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'In habits, in character, in fact [in] everything except language … like the Norwegians':[1] New Zealand's Shetland Immigrants

Rebecca Lenihan

Arriving at the Shetland Family History Society in Lerwick in November 2007, the last thing I expected was that almost everyone met would claim a personal connection to New Zealand. Evidence that a large number of Shetlanders had left the Islands for New Zealand in the later nineteenth century was the reason for my being there, but that these migrants were still remembered by the descendants of those who remained behind was striking, and certainly not a phenomenon encountered elsewhere in Scotland. While it is likely this was partly due to the small population of Shetland relative to the rest of Scotland, it became clear that it was also an indication of the maintenance of relationships with those who had left the islands for New Zealand, and of a persisting Shetland identity among the migrants post-migration. If the degree to which connections with 'home' were maintained set the Shetlanders apart from other Scots, it was not the only point of difference; New Zealand's Shetland immigrants also differed from their Scottish counterparts in terms of the timing of their departures, their demographic characteristics and their occupations. The present paper outlines some of the findings of a recent study of the quantifiable characteristics of the Shetland migrants to New Zealand, and explores aspects of this discrete migrant flow.[2]

Brief background and overview to Shetland migration

If 'Scottish' is defined in a strict and purely cultural sense, it might fairly be argued that Shetland is Nordic, or at best 'Shetlandic'. The Shetland Islands belonged to Denmark and Norway until 1469, in which year King Christian pledged first the royal estates in Orkney, then those in Shetland, to the Scottish

[1] Robert Stout to Colonial Secretary, 18 September 1871, IM 6–10–1, Stewart Island, Archives New Zealand (hereafter ANZ), Wellington, 1.

[2] Rebecca Lenihan, 'From Alba to Aotearoa: Profiling New Zealand's Scots Migrants, 1840–1920' (PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2010).

Crown as a dowry for his daughter upon her marriage to James the Third of Scotland. Notwithstanding the several hundred years in which the islands have been in Scottish hands, language and cultural differences arising from this Nordic heritage have been maintained, in large part due the geographical distance of the islands from mainland Scotland and the consequent relative isolation of Shetland from 'Scottish' language and culture.

The distinctive character of the Shetland Islanders has been significantly shaped by another geographical factor, the fact that the islands have never been well suited to farming. While crofts have traditionally provided just enough food for individual family needs, there has been little scope for additional income to be made from the land. Instead, the traditional mainstay of many Shetland families has been fishing. Indeed, 'the lottery-like gains of a fisherman's occupation' are noted in the *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1845) as one of the reasons for the 'versatile and sanguine' character of the Shetland people, 'more apt for desultory and adventurous, than for regular and continued exertion'.[3]

Dependence on the sea for their livelihood meant that Shetland men were frequently absent from the home for long periods of time; moreover, many of those who earned their living at sea also died there. The high death toll at sea arguably helps explain why the Shetland population was disproportionately female in the nineteenth century, and also why there was a high proportion of unmarried and widowed women. Preparedness to seek employment elsewhere was another reason for the gender imbalance. The *Statistical Account of Scotland* observes that the attachment of Shetland males 'to country is not very strong, an effect which may, in some measure, arise from the love of a wandering life, induced by sailor habits, and which so many of the young men imbibe, by going annually in the whalers to Greenland'.[4] The *Statistical Account* further records that because Shetlanders 'make good sailors, and their practice at the oar is as near to perfection as this elegant exercise can approach … most of the men that leave Shetland enter the merchant navy, and few eventually are heard of'.[5] Shetlanders, in common with their Scottish mainland contemporaries, were migrating to England, Europe, and North America in relatively large numbers from the seventeenth century. Shetland emigrants, as well as their Orcadian counterparts, were frequently employed

[3] 'General Observations on the County of Shetland', 145–74, *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, Vol.15, (Edinburgh, 1845), 158.

[4] Ibid., 159.

[5] Ibid., 155–6.

by the Hudson Bay Company from the eighteenth century. Shetlanders were among the small number of Scots transported to Australia as convicts, while in 1850, in an attempt to address the gender imbalance in Shetland, Lady Franklin and her associates in Lerwick sought to assist young Shetland women to emigrate to Australia.[6]

Though there were a few Shetlanders among the early whalers and sealers to New Zealand, and several Shetland folk settled on Stewart Island and in Dunedin in the 1860s, the primary Shetland-New Zealand flow began in the 1870s. The population of Shetland had reached its peak of 31,670 people in 1861. Even at this point, however, Shetland accounted for only 1.03 per cent of the total population of Scotland. For this reason, the Shetland Islands supplied a similarly small proportion of New Zealand's Scottish immigrants over the eighty years to 1920, just 1.9 per cent of migrants in the New Zealand Society of Genealogists (NZSG) dataset and 3.58 per cent of the Peopling New Zealand (PNZ)[7] migrants. These figures raise two important questions. Firstly, given that the distribution of Scottish migrant origins among those arriving in New Zealand between 1840–1920 from nearly every part of mainland Scotland was proportionate to the population distribution of Scotland itself, why was the proportion of Shetland immigrants to New Zealand higher than the county's share of the Scottish population? Secondly, why is the proportion of Shetland migrants in the PNZ data compared to the whole sample considerably higher than is the case with the NZSG data?

The proportion of Scottish migrants to New Zealand from Shetland ranged between 0 and 2 per cent in all but one decade between 1840–1920 in the NZSG data, and between 3 and 6 per cent of the migrants in the PNZ data. However, in the 1870s the proportions for Shetland were 6 and 10 per cent respectively. The number of Shetland migrants bound for New Zealand in this decade alone accounts for the proportion of Shetland migrants to New Zealand being higher than the county's share of the Scottish population over

[6] Marjory Harper, *Adventurers and Exiles: The Great Scottish Exodus* (London, 2003), 35, 275.

