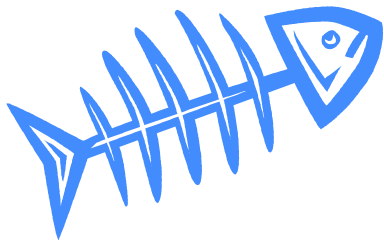
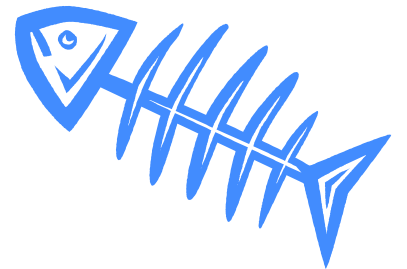


# Fishing in Shetland



Through the  
years



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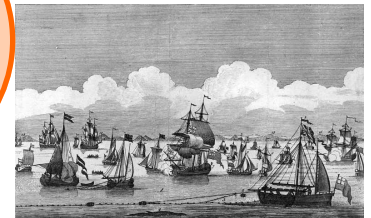
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# Early people

Few relics have survived from the early periods of Shetland's history.



It is likely that the earliest settlers in Shetland hunted wild animals, fish and birds.



Remnants which may have given us information about diet and hunting methods decayed long ago before we could assess them.

We think settlers in Shetland went fishing, but also grew crops and kept animals in periods of warmer weather.

A warmer climate greeted Shetland around 2500BC.



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

These bone 'disgorgers' are for removing fish hooks and gorges from the mouths of fish. They were found in Shetland and used between 3000BC and 1100AD.





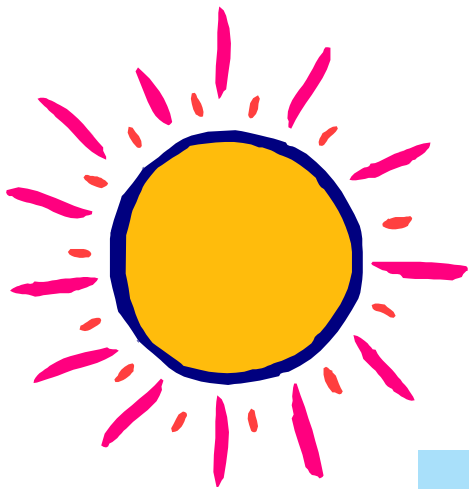
# THE PICTS



The Picts lived in mainland Scotland from around the 6th to the 9th Century, possibly earlier. Indications of a burial at Sumburgh suggest that Picts had probably settled in Shetland by 300AD.



The Picts built the Mousa Broch



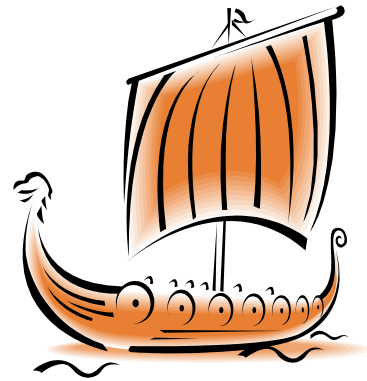
We think Picts went fishing, but also grew crops and kept animals in periods of warmer weather.



They cultivated the land, before the Vikings made their way to Shetland from Norway.

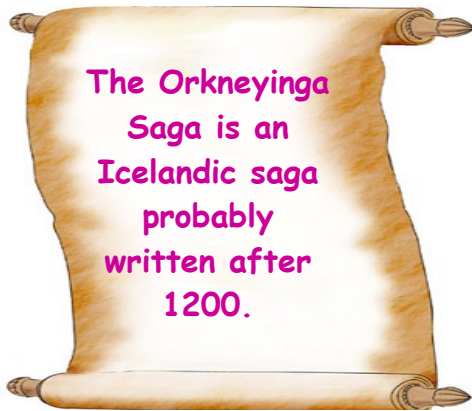


# Vikings!



Viking boats that travelled to Shetland were strong, sea-worthy but lightweight.

