El, *Conscripts*, particularly 10 – 12 and 20 – 23 respectively on soldiers' writing as sources

⁸⁴ Meyer, *Men of War*, 48 – 49

⁸⁵ SA, D1/452/1, Diary of James Pottinger

⁸⁶ Lewie Peterson, 'Extracts from a First World War Journal', *Shetland Life*, 289 (Nov. 2004) – 297 (Jul. 2005); quotation from part VII, 297 (July, 2005), 34 – 35, 35

⁸⁷ Meyer, *Men of War*, 16

⁸⁸ *ST*, 14 Nov. 1914, 4

⁸⁹ *SN*, 21 Dec. 1916, 5; *ST*, 7 Apr. 1917, 4

been a little worse and I might have got “blighty””.⁹⁰ *Stones in the Millpond*, a modern compilation of prose and verse, was based around the letters of the Scott family; eleven sons, of whom six lived in Australia, nine served in various capacities and three died.⁹¹ They complained of the cold, the heat, the flies and rats. Tommy wrote of ‘a perfect hail of machine gun and shrapnel fire’, and Frank described the ‘pure Hell’ of facing fire and ‘seeing all your chums go under’, though his experience was not all so grim: ‘Certainly the life is not all “milk and honey” but it’s not so bad as some folks would have you believe.’ Their letters followed common themes and there is little to link them to a Shetland background. Tommie Scott’s last letter, however, was unusually nostalgic and he used dialect words and quoted from a book of Shetland poems that he carried with him.⁹²

Karl Manson, son of the editor of the *Shetland News*, also wrote home frequently and kept a diary. Even before he reached France, being unused to manual labour, he found ‘soldiering is not the nice job one reads about’. There was a bond, however: at camp, ‘all us Shetland chaps have our beds in a row and call it the Shetland Section Seaforth Highlanders.’ Later he complained of being called ‘Jock’. He had been willing to serve: ‘I am sure I would rather go over and do my share than stay at home sheltering under a ‘certified occupation’ or something.’ He died at Arras in April 1917; his friend Willie Irvine wrote, ‘He was ... lying with a smile on his face’, a typical report intended to offer comfort to the bereaved.⁹³

The local newspaper published many poems, including a number from servicemen, most of which expressed very conventional themes. One letter from John Moar at Gallipoli complained that the Navy and Shetlanders were being overlooked. The first of his five verses read:

You read in your papers of the deeds that are done,
Of the brave sons of England with their bayonets and gun,
But no mention is made of your brave Shetland Jacks,
Who are helping your Tommies, your Paddies, your Macs.

⁹⁰ *SN*, 30 Nov. 16, 2; 7 Dec. 1916, 2

⁹¹ Christian S. Tait, *Stones in the Millpond* (Lerwick, 2001)

⁹² Letters from Thomas Scott, 14 Aug. 1916 and 12 July, 1918 and Frank Scott, 15 Mar. 1916, quoted in Tait, *Stones in the Millpond*, 24, 21, 94; Meyer, *Men of War*, 14 – 46

⁹³ Susan Cooper, ‘Have You Forgotten Yet?’, *Shetland Life*, 204 (1997), 19 – 23; Meyer, *Men of War*, 82 – 84

He was on one of three trawlers with Shetland crews, who ‘generally had a good time together’.⁹⁴

The Great War is famous for its war poets and two Shetlanders had books published. Ben Morrison fought and was wounded in Palestine. Several of the thirty-six poems in *Desert Nights 'neath Silver Stars* were written in hospital; others say where they were written: Alexandria, Palestine, Port Said, ‘on the High Seas’. Many contain nostalgic thoughts of home, for example, ‘I am thinking of the glories sweet that Thulé’s are this eve’. The dedication gives a flavour of his idiom: ‘as a wreath of Rosemary to the memory of “Comrades of the Trenches” who, fighting by my side, have fallen a sacrifice in “the Great War”’. His language is heroic: ‘No victory has the grave where heroes rest!’ A dead soldier is described, ‘one upturned smiling face and ‘Yet of Despair, in sightless eyes, no trace!’ Yet he also wrote about the horrors of war:

Sodden and wet
The parapet
Was caved and wrecked by wrath of deadly shell
Once strong defence, lay broken, tumbled wire –
All frail against the wall of steel and fire
That turned, with fury, ‘No Man’s Land’ to Hell.⁹⁵

A particular Shetland theme appears in two of his poems: that of women knitting and thinking of soldiers at the front. ‘The Knitter’s Song’ links the two experiences:

‘Plain and purl, purl and plain.’
Whining Shrapnel, gas-clouds thick curl,
Bullets like valve-oozed steam,
Bayonets flashing with sun-lit gleam,
Fields, once verdant, a blood-dyed stream,
Death-dealing missiles swiftly hurl,
‘Plain and purl, purl and plain.’

In contrast, ‘Knittin’ Fur Da Boys’, the only poem ‘written in the Shetlandic’, the high-flown clichés expressed by the knitter require the use of unlikely words for the dialect:

Courage rins trou every vein,
Honour dey will aye retain,
On dir names sall rest no stain
Whether woe, or weal!⁹⁶

⁹⁴ *SN*, 1 Jun. 1916, 5

⁹⁵ Ben Geo. Morrison, *Desert Sands 'neath Silver Stars* (Warrington, 1918), 15, 30, 20

John (Jack) Peterson served in the Seaforth Highlanders and was also wounded. *Roads and Ditches* was published under the pseudonym 'Private Pat', and is in English rather than dialect. Dedicated to his dead or maimed comrades, it contains poems with titles like 'The Great Guns', 'Arras', 'The Advance' and 'Didymus to the Trench-Rat'. Two poems, 'Thule' and 'The Home-Farer' refer to his Shetland homeland and are sentimental in comparison:

Now dreams, an Isle
Of purple peaks,
Set where the sun
Red slumber seeks;
Where summer-night
Like dusky rim
Encircling creeps
Slow, soft and dim.

Mostly, however, he described the sights and sounds of the trenches, the despair, terror and courage of soldiers, the futility and madness of war:

And when your heart is broken,
And you care not if you die
You'll keep on carrying on
Till self-pity makes you cry;

Till you take the man who loved you
And rake him through the mud,
And scoop a shallow hollow,
With your hands all smeared with blood,
And throw him in and leave him:
And you'll laugh for – God know why!
And you'll keep on carrying on,
(Or God loves you, and you die),

He gave some indication of the attitudes that he thought led men to enlist:

Man in his lusty pride.
Man gone down to battle
Mid the blatant, brazen thrums,
Mid the flourishing of banner
And the throbbing of loud drums,
Gone down to death rejoicing
Because he deemed he should
To vindicate his honour,
And prove his manhood good.

And in 'The Waste':

⁹⁶ Morrison, *Desert Sands*, 27

Fathers of men, in pride you bade them go –
 Are you proud now; your sons are dead;
 Their limbs lie rolling in the mud.
 Mothers of men, you wept and bade them go –
 Do you weep now?

He wrote about how war brutalised participants:

For one red hour I lived to curse and slay,
 To shoot, and stab, and bite, and brain, and tear.

Although later a hard-line Communist, he did not include much political commentary except in ‘The Debt’, addressed to the civilians who pray for peace and to whom the soldiers will return:

Strange men who paid a price,
 Who made war’s sacrifice,
 Clear-eyed, unflinching, fearless,
 Who come to bid you pay.

It ends:

The bottom-dog’s your brother,
 The Kings’s your brother too.⁹⁷

Peterson’s war poetry, in contrast to most contemporary verse, was in a modern and explicit idiom similar to that of more famous poets such as Owen and Sassoon. This is particularly striking in the context of the local themes and stereotypical language of most Shetland writers.⁹⁸

Probably the most widely read account was by Robert Greig, a reporter for the *Shetland Times* who served in the Seaforth and Cameron Highlanders. His series of articles, ‘Doing his Bit: What it Meant’, published between January and August 1920, has been set by Cluness in the context of other soldiers’ accounts, war fiction, poetry and histories.⁹⁹ Greig made it clear that his articles were not ‘a history’ (he had lost his war diary), merely:

the edges of things as seen by the man in the ranks, the actual experiences of a “Tommy”, or more accurately a “Jock”, to whom the joys and sorrows of the campaign came, not as something purely personal, but as the common lot of the millions of citizen soldiers who offered and were often individually asked to surrender their all.

⁹⁷ John Peterson, *Roads and Ditches* (Lerwick, 1920), 1, 11, 12, 36 – 37, 23, 32 – 33

⁹⁸ Oral information from Mark Smith

⁹⁹ Robert M. Greig, *Doing His Bit; A Shetland Soldier in the Great War* (Lerwick, 1999); Alex Cluness, ‘Introduction’, ix – xxvi

While unable to describe the bigger picture, he felt his experience was typical of the soldiers whose suffering had been hidden ‘under a bushel of silence’ and ignored. He aimed:

to set before you the soldier, and not the man or boy he was before the soldier, not the man he appears to be today, but the man you never saw and never knew, who lived like an animal and died like an angel.¹⁰⁰

Although he did not usually relate his experiences to his Shetland identity, Greig started by expressing:

the difficulties of the Shetlander who has to join up in the south. He has thrust upon him with great force in a case of that kind the insularity of Shetland and its limitations as a centre of the universe.¹⁰¹

This was no doubt true, but many men from other rural areas or small towns might well have felt just as disorientated, while many Shetlanders now serving at sea had experienced similar problems with travel and lack of home comforts in a civilian setting. Unusually, Greig considered the sea ‘anathema’, and it was ironic that the first danger he met was the sinking of his troopship en route to the East. This brought him first back to England and then to the Western Front and the Third Battle of Ypres, which he described as ‘nearer a picture of hell than any mortal has yet conceived’.¹⁰² He took part in the retreat of spring 1918 and the subsequent advance to victory, at some point being attached to the Royal Army Medical Corps. Although he does not mention it, he won the Croix-de-Guerre, and was promoted to Corporal in the Army of Occupation, before being demobilised in November 1919.

He described occasions when he encountered Shetlanders and the problems which they could face on leave, some arriving at Aberdeen to find no transport home and visiting the steamers ‘just to talk to someone who had seen Lerwick recently and could give them a little verbal news’. Fussell’s reference to the ‘ridiculous proximity of the trenches to home’ certainly did not apply to Shetlanders. Greig once managed to ‘wangle’ two weeks leave through his ‘imaginative word pictures of the isolation of the Shetland Islands and the difficulties of access thereto’, and on another occasion persuaded the Officer in Charge at Lerwick to give him an explanatory

¹⁰⁰ Greig, *Doing His Bit*, 1 – 2

¹⁰¹ Greig, *Doing His Bit*, 2

¹⁰² Greig, *Doing His Bit*, 11, 8 – 10, 17

note.¹⁰³ These difficulties concerned the local authorities who petitioned on behalf of local servicemen about travel arrangements and the cost of meals on the journey. The Admiralty agreed to allow sailors on leave to travel on Fleet mail vessels, but the issues were never entirely resolved.¹⁰⁴ Mail between home and servicemen was important for sustaining morale, but, in addition to the restrictions of censorship (both at home and away) could be slow and uncertain in the island context.¹⁰⁵

Candidly describing the conditions in the trenches, Greig mentioned several times the monotony of service life and deplored the way in which soldiers were kept in ignorance, or lied to, and how any initiative was trained out of them. He thought war brutalised them and challenged their morality, and the churches failed to support them. Despite the bonds that formed between soldiers in battle, his judgement was that war was not a positive thing.¹⁰⁶

Gregory pointed out that, while most well known literature was not concerned with links to home, this was not the case in the more clichéd and stereotypical verse. Grieves also recognized that soldier poets turned to representations of the familiar landscapes of home in contrast to the grim reality of the trenches.¹⁰⁷ It has been claimed that soldiers' letters, diaries and post-war accounts rarely referred to local identities, but, like Greig, other Shetland soldiers mention trying to meet other Shetlanders, even if they did not already know them well.¹⁰⁸ Jack Peterson explained: 'His was the first familiar face I saw, and although I did not know him to speak to in Lerwick, we of course met like old friends over there.'¹⁰⁹ An unnamed Lerwick soldier wrote that he was waiting to go forward with other Shetlanders, all friends, 'having a happy time together', and as long as he was with chaps he knew,

¹⁰³ Fussell, *Great War and Modern Memory*, 64; Greig, *Doing His Bit*, 18, 54, 57, 11

¹⁰⁴ SA, CO/3/1/7, ZCC mins., 17 May 1917; TO/1/4, LTC mins. 15 Jun. 1917, 6 Nov. 1917, 4 Jan. 1918

¹⁰⁵ Michael Roper, 'Nostalgia as an Emotional Experience in the Great War', *Historical Journal*, 54, 2 (2011), 421 – 51; Bet El, *Conscripts*, 131 – 37

¹⁰⁶ Greig, *Doing His Bit*, 10, 28, 41, 14, 20, 4 – 5, 15, 69, 31 – 33, 40, 44

¹⁰⁷ Gregory, *Last Great War*, 134; Keith Grieves, 'The Propinquity of Place: Home, Landscape and Soldier Poets of the Great War', in Jessica Meyer, (ed.), *British Popular Culture and the First World War* (Leiden and Boston, 2008), 21 – 46

¹⁰⁸ Townley, 'First World War and Voluntary Recruitment', 6; *ST*, 15 Jan. 1916, 4

¹⁰⁹ SA 2/618, letter to J. J. Campbell, 23 May 1917

he did not care where he was sent.¹¹⁰ This was the mentality that inspired the ‘Pals Battalions’.

Many Shetlanders served in Scottish ‘kilted’ regiments, and McFarland emphasised the dominance of Scottish ‘martial race ideology’ and tartanry in sustaining morale, which was effective but must have seemed alien to many Shetlanders, who would have found it strange to be described as ‘Scottish’ or addressed as ‘Jock’. There is no mention of any perceived incongruity in the newspapers and probably the soldiers were pleased to be associated with these icons of bravery. It proved impossible to maintain the Shetland companies, but servicemen tried to maintain links to other Shetlanders when the opportunity arose.¹¹¹

Roper described the prevalence of nostalgia (in its original meaning of the longing for home) among servicemen and how it helped them survive the trenches, but does not discuss how that nostalgia might be shared with men from the same place, which seems to have been common among Shetlanders.¹¹² Most surviving sources are from soldiers and so cannot be representative of Shetland servicemen’s experience of the war, but appear typical of such writing. Nevertheless, in their references to their Shetland homeland and fellowship with other Shetlanders, they demonstrate a Shetland identity.

Campaigns and Casualties

While, because initially most servicemen were based in Shetland, casualties were comparatively low, but they increased as active involvement grew. The earliest deaths were reported in a very low-key manner, for example, the loss of six Shetlanders when the hospital ship *Rohilla* ran aground near Whitby.¹¹³ Perhaps only two Shetland residents were killed by enemy action in 1914, Lance Corporal Thomas Hardy of the Gordon Highlanders in November and Seaman James Umphray when

¹¹⁰ *SN*, 17 Aug. 1916, 2

¹¹¹ McFarland, ‘Great War’, 557 – 60; also Edward Spiers, ‘The Scottish Soldier at War’, in Hugh Cecil and Peter H. Liddle, (eds), *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced* (Barnsley, 2003), 314 – 35, 316 – 18; J. G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914 – 1918* (Oxford, 1991), 161 – 65

¹¹² Roper, ‘Nostalgia’; also McFarland, ‘Great War’, 560; Bet-El, *Conscripts*, 144

¹¹³ *SN*, 7 Nov. 1914, 4

SS *Gem* was mined on Christmas Day.¹¹⁴ News was also received about seamen interned in Germany or detained in Holland, Russia and elsewhere.¹¹⁵

The 1915 *Roll of Service* listed six dead and seven wounded. There were discrepancies, however, and this was not a comprehensive record. When the Gallipoli campaign began in April, reports of casualties became more frequent and by the summer, every issue of the newspapers carried news of one or two deaths. The biggest loss came with the sinking in the North Sea of HMS *Ramsey*; of the fourteen Shetlanders in the crew, eight, including four from Whalsay, were lost.¹¹⁶ By the end of the year, about fifty Shetlanders were reckoned to have died.¹¹⁷ The *Shetland Times* commented:

Like every other place, Shetland is feeling that war claims its victims relentlessly. In proportion to the number of men engaged, the toll from these islands has been considerable, and scarcely a week passes, but fresh names are added to the list.¹¹⁸

In November the *Shetland Times* started a record of 'Shetland's Fallen Heroes' with thirty-six names, by the end of May the total was seventy-eight, by September, 145 and by December, 220.¹¹⁹ The Shetland TA Companies fought in the Battle of the Somme at Pozieries Ridge and near the River Ancre. The biggest loss of Shetlanders was on 13th November 1916 at Beaumont Hamel; around this time nineteen died and twenty-two were wounded.¹²⁰ After that, the survivors of the Shetland Companies were absorbed into the Seventh Battalion Gordons.¹²¹ The *Shetland Times*' year-end report commented, 'Scarcely anyone was prepared for the heavy toll ... that so large a sacrifice should have been demanded out of so small a district must always remain an enigma.'¹²²

This belief that it was a particularly high toll raises questions about the reliability of the data and the methods of calculating the proportions of both servicemen and

¹¹⁴ Manson, *Roll of Service*

¹¹⁵ E.g., *SN*, 22 Aug. 1914, 6; 12 Sep. 1914, 6; 19 Sep. 1914, 7

¹¹⁶ *SN*, 14 Aug. 1915, 4; 30 Dec. 1915, 4

¹¹⁷ *SN*, 23 Dec. 1915, 4

¹¹⁸ *ST*, 1 Jan. 1916, 4

¹¹⁹ *ST*, 27 Nov. 1915, 4; 27 May 1916, 5; 28 Sep. 1916, 8; 9 Dec. 1916, 8

¹²⁰ Reported casualties varied; these numbers are from *ST*, 2 Dec. 1916, 2

¹²¹ Statements that they were transferred to the Fourth Battalion do not appear to be supported by service records; information from John Sandison and Caroline Morrissey

¹²² *ST*, 2 Dec. 1916, 5

casualties, what Gregory calls ‘the slipperiness of definition.’¹²³ What is clear is that the pattern of service for Shetlanders was not similar to the national picture. Manson’s *Roll of Honour and Roll of Service* listed over 4300 men in the services (including 500 non-residents): only about 30 per cent served in the Army including the Dominion forces. It is possible that other communities, for example Lewis and East Coast Scottish fishing towns, had a similar pattern. Gregory’s conclusion that casualty rates were directly related to length of time in the trenches and ‘disproportionately early volunteering led to disproportionately high casualty rate’ is only partly relevant to Shetland, since volunteers predominantly joined the RNR. Of the 107 Territorials who had originally volunteered for overseas service, 21 per cent did not survive. While the greatest death rate occurred among the men in the Army – the percentage lost in the Dominion Forces might have been the highest –, more men died at sea than in the trenches. Gregory commented, ‘Shetland was probably peculiar even within Scotland’.¹²⁴ Merchant seamen, many in ships requisitioned or chartered by the Navy, were at greatest risk in the unrestricted submarine warfare from early 1917 onwards. About 140 surviving seamen are recorded in the post-war *Roll of Service* as having been torpedoed or mined, one six times. Conscription was never applied to seamen but the Admiralty devised the ‘Sunhill Scheme’ for retaining reserves; despite the better pay, it was not popular. By 1917, seamen and their dependents were entitled to pensions and compensation for injured or loss.¹²⁵

Shetland was not unique in having a very local focus on the national, indeed international, situation; because of the way recruitment was organised, towns and counties across the UK were identified with particular service units and so suffered high casualty rates in particular battles.¹²⁶ April 1917 saw another high loss at Arras; nine soldiers dead, six wounded, and nine seamen lost were reported in one week.¹²⁷ The 1917 year-end report in the *Shetland Times* paid tribute in a poignant mix of sorrow and pride to the courage and ubiquity of Shetland servicemen:

¹²³ Gregory, *Last Great War*, 121; Appendix I

¹²⁴ Gregory, *Last Great War*, 121, 123

¹²⁵ Marsh and Ryan, *Seamen*, 78 – 80

¹²⁶ E.g., Moorhouse, *Hell’s Foundations Quiver*

¹²⁷ *ST*, 5 May 1917, 4;

That Shetland has done her part and is still doing splendidly, in the great fight, is common knowledge. Her sons have responded to the call and taken up arms in defence of Right and Home in a manner second to none. Out on the turbulent waters of the cold North Sea, in the Mediterranean, and in fact, wherever the British flag is flying, on the ocean, there are sons of the 'Old Rock' to be found; and on the land, whatever it be amid the mud and discomfort of the Western front, or on the Snowy peaks of the Italian front, or in the sands of Egypt and Palestine, there are Shetlanders to be found, wearing the khaki, and 'doing their bit' and facing the danger. So the war cloud grows thick and dark, for scarcely a mail reaches these islands but it brings ill-tidings to some fireside. The average death-rate has been about twenty-five men per quarter since the war commenced; and what that means, especially when it is considered that it is the young manhood of these islands, does not require to be stated. Shetland has responded most nobly to the call; but she is paying the price.¹²⁸

Overall, 1917 saw the highest losses. In 1918, the severe casualty rate continued and more men were conscripted, though some would not have completed their training before the Germans began to retreat. Another 100 RNR were sent to Portsmouth.¹²⁹ At sea, convoys had reduced the submarine attacks but there were still many casualties.

Conclusion

For Shetlanders the pattern of service and casualties was not typical and were influenced by the effects of geography, the sea-going tradition, suspicions about the loyalty of the islanders and the need for local defence. In the early part of the war, most volunteers joined the RNR and spent the first part in of the war in Shetland, which meant that casualties were comparatively light before 1916, when the local Territorials reached the front-line. Conscription meant that more men joined the Army and the casualty rate rose. Once in active service, the experience of Shetlanders was unlikely to have been unusual. The men in the Merchant Navy found themselves in danger during the periods of unrestricted warfare, while the hazardous work of escort and mine clearance took its toll of the RNR in the later years. Overall, Shetlanders felt that they had 'done their bit' for the war effort and this idea became fixed in local consciousness, affirming pride in their contribution and island identity.

¹²⁸ *ST*, 8 Jan. 1918, 4

¹²⁹ PRO:TNA ADM 116/1830, Collard to Greatorex, 31 Aug. 1918

CHAPTER 5 ROYAL NAVY OPERATIONS IN SHETLAND

The war at sea was, and is, far less well known than the Western Front. Given that the naval race between Britain and Germany was the most evident manifestation of their rivalry, the switch of focus to land-based warfare was a significant transformation. For Shetlanders, the sea was equally, if not more, important. Because of its geographical position, Shetland was used as a base for naval operations and played an active role in the war. That role has been underrated, as has been the Navy's contribution to Britain's victory. This chapter focuses on these naval activities, which meant that many civilians in Shetland, unlike inland communities, had direct experience of these aspects of the war.

Britain's maritime, indeed only, pre-war strategy was to sweep Germany's shipping from the sea and block its imports. Shetland could play a crucial part. The valid concern about a potential invasion was not that Shetland might be a bridgehead for a larger invasion, but that it might enable the Germans to break the blockade. In reality, Britain's naval superiority made an invasion very unlikely, and a greater danger was the threat to Britain's trade from submarines, mines and the German contempt for international law regarding civilian lives.

There were four main fields of activity around Shetland: coast-watching by the RNR; the blockade by the Tenth Cruiser Squadron; the Auxiliary Patrol's anti-submarine and minesweeping activities and the Scandinavian convoys. They were interrelated and employed some of the same personnel at different times. In 1918, as well as support for the Russian campaign and the laying of the Northern Barrage, there were airborne operations, a kite balloon base and a seaplane base. After discussing these operations and their importance to the war-effort, this chapter considers how naval personnel viewed Shetland and relations between Shetlanders and the Navy.

The RNR Shetland Section

The role of the Shetland Section of the RNR was the outcome of the Admiralty's concerns about a potential invasion and involving Shetlanders in defence, as described in Chapter 3. As soon as the war started, Lieutenant Colonel Evans put into action the plans laid the previous winter. The RNR manned thirty-five lookout stations, with the younger

men being retained in Lerwick. Rear Admiral Dudley De Chair, commanding the Tenth Cruiser Squadron, considered that the force ‘would be able to offer an effective resistance to a raiding force until help should be forthcoming’.¹ In December, Vice Admiral Colville, commanding Orkney and Shetland, abandoned the idea of a mobile defence force and asked for a report on the lookouts. Evans’ report explained that the primary objective was ‘the establishment of an efficient watch for submarines’. One difficulty was that the stations were on high ground to command a view over all potential anchorages, which was not conducive to detecting a periscope or submarine wash. There also had to be a means of destroying any observed submarines. Accordingly, a system of coastal patrols was established, with 250 men in seven districts, based in Unst, Yell, Hillswick, Voe, Lerwick, Walls and Sandwick, each with a six-pounder and a field-gun and a car to tow them.²



Figure 5.1 An RNR gun in tow

Evans had a Lieutenant and Sergeants of Marines but no other officers, since the pre-war RNR had not been envisaged as a coastguard force.³ He decided, ‘the Shetlander will work far better under local men, who understand him, than under strangers who do not’.⁴ Local landowner, Sir Arthur Nicolson, was delighted to recruit his three sons as officers, along with William Gordon of Yell, James Adie of

¹ TNA: PRO ADM 137/185, report, 27 Aug. 1914

² TNA: PRO ADM 137/1951, 574, Colville to Officer i/c troops, Lerwick, 4 Dec. 1914; 578 – 85, report, Evans, 12 Dec. 1914

³ SA, D50/1, Rollo, II, II

⁴ TNA: PRO ADM 137/1951, 581, report Evans, 12 Dec. 1914

Voe, James Shearer of Whalsay, Thomas White, William Isbister and Denis de Vitre.⁵ In the summer of 1915, Evans drew up a list of the 1216 men under his command; 542 were look outs and cable guards; 238 were on service with the Fleet at home and away and 190 were employed on various guard duties and working parties, leaving 246 'available for duty'.⁶

According to the inspector and supervisor, Lieutenant Walter Windham, the RNR men were not always well disciplined originally: 'They come on duty in the evening the worse for drink, and refuse to answer the sentry's challenge'. Windham suggested, 'why not tickle them up with the bayonet?' and the first one got such a tickling that he had to go to hospital. Still drinking too much, he was put 'on board a disused hulk in charge of a pugilist' and caused no further trouble.⁷ This was presumably the worst case, although Windham moved the Unst Reservists into barracks as he thought they were 'getting too soft'.⁸ His later assessment, however, was that the men 'were splendid fellows and one could not find a more obliging or nicer lot to deal with'.⁹

It is doubtful whether the lookouts were of much value. There were a number of false reports of submarines, usually sharks or whales. Other people also sent reports of sightings but, received several days later, they were useless.¹⁰ Communication was a problem, hampered by remoteness, weather and confusion about similar place-names. Though eventually all the stations had telephones, originally only the highest station had one, and so a beacon system was used with cairns filled with kelp, which produced a dense smoke.¹¹ Various methods of signalling between stations and to patrol boats, including fish baskets, flags and Very lights, were tried unsuccessfully, and in 1917, seven of the stations were supplied with Fallolite flashing lamps.¹² Windham taught the Reservists signalling with Morse Code and semaphore and how

⁵ SA, D24/72/1, Nicolson to Evans, 18 Nov. 1914 – 5 Jan. 1915; SA, D50/26/1 Rollo, 'Land Defences', 2

⁶ TNA: PRO ADM 137/2250, 141, undated

⁷ Walter Windham, *Waves, Wheels, Wings: An Autobiography* (London, 1943), 92

⁸ SA, D1/123/9/22, Sandison, 13 Jun. 1915

⁹ Windham, *Waves, Wheels, Wings*, 116

¹⁰ TNA: PRO ADM 137/1951, 578, report Evans, 12 Dec. 1914

¹¹ Windham, *Waves, Wheels, Wings*, 93; Alston, 'Shetland in the Last War', *SN*, 14 Dec. 1939, 7

¹² ADM 137/2250, 361 – 78, correspondence, 25 – 27 Aug. 1915 and 12 Jun. – 3 Oct. 1917

to judge distances.¹³ The guns were practically useless because of difficulties with transporting them and they were never fired at any submarine.¹⁴ A story described the sighting of a submarine in Unst in September 1915. First the telephone was not working; then, after two cars had broken down, the crew ‘had to enlist the help of a lot of old men to drag the gun’, only to find that, predictably, the submarine had disappeared.¹⁵ Later, lorries were used to tow the guns.¹⁶

The local population did not always respect the RNR, sometimes termed the ‘Run No Risks’. Tom Sandison considered the lookouts indispensable, ‘but the employment of the rest is futile and foolish at the best, sometimes even farcical’. In 1916, he wrote that they spent most of their time fishing at the pier; ‘a fine body of men’, deteriorating through inactivity.¹⁷ Another disparaging report described a crew responding to a submarine alert but forgetting the ammunition.¹⁸

Evans was unpopular, not only among the RNR. He was removed after the death of a Reservist, whom he had illegally punished and imprisoned, and was replaced in November 1915 by Lieutenant Colonel T. F. Phillips.¹⁹ As described in Chapter 4, successive groups of RNR left Shetland for more active service. After conscription was introduced, Vice Admiral Brock, Colville’s successor, was ‘not at all satisfied that the duties of Shetland Section R.N.R. are arranged so as to obtain the maximum amount of work out of the number available’. The Admiralty approved his proposal for retaining 707 men, including 319 lookouts over military age, and relocating 501 ‘unnecessary for their present duty in the Shetlands’. Proposals that 360 could be substituted for naval and civilian stokers were rejected. Phillips then suggested that five lookout stations might be closed. The total RNR was reduced to 638, ninety-four in Lerwick, thirty-four at the Swarbacks Minn base and the rest on guard duties.

¹³ Windham, *Waves, Wheels, Wings*, 116

¹⁴ Alston, ‘Shetland’, 14 Dec. 1939, 7

¹⁵ Attributed to W. S. Inkster, ‘An Incident in World War One’, in *Shetland Life*, 203 (2007), 26

¹⁶ Alston, ‘Shetland’, 14 Dec. 1939, 7

¹⁷ SA, D1/123/10/14, Sandison, 26 Mar. 1916; /16, 9 Apr. 1916; /24, 4 Jun. 1916

¹⁸ James Miller, *The North Atlantic Front: Orkney, Shetland, Faroe, and Iceland at War* (Glasgow 2003), 44

¹⁹ Flett, *Spy Fever*, 143 – 57; SA, D123/9/13, Sandison, 11 Apr. 1915; /43 – 48, 14 Nov. – 19 Dec. 1915; TNA, PRO ADM 12/1545B, 78.1, 78.2, Digest, 24 Oct. 1915; H.E. Blumberg, *Britain’s Sea Soldiers: A Record of the Royal Marines during The War 1914 – 1919* (Devonport: 1927) 3, 258

Three hundred and eighty-one were over military age.²⁰ In 1918, fifty were between sixty and seventy-two years old and by the end of the war, the average age was over fifty.²¹

Lieutenant Colonel C. E. Collard took over in April 1918 and re-appraised the requirements. He introduced gun crews from Chatham, abolished the patrols and reduced the stations to twenty-four and the RNR to 492: 319 lookouts and 173 at Lerwick. This reduction, which would save about £13500, was dependent on the installation of telephones, beacons being 'scarcely efficient owing to the vague, slow, and uncertain report'. He thought it was 'exceedingly improbable' that the enemy would attempt to use the islands, and that the inhabitants 'in view of the reward which has been offered, may ... be reasonably reckoned upon to give information'.²² It seems that he did not count on them without this incentive, possibly based on an incident when a German submarine, beached on the Orkney island of Sanday, was neither investigated nor reported.²³ At the Armistice, Lieutenant Colonel F.C. Edwards took over.²⁴

The RNR were useful in supporting the naval operations in Shetland but, given that an invasion was never more than a remote possibility requiring the prior annihilation of the Grand Fleet, their coast-watching operation added little to the defence of Britain. What it did was to provide employment for hundreds of Shetland men, particularly those over military age, and enable them to feel that they had contributed to the war-effort. It also kept several hundreds more out of riskier activities for the first two years of the war, an unusual situation that was perhaps not recognised in Shetland.

The Tenth Cruiser Squadron at Swarbacks Minn

The Tenth Cruiser Squadron operated a blockade of German seaborne trade to the north of Britain (sometimes called the 'Northern Patrol') and Shetland was clearly in a crucial position for its operations. Several books have described the blockade, some written by Squadron officers, and mostly concentrating on the uncomfortable

²⁰ TNA, PRO ADM 137/2250, 180 – 208, correspondence, Brock, Phillips and Admiralty, 31 Mar. – 3 Jul. 1916

²¹ TNA: PRO 116/1830, Collard to Greatorex, 7 Jun. 1918; TNA: PRO ADM 1/8540/261, Collard to Greatorex, 10 Oct. 1918

²² Blumberg, *Sea Soldiers*, 258; TNA: PRO ADM 116/1830, Collard to Greatorex, 7 Jun. 1918

²³ TNA: PRO ADM 137/2249, 420, Notice, Hall, 31 Jul. 1918

²⁴ SA, D50/26/1, Rollo, 'Land Defences', 3

and dangerous actions at sea.²⁵ Since few of the Admiralty records about the shore-bases have survived, it is not so easy to discover how Shetlanders were involved.

On 27th July, even before war was declared, a cruiser and four destroyers of the Eighth Flotilla were despatched to Dales Voe. It was said that ‘the Army Council are very anxious regarding possible attack on the Orkney and Shetland Islands’. On 3rd August, three German transports were rumoured to have left the Baltic, and more cruisers were sent to Shetland waters.²⁶ Two colliers were sent to Lerwick and two to Swarbacks Minn, a practically landlocked area of water on the west of Shetland, and the first ship refuelled there on 10th August. De Chair arrived in Lerwick on 15th and found the defences ‘most inadequate’. He had twelve guns put ashore from cruisers; eight were stationed in Lerwick, the others for use by the coast-watchers. There were rumours about submarines and aircraft, and De Chair, suspecting that the enemy had a base in Shetland, had potential anchorages searched.²⁷

The squadron originally consisted of eight elderly ‘Edgar class’ cruisers, supplemented later in August by three armed merchant cruisers.²⁸ Their duties were to prevent contraband goods from reaching Germany, to destroy any warships encountered and preclude an enemy landing in Shetland. Early in the war, they also took part with other squadrons in ‘sweeps’ of the North Sea, searching for German vessels. The German merchant fleet was no longer operational by the end of August but neutral countries and ships continued to trade. The blockade, while hampered by bureaucracy, issues of international law and concerns about offending neutral powers, gradually became more stringent and was ultimately important in Germany’s defeat.²⁹ The tactics were to intercept and board merchant ships and send those with suspicious cargoes to a port for examination. In October, fewer than twenty ships were stopped, nearly all Scandinavian; only two were sent in and they were not

²⁵ Corbett, *Naval Operations*, I; Tupper, *Reminiscences*; E. K. Chatterton, *The Big Blockade* (London, 1932); De Chair, *Sea is Strong*; Brocklebank, *Tenth Cruiser Squadron*; A. C. Hampshire, *The Blockaders* (London, 1980); John D. Grainger, (ed.), *The Maritime Blockade of Germany in the Great War: the Northern Patrol 1914 – 1918* (Aldershot, 2003); Eric W. Osborne, *Economic Blockade of Germany, 1914 – 1919* (London, 2004)

²⁶ Corbett, *Naval Operations*, I, 25; De Chair, *Sea is Strong*, 168; Hampshire, *Blockaders*, 18; PRO: TNA ADM 137/965, 12, instructions to officer i/c O&S, 2 Aug. 1914; ADM 186/614, *Naval Staff, Monograph: 10th Cruiser Squadron* (1922), 12

²⁷ De Chair, *Sea is Strong*, 168, 171; SA, D26/1, Rollo, ‘Home Defences’, 2

²⁸ De Chair, *Sea is Strong*, 173

²⁹ Osborne, *Economic Blockade*, 59 – 62; 74, 83 – 85; De Chair, *Sea is Strong*, 185 – 87, 199 – 200

detained.³⁰ The squadron's first casualty was the armed liner, SS *Oceanic*, which ran aground near Foula on 8th September and sank with no loss of life. HMS *Hawke* was sunk on 15th October during a 'sweep'. Due to this and other losses, the squadron was withdrawn from the North Sea to patrol to the north of Shetland.³¹

In November, Britain designated the entire North Sea a military area and ordered that all merchant ships should take the route through the Dover Straits. Some Scandinavian ships were allowed to go north of Scotland provided they called at Kirkwall.³² Due to intelligence reports that Germans U-boats were heading for Shetland, Swarbacks Minn was evacuated and destroyers searched the coastline again.³³ The numbers of interceptions increased, 319 vessels being boarded before 14th November.³⁴ The 'Edgars', found to be incapable of withstanding prolonged cruising in rough weather, were replaced by newer armed merchant cruisers.³⁵ The squadron's bases were Liverpool and Glasgow, which offered the sailors urban entertainment when in port for supplies and repairs, but travelling took up valuable time and so a more convenient base was sought. Swarbacks Minn was reported in December 1914 to be unsuitable.³⁶

By early 1915, the Squadron consisted of twenty-four armed cruisers, reduced by mid-March to eighteen.³⁷ The crews were mainly merchant seaman and Reservists with some Royal Navy officers, over 7000 in total.³⁸ The blockade became more effective: 122 ships were intercepted between 24th December and 24th January.³⁹ In response to Britain's restrictions, in February 1915, the Germans declared the waters round Britain a war zone and advised merchant shipping to sail to the north or risk being sunk. It was impossible for neutral shipping to comply with the orders of both combatants. The Germans had the same issues as the British about interfering with

³⁰ Corbett, *Naval Operations*, I, 235 – 36

³¹ *ST*, 24 Oct. 1914, 5; Corbett, *Naval Operations*, I, 167; De Chair, *Sea is Strong*, 177

³² De Chair, *Sea is Strong*, 187

³³ PRO: TNA ADM 186/621, Naval Staff Monograph, *Home Waters, Nov. 1914 – Jan. 1915* (1925), 59

³⁴ Osborne, *Economic Blockade*, 79

³⁵ De Chair, *Sea is Strong*, 180 – 82

³⁶ Alexander Scrimgeour, *Scrimgeour's Small Scribbling Diary, 1914 – 1916* (London, 2009), 91; PRO: TNA ADM 186/614, *10th Cruiser Squadron*, 31

³⁷ PRO: TNA ADM 186/614, *10th Cruiser Squadron*, 40

³⁸ Tupper, *Reminiscences*, 226 – 27; Chatterton, *Big Blockade*, 173

³⁹ De Chair, *Sea is Strong*, 193

neutral shipping, but took a much harder line, starting unrestricted submarine warfare, sinking merchant ships without warning.⁴⁰ Britain announced that no vessels would be allowed to land in Germany and any goods bound for Germany would be confiscated. This removed some of the complications for the blockaders but added to the workload.⁴¹

Having moved his patrols further north, De Chair found that going south for supplies and repairs was wasting too much time and fuel. In May 1915, he decided to use Swarbacks Minn, a handier location, already being used for refuelling and offering good natural protection for several ships. The examination boat HMS *Thirty* and four colliers were stationed there with over 200 stokers, and HMS *Gibraltar* became the depot and repair ship. Her guns were brought on shore, booms were put in place to protect the entrance between Muckle Roe and Vementry and extra lookout posts were established. Trawlers and drifters were used to sweep for mines and for boom defence and patrols. The Officer in charge, Rear Admiral W. B. Fawckner, used Busta House as his shore headquarters and the pier there was extended using materials from an old fishing station.⁴² There were problems supplying this remote base; Lerwick merchants needed four days' notice because of the unreliability of the steamer service and the poor state of the roads.⁴³ Fresh water was piped from a loch above Olnafirth but was initially fit only for boilers and not for drinking. By the end of the year, however, De Chair found that the harbour's 'proximity to the patrol areas and natural advantages make it extremely useful', though only certain ships could take on coal in the enclosed space and no large repairs could be carried out.⁴⁴ In June, Jellicoe, concerned about German submarines sinking ships sent in under guard, proposed Gruting Voe on the west side of Shetland as an additional examination port. He accepted Colville's recommendation that it would be better to

⁴⁰ PRO: TNA ADM 186/614, 10th Cruiser Squadron, 36 – 37

⁴¹ De Chair, *Sea is Strong*, 206

⁴² De Chair, *Sea is Strong*, 210 – 11; TNA: PRO ADM 137/185, reports, De Chair, 31 May 1915; 9 Jul. – 15 Nov. 1915; TNA: PRO ADM 137/2249, Assistant Civil Engineer to Greatorex, 24 Oct. 1918

⁴³ TNA: PRO ADM137/1105, 365 – 67, report, Hicks, 12 Aug. 1915 et al

⁴⁴ TNA: PRO ADM 137/185, report, De Chair, 15 Nov. 1915

use Lerwick, which might accommodate only twelve vessels to Gruting Voe's fifty but had better shore facilities.⁴⁵

During 1915, the Squadron intercepted 3098 ships and sent in 743 for examination.⁴⁶ In order to present a combined allied force for the blockade, two cruisers were given to France and their names changed to *Champagne* and *Artois*. De Chair had no great admiration for the French crews, particularly when *Champagne* dragged her anchor at Olnafirth.⁴⁷ Due to pressure from neutral countries, the Germans suspended unrestricted warfare but the blockade was increasingly hazardous: submarines and mines became more common and there was always the threat of rough weather. In January 1916, the boom at Swarbacks Minn was damaged by gales and it was later moved into more sheltered waters.⁴⁸ In March, Rear Admiral Reginald Tupper replaced De Chair, who moved to the new Ministry of Blockade. New armed cruisers arrived to replace losses: in all thirty-six ships participated in the squadron, along with eighteen trawlers. Ships of the Second Cruiser Squadron were used to strengthen the patrol.⁴⁹ The area of sea covered expanded, even to the north of Iceland. Swarbacks Minn was a busy harbour used by 265 vessels in October and November.⁵⁰ The blockade was becoming more effective and five of the cruisers were withdrawn at the end of 1916.⁵¹

The base was an obvious target for minelayers, and in January 1917, a mine exploded during a sweep.⁵² After the Germans resumed unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917, the USA joined the war in April and convoys were introduced on the Scandinavian route, attempts to avoid the blockade ceased. The squadron's main task was then to prevent raiders from getting into the Atlantic.

⁴⁵ TNA: PRO ADM 137/1081, 323, Jellicoe to Admiralty, 4 Jun. 1915; 341 – 42, Colville to CinC, 25 Jun. 1915; 352, Jellicoe to Admiralty, 2 Aug. 1915

⁴⁶ TNA: PRO ADM 137/185, Analysis of Vessels Intercepted

⁴⁷ De Chair, *Sea is Strong*, 203 – 04

⁴⁸ PRO: TNA ADM 186/614, *10th Cruiser Squadron*, 57

⁴⁹ Tupper, *Reminiscences*, 212, 220; 285 – 86; TNA: PRO ADM 137/2142, 486 – 635, 31 Oct. 1916 – 4 Mar. 1917

⁵⁰ TNA: PRO ADM 137/1894, Tupper to CinC, 8 Dec. 1916

⁵¹ Osborne, *Economic Blockade*, 153 – 55

⁵² Hurd, *Merchant Navy*, III, 184

Cruisers were gradually withdrawn and the squadron was abolished at the end of 1917, though the base remained open in case of an urgent requirement.⁵³

The Tenth Cruiser Squadron intercepted 12979 ships and another 2039 reported voluntarily; 642 ships were thought to have evaded the cordon. In the busiest week, 156 ships were boarded and fifty-eight sent to port. Between December 1914 and December 1917, nine cruisers were lost with 1165 men.⁵⁴ There were many exciting and dangerous incidents involving expert seamanship and courage. The importance of the blockade was rarely recognised during the war, though both local and national newspapers frequently reported shortages of food and other goods in Germany, which sapped civilian morale.⁵⁵ The Germans' response, unrestricted submarine warfare, was instrumental in bringing the USA into the war. Swarbacks Minn was not, of course, the only harbour used for the blockade but it was very much on the front line because of its proximity to the northerly shipping routes.

The Lerwick Base and the Auxiliary Patrol, 1914 – 16

Lerwick complemented the work of the blockaders by providing a port for the examination of ships suspected of trading with Germany and for the Auxiliary Patrol, whose purpose was to prevent the Germans disrupting Britain's trade with mines and submarines. The Patrol consisted of yachts and motor- and steam-powered boats, manned by volunteers and reservists, officers being commissioned in the Royal Naval Voluntary Reserve.⁵⁶ Trawlers and drifters were commandeered, often complete with crews. Commander James Startin, the Senior Naval Officer in Shetland, started with four trawlers and four motor boats and used the yacht *Shemira* as his headquarters.⁵⁷ The numbers soon increased and the Auxiliary Patrol was reorganised in January 1915 into twenty-three areas, Shetland being one.⁵⁸

When it became clear that there would be considerable activity, a more substantial administration was required. Startin was relieved in March 1915 by Captain H. C.

⁵³ PRO: TNA ADM 137/1448, 12 – 170, 14 Aug. 1917 – 1 Mar. 1918; PRO: TNA ADM 137/1373, 369, Hunt, 8 Dec. 1917

⁵⁴ Tupper, *Reminiscences*, 288. Grainger considered the estimate of those not intercepted was probably low; Grainger, *Maritime Blockade*, 19

⁵⁵ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery*, rep. (London: 2004), 132 – 34

⁵⁶ Hurd, *Merchant Navy*, I, 327–28

⁵⁷ SA, DA 50/1, Rollo, II, II

⁵⁸ Hurd, *Merchant Navy*, I, 370 – 71

Alston, who established an office in the Fish Market. The staff, which had consisted of a paymaster, two RNR lieutenants and a warrant officer, was augmented by another lieutenant, a secretary, a typist and a master-at-Arms. By this time, the Shetland Patrol consisted of three yachts, ten trawlers, four motorboats and three drifters; in the summer eighty-five vessels were on patrol with forty-five officers and 1200 men. The first losses occurred in the spring: a yacht, a trawler and a collier were sunk by a submarine in the Fair Isle channel. Although there were many scares, the first confirmed sighting of a submarine was on the east coast in May 1915.⁵⁹ Trawlers were fitted for minesweeping, and a new method of submarine-hunting was developed using nets slung from drifters. A curing station was used to store and dry some forty to fifty miles of nets. Generally these methods were ineffective: the Lerwick drifters never caught a submarine, though once a whale became entangled in a net.⁶⁰ Alston had a trawler *Sitvel* fitted up with masked guns and secret wireless, but she never encountered a submarine. In June, the trawler *Tenby Castle* captured a German merchant ship and sank another off the coast of Norway.⁶¹ That same month two German submarines sank sixteen drifters fishing to the east of Shetland and so armed drifters were deployed to protect the fishing fleet.⁶² In September, the depot ship HMS *Brilliant* arrived, reducing the need to bring stores from Orkney. Lerwick had no anti-submarine defences until, between October 1915 and spring 1916, booms were placed at the harbour entrances between Bressay and the Shetland Mainland.⁶³

There were incidents on land as well as at sea. On 12th April 1915, a fire and explosion occurred in a galvanised-iron building at the north end of the Fish Market, used for ammunition without the knowledge of the Harbour Trust or the Town Council. Three RNR trawler-men, three local men and a boy were killed, fifteen trawler-men and twelve local people injured. Suspicion fell on one Patrick Brennan who had been sacked from the post at the Grand Hotel and could not be traced, but there was no substantive evidence against him. The Admiralty held two enquiries. Original reports claimed the fire had started in the net-store above the naval store but

⁵⁹ Alston, 'Shetland', 14 Dec. 1939, 7; 21 Dec. 1939, 7

⁶⁰ Halpern, *Naval History*, 296 – 97; Alston, 'Shetland', 21 Dec. 1939, 7

⁶¹ TNO:PRO ADM 186/614, *10th Cruiser Squadron*, 46 – 47

⁶² Alston, 'Shetland', 21 Dec. 1939, 7; TNO: PRO ADM 186/622, *Naval Staff Monograph: Home Waters, Feb. – Jul. 1915* (1925), 247 – 48

⁶³ Alston, 'Shetland', 14 Dec. 1939, 7

this appeared to be incorrect. The second enquiry concluded there had been negligence in how the ammunition had been temporarily stored, and that one of the two men working there must have been smoking, but there was no good evidence to support this or any other conclusion. This outcome was never made public and the Admiralty refused to accept responsibility, but offered compensation through the Local Government Board as ‘an act of grace’. The Admiralty’s surveyor assessed the damage at over £6000, though 138 claims had been made, totalling over £10000, and so the £3000 distributed was not considered adequate.⁶⁴ Another fire occurred in January 1916, this time in a building adjacent to the Navy’s store, and the stored materials were saved. It happened during a particularly severe storm during which ships were damaged and several, including two destroyers, drifted ashore.⁶⁵



Figure 5.2 The Norwegian Barque *Sagitta* in Lerwick Harbour, 1915/16

In April 1916, Brentham House became the headquarters and, in order to release men for active service, women were employed as typists and telegraphists with Boy Scouts as runners.⁶⁶ During 1916, submarines were less of a threat, though British vessels remained at risk. Sightings of submarines increased and it was suspected that they came into land at night; drifters set nets without success.⁶⁷ During the summer, examination work increased and an examination office was opened with two officers

⁶⁴ TNA PRO ADM1/8437/320, SNO, 15 Apr. 1915; Metropolitan Police, 23 Apr. 1915; Report of Enquiry, 24 Apr. 1915, 4; Minute, 19 Apr. 1915

⁶⁵ Alston, ‘Shetland’, 14 Dec. 1939, 7

⁶⁶ SA, D50/1, Rollo, II, VI

⁶⁷ TNA: PRO ADM 137/437, Aux. Patrol report, 25 Nov. 1916

and four interpreters.⁶⁸ Between July and September, 269 ships were examined, and that year 150 suspects were disembarked.⁶⁹

The North Sea Convoys and the Lerwick Base, 1917 – 18⁷⁰

After Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917, more ships were sunk than even the German Navy had predicted.⁷¹ From November 1916, a form of ‘controlled sailing’ or ‘protected sailing’ had been tried on the Scandinavian route, with westbound ships sailing overnight met by destroyers at dawn and those eastbound from Lerwick escorted until dusk. Escorts were also provided to the west coast of Scotland and the White Sea. Then, in April 1917, Lerwick became the collection point for convoys, escorted to and from Norway and ports on the east coast of the British Mainland. This began the base’s busiest period. Additional facilities and defences were provided; more destroyers and trawlers arrived with the cruiser *Leander* as depot ship, the water ship *Aquarius*, and the hospital ship *Bernice*. Two 4.7 in. guns from HMS *Brilliant* were stationed overlooking the southern approaches.⁷²

In March 1917, the Admiralty decided that, ‘owing to the special character of the work being performed by the various vessels stationed at Lerwick’, vessels would be sent elsewhere for examination.⁷³ Nevertheless, the shipping using Lerwick increased; between March and November 5560 vessels passed through. The largest number there on one day, 23rd September, was 139 vessels including seventeen destroyers, twenty-six trawlers, twenty-two drifters, four whalers, two yachts, one salvage steamer, one tug, four motor patrol boats, three oilers, fifty-five steamers and sailing ships. Often ships had to moor outside the defences, in Breiwick to the south.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Alston, ‘Shetland’, 14 Dec. 1939, 7

⁶⁹ Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM), 13(41).18, W.R.N.S.: A Brief Record of the Royal Naval Base, Lerwick, Shetlands, during the Great War, 1914 – 1919

⁷⁰ TNA: PRO ADM 137/2660, H. E. Symons, *History of the Scandinavian Convoys*, 22 Jan. 1919

⁷¹ Newbolt, *Naval Operations*, VI, 370 – 71

⁷² Alston, ‘Shetland’, 21 Dec. 1939, 7

⁷³ TN: PRO ADM 137/299, 196, reports, Tupper, 8 Mar, 1917, 24 Apr. 1917

⁷⁴ Alston, ‘Shetland’, 21 Dec. 1939, 7; Symons, *Scandinavian Convoys*

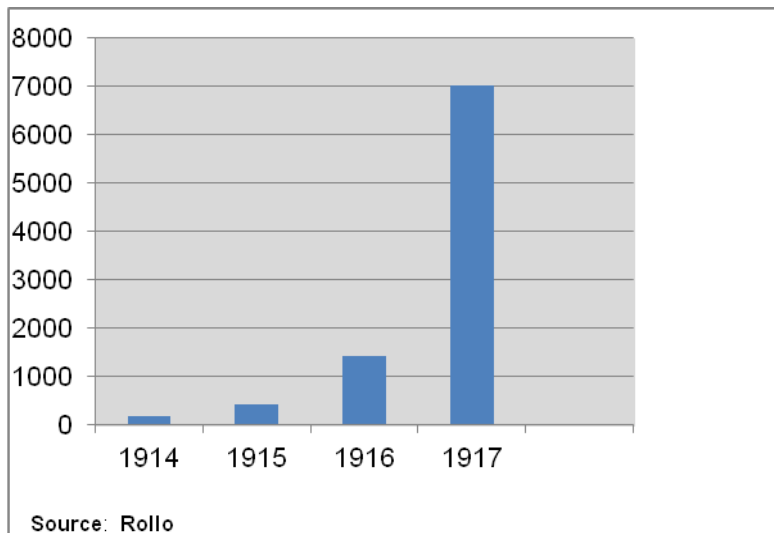


Figure 5.3 Merchant ships using Lerwick Harbour

The convoys required complex coordination of ships of different kinds, speeds and nationalities, and a Route Instruction Office was opened for briefing captains.⁷⁵ Telegraphists were kept busy sending manifests and other documentation. The female office staff, about fifteen at maximum, joined the newly formed WRNS; Lena Mouat, since 1915 the commanding officer's secretary, was promoted to Assistant Principal.⁷⁶ An average of four shipwrecked crews a week arrived in the harbour and townspeople provided clothing and hot meals. In October 1917, because of the increased importance of the base, Rear Admiral Clement Greateorex was appointed Senior Naval Officer. The Examination Office continued until the end of 1917.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Alston, 'Shetland', 21 Dec. 1939, 7

⁷⁶ Lena N. Mouat, 'With the W.R.N.S. 1914 – 18', *New Shetlander*, 107, (1974), 23 – 25; SA, D1/43/3, A. A Oldham, 'Ultima Thule', 1919

⁷⁷ Alston, 'Shetland', 21 Dec. 1939, 7; 28 Dec. 1939, 7; 14 Dec. 1939, 7

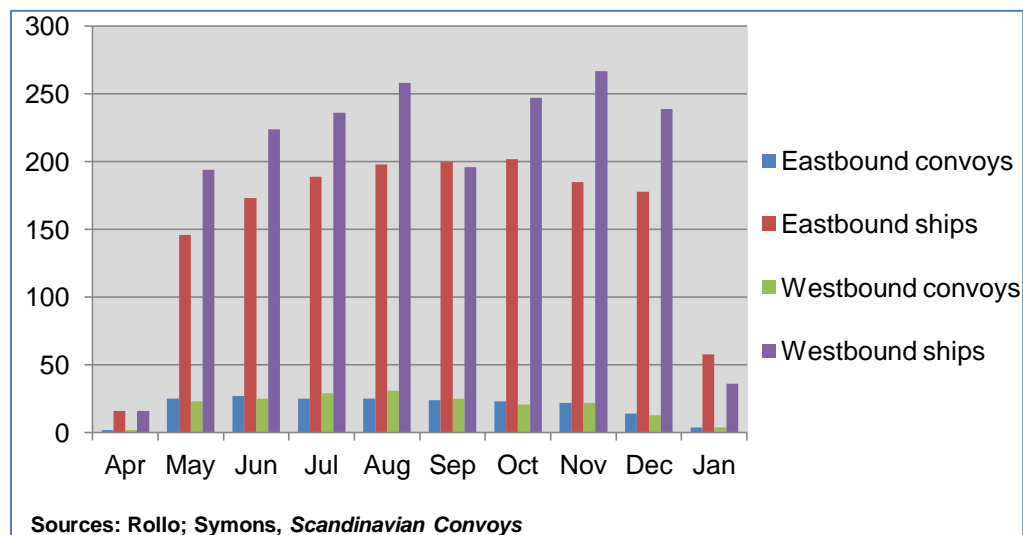


Figure 5.4 Bergen – Lerwick convoys, 1917 – 18

The convoy system was effective in protecting shipping, but there were still losses. Of the 3423 ships convoyed across the North Sea and 3654 on the East Coast route, 74 were sunk. An attack on an eastbound convoy in July 1917 was foiled by the escorting destroyers. Then on 17th October, nine ships and two destroyers of the westbound convoy were sunk by two German cruisers; only three freighters and the two trawlers escaped. A week later, also westbound, one ship was sunk and one torpedoed. On another occasion, two convoys collided and several ships were sunk. On 12th December, two ships bound for the Humber were sunk and an eastbound convoy was attacked; one destroyer, the four trawlers and the six merchant ships were sunk and only the other destroyer escaped. After that, the route was changed and Methill became the collection point, but the Shetland patrol continued to escort shipping when required.⁷⁸ Mines were a constant danger, even in the harbour.⁷⁹ After an explosion in January 1917, the port was closed and swept. Seven mines were found at the entrance and thereafter, the approaches were swept daily and mines discovered almost every fortnight. About 200 trawlers and drifters were employed.⁸⁰ Between 10th September and 12th December six merchant vessels, an Admiralty trawler and a fishing trawler were sunk or damaged near Lerwick, all attributed to the

⁷⁸ Alston, 'Shetland', 21 Dec. 1939, 7; Chatterton, *The Auxiliary Patrol* (London, 1923), 219 – 24; Halpern, *Naval History*, 376 – 79; *SN*, 11 Dec. 1919, 4; Symons, *Scandinavian Convoys*

⁷⁹ Symons, *Scandinavian Convoys*; TNO: PRO ADM 137/522, 137/523, passim

⁸⁰ TNO: PRO ADM 137/1448, 196, report, Brock, 23 Jan. 1918

German submarine, UC-40.⁸¹ On 7th February 1918, depth charges exploded on the trawler *Tenby Castle*, near the site of the 1915 explosion, killing four men. A fire on the American steamer *St. Dora* in the harbour raised suspicions of sabotage; two German passengers were arrested. In April, a Finnish government representative was held briefly on suspicion of photographing coastal defences.⁸²

Concerted efforts to hunt submarines, 'Operation BB' in June and 'Operation CC' in July 1917, were unsuccessful. Though several submarines were sighted, particularly east of Shetland, none was sunk.⁸³ Later, however, the Lerwick patrols sank three submarines, one just outside the harbour.⁸⁴ In 1917 and 1918, Lerwick was used by 'Q ships', armed vessels disguised as merchant-men, including the *Dargle*, a topsail schooner, and the barquentine *Imogen*. They had no spectacular success, though in early 1918, a small steamer, the *Tay and Tyne*, and trawlers captured German ore-ships off Norway.⁸⁵ New technology was introduced: there was a naval wireless station at Cunningsburgh and both wireless and hydrophone stations at Lerwick, Fair Isle and Swarbacks Minn.⁸⁶

The diversion of the convoy route led to changes in the defences. Early in 1918, Greatorex resurrected the question of 'the defenceless state of the Shetland Islands' because of its proximity to Germany and distance from the UK Mainland. Brock and Admiral Beatty both accepted that Lerwick could be bombarded, but thought that, since the Grand Fleet defended all the East Coast, stationing vessels at various ports would be 'a dissipation of forces contrary to all strategic principles'.⁸⁷ HMS *Brilliant* left in January 1918, being replaced as the nominal parent ship by HMS *Ambitious*. As part of the reorganisation of the RNR, new 6 inch guns were positioned, with some difficulty, at high points in the north and south of Bressay.⁸⁸ After the USA entered the war, an extensive minefield, the Northern Barrage, was

⁸¹ John Peterson, 'Pearl in the Harbour: Bressay Sound and the Menace of UC-40', *Shetland Life*, 312 (2006), 32 – 35

⁸² SA, D50/1, Rollo, II, VI; Nicolson, *Lerwick Harbour*, 100

⁸³ Halpern, *Naval History*, 366 – 67; TNA: PRO ADM 137/875, 261, map, 6 Jul. 1917

⁸⁴ Alston, 'Shetland', 28 Dec. 1939, 7

⁸⁵ E. K. Chatterton, *Q Ships and Their Story* (London, 1922), 190, 177, 259 – 64; TNO: PRO ADM 137/1448, 200, report, Brock, 23 Jan. 1918

⁸⁶ SA, D 50/1, Rollo, II, VI

⁸⁷ TNA: PRO ADM 137/1894, 97 – 99, Greatorex to Admiralty, 13 Jan. 1918; 100, Brock to CinC, c. 19 Jan. 1918; 103 Beatty to Rear Admiral Lerwick, 23 Jan. 1918

⁸⁸ SA, DA 50/1, Rollo, II, VI

laid across the North Sea by the Northern Patrol Force, under Tupper. Minelaying ships came to Lerwick in the summer of 1918, with an old battleship, HMS *Implacable*, as depot ship.⁸⁹



Figure 5.5 Raising the gun at the south end of Bressay, 1918



Figure 5.6 HMS *Implacable* and other vessels in Lerwick Harbour

The final strand of Lerwick's naval activity was supporting the British campaign in northern Russia, which was originally intended to support Russia against Germany, but became embroiled in the civil war between the Bolsheviks and White Russians. From summer 1916, ships passed through Lerwick on the way north with a variety of

⁸⁹ Osborne, *Economic Blockade*, 166; IWM, W.R.N.S.; SN, 11 Dec. 1919, 4

war material.⁹⁰ Swarbacks Minn was also used in October 1918 by the *Tras-os-Montes*, a ‘dirty, insanitary and frankly unserviceable’, Portuguese, ex-German liner carrying two battalions of Green Howards. After a near mutiny, steering problems and a burst boiler, she lay there for three weeks for temporary repairs, before encountering further breakdowns and storm-damage on the return journey.⁹¹ Supplying the war in Russia did not end at the Armistice.

