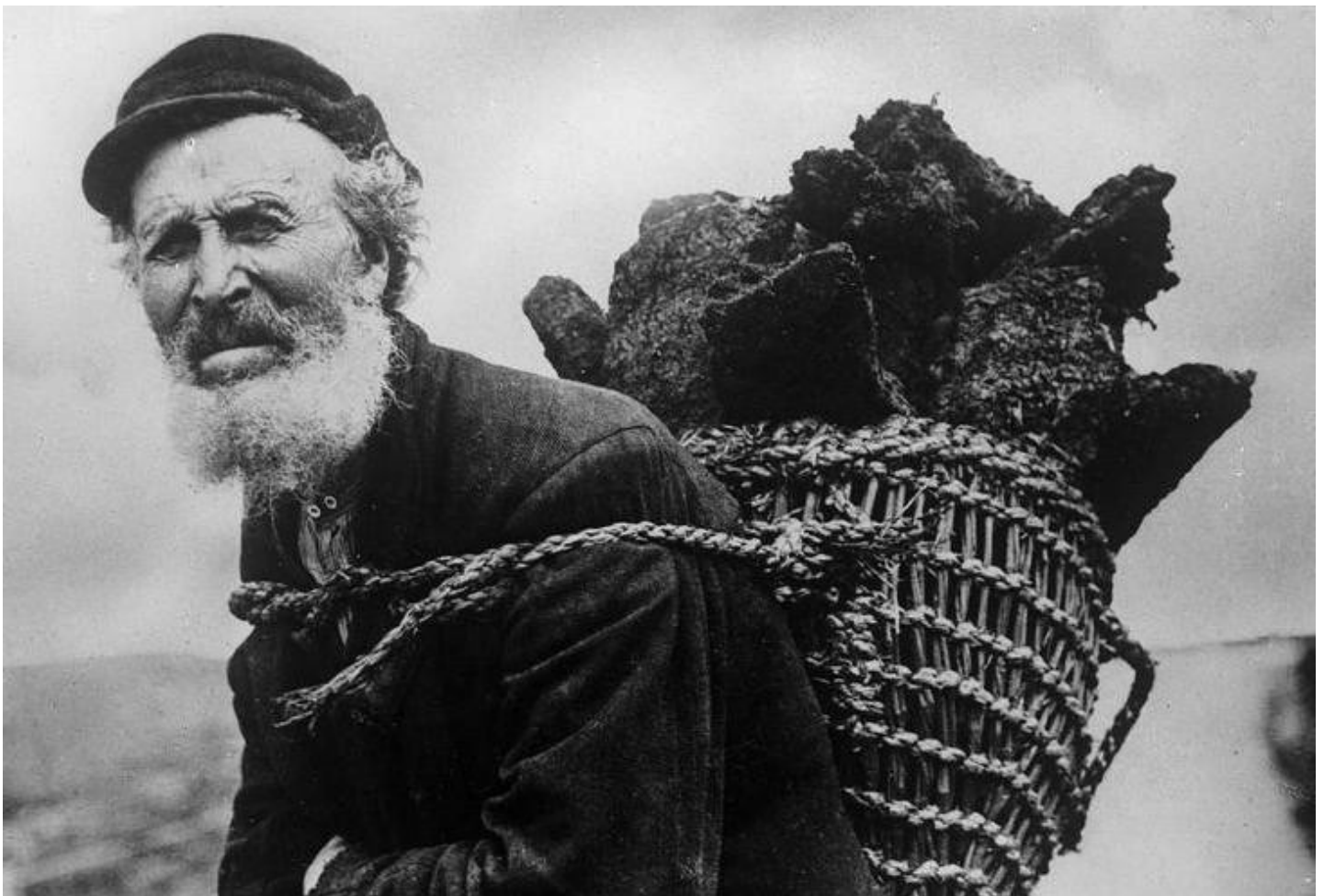


LANDWISE

CROFTS AND FARMLAND IN SHETLAND

THEN AND NOW



Primary 5-7



People of the past



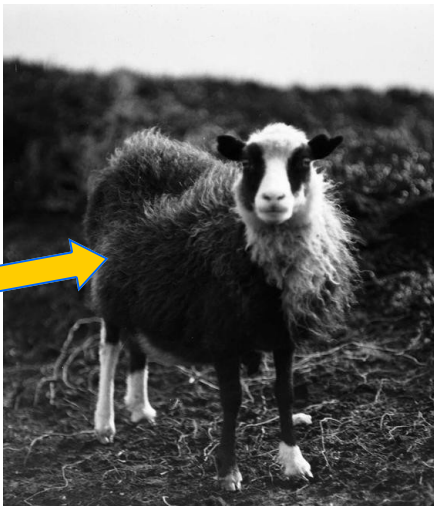
Tending to the land has always been a part of Shetland life.

The first settlers grew crops and hunted wild animals.

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



A native Shetland sheep!



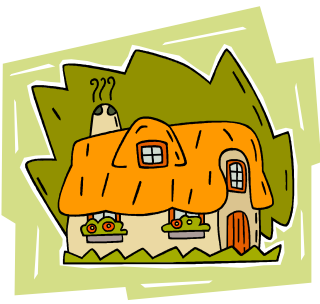
When Vikings travelled to Shetland, they brought their own livestock with them.

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

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

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



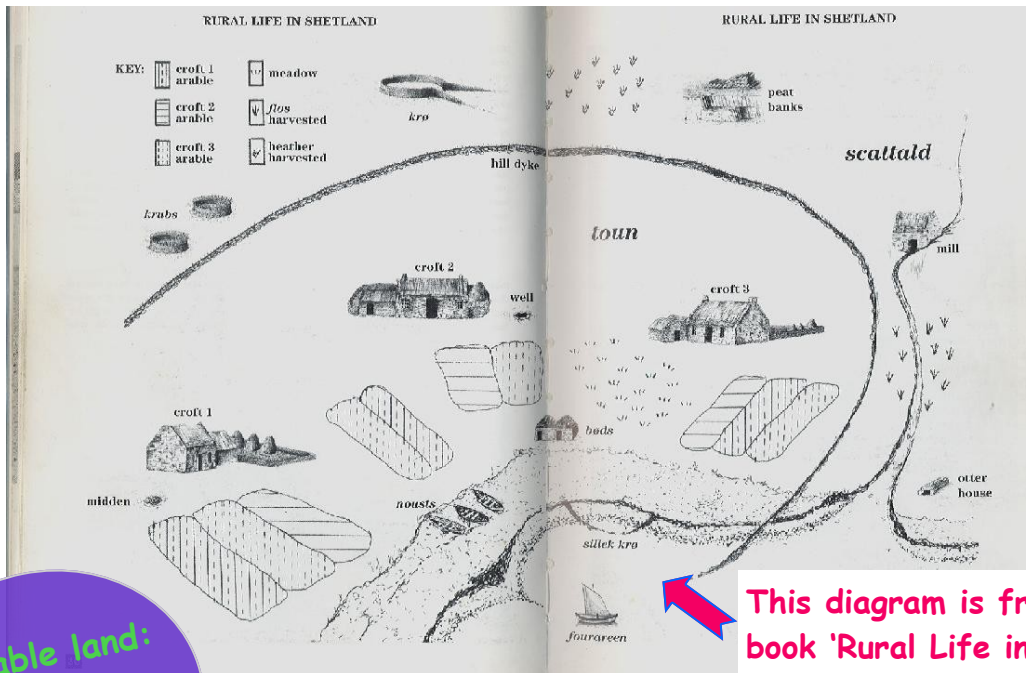


The Land



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

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



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

Arable land: land fit for planting crops.

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

The 'runrig' system developed because the population was growing.

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



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

Inside The Croftthouse

Around 1870, most crofts only had two rooms—the 'but' end and the 'ben' end.

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



The 'but' room had no chimney—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.

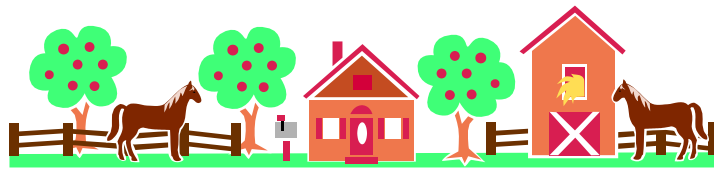
The 'ben' room was the bedroom. It was the best kept room, and important visitors like the minister or landlord's representative would be invited into this room.



