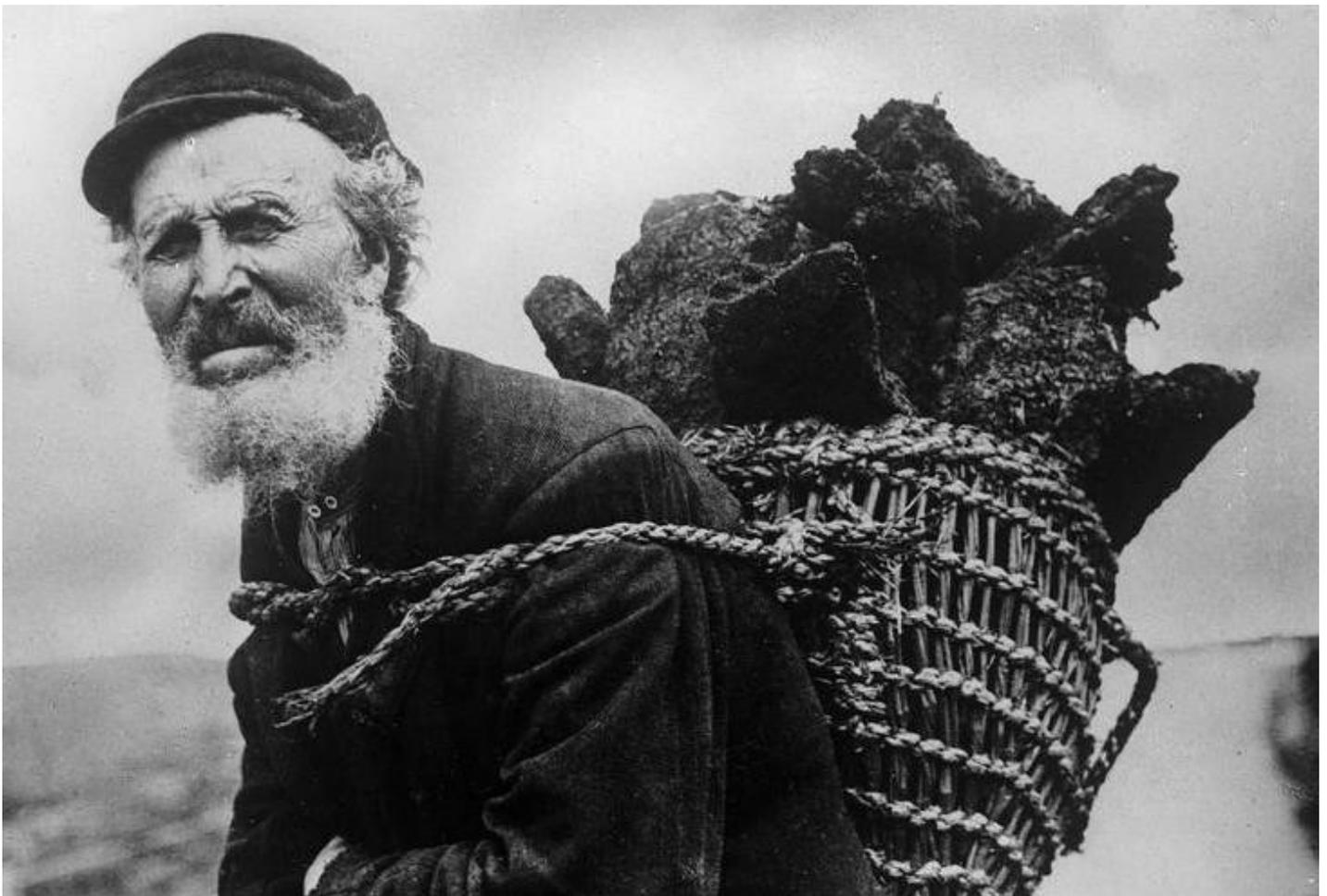


LANDWISE!

FARMING, CROFTING AND
TENDING TO THE LAND

THEN AND NOW



Secondary 1-3



Crofting Contents



People of the
past,
page 3

Land and
buildings,
pages 4-7



Resources,
tools and
chores,
pages 8-12



Social life,
pages 13-14

The lairds and
their impact,
pages 15-17



Reform and
crofting today,
pages 18-21

Bibliography,
pages 23-24

CROFTERS COMM
APPLICATION TO FIX FAIR RENT.
CERTIFIED COPY ORDERS BY COMMISSIONERS.

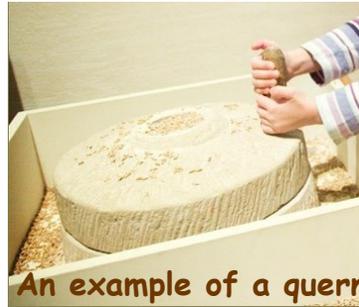
Landlord *Lord Belsland*
Crofter *John Johnson, W. Howland, Sandefur*
Amiel & Co 1889 Commissioner *Macintyre*



People of the past



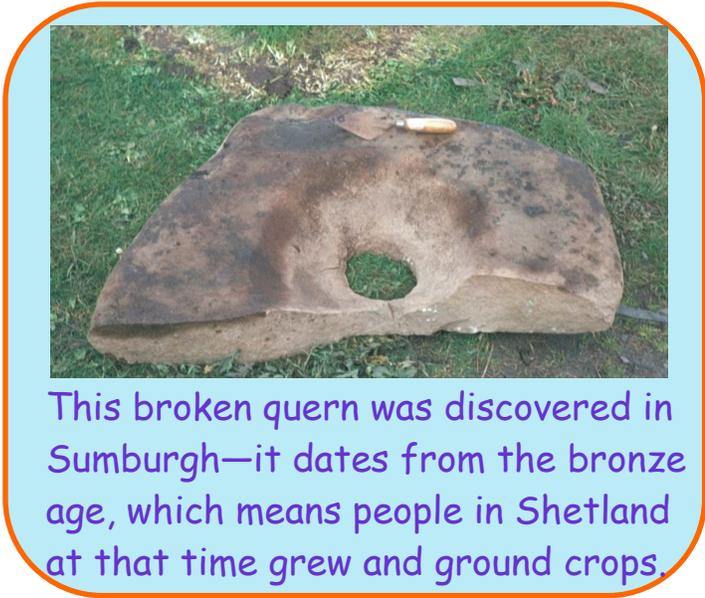
Tending to the land has always been a part of Shetland life.