The design of the Viking boats developed into the 'Shetland boat' style in later years.



The Orkneyinga Saga is an Icelandic saga probably written after 1200.



The Orkneyinga Saga mentions fishing in Shetland briefly—off Fair Isle, and off Sumburgh.

*"...and Uni took three Hjatlanders, and they took a six oared boat... in Sumburgh Voe a poor old bondi drove out as each was ready..."*

...kæmum þessum vortu þá at hýja þess er rígers.  
...þá er þessu þá áttu mikinn rílagu þá þess daga þess  
...illmik þess rílagi nær at þá mudi þessu rílagu. þá þess.  
...hlut uvan áttengr rílagu þess: þá þessu þessu þessu  
...þess þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu  
...þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu  
...þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu  
...þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu þessu

We think men went fishing in local and inshore waters. Fish were plenty so they didn't have to go too far out.



Species of bone found from this era include cod, saithe and ling.

# Types of boats over the centuries



At first, boats arrived from Norway—  
Shetland didn't have enough wood to  
build their own.

When more roads were built, people  
started using them regularly, and  
used their boats less often.

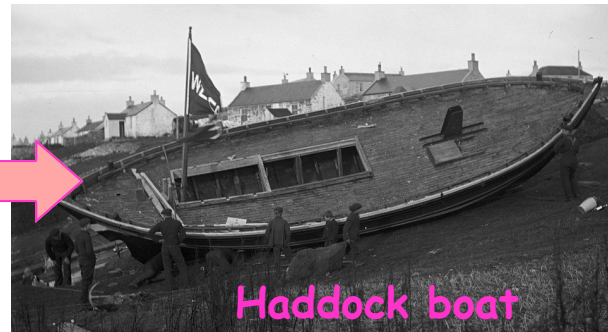
These boats arrived  
in parts, and the  
Shetlander put all  
the parts together.



Small whilly

The smallest of the open  
boats—it can be used close  
to the shore for fishing or  
visiting the shop!

Used for winter haddock  
fishing. It had to be  
strong and sea worthy!



Haddock boat



Fourareen

Fourareen—  
boat with  
four oars!

Fourareens can be lots of  
different shapes and  
sizes—they are often  
painted colourfully!

Sixareens are the largest of the open  
boats and has a crew of 6 or 7. They were  
used for haaf fishing far out at sea.



Sixareen

There are ponies  
in the boat!

# Trade and Merchants

In the Middle Ages the Hanseatic League had a trading port in Bergen.

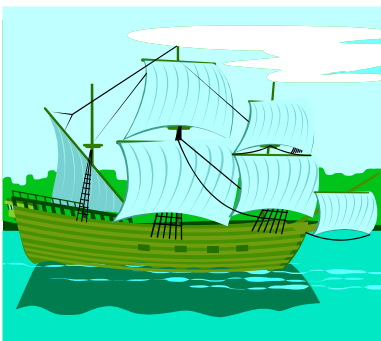
Hanseatic League: merchant traders who controlled trade across Northern Europe from the 13th to 17th centuries.



They were powerful and controlled Norwegian trade with Shetland.

The Hanseatic League had rules on trading. From about 1450, merchants from North Germany decided to ignore these rules.

They travelled over to Shetland from Germany, and traded directly with Shetlanders over the summer months.



They arrived in May and set up trading booths all over the isles. They stayed until September.

The story of the German merchant families is found in Whalsay's 'Bremen' or 'Hanseatic' Böd in Symbister.



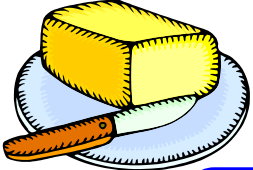
Barter (verb)  
- to trade or  
exchange  
goods

# Bartering

Shetlanders got most things from local sources, but swapped things like cloth, butter and fish for items they couldn't get, make or grow in Shetland.



Shetlanders bartered with the German merchants.