[7] For information on the construction of the two datasets utilised – the 'PNZ dataset', a random sample of post-1876 New Zealand death certificates created for the New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage's 'Peopling of New Zealand' project). and the 'NZSG dataset', a self-selected sample created by the present author, based upon the New Zealand Society of Genealogists Scottish Interest Group's 'Register of New Zealand Immigrants of Scottish Birth arriving before 1 January 1921', see Lenihan, 'From Alba to Aotearoa', Appendix 1.

the full eighty years of the study. The most detailed prior investigation of New Zealand's Shetland migrants suggests that approximately 1,200 Shetlanders arrived in New Zealand in the 1870s.[8] This outflow of migrants equates to 15 per cent of Shetland's net population decrease between 1861 and 1881 and 3.8 per cent of Shetland's total 1861 population migrating to New Zealand in the 1870s.

The variation between the NZSG and PNZ datasets is explained by the criteria adopted for selection of migrants in the two samples. While the compilers of the PNZ data identified all Shetland-born migrants as Scots, most descendants of Shetland migrants living in New Zealand continue to assert their Nordic heritage. This assertion of cultural difference is clearly evidenced by the longevity of the Wellington Shetland Society, formed in 1922. Until the eve of World War Two the society had little to do with Scottish societies, preferring to celebrate a Norse identity over Scottish background.[9] Even today relatively few descendants of Shetland migrants consider their forebears to have been 'Scottish'. With the NZSG sample being based upon on a register of 'Immigrants of Scottish Birth', it is possible more descendants of Shetland migrants may have contributed information if the register had been entitled 'Immigrants to New Zealand born in Scotland–including Shetland'.

The surge of Shetland immigration to New Zealand in the 1870s was influenced by factors at both the sending and receiving ends of the flows, primarily clearance in the islands and New Zealand Government's assisted migration schemes respectively.[10] Though Shetland had not been exempt from the widespread evictions throughout the Scottish north in the first half of the nineteenth century, this process of removal accelerated in the islands from the late 1860s. In 1874 twenty-seven families were evicted from Quendale, Dunrossness, their houses being stripped and sometimes burned by those officiating to prevent future habitation.[11] Though in his evidence to the 1883 Napier Commission James Garriock of Reawick noted that

[8] Susan Butterworth, *Chips off the Auld Rock: Shetlanders in New Zealand* (Wellington, 1997), 64.

[9] Ibid., 136

[10] However, it must be noted, the outflow from Shetland was generally high at this time, due to a longer standing problem of over-population and consequent unemployment in the islands. J. Laughton Johnston's forthcoming book notes similar flows to that received by New Zealand in the 1870s arriving in Vancouver especially but also other parts of Canada, the United States and Australia throughout the 1860s, 70s and 80s.

[11] Eric Richards, *The Highland Clearances* (Edinburgh, 2000), 285–6.

the approximately twenty families from Walls who had emigrated to New Zealand had done so of their own accord, it is clear, given the context of the testimony, that they were compelled to leave by the actions of their landlord.[12] Though Garriock does not state precisely when the migration of the twenty families occurred, it was almost certainly between 1874 and1876, for it was in these years that Shetland–New Zealand migration peaked. For over two years 'the islands were stumped by emigration agents from New Zealand, and a great many people were induced to take advantage of the assisted passages, and went out to that colony'.[13]

Under the assisted immigration schemes of the 1870s, the New Zealand Government offered not only passage to New Zealand, but also the cost of transportation to the port of embarkation. This was an important consideration, as many would-be Shetland emigrants were hindered by the truck system (a barter system) prevalent in the islands from independently making their way to the port of departure to take advantage of other schemes of assisted migration.[14] Of the various assisted migration schemes devised by the General Government of New Zealand, none was more attractive to Shetland migrants than the policy of free passages introduced in October 1873. Under this policy passages were offered to both married and single agricultural labourers, navvies, shepherds and mechanics, and to single women who were cooks, housemaids, nurses, general servants or dairy maids, all between fifteen and thirty-five years of age. Migrants were also required to be 'sober, industrious, of good moral character, of sound mind, free from bodily deformity, in good health and must be going to the colony with the intention to work for wages.'[15] Yet, even before these free passages were offered, there had been recommendations from several quarters that Shetlanders would be ideal migrants to improve New Zealand's fishing industry.[16] In consequence, immigration agents specifically targeted Shetlanders for the first time. The first and perhaps best known group specifically recruited for this purpose was

[12] James Garriock, 'Minutes of Evidence, James Garriock, Reawick (49)–examined', *Napier Commission*, 1883, transcribed by Angus Johnson, Shetland Archives, 22391, 1416.

[13] David Charles Edmonston, 'Minutes of Evidence, David Charles Edmonston (46)–examined', *Napier Commission*, 1883, transcribed by Angus Johnson, Shetland Archives, 20277, 1302.

[14] 'Introduction to the Report on the Truck System', *Truck Commission*, 1872, transcribed by Angus Johnson, Shetland Archives. George W. Hilton, *The Truck System, Including a History of the British Truck Acts, 1465–1960* (Cambridge, 1960).

[15] Regulations for free passages, *AJHR*, 1874, D–3, 33.

[16] Colonial Secretary from Robert Stout, 18 September 1871, 1.

a party of thirty-one migrants carried to Stewart Island in June 1873, whose experiences will in due course be discussed.

Demographic Characteristics and Occupation

Given the already acknowledged cultural differences between the Shetland Islanders and their Scottish mainland contemporaries, it might reasonably be anticipated that these would also be reflected in the demographic characteristics. The available evidence suggests this was the case.