Lerwick Harbour, therefore, served a variety of functions at different times: supply base, examination port, convoy collection point and haven for shipwrecked seafarers; it harboured ships hunting submarines, intercepting suspect vessels, escorting convoys, minesweeping, minelaying and supplying Britain’s allies, as well as fishing and merchant vessels. The Auxiliary Patrol has received less attention from writers than the blockade. It did not match the Navy’s preferred image of major and decisive sea battles, but its work was continuous and dangerous, and helped maintain the trade supplying both the armed forces and civilian population.

The Air Patrol

In 1914, De Chair considered whether seaplanes could be berthed at Lerwick, but it was several years before they appeared.⁹² First, a kite balloon base was built at Gremista near Lerwick, under Captain Sanders of the RAF, with six vessels, twelve sheds, twelve balloons and 264 staff.⁹³ The appearance of the first two balloons in September 1917 ‘caused quite a sensation in the town’, since many of the inhabitants thought they were German airships, but according to Alston, they ‘did not have a very long or glorious life in the Shetlands’, being destroyed two days later, presumably by weather. Overall, very little flying was done.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Alston, ‘Shetland’, 28 Dec. 1939, 7; Symons, *Scandinavian Convoys*

⁹¹ H. C. Wylly, *The Green Howards in the Great War* (Richmond, 1926), 202 – 04

⁹² TNA: PRO ADM 137/185, report, 27 Aug. 1914

⁹³ TNA: PRO AIR 1/308/15/226/188, Report on Air Organisation in regard to the Northern Barrage, 19 Jan. 1918; RAF Museum, X002-7200, Quarterly Survey of RAF Stations: 5 (1918), 60

⁹⁴ Alston, ‘Shetland’, 28 Dec. 1939, 7



Figure 5.7 A balloon over Lerwick, 1918

In May 1917, it was decided to add seaplanes to the Northern Patrol.⁹⁵ Planes were used to hunt submarines, with some success in deterring rather than destroying them.⁹⁶ Eighteen seaplanes were to be based on a ninety acre site at Catfirth on the east side of the Shetland Mainland, with sheds, workshops, slipways, wireless telegraphy, directional finding equipment and a pigeon loft.⁹⁷ It was hoped that it might be operational by the end of April, with the personnel sleeping under canvas. There were problems with transport: there was no pier and the road was not suitable for heavy vehicles.⁹⁸ A proposal to import Chinese workers from Africa was rejected; it was likely to upset not only the Islanders, ‘so many of whom are engaged in assisting the work of the Navy in various ways’, but also trade unionists on Clydeside.⁹⁹

In April 1918, the Royal Naval Air Service was amalgamated with the Royal Flying Corps to form the Royal Air Force. During the summer, 300 Flight was based at Catfirth under Lieutenant Colonel C. R. Finch Noyes, with Felixstowe F3A and

⁹⁵ TNA: PRO ADM1/8486/1, Min. Director of Air Service, 7 May 1917

⁹⁶ Alfred Price, *Aircraft versus Submarine: in Two World Wars*, 3rd ed. (Barnsley, 2004), 14 – 25; Halpern, *Naval History*, 441

⁹⁷ RAF Museum, Quarterly Survey, 26; Malcolm Fife, *Scottish Aerodromes of the First World War* (Stroud, 2007), 37 – 43

⁹⁸ TNA: PRO AIR 1/308/15/226/188, Air Organisation

⁹⁹ TNA: PRO LAB 2/892/ED1/76994/4/1918, letters, Ministry of Munitions and Ministry of Labour, 26 Jan. – 6 Feb. 1918

‘Large America’ or ‘Porte Baby’ seaplanes.¹⁰⁰ Planned Flights 301 to 305 were never formed, but 445 personnel were stationed there.¹⁰¹ The location was unsuitable and in June, the sole seaplane was driven ashore and damaged. There were problems with unfinished facilities and inexperienced personnel. Vice-Admiral Hall, now in command of Orkney and Shetland, visited in July 1918 and wrote that Catfirth was ‘anything but ideal, having hills close to and with strong winds I should suppose it may be found useless’. It was decided to review the suitability of the air stations.¹⁰²



Figure 5.8 A damaged seaplane at Catfirth, 1918

Finch Noyes reported on 23rd August. As it would impossible to fly after mid-September, he proposed to reduce to a care, maintenance and development basis, with about sixty men at the balloon station, forty at the Gremista headquarters and twenty-five at Catfirth, but to consider building an aerodrome for patrols south of Shetland by April.¹⁰³ A committee report recommended an intelligence sub-centre in Lerwick, ‘owing to the poorness of communications between the Orkneys and the Shetlands’; the abandonment of Catfirth and the establishment of a new base at Baltsound and possibly another at Lerwick. The balloon requirement was left to the

¹⁰⁰ Simon Gunn, ‘The Catfirth Flying Boat Station’, *New Shetlander*, 139 (1982), 12 – 14; 140 (1982), 27 – 29; TNA: PRO AIR 1/308/15/226/188, Report on North Sea Air Forces, 13 Feb. 1918

¹⁰¹ Mick Davis, and Bill Morgan, ‘Gazetteer of Flying Sites in the UK and Ireland, 1912 – 20, Part 5’ in *Cross & Cockade International*, 42, 1 (2011), GES 033; RAF Museum, Quarterly Survey, 26

¹⁰² TNA: PRO AIR1/643/17/122/267, Swann to Vice-Ad. Northern Patrol, 23 Jun. 1918; /259, Hall to CinC, 8 Jul. 1918; /262, Terms of Reference of Conference, 17 Jul. 1918

¹⁰³ TNA: PRO AIR 1/643/17/122/ 262, Finch Noyes to Hall, 23 Aug. 1918

Admiralty to decide, though during the winter the base could be reduced to 100 men. This report also mentioned problems with the weather, transport, shortage of skilled engineers, lack of experience and energy and ‘the low category of the personnel, many of whom are quite unable to stand the exacting climatic conditions’.¹⁰⁴ A conference on 24th September decided to reduce the programme for Catfirth:

to the lowest possible limits to enable it to be converted to a Repair Base for dealing with two Squadrons of Large Americas working in the Shetlands in the Summer, and for one flight operating from there.

The wireless installations and personnel were to be retained during the winter and be available for deployment by the Senior Naval Officer. A mooring-out station for two flights of ‘Large Americas’ was to be established at Baltasound for summer use only, with accommodation and a workshop. There was no objection to another station at Lerwick. Six sheds were to be finished at the Gremista Balloon Station, but it was to be closed down for the winter.¹⁰⁵

A committee investigated potential sites for an aerodrome for planes to patrol between Shetland and Orkney. Greatorrex objected because ‘flying from any base in Shetlands is most uncertain’ and that Sumburgh was too far from Lerwick. In any case, the sites were judged unsuitable. Greatorrex also opposed a base at Baltasound as it had all the disadvantages of Catfirth, which he thought had been a very costly experiment; the 800 personnel involved could have been better employed and ‘as far as Air effectiveness against the enemy is concerned, the net result has been “nil”’.¹⁰⁶

The comments from Alston, Greatorrex and Hall may have indicated a prejudice on the part of naval personnel against the new technology, but flying in Shetland was at the margins of current capability. The Air Force was never given the chance to show whether, given time to develop their facilities and expertise, they might have contributed to the war against the submarines.

¹⁰⁴ TNA: PRO AIR 1/643/17/122/262, report, undated

¹⁰⁵ TNA: PRO AIR 1/643/17/122/262, DCAS to Grooves, 25 Sep. 1918

¹⁰⁶ TNA: PRO AIR 1/643/17/122, Greatorrex to Ad. CO&S, 23 Sep. 1918; Aerodrome Selection Committee to DAC, 17 Oct. 1918; Greatorrex to Ad. CO&S, 9 Oct. 1918

The Servicemen and Shetland

Thousands of servicemen visited Shetland during the war but information about how they regarded the islands is scarce. An interesting indication of the Admiralty view appears in a letter from the Ministry of Munitions in 1918: 'the Shetlands count definitely as a Foreign Naval Station, and all ratings there are treated as on an Active Service Foreign Station'; there was obviously no perceived irony about pre-war suspicions of the Shetlanders.¹⁰⁷

At Swarbacks Minn, there were few amenities for the considerable number of sailors stationed there or in harbour for respite and supplies. A Church Army hut was provided near Brae, with games, refreshments and writing facilities; at Busta, football grounds were improvised and a golf course with 'no made-up bunkers but plenty of natural hazards'. Films were shown on ships and crews performed concerts and 'theatricals'; a trip to port gave a chance to sample the offerings on other vessels.¹⁰⁸ Otherwise, walks and church services were the main leisure pursuits for ratings, while officers could go fishing or shooting and a car service ran daily to Lerwick. Boredom must have been a common condition. Stokers were relieved frequently because of 'the hardness of their work and the monotony of the life'. Tupper wrote that trawler officers told him that 'a week spent at Swarbacks Minn is no recreation, and they might as well be at sea'.¹⁰⁹

Midshipman Alexander Scrimgeour wrote in his diary:

Busta Voe is an inlet in the west off the Mainland off (sic) the Shetlands, a deserted spot which is being used as a naval base now for our squadron. It has a post-office, a kirk and four houses. It is twenty-two miles north-east of Lerwick, but thirty miles by road. Very pretty scenery with the sun rising over the hills ... This is a very desolate corner of God's earth.

He claimed to have cycled seven and a half miles without seeing human habitation.

¹⁰⁷ TNA: PRO LAB 2/892/ED1/7699/4/1918, Hunter to Kent, 26 Jan. 1918

¹⁰⁸ TNA: PRO ADM 137/2250, 65, General Orders, 20 Apr. 1917; Brocklebank, *Tenth Cruiser Squadron*, 15, 41 – 42

¹⁰⁹ TNA: PRO ADM 137/1972, 391, General Orders, 25 Oct. 1917; 137/2250, 194, Admiralty to Vice-Ad. CO&S, 9 May 1916; ADM 137/1218, 288, Tupper to CinC, 4 Oct. 1916

The scenery among the hills and voes is very rugged, wild and fine indeed. No trees or vegetation, just rocks with a little smattering of grass, moss, and thin heather.¹¹⁰

Able Seaman W. C. Style thought, 'It looks pretty desolate from the ship. Can't see half a dozen houses all told', and Grayson, an RNR signalman, wrote, 'It was just like the Yorkshire Moors and there was drizzle rain so we did not get much enjoyment'.¹¹¹ Shaw, the surgeon on HMS *Chanuinola*, thought that Shetland offered very little more than Iceland; although he appreciated the scenery and the 'keenness in the atmosphere which gave one an appetite', he complained of the tedium and bad weather. He took tea 'in a small farmhouse which seems to be a regular tea room now since officers come to it from all ships'. Style also had tea in a crofter's house, where a woman explained how they lived and worked.¹¹² In his diaries, H. E. Spragge described walking and fishing expeditions as well as sliding on ice, snowballing and tobogganing and taking tea with the Rear Admiral's wife and daughter. The local minister, doctor and merchant and their families were also entertained onboard ship.¹¹³

Lerwick offered rather more in the way of entertainment and the officers at least appeared to have been welcomed in the social life of the better-off townspeople. Concerts, dances and social evenings were held. Local women managed a Church Army Hut. There were some problems with drunkenness but licensing restrictions reduced the likelihood of major disturbance. Alston commented on how, at the end of 1916, crews of the auxiliary vessels who had been in Lerwick for two years were exchanged with those stationed on the UK Mainland; 'You can imagine how the men who thus got south, appreciated the change after their long spell in the North.'¹¹⁴ Oral sources related that the men stationed at Catfirth held concerts and dances in a large YMCA hut there and went by sea to Lerwick on Saturday nights.¹¹⁵ Over fifty

¹¹⁰ Scrimgeour, *Scribbling Diary*, 86 – 87

¹¹¹ Quoted in Grainger, *Maritime Blockade*, 280; IWM, 6292, Papers of T. Grayson, 27 Aug. 1915

¹¹² Quoted in Halpern, *Naval History*, 138 – 40 and Grainger, *Maritime Blockade*, 273, 280

¹¹³ IWM, 7304, Papers of H. E. Spragge, Diary for 1917

¹¹⁴ Alston, 'Shetland', 21 Dec. 1939, 7

¹¹⁵ Gunn, 'Catfirth Flying Boat Station', *New Shetlander*, 140 (1982), 28

servicemen married local women, the local newspapers reporting the weddings of officers but not ratings.¹¹⁶

Alston seemed to have enjoyed his time in Shetland and was complimentary about the scenery, the fishing and the hospitality: 'It is extraordinary, and you receive it all over the Islands'.¹¹⁷ Another officer, Arthur Oldham, particularly liked Shetland's archaeological sites and compiled scrapbooks with photographs, drawings and descriptions.¹¹⁸ Windham made friends with several people including Tom Sandison. He found the Shetlanders 'a most delightful people' and 'most adaptable, well able to look after themselves', though 'somewhat haphazard ways go with their charm'. After the war, he returned to Shetland for holidays.¹¹⁹

After the Armistice, the WRNS officers at Lerwick, M. E. Mackenzie-Grieve and Lena Mouat, edited a booklet describing the work of the base with drawings, cartoons and photographs as well as information and commentary.¹²⁰ It showed how humour could be found even in the midst of war, in a way similar to, but much gentler than, journals like the earthier *Wipers Times*, produced in much more extreme conditions.¹²¹

The Shetlanders and the Navy

Due to censorship, the naval and air force activities were not widely reported at the time, and this together with the destruction of many naval records makes it difficult to assess the effect of on the civilian population. After the war, the *Shetland News* suggested that, even in Lerwick, people were not aware of the scale of the losses.¹²² The Admiralty was in charge and, in effect, Shetland was under martial law, which must have seemed ironic, given that that a widely quoted reason for the war was 'German militarism'. Dealings between the military and civil authorities were sometimes fraught, particularly when Evans was in charge.¹²³ The County Council

¹¹⁶ Lerwick Register of Marriages, 1915 – 19

¹¹⁷ Alston, 'Shetland', 28 Dec. 1939, 7

¹¹⁸ SA, D1/43, Material assembled by Arthur Oldham

¹¹⁹ SA, D1/123/9/22, Sandison, 13 Jun. 1915; Windham, *Waves, Wind, Wheels*, 94

¹²⁰ IWM, W.R.N.S.

¹²¹ J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke, 2003), 285 – 89; Fuller, *Troop Morale*, 7 – 20

¹²² SN, 11 Dec. 1919, 4

¹²³ SA, TO/1/4, LTC mins., 20 Oct 1914

appointed a committee to liaise with him about 'the hardships entailed upon the inhabitants of the outlying districts of the county' by navigation restrictions. They wanted the Navy to consult the civil authorities before making orders under the Defence of the Realm Act and considered approaching the Secretary of State, but were worried this would make the military authorities 'worse than they were'. Evans agreed to form a consultative body.¹²⁴ Sandison thought Evans' removal would 'give universal satisfaction throughout the islands', and described him chasing the County Convenor down the street 'beating him about the shoulders with his cane'.¹²⁵ Conversely, Alston was praised for carrying out duties that were 'occasionally irksome and embarrassing so far as the civilian public is concerned ... with full consideration for local conditions and customs'.¹²⁶

One area of restrictions that pleased some people while annoying others was the sale of alcohol. After January 1915, public houses had to shut at eight p.m., ostensibly because of trawler-men. Even so, in 1916, a columnist thought that, despite many men being away, the amount spent on alcohol had increased. In June, the local ministers petitioned the councils for further restrictions. The Town Council supported them. The County Council heard claims from the Police that there had been a steady increase in drunkenness, and from the licensed trade that problems had been exaggerated, and so did nothing. Again servicemen were blamed. In December, the sale of spirits was banned.¹²⁷

The presence of the Navy brought benefits to the Shetland economy. The employment of several hundred men of over military age has already been mentioned and the RNR men were said to pay well for lodgings and bring business to the shops.¹²⁸ No doubt, the Navy provided part of the increased demand for agricultural produce, though Shetland's output was limited and there were problems with logistics. Some businesses prospered; Admiralty work occupied all Hay & Company's ship-repair resources and it is likely that other businesses were similarly engaged. J.W. Robertson established a salvage company. At one time, there were seven vessels on

¹²⁴ SA, CO3/1/6, ZCC mins., 19 Aug. 1915; *ST*, 28 Aug. 1915, 5

¹²⁵ SA, D1 123/9/44 and 48, Sandison, 21 Nov. 1915, 19 Dec. 1915

¹²⁶ *SN*, 18 Oct. 1917, 8

¹²⁷ *ST*, 17 Jun. 1915, 5; *ST*, 1 Jul. 1916, 4; *SN*, 13 Jul. 1916, 2; *SN*, 7 Dec. 1916, 2

¹²⁸ SA, AF 29/253, 843 – 46, Lerwick Fishery Office report, 28 Apr. 1915

the bottom in Lerwick harbour; five were repaired by the Navy and two by a local firm, probably Robertson's.¹²⁹ This firm also provided labour, sixty men over military age, for coaling naval vessels at a cost of £300 – 400 a month in 1916.¹³⁰ It is unclear, however, whether even the large number of personnel passing through Lerwick replaced the business usually provided by the herring season.

Damaged ships were common in Lerwick, and crews and passengers whose ships had been sunk were often landed there, particularly in 1917. Hay & Company were agents for Lloyds and several shipping companies, as well as consular officials for Norway, Denmark, Spain, Russia and France. Their staff were kept busy meeting shipwrecked seafarers, finding them accommodation, food and clothing (often at very inconvenient times), arranging passages to the British Mainland or Europe and liaising with the relevant authorities, owners, agents, insurers and the Shipwrecked Fishermen and Mariners' Society. The Church Army Hut was sometimes used to house women and children from torpedoed ships.¹³¹

Although the harbour was extremely busy with naval and other ships, Lerwick Harbour Trust's revenue decreased. The steamer service was disrupted and there were far fewer fishing boats. Early in the war, the Admiralty ruled that English and Scottish fishing boats heading for or from Icelandic waters had to call into Lerwick, but they were not allowed alongside the wharfs and so paid no dues. Nor were vessels ordered into Lerwick for examination allowed alongside.¹³² The Admiralty took over quays and offices and the space available for other shipping was much reduced. There were disagreements, not least over the damage caused by the 1915 explosion, and delays in paying rent for the premises used. The Trust was in financial difficulty (only partly related to the war), sought overdrafts and delayed repaying money to the Public Works Loan Board, which refused to set the money owed by the Admiralty against what it was due.¹³³ Naval boats also caused damage to piers: in 1917, the Admiralty asked for extensive repairs to Alexandra Wharf,

¹²⁹ Alston, 'Shetland', 28 Dec. 1939, 7

¹³⁰ TNA: PRO ADM 137/2250, 190, Brock to Admiralty, 15 Apr. 1916; Nicolson, *Lerwick Harbour*, 100 – 01

¹³¹ Nicolson, Hay & Company, 156 – 59; SA, D31/1/138 – 40, Hay & Co. Letter Books, 1917; Alston, 'Shetland', 21 Dec. 1939, 7

¹³² SN, 18 May 1919, 5; Lerwick Harbour Trust Minutes (hereafter LHT mins.), 24 Feb. 1915; SN, 27 Feb 1915, 1

¹³³ LHT mins., 8 Jun. 1917, 4 Feb. 1916; Nicolson, *Lerwick Harbour*, 101 – 02

which it suggested the Harbour Trust would organise and finance. The Harbour Trust had other ideas: although there had been a pre-existing weakness, the damage was due to constant use by larger vessels of a wharf intended for summer use by drifters. In addition, both material and labour were unavailable. The Harbour Trust won this argument, but overall did not benefit from the wartime disruption. Greatorrex recognised the considerable inconvenience but claimed relations had been excellent.¹³⁴ Lerwick Town Council also lost revenue through supplying water to the Navy at reduced rates.¹³⁵ Later the Navy's reluctance to help with shipping herring was unpopular.¹³⁶

The impact of the Tenth Cruiser Squadron's activities on Shetland is more difficult to assess. A number of RNR men were directly involved in support work. Given the location of the base, perhaps only a restricted number of people were aware of the frequent comings and goings of the cruisers, which were not reported in the newspapers. Local firms, such as Adie's of Voe, supplied provisions, though much must have come via the Navy's own transport.¹³⁷ Again, there were some problems. The Admiralty's vehicles hugely increased the wear and tear on Shetland's inadequate roads.¹³⁸ A Court of Inquiry was held 'about a theft of government grain by the natives: seemingly, they took an opportunity and stocked their barns for the winter'.¹³⁹ In other rural districts, the naval operations may not have had much impact other than the RNR patrols, though naval vessels used some other anchorages; for example, the submarine E49 was sunk at Baltasound in March 1917.¹⁴⁰ In Lerwick, however, the harbour was 'filled with ships flying the White Ensign, and the streets ... with men in uniform'.¹⁴¹

¹³⁴ LHT mins., 24 Apr. 1916; 19 Jun. 1917; 16 Oct. 1917; 12 Dec. 1919

¹³⁵ SA, TO/1/4, LTC mins. 22 Feb. and 21 Aug. 1915

¹³⁶ SA, AF29/254, 574, Lerwick Fishery Office, 26 May 1919

¹³⁷ TNA: PRO ADM 137/2250, 168, Phillips to Admiral CO&S, 26 Dec. 1915

¹³⁸ SA, C0 3/1/7, ZCC mins., 15 Jun. 1916

¹³⁹ Brocklebank, *Tenth Cruiser Squadron*, 42

¹⁴⁰ TNA: PRO ADM 137/2249, 363 – 68, reports, Apr. 1917; SA, D56/2, papers concerning shipwrecked submarine E49

¹⁴¹ IWM, W.R.N.S.

Conclusion

At the end of the war, Admiral Beatty commented that the Navy's role had been 'passive'; even De Chair wrote of 'a most unsatisfactory war, so far as the Navy was concerned'.¹⁴² That was an inadequate description of the work of the Tenth Cruiser Squadron and Auxiliary Patrols. Blockading and protecting merchant shipping did not have the glamour of major battles, for which both the Navy and the public hoped, but this was based on an unrealistic and out-of-date perception of modern naval warfare. Newbolt termed Germany's strategy as 'the gamblers' choice', and defined the naval war as a conflict between two systems of blockade, in which Britain triumphed – or at least held out longer.¹⁴³ Sir Eric Geddes, the First Lord of the Admiralty, recognised this in 1918 when he said, 'The Blockade is what crushed the life out of the Central Empires'.¹⁴⁴ Grainger regarded blockade as 'a war-winning weapon', whose cumulative effects contributed to victory, though not the decisive weapon sometimes claimed.¹⁴⁵ Osborne agreed that it was 'one of the greatest of the Allied weapons in World War I', which deserved credit equal to that afforded the military effort.¹⁴⁶

Halpern described the North Sea as 'for capital ships somewhat similar to no-man's land between the opposing trench systems on land'; that meant that it could be entered but only occasionally, for specific purposes and at great risk.¹⁴⁷ The result was that smaller ships were more active than the great warships that were the pride of the Navy. Shetland, between the North Sea and Atlantic, was on the front line of activities that contributed both to the blockade, which in turn led to the breakdown of Germany's fighting capacity, and to the maintenance of trade, which sustained Britain's population. Providing bases for the Navy was not unique to Shetland, but it had an impact on the economy and the war experience of civilians as well as servicemen.

¹⁴² Rüger, *Naval Game*, 257 – 58; De Chair, *Sea is Strong*, 239

¹⁴³ Newbolt, *Naval Operations*, IV, Preface, vii

¹⁴⁴ Tupper, *Reminiscences*, 217 – 18

¹⁴⁵ Grainger, *Maritime Blockade*, 16 – 22

¹⁴⁶ Osborne, *Economic Blockade*, 194

¹⁴⁷ Halpern, *Naval History*, 48

CHAPTER 6 THE WARTIME ECONOMY

This chapter analyses how Shetlanders made their living in the wartime conditions. Writing about the Scottish economy has tended to focus on the production of ships and munitions; at the time, however, ‘rural Scotland during the war’ was considered distinctive enough for a Carnegie volume, focussed on fishing and agriculture.¹ Because the war was originally expected to be brief, the Government promoted ‘business as usual’ and only reluctantly and gradually took control of aspects of the economy related to the war. Shetland was controlled by the Navy, much less averse than civilian authorities to taking charge in the name of the war-effort. ‘Business as usual’ was not possible for everyone; even at the start, some industries and businesses were affected.²

At first, there was concern about unemployment. By 15th August, about 200 men were unemployed in Lerwick and merchant seamen were being laid off.³ Ganson, the County Convenor, warned that the war ‘will be a terrible struggle’ and urged crofters to husband the grain crop – which condescending advice was not entirely welcomed by people with cattle to feed.⁴ On 20th August, the County Council proposed to set up a committee of the Prince of Wales Fund, ‘to be able to deal with any cases of distress, should such arise’. They applied for a grant to improve roads, ‘in relief of the distress that was bound to be felt in the islands consequent on the present war’, and intended to form a Labour Bureau to which any unemployed person could apply for work on road-improvement. They also supported the Lerwick Harbour Trust’s plan to build a patent slip for ship repairs.⁵ As early as September, however, the Fishery Officer was reporting shortage of manpower.⁶ Transport between Shetland and the Mainland was disrupted; by October 1914, there were only three steamer crossings per week, delaying the mail, and freight rates rose by 25 per cent, increasing the price of food.⁷ Nevertheless, at the end of 1914, the *Shetland News* reported, ‘Trade in the town is therefore wonderfully good, all things considered ... so far the war has made up for what it has taken

¹ Jones et al., *Rural Scotland*

² Marwick, *Deluge*, 79; DeGroot, *Blighty*, 54 – 56

³ *SN*, 15 Aug. 1914, 7

⁴ *SN*, 22 Aug. 1914, 8; 29 Aug. 1914, 4

⁵ SA, CO3/1/6, ZCC mins., 20 Aug. 1914; 17 Sep. 1914

⁶ SA, AF29/253, LFO letter, 12 Sep. 1914

⁷ SA, CO3/1/6, ZCC mins., 20 Aug.; 15 Oct. 1914

away'.⁸ In Shetland, as elsewhere, it became apparent that the economy would have to be adapted to wartime conditions.

Fishing

The war had a huge impact on fishing in Shetland and elsewhere: 'The Scottish fishing industry was more in the thick of the war than perhaps any other'.⁹ Even before Britain declared war, it was recognised that the principal markets in Germany and Russia would be obstructed. The herring-fishing season had been in full swing, but amid 'complete paralysis', 'workers clamoured eagerly to be let home'. The two barrel factories closed down with the loss of between eighty and 100 jobs. Since fewer than 40000 barrels of herring out of 350000 were still unshipped, curers were not expected to incur severe losses. The *Shetland Times* thought that there would be no autumn fishing from English ports.¹⁰ The Dutch, however, continued fishing, and the newspapers urged fishermen to either fish herring for kippering, which was not dependent on foreign markets, or to revert to line fishing.¹¹ Nevertheless, the herring fishing closed down immediately.

Some idea of the problems can be gleaned from Hay & Company's letter books. At this stage, the war was not benefitting this business:

The circumstances ... are also making themselves felt severely here, the fishings which are the principal means of livelihood in our Islands, being stopped and other industries being practically at a standstill. Consequently money is very scarce and payments slow ...

The company tried to dissuade skippers from putting their boats ashore.¹² Initially the export of fish was not allowed, and then there was not enough to meet demand. So many fishermen joined the RNR that the winter fishing was limited; fish were scarce and prices high in Aberdeen. Cod was being sent fresh to mainland markets rather than cured locally.

Nevertheless, in 1914, there was not a big decrease in the total value of fish landed. According to the *Shetland Times*, after low catches in August and September, the

⁸ *SN*, 26 Dec. 1914, 4

⁹ W. R. Scott, 'Plan of the Book', in Jones et al, *Rural Scotland*, 1 – 22, 4

¹⁰ *ST*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

¹¹ *SN*, 15 Aug. 1915, 5; 22 Aug. 1915, 4; *ST*, 22 Aug. 1915, 4

¹² SA, D31/1/133, Hay & Co. Letter Book, 10 Apr. – 16 Oct. 1914, 663; to Groen, 24 Aug. 1914; e.g., 649, to Polson, 17 Aug. 1914

haddock fishing had done well and there had also been an abnormal catch of herrings on the west side. Some had been sold in Lerwick, some to crofters in the north of the Islands, which ‘proved a more than ordinary blessing to the people’.¹³ The *Shetland News*, however, reported at the end of the year that the haddock fishing was ‘not proving very lucrative’: although excellent prices were being paid in Aberdeen, business was limited by the unreliable steamer service. It claimed that the collapse of the herring fishing had resulted in ‘a great curtailment of the fishermen’s earnings’.¹⁴ This over-stated the problem, however. Fishermen’s earnings amounted to over £319000 against £347000 in 1913, a smaller decrease than at any fishing port along the East Coast of Scotland.¹⁵ The winter haddock fishery was actually exceptionally profitable. Gutters in Lerwick, however, earned only about £15 and a fisherman hired for the herring season, £15 10s, compared to £21 15s and £35 respectively in 1913. Only twenty-four gutters went to the English season compared to over 170.¹⁶ Many curers had ‘sustained considerable losses’, as money had not been paid from Germany and herring had gone mostly to Russia at a low price.¹⁷

In addition to the anticipated loss of markets, new problems arose. At first, the Admiralty restricted the areas where fishing was permitted; initially the east of Shetland grounds were prohibited and from December, the west as well. Local boats were allowed to fish close to land provided permits were obtained.¹⁸ In early 1915, after some uncertainty, drifting was allowed outside the prohibited area provided the herring was landed at Lerwick or Baltasound.¹⁹ The Admiralty, whose priority was to wage war, regarded fishing as a nuisance. A hand-written note in naval correspondence stated:

Lerwick is a considerable fishing Port and its use as proposed will some what [sic] restrict its use for fishing vessels but it is not to our advantage to encourage fishing, especially by neutrals, near our Northern Fleet Base.²⁰

Later, when safeguarding the country’s food supplies became critical, it was an important part of the Auxiliary Patrol’s work to protect fishing vessels and fishing was allowed in

¹³ *ST*, 2 Jan. 1915, 4

¹⁴ *SN*, 26 Dec. 1914, 4

¹⁵ *FBS 1914*, pp. 1914 – 16, XXII, 94; *SN*, 2 Jan. 1915, 4

¹⁶ SA, AF 29/253, 758 – 59, LFO report, 28 Dec. 1914; 774 – 76, LFO letters, 14 Jan. 1915; 676 – 82, 12 Aug. 1914

¹⁷ *SN*, 26 Dec. 1914, 4

¹⁸ Jones, ‘Scottish Fisheries’, 40 – 41

¹⁹ SA, AF/193, 10 and 17, FBS circulars, 29 Mar. and 15 Apr. 1915

²⁰ TNA: PRO ADM 137/1081/343 – 44, Oliver, 13 Jul. 1915

more areas. Another difficulty caused by the Navy was the extinguishing of navigation lights.²¹

A major problem was the shortage of manpower. The number of people employed in the fishing industry dropped in 1915 to under a quarter of the 1914 figure, but the numbers rose slightly in 1916 and 1917 as older men and boys formed crews. When conscription was introduced, fishermen were initially reserved for naval service, if required, but later this changed.²² Hay & Company struggled to form crews for their boats and this was probably common.²³ The six newest steam drifters were taken over by the Admiralty.²⁴ There were also other shortages, of salt and materials for repair or replacement of boats and gear, though the scarcity of fuel did not affect the local sailing boats. In 1917, the *Shetland Times* estimated that the annual expenses for a boat, (which would have included some food), had increased from about £120 to over £400.²⁵

Of course, the most serious problem was fear of enemy action. In 1915, sixteen Scottish drifters fishing from Lerwick were sunk by German submarines, though with no loss of life. Fishing was allowed in areas further south and patrols were introduced.²⁶ Two drifters and a motor boat were sunk on two separate occasions in 1917, but sailboats were not attacked.²⁷ Though no fishing boats fell foul of them, mines were a constant danger and had a deterrent effect, particularly in 1917 and 1918.

Conditions were not static, and every herring season was different. Accounts of 1915 are difficult to reconcile. The Fishery Board claimed that in Scotland ‘the whole industry and those directly dependent on it did not suffer to the extent anticipated’. Over 10000 Scottish fishermen and most of steam-powered boats were employed by the Navy, and the catches decreased. The Board specially mentioned that the small boats in Shetland had generally been successful.²⁸ According to Manson’s *Almanac*, however, the fishing in Shetland was ‘disastrously affected by war’.²⁹ There was

²¹ E.g., TNA: PRO ADM 137/1278, O&S 1917, *passim*

²² Pages 127 – 28

²³ SA, D31/1/129 – 142, Hay & Company Letter Books, 1914 – 18, *passim*

²⁴ SA, AF 29/254, 55, LFO letter, 15 May 1916

²⁵ *ST*, 5 Jan. 1918, 4

²⁶ *SN* and *ST*, 26 Jun. 1915, 4; SA, AF 29/253, 995 – 1000, LFO report, 8 Jan. 1916

²⁷ AF 29/254, 330 – 34, LFO report, 8 Jan 1918

²⁸ *FBS 1915*, PP, 1916, IX, xi

²⁹ Manson, *Almanac 1916*, 102

uncertainty due to the Navy's reluctance to allow fishing, and curers were discouraged because of problems obtaining payment for exported fish. There was curing only at Lerwick, Scalloway and Baltasound. The fleet was very small, never more than sixty-five drifters, as was the catch. With supply much short of demand, prices rose; local drifters made good earnings. A few even went to the English fishing in autumn and did well. Overall the fishing was 'very remunerative' for fishermen but less so for curers, because of the low catch. The biggest losers were the shoreworkers, though the barrel factories remained open. The *Shetland Times* commented:

The great summer herring fishing left most of its dependants stranded, and, but for other revenues of industry opened to them, many people would have found themselves in straitened circumstances.

On the other hand, haddock prices doubled and many line fishermen enjoyed unprecedented earnings. Curing was less common; haddocks were shipped fresh to Aberdeen, but the lack of regular steamers led to depreciation in quality and value. Despite the rise in the price of fish, the total value of the Shetland catch was less than a quarter of 1914's.³⁰

In 1916, some restrictions were relaxed; fishing for herring was allowed east of Shetland and there was more confidence in the Navy's protection. Lerwick and Scalloway were among the few working ports in Scotland, with thirty-two curers and four kipperers, and two curers respectively. About 200 drifters started but about half left when the English season began. There was an abnormal demand in the UK for fresh and kippered herring and some salted was exported to Russia, the USA and France. Prices were as low as 5s a cran in May but rose to 60s in September. Local boats averaged about £1100 and 'never before ... did the Shetland fishermen earn so much money.' Gutters made between £30 and £50. Many curers also had a record season as nearly all stocks were sold. Although fewer boats participated in the line fishing and catches were down, the quality was good and prices high, haddocks going mostly in ice to Aberdeen.³¹

³⁰ SA, AF 29/253, 792 – 93, 797 – 800, LFO letters, 1 Jan. 1915, 6 Feb. 1915; 995 – 1000, LFO report, 8 Jan. 1916; *SN*, 30 Dec. 1915, 4; *ST*, 1 Jan. 1916, 4; *FBS 1915*, 44

³¹ *ST*, December 30, 1916, 4; SA, AF 29/254, 157 – 62, LFO report, 17 Jan. 1917

The 1917 season was different again; the Fishery Board reported that in Shetland ‘herring fishing was not prosecuted with any vigour’.³² Fear of enemy action was probably the main factor and the Navy prohibited fishing early in the year. There were fewer visiting boats; between twenty and forty English drifters made poor catches in February due to lack of local knowledge. In summer, only local boats obtained permits. Despite ‘a supreme effort’, it was difficult to find competent crews, though over eighty local boats participated. There were twenty-three curers and four kipperers in Lerwick and four curers and four kipperers in Scalloway. Due to light catches and transport problems, some curers had a short and unprofitable season. Although good prices were paid, according to the *Shetland Times*, ‘the season was disappointing to almost everyone engaged in herring fishing’. Most boats made only between £200 and £500 and the best £800, and it was estimated that only a tenth of the small fleet cleared expenses. There was some white fish curing at Lerwick, Grutness and Scalloway and haddock fishing proved ‘a veritable gold-mine’; good quality and high demand meant unprecedented prices. The Fishery Office reported that ‘regular fishermen had a prosperous year’.³³

The Government banned exports and tried to increase consumption of fish as a substitute for meat.³⁴ Demand grew, but salt herring was never popular in Britain. Shetland’s distance from markets, exacerbated by shortage of transport, limited the export of fresh fish. In 1917, the Government recommended that herring should be kippered or canned rather than salted, and curers agreed not to buy fish that might be sold fresh or kippered.³⁵ The Government’s Cured Fish Committee introduced a scheme to buy the entire summer cure.³⁶

In the first quarter of 1918, enemy submarines made fishing for herring impossible. In June, there were only sixteen herring and two white-fish curers, ten kipperers and seventy-four boats at Lerwick. The summer season started well with big catches, but because of the poor quality, prices dropped from over £7 to as low as 5s a cran.

³² *FBS 1917*, pp. 1918, X, v

³³ SA, AF 29/254, 330 – 34, LFO report, 8 Jan 1918; 277 – 80, LFO letter, 10 Oct. 1917; *ST*, 5 Jan. 1918, 4

³⁴ Jones, ‘Scottish Fisheries’, 48

³⁵ SA, AF 29/194, 25, FBS circular, 18 May 1917; SA, AF 29/239, 38, Jones to McKenzie, 23 Jul. 1917

³⁶ *FBS 1917*, vii

After the boats stayed ashore for a few days, the prices rose again.³⁷ The Fishery Board agreed to supply steamers to transport fresh herring, but gave up in the face of enemy action, and a lot was dumped.³⁸ Rather than help with shipping, Greatorrex asked for excess herring to be supplied to the Navy.³⁹ At the end of the season, the small catches fetched the maximum controlled price of £6 6s. Many boats stopped early and the curers had a poor season, although the catch had been sold out with the bulk of the better herrings going to the USA. Most local boats earned between £300 and £600 with the best making £1400, but some made no profit and gutters were left unemployed. Line fishermen made the highest earnings with halibut especially reaching high prices.⁴⁰

Elsewhere in Britain, the war benefitted fishermen and businessmen involved in the trade. The costs of fuel and materials increased but the price of fish rose hugely. In 1917, there were complaints that it had 'been elevated out of the ordinary man's diet'.⁴¹ In January 1918, the Government fixed maximum retail prices at levels appropriate for inland urban centres. The argument that prices at the point of production should be lower, making an analogy with the price of coal, much higher in Shetland than at the pithead, carried no weight.⁴² A columnist in the *Shetland Times* argued that Shetland was being victimised:

There has been a great deal of complaint made recently about Shetland being penalised for its geographical position; but surely it would be the acme of injustice to penalise the inhabitants and prevent them sharing in the what may be described as its own product, because of the geographical position of the inland consuming centres in England'.⁴³

Then, in March, a Trade Committee was established to fix prices to fishermen, wholesalers and retailers.⁴⁴ The Government fixed the maximum prices at a rate lower than they had been; due to competition, they became the usual price.⁴⁵ In April, the Town

³⁷ SA, AF 29/254, 521 – 25, LFO report, 10 Jan. 1919; SN, 26 Dec. 1918, 4

³⁸ ST, 28 Dec. 1918, 4

³⁹ SA, AF 29/240, 107, letter, Greatorrex to LFO, 6 Jun. 1918

⁴⁰ SA, AF 29/254, 521 – 25, LFO report, 10 Jan. 1919

⁴¹ ST, 12 May 1917, 5

⁴² SN, 16 Feb. 1918, 5

⁴³ ST, 2 Feb. 1918, 5

⁴⁴ Jones, 'Scottish Fisheries', 60 – 61

⁴⁵ FBS 1918, PP. 1919, XXII, iv

Council asked for a reduction but the Ministry of Food replied that these prices were necessary to motivate fishermen⁴⁶

The Government's intervention was not judged a success: 'the people who did the price-fixing were (one gathers) pleased with the result, and hardly anyone else'.⁴⁷ Prices were reduced in the autumn due to 'universal complaint by consumers of the exorbitant price of fish' and a belief that fishermen were making unreasonable profits.⁴⁸ The Fishery Board reported that the value of boats and gear had increased greatly, due to the high cost of materials and the competition to acquire boats 'because of the extraordinarily lucrative results derived from fishing during the year'.⁴⁹ Although the prices were beneficial to fishermen, earnings varied. Black showed how, for a limited number of fishermen for whom data was available, earnings fell dramatically in 1914, rose even more dramatically in 1916, only to fall again in 1917 and return in 1918 to 1913 levels, which, due to inflation, would have been worth much less.⁵⁰

The war brought disruption and new problems to an industry that was always physically and economically risky, and the effects were complex. Nevertheless, some overall trends can be discerned. First, despite all the difficulties, fishing continued. Demand pushed prices higher than ever before, so that fishermen were willing to take the risks. Secondly, the herring fishing was on a much-reduced scale; only a fraction of the pre-war number of boats participated and the catches, although variable, were much reduced. Fewer people were trying to make a living through fishing, and probably many of the older men and boys would not have been so economically active in peacetime. Fishing did not hold its critical position in the economy, as confirmed in contemporary comments; for example, 'The fishings which have always bulked so largely in the making or marring of the Islands, have been relegated to a subsidiary place'. In 1916, 'although the herring fishing was in pre-war times the great industry of the islands, it has necessarily shrunk in its dimensions, and in consequence does not bulk so largely'.⁵¹

⁴⁶ SA, TO/1/4, LTC mins., 25 Apr. 1918; 7 May 1918

⁴⁷ Scott, 'Plan of the Book', 6

⁴⁸ SA, AF 29/241, 6 and 15, letters, Fish Distribution Officer, 29 Aug. 1918; 10 Sep. 1918

⁴⁹ *FBS 1918*, iv

⁵⁰ Black, 'External Shocks', 59

⁵¹ *ST*, 1 Jan. 1916, 4; 8 Jan. 1917, 4

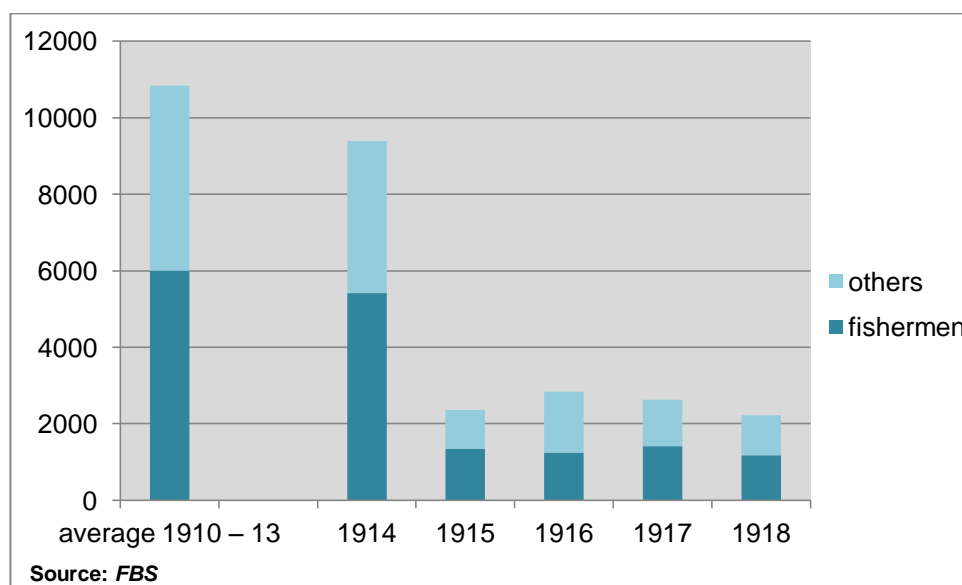


Figure 6.1 Numbers employed in fishing

Thirdly, as well as being reduced in overall terms, in three of the war years, the percentage of herring in the weight of the total catch fell and the fall in the proportion of the value was even more marked. The haddock fishery had become more important than previously.

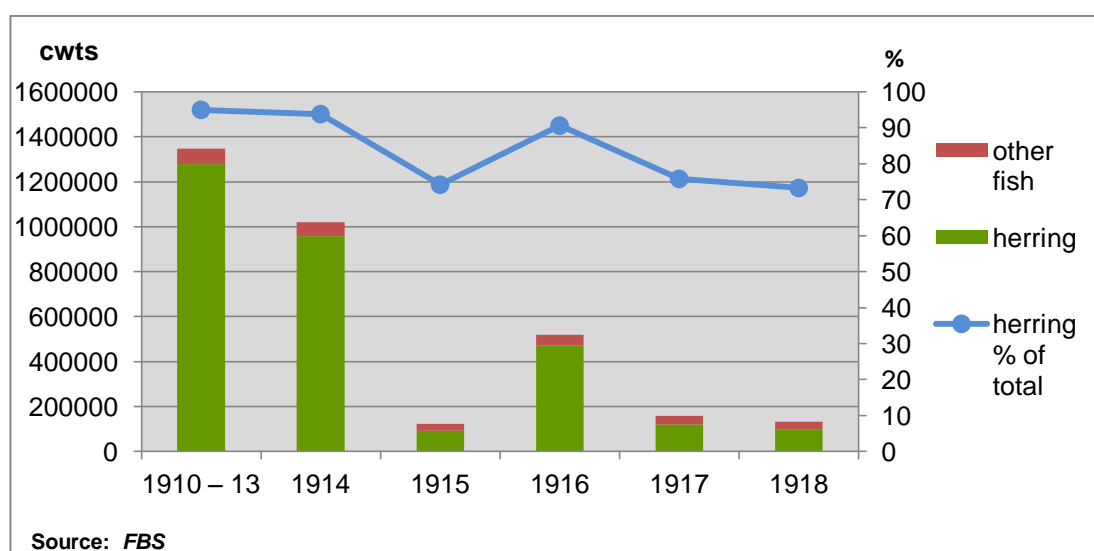


Figure 6.2 Weight of herring as percentage of total catch

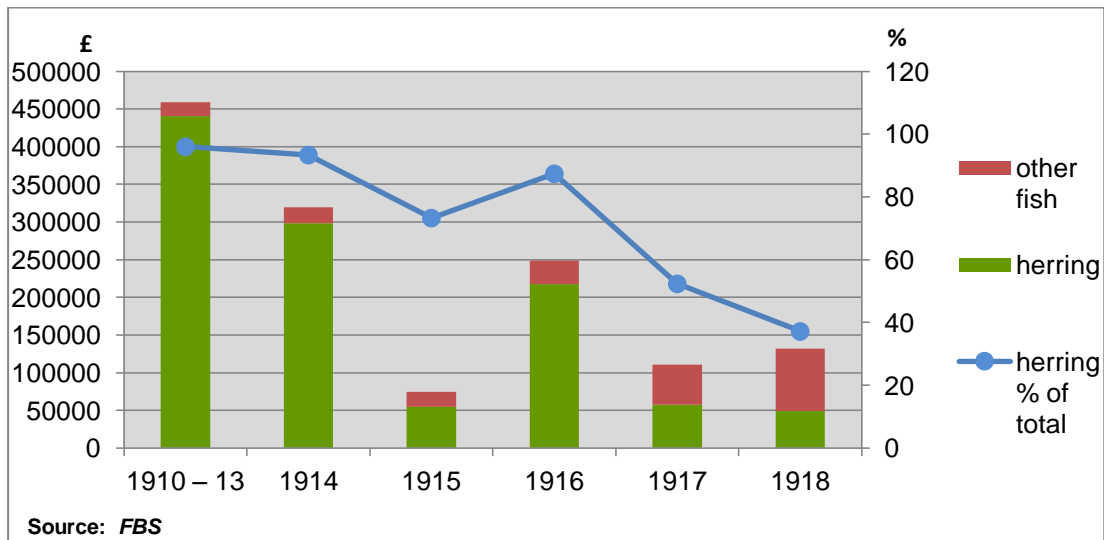


Figure 6.3 Value of herring as a percentage of total catch

Fourthly, the geographical concentration of fishing that had been evident before the war intensified. Herring curing was restricted to Lerwick and Scalloway. Finally, Shetland fish were fetching a lower price than the Scottish catch in general.

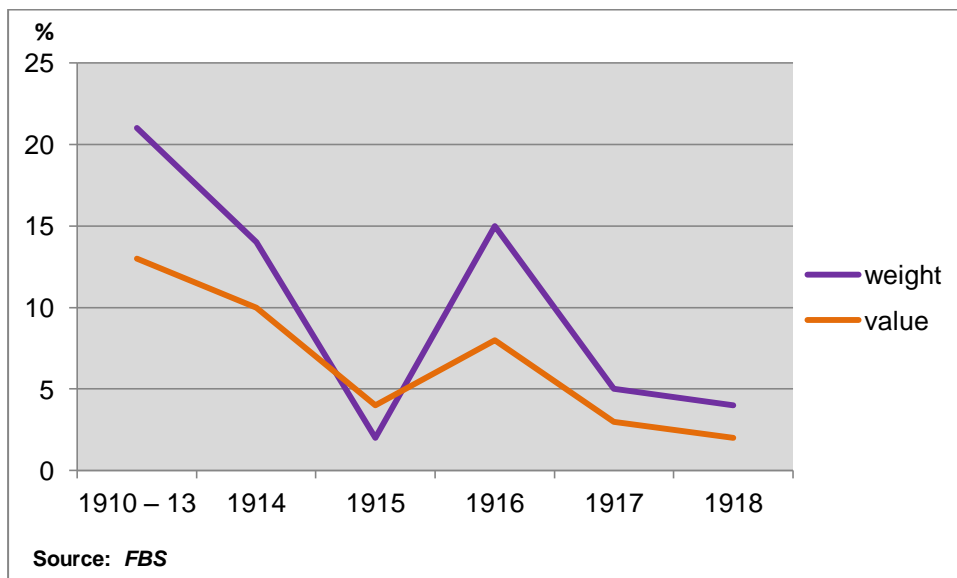


Figure 6.4 Shetland catch as percentage of Scottish catch

Agriculture

Some of the war's effects on agriculture were the same as on fishing; for example, agriculture suffered through the loss of manpower. As early as 1915, the *Shetland News* mentioned the shortage of workers.⁵² Before conscription, tending a croft was considered an acceptable reason for not volunteering, but exemption from service was generally not given to men who were employed only part-time in agriculture. In 1917, there were complaints that too many men had been conscripted and about the unfairness of conscripting the sons of crofters but not of sheep farmers.⁵³ By the end of the year, 'the cry throughout the land was that there was no one to work the land'.⁵⁴ In 1918, Zetland County Council protested to the Ministry of National Service and the Board of Agriculture and suggested that the Board's representative might not be knowledgeable about crofting conditions. In at least one case, the Council actually intervened to ask for the demobilisation of a crofter. In September 1918, the Board of Agriculture agreed that no more agricultural workers would be conscripted meantime, and delegated appeals to the District Agricultural Committee.⁵⁵ The *Shetland Times* complained:

Young men, whose everyday work was of vital national importance, were forced from their homes, and crops were left in the ground at a period of the year when delay in reaping meant total loss.⁵⁶

These comments refute the notion that Shetland women ran the crofts without male help, but much croft-work had always been done by women, and this was even more so in wartime.⁵⁷

The most important effect of the war was on prices. On the debit side, things like fencing materials and imported feedstuff were scarce and costly, but most stock fed on local produce.⁵⁸ Prices for produce also rose steeply, with demand from the armed services and the shortage of shipping. Shetland, of course, experienced transport problems, but the

⁵² *SN*, 30 Dec. 1915, 4

⁵³ *SN*, 25 Jan. 1917, 2, 5; *SA*, CO/3/1/7, ZCC mins., 15 Jan. 1917; *SN*, 22 May 1917, 2; *ST*, 27 Jan. 1917, 5

⁵⁴ *SN*, 22 Nov. 1917, 4

⁵⁵ *SA*, CO/3/1/7, ZCC mins., 13 Jun. 1918; 17 Oct. 1918; 19 Sep. 1918

⁵⁶ *SN*, 29 Dec. 1918, 4

⁵⁷ E.g., Abrams, *Myth and Materiality*

⁵⁸ H. M. Conacher, 'Scottish Agriculture, with Special Reference to Food Production', in Jones et al, *Rural Scotland*, 122 – 220, 177

problems of deterioration in transit were not as great for agricultural products as for fish.⁵⁹ The Navy also provided a market on the spot. Rents did not rise; on the contrary, a number had been reduced by the Land Court in 1914.⁶⁰

One thing that the war could not affect was the frequently inclement Shetland weather, and so the picture of agricultural returns was not always rosy. Nevertheless, even by the end of 1914, prices for cattle and sheep were at an all-time high, as were eggs, retailing at 1s 9d per dozen. In addition, the crop of oats and bere had been much better than average. The potato crop had mixed fortunes: according to the *Shetland Times*, except for a few areas, the crop had been 'a signal success', but the *Shetland News* reported 'a marked shortage all over'. Turnips and cabbage had also not fared well, due to damp misty weather early in the summer. The only product for which demand had slumped was ponies. The *Shetland News* stated 'crofters had little ground for complaint ... on the whole the outlook for the Shetland crofter just now is as promising as it ever was,' and the *Shetland Times* agreed: 'the agricultural side of Shetland is certainly in advance of anything which could be said of it during the past century.'⁶¹

This success was repeated in 1915. Despite the cold spring and wet summer, the cereal harvest was good, though hay and potatoes were damaged by early frost. Like agriculturalists across the country, Shetlanders concentrated on stock-rearing, and record prices were again realised, from 30 to 75 per cent more than pre-war levels. There was still no demand for ponies, but an 'unprecedented' demand for eggs, scarce even at 2s 6d a dozen. The *Shetland Times* claimed:

It may be safely asserted that one may turn back the pages of history in vain to find a period when those who lived on the soil in Shetland reaped so great a benefit from their labours.⁶²

The weather in 1916 was not favourable, and crops were generally poor, especially potatoes. All over Scotland, the harvest was the worst since records began.⁶³ Prices of all kinds of produce, including eggs and milk, rose again. There was a good yield

⁵⁹ SA, TO/1/4, LTC mins., 27 Sep. 1917

⁶⁰ SN, 26 Dec. 1914, 4

⁶¹ SN, 26 Dec. 1914, 4; ST, 2 Jan. 1915, 4

⁶² ST, 1 Jan. 1916, 4; SN, 30 Dec. 1915, 4

⁶³ ST, 30 Dec. 1916, 4; P. E. Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War* (London, 1989), 32; *BoA Statistics 1916*, V, ii, PP. 1919, LI, 62

of lambs and overall the increased values – up 100 per cent – more than compensated for the poor harvest. The *Shetland Times* even hoped for reduced prices the next year ‘in the interests of the consumer’.⁶⁴

Then, after a cold spring, the dry summer of 1917 produced some of the best crops in Shetland for many years. The meal mills in Shetland were said to be ‘working at top speed and are quite unable to cope with the orders coming to them from crofters’. The prices of all livestock again reached record levels, demand always exceeding supply. Very ordinary Shetland cattle realised from £14 to £18, while good animals fetched from £20 to £25.⁶⁵

In 1918, the weather performed a complete volte-face, an unusually promising spring giving way to a persistently wet summer, which damaged crops and impeded harvesting. On the advice of the Board of Agriculture, many crofters had cultivated additional land but ‘an even greater blight ... than the vagaries of the weather’ – the shortage of young men – meant that crops were left in the ground. Overall, there were good crops of potatoes and hay, but cereal and turnip yields were mixed. Many calves had been lost and milk was scarce, but demand was high for sheep, the sale of which was not restricted. Despite a shortage of cattle-feed, stock prices again broke records, except for ponies. According to the *Shetland Times*, ‘The prices of all kinds of agricultural produce have been so high as to leave all producers in a much better position than they have ever been before’.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, the number of holdings decreased by 6.5 per cent, possibly due to the lack of manpower. The average size also fell from 10.6 acres to 9. The *Shetland Times* claimed land was going out of cultivation as crofts were being combined.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *ST*, 30 Dec. 1916, 4