They swapped fish, butter, meat and knitwear for salt, fish hooks, tar, beer, tobacco, linen, pottery, flour or rye meal.



German merchants sailed to Shetland for nearly 250 years—they were a vital part of the local economy.

- German merchants residing in Shetland in 1685
- |                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Delmar Lanhanow    | Ellart Martens  |
| Derick Cuning      | Castin Hackman  |
| Claus Derick       | Frarick Dicken  |
| Barthol Hinch      | Herman Badiwish |
| Adolphus Westerman |                 |

Trade continued even after the passing of Shetland into Scottish hands.



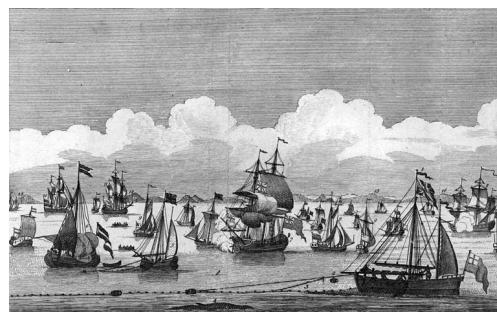
# Dutch fishing fleets



The abundance of fish stocks also attracted the Dutch fishermen.

Merchants and fishermen travelled from the Netherlands to Shetland from the end of the 16th century.

Hundreds of boats and fishermen gathered in Bressay Sound harbour, and started fishing on the 24th June each year.



The Dutch fishermen slept on their ships, and salted their herring onboard.



This map was drawn in 1741 and shows Dutch busses positioned around the islands.

They also came ashore to socialise, and they held an annual fair at Hollanders' Knowe near Lerwick.

They traded tobacco, gin and cash for the goods Shetlanders gave them.

Quite often, Shetlanders could understand Dutch and German because of their trade with their summer visitors.

# Economic Depression

There was severe cold between 1690 and 1700—severe storms hit Shetland around 1696, destroying crops and disrupting trade and fishing.

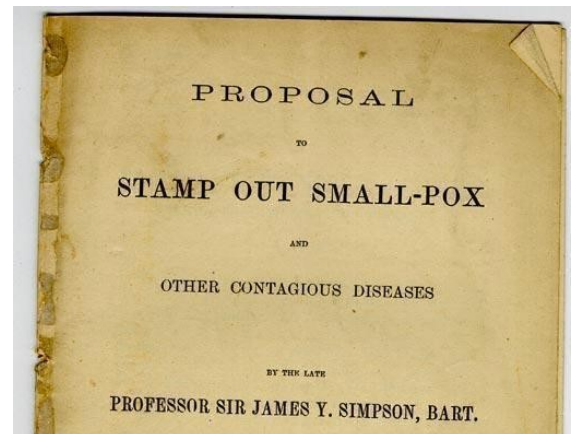


## Did you know?

'Johnnie Notions' of Eshaness came up with a vaccine for smallpox! He cured 3000 people and lost none!

As well as the famine from the poor harvests, smallpox spread around Shetland—there were epidemics from 1700-1760.

Merchants avoided the isles at this time. They were no longer appealing to traders—their wealth was dwindling and their health was a hazard.

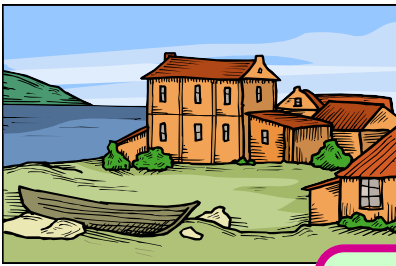


In 1703, when France was at war with Holland, around 400 Dutch busses were burned in Bressay Sound, with huge impact on Shetland.

Wars between the Netherlands and Great Britain in the 17th and 18th centuries made the crossing through the English Channel dangerous.

The 1707 Act of Union made trade with non-British countries very difficult. To German merchants and Dutch traders, Shetland was no longer worth trading with.

