

Fetlar2013

History & Archaeology

Fetlar has a wealth of archaeological sites covering thousands of years of history. People have lived on the island for at least 5,000 years, although the exact date of the first settlement is not known.

One of the more enigmatic structures on the island is Finnigert Dyke, an ancient wall that stretches from the north of the island to the south and once cut the island into two. Sources differ as to a precise date of construction, but it is Fetlar's oldest surviving man-made structure, having been built some time prior to the 1st millennium BC, and still standing whole when the first Viking families settled on the island.

During the 19th Century, Fetlar's population was drastically cut due to the Clearances. Instigated by the laird Sir Arthur Nicolson, much of the island was enclosed and turned over to grazing sheep, and the crofting tenants that had been living there were forcefully evicted. During this period of time, Fetlar – and the Shetland Islands as a whole – underwent mass emigration. In 1886, the Crofters Holding Act was passed, which protected the rights of crofters based on fixity of tenure, free sale and fair rent.

There were a number of reasons that the population of Fetlar continued to fall even after the implementation of the Act. The most important of these was the lack of a fishing pier, something only remedied in December 2012. Without a pier, it meant that the tenants could not supplement their income with fishing, as happened on other islands.

Fetlar is home to two grand houses, both listed buildings: Brough Lodge, built in c.1825 to serve as home for the Nicolson family, and Leagarth House, built in c.1900 by Sir William Watson Cheyne and which remains in the possession of the family to this day. Both buildings boast beautiful and interesting architectural designs.

In 2002, the island was featured in an episode of Channel 4's Time Team. With just three days at their disposal, the team's archaeological experts were tasked with the feat of excavating two separate Viking sites on Fetlar – one a boat burial, the other a homestead. The results of the dig, among them a bronze tortoise-shaped brooch, are now on display at the [Shetland Museum and Archives](#), Lerwick.

Over its many years of inhabitation, Fetlar's past history has become intertwined with folklore. Well-known local storyteller Jeemsie Laurenson left a rich recorded history of the many stories from Fetlar.

Fetlar Interpretive Centre

The centre offers displays and interactive multi-media on the island's cultural history, folklore, natural heritage and geology. A range of recordings, both visual and audio, brings the history of Fetlar to life for visitors.

Contact

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