

Shetland Forebears ... *How to find them*

Shetland Society of Wellington Family History Day, 1 November 2014

Presented by Jo Lewthwaite (nee Joanne Helen Duncan) - *As I introduce this talk, I acknowledge many will have closer, or more recent, ties with the Shetland Islands than I do – yet for each and all, there is a collective esteem and respect for our forebears; their faith, resourcefulness and resilience of character; also strength of purpose, which inspires us still.*



From a last view of
Sumburgh Head, Shetland -
to Island Bay, New Zealand



Topics to consider:

Where to start

How to find relevant information

Why did they leave Shetland / choose New Zealand

What did they do?

Where did your forebears settle?

My father's family are Shetlanders, so it was my great grandparents who came to Wellington in the 1920's to make a new life for their families amongst kinfolk and friends at Island Bay.

Where to start:

Start with yourself – your date of birth, place and parents: *Starting with yourself may mean talking with family, seeking out a birth certificate, asking questions around where the family were living and working.*

Ask about your relatives – about their family births, deaths, and marriages: *Asking relatives about their details and those of your grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, allows one to build a picture of the family structure.*

Seek documentation – Certificates of BDM's, special events, wills: *Documentation may already be in your possession, or held by other relatives – ask the “what, who, when, why” questions as appropriate. Wills may or may not be held, so ask where forebears were at the end of their life, consider looking at family archives or those of the government.*

Find pictures, maps – Photographs at any age, Maps to locate origins: *Finding pictures may just mean asking to see what each family may have in their albums, they may let you photograph them or make a copy. Maps are useful to place folk in the locality they grew up in or came from. These may be found in a book, on a larger map of the area, or indeed online for old maps.*

Social History:

Push / pull factors relating to emigration: *Push/pull factors tend to revolve around economic and political factors; as well as personal hopes and dreams of a new life elsewhere.*

Occupations – before and after migration: *So think about the whys and wherefores in each location related to resources, industry and opportunity to try new things; for example my great grandfather was by trade a Cooper, yet worked as a Merchant Seaman as did many Shetlanders, also using his skills as a Ships Carpenter and a Fireman.*

Location – housing accessibility, affordability: *This is a pivotal factor – a number of folk stayed with countrymen until establishing themselves in work, rental accommodation, or indeed their own homes.*

Personal, family and cultural implications: *It is of value to consider the ages and stages of family members as it often determined the level of input (or not) in decision making around new ventures. How would they fund their migration, who would work outside the home to accumulate resources, would assistance be sought with passage – indeed which family members would go/come and how; when they got here what did they find beyond the familiar cultural mores; which institutions smoothed that transition?*

Looking for clues:

Family papers, certificates, letters – shipping records, apprenticeships: *Family papers of any description are a good find, especially if hand written – albeit increasingly difficult to decipher with time, and dependant on condition. Shipping records may be more accessible through the archives of the destination country, although the port of departure (if known) may hold records too of passenger lists.*

Photo albums, pictures: *Some families had photographs taken before their departure; occasionally there would be more on settlement – of significant value to us now, yet not universally obtainable for some.*

Family folklore and narratives: *these can be a rich source of information and insight into the why's of what happened – try and write down what you hear soon after being told, or think about writing retrospectively of what you remember, adding to the story as time and memory permit.*

Books, Bibles, and Obituaries: *Books about the place of origin, social history, ship board diaries, and occupations of forebears, are useful for background detail. Family Bibles may provide clues to who fits where;*

while Obituaries can give glimpse of a character that others know in a different context to the relationship you have with the deceased person.

Cemeteries, Monumental Inscriptions: *Cemetery records in New Zealand can be accessed via Council records, archives and websites in many instances, some can also be found online. For Scotland and indeed Shetland, death records can be hard to source – so the many hours spent by volunteers transcribing headstones are invaluable, and these are accessible in the Monumental Inscription booklets available through Family History Societies.*

Resources:

Newspapers online – Papers Past in NZ, overseas collections: *Old newspapers are a wonderful source of articles, advertisements, shipping news and in many instances, births, deaths, and marriages.*

Electoral Rolls – Directories, phone books: *Public Libraries in NZ and overseas hold Electoral Rolls, Directories, and Phone Books – some of this information may be found online.*