⁶⁵ *ST*, 8 Jan. 1918, 4

⁶⁶ *ST*, 28 Dec. 1918, 4; *SN*, 26 Dec. 1918, 4

⁶⁷ *SN*, 19 Jul. 1917, 5

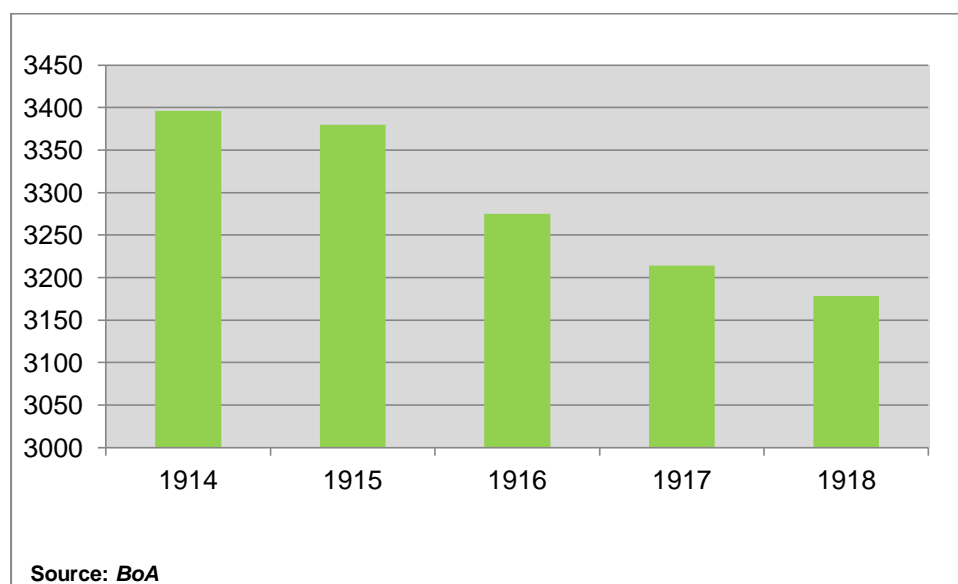


Figure 6.5 Number of agricultural holdings

When the German submarine campaign began to bite, the Government made efforts to increase food production, bombarding the local authorities with instructions. Although Shetland's contribution could only be very small, Zetland County Council responded enthusiastically, motivated no doubt both by patriotism and a desire to take advantage of the increased prices for produce. In February 1917, a District Agricultural Executive was established, with local sub-committees.⁶⁸ The *Shetland News* reported in March that the Council was helping people willing to cultivate more ground; for example, land in Dunrossness and Levenwick had been allocated to cottars. Near Lerwick a good deal of new and fallow ground was being ploughed.⁶⁹

The Board's plan to supply seed oats and potatoes in 1917 after the previous poor harvest became a fiasco. The small quantity that arrived was distributed to the most outlying districts. In April, a deputation of landowners of Lerwick parish complained that they had not received any. The cargo had gone missing en route and the Board wrote to the County Council asking where it was. The Council had been given the wrong information; received only seventy-two bags instead of 100; then expected 300 and received thirteen. Some arrived too late; the potatoes were sold for food or given to the hospital and the oats milled and sold. One member said that the Seed Committee, 'the most energetic Committee he had ever known since he was

⁶⁸ SA CO3/1/7, ZCC mins., 15 Feb. 1917

⁶⁹ *SN*, 22 Mar. 1917, 2

associated with the County Council', had gone all over the islands at their own expense, 'and after doing their outmost had been brought under the most wholehearted abuse'.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, the County Council persevered in encouraging cultivation. The entire membership was appointed to the Executive Committee for Food Production.⁷¹ The Board of Agriculture required that 1300 more acres be cultivated in 1918 than in 1916.⁷² After the Council requested an executive officer to assist, then threatened to appoint one at the Board's expense, Angus Macleod was appointed in July. District committees were appointed to report on the acreage available and people willing to participate.⁷³ In September, a scheme for improved production was agreed whereby a quarter of the pasture in farms was to be cultivated. Crofters were to be told they might lose land left uncultivated, which was considered unfair considering the shortage of manpower. People who wanted to cultivate former farm pasture would be required to pay for fencing and compensate for loss of grazing.⁷⁴ Macleod identified areas of pasture suitable for return to arable, including parts of the sheep-farms of Scatsta and Quendale. The tenant farmers were uncooperative. It may have been that elsewhere 'unwilling farmers were induced to do what was expected of them under the feeling that the committees were in a position to force them', but not in Shetland. The Government did not favour compulsion and, although the Board could prescribe land use under the Defence of the Realm regulations, this power had not been delegated to local committees.⁷⁵ Only 777 additional acres had been identified by December.⁷⁶

The County Council appealed to the Board to support them but received no reply. The Board were perceived as being ignorant of local conditions and unsympathetic to the needs of Shetlanders. The newspapers were as one in their condemnation. The *Shetland Times* thundered, 'Official and organised hypocrisy have found high-water mark', while the *Shetland News* thought it threw 'a lurid and sinister light' on

⁷⁰ SA, CO/3/1/7, ZCC mins., 26 Apr. 1917, 16 Aug. 1917; SN, 3 May 1917, 8 ; 24 May 1917, 2; ST, 19 May 1917, 4; 23 Jun. 1917, 4

⁷¹ SA, CO/3/1/7, ZCC mins., 17 May 1917

⁷² SN, 20 Dec. 1917, 5; BoA 1917, PP. 1918, V, 3

⁷³ SN, 26 Jul. 1917, 4; 16 Aug. 1917, 5

⁷⁴ SN, 20 Sep. 1917, 4; 22 Nov. 1917, 4; ST, 27 Oct. 1917, 5

⁷⁵ SA, CO/3/1/7, ZCC mins., 15 Nov. 1917, 13 Dec. 1917; Conacher, 'Scottish Agriculture', 164, 167 – 68

⁷⁶ SN, 20 Dec. 1917, 5

Government methods when, despite appeals to the community, red tape and incompetence jeopardised the crop by sending the seed late and refusing to use compulsory powers:

It is perfectly scandalous that a Board set apart for looking after the public interest and paid out of public funds, should, in defiance of the express and explicit order of Parliament, hamper and hinder efforts made in a matter of such supreme importance as the production of food.⁷⁷

The Vice-Convenor met the Director of Cultivation, who reportedly suspected the Council of trying to tackle the land question by a 'back-door method'. Councillors were furious.⁷⁸

With the issue unresolved, the *Shetland Times* claimed that the Food Production Committee had 'oscillated between hope and despair for many months', and railed against the unfair conscription of young men; when 'there can be no conscription of wealth; there must be no conscription of land'.⁷⁹ Eventually, at Quendale, where the Council wanted thirty acres, the farmer cultivated only twelve, and at Scatsta, where the Council wanted forty, the Board offered twenty, but too late and for only one year. The County Council asked Wason to ask a question in Parliament about the broken promises, but it was deemed too long-winded and never raised.⁸⁰

Rather more successful were Lerwick Town Council's efforts to provide allotments. Opportunities around Lerwick were limited but potato plots were cultivated in 1917 and 1918. Again, some landowners were not cooperative; one factor (despite being an officer in the RNR) refused to give up land, as did the Golf Club. The Board of Agriculture approved the use of land to the west of the burgh belonging to Miss Hay. She threatened legal proceedings but the Council obtained agreement that the Board would assume responsibility. In total, 150 allotments were cultivated to the south of the town and on ground previously used for herring stations.⁸¹

Overall, the increase in cultivation was small, the lowest percentage for any county.⁸² The acreage of land sown with oats had reduced in 1914 and rose only in 1918. Only a small

⁷⁷ *ST*, 15 Dec. 1917, 4; *SN*, 29 Nov. 1917, 4

⁷⁸ *SN*, 24 Jan. 1918, 1

⁷⁹ *ST*, 23 Feb 1918, 4

⁸⁰ *ST*, 4 May 1918, 5; 18 May 1918, 5

⁸¹ SA, TO/1/4, LTC mins., 1917 – 18; *ST*, 4 May 1918, 5

⁸² Dewey, *British Agriculture*, 5; *BoA 1918*, PP. 1919, IX, 3

proportion was suitable for barley, but the acreage also increased from 1916. Potatoes hardly changed. Stock was more profitable and less work for crofters, but after 1915, the number of cattle and sheep fell, though sheep remained above the pre-war level; this was not the same picture as in Britain as a whole, where stock levels fell in 1915 and then rose.⁸³

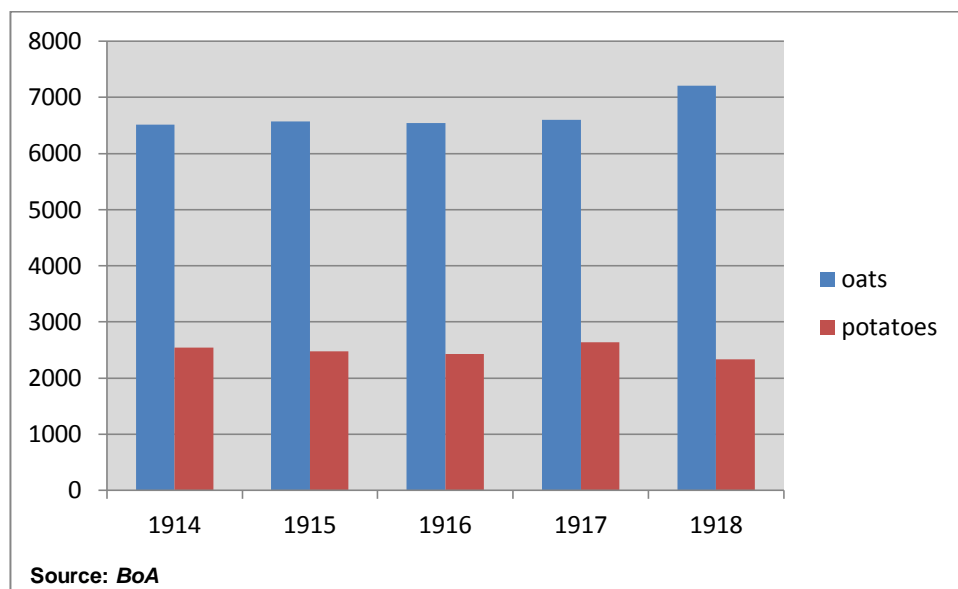


Figure 6.6 Acreage sown

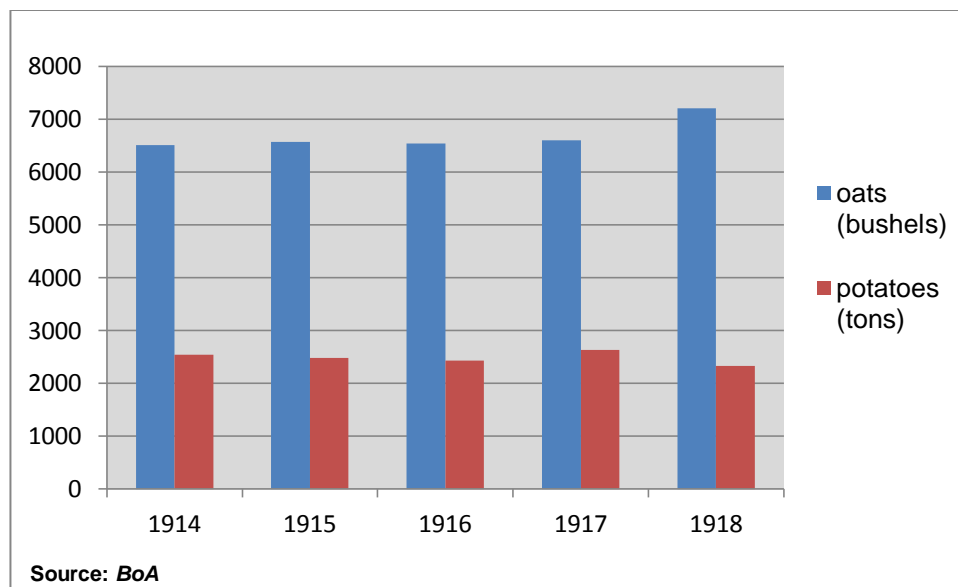


Figure 6.7 Yields per acre

⁸³ Dewey, *British Agriculture*, 204, 249

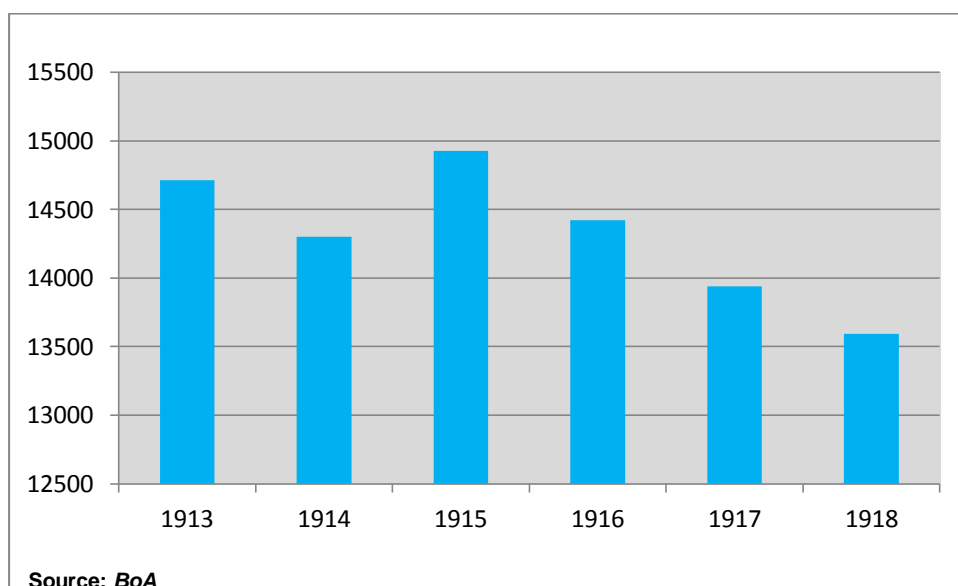


Figure 6.8 Cattle

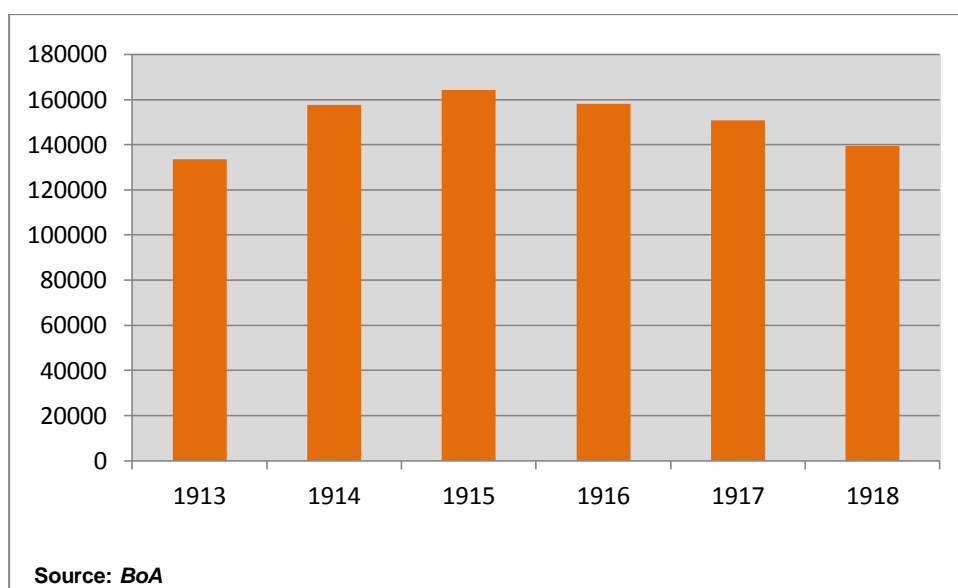


Figure 6.9 Sheep

Unfortunately, there are no figures available for the production of eggs, which rose greatly in value, to an average of 4s 10d a dozen in 1918.⁸⁴ Eggs were regarded as ‘women’s work’ and did not require much land or effort to increase production. The significant quantity collected for wounded soldiers shows both that eggs were plentiful and that people felt prosperous enough to be willing to contribute this valuable product to charity.

⁸⁴ BoA, *1918 Statistics*, VII, iii, PP. 1920, I, 90

Overall, although Shetland crofters did what they could to help the war effort as well as making the most of the higher demand, the opportunities were limited. There were no improvements in farming methods. Black considered, ‘Arguably the crisis of war exposed the large amount of surplus labour normally present in the economy. During the war agriculture worked much closer to capacity and productivity improved’.⁸⁵ British agriculture in general profited from the war.⁸⁶ The ‘official history’ purported to show ‘that Scottish agriculture has its own character and history, and accordingly that it might be expected that it would be affected in its own way by war conditions’.⁸⁷ Shetland’s experience seems to have been similar to other places in Scotland with rises in demand and values. Agriculture was always going to be marginal; in the past, it had not generated much income but the war changed its relative importance to the economy.

Knitwear

One early casualty of the war was the conference scheduled for 18th August in Lerwick to discuss a trademark for Shetland knitwear.⁸⁸ Other than that, the fortunes of this third strand of the economy were greatly improved; the Army’s requirements for wool and the disruption of import trade led to increased demand for knitted goods. In 1915, trade was said to be ‘very brisk’ and prices had risen, the main restraint being delays in spinning.⁸⁹ The same story of high demand and increased prices was repeated every year, until in 1918, the *Shetland News* reported, ‘the supply ... rarely equalled the demand and was far short of it during the summer and autumn months, when women were largely employed on the land’.⁹⁰

In 1916, the Government commandeered wool for the Army. Shetland wool, being unsuitable for uniforms, was exempted and became ‘the prey of the speculative broker’; demand and prices soared.⁹¹ This sparked one of the sporadic arguments that illustrate both the rifts within the community and the difficulty of understanding conditions even at

⁸⁵ Black, ‘External Shocks’, 52

⁸⁶ Bourne, *Britain and the Great War*, 194; Clive H. Lee, ‘The Scottish Economy and the First World War’, in Macdonald and McFarland, *Scotland and the Great War*, 11 – 35, 16

⁸⁷ Conacher, ‘Scottish Agriculture’, 131

⁸⁸ *BoA 1914*, PP. 1914 – 16, VII, xciv

⁸⁹ *SN*, 30 Dec. 1915, 4; *ST*, 1 Jan. 1915, 4

⁹⁰ *SN*, 26 Dec. 1918, 4

⁹¹ *ST*, 22 Jul. 1916; *SN*, 7 Jul. 1917, 8

the time. The issue was about whether wool was available for local knitters at a reasonable price. Knitters from crofting households were able to take full advantage of the increased demand using their own produce, but from 1916, there were complaints that the cost of wool had risen by more than the price of finished goods. Knitters who sold directly to customers or to dealers who paid cash may have made good profits, despite the higher cost of yarn; others who bartered their products complained that dealers were profiteering.⁹²

In 1917, a letter to the *Shetland Times* said that wool had been sent south in 1916 and ‘the knitters’ interest was “a farce”’.⁹³ Lerwick Town Council set up a committee to ensure that wool was retained in Shetland but the Government refused to ban export from Shetland.⁹⁴ It was reported that the Town Council were trying to have the exemption rescinded.⁹⁵ Zetland County Council debated the price of wool; one farmer asserting that it had risen from 1s 6d a pound before the war to 1s 11d, while the price for hosiery had risen from 1s 6d to 2s 6d. A merchant claimed that only surplus wool was exported and it cost between 2s and 3s per pound; another that hosiery had risen less than 60 per cent but wool about 90.⁹⁶ The County Council received a petition signed by over 600 people in Delting asking them not to bring down the price of wool. The general view was that the price of finished articles more than compensated for the high cost of yarn.⁹⁷ Later in 1918, wool was scarce and very expensive, but there were fewer complaints about shortages.⁹⁸ The success of Shetland knitwear was no doubt a boon for women whose earning opportunities were reduced by the contraction of the herring fishing. Nevertheless, the *Shetland Times* declared that in 1917, ‘even with the advance which has taken place, knitters are about the poorest paid class in the islands’, and in 1918, ‘they still had to be content to form the very remote remnant of “the forlorn hope” of the army of labour.’⁹⁹

⁹² Black, ‘External Shocks’, 62

⁹³ *ST*, 30 Jun. 1917, 5

⁹⁴ SA, TO/1/4, LTC mins., 3 Jul. 1917; *SN*, 6 Dec. 1917, 4

⁹⁵ SA, CO/3/1/7, ZCC mins., 20 Dec. 1917

⁹⁶ *SN*, 20 Dec. 1917, 8

⁹⁷ *ST*, 23 Feb 1918, 5

⁹⁸ *SN*, 16 May 1918, 8; 26 Dec. 1918, 4

⁹⁹ *ST*, 5 Jan. 1918, 4; 28 Dec. 1918, 4

Employment, Income and Prices

The war, therefore, had a major impact on the main sectors of the economy. Otherwise there is not much surviving evidence of how local businesses fared. Chapter 5 showed how the presence of the naval forces during the war provided employment particularly in Lerwick. Hay & Company's letter books show how the company adapted to circumstances that originally were expected to be short-lived.¹⁰⁰ There were shortages of goods such as coal and paraffin; the cost of freight rose and there were insurance issues. The branch shop managers were instructed to stop giving credit because 'those supplying goods are shortening their credit generally', and to 'take pains to gather in debts at this time'. Hays had to start buying hosiery in order to retain retail business. Shortages grew worse but other economic circumstances improved. Maintaining coal supplies was particularly difficult for both domestic use and ships; the Navy had to assist at times to keep transport on the move. As shipping and consular agents, Hays had a huge amount of work in Lerwick, with ships brought in for examination, joining convoys or damaged by enemy action. There was much disruption but also commercial opportunities. This was not a typical business, however, and it is unfortunate that no other records survive to give a more rounded picture. However, the newspapers reported a generally favourable assessment; in 1917, 'the general trade of the islands has been very good, the perplexity of many merchants being how to procure supplies to meet the demands made on them'.¹⁰¹

One sector usually mentioned by the newspapers in their year-end reports was building, which came practically to a standstill except for small buildings and repairs, mainly because of shortage of manpower. There was no unemployment; even by the end of 1914, the *Shetland Times* reported, 'at the present moment there is a greater complaint about the scarcity of workmen than there is about the absence of work for them to do.' Again in 1915, 'there was no "dislocation of labour," which is so frequently experienced when economic conditions undergo a great change'.¹⁰² A similar message was repeated every year. Having had their application for a road grant to relieve the

¹⁰⁰ Page 165 – 66, 170; SA, D31/1/133 – 142, Hay & Company Letter Books, 1914 – 18

¹⁰¹ *ST*, 5 Jan. 1918, 4

¹⁰² *ST*, 2 Jan. 1915, 4; 1 Jan, 1916, 4

expected unemployment rejected early in 1915, the County Council later found labour so short that they requested prisoners-of-war; this was refused.¹⁰³

At first, unlike in some parts of the country, the rates of pay in the services were considered favourable, particularly in the RNR: 'The income ... is not only more regular, but is also in the majority of cases larger than what they earned in times of peace'.¹⁰⁴ Crews of naval drifters and trawlers were paid more in Orkney and Shetland than elsewhere.¹⁰⁵ Servicemen's pay, however, did not keep increase in line with retail prices or civilian earnings, which increased substantially; for example, the County and Town Councils were asked repeatedly for pay-rises, and agreed to them. Since few people were employed in agriculture full-time by others, agricultural wages were less of an issue than they were in many rural areas before the Corn Production Act of 1917 required district committees to fix rates.¹⁰⁶ Many men were still employed in the Merchant Navy, where, for most of the war, trade union members were dissatisfied with pay, conditions and compensation for loss due to enemy action. Pay was increased several times, finally in 1917, after many sailors had deserted in the United States, to over £11 a month.¹⁰⁷ The people who suffered most from inflation were those on a fixed income, such as pensioners with no land, war widows and disabled men discharged from the services.

During the war, retail prices rose by 130 per cent.¹⁰⁸ It is hard to estimate how similar the situation in Shetland was to the national picture. The outbreak of war caused 'almost a panic in the provision market'; prices rose, supplies of oatmeal and sugar were exhausted and flour was 'at a premium'. Dealers rationed supplies of coal, and paraffin and candles were scarce.¹⁰⁹ Then the situation settled down again quickly, if temporarily. At the end of 1915, the *Shetland News* estimated that the costs of 'the necessities of life' had risen by between 40 and 50 per cent, which was

¹⁰³ SA, CO3/1/6, ZCC mins., 21 Jan. 1915; 15 Feb. 1917

¹⁰⁴ *SN*, 21 Oct. 1915, 4

¹⁰⁵ *ST*, 7 Apr. 1917, 5

¹⁰⁶ P. E. Dewey, 'Nutrition and Living Standard in Wartime Britain, in R. Wall and J. Winter, *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe 1914 – 1918* (Cambridge, 2005), 197 – 220, 210 – 11; Conacher, 'Scottish Agriculture', 141 – 42

¹⁰⁷ Marsh and Ryan, *Seamen*, 80 – 83

¹⁰⁸ A. L. Bowley, *Prices and Wages in the United Kingdom, 1914 – 1920* (Oxford, 1921), 74; Boyer, 'Living Standards'; Winter, *Great War and British People*, 213 – 44

¹⁰⁹ *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

comparable to the UK as a whole.¹¹⁰ There were constant complaints about the irregularity and cost of shipping. The sinking of the *St. Magnus* in February 1918 compounded the problem.¹¹¹ Because the steamer service was routed via Kirkwall, food was often rotten when it reached Lerwick; in the summer of 1917, shopkeepers petitioned the Town Council for action when a shipload of meat had to be dumped, and they resorted to bringing in animals alive.¹¹²

The local authorities also complained about the price of food. In February 1915, Lerwick Town Council wrote to the Government protesting at the ‘great increase in the prices of household commodities’ and asking for regulation of supply and prices.¹¹³ In early 1916, the County Council appealed to Wason, the Board of Trade and the Prime Minister.¹¹⁴ There were complaints in the newspapers and in September, the Town Council resolved:

that the Council urge upon the Government the dire necessity of taking control of the national food supply in order to stop the plundering of the people that is at present taking place.¹¹⁵

The Government was no more enthusiastic about intervening in food supply than in any other aspect of the economy, but Britain was particularly vulnerable, being dependent on imports for most of its food.¹¹⁶ Actions to control supplies and prices satisfied nobody. In Shetland, the disagreements about food production paled into insignificance when compared to the quarrels about food control. There were conflicts among all parties: the Committee, consumers, local shopkeepers and wholesalers, the Councils, the Food Controller based in Inverness and the Ministry of Food.

Initial efforts tried to persuade people to eat less; in Shetland, this was deemed to illustrate the Government’s lack of understanding of people in a remote rural location whose diet was sparse enough at the best of times. A columnist in the *Shetland Times* commented:

¹¹⁰ *SN*, 30 Dec. 1915, 4

¹¹¹ John H. Manson, ‘The “North” Boats in World War One’, *Shetland Life*, 373 (2011), 30 – 33

¹¹² *SN*, 28, Jun. 1917, 2; 5 Jul. 1917, 8

¹¹³ SA, TO/1/4, LTC mins., 2 Feb 1915

¹¹⁴ SA, CO 3/1/7, ZCC mins., 20 Jan 1916

¹¹⁵ E.g., *ST*, 17 Jun. and 1 Jul. 1916, 5; 1916; SA, TO/1/4, LTC mins., 5 Sep. 1916

¹¹⁶ L. M. Barnett, *Food Policy in the First World War* (London, 1985), xiii – xiv; Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 194 – 226

I have grown utterly sick of this cheap and silly kind of clap-trap which is dished up to the public under the title of 'patriotism' ... In a community like Shetland, and any such a frugal people, it were useless to preach a gospel of economy.¹¹⁷

The Government brought in control measures only after shortages and high prices led to public demand and labour agitation. Local Food Control Committees were appointed in August 1917, and included at least one woman and a representative of labour.¹¹⁸ In Shetland, the County and Town Councils together formed the 'appointing authority' and appointed a committee, though there were both local complaints about there being too many traders on it and difficulties obtaining the approval of the Food Commissioner for the membership.¹¹⁹

Retailers had to register locally and wholesalers nationally, and prices were set for some staple goods, the first being 9d for a loaf of bread. The problem in Shetland was that bakers claimed that this price did not compensate them for the additional cost of importing flour, and so the Committee fixed the price of a loaf at 10d. In addition, shopkeepers in the country districts had been accustomed to charging extra for their additional transport charges; the Committee received over fifty applications to charge more and agreed an additional halfpenny for bakers and a penny for other shopkeepers.¹²⁰

Prices were also fixed for other foods including milk, jam, meat, cheese and butter; sugar was rationed. From the start, the butchers complained. Milk became scarce in Lerwick as producers claimed that the price did not cover transport costs. Illogically, freight was paid on cheese but no other foodstuff. The Assistant Food Commissioner, Sir Duncan Beattie, visited Lerwick in October 1917, and met the Food Control Committee and deputations of bakers and butchers. Despite admitting that transport costs had trebled, he made no promises to address the situation. The price of sugar caused arguments as some shops were charging more than others; the concept of competition was not popular – perhaps never had been in Shetland. Potato prices were fixed and it was alleged that some growers had been holding back

¹¹⁷ *ST*, 23 Jun. 1917, 4

¹¹⁸ Barnett, *British Food Policy*, xviii, 127

¹¹⁹ *SN*, 6 Sep. 1917, 4; *ST*, 8 Sep. 1917, 5; *SN*, 8 Nov. 1917, 5

¹²⁰ Barnett, *British Food Policy*, 134; *SN*, 20 Sep. 1917, 4; 27 Sep. 1917, 5; 4 Oct. 1917, 4

supplies. The price of fish also caused problems, as described earlier, and, as well as food, other items were scarce, especially coal.¹²¹

The Committee were attacked in the newspapers for favouring the interests of traders as against consumers, whom they were intended to protect. Requests to the Ministry of Food to pay for freight went unanswered and so the entire Food Control Committee resigned. The view was that yet again the Government did not appreciate the problems of remote communities: ‘Owing to their geographical position the Shetland Islands are of inestimable value to the Navy’, protecting shipping and trade, but ‘owing to this same fact of geographical position’, they were being penalised. Roberts, the Food Commissioner in Inverness, wrote to the Ministry of Food in strong support of Shetland Committee, but he too received no answer. The local authorities, who did not have the power to reconstitute a committee, sent telegrams to the Food Commissioner, the Secretary for Scotland and the MP.¹²²

In January 1918, there was a gap of ten days between steamers and Lerwick experienced the first real shortages of the war; shops ran out of food and the gas was turned off one day because of the shortage of coal. The *Shetland News* blamed ‘Government ineptitude, bungling and folly’ and asked, ‘why not let every town and parish look after itself?’¹²³ The next month, a new Food Control Committee was convened and again requested clarity on freight costs and their power to vary prices. Despite recognising the ‘Herculean task’ facing the new Committee, the newspapers continued to criticise its actions and question its composition and legality. Shortages became more apparent and the *Shetland Times* ran the controversial headline: ‘Dealers not all Rogues and Thieves’.¹²⁴ The Committee gathered detailed statistics about costs, quantities and output from dealers. Various retail and producer groups lobbied for prices to be raised, claiming that, although they were required to provide detailed statistics of their financial transactions, their costs were not being adequately taken into consideration, but the Committee remained indecisive and inconsistent.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Pages 175 – 76; *SN*, 13 Sep. 1917, 8; *SN*, 4 Oct. 1917, 4; *ST*, 6 Oct. 1917, 4

¹²² *ST*, 22 Sep. 1917, 4; 17 Nov. 1918, 4; *SN*, 29 Nov. 1917, 4; *ST*, 24 Nov. 1917, 4

¹²³ *SN*, 17 Jan. 1918, 4

¹²⁴ *SN*, 21 Feb. 1918, 5; *ST*, 23 Mar. 1918, 4; *SN*, 7 Mar. 1918, 7; 28 Mar. 1918, 4 – 5; *ST*, 2 Mar. 1918, 4

¹²⁵ *SN*, 28 Mar. 1918, 4; 4 Apr. 1918, 4

Butter, tea and meat were rationed and the Food Control Committee accepted a proposal by butchers to exempt Shetland from the Meat Order only to have the decision overturned by the Commissioner.¹²⁶

The Joint Appointing Committee, (Town and County Councils together), wrote to the Commissioner asking him to deal with the question of freight and then with the composition of the Committee. The Commissioner finally replied, refusing to pay for freight or change the meat ration. The price of fish was set and there was fear that fishermen would not sell in Shetland at all.¹²⁷ The Committee fell out with the Lerwick Merchants Association, who claimed that selling small amounts of flour was unprofitable, and then threatened to withdraw licences to trade. A merchant at Walls refused to sell flour altogether.¹²⁸ The Joint Appointing Committee met and, having condemned the 'unreasonable and arbitrary attitude' of the Food Control Committee and the heavy expenses incurred by its frequent meetings, demanded resignations. Some members stood down and, after several further acrimonious meetings of the Joint Appointing Committee, new members were appointed and the Food Control Committee struggled on.¹²⁹ The Government Orders were complex and required almost constant communication with the Commissioner. In July, bread was short as there were few bakers and the Navy had priority over the supply. Other materials were being mixed with flour to make it go further, and bakers stopped baking loaves while continuing to sell rolls and buns, which were more profitable. In September, there was another potential crisis this time about milk, then further arguments and a resignation and recurring complaints about the price of flour.¹³⁰

All of this was illustrative of the kind of problem that arose when decisions were taken centrally without knowledge of, or regard for, the situation in more remote areas, a point made repeatedly by the local newspapers. It also showed the difficulties of a body of local people trying to apply restrictive controls over which they had little influence and which would never please all sections of the community. While people might consider themselves united in their determination to win the war,

¹²⁶ *SN*, 18 Apr. 1918, 4

¹²⁷ *SN*, 25 Apr. 1918, 4; 2 May 1918, 4

¹²⁸ *SN*, 25 May 1918, 4; 30 May 1918, 4

¹²⁹ *SN*, 6 Jun. 1918, 4; 13 Jun. 1918, 4

¹³⁰ *SN*, 18 Jul. 1918, 4; 2 Aug. 1918, 5; 12 Sep. 1918, 4, 8

the resultant privations, minor though they were in comparison with those endured by servicemen, caused conflict locally as well as criticism of the Government. Despite their conviction that they were being penalised, however, Shetlanders were not the only people who had problems with food control. An account by an official in the very different, more populous and extensively urban North West District of England, despite admitting to glossing over the problems, shows that the complex regulations gave rise to questions, loopholes and conflicts similar to the Shetland experience.¹³¹

Despite the many complaints, the newspapers did not suggest the economy as a whole was suffering. In early 1915, the *Shetland Times* stated:

There is a marked change over the income of the islands today. In fact, it is questionable if Shetland was ever so prosperous at any period in her history ... It is doubtful if the people of Shetland, taken as a whole, were so well off and care-free as they are today'¹³²

The following year, the message was similar:

The year which is now closing has been one fraught with blessings to the people of our Isles, and despite the war, has uplifted the entire community, and brought much material comfort to the Islands.¹³³

The *Shetland News* agreed that despite the poor fishing, business had been good, in the country districts as well as Lerwick because servicemen's pay, amounting to 'the enormous sum of approximately £150000', had greatly increased the money available. The comment 'there has never been so much ready cash in the country before' is supported by the increase in bank deposits highlighted by Black, and suggests that much business previously was based on credit.¹³⁴ The local Fishery Officer also remarked, 'The islanders generally were never in more comfortable circumstances financially ... seldom, if ever, was the circulation of ready money greater'.¹³⁵ Later, the benefits were perhaps overstated, as the effects of inflation were not always recognised. In 1917, the *Shetland News* said, 'Some are worse off, but a great number are not. Crofter-fishermen, fishermen, and almost every other class

¹³¹ H. W. Clemesha, *Food Control in the North West Division* (Manchester, 1922)

¹³² *ST*, 30 Jan. 1915, 4; also 4 Sep. 1915, 4

¹³³ *ST*, 1 Jan. 1916, 4

¹³⁴ *SN*, 30 Dec. 1915, 4; Black, 'External Shocks', 66 – 67

¹³⁵ SA, AF 29/253, 995 – 1000, LFO report, 8 Jan. 1916

have had control of more money than they ever had in their lives'.¹³⁶ At the year-end, the *Shetland Times* reported, 'It will be seen that during 1917, Shetland has been prosperous in the most of her undertakings.'¹³⁷

Conclusion

War brought no fundamental changes to the way civilian Shetlanders made their living. It could not change the basic resources of land and sea, or the restrictions of weather and location. Nor was their capacity improved by new technology or methods. Some economic difficulties were exacerbated by the war; costs rose and transport problems affected both exports and imports. There was disruption, particularly in the fishing industry. On the other hand, demand for Shetland's products rose and there was generally full employment, so the war offered opportunities that at least some Shetlanders were able to exploit. The Government's interventions, which were never going to be designed with the Shetland situation in mind, were a hindrance and source of friction. This led to disagreements and a feeling that both Shetland's problems and contribution were being discounted. It was a changeable situation and always recognised as temporary.

¹³⁶ *SN*, 12 Jul. 1917, 5

¹³⁷ *ST*, 8 Jan. 1918, 4

CHAPTER 7 THE CIVILIAN EXPERIENCE

This chapter examines how the war affected Shetland society and how civilian Shetlanders viewed the war. Clearly, the people most affected were the servicemen; however, the majority even of the adult male population did not serve and the so-called ‘home front’ was the experience of most people. These years were blighted by absence and loss, but the war presented both challenges and opportunities, improvements in life as well as detriments. Geographical location was one factor influencing how the war impinged on communities; Shetland was simultaneously in the heart of some maritime operations and remote from the centre of national decision-making. After the outbreak of war, discussed in chapter 3, there were other times when perceptions of the war were most likely to be apparent, for example, when local casualties were highest and when events had most impact locally. This chapter, which relies heavily on the local newspapers, assesses attitudes to the war, the enemy and the Government, and tensions within the community.

The Early Years: ‘Business as Usual’?

Even at an early stage, trends are evident in the newspapers which displayed attitudes and conventions that persisted throughout the war and beyond. One was a thirst for information: ‘nowhere is the significance of this great European war more appreciated than in Shetland’. In Lerwick, the demand for newspapers was unprecedented: ‘local booksellers have been literally under siege’.¹ Shetlanders were well informed, though it took time for news to reach more remote areas. Telegrams from the News Agency were displayed daily in Lerwick, and every Sunday a digest of telegrams was available to callers and subscribers and displayed at telegraph offices. Both newspapers published a daily war edition. The same news was then published in the weekly editions with comment and local news. The Star Picture Palace showed war news, for example, ‘war pictures direct from the front’ in early September. Shetlanders were said to take ‘an unusually deep and intelligent interest in the war’.²

¹ *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

² *ST*, 15 Aug. 1914, 5; *SN*, 5 Sep. 1914, 1; 11 Nov. 1915, 4

Marwick described ‘the widely held belief that the war would be over within six months’, based on rhetoric about Britain’s naval invincibility.³ The *Shetland Times* stated over-confidently, ‘The crisis has come at the very moment when our fleets are in the highest state of war efficiency’, but cautioned that, although ‘quite a lot of the people seem to attach little importance to the great struggle which is now proceeding in Europe’, expectations of a short war were mistaken.⁴ Despite warnings from a war correspondent that the war might be ‘long, very long’ and from Kitchener that it might last for three years, the general impression was that this would not be a protracted affair.⁵ Both newspapers hoped so: ‘Heaven grant that the conflict may be short; sharp and terrible it will be’; ‘Let us join in hoping and praying that the conflict, horrible though it must be, will be short’.⁶ Like most people, the editors had no realistic conception of what was to come.

It was expected that the naval war would be decisive and Shetland would be involved as a signal station and base for a defence flotilla. Although Germany was expected to fight defensively near its own coastline, ‘naval engagements may take place almost within earshot of the “Old Rock”’.⁷ Initially, the newspapers were optimistic that the Allies were winning. In December, the *Shetland Times* claimed, ‘Gradually but none the less surely the power of the Germans is being borne down’. The *Shetland News* repeated this positive message for most of 1915: ‘It is now taken for granted almost everywhere except in Germany that that country will be defeated in a few months.’ In June, the *Shetland Times* said, ‘There is little room to hope for a speedy conclusion to the war’, but returned by December to, ‘Germany is a conquered nation; or, at least, she is now beaten’. By that time, the *Shetland News* had accepted that ‘many months must elapse before the great struggle can end’.⁸

One of the reasons an early victory was anticipated was that the newspapers relied for information on the Official Press Bureau, which ‘doled out highly uninformative

³ Marwick, *Deluge*, 75; Strachan, *First World War*, 1000 – 13; Stuart Halifax, “‘Over by Christmas’: British Popular Opinion and the Short War in 1914”, *First World War Studies*, 1, 2 (2010), 103 – 22

⁴ *ST*, 1 Aug. 1914, 4; 22 Aug. 1914, 4

⁵ *SN*, 29 Aug. 1914, 6; *ST*, 29 Aug. 1914, 4; 5 Sep. 1914, 4

⁶ *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 4; *ST*, 15 Aug. 1914, 4

⁷ *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

⁸ *ST*, 26 Dec. 1914, 4; *SN*, 17 Apr. 1915, 4; *ST*, 26 Jun. 1915, 4; 4 Dec. 1915, 4; *SN*, 30 Dec. 1915, 4

official communications'.⁹ The newspapers realised censorship was being imposed; the *Shetland Times* called it 'that abortion of modern times'.¹⁰ They recognised German propaganda: the *Shetland Times* questioned a triumphant report: 'One wonders how much of this is true, and how much if it is – German' and later stated, 'Every German account of the struggle is contrary to the facts'.¹¹ Nevertheless, they accepted British reports without question, for example, the Government's mendacious denial of the loss of HMS *Audacious*. Only 'official' news was readily available, and perhaps the editors felt that responsible newspapers had a duty to support the national cause, besides complying with the very complicated censorship instructions.¹² Studies of the national press have concluded that 'the claim that it became part of the official propaganda machinery during the war is ... largely justified,' through acquiescence rather than coercion.¹³ Because of remoteness, local press found it even more difficult to follow events with the limited information supplied by 'that most extraordinary of all modern inventions, the Press Bureau.'¹⁴

Contrary to Churchill's accusations, the war strengthened feelings of patriotism and affiliation with the Empire. Even before Britain declared war, the *Shetland Times* declared, 'There are times when Shetland feels itself no small section of the British Empire, and Monday was one of those occasions'. Reporting on reactions in country districts, the *Shetland News* adopted a rather condescending tone, but emphasised the commonality of experience:

The thrill that passed through many a lonely township on Wednesday morning was as great as in any district of the Empire ... crofters and fishermen became gradually aware of what the beginning, the preliminaries, of a European war mean to those situated even on the outskirts of the countries concerned ... similar to what was simultaneously happening in six great countries in Europe.¹⁵

⁹ Marwick, *Deluge*, 78; Haste, *Home Fires*, 2 – 3

¹⁰ *ST*, 3 Apr. 1915, 4; Colin Lovelace, 'British Press Censorship during the First World War', in George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate, (eds.), *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (London, 1978), 306 – 19

¹¹ *ST*, 20 Feb. 1915, 4; 19 May 1917, 4;

¹² *SN*, 12 Dec. 1914, 7; Haste, *Home Fires*, 35, 31

¹³ Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda*, 31; DeGroot, *Blighly*, 180 – 87; Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 231 – 38; G. Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2002), 110 – 14

¹⁴ *ST*, 27 May 1916, 4

¹⁵ *ST* and *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

The conventional language in which the war was articulated bound Shetland securely into the national cause. This included concepts such as ‘duty’, ‘honour’, ‘freedom’ and ‘justice’, identified by Marwick as ‘the emotional moulds within which British attitudes were set’.¹⁶ Strachan described this ‘shared vocabulary, an approved style, which is in itself evidence of the ability of language to pervade, externalize, and universalize the emotions which war generated’.¹⁷ Robb suggested that it was the result of ignorance of war conditions and the limiting effects of propaganda.¹⁸ While not pro-war, the newspapers were keen to establish Shetland’s patriotism and contribution to the war-effort:

It is quite gratifying to know that Shetland has done, and is doing, her fair share towards the righteous cause in which the British nation, and the Empire beyond the seas are now engaged.¹⁹

Not only servicemen were involved: ‘We are engaged in a national war in its literal sense, and that being so its demands, ravages and sacrifices must affect everyone in the land.’²⁰ It is striking how Shetlanders contributed to charities in aid of the armed services, refugees or prisoners-of-war. Every week there were reports of fund-raising events, such as flag days or concerts and letters of thanks for donations. The *Shetland Times*’ campaign sent over 1.5 million ‘cigarettes for Tommy’. By the end of 1915, over £2200 had been collected for the National Relief, the Belgian Relief and the Red Cross Funds. Knitted articles, eggs and sphagnum moss for dressing wounds were collected.²¹ Charities, according to Haste, used messages about the righteousness of the war and shared sacrifice to gain support; there were so many, ‘voluntarism had run riot’.²²

¹⁶ Marwick, *Deluge*, 89

¹⁷ Strachan, *First World War*, 142

¹⁸ Robb, *British Culture*, 124 – 27

¹⁹ *ST*, 2 Jan. 1915, 4

²⁰ *SN*, 30 Dec. 1915, 4

²¹ *SN*, 30 Dec. 1915, 4; Manson, *Roll of Honour*, 273 – 76

²² Haste 27 – 29; DeGroot, *Blighty*, 64 – 65



Figure 7.1 Sorting sphagnum moss

Although the Government's slogan 'Business as Usual' promoted the idea that civilian life would go on undisturbed, this was clearly not entirely possible.²³ Because of Shetland's trade with Germany and strategic position, some changes were soon apparent. 'Hamlet' even lamented that 'everything stopped because of the war'.²⁴ The Admiralty took command and applied the regulations under the Defence of the Realm Act for ensuring public safety, securing means of communication and preventing contact with the enemy. The most irksome prohibited taking a boat to sea and showing lights visible from the sea – which meant nearly all of Shetland. Relations with the naval authorities were not always cordial.

Nevertheless, many aspects of life continued unaltered. After the first few months, the economy recovered, the effects of the war were felt only gradually and opinions evolved. In its 1914 review, the *Shetland Times* reported that 'Amid all the difficulties and turmoils', Shetland had mainly continued 'the even tenor of her way'.²⁵ The editor of the *Shetland News*, however, was strongly affected:

There is war everywhere – terrible, relentless, bloody war ... the ghastly struggle radiates its horrors and hideousness to the ends of the earth ... sacrifices must be made bravely, and burdens met patiently and cheerfully, in the calm confidence that our cause is a just one and that in the end we will triumph.

²³ Marwick, *Deluge*, 79 – 80; DeGroot, *Blighty*, 54 – 78; Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 40

²⁴ *SN*, 22 Aug. 1914, 5

²⁵ *ST*, 2 Jan. 1915, 4

There was, in fact, little evidence that life had been adversely affected and even the positive outcome that emigration had been checked.²⁶ In Lerwick, the Festive Season was quieter than usual despite the presence of so many young men, and the *Shetland News* thought, 'It was good to see almost every guizer add to his wish the earnest hope that another New Year would see the world at peace and the sound of battle still.'²⁷ Most of the war action was far away and not many Shetlanders were caught up in it yet.

There were few casualties in 1914 but people had some awareness of the conditions at the front and at sea. Throughout 1915, casualties were reported in the newspapers most weeks, though often they were not Shetland residents. Tom Sandison wrote:

Almost every day one hears of the loss of some friend, or somebody ones knows. It is terribly sad, what a waste of young life! And one can see no gain – no progress. God pity a world in torment! How long? How long?²⁸

When the TA and the RNR left for active service, large crowds gathered, but the *Shetland Times* commented that they 'seemed to be rather subdued, and lacking in that vivacity which is noticeable in an English crowd'. An old woman said, although she had no relations among the servicemen, 'dir wir ain boys, and we canna' bit feel it'.²⁹ More men were required to fight. The National Registration Act was followed by the Derby Scheme, and, despite concerns that it would fail, the County Council pledged their full support to the Government in 'their unswerving determination to carry on the great war'.³⁰

Tom Sandison observed, 'These days one seems to be obsessed with the war, one can't get away from it, day or night – the crime, the folly, the misery of it.'³¹ Nevertheless, at Christmas 1915, the Lerwick shops were 'almost as bright and animated as in previous years' and there were the usual celebrations. The *Shetland News* declared, 'The life and industries of our little community have gone on pretty much as usual'. The implication that the war was having little effect might seem extraordinary, but the article proceeded to describe 'the vastness of the struggle, its

²⁶ *SN*, 26 Dec. 1914, 4; *ST*, 8 Dec. 1915, 4

²⁷ *SN*, 2 Jan. 1915, 4

²⁸ *SA*, D1/123/9/23, Sandison 20 Jun. 1915

²⁹ 'They are our own boys and we can't help but feel it.' *ST*, 19 June, 1915, 4

³⁰ *SN*, 11 Nov. 1915, 4

³¹ *SA*, D1/123/9/41, Sandison, 31 Oct. 1915

awful hideousness, appalling bloodshed, and inexpressible suffering'. The war was not expected to end soon: 'There will be sacrifice demanded and untold suffering felt before peace can be restored'. Nearly sixty young Shetlanders had already died.³²

Shetland was coping quite well. The *Shetland Times* judged that 'Taken all over, the year that is now closing has treated Shetland very kindly.' 'All minds are obsessed with war and its tragedies', yet 'although we read of the war, we, fortunately, know nothing of its horrors.'³³ The newspapers made no mention of the naval activities nearby since this was prohibited under DORA.³⁴

There were, however, cracks in the national unity: the *Shetland News* declared:

In the conduct of the war there has been much bungling by our statesmen and even by our military commanders; there has been great stupidity in every department; wanton waste and extravagance on the part of those who should have regulated matters with common sense and business-like methods has been rife; many things have occurred which it is as well not to mention; but in spite of this, the nation has been true to its high traditions.³⁵

Things were only going to get worse.

Enemies and Spies

One of the most deeply and constantly held convictions about the war was that the Germans were to blame.³⁶ Shetland had a closer relationship with Germany than most of Britain, but still the *Shetland News* declared, 'The day to which the Germans have looked forward, for which they have striven, toiled, and prayed, for which they have made untold sacrifices, has come.' The *Shetland Times* agreed that Germany had 'set Europe aflame'.³⁷ In Marwick's words, 'Anti-German sentiment was pretty spontaneous ... in this war there could be no charity, let alone enthusiasm, on either side, for aliens'.³⁸ Nevertheless, the German reservists in the fish trade were allowed to leave for home.³⁹

³² *SN*, 23 Dec. 1915, 4; 30 Dec. 1915, 4

³³ *ST*, 1 Jan. 1916, 4

³⁴ Haste, *Home Fires*, 30, 32

³⁵ *SN*, 23 Dec. 1915, 4

³⁶ Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda*, 135

³⁷ *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 4; *ST*, 15 Aug. 1914, 4

³⁸ Marwick, *Deluge*, 77

³⁹ *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

Germany's behaviour was demonised and the conflict depicted as a struggle between right and wrong, good and evil, for the future of the civilised world. According to Macdonald, local newspapers were instrumental in forming anti-German opinion and the right-wing press tended to be more anti-German than Liberal supporters.⁴⁰ Both Shetland newspapers, however, declared that Britain was forced into the war because of obligations to Belgium and France: 'The power and might of Britain ... has always made for peace and civilisation and the protection of the weak and down-trodden among the nations'.⁴¹ A direct threat was also implied: 'The country's call was quite eagerly responded to by Shetlanders, who were ready to face any foe who threatened their country and their freedom'.⁴² According to Strachan, by portraying the war as a defence of family, 'a primitive and basic response could be rolled into the patriotism demanded by the state'.⁴³ The actual reasons behind the war – empire and trade – were transformed: the Germans were 'fighting for military power and "the right to rule"', the Allies for righteousness and justice and "the right to live".⁴⁴

At the beginning, 'spy fever' was rife, based on pre-war invasion stories and rumours of secret agents.⁴⁵ The *Shetland Times* reported a spy shot dead at Newcastle, a wire-tapping device found in London, a man arrested in Peterhead for photographing the Admiralty breakwater and a foreigner suspected of poisoning horses in London.⁴⁶ Shetland had its own suspect: when Edgar Newton complained to the Board of Trade about high prices, Hay & Company retaliated, 'Mr. Newton is reported to be somewhat peculiar, and his singularity of manner caused him to be reported as a German spy'.⁴⁷ The police investigated; Newton's suspicious behaviour included keeping his blinds drawn and taking fishing trips during which he might have interfered with telegraph cables or laid mines. This might have started as a joke but Lieutenant Colonel Evans sent a boat to search the seabed. The Police Superintendent wrote, 'Since the outbreak of the war there has been almost a panic in

⁴⁰ Macdonald, 'Race, Riot and Representations', 145 – 7; also Gregory, *Last Great War*, 47 – 48

⁴¹ *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 4

⁴² *ST*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

⁴³ Strachan, *First World War*, 110

⁴⁴ DeGroot, *Blighty*, 13; *ST*, 8 Jan 1916, 4

⁴⁵ French, 'Spy Fever', 364 – 65; Andrew, *Secret Service*, 1264 – 68; Haste, *Home Fires*, 108 – 39; Simmonds, *Britain and the First World War*, 168

⁴⁶ *ST*, 15 Aug. 1914, 5

⁴⁷ SA, D31/1/133, Hay & Company Letter Book, 825 – 26, to Flux, 15 Sep. 1914

the country districts of Shetland in regard to spies'. Some Government land-valuers had to carry authentication, to avoid being harassed: 'Any person moving about a country district who is not known to the inhabitants is liable to be accused of being a suspicious person'.⁴⁸ The unpopular Norwegian whalers were also suspected of spying and their premises inspected.⁴⁹

The Navy were also distrustful. Midshipman Scrimgeour noted in his diary, 'Three suspicious men were seen up in the hills examining the harbour with spy-glasses, and although they were chased they made good their escape'. Less credibly, he reported that one of the officers, 'an eccentric-looking fellow', was arrested by a local policeman as a potential spy, and another was court-martialled and executed at Olnafirth for passing information to the enemy.⁵⁰ On 31st October, the *Shetland News* mentioned that, on the east coast of England and Scotland, 'spies are strongly suspected of signalling to the enemy the whereabouts of British vessels'.⁵¹

The following day saw the start of a bizarre episode when all forty of the Lerwick Post Office staff: postmaster, overseers, postmen, telegraphists, caretaker, linesmen and gig-drivers, were arrested and imprisoned.⁵² Vice-Admiral Colville thought his mail from Shetland had been tampered with and ordered that the postal staff be detained; Evans carried out the order. Only the postmaster, James MacMaster, was told why they had been arrested and he insisted on accompanying his staff. They were neither questioned nor charged, but their homes were searched. The prisoners' families had to provide food and bedding. Though the local press was censored, the incarceration was common knowledge. Meanwhile, mail and telegraph services were disrupted until staff arrived from the Scottish Mainland. Two of the prisoners were sons of Provost Stout and he alerted Sheriff Menzies, who in turn wrote to the Lord Advocate. The Secretary of State for Scotland and Shetland's MP were also notified, along with the Post Office authorities and the Prison Commissioners – the prison was overcrowded. Some of the prisoners were released after a couple of days,

⁴⁸ SA, AD22/2/49/4, precognition of Edgar F. Newton, 30 Sep. 1914

⁴⁹ SN, 9 Jan. 1919, 4

⁵⁰ Scrimgeour, *Scribbling Diary*, 87 – 91. There is no record of such a court martial

⁵¹ SN, 31 Oct. 1914, 4

⁵² Flaws, *Spy Fever*; NAS, HH31/17, Arrest and Imprisonment of Post Office Staff at Lerwick, 1914 – 15

the last after six. There was never any public explanation for their arrest, though they were offered an apology and compensation.

It has been claimed that Churchill continued to fear invasion until the second year of the war, which is why the North of Scotland was a prohibited area controlled by the Admiralty. Admiral Beatty was said to have shared his suspicion of postal workers.⁵³ Naval activities, including the explosion in Lerwick and the interception of Germans, gave credence to spy scares.⁵⁴ Fishermen were warned about the dangers and asked to display false information in their boats in the hope of misleading any enemy boarding party.⁵⁵ Later, there were further rumours; Tom Sandison wrote:

I don't think there is anything in the rumours of important happenings up our way about the time of Casement's landing in Ireland. If there had been anything of importance we could hardly have failed to have got wind of it somehow.

A Scottish newspaper had reported a Fenian raid in Unst.⁵⁶ In 1917, a restaurant-keeper in Lerwick was accused of spreading false rumours about the loss of two destroyers; he protested that he had only asked if what he had heard was true.⁵⁷ Two Unst people who made derogatory remarks about the Navy in letters were found guilty of offences under DORA.⁵⁸

Atrocity stories abounded, and were believed.⁵⁹ 'Hamlet' asked, 'Are the Germans Cowards as well as Barbarians?' and another columnist, 'Argus', declared, 'Their treachery, cruelty, cowardice, bullying, their mean underhand methods, their minelaying, their continued spying, are crimes which no sophistry, no apology, will ever justify in the time of humanity'.⁶⁰ Wason published an anti-German address called *The Beast*.⁶¹ The Germans' willingness to sink merchant ships without

⁵³ Stafford, *Churchill*, 47, 58

⁵⁴ TNA: PRO ADM 1/8437/320, Report of Metropolitan Police, 23 Apr. 1915

⁵⁵ SA, AF29/237, 54, 65, 115, LFO letters received, 12 Jun. – 27 Dec. 1915

⁵⁶ SA, D1/123/10/22, Sandison, 21 May 1916; *ST*, 8 Jul. 1916, 5

⁵⁷ SA, AD22/2/53/2, Precognition, Arthur Conley, 21 Sep. 1917

⁵⁸ SA, AD 22/2/52/23 – 24, Precognitions, Duncan and Mary Sinclair, 25 Apr. 1917; *ST*, 26 July, 1917, 5

⁵⁹ Haste, *Home Fires*, 79 – 107; Gregory, *Last Great War*, 40 – 69; Gullace, *Blood of our Sons*, 17 – 33; DeGroot, *Blighty*, 187 – 90; Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda*, 135 – 63; Robb, *British Culture*, 99 – 103

⁶⁰ *SN*, 12 Sep 1914, 4

⁶¹ *SN*, 2 Dec. 1914, 4

warning was viewed with particular horror. It seemed some Shetlanders attributed the fact that the local steamers had not been attacked to the fish trade: ‘the Germans ... know that if they dared to touch one of our steamers they would never get another herring from us.’ The *Shetland News* was not convinced: ‘Think of Shetland being saved, and perhaps humanity with it, for the love the Germans bear the thirst-creating herring’.⁶² A more typical remark was:

Germany had lost (if she ever had any) all sense of honour as a nation. Her actions from the day she invaded Belgium down to the present hour, have shown a barbarism and brutality which would have disgraced the Dark Ages.⁶³

A local spin was put on a stereotypical story in *Hughie and the Hun* by John Nicolson, a sketch sold for the Red Cross, in which a Shetlander saves a German at sea before the war only to be sunk by him in a submarine.⁶⁴

The rhetoric about war aims developed. Britain was:

fighting the battle for freedom and humanity; and when her task has been accomplished, she will have saved Europe from the despotism of a military issue as unscrupulous and as heartless as that displayed in the Dark Ages.⁶⁵

Editorials perpetuated the twin themes of the Germans’ iniquity and the righteousness of Britain’s cause, with phrases such as ‘for a generation the Germans have worshipped the Devil, and all his works’ and ‘the Germans have shown throughout the war the most colossal fiendishness, cruelty, and treachery’. In contrast:

Our nation is fighting for all that makes life worth living – for liberty, justice, honour, truth, against a foe who had trampled underfoot with unbelievable callousness and contempt all that humanity holds dear.⁶⁶

Shetland’s newspapers could be said to be among those which ‘had become adept at dressing hatred with the voice of reason’.⁶⁷ There is little to show whether most Shetlanders shared these opinions. According to Marwick:

Of the mood of the inarticulate public it is difficult to say more than its most obvious features were an intense hatred of the German Kaiser and people, and a mighty sense of righteous exaltation, the one clearly enforcing the other.⁶⁸

⁶² *SN*, 14 Aug. 1915, 5

⁶³ *ST*, 4 Sep 1915, 4

⁶⁴ *ST*, 1 Apr 1916, 4

⁶⁵ *ST*, 20 Feb. 1915, 4

⁶⁶ *SN*, 22 Mar. 1917, 2; 6 Sep. 1917, 4; 21 Nov. 1914, 4

⁶⁷ Simmonds, *Britain and the First World War*, 167

A later account said that the people of Unst disapproved of the Navy's refusal to bury a German sailor in the graveyard, so there were limits to their acrimony, though Sandison believed that 'surely in this struggle we are fighting for the right and all that makes for righteousness'.⁶⁹

Despite the casualties and the inconveniences, there was no support for peace without a German defeat. A pamphlet, *International Appeal from the Peace Society*, prompted a very philosophical, literary and anti-German editorial in the *Shetland Times*: the Kaiser was 'the most vile master that ever defiled God's great earth'; the Germans, 'baby-butchers, and the murderers of women and the outragers of young women' and the pamphlet, 'useless and almost treasonable'; praying was a waste of time and the Society's members would be better making munitions.⁷⁰ Calls for a negotiated settlement in 1916 and 1917 were rejected by the Allies and the *Shetland News* considered such proposals traitorous:

For German rule means scientific, calculated barbarism; a return to bestiality worse than that of the primitive savage; the snapping of the chords [sic] which bind humanity together; and the negation of everything which distinguishes man from the brute creation.⁷¹

This odium did not diminish even when the prospect of peace was in sight: 'It is impossible to conceive of anything too hard or terms too severe to inflict on Germany for their diabolical crimes' and 'There should be no mercy.'⁷² If other attitudes to the war may be ambiguous or contradictory, the message from the local newspapers about the blame for the war and the nature of the enemy was very clear indeed.