An example of a quern

The first settlers grew crops and hunted wild animals.

The Picts had a growing population, so they had to plant a lot of crops.



This broken quern was discovered in Sumburgh—it dates from the bronze age, which means people in Shetland at that time grew and ground crops.



The hjuk (heuk), or sickle, was used for reaping.



Vikings would have used hjuks, or similar implements.

When Vikings travelled to Shetland, they brought their own livestock with them.

They brought cows, sheep, pigs, ponies and poultry.

The livestock the Norsemen took to Shetland evolved into unique Shetland breeds—these animals could weather some bad storms!



A native Shetland sheep!

The ponies the Norsemen took to Shetland evolved into the Shetland pony we know today!





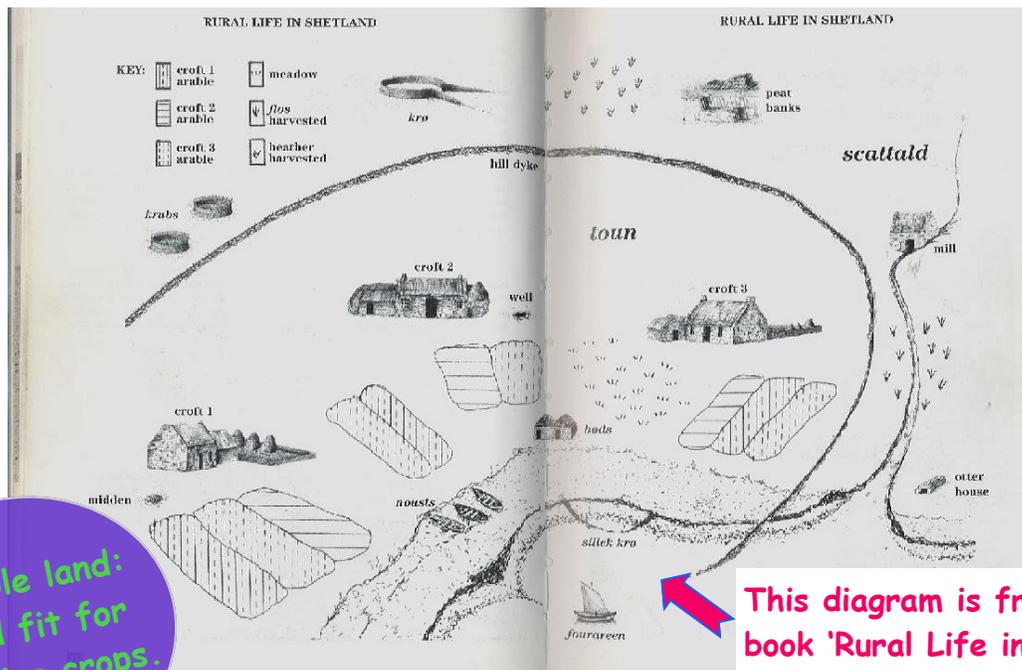
The Land



The Norsemen continued to cultivate land previously used by earlier people, and set up 'townships'.

Each 'township' was a group of 1-20 houses, where crops would grow.

Arable land: land fit for planting crops.



Animals were kept outside of the hill dyke, to graze on land less arable.

This diagram is from Ian Tait's book 'Rural Life in Shetland' (p.20)

'Runrig' systems were set up because the population was growing.

The land was shared equally, so that each crofter had both good and poor quality land to work with.

Farms worked together to make sure everyone's crops were harvested on time.

Runrig: the land was shared by having strips (rigs) of land divided up throughout the township.



The main grain crops the Norsemen planted were bere, oats and kale (cabbage). Tatties were only introduced around 1730—they were resilient to the harsh climate and became a staple part of the diet.

Inside The Crofthouse

"Dere wis seven o wis...many slept in da ben room, some in da closet, an dere wir a bed in da kitchen/ living room..."

Maggie Morrison in
Ahint Da Daeks,
Mitchell, p.15

By about 1870 the crofthouse was built on ground poor for growing crops. It was in a sheltered area with a supply of fresh water nearby. The floor was made of earth, and a fire sat in the middle of the 'but' end.

The croft had drystone walls with clay, mortar or earth.

Most crofts only had two rooms—the 'but' end and the 'ben' end.

The 'but' end was dark, smoky and smelly. It was used for cooking, eating, sitting, knitting, and socialising.



The 'but' end had no chimney—sometimes they had a hole in the roof, and a 'koli' lamp for light.



This picture of a but end was taken sometime between 1905 and 1910. You can see the hearth for cooking in the middle of the floor.

'koli' lamp—a lamp that burned fish oil.

The 'ben' end was the bedroom. It was the best kept room, and important visitors like the minister or landlord's representative would be invited into this room.

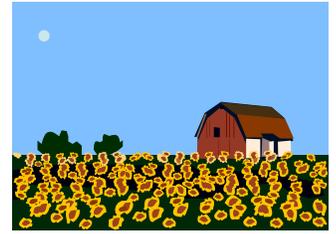
The ben end



Most of the family slept in the ben end, and many children shared the same 'box-bed' - the doors helped keep out the draughts!



There was no inside toilet—you either went outside or into the byre!

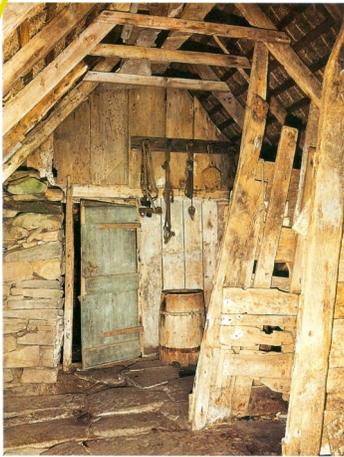


Outbuildings

A byre was often built at one end of the house, and a barn at the back. Connecting doors through the 'trance' (hallway) meant that the crofter could tend to his or her animals on a dark winter night without going outside.

Some crofts had kilns and stables, but they weren't usually connected to the house.