Shetland fell into an economic depression. Local merchant-landowners were to take control in this crisis.



# Lairds and the haaf

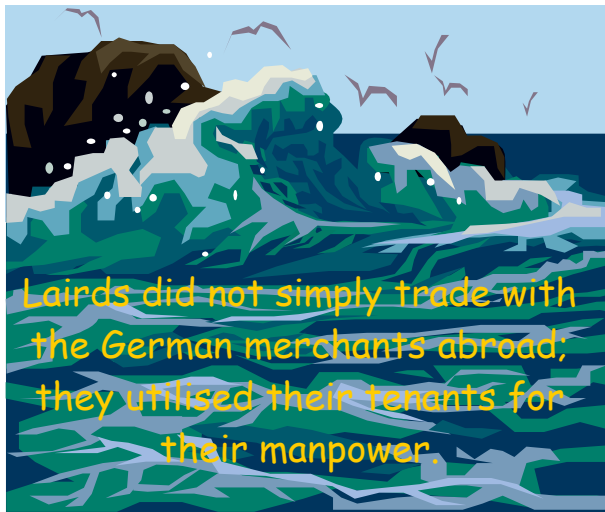


In the 17th century, lairds in Shetland began to take control of land previously shared equally between crofters.

Crofters and fishermen were 'tenants' to the laird and liable to pay rent.

Truck System: lairds provide tenants with basic necessities—buys their goods from them at a low price.

The lairds started sending ships over to Germany to trade.



Lairds did not simply trade with the German merchants abroad; they utilised their tenants for their manpower.

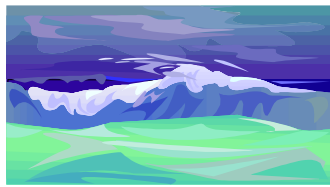


Crofters then had to go out and fish—the laird took a lot of the fish they caught. Tenants were almost always forced to fish for the laird or risk being evicted.

The lairds got much larger boats and sent their tenants further out to sea—the well-known 'haaf' fishing began.

Lairds sent so many men out to fish for them that soon there were too few fish left inshore!

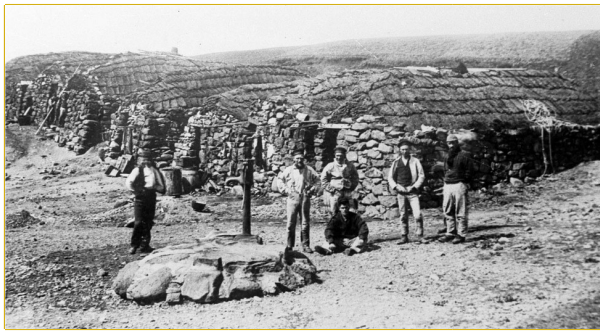




# Out at da Haaf



Haaf fishing:  
May-August.