1916 – 1918: War Weariness, Endurance and Patriotism

A British victory was never doubted but, as the war dragged on, there was growing horror at the casualties, irritation at the inconveniences and annoyance with the Government. The pressures led to disagreements but the community maintained a front of unity and pride in Shetland's part in the struggle. Purseigle emphasized how

⁶⁸ Marwick, *Deluge*, 89

⁶⁹ Samuel, S. S. Polson, 'Looking at Unst 1914 – 1960: The End of the Story', *Shetland Life*, 101 (1989), 25 – 27, 27; SA, D1/123/10/35, Sandison, 13 Aug 1916

⁷⁰ *ST*, 9 Oct. 1915, 4

⁷¹ *SN*, 29 Nov. 1917, 4; Haste, *Home Fires*, 162 – 65

⁷² *SN*, 19 Sep. 1918, 4; *ST*, 9 Nov. 1918, 4

important the losses and the concept of sacrifice were in mobilising support for war.⁷³

Chapter 4 showed that the end of 1915 was the point when the realisation set in that many Shetlanders would lose their lives. The battle of Jutland was regarded as particularly important by the local councils and the newspapers; two Shetlanders were killed and five injured.⁷⁴ Tom Sandison wrote, 'The terrible loss in men and ships as a result of Wednesday's naval battle has affected us as no other incident in the war has done'.⁷⁵ Then at the death of Lord Kitchener, the *Shetland Times* observed, 'Never have we seen people so deeply moved in Lerwick.'⁷⁶ A much greater shock was the number of local casualties at the Ancre in November 1916, which hit Lerwick particularly hard. The *Shetland News* printed a special supplement with photographs of twelve of the dead.⁷⁷ The *Shetland Times*' year-end review was dismal:

The great and terrible world tragedy of the war has hung like a black pall over the whole islands ... many of the bravest and best of Shetland's young men have fallen, and the list of Shetland's dead heroes ... speaks mutely of the many aching hearts and darkened lives left behind.⁷⁸

It was said to be 'almost a mockery' to use the conventional phrases such as 'he died like a soldier' or 'fighting nobly for king and county'. This kind of language was, however, enshrined in any discussion of the war-dead; for example, 'Many young and promising lives have been sacrificed on the altar of war' and 'These young men ... were greater in their deaths than in their lives'.⁷⁹ At the time of the battle at Arras, Sandison commented, 'We have been rejoicing at the great British victory in France. But O, the price!'⁸⁰ The *Shetland News* published another supplement.⁸¹ In 1917, it was said that 'over every hamlet, if not, indeed, every household in Shetland the

⁷³ Purseigle, 'Beyond and Below the Nations', 109 – 11

⁷⁴ *SN*, 15 June, 1916, 2

⁷⁵ *SA*, D1/123/10/24, Sandison, 4 Jun. 1916

⁷⁶ *ST*, 10 Jun. 1916, 4

⁷⁷ *SN*, 28 Dec. 1916, 2

⁷⁸ *ST*, 30 Dec. 1916, 4

⁷⁹ *ST*, 6 Jan. 1917, 4; Meyer, *Men of War*, 74 – 96; Ted Bogacz, '"A Tyranny of Words": Language, Poetry, and Antimodernism in England in the First World War', *Journal of Modern History*, 58, 3 (1986), 643 – 68; *SN*, 4 Jan. 1917, 4

⁸⁰ *SA*, D1/123/11/17, Sandison, 13 Apr. 1917

⁸¹ *SA*, D6/294/1, 67, Broadsheet in Reid Tait Scrapbook, 5 Jul. 1917

shadow of Death sits brooding.’⁸² On another occasion, Sandison asked, ‘Have you noticed that it is generally the best that are taken? That is very markedly so in regard to the Shetland men.’⁸³ The *Shetland News* also mourned ‘the best of the land ... the young and the strong and the promising’.⁸⁴ This sanctification of the dead arose from the prevalent ideas of sacrifice. In another example, a columnist wrote, ‘They will live on throughout the ages shining in the star-spangled firmament of history’.⁸⁵ In the later years, the newspapers published longer obituaries including photographs, and the notices in the ‘Deaths’ column became more frequent, longer and more elaborate, often including eulogistic verses.

Each year, there were expectations of a breakthrough but gradually the reality was accepted, for example, ‘There is no blinking of the fact that the war has entered a phase which, unless something akin to a miracle happens means its prolongation.’⁸⁶ Recognition that the war was also going to have a negative impact on civilians also developed gradually. The unrestricted submarine warfare of 1915 was the first major indication, and 1916 saw increasing impact and corresponding changes in attitude. Conscription ended any notion that only volunteers would be affected. Historians including Marwick and Horne have debated the effects of ‘total war’ on civilian society, generally concluding that they were intrusive and pervasive: ‘All were mobilized; all were transformed’. Mobilisation was, however, a gradual and uneven process; rather than a ‘complete investment ... in the war effort’, (notwithstanding the rhetoric in the newspapers), the picture in Shetland is of people trying to live their lives as best they could despite the abnormal circumstances.⁸⁷

Because of the Government’s measures to manage security and the economy, Britain was perceived to be ‘not only steadily, but rather rapidly, drifting into that state of

⁸² *ST*, 16 Jun. 1917, 5

⁸³ *SA*, D1/123/12, Sandison, 18 Apr. 1918; *ST*, 5 May 1917, 4

⁸⁴ *SN*, 3 Jan. 1918, 4

⁸⁵ *ST*, 12 May 1917, 5

⁸⁶ *SN*, 7 Dec. 1916, 2

⁸⁷ Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War* (London, 1968); John Horne, ‘Introduction: Mobilizing for “Total War” 1914 – 1918’, in John Horne, (ed.), *State Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge, 1997), 1 – 17; Jenny MacLeod and Pierre Purseigle, ‘Introduction: Perspectives in First World War Studies’ in *Uncovered Fields*; 1 – 23, 14 – 16; Pierre Purseigle, ‘Beyond and Beneath the Nations’, 95

militarism which we set out to oppose in Germany'.⁸⁸ This caused tensions both between the community and the Government and within the community. Relations with the Admiralty have already been discussed.⁸⁹ Travel restrictions were a nuisance and in March 1916, permits became necessary for travel even between islands in Shetland. In April, two Lerwick men were fined £10 for sailing to Yell without a permit.⁹⁰

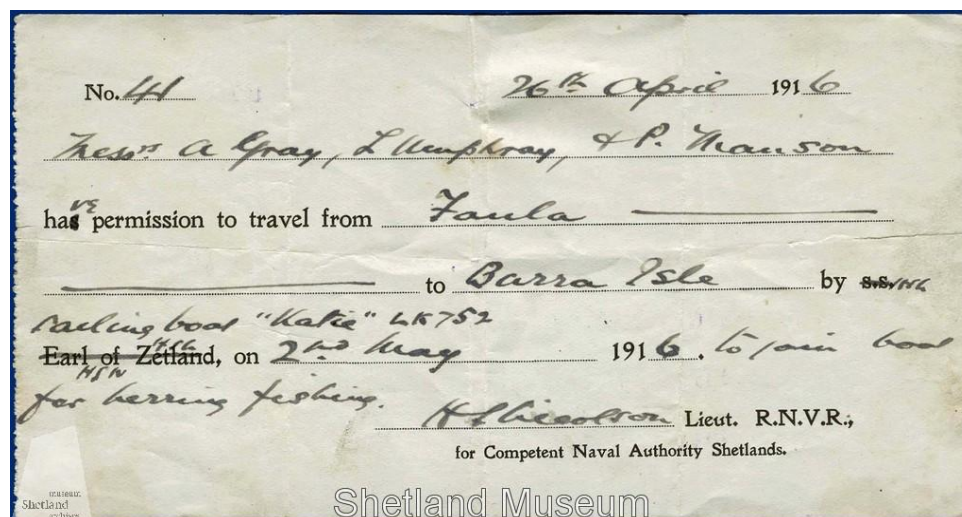


Figure 7.2 A permit for travel from Foula to Barra

Several cases of showing lights were also investigated by the police and were controversially brought to court amid accusations of victimisation.⁹¹ Restrictions on the sale of alcohol became more stringent.⁹² The introduction of daylight saving was unlikely to have caused problems in the Shetland summer but irritated a columnist in the *Shetland Times*.⁹³ Although the food shortages were never severe, they were claimed to be a great inconvenience; for example, in Unst in late 1916, 'The difficulties in regard to food, and the greater restrictions and difficulties looking in the future are bringing very close to our folks the seriousness of the times'. It was

⁸⁸ *ST*, 16 Jun. 1917, 5

⁸⁹ Pages 164 – 65

⁹⁰ TNA; PRO HO 45/10781/ 278281, order, 1 Mar. 1916; *SN*, 27 Apr. 1916, 2

⁹¹ E.g., *SN*, 12 Oct. 1916, 2; 26 Oct. 1916, 2

⁹² Simmonds, *Britain and the First World War*, 215 – 19

⁹³ *ST*, 21 Apr. 1917, 5

claimed, however, that it was early 1918 before shortages in Lerwick resulted in ‘the first time that the fact that we were really at war was borne in on many minds’.⁹⁴

The expansion of central government also meant the expansion of local government to administer the national registers, conscription tribunals, service pensions, fund-raising, additional food production and food control, blurring the lines between the state and volunteers.⁹⁵ People were called on to undertake responsibilities for which they had not been elected, often difficult, sensitive and unpopular. The pressures led to conflict. As discussed in the last chapter, the Food Production Committee’s problems were taken as evidence of the Government’s ineptitude, and increased ill-feeling between land-owners and farmers on one hand and people wanting land on the other. Food control, the major issue in the winter of 1917/18, also caused both internal and external strife, again probably exacerbating pre-existing animosity towards shopkeepers and between town and country.⁹⁶ The Government raised issues about food hoarding and profiteering, and a gulf, identified by DeGroot, between those who profited from the war and those who lost existed even in this small community.⁹⁷

A columnist asked rhetorically, ‘Would a German bomb not be more humane way of “cutting the cord” than being slowly starved to death because a special few of our own kith and kin desired to become rich?’ The profiteer was termed ‘as much an enemy to his country as the vilest Hun’, and another columnist claimed profiteering existed in all walks of life and some people, both workers and businessmen, were having ‘the time of their lives’.⁹⁸ The Councils would not interfere with the price of wool, despite a comment that ‘Even in our small islands, the poor are burdened by the rich’.⁹⁹ Lerwick Town Council did, however, intervene in the housing shortage, asking landlords to extend leases while the war continued: the Government had already legislated to freeze rents at 1914 levels.¹⁰⁰ Even after conscription was

⁹⁴ SA, D1/123/10/51, Sandison, 3 Dec. 1916; *ST*, 19 Jan. 1919, 4

⁹⁵ Gregory, ‘Military Service Tribunals’, 190

⁹⁶ *ST*, 22 Jun. 1916, 5

⁹⁷ DeGroot, *Blighy*, 71 – 73

⁹⁸ *ST*, 16 Sep. 1916, 5; 12 May 1917, 5; *SN*, 12 Jul. 1917, 5

⁹⁹ *ST*, 10 Aug 1918, 5

¹⁰⁰ SA, TO/1/4, LTC mins., 7 May 1918; Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 181 – 84

introduced, the idea that some people were making greater sacrifices than others continued. 'A Working Man' wrote:

We see men sleeping in their own beds almost every night, getting as much or more pay than the man who is braving the untold dangers of war on land or sea; while their wives are drawing separation allowance for them.

There was also discussion about the high wages paid to civilians compared to soldiers.¹⁰¹

Despite censorship, the newspapers clearly felt free to criticise the Government.¹⁰²

Indeed, there was an unusual consensus between the newspapers, since the major point of contention in normal times – free trade or protectionism – was now irrelevant. A good example is a diatribe about the advice for reducing food shortages:

I have grown utterly sick of the this cheap and silly kind of clap-trap which is dished up to the public under the title of "patriotism" ... we are having our whole lives – what we shall eat, what we shall drink, and wherewithal we shall be clothed – explained to us with such mathematical precision.¹⁰³

Criticism was directed more at the civilian circumstances than the conduct of the fighting, but not exclusively. For example, the Mesopotamian Expedition was judged worse than 'the holocaust of the Dardanelles Bungle', and 'a mass of utter incompetency which is as sickening to read of as it is dreadful to contemplate'. The *Shetland News* asked, 'Are the words "Too Late", "Muddle" and "Bungle" to be written about everything connected with this War?'¹⁰⁴

An underlying problem was Shetland's dependence on shipping. According to a correspondent, the problem not due to 'actual geographical distance' but to the monopoly: 'Neither the remoteness of the Islands, nor the dangers of the voyage, stand in the way of the modest improvement in the present service which is desired'.¹⁰⁵ This reinforced the idea, described in chapter 6, that the Government was ignorant of Shetland's circumstances and unappreciative of its importance to the

¹⁰¹ *SN*, 15 Feb. 1918, 5; *ST*, 18 Aug. 1917, 5

¹⁰² The right to do so was expressly allowed; Lovelace, 'British Press Censorship', 306

¹⁰³ *ST*, 23 Jun. 1916, 5

¹⁰⁴ *ST*, 14 Jul. 1917, 5 ; *SN*, 20 Dec. 1917, 4

¹⁰⁵ *ST*, 27 Oct. 1917, 4

war-effort. The *Shetland Times* argued frequently that ‘owing to the isolated position of Shetland, these islands deserved very special treatment’.¹⁰⁶

This assertion of Shetland’s special situation arose again in discussions about parliamentary representation. The Town Council opposed a suggestion that Lerwick join the Northern Burghs constituency and wanted separate representation from Orkney, claiming the two island groups did not have common interests. Lerwick was ‘an integral part’ of Shetland, whose circumstances were special and required a representative with local knowledge and the ability to foresee the effects of proposed legislation’.¹⁰⁷

There was a feeling that the war had afflicted Shetland particularly; for example, it was claimed that ‘few districts of the UK have been so stricken by the war as Orkney, Shetland, and Lewis’. In addition, there was a sense of grievance: ‘One begins to wonder ... whether there is such another long-suffering yet law-abiding community in the British group, as the islands of Shetland ... patriotic in the highest and best sense’.¹⁰⁸ The repetition of this idea prompts the question as to how aware Shetlanders were of circumstances elsewhere. The *Shetland Times* explained:

The war is the cloud which is overshadowing the whole islands, to an even larger extent than it does in other greater centres, where the bustle and stir of commerce and industry offer but little chance for brooding; but in Shetland it is so different, where the houses are scattered very often far apart, and when all the surroundings tend to turn the mind in on itself.¹⁰⁹

Reports of the extent to which people felt involved were contradictory. A columnist claimed:

It seems almost impossible to think of anything, to speak of anything, or write of anything but war. It clouds the intellect, over-masters the emotions and obsesses the mind almost to the exclusion of aught else.

Conversely, possibly the same person wrote that, ‘as long as it does not interfere with our personal comforts and conveniences’, people treated the war as ‘something to be regretted, and, in an abstract manner, think of it as really terrible’, but were very

¹⁰⁶ *ST*, 17 Nov 1917, 4; 19 Jan. 1918, 4;

¹⁰⁷ *SA*, TO/1/4, LTC mins., 5 Jun. 1917

¹⁰⁸ *SN*, 7 Mar. 1918, 4; *ST*, 23 Mar. 1918, 4

¹⁰⁹ *ST*, 5 Jan. 1918, 4

ready to complain when individually affected.¹¹⁰ Even in the summer of 1917, Tom Sandison remarked:

Though the times are so tremendous we in our own little quiet corner see but little to remind us that the whole world is involved in a life and death struggle the most momentous and awful this poor planet has endured.¹¹¹

Despite the problems, the newspapers emphasised the patriotism of the Shetlanders, and the magnitude of the local contribution, frequently repeating that Britain would win, that no sacrifice would be too great and ‘as an integral part of the Kingdom’, Shetland was bound to share the hardships:

In no part of the great Empire to which we belong has there been a more ready or more generous response to the patriotism of the people than there has been in Shetland.¹¹²

One way of stressing the community aspect of this contribution was to link it to Shetland’s Norse past and ideals of bravery and hardiness; for example, ‘Shetland ... has borne her part in the struggle before them [sic] with that calmness and fortitude which were to be looked for the descendants of the old Norse sea-rovers’.¹¹³ Volunteers were described as looking ‘worthy descendants of their Norsemen sires who “lived of old, upon the stormy wave”’.¹¹⁴

Saving in the Government’s war schemes, besides being evidence of available funds, appealed to the ideas of sacrifice and was taken as sign of patriotism: ‘The history of Shetland is “writ large” on the page of fame for the part she has played in this, the greatest of all wars’.¹¹⁵ Shetland had nineteen War Savings Associations and in the spring of 1918, made a disproportionately high investment in war bonds, claimed to be three times the national average. Models of a tank and plane were displayed and £170000 raised, though the *Shetland News* pointed out discrepancies in amounts from different areas.¹¹⁶ There was another view that, although the variety of

¹¹⁰ *ST*, 8 Apr. 1916, 5; 7 Apr. 1917, 4

¹¹¹ SA, D1/123/11/36, Sandison, 19 Aug. 1917

¹¹² *ST*, 2 Feb. 1918, 4; 9 Mar. 1918, 4

¹¹³ *ST*, 2 Jan. 1915, 4

¹¹⁴ *ST*, 24 Jul. 1915, 4

¹¹⁵ Haste, *Home Fires*, 43; *ST*, 20 Apr. 1918, 4

¹¹⁶ Gregory, *Last Great War*, 221 – 22; *ST*, 4 May 1918, 4; *SN*, 16 May 1918, 4;

contributions demanded were not grudged, 'the war was 'a charity war', 'carried on largely by means of the free-will offerings of the public'.¹¹⁷

People wanted peace. This wish was expressed (with unusual empathy with the enemy) in a dialect poem, 'Wisses', recited at a concert in Bressay:

I wiss dis horrid war wis bye,
An' paece brought back ta sea an' sky;
An' William's hordes wir bundled hame;
'Twid be da best for wis – an' dem.¹¹⁸

Although peace without victory was unthinkable, when the coalition government came to power, the *Shetland News* claimed:

The one dominating desire is to see the war ended. The nerves of the nation are strong and resolute but the heart cries out for peace. And so the cry of the people goes up in one chorus to those in power "Finish the war".¹¹⁹

Although civilians knew that servicemen were suffering: 'The trenches are veritable "sloughs of despond" and the intervening ground is lakes of liquid mud', 'Current Topics' wondered if people realised what the front was like, that, for example, servicemen went without sleep for a week.¹²⁰ The feeling of weariness intensified: 'It is no figure of speech to say that the whole Kingdom is war-weary'; and was expressed in clichés such as 'the war-clouds hang heavily over the heads of the people of these islands'.¹²¹ Conversely, another frequent theme was that Britain had 'not been pinched for anything essential to comfortable living' in comparison to the wretched plight of the enemy.¹²² A columnist expected the conqueror to be as hard hit as the conquered: 'The price to be paid in gold and blood will be found to have been so stupendous as will make the human family shudder'.¹²³ Still, defeat was never contemplated. In Strachan's words, 'The underlying conviction of the war's necessity, of the duty of patriotic defence, established in 1914 remained the bedrock of that continuing commitment'.¹²⁴

Despite all the controversies, in early 1918, the *Shetland Times* was fairly positive:

¹¹⁷ *SN*, 6 Sep. 1916, 4

¹¹⁸ *SN*, 23 Mar. 1916, 2;

¹¹⁹ *ST*, 16 Dec. 1916, 4

¹²⁰ *ST*, 27 Jan. 1917, 4; 17 Mar. 1917

¹²¹ *ST*, 6 Jul 1918, 4

¹²² *SN*, 7 Dec. 1916, 2

¹²³ *ST*, 6 Jan. 1917, 5

¹²⁴ Strachan, *First World War*, 162

But for the shadow of the war, all would be well. There is no real dearth of any of the necessities of life, although occasional trifling inconveniences have to be put up with ... actual want is un-dreamt of. On the contrary, on every hand there are indications of prosperity and well being.¹²⁵

During these years Shetlanders communicated a series of contradictions: complaints of economic disruption, but more winners than losers; expressions of unity, despite feelings of inequality and victimisation; claims for special consideration for Shetland, balanced by assertions of patriotism and willing sacrifice; internal conflicts, as well as pride in Shetland's contribution to the war effort; 'total war', obsession and weariness, yet life continuing much as usual.

Women and the War

The situation of women has been given special attention in the context of the social effects of the Great War, although, given that more than half the population and a much greater proportion of civilians were women, comments on society generally might be assumed to apply as much to them as to men. Nevertheless, men dominated public life and the male perspective is preponderant in the sources. It has also been asserted both that war added an additional factor (that is widespread armed service) to gender differences and that the war changed the situation of many women, temporarily or in the longer-term.¹²⁶ It is therefore worth investigating how the war affected the circumstances of women in Shetland.

Black devoted the majority of her chapter on the war's social impact to women, because of the particular interest among social historians and the purportedly unusual position of women in the Shetland economy.¹²⁷ In the UK generally, because of the shortage of male workers, many more women were employed than previously, some in occupations previously closed to them, including making munitions as well as more routine work in offices, factories and transport. For many Shetland women, the war brought only an extension of normal work; the demand for knitwear increased and, with so many men away, they did more agricultural work.¹²⁸ Chapter 6 shows that opportunities for some Shetland women reduced due to the disruption of the

¹²⁵ *ST*, 5 Jan. 1918, 4

¹²⁶ Joanna Bourke, 'Preface to the Reissued Second Edition', in Marwick, *Deluge*, i – xxii, xiv – xix, summarised the debate; Gullace, *Blood of our Sons*

¹²⁷ Black, 'External Shocks', 72, 83 – 105; page 51

¹²⁸ Black, 'External Shocks', 92 – 93; e.g., *SN*, 19 Apr. 1917, 8

herring fishing. In April 1915 for example, the Fishery Officer reported some hardship and an over-supply of domestic servants.¹²⁹ Two small groups for whom opportunities increased were teachers and office-workers, and a few served as nurses or in the women's services.¹³⁰ Despite their economic contribution, Shetland women were sometimes subject to prejudice about their abilities, for example, as to whether they could learn the skills of kippering.¹³¹ The gender roles of work in Shetland (and perhaps other rural areas) may have been different from that described in most discussions, but the war did not change them substantially.

The attitudes of Shetland women towards the war were described stereotypically. They were assumed to have reacted unenthusiastically to the outbreak of war:

The men formed quite a jovial crowd and joked and chaffed all round: but the women were in quite an opposite mood, seeming to regard the whole movement as one charged with the utmost gravity ... Ignorant of the true state of affairs, the women-folk in particular put the worst possible construction on the situation.¹³²

This may have accorded with the national situation; Strachan thought that 'women as a whole may have been more dubious about the war'.¹³³ The local newspapers claimed the mobilisation of reservists had caused 'poignant sorrow in many a home' and 'there had been many pathetic scenes where the women folk had bade farewell to the bluejackets'. Departure was 'the occasion for outbursts of unrestrained grief', but few women could bring themselves to bid farewell in public:

Needless to say the calling out of the Reservists drew many tears from Shetland women. They knew well enough that their sons, husbands, and sweethearts were being called upon to do what they had never been asked to do before, and they felt the parting as only women can. We cannot speak about our women in the country, because their position is so very isolated, but we know that the loyalty and patriotism of the Lerwick women is beyond reproach.¹³⁴

The contradictions in these accounts and the reporting of imagined private anguish says more about the attitudes of the writers than of the women. However, the Shetland Suffrage Society complied:

¹²⁹ SA, AF 29/253, 842, Lerwick Fishery Office report, 29 Apr. 1915

¹³⁰ Taylor, *Women's Suffrage*, 252 – 75

¹³¹ SA, AF29/254, 40, FBS letter, 8 Mar. 1918

¹³² SN, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

¹³³ Strachan, *First World War*, 110

¹³⁴ SN and ST, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

It is chiefly women who have to repair the ravages of war, and sustain the strength of the nation under stress ... They must make worthwhile the sacrifice of the gallant men who are offering their lives for their country.¹³⁵

According to Marwick, for women, enthusiasm 'showed itself in two traditional responses: bandaging and knitting', and there certainly seemed to be an eagerness to contribute.¹³⁶ The Shetland Women's Suffrage Society suspended their usual work and formed an Emergency Helpers' Society, taking over the premises of the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen for nursing care in the event of a naval engagement.¹³⁷ They collected the names of volunteers and promises of equipment, held classes in auxiliary tasks and rolled linen for bandages. The *Shetland News* commended their plan:

If the occasion arises when the help of these ladies is required, we have not the slightest doubt they will give it, and they will act with that rare courage and fortitude which is particularly feminine. Their desire to do what they can is, to say the least of it, encouraging, and it shows that what women can do better than anyone else women are prepared to do.¹³⁸

Respect there may have been, but the role of women was closely and conventionally defined. These were examples of the 'active perpetuation of stereotypes' which has been said to have intensified the divide between the front and home.¹³⁹

Women's voluntary activities included organising fund-raising events and collections for charity. There was an enthusiastic branch of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, and the Emergency Helpers' Scheme ran church huts for servicemen and looked after shipwrecked crews and passengers. The leaders were generally the more affluent, mainly in Lerwick, who had the free time to devote to 'war work'.

As in other places, the authorities had concerns about the effect of servicemen on the morals of women. The Suffrage Society warned against provoking the charge of 'light, careless, or coarse behaviour'.¹⁴⁰ Restrictions on the sale of alcohol was said to have resulted in 'a marked improvement in the streets and in houses where drink

¹³⁵ *SN*, 6 Feb. 1915, 4

¹³⁶ Marwick, *Deluge*, 78

¹³⁷ *ST*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5; Taylor, *Women's Suffrage*, 249 – 66

¹³⁸ *SN*, 8 Aug. 1914, 5

¹³⁹ DeGroot, *Blighy*, 70

¹⁴⁰ *SN*, 6 Feb. 1915, 4

was consumed, especially by women'.¹⁴¹ Black examined evidence for social disruption in illegitimacy rates, which rose in 1914 and 1915, then fell again, but the numbers were small and the rate remained below the Scottish average. The marriage rate, unlike that for Scotland as a whole, rose slightly from 1915, but remained low. The birth rate also remained lower than the Scottish average and declined more steeply between 1914 and 1917.¹⁴² Bereavement was common and it was conventionally accepted that women would feel the death of a loved-one more keenly. It is not clear whether this implied that men were more able to cope with grief or supported a fiction that all men were involved in war-service while women kept the home fires burning.¹⁴³ The Rev. Groundwater wrote that the most glorious deeds 'have been done by the mothers of Britain ... What they have suffered and sacrificed pen or tongue can never tell'.¹⁴⁴

There is little evidence that women participated more in public life other than in food control, an experience that was not likely to encourage further attempts.¹⁴⁵ Historians have debated whether the war led to or hastened the extension of the franchise, and when the issue was raised again, debate was renewed in the *Shetland News*.¹⁴⁶ Although the Representation of the People Act was perceived as 'of far-reaching importance to the people of Shetland', there was not much interest: 'The war has altered values so greatly'.¹⁴⁷ The Shetland Women's Suffrage Society had already had its last meeting.¹⁴⁸

It was not unusual for many Shetland men to be absent, nor for women to 'watch and wait' – and work. Black concluded that life went on much as usual for most Shetland women.¹⁴⁹ There is little evidence for any major renegotiation of their role as envisaged, for example, by Gullace.¹⁵⁰ Other than active service, women

¹⁴¹ *ST*, 6 Jan. 1917, 4

¹⁴² Black, 'Impact of External Shocks', 102 – 05, 98 – 100

¹⁴³ Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford, 1998), 204 – 05

¹⁴⁴ *ST*, 4 Dec. 1915, 6

¹⁴⁵ Taylor, *Women's Suffrage*, 252

¹⁴⁶ Marwick, *Deluge*, 29 – 33; Gullace, *Blood of our Sons*; DeGroot, *Blighty*, 312 – 14; *SN*, 10 May 1917, 2; 24 May 1917, 5

¹⁴⁷ *SN*, 30 May 1918, 4

¹⁴⁸ Taylor, *Women's Suffrage*, 291

¹⁴⁹ Black, 'Impact of External Shocks', 105

¹⁵⁰ Gullace, *Blood of our Sons*

experienced the circumstances described throughout this thesis, even if there is little direct evidence of their opinions about it. In addition, for some women the war brought individual change; a job, a marriage partner or, much more frequently, a bereavement, which would not have otherwise happened.

Better Times to Come?

One of the ways that people tried to cope with the war was to look forward to improvements when it ended. DeGroot argued that Britain fought to preserve conservative and traditional values not for fundamental change, but the pre-war Liberal government had already made some steps towards social improvement and the idea of a better world after the war was widespread.¹⁵¹ It had several strands. First, there were some extreme opinions, expressed, for example, by Wason, that saw war as a purifying experience sweeping away pre-war decadence and excesses.¹⁵² Then, there was a desire to find some rationale and purpose for the losses, and it followed from the widespread belief that Britain was fighting to preserve liberty, democracy and civilisation, that it should demonstrate those virtues in victory. In addition, there was a view that the men who were fighting deserved some reward. There was also the revelation, flagged up by the poor health and fitness of potential recruits, that many of the country's young men were not adequately fed or cared for. Finally, there was the increased power of organised labour, due to the scarcity of skilled workers and the need to maintain production. The Rev. Groundwater wrote, 'When the boys come back they will come back to reconstruct the nation and to establish a peace and equity the glory of which will fill the sky'. The longer the war continued, the more people looked forward to better times to come; 'Current Topics' sceptically commented, 'There does not seem to be a dreamer ... but finds in the end of the war a stem around which to weave pet theories for the future'.¹⁵³

Not everybody was convinced. 'Current Topics' was repeatedly sarcastic about utopian visions: 'Does anyone imagine that this present war is going to work miracles? That ... human nature will grow better and political conditions will become changed?'

¹⁵¹ DeGroot, *Blighy*, 9 – 13

¹⁵² *ST*, 19 Jun. 1915, 4

¹⁵³ *ST*, 18 Dec. 1915, 5; 16 Jun. 1917, 5

What a marvellous change is to come over humanity 'after the war'. Our old nature is to be cast aside like a mantle and we are to stand forth in spotless raiment, religiously, socially, morally, and commercially regenerated.

Hopes for social reforms were unrealistic for various reasons: because 'Europe will be left broken and bleeding'; Britain was 'too old and too orthodox' to change; 'war lets loose all that is worst in man' and was not 'an elevating business'; and 'there never was a great war yet, but was followed by a wave of depression and hardship'.¹⁵⁴ In 1918, Tom Sandison wrote, 'We are all, consciously or unconsciously, heavily mortgaging "when-the-war-is-over"'. And I fear me, most of our expectations will be unfulfilled, or claims unpaid.'¹⁵⁵

The Government started planning post-war reconstruction as early as 1916. In 1917, the Ministry of Reconstruction wrote to local authorities asking for ideas. Shetland County Council responded with a remarkable fourteen-page letter with proposals for development: the availability of agricultural land and promotion of rural industries; the ending of whaling; grants to motorise fishing boats and develop shellfish culture; expansion and protection of the Shetland knitwear industry; road improvements and housing provision. Transport was the major problem, 'a serious barrier in the way of the distribution of and sale of rural produce'. Shetland, it was claimed, deserved special consideration as, despite its isolated position, it already contributed to the national wealth. Unemployment was likely after the war, but hardship could be mitigated if these developments were facilitated.¹⁵⁶

Settlement of the land question, however, was considered particularly unlikely, requiring the repeal of 'the hide-bound and oppressive land laws of the country':

Among the very many reforms socially, politically, and spiritually, which are held out in bright hope to the people of this country 'after the war', there is no section more emphatic than the land reformers that the land will be so revolutionised ... that every man who can wield a spade and wishes to do so, will in the days to come forget the days or marks of their agonised existence in the trenches, and seated under the shelter of their own vine-trees, enjoy the sweets of rest and repose.¹⁵⁷

A letter to the *Shetland News* addressed soldiers:

¹⁵⁴ *ST*, 1 Apr 1916, 5, 15 Apr. 1916, 5, 31 Jul. 1915, 4; 15 Jan 1916, 5; 4 Sep. 1915, 4

¹⁵⁵ SA, D1/123/12/4, Sandison, 4 Aug 18

¹⁵⁶ TNA: PRO RECO 1/956, letter 25 Mar. 1918

¹⁵⁷ *ST*, 23 Feb. 1918, 4

While defending your country, you doubtless had some experience of barbed wire entanglements, and when you come home you will find the domain of the blackface, the Leicester, and the heifer religiously guarded with stakes and wire.¹⁵⁸

Zetland County Council petitioned the Government for land for ex-servicemen and dependents of the war-dead.¹⁵⁹ A correspondent to the *Shetland News* thought the idea misguided; since agriculture was so poor in Shetland, rewarding soldiers with a croft would be ‘a piece of cruelty worthy only of the Huns’. There were many places in the Empire whose climate and soil would guarantee a better life. ‘It is all very well to call Shetland affectionately “the Old Rock”: but if you want to make a living by agriculture you need something more than an old rock’.¹⁶⁰

The level of pensions for disabled servicemen and dependents of the war dead also caused concern. A columnist in the *Shetland Times* pointed out cases of hardship:

If such cases can – and they do – exist when the war is still going on, when money is plentiful, and when patriotism is running high, what may we expect when the fight is over, the victory won, and we start to drift back to normal?

This provoked an argument with the Secretary of the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Families Association, who maintained the information was misleading, but the situation would only deteriorate.¹⁶¹

Meanwhile, the accounts of casualties, rhetoric of sacrifice, privation and patriotism, and false expectations of imminent victory continued. In 1918, casualties were high again during the German offensive and subsequent Allied advance. The newspapers were optimistic: for example, ‘Signs are not wanting that the War Councils of Germany are beginning to realise that she is beaten.’ In June, the *Shetland Times* claimed to see ‘the lengthening beams of the day-dawn of peace’.¹⁶² Then in the autumn, after all the previous erroneous predictions, people seemed reluctant to hope for victory. Plans were still being made, for example for further increases to cultivation, and the *Shetland Times* forecast, ‘We are still far from the end’.¹⁶³ Despite good news in September, Tom Sandison expected negotiations to start

¹⁵⁸ *SN*, 15 Feb. 1917, 5

¹⁵⁹ *ST*, 30 Mar. 1918, 5

¹⁶⁰ *SN*, 4 Apr. 1918, 5

¹⁶¹ *ST*, 28 Sep. 1918, 5; 12 Oct. 1918, 5

¹⁶² *SN*, 4 Apr. 1918, 4; *ST*, 22 Jun 1918, 6

¹⁶³ *ST*, 14 Sep. 1918, 4

perhaps in May but more likely in September 1919. Even in early November, he commented, ‘The thing has gone on for so long that one has come almost to regard a state of war as the normal conditions of things’¹⁶⁴ By 11th November, however, the Armistice was expected, and news came that the fighting (if not officially the war) was over.

Conclusion

Shetlanders, in common with millions of other people, experienced a war they could not have imagined in advance. Changes were gradual and some aspects of life never changed, but the war affected civilians in many ways; restrictions were placed on day-to-day living, conscription introduced, the economy disrupted and shortages endured. Naturally, the war came to dominate people’s thoughts. It is striking how quickly the conventional language for describing the war was adopted and some of the attitudes apparent from the start continued throughout. The firm belief that the Germans were to blame for the war hardened with atrocity stories and more direct knowledge of warfare. Despite all the vicissitudes, disappointments and escalating casualties, the conviction that Britain was fighting for the right and would prevail did not waver. There was no discussion of whether it had all been worthwhile; perhaps this was too difficult a topic while victory was still to be won, but there was horror and huge sorrow at the death and injuries. Many of the attitudes shown were common in the rest of Britain but Shetlanders were very conscious of how war affected their community in particular. This was emphasised in two ways: claims for the disproportionate scale of Shetland’s contribution and complaints about how badly it was treated due to its geographical situation. Outwardly, there had been unity of purpose but all of this had put strains on the community and there had been disagreements and criticisms, not least of the Government.

¹⁶⁴ SA, D1/123/12, Sandison, 6 Sep. 1918; 6 Nov. 1918

CHAPTER 8 AFTER THE ARMISTICE

The Armistice, though not officially the end of the war, brought the return of peace for most people. This chapter investigates reactions to the news and to the ‘official’ peace in June 1919, the continued presence of the Navy in Shetland and the subsequent disbandment of the RNR. The Great War had massive effects across the world but it is not the intention here to consider long-term impacts, rather how Shetlanders adapted to peace and how the experience of the war was perceived when the memories were still fresh, until around 1923, when the short-lived beneficial economic effects were disappearing. The commemoration of the war-dead is discussed in the following chapter.

Armistice and Peace

About 9 a.m. on Monday 11th November, 1918, Admiral Greatorex received news of the impending ceasefire and informed the newspapers. They displayed placards, and, on confirmation from the Central News Agency, printed handbills, which were distributed through the town by schoolboys. According to the *Shetland Times*, ‘A profound heart-throb ... went up from the whole community, with a fervent “Thank God, Peace has come”, but ‘no indication of hilarity’ and ‘no pretence at what is commonly described as “popular” rejoicings’. Nevertheless, bells were rung, ships’ sirens sounded, rockets fired and flags and bunting displayed; the Brass Band played and young people sang patriotic songs. Tuesday was a general holiday, with a parade and three united church services of thanksgiving. There is less evidence of how the news was received in country districts, though church services were held, and in Unst and Burra, bonfires were lit and ‘the inhabitants gave vent to the universal joy’.¹

The Convenor of the County Council stated:

The people of Shetland, devoutly thankful that hostilities have ceased, rejoice that the cause of liberty, truth, and honour has been vindicated by the glorious victory of the Allied forces, and hope world peace will thus be made secure, so that our honoured dead may not have laid down their lives in vain.²

¹ *ST*, 16 Nov. 1918, 4 – 5; *SN*, 14 Nov. 1918, 4; *ST*, 23 Nov. 1918, 5; 30 Nov. 1918, 5

² SA, CO 3/1/8, ZCC mins., 21 Nov. 1918

So the idea of sacrifice and the justification for the war – the freeing of the world from tyranny – continued, as did hatred of the Germans; an example was the burning of an effigy of the Kaiser in Scalloway at Christmas.³ The general reaction was not vainglorious or jubilant, however. Sandison had written that, despite the thankfulness, there was ‘no gloating over victory, and the bell-ringing impulse is absent’.⁴ The *Shetland Times* explained:

For the flag that flies to-day triumphant in victory is stained with the blood of the brave and the noble, who laid down their lives in order that those at home might live in comfort and peace without tasting any of the horrors which are so inseparable from war.⁵

According to Thomas Manson, ‘a great relief came to our incredibly weary fighting men and a great load was lifted from the minds of a sad and war-tired people’.⁶

The end of the fighting was, of course, the most important event in the newspapers’ year-end reviews:

The one great feature which stands out at the year end, obscuring all other considerations, is the fact that the war is over, and that our boys who still survive are no longer called on to face death at every hour.

There was ‘deep and heartfelt gratitude to God’, but also intense grief:

Although we have now entered on peace, the story of the war still bulks largely in the tale of the year. For scarcely a home has felt not the blight of the scourge that has devastated the world, and brought the grim shadow of sorrow to every fireside.⁷

One rather strange comment declared, ‘But for the taking of our boys – and the consequent nerve-strain and sorrow – we have scarcely known up here that there has been a war on’, ignoring the local naval activity and contradicting the recurrent notion that civilians had been hard-hit.⁸ This perception, that local war service had been exceptional and Shetlanders had experienced particular hardships, led to an idea that Shetland deserved to be treated well by the Government. The *Shetland News* was cautiously optimistic about benefits from ‘the great after-war activity that will prevail in the south’ and ‘the vast schemes of reconstruction which are soon to come into

³ *ST*, 1 Feb 1919, 5; Haste, *Home Fires*, 179 – 98

⁴ SA, D1/123/12, Sandison, 1 Nov. 1918

⁵ *ST*, 28 Dec. 1918, 4

⁶ Manson, *Roll of Honour*, 269

⁷ *ST*, 28 Dec. 1918, 4; *SN*, 26 Dec. 1918, 4

⁸ *ST*, 30 Nov. 1918, 5

operation’.⁹ The *Shetland Times* was less willing to accept the promises of the new Coalition Government:

We are told, from almost all quarters, that there will be wonderful happenings ‘when the boys come back,’ but it would be wise for the most eager to adopt the policy of ‘Wait and See’.¹⁰

On Saturday 28th June 1919, in the late afternoon, the *Shetland New* received the news of the Treaty of Versailles, ‘the greatest event in the history and destiny of the world’, and printed handbills, for which ‘there was a clamorous demand’. The news was also greeted by ship’s whistles and sirens and Union Flags displayed at houses and public buildings. The *Shetland News* noted, ‘In the evening the animation on Commercial Street was not much more noticeable than usual’, but the *Shetland Times* reported, ‘a rollicking happy crowd that paraded Commercial Street until almost midnight’. The following day there was a united church service and Monday was a half-holiday. The Brass Band led a procession of RNR, WRNS, Boy Scouts and ex-servicemen to Alexandra Wharf. A 101-gun salute was followed by the national anthems of the allied countries and three cheers for the King. A crowd attended, but the *Shetland News* felt that the celebrations ‘opened fresh wounds inflicted by the loss of some near dear one’ and ‘the straggling ranks of the demobilised were equally eloquent’. In the evening, a reception was held in the Town Hall.¹¹ During the following weeks, celebratory events were held in country districts, with religious services, picnics, food (and no doubt drink), sporting activities, music and dancing. Children were often the focus; in September, the Town Council presented Lerwick schoolchildren with commemorative medals, showing the Burgh Coat of Arms and a representation of Peace, but Zetland County Council considered a similar gesture too expensive.¹²

⁹ *SN*, 26 Dec. 1918, 4

¹⁰ *ST*, 28 Dec. 1918, 4

¹¹ *SN*, 3 Jul. 1919, 4; *ST*, 5 Jul. 1919, 4

¹² *SN*, 11 Sep. 1919, 4



Figure 8.1 Peace celebration in Lerwick, July 1919



Figure 8.2 Peace medal presented to Lerwick schoolchildren, 1919

A civic reception for ex-servicemen was held in Lerwick in August, not without controversy. The delay caused some annoyance, although the date was chosen so that most servicemen would be demobilised and fair weather might be expected. Then, some of the would-be organisers, Temperance supporters, objected to the provision of alcohol. Nevertheless, the event was judged ‘a gigantic success’; a march was followed by speeches, Sheriff Menzies claiming, ‘In regard to the numbers of men who had gone forth to serve Flag and Country, Shetland was very

nearly at the top'. Afterwards nearly 500 people attended the Town and Drill Halls for refreshments and dancing.¹³

When it came to the anniversary of the Armistice, the two minutes' silence was observed and a Victory Ball was held at the Town Hall. The *Shetland News* remarked that people were putting the war behind them – 'Many of us have almost forgotten its existence' – but they should not forget. It deplored the industrial unrest which was said to be causing more internal conflict in the country than the war:

The prevalent idea that there should be widespread upheavals as a result of the war, that the gamble of war – wealth and power to some, poverty and death to others – should be carried into the era of peace, has resulted in upsetting the constitutional elements of the country.

To be worthy of the sacrifices, the wartime unity of purpose had to be continued.¹⁴ On the anniversary of the Battle of the Ancre, which had particular significance in Lerwick, there was another church service. November, therefore, saw both international and local remembrances of the war.

The Navy

Though the balloon and seaplane bases were soon closed, the naval bases remained operational.¹⁵ Many of the RNR at Lerwick were demobilised early in 1919, and nearly all the others in Shetland applied for demobilisation and were deemed 'mostly too old for heavy work'. Volunteers were sought to clear the Northern Barrage and permission was given to enrol up to thirty recruits for six months. The mine-clearing ships were based in Lerwick in spring.¹⁶ Troops and supplies were still being sent to Russia, and Lerwick saw a last flurry of naval activity in autumn as these troops and refugees were evacuated. The base closed on 13th December.¹⁷

¹³ SA, CO 3/1/8, ZCC mins., 21 Aug. 1919; Manson, *Roll of Honour*, 272 – 73; *SN*, 14 Aug. 1919, 4

¹⁴ *SN*, 13 Nov. 1919, 4

¹⁵ TNA: PRO ADM1/8540/258, correspondence, Admiralty and Air Ministry, 9 Nov. 1911 – 27 Dec. 1918; Davis and Morgan, 'Gazetteer of Flying Sites', GES 033

¹⁶ TNA: PRO ADM 116/1830, Greatorex to Rear Admiral, 3 Apr. 1919 and reply, 24 Apr. 1919; ADM 137/2249, 345, notice, 22 Mar. 1919; *SN*, 11 Dec. 1919, 5

¹⁷ *SN*, 9 Oct 1919, 4; 4 Dec. 1919, 4



Figure 8.3 American minesweeping ships

The future of the Shetland RNR was now in doubt. Initially, the Admiralty intended to retain a force, despite thinking, ‘In a future war the risk of attack on the Islands, or their utilisation by the enemy is not so great as in the past war’, but mindful of ‘the failure of the pre-war Military Territorial organisation and the desire of the War Office to be rid of any responsibility as regards the defence of the Shetlands’. Collard deprecated the ‘delay in adopting some measure which will continue to foster the present willingness of the Shetland Islanders to take some share in national defence.’ The Admiralty Board accepted his recommendation of a reserve force of 288, but Greatorex’s estimated requirement for twenty-seven permanent staff (later reduced to twenty-one) caused a rethink. In March 1920, thirteen reservists were still employed in Lerwick maintaining the guns; in August, the order was given to plug them and return the ammunition.¹⁸

A conference was held in November to discuss the future. The view that Shetlanders would not join a military unit was repeated several times, but it was decided in 1921 to convert the Shetland force to the Royal Marine Voluntary Reserve, an unpopular move. The force was not considered strategically justified but ‘principally political – as a means of fostering local patriotism, and incidentally of relieving unemployment

¹⁸ TNA: PRO ADM 116/1830, Memo Naval Branch, Apr. 1919; Extract Admiralty Board mins., 15 May 1919; Greatorex to Rear Admiral O&S, 9 Aug. 1919; Admiralty memos, 18 Aug. to 21 Oct. 1919; Greatorex to Admiralty, 28 Nov. 1919; Lt. Col. RMLI to Commanding Officer N. of Scotland; 20 Mar. 1920; Admiralty to CinC East of Scotland, 21 Aug. 1920

in the Shetland Isles'. The estimated annual cost of £7827 was considered too high and in January 1922, despite the efforts of Zetland County Council and the MP, it was decided to disband the Shetland RNR and not reconstruct the TA.¹⁹ This was a bitter blow after the forces' active service and a loss to the fragile economy.

Ideas for Development

The Shetland economy had prospered during the war, as described in Chapter 6, but the concern now was how it could be developed. The Government had put a great deal of thought and discussion into reconstruction, but the country was no better prepared for the return to peace than it had been for war. The UK experienced a short-lived boom followed by the onset of recession in 1921. Zetland County Council had told the Reconstruction Committee the kind of development they wanted.²⁰ In December 1918, a delegation met the local Government Board, the Board of Agriculture and the Fishery Board in Edinburgh. Criticisms of the food control administration were accepted and land settlement and other issues were discussed. Powers of compulsory purchase and assistance with planning were sought for between seventy-five and 100 houses near Lerwick. The senior medical officer commented that no place was in more need, there being 'slums in Lerwick worse than in any city'. The deputation also asked for assistance for fishing, including the continuation of the whaling ban and grants for new docks, the installation of motors in boats and shellfish cultivation. The *Shetland Times* observed, 'There is no county in the whole of Scotland which stands in greater need of development than does Shetland'.²¹

Underpinning the economic issues were difficulties with communications. In summer 1919, there were still only two weekly sailings to Aberdeen. Mail services had been reduced especially for the rural districts, and were scheduled, it seemed perversely, so as not to coordinate with the steamers.²² Subsidies were not forthcoming. Moreover, despite representations from the County Council, telephone

¹⁹ TNA: PRO ADM 116/1830; Admiralty correspondence 1920 – 21; Minute, 8 Dec. 1921; Admiralty to Admiral Commanding Reserves, 26 Jan. 1922 et al; SA, CO3/1/8, ZCC mins. 20 Oct. 1921; 17 Nov. 1921; 16 Feb. 1922

²⁰ Page 220

²¹ *SN*, 2 Jan. 1919, 4; 9 Jan. 1919, 4; *ST*, 25 Jan. 1919, 4

²² *ST*, 22 Feb. 1919, 2

lines installed by the Admiralty were removed.²³ The roads had not been repaired during the war and traffic had increased. The County Council won some recompense from the Admiralty and applied for a grant to widen some 415 miles of road within four years. They obtained £10000, but grants were available only for work completed by May 1920 on existing roads, which disappointed many communities hoping for new roads. In July 1919, some members of the Rural Transport (Scotland) Committee visited Lerwick and were lobbied to support a daily motor service to rural locations and more steamer services. A dispute arose between the local councils when the Town Council refused to raise its annual contribution to the roads from £75 to £200. Again in 1921, a deputation obtained more Government funds for roadworks.²⁴

Zetland County Council was in financial trouble. In 1920, it protested against 'the reckless expenditure of the Government departments' and legislation allowing them 'to enforce expenditure on Local Authorities', and requested that 'a more proportionate share of the County services should be derived from sources other than local rates'. In 1921, it appointed a committee to review its organisation and finances and recommend economies, but the overdraft grew to £14603 in August. Agricultural holdings paid only five-eighths of assessed rates; at the time of the Agricultural Rates Act, the reduction had been £316 but now it was about £5000, while the Government grant remained unchanged. The Council sent a deputation to lobby the Departmental Committee on Local Taxation and in 1922, tried to get other councils to join in.²⁵ It was not in a position to finance any economic development.

Many of the Council's ideas came from the Convenor, J. W. Robertson, who proposed a very bold scheme, combining shipbuilding in Orkney with repair yards in Lerwick, fishing based in Scalloway and shops in Scalloway and Lerwick. A new model town at Laxfirth would be run on a co-operative basis with shops and recreation facilities such as football grounds, a swimming pool and a cinema, powered by electricity.²⁶ A columnist in the *Shetland Times* liked the proposals but had doubts: 'There is

²³ SA, CO 3/1/8, ZCC mins., 20 Mar. 1919

²⁴ SN, 30 Jan. 1919, 4; SA, CO 3/1/8, ZCC mins., 20 Mar. 1919, 17 Jul. 1919; 20 Oct. 1921; ST, 29 Dec. 1921, 4

²⁵ SA, CO 3/1/8, ZCC mins., 19 Feb 1920, 16 Jun. 1921; 18 Aug. 1921; 17 Aug. 1922

²⁶ SN, 1 May 1919, 4

always the circumscribed area, the limited population, and the great distance from real industrial centres which must evermore be a handicap to big undertakings in Shetland'.²⁷ Robertson's ideas were linked to Lord Leverhulme's activities in Lewis. 'Hamlet' thought Leverhulme would find more cooperation in Shetland, and an article from the *Edinburgh News* carried a headline: 'Wanted – a Leverhulme'.²⁸ Robertson shared Leverhulme's vision, but did not have the necessary capital and nothing more was heard of the plans.

Land reform was considered essential. Servicemen all over the United Kingdom believed that they had been promised land-holdings as a reward for their armed service.²⁹ According to the *Shetland News*:

The whole existing land system is out of date. Existing crofts are little better than 'slave centres.' The real land – that is, the land of value as a means of production – is lying waste as sheep runs. Instead of three or four acre plots, if Shetland is to become an agricultural centre – and there is no reason why it should not – the average holding will require to be from twenty to thirty acres, and even then cultivated to its utmost value. Such a revolution – and it means nothing else – will require a broad generous measure of land reform, and such a real measure seems somewhat remote at present.³⁰

The Land Court heard appeals against pre-war decisions, but, as it did not deal with new holdings and enlargements, was considered both costly and ineffective. The Board of Agriculture was berated for delaying applications.³¹ Zetland County Council sent a letter to the Secretary for Scotland:

From many authoritative sources these men have been given to understand that everything possible would be done for them in this respect immediately or shortly after their return from the war.

Although suitable land was available, it appeared nothing was being done, and there was even a threat of illegal action:

A feeling of unrest is now making itself felt ... Unless something definite is done within the next few weeks, the Council feel that they cannot longer hold themselves responsible for the maintenance of law and order in these islands.

²⁷ *ST*, 17 May 1919, 4

²⁸ Nigel Nicolson, *The Lord of the Isles* (Stornaway, 2005); *SN*, 17 Jul, 1919, 5; 24 Jul. 1919, 7

²⁹ Ewen A. Cameron and Iain J.M. Robertson, 'Fighting and Bleeding for the Land: the Scottish Highlands and the Great War', in Macdonald and McFarland, *Scotland and the Great War*, 81 – 102, 93 – 98

³⁰ *SN*, 23 Oct. 1919, 4

³¹ *SN*, 19 Jun. 1919, 4; 25 Sep. 1919, 4

One letter in the *Shetland News* proposed a petition for the appointment of ‘a commission of honest men, patriots, not parasites’ to confer with the County Council and ‘decide whether Shetlanders or sheep are from a national viewpoint of most value on the land’. The writer felt that the Shetlanders’ war record was being undervalued: ‘The petitioners pledge themselves to do as they have helped to do for the Belgians, and others, namely restore the land to those who have the best right to it’.³²

The new Land Settlement (Scotland) Act, which came into force in December 1919, provided the Board of Agriculture with new funds and powers of compulsory purchase and looked as if it might make progress. Disappointingly, the process was still cumbersome and the funds were soon exhausted. In some areas, dissatisfied applicants began land-raids but not in Shetland, though there were threats.³³ Between 1912 and 1923, only forty-six applications for new holdings and 167 for enlargements had been granted out of a total of 1313, with 649 outstanding.³⁴

The Staple Industries

Meanwhile Shetland’s industries had to re-adapt to new circumstances. Of the three ‘staples’, fishing had encountered most difficulties during the war and this continued. According to the Shetland Fishery Officer, the war had left regular fishermen in a better financial position, but the shortage of manpower and the high domestic demand caused by food-shortages would not continue nor the Eastern European market for herring be speedily restored.³⁵ Restrictions on fishing areas were lifted, however, except where mines were especially likely.³⁶

The Government offered grants for the installation of motor engines, and motor boats continued to increase. Assistance was also offered to replace boats and gear that had deteriorated while the owner was on active service, though the local Fishery Officer

³² *SN*, 23 Oct. 1919, 4

³³ Leah Leneman, ‘Land Settlement in Scotland after World War I’, *Agricultural History Review*, 37, 1 (1989), 52 – 64; *Fit for Heroes? Land Settlement in Scotland after World War I* (Aberdeen, 1989), 88 – 90; Cameron, *Land for the People?*, 166 – 90; Hunter, *Making of the Crofting Community*, 271 – 77

³⁴ *BoA 1923*, PP. 1924, VII, 84 – 85

³⁵ SA, AF29/254, 573, LFO letter, 26 May 1919

³⁶ SA, AF29/241, 98, FBS notice, 8 Jan. 1919, 102, letter, Jones, 28 Jan. 1919; AF29/538, 160, FBS notice, 6 Aug. 1919

was reluctant to support applications.³⁷ The scheme adopted for ex-Admiralty trawlers (a co-ownership scheme run by the Fishery Board) was not attractive to Shetlanders, but a few drifters were bought, probably on a deferred payment scheme for ex-servicemen.³⁸ Another scheme to provide funds for boat-building also failed, 'the innate individualism of the Scottish fishermen proving to be too deeply rooted'.³⁹ The old problems of obsolete technology and lack of capital continued.

Initially fish prices were still regulated and were high. The *Shetland Times* thought they were based on a fallacy:

The fixing of such ridiculously high prices for fish was alleged to be on behalf of the producers – that is in order that fishermen might be induced to incur the risks in order to maintain the food supply of the country. If that were the notion it entirely failed. Fishermen – like profiteers and capitalists – follow their calling as usual, and the inflated prices did not add to the quantity landed.

This interference, 'one of the biggest blunders of the Government', had seriously disadvantaged consumers.⁴⁰

The disruption to the herring market was the biggest problem and in 1919, the Government agreed to buy a maximum of 400000 barrels of herring unsold at mid-September, and actually bought 250000 barrels. The scheme was changed in 1920; minimum prices were set at 45s per cran to fishermen and 62s 6d per barrel to curers, and the Government undertook to buy to a maximum of £1800000 during two months from 21st June, so the curers' capital was not tied up in unsold product. Curers also agreed a contract to supply 250000 barrels to the German government.⁴¹ Despite continuing problems, there were no further subsidies.

It took some time for shipping services, essential for the fresh fish trade, to recover. In late 1918, the Fishery Officer complained: 'There seems to be an entire lack of consideration for the interests of the fish trade which is most exasperating and which has roused a bitter feeling throughout Shetland'. Next spring, he tried to persuade the Navy to take kippers to Aberdeen, but 'as on all previous occasions', no help was forthcoming:

³⁷ SA, AF29/538 /147, FBS circular, 28 May 1919

³⁸ Jones, 'Scottish Fisheries', 75

³⁹ *FBS 1919*, PP. 1920, XVI, xvi

⁴⁰ *ST*, 28 Dec. 1918, 4

⁴¹ Jones, 'Scottish Fisheries', 76 – 77

The trade in their difficulties have not been indebted to the Naval Authorities for one iota of help in connection with the transport of fish ... In fact the trade are sick of making representations in this connection.⁴²

Though shipping improved, rail strikes exacerbated the situation and transport within Shetland remained difficult. In 1921, the Fishery Board was still reporting problems throughout Scotland and that the Government was unlikely to help.⁴³

Another contentious issue was the resumption of whaling, which had been suspended by the Admiralty.⁴⁴ There was vehement opposition, extensive coverage in the local newspapers and a report in the *Scotsman*. Wason wrote to both local newspapers deploring the visual, rather than the economic, impact. Public meetings were held and telegrams sent to relevant authorities by fishermen and the Councils.⁴⁵ The proposed licences were regarded as an insult to the Shetlanders' war effort: 'There is no part of the Empire which has done more than Shetland (according to population) has done in the Great War'. One correspondent objected not to whaling but to the Norwegian management: 'It is wrong to think of Shetlanders fighting to protect their islands to become scenes of foreign activity'.⁴⁶ The Fishery Board appointed a committee, which took evidence in Shetland and Edinburgh. The *Shetland News* commented:

It is really is a piece of gross impertinence on the part of any body to come and ask a community if they are prepared to see their principal industry jeopardised for the benefit of a few outsiders.