The byre



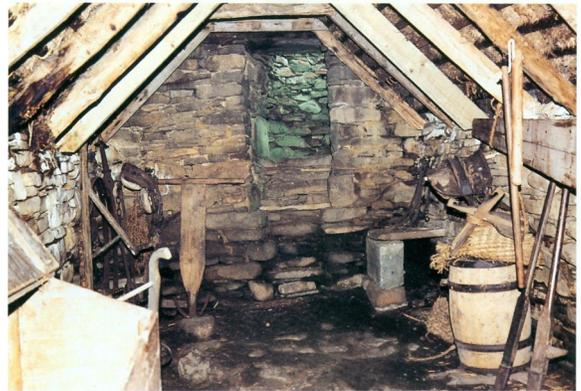
The delivery of calves would take place in the byre.

The byre was home for the cattle every night and most winter days.

Cows were looked after as well as possible because they were so important to the croft.

The barn

The barn was used for storing working tools and doing practical work. You'd find the quern in the barn.



The crofter could nip into the barn to grind some meal or fetch tatties.

The 'hopper' - the grain is poured in here

The mill

The mill was nearby the croft, and was where the meal was ground.



The outside of a mill



The 'oversten' - this stone grinds the grain

The inside of a mill where the grain was ground

It was said that 'njuggels' - water creatures in the form of a horse—loitered around the mill and lured people to their doom in lochs.

A Practical Guide to Roof Construction

If you want a leak-proof roof, follow this article from *Thatching and Scratching: Croft Roofs and Things you Find in Them*. *joke!*



1. Connect your new roof 'couplets' with these connecting beams—they are called 'twartbaks'. You will probably have to find some drift wood as we don't have enough trees! This will give you the framework for your roof.

2. Nail the 'langbands' (laths) lengthwise over the framework, using thick driftwood. Fix rope at 90 degrees to this. This lattice effect prevents turf from falling through the roof.

Tip: You can make the rope by twisting rough heather together.

Turf

3. Now lay your poans (turf) over the lattice framework. Overlap them like slates. They can be attached to the couplets and twartbaks with wooden pins.



4. Now gather your gloy (thatching straw) together into bundles. Place the bundles of straw on the turf, making sure you keep an equal thickness over the entire roof.



5. Get some simmens (rope) and pull them over the straw roof, from gable to gable. Attach linkstens (thatching weights - large, flat stones) to the end of the simmens to hold everything in place.



Nature's gifts



Crofters could use the wild plants, peat and seaweed on their



Heather

Natural resources like these were essential to the crofter.



Seaweed

Ling (heather) could be used to make rope. It was very hard on the hands, but good ling rope could last for a long time.

It could also be used to dye wool!



Making rope out of heather.

Seaweed could be burned into 'kelp' to put on the soil—this acted as a fertiliser and helped crops grow.

It was also used for animal feed—sheep often came down to the shore in winter to feed on seaweed.



Man burning seaweed!

Peat could be burned on a fire like coal. Peat is found in many areas of Shetland, and was very important to crofters—it was their only source of fuel!

Peat stack



Some peat was also used for animal bedding.

Dung and seaweed, dat wis aa dat wis used den as fertiliser, dere wis no bagged fertiliser den...

Bob Goudie speaking about crofting methods in the first half of the 1900's (Mitchell, 1987, p.2)



CASTING PEATS

Peat cutting preparations started in March or April when crofters flayed the surface of the turf to expose the moor beneath.

They use a 'ripper' and flat shovel to do this.



Ripper



Tushkar

Peat was then cut in May using a 'tushkar' - a narrow iron spade with a right-angled cutting blade.

The soft peat was cut into slabs then stacked to dry in the sun and wind.

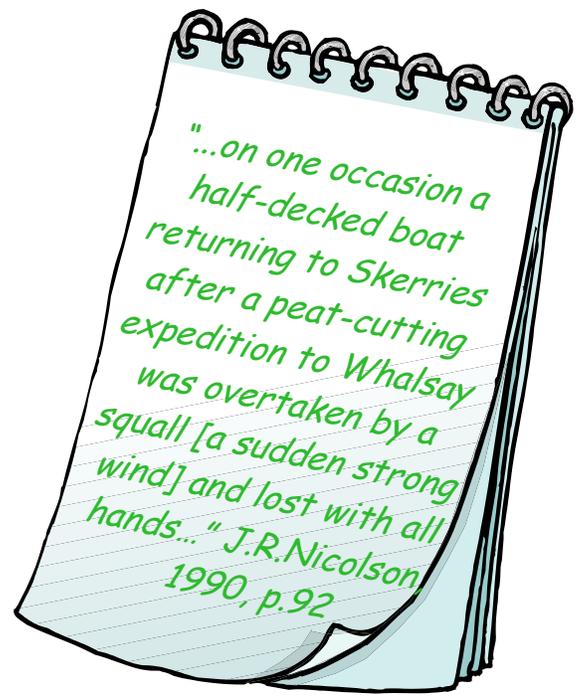


Flitting (moving) the peats was one of the major events in the crofting year, as everybody was needed to help lift and load the peats.

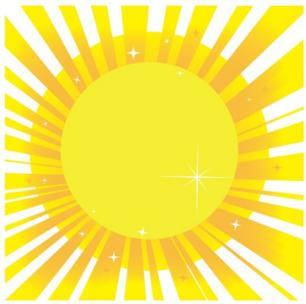


Flitting peats

The peat would be transported by boat, cart, sledge or horse, and once home would be stacked outside the house.



"...on one occasion a half-decked boat returning to Skerries after a peat-cutting expedition to Whalsay was overtaken by a squall [a sudden strong wind] and lost with all hands..." J.R.Nicolson, 1990, p.92



Crofting Calendar



A crofter's life was governed by the seasons. Weather plays a big part—a poor harvest means less bread, less fodder, and less straw for thatching the roof.

Particular crofting jobs were done in summer, whilst others were done in winter, often indoors.

Many crofts have a five year crop rotation.

Year	Crop Type
1	Fallow
2	Oats
3	Oats
4	Tatties
5	Bere

After harvest, crofters threshed their grain to separate seeds from straw, then winnowed it to blow off the chaff, and finally dried it.



Summer

The Shetland breed of animals could survive through bad weather on little food.



Winter

In the spring the animals took a long time to recover from the winter.

The outdoor life and diet gave the Shetland sheep very fine wool.

'Rooin' sheep: Shetland sheep shed their fleece naturally, so crofters just had to pluck the wool instead of clipping.