Box-beds helped keep out the draughts, and many children shared the same bed.



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



Outside the croft



There was usually a byre connected to the house on one side, and a barn on the other.



The byre

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

The crofter could check on the animals in the byre easily in winter.

The barn

The barn was used for storing working tools and doing practical work.



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

The mill

The 'hopper' - the grain is poured in here

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.



Nature's gifts



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



Natural resources like these were essential to the crofter.



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.



This man is 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 is dead plant and moisture which has been compressed into the ground over time. It is often found in cold, damp climates.



Peat stack

It can be cut from the ground, dried and 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!

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.



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

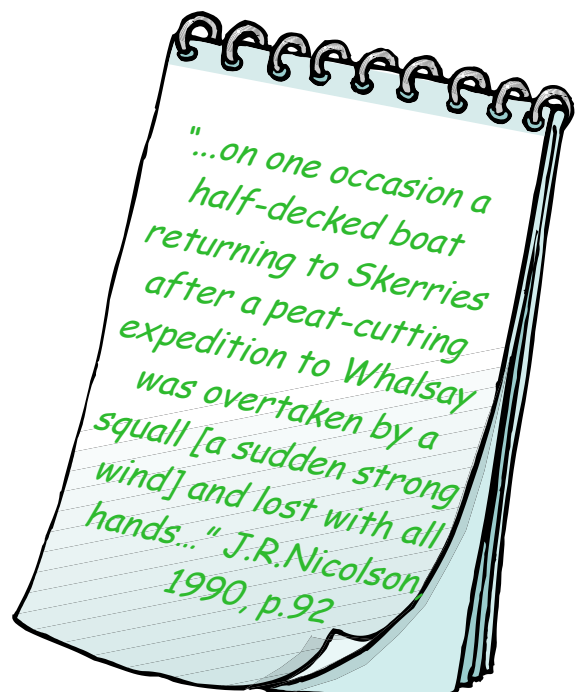
The soft peat was cut into slabs then stacked to dry in the sun and wind.

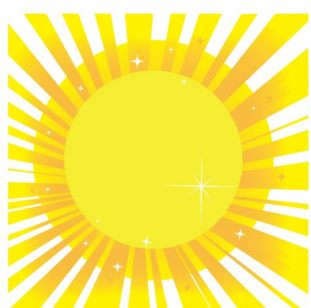


Flitting (moving) the peats was one of the major events in the crofting year, as everybody was needed to help lift and load the peats.



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





Crofting Calendar



A crofter's life was governed by the seasons. Weather played a big part—a poor harvest meant 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



Winter

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

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

'Rooping' 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—bundle 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



Women's work



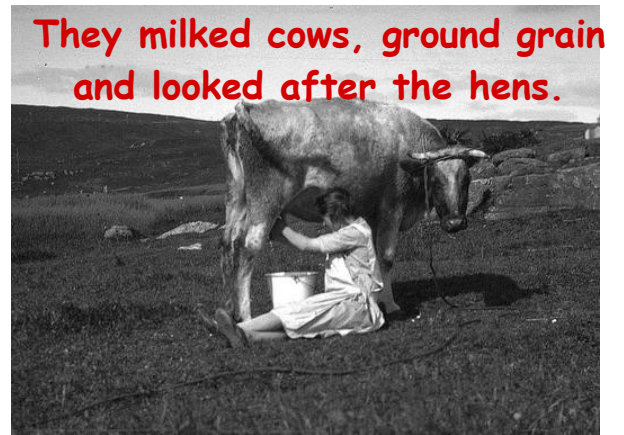
Women were essential to the croft.



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.



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



Women carrying 'kishies' full of peat.

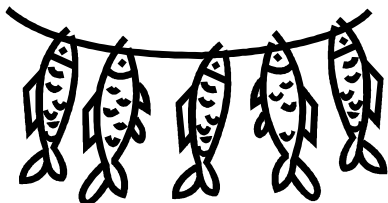


Women harrowing the field in Unst in the 1890's.