The Board recommended that the licenses be rescinded.⁴⁷

When in March 1920, men and materials arrived to refurbish the whaling stations, the fishermen held more meetings and sent more telegrams, as did Lerwick Town Council. Some men went to Olnefirth 'with sinister intentions'; an attempt to set fire to the station was reported but no damage was done. A delivery of coal at a time of scarcity added to the animosity and special constables guarded the stations 'as a general revolt is anticipated'. In the Fishery Officer's view:

⁴² SA, AF29/254, 494 – 95, 572, 574, LFO letters, 6 Dec. 1918, 23 May 1919, 26 May 1919

⁴³ *FBS 1921*, PP. 1922, VII, 29 – 31

⁴⁴ *FBS 1919*, xvi

⁴⁵ E.g., *ST*, 18 Jan. 1919, 4; *SN*, 16 Jan. 1919, 4; 23 Feb. 1919, 4

⁴⁶ *ST*, 18 Jan. 1919, 4; 15 Feb. 1919, 2

⁴⁷ *SN*, 31 Jul. 1919, 4; 2 Oct 1919, 8

Appearance would indicate that the patience of the Shetland people is exhausted in this connection and grave consequences are expected if the stations are re-opened ... The general view is that it would be nothing short of calamitous at this difficult time of reconstruction and unrest.⁴⁸

In the short-term, the reconstruction of the stations provided some much-needed employment for about 150 local men, but the delay in legislation caused great dissatisfaction.⁴⁹ Then the demand for oil dropped; in 1921, there was no whaling and in 1922, only one station was open. That same year, new legislation empowered the Secretary for Scotland to cancel licences injurious to fishing, but in March 1923, he refused to intervene. The whaling companies were in financial trouble, however, and only one station operated that year, though more British men were being employed.⁵⁰

Despite the problems, it was still assumed that fishing underpinned Shetland's economy.⁵¹ For Scotland's herring industry, the post-war period has been described as one of 'ordeal and retrenchment' and 'painful readjustment and contraction', its development having been 'crippled in important ways'.⁵² However, Shetland was briefly an anomaly in this bleak picture and, as usual, every season was different.

In 1919, the quantity of fish caught in Scotland rose by 80 per cent, but the value by only one; the Fishery Board thought this 'a striking commentary on the assertion that the fisherman is still reaping the lion's share of the harvest of the sea'.⁵³ In Shetland, most men were not demobilised in time for the summer fishing and because of the uncertainties, curers delayed, prices fell and fish were dumped. Fishing was suspended until 9th June and a minimum price set. Then curers and fishermen cooperated to withstand a threat by striking East Coast fishermen to glut the market. Despite shortages of labour, salt and wood, and cash-flow problems for curers, it was

⁴⁸ SA, AF29/254, 748 – 50, LFO letter, 5 Mar. 1920

⁴⁹ SA, AF29/254, 782, 838 – 39, LFO letters, 22 Apr. 1920, 31 Jul. 1920

⁵⁰ *FBS 1922*, pp. 1923, XI, 29 – 30; 1923, 34

⁵¹ E.g., *ST*, 31 Dec. 1921, 4

⁵² James R Coull, 'The Scottish Herring Fishery in the Inter-War Years, 1919 – 1939: Ordeal and Retrenchment', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 2, 1 (1990), 55 – 81, 55 – 56

⁵³ *FBS 1919*, iii

a very busy, though short season; Lerwick was the second most successful port in Scotland.⁵⁴

The 1920 season, in Shetland as elsewhere, was judged ‘one of most disappointing seasons’, though, despite the prevalence of destructive dogfish, the total catch increased. Large stocks of 1919 herring remained unsold. Prices fell and many fishermen and some curers incurred losses, gutters’ income was less than usual and, with many barrels unused, there was less work for coopers.

The Fishery Board described 1921 in similar terms to 1920: ‘again one of acute depression in practically every branch of the fisheries’.⁵⁵ Unsold herring again meant low demand. The cost of some expenses dropped but not by as much as herring prices. Industrial disputes led to coal shortages and price rises. Herring was scarce and the poor quality was ascribed to ‘abnormal hydrographical conditions in the North Sea.’ In this picture of gloom, Shetland was the exception. After a very hesitant start, herring was abundant, the coal strike had no effect on sailboats and the Shetland curers had a monopoly of the market in June. The season was ‘one of the most lucrative ever experienced’, with prices averaging 24s and a maximum of 54s.

The 1922 season was better for the Scottish industry. Catches were low though the quality was better; not much profit was made but there were fewer losses than in 1921. In Shetland, the season was judged a success. After some early activity on the west, nearly all the catch was landed at Lerwick. In July, heavy landings brought a fall in prices and incomes.

In 1923, the situation of the Scottish herring fishing was ‘perhaps more acute than at any previous period in its history’.⁵⁶ Herring was plentiful but demand slack and prices low; most fishermen made a loss. Shetland was the most important centre but, despite a larger fleet, the catch was down and quality poor; some fish was dumped. Prices started fair, then dropped; with gross incomes much lower, many boats did little more than clear expenses.

⁵⁴ *FBS 1919*, v, 44; *SN*, 5 Jun. 1919, 4; 26 June, 1919, 4; *SA*, AF29/254, 693 – 98, LFO Report, 7 Jan. 1919

⁵⁵ *FBS 1920*, PP. 1921, XII, v, 44; *FBS 1921*, 5

⁵⁶ *FBS 1923*, PP. 1924, IX, 5

The white fish sector employed far fewer people, but it had become comparatively more important during the war. The catching capacity increased and in 1920, there was competition from imports from Norway and Newfoundland; in 1922 and 1923, Scottish trawlers were laid up in protest at German competition. In Shetland, haddocks were fairly plentiful in 1920, but the price was often disappointing; there were now 70 motor boats in Shetland and they scarcely made a living wage. Haddock smoking commenced at Lerwick and Whalsay. The problems became more acute in 1922 when demand fell due to general unemployment. The average price per hundredweight in Scotland fell from 59s in 1918, to 35s in 1919, 28s in 1921 and 20s in 1922. In 1923 in Shetland, costs were high and fish scarce.⁵⁷

The Shetland fishing industry had been declining before the war, and after the war, the scale was much smaller. Fewer people were employed and the amount and value of the catch were less and still variable. The prices realised by both fishermen and curers continued to be lower than the Scottish average. Though the number of stations operating increased from 23 in 1919 to 58 in 1923, outside Lerwick, curing was very limited.⁵⁸

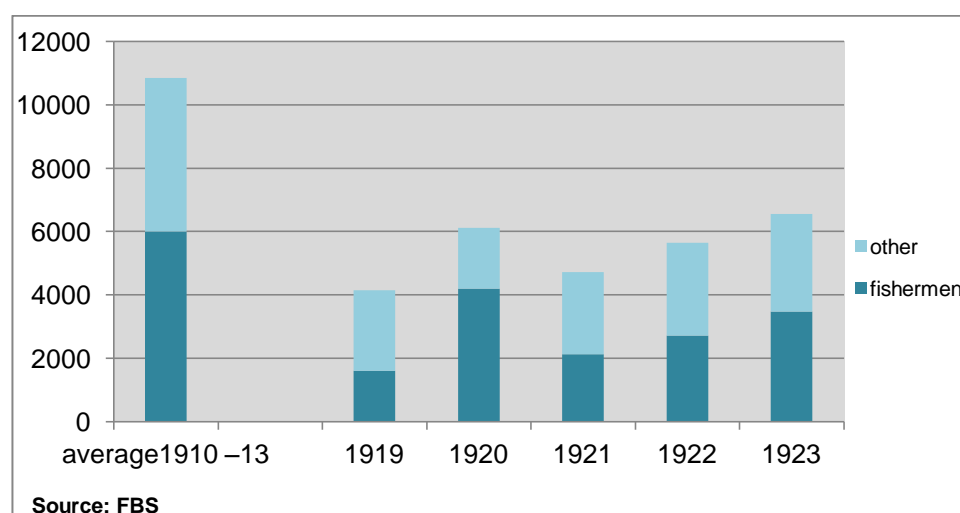


Figure 8.4 People employed in the fishing industry

⁵⁷ *FBS 1919*, xii; *1922*, 5; *1923*, 5

⁵⁸ *FBS 1923*, 67; SA, AF29/524, 677 – 79, LFO letter, 17 Dec. 1919

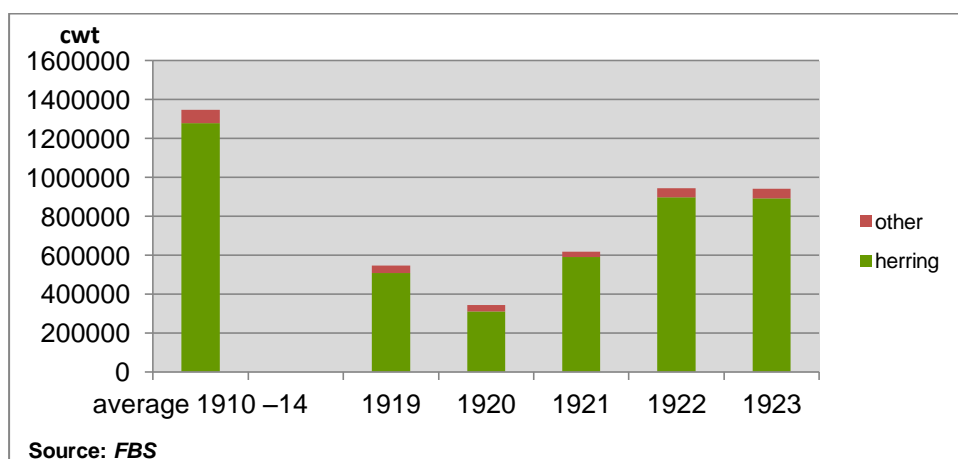


Figure 8.5 Weight of catch

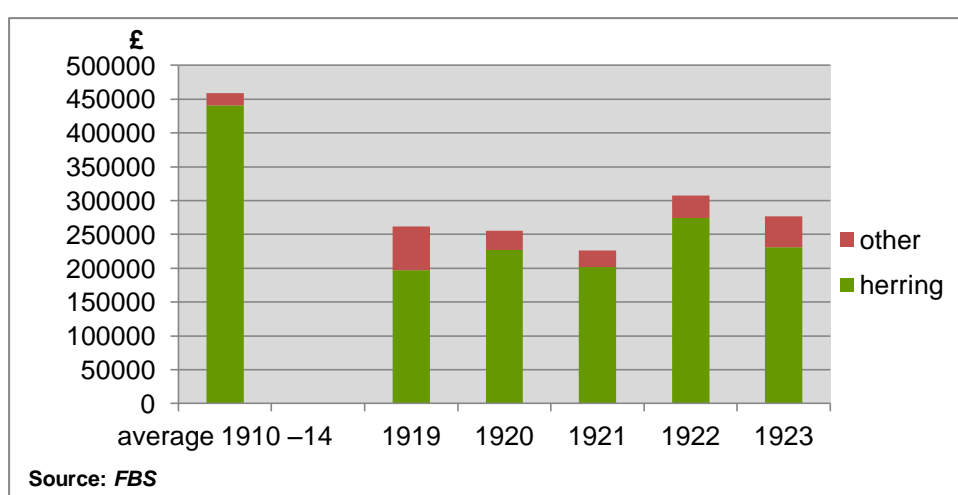


Figure 8.6 Value of catch

	Gross earnings (£)		
	Steam	Motor	Sail
1919	900 – 2700		500 – 1200
1920	750 – 2500	400 – 1100	150 – 700 (lowest 20)
1921	1300 – 1800	1000 – 2200	500 – 1170
1922	900 – 1550	600 – 1500	150 – 750
1923	400 – 1500	250 – 800	250 – 800

Figure 8.7 Gross earnings of herring fishing boats (Source: FBS)

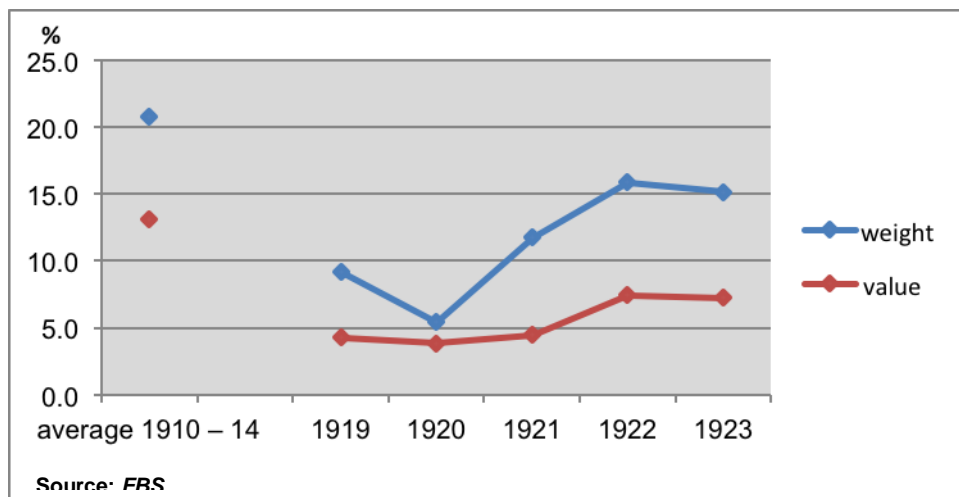


Figure 8.8 Weight and value of Shetland catch as percentage of Scottish

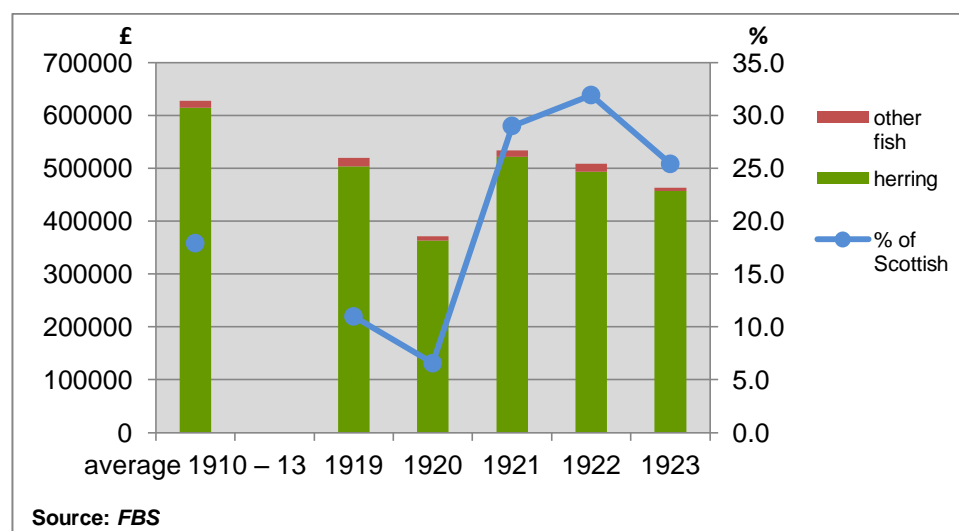


Figure 8.9 Value of Shetland cured fish

There had been no basic change and the disruption to markets had added to the problems. The trend towards centralisation of curing in Lerwick continued and lack of transport discouraged the wider development of line fishing. The Scottish fleet was ageing and oversized and its share of European production was dropping.⁵⁹ The Shetland fleet of sailboats was particularly outdated. It was still the mainstay of the economy but its fortunes were as erratic and precarious as ever.

Agriculture had been boosted by the disruption to imports and increased demand but had also not changed fundamentally. In the ‘official history’ of rural Scotland during

⁵⁹ Coull, ‘Scottish Herring Fishery’, 73 – 74

the war, Conacher wrote, 'One may be well disposed to doubt whether the war has made any great difference to the future of Scottish agriculture.'⁶⁰ This was certainly true in Shetland. The prosperity of Shetland agriculture, therefore, depended on how quickly the situation reverted to peacetime conditions.

In 1919, labour was still short, and, due to the weather, the harvest was not as good as in 1917 and 1918. Turnips were the only crop with a fair yield; oats and hay were 25 to 30 per cent below average, and the quality of potatoes was poor. With a considerable death rate among lambs, prices remained high, despite the poorer condition of livestock; cattle realised three times their pre-war value. Demand for ponies revived. The price of milk reached a record high and eggs fetched good prices at 4 to 5s a dozen. The verdict in the *Shetland Times* was:

The crofting and producing population in Shetland – and they form the great majority – have never, in years before, had such returns for all kinds of live stock and other produce they have had to dispose of.⁶¹

The harvest of 1920 proved so good that again the *Shetland Times* was fulsome, describing agriculture as 'conspicuous for its money producing power':

At no period in the history of Shetland has there been such a harvest reaped from the land ... Far from being 'the forlorn hope' of the army of labour, the crofters and agriculturalists have, compared with artisans and fishermen, reaped a golden harvest. The weather was good all through the year, and both grass and hay were abundant, as were all kinds of root crops and cereals. Potatoes have been the best crop gathered in Shetland for over thirty years ... The yield of corn and turnips was similar – rich and over-flowing ... Sheep-rearing and cattle-breeding has become the be-all and end-all of Shetland agriculturalists. And this year their efforts have been crowned with signal success. At no period in the history of the islands has the price of live stock been so high.⁶²

It did not last. Bad weather returned in 1921, crops were poor and the prices for livestock, wool, butter and eggs fell, though remaining high by pre-war standards. Many ponies were exported but the price reduced by 40 per cent.⁶³ In 1922, 'almost a record for cold and wet', the yield of all crops was low, potatoes being only about 70 per cent of average. Prices for livestock in the southern markets fell but the local

⁶⁰ Conacher, 'Scottish Agriculture, with Special Reference to Food Production', in Jones et al., *Rural Scotland*, 122 – 220, 175

⁶¹ *ST*, 3 Jan. 1920, 4; *SN*, 25 Dec. 1919, 4

⁶² *ST*, 8 Jan. 1921, 4

⁶³ *ST*, 31 Dec. 1921, 4; *SN*, 29 Dec. 1921, 4

market held up and wool did well.⁶⁴ The harvest of 1923 was reckoned the worst for fifty years, so bad that Zetland County Council wrote to the Board of Agriculture asking for seed oats and potatoes ‘in view of the almost complete failure of crops in the county.’ Demand for livestock and wool continued, however, and the prices improved.⁶⁵

Livestock was therefore sustaining Shetland agriculture and the majority of the crops, except potatoes, were being used for animal feed. Crop failure meant greater use of imported feedstuffs and/or keeping fewer animals; either way profitability would fall. The acreage under crops fell in 1921 but rose again. Overall, the war had made little difference, raising demand for Shetland’s products, but of course, having no effect on its natural resources.

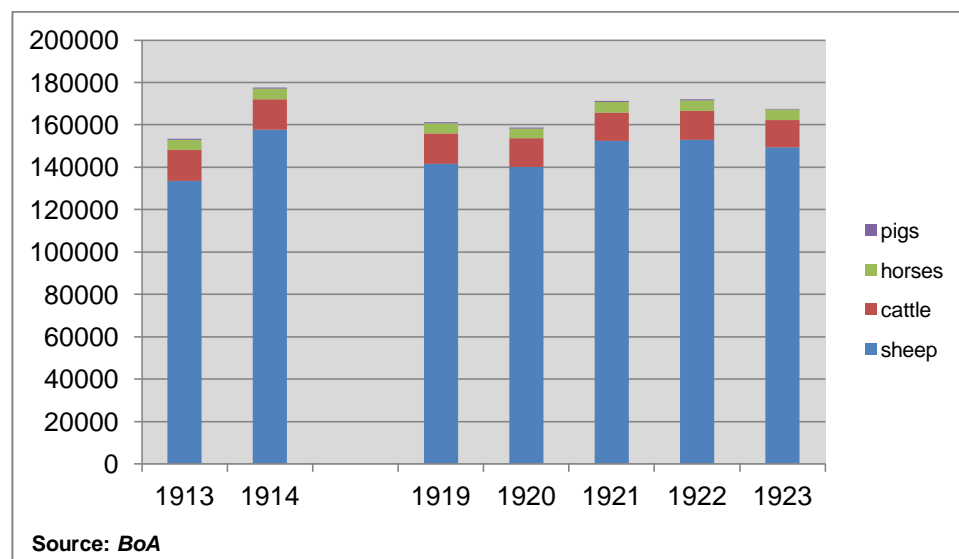


Figure 8.10 Livestock

⁶⁴ *ST*, 30 Dec. 1922, 4

⁶⁵ *SN*, 27 Dec. 1923, 4; *SA*, CO3/1/8, ZCC mins., 18 Oct. 1923; *ST*, 29 Dec. 1923, 4

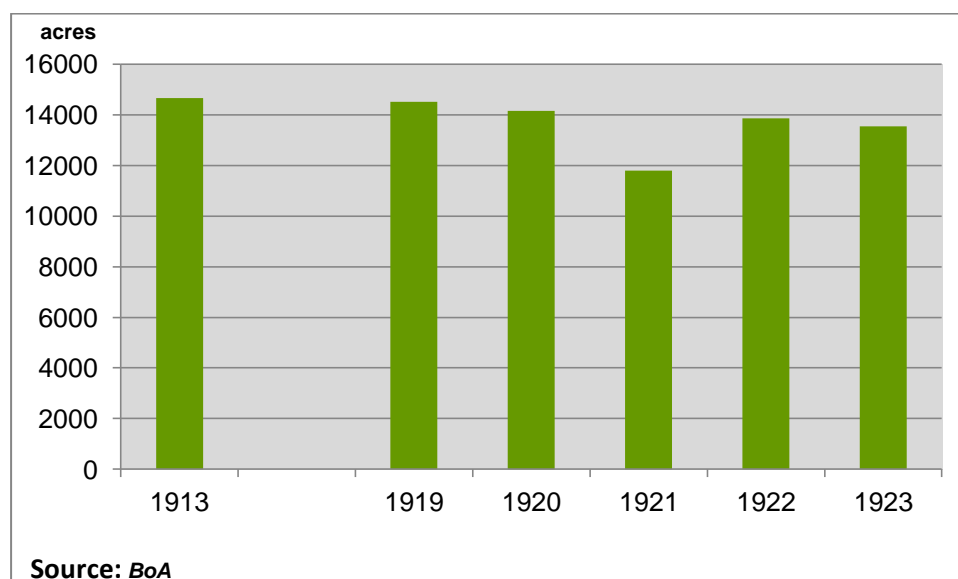


Figure 8.11 Arable

The hosiery trade continued to prosper in 1919 and early 1920, with demand still exceedingly supply. Problems in Australia had aggravated the wool shortage and spun wool was over three times the pre-war price. However, with trade in German and Austrian products still blocked, the price of finished articles was high; lace shawls had more than doubled and men's 'frocks' increased from 4s to between 12s and 16s.⁶⁶

Towards the end of 1920, as the Government released wool, imports increased and factories returned to full production, the trade slumped and dealers who had bought at high prices were badly hit. However, the price of wool dropped and help came from an unexpected source; the Fair Isle patterned 'jumper' was popularised by the Prince of Wales. This style of knitwear became the principal product.⁶⁷ The *Shetland News* claimed, 'The Shetland hosiery industry has boomed as never before and the effect of this has been directly felt in every house and benefited every family in the islands', attributing the demand to 'the numerous reports, rumours and contradictions about Shetland hosiery which have appeared recently in the big daily papers in the south'. In 1923, knitters were making more money than ever before; the *Shetland News*

⁶⁶ *SN*, 25 Dec. 1919, 4; *ST*, 3 Jan. 1920, 4

⁶⁷ *SN*, 22 Dec. 1921, 6; *ST*, 31 Dec. 1921, 4; 30 Dec. 1922, 4; 29 Dec. 1923, 4

reckoned, 'Their busy fingers have more than made up for losses occasioned by the failure of the herring fishing and poor harvest'.⁶⁸

The County Council encouraged formation of the Shetland Woollen Industry Association in 1922 with intentions of establishing a trademark and spinning mill.⁶⁹ The return for the time invested in knitting was still poor, but knitting was still seen as vital, particularly with the loss of so many men:

It is not only a help to many a family who has bread-winners, but it is the stay and support for hundreds who have little else to depend on for a living – or at these times, perhaps existence would be the better word.⁷⁰

The Merchant Navy remained a significant employer. Shipping was booming for eighteen months after the Armistice, until the coal strike laid ships up. Thereafter, the diminution in trade meant unemployment – at 20 per cent in October 1921 – and pay was reduced in 1921 and 1922.⁷¹ To qualify for unemployment benefit, seamen had to be in a major port, an uneconomic requirement for Shetlanders.⁷² With very few references in the local newspapers, it is impossible to gauge the contribution to the economy.

Other employment was scarce. By November 1919, work was 'down to about the lowest ebb' for ex-servicemen. After the backlog of repairs was complete, the building trade was moribund, other than Lerwick's housing scheme, which employed between thirty and eighty-five men from 1921 to 1923. The copper mine at Sandwick opened for the third time in 1920 with about fifty employees, but the anticipated expansion never materialised and it closed in 1921.⁷³ In 1922, about fifty men were employed improving the Gilbertson Park in the town, with a grant from the Unemployment Grants Committee. The grants for road improvement also provided employment in rural areas. At the end of 1923, there were almost 600 registered unemployed in Lerwick, but, since there had been no previous measurement, it is impossible to say how this compared to the pre-war situation.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ *SN*, 28 Dec. 1922, 4; *SN*, 27 Dec. 1923, 4

⁶⁹ *SA*, CO 3/1/8, ZCC mins., 17 Jun. 1920; *SN*, 28 Dec. 1922, 4; Fryer, *Knitting*, 138

⁷⁰ *ST*, 8 Jan. 1921, 4

⁷¹ Marsh and Ryan, *Seamen*, 111 – 21

⁷² *ST*, 5 Mar. 1921, 4

⁷³ *ST*, 27 Nov. 1911, 4, 5

⁷⁴ *SN*, 29 Dec. 1921, 28 Dec. 1922, 4, 27 Dec. 1923, 4

In the first few post-war years then, Shetland's economy experienced neither a boom nor a collapse, but pre-war disadvantages and problems continued and demand for products was fragile. Employment was scarce and seasonal. Unsurprisingly, hopes for development were framed within pre-existing parameters. However, the economy did not generate enough capital for investment and, when the Government failed to provide assistance, the ideas mostly came to nothing.

Post-war Conditions

As discussed in Chapter 7, during the war an idea developed that economic and social equality had to be improved. Chapter 2 showed how Shetland's pre-war problems, particularly inadequate housing and limited health and education provision, were mainly due to lack of resources, but the community had not been especially subject to social conflict. Wartime experience and government measures made some changes to this situation.

Initially, some wartime conditions remained in place. The Admiralty was still in charge and one of the first issues raised by Zetland County Council was the 'Post Office incident'.⁷⁵ In December 1918, they wrote to the Admiralty, the Prime Minister, the Secretary for Scotland and the MP asking for a public apology and explanation. This was considered crucial for Shetland's reputation:

The Post Office staff were the direct sufferers, but Shetland as a whole suffered and a stigma was cast upon our loyalty throughout the whole United Kingdom and in the colonies, and indeed throughout the world. It was an insult to the loyalty of the county.

Further attempts in 1919 were unsuccessful; the national authorities clearly considered the matter much less important than the Shetlanders did.⁷⁶

Other issues still rankled. In December 1918, the *Shetland Times* complained, 'The Defence of the Realm Regulations still muzzle the out-spoken comments of the press, and the Grand Navy puts its veto on the incidents of the hour.'⁷⁷ The County Council asked for travel permits to be discontinued.⁷⁸ Lerwick Harbour Trust had problems retrieving its wharves and equipment from the Navy and was still

⁷⁵ Pages 205 – 06

⁷⁶ SA, CO 3/1/8, ZCC mins., 19 Dec. 1918; SN, 27 Feb. 1919, 8; Flaws, *Spy Fever*, 149 – 52

⁷⁷ ST, 28 Dec. 1918, 4

⁷⁸ SN, 9 Jan. 1919, 5

wrangling about money for several years. In 1920, it was said to have ‘had enough, more than enough of the Admiralty’.⁷⁹

In late 1919, the Profiteering Act required the local authorities to appoint a committee and an appeal tribunal. This was considered yet another expensive measure that was not required in Shetland and the Councils complied reluctantly.⁸⁰ The problems of the local Food Control Committee did not go away. The County Council objected to their expenses and in May 1919, milk producers threatened to stop selling unless the price was increased. In October, the Railway Strike led to reductions in rations, including coal.⁸¹ Food Control ended in March 1921.

Prohibition continued to be a contentious issue; some people supported the continued constraints, some objected and were offended that Shetland and Orkney were uniquely restricted. In April 1919, some American troops found a source of supply and the ensuing ‘wild west show’ led to criticism of the police.⁸² The Temperance Act of 1913 became effective in 1920 and polls were held; four parishes, including Lerwick, voted for no licenses and three for no change; twenty-eight of thirty-seven licences lapsed. The prohibition lobby, therefore, had mainly won the argument.⁸³

Across the country, the housing shortage had been exacerbated and the Government offered support for local authorities to build houses for rent.⁸⁴ In Shetland, the problem was most apparent in and around Lerwick and there was talk of extending the burgh boundaries. After discussions about joint action, the Town Council decided to build a burgh scheme, another source of friction between the two authorities.⁸⁵ In October 1919, it decided 400 houses were needed, 150 ‘to relieve the housing congestion’, 150 ‘to enable unsuitable buildings presently occupied to be condemned’ and 100 ‘to meet the growth of the population’. Architects from Aberdeen were appointed with a brief for semi-detached cottages, eight to the acre, with gardens and open spaces, the streets to be curved so that ‘while uniformity of

⁷⁹ LHT mins., 17 Dec. 1919 – 26 Sep. 1922; *ST*, 24 Jul. 1920, 4

⁸⁰ *SN*, 25 Sep 1919, 8; *SN*, 9 Oct, 1919, 4; *SN*, 27 Nov. 1919, 5

⁸¹ *SN*, 27 Feb. 1919, 4; 2 Oct 1919, 4

⁸² *ST*, 15 Mar. 1919, 5; 29 Mar. 1919, 5; 12 Apr. 1919, 5

⁸³ *SN*, 30 Dec. 1920, 4; Smout, *Century of Scottish People*, 147 – 48; Marwick, *Deluge*, 108, 322; Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 215 – 19

⁸⁴ Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 294 – 96

⁸⁵ *SN*, 26 Jun. 1919, 8

space is assured, the dull monotony of rows of exactly similar match-box dwelling places will be avoided'. The initial scheme of 120 houses was completed in 1923 but an application for further subsidy was rejected.⁸⁶ The housing type, conforming to national ideals of model or garden towns, had been designed for a very different setting, and for the same cost, many more people could have been provided with improved housing of the existing tenement type. The Council were allowed to subsidise the rents only slightly from the rates and argued with the Board of Health to keep them low. Nevertheless, they were too high for poorer people, though presumably there was a knock-on effect of releasing cheaper accommodation.⁸⁷ The Council also made efforts to improve current conditions requiring landlords to provide their property with water supplies and basic sanitation.⁸⁸ The County Council decided not to build, since there was not considered to be a shortage of houses except near Lerwick. The *Shetland News* urged crofters to take up the Board of Agriculture's loans for home improvement. Even the 4 per cent interest was too high, however, and cottars, the group perhaps in most need, were not included.⁸⁹ With the fall in population, the 1921 Census showed reductions in both occupied houses (5901 as compared to 6204 in 1911) and overcrowding, with 36.8 per cent of people living more than two per room (43.7 in 1911).⁹⁰

Although Winter has shown that generally health, especially of the urban poor, had improved during the war, Shetland had two major concerns, one short-term and one more enduring.⁹¹ The influenza pandemic that killed millions of people world-wide arrived in December. Schools, churches and other public buildings were closed, and by mid-February, it was estimated that there had been 120 cases in Lerwick. By April had been twenty-seven deaths in Lerwick and some rural areas, Delting for example, were also hard-hit.⁹² Tuberculosis was found to be particularly prevalent among Shetland ex-servicemen, affecting 40 per cent of those invalided out. In 1921, the death rate from tuberculosis in Shetland was nearly twice the national

⁸⁶ *SN*, 30 Oct. 1919, 4; *ST*, 29 Dec. 1923, 4

⁸⁷ *SA*, TO/1/5, LTC mins., 19 Jan. 1922; *SN*, 6 Nov. 1919, 5; *ST*, 3 Jan. 1921, 4

⁸⁸ E.g., *SA*, TO/1/5, LTC mins., 4 Jun. 1919, 18 Nov. 1919

⁸⁹ *SN*, 27 Nov. 1919, 4

⁹⁰ *Report on the Thirteenth Decennial Census of Scotland, 1921*, I (Edinburgh, 1922), 1763 – 64

⁹¹ Winter, *Great War and British People*, 103 – 244

⁹² *SN* 13 Feb. 1919, 4; 3 April, 1919, 4

average. The County Council tried to find a suitable site for a sanatorium, but lacked funds, and tuberculosis persisted for many years. A new Medical Officer of Health reported all the same problems as had existed before the war.⁹³

Another piece of wartime legislation, the Education Act, met mixed reactions. It provided free secondary education and reorganised administration under a single Education Authority. This meant the rates would be equal in all parishes but the total expenditure was more visible and ‘somewhat staggered’ the public. A grant was expected of 80 per cent of approved expenditure, the highest for any Scottish county, though it reduced in 1922.⁹⁴

Retail prices remained well above double pre-war figures, falling briefly in 1919 and then rising to a peak in January 1921.⁹⁵ Wages did not keep pace but unemployment was a bigger problem. There were new unemployment benefits, though recipients had to come to Lerwick to collect them and seasonal workers and part-time crofters were denied assistance.⁹⁶ Emigration became common again. The population loss, which was highlighted by the census of 1921, was ascribed to the centralisation of fishing and the desire to escape the harsh conditions of rural life, then to general unemployment, rather than to the war. Indeed, the loss of servicemen accounted for less than 20 per cent of the inter-censal reduction. The *Shetland News* concluded, ‘It seems unlikely that there will ever be any change in Shetland which will check depopulation’.⁹⁷

Another outcome of the war was the increased power of trade unions and there was labour unrest all over the country, including Shetland. Both local newspapers disapproved.⁹⁸ A branch of the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers’ Union was formed with seventy members, and made a bid to represent the employees of the local councils, asking for increased pay and improved conditions. Lerwick Town Council met the burgh workers and agreed the pay rise, but refused to recognise the

⁹³ *SN*, 28 Nov. 1918, 4; *Sixty-seventh Annual Report of the Registrar-General for Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1922), xci; SA, CO 3/1/8, ZCC mins., 18 Mar. 1920; 10 May – 20 Sep. 1923; CO 9/1/1, Report of MOH, 1920

⁹⁴ *SN*, 25 Dec. 1919, 4; *ST*, 20 May 1922, 4

⁹⁵ Bowley, *Prices and Incomes*, 35

⁹⁶ Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 293 – 94; SA, CO 3/1/8, ZCC mins., 16 Dec. 1920; SA, AF29/524, 731 – 32, LFO letter, 10 Feb. 1921; TO/1/5, LTC mins., 1 Mar. 1921; CO 3/1/8, ZCC mins., 18 Aug. 1921

⁹⁷ *SN*, 29 Dec. 1921, 4; 28 Dec. 1922, 4; 27 Dec. 1923, 4; Appendix I; Lee, ‘Scottish Economy’, 21

⁹⁸ E.g., *ST*, 4 Oct. 1919, 4; *SN*, 13 Nov. 1919, 4

union; the County Council ignored the requests.⁹⁹ In 1919, the Fishery Officer wrote that gutters were able to protect their interests with employers and that the coopers were ‘highly pleased with their remuneration and conditions of labour’.¹⁰⁰ The next year, however, 200 employees of several local firms went on strike for higher pay. Dockers in Aberdeen supported them by refusing to load steamers for Shetland. Settlement was reached with the help of the Ministry of Labour.¹⁰¹ It appears that, initially at least, in Shetland as elsewhere, workers had increased confidence in negotiating with employers.

In the field of politics, local issues surfaced briefly. At the 1918 general election, Wason decided to stand down for health reasons. Not having visited for five years, he had lost popularity and was perceived to be out of touch. His chosen successor, Sir Leonard Powell, visited Lerwick and was duly adopted by the local Liberal Party. A number of local people encouraged J. W. Robertson to stand. Reports do not mention his affiliation to any political party; he was supported as a local candidate, though concern was voiced that he might not find favour in Orkney.¹⁰² In the event, Wason changed his mind and was returned unopposed. When he died in April 1921, Sir Malcolm Smith, born in Shetland and ex-Provost of Leith, was elected unopposed as a Coalition Liberal. At the general election in 1922, standing as a National Liberal, he was defeated by the Liberal candidate, Robert Hamilton, who had no local connections. The electorate had more than tripled but the percentage turnout halved; against the national trend, the constituency remained loyally Liberal.¹⁰³

Local government experienced more upheaval. In November 1919, elections were held for the first time since 1913. For Lerwick Town Council the largest ever number of candidates stood, thirteen for seven seats. The electorate had now been increased from fewer than 1100 to over 1700, but the proportion who voted, 64 per cent, was the same. The four Labour candidates topped the poll.¹⁰⁴ Zetland County Council also experienced ‘a very sweeping change in the personnel’. There were

⁹⁹ *SN*, 16 Jan. 1919, 4; 24 April, 1919, 8; 1 May 1919, 7, 8; *SA*, CO 3/1/8, ZCC mins., 24 Apr. 1919

¹⁰⁰ *SA*, AF29/254, 655 – 58, LFO letter, 14 Nov. 1919

¹⁰¹ *ST*, 29 May – 26 Jun. 1920

¹⁰² *ST*, 19 Oct. 1918, 4; 26 Oct. 1918, 4

¹⁰³ F. W. S. Craig, (ed.), *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918 – 1949*, 3rd ed. (London, 1983), 641

¹⁰⁴ *SN*, 30 Oct. 1919, 4; 6 Nov 1919, 4

some complaints about councillors who were not resident in their constituencies and the main issue was the condition of the roads. Although twelve members were returned unopposed and one was re-elected, there were seven new members, including one Labour. The *Shetland News* declared that the ‘greater infusion of new blood than has ever before’ was ‘due to a genuine desire for new representatives’, as had happened all over the country, ‘the natural aftermath of a great war’.¹⁰⁵

After the rhetoric and controversy of the war years, the newspapers seemed less contentious. Although some recent legislation was beneficial, the Government was rarely praised; other measures put additional pressures on the community and the lack of action in some areas such as whaling and land settlement still caused rancour. Possibly there was less internal conflict and, other than references to Shetland’s war service, less assertion of the ‘Old Rock’s’ special status and identity.

Continuity and Change

Tom Sandison wrote of the anti-climax of post-war life: ‘It’s a topsy-turvy world, and no mistake, in this year of God 1919’.¹⁰⁶ It might be expected that war would bring changes, and this has been the subject of major debate among historians. Constantine et al emphasised the variability of experience and pointed out the different conceptual approaches to the extent, intensity and duration of change, much of which was only identifiable in a longer perspective. Marwick’s view was that the war had been a powerful agent of social change, some of it short-lived, not least in the area of the Government intervention that so often infuriated the Shetland press. Winter described the war as ‘a man-made earthquake’, which, as well as killing people and devastating families, demolished boundaries between groups, transformed ideas and brought some social benefits. In McFarland’s view, many Scottish writers, particularly Royle, shared the ‘sense of rupture and discontinuity’. DeGroot, however, argued that the dominant social force was not change but conservatism; people wanted life to return to how it had been – and it did to large

¹⁰⁵ SN, 13 Nov. 1919, 4; 11 Dec. 1919, 4

¹⁰⁶ SA, D1/123/13/5, Sandison, 26 Jan. 1919

extent. In the local context, Smith, while referring to ‘the end of an era’, recognised many continuities from pre-war conditions.¹⁰⁷

Soon after the Armistice, however, the *Shetland News* declared, ‘Conditions in almost every phase of life have profoundly and fundamentally changed ... it is utterly impossible to go back and live as if the war had never been’.¹⁰⁸ It may have seemed like that, but, as the temporary effects reduced, it became evident that many of the conditions of, and trends in, Shetland life endured. The *Shetland Times* averred:

We are living in a period of unrest and desire for change ... the underlying and compelling force of life ... is ... a determination that old things must pass away, and all things become new.

On the other hand, a columnist saw no sign of the ‘new heaven and new earth’ promised after the war.¹⁰⁹

As usual, the year-end reports in the local newspapers provided the best general overview. In 1919, the *Shetland Times* was very positive: ‘Taken all over the past year has been one of the utmost prosperity for Shetland and the Shetlanders.’¹¹⁰ The *Shetland News* thought the year ‘differed little from normal years before the late Great War’. The main differences highlighted were higher wages and prices, more money in circulation and the better situation of most Shetlanders compared to people elsewhere.¹¹¹ Both newspapers, however, were looking backwards for their comparisons, rather than to the future. In this transition year, the outlook was generally optimistic. The economy was still holding up and there were several proposals for development, but they all needed support from outside Shetland, by legislation or capital. War had not changed the basic resources available to Shetlanders, or the natural restrictions of location, weather and the movement of fish; nor had their technology and methods developed. What had changed was the economics: the cost of materials, freight, labour and everyday items had risen, as had

¹⁰⁷ Constantine et al. ‘Introduction’, 5; Marwick, *Deluge*, Winter, *Experience of World War I*, 7; Jay Winter and Blane Baggett, *1914 – 1918: The Great War and the Shaping of the Twentieth Century* (London, 1996), 107; Winter, *Great War and British People*; DeGroot, *Blighty*; McFarland, ‘Great War’, 554 – 55; Royle, *Flowers of the Forest*, passim; Smith, *Shetland Life and Trade*, 281

¹⁰⁸ *SN*, 21 Nov. 1918, 4

¹⁰⁹ *ST*, 1 Mar. 1919, 5; 8 Mar. 1919, 4

¹¹⁰ *ST*, 27 Dec. 1919, 4

¹¹¹ *SN*, 25 Dec. 1919, 4

the demand for products. Much depended on how this demand continued and other factors came into play. At the end of the following year the *Shetland Times* felt:

It has been a prosperous year, not marred by any disaster or mishap; but rather a period wherein the people of these islands have pursued the tenor of their way in safety and comfort.¹¹²

Nevertheless, it was doubtful that this cosy state of affairs would last.

According to the *Shetland News*, 1921 was not ‘a very prosperous one for Shetland’. The trade depression had taken effect and the harvest had been poor but, despite a great deal of unemployment, Shetland ‘had been better off than a great many places in the south’. The *Shetland Times*, however, was more upbeat: the year had been ‘one of exceptional prosperity’ and ‘almost every section of the community has reaped a share of the bounty, and participated in the prosperity’.¹¹³ Again, in 1922, opinions differed slightly. The *Shetland Times* said that the year ‘cannot be spoken of as one of exceptional bounty, yet it cannot be spoken of as a niggard period’, with returns less than in 1921 but still above average. The *Shetland News* thought that 1922 was not materially different from 1921 but ‘fully more prosperous’. The depression gripping the rest of the country seemed to be less severe in Shetland:

Trade depression or trade booms in the south react on Shetland to a greater or less degree, but this county is peculiarly self-contained, and its interests are very inter-dependent, and the position in which its inhabitants find themselves from year to year depends largely on its own native prosperity.

This theme was repeated a few weeks later:

The four years following the Armistice may almost have said to have been as trying as the four years of war. Fortunately in Shetland, although there has been and still is, a considerable amount of unemployment, the troubled conditions prevailing elsewhere have not been as keenly felt. Our islands are wonderfully self-contained, and more productive than most people imagine. Cases of actual distress or want are practically unknown.¹¹⁴

This relative freedom from extreme poverty was ascribed to the mix of land and sea resources, and particularly to the old-age pension, which had been a great boon, but could not provide a basis for a developing economy.

¹¹² *ST*, 8 Jan. 1921, 4

¹¹³ *SN*, 29 Dec. 1921, 4; *ST*, 31 Dec. 1921, 4

¹¹⁴ *ST*, 30 Dec. 1922, 4; *SN*, 28 Dec. 1922, 4; 4 Jan. 1923, 4

This was clear in 1923, when both fishing and agriculture failed. The *Shetland Times* reported there was ‘no abject poverty’ but ‘hardship’, which ‘must always be looked for to recur at intervals where the real means of earnings for the great majority of the people is dependent on the land and sea’. The *Shetland News*, however, thought, ‘The year 1923 ... has not been very different from the three preceding years’, and that the income from knitwear had kept conditions in Shetland from being as bad as in the Northern and Western Highlands, ‘where there is such appalling distress and suffering especially among children’.¹¹⁵ In all these three years Shetland was also compared to unspecified fishing localities in Scotland where conditions were much worse.

Conclusion

Shetland settled back into a life that was not essentially different from before the war. The newspapers show no great change, no new mindset; instead, initially there was harking back to pre-war conditions and expectations that things would get back to ‘normal’. There was no boom but relative prosperity. The downturn in 1923 was due to the failure of the fishing and the unfavourable weather as much as to the British or world situation, which showed how precarious the economy was. By this time five years had passed, longer than the duration of the war itself. Its effects were not over, far from it, but in this short-term, local, post-war context, the war was no longer dominating discussions about economic or social conditions. The exceptional context was bereavement and commemoration, which are discussed in the next chapter.

¹¹⁵ *ST*, 29 Dec. 1923, 4; *SN*, 27 Dec. 1923, 4

CHAPTER 9 COMMEMORATION

After the war, commemoration was ubiquitous in the United Kingdom and other belligerent countries and it has been one of the major themes of Great War historiography. Most studies use local examples to illustrate common themes, and specific local research has been built into national or international pictures, as discussed in Chapter 1. While there were national manifestations, such as the Cenotaph, the Two Minutes Silence on Armistice Day, the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior and in Scotland, the National War Memorial, most people engaged in collective commemoration at a local level. Memorials were often produced by quite small communities and often demonstrated local identity. Shetland provides both examples of national trends shared across many different communities and aspects with local connotations.

The post-war period has been characterised as being obsessed with commemoration, ‘the backdrop against which post-war lives were lived’.¹ Winter has suggested that it ‘was a universal preoccupation. The need to bring the dead home, to put the dead to rest, symbolically or physically, was pervasive’.² Shetland newspapers, however, do not give an impression of absorption at a public level with commemoration, rather, as Chapter 8 describes, of trying to deal with the problems of everyday life. Nevertheless, a *Roll of Honour and Roll of Service* was published and over fifty other memorials were commissioned.³

Because of the seafaring tradition, the death of young men was not rare in Shetland. As recently as 1900, twenty-two fishermen had been lost from one small area of Delting and that was only the latest of such fishing disasters. The overall scale of the war-dead was, however, much greater, and in only one district, Skerries (population about 140), did all the servicemen survive. Shetland consisted of tight-knit communities and losses were felt keenly. It seems unlikely that, as Ferguson suggested, memorials were intended ‘to transmit the pain to those who had been lucky enough to suffer no immediate loss’; nor is there a need to postulate, as Winter

¹ Bob Bushaway, “‘Name upon Name’, the Great War and Remembrance”, in Roy Porter (ed.), *Myths of the English*, rep. (Cambridge, 1994), 136 – 167, 148

² Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, rep. (Cambridge, 1997), 28

³ Appendix III

did, the development of ‘adoptive kinship’ as a result of the war losses: that kinship already existed.⁴

Shetland’s *Roll of Honour and Roll of Service*

Early in the war, there emerged an idea of recording the names of men who were fighting for their country. Rolls of honour had therefore been started long before the horrifying totals of the dead were known. Then, when monumental memorials were being planned, unless the wording was general (like the Cenotaph in Whitehall to ‘The Glorious Dead’), a list had to be drawn up of the names to be inscribed. This was the simplest roll of honour and sometimes the list or a ‘book of remembrance’ would be deposited nearby, in a church or public building, or incorporated in the memorial itself.⁵

Some, however, were published in book form. Service units published rolls of their members and so did many civilian organisations: church congregations, sporting clubs, businesses and professional societies, schools and universities. Towns, parishes and counties also published rolls. Indeed, while planning the Scottish National War Memorial, the Duke of Atholl wrote, ‘In nearly every town and parish in Scotland a local record of the names of the fallen belonging to the particular town and parish is being kept’.⁶ These rolls are a rich source, not just of information about the men listed, but also about the attitudes prevailing at the time. Shetland had a particularly fine example, the *Roll of Honour and Roll of Service*, the work of Thomas Manson, the editor of the *Shetland News*. In this section, the format, methods of compilation, content and purpose of this volume, are compared with over thirty rolls from across Scotland.⁷

Manson decided to publish his rolls in February 1919. The work was partly an expression of private grief at the death of his son, but it was also a response to requests and followed on from his volume of 1915 and the obituaries in both

⁴ Ferguson, *Pity of War*, 437; Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 27

⁵ Colin McIntyre, *Monuments of War: How to Read a War Memorial* (London, 1990), 170 – 92; Derek Boorman, *At the Going Down of the Sun: British First World War Memorials* (York, 1988), 2, 14 – 163

⁶ *SN*, 17 Mar. 1921, 5

⁷ Appendix IV

newspapers.⁸ In other places, rolls had been had collated by individuals, though more often by a local council or charitable society. Manson found the compilation ‘a problem ... solved by the most laborious and painstaking methods’.⁹ He advertised in his newspaper and wrote to every name on the electoral roll. This elicited encouragement but not detailed, accurate information. He therefore asked public-spirited people in each district, thirty-six in all, to visit every house. After collating the information, he sent out proofs and encouraged everyone to check them. Despite his efforts, there were errors; the alphabetical order was not strictly maintained, some addresses were in the wrong parish and there were a few misprints. Some names were omitted; some people preferred not to be included and perhaps others were just missed.¹⁰ Compilers elsewhere faced similar problems; it could be hard to stimulate interest and achieve consistency.

Manson had an advisory committee of six prominent townspeople ‘to consider and decide on several debateable points’. He did not specify these points but probably one was about whose names were to be included. Unlike some rolls, Manson never defined the eligibility for inclusion, but the *Roll of Honour* included men in the forces (including the Merchant Navy) who died between the outbreak of war and February 1920, no matter what the cause of death. Very many died in action, but others of illness or accident, which might not have been directly related to the war. The inclusion of, for example, Royal Naval patrolmen who died of tuberculosis or merchant seamen killed in an accident after the Armistice, might be questioned. This was less likely to have been an issue for most other areas. Besides Shetland natives and residents, Manson included some servicemen whose parents or even grandparents had lived there. One example with quite tenuous connections was ‘Shetland’s VC’, William Bruce, born in Edinburgh and resident in Jersey, the grandson of a local landowner. Out of the 618 men listed in the *Roll of Honour*, at least 150 were not resident when they enlisted. Over 100 served in Dominion or United States forces; probably some had emigrated soon before the war, but there were some longer-term or second-generation emigrants. There was even a special

⁸ Page 119

⁹ Manson, *Roll of Honour*, vii

¹⁰ Oral information; ms information in copy of *Roll of Honour* in SA; J.A. I. (Isbister), ‘Foula Men in the First World War’, *Shetland Life*, 21 (1982), 28

section for men 'whose precise local connection was not stated'. Like most rolls, Manson's included the few women who served, mainly as nurses or at the Lerwick naval base.

Shetland's *Roll of Service* provided a standard set of information about each person: name, rank and force, regiment or ship, address, and any wounds, ship-wrecks or decorations. The *Roll of Honour* had a much more ornate format with photographs and the names of family with address, the date, place and cause of, and age at, death. This was not an unusual format, though some rolls contained a single list. Some early rolls only included officers, but later they became less elitist, the idea being that sacrifice made every serviceman equal. Shetland had few officers, except in the Merchant Navy. Manson chose not to honour rank especially, but ordered his *Roll of Honour* alphabetically and his *Roll of Service* alphabetically within each parish.

Beside biographical information, rolls often had other contents. Manson wrote an account of the main activities of the war: the main front-line actions in which Shetlanders participated and both naval activity and home-front support in Shetland. It was to be 'a most interesting and reliable local history of the Great War'.¹¹ This was quite common; in some rolls, fund-raising and sending parcels to the front are commended almost to the same level as the fighting forces. Manson was careful to emphasise the special honour due to the armed forces.

Another common content was poetry, sometimes by established poets not connected with the area and sometimes by local poets. All the poetry was traditional in format, often romantic and heroic, with no sign of the modern forms and anti-war opinions that later became associated with the Great War poets. This accords with Winter's view that traditional forms were considered most appropriate.¹² Manson quoted these lines from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*: '... from successful wars, You that survived, and you that sleep in fame'. He also included an acrostic by Shetland's foremost poet, J. J. Haldane Burgess.

¹¹ *SN*, 27 Feb 1919, 4

¹² Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 5 and 115

SHETLAND HEROES

Silent ye lie in distant lands and seas,
 Heroes, whose names we trace with love and pride;
 Endless our debt to you, who fought and died,
 That we might taste the sweets of life and ease.
 Long shall the voice of fame your deeds recall,
 And glory gild your names on storied page,
 Noble and brave as in the sea-kings' age,
 Defenders of fair freedom for us all.
 High on the shining scroll of bright renown,
 Emblazoned in the work wrought by your hands,
 Refulgent now the name of Shetland stands,
 On through long ages to be handed down:
 Ever shall thoughts of your victorious strife
 Stir Shetland's sons to greater, grander life.

It included many of the sentiments common in such works: the nobility and bravery of the dead, their sacrifice for the freedom of others and their example to future generations, as well as a reference to the 'sea-kings' of the Viking age.

Most rolls also had illustrations. The photographs in Manson's *Roll of Honour* were set in an interlaced frame with four Shetland scenes at the corners – the South End of Lerwick, Scalloway with its castle, a rural scene of the sea and crofts and another of breaking waves and cliffs. These scenes were nostalgic and old-fashioned, but there were contrasting pictures of military action – a warship, aeroplanes, a trawler and field guns. Crossed rifles with a wreath were a symbol of mourning. At the foot was the coat of arms of Lerwick, with its Norse axe, galley and raven, and the County Council motto: 'Með Lögum Skal Land Byggja'*. The text was in scrolls under each photograph. Similar to other artwork used by the *Shetland News*, this was very symbolic and very specific to Shetland, and no other roll had anything like it.

* literally 'with laws shall land be built'



Figure 9.1 A page from Shetland's *Roll of Honour*

As a memorial, rolls were in a convenient form that could be kept at home, and so they were linked to families. Several rolls aspired to be an heirloom, a link between past and future, all part of ensuring that the names lived for evermore. Manson was particularly strong on this idea:

Every family in Shetland, as well as many outside the Islands, will be able to point to it with pride and love, and can leave the volume to be handed down to those who follow them ...¹³

His rolls came in five varieties to suit every pocket, from cloth-bound, priced at one guinea, to morocco or calf leather, at two. It was a commercial venture but it is perhaps unlikely that it made much profit. He encountered problems obtaining the leather for the more expensive bindings, which were still not available by 1923, and had to increase the prices. The volume won the 1920 Hood Medal for work done by a small firm from the *British Printer* magazine, which said, 'The production of this literally monumental volume ... constitutes a record of technical courage and achievement'.¹⁴ Manson was ambitious; his advertisement stated the work would be 'the most Important and most Valuable Shetlandic work ever published'. It was well-received and reviewed in various publications, including the *Scotsman*, the *Orcadian*, the *John o' Groat Journal*, the *Falkirk Herald* and the *Scots Pictorial*. The *Press and Journal* thought inaccurately, 'In its completeness, indeed it is in all probability unique'. Even the rival *Shetland Times* was very complimentary, judging the Roll a 'suitable tribute', 'destined to live in many homes, wherever Shetlanders are to be found, for many a day'. This appreciation would be expected about a community book of remembrance that expressed:

pride that, when the World's Civilisation and Freedom trembled in the balance, sons of the "Old Rock" left their natives isles, and fared forth to war – to face suffering and death on many a stricken field – in order that Right might triumph over Wrong, and Justice be done to the people of Europe.¹⁵

Local readers were also complimentary; the author, Jessie Saxby was particularly profuse: 'The young, noble features of our Boys, so finely reproduced in the book, were blurred to my vision by tears rising from a fount of feeling in the soul'. She

¹³ William Kidd, 'To the Lads Who Came Back: Memorial Windows and Rolls Of Honour in Scotland', in William Kidd and B. Murdoch, (eds.), *Memory and Memorials: the Commemorative Century* (Aldershot, 2004), 107 – 26, 5; *SN*, 6 Mar 1919, 1

¹⁴ *SN*, 20 Nov. 1923, 4

¹⁵ *SN*, 25 Mar. 1920, 4; 31 Jul., 1920, 4; 5 Aug. 1920, 5, 12 Aug. 1920, 5; *ST*, 31 Jul, 1920, 5

thought the book could travel, 'sent as a bond of the "Old Rock" to its children parted far and wide', who would be taught 'how our heroes fought for us and them' and for 'the Captain who desired them to take up the cross and follow Him'. She even spoke for the dead:

If they were asked that question, I think, their reply from paradise would be 'yes, that book will keep our memory green for all time, and in all homes where it finds a place'.¹⁶

In these sentiments about the virtue of the dead, the right of the British cause in the war, the preservation of memory and the local associations, she was echoing ideas and language used across the country.

Manson's work aimed to be:

at once a lasting Memorial to Fallen Shetlanders, a complete list of those engaged on active service, and a record of the varied activities directly connected with the war which took place in Shetland from the opening of hostilities to the signing of peace.¹⁷

As a source about the Shetlanders who served, it presents some difficulties due to the variation in information, but nevertheless it is an excellent record.¹⁸

The War Memorials

A study of Scottish war memorials states, 'War memorials were erected with pride as well as sadness and at great cost. They are pieces of local history which in sum are part of the national story.'¹⁹ Memorials have been studied from various points of view: as sites of mourning and commemoration, as works of art, as sources for family and social history.²⁰ Most districts in Shetland had a memorial, usually a stone monument, in either the cemetery or a prominent roadside position, though some communities chose a plaque at the church, and two, Papa Stour and North Yell, stained glass windows. Most cost between £100 and £150 and generally, designs were plain, with no statues, but some had carvings, for example, Tingwall and

¹⁶ *SN*, 22 Jul. 1920, 3

¹⁷ Manson, *Roll of Honour*, vii

¹⁸ Appendix I

¹⁹ G. T. Bell, 'Monuments To The Fallen: Scottish War Memorials of the Great War', unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Strathclyde (1993), 165

²⁰ E.g., J. R. Gillis, (ed.), *Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity* (Chichester, 1994); A. Gregory, *Silence of Memory; Armistice Day 1919-1946* (Oxford, 1994); Kidd and Murdoch, *Memory and Memorial*; Colin McIntyre, *Monuments of War*; Winter, *Sites of Memory*

Lunnasting had a crossed sword and flag.²¹ Inscriptions were stereotypical, such as 'Lest we forget' and 'Their name liveth for evermore', though Burgess's acrostic was quoted at North Roe and Uyeasound. Names were often divided into services; sometimes rank and decorations were included. Crosses were often incorporated in the designs and religious references in inscriptions. Dedication ceremonies, often reported in the local newspapers, included prayers, hymns and sermons from the clergy of several denominations.



Figure 9.2 Shetland War memorials: Lunnasting, Levenwick and Whalsay



Figure 9.3 Shetland War Memorials: Papa Stour window and Bressay plaque

²¹ McFarland, 'Great War', 565 – 66 and Bell, 'Monuments' discussed Scottish monument design

In Lerwick and Scalloway, some church congregations had their own memorials. Other organisations with memorials included the Anderson Educational Institute, Lerwick Post Office and the Rechabites. Two individual memorials were erected, at Fetlar to a master mariner who had lived in Liverpool and at Hillswick to a local landowner. Commemoration was on display even at home, with photographs in ornamental memorial frames.