In 1881 61.34 per cent of the Shetland population was female, compared to 53.27 per cent in Scotland as a whole. Yet, while Shetland consistently had an excess of females in the population greater than the 'excess' exhibited by the rest of Scotland, as shown in Table 1, no other county sent a more even number of males and females to New Zealand. Half of the NZSG Shetland migrants were female.

Table 1
Showing the ratio of females to every 100 males in Scotland and in Shetland

	Census year						
	1841	**1851**	**1861**	**1871**	**1881**	**1891**	**1901**
Shetland	131.9	136.4	142.6	141.2	134.7	135.5	126.9
Scotland	111.0	110.0	111.2	109.6	107.6	107.2	105.7
	1911	1921					
	121.7	119.9					
	106.2	108.0					

Source: Population, Ages, Conjugal Condition, Orphanhood, Birthplaces, Gaelic-speaking, Housing, Scotland, Table 34, 1921 Census of Scotland, 164

This gender parity among Shetland migrants is most probably due to the family nature of the Shetland migration. A tendency for a large number of the Shetland migrants to come to New Zealand in family groups, nuclear and extended, rather than as single men or women, ensured that the gender ratio was far closer than was the case in respect of those parts of Scotland from which family migration was less common. In addition, the period during which most of the Shetland migrants arrived – the 1870s – was a period of greater gender balance among migrants to New Zealand generally (not only Scots), heavy emphasis having been placed on the recruitment of single females and families.

In terms of the age profile of Shetland migrants, the PNZ and NZSG data samples are too small to facilitate reliable analysis. As Table 2 suggests, dividing the Shetland sub-sample further into age cohorts creates very small sub-samples, rendering the results potentially misleading. That noted, it may be inferred from Table 2 that, while the majority of Shetland female immigrants to New Zealand were over fifteen years of age, the majority of Shetland males were children at arrival.

Table 2
Proportion of each age range of Shetland migrants that was female or male

	Female	**Male**	**n***
0–5	30.00	70.00	10
6–10	60.00	40.00	15
11–15	38.89	61.11	18
16–20	70.00	30.00	10
21–25	42.86	57.14	14
26–30	71.43	28.57	7
31–35	62.50	37.50	8
36–40	75.00	25.00	8
41–45	42.86	57.14	7
46–50	100.00	0.00	3
50+	41.67	58.33	12

*age is unknown for 4 Shetland females and 10 Shetland males

Source: NZSG data 1840–1920

While 44.46 per cent of females over fifteen years of age across all of Scotland were married, just 33.46 per cent of this group were married in Shetland.[17] Despite the equal gender ratio among Shetland migrants, the NZSG data suggests that in terms of marital status there were not only more single females than males, but also that there were more married females than males. Females constitute 57.89 per cent of Shetland migrants aged over fifteen years who were single at arrival, and 57.69 per cent of married migrants. Table 3 compares these gendered marital status figures for Shetland to those for Scotland as a whole.

[17] Appendix Tables, Table LXI, 1881 Census of Scotland, l.

Table 3
Showing the percentage of the NZSG Shetland migrants of each marital status by gender compared to Scotland total figures.

	Shetland			Scotland Total		
	Female	**Male**	**n***	**Female**	**Male**	**n****
Child	44.19	55.81	43	47.86	52.14	1,916
Single	57.89	42.11	38	39.64	60.36	1,405
Married	57.69	42.31	26	45.99	54.01	2,342
Widowed	50	50	2	69.72	30.28	109

* Marital status is unknown for 6 females and 11 males in the sample
** Marital status is unknown for 287 females and 542 males in the sample

Source: NZSG data 1840–1920

Shetland contributed one of the highest proportions of single females for counties in the NZSG sample for the full eighty years; 34.92 per cent of female migrants from Shetland were single at arrival.[18]

Table 4
Showing the percentage of the NZSG Shetland migrants of each gender by marital status

	Shetland		Scotland Total	
	Female	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**
Child	30.16	38.1	34.91	31.76
Single	34.92	25.4	21.2	26.96
Married	23.81	17.46	41	40.22
Widowed	1.59	1.59	2.89	1.05
n*	57	52	2,627	3,145

* Marital status is unknown for 6 Shetland females and 11 Shetland males in the sample; unknown for 287 females and 542 males from Scotland in total

Source: NZSG data 1840–1920

Comparing the proportion of migrants from each county of Scotland who were married at arrival, Shetland had the smallest proportions for males and females, just 23.81 per cent of Shetland females and 17.46 per cent of Shetland males (see Table 4). The high proportion of single females, also the low

[18] Nairn, Clackmannan and Peebles had a higher proportion of single females in their samples, but the samples on which this evidence is based are too small to indicate clear patterns.

proportions of male and female migrants from Shetland who were married, may be explained by the very high proportion of unmarried and widowed women in Shetland, due in part to the high death toll at sea of Shetland men, and the consequent high ratio of females to males in the county (61.34 per cent of the 1881 population). This, together with the familial nature of the Shetland migration to New Zealand, meant that a much higher proportion of the Shetland females than females from the rest of Scotland over fifteen years of age were unmarried and emigrating with their immediate or extended family. They are thus counted as single migrants. Single females constituted 27.72 per cent of the NZSG Shetland migrants. The tendency to migrate in family groups ensured that a large proportion of the Shetland migrants were children – 54.18 per cent. This, combined with the high proportion of single females in the migrant cohort, created a proportion of married males and females among the Shetland migrants smaller than from any other county of Scotland.