Summer to-do list

- * Lead cattle into township to roam free
- * Mow and rake the hay—stack into a *skroo*
- * Cut peats from ground and leave to dry
- * Plough and dell tatties
- * Fetch peats
- * Churn milk into butter

Winter to-do list

- * Lead cattle to byre
- * Go inside and prepare fodder for the animals
- * Card and spin wool—knit jumpers and socks for bairns
- * Mend nets and make 'kishies'
- Cut kale for lambs morning feed

A day in the life of a crofter's wife



Women were essential to the croft.



As well as cooking, baking, spinning, knitting and looking after the children, they worked hard on the croft.



They could be found 'dellin' for tatties, carrying peats home, gathering crops and selling eggs and other goods.



Women carrying 'kishies' full of peat.



They milked cows, ground grain and looked after the hens.

The fine quality Shetland wool garments they knitted sold for a good price.



Women harrowing the field in Unst in the 1890's.

Many men had to leave the croft and go to sea in order to provide for the family.



The herring industry grew in Shetland in the late 19th century, and many women could be found gutting fish at the herring stations.



John Thomas Leask, speaking about the work his mother did in the first half of the 1900's. Mitchell, 1987, p.6

The woman would then be responsible for the whole croft—she would do her chores as well as the jobs the man would usually do.

"At one time she [mother] was on her own, and half a dozen o kids, so dey maybe helped some; but dere wisna much dey could do. So shö aye did a lok o croft work—I don't know how she managed...there were a lok o work for da women folk on dis crofts."

Summer wake-up
call—6am
Setting down the
work—9pm

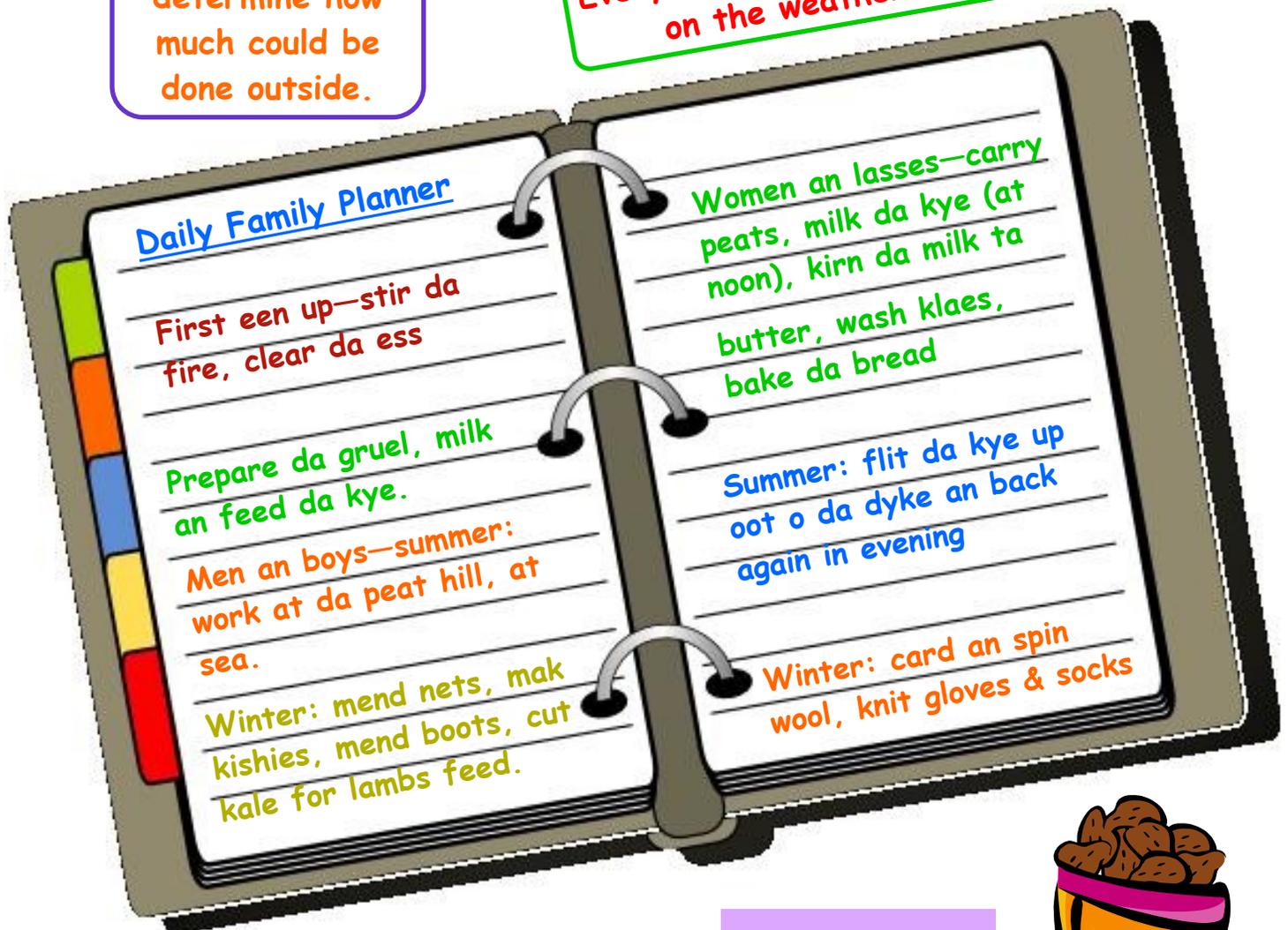
Daily Work

Winter wake-up
call—8am
Work ongoing
throughout evening

Extra chores: May-August
when men away at sea.

The season would
determine how
much could be
done outside.

Everything was dependent
on the weather!



"Hit wis cured, yes, yes; I can mind da hams hangin up cured, saated pork...you were haein da fresh spread oot ower da Hairst months up ta aboot da New Year; an den da rest o da year, of course, hit wis jest aa saat stuff; something at I niver did like."

12 Agnes Leask remembers the seasonal foods
(Mitchell, 1987, p.14)

Foodstuff!



"We aaways hed milk, and we made our own butter an kirn milk, and we hed da buttermilk, both ta drink an ta bake with..."

Jim Smith tells us about how his family made their own milk-based foods (Mitchell, 1987, p.14)



Social life



Much of the time in winter it was too cold and dark to work outside!

Instead, friends and neighbours would gather in the 'but' room with the kili lamp and the peat fire and tell stories, riddles and superstitions.



A dance was often held at Christmas with a solo fiddle and the fiddle was often brought out on a winter's night!

