

The  
**Shetland Times**  
**150**  
*years*  
1872 – 2022



# Celebrating a century-and-a-half of delivering *The Shetland Times*

**T**oday, *The Shetland Times* celebrates its 150th anniversary – our sesquicentennial.

The first edition was printed on 17th June 1872 paving the way for the multi award-winning newspaper that is now read across the isles and beyond – including daily online.

We are the oldest fully-independently-owned local newspaper in Scotland which is printed on its own newspaper press.

As well as eight pages within this paper celebrating this achievement, with memories from previous editors, *The Shetland Times* is providing a free magazine marking 150 “moments” – covering stories that have dominated the news in the isles, as well as others that show the lighter side of island life and the varied role of a local newspaper.

The colour magazine covers the 50 years of news and events since a special centenary magazine was published in 1972

– which can today be accessed electronically via a QR code within its pages.

More codes will appear throughout the magazine, giving readers the opportunity to view the original newspaper pages to see how stories were reported at the time they happened.

In some cases this expandable content allows us to display how the story then developed over many years, such as the controversial Viking Energy Windfarm.

In all, the QR codes will allow readers electronic access to nearly 600 *Shetland Times* archive pages – as well as the link to the centenary magazine.

The magazine is aimed to provide readers with a fresh insight – not only into what stories were covered, but also how *Shetland Times* journalists reported them. Topical cartoons from over the years are also included.

Stories include major incidents such as the *Braer* oil tanker disaster of 1993, the

Chinook helicopter crash of 1986 – claiming 45 lives – and the Dan Air tragedy in 1979, killing 17 people.

But there are happier stories too, such as coverage of the Island Games when they came to Shetland in 2005. To mark that occasion, *The Shetland Times* issued its first ever daily paper over the five-day event, a major 24-hour effort from all staff involved.

The opening of the Sullom Voe Oil Terminal – which heralded a dramatic transformation in Shetland’s economic and cultural outlook – is also remembered in the magazine.

In 1872, the four-page issue cost 2d and was then titled *The Zetland Times* – with a subtitle of “And Orkney and Shetland Advertiser”.

However, the title was soon changed to *The Shetland Times*.

Since then, the newspaper has been ever-present, and has recorded times of unprecedented transformation in Shetland – from

the crofting act which gave security of land tenancy to crofters in the late 1800s, to subsequent changes in the fishing industry, and the development of the oil production era, before the emergence of renewable energy – and much, much more.

We are a multi-award-winning newspaper, having won Newspaper of the Year in the Highlands and Islands Newspaper Awards on numerous occasions, with many of its journalists also picking up accolades.

We have also been acknowledged for our online content, picking up the Highlands and Islands award for “Best Digital News Provider” in 2016.

In addition, *The Shetland Times* has campaigned on a wide range of issues. Whether it’s the massive reduction of Shetland Islands Council’s housing debt or the retention of emergency tugs, *The Shetland Times* has maintained a strong presence in fighting for the community.

A strong community focus was main-

tained during the coronavirus pandemic, printing every week with reduced team numbers for two years.

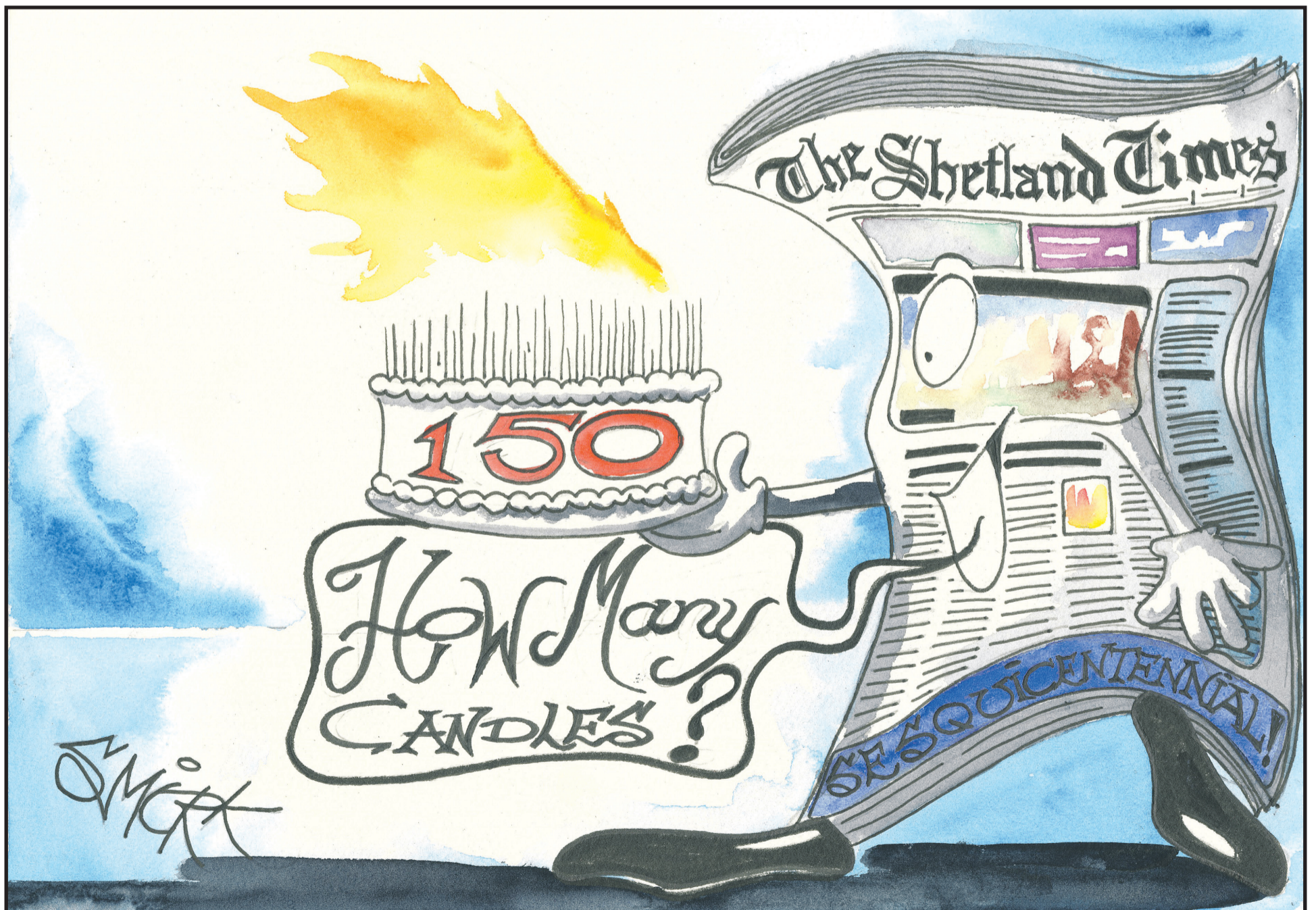
Local journalism can be a challenging career, particularly during the last two years since the start of the pandemic, but it continues to be a privilege to work in such a supportive and lively community.

Shetland may be isolated geographically, but it has always been an extremely busy news patch, with a lively social scene.

There has been plenty to write about in sport as well, much of which we rely on dedicated contributors, and our column-writers keep us informed from the different patches of the isles.

Since 1872, *The Shetland Times* has been at the forefront of local news. Our 150th magazine highlights some of the moments that have kept generations of readers informed of news and events.

Alistair Munro, Editor



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# There *must* be a future for local journalism – and this newspaper will be a part of it

**Fifty years into a six-week job with *The Shetland Times* ROBERT WISHART, now proprietor and director of the company, tries in vain to answer the question posed at the time of the paper’s centenary: “What future is there for this newspaper?”**

A thousand years ago, or so it seems – 1972 was certainly a different world – the editor, my father Basil Wishart, asked: “What future is there for this newspaper?”

“To me”, he wrote in our centenary supplement, “it seems entirely related to the future of the islands as a whole. The printed word cannot be supplanted and as long as there is a community there will be the need for some form of print, if only to convey necessary information. Our geographical location favours the paper, for, no matter how many daily papers arrive, there is need for a weekly that recognises Shetland for the entity that it is.”

These remarks, made when the internet and social media were unimaginable and print was still the product of squashing paper on to inked metal type, could perhaps be updated by rephrasing the question: Is there a future for local journalism?

Our 150th prompts reflections on the past – what he referred to as the future! This tends to be inward-looking, at the processes by which we turn out the physical product – or the digital one. Technological changes, from basically 19th century at the time of our centenary to today’s mix of printed products, websites – the first Scottish weekly online – and social media, have been constant over the intervening years. This sort of navel-gazing may not be of much interest to our readers, contributors or advertisers who will ask what the paper does for them and the wider community of which it is part and on which it depends.

In contemplating the future of this newspaper we’d need to ask what it is for. We can trot out the usual, often self-serving, responses: The newspaper is there to inform, to entertain and to educate. It can act as a voice for the disadvantaged and hold our community leaders to account. It can counter the propaganda efforts of the public relations industry and the misconceptions and outright lies sometimes propagated on social media. It helps foster a sense of community.