Figure 9.4 The Lerwick Post Office Roll of Honour



Figure 9.5 An individual commemorative photograph

Although the local newspapers usually reported only the dedication ceremonies for most memorials, the story of the County War Memorial was played out in detail.

King studied the process of memorial building in Britain, describing the relationships and tasks required: the form of the memorial had to be agreed; funds raised, the site acquired, the design selected and the memorial built.²² This is a useful framework for discussing the Shetland Memorial.

Discussions started during the war. In July 1918, the Zetland County and Lerwick Town Councils jointly appointed a Committee chaired by Robertson, the County Convenor.²³ The first debate – about the form of the memorial – involved a difference of opinion common across the country, termed the ‘utility’ or ‘utilitarian’ debate.²⁴ One idea was that the memorial should be of practical use to survivors and future generations. In Shetland, there were two main proposals; a hospital extension or sanatorium; alternatively an educational establishment, such as a technical college or training ship. There were two counter-arguments: such establishments should be state-funded, and this form of memorial demeaned the memory of the dead: the memorial should not be ‘for the profit of the living’.²⁵ National causes also reached Shetland; correspondents suggested building YMCA Red Triangle clubs.²⁶ Another suggestion was that the memorial could incorporate a museum for relics of the war.²⁷

At a public meeting in September 1918, several prominent people aired their favoured schemes. Robertson, however, was adamant that no decision should be taken without further consultation.²⁸ Most letters to the newspapers appeared to favour a monument and several strongly opposed the utility idea. An ‘Ex-soldier’ claimed to have contacted several mothers and none of the suggestions had met with approval: ‘The boys who have fallen are too sacred, their memory too holy a thing, to be mixed up with anything whatever that savours of the utilitarian’. ‘A Mother’ wrote, ‘The idea of the memorial being put to any secular use by the general public ... is unthinkable to many’. She complained that the bereaved had no access to the

²² King, *Memorials*; also Bell, *Monuments*, 184; Catherine Moriarty, ‘Private Grief and Public Remembrance: British First World War Memorials’, in Martin Evans and Ken Lunn, (eds) *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1997), 125 – 42, 126 – 30

²³ SA, CO7/77/1/20; ZCC Files, War Memorial, 1917 – 39, ZCC and LTC conference mins., 18 Jul. 1918,

²⁴ McIntyre, *Monument*, 166 – 79; King, *Memorials*, 65 – 82; Bell, ‘Monuments’, 205 – 14; Moriarty, ‘Private Grief’, 128

²⁵ E.g., *SN*, 6 Sep. 1918, 5; 3 Oct. 1918, 5

²⁶ *ST*, 15 Feb. 1919, 8; *SN*, 8 May 1919, 4

²⁷ SA, CO7/77/1/20, War Memorial Joint Committee minutes (hereafter WMJC mins.), 19 Jun. 1919

²⁸ *ST*, 12 and 21 Sep. 1918, 5

Committee – unfairly, as they were trying hard to canvass opinion.²⁹ The deciding factor seems to have been not principle but funding. By June 1919, the Joint Committee had opted for a monument in a central Lerwick site. Robertson still wanted the views of ex-servicemen. He sounded them out at the reception in August 1919 and found most content to leave decisions to the Committee.³⁰ There were, however, other contentious issues.

Fund-raising encountered several problems, including disagreement about methods. A letter in the *Shetland News* deemed a whist drive and dance unworthy of the sacrifice: ‘How can Sorrow and Death be partners to gaiety and frivolity?’³¹ A sale-of-work, however, appeared to be acceptable.³² Subscription was the main form of fund-raising, but it was difficult without a definite proposal, while conversely, a design could not be finalised without knowing the budget.

Subscriptions were opened in July 1918. A Sub-Committee was appointed, an advertisement inserted in the local newspapers and a circular sent to ministers and the chairmen of parish councils and school boards asking them to appoint local committees. This encountered another problem, identified by ‘Hamlet’ as ‘a certain amount of jealousy of Lerwick’. The first public meeting had been disparaged as ‘simply a Lerwick meeting’ and ‘a fiasco’, and the fact that the Committee mainly comprised Lerwick residents caused resentment.³³ ‘Hamlet’ argued that Lerwick was the likely place for the memorial, being:

the county town; the meeting-place of the big public bodies; the place where the Courts are held and justice administered; where most traffic converges to and goes from; where the mails arrive and are despatched.³⁴

By April 1919, only seven replies had been received. The Committee agreed it was ‘inexpedient to inaugurate a collection as matters stand at present’ and letters in the newspapers agreed.³⁵ The Committee were dismayed at the resentment. They had supported proposals for local memorials and even hoped to coordinate them. In

²⁹ *SN*, 10 Apr. 1919, 8; 8 May 1919, 4

³⁰ *SN*, 26 Jun. 1919, 4; SA, CO7/77/1/20, WMJC mins., 25 Sep. 1919

³¹ *SN*, 19 Oct. 1918, 5

³² SA, CO7/77/1/29, letter, Smith, 19 Mar. 1919

³³ *SN*, 17 Oct. 1919, 4; 26 Feb. 1920, 5, et al

³⁴ *SN*, 10 Apr. 1919, 5

³⁵ SA, CO7/77/1/20, Sub-Committee minutes, 25 Apr. 1919

1920, one member commented, 'A thing which was a world-wide affair should not go at the parish pump idea' and he had expected people to be more broad-minded.³⁶ However, local schemes were competing for limited funds.

In February 1920, a new committee, again chaired by Robertson, with members of the Town and County Councils and the new Education Authority, met for first time, and co-opted three members of the Territorial Army. About £700 had been subscribed and the Committee printed 7500 copies of an appeal.³⁷ In Lerwick, a group of women undertook house-to-house collections. They asked if they should approach every house and Robertson thought that the bereaved might be anxious to contribute. Nor should people be excepted on grounds of poverty: 'Even if a person subscribed only a penny, that might be quite as good a subscription as the hundreds of pounds subscribed by someone who could afford it'. The idea was that everyone should contribute; then 'all could point to it and say that they had a share in it'.³⁸ Another suggestion was that people who could not afford to subscribe could contribute labour.³⁹ About £1800 was raised, less than the £2500 anticipated. The donors' names and amounts donated were published in the newspapers.⁴⁰ Collections in the country districts were more problematical. A second letter to leading men in the country parishes evoked only two replies and a few donations. The Committee asked county councillors to act in their constituencies; some meetings were held but there were issues about expenses.⁴¹

Some people in country districts wanted a more local memorial. 'A Country Observer' suggested that the Committee should erect a granite cross in each cemetery; the Committee proposed a brass tablet or something similar. Others, however, were moving ahead independently. Dunrossness Parish Council formed a Committee to erect memorials in each of six churchyards. Letters in the newspapers urged other districts to follow suit. In March 1920, the first monument was unveiled to just two ex-pupils of the Guther School in Yell. The first parish one was in

³⁶ *ST*, 1 May 1920, 4

³⁷ *SN*, 19 Feb. 1920, 4

³⁸ *SA*, CO7/77/1/20, Joint WMJC mins., 11 Mar. 1920; *SN*, 18 Mar. 1920, 4

³⁹ *ST*, 3 Apr. 1920, 5

⁴⁰ *SN*, 29 Apr. 1920, 5; 6 May 1920, 4; 13 May 1920, 5; 20 May 1920, 5; 3 Jun. 1920, 8; 29 Apr. 1920, 5

⁴¹ *SN*, 4 Mar. 1920, 8; *SN*, 15 Jul. 1920, 5; *SA*, CO7/77/1/20, WMJC mins., 8 Oct. 1920, 25 Dec. 1920

Bressay, 'a handsome and artistic wall tablet' on the outside of the church. When the North Yell people dedicated their stained-glass window, it was reported that they 'felt very strongly' they should have a local memorial, because, though 'a County Memorial had much to commend it, a very large percentage of the people would never have the opportunity of seeing a Memorial erected in Lerwick'.⁴²

This was difficult for the Committee. Robertson said, 'We cannot dare go to a parish that has decided to erect its own memorial and solicit subscriptions for the County memorial at Lerwick'. Nevertheless, when asked whether the men from parishes that erected their own memorials would be omitted from the County one, he felt it should include them all. That there was some antagonism is shown by a councillor's comment that people were being misled by 'interested parties who wanted the local monuments stuck in certain places'. Some districts, such as Delting, divided their funds between their local and the County memorials.⁴³ Subscriptions were also received from emigrant Shetlanders. The Committee asked newspapers and newsagents for names from their subscription lists so that they could solicit further contributions. About £150 had been received by July 1920.⁴⁴

To complicate things further, in 1921, the Duke of Atholl wrote to the newspaper editors and chairmen of the parish councils asking for the names of the dead for the Scottish National Monument and soliciting subscriptions for the 'shilling fund'. The *Shetland News* started a fund and expected Shetlanders would respond 'warmly'.⁴⁵ There were further appeals such as 'Thistle Day' in June 1922, and over £120 was raised for a memorial to the Highland Light Infantry.⁴⁶ Subscriptions for the County Memorial never reached the £10000 envisaged by Provost Geddes in 1918. By July 1920, £2000 had been raised; the Committee hoped for £3000, but by May 1921, had received just £2365.⁴⁷

⁴² *SN*, 12 Feb. 1920, 5; also *ST*, 6 and 20 Mar. 1920, 5; *SN*, 4 Mar. 1920, 5, 8; 11 Mar. 1920, 5; 18 Mar. 1920, 6, 8; 1 Jul. 1920, 5; 4 Aug. 1921, 5

⁴³ *SN*, 29 Apr. 1920, 5; 15 Jul. 1920, 5; 16 Sep. 1920, 5

⁴⁴ *SN*, 4 Mar. 1920, 8; 15 Jul. 1920, 5

⁴⁵ *SN*, 17 Mar. 1921, 5

⁴⁶ *SN*, 8 Jun. 1922, 4; 19 Jul. 1923, 4

⁴⁷ *SN*, 19 Sep. 1918, 4; 15 Jul. 1920, 5; 5 May 1921, 8

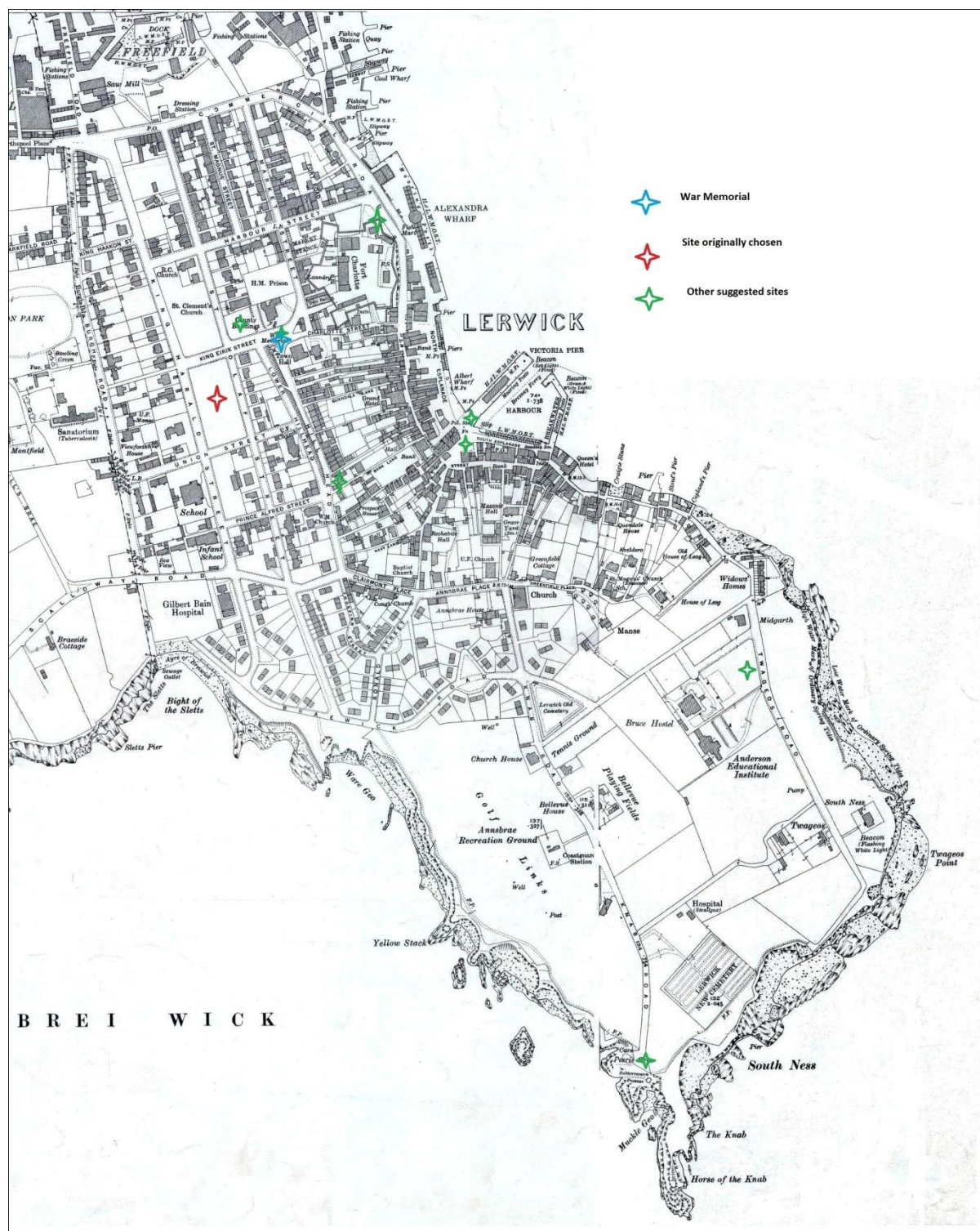


Figure 9.7 Proposed sites for Shetland War Memorial

Having settled on a monument, the Committee had to choose a design and site. A number of sites were proposed and most rejected for various reasons – too busy and cramped, too far from the centre. For a time the preferred location was a field in the ‘New Town’, which would be laid out as a flower park. Two other locations were favoured near the Town Hall and County Buildings, one in the middle of the road and one on a grassy bank. This debate, linked with the design and the limitations on resources, continued right to the end of the project.

Several people submitted designs. Robert Williamson, a Lerwick cycle dealer, exhibited a plasticine model in the County Hall in February 1919. The monument would be of grey Shetland granite with two oblong pillars flanking a buttressed central pillar, backed by a higher circular pillar. The front would have four columns of red granite and there would be figures – two sailors with an anti-submarine gun, two Gordon Highlanders, an old patrolman talking to Scouts, a woman and child and, on top, a Viking.⁴⁸

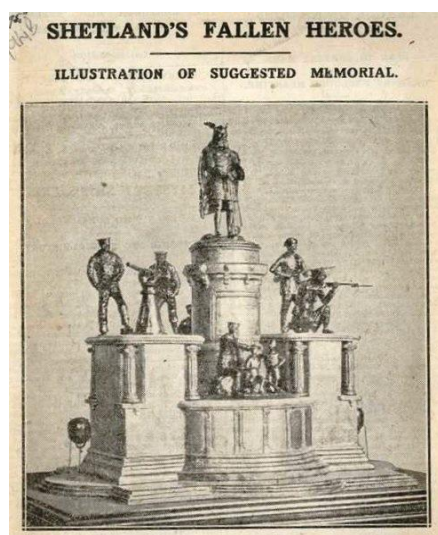


Figure 9.6 Williamson's model memorial (SN, 21 Feb. 1921, 5)

It was strongly criticised. ‘Viking’ disliked the mixture of styles and suggested instead a Shetland symbol, a boat or Norse longship, because ‘it is round the boat that all our affections and sorrow twine’. Williamson replied that he had intended only to provoke debate, as the councillors were doing nothing. He wanted a ‘Shetlandic’ monument, perhaps a cairn of granite blocks: ‘if this is emblematic of

⁴⁸ *ST*, 1 Mar. 1919, 8; also Bell’s critical commentary, ‘Monuments’, 261 – 63

anything it would be of our barren but beautiful isles'. 'War Worn' thought the armoured Viking objectionable and inappropriate because the Vikings' ideals and methods were 'as far as the Poles asunder from those of our boys'.⁴⁹ Another objector said that, while 'the main element of our island-race is Norse ... we must not forget the pre-Norse, even pre-Celtic substratum; nor the modern admixture of southern peoples.' He claimed, 'An ultra-Norse memorial might easily be construed by southerners as the emblem of disloyal affection for a "motherland" that is now, apart from sentiment, nothing but a foreign land', and that during the war, Shetlanders had been accused of being 'disaffected' because of 'foreign origins', and of providing harbours and supplies for enemy submarines.⁵⁰ More in this vein was to come.

A very different design was submitted by John Aitken, the builder of many prominent buildings in Lerwick including the Town Hall. His chosen site was next to Fort Charlotte, maintaining the connection with the reserve forces. The building of local granite would have a reading room and lecture hall on the ground floor, a round tower with the memorial hall on the first floor and a war museum on the second. This was opposed because of its 'utility', and one generally supportive letter pointed out that it would not be visible from every part of the town and would soon be 'begrimmed and soot-dirty' with the smoke from drifters.⁵¹ Other proposals included a rough hewn block of local granite with a 'figure of peace' and a soldier and sailor, and a hexagonal building:

more in the nature of a pillar with a massive base, even of virgin rock, laid out in such a way as would denote, and convey the impression of power and strength.

'Viking' thought a cairn or slab inadequate and preferred a cross 'simple, dignified and universal'; what was wanted was 'something really beautiful and worthy of the men we desire worthily to honour'.⁵²

If the Committee gave these designs any substantial consideration, this was neither minuted nor reported in the newspapers. In late 1919, they sought advice from the

⁴⁹ *SN*, 6 Mar. 1919, 5; 13 Mar. 1919, 8

⁵⁰ *SN*, 20 Mar. 1919, 5

⁵¹ *SN*, 24 Apr. 1919, 5; 8 May 1919, 4; *ST*, 26 Apr. 1919, 5

⁵² *SN*, 24 Apr. 1919, 8; 8 May 1919, 4; 5 Feb. 1920, 4

Scottish War Memorials Advisory Committee, who replied that they did not offer designs only aesthetic criticism and assistance.⁵³ From their booklet, the Committee selected Sir Robert Lorimer, a very distinguished and influential architect, already involved in designing memorials including the Scottish National War Memorial. He was given 'a free hand in connection with the whole matter' within a budget of £2000.⁵⁴ This sparked objections to an external architect; one correspondent asked if this was thought 'a patriotic action for a patriotic cause', and suggested a competition for the design.⁵⁵

Lorimer's first design arrived in April 1921: about twenty-four feet high in grey granite, set on two octagonal slabs, with the bronze figure of a Viking, above him a pinnacle, with a sword in relief on the front and the County coat of arms on the back, and a cross on the top, estimated to cost between £2000 and £2240. Lorimer wrote, 'I have shewn the design rugged and simple in character as I think this will suit the place'. The Committee generally approved but asked if it could be raised by two or three feet, 'to make it more commanding', and if Shetland granite could be used.⁵⁶

The design was exhibited publicly and soon views were being expressed in the newspapers.⁵⁷ Presumably, Lorimer was unaware of the reactions to Williamson's design and assumed that a Viking would be both apposite and popular. In this situation, however, the symbolism was vehemently criticised. 'An Interested Parent' wrote that he found 'nothing specially objectionable except the Viking as the central figure, and for him I have the most thorough contempt. His ideas were piracy, murder and robbery'. The depiction showed him retreating cravenly, and Vikings were also associated with 'strong drink and other unholy rites'. The figure would 'desecrate' the memorial, a female Victory with a soldier and sailor was proposed instead. 'Interested' took up the same theme: the Viking looked 'as if he has just risen from a prolonged drinking bout' and was 'ready for its sole occupation – the

⁵³ SA, CO7/77/1/20, WMJC mins., 25 Sep. 1919, 18 Feb. 1920

⁵⁴ SN, 16 Sep. 1920, 5; SA, CO7/77/1/20, WMJC mins., 18 Feb. 1920

⁵⁵ SN, 30 Sep. 1920, 8; also 7 and 14 Oct. 1920, 5

⁵⁶ SN, 5 May 1921, 8; SA, CO7/77/1/29, letter, Lorimer, 7 Apr. 1921

⁵⁷ SA, CO7/77/1/20, WMJC mins., 14 Sep. 1921

shedding of innocent blood'. He hoped for something more suggestive of peace, 'having had enough of war pictures'.⁵⁸

This rejection of the Viking imagery aroused the most intense engagement with the ideas of the memorial. Even 'Viking' found the proposed design 'disappointing and unsatisfactory':

neither one thing nor another, neither cairn nor cross, cenotaph nor obelisk, but an incongruous mixture of all, and to add to the absurdity there is stuck on the memorial, as if on a bracket, the diminutive figure of a Norse warrior.

He thought the Committee had 'no clear idea of what they want to commemorate' and the result was 'an unharmonious conglomeration of meaningless lines'.⁵⁹ This letter expressed much of the contemporary discussion across the country:

A memorial is the embodiment of a thought, a sentiment or an action in appropriate symbol, that is to say, in a symbol that most truly and vividly suggests and calls up the thought or action to the spectator.

It gave examples: if the sentiment to be conveyed were 'the savage valour of the Norseman', a heroic figure of a Viking would be suitable; if 'Christian valour, courage and endurance triumphing over brute violence', a cross; if peace, a dove or Angel of Peace; if 'the sorrow of the Shetland mothers' heart', the 'pathetic figures of Rachael or Niobe'. One symbol missing from this list was the figure of a serviceman, though that was suggested by others. These were conventional symbols with the exception of the Viking, which was unique, though the Greenock War Memorial included the prow of a Viking ship. Other Shetlanders were not shy of criticising Lorimer's work. '1A' thought it 'simply beneath contempt', the cross being 'ugly and insignificant' and the sword looking as if it were offered for sale: 'one expects to see a price appended'. 'A Lerwegian' complained of 'the glorification of war'; people had suffered too much sacrifice to defend hearth and home did not want a Viking and a sword, 'an offence to the fallen and maimed'.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *SN*, 26 May 1921, 8; 25 Aug 1921, 5

⁵⁹ *SN*, 8 Sep. 1921, 4

⁶⁰ *SN*, 8 Sep. 1921, 4; 15 Sep. 1921, 4

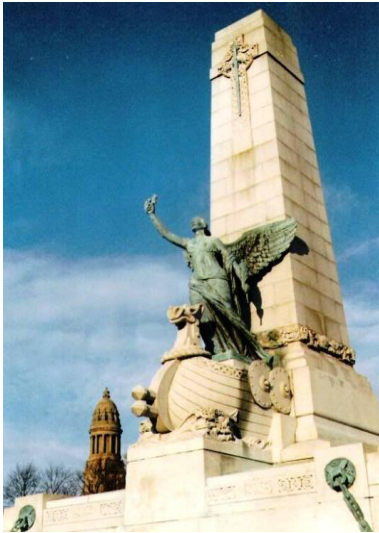


Figure 9.8 Greenock War Memorial with Viking ship

Perhaps the most surprising comment on the Viking was from the writer of ‘Current Topics’: ‘when I survey the wondrous thing, my pulses quicken and it is with difficulty I do not shout aloud with sheer delight’. He asked ‘what in heaven’s name has the image of a Norse warrior to do with the boys who fought and fell?’ – the Norse who ‘turned their arms against peaceful law abiding people’ and whose ‘whole early history reeks with deeds of blood and debauchery’. He advocated turning the figure into one of the Guizer Jarl from Up-Helly-Aa, which would be ‘purely Shetlandic’ and:

would make the Memorial a kind of Shadow and Sunshine, for our grief at the loss of our boys would be tempered with the recollection of the rollicking fun of ‘Up-Helly A’’, and would emphasise the beauty and charity of the saying – ‘Let thou mourn who misses’.

This remarkable commentary appears to have ‘touched a popular chord’: a couple of weeks later, he thanked the numerous correspondents who supported him.⁶¹

The Committee realised that the design was unpopular: at their meeting in September 1921, MacIntyre, the Lerwick Parish Minister, went as far as to say that the design was ‘a shocking thing for a first-class architect to put out’, ‘a poor production for an eminent man’s brains’, and ‘excessively expensive’. Robertson admired the design of the Stonehaven Memorial, ‘impressive as well as expressive’, costing only £820, while the Stromness Memorial with a figure of Rachael, cost about £800. A

⁶¹ *ST*, 3 Sep. 1921, 5; 17 Sep. 1921, 5

suggestion that they try to sound out local opinion was turned down by Robertson as ‘a fatal mistake’; ‘You will only start an agitation and people will be at each other’s throats’. The Committee decided to ask Lorimer to start again. The *Shetland Times* ran the headline: ‘Exit the Norseman’.⁶²



Figure 9.9 Stonehaven and Stromness War Memorials

The letter to Lorimer has not survived, but he had unfortunately seen a newspaper report and was predictably offended. He considered that the Stonehaven Memorial (which had not yet been erected) inappropriate:

⁶² *SN*, 8 Sep. 1921, 4; *ST*, 17 Sep. 1921, 2; *SN*, 15 Sep. 1921, 4; *ST*, 17 Sep. 1921, 2

There are surely enough ruins in the world already without adding to their number by erecting a sham one as a Memorial to the men who died to save the world from ruin.

Nor did he like the Stromness Memorial: the enclosure 'will merely form a receptacle for rubbish, dead leaves, wastepaper, cigarette boxes, dead cats, etc. etc.' He thought that it would be useless to make further designs since 'if these two Memorials represent the two types of design that appeal to local feeling I am afraid we are unlikely to agree'.⁶³ To avoid further argument, Robertson decided against publishing this letter; the Rev. Fotheringham visited Lorimer and persuaded him to produce another design.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, the debate continued in the newspapers, and various sites and designs were proposed. 'Viking' suggested the Knab, from where people watched the departing servicemen 'as they steamed out into the mist and the twilight on their heroic adventure', and a statue of:

a Shetland youth and maiden side by side, she looking up to him in loyal confidence, his uniform and helmet a symbol of the everlasting hope of the world, based on the sacrifice and achievement of the past.

'Current Topics' wryly commented: 'There seems to be no end to the finding of sites for the proposed War Memorial'.⁶⁵ The Committee now realised that landscaping their chosen site would cost too much, and opted for the site outside the Town Hall, despite its steep gradient, and this was approved by the Town Council in November. Although 'A Parent' had claimed that most people preferred this site; an unnamed prominent Lerwick gentleman recommended another nearby site in the middle of the road.⁶⁶

In January, Lorimer's new design arrived. It had a cross-shaped base eight feet high, with bronze panels with the names of the war-dead; the column above had a sword on the front, 'appropriate devices' (a Lion Rampant, a Norse longship, a St. Andrew's Cross and a Thistle) on the four faces and a cross on the top. Lorimer

⁶³ SA, CO/7/77/1 29, letter, Lorimer, 23 Sep. 1921

⁶⁴ *SN*, 6 Oct. 1921, 4; 10 Nov. 1921, 5

⁶⁵ *SN*, 22 Sep. 1921, 5; *ST*, 8 Oct. 1921, 5

⁶⁶ *SN*, 11 Aug. 1921, 8; *ST*, 8 Oct. 1921, 4; 13 Oct. 1921, 8; 29 Sep. 1921, 4; SA, CO/7/77/1/29, letter, LTC, 14 Nov. 1921

recommended grey or white granite.⁶⁷ It was similar to his Royal Naval memorials at Chatham, Portsmouth and Plymouth. Scaling down the design for cost reasons, resulted in the base, which had to take the names, being larger in proportion to the obelisk.



Figure 80 Shetland War Memorial (the panels at the sides were added with World War II names)

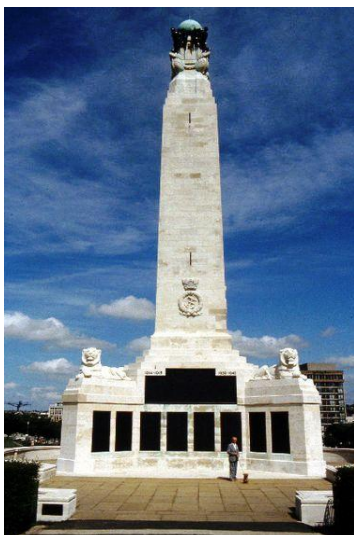


Figure 9.11 Lorimer's Royal Navy War Memorial at Plymouth

⁶⁷ *SN*, 26 Jan. 1921, 4

The Committee, being ‘much struck with the new design’, approved it unanimously and hoped they would not be further deterred by anonymous letters. Comments were generally favourable: ‘Justicia’ thought it a great improvement and Shetland had been saved from ‘a very poor, inartistic, ugly Memorial’.⁶⁸ Lorimer sent two quotations for the work and the Committee accepted the cheaper from Alex. MacDonald & Co. of Aberdeen with bronze panels from Chas. Henshaw of Edinburgh.⁶⁹

During the construction in 1922, the Committee was inactive other than agreeing the inscription (very simply, ‘In memory of the men of Shetland who gave their lives in the Great War’) and collecting the names. The *Roll of Honour* was used, advertisements were inserted in the newspapers and secretaries of local memorial committees were asked for information.⁷⁰ Unlike the *Roll of Honour*, the memorial included only the names of those ‘who were purely Shetlanders’, i.e. natives or residents, who had died in service (including the Merchant Navy) or afterwards for reasons connected with the war. Names would be listed alphabetically by parish but for cost reasons, rank would not be included. In September, the Committee approved the list of 624 names.⁷¹ There was no debate in the newspapers about the criteria, though the Committee received a few complaints that names had not been included.⁷²

In December, Lorimer wrote that the stonework was complete.⁷³ This caught the Committee on the hop, as they had not decided the site, far less contracted for the construction. Early in 1923, Lorimer sent a draft specification and form of tender, which the Committee passed to the burgh surveyors. Hoping to have the monument erected by the summer, they returned to discussing the site.⁷⁴ The *Shetland News* thought this debate ‘really extraordinary’ and declared that public opinion was strongly against the middle of the road. When consulted, Lorimer said either site would be suitable. Yet another nearby site was proposed. After a lot of argument – Was there room for the ‘infinitesimal’ traffic? Would the Memorial have to be lit

⁶⁸ *SN*, 2 Feb. 1921, 5

⁶⁹ SA, CO7/77/1/29, Lorimer’s estimates, 13 Jan. 1922

⁷⁰ *SN*, 20 Apr. 1922, 5; *ST*, 22 Apr. 1922, 4

⁷¹ *SN*, 14 Sep. 1922, 4

⁷² SA, CO7/77/1/29 letters, Smith, 21 Jan. 1923; Spence, 5 Feb. 1923

⁷³ SA, CO7/77, letter, Lorimer, 12 Dec. 1922

⁷⁴ *SN*, 1 Feb. 1923, 8; 8 Feb. 1923, 5

after dark? – the Committee asked Lorimer to come himself or send a representative to help. After a Mr Matthews viewed all the suggested sites in April, Lorimer recommended the embankment, and the Committee agreed.⁷⁵

In August, tenders had been received from two local contractors and the cheaper, for £665 from William Horne, was accepted.⁷⁶ In September, yet another hitch occurred; local stone proved unsuitable for the coping surrounding the memorial. Horne offered granite, first at cost price, then free, which was accepted.⁷⁷ The bronze panels arrived in November and the memorial was completed. It had cost £2547, leaving a balance of £18.⁷⁸

The unveiling ceremony generated debates about who would preside, who would perform the ceremony and the date. The Committee asked Lorimer for information about ceremonies elsewhere.⁷⁹ The Lord Lieutenant, then two other landowners were asked to preside but declined, but the Sheriff accepted. Opinions had already been aired about who should perform the unveiling: a letter from ‘A Parent’ suggested that it should be the woman who had lost the most family members, which was quite common at such ceremonies⁸⁰. The Committee identified three women who had each lost three sons. One had died and two initially refused on the grounds of ill-health, but Mrs. Thomas Hardy later agreed to perform the ceremony.⁸¹ After the first choice of Armistice Day was missed, New Year’s Day and the day after Up-Helly-Aa were rejected as not suitably solemn occasions. The first Sunday in 1924 was chosen, allowing people from country districts to attend.⁸²

The programme was similar to others across the country. Some 230 ex-servicemen with the Brass Band marched from the Drill Hall to the parish church, collecting the local dignitaries at Town Hall. After the service, which was conducted by the

⁷⁵ *SN*, 15 Feb. 1923, 4; 15 Mar. 1923, 5; 8, 22 Mar. 1923, 5; 12 Apr. 1923, 5; SA CO7/77/1/29, telegram, Lorimer, 12 Apr. 1923; SA, CO 7/77/1/20, WMJC mins., 12 Jul. 1923

⁷⁶ *SN*, 9 Aug. 1923, 4

⁷⁷ SA, CO7/77/1/20, WMJC mins., 17 Sep. and 12 Oct. 1923

⁷⁸ SA, CO7/77/1/29, telegram, Lorimer, 16 Nov. 1923; letter, Lorimer, 24 Aug. 1923; *SN*, 29 Nov. 1923, 5

⁷⁹ *SN*, 9 Aug. 1923, 4

⁸⁰ Moriarty, ‘Private Grief’, 136

⁸¹ SA, CO7/77/1/20, WMJC mins., 12 Oct. 1923; 21 Nov. 1923; 19 Dec. 1923; letter, Nicolson, 9 Dec. 1923; *SN*, 10 Jan. 1924, 4; 16 Feb. 1922, 8; Bell, ‘Monuments’, 326

⁸² *SN*, 9 Aug. 1923, 4; 29 Nov. 1923, 5

ministers of six Lerwick congregations, they marched back to the memorial and the unveiling was performed. A sizeable crowd had gathered; 'a representative gathering of people the like of which has not often before been in Lerwick'.⁸³



Figure 9.12 Unveiling the Memorial, January 1924

The whole project had taken over five years and had been marked by controversies – over fund-raising, the design, material and site, the names to be included and the unveiling ceremony. This was quite common in similar projects across the country as described by King and Bell. More unusual was the challenge to a leading architect. King stated that usually committees took professional advice to ensure the memorial reflected well on them as well as the war-dead.⁸⁴

The process was not well managed. The Committee were aware of the decisions and actions required but did not seem to have a sense of urgency, sometimes perhaps not even enthusiasm. Fund-raising was delegated to others and not strenuously pursued, particularly in country areas. Although a site was chosen in 1919, no formal application for the land was made.⁸⁵ The final debate – about two sites within a few yards of each other – was allowed to drag on. The construction was delayed because the inscription was not agreed, the building because the site was not agreed, the bronze panels because the list of names was not ready. Lorimer wrote several

⁸³ Moriarty, *Private Grief*, 130 – 38; SA, D1/460, Order of Service for the Unveiling of Memorial, 6 Jan. 1924; SN, 10 Jan. 1924, 4

⁸⁴ King, *Memorials*, 12 – 13, 86, 100 106, 120 – 24; Bell, 'Monuments', 265

⁸⁵ SN, 15 Jul. 1920, 5

reminders and MacDonald was still requesting payment two months after the monument was complete.⁸⁶ In their defence, the Committee had not undertaken anything like this before, and they were genuinely trying to ascertain the will of the people, which proved difficult, and to fulfil it, which was impossible because of the lack of consensus and shortage of money.

Impatience was expressed on various occasions. 'D. E. Mob', for example, thought the local authorities were wasting time with 'matters of trifling interest'; 'memory is short; and the memory of the brave deeds of our local heroes killed in action is apparently slipping away'.⁸⁷ As early as 1919, Robertson himself thought the lack of action had been 'a standing disgrace to Shetland', but in 1923, he protested that the Committee could not be blamed for delays.⁸⁸

Despite initial support in 1918, the Committee found it difficult to drum up enthusiasm. In 1919, Robertson thought the public had responded 'in a very faint-hearted way', and Councillor Manson deplored the 'utter lack of interest... widespread over the county'.⁸⁹ Councillor Pottinger said, 'The war had been forgotten by a great many people and not only the services of those who fell but of those who had come back'.⁹⁰ There was no public recognition of Armistice Day in 1920, but the two minutes' silence was observed in 1921 and 1922, when poppies were worn.⁹¹ It was not clear whether the Committee's dilatoriness was due to public apathy or the apathy due to the lack of progress. At one point the Committee thought they might drop the idea if not enough funds were raised: although 'a good many people were very lukewarm', they still thought, 'A very large number were anxious that a fitting monument should be erected'. Even in late 1921, 'Justicia' counselled there was no need to hurry; it was more important that the memorial should be fitting'. The irreconcilable ideas made life difficult for the Committee; even Robertson expressed himself 'weary of continual controversy'.⁹²

⁸⁶ SA, CO7/77/1/29, telegrams and letters, Lorimer, 8 Mar – 27 Jul. 1922; 30 Apr. 1923

⁸⁷ ST, 3 Jan. 1920, 4; other examples, SN, 5 Feb. 1920, 4; 14 Sep. 1922, 5; ST, 14 Aug. 1920, 5

⁸⁸ SN, 26 Jun. 1919; 1 Feb. 1923, 8

⁸⁹ ST, 21 Jun. 1919, 4; SN, 2 Oct. 1919, 8

⁹⁰ SN, 15 Jul. 1920, 5

⁹¹ SN 18 Nov. 1922, 5; ST, 12 Nov. 1921, 4; SN, 16 Nov 1922, 4

⁹² SN, 19 Feb. 1920, 4; 3 Nov. 1921, 4; SA CO7/77/1/29, letter, Robertson to Sutherland, 22 Feb. 1923

National and Local Commemoration

Much has been written about the meanings of monumental memorials, often inferred from the structures or from reports of the dedication services. King commented that their meanings were ambiguous, ‘complex and elusive’; ‘their capacity to convey a particular meaning was not entirely reliable’.⁹³ Rolls of honour have received far less attention but, as written texts, their purposes and connotations are more explicit. Some of these meanings related to locality, and, while fitting in with national practice, Shetland’s memorials also have features that were linked to community identity.

The intentions of those involved in memorial projects and contributors to the discussions were complicated; differences of opinion were not unusual. Some people were motivated by grief and a desire to see proper commemoration of the war-dead, for others it could be as practical as a job of work.⁹⁴ McIntyre thought that for veterans it could be ‘a catharsis, a means of purging that guilt of the survivor’; guilt might also have been felt by those who encouraged men to enlist.⁹⁵ Kidd suggested that memorials ‘often purport to present as unifying and homogenous what was pluralistic and fragmentary’, and that ‘like individual memory, collective memory can also be a site of repression and selectivity, of negotiation and denial’.⁹⁶ King also discussed the necessity of reconciling conflicting interests and ideas to achieve the communal aim: ‘Participants could disagree profoundly about the moral meaning they believed a memorial to communicate but still agree on the need to regard it as sacred.’⁹⁷ Gillis’s assertion that ‘commemorative activity ... involves the coordination of individual and group memories’ which ‘may seem consensual but are a product of contest, struggle and annihilation’ uses robust language, but some committees had serious rows, not necessarily related to the matter in hand.⁹⁸ Producing a roll of honour probably posed fewer problems than a monument but the Shetland Committee also tried to be sensitive to the feelings and opinions conveyed

⁹³ King, *Memorials*, 2

⁹⁴ Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 86

⁹⁵ McIntyre, *Monuments*, 20

⁹⁶ William Kidd, ‘Introduction’, in Kidd and Murdoch, *Memory and Memorials*, 1 – 9, 7

⁹⁷ King, *Memorials*, 230 – 36, 247–49

⁹⁸ J. R. Gillis, ‘Memory and Identity’, 5; King, *Memorials*, 86

and avoid open conflict. Despite the variety of ideas expressed, there was no disagreement that the intention was to convey pride in the war-dead, only about how to achieve this. Except for the rejection of Lorimer's first design, the Committee did not enter into public debates about the merit of ideas or designs; neither did they impose their opinions.

There was no overt opposition to the County Memorial, though some people felt that the money could have been better spent in alleviating hardship. 'Soldier' exhorted people to 'see to the living for whom they gave their lives'. 'One Interested' thought, 'the residue from entertainments of a nature so alien to the solemn purpose for which the memorial is intended' should instead be distributed to distressed dependents. 'Shetlander' proposed that the majority of subscriptions should go to widows and orphans, claiming, 'Every county and every town in the British Empire is making provision', except Shetland. In 1921, Councillor Laing suggested that building the memorial could ease unemployment, 'while so many ex-servicemen were walking around starving'.⁹⁹

In the context of commemoration, the language of sacrifice and heroism was employed across the country. This has been termed 'high diction' and attributed to 'the inability of the bereaved to comprehend a more immediate military or political justification for their loss'.¹⁰⁰ It seemed that victory was not reason enough; servicemen are described as going enthusiastically or at least willingly to war, fighting and dying bravely, their deaths a sacrifice in the cause of freedom and honour. On monuments, few words were used, but in rolls, the traditional and grandiose rhetoric was given full rein. Mostly published in the early 1920s, they show no sign of later re-thinking of the experience and achievement of the war. As Moriarty pointed out, memorials rarely challenged the 'official' interpretation of the war.¹⁰¹ Standard phrases abounded. The dead were nearly always termed 'the Fallen' – a phrase with connotations of a 'clean death' from a bullet rather than the realities of shells, mud, gas, disease and drowning. Often the words duplicated those

⁹⁹ *SN*, 27 Mar. 1919, 4; *ST*, 3 Apr. 1920, 5; *SN*, 11 Mar. 1920, 5; 27 Oct. 1921, 10

¹⁰⁰ Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 1 – 2; Fussell, *Great War and Modern Memory*, 21 – 22; Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London, 1990), 109 – 11; McIntyre, *Monuments*, 112 – 14; Gregory, *Silence of Memory*, 34 – 41; Bushaway, 'Name upon Name', 149

¹⁰¹ Moriarty, 'Private Grief', 126

on, the ‘dead man’s penny,’ the national memorial plaques, and scrolls sent in the name of the King to each bereaved family.¹⁰² Cannadine commented that before the war, ‘Death on the battlefield was seen as something noble, heroic, splendid, romantic – *and unlikely*’; after the war the same ideas applied, only death had become very common indeed.¹⁰³



Figure 9.13 'Dead man's Penny'

The County Memorial fund-raising appeal expressed similar ideas:

the gallant deeds of those heroic sons of the ‘Old Rock’ who made the supreme sacrifice in defence of the rights and liberties of a free nation and against the domination of a country imbued with the lust of worldpower.¹⁰⁴

The newspapers contained phrases such as ‘justice of the cause’ and matchless valour’, and religious references: ‘Did they not lay down their young lives to do the work of the Almighty in humbling the foulest monster in human form that ever polluted this earth?’¹⁰⁵ The notion that they saved their homeland and people from a terrible fate gave purpose to the deaths of young men who might have had few opportunities for achievement in life.¹⁰⁶ Grief was therefore combined with gratitude and with pride. The idea that no memorial would be good enough was expressed several times, one writer suggesting that there was therefore ‘no need to be too

¹⁰² Bushaway, ‘Name upon Name’, 138

¹⁰³ David Cannadine, ‘War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain’, in J. Whalley, (ed.), *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (London, 1981), 187 – 242, 196

¹⁰⁴ *SN*, 4 Mar 1920, 4

¹⁰⁵ *SN*, 25 May 1921, 8

¹⁰⁶ King, *Memorials*, 224 – 25

elaborate'.¹⁰⁷ Williamson, however, wanted 'something big, not too puny and humble, something the Shetlanders would go far out of their way to see'.¹⁰⁸

The primary purpose of memorials was recording and commemoration, a deliberate construction of remembrance.¹⁰⁹ Manson's aim was 'to treat a great subject in a manner worthy of it, and fashion a unique and intimate memorial of the hero sons of Shetland'.¹¹⁰ Monuments may have been conceived as replacements for gravestones for the bodies that were not brought home, though many Shetland men had been lost at sea or died abroad in the past. Perhaps the difference was that the war-dead had not died by accident; they had taken the risk and had been intentionally killed; their deaths for the sake of others should be publicly acknowledged. King wrote that building a memorial was a 'sign that the appropriate actions had been performed, and the dead properly appreciated, by the inhabitants of a particular place'.¹¹¹

Presumably, the bereaved did not require memorials; they surely would not forget. Nevertheless, their putative wish to see their loved ones' names inscribed was often mentioned. In the 'obsession with lists and rolls', Bushaway saw the 'concern of the bereaved to see proper recognition accorded to the individuality of their loss'.¹¹² Although equally formulaic, rolls allowed more individuality and detail than inscriptions on war memorials. They offered more than a gravestone, which was commonplace; not many people were commemorated in print. Both rolls and monuments were, however, compromises between a public and a private memorial and expressed only what people wanted to be seen.¹¹³ There remained what Gregory called a 'hidden transcript' – 'a memory preserved at a familial and personal level'.¹¹⁴

As well as commemoration, rolls sometimes expressly aimed at offering consolation, though Manson made no such claims. Winter suggested that, in building monumental memorials, people 'tried to find ways to comprehend and then to transcend the catastrophes of war'. Robb suggested, 'The very act of cataloguing the

¹⁰⁷ *ST*, 21 Sep. 1918, 5; 28, Sep. 1918, 5; 14 Aug. 1920, 5

¹⁰⁸ *SN*, 13 Mar. 1919, 8; page 270 – 71

¹⁰⁹ Bushaway, 'Name upon Name', 151

¹¹⁰ Manson, *Roll of Honour*, vii

¹¹¹ King, *Memorials*, 25

¹¹² Bushaway, 'Name upon Name', 138

¹¹³ King, *Memorials*, 225

¹¹⁴ Gregory, *Silence of Memory*, 6

dead may have helped'.¹¹⁵ Generally, the bereaved were encouraged to be proud of the character and achievements of the dead, their selflessness, courage, comradeship and, paradoxically for those who had died fighting, their love of peace.¹¹⁶ There was no mention of social pressure, conscription or lack of choice. As already discussed, the dominant theme was sacrifice; the sacrifice of the dead had become a sacrifice by the bereaved; losing a loved one 'a moral achievement in itself'.¹¹⁷

The axiom that women were particularly affected by bereavement was continued in commemoration.¹¹⁸ The figure of a woman on Williamson's model was described as 'one of those anxious souls who learned to watch and to wait.'¹¹⁹ Most rolls were compiled by men and there were no women on the Memorial Committee, though their fund-raising skills were used. Few of the letters to the newspapers seemed to have been written by a woman. Speaking for women, 'An Interested Parent', in his tirades against the 'piratical, marauding, murderous, savage Viking', asked rhetorically, 'Are their mothers, wives and sisters to have nothing better to look at than the stern visage of a piratical viking? an emblem of peace would now and afterwards much more suit our women folks'. He demanded 'something more appropriate to the feelings of the Shetland mothers. Their peculiar affection for their sons is well known to all natives, and not at all to any outsider'. A Committee member, the Rev. Fotheringham wrote of the 'heroic patience of its [Shetland's] womanhood'.¹²⁰

Jessie Saxby, who, though not typical of Shetland women, liked to speak for them, wrote at length about memorials, claiming, 'The wish of our folk is have local memorials rather than one placed in Lerwick', though they might subscribe to both. The purpose was 'to keep before the minds of the generations to come after us that self-sacrifice in a holy cause is one of the first of duties.' Children would be 'taught to follow the example of men who gave their *all* for Honour and Liberty' and reminded by seeing memorials. 'Schools and hospitals and the like do not appeal to

¹¹⁵ Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 1; Robb, *British Culture*, 217

¹¹⁶ King, *Memorials*, 174; Gregory, *Silence of Memory*, 34 – 41; J. R. Gillis, 'Memory and Identity: the History of a Relationship', in Gillis, *Commemorations*, 3 – 24, 12

¹¹⁷ Gregory, *Silence of Memory*, 35; King, *Memorials*, 190

¹¹⁸ Gregory, *Silence of Memory*, 10, 33 – 34, 41

¹¹⁹ *ST*, 1 Mar. 1919

¹²⁰ *SN*, 26 May 1921, 8; 18 Aug. 1921, 5; 20 Mar. 1919, 5

the Imagination and the feelings which we like to keep alive'. Rather than inappropriately elaborate and costly memorials, she preferred cairns, which were characteristically 'Shetland' and used by 'Keltic and Scandinavian people', a cross or a standing stone and a tablet in churches, schools and churchyards. She thought that the names of those who 'came from many localities, and are as much OUR Heroes as those who went straight from the isles' should be included; also that 'Death is not always the worst', and attention should be paid to survivors maimed in mind or body.¹²¹ This letter evoked several prevalent notions about the appropriate form of memorials and their purposes.

One was that, by commemorating the dead, memorials would instruct the living, particularly the young, and improve their behaviour. It was claimed a memorial 'would do more to engender the spirit of patriotism, courage, and determination in the breasts of Shetland's rising manhood than anything else I can imagine'.¹²² The idea that the selflessness of the dead, which had preserved freedom and civilisation, obliged the living to be worthy of the sacrifice, provided 'a spiritually constructive side to war'. The war was even justified 'as a purgative blood-sacrifice which would cleanse the world not only of political, but also of social and moral evil', an idea which was verging on blasphemy.¹²³ In 1918, the *Shetland News* quoted Lord Leverhulme: 'We honouring ourselves are not raising a memorial to the dead – they are remembered, we are in showing ourselves worthy of the brave men who have fought for us'.¹²⁴ One suggestion was brass plaques in schools:

'Such a memorial would live and be ever-present with the people reminding them of a time of national peril and threatened disaster, when the sons of Thule fared forth to war, and did deeds of valour in the cause of Truth and Righteousness'.¹²⁵

'A Parent' thought that present and future generations should show proper gratitude:

to inspire them with higher ideals, nobler thoughts, and enable them to fulfil more faithfully their duty to God and man, so that they may be worthy of the

¹²¹ *ST*, 5 Apr. 1919, 5

¹²² *SN*, 10 Oct. 1918, 5

¹²³ Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 95; King, *Memorials*, 183, 194, 188 – 190, 130

¹²⁴ *SN*, 12 Sep. 1918, 4

¹²⁵ *ST*, 5 Oct. 1918, 5

kinship to those whose lives have been offered as a living sacrifice, that they who are at home may enjoy security.¹²⁶

‘Viking’ who wrote frequently about the County Memorial, stated that, as well as commemoration, the aim was:

to arrest the attraction of the living as well, so that deeds bravely done shall speak to the living and have the right effect on the generation who come after. We wish not only to commemorate the dead, but also to interpret their sacrifice.

He did not explain what he meant by ‘the right effect’. It might have been one of two common, but almost conflicting, views: to prevent war happening again or to ensure that in a future war Shetland’s young men would participate bravely and enthusiastically. It was also thought particularly important that schoolchildren would attend the unveiling ceremony.¹²⁷

Another idea – that ‘the best had been killed’ – has already been discussed. This could be demeaning to those who had survived.¹²⁸ Unlike most monuments, many rolls gave an honoured place to those who fought and survived. Manson though the story of servicemen:

can never be told; that fearful story of discomforts, danger and death, of the unspeakable horrors of modern warfare, and, above all, of steadfastness, endurance and transcendent courage, the soldiers and sailors keep hidden in their hearts.¹²⁹

Some writers have stated that veterans were sidelined in commemorative practices, but in Shetland, they were represented on the Committee, their views on the memorial were particularly sought and they were given pride of place at the unveiling ceremony.¹³⁰ Some ex-servicemen and others took issue with the language of glory and the concentration on the dead. ‘Nemo’ wrote, ‘We have won the war but at what cost?’ ‘Truly we have little cause to be anything but in a humble frame of mind’. ‘Qui Vivra Verra’ complained that there was so little interest in returning soldier. ‘Observer’ stated that the memorials were debt, the deaths and maiming of

¹²⁶ *ST*, 19 Oct. 1918, 5

¹²⁷ *SN*, 5 Feb. 1920, 4; 29 Nov. 1923, 5

¹²⁸ Page 210; King, *Memorials*, 190; Meyer, *Men of War*, 83

¹²⁹ Manson, *Roll of Honour*, 269

¹³⁰ Gregory, *Silence of Memory*, 4, 10, 41, 51 – 55; Gillis, ‘Memory and Identity’, 12; Bushaway, ‘Name upon Name’, 155; K. S. Inglis, ‘The Homecoming: the War Memorial Movement in Cambridge, England’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27, 4 (1992), 583 – 605, 586 stated that survivors were often included in memorials, but they were not in the Shetland monuments.

young men and broken-hearted mothers; so little had been gained compared to the losses.¹³¹ Veterans were among the bereaved but their experiences set them apart from civilians. Their experiences had affected them in different ways: some had been numbed by their experiences; others had difficulty in accepting the reality of death. They had to cope with the paradox of wishing to turn their backs on the war while hoping that their efforts would not be forgotten. There were also problems with disabilities, pensions and unemployment.¹³² Greig was incensed by how people were happy to return to 'normal' life and, although glorifying death in action, were indifferent to the plight of ex-servicemen.¹³³

While some writers, such as Winter, concentrated on bereavement and grief, others, such as Mosse, saw commemoration as the affirmation of political ideas about wars and nationality.¹³⁴ Rolls of honour and the correspondence about the War Memorial have much to say about the attitudes to the war. Although many rolls confirmed that people blamed the Germans and Manson strongly agreed, he wrote nothing about this in his roll. Animosity towards Germany was diminishing, at least in some quarters; in 1922, the *Shetland Times* said that Germany 'may be a bad neighbour, but she's not a bad customer'; and in 1923, 'The majority of the German population are respectable citizens, peaceloving and tired of war'.¹³⁵

In rolls generally, there is not a lot of discussion of victory, the depiction of which has been described as 'a delicate matter'.¹³⁶ Victory was often portrayed as the triumph of peace over violence – which ignored the real experience. In discussions about the County Memorial, 'Much Interested' objected to a proposed figure of Victory, 'for there are only too many war memories to forget', and 'Lerwegian' to 'the glorification of war' as people had suffered too much.¹³⁷ In her work on Orkney, Tarlow claimed that the mood of the time was neither glorious nor

¹³¹ *SN*, 1 May 1919, 8; 3 Apr. 1919, 8; *ST*, 22 Oct. 1921, 4

¹³² Cannadine, 'War and Death', 187 – 242, 202 – 12, 217; DeGroot, *Blighty*, 275 – 81, 70; Gregory, *Silence of Memory*, 41; Meyer, *Men of War*, 97

¹³³ Greig, *Doing His Bit*, 5, 67, 71

¹³⁴ Winter, *Sites of Memory*; George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford, 1990); Gregory, *Silence of Memory*, 2 – 3

¹³⁵ *ST*, 2 Sep. 1922, 4; 23 Sep. 1922, 8

¹³⁶ King, *Memorials*, 178 – 79; Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 94

¹³⁷ *SN*, 8 May 1919, 4; 8 Sep. 1921, 4

nationalistic.¹³⁸ That is too simple; rolls of honour expressed the glory of war as well as thankfulness at victory, but also enormous grief at the cost in lives.

King suggested that memorial building demonstrated 'a nationwide uniformity of aims and attitudes and a desire to conform to national stereotypes'.¹³⁹ Gregory emphasised the establishment of post-war identity, suggesting that remembrance was 'a national obligation', but conforming to pre-existing cultural traits. To justify the war it was necessary to extol the values being defended; British society, however unrealistically, 'stood for decency, order, peace, fairness and social harmony'.¹⁴⁰ Writers have stressed the role of remembrance in patriotic/national feeling that would 'mask the reality of war, transfigure the unacceptable, and not only console the bereaved, but also and justify the nation', although Bushaway described the language of sacrifice as 'supranational and spiritual rather than conventionally patriotic'.¹⁴¹ Rolls of honour, however, expressed a total solidarity with Britain and the Empire in fighting for British values and defence of the homeland, and in Shetland, loyalty to King, Country and Empire was as strong as anywhere.

Memorials were, nevertheless, intensely local productions, a celebration of the district's contribution to the war. Bell commented: 'Without direction from central government each community, and certainly every parish, felt the need to erect a war memorial'.¹⁴² Gillis explained the connection between memory and identity:

The notion of identity depends on the idea of memory and vice versa. The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering, and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity.

In those terms, memorials were a deliberate effort to determine what would be remembered at a community level. This public compilation of private memories can be seen as a reflection of the community's efforts in enlistment and during the war,

¹³⁸ Sarah Tarlow, 'An Archaeology of Remembering: Death, Bereavement and the First World War', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 7, 1, 1997, 105 – 21; 115 – 16; also Angus Calder, 'The Scottish National War Memorial', in Kidd and Murdoch, *Memory and Memorials*, 61 – 67, 61; Winter, *Sites of Memory*, e.g., 1 – 5, 94

¹³⁹ King, *Memorials*, 20

¹⁴⁰ Gregory, *Silence of Memory*, 138, 5

¹⁴¹ Tarlow, 'Archaeology of Remembering', 114; Bushaway, 'Name upon Name', 140

¹⁴² Bell, *Monuments*, 166

when bonds were strengthened by a common interest in the fate of servicemen.¹⁴³ Even the population of a sizeable city felt bound together ‘in a common sympathy and a common conscience’.¹⁴⁴

Shetland’s memorials were expressions of communal acknowledgement of the number of Shetlanders who had served and been killed. Building a memorial was a matter of civic pride – perhaps the reason for employing Scotland’s top architect – and it was typical that the local authorities took charge.¹⁴⁵ The debates about the criteria for inclusion of the names and the use of a local or external architect and the many proposals to use local stone all show a desire to assert a local identity. As well as the reviled Viking, some of the designs included relevant symbols: one suggestion included a frieze with figures:

of animals, a pony, a seal and a maa; of fishes, a whale, a shark, and a herring; of vessels, a drifter hauling her nets, a sixern under sail, and a boat with a man in the bow aiming a harpoon at a whale; of other objects a spinning wheel and a tushkar.¹⁴⁶

Views were also expressed that the Memorial should be visible to visitors: one writer wanted it to be higher than the Town Hall, ‘so as to dominate every building in the town ... The Monument, or Memorial, should be the first thing seen in approaching the town from whatever quarter’. ‘Old Rock’ hoped it should stand for all time, ‘for all Shetlanders and all who come to Shetland to see and understand’. Only the Rev. MacIntyre expressed a different view: he thought the Memorial was ‘not for vulgar sight’ but for the bereaved and needed peace and quiet.¹⁴⁷

More unusual perhaps were the tensions between town and country that surfaced in Shetland. The Committee tried hard to involve people from all districts, to make the Memorial represent the entire county, not entirely successfully. Lerwick did not have a specific town memorial and many people from rural areas saw it as mainly a town project, not accessible enough for them. In this, it is similar on a local scale to

¹⁴³ Gillis, ‘Memory and Identity’, 3, 5; Bushaway ‘Name upon Name’, 14

¹⁴⁴ Foreword to *Roll of Honour: a Record of Those Belonging to Aberdeen and District who Gave Their Lives for Their Country in the Great War, 1914 – 1919* (Aberdeen, 1926)

¹⁴⁵ King, *Memorials*, 20, Bell, *Monuments*, 184 – 85

¹⁴⁶ SN, 20 Mar. 1919, 5 Maa = seagull, tushkar = an implement for cutting peat

¹⁴⁷ SN, 8 May 1919, 4; 26 Sep. 1918, 5; 12 Apr. 1923, 5

what happened nationally in the building of the Scottish National War Memorial.¹⁴⁸ It could be perceived as a manifestation of the pre-war breach between town and country, which the war may have magnified.¹⁴⁹ Winter commented that, when it came to memorials, ‘Community ... had a very local character’; in post-war Shetland, perhaps the concept of the county was not local enough.¹⁵⁰

One of the ways memorials built a community memory was through the listing of names; in King’s view, ‘The names of the dead were invested with a transcendental importance’.¹⁵¹ As Laqueur observed, the state ‘had already poured enormous human, financial, administrative, artistic and diplomatic resources into preserving and remembering the names of individual common soldiers.’¹⁵² Sherman, discussing naming in France, thought, ‘Names as the irreducible synecdoche for monuments stake a community’s claim to a place in history, representing its loss as its most essential link to the nation’, and gave a historical role to memory ‘in its constructed “collective” form’.¹⁵³ ‘Their Name Liveth’ was a very common inscription in memorials, and was used by ‘Ian Hay’ for his guide to the National Memorial. He wrote, ‘Scottish surnames are so few in number and so strongly localized that any Scot can usually tell where another Scot hails from immediately upon hearing his name’.¹⁵⁴ This was an over-simplification given the urbanisation of Scotland; nevertheless, outwith the cities there were still strong local affiliations with surnames. The practice of ‘naming the dead’, which has been seen as an essential part of the commemoration process, ran counter to the usual custom in Shetland of deliberately not naming the dead, but substituting euphemisms. This aspect does not seem to have been discussed, and names were of course inscribed on gravestones as well as war-memorials.