Table 5
*Proportion of Shetland migrant totals employed in each occupation sector in Scotland**

	Agricultural	**Mining**	**Building**	**Dealing**	**Domestic**	**Labouring**	**Manufacturing**	**Public Service, etc**
Shetland	12.50	7.50	7.50	2.50	17.50	2.50	17.50	2.50
Scotland	28.50	4.78	8.58	8.42	11.13	2.65	25.38	6.71
	Transport and Commercial	**n**						
	30.00	40						
	3.85	1,922						

* Excludes 'unknown', 'indefinable' and 'other'

Source: NZSG data 1840–1920, migrants with only one occupation in Scotland.

Significant differences between the profile of the Shetland migrants and that of migrants from the rest of Scotland are very clear. The proportion of

migrants who had been involved in building and labouring is approximately the same as for the rest of Scotland, but the proportion employed in mining is comparable only with the Western Lowlands. Due to the limited viability of Shetland for farming, the comparatively small number of Shetland migrants with occupations in the agricultural sector recorded pre-migration is unsurprising. However, it is in the 'transport and commerce' sector that the main contrast is evident. While less than 5 per cent of migrants from all regions in Scotland, with the exception of the Far North, had been employed in this sector, the Far North recording 11.21 per cent, 30 per cent of Shetland NZSG migrants were from this occupational background.

Of the 126 Shetlanders in the NZSG sample, just sixty-nine were aged sixteen or over at arrival in New Zealand. Forty of these sixty-nine had an occupation listed in Scotland and sixteen of these forty were female. Twenty of the migrants, 50 per cent of this NZSG occupation sub-sample born in Shetland, had a sea-oriented occupation listed among their occupations in Scotland, with only one female. (Table 6.)

Table 6
Showing the occupations in Scotland of the twenty Shetland born migrants in the NZSG data with sea-oriented occupations

Shetland Occupation	**n**
Master Mariner	2
Harbour Master	1
Sailor/Seaman/Ship Builder	1
Sailmaker	1
Ships Carpenter	1
Sailor/Seaman	6
Fisherman/Seaman	2
Fisherman	3
Fisherman & farmer	1
Fish Curer*	2
* One of whom was female.	

Source: NZSG data 1840–1920

While the majority of Scottish migrants remained in the same sectors of work post-migration, this was not so among Shetland migrants. This was

the combined result of the prevalence of fishing and other sea-oriented occupations in Shetland, and the relative scarcity of such employment in New Zealand. While nineteen of the twenty-eight males in the sample were in sea-oriented occupations in Shetland, only four continued to earn their living in this way in New Zealand. In contrast, fourteen of the sixteen female migrants in the sample were employed in the home, in domestic service or in dressmaking in Shetland. All of the women with an occupation recorded in New Zealand were in similar lines of work to those they had followed prior to migration. Due to the size of the sample from which this data is extrapolated, the results from the NZSG Shetland sub-sample may at best be considered suggestive, however they clearly reinforce the differences between the Shetland migrant occupational profile and those of the migrants from the rest of Scotland. Perhaps more than with any other county of origin, it was the nature of the islands they came from that shaped the occupational background differences of the Shetland migrants.

Origins

The small population of Shetland facilitates a clear examination of migrant origins within the boundaries of the county, makes the traking of migrants and the noting of connections between individuals and groups prior to and after migration a plausible task, and permits a consideration of the importance of travel companions and chains of migration. Caution is nevertheless required when examining migrant origins within county boundaries, since such a study inevitably depends on small sub-samples from which it may be misleading to draw too explicit conclusions. In a sub-sample as small as that for the NZSG Shetland migrants (126 migrants), and from a county in which large families migrating together was the norm, there is little value in statistical analysis at parish level. For example, ten of the migrants in the NZSG Shetland sub-sample belonged to Morgan and Mary Laurenson's family. Only seven individuals in the sample were born in Northmavine, and they were all children of Morgan and Mary. Only four NZSG migrants were born in Delting, and this included Morgan and two of his children. A more qualitative approach has thus been adopted to investigate Shetland migrant origins, with a separate database being created for that purpose.[19]

[19] This Shetland migrant database takes as its core the 126 Shetland-born migrants, with additional Shetland-New Zealand immigrants included based on information from

The 553 individuals in this extended Shetland migrant database belonged to 195 different immediate family groups. Of these, 104 families had five or more people in the family group, while twelve of the families had twelve or more people migrating. While large families migrating to New Zealand together from Scotland was by no means a phenomenon limited to Shetland migrants, there is evidence to suggest that as a proportion of the migrants migrating from the county of origin, immigrants from Shetland were more likely than their counterparts from other parts of Scotland to migrate in large family groups.

Though chains of migration to New Zealand are evident among migrants from elsewhere in Scotland in the NZSG data, these are nowhere more obvious than among the Shetland migrants. Such chains are most apparent in the 1870s, as subsequent migrants, having received news and encouragement from friends or relatives who had migrated earlier in the decade, took advantage of the assisted passages, but chains spanning several decades can also be distinguished. Isabella Robertson, born in Sandness, Walls, appears to have come alone to New Zealand in 1872, as an assisted passenger on the *Christian McAusland*, but within two years her parents and six siblings joined her in Dunedin, having themselves travelled as assisted passengers on the *Invercargill*. Grace Nicolson also came to New Zealand as an assisted passenger on the *Christian McAusland*. Grace's sister Mary followed two years later, arriving on the *Auckland* in 1875, and their mother migrated that same year. A maternal uncle, William Davidson, joined them in 1876, together with his wife, three children and mother (Grace and Mary's maternal grandmother). In 1894 the sisters' youngest brother Samuel migrated, and he was followed eleven years later by their brother William, his wife and their eight children. This migration chain spanned thirty-four years.[20] The migration of Williamina Robinson (formerly Fordyce, née Spence), together with her husband and four children in 1860, began a chain of migration that included fourteen members of her extended family and spanned fifty-one years, her grandson Robert Bruce Fordyce arriving in Wellington Harbour in 1911. The three interconnected

various other sources. Though originally intended as a source for statistical analysis of the Shetland migrants, adequate information for a sufficient number of migrants could not be gathered. Of the 1,248 Shetland individuals identified as New Zealand migrants it was possible to trace something of the migration experience of 746. It was not possible to assign 193 of these individuals to family groups, leaving a sub-sample for the purposes addressed here of 553 individuals.