And a lot more besides. A free and independent press is an essential element of the democratic process, which explains why politicians – not just Russia’s Putin – are so keen to control the press and are fearful of it. I’m not comparing that extreme to the town hall, Holyrood or Westminster, but I think we can say they are on a continuum.

So does the newspaper achieve these aims? This is a something which others – our readers – must answer, for our own perceptions are clothed in bias. I think it fair to say that everyone involved in the production of *The Shetland Times* does their best within the technical and financial restraints imposed upon them.

We know we do not always get it right, that looming deadlines often cut short the simplest enquiry – as those who refuse to return a call on a Thursday well know and sometimes take advantage of – and that a daft headline or photo caption is all it takes to undermine our best efforts. There is a long-standing fear of Friday morning when angry calls might be received about an alleged misquote or some other misdemeanour, or worse, a typo in the births, marriages and deaths.

We are accused from time to time of “sensationalising” issues, sometimes by loud-mouthed social media warriors who claim they never read the paper. But a fiery controversy is meat and drink to any newspaper when a’ is said and done. Perhaps issues which split the community are best tackled by open and honest reporting and robust debate.

The newspaper provides a forum which demands a bit of effort and gives space for context which, far from causing division, may have the opposite effect and teach us to understand, if not endorse, others’ views rather than leading to ever more polarised sound bites and enclaves on social media.

In the magazine accompanying this issue we recall some of stories published over the last 50 years, the period most of us can best mind – those privileged to be old enough, that is. The news is local – a word we should be proud to repeat as



Working on local journalism at *The Shetland Times* are editor Alistair Munro (seated) with deputy editor Ryan Taylor, and reporter Ryan Nicolson

often as we can – much of which may seem trivial to commentators who sneer at the parochial efforts of the weekly press, and by doing so at the communities local papers serve. These stories, little and large, now tell us a little of what life was like then and how our islands came to be the way we find them today.

Some headlines we can readily recall – the *Braer*, the Dan Air crash, the opening of Sullom Voe Terminal – but many others might now puzzle us. Does that mean they were not worth reporting? No, like the routine council and court reports, the SWRIs, regattas, sports, shows, charity fundraisers and adverts they are all part of life at that time, a snapshot of the community, its values and its concerns. And that is what local journalism

should do today. Tell readers what is happening in our islands as best we can.

How do we do this? By employing a team of trained reporters dedicated to their trade and adhering to an industry code of practice. By trying to maintain reasonable standards of literacy and produce a product worthy of the intelligent and well-informed reader who will often know more about a given subject than can be encapsulated in the space available in our columns. And by printing and producing the newspaper in the islands on our own press to ensure it comes out every Friday. A curiosity – the newspaper you are reading is now the only weekly paper in Scotland which prints in-house on its own press. Owned, written, printed and pub-

lished in Shetland – that is as local as you can get.

On a personal note, it was 50 years ago that my father asked me to lend a hand, just for “six weeks” he said, to help put together the centenary magazine in which he ruminated on the future of the newspaper – the future which is now my past, half-a-century after taking on a six-week job and ending up with responsibilities for which I was, and remain, ill-suited temperamentally.

But back to the question. What future is there for this newspaper, or rather, for the future of local journalism? As my father said, “it seems entirely related to the future of the islands as a whole”.

The last 50 years have been very good ones for our islands with a level of prosperity and amenities unimagin-

ined by previous generations and the paper has, by and large, prospered. This is not the time to dwell on various low points, suffice it to say it has not all been plain sailing.

Like many businesses we would not have survived the pandemic and lockdown without the Westminster government’s largess, thanks to which the paper continued to come out every Friday, as it must. The community support and the way all involved responded to the challenges was inspirational and reinforced a feeling that *The Shetland Times* is more than just a commercial operation. It serves, I believe, a socially useful purpose.

In letters to various politicians in the early days of the lockdown I referred to my fear for the future of local journalism.

Whether this newspaper survives is perhaps not the issue. We are told by the pundits, and have been for 20 years or more, that newspapers are dying. And many are, as tech giants suck advertising revenues out of them and circulations dwindle.

Ah, you might say, all the content of a newspaper can be delivered online without the cost of the print product and all the other “legacy” costs they are lumbered with. If you believe that you will probably believe anything. Yes it “can” be delivered online or on an app, but will there be any content to deliver?

There is currently no tested business model which will allow a local online “newspaper” to retain the services of a sufficient number of reporters to provide the comprehensive community news coverage which makes a paper truly “local”.

Advertising revenues remain trivial, digital subscriptions relatively minor, and it has been shown over and over again that most people will not pay for local news online.

We see this with online services and blogs which must hold out the begging bowl to keep going.

Is this the future for local journalism – decline and death? The challenge is to find a way to ensure the community has a local, independent, source of news provided by journalists committed to enhancing and fostering a sense of community and which, as my father put it 50 years ago, “recognises Shetland for the entity that it is”.

There is little point in asking “is there a future for local journalism?”. We should say instead “there *must* be a future for local journalism”. And I hope that this newspaper, in whatever form, will be a part of it.

## ‘The *Times* has an impressive history of serving Shetland with news, and long may it continue to’

**Beatrice Wishart, MSP, gives a personal insight.**

Congratulations to the directors and staff on *The Shetland Times* newspaper reaching its 150th anniversary. From 1872 it has upheld the traditions of a free and fair local press in its weekly printed editions.

The changes over the last 150 years are enormous but people don’t really change as today, just as before, Friday mornings in Shetland mean scouring the columns of public notices, situations vacant and BMDs (births, marriages and deaths) along with the news and local sports coverage.

Maintaining reliable and respected coverage of diverse local and national incidents like the grounding of the *Braer*, or the Island Games – or even the occasional by-election – has never been more important, especially in today’s world of “fake news”.

Current affairs and politics are, understandably, at the fore whether it is what elected representatives in the Town Hall, Holyrood or Westminster are, or are not, doing, accompanied by editorials that can hit the mark. In the run up to elections all candidates are given equal opportunity to put their views across to the electorate.

Shetland’s news coverage in the latter half of the 20th century was shaped by the decision my parents made at the end of the Second World War to return to Shetland and rescue the family newspaper business which was in terminal decline.

Basil Wishart came home from service in the Far East and he said his two main aims at that time were to make the business prosper again, and to get a Liberal MP elected. As he told his story in later years, it was that “the second proved easier than the first” but he, along with his business partner Hugh Crooks, built strong foundations that secured the future of the newspaper.

I was asked to provide some of my own memories for this piece. There are many but I’ll stick to some early personal memories, one of which was spending Saturday mornings printing newspaper wrapper labels ready for mailing out the next edition of the paper to Shetland exiles all over the world who wanted to keep in touch with what was happening on the “auld rock”.

I recall the smell of paper and the thundering roar of machinery in the Prince Alfred Street printing works; my father’s pockets stuffed with proofs waiting to be read (he often roped in one of his children to proof read the adverts with him); hear-

ing him setting off down to the pier on a dark winter’s night to find out why the maroons had gone off and the lifeboat was setting out, usually in foul weather; the phone ringing at all hours when a news story broke and the national dailies wanted copy. He and Hugh sought out news day and night.

Times move on and newsgathering has changed. The *Times* wasn’t slow to move on either, becoming the first local online newspaper in Scotland in 1996.

It has an impressive history of serving Shetland with news, and long may it continue to do so.



The staff and management at  
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Former editor Basil Wishart and engineer John Waters inspect the first edition of *The Shetland Times* printed on the new reel-fed press installed at Prince Alfred Street in 1968, a huge investment at the time – £22,500. Photo: Dennis Coutts



The 2022 print team running the Goss web-offset newspaper press at Gremista. From left: David Robinson, Maurice Jamieson, Ian Flaws, Agnieszka Gardner and Colin Grant. Photo: Emma Dawn Coote

# Changing Times recorded from 1872 to 2022 – bar a fire and General Strike

When the first edition was published on 17th June, 1872, it was a broadsheet and consisted of only four pages.

Back then it was titled *The Zetland Times*, with the subtitle of *And Orkney and Shetland Advertiser* – but this soon changed to *The Shetland Times*.

It was priced 2d and was mostly made up of adverts.

The only non-advertising copy was a short note from the publisher in the top left hand corner of the page (see page 32).

It was not the first attempt at introducing a paper to the Shetland public, but is the only one that has thankfully lasted. The first was *The Shetland Journal*, which lasted only a year and was printed in London. Its founder was Arthur Anderson who attempted to extend into Orkney, but this failed.

In 1862 a further short-lived attempt was made by Charles D. Jamieson, called *The Shetland Advertiser* – and this was the first newspaper to be printed in Shetland.

*The Shetland Times* began due to the influence of then Procurator Fiscal Charles G. Duncan, who brought journalist Donald Stephen north from *The John O' Groat Journal*.

In the early days the paper appeared on a Saturday or Monday, depending on the arrival of mail from south with adverts and news items.

The two hand presses which were used to begin with were soon replaced with a cylinder machine.

The business was taken over by Christopher Sandison three years later, and operated from premises near the Market Cross, which later became Anderson & Co.

When he died in 1883, his brother Andrew took over, then it changed hands again in 1894, taken over by Basil Johnson and Peter Greig. They moved to Mounthooly Street and increased the size of paper from four pages to eight, using the first Linotype machine. Hand-setting of the paper ceased.