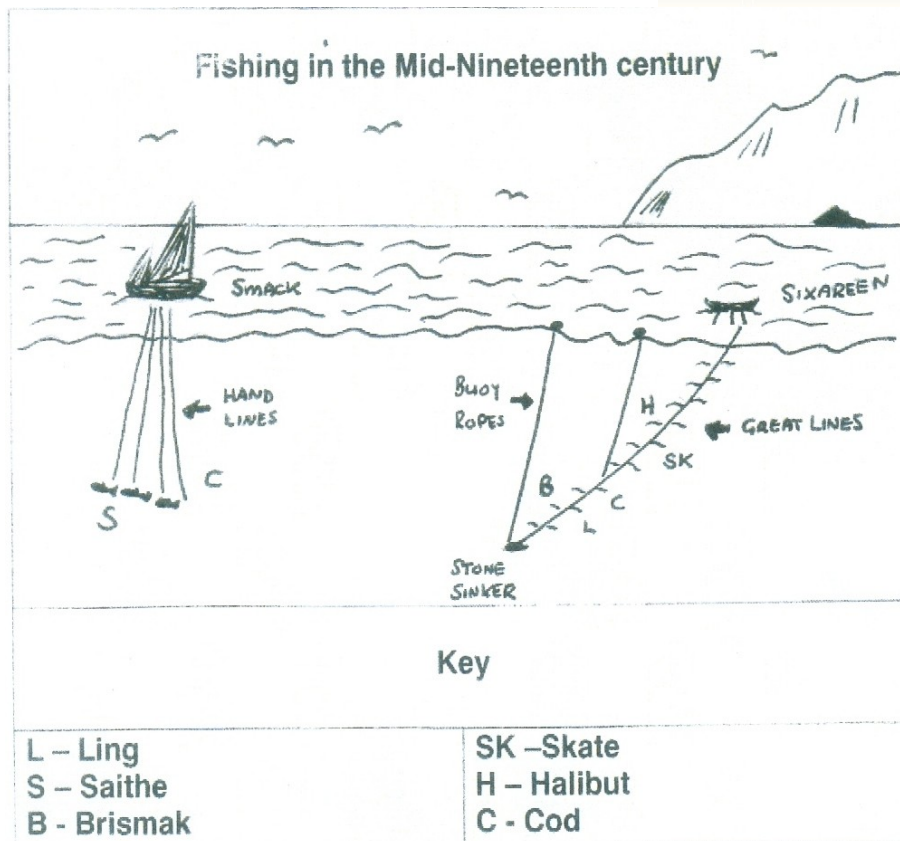
Before they set off they would stay in small huts.

Six or seven men would row out in six-oared boats called 'sixareens' for a voyage of several days.

Fishing far from land in an open boat is very dangerous.

Some died of lack of food or warmth. Others perished in wild storms.

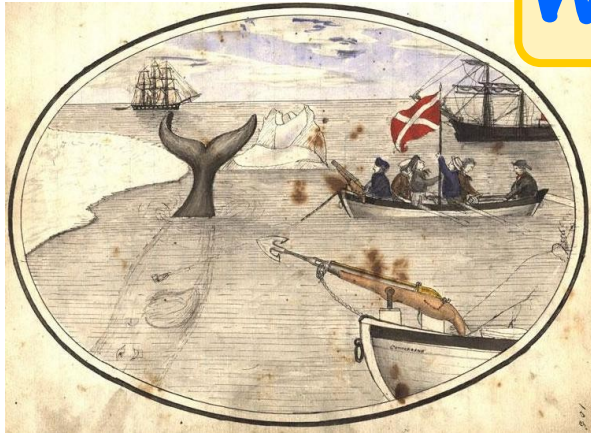
These men wouldn't have nets. They used long-lines to catch fish.



Long-lines could have 7 miles of line stretched out on the sea-bed—hauling these in when they were full of fish must have been incredibly hard!

Cooking, eating and sleeping were difficult when haaf fishing. Sleeping in the boat was unlikely, and men were out for 2 or 3 days and nights at a time.

# Whaling



Many Shetland men saw whaling as a way of getting experience at sea before taking on jobs on fishing or merchant ships.

From 1730 whaling vessels from Britain stopped by Shetland on their way to Greenland. The ships would arrive in March to recruit Shetland men to complete their crews.



There was a whaling boom from 1820-1880.

The arrival of whaling ships boosted local trade.



Whalers would often be away at sea from March/April-November.

In March 1859, 50 Greenland whaling ships were at anchor in Lerwick.

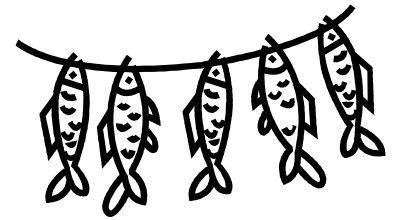
Whaling was a very dangerous affair.



Accidents could happen from harpooning the whales, and the route was often cold, icy and threatening storms could cause huge casualties.



# The end of 'Da Haaf'



The 1886 Crofters Act changed crofters lives for the better!