...dey used ta have dances in aa da different hooses...and somebody played da fiddle and you danced...

There wasn't much room, but small dances could be had around the hearth in the middle of the floor.
And sometimes they gathered in a large barn nearby and danced in there.

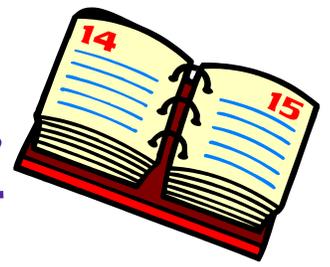
John W. Leask sharing memories (Mitchell, 1987, p.26)

The but room would be dark, smoky with tobacco and peat reek, and would smell of dried meat and fish—not unpleasant, but unusual today!



Women cairding (carding) wool together in the but-end.

The but room would also be used for 'carding' gatherings. Women would get together and card their wool—a long and monotonous job made easier with good company.



Dates for your diary



17th January

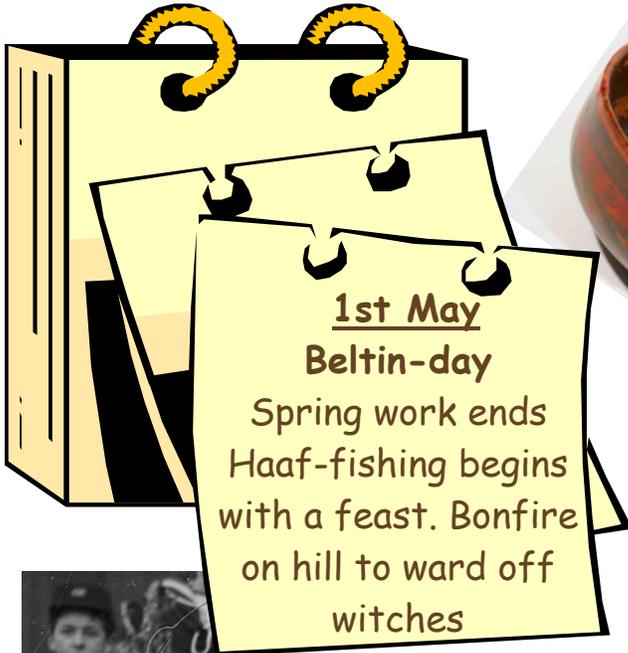
Antonsmas

Well known for heavy snow—"Antinsmas sna is da warst sna."

17th March

Bogl-day

Spring work begins
Supper was cakes of oatmeal or beremeal named "bogls"



1st May

Beltin-day

Spring work ends
Haaf-fishing begins with a feast. Bonfire on hill to ward off witches



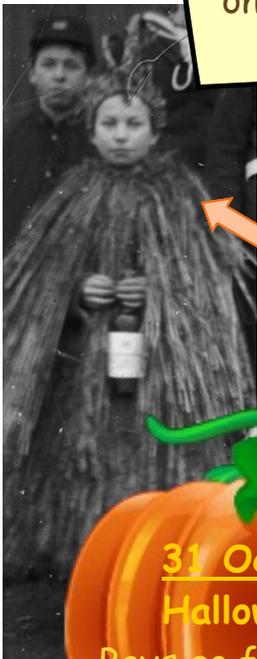
Skovi kapp = bowl used by 'witches' to sink boats by placing in a tub of water and chanting a spell



August

Lammas day (moveable)

Haaf fishing ends



Boy in a skeler costume



Haaf fishermen 1890/92



31 October

Hallow-e'en

Boys go from house to house in disguise

29th September

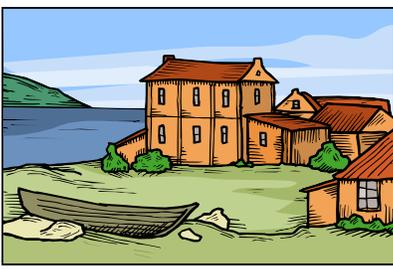
Miklsmas

Grain cutting ends.
Migrating trout reach the tops of the burns. Rams killed, mutton eaten with dried corn and bloody puddings.

25th December

Yule-day

Fiddler played a tune called "The day dawn" to wake neighbours.
Games of football, dances at night, drams of spirits taken.



The Lairds



In the 17th century, lairds in Shetland began to take control of the land previously shared equally between crofters. Sometimes they bought the land, and occasionally they just took it.

Laird: a Scottish word for landowner

The lairds made a profit from the land and the crofters living there.

The crofters had to pay rent to the laird for living on the land.



As part of the 'tenancy', crofters had to give the laird the fish that they had caught and some other products too.

This meant that the laird could build an extravagant home for himself, while the crofter had little food or money for his family.



William Bruce, laird in Whalsay, 1938



The Symbister House was owned by the Lairds of Whalsay, the Bruce family. It was built by forced labour in 1823 and cost £30,000—a fortune at the time.

It is now the school.

The cost of the house bankrupted the Bruce family—when the last resident laird died in 1944, the estates' finances still had not recovered.

HARSH TIMES

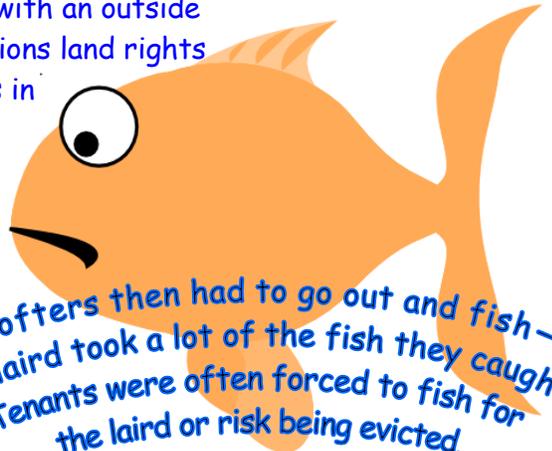


"A Scotchman who pays rent for the pasturage of a hill not unnaturally expects that he is to have the exclusive right of feeding his sheep upon it. The Shetland cottars cannot yet see...they have no sense of wrongdoing in turning their ponies or sheep into a neighbours field..."