The circulation doubled when it doubled in size. Much of its popularity was attributed to its advocacy of land reform, which had come about the the passing of the Crofters Act in 1886.

With its enthusiasm for land reform and better social conditions, the paper naturally supported the Liberal Party.

The newspaper missed eight weeks of publication after the Mounthooly premises burned down in 1915, and moved to an old infant school in Prince Alfred Street.

There was also one missed issue in 1926 during the General Strike.

*The Shetland Times* and rival *Shetland News* – until its closure in 1963 because of declining advertising revenue – both reported the outbreaks of the world wars.

The paper was edited by Basil Johnson from 1894 until after the First World War, with Peter Greig its sole reporter.

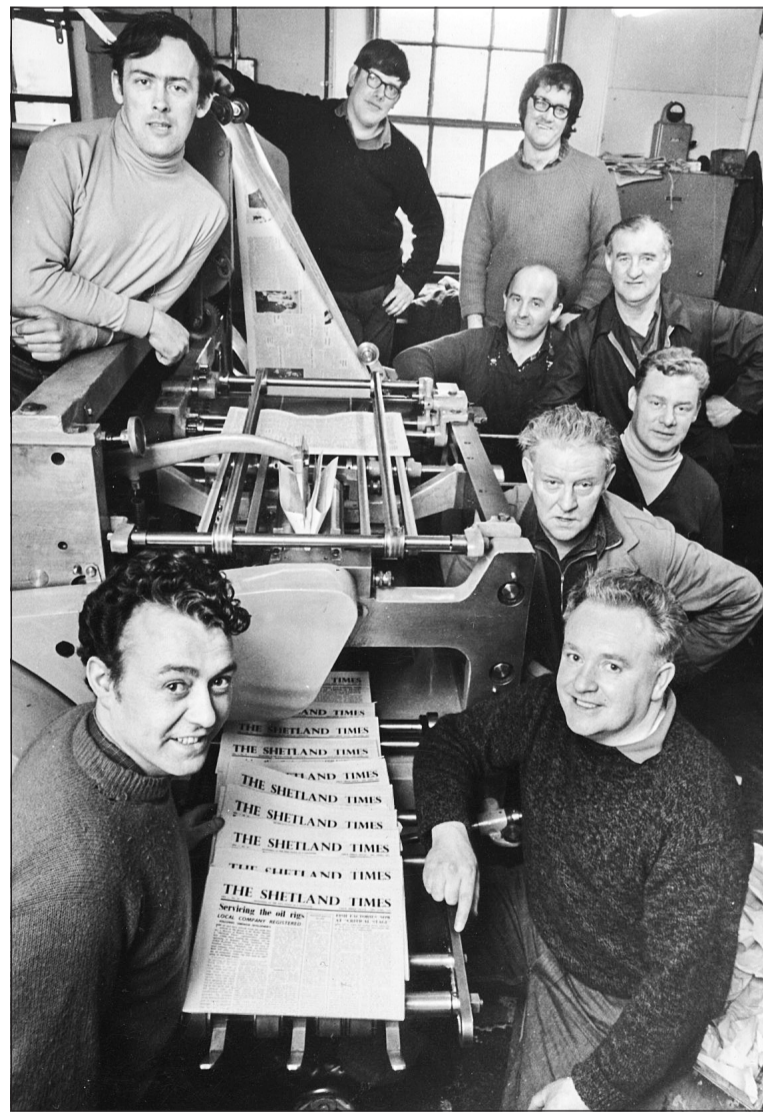
After the war their sons, Bertie Johnson and Bob Greig, took over. Bob's death in 1938 was a severe blow.

During the Second World War then owner Bertie Johnson died and left the

business to his sister, Mrs Helen (Cissie) Wishart – and the paper has remained in the family since then.

Basil Wishart took over as editor on his return from the Second World War. He was joined by Hugh Crooks, a reporter with great shorthand and typing speeds, who had served in Shetland during the war and married local lass, Laura Simpson.

Basil and Hugh put their efforts in the post-war years to make the business profitable, and ploughed back these profits in buying new plant and equipment.



The print team at the Duplex press c. 1972. Clockwise from bottom left: Hamish Cutt, Alastair Johnston, Ian Williamson, Ian Crooks, Donnie Johnston, Willie More, Allan Bruce, John Laurenson and James Manson. Photo: Dennis Coutts

Basil's ambition was to first make a profit and second to get a Liberal MP elected, which happened with Jo Grimond. Basil later said the second ambition proved easier than the first.

It was not until September 1968 when the format of the newspaper was scaled down to a tabloid, with news now the main force on the front page.

But the adverts remained splayed across pages two and three, including for the old North Star Cinema.

Back in the centenary edition of *The Shetland Times* in 1972, the then editor Basil Wishart was looking towards the era of North Sea oil.

He wrote: "When *The Shetland Times* was launched its founder no doubt felt that the islands were about to enjoy a period of expansion.

"In fact, save for two short periods of boom conditions in the fishing industry, the reverse was the case.

"Now with the lessons of the past in mind, it would be unwise to make forecasts, though today we have social and economic conditions immeasurably superior.

"The pace of events is now so fast that it is difficult to appreciate that a community whose population had ebbed away over the century is now actually somewhat fearful of the influx it had hitherto always desired.

"But while we are unwilling to indulge in crystal gazing we are confident that Shetlanders have the energy and the acumen to meet changing situations in future just as they did in the past."

He had the foresight to add: "It continues to give factual accounts of local events at a time when the daily press is quite dismally failing to give adequate coverage of national and international events.

"It is unfortunate that daily newspapers in Britain grew to give nationwide coverage, for the public would have been better served by a healthy range of regional papers, though some do exist.

"The result is that, with the growth of television news coverage, a London-based national press is turning more and more to magazine-type articles and background comments on the hard news that is now available at a flick of a switch.

"This is all the more unfortunate because the spoken word cannot be assimilated in the same manner as the printed word.

"The pattern of development would appear to be one in which the 'popular' papers will cease to be newspapers at all, while the more serious dailies will

increase their circulation and the weekly press playing a complementary role.

Since then, it was seen that Shetlanders had indeed taken change in their stride.

Shetland became more prosperous, but was not – and is still not – immune to the social problems which accompanied this change.

The paper's circulation continued to rise – from 4,00 in 1939 to 8,000 in 1972 – despite a decline in population which was only stemmed by the arrival of oil – then to more than 11,000 a week in the 1990s, in a population of 22,000.

The oil industry has played a major part in the economy of Shetland in the last 50 years, particularly since the opening of the £1.3billion Sullom Voe Oil Terminal in 1978. The population initially grew to a peak of 25,000, as over 7,000 workers descended on the islands.

As well as hundreds of permanent new jobs post-construction at the terminal, there were massive offshoots for local business.

It provided a boom for hoteliers, building contractors, lorry drivers, quarrymen, shopkeepers, labourers, cooks, maids, etc.

One year Sumburgh Airport hit a peak of 800,000 passengers, mainly contributed by offshore workers flying to and from rigs and platforms.

The disturbance payments and rents which flooded into the community's funds have been invested in roads, care homes, health centres, leisure centres, new schools and so on.

Even since our last anniversary celebration 10 years ago, Shetland is subject to another new industry changing the face of the island – this time windfarms.

The Viking Energy Windfarm has split opinion in the isles, and offshore projects are also proving controversial – particularly within the fishing industry.

While these events were taking place there were many changes at the paper. Basil's son Robert brought in phototype-setting and web-offset litho printing in 1980, finally replacing the old hot metal and letterpress processes.

Then there was the move from Prince Alfred Street to Gremista. The shift to the much larger former Jubilee 77 nightclub premises allowed further press and information technology investments, including large format printing.

The way news is reported worldwide has also changed over the years, particularly with social media now having a massive impact on the industry. How these will affect newspapers over the coming years still has to be seen.



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We have compiled a quiz centring on the year of our birth – 1872, with the help of Adam Jacot de Boinod, a researcher for the first BBC series of *QI*, compered by Stephen Fry, and is an author of three books, including *The Meaning of Tingo*.

## QUESTIONS ON 1872

- How many days were there in the year 1872?
- Who was Prime Minister in 1872?
- In this year which museum opened in New York City?
- For the first ever final of which cup was contested at the Oval, London?
- What was legalised in Canada in this year?
- Explorer William Gosse reached Uluru in central Australia and named it what?
- Who painted in November 1872 "Impression, Sunrise" that gave a name to Impressionism?
- Where did a large fire destroy much of the city's financial district?
- Which British composer was born in October 1872?
- Who published in 1872 his novel *Under the Greenwood Tree*?
- For what name does the initial U stand for US Grant who became American President in 1872?
- Which French aviation pioneer was born in July 1872?
- Which profession in London went on strike?
- The last use of what for judicial punishment was recorded at Newbury, Berkshire?
- By whom was the 1872 novel *Middlemarch* written?
- Which British philosopher was born in May 1872?
- The breakwater of which Caithness town was washed away in a storm?
- In which country did work begin on the Seven Sisters Colliery?
- The hearings for what system of debt bondage, evolved in Shetland after the 1690s, were held in the Queens Hotel?
- Who contributed to the invention of the single-wire telegraph system before dying in April 1872?
- Who drew the antique map of the Shetland islands in 1872?
- The third Carlist War from 1872 to 1876 was enacted in which country?
- Which Scottish football club was founded in March 1872?
- Which was the world's first National Park to open in this year?
- Which Dutch painter was born in March 1872?