Tenants could now fish without giving any of their catch away.



On the 16th July 1832, a great storm off Shetland claimed 107 lives and 17 boats—the haaf was a huge risk, but many had little choice until the second half of the century.

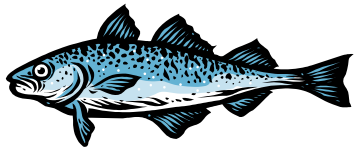
Pages and pages of this report detailed the deceased and how many were dependent on them. A saddening case—hundreds were left in severe poverty, aided by the government in 1834.

41 Thomas Galt	Left a widow and 5 children under 14	Much in debt
43 Andrew Pole	Left a widow	Left no one who was dependant on him
44 John Thomson	Unmarried	Unmarried; no children under 14
45 John Robertson	Unmarried	Unmarried; no children under 14
46 David Jeromson	Left a widow and 2 children under 14	Left a widow and 2 children under 14
47 John Charlison	Left a widow and 1 child under 14	One child grown up
48 Magnus Christie	Left a widow and 5 children under 14	Not destitute, see No. 53
49 William Charleson	Left a widow and 3 children under 14	Two children grown up
50 William Blance	Left a widow and 3 children under 14	A poor family
51 Robert Thomason	Left a widow but no children	The father of the deceased aged poor
52 John Robertson	Left a widow and 2 children under 14	Rather poor
53 Basil Christie	Unmarried, left aged parents who depended on him, brother of No. 48	on him, brother of No. 48
54 Adam Clunis	Left a widow; no children under 14	In tolerable circumstances
55 William Rendal	Left a widow and 4 children under 14, 2	grown up. An aged father
56 Jerom Manson	Left a widow; no children under 14	Two children grown up
57 Robert Couotts	Left a widow and 4 children under 14, very	poor. A blind sister, aged 89
58 Daniel Robertson	Left a widow and 2 children under 14	Four children grown up
59 Hosea Robertson	Left a widow and 3 children under 14	In great poverty
60 Andrew Johnson	Left a widow, but no children under 14	Three children grown up
61 Gilbert Robertson	Left a widow and 4 children under 14	Very poor
62 George Williamson	Unmarried; left a mother and a brother under	14 who depended on him
63 Adam Shewardson	Left a widow and 3 children under 14	Five children grown up
64 Gilbert Hunter	Left a widow and 3 children under 14	A destitute family

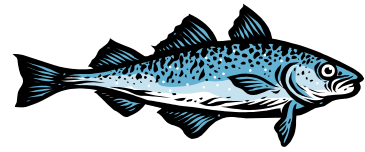
In 1881, 58 men were lost off Gloup, North Yell when another freak summer storm left 34 widows and 85 orphans.



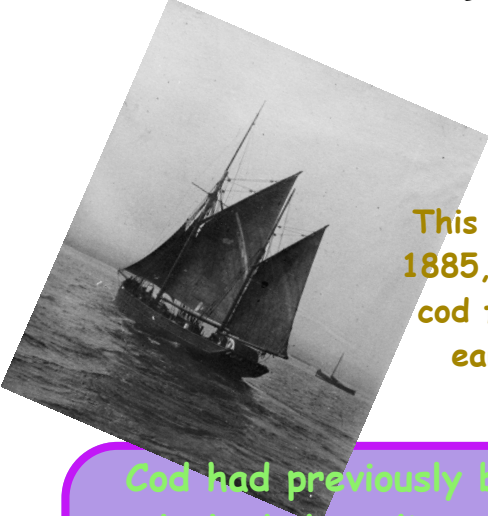
These open boats were too ill-equipped for deep-sea fishing, and people were beginning to count their losses.