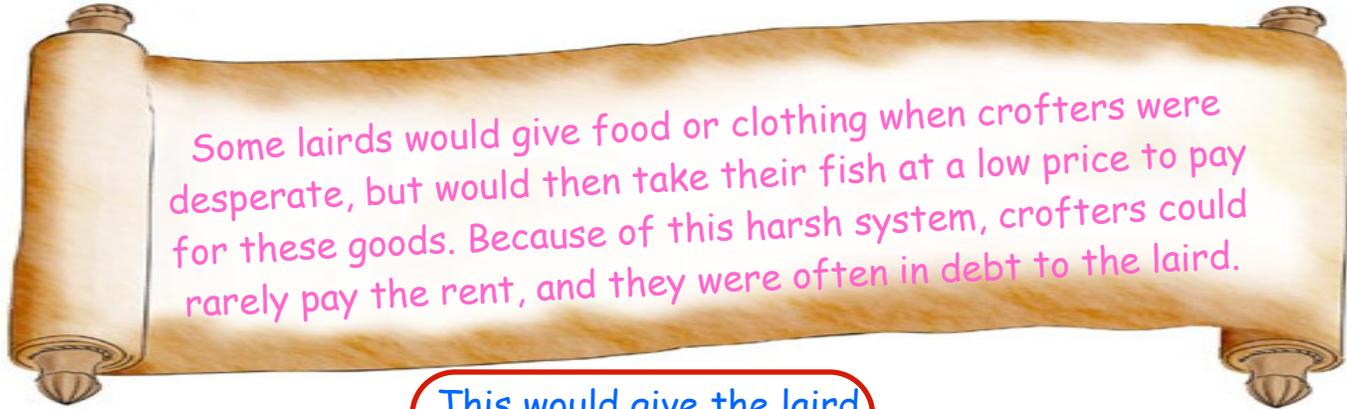
A visitor with an outside eye questions land rights traditions in the isles, Benjie, p.32-33

George Low, a visitor to the isles in 1774—sympathises with West side residents Low, p.90

"...their landlords don't give them worth their labour for their fish, and they are forced out to sea from the time they are able to handle an oar..."



Crofters then had to go out and fish—the laird took a lot of the fish they caught. Tenants were often forced to fish for the laird or risk being evicted.

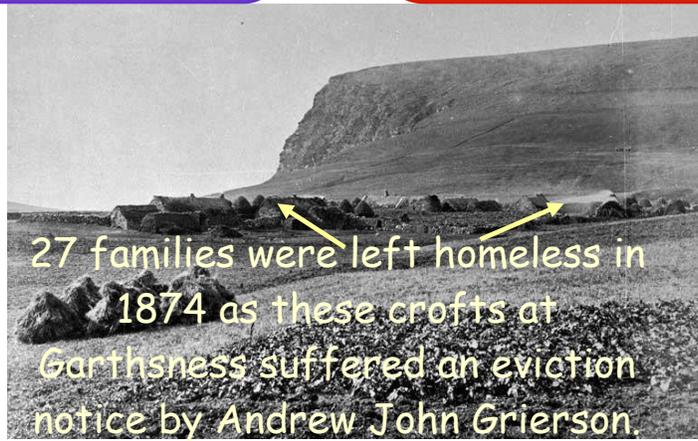


Some lairds would give food or clothing when crofters were desperate, but would then take their fish at a low price to pay for these goods. Because of this harsh system, crofters could rarely pay the rent, and they were often in debt to the laird.

The laird also had the power to evict the crofter from his home.

This would give the laird land for sheep farming—he could make a lot of money from farming sheep on the land.

Many crofters in Scotland were evicted from their homes, or were forced to give the laird dairy goods, meat, wool and fish as well as paying rent for their croft house.

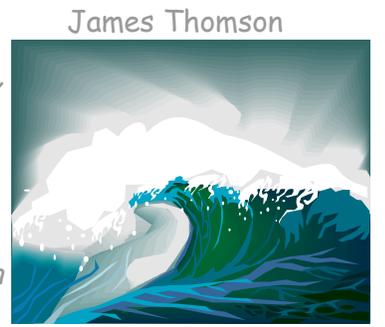


27 families were left homeless in 1874 as these crofts at Garthsness suffered an eviction notice by Andrew John Grierson.

By 19th century, some lairds couldn't be bothered with the work of getting tenants to fish for them, so they evicted them and used the land for sheep farming.



Seaward!



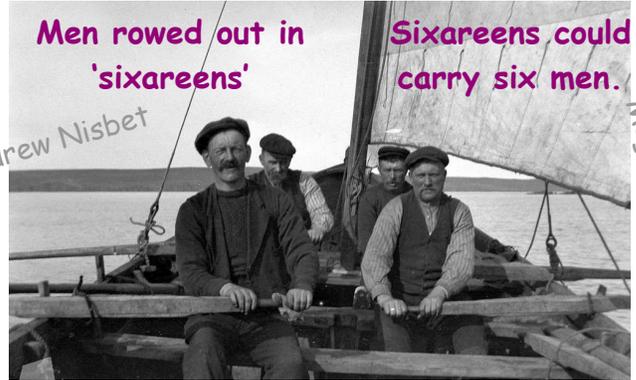
"...[the crofter] was compelled to risk his life in the dangerous waters surrounding these Islands..."

The lairds could make a lot of money with the fish caught by crofters.

They exported the fish abroad to Europe, and made good money doing so.

William George Lennox, in 1893, (p.7)

So many men went out trying to catch fish for the laird and their family that soon there wasn't much fish left inshore. The lairds bought bigger boats and told the men to fish further out to sea.



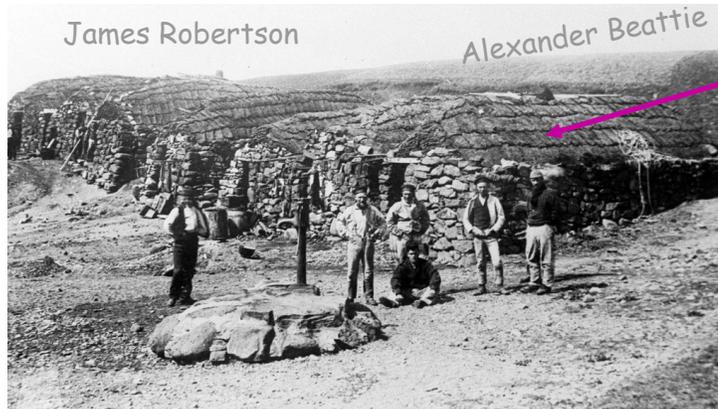
Men rowed out in 'sixareens'

Sixareens could carry six men.