(Answers in next week's issue)

# Where it all began...

The reproduction of this newspaper's first front page from a photograph of a framed print in our Gremista offices, hence the slight fuzziness. As can be seen, it is mostly made up of adverts, as was the case until September 1968 when the paper went tabloid.

The only non-advertising copy on 17th June 1872 was a short note from the publisher in the top left hand corner of the page which said: "Within recent years the newspaper press has become one of the most powerful institutions in the kingdom; and, since the abolition of what was appropriately termed 'the tax upon knowledge,' there is scarcely a town of any importance in the country but has its local organ, which is often the means of disseminating valuable information on

local matters; exposing and denouncing cruelty and oppression; approving and supporting justice; besides catering to the reading public.

"The Shetland Islands, containing a population of between thirty and forty thousand inhabitants, offer we have every reason to believe, a fair field for the establishment of a first class newspaper, one which will represent the interests of the islands – more especially the prosperous county town of Lerwick – and supply them with that which is so much wanted – an organ of their own.

"The *Zetland Times*, without adopting the views of any party, either political or otherwise, will steadily support measures of justice and progress. Public topics will always

be treated with moderation and honesty; and *The Times* will be an observant recorder of every event of national and local interest.

"As regards local questions, *The Zetland Times* will advocate those measures which will prove most beneficial to all classes of the community, and tend to the prosperity of the islands generally. The industries of the islands, too, will have our careful consideration; and everything calculated to enhance their importance will have our hearty co-operation.

"*The Zetland Times*, with these aims and intentions, will be launched in the month of June, respectfully courting the patronage of the public of Lerwick, as well as the support of the other islands."

The accounts of the Lerwick Parish Church Organ Fund were published as a public notice and show that the cost of the organ was £175. A different type of organ to the one born that day in 1872.

Not many hire cars available but Thomas Stewart, horse hire, 80 Commercial Street, Lerwick boasts "A velocipede for Hire". Active travel anyone?

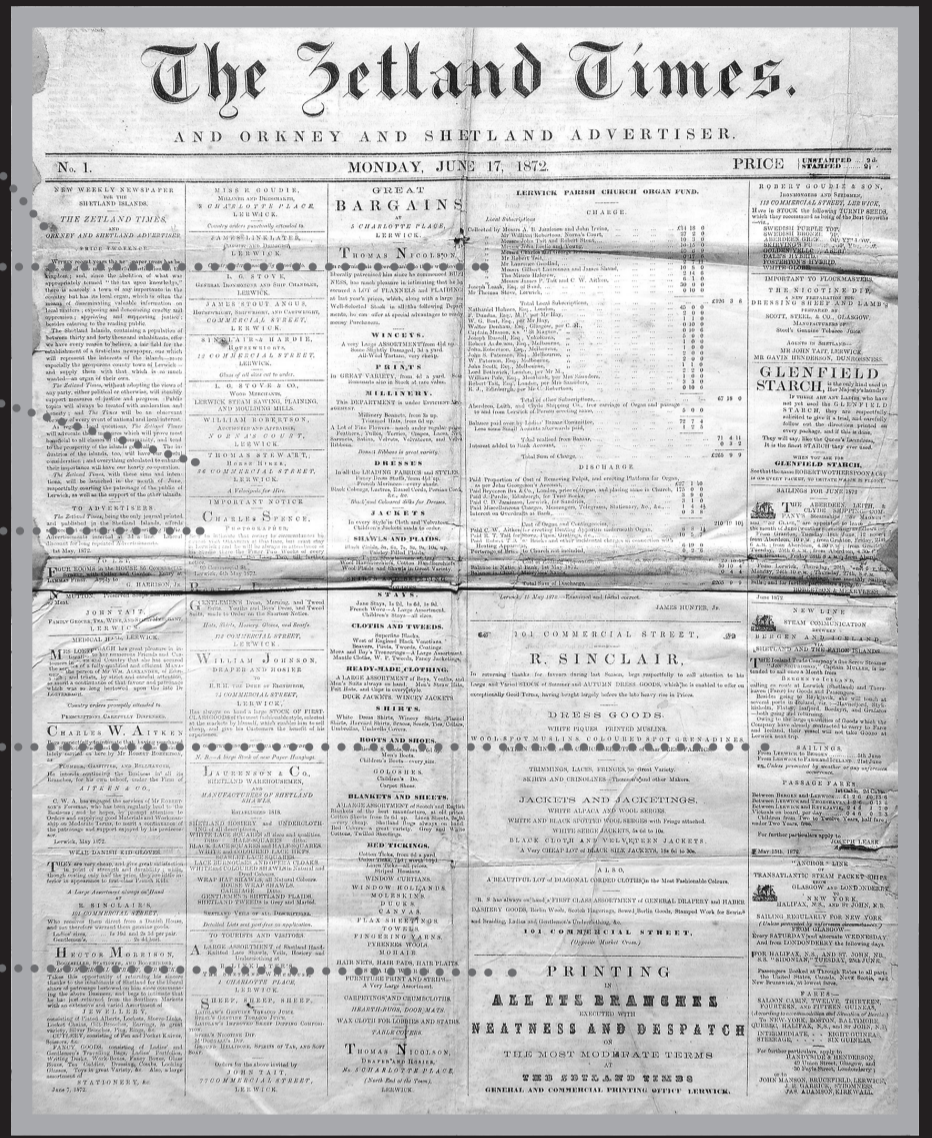
Charles Spence, photographer, was advertising "An important notice" and "Beggars to intimate that owing to circumstances he cannot visit Ollaberry at this time, but must stay in Lerwick ...". One wonders why.

Shipping adverts: Travel to Granton or Aberdeen on The Aberdeen, Leith & Clyde Shipping Company's steamships St Clair or St Magnus or to New York, Halifax or St John with Anchor Line – saloon fares twelve to fifteen guineas or steerage six guineas ... or to Bergen for a princely £1 2/6 in a first cabin".

From the first we advertised: "Printing in all its branches executed with neatness and despatch on the most moderate of terms ..." a service The Shetland Times Ltd. provides to the present day. We are our own longest running advertiser!



To view the front page in higher resolution please scan the QR code or visit: [www.shetlandtimes.co.uk/150-years](http://www.shetlandtimes.co.uk/150-years)



# Quite an achievement and one worth celebrating

On congratulating *The Shetland Times* on our 150th anniversary, ALISTAIR CARMICHAEL MP gives a political insight on local journalism.

One hundred and fifty years – and still going strong! It is quite an achievement for the *Times* and one worth celebrating.

At a time when local papers in other parts of the country are closing down or bought out by bigger outfits who run them as anything other than local, *The Shetland Times* continues to thrive.

Why is it different?

There are many reasons, but fundamentally I believe that Shetland as a community is different itself, and *The Shetland Times* reflects that unique character. We retain in Shetland a strong sense of identity as a community and one which is distinctive – distinct from the rest of Scotland, and the UK.

That strong identity is reflected in the ethos of the *Times*. At the same time, having a paper that reflects that Shetland identity itself helps to maintain our local character.

Like all good local papers it has a well-used and lively letters page. Many a parlia-

mentary question or speech has grown from what I have read in *The Shetland Times* letters page. I learned early on as MP not to see the letters page as being reflective of anything other than the individuals who write in it but I have no doubt that many lively Friday tea time debates have been sparked around Shetland as a result of its contents. It is the grit in the oyster that grows the pearl.

The paper itself has never been shy of campaigning when a critical local issue has been in play, be it ferry services, petrol prices, coastguards, emergency tug coverage or anything else.

The first point that I saw *The Shetland Times* at full throttle was in 2007 when the community came together as one to protest the arrest and planned deportation of Sakchai Makao, a young Shetlander who had come to the isles from Thailand as a ten-year-old and made his life here.

The campaign to stop Sakchai's deportation was Shetland at its best. Overnight a

petition was set up and distributed. Money was found, lawyers were instructed, meetings were organised – and t-shirts were printed. For the first 24 hours I just worked the phones to find out where Sakchai was being held and what his status was. A grassroots campaign was growing.

Deportation can be a divisive issue. In Shetland it brought everyone together. At the heart of it *The Shetland Times* (and yes, *Shetland News*) gave a voice to the community, corralling different elements of the campaign. Had our local media outlets not been there would we still have succeeded? Perhaps, but there is no doubt that it would have been a longer, harder slog. The community spirit that was so important to our success would not have been so easily rallied.

The world of news reporting has changed beyond all recognition over the life of *The Shetland Times*. The pace of change just over the last two decades has been a blistering one. When I first knew the paper as a newly-elected Member of Parliament the paper went into every house and every workplace. Friday didn't start properly for most Shetlanders until the paper had at least been scanned and digested.