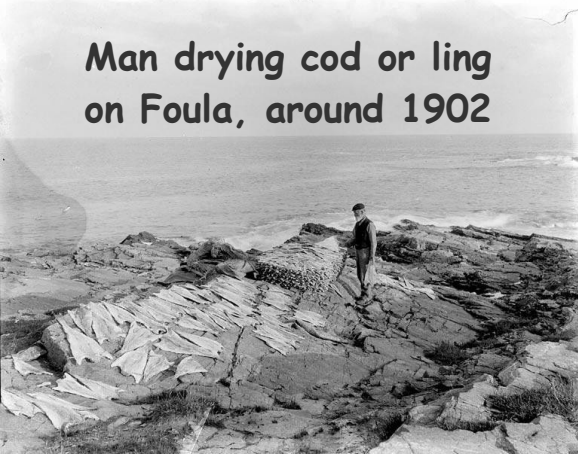
# Cod fishing



In the 19th century there was a cod fishing boom in Shetland.



This boat, built in 1885, was used for cod fishing in the early 1900's.



Man drying cod or ling on Foula, around 1902

Cod had previously been overlooked – long-lines sitting on the seabed couldn't catch cod as they swim half way between the surface and the seabed.

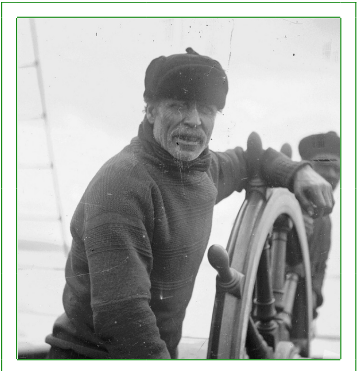
Many cod schools had not been discovered before 1800 as they didn't swim in the fishing areas commonly used by locals.



John Johnson and his wife in the early 1880's. John went out to the cod fishing around Shetland, and followed many Shetlanders further afield to the Faroe cod fishing.

The number of cod may have increased since the Dutch fishing fleets left in the 18th century, giving the species time to populate again.

Strong fully-decked boats, new fishing methods and navigation equipment all played a part in developing Shetland fishing.



Sixereens were still going out to the haaf at this time.

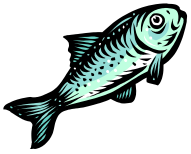


# Herring fishing



Shetland herring fleet around 1890

Shetlanders had never fully taken advantage of the sheer quantity of herring around the Shetland seas. In the 19th century there was a huge herring boom.



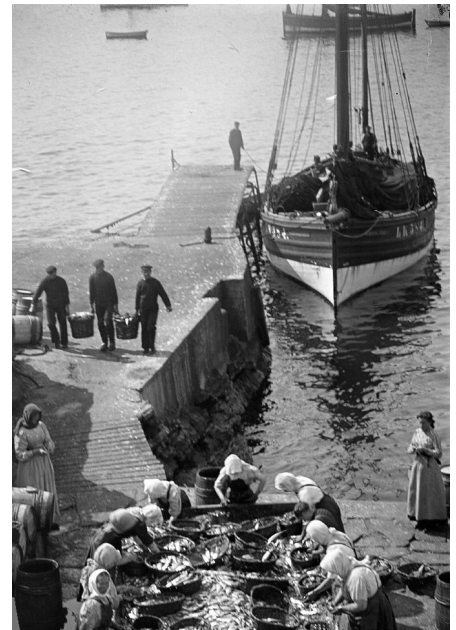
The herring boom was hugely important for Shetland's economy!



The Dutch were the first to exploit the herring population in Shetland waters. The locals didn't get there until the late 19th century.

The herring industry grew and fell rapidly in bouts.

Around 1830 the industry grew rapidly but had fallen dramatically by 1840.



Women gutting fish as men take their catch ashore.



Women played an important part gutting fish at the herring stations.

In 1874 only 1100 barrels of herring were cured ashore in Shetland and the fleet was up to 50 boats. In 1881 the total cured had risen to 59,586 barrels and the fleet to 276 boats.

By 1884 the number of barrels cured was 300,117 from 932 boats.





# 20th Century



By the First World War, few people still went out fishing in sixareens—the herring booms had paved the way to motor engines.



