

# SIR ROBERT STOUT - FIRST PATRON OF THE SHETLAND SOCIETY OF WELLINGTON

In 1922, almost 60 years after Robert Stout's arrival in New Zealand the Shetland Society of Wellington was formed, and Chief Justice Sir Robert Stout became its patron. Temperance being one of his passions, the Society rules included a stipulation that no alcohol was to be consumed at any function of the Society, and this rule stayed on the books until 1967, almost 40 years after his death.



This is believed to be the first Shetland Society picnic, early in 1923 at Maidstone Park in Upper Hutt. Sir Robert Stout is sitting in the front row. The picnics attracted up to 300 people, and from the beginning featured a sports programme with competitions for several trophies. In December 1929 Sir Robert Stout donated a silver rosebowl to be competed for in his name at the annual picnic. The Sir Robert Stout Challenge Rosebowl is still competed for annually in a foot-race by women members.

On 26 May 1928 the Society held what it believed to be the first Up-Helly-Aa ever held outside of Shetland. The celebrations took place in the New Century Hall, one of the society's regular venues, around the 3.5m long Viking galley. The Jarl, Peter Isbister, is standing in the stern and Sir Robert Stout (and Lady Anna Stout?) seated on the right.



Sir Robert attended Shetland Society functions and was in regular contact with its officers. He enjoyed his evenings with his fellow islanders and liked to have a short whirl on the dance floor. Meg Mouat recalled that he would seek her out and ask for a dance, from his "peerie bonnie Shetland lass" as he called her.



The Society held a ceremonial dinner on 15 December 1928 when Sir William Watson Cheyne, Lord Lieutenant of Orkney and Shetland, visited New Zealand. Sir Robert addressed the large gathering of more than 300 guests, which included Peter Fraser later Prime Minister of NZ, talking of his early experiences in Shetland. He is holding the illuminated address of welcome in English and Maori inscribed by Graeme Laurenson that was presented to Sir William. It was Sir William's 77<sup>th</sup> birthday, and a cake with 77 candles was presented by a young girl flanked by two fiddlers. Sir William was installed as joint patron with Sir Robert for the year. This was almost the last important Society occasion at which Sir Robert Stout was present.

Sir Robert's health began to fail and he died in Wellington on 19 July 1930. Lady Anna Stout passed away less than a year later in May 1931. Their ashes are buried at Karori Cemetery and commemorated with a plaque. Of their six children, Margaret was the eldest, Robert and Thomas became surgeons, Janet a registered nurse, Olaf and John barristers and solicitors.

Sir Robert bequeathed a collection of books to the Society which subsequently deposited them in the Alexander Turnbull Library in early 1931. Later that year a second presentation from the estate of Sir Robert was added, and the collection of 72 titles was named the Shetland Islands Collection.

Sir Robert had maintained a strong interest in Shetland to the end of his life, encouraging and financially assisting other Shetlanders to migrate to New Zealand. He had kept in contact with his family in Shetland, and five of his brothers and sisters settled in New Zealand.