

Fetlar2013

Jeemsie Laurenson

Born on Fetlar in 1899, James John Laurenson – known locally as Jeemsie – was brought up on a croft at Aith. During the First World War, he sailed on the Atlantic Patrol, but after the war came home to look after both his family and the croft, and lived on the island until his death in 1983, aged 84.

Like many residents of Fetlar, Jeemsie undertook varying jobs. He was primarily a crofter, but also had skills in cobbling and thatching, and was the island's registrar. Jeemsie also participated in singing in the church choir. He was best known, however, for his talent in storytelling and singing of folksongs.

Jeemsie learnt many tales and songs from his mother and grandmother, but also collected his own as the years went by. Preferring to describe himself as an historian, Jeemsie's storytelling was akin to giving a lecture, and he often referred to sources such as maps, the birth, death, and wedding registries, and other printed materials.

He undertook the writing of many articles, including a series on "The Sixern Days" printed in New Shetlander, and the fourth Shetland Folk Book contains his "Notes on Fetlar" and the island's lore. Additionally, he collaborated with Alexander Fenton in a substantial article on "Peat in Fetlar" in Folk Life, and is noted as an important source for the same writer's article on Craig-Fishing in Scottish Studies 17. Jeemsie also made a number of appearances in the Shetland Times.

Jeemsie was regarded as a man of great strength, and many tales are still told of his various feats of strength. Perhaps the best-known display of this strength is an occasion when Jeemsie straight-armed the oar of a sixareen – these oars were made of ash, and roughly 15 feet long. The accompanying picture shows Jeemsie lifting a smaller oar from a fourareen in the same fashion – possibly a warm up before the main event!

Aithbank, home of Jeemsie Laurenson, was the location of one of the main trading centres in Fetlar as far back as the 17th Century. The present house was rebuilt in c.1835, and Jeemsie lived in it for most of his life.

In 2004, Aithbank – a Category B listed building – was restored by Shetland Amenity Trust and now serves as Fetlar's camping böd. One of a network of 9 böds, each a building with great socio-historical significance, Aithbank offers very basic catering and accommodation facilities for visitors to the island.

It is due to Jeemsie's great legacy that Aithbank is preserved for the future.

Additional Information

Visit the [Shetland Camping Böds website](#) to learn more about Aithbank and the camping böd network.

Contact

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