¹⁴⁸ Jenny MacLeod, ‘Memorials and Location: Local versus National Identity and the Scottish National War Memorial’, *Scottish Historical Review*, LXXXIX, 1, 227, 2010, 73–95

¹⁴⁹ Smith, *Making of Modern Shetland*, 56

¹⁵⁰ Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 6

¹⁵¹ King, *Memorials*, 184; practically the same phrase: ‘invested with an almost transcendent importance’ in Robb, *British Culture*, 217

¹⁵² T. Laqueur, ‘Memory and Naming’, in Gillis, *Commemorations*, 150 – 167, 155

¹⁵³ Daniel J. Sherman, ‘Art, Commerce and the Production of Memory in France after World War I’, in Gillis, *Commemorations*, 186 – 211, 206 – 07

¹⁵⁴ Ian Hay, *Their Name Liveth: the Book of the Scottish National War Memorial* (London, 1931), 5

Besides being named, the dead were numbered. Nearly every roll of honour, including Shetland's, quoted numbers of servicemen, dead and survivors. All the reviews and letters about the roll published in the *Shetland News* mentioned the numbers of dead, which was a matter of local pride, as it had been throughout the war. This obsession with numbers was also present at a national level in the Scottish National War Memorial. Scotland claimed to have suffered the biggest losses of any Western European participant in the war, though what McFarland called 'the process of acquisition' was riddled with inconsistencies and duplications.¹⁵⁵ 'Ian Hay' wrote, 'Big England's mourning is local; little Scotland's is national'.¹⁵⁶ The local rolls show how wrong that sweeping assumption was. Scotland commemorated locally in addition to, not instead of, as a nation.

Another important way of building community memory was through linking to past traditions, which had been used in local recruitment drives. Manson's volume contained several references to Shetland's heroic Norse past. He wished to show that 'the people of the Shetland Islands who lived through the tragic years 1914 – 1919 proved themselves worthy descendants of the brave, unvanquished Norsemen.'¹⁵⁷ The Vikings had been credited not only with bravery, fighting skill and seamanship but also with love of freedom. The appeal to the memory of the Norsemen was unusual – perhaps unique – as only the Northern Isles had such a recent history of Scandinavian settlement and rule. Nevertheless, when it came to the Memorial, this Norse imagery was rejected in favour of solidarity with Britain.

Besides the reference to Shetland's Norse past, Manson also referred to the 'Old Rock'; this was particularly apposite when so many of the servicemen were in the dominion forces. Saxby had also made a point of including them. The boundaries of Shetland identity were elastic when it came to inclusion in memorials.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ McFarland, 'Great War', 563 – 63; Calder, 'The Scottish National War Memorial', 63

¹⁵⁶ Hay, *Their Name Liveth*, 6

¹⁵⁷ Manson, *Roll of Honour* 278

¹⁵⁸ For a similar 'imagined community' in the Scottish National War Memorial see Jenny Macleod, "'By Scottish Hands, with Scottish Money, on Scottish Soil': Building the Scottish National War Memorial', *Journal of British Studies*, 49 (2010), 73 – 96, 83

Tarlow has attributed the appeal to tradition and history in memorial monuments as attempting to transcend the day-to-day and help the bereaved. She also stressed that community effort subsumed individual differences in the unification of military status, service and death.¹⁵⁹ Winter stated, 'It is not an exaggeration to suggest that every family was in mourning' for relatives, friends and lovers, neighbours, work colleagues and service comrades. He also considered that 'however sacred the task of commemoration, it still touched all the chords of local loyalties, favouritism, apathy, and indifference' concealed in the public record.¹⁶⁰ As always, it is difficult to judge how representative the views expressed in the newspapers were, and sometimes, such as in the 'utility' debate, opinions differed widely. Though the fundamental ideas may have been shared, some of the very rhetorical language was not at all likely to be used by most people. Perhaps the majority were satisfied with a local memorial and not enthusiastic about one in Lerwick for the county. For people in Lerwick it was a different matter and the level of subscriptions bears this out, though social pressure might also have played a part. A sizable crowd turned out for the unveiling and it became the focus of Armistice Day commemoration. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing how many visited the memorial in the years to come.

It is interesting that, in his speech at the dedication service, Robertson, who as Committee chairman had dealt with all the controversies, called on the natural elements of Shetland's environment as the most appropriate media to commemorate the dead, rather than the work of man: 'Today we proudly display the names of our glorious dead. Our wild northern winds shall chant requiem. The surge of the mighty ocean shall ceaselessly sob out their dirge'.¹⁶¹

Conclusion

Besides the information about servicemen, memorials can be useful sources for the social history of the time, including for attitudes to military service, bravery, death and mourning; to class distinctions; to children, education, and gender roles; to

¹⁵⁹ Tarlow, 'Archaeology of Remembering'; also Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 95 – 96

¹⁶⁰ Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 2, 30; 90; also Cannadine, 'War and Death', 197, 213

¹⁶¹ *ST*, 12 Jan. 1924, 4

loyalty to the Empire and identification with the community.¹⁶² Calder's statement that 'all monuments commemorate not only past events but the moments of their own creation' is equally true of the rolls of honour.¹⁶³ These two different kinds of memorial, produced in Shetland in the same period of post-war shock at the number of war-dead, illustrate the paradoxical combination of powerful local pride with conformity to national practice and allegiance to Britain and the Empire.

¹⁶² McIntyre, *Memorials*, 10

¹⁶³ Calder, 'The Scottish National War Memorial', 61

CHAPTER 10 CONCLUSION

In the context of the Great War, Winter wrote that cultural history ‘is a messy subject, full of unevenness and inconsistencies’; this is true of many aspects of this study.¹ Even in such a small place as Shetland, the war was a period of complexity and contradiction, and in some circumstances, it has proved difficult to form a clear picture from available sources and to provide unequivocal answers to some questions. In particular, attitudes towards the events have had to be reconstructed from limited evidence; at best, it has been possible to learn what some people expressed in words and, since newspapers were a major source, what most people were told. Nevertheless, the war affected the lives of everyone who lived through it albeit in different ways, as the results of this thesis show.

Three connecting themes have been explored. First, the introduction explained how important it is to avoid myopia in a local history, and so the Shetland experience has been related to what numerous books and articles have portrayed as the general experience across the UK. Secondly, the ways in which Shetland’s geographical location affected both the events of the war and attitudes to it have been demonstrated. The third theme was that of local community identity: how it was expressed during the war, how it was affected by the war and how it influenced perceptions of the war in Shetland.

Often, unsurprisingly in the context of such a massive and pervasive event, the Shetland experience was not unusual; a good example of this is the difficulties and disagreements caused by the introduction of conscription; another was the wave of memorial-building in the years immediately after the war. In these cases, local detail has been provided which enhances understanding of how such national (even international) matters played out at a local level.

One of the most interesting common aspects is the language in which the experience of the war was framed in Shetland as across the UK, epic and emotive, concerned with concepts of heroism and sacrifice. Rather than being the result of the war

¹ Jay Winter, ‘Popular Culture in Wartime Britain’, in Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites, (eds), *European Culture in the Great War: the Arts, Entertainment and Propaganda 1914 – 1918* (Cambridge, 1999), 330 – 348, 343

experience or bereavement, this was adopted immediately on the outbreak of war and, it has been shown, continued throughout the war and beyond.² Chapter 3, despite showing that Shetlanders were aware of pre-war international tensions and defence plans, concluded that it was difficult to see Shetland as a militaristic society, but it is clear that this orthodox and traditional way of describing war must have been ingrained in the consciousness, particularly of the people who wrote the newspapers and to the newspapers. That this was probably the result of formal education, as well as reading newspapers and fiction, was borne out by Greig's contention that schoolbooks 'with their savage glorying in the bloodshed of the past' should be scrapped.³ The stereotypical language was particularly prevalent in the context of death and commemoration, as illustrated in the discussions about, and inscriptions on, war memorials. Conversely, Shetland writing about the war included the starkly modern verse of Jack Peterson.⁴

There were areas where the Shetland experience was more unusual, possibly even unique. The prime example was the suspicions of potential disloyalty; despite the widespread fear of spies and invasion described in chapters 3 and 7, the people of no other area, with the exception of the very different case of Ireland, were distrusted in this way.

Topics raised in the thesis have engaged with a number of historiographical discourses where historians have presented differing views. Chapter 2, for example, set pre-war Shetland in the context of descriptions of Edwardian Britain as a 'Golden Age' or an 'age of conflict'. While generally people experienced a better standard of living than their forebears and avoided the extremes of urban poverty and deprivation, there were still problems related to the lack of resources. There were no signs of open conflict, but it was still an unequal society and there were tensions between various sections of the community over issues as diverse as the availability of land and the sale of alcohol. Neither description, therefore, accurately fitted the circumstances.

² E.g., pages; 200, 207 – 10, 259, 283 – 85. For the use of 'sacrifice' before the war, see Meyer, *Men of War*, 80.

³ Greig, *Doing His Bit*, 71,10

⁴ Pages 132 – 33

Response to the outbreak of war was another example where the Shetland experience has been compared to circumstances on which historians have offered conflicting opinions. Reactions were varied; Shetlanders, while not displaying the enthusiasm claimed by some writers, responded with a mixture of excitement and apprehension, though perhaps not surprise and certainly not any pro-German treason.⁵ The motives for volunteering were another case; here it was demonstrated that economic factors influenced volunteering as well as more altruistic motives.⁶ Another related to the tribunals that heard appeals against conscription; they were shown to be were difficult for members as well as applicants.⁷ The contrasting claims of widespread change, by Marwick and others, or of dominant conservatism and continuity, by DeGroot, were discussed in chapter 8. In these situations, the evidence from Shetland showed how varied the experience of war was, even in a small population.

Generalisations have therefore been tested. Chapter 4 showed how volunteering and the deployment of servicemen did not follow the pattern most common across the UK, that is predominantly into the army. More Shetlanders served and more died at sea than on land, though after conscription, as entrants to army increased, so did casualties.⁸ Civilians shared many of the economic and social effects and attitudes to the enemy, casualties and disruption as others across the UK, but also some which were unusual, such as the presence of the Navy.⁹ Post-war, the adaptation to peace and the economic conditions were somewhat different from the conditions generally described.¹⁰ Commemoration conformed to national practices but involved debates and issues of purely local significance.¹¹ Overall, therefore, the Shetland experience was a mixed picture of consistency with national experience and challenge to descriptions that have often been based on mainly urban circumstances.

Discussion on the theme of geographical location showed how fundamental it was to life in Shetland. It had shaped Shetland society for centuries, limiting how people

⁵ Pages 104 – 08

⁶ Pages 113 – 18

⁷ Pages 123 – 25

⁸ Pages 111 – 21, 136 – 39; Appendix I

⁹ Pages 164 – 67, 209 – 11

¹⁰ Pages 234 – 51

¹¹ Chapter 9

made their living from land and sea, and influencing the local culture. Shetland's position between Scandinavia and Scotland led to feelings of distinctiveness, though before the war, it was becoming more integrated into Britain and especially the Empire.¹² Nevertheless, it was perceived as remote and outlandish by outsiders, including the Government. Its location also aroused interest from both British and German navies and provided first-hand acquaintance with the tensions between the countries. It made it the focus of invasion scares and distrust.¹³

The influence of geographical location carried forward to the unusual pattern of volunteering into the local forces and to so many men being in the Merchant Navy, who consequently did not enlist. It was therefore a major determinant of the casualty rates.¹⁴ Geographical location also led to Shetland being used by the Royal Navy; unfortunately, due to censorship and pruning of records, it proved difficult to find detailed evidence of how their operations affected local people. The activities were, however, varied and involved different phases of naval warfare. Even after the war, naval operations continued for most of 1919.¹⁵

Locational factors contributed to the fact that Shetland's main trading produce was fish, knitwear and stock, and so to how the economy fared during the war. Because of the proximity to German sea-routes, fishing was disrupted by both the Admiralty and danger of attack, but benefitted from the expanded markets and increased prices. Agriculture and knitwear also benefitted, and there was high demand for labour. The other main source of income, the Merchant Navy, a dangerous occupation at the best of times, became much more so, but there was high demand for the depleted shipping and manpower and increased income.¹⁶ In other ways, Shetland civilians were also affected by location, as communications were disrupted and the Admiralty imposed defensive measures such as censorship and travel restrictions.¹⁷

The men who visited Shetland in the Navy experienced some of the worst conditions of Shetland: the weather, the remoteness, the lack of entertainment, as well the

¹² Pages 29 – 38

¹³ Pages 84 – 88, 94 – 104

¹⁴ Pages 111 – 22

¹⁵ Pages 228 – 31

¹⁶ Pages 137, 191

¹⁷ Pages 164 – 65, 190, 211 – 13

discomforts of being at sea, the lack of respite and the danger of mines and submarines. They perceived Shetland as bleak and desolate, though they were generally well received by local people.¹⁸ Shetland servicemen also experienced special difficulties in returning for leave, as well, no doubt, as problems with keeping in touch through the erratic postal service.¹⁹

In her discussion of Shetland's 'peripherality', Black questioned whether a traditional economic base, such as Shetland's, necessarily led to an insular and static society, and decided that core-periphery theory did not adequately explain the complexity of experience. The Great War, the first of the 'external shocks' of the twentieth century, she concluded, resulted in minimal social change and merely perpetuated existing social relationships.²⁰ It has been shown here that for a short time, Shetland received 'official' attention as having important implications for the defence of the state: a focus for enemy interest, a potential invasion site and the base for naval operations, showing that perceptions of peripherality can be contextual. Even the Navy, however, could be vague about Shetland's location. The officers of the local WRNS wryly commented:

The War had doubtless been instrumental in disseminating a better knowledge of these comparatively little-known but extremely interesting Islands, and the issue of orders from London for a clergyman to take matins in the Orkneys and evensong in the Shetlands – a distance of 100 miles by sea – is a mistake not likely to be repeated in the future.²¹

Nevertheless, the war did not change the perception that Shetland was remote and behind the times. When it ceased to have value as a naval base, the Government, facing social unrest and huge debts, had more to worry about than small isolated communities. Shetland reverted to its former status, lacking the capital required to modernise its traditional industries and sustain its population, far less achieve the more innovative ideas of its entrepreneurs.²²

¹⁸ Pages 162 – 64

¹⁹ Pages 134 – 35

²⁰ Black, 'External Shocks', 108 – 09

²¹ IWM, W.R.N.S.

²² Pages 230 – 34

The introduction showed how the Shetland identity was strong before the war and was already asserted by the local people. They perceived themselves as having a distinct history and culture and as being a community; they were Shetlanders and that had meaning for them. Grieves described ‘the richly-textured intensity of place-related identity or local worlds which framed geographical and social realities in early twentieth century Britain’, and so Shetlanders were not unusual in this.²³ The war heightened this awareness as the local newspapers were continually reinforcing messages of unity and communal effort to wage the war.²⁴ Such means were crucial in mobilising the country: ‘The wartime system of representations rested on a process of acculturation, on the appropriation of the national narrative though local cultural codes’.²⁵ Although local priorities were not always the same as national, local imagery and connections were used to strengthen resolve.

Images of home were important. As well as it being natural for such thoughts to be significant for men serving abroad or at sea, the concepts were used in national propaganda. The idea that Britain was fighting for the defence of home and family was used to maintain motivation, both for servicemen and civilians.²⁶ For some Shetlanders, home was the ‘Old Rock’. Yarta Saxby wrote that ‘just as our Shetland lads say “Back again on the Auld Rock” so our English soldiers say “Back again in dear old blighty.” They both mean the same thing, namely, Home.’²⁷ Blighty, according to DeGroot, ‘was a place, an idea and a set of warm-hearted cozy emotions’; the ‘Old Rock’ might have fulfilled the same purpose.²⁸ The phrase was used frequently in relation to servicemen and commemoration; later Shetland’s actual ‘old rock’ was perceived as the most appropriate the material for war memorials (though in reality rarely used).²⁹

The belief that Shetland was making a disproportionate contribution to the war effort was continually repeated in the Shetland newspapers. They expressed pride about the number of men in uniform, who were ‘reflecting a fresh glory on the land of their

²³ Grieves, ‘Propinquity of Place’, 22

²⁴ E.g., pages 119, 122, 139, 200, 215

²⁵ Purseigle, ‘Beyond and Below the Nations’, 97 – 99

²⁶ E.g., page 108, 204

²⁷ Daughter of Jessie Saxby. *ST*, 13, Apr. 4 1918, 5

²⁸ DeGroot, *Blighty*, xiii

²⁹ E.g. pages 270 – 72

birth'.³⁰ Civilian activities, such as collecting contributions for charities, investing in war bonds and supporting the naval bases, were also framed as efforts by the community as much as by the individuals concerned.³¹ Another spur was the various government actions, which Shetlanders felt were inequitably, unfairly or inappropriately conceived and applied, such as the restrictions imposed by the Admiralty under DORA. The problems with travel, increasing food production and price control were perceived as the result of indifference or ignorance of local conditions and failure to recognise Shetland's contribution.³² Shetland's special requirements were asserted strongly by the local authorities during the war, and again afterwards, when trying to win government aid for development. When supporting a local candidate for Parliament in 1918, a local minister and councillor asserted that Shetland was often treated unfairly, 'although probably not deliberately'. It was likely to be overlooked or misunderstood because it was 'so far from the centre of things'. The policy required, therefore, was 'Shetland Über Alles'.³³

Shetland seemed to attract a reputation for being demanding. The *British Baker* declared, 'The Food Control Committee of that ilk is, I should imagine, one of the most difficult to deal with in the whole of the United Kingdom'.³⁴ At the death of the local MP, a local commentator recalled that *Punch* had remarked, 'If there were earthquakes going Mr. Wason would be sure to endeavour to get a share of them for Shetland'.³⁵ On the other hand, the view had been expressed in Shetland that he had not pursued his constituency's needs strenuously enough, and that Shetlanders failed to obtain benefits as they were not sufficiently assertive.³⁶ Places can be ascribed multiple identities and it seemed that Shetlanders sometimes enjoyed and exploited and sometimes deplored their situation, which was simultaneously 'remote' and 'special'.³⁷

³⁰ *ST*, 18 Dec. 1915, 4

³¹ Pages 215 – 16, 199, 220

³² Pages 175 – 76, 183 – 84; 190 – 95, 213 – 14, 231 – 36

³³ *SN*, 31 Oct. 1918, 4

³⁴ *SN*, 16 Jan 1919, 5

³⁵ *ST*, 30 Apr. 1921, 4

³⁶ *SN*, 31 Oct. 1918, 4

³⁷ Holloway and Hubbard, *People and Places*

No situation is more likely than war to highlight the ‘us and them’ demarcations of nationality, and, in conjunction with the claims of local achievement, the newspapers and local authorities espoused total allegiance to the British cause. The issue of the imputed disloyalty, however, surfaced from time to time and gave rise to indignation.³⁸ It seemed to strengthen the determination to show that Shetlanders were committed and contributing disproportionately to the war effort. Afterwards, the *Shetland Times* claimed, ‘Shetland has had to pay so great a price for the blessings of peace restored to a war-torn world’.³⁹

Despite the need for national unity, it was not unusual for local identity to be asserted during the war; reactions often stemmed from pre-existing social organization and attitudes.⁴⁰ This was particularly evident in relation to recruitment, which is one context where it has been frequently studied and discussed.⁴¹ The second main area where such local examples have been incorporated into the mainstream historiography of the war is commemoration, which occurred simultaneously at various levels: individual, local and national, and featured both local and national symbolism.⁴² There was, of course, a connection between enthusiasm for volunteering and the resulting casualties. In commemoration, Shetland conformed to national themes and practices, while building local memorials, and, in this, was consistent with many other areas.

For Shetlanders, the war was a period of intensified interaction with the outside world, both at home, with a greater variety of shipping, and away: Shetlanders served in all the theatres of war. The new experiences could well have altered how Shetlanders perceived themselves, especially those who fought in Scottish regiments.⁴³ This is a difficult thing to judge over a short timescale. It also seems likely that the war would strengthen bonds to the Empire, as there was so much propaganda to that effect. The *Shetland Times* thought so, claiming, ‘Men are compelled to “think imperially” today, for no other kind of thought seems

³⁸ Pages 205 – 07, 119, 246

³⁹ *ST*, 31 Jul. 1920, 5

⁴⁰ Purseigle, ‘Beyond and Below the Nations’, 96

⁴¹ Page 112

⁴² Pages 282 – 94

⁴³ Page 136

possible.⁴⁴ The way that the newspapers referred to Shetlanders in the Dominion services and the inclusion of them in war memorials showed how the boundaries of Shetland – in terms of what constituted a Shetlander – were perceived flexibly, sometimes controversially.⁴⁵ Some Shetlanders were willing to ascribe local identity to people who had left the islands or even had a more tenuous family connection. Again, the study of other Scottish Rolls of Honour and the Scottish National War Memorial showed that this was not unique to Shetland.

The most overt debate about Shetland identity was the dispute over the proposed Viking imagery on the County War Memorial, but this was very specific to this connection.⁴⁶ In any event, as was discussed in chapter 1, attitudes towards the Norse heritage were not as widespread and deep-rooted as sometimes suggested, and sometimes not entirely serious. After some discussion about the propriety of such celebrations in the aftermath of the war, Up-Helly-Aa was resumed with renewed enthusiasm and as many Norse trappings as before. In general, however, interest in the Vikings had waned during the war, and there was perhaps less romantic rhetoric about being ‘sons of Vikings’.⁴⁷ A poem in the *Shetland News* exhorted:

Sing no more, Northern Bards, of Vikings and Jarls,
Save of their ancient
Courage and freedom.
Emulate never more
Their deeds of Slaughter.⁴⁸

Despite the claims of national unity, there were stresses in Shetland’s social cohesion, and sometimes, open rifts, when the war was believed to be benefitting some at the expense of others. This was shown in the newspapers in discussions about conscription, profiteering, the increased incomes of civilians as against the low pay of soldiers, the effect of price rises on people with fixed incomes and the vagaries and tribulations of food price regulation.⁴⁹ Post-war it was clear that the divisions in society between, for example, landowners and landless; employers and employees and unemployed; prohibitionists, drinkers and publicans; had not

⁴⁴ *ST*, 18 Dec. 1915, 4

⁴⁵ Pages 257 – 58, 293, Appendix IV

⁴⁶ Pages 272 – 75

⁴⁷ Seibert, *Reception and Construction*, 17

⁴⁸ *SN*, 3 Apr. 1919, 5

⁴⁹ Pages 125 – 27, 178 – 79, 190 – 95, 212 – 13

disappeared. In addition, there may have been tensions between veterans and civilians, and the discrepancies between town and country had widened with the centralisation of fishing.⁵⁰ Issues about food control and transport were symptomatic of this, while fund-raising for the war memorials showed that people were willing to support the image of a county united in mourning, but also keen to commemorate the war-dead from their own district separately.⁵¹ Sometimes Shetland mattered and sometimes parish or district mattered more.

It is not possible to ascertain how the identity trumpeted in the newspapers and by local politicians, mattered to most Shetlanders, particularly at such times of stress. It seems likely that the war brought communities together, particularly in commemoration. Chapter 7 discussed how there were hopes and expectations that life would be better after the war, and chapter 8 how development plans were not fulfilled as the Government's reconstruction schemes hit the barrier of financial recession. For the longer term, if what you have been boasting about – your contribution to the war effort – comes to an end, and the demand for your main product (salt herring) falls away, it may be more difficult to sustain pride and cohesion in your community. There is a danger that what remain from the experience of war are the grievances about disproportionate losses and lack of appreciation, unnecessary difficulties and inappropriate restrictions, ignorance of local conditions and ignoring of representations.

Winter stated, 'The war was so vast that all attempts to contain it in any single or simple explanatory framework are bound to fail'.⁵² This is true even in this local situation, and this thesis has tried to examine the war through contemporary sources, rather than through the lens of memory and later re-evaluation. Despite the many comments about how things changed and would never be the same, that was obviously not universally true and it was not clear then, and perhaps not even now, to what extent, as many writers have claimed, the war was a 'fault line' in history, the end of an era and the start of a new one. Simmonds emphasised how much of a shock the war was for the British people, but it was a gradual shock; the high number

⁵⁰ Pages 233 – 34, 289, 239 – 41

⁵¹ Pages 266 – 68

⁵² Winter, *Experience of World War I*, 7

of servicemen required, the horrendous toll of casualties and the effects on civilians only became apparent as the war dragged on.⁵³ The situation described here seems to fall short of descriptions of a cataclysmic experience of 'total war' for everyone who lived through it. Nevertheless, even historians who have sought to balance the picture of the consequences of war as universally catastrophic would not claim that people came through it untouched.⁵⁴

The experience of individuals varied immensely according to a variety of factors including age, sex, occupation and opportunity as much as personal decisions; for servicemen, survival depended on chance as much as courage or skill. Particularly in the early years, there was a stark contrast between the misery, terror and close encounters with death experienced by servicemen in action and the tranquillity and prosperity at home. Later, when hopes of a speedy return to peace faded, civilians endured, beside the minor shortages and inconveniences, the pangs of separation and worry, bereavement and grief. There were therefore contrasts over place and time, as well as between groups and individuals. Nevertheless, it was surely impossible that people who lived through the war were not affected in some way, and generations later lived with the consequences. In his speech at the dedication service for Shetland's County War Memorial, the Chairman of the committee spoke of 'the years of disillusionment' since the Armistice and commented that the world was 'as far as ever from lasting peace'.⁵⁵

⁵³ Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*, 3

⁵⁴ E.g., Marwick, *Deluge*, Winter, *Great War and British People*; Gregory, *Last Great War*, 282 – 87

⁵⁵ *ST*, 12 Jan. 1924, 4

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Images

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Brian Speight	9.5
EmersonKent.com http://www.emersonkent.com/maps.htm	I
Heraldry of the World http://www.ngw.nl/int/gbr/scot/lerwick.htm	1.2
Scottish War Memorials Project http://warmemscot.s4.bizhat.com/warmemscot-ftopic328.html	9.7, 9.8

Shetlopedia

II, 9.2, 9.3

Wikipedia

9.10, 9.11, 9.12

APPENDIX I DEMOGRAPHY

Population Statistics

Gauging the effect of the war on population, even such as small population as Shetland's, is not straightforward. This appendix does not attempt to address the issues in detail but to describe some of the problems and amplify the data used in the thesis.

The main sources for demography are the Census Reports and the Reports of the Registrar General. Because the censuses were taken in 1911 and 1921, there were several years of potential change both before and after the war. There are other difficulties with using the Census Reports, particularly people on ships berthed in Shetland when censuses were taken. In 1967, Barclay published an article about Shetland's population in which he adjusted the Census statistics to discount the people in ships¹. This was reasonable given that, arguably, they were not 'in' Shetland. The numbers could have a distorting effect, since nearly all the people concerned were in one section of the population, i.e. economically active men. For example, in 1911 at Unst, there were 28 ships with 246 men, some 12 per cent of the recorded population of the island. This aspect does not seem to have occurred to contemporary commentators, even though they were concerned about emigration.

Barclay did not take into consideration that some of the ship population might be resident Shetlanders (only thirty-two in 1911), and he did not remove other people recorded temporarily in Shetland or away at this time, which were even smaller numbers. In 1901, the Census was taken in March and in 1911, in April, a time when men might be expected to be at home to help with spring agricultural work, but the question of how many men were at sea remains unresolved as the censuses did not adequately report them. In 1921, the Census was taken in June, and Barclay removed both the 939 people in ships and 464 fishworkers (5.5 per cent of the recorded population), and reallocated Shetland fishworkers temporarily in Lerwick to their home parishes. Because the detailed information for 1921 is not yet available, the effect of removing these people on an analysis of the population cannot be checked.

¹ Barclay, 'Population Statistics'

The main effect the adjustment for shipping is in age/gender comparisons, for example, the 1911 Census showed nearly 200 more married men than women and the 1921 Census 337. Birth, death and marriage rates in the Reports of the Register General were calculated using an estimated population based on the previous Census; so this was perhaps slightly too high and the rates therefore slightly too low. The effect was heightened during the war years, because the deaths of men outwith Scotland were not taken into account. In the 1921 Annual Report, the Registrar revised the baseline population figure for Scotland by between 0.6 in 1916 and 2.7 in 1920 to take account of this. No attempt has been made here to recalculate the rates quoted for Shetland.

Shipping also had an effect on occupational data and most of those on ships were fishermen rather than seamen. The occupational data is in any case unreliable as some occupations were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Some men worked in the Merchant Navy in winter and fishing in the summer; some women would be classed as fishworkers in the summer and knitters in winter. Obtaining an accurate number of men in the Merchant Navy is impossible but the Fishery Board statistics provide more detail on the numbers involved in fishing each year.

The following are the main relevant statistics and conclusions:

1. Population Numbers

Before the war, the population had been falling from a peak in 1861 but the rate of decrease had been falling. The 1911 Census showed a population of 27911 (Barclay, 27238) and the 1921 Census 25520 (Barclay, 24117).

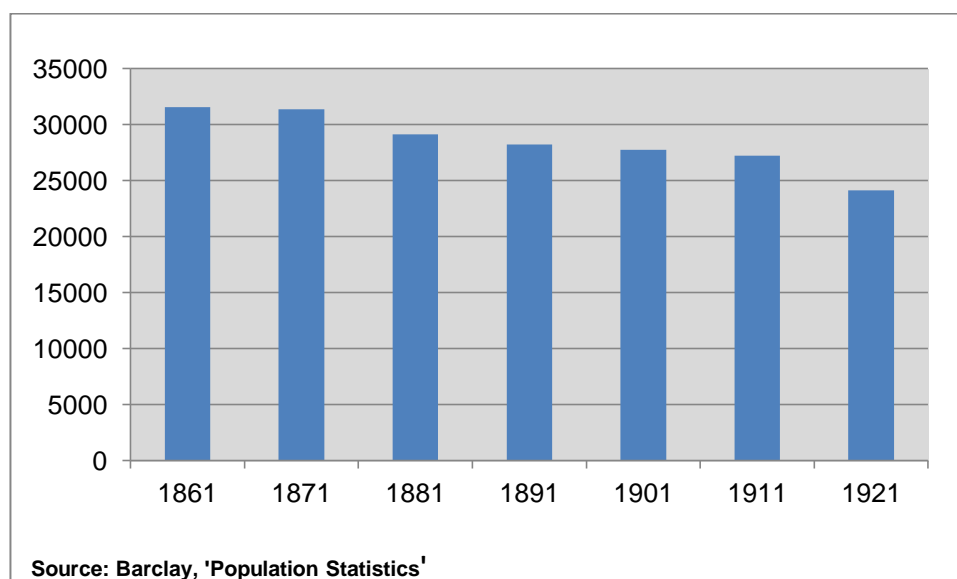


Figure I.1 Population of Shetland (adjusted for shipping)

Birth rate²

In most developed countries the birth rate was falling. In 1913, Scotland's birth-rate was the 25.5 per thousand, the lowest since 1855. In Shetland, it was only 17.5 but had been steady for some years. In 1921, Shetland's birth rate was 15 and Scotland's 25.2; both had been rising since 1917, though Scotland's was lower than in 1920. When calculated in relation to women aged between 15 and 45, Shetland's rate was even lower, 66.8 compared to 105 for Scotland.

Death rate³

Shetland's death rate was 17 per 1000 in 1913, which was an increase but lower than the average for Scotland at 18.4. In 1921, it was 12.4, compared to 13.6 for Scotland, the lowest since 1861.

Loss by emigration

The net loss in Shetland's population was therefore due to emigration. Barclay calculated this loss using the birth and death rates and until 1921 it was always higher than the actual reduction. In 1921, the actual loss was higher but Barclay did

² *Registrar General's Report Scotland for 1913*, vii, xix; and *for 1921*, vii, xii, xci; Black, 'External Shocks', 98 – 104

³ Rates corrected by re-allocating people who died away from their normal residence

which not discuss the abnormally high rate of deaths outwith the UK, which were not counted in the Registrar-General's report.

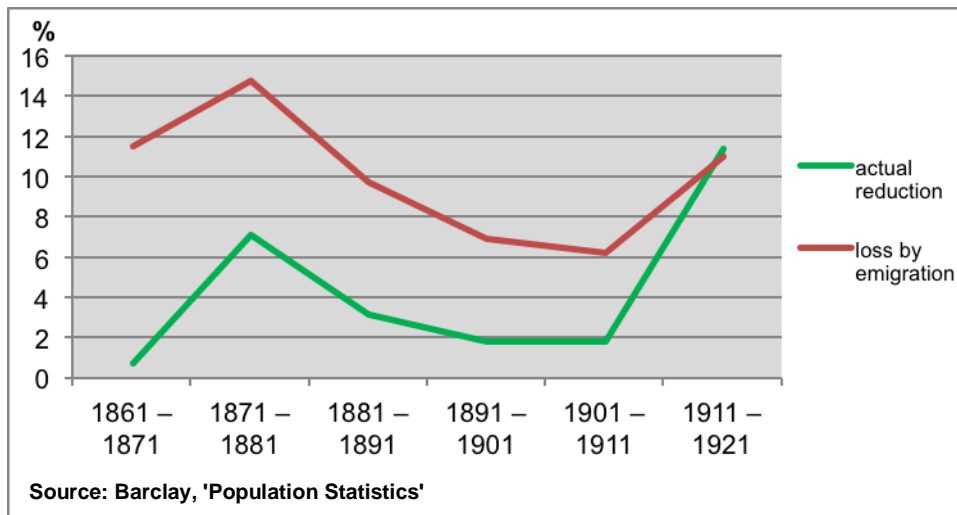


Figure I.2 Reduction in population and loss by emigration

2. Distribution

In 1911, twenty-seven islands were inhabited; 7 per cent of people lived on the Mainland, Yell had over 2000 people and Unst and Whalsay over 1000, while fourteen islands had less than 100, and eight less than ten. Between 1911 and 1921, four small islands lost their population and one showed a gain, but probably because of temporary summer occupation. Every parish showed a loss.

About 20 per cent of people lived in Lerwick. These figures do not include the people who lived just outside the burgh boundaries and so under-estimate the town population. The population had been growing at the expense of the country districts. Between 1911 and 1921, however, the population of Lerwick fell by a higher percentage than that of Shetland as a whole.

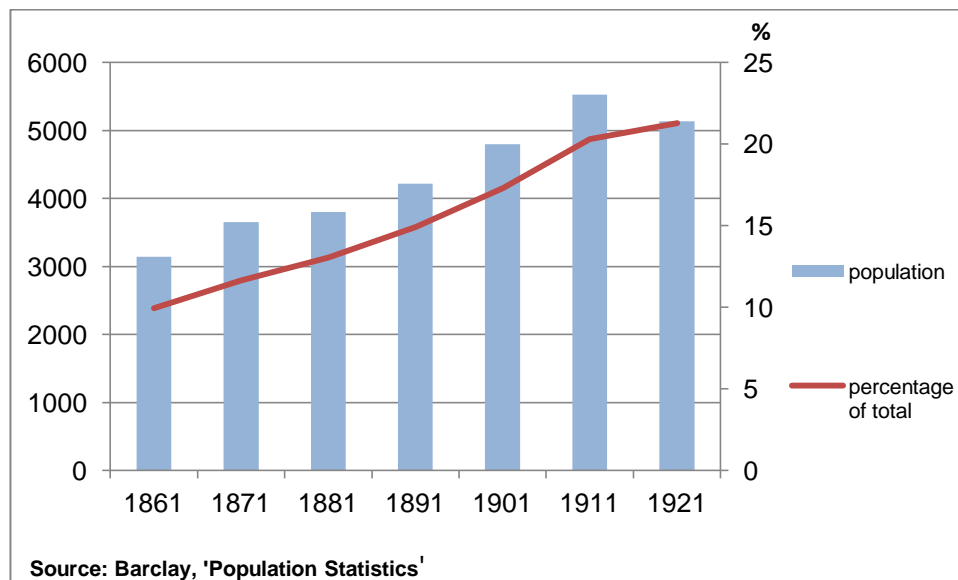


Figure I.3 Population of Lerwick

3. Age Profile

The proportion of young people was falling. The age profile shows a severe drop in men over the age of twenty, reflecting the emigration of young men).

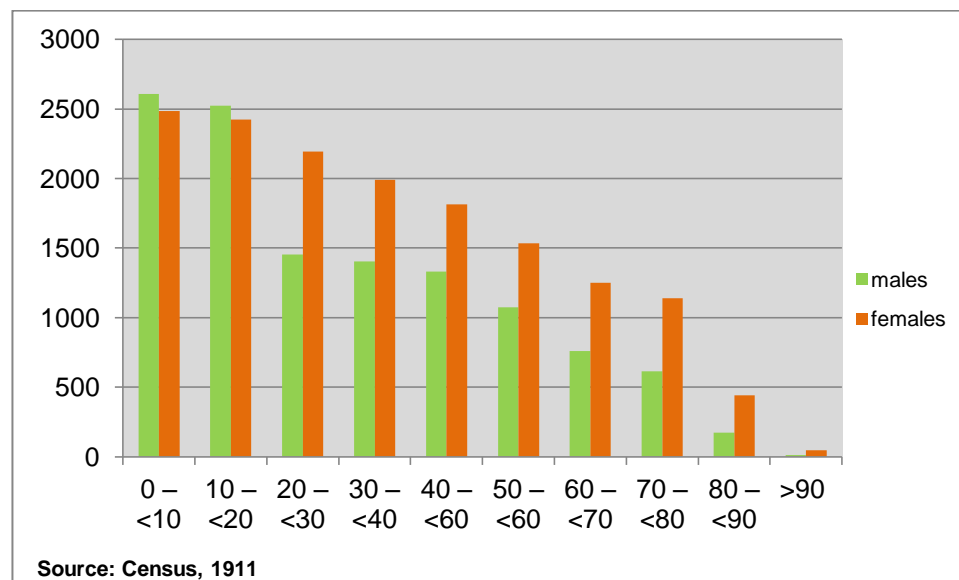


Figure I.4 Age profile in 1911 (corrected for shipping)

4. Gender Ratio

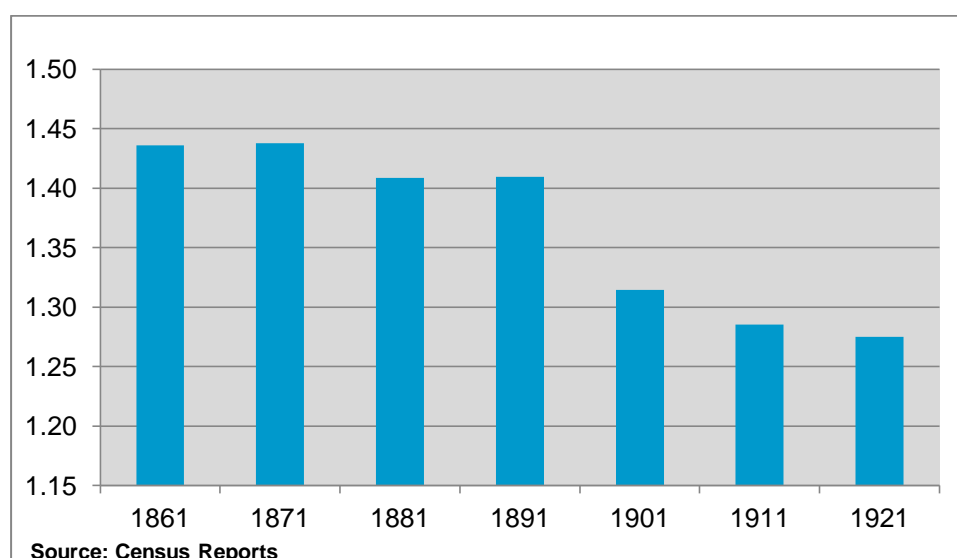


Figure I.5 Gender ratio – number of females per male (adjusted for shipping)⁴

Shetland had more females than males, which was to be expected when many men went to sea. The ratio was high even in comparison to Scotland, which was considered to have a high ratio, but it was falling. The number of women emigrating was increasing.

5. Marital Status

Possibly because of the gender imbalance, the percentage of men who were married was high, in 1911 the highest for any county in Scotland. For women the situation was reversed with the number of spinsters being the highest. This table shows the figures, with the Scottish average in brackets.

		unmarried	married	Widowed
1911	Male	42.6 (46.1)	51.1 (45.2)	6.3 (5.4)
	Female	51.5 (44)	36.4 (45.2)	12.1 (10.4)
1921	Male	44.1 (43.1)	49.9 (51.4)	6 (5.5)
	female	52.5 (42.4)	35.5 (46.4)	12 (11.2)

Figure I.6 Marital status of population over 15 (percentages) (Source: *Census, 1921*)

⁴ The 1921 figure is an estimate

Servicemen and Losses

The assertion that more Shetlanders were killed in proportion to the total population than men from any other place is still believed and quoted. It is not, however, possible to be accurate about the numbers. That would require three things: an accurate base figure for comparison for which, as explained above, the 1911 Census is not reliable; an accurate number of Shetland resident servicemen, both war-dead and survivors, which is also not available; and a similar comparison for all other places, which is clearly unrealistic.

Nevertheless there are things that can be said about this aspect of Shetland's 'war effort'. The two main sources are Manson's *Roll of Honour and Roll of Service* and the Shetland war memorials. As discussed in chapter 9, Manson included his *Rolls* people who were neither native to nor resident in Shetland but had some connection, for example, their grandparents may have been native. Because of that, it is not consistent as it is very unlikely that every serviceman whose grandparents were born in Shetland is included. The County War Memorial includes only the names of men who were born in Shetland or lived there before they enlisted. It is not possible to be entirely accurate in matching names but a comparison shows the following:

<i>Roll</i> total	Memorial total	In both <i>Roll</i> and Memorial	In Memorial not in <i>Roll</i>	In <i>Roll</i> not in Memorial	Total
618	624	558	66	60	684

Figure I.7 War-dead

One way of looking at these figures is that they represent the psychological impact of the loss; at least 684 men were mourned in Shetland. When it comes to the economic impact of the war, however, the loss was restricted to men who might have been expected to be part of the future working population of Shetland. Seventy-eight of the men commemorated on the War Memorial served in the Dominion or United States forces and therefore were not resident in Shetland when they enlisted. It also looks likely, from the regiments in which they served or the residence of their parents or widows, that others were also non-resident when they enlisted. Probably fewer

than 80 per cent of the men named on the War Memorial were Shetland residents; whether, but for the war, they might have returned to Shetland is obviously impossible to say. The *Roll of Service* does not provide so much information about the men listed as the *Roll of Honour*. One section lists men outside Shetland ‘whose precise local connection was not stated’. Others are listed as being formerly of a district.

In the *Roll of Service*, it is usually easy to identify men who served in the army, Empire or United States forces or RAF. It is not always so clear when it comes to men who served in the Royal Navy or Merchant Navy. Chapter 4 shows that there were perhaps 1500 in the RNR and about 500 remained in the Shetland Section throughout their service. 600 remained in the Shetland Section throughout the war. Many, however, moved on to other RNR duties, for example, the Trawler Division or Royal Fleet Auxiliary. There were also a few men in the Royal Naval Voluntary Reserve and the Royal Naval Division (who fought as soldiers on the Western Front). Other men, though never enrolled in the Royal Navy served on ships contracted to or commandeered by the Navy, sometimes in the Mercantile Marine Reserve, or DAMS (Defensively Armed Merchant Ships). It is a complex picture. The detail may not be as significant as the fact that many more Shetlanders served at sea than in the Army.

	Army	Navy	Merchant Navy	Dominion and US	Other	Total
Resident	174	199	105		3	143
Non-resident	23	11	16	78	15	481
Total	197	210	121	78	18	624

Figure I. 8 Resident and non-resident war-dead (Source: Shetland War Memorial)

The *Roll of Honour* recorded dates of death:

1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	No date
10	72	133	200	173	20	4	6

Figure I.9 War deaths by year

The number of men at sea meant that more older men were involved and lost their lives than purely army service would have entailed. Ages at death recorded in the *Roll of Honour* are:

<20	20 – <25	25 < 30	30 – <35	35 – <40	40 – <50	50 – < 60	60 +	Not given
62	193	125	84	50	44	7	10	43

Figure I.10 Ages of war-dead

A final point is that neither the *Roll of Honour and Roll of Service* nor the war memorial can be relied on to be accurate. Even for such a small and well-recorded community as Shetland, in Winter's words, 'we have no clear guide to the demography of the war'.⁵

⁵ J. Winter, *Experience of World War I*, 114

APPENDIX II SHETLAND'S FISHING INDUSTRY

Contemporary commentators did not doubt that Shetland's economy depended on the fishing industry. It is, however, difficult to estimate what the fishing was worth. The Fishery Board for Scotland produced an array of statistics, but these need to be used carefully as the measures changed and some were not recorded during the Great War. It is also not straightforward to determine how the different sectors of the industry affected the different groups of people involved.

Different kinds of fishing

- **Herring (drift net)** By far the most important was the summer herring season which lasted from May to September. In the preceding few months, there was a less extensive winter herring fishing.
- **Great lines** There was a remnant of the 'haaf' summer fishing from small boats; the fish was salted and dried. Some drifters fished with great lines, mostly for cod and ling, before the herring season and a few during the summer in conjunction with the herring fishing.
- **Small lines** Winter was the main time for this line fishing, from smaller boats, mainly for haddocks.
- **Shellfish** Shellfish was a very small part of the Shetland fisheries but mussels were used as bait for lines.

People involved in fishing

The Fishery Board produced statistics for the number of fishermen and kinds and value of boats belonging to each 'creek' and how many were employed in all kinds of fishing. In addition, the total number of people employed in the herring season in the busiest week was published

- **Fishermen and boats** Nearly all Shetland drifters were sailboats but a large number of motor and steam drifters came to Shetland for the early herring season. Shetlanders often owned their boats on a share basis, dividing the expenses and profits among them; sometimes other people, such as curers,

owned boats or shares. Purchase costs and running expenses for steam and motor boats were much higher than for sail.

- **Curers** purchased herring from fishermen, operated the stations where it was cured and sold it. They had to provide stations (often rented), quays, buildings, salt and barrels and employ shoreworkers. Herring had to be bought and often exported in anticipation of sales. Curers therefore bore financial risks; low catches could mean a loss; over-production could result in unsold product. Curers often came from outside Shetland. Some local curers also owned boats and ran other businesses such as shops. A small proportion of herring was kippered and a few curers still dried and cured other fish.
- **Shoreworkers** Many came from outside Shetland. Coopers made barrels but also oversaw the curing operations. The women who gutted and packed herring in brine were paid 'arles' (a signing-on fee) and then by piece-work. Fishing also employed labourers, seamen and clerks.

Measures (Fishery Board statistics)

- **Catch** The amount of fish caught was measured in crans (a volume measure for herring only) and hundredweights. The total catch was a useful measure of the overall success of a season. Since the number of boats varied, the average catch was a better indicator of success for fishermen, but could conceal a wide range of input and earnings. On any day, a particularly high catch would result in lower prices and might even be more than curers could process and so some might remain unsold
- **Price/value** Prices paid to fishermen were quoted per cran or hundredweight. The earnings of the fishermen were a function of the catch and the price, which varied depending on the amount caught on the day, the quality and the market conditions. The 'value' was the total amount paid to fishermen and was a better indicator of the success of a season to them overall than the catch. It did not take into consideration the number of people involved or expenses of the boats, so the ranges of earnings for different classes of boat were published.

- **Cure** The amount of herring cured was quoted in barrels, which were either 'seastick', i.e. as originally packed, or 'bungpacked', i.e. topped up after the herring had settled. Dried salted fish was sold by the hundredweight. Some fish might not be sold until the year following catch.

The Shetland economy

Having this extensive fishing located in Shetland provided income in various ways including building-work, rents for stations, rates, harbour dues, transport and purchase of fuel, water and general supplies. Since so many of the participants came from outside, it was estimated that up to 90 per cent of the wealth generated by the herring season did not remain in Shetland. The 'stranger' boats, mainly from the east coasts of Scotland and England, usually fished in Shetland waters for the first part of the herring season and then moved south. This meant that that if most of the 'value' was realised early, the Shetland fishermen had a lower proportion of it, than if it was earned in August and September.

Appendix III Shetland War Memorials

Parish	Community / Location	Materials and Form	Inscriptions	Names
Unst	North Unst Norwick kirkyard	Square grey granite column on 3 bases surmounted by Celtic cross	ERECTED / IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF / THE MEN OF / THIS PARISH / WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES / FOR US / IN THE GREAT WAR / 1914 – 1918 / THEIR NAMES LIVETH / FOR EVER On base: GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS, / THAT A MAN LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS	17 Alpha, with service, age and some ranks
	South Unst Inside Uyeasound Church	Brass plaque with gold on black leaf design border; cross above and red shields in top corners with dates 1914 and 1918	TO THE GLORIOUS MEMORY / OF THE MEN OF / SOUTH UNST / WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR LIVES / FOR THEIR COUNTRY/ HONOUR TO THE IMMORTAL DEAD /(names) / <i>Heroes whose name we trace with love & pride / Endless our debt to you who fought & died / Ever shall thoughts of your victorious strife / Stir Shetland's sons to greater grander life</i>	14 Alpha, with service
	Shetland (Erected by Jessie Saxby) On hillside south of Baltasound	Stone cairn surmounted by small concrete cross with metal plaque on front.	<i>In remembrance of /</i> SHETLANDERS /WHO GAVE THEMSELVES TO THEIR COUNTRY /DURING THE GREAT WAR 1914 – 1918 / <i>ALL SUFFERED, MANY WERE KILLED / “GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS, / THAT A MAN LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS”</i>	0
Yell	North Yell St. Olaf’s Church, Cullivoe	Stained glass window; main figure of Jesus with ‘Peace be unto you’ above; below 1914 and 1918 and names	This Window is erected to the glory of GOD / and in memory of the men of this Parish who / died in the Great War	10 Alpha, with service

Parish	Community / Location	Materials and Form	Inscriptions	Names
	Sellafirth In church	Marble plaque in wooden frame	ERECTED / TO THE GLORY OF GOD / AND IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE / MEMBERS & ADHERENTS OF THIS / CHURCH WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES /IN THE GREAT WAR / 1914 – 1921 / (names) / GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN /THAN THIS, THAT A MAN LAY / DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS.	7 Alpha, with service
	Mid Yell Inside St. John's Church	Light grey marble plaque	TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN MEMORY OF / THOSE OF THIS PARISH WHO PERISHED IN THE GREAT WAR / 1914 – 1919	29 Alpha within districts

Fetlar	Fetlar Inside Fetlar Church	Board roll of honour	IN MEMORY OF THE MEN BELONGING TO THE PARISH OF FETLAR / WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR 1914 – 1918 / (names) / DYING, YET BEHOLD THEY LIVE. / PRESENTED BY THE REV. JAS. A. CAMPBELL & MRS. CAMPBELL / FETLAR.	10 Alpha
	Inside Fetlar Church	Plaque	ERECTED BY HIS WIDOW / IN AFFECTIONATE MEMORY OF / JAMES PETRIE / MASTER MARINER OF LIVERPOOL / ELDER SON OF THE LATE JAMES PETRIE / SETTER, FETLAR / WHO DIED AT SEA 18TH DECEMBER 1919 / IN HIS 45TH YEAR / "UNTIL THE DAY DAWN"	1

Parish	Community / Location	Materials and Form	Inscriptions	Names
Northmavine	Ollaberry Churchyard	Grey granite square column, on cairn of rough stones, on stepped bases, surmounted by Celtic cross.	RESTING IN PEACE / TO THE GLORY OF GOD / AND IN THANKFUL REMEMBRANCE / OF ALL THOSE IN THE DISTRICT OF / OLLABERRY WHO GAVE THEIR LIFE FOR KING AND COUNTRY/ IN THE GREAT WAR /THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE / 1914 – 1919	16 With district
	Lochend and North Roe Beside road in North Roe	Red granite obelisk; army side, carving of crossed rifles below wreath; navy side, carved outline of rope and anchor below leaves; on stepped bases, in walled enclosure with railings.	ERECTED / IN MEMORY OF THE MEN / OF LOCHEND AND NORTH ROE / WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR/ 1914 – 1918 (on side) “EVER SHALL THOUGHTS OF YOUR VICTORIOUS STRIFE / STIR SHETLAND'S SONS TO GREATER, GRANDER LIFE”	12 Army on one side, MM and MMR on another. Some with rank
	Eshaness Graveyard	Grey rough granite gravestone, with polished face, on rough granite base and concrete plinth	1914 – 1918 WAR / OUR GLORIOUS DEAD / (names) / ERECTED BY THE PEOPLE OF / ESHANESS	5 2 army, with rank and regiment, 3 RNR, 2 with rank.
	Hillswick In vestibule of church	Brass plaque, framed in pink and cream marble and wood, carved with thistles and wreaths; dates of war in top corners.	DULCE ET DECORUM / EST PRO PATRIA MORI / ROLL OF HONOUR / 1914 – 1919 / TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN MEMORY / OF THOSE FROM THIS DISTRICT WHO GAVE / THEIR LIVES FOR US IN THE GREAT WAR / (names) / “BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED” / “ON THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN AND IN THE MORNING / WE WILL REMEMBER THEM”	10 Alpha with regiment/ service and some ranks

Parish	Community / Location	Materials and Form	Inscriptions	Names
	Harry Cheyne In Hillswick church	White wooden Celtic cross	IHS / IN / MEMORY / OF / MAJOR HARRY CHEYNE D BATTERY 189TH ARMY FIELD ARTILLERY BRIGADE / KILLED / IN / ACTION / JULY / 10TH / 1917	1 with rank, unit and date.
Delting	Delting Beside the road in Voe	Rough grey granite, upright slab on 3 square bases and surmounted by cross with sword, with polished face, in walled enclosure with railings.	TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE EVERLASTING MEMORY OF / (names) / ALL OF THIS PARISH/ THESE FELL IN THE GREAT WAR / 1914 – 1918 / AT THE CALL OF KING AND COUNTRY THEY / LEFT ALL THAT WAS DEAR TO THEM, / ENDURED HARDSHIPS, FACED DANGERS, AND / FINALLY PASSED OUT OF SIGHT OF MAN. / BY THE PATH OF DUTY AND SELF-SACRIFICE / GIVING UP THEIR OWN LIVES THAT OTHERS / MIGHT LIVE IN FREEDOM. / LET THOSE WHO COME AFTER SEE TO IT / THAT THEIR NAMES BE NOT FORGOTTEN.	32 Alpha with district
Nesting, Lunnasting and Whalsay	Lunnasting Beside the road, next to Public Hall in Vidlin	Grey granite obelisk, on 2 square bases and slab; relief cross at top and slab carved with crossed sword and furled flag and dates, 1914, 1918, with walls and railings.	TO THE / GLORY OF GOD / AND IN MEMORY OF / THE BRAVE MEN / OF LUNNASTING / WHO DIED FOR FREEDOM / IN THE GREAT WAR / (names) / FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH	10 Alpha with service
	North Nesting Beside the road near Brettabister	Polished red granite column on base, surmounted by rough granite Celtic cross, on 3 rough granite bases.	(names) / IN EVERLASTING REMEMBRANCE / OF THE MEN / FROM NORTH NESTING / WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR KING / AND COUNTRY IN THE GREAT WAR On base: 1914 – 1918	7 Alpha

Parish	Community / Location	Materials and Form	Inscriptions	Names
	South Nesting School Now in public hall	Brass plaque in dark wooden frame	SOUTH NESTING SCHOOL / in memory of / THOSE WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR /1914 – 1918	11 Alpha with one anomaly
	Whalsay In churchyard at Brough	Polished grey granite column, surmounted by battlements and cross, on circular and square bases with railings.	ERECTED BY THE PEOPLE OF WHALSAY/ TO COMMEMORATE THEIR MEN / WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR / 1914 – 1918	23 Alpha with township and place and date of death
	Whalsay and Skerries In church, Brough, Whalsay	Framed illustrated scroll; heading with a central burning bush; at sides – thistle, shamrock and rose; and 2 flags – Union Flag, Lion Rampant, Saltire and Royal Standard; laurel leaves	In banner: NEC TAMEN CONSUMEBATUR. CHURCH OF SCOTLAND / PARISH OF WHALSAY & SKERRIES / EUROPEAN WAR 1914 / ROLL OF HONOUR.	115 No obvious order

Walls	Walls By the road in Walls		TO THE GLORY OF GOD /AND TO COMMEMORATE THE MEMORY OF THE MEN OF / WALLS DISTRICT WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES IN THE GREAT WAR / 1914 – 1919 / (names) / THEIR NAMES LIVETH FOR EVERMORE	11 Alpha with some ranks, district and place of death
	Sandness In St. Margaret's kirkyard	Red Balmoral granite obelisk surmounted by Celtic cross, on 4 square bases, 2 granite and 2 concrete, with railings.	TO THE IMPERISHABLE / MEMORY OF THOSE / BELONGING TO AND / CONNECTED WITH THIS PARISH / WHO LOST THEIR LIVES / IN THE GREAT WAR / 1914 – 1918 On base: THEIR NAMES LIVETH FOR EVERMORE	12 With force 3 sides: Killed in action; Died; Lost at Sea

Parish	Community / Location	Materials and Form	Inscriptions	Names
	Foula Burga Ness, south of Ham Little	Square stone structure with castellated top, on wider stone base	TO THE GLORY OF GOD / AND IN MEMORY OF THE MEN OF FOULA / WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES IN THE GREAT WAR / 1914 – 1919	5 With rank and service
	Papa Stour In church	Stained glass window; Jesus calming the sea, with brass plaque below	TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN HONOURED MEMORY OF / (names) (on plaque): THE ABOVE WINDOW ERECTED BY PUBLIC SUBSCRIPTION IS / DEDICATED TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN SACRED MEMORY OF / (names) / NATIVES OF THIS ISLAND, / WHO MADE THE SUPREME SACRIFICE IN THE GREAT WAR / "GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS, THAT A MAN LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS"	6 In order of date of death Plaque has place and date of death
	In Sandness kirkyard	Wooden cross	1917	
Sandsting and Aithsting	Reawick / Skeld In wall of graveyard, Wester Skeld	White marble stone	SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF / THOSE WHO FROM THIS DISTRICT / LOST THEIR LIVES IN / THE GREAT WAR, 1914 – 1918 / (names) / THEY DIED THAT WE MIGHT LIVE	14 Killed in action / Lost at sea / Died of illness contracted during service
	West Burrafirth On wall of (formerly Methodist) church	White marble tablet in Orkney freestone moulding	TO THE MEMORY OF THE MEN OF THIS DISTRICT / WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE GREAT WAR, 1914 – 1918 (names) / "GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN"	10 Alpha with age