[20] Extract of email from cousin Les, William Ogilvy Duthie and Grace Nicolson, family history material Val Petrie.

families of Flaws, Henderson, and Harper/Mouat/Anderson/Priest included more than sixty-four individuals arriving in New Zealand in a chain spanning nearly fifty years beginning in 1874.

An examination of the origins within Shetland of the migrants indicates that there was virtually no part of the islands that did not send migrants to New Zealand; however the island parish of Unst was very clearly the most significant source parish. The extended Harper/Mouat/Anderson/Priest family noted above was a part of a wider chain of migration from Unst to New Zealand. Unst, Scotland's most northerly island, is about nineteen kilometres long, eight kilometres wide, with an approximate land area of 120 square kilometres. At its maximum population in 1861, the parish of Unst comprised 3,060 people. Between 1871 and 1881 the population decreased by 599 – nearly 20 per cent – and much of the decrease was due to emigration.[21]

Nicol Priest left Unst in 1868 with Magnus and Barclay Mouat, Gilbert Harper, William and Gilbert Anderson and John Johnson, bound for the Australian goldfields. Approximately twelve months later Magnus Mouat and Gilbert Harper made their way to Westport, New Zealand, to try their luck there. In 1870, finding profit in beachcombing for gold, they sent for their companions still in Australia and for friends and relatives in Unst. Gilbert Harper was Nicol Priest's brother-in-law (the brother of Nicol's wife Robina), Magnus and Barclay Mouat were Gilbert Harper's cousins, as were William and Gilbert Anderson, and Magnus Mouat's brother-in-law was John Johnson, making this 'exodus' from Norwick, Unst to New Zealand a distinctly family affair.[22] Nicol's daughter, Nicolson, was born in 1869 and this may have been why his wife Robina did not come with her four other siblings to join her husband and relatives in New Zealand. Nicol Priest was gold mining on Nine-Mile Beach when he died in Nelson in 1873, aged only 37. It was not until 1913 that his daughter Nicolson left Unst for New Zealand with her family. The chain of migration set in motion by these seven men from Norwick included more than thirty migrants.

The *Clarence*, sailing for Napier, New Zealand, in 1874, carried at least another forty-five migrants from Unst, all recruited by the New Zealand immigration agent Peter Barclay, the majority of whom remained in the

[21] Return of population of Scotland at each decennial period, Section III, 1881 Census of Scotland, 39.

[22] 'Some History Notes', William Robert Henderson and Nicolson Priest, family history material provided to the author by Elizabeth Angus.

Hawkes Bay region.[23] All of the Unst migrants on the *Clarence* for whom more precise place of origin information has been traced were born and lived within approximately five kilometres of each other in the north of Unst – in Burrafirth, North Dale, Norwick and Skaw. Considering that the population of Unst never exceeded 3,060, together with the close proximity of these families to one another, it seems certain they were at least known to each other before they were recruited by Barclay. Whether the decision to leave was jointly made, or whether the families took advantage of the available passages on the *Clarence* separately, of their own volition, remains unclear. Given that this was also the area of Unst that the friends and families of Nicol Priest and his companions hailed, it is possible that their example had some influence on the later migration of other Unst families.

Given the Shetland propensity for chain migration and the large number of migrants from Unst arriving in the 1870s, it is not surprising that migrants from Unst continued to flow to New Zealand for many decades afterwards. Though it is possible that migrations of extended family groups, of large sections of communities, of chains spanning up to five decades, may well exist among migrants from other parts of Scotland migrating to New Zealand, such movements appear to have been especially pronounced amongst Shetlanders. Indeed there is no evidence that this degree of cluster migration occurred among other Scots migrants to New Zealand. That it was so evident from Shetland is perhaps attributable to a specific combination of push and pull factors working simultaneously to bring Shetland migrants to New Zealand from the 1860s, but especially during the 1870s. With such a large proportion of the Shetland population coming to New Zealand in that decade, and encountering mostly favourable conditions, those remaining behind inevitably received positive reports of the country from a greater than usual range of personal testimonies, from siblings, cousins, friends and former neighbours. With familial and community support potentially awaiting them in New Zealand, and with assorted schemes of assisted migration to New Zealand available at various times through to the 1960s, there was incentive enough for generations of Shetlanders to prefer New Zealand over other migrant destinations.

[23] Barclay had previously recruited approximately seventy migrants from Plockton, Lochalsh, Ross-shire for the Hawkes Bay, in 1871–2. Peter Barclay, 'Report of Emigration work during the last six months', 11 June 1872, ACFQ 8226 IM 6/1/1 General 26/03/1873–6/06/1876, ANZ, Wellington. There are migrants from Shetland on the *Clarence* for whom no parish information has yet been traced. Ninety-six of the passengers on the *Clarence* were from Shetland.