Motor haddock boat, Burra 1911



The 'seine net' was developed.

The seine net is a bag-shaped net. It is operated by ropes and has a higher catch rate than line-fishing.

The white fishing (demersal fishing) bounced back after the wars with a good number of local fishing boat catches.

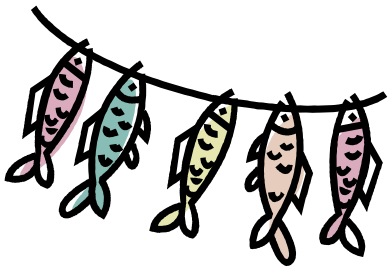


A loan and grant scheme was introduced through the Inshore Fisheries Act 1945 which gave economic incentive to those working in the fishing industry in Scotland.

Shetland fishing industry was coming in line with Scottish industry, and were helped along by the grant scheme.



The Shetland fishing industry today includes demersal, pelagic, and shellfish and there are some local fish farming companies too.



# Fishing today!



Today, the best of Shetland seafood is marketed worldwide.



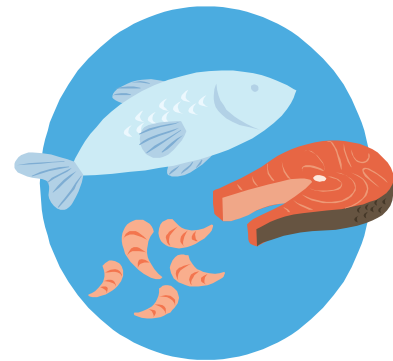
Shetland mussels waiting to be cooked!

We even have our own Food Festival!

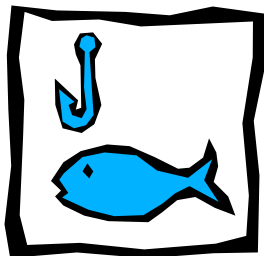


Shetland lamb, salmon and mussels are fiercely sought after by Michelin star restaurants.

There are a number of local salmon farms around the isles, as well as farms owned by large national companies.



Processing factories employ people to clean, gut and package fish caught in Shetland.



Fisheries made up nearly 10% of the employed population of Shetland in 2010.



The total value of all kinds of fish landed in Shetland in 2010 was £80,494,356!

# Today's Special

## Smoked Haddock Pasties with Leeks and Clotted Cream

Serves 6

### Ingredients

2lb chilled puff pastry  
12oz smoked haddock  
6oz cleaned chopped leeks  
10oz peeled cooked tatties  
4 tbsp clotted cream  
black pepper and salt  
1 egg

### Method

- Preheat oven to 200°C or Gas 6
  - Roll out pastry to create 7.5 inch circles
  - Cut haddock to 1 inch chunks, slice the leeks and cut tatties into 0.5 inch cubes
  - Mix haddock, leeks, tatties, clotted cream and seasoning
  - Divide mixture between the pastry circles, then bring pastry edges together and crimp.
  - Transfer to a lightly greased and floured baking tray, brush with egg and cook for 35 minutes
- Serve hot, warm or cold

Recipe from Seafood Shetland ([www.fishuk.net/seafoodshetland](http://www.fishuk.net/seafoodshetland))

Recipe donated by Eunice Henderson

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- Smith, Hance D., 2003, *Shetland Life and Trade 1550-1914*, (John Donald Publishers: Edinburgh)
- Osler, A.G., 1983, *The Shetland Boat*, (Wandle Press: England)

## **Online resources:**

- BBC Learning Zone: [www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/)
- Shetland Museum and Archives: [www.shetland-museum.org.uk](http://www.shetland-museum.org.uk)
- Scran: [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk)
- Scotland on Screen: [www.scotlandonscreen.org.uk](http://www.scotlandonscreen.org.uk)
- Scotland's History: [www.educationscotland.gov.uk/scotlandshistory/](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/scotlandshistory/)

## **Good Resources:**

Shetland Museum and Archives—Fishing Discovery Box