Parish	Community / Location	Materials and Form	Inscriptions	Names
Tingwall, Whiteness and Weisdale	Tingwall In Tingwall churchyard	Rough grey granite obelisk with polished face, surmounted by a pitched roof, on a granite slab with a carving of a sword and a furled flag and a granite base; upper part has a carving of a lion rampant.	TO / TINGWALL' S SONS /WHO DIED IN WAR / THEIR NAMES LIVETH FOR EVERMORE / (names) / "THEY LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR FRIENDS" / GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS on base: 1914 – 1919 / "LEST WE FORGET"	38 Alpha within districts
	Whiteness and Weisdale Beside the road in Weisdale	Polished red granite obelisk, surmounted by 2 rough square stones and a Celtic cross, on a rough red granite slab with polished face, 2 rough granite bases and a square concrete base and with railings.	on base: TO THE / MEMORY OF THE MEN OF/ WHITENESS AND WEISDALE / WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR / 1914 — 1918	21 Alpha, with one anomaly
	Scalloway In Methodist Church, Scalloway	White marble plaque with arched top and grey border	ERECTED / IN MEMORY / OF / THE MEN OF / THIS CHURCH / WHO MADE THE SUPREME SACRIFICE / IN THE GREAT WAR 1914 – 1919	9 Alpha
Bressay	Bressay On wall of church	White marble tablet in stone / concrete frame	THEY DIED THAT WE MIGHT LIVE / (names) / ERECTED BY THE INHABITANTS OF BRESSAY / IN LOVING MEMORY FOR THOSE WHO LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES / FOR HOME AND KINDRED on sides: 1914 – 1918	16 Alpha with service / regiment

Parish	Community / Location	Materials and Form	Inscriptions	Names
Lerwick	Burra Middle of the road at Bridgend, Burra	Polished pale red granite obelisk on 6 square bases, 4 granite and 2 concrete with railings; reliefs on each side: wreath, crossed rifles and leaves, anchor and rope, field gun	1914 – 1918 / TO / THE GLORY OF GOD / IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF / THE BURRA ISLE MEN / WHO MADE THE SUPREME / SACRIFICE / IN THE GREAT WAR 1914 – 1918 / “LEST WE FORGET”	23 By service, rank, name, service
	In St. Columba’s parish church	2 oak-framed brass tablets with depictions of burning bush and the dove of peace	1914 – 1919 / TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN / LOVING MEMORY OF THE MEN / FROM THIS CHURCH WHO FELL IN / THE GREAT WAR	65 Alpha
	In Adam Clarke Memorial church	Brass table in oak frame	TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND IN LOVING MEMORY OF THE FOLLOWING / CONNECTED WITH THIS CHURCH AND / CONGREGATION WHO MADE THE SUPREME / SACRIFICE IN THE GREAT WAR 1914 – 1919 / (names) / MAY WE BE WORTHY OF THEM.	19 Alpha
	In Adam Clarke Memorial church	Painted roll of honour, a scroll in 3 sections <u>Left Section:</u> Ionic Column with a soldier and a sailor superimposed and a ribbon banner round; a cross underneath surmounted by a crown. <u>Right Section:</u> sword with a shield superimposed at the top of the blade and an army belt (with inscription) wound round; underneath a palm tree on a shoreline and under this a	LERWICK WESLEYAN CHURCH / ROLL OF HONOUR <u>Left section</u> GREATER LOVE HATH / NO MAN THAN THIS / THAT A MAN LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS. / BE / THOU / FAITHFUL / UNTO DEATH / AND / I WILL GIVE THEE / A CROWN / OF LIFE. <u>Right section</u> On the shield: FOR / GOD / AND THE / RIGHT. On the belt WAR DECLARED / 4TH AUGUST 1914 / PEACE PROCLAIMED. 28 – 6 – 1919 / THE GREAT WAR / 1914 / 1915 / 1916 / 1917 / 1918 / 1919. On the sword: ARMISTICE / SIGNED / 11TH NOV 1918	In central section. 76 Alpha with 6 anomalies

Parish	Community / Location	Materials and Form	Inscriptions	Names
		soldier helping a wounded comrade being watched over by a guardian angel in the form of a nurse	Signed at the bottom: Wm. L. CHEYNE / APRIL 1918 ROLL / COMPLETED MAY 1920.	
	St. Olaf's church Present location unknown		ROLL OF / HONOUR / PRO PATRIA / LIST OF MEN BELONGING TO ST. OLAFS CHURCH SERVING THEIR COUNTRY IN THE NAVY & ARMY	49 Alpha, by service, many with rank and regiment
	St. Olaf's Church Plaque in Shetland Library (formerly St. Ringan's Church)	Oak communion table with brass plaque	DEDICATED TO THE GLORY OF GOD / AND IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE OF THE MEN OF / ST OLAF'S CHURCH / WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES IN THE GREAT WAR 1914 – 1918 / (names) / "GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS"	15 Alpha
	St. Ringan's Church In Shetland Museum,	Roll of Honour with crown and flags	FOR KING AND COUNTRY / ROLL OF HONOUR / ST. RINGAN'S / UNITED FREE CHURCH / (names) / GOD SAVE THE KING	29 With service
	St. Ringan's UF church In Shetland Library (formerly St. Ringan's church)	Brass plaque	ROLL OF HONOUR / ERECTED AS A TOKEN OF LASTING GRATITUDE / TO THE MEN FROM THIS CHURCH / WHO DIED FOR KING AND COUNTRY / 1914 – 1919 / (names) / WELL DONE THOU GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT / ENTER THOU INTO THE JOY OF THE LORD	10
	In Lerwick Congregational church Hillhead, Lerwick	Tablet	TO THE GLORY OF GOD / AND IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF THE MEN / CONNECTED WITH THIS CHURCH WHO / GAVE THEIR LIVES IN THE GREAT WAR /1914 – 1918 / (names) / "FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH"	10 By rank

Parish	Community / Location	Materials and Form	Inscriptions	Names
	Anderson Educational Institute In Anderson High School, Lerwick	Board with black and white design. Pillars supporting a tablet with drawing of the school surmounted by the Shetland coat of arms. flagstuffs and Union Flags	Names of pupils and former pupils of the ANDERSON INSTITUTE who gave their lives during the / GREAT EUROPEAN WAR 1914 – 1919 / these died that we might live	49 With rank, service, manner, place and date of death
	Rechabites In Shetland Museum	Framed scroll with pictures of men. Shield in centre with women, flanked by soldier and sailor. Six flags.	INDEPENDENT ORDER OF RECHABITES / SALFORD UNITY / PEACE AND PLENTY THE REWARD OF / TEMPERANCE / ZETLAND DISTRICT'S ROLL OF HONOUR / (names) / PRO PATRIA	31 With Rechabite tent name, service, place and date of death
	Post Office Location not known	Board	1914 LERWICK POST OFFICE 1918 / ROLL OF HONOUR / HEAD OFFICE SUB-OFFICES / (names in 2 columns)	33 With service. No obvious order.
	Shetland Hillhead, Lerwick	White granite column, surmounted by cross on cross-base, surrounded by coping. On column faces, a sword, Lion Rampant, St. Andrew's Cross, a longship and thistle.	1914 – 1918 / IN / MEMORY / OF THE / MEN OF SHETLAND / WHO GAVE / THEIR LIVES / IN THE / GREAT WAR	620 Alpha within parishes / districts, with abbreviated service / regiment
Dunrossness	Cunningsburgh In Meal graveyard, Cunningsburgh	Rough grey granite stone with polished face and wreath in relief	1914 – 1919 / IN MEMORY OF / THE MEN FROM THIS / DISTRICT WHO FELL / IN THE GREAT WAR On base: THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE	13 With service and some ranks, alpha within service
	Sandwick In Sandwick churchyard	Rough grey granite stone with polished face	1914 – 1919 / IN MEMORY OF / THE MEN FROM THIS / DISTRICT WHO FELL / IN THE GREAT WAR On base: THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE	19 With service and some ranks, alpha within

Parish	Community / Location	Materials and Form	Inscriptions	Names
				service
	Bigton In graveyard, Ireland	Rough grey granite stone with polished face and wreath in relief	1914 – 1919 / IN MEMORY OF / THE MEN FROM THIS / DISTRICT WHO FELL / IN THE GREAT WAR On base: THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE	7 With service and some ranks, alpha within service
	Bigton In St. Ninian's church, Bigton	Roll of Honour in carved wooden frame	FOR KING AND COUNTRY / ROLL OF HONOUR / THE GREAT WAR / 1914 – 1919 / BIGTON / (names) / GOD SAVE THE KING	10 Alpha with force, township and place, sometimes manner, of death
	Levenwick In Levenwick graveyard	Rough grey granite stone with polished face and wreath in relief	1914 – 1919 / IN MEMORY OF / THE MEN FROM THIS / DISTRICT WHO FELL / IN THE GREAT WAR On base: THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE	10 With service and some ranks, alpha within service
	Dunrossness In Dunrossness graveyard	Rough grey granite stone with polished face and wreath in relief	1914 – 1919 / IN MEMORY OF / THE MEN FROM THIS / DISTRICT WHO FELL / IN THE GREAT WAR On base: THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE	20 With service and some ranks, alpha within service
	Dunrossness Bruce Memorial Hall, Virkie Current location unknown	Roll of Honour	THE GREAT WAR (flanked by 2 union flags) / 1914 ROLL OF HONOUR 1918 / (names) / GOD SAVE THE KING	56 Mainly alpha with address, manner, place and year of death, age

Parish	Community / Location	Materials and Form	Inscriptions	Names
	Fair Isle In Fair Isle graveyard	Rough grey granite stone with polished face and wreath in relief	1914 – 1919 / IN MEMORY OF / THE MEN FROM THIS / DISTRICT WHO FELL / IN THE GREAT WAR On base: THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE	8 With address. No obvious order

APPENDIX IV SCOTTISH ROLLS OF HONOUR AND ROLLS OF SERVICE

War-time	Area / title	Date
	<i>Blair Atholl & Killiecrankie Roll of Honour</i>	1915
	<i>Kilwinning & Bartonholm 1914 – 1915</i>	1915
	[Lewis] <i>Loyal Lewis</i>	1915
	<i>Monifieth For King and Country</i>	1915
	<i>New Kilpatrick's Response to the Call of the King</i>	1916
	<i>Peeblesshire Roll of Honour 1914 – 1915</i>	1916
	<i>Shetland Roll of Service and Roll of Honour</i>	1915
	<i>Tweeddale and Peebles</i>	1916
Post-war	[Aberdeen] <i>Roll of honour: a Record of Those Belonging to Aberdeen and District who Gave Their Lives for Their Country in the Great War, 1914 – 1919</i>	1926
	<i>Arbroath and District</i>	1921
	<i>Auchterarder Roll of Honour</i>	1920
	<i>Border Heroes of the Great War: Tweeddale, Etterick, Yarrow, Gala Water, Leadervale, Teviotdale, Ale Water and the Merse</i>	
	<i>Bridge of Allan Roll of Honour</i>	
	<i>Coatbridge and the Great War</i>	1919
	<i>Comrie: The parish's part in the Great War</i>	1921
	<i>Denny and Dunipace Roll of Honour</i>	1920
	[Dundee] <i>The Roll of Dundee men</i>	
	<i>Forfar and District in the War 1914 – 1919</i>	1921
	[Glasgow] <i>City of Glasgow Reproduction in Miniature</i>	1922
	[Kilmacolm] <i>Parish of Kilmacolm Roll of Service</i>	
	<i>Kinghorn Roll of Honour</i>	1919
	<i>Kirkcudright: the Stewartry Roll of Honour</i>	1927
	[Lewis] <i>'Loyal Lewis'</i>	1920
	[Lochbroom] <i>The Men of Lochbroom</i>	1921
	<i>Macduff Roll of Honour</i>	1919
	<i>Morayshire Roll of Honour</i>	1921
	<i>Paisley's Fallen in the Great War</i>	1924
	<i>Scone Roll of Honour 1914 – 1918</i>	1920
	<i>Selkirk Roll of Honour 1914 – 1918</i>	1921
	<i>Shetland Roll of Honour and Roll of Service</i>	1920
	<i>Tibbermore and Hillyland, Tulloch and Burghmuir Roll of Honour 1914 – 1919</i>	
	[Turrieff] <i>War Book of Turrieff & Twelve Miles Around</i>	1926
	<i>Wanlockhead: Her Sons in the Great War, 1914 – 19</i>	1920

1. Format and Appearance

1.1 Rolls included

Rolls analysed here related to geographical areas in Scotland, i.e. not including those compiled for social organisations, businesses, schools, etc.

1.2 Definition

There was no agreed distinction between ‘roll of service’ and ‘roll of honour’. Frequently, the former was used to denote a list of people who had been in the services during the war; the latter for those who had died, but in at least one case, Forfar, the definitions were reversed. In other cases, ‘roll of honour’ was used for all who served.

1.3 Appearance

Volumes varied in format, size and appearance, from Aucherarder’s single sheet to Tweeddale’s five volumes. Most were bound in cloth but some in leather. Mostly they were published and printed by local firms, often by the local newspaper.

2. Compilation

2.1 Compilers

Rolls were initiated by different sources:

- often a local council; sometimes the committee organising the war memorial

Others include:

- Kilwinning: the Local War Relief Committee
- Wanlockhead: the War Relief Society
- Turriff: the Ex-Servicemen’s Association
- New Kilpatrick: the Girls’ Auxiliary of Bearsden United Free Church

Some were compiled by an individual:

- Lochbroom: Mrs. Fraser of Leckmelm, (sons killed in the war)
- Coatbridge: the Rev. Samuel Lindsay
- Comrie: Alexander MacGregor (‘put God’s gifts given me to the best use in furthering the interests and wellbeing of my fellows’ and ‘carried on the work which Fate designed I should perform’)

2.2 Methods and problems

Most rolls do not state how the names were collected but methods included press advertisements, questionnaires, house visits and using existing lists, e.g. National Registration Rolls, and obituaries. Draft rolls were exhibited or published for checking.

Several rolls mention the problems of collation and the probability of errors and omissions.

- The Kirkcudbright committee found that hundreds of men could no longer be traced and so gave only their names.
- Denny's committee found it difficult to trace single men who had lived in lodgings and left no record and families who had moved and 'were practically forgotten'.
- Selkirk's roll hinted at conflict: 'Owing to objections on the part of relatives, and indifference on the part of surviving combatants, several names have had to be omitted'.

3. **Contents – People**

3.1 Criteria for inclusion

Some rolls listed only the dead, others, all who served. Some are specific about the criteria:

- Peebleshire: anyone connected 'by parentage, birth, marriage or residence'
- Morayshire: people born in Moray, people born elsewhere but settled in Moray before the war or their enlistment, and people 'who at any time were long connected with the county, but had since left the county and enlisted elsewhere'
- Forfar: 'Forfarians resident at home and abroad'
- Kilmacolm: 'the names of some formerly resident in the parish, who feel they still belong to it, and desire on this occasion to claim their citizenship'
- Turriff included people who had settled in the area after the war and wanted to be included.
- Some, including Tibbermore and Lewis, specifically mentioned the Dominion forces.

Civilians Most rolls included women who served, mainly as nurses; Selkirk mentioned particular problems of obtaining information about them and so left them out. Others had lists of people involved in war work at home:

- Nairnshire: the Red Cross ladies and Boy Scouts coast guard services
- Peebleshire: the home guards.

3.2 Information about the people included

- Some gave more information on the dead than on survivors.
- At least name, rank, unit and usually address were included.
- Some rolls added photographs.
- Some included biographical details such as parents, wives and children, previous occupation and service record.
- Some included the time, place and manner of death in service.

3.3 How information was arranged

Rolls were ordered in different ways, for example, by

- the date of death
- rank
- service, by regiment or ship, then by rank
- alphabetical order, reflecting the prevalent idea that rank and class were irrelevant in the circumstances of death in wartime
- parish. *Loyal Lewis* listed each address within each township within each parish.
- Some separated those who died from those who merely served and some, e.g., Lewis and Bridge of Allan, had a single list with the dead marked in some way, perhaps an asterisk.
- Prominence was sometimes given to people who won honours in a separate list.

4. **Contents - Other Information**

4.1 Articles about the war

Rolls often include articles about various aspects of the war, for example:

- Kirkcudbright: 'With the 52nd (Lowland) Division in Egypt'
- Forfar: 'From a Mesopotamian Diary' and 'Surrender of the Grand Fleet'
- Turriff: 'A Day Bombing Raid' and 'a Nurse's Experience on the Serbian Front'
- Lochbroom: 'The Company Orders given to Captain Fraser 1917'

- Coatbridge: every Scottish regiment and other units; ‘The Watch on the Rhine’
- Forfar: ‘From the Green Envelope, etc.’, compiled from the letters of ordinary soldiers, unlike most articles, which were written by officers.
- Turriff: “‘Thicket’ A Tale of the Lighter Side of Active Service’ Unlike most articles, which were serious, this was said to be required ‘partly as a complement, more by way of relief’ to the gravity of the war record.

4.2 Articles about the ‘home front’

Fund-raising and charity work in the locality were praised in some rolls almost to the same level as the fighting forces. For example,

- Wanlockhead: the Prince of Wales Fund, the Relief Society Fund and the ladies who made up parcels for the forces.
- Kirkcudbright: the Tribunals which heard appeals against conscription.
- Coatbridge: food control and prices, fuel and lighting.
- Turriff: ‘There is a sense indeed in which almost every responsible human being in our country who lived through those terrible years may be said to have served in the war, down to the very schoolchildren who proudly wore their badges for war-work’. In contrast, its article, ‘On the Home Front’, brought out ‘the world of difference between living in fighting zones and peace zones’.

4.3 Poetry by well-known poets

All the poetry was traditional in form, often romantic and heroic in nature, for example:

- Bridge of Allan: Tennyson and Wolfe’s ‘The Burial of Sir John Moore after Corunna’
- Denny: Tennyson, Shakespeare and Collins’ ‘How Sleep the Brave’
- Selkirk ‘The Flowers of the Forest’.
- Some rolls, e.g. Tweeddale and Loch Broom, included a few lines of verse for each person.

4.4 Local poetry

Several rolls included poems by local writers. Common themes included the nobility and bravery of the dead, their sacrifice for the freedom of others and their example to future generations, for example:

- Comrie: ‘Our Dead Warriors’ by Mary E. Beagle
- New Kilpatrick: ‘The Bended Bow’ by Mrs. Hermans
- Arbroath: ‘Their Memory Liveth for Ever’ by J. F. Skinner.
- Forfar: ‘Ay, but Ye Live!’ by Violet Jacob; ‘The Forfar Bus’ by J. B. Salmond (the only example in local dialect)

4.5 Illustrations

Besides photographs of the individual servicemen commemorated, most rolls also had illustrations.

- A common feature was a photograph or drawing of the local war memorial, such as at Kilmacolm, Denny and Comrie, sometimes accompanied by an account of an unveiling or dedication ceremony.
- Denny and Turriff had several photographs of the town and area. Turriff explained that this was appropriate because servicemen had risked their lives ‘for hearth and home’.
- Some included photographs of local dignitaries involved in the roll. The first three pages of Coatbridge’s roll had photographs of the town’s provosts, their wives and the family of the compiler.

Others had photographs of local war events, for example:

- MacDuff: the RNR men and the local company of Gordon Highlanders
- Turriff: the ‘first eighty’ Gordons who left from the station
- New Kilpatrick: the hospital and convalescent home
- The only attempts to show images of the war were paintings in the Forfar roll and Lochbroom’s maps of battlefields.
- Turriff included a picture of ‘Baghdad on Armistice Day’ to express the international thankfulness for peace.
- The only specifically religious images were of an old kirk in Peeblesshire’s roll and the Madonna and child in Selkirk’s.

5 Purpose of Rolls

Unlike monumental war memorials, rolls of honour often specifically state the intention behind them.

5.1 Fund-raising

Some rolls published during the war were used for fund-raising; for example, at New Kilpatrick for the YMCA to provide huts at military camps, at Monifieth for the Red Cross.

5.2 Encourage recruitment

Rolls could be aimed at recruitment.

- Bute: ‘Some day you will want a share in the joy and honour of *victory*. You don’t want to be out of it at the end; you can only avoid that by being *in it* now’.¹

5.3 Recording and commemoration

The main reason was recording and commemoration.

- Turriff: ‘an effort to recapture the individual from huge and bewildering mass-movements of humanity, and to integrate the human atoms caught up in the nebular swirl of war’.
- Lewis: ‘The purpose of this volume is to give in permanent form a record of the Island’s war service, and to perpetuate the memory of the men who sacrificed their life in the great struggle.’
- Macduff: ‘This record is inscribed to the Memory of the Gallant Dead who bravely fought and fell in the Great War, who faithfully upheld the glorious traditions of their Race, and whose immortal memory is now enshrined in the hearts of all who knew them’.
- Tibbermore: ‘Souvenir of the Great European War’, ‘to place on permanent record the service which the parish gave to the nation in its hour of need’.

5.4 Consolation

- Coatbridge: ‘may give some comfort and consolation to those whose hearts have been torn asunder’.
- Wanlockhead: It might be comforting to the bereaved to know the war-dead ‘freely gave their lives in a just cause’ and to ‘reflect on the clean lives they lived’.
- Tibbermore: ‘Their grief is great, but it is tempered by the knowledge that their dear ones have fallen in defending King and county, and in a righteous cause’.

¹ King, *Memorials*, 44 – 46

5.5 Honouring survivors

The inclusion of survivors is a major difference between the monumental war memorials and rolls; unlike most monumental memorials, many rolls gave an honoured place to those who fought and survived as well as those who died.

- Wanlockhead's roll referred to 'those who have been spared to return. May they live long, and be enabled as time goes on, in some measure to forget the hardships and horrors of the war'.
- In 1926 an ex serviceman in Turriff's wrote 'to most of the men, looking back on it all now, it seems like a dream, or, at worst, a huge phantasmagoria'.

5.6 Heirloom

One of the advantages that rolls of honour had over monuments was that they were in a convenient portable form that could be kept at home, and so they were linked to families and the future.

- Selkirk's roll was presented to bereaved families and space was left to add further details about their deceased relative.
- Moray raised subscriptions so that the book could be sold at a nominal price so 'that no family however poor, may be unable to obtain a copy'.
- Monifieth: 'a list will be found interesting now, but particularly so later'
- Tibbermore: 'that each family might show to future generations the part played by its members'
- Wanlockhead: 'in future children will be told'
- Lochbroom: 'provide in every home where there is an empty chair "monumentum aere perennis"'
- Selkirk: 'will say with pride that is the name of one of our forebears, who fought in the Great War of 1914 – 18, saved Europe from German domination and preserved the liberties of the whole world'

5.7 Instruction by example

By commemorating the dead, memorials were to instruct the living and improve their behaviour so that the sacrifice would not have been in vain, for example:

- Comrie: 'May we resolve afresh to make and keep ourselves fit for the noble heritage they have bequeathed to us'.

- Denny: Servicemen ‘believed their land was worth fighting for – that it was a good land’ and ‘that it should be a land worth living in should be the earnest desire and constant endeavour of all’.
- Lochbroom: Survivors had ‘been spared to benefit their native land’ by the example of their lives, ‘already gloriously distinguished by gallant deeds in the past’.
- Forfar: ‘The boys will not weigh our words’ but will ‘judge how real is our love for them by the kind of lives we live now. Their fire will be kept alight not by act of parliament or memorial in stone or bronze but by every life becoming a lantern to protect it’.

6 Rolls as Expression of Local Identity

Rolls were an expression of local community pride, a celebration of the district’s contribution to the war effort, for example:

6.1 Number of servicemen

As well as listing the names, nearly every roll counted both the dead and those who served.

- Nairnshire calculated the servicemen as percentages of total population, the male population and the number of males aged between 18 and 40.
- Lewis calculated the proportion of men involved from each district compared to the population at the 1911 census.
- Kirkcudbright included names in parishes by birth, residence and occupation, and the parishes competed to get the highest number.
- Moray ‘furnished ... more men for the local forces in proportion to its population than any other county in Great Britain’.
- Tibbermore had several families who contributed ‘among the largest quota to the Colours in the country’.
- Lochbroom: ‘a noble total for a sparsely populated Highland parish’.
- Turriff: ‘a prodigious number of men from what is essentially a rural area’.
- Wanlockhead: ‘no set of young men more brotherly’ and ‘no village or town that yielded better-behaved “boys”’.

Heroes were particularly prized:

- Moray included the winner of a Victoria Cross, a native of Dallas whose parents once resided at Forres.
- Shetland included a VC, neither a native nor resident Shetlander but the cousin of a prominent local landowner.

6.2 Community war effort

Inclusion of civilians – see 3.1 and 4.2 above

6.3 Links to history

Another way of expressing local pride was by connecting to the past, for example:

- Kirkcudbright sought ‘the credit due to the ancient Province, as a legal corner of His Majesty’s Realm’.
- Past wars: Moray, fighting the Danes in the tenth century; Lewis, sixteenth century clan feuds; Selkirk, fighting at Falkirk with Wallace, at Flodden and many wars since.
- Comrie referred to a standing stone, said to be a monument to ‘a great Caledonian leader’ who ‘died in attacking a Roman camp’.

7 Attitudes to the War

Rolls express common contemporary attitudes to the war.

7.1 Reasons for the war

Many rolls describe the ambitions of the Germans to dominate the world and Britain’s part in foiling this threat to civilisation.

- Comrie: ‘to keep the German foot from our shores’
- Selkirk: ‘rallied to withstand an aggressive and implacable military conspiracy which, had it been successful, would have put the world under the heel of a selfish and relentless tyranny’
- Tibbermore: ‘died to preserve their country, and all that was dear to their hearts’, ‘delivered from the dread menace of invasion and defeat’
- Scone: ‘for hearth and home, and for things more precious imperilled in the great struggle of Might against Right, stepped into the breach with their human bodies, and laid down their lives’
- Wanlockhead: ‘we may never fully comprehend the callous and calculated tyranny designed for us’.

- Aberdeen: ‘would have darkened the heavens and depressed the spirit of man for generations’.
- Turriff: ‘War may still be, as was this war, necessary’ but the roll was ‘an overwhelming testimony in favour of a League of Nations or whatever device will lead and keep mankind in the paths which are of peace’.

7.2 Solidarity with the nation and Empire

Rolls expressed a total solidarity with Britain and the Empire in pursuing the war aims.

7.3 Sacrifice

Linked to consolation and coping with grief (5.4) and example for the future, (5.7)

The idea of sacrifice was about giving some purpose to the deaths of so many young men. People were encouraged to believe that they had died to save their homes and families from a terrible fate and to be proud of them. The deaths were even seen as a sacrifice on the part of the bereaved.

- Tibbermore: a photo of the ‘Patriotic Tulloch Family’ including all seven sons, of whom two died and three were gassed, and their father and mother.

7.4 Victory

There is not a great deal of discussion of victory, but it is depicted as the triumph of peace over violence – which ignored the real experience of war.

- Turriff: ‘not been compiled in any vainglorious spirit’ which ‘would soon have been quenched in the revelation of sorrow and suffering hid away from the eyes of the world’.
- Wanlockhead: ‘The joys of Victory are sweet’

7.5 Class/ rank

Early in the war some rolls (though none of those studied) only included officers, but later they became more inclusive.²

7.6 Gender

Most rolls were compiled by men and men were presumably expected to maintain a stiff upper lip. Bereavement was thought to be worse for women, for example:

² McIntyre, *Monuments*, 170 – 92

- New Kilpatrick: women ‘Wait in gnawing fear, but in silent patience and faith.’ ‘Theirs is perhaps the hardest lot’.
- Scone: ‘those who watched and waited’ and ‘those who uncomplainingly bore the tidings of death’.
- Tibbermore: ‘at no time in the history of our race have the women of our country done more for the good of the nation’.

7.7 Language

Linked to 5.4, 5.7 and 7.3

Since they were mostly published in the early 1920s, rolls show no sign of the later re-thinking of the experience and achievement of the war. The language employed is that of heroism and traditional modes of expression. Often the words duplicated those on the national memorial plaques: ‘He died for freedom and honour’. The dead are nearly always termed ‘the Fallen’ – a phrase with connotations of a ‘clean death’ from a bullet rather than the realities of shells, mud, gas, disease and drowning.

- Tibbermore: ‘their youth, their willingness and their cheerful courage’
- Forfar: ‘the brightest and best of all our number’ who found ‘resources of heroism in them all which our humdrum life before the war never tapped’; ‘all caught up and transfigured’.

APPENDIX V PUBLISHED WORK

Linda Riddell, 'Shetland's Viking Identity: A Casualty of the First World War?', in Jodie Matthews and Daniel Travers, (eds), *Islands and Britishness: a Global Perspective* (Newcastle, 2012), 134 – 48

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SHETLAND'S VIKING IDENTITY:
A CASUALTY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR?

LINDA RIDDELL

The archipelago of Shetland lies to the northeast of Scotland, with the Atlantic Ocean on the west and the North Sea on the east. Administratively, Shetland is the most northerly county of Scotland and was the last piece of the geographical and national jigsaw to make up the kingdom before the formation of Great Britain. In the early twentieth century, twenty-seven islands were inhabited by a population of about 27,000. In World War I, Shetland played an important part as a base for naval operations as well as providing its share of manpower for the armed services.

The building of the memorial to the Shetland men who died in the Great War was a lengthy and contentious process that provoked a debate about the appropriateness of Viking imagery in the circumstances of such loss. Before discussing the dispute, this chapter will briefly describe Shetland's Norse heritage and identity and how they were perceived in the early twentieth century.¹ The issues about the memorial will lead to questioning of that Viking image and consideration of Shetland's British identity in the context of the Great War. The chapter also explores wider themes of heritage and community identity, the pressures exerted by the war and the concepts surrounding post-war commemoration.

Shetland's Norse heritage

Shetland had a Norse past. Contrary to popular belief, the Islands are not nearer to Norway than to mainland Scotland, but nonetheless are well placed as a landfall for seafarers travelling west, and were settled by Vikings in the late eighth century. Shetland became part of the Norwegian Mediaeval kingdom and remained so until 1469, when it was transferred to Scotland on the marriage of James III to Margaret of Denmark. Thereafter the royal lands and administrative power passed to Scots, the distinctive laws were abolished in 1611 and the system of landholding changed gradually. By around 1700, the land-owning families were mainly of Scottish descent or claimed to be.² Norn, the local Norse language, died out in the eighteenth century, and links with Norway declined until the import trade in timber and boats ceased in the 1800s.³

Shetland's Norse past, if sometimes undervalued, was always recognised. The earliest detailed accounts of Shetland differentiated between the gentry, of Scottish descent, and the common people, a mixture of Scottish and Norwegian.⁴ During the eighteenth century in Britain and elsewhere, interest in Norse history and mythology developed, and it was given huge impetus when Walter Scott set his novel, *The Pirate*, in late-seventeenth-century Shetland and Orkney.⁵ In the following decades, evidence of Norse roots was enthusiastically sought in archaeology, history, language and placenames; Shetland's recent history was bypassed and Norse inheritance emphasised.⁶ The Islands were studied by scholars like Jakob Jakobsen and Gilbert Goudie, and local novelists wrote books with titles like *The Viking Path* and *Viking Boys*.⁷ Norse identity found expression, for example, through the celebration of Norse heroes in the stained-glass windows of Lerwick's town hall and the names of streets such as St. Magnus Street and King Harald Street. The best-known demonstration of this Norse heritage is the festival of Up-Helly-Aa, which evolved in the 1870s and 1880s from a custom of celebrating Christmas and New Year with rowdy behaviour, burning tar-barrels, and guizing (entertaining in disguise). Norse imagery such as Viking costumes, the burning of a longship and songs extolling Viking traditions were incorporated, for example:

The Norseman's home in days gone-by
Was on the rolling sea,

And there his pennon did defy
 The foe of Normandy.
 Then let us ne'er forget the race
 Who bravely fought and died
 And never filled a craven's grave
 But ruled the foaming tide.⁸

One of the features of this identification with Shetland's Norse past was an aversion to Scotland. Scottish immigrants were believed to have disinherited native landowners. Their descendants, who in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries exploited their tenants with fishing tenures, truck systems and debt, were identified as "Scottish" and their actions construed as "Scottish tyranny."⁹ The focus on the Islands' distinctive Norse heritage encouraged a feeling of "otherness" in Shetlanders, allowing them to differentiate themselves from their Scottish neighbours. As Lowenthal has argued, "minorities construe their heritage by negating the mainstream . . . Shetlanders know little of their Norwegian roots but know well they are *not* Scots, *not* Gaelic, *not* Highland Chieftain's churls."¹⁰

In *The Pirate*, Scott introduced "notions of nations and nationhood" and "the interface between cultural margins and centres of authority."¹¹ Picking up these ideas, antiquarians "composed an identity for their people that denied their Scottish heritage, and polished their folk tales and fragments of Shetland history into the story of how Scottish oppression overturned the idyllic life of Norse udallers."¹² Scotland was blamed for "the wounds which were inflicted during the dark centuries of neglect and oppression which followed upon her acquisition of the isles."¹³ Interest in Shetland's "traditional life" and history may have at least been partly motivated by the perception that it was under threat from economic changes and government intervention. Shetlanders had reasons for feeling apart and not fully incorporated into Scotland; their sense of shared history was limited by a dislike of what Scots had brought to Shetland. The availability of an attractive alternative history and culture supported the rejection of the nostalgic tartan and bagpipe images with which Scots built their traditions and identity. This, then, was the Norse aspect of Shetland's community identity in the early twentieth century.

The war memorial

Despite recognition of their Norse past, Viking imagery was abruptly rejected by the Shetlanders for their war memorial. During the Great War, thousands of Shetlanders had served in the armed forces; over 4,300 natives, residents and descendants of Shetlanders were listed in the *Shetland Roll of Honour and Roll of Service*.¹⁴ About 1,300 of these had been in the Army, mostly in the Gordon Highlanders and other Scottish regiments, but the majority had served in the Royal Naval Reserve or the Merchant Navy. Over 600 died, a grievous loss for the close-knit community. From November 1915, the *Shetland Times* recorded "Shetland's Fallen Heroes" and the lengthening list was described as "evidence of the harvest which Death is reaping out of these isles" which "speaks mutely of the many aching hearts and darkened lives left behind."¹⁵

Memorials to the war-dead were built all over Britain and in other countries, and Shetland was no exception. Over thirty were erected in the various parishes and islands, and planning for a memorial to "Shetland's Fallen Heroes" from the whole county had started in July 1918. Yet this monument, located in the centre of Lerwick, was not unveiled until early 1924. One of the controversial issues was the choice of the design and the argument was played out in the local newspapers.

A number of people submitted designs. One was Robert Williamson, a bicycle dealer in Lerwick. His scale model in plasticine was exhibited in the County Hall in February 1919. The monument, twenty-eight feet high, would be of Shetland grey and red granite with two oblong pillars flanking a buttressed central pillar, backed by a higher circular pillar. It would have figures: on the side pillars two sailors and two Gordon Highlanders, in front an old patrolman and two Scouts, at the back a woman and child and on the top a Viking.¹⁶ This design attracted much criticism. One letter to the *Shetland News* called it "monstrous," "incongruous" and "barbaric." Other people objected especially to the Viking. A letter with the pseudonym "War Worn" found it both "objectionable" and inappropriate, declaring, "had the ideals and methods of the Vikings not been as far as the Poles asunder from those of our boys, it might still be said that they are out of place in this connection!"¹⁷

The members of the committee in charge of the memorial were not interested in a local design. They commissioned Sir Robert Lorimer, a very distinguished architect and designer of memorials, including the Scottish National War Memorial. Lorimer sent his first design in April 1921.

Unfortunately, no copy seems to have survived, but it was described as being about twenty-four feet high in grey granite, with the bronze figure of a Viking. Above him was a pinnacle with a sword in relief on the front, the county coat of arms on the back and a cross on the top.¹⁸ Lorimer, who presumably was not aware of the reaction to Williamson's design, wrote, "I have shewn the design rugged and simple in character as I think this will suit the place."¹⁹

It did not suit some of the people. The design was exhibited publicly and was vehemently disparaged. One writer, "An Interested Parent," objected to the Viking because "his ideas were piracy, murder and robbery." He looked cowardly, retreating rather than facing the foe, and Vikings were associated with "strong drink and other unholy rites." The figure would "desecrate" the memorial.²⁰ Another correspondent took up the same themes. The Viking looked "as if he has just risen from a prolonged drinking bout" and was "ready for its [sic] sole occupation—the shedding of innocent blood." The writer hoped for something more suggestive of peace, "having had enough of war pictures."²¹ Another complained of "the glorification of war"; after all the sacrifice people did not want a Viking and a sword, "an offence to the fallen and maimed."²² All this was linked to ideas current at the time: that the British had gone reluctantly to war in their own defence and had fought for right against might, an ideal incompatible with Viking behaviour.

Perhaps the most surprising reaction to the design was from a columnist in the *Shetland Times* who wrote a sarcastic piece: "when I survey the wondrous thing, my pulses quicken and it is with difficulty I do not shout aloud with sheer delight." He asked, "What in heaven's name has the image of a Norse warrior to do with the boys who fought and fell?"—the Norse who "turned their arms against peaceful law abiding people" and whose "whole early history reeks with deeds of blood and debauchery." He advocated turning the figure into one of the Guizer Jarl from Up-Helly-Aa, which would be "purely Shetlandic." This

would make the Memorial a kind of Shadow and Sunshine, for our grief at the loss of our boys would be tempered with the recollection of the rollicking fun of "Up-Helly A'," and would emphasise the beauty and charity of the saying—"Let thou mourn who misses."²³

This remarkable commentary appears to have found popular approval: two weeks later, he thanked the numerous correspondents who supported him.²⁴

The War Memorial Committee realised that the design was unpopular: one went as far as to say that the design was "a shocking thing for a first-class architect to put out," and "a poor production for an eminent man's brains."²⁵ They decided to ask Lorimer to try again. The *Shetland Times* ran the headline: "Exit the Norseman."²⁶ Lorimer was offended by these criticisms and responded with a strongly worded letter.²⁷ He was, however, persuaded to submit another design, which was accepted and built. The memorial has no figure, Viking or otherwise; the only decorations are a sword and the shields on the faces of the column, a Lion Rampant, a St. Andrew's cross, a thistle and a Viking longship: three Scottish icons to one Norse.

Norse heritage challenged

The Viking was rejected, but this was clearly not the end of Shetland's identification with Norse heritage, which is still a strong and persistent influence today. To investigate what the controversy signified it is worth posing some questions about how Shetlanders really perceived their Norse identity.

Firstly, how pervasive was it? Probably most people knew of Shetland's Norse past; they had been told about it in the newspapers and perhaps at school, but the extent to which it affected their everyday lives is debateable. Many of their words and place names had Norse roots; some of the artefacts they used on the land or at sea may have had Norse origins; but it is doubtful if they considered themselves "Norse." Seibert, in his study of perceptions of the Norse past in Orkney, emphasised the smallness of the group that fostered this heritage.²⁸ This was even more the case in Shetland, and many of them were not residents.²⁹ It has been suggested that the idea of "otherness" based on "geographical isolation and Norse influences" may have come more from outsiders than Shetlanders.³⁰

Secondly, how seriously did Shetlanders perceive their Viking heritage? This question relates specifically to Up-Helly-Aa. It is very difficult to explain the strange mixture of significance and humour with which the people of Lerwick regard their festival. Much of it is a joke. A good example is the earliest surviving Up-Helly-Aa document, a notice of 1877, calling for the return of old Norse

religion: "The time has come when the Ancient Norse Faith of Shetland in all its sublime and rugged simplicity should be revived."³¹ This was far from serious; there was ambivalence about "Vikingry" and it was not always taken in earnest.

Finally, was there any political aspect to the Shetlander's Norse identity? Alfred Johnston of the Udal League had no success when he attempted to interest Shetlanders in home rule.³² In 1906, a writer (who lived in Edinburgh) claimed that Shetlanders looked back with regret on the time when they were Norwegians, claiming that "Shetlanders still have a kindly feeling towards Norway, and look back with unfeigned regret upon the time when the isles were under the wing of the mother-country."³³ This was a romantic and unrealistic view. That same year the Norwegians gained their independence from Sweden, and Shetland's local councils sent a congratulatory address to King Haakon. It claimed, "Shetlanders continue to look upon Norway as their old Mother-Land," but also mentioned Norway's "foreign" flag and did not suggest that Shetland might want to rejoin that "old motherland."³⁴

On the contrary, Shetlanders were seriously annoyed with Norwegian whaling companies operating in the Islands, and blamed them for the decline in the herring fishing. In 1907 in the House of Commons, Shetland's MP, Cathcart Wason, raised the question:

whether, in view of the fact that the King of Norway has a moral and legal claim on the Shetland Isles, and that the people of the islands are menaced with starvation owing to the failure of the herring fishing [the Prime Minister] will consider if the material well-being of the Shetlanders would be better under Norwegian than British rule?

When Campbell-Bannerman suggested that he was not serious, Wason asked, "is it not the case that if the spirit of the people had not been ground between the upper and the nether millstones of Scottish Land Laws and Scottish tyranny they would have protected themselves as the Norwegians did?"³⁵ But the Shetlanders were seeking a better deal from the British government, not union with the whale-hunting Norwegians. Indeed, since there were so many Shetland emigrants in the colonies, Shetlanders felt themselves to be part of the British Empire. There was no separatist movement or suggestion that Shetland should join the new Norwegian kingdom, and attempts to politicise Scandinavian roots failed. The Norse past was seen as having aspects worth celebrating, but was still very much considered "past." In addition, as described by Wawn, Vikings were very popular in Britain as a whole and claimed as British ancestors.³⁶ Norse ideals fitted well with the ethos of Empire, with concepts of courage and showing a stiff upper-lip; maritime skill, exploration and the settlement of new lands; self-reliance, liberty and egalitarianism. It was quite possible to hold extremely romantic notions about the Norse past and still extol the greatness of the British Empire.

Shetland and "Britishness"

Three inter-related aspects are important when looking at the "Britishness" of the Shetlanders. One was that life for most Shetlanders had improved towards the end of the nineteenth century; from the Truck Commission in 1872 which had publicised their economic plight; through the Education Acts of 1872 and 1889; the Crofter's Act of 1886 which had brought security of tenure and reduced rents; and the Works Act 1891 which helped build road and piers. The first decade of the new century brought improved medical provision, Old Age Pensions and National Insurance. Shetlanders were grateful for these benefits, which, crucially, had come from the British government.

Secondly, Shetland had seen a period of unprecedented prosperity before World War I. This was based on herring fishing, which was an international, not merely a local, industry, and the Merchant Navy, which was tied in with the British Empire and the trade that sustained it.

Thirdly, Shetland's self-sufficiency was decreasing, and interaction with other places had become more frequent with scheduled steamer services and postal and telegraph facilities. Literacy had improved and two local newspapers had been established. The extension of the franchise had involved more people in politics. The herring "boom" had brought large numbers of incomers, and both locals and visitors commented on the cosmopolitan nature of the small port of Lerwick. Employment in the merchant service meant many Shetland men travelled the world, and there were Shetland emigrants in the UK and abroad.

Across the country, this was a period when "Britishness," the Empire and patriotism were promoted through education, newspapers and books.³⁷ Shetlanders were well aware of their British nationality. Many Shetlanders joined the Royal Naval Reserve and there was no more British, indeed

English, institution than the Royal Navy. The Territorial Army, started in 1908, was a popular leisure pursuit in Lerwick—even though it involved occasionally wearing the kilt. Shetlanders saw themselves as not so much part of Scotland as of Britain and the Empire. They participated in Empire, professed (with some misgivings) loyalty to the monarchy and made good use of the opportunities provided by the expansion of Britain's interests abroad. This period, when communication with the outside world was escalating, saw both increased interest in Shetland's past and development of a distinctive local culture. As Smout points out, Shetlanders maintained their British and imperial identities simultaneously with their local Shetland identity, while repudiating the national or Scottish level.³⁸

It may seem grandiose to speak about a place as small as Shetland having a distinct "place in the world"; nevertheless, at this time Shetlanders were aware of their unique position.³⁹ They developed an identity round the "Old Rock," based on the idea that all the "exiles" (emigrant Shetlanders) were deeply interested in Shetland and longed to be back there. Newspaper reports about ex-Shetlanders in cities such as Wellington, Chicago and Vancouver supported this idea. A columnist declared that:

The sons of the "Old Rock" are scattered far and wide and . . . there are no more loyal subjects to be found anywhere, and many of them have settled in distant lands, who have proved themselves true Empire builders, giving of their best to the land of their adoption, and remaining true to their allegiance to the Homeland.⁴⁰

The phrase was adopted as the title of the editorial column in the *Shetland Times* and widely used in the local newspapers and the sentimental literature of the period. During World War I the new "exiles," the servicemen, were often termed "sons of the 'Old Rock.'"

The "Old Rock" expressed the geographical reality of a sea-girt homeland, suggesting barrenness, a hard way of life, durability and resilience. Shetlanders had a real love and pride in their isles, and were gratified when they were noticed, for example, in the press. Their identity was forged of geographical isolation, a distinctive ethnic background and history, a sea-faring way of life, memories of oppression, a strong dialect and community ethic. It was being reinvented and written about at a time when they were experiencing rapid change and increasing external contact. There was room in it for both their Norse past and their British present. An illustration of this is the original last verse of "The Norseman's Home," which was sung at Up-Helly-Aa:

The Norseman's power is past and gone,
Their courage, strength and pride:
For now Britannia's sons alone,
In triumph stem the tide;
Then may Victoria rule the land,
Our laws and rights defend,
One cheer then give with heart and hand—
The Queen!—the people's friend.⁴¹

Patriotism tested

The outbreak of the Great War provided an opportunity for Shetlanders to show their patriotism and loyalty to the Empire. They were very proud of their war effort and the local newspapers frequently asserted that Shetland was more than "doing its bit." For example, in March 1918, the *Shetland Times* declared, "in no part of the great Empire to which we belong has there been a more ready or more generous response to the patriotism of the people than there has been in Shetland."⁴² Their patriotism, however, was put under pressure in several ways. The most significant occurred before the war but was linked to the objections to a Viking on the war memorial. One letter of 1919 claimed that the symbol might be misunderstood:

an ultra-Norse memorial might easily be construed by southerners as the emblem of disloyal affection for a "motherland" that is now, apart from sentiment, nothing but a foreign land . . . in many parts of the south during time of the war, we Shetlanders were spoken of as being "disaffected" because of our "foreign origin." . . . We were supposed to be pro-German.⁴³

This suspicion had come from Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, who had been concerned that Shetland would make a good base for German submarines and that Shetlanders would

support the enemy. He thought that the Shetlanders' "attachment to Great Britain was somewhat weak" and wrote:

In the Shetlands particularly, the detached situation of the islanders has tended to weaken their sense of British nationality. The Germans have in the past few years been paying them a great deal of attention. Frequent visits of squadrons and of individual vessels have taken place; and German influences are already sensibly at work in the islands.⁴⁴

It is not clear whether Churchill really believed this; but he discounted contrary intelligence and, despite visiting Orkney in 1913, did not go to see Shetland for himself, ignoring the Shetlanders' membership of the reserve forces and requests for a naval base.

He was right that the Germans were aware of Shetland's strategic location. German ships visited Lerwick in 1894, in 1900, and over thirty of them in 1904. Despite offering and enjoying great hospitality, Shetlanders suspected there was a sinister reason for the visit—to gather information. There were rumours of landings in remote places, sailors taking an over-keen interest in their surroundings and unlit ships passing through the harbour at night. The British Navy had to be persuaded to visit and in September, because of rough weather, only four ships of the Channel Fleet arrived. The officers made no effort to learn about the place. Local people were not impressed. The *Shetland Times* carried a sarcastic editorial headlined "The Phantom Fleet" suggesting that "A polite request to the Germans might get all the information needed to use the harbour for battleships."⁴⁵

At this time, scares about a German invasion were prevalent in both the newspapers and fiction.⁴⁶ Shetland figured prominently in William Le Queux's very popular fictional *Invasion of 1910*, which included an account of the liberation of the Islands from the Germans, and in *The German Invasion of England* by "a French Staff Officer," which explored the possibility that the Germans might take a British island, perhaps Shetland.⁴⁷

Shetland's location combined with such suspicions meant that it was placed under Admiralty rule for the duration of the war. This brought benefits in the form of employment opportunities, but also caused restrictions such as censorship of letters, the need for permits for inter-island travel and a ban on showing lights. Fishing and sea transport were disrupted by Admiralty activities as well as enemy action, and the Admiralty's cars damaged the Shetland roads. In 1915, a store in Lerwick, used by the Navy for ammunition, exploded with loss of life and damage to property; the Admiralty paid some compensation but did not satisfy all claims. Relations between the Admiralty and local people, therefore, were sometimes strained.

The "Post Office incident" was perhaps the low point in this association.⁴⁸ In 1914, "spy fever" was rife across the country and accusations were made on the flimsiest of evidence. In November, Vice-Admiral Colville in Orkney suspected his mail had been tampered with and ordered that the staff of Lerwick Post Office be detained. All forty of them were imprisoned, though neither questioned nor charged, and their homes were searched. The mail and telegraph services were seriously disrupted. The Sheriff, the Lord Advocate, the MP and the Secretary for Scotland were involved, as were the Post Office authorities and the Prison Commissioners, and the incident was reported in Scottish newspapers. The prisoners were released within a week and offered an apology and compensation, but there was never any public explanation. Even after the war, this incident still rankled and in 1919, the Council pressed for a public apology, calling the incident "an insult to the loyalty of the county."⁴⁹

This was not the only way that the patriotism of Shetlanders was tested during the war, though it was probably the most unusual. Sacrifices were expected and it was accepted that men would serve and some would die, but the war also bore hard on civilians. In 1917 and 1918, people were sick and tired of it. There was disruption to shipping and mail and food shortages. The government fixed the prices of flour and bread so low that it was uneconomic to sell them in Shetland, and refused to pay for or take account of freight. Perversely the price of fish was fixed too high for local purchase. The Board of Agriculture refused to support local efforts to increase agricultural production. Shetland servicemen found it difficult and expensive to get home on leave. The local newspapers criticised many aspects of the government's handling of the war and Shetlanders felt that they were particularly afflicted by petty and inappropriate regulations, even speculating that they were the most "long-suffering yet law-abiding community in the British group."⁵⁰

Nevertheless, although their loyalty had been under suspicion, the war, if anything, strengthened unity with Britain and the Empire in whose name the sacrifices had been made. The immediate post-war period was a time of uncertainty but also of hope; hope that life would improve and that the government might help tackle some of Shetland's long-term economic problems. Shetlanders knew

their islands were regarded as remote, perhaps backward, even uncivilised, and they wanted to have the benefits of the modern world. They needed practical solutions for the future not romantic notions about the past. In the following years, many of these hopes came to nothing and a utopian Norse heritage was of little value. Jay Winter has written that local war memorials “arose out of the post-war search for a language in which to reaffirm the values of the community for which soldiers had laid down their lives.”⁵¹

Although local memorials in Britain were built in forms consistent with “a nationwide uniformity of aims and attitudes and a desire to conform to national stereotypes,” they were also expressions of the cohesion of individual communities in the face of bereavement and often gave rise to disputes.⁵² The Viking image, though relevant to Shetland’s heritage, did not reflect the “nationwide conformity” and the mood of the times. Its rejection was very specifically related to the war memorial, the commemoration of the dead and the sacrifice of the community. Ideas of what was appropriate did not include the celebration of a violent, predatory people. One respondent to the *Shetland Times* wrote:

How false in sentiment must be a memorial that over-emphasises the racial distinction and neglects entirely, or almost entirely, to portray in unmistakable fashion Shetland’s loyalty and devotion to the great Empire of which we, I trust, form a worthy part.⁵³

In general, admiration for the Vikings waned during the war. In Orkney, the 1920s has been called “the golden age of antiquarianism,” but there was no comparable renaissance in Shetland; interest in its Norse past survived but there was less scholarly investigation and perhaps less romantic rhetoric.⁵⁴

Shetlanders, therefore, had given an unequivocal thumbs-down to the Viking figure suggested for the war memorial and its presumed symbolism. This had happened for complex reasons: people had had more than enough of war and war imagery; they spurned the Viking war-like tradition and its links to suspicions of disloyalty. This was not the end of Shetland’s Norse heritage, but in any case it had been viewed sometimes with pride, occasionally with derision, and the use of its concepts and symbolism was selective. It had been subsumed within a particular identity of the “Old Rock.” When it came to the war, Shetlanders felt that they had more than “done their bit,” despite the British government’s suspicions about their loyalty and perceived lack of appreciation for their war effort. The post-war period was not the time to be lacking in patriotism and, regardless of their Norse heritage, they remained resolutely, loyally “British.”

Notes

- ¹. The terms 'Viking' and 'Norse' are used here without any particular differentiation.
- ². John Brand, *A Brief Description of Orkney, Shetland, Pightland Firth and Caithness* (Edinburgh: Mosman, 1701), 69–70; Robert Sibbald, *Description of the Isles of Orkney and Zetland* (Edinburgh: Andrew Symson, 1711), 4; Thomas Gifford, *Historical description of the Zetland Islands in the Year 1733* (London: J. Nicols, 1786), 31.
- ³. M. P. Barnes, *The Norn Language of Orkney and Shetland* (Lerwick: Shetland Times, 1998), 21–28; Brian Smith, "The Development of the Spoken and Written Shetland Dialect: A Historian's View" in *Shetland's Northern Links: Language and History*, ed. D. J. Waugh, 30–43 (Shetland: SSNS, 1996), 31–35; Brian Smith, "Shetland, Scotland and Scandinavia, 1400–1700: The Changing Nature of Contact" in *Scotland and Scandinavia*, ed. G. Simpson (Edinburgh, John Donald, 1990), 25–37.
- ⁴. See note 2.
- ⁵. Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), 80–81; S. Seibert, *Reception and Construction of the Norse Past in Orkney* (Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 74–85.
- ⁶. Bronwen J. Cohen, "Norse Imagery in Shetland: An Historical Study of Intellectuals and their Use of the Past in the Construction of Shetland's Identity, with Particular Reference to the Period 1800–1914" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1983); Seibert, *Reception and Construction*, 85–162.
- ⁷. J. J. Haldane Burgess, *The Viking Path* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1894); Jessie Saxby, *Viking Boys* (London: Nisbet, 1892).
- ⁸. C.E. Mitchell, *Up-Helly-Aa, Tar Barrells and Guizing Looking Back* (Lerwick: Manson, 1948), 128; James W. Irvine, *Up-Helly-Aa: A Century of Festival* (Lerwick: Shetland Publishing, 1982); Callum G. Brown, *Up-Helly-Aa: Custom, Culture and Community in Shetland* (Manchester: Mandolin, 1999); Brian Smith, "Up-Helly-Aa: Separating the Facts from the Fiction," *Shetland Times*, January 23, 1993, 24–25.
- ⁹. Cohen, "Norse Imagery," 392–422; Seibert, *Reception and Construction*, 97–102.
- ¹⁰. David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 234.
- ¹¹. Wawn, *Vikings and the Victorians*, 67.
- ¹². Cohen, "Norse Imagery," 391.
- ¹³. W. F. Clark, *The Story of Shetland* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1906), 13.
- ¹⁴. Thomas Manson, *Shetland's Roll of Honour and Roll of Service* (Lerwick: Shetland News, 1920).
- ¹⁵. *Shetland Times*, December 30, 1916, 4.
- ¹⁶. *Shetland News*, February 27, 1919, 5.
- ¹⁷. *Shetland News*, March 13, 1919, 8.
- ¹⁸. *Shetland News*, May 5, 1921, 8.
- ¹⁹. Letter from Lorimer to the War Memorial Committee, April 7, 1921. Shetland Archives, CO7/77/1/29.
- ²⁰. *Shetland News*, May 26, 1921, 8.
- ²¹. *Shetland News*, August 25, 1921, 5.
- ²². *Shetland News*, September 5, 1921, 4.
- ²³. *Shetland Times*, September 3, 1921, 5.
- ²⁴. *Shetland Times*, September 17, 1921, 5.
- ²⁵. *Shetland News*, September 8, 1921, 4.
- ²⁶. *Shetland Times*, September 17, 1921, 2.
- ²⁷. Letter from Lorimer to the War Memorial Committee, September 23, 1921. Shetland Archives, CO7/77/1/29.
- ²⁸. Seibert, *Reception and Construction*, 14.
- ²⁹. For example, Clark, Saxby and Goudie were Shetland natives but wrote mostly in Edinburgh.
- ³⁰. Lynn Abrams, *Myth and Materiality in a Woman's World: Shetland 1800–2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 5.
- ³¹. Mitchell, *Up-Helly-Aa*, 207–10.
- ³². The Udal League was a society aiming to rectify Orkney and Shetland's alleged grievances. Cohen, "Norse Imagery," 384–91; W. P. L. Thomson, "The Udal League," *Orkney View* 2 (1985), 15–17; Colin Kidd, "Race, Empire and the Limits of Nineteenth Century Scottish Nationhood," *Historical Journal* 46, no. 4, (2003): 873–92, 890–91; Seibert, *Reception and Construction*, 128–32.
- ³³. Clark, *Story of Shetland*, 13.

- ³⁴. Zetland County Council and Lerwick Town Council to Haakon VII of Norway (1906). Text taken from a cutting in a scrapbook. D1/135/285, Shetland Archives.
- ³⁵. *House of Commons Debates*, 4th series, vol. 179 (August 5, 1907), cc.1562–63.
- ³⁶. Wawn, *Viking and the Victorians*.
- ³⁷. John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1860–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).
- ³⁸. T. C. Smout, “Perspectives on the Scottish Identity,” *Scottish Affairs* 6 (1994), 101–13; Paul Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2004), pages 1–9 summarise the debates about British identity.
- ³⁹. Hance D. Smith, *Shetland Life and Trade 1550–1914* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1984), 1; 288–89.
- ⁴⁰. *Shetland Times*, January 4, 1913, 5.
- ⁴¹. Mitchell, *Up-Helly-Aa*, 128.
- ⁴². *Shetland Times*, March 9, 1918, 4.
- ⁴³. *Shetland News*, March 20, 1919, 5.
- ⁴⁴. Admiralty to War Office, October 4, 1912. ADM 116/1293. Admiralty: Record Office: Cases, National Archives, Kew; CID Minutes, August 5, 1913. ADM1/ 8925. Admiralty, and Ministry of Defence, Navy Department: Correspondence and Papers, National Archives, Kew.
- ⁴⁵. *Shetland Times*, September 24, 1904, 4.
- ⁴⁶. I. F. Clarke, ed., *The Great War with Germany, 1890–1914: Fictions and Fantasies of the War-to-come* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997); A. J. A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament 1896–1914* (London: Routledge, 1984).
- ⁴⁷. Linda Riddell, “‘The Great Invasions of 1910’: Alternative Versions of the Glorious Liberation of Lerwick,” in *New Shetlander* 251 (2010), 32–35.
- ⁴⁸. Margaret Flaws, *Spy Fever: The Post Office Affair* (Lerwick: Shetland Times, 2009).
- ⁴⁹. *Shetland News*, February 27, 1919, 8.
- ⁵⁰. *Shetland Times*, March 23, 1918, 4.
- ⁵¹. Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6.
- ⁵². Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 51; J. R. Gillis, “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship,” in J. R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1994), 2–24: 3, 5; Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 20, 86–99, 247; T. Laqueur, “Memory and Naming,” in J. R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, 150–67, 158.
- ⁵³. Letter in *Shetland News*, March 20, 1919, 5.
- ⁵⁴. Seibert, *Reception and Construction*, 17.