The paper at that time sat at the heart of Lerwick. From her office at Prince Alfred Street the then-editor Vaia Wishart and her team could gather news like squirrels gather nuts. After a week in Westminster a cup of coffee with her and her team could be a bracing start to the weekend. Opinions were rarely softened and the delivery of them was blunt. It was never a discourse for the faint-hearted, but then neither is politics – so we were probably well-matched.

Over the years I have made it my business to ensure that local issues were well ventilated in parliament. Like all good local newspapers, that has been the focus of the content that the *Times* has reported on my work as an MP.

Just because your focus is local, however, doesn't mean you have to be parochial. Where I have taken a role on bigger issues, such as campaigning on human rights issues, especially working with groups like Amnesty International to end the use of the death penalty around the world, the paper has taken an interest, contributing to a healthy and broad discourse in our community.

The advent of online news and social

media has changed a lot of how local journalism operates. News comes to us all as it happens real time. We no longer have to wait to read it printed on paper on a Friday morning.

Inevitably the paper has had to change to reflect these wider changes. For papers in other parts of the country these changes have been their undoing. *The Shetland Times*, however, manages to maintain its position at the heart of island life here.

That has been proven once again in recent years with the arrival of the pandemic. For all that this was a global event, it was local news that people often turned to in those difficult months. Trusted sources of information and a sense of community go a long way in a crisis.

I hesitate to predict anything these days, but I am confident that as long as we remain a strong and distinctive community in Shetland – and as long as *The Shetland Times* reflects that in its pages – then it should be good for another 150 years – at least.

Happy anniversary to the team at Gremista. Enjoy a celebration – responsibly of course – and keep on going. The *Times* makes Shetland – just as much as Shetland makes *The Shetland Times*.

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# ‘I hope it lasts another hundred years’

Former editor JONATHAN WILLS (1987-1990) recalls his early days with *The Shetland Times*.

It seems no time at all since *The Shetland Times* was only 100 years old. I mind it fine.

During the first 15 years of my life my mother, a Twageos “exile”, always had either a postal subscription to “da pepper” or a Lerwick relative who sent her bundles of back numbers. The newspaper’s arrival was eagerly awaited on whichever doorstep we currently inhabited in Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire or Warwickshire. She would read aloud to my father and, as we grew older, to my sisters and me.

When we moved “home” to Lerwick in 1962 I enrolled at the Anderson Educational Institute and was soon contributing my juvenilia to the imaginatively titled *A.E.I. Magazine*. This was professionally printed at *The Shetland Times* printing works in Prince Alfred Street, a converted infant school where I first saw a Linotype machine clattering into action, first watched compositors laying out columns “on the stone” and first observed the taking and correcting of proofs. The craftsmen were very friendly, humorous and helpful, both then and much later when I worked with them professionally as a reporter and editor. I delighted in the smell of the ink and the roar of the presses.

I was still at school when I first saw the big newspaper press in action. The magical moment when the press starts to roll and the first copy comes off was very exciting to me. Even more exciting was when someone spotted a nasty factual or typographical error that had somehow escaped the proof reader’s eye and the press had to be stopped. Then Willie More or one of the other printers would crawl onto the bed of the press, loosen the forms with a key, remove the offending slug of type and slot in the corrected line. Sometimes, if they were in a hurry, Willie would just bash the bad line with a hammer and chisel. He could read lead type upside down and the wrong way around, even when he was bent double in a confined space.

During my accidental career in journalism I had four spells working on *The Shetland Times*, as a student in 1969, a junior reporter in 1976, senior reporter in 1981 and 1987, and as editor from 1987 to 1990.

In the summer of 1969, the University of Aberdeen organised a prestigious academic conference in Shetland, to mark the 500th anniversary of the Danish king pawning his property in the islands to Scotland, in part payment of his daughter’s dowry when she married one of the many King Jameses. Basil Wishart, *The Shetland Times* editor, wondered if I’d be interested in reporting on the event.

At the 1969 conference, instead of scribbling in longhand for exam papers, I now typed on sheets of copy paper which I handed to Basil or to the news editor, Hugh Crooks.

Hugh was rightly proud of the fact that he was a properly trained reporter, having served his time on the *Falkirk Herald*, a hard school if ever there was one. He did not have a lot of time for academics or recent graduates, particularly if they didn’t have shorthand or ten-finger typing skills, and he made his view plain. He explained the difference between reporters and journalists. The latter, in his opinion, were a lesser breed and had turned once respectable newspapers into mere newspapers.

“Nobody cares what you think,” Hugh once told me. “Your job is to report what other people think, say

and do. Full stop.”

Basil put it even more brutally on another occasion, when I’d told a group of striking dockers that the reason their side of the story didn’t get into the paper might be because they refused to speak to reporters: “If yer lugs were as big as yer mouth,” he said, “You might make a reporter.” Ouch! It turned out Basil had heard about my remarks while he was having a pint with the dockers’ union shop steward in the British Legion bar.

Despite this, when the conference ended I was asked to stay on for a few weeks and thus had my introduction to “making the calls” to police, fire, ambulance and coast-guard officers each morning. I was sent to the fishmarket to note down the landings and prices, learning that four baskets make a cran of herring (now, in these metricated days, an anachronism – a piece of stranded knowledge). I wrote sailing regatta reports, I sat in the press box at Lerwick Sheriff Court for the first time, and I also reported on events at the Baillie Court, usually held in Lerwick Town Hall on a Monday morning when they dealt with the weekend’s drunkards from custody.

During my vacation job there was a small but significant technical revolution at the paper. Before 1969 there were very few photographs in *The Shetland Times*, or most other rural Scottish newspapers. This was because of the considerable expense and delay involved in posting our pictures south to be made into “stereos” – metal plates with the image converted into lines of dots. On arrival back at our printing works in Prince Alfred Street the plates were mounted on wooden blocks and these were then wedged among the columns of type in the heavy page frames of the flatbed press.

In the summer of 1969 Basil invested in a clever machine that cut the dots into a flexible plastic plate. You fitted your photograph onto the left side of a rotating cylinder, an electronic eye scanned the image, transferred it to the plastic plate on the right hand side of the cylinder and, hey presto, you had a plate ready to stick on a block for printing. The resolution was extremely coarse compared with what’s available on the cheapest home photo scanner today.

Seven years later I knocked on the door of *The Shetland Times* again. Basil appeared pleased to see me and hired me as a junior reporter, still with no formal training as a journalist.

This involved a return to the Sheriff Court. Some cases looked dull but suddenly came to life. A colourful Lerwick character appeared in the dock one morning to defend himself against a charge of not having a television licence. In those days the only TV channel available in Shetland was the BBC, in black-and-white. Sheriff Alistair MacDonald, in a friendly manner, leaned over the bench and gently pointed out to the accused that there could be no doubt about whether or not he had paid for a TV licence: he either had one or he didn’t and the bench was at a loss to understand how he could plead not guilty to the charge.

“It’s very simple, your Honour,” replied the accused, “The licence is for black and white TV. All we get here is grey and grey with snow flakes and the reception’s absolutely terrible.”

“You certainly have a point there. I’ve noticed that myself,” the Sheriff

## The Shetland Times I.R.A. bomb blast

Police confirmed on Wednesday afternoon that the blast which ripped through the power station at Sullom Voe during The Queen’s visit on Saturday was caused by a bomb. A police statement said that “initial examination of the material at the Royal Armament Research and Development Establishment, Woolwich, has revealed that the damage was caused by high explosive and it is apparent that a device was placed in the power station. A much more detailed examination has to be carried out before the nature of the device can be established. Since the incident occurred the police investigation has been based on the assumption that this would prove to be the case”.

The IRA has repeatedly claimed that it planted a seven pound bomb in the power station. A statement issued on Monday night said that, “had we managed to place Saturday’s bomb close enough to the British Queen she would now be dead”. The statement claimed the authorities tried to suppress the incident because of embarrassment at “this breach of the British monarch’s security”.

The bomb went off about noon on Saturday, while the Norwegian and British national anthems were being played in the engineering services building at Sullom Voe. Because of the music none of the Royal party or VIP guests heard the blast at the power station, which is a quarter of a mile away across the site. The Royal visit was running about twelve minutes late and if it had been on time the bomb would have gone off during The Queen’s address. Less than half an hour before the blast, the Royal party had driven past the



The Queen, King Olav and the Duke of Edinburgh step ashore at Sullom Voe on Saturday just an hour before the I.R.A. bomb exploded in the power station, which can be seen in the background top right.

damaged, though BP has not confirmed this. Debris was scattered over a wide area and because this part of the power station is a maze of pipes, ducts and large machinery the detectives had a difficult

Now that it has been confirmed that the explosion was caused by a bomb, BP and the police are left to ponder how such a major breach of security could have happened. There has been criticism of the apparent

the inception of the project and according to the newspaper arrangements for the Royal visit. The Royal tour of the terminal did not include the power station and all buildings along the route were fully examined in advance

down over cost. He said, according to the newspaper report, that the present fence would not keep intruders out for more than 40 seconds. News of the explosion was not released by the police until over

How we covered the bomb scare at the official opening of Sullom Voe Oil Terminal.

observed, but then found him guilty. He did not impose a fine, however, but merely admonished the offender. The story made a column lead of which I was rather proud and also earned us some lineage from the “sooth papers”, who loved it.