This kind of fishing is known as 'haaf fishing' (deep-sea fishing).

The men went out to sea from May to August.

Before they left they would stay in small huts, then would be out fishing from one to three nights at a time.



Group of men at Eshaness. They lived in the bòds behind when they came ashore for a short time.

Men occasionally died out at sea from sleep deprivation, lack of food and drink, and lack of shelter.

Others died in storms—their 'sixareens' were completely open to the tempestuous sea around them.



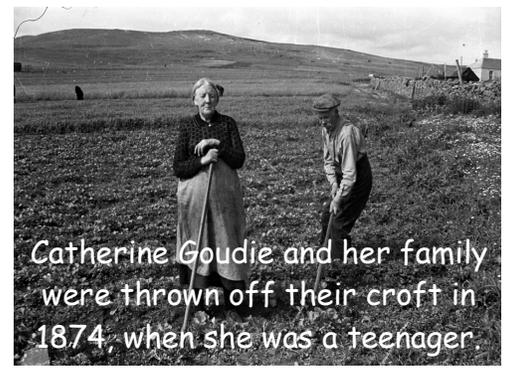
The Gloop Memorial, remembering the fishing disaster of 1881

On 20th July 1881, 58 men drowned after a freak storm hit their open boats over 40 miles out to sea from Gloop in North Yell. 34 widows and 85 orphans were left behind for a future of certain destitution



Register House, Edinburgh where the Commission put their report together

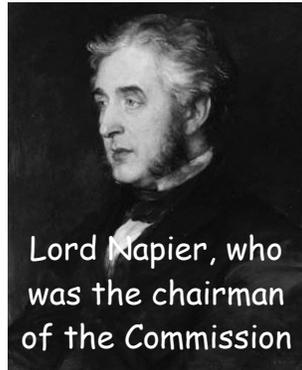
Crofter's rights!



Catherine Goudie and her family were thrown off their croft in 1874, when she was a teenager.

In March 1883, a 'Royal Commission' was set up to investigate the living and working conditions of crofters throughout Scotland.

This gave crofters all over Scotland the chance to speak up against the hardships they suffered at the hands of lairds.



Lord Napier, who was the chairman of the Commission

The Commission travelled around Scotland listening to crofters speak about their way of life and the harsh conditions in which they had to survive.

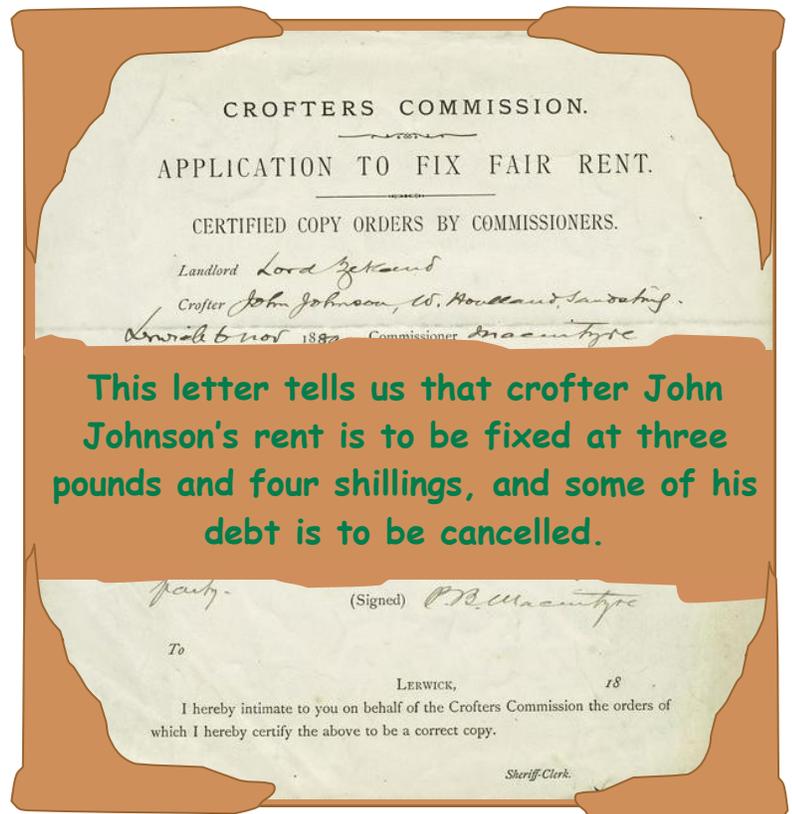
The report given by the Commission forced the government to recognise the difficulties faced by crofters.

**QUASH UNFAIR
EVICTION NOW!**



Lairds could no longer evict the crofters from their homes, and crofters did not have to give them fish or crofting goods.

- In 1886 an act was passed by parliament called the Crofter's Holdings Act. The act meant that crofters could no longer be unfairly evicted, and that their rent was to be fixed at a fair price.





Changes



The 1886 Crofters Act changed crofters lives for the better!

They now had the security of their homes and the crofting grounds—they could not be evicted by the laird.



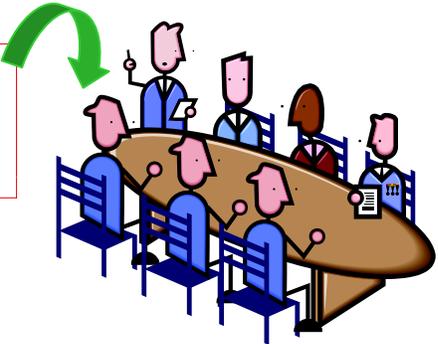
Sheep grazing freely



They were guaranteed fair rent.

They could now use the common land for grazing

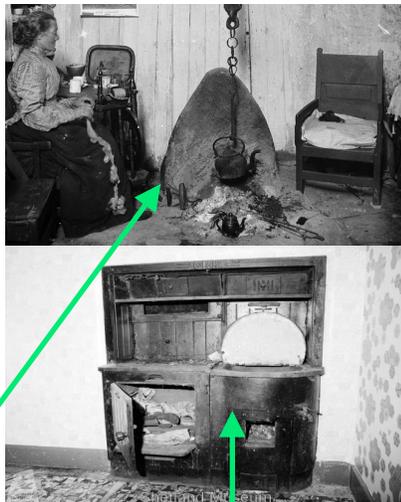
The Crofters Commission was set up to listen to any appeals crofters made against landlords.



Changes in crofting life in the 19th and 20th centuries affected the way the land was divided up, the types of crop grown and the livestock kept.

More people worked for paid employment, and spent their wages on imported goods for their homes.

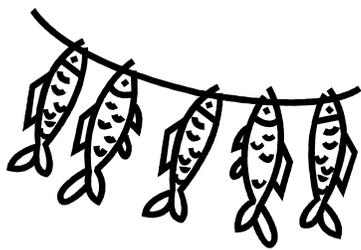
The crofter's home in Shetland gradually improved, with larger houses, tarred roofs, walls lined with wood and iron stoves for cooking rather than an open hearth.



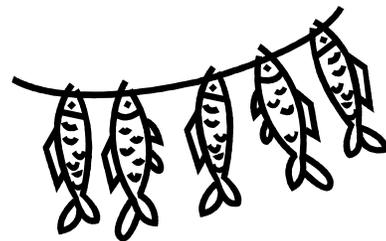
Tractors came into use, as did reapers. These made crofting work easier and quicker.



The old open hearth in a croft house in Walls in 1905-1910, and a cooking stove below—a cleaner and safer way of cooking!



Changes at sea



The changes in crofting law stabilised after the 1880's.

There was a new level of security for crofters in that they no longer had to fear eviction as much as they used to, their rent was set at a fixed price, and they could fish freely for whoever they wanted.

The economy improved, which allowed people to afford second-hand fully-decked smacks from places like the Moray Firth and the East Coast of Scotland.

The Dutch had fished for herring around Shetland for centuries, an opportunity missed by locals through lack of resources.

The herring fishing developed from the 1880's onwards. People began fishing from these newly bought herring smacks or by working on travelling drifters—they caught more fish this way than by line fishing.

Women were employed at gutting factories onshore—this brought in an income previously unheard of in the croft house.



The sail drifter Queen Adelaide LK 1003 on the slipway in 1922.

Women working at a gutting factory at North Ness, Lerwick in the 1940's



They were making more money, and fishing communities grew—there was less need to have a croft.

Crofting now!

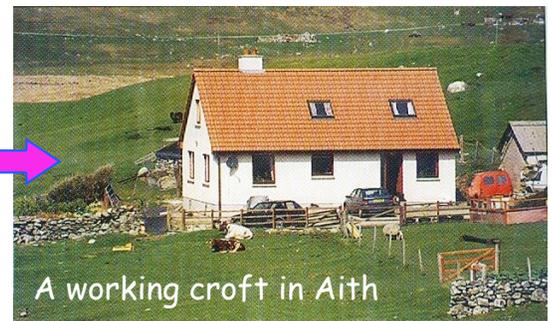


Living conditions for crofters have improved over time, and 'crofts' today don't resemble the crofts of the past.



This is the Croft House Museum in Dunrossness. You wouldn't find anyone living in a croft like this in Shetland today.

Most people who keep sheep on their land today don't live in the kind of croft houses we would imagine!



A working croft in Aith



And they don't usually grow crops — in fact, many 'crofts' today keep only sheep.

Sheep are easier to tend to than lots of animals and crops—crofters don't have to work on the croft all day if they only have sheep there.

Many crofters today have another day-time job—they tend to their croft before and after work.



*Rhoda Bulter describes a day of wild
weather late on in the year!*

A Coorse Day

Da **spindrift** hings across da soond,
An da sea braks right up ower da Taen;
Da **reek** is **flannin** ta da flür,
An da ben laft's **runnin in** again.

Da **dockens tresh** da barn door
Lik **tirn** folk at's lockit oot,
An da kael seed doon atti da yerd
Ill be strippit ta da rüt, I doot.

Dere goes da hens' pot **birlin** by,
Doon ower da toons, clean oota sight.
I hoop da **dess** is no med wye,
An he aeses oota dis ere night.

Rhoda Bulter

Spindrift—sea spray whipped
and blown about by heavy winds

Reek—smoke

Flan—a sudden squall of wind

Runnin in—leaking

Dockens—common docks

Tresh—thrash

Tirn—angry

Birl—whirl around rapidly

Dess—stack of hay

Bibliography

Books:

Benjie, c1870, *Benjie's Tour of Shetland in the summer of 1870*,
(Menzies & Co; Edinburgh)

Cameron, A.D., 1986, *Go Listen to The Crofters: The Napier Commission
& Crofting A Century Ago*,
(Acair Ltd.: Stornoway)

Clark, W.F., 1912, *Shetland Nights: Tales from the Land of the 'Simmer
Dim'*,
(Oliver & Boyd: Edinburgh)

Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, 2008, *Crofting Inquiry: Final Report*,
(RR Donnelley: Committee of Inquiry on Crofting)

Lennox, G., 1893, *A Pamphlet Addressed to the Crofters, Cottars,
Squatters, and Small Tenant-Farmers of Shetland*, (C&A Sandison; Ler-
wick)

Low, G., 1978, *A Tour through the islands of Orkney and Schetland in
1774*, (Bookmag, Inverness)

Mitchell, I., 1987, *Ahint da daeks*,
(Shetland Amenity Trust: Lerwick)

Nicolson, J.R., 1990, *Traditional Life in Shetland*,
(Robert Hale: London)

Smith, B., 1978, "Lairds' and 'Improvement' in 17th and 18th
century Shetland', in Devine, T.M., *Lairds and
Improvement in the Scotland of the Enlightenment*,
(University of Strathclyde)

Bibliography

Books continued...

Smith, H.D., 1984, *Shetland Life and Trade 1550-1914*,
(John Donald: Edinburgh)

Smith, H.D., 1977, *The making of modern Shetland*,
(Shetland Times: Lerwick)

Tait, I., 2000, *Rural Life in Shetland & Guidebook to the Croft House
Museum*,
(Shetland Museum: Lerwick)

Willis, D., 1995, *The Story of Crofting in Scotland*,
(John Donald: Edinburgh)

Online resources:

BBC Learning Zone: www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/

Crofting Connections: www.croftingconnections.com

Shetland Museum and Archives: www.shetland-museum.org.uk

Scran: www.scran.ac.uk

Scotland's Rural Past: www.scotlandsruralpast.org.uk

Good Resources:

Shetland Museum and Archives—Crofting Discovery Box