Patterns of Settlement

Notwithstanding the inclination of Shetland migrants and their descendants to claim their Nordic rather than Scottish heritage, they tended to follow a Scottish pattern of settlement within New Zealand. However, while migrants from elsewhere in Scotland appear to have settled in almost every part of New Zealand, case study evidence suggests that Shetland migrants did not spread throughout the country to the same extent. As with Scots generally, there was a clear preference for the lower South Island as place of New Zealand residence among Shetland migrants: Invercargill, Dunedin and surrounding areas, areas with a relatively high concentration of Scots. Beyond these southern locations, only Auckland City and environs, Hutt County and Hawkes Bay appear to have received significant numbers of Shetland migrants. That the Shetland migrants did not spread so evenly throughout New Zealand is probably attributable to the smaller numbers involved. Were the population of Shetland itself larger, and therefore the actual numbers involved in Shetland-New Zealand migration also larger, it is reasonable to assume that Shetland migrants would also have been distributed throughout New Zealand.

From the 1860s Stewart Island, the most southerly of New Zealand's three principal islands, attracted independent migrants from Scotland's most northerly county. Robert Scollay arrived on Stewart Island with his wife and three children in 1861, initially was occupied in sawmilling, later involved in the fishing industry in the area, also running his own schooner on the coast until 1899.[24] James Robertson Thomson, born in Tingwall in 1848, arrived in Port Chalmers on the *Jessie Readman* with his Shetland-born wife Barbara and one-year-old daughter Robina in 1873. He and his family settled on Stewart Island in 1876. Purchasing land there, he farmed, fished and mined, and in 1886 opened the Greenvale Accommodation House at Half Moon Bay.[25]

Beyond such unregulated transfers, Shetland migrants were singled out as ideal for the 'special settlements' launched in the 1870s by the New Zealand Government. Conceived as a means of promoting rapid settlement and development, the 'special settlements' promoted under the Immigration and Public Works Act 1870, were not the first of their kind in New Zealand,

[24] 'Mr. Robert Scollay', *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, (Christchurch, 1905), New Zealand Electronic Text Centre 3 April 2009, 892; Graeme Laurenson, *A Kiwi in the Shetland Scattald*, (New Plymouth, 1980), 53.

[25] 'Mr. James Robertson Thomson', *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, 3 April 2009, 893.

previous group settlements including Waipu, Albertland, Puhoi and military settlements in the Waikato.[26] As well as promoting infrastructural growth in the regions in which the migrants were located, another purpose of the 1870s 'special settlement' scheme was to populate parts of the colony that were relatively remote and generally less attractive.[27] The first, and perhaps best-known, group of Shetland settlers to be specifically recruited for New Zealand was the group of thirty-one who arrived in June 1873, secured to settle at the Port William special settlement site in Stewart Island.

In late 1871 Robert Stout, a Dunedin lawyer, later Minister of Lands and Immigration, ultimately Premier, himself a Shetland migrant, wrote to the New Zealand Government suggesting that, in light of the recent Government-sponsored recruitment of Scandinavian immigrants, it might perhaps also be inclined to assist the migration of some British migrants who were 'in habits, in character, in fact [in] everything except language … like the Norwegians'—that is, Shetland migrants, or those from Orkney.[28] Stout noted that a 'large number' of such people, in Shetland especially, were 'anxious to change their address' as a result of a recent spate of 'extensive evictions'.[29] As well as highlighting their expertise in fishing, an underdeveloped industry in nineteenth-century New Zealand, he assured the Government of the suitability of the migrants, noting particularly the scarcity of liquor in Shetland and the need for only two policemen for a population of 33,000.[30] Less than a month later Stout was asked for further details and suggestions regarding the prospective migrants. Replying, he outlined the criteria he believed should be addressed if a special settlement of Shetland migrants was to succeed. He placed particular stress on the careful selection of migrants in Shetland, on ensuring at least one boat builder and one blacksmith were among the colonists, with many 'Jacks-of-all-Trades' among the rest. Further, he urged that migrants be picked up directly from Lerwick Harbour, thus reducing the cost of the transfer to the migrants themselves and increasing the likelihood that a greater number would apply for passage. In a postscript, Stout emphasised 'the evil that the barter or as it is called "truck" system has wrought in Shetland'.[31] Realistically, he outlined the potential problems the migrants would face if settled on Stewart Island,

[26] R. P. Hargreaves and T. J. Hearn, 'Special Settlements of the South Island New Zealand', *New Zealand Geographer,* 37, 2, 1981, 67–72, 67.

[27] Ibid., 68.

[28] Robert Stout to Colonial Secretary, 18 September 1871, 1.

[29] Ibid., 1.

[30] Ibid., 2.

[31] Ibid., 1–3.

as was proposed, noting their lack of experience in clearing bush, there being no 'timber' whatsoever in Shetland. Further, they would need provisions for the first two years, and he recommended that some land should be cleared for them in advance of their arrival.[32]

Stout's recommendations encouraged the Government to act. In December 1871, responding to a request from the Otago Provincial Superintendent James Macandrew, Walter Pearson, the Commissioner of Crown Lands at Invercargill, submitted a report that comprehensively described Stewart Island and the seemingly endless opportunities it presented to intended colonists.[33] Though the existing settlers of Stewart Island had managed to 'subsist' on fishing, Pearson noted that they laboured under several disadvantages unlikely to be shared by the Shetland migrants. The Shetland migrants were 'men whose life training has rendered them adepts at the occupation, masters of the position' and so 'the undertaking could be conducted to a most successful issue'.[34] This comment is interesting, given that there were already several Shetland migrants settled on Stewart Island and involved in the fishing industry.[35] Pearson believed that, although the curing of fish was still in its infancy in New Zealand, these enterprising and highly skilled colonists would quickly raise it to the level of a great and lucrative industry, supplying product in great quantities to the local (Invercargill and Dunedin) and Australian markets.[36] It would not be necessary, however, for the future colonists to confine their attention to fishing. In their spare time they could set their hand to building 'vessels of any tonnage', there being ample standing timber on the island to provide raw materials. Those who sought to escape from the sea in their leisure time would find profit in prospecting and mining, or in the loading of Otago wool-ships.[37] In fact, Pearson continued:

> Stewart Island is so singularly favourably situated for the proper class of settlers, that it is difficult to determine what they could <u>not</u> do … While

[32] Ibid., 5–7.