The year 1976 was an interesting time to be on a Shetland newsdesk. The huge oil and gas terminal at Sullom Voe was under construction at last, having overcome the hurdles of getting planning permission and moving mountains of wet peat in order to find solid rock for the foundations of the oil storage tanks and gas processing equipment. Planning permits had been fast-tracked in return for the Shetland council receiving some loot – that would amount to almost £82 million in “disturbance payments” between 1976 and 2000 – and the grant by the UK Parliament of special powers under the Zetland County Council Act of 1974.

Strictly speaking, the oil “disturbance” money should have gone into the council’s general fund because nowhere in the special Act of Parliament did it actually say anything about holding the money “in trust” but the cash-strapped Labour government decided not to make a fuss about it when councillors went ahead and set up a charitable trust anyway and put the loot in it.

The outside world was taking a keen interest in the Shetland oil deals and lazy Fleet Street journalists were referring to us as “blue-eyed Arabs”, but almost as soon as the first agreements with the industry were signed, oil company lawyers started trying to pick them apart, leading to considerable loss of revenue to the council. For example, the dispute over how much rent the companies should pay for the council’s land at Sullom Voe was to last 14 years and generate thousands of words of copy as we tried to understand and report the details. Eventually the council had to settle for a tenth of what it had demanded.

However, the biggest loss of revenue would come not from these disputes, which were all eventually

“Nobody cares what you think. Your job is to report what other people think, say and do. Full stop.”

Former editor Hugh Crooks

settled, but from the Conservative government’s massive cuts in business rates during the 1980s. These taxes would have been much more valuable to the council than Shetland’s special oil deals, had they continued. By 1985 the council had received £27.3m in disturbance payments but had a public debt of £140.7m, three times the Scottish average per head of population, after building all the roads, schools, waterworks, drains, social facilities and houses required for a population that had risen by a quarter in 10 years, due to the influx of oil workers. Even so, the relatively small sums of money the council did receive, and the fact that they were partly held in a trust, out of reach of the UK government, enabled Shetland to create and, for many years, to sustain a miniature Scandinavian welfare state which was much admired, and envied, by less fortunate local authorities.

All this unprecedented activity provided news for the pages of *The Shetland Times* each Friday, but it was also a source of income from “linage” – stories sent every day from our office to the “sooth papers”, the BBC and Grampian Television in Aberdeen. As the “stringers” we at “Wishart Lerwick” were the local eyes and ears of the Scottish, UK and sometimes inter-

national news media. I had to learn how to operate a telex machine, and was astonished to find that Hugh could actually read words from the dots on the ticker tape that fed it.

One of the big issues for us to report on was environmental protection. Fishermen, councillors, the tourist trade and bird watchers were all seriously concerned at the pollution risks. The arrangements for preventing and responding to oil spills from the terminal and its tanker traffic had not been completely sorted out before the deals with BP and partners were signed. Not long after I joined the paper’s staff, Basil asked me to write a report on the environmental impact statement produced by the Sullom Voe Environmental Advisory Group (SVEAG), in anticipation of a day-long seminar where the document would be presented to the public.

Sensing the mood in Shetland, where fishermen were already complaining about debris dumped on their fishing grounds from oil rigs and oil service vessels, BP and partners had quickly agreed to set up SVEAG, with the chairman a BP scientist, Peter Bracknell. In the summer of 1976 BP paid for the new terminal’s environmental impact statement to be printed by a local co-operative called Thuleprint, whose boss, John Button, took the precaution on the title page of dissociating himself and Thuleprint from the contents. When it arrived on the desk of Ian R. Clark, the Shetland council’s chief executive, he was dismayed because throughout the document the authors (mostly BP staffers like Bracknell) kept referring to the financial impact on the oil companies of various courses of action – for example, whether the oil storage tanks should be below ground or on the surface of the terminal site. That, surely, was a financial, rather than an environmental, consideration.

Clark was so annoyed at the apparent bias in the report that he then did an extraordinary thing: when I rang him up for a comment he invited me to his home in St Olaf Street, Lerwick, one evening and

for over an hour listed all the faults in the SVEAG document, while I took detailed notes. He observed that the central problem was that the chairman and vice-chairman of SVEAG were both BP employees.

My report (which, by agreement, did not quote Clark) was published as a full page in *The Shetland Times* and caused a minor uproar. Basil wrote a scathing editorial. Perhaps “coruscating” would be a better word. That same week, at SVEAG’s public meeting to launch the environmental impact statement, members of the audience, including me, asked some awkward questions. Mine were mostly based on what Clark had told me. Not long afterwards, SVEAG was disbanded at Clark’s insistence and a new advisory body, the Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group (SOTEAG) set up. Its chairman was George Dunnett, an independent, widely respected zoology professor from the University of Aberdeen. There were no more complaints about industry bias. And I had just learned that being an accredited correspondent of a real newspaper, rather than an amateur on a student rag, gave you surprisingly privileged access to senior people and confidential information.

In 1976 I went to the BBC to start Radio Shetland. I lost touch with the Wishart family. In addition to Mary Blance as a full-time secretary, in July 1978 Radio Shetland was allowed to advertise for an extra member of staff. I was delighted when the BBC chose Vaila Wishart, a childhood friend who had been studying in London and was now helping out at *The Shetland Times*.

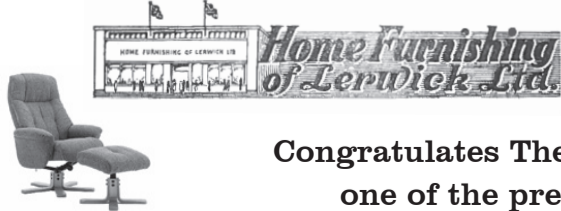
Having been brought up in a household where her father was often to be found correcting galley proofs over breakfast or composing leaders at dinner, Vaila had news in her blood and was soon doing a lot more than her job description of helping with the technical and administrative work. Vaila later went on to a distinguished editorship of *The Shetland Times* for many years.

After leaving Radio Shetland in 1981 I went back to *The Shetland Times* for a third stint, during which I missed a major scoop: arriving late, I was the only reporter who actually heard the bomb go off while the Queen was inaugurating the Sullom Voe Terminal, but failed to recognise it as a bomb.

A year later I failed to recognise that the man having dinner with plain clothes police in Busta House (where my wife and I were celebrating our 10th wedding anniversary) was in fact Salman Rushdie, on the run from maniacal fatwah wallahs.

I then worked for the BBC again in Edinburgh, then for a Labour MSP and a young MP called Brown (whatever happened to him?) before coming home again in 1985 to that familiar roost at *The Shetland Times*. The rest, as they say, is history, of which journalism is supposed to be the first draft.

*The Shetland Times* and I have sometimes fallen out. That’s another story. But I have never doubted the need for a local newspaper determined to “tell it like it is” and “speak truth to power”, even if that power is only a few silly, secretive councillors who sometimes get above themselves. We are fortunate we still have such a paper in Shetland. Many other places have lost theirs. They are much the worse for it. I hope our “local rag” lasts at least another 100 years. It is our journal of record. Even in this age of antisocial media, when anyone can be famous for 15 seconds, that is something of great value. It matters.



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# Overseeing an international crisis at a local level

Former editor ADAM CIVICO (2012-2022) takes a look back at his years in charge of the newsroom – which included coverage of when the country went into lockdown because of Covid-19, causing the newspaper industry – among many others – a logistical headache.

It's difficult to know where to start. But the beginning seems as good a place as any.

For simplicity, I'll make that July 2012.

It was a summer of celebrations. The country was gearing up for the London Olympics and (another) jubilee was being marked. In the Civico household, there was another reason for celebration. A new job was on the horizon.

I clearly remember sitting in a Lerwick B&B watching the Olympics opening ceremony while phoning my wife, back in Barnsley. Earlier that day I'd been interviewed for the editor's role, and effectively been offered the job.

The conversation with Anouska went along the lines that she should get used to the idea of packing up and moving to Shetland.

"What's it like?" "You'll see. I think you'll like it."

Luckily, she did. My family and I arrived in Lerwick in October 2012, and I took up the job at the end of the month.

Even then I was already aware that editing *The Shetland Times* would be like no other local news-

paper job in the country. There is something special about the paper and its relationship with the community that marks it apart.

Up to that point, I'd spent a career working in local newspapers and thought I knew how important they were to a community. Then I arrived in Shetland.

If Carlsberg did local newspapers, they'd be like *The Shetland Times*.

If I had any doubts about how big a challenge it was going to be moving to a new community and editing the local newspaper, they were soon brought into focus.

As we moved into our new home in Kanterstedt Court, Lerwick, the new neighbours said hello. Then, one of them pointed out "You're the new editor of *The Shetland Times* ... you've got some big boots to fill."

I'm paraphrasing, but conversation after conversation went like that, and the realisation that this was not just any newspaper job quickly dawned on me.

On a night out, in my first few weeks in the islands, I was queuing for the bar when I was stopped by an, admittedly drunk, new acquaint-

ance who took great pleasure in announcing, "yun's the editor of da pepper!"

After the ground had swallowed me, and spat me out again, the experience served as a useful reminder about life in a small community. A lesson that, I hope, I took on board.

Journalism is an unusual, and at times challenging, profession. There should be no looking the other way, no reluctance to ask the tough questions, and no hiding place (even at the bar).

One of the questions I used to get asked the most, while working as a journalist, was, "What's the biggest story you've worked on?"

It's a reasonable question, but one I always struggled to answer. What seems "big" in the newsroom, doesn't always carry the same weight with readers.

"Big" issues of the day, often seem less significant after the passage of time. Anyone who has flicked through a newspaper archive would understand the feeling of coming across a front-page lead, that had completely escaped your memory.



The devastating Moorfield Hotel fire in Brae.

What's that adage about today's news and fish and chip wrappers?

Of course, there are some stories that stick out.

Back in the early 2000s, my fledgling career started in a crummy newsroom in Barnsley. It was an excellent "patch" and a superb place to learn the trade. The deputy editor was an old character who had seen it all and who loved tearing junior reporters' stories to pieces (his tearing was more metaphorical than literal, in those days as I'm not old enough to remember proper typesetting).

One of his favourite sayings was that the best stories needed "scale", referring to the number of people the story was relevant to.

Using that measure, the emergence of Covid-19 – and the anguish, uncertainty, and raw panic that came with it – must be the biggest story I ever worked on.

It's the only story I can think of that affected everyone. It was off the "scale".

So how to report it? Before it became the major news story of its time, Covid-19 had been rumbling around for months as concern was growing internationally. Locked away in our little newsroom in Gremista we watched with interest but were rather bemused. Conversations were held about how relevant the virus was to Shetland. Ridiculous though it seems, for several weeks the decision was that it was not relevant enough.

All that changed in early March 2020. As the national conversation controversially rumbled on about what steps should be taken to protect the population, Shetland took its own steps and life as we knew it paused.

"Isles shutdown begins", declared the front-page, dominated by photos of empty car parks and closed buildings.

One of the hottest topics of conversation in the newsroom on that deadline day was whether what was

happening should be referred to as a shutdown or a lockdown. It felt hugely important at the time but, as with so much else, it hardly seems so now.

However, it does indicate the level of consideration that goes into producing a newspaper, particularly one that is so important to its community as *The Shetland Times* is.

For the weeks and months that followed there was barely another story in town. From the first known cases to the disruption on school life, the public health messages and the threat to the economy it was all anyone was talking about.

The pandemic changed life, so it's no surprise that it transformed the way the newspaper was put together each week.

When lockdown began (reticence over using the word rapidly dissipated) there was an immediate desire, amid all the uncertainty, to find a way that a newspaper could be published each week.

There are so many elements of producing a newspaper on-site that it's a complicated challenge at the best of times. Content arrives from the newsroom, contributors, readers. Then there is the sales team dealing with adverts, classifieds, BMDs etc. Further down the line the process involves designers, subbing, proofing, platemaking, and then the printing. There's no way that could be done with remote working.

Everyone who was working at the paper at that time deserves huge credit for the way they reacted and pulled together to ensure that the paper continued to come out.

Robert Wishart, proprietor and director, was resolute in his belief that *The Shetland Times* had never been more important, and so it proved. The response from the whole workforce was nothing short of extraordinary and some of the best editions were published in that peculiar period.

There was an undoubted strength in adversity, and a creativity borne

of necessity. Week after week the paper was packed with every development from the sad and disturbing to the more light-hearted and uplifting.

We reported case numbers, challenged health chiefs and care home managers, spoke to those who been ill and recovered. And we found bits of brightness among the gloom – the acts of kindness, public-spiritedness, and sheer resilience – and brought them to the eyes of a wider public.

And that is the essence of everything a community newspaper should be. That the *Times* did it in spades, through one of the toughest times in living memory is something that everyone involved should be proud of.

Of course, there were other big stories over the years. Inevitably, and sadly, the list features the fatal helicopter crash at Garths Ness in 2013, along with major fires at the Fair Isle Bird Observatory and the Moorfield Hotel, although responsibility for reporting of those blazes must go to others, as I was away from work on both occasions.

In the nine years or so of my involvement, there were thankfully few violent crimes, but many drugs busts, and armed police were flown to Shetland to deal with a gunman.

There were local "scandals" like the rows over the removal of popcorn machines, or whether a bearded Viking could watch an 18-certificate film (he was denied entry despite Mareel staff serving him a pint of beer).

There were controversies, ranging from the perpetual debate over windfarms to the democratic deficit in selecting charitable trust trustees, and political arguments over just about everything. None of those debates dominated as much as that over Scottish independence.

We should be grateful that most of the debate in Shetland remained civil. No doubt that will continue, and no doubt *The Shetland Times* will keep reporting it.

As the global coronavirus crisis continues to deepen...

## Isles shutdown begins

The empty toilet roll shelves at Tesco on Sunday. Photo: Robert Wishart

Commercial Street was dead as shoppers stayed away. Photo: Dave Donaldson

Shetland Museum and Archives shut its doors on Tuesday. Photo: Dave Donaldson

Clidinn Leisure Centre closed on Tuesday evening. Photo: Dave Donaldson

The deserted Mareel car park in Lerwick. Photo: Dave Donaldson

Library services are halted. Photo: Dave Donaldson

Venues close, events off and people told to stay at home

Schools close and may remain shut until summer break

The splash when Covid sparked the first lockdown.

## May the Old Rock stand steadfast – Jim Wallace

Former MP for 18 years JIM WALLACE looks back on his Shetland Times memories.

One of the joys of my year as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland was to join with congregations as they celebrated special anniversaries. I did note, however, that our society seems to have a fascination for anniversaries which end with a "0" or a "5".

Nevertheless, I hope I can be forgiven for recalling the 111th anniversary edition of *The Shetland Times*, published on 17th June, 1983, which reported my first election as MP for Orkney and Shetland. I also recall, with gratitude, the edition two weeks previously when the editorial, thanks to Basil Wishart and Hugh Crooks,

recommended that Shetland should hold fast to its Liberal tradition and return me as their MP.

If, in subsequent elections, there was no endorsement of any one candidate, coverage was thorough, with questionnaires to all candidates and a final week editorial, which, as far as my memory serves me, gave a fair and balanced view on the campaign and the candidates.

For a local representative, a local newspaper like *The Shetland Times* is invaluable. It fulfils a two-way function of allowing the MP, MSP or councillor to report on what he or she is doing – and in turn provides not only a means for the elected representative to keep abreast

of local news and developments, but also serves as a forum for local accountability. All that is a necessity for a healthy democracy. In my experience, *The Shetland Times* more than fulfils that role.

As I searched through my memory bank, two issues immediately sprang to mind.

The grounding of the *Braer* at Garths Ness on 5th January, 1993, was a major local, national and even international news event.

Not only did *The Shetland Times* report in words and photographs the immediate story, but for many years thereafter, faithfully followed developments through coverage of local anxieties, environmental analysis, Lord Donaldson's report and aftermath, and all the twists and turns of compensation claims.

If the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund and the name of its chief executive officer Mans Jacobs-

son weren't familiar to the newsroom on New Year's Day 1993, they soon would be – and for several New Years to come!

I also recall the strong local campaign, well aired in the columns of *The Shetland Times*, when Bulgarian sailors on board the *Rotalia* in Lerwick Harbour discovered that their employers had gone bankrupt and the ship sold from under them, when they were still owed considerable back-wages. The ensuing campaign for justice engaged both the compassion of the Shetland community and a shared political resolve.

For me, it captured much of the ethos of Shetland life which, for 150 years, *The Shetland Times* has sought to report and articulate.

Congratulations and best wishes for the next 150 years. Whatever they may bring, may the Old Rock stand steadfast in the cause of justice with compassion.

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# The Times became daily for the Games

Former News Editor JIM TAIT recalls the day he became the first – and only – daily editor of a newspaper in Shetland when he took charge of the Island Games coverage of 2005.

“I think we should do some kind of daily coverage of the island games. What do you think?”

That was the question posed when I stepped into editor Vaila Wishart’s office a couple of months before the biggest sporting event ever to be staged in the isles.

I agreed. It seemed a good idea. But it was going to be a huge task with yours truly likely having to shoulder a large chunk of responsibility.

My experience of the games was limited, but I had been sent to Guernsey for the 2003 version, so I had some idea of what might be involved.

I had taken home some copies of the supplements produced by the *Guernsey Post* two years earlier, but that was only a minor step for a daily newspaper. For us, a small provincial weekly, it was going to be a big jump.

To cover the event properly, I figured we would need a fairly substantial team of reporters, plus photographers of course. Although the bulk of the action would take place in or around Lerwick, some individual sports were based in different parts of Shetland, from table tennis at Sandwick to sailing and windsurfing in Brae.

The question was, where was the necessary extra staff going to come from?

At that time we had eight people in the newsroom, starting with Vaila as editor and myself as news editor – I had been in the role for less than a year after the sad and untimely death of Rob Fogg in 2004.

There were four reporters – John Robertson, Melissa Duncan, Mark Latham and Pat Barnham – plus Chris Hudson on work experience and newsroom assistant Karen Olivier, who had replaced the long-serving Marilyn Stewart the previous November.

It was obvious that we needed to split the staff for the island games week, and agreed that Vaila, John, Melissa and Karen would remain on normal newspaper duty while myself, Mark, Pat and Chris would take on the daily shifts.

We needed several more reporters, however, as there were 15 different sports to cover. Some could

perhaps double up, for example with sailing and windsurfing, but in my opinion we needed around eight.

Rosalind Griffiths, who had been doing advertising features for the paper, was first to come on board. We also successfully attracted youngsters Joanne Jamieson and Melissa Stewart, who had previously worked on the *Shetland Post* magazine.

Another boost came in the form of Malachy Tallack, who earlier in the year had been trumpeted as one of the team appointed to the new *Shetland Weekly* newspaper.

However, Malachy, like almost all the senior editorial staff, jumped ship even before the *Weekly* had sailed on its short, nine-edition voyage.

While it was good to have recruited all these people, a worry was that half of them had little or no interest in sport. And as football was likely to be the most followed of all the events, we really needed an experienced person to take charge of that.

The answer came in the form of former *Times* reporter Jim Mason, who I had remained friends with since his year-long stint at the paper in 2000-01.

Jim, who was then working as a sports producer with BBC Scotland, had intimated previously that he might be interested in getting involved, and a quick phone call did the trick. As long as I provided him with accommodation, he would be willing.

Now to the photography side of things. Our own retained man, Keith Morrison, had proved adept at sports coverage, but we needed more.

Another three calls were all thankfully successful. Jim Nicolson and Gary Sandison agreed to switch from their preferred wildlife and family groups respectively, while Brae teacher Gordon Stove, who we had used for small jobs on many occasions, also signed up.

That was our team complete, and a daily budget was agreed with management accountant June Wishart.

We headed some kind of special masthead so I turned the clock back to my days in print design and put down a few ideas. Our graphics expert Andrew Morrison had a



Front pages capturing the drama each day of the Island Games.



look, weaved his own magic and the appearance of the product began to take shape.

A few days before the games was scheduled to begin, we got the bulk of our team together for a meeting. The enthusiasm was impressive, with everyone keen to get started.

Jim Mason arrived off the boat on the morning of Saturday 9th July, and joined me a few hours later at a press gathering in Lerwick Town Hall. The sun was shining outside and I recall the building’s stained glass windows had never looked better.

The opening ceremony was to take place that evening at 7pm, with Scottish First Minister Jack McConnell joining International Island Games Association chairman Bo Frykenstam as the main speakers.

Two or three thousand people gathered at Clickimin for the ceremony, which included the parade of islands. The 24 teams marched past in alphabetical order with Åland and Alderney leading the way, accompanied by members of the year’s Lerwick Up-Helly-A’ Jarl’s Squad.

The Shetland team was last into the arena, all 241 members in blue tracksuits with flag-bearer Ian Williamson, long-distance runner supreme, at the front.

The official welcome was given by Shetland Island Games Association chairwoman Sandra Jamieson.

As ever, the traditional water ceremony followed, with a representative from each island invited to pour their own water into a large feature modelled on the shape of Shetland.

Ironically, the weather gods had decided to get in on the act too, and it poured with rain during almost the entire proceedings.

Organising committee chairman John Scott was next to speak, paying tribute to all the volunteers and sponsors involved.

The competitors were the most important thing, however, Mr Scott said, and he was delighted to see so many present.

It was then over to Mr Frykenstam, who thanked Shetland for making the games a reality, and gave a special welcome to the newest association member, the Western Isles.

All that was left was for Mr McConnell to officially declare the 2005 event open, and the action would begin the following morning.

Our earlier team meeting had determined which events reporters would cover on the opening day, and subsequently it was decided after copy had been filed where they would go the next morning.

While we would obviously lean heavily towards our own competitors’ achievements, it had been agreed that in order to sell more copies we also needed to feature the success of other islands.

So that initial edition, Games Monday, carried a front page photo of the first gold medallists, Manx shooters Barry Martin and David Walton.

Shetland’s Emma Gray, the women’s javelin winner, was featured on page three, while Josie Jamieson picked up the bronze in the same event.

A few pages later came the story of home cyclist Carlos Riise, who took the time trial silver behind Andrew Roche from the Isle of Man.

There was also another bronze for Shetland on the opening day, won by shooters Peter Davies and Jim Work in the universal trench category.

The timing for publication seemed to work fairly well from the start. I would head into the office around 6pm, by which time the copy was starting to filter through, and begin subbing and page design.

At about 9pm the pre-press staff, usually Kenneth Shearer and Ross Dalziel, would begin making up pages and an hour or so later the headlining and page-proofing would begin.

Myself and Jim Mason did most of the headlines, while Vaila Wishart helped out on the first evening and Robert Wishart was always willing to assist when we were under pressure.

In the early hours of the morning the printers would arrive, and after plate-making the press would begin to rumble. As far as I recall the printing would be complete around

4am, and copies would be parcelled up ready for distribution.

Day two saw another gold medal for Shetland, won by runner Michelle Sandison in the women’s 10,000 metres. Her fellow athlete Faye Richardson finished second in the 100 metres while two more silvers were won by shooters Karl Scott and John Magnus Laurenson and the Shetland badminton team.

Another couple of bronzes, in both the men’s and women’s bowls fours category, added to the local medal collection.

The highlight of Tuesday’s action was undoubtedly athlete Claire Wilson’s fantastic run in the 1,500 metres. Shetland’s golden girl came up trumps again, finishing more than six seconds ahead of her nearest rival.

A second home gold came via air pistol shooters David Lewis and Kevin Gray, while on the clay range Graham Fraser and Peter Ratter took silver and bronze respectively in the individual sporting category.

More medals were won in table tennis, archery and badminton, taking the total to 19 at the halfway stage of the games.

Most afternoons I would call along at the media centre. It was based in the little-known shooting range upstairs at the Clickimin Centre, directly across from what was then the cafe and viewing gallery and later became a gym.

Handily, our former *Times* newsroom assistant Marilyn had been given the role of local media co-ordinator. She proved a great help with press releases and even did some interviews with far-travelled competitors. We were also grateful to Pamela Scott, one of the assistants at the centre, who offered to type up results for the paper.

The place was a real hive of activity, with there being a record number of over 200 media representatives from all over the world present for the week.

On day four it was the shooters who registered more success for Shetland, with gold for David Lewis and silver for Kevin Gray in the individual air pistol category and a silver for Dianne Garrick in the women’s event.

In the football, meanwhile, the Shetland men’s team dropped their first points in group one, drawing 0-0 with Saaremaa. They had previously defeated the Falklands 4-0 and Åland 3-1 and now shared top spot in the group with the Isle of Man. The match between the two on Thursday would decide who made it to the final. In group two reigning champions Guernsey were already through to the final with a game to spare.

Another flurry of medals came Shetland’s way on the Thursday,

archer Morag Hughson and bowlers Margaret Burnett and June Bain leading the way with gold.

Steven Umphray of Scalloway proved the talisman in the football competition, netting the only goal of the match against the Isle of Man to secure a spot in the following day’s final against Guernsey.

In the women’s football competition the inexperienced Shetland side was unfortunately propping up the table, but they had managed an impressive 1-1 draw with Guernsey.

Being so involved in the production side of things it had been difficult to take in much of the action. I had witnessed a superb singles performance by badminton player Kevin Smith against an opponent from Greenland, but other than that little else.

I decided that had to change on the final day, however, and in the early afternoon headed to Clickimin to see if Claire Wilson could complete the double in the 800 metres.

She did not disappoint, romping home five seconds ahead of the silver medallist.

From there it was off to Gilbertson Park where the men’s football team was facing Guernsey in the final. A huge crowd had assembled, possibly as many as 6,000 according to an unnamed visitor with a “clicker”.

As I’m sure most people know, the Shetland team deservedly saw off their opponents 2-0. Captain John Montgomery thundered home a penalty in the 61st minute and five minutes later substitute Duncan Bray added a fine individual second goal.

From there it was back to the office where everyone was on a high. Chris Hudson had just come with in with news that the women’s golf team had recorded their own golden moment at Skaw in Whalsay.

It was a tremendous finish to a memorable six days of sport, and the greatest ever achievement by a Shetland team. In total 46 medals were won – 10 gold, 14 silver and 22 bronze – which contributed to a seventh place in the overall table.

The medals were spread across a variety of sports, with every single member of the bowls team taking home some colour and a special mention for table tennis player Lynda Flaws, at just 12 years old bagging a silver and two bronzes.

There were unfortunately no medal successes in the pool, but the number of personal bests, fifth place finishes and the tremendous promise shown by another 12-year-old, Andrea Strachan, suggested that the future would be bright.

It had indeed been a great week, which no-one really wanted to end, and it was a pleasure to play a part in some way.

# MONDAY

A COMPREHENSIVE ROUND-UP OF THE ACTION DAY BY DAY 11th July, 2005 • 50P

## When you're smiling ...



It would take more than a drop of rain to dampen the spirits ... Claire Wilson, one of more than 200 Shetland competitors, thoroughly enjoys the opening ceremony. More on pages 8-10.

Photo: Keith Morrison

The first day's competition rounded up in the Monday edition of the "daily paper".



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