Genealogy sites – Family Search, Ancestry, Findmypast: *Genealogy sites offer a wealth of information on a variety of topics – births, deaths and marriages, in the form of indexes or records; immigration and shipping records; also military indexes. Free to view site Family Search has records transcribed by volunteers, also their microfilms can be obtained via this site and ‘read’ at National Library, or a Latter Day Saints reading room. Pay to view sites such as ‘Ancestry’ and ‘Findmypast’ are available via subscription; however many Public Libraries in NZ hold subscriptions which provide local access, which is helpful.*

Society of Genealogists – NZSG website, local branches: *The New Zealand Society of Genealogists (NZSG) has a useful website and local branches throughout the country. Aside from meeting likeminded folk, you will find they have local and international resources, wide ranging interests and a feast of good advice to offer.*

Repositories:

Local repositories and resources – Libraries, National and City; Archives NZ; Museums, local and national, also Military facilities: *I have already touched on the local library as a useful repository, however in Wellington we also have easy access to the National Library which includes Alexander Turnbull Library in Molesworth Street; while over on Mulgrave Street, Archives NZ has many NZ Government papers and artefacts on site too. Museums locally include City and Sea, and Te Papa Tongarewa. The Military Museums have information online, and are well worth a visit if you are in Devonport, Waiouru or Wigram. Auckland Museum has the Cenotaph Database, while Dunedin has Otago Settlers Museum and Hocken Library.*

Shetland and Scottish sources – Shetland Family History Society; Shetland Museum Archives; Scotlands People and Places; National Archives of Scotland: *These sources are clearly not so easy to wander into, however they do have an internet presence that is accessible – albeit at a potential cost. The Shetland Society of Wellington has various Shetland Family History Society Publications and Magazines available through the Library. Scotlands People, Places, Library, Archives and Records are accessible online when seeking BDM's, Wills and Property records, Maps and Books.*

(A list of repositories is included at the end of this presentation)

Where to record your finds:

Cards, notebooks, folders: *Recording and storing genealogical finds allows orderly documentation of names, dates, places, events, certificates and family papers; thus easy retrieval of needed details and sources, making facts readily verifiable should you wish to share – or ultimately publish your research findings. Cards, notebooks and folders have the advantage of being very visible – a tangible record. There are a variety of ways a person may make use of these tools to file information in what one regards as a logical system.*

Computer documents: *these do allow one to compile information in a format you find useful, some folk use a standard blank document, or a template can be constructed to suit your preferences; yet others use the 'excel' programme with its lines and columns formalising the way data is entered.*

Computer programs for Genealogy: *Genealogy computer programs provide a formal framework to record a great range of facts, from which family tree printouts and charts can be made. These may allow inclusion of photos, maps and scanned documents. Some programs may upload your family information to an internet site if you so choose, as with 'Legacy' or 'Family Tree Maker'. Online interaction with the internet is the mode of operation of 'Myheritage'. These programs make use of Windows Operating systems. 'Reunion for Mac', and 'Family Tree Maker' can make use of Apple Macintosh operating systems, and can also include Apps for 'iPhone'.*

- Legacy www.legacyfamilytree.com
- My Heritage www.myheritage.com
- Family Tree Maker www.familytreemaker.com
- Reunion for Mac www.leisterpro.com

Websites and Contacts

Shetland Island and Scottish sources:

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| Shetland Family History Society | www.shetland-fhs.org.uk |
| Shetland Museum | www.shetland-museum.org.uk |
| Shetland Society of Wellington | www.shetlandwellington.org.nz |
| Scotlands People | www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk |
| Scotlands Places | www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk |
| National Records (Archives) of Scotland | www.nrscotland.gov.uk |
| National Library of Scotland | www.nls.uk |
| The National Archives (UK) | www.nationalarchives.gov.uk |

Genealogy sites to explore include the free: www.familysearch.org and www.bayanne.co.uk

And 'Pay to view' sites: www.Ancestry.com and www.findmypast.co.uk

New Zealand Sources:

NZ Society of Genealogists	www.genealogy.org.nz
NZSG Shetland Islands – email	shetlandislands@genealogy.org.nz
NZSG Kilbirnie – email	kilbirnie@genealogy.org.nz
NZSG Wellington – email	wellington@genealogy.org.nz
Births, Deaths, Marriages	www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz
National Library	www.natlib.govt.nz
- Papers Past	www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz
Wellington City Library	www.wcl.govt.nz
Museum of City and Sea	www.museumswellington.org.nz
Archives New Zealand	www.archives.govt.nz
Te Papa Museum	www.tepapa.govt.nz
NZ Defence Force	www.nzdf.mil.nz
Cenotaph Database	www.aucklandmuseum.com
Otago Settlers Museum	www.toituosm.com