[33] W. H. Pearson to Supt Otago, 11 Dec 1871, IM 6–10–1, Stewart Island, ANZ, Wellington. This overblown account of the island lead to later reference to Stewart Island as 'Pearson's Paradise.' Basil Howard, *Rakiura: A History of Stewart Island, New Zealand* (Wellington and Dunedin, 1940), 242.

[34] Ibid., 10.

[35] Butterworth, *Chips off the Auld Rock*, 46–51.

[36] W. H. Pearson to Supt Otago, 11 Dec 1871, 13–17.

[37] Ibid., 8, 14, 21–2.

> trawling, if he sees a whale he can, if prepared give chase, and if he gets his monster fish, tow it home and try it out at his leisure: if he loses it, go on trawling; always sure of a return of some sort. He lives in a genial climate, with a means of subsistence, nay wealth at command, and surrounded with such comfort as few of his calling experience, either in the home country or in the bitter winters of Nova Scotia.[38]

On the back of this most favourable description, Macandrew proposed to settle at least 1,000 migrants on the Island.[39]

Not everyone was as easily convinced as Macandrew that the settling of Shetland migrants on Stewart Island would be so effortless or successful. In July 1872 the Resident Minister for the Middle Island, William Pember Reeves, wrote to Macandrew on behalf of the New Zealand Government. He recognised 'a considerable amount of extra care and assistance' would be necessary, and asked if the necessary surveys were going to be carried out. Reeves further noted that 'before undertaking the grave responsibility of introducing population to these settlements, the government would be glad to be definitely informed what steps [Macandrew] propose[d] to take, to supply the various wants of the people, until such time as they can reasonably be expected to provide shelter for themselves and to carve their own living'.[40] Issues raised by the Minister included: the extreme poverty of the migrants the government proposed to recruit; the fact that they would be out of the reach of private employers; that there would be no public works offering supplementary employment nearby; and that the settlers would be highly dependent upon their own efforts. They would not only have to clear their allotted land and build their own houses, they would also have to rapidly begin to make a living, as government provisions were to be allocated for one year only.[41] Despite the raising of these concerns, Macandrew persisted with his plans. The recruitment of suitable migrants went ahead, although initially only thirty-one migrants, rather than 1,000, were enticed to the Port William settlement.

The thirty-one who arrived in 1873 comprised six families and three single adults. Twenty-six of the thirty-one settlers almost certainly knew each other

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[38] Ibid., 24, 26–7.

[39] Memo on Special Settlements, Stewart's Island, from Supt Otago, 17 January 1872, *AJHR*, 1872, D–7A, 3.

[40] W. Reeves to Supt Otago, 25 Jul 1872, IM 6–10–1, Stewart Island, ANZ, Wellington.

[41] Ibid.

before they departed for New Zealand. Twenty of the twenty-six traceable settlers were from Dunrossness: sixteen were from Scatness, and four from Virkie, and, although the other six settlers are recorded as being in Wilhoul, Sandwick, in the 1871 Census, the mother/wife of this family was the sister of the head of one of the Scatness families. Laurence Garriock and Laurence Young, the two traceable single men, were both boarders with the Mail family of Scatness in 1871. Garriock was the brother of Janet Gilbertson. Eighteen of the twenty-six travelled to New Zealand on the *Euterpe*, the eight members of James Harper's family following six months later on the *Dover Castle*. The gender split was near even (fifteen males and thirteen females), as was the age distribution (nine males and six females were over fourteen and the oldest adult was just thirty-eight.) 'Fisherman' was the recorded occupation of every head of household bar one, James Harper, who worked as a house carpenter in Shetland.

Nevertheless, despite the contingent being an apparently well-mixed and seemingly well-suited group of settlers, there were significant problems from the very beginning, arguably the most considerable being difficulties with fishing. The method of fishing that the Shetlanders had employed successfully at home, set line fishing, was of little use in Foveaux Strait, the settlers reportedly regularly returning to their lines to find that sharks had eaten most of the catch, leaving only heads.[42] Moreover, despite there being an abundance of fish when other fishing methods were eventually used, the only means of preservation was time-consuming salting or smoking. Ultimately, the return was not worth the work involved. Some 800 pounds of fish shipped to Melbourne brought just £1 in payment to each of the four men involved, while no payment at all was received for the several boatloads of fish sent to Bluff. Howard notes 'their attempts to obtain money from their agent [for the boatloads of fish] were fruitless, and the impossibility of dealing with the matter satisfactorily from their isolated village induced them to give up all hope'; fishing was soon abandoned altogether by the group.[43]

A further pall was cast on the new settlement when Robert Thomson became ill and had to be taken to Invercargill Hospital, where he eventually died. Shortly afterwards Henry Gilbertson 'suffered a severe tooth abcess [sic] and also had to be transferred to Invercargill hospital', meaning a population loss to the settlement of seven people within the first few months as families

[42] Olga Sansom, *In the Grip of an Island: Early Stewart Island History* (Invercargill, 1982), 128.