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

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



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.

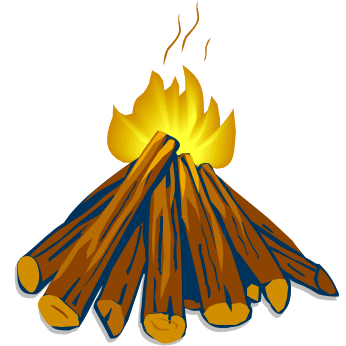


Social life



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!



There was not much room, but small dances could be had around the hearth in the middle of the floor.

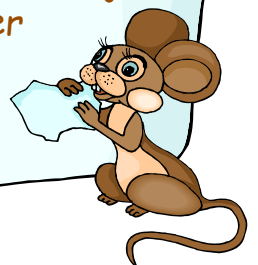
And sometimes they gathered in a large barn nearby and danced in there.

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.





The Lairds



In the 17th century, lairds in Shetland began to take control of the land previously shared equally between crofters.

Laird: a Scottish word for landowner

Sometimes they bought the land, and occasionally they just took it

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 they 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 in 1823 and cost £30,000—a fortune at the time. It was built by forced labour.

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

It is now the school.

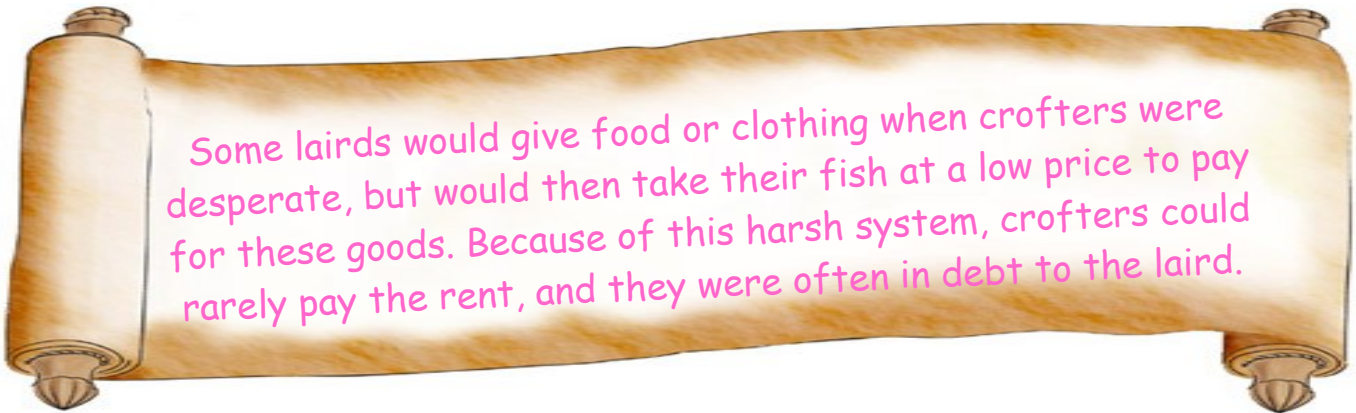
HARSH TIMES



The lairds split up the farms to get more sheep and more workers on them—each farm became so small that crofters could not make a living from the crops and animals they kept there.



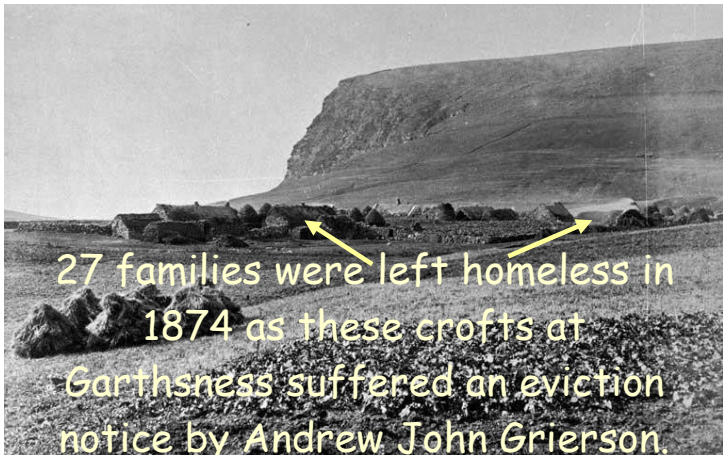
Crofters then had to go out and fish—the laird took a lot of the fish they caught. Tenants were often forced to fish for the laird or risk being evicted.



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 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.

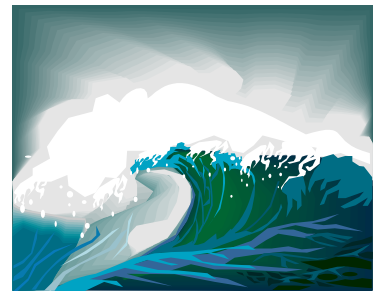


27 families were left homeless in 1874 as these crofts at Garthsness suffered an eviction notice by Andrew John Grierson.

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.



Seaward!



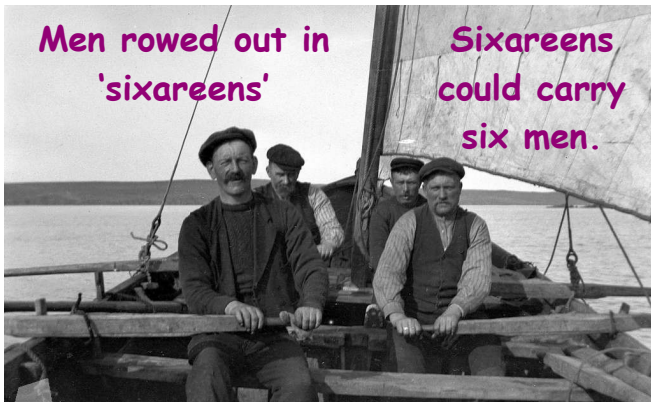
"...[the crofter] was compelled to risk his life in the dangerous waters surrounding these Islands..."

William Geo Lennox wrote this in 1893

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.

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.

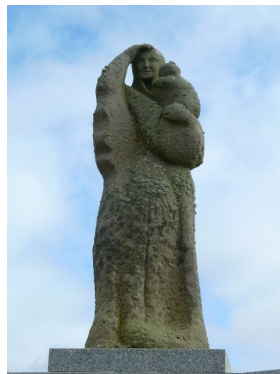
Before they went they would stay in small huts, then would be out fishing from one to three nights at a time.



Group of men at Eshaness. They lived in the bōds 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.



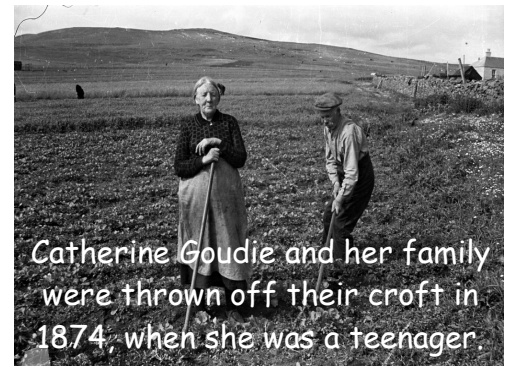
The Gloop Memorial, remembering the fishing disaster of 1881

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.



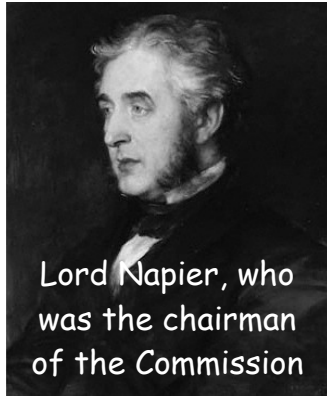
Register House, Edinburgh where the Commission put their report together

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.



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.

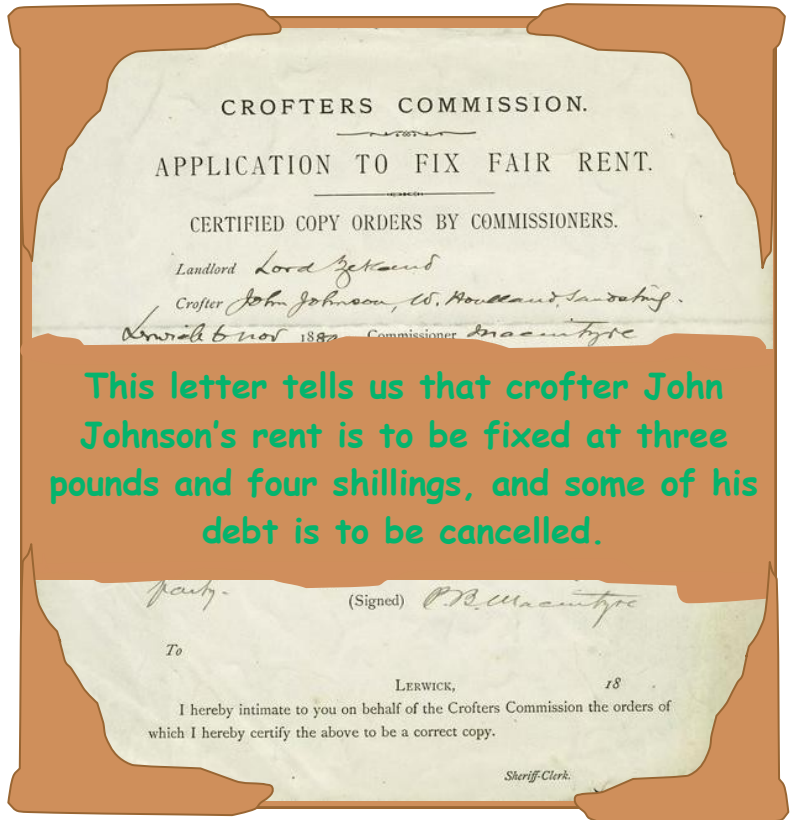


This gave crofters all over Scotland the chance to speak up against the hardships they suffered at the hands of lairds.



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.

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



This letter tells us that crofter John Johnson's rent is to be fixed at three pounds and four shillings, and some of his debt is to be cancelled.

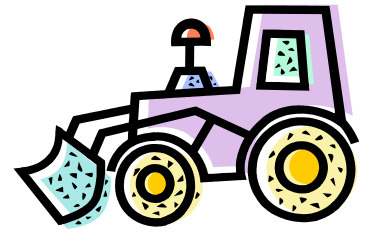
(Signed) P. B. Macintyre

To
LERWICK, 18
I hereby intimate to you on behalf of the Crofters Commission the orders of which I hereby certify the above to be a correct copy.

Sheriff-Clerk.



Changes



The 1886 Crofters Act changed crofters lives for the better!

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



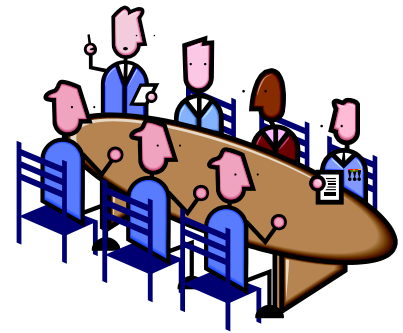
Sheep grazing freely



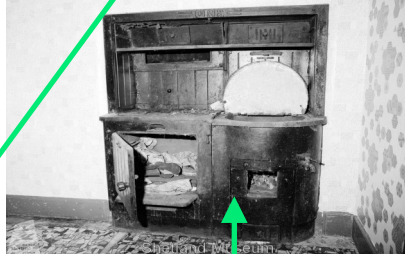
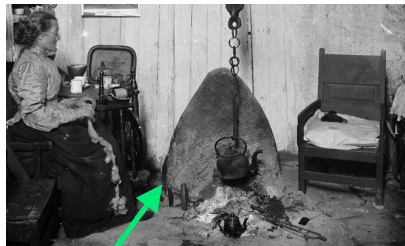
They were guaranteed fair rent.

They could now use the common land for grazing again.

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



Through the 1900's, the crofting life in Shetland gradually improved, with larger houses, tarred roofs, walls lined with wood and iron stoves for cooking rather than an open hearth.



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

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





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 anymore!

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



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

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