[43] Ibid., 128; Howard, *Rakiura*, 249.

followed their men folk to the mainland.[44] Within fourteen months of arrival every one of the migrants had left the island for the mainland. Though the local press insisted that this was because they were 'a very lazy lot', only remaining so long as the government provisions lasted, several houses had been built by the settlers within six months of their arrival.[45] They had cut the timber themselves, imported doors and sashes from the mainland and, in at least one case, employed a labourer to help with the construction.[46] Having spent such energy and finances in attempting to settle on the island, it seems unlikely that the migrants would have easily decamped. An account by one of the children in this group captures its mood: 'The final straw was when my father's violin gave up singing. It hung on the wall damp and useless like the harp on Tara's walls. The whole place seemed damp all the time. Severe illness forced one family then another to the mainland. No one felt much like singing any more since the violin had gone dumb'.[47] The extent to which the families stayed in contact with each other after the break up of the settlement is unclear, although it is known that Christina Thomson married one of the single men – Laurence Young – after the death of her husband.[48]

Three further special settlements, all on the West Coast of the South Island, attracted a number of Shetland migrants. While approximately fifty Shetlanders joined the Karamea settlement, the Jacksons Bay and Martins Bay settlements attracted rather fewer. Martins Bay, formed prior to the passing of the Immigration and Public Works Act 1870, was the first of the settlements mentioned here but remained small due to its isolation – fifty settlers at its peak population in January 1871, and just twenty remaining by 1880. Jacksons Bay, proclaimed a 'special settlement' in February 1875, was arguably the most troubled of all, a primary difficulty being the mixed origins of the migrants and the consequent communication difficulties that arose. Settlers hailed from England, Ireland, and Scotland, as well as Germany, Italy, Poland and Scandinavia. From a peak population of 402 in 1878, the settlement had been reduced to just 160 individuals by 1881 and by 1884 only twenty-four families remained. How many were originally from Shetland is unknown.[49] The anecdote of the Dalziel family, formerly of Shetland, who left the Martins Bay

[44] Butterworth, *Chips off the Auld Rock*, 70.
[45] *Southland News*, 26 August 1874, quoted in Howard, *Rakiura*, 249.
[46] Ibid., 249.
[47] Laurence Young, Junior, quoted in Sansom, *In the Grip of an Island*, 128.
[48] Butterworth, *Chips off the Auld Rock*, 70.
[49] Hargreaves and Hearn, 'Special Settlements of the South Island New Zealand', 68–71; Butterworth, *Chips off the Auld Rock*, 76.

settlement for Jacksons Bay in 1878, provides a further example of the New Zealand Shetland community taking care of its own. Jeremiah Dalziel and his son James were among the seven men lost at sea on a trip to Jacksons Bay in June 1878, leaving Mrs Dalziel – the only woman remaining at the Martins Bay settlement – to support her four remaining children. A collection was taken to send the family to Dunedin where they remained, under the care of Robert Stout.[50]

Whether or not Shetland migrants were more likely than their Scottish mainland counterparts to keep in touch with family and friends at home, thereby encouraging other family and community members to emigrate, merits deeper investigation. Yet, due to the relative ease of tracing Shetland migrants, both pre- and post- emigration, some impression of their activities post-migration is possible. A letter from Nicolson Henderson (nee Priest) to her 'ever-Dear Cousins' in 1932 provides evidence that Nicolson kept in touch with her mother's cousins' children – who had been born in New Zealand after the migration of their parents in the 1870s – after her own arrival in 1913, writing to them and speaking of a trip she and her husband had been long anticipating to the West Coast to visit them.[51] This suggests that Nicolson's mother Robina had kept in contact with her siblings and cousins who departed Shetland for New Zealand in the 1870s though Robina herself remained in Unst.

In a letter home in 1862 Laurence Mathewson wrote that 'Magnus Williamsons Son William' [sic], who he had seen six weeks earlier, was doing very well on the goldfields, indicating that migrants sent home news not only of themselves, their family and friends but also of any other Shetlanders encountered, so that news might be passed on to the relatives of that migrant.[52] It was also common for wedding and obituary notices involving Shetland migrants to be republished in Shetland newspapers. As examples, the obituary notice of Mrs Jane Fea Spence that appeared in the *Hokianga County Times* on 27 January 1908 was republished in the *Shetland Times* two months later, while that of William Sievwright, previously of Lerwick, was published in

[50] Butterworth, *Chips off the Auld Rock*, 75–6.

[51] Letter from Wm R and N Henderson to 'My ever-Dear Cousins', letter home from Mornington, Dunedin containing news of family and friends in New Zealand, 16 April 1932 within 'Some History Notes' family history material provided to the present author by Elizabeth Angus.

[52] Letter from Laurence Mathewson, Otago, New Zealand, to 'My Dear Beloved Parents', 29 March 1862, D23/151/28/19, Shetland Archives.

the *Shetland Times* in 1909.[53] On 21 February 1891 the *Shetland News* published 'Death of "Bob Sinclair": A Shetlander's Strange Adventure', an article about a Lerwick-born migrant published by the *Taranaki Herald* in December the previous year, which had been sent 'home' by a Shetlander in New Zealand.[54]

Even when Shetland migrants felt New Zealand had become home, and knew that it would be their country of residence for the rest of their lives, Shetland was still 'home' too. When William Fraser of Invercargill North wrote 'home' to his uncle and aunt in Shetland in February 1923, he wrote that he had just returned home to Invercargill from having returned home to Shetland and noted that some fellow Shetlanders who resided in Masterton were also just returning home from having been home.[55] It is suggestive of the enduring bonds that when Shetland migrants in Dunedin heard in 1881 of a fishing disaster in Shetland, in which many Shetlanders lost their lives and property, a subscription list was promptly circulated and every Shetlander in the district was reported to have given to it liberally.[56]

Maintaining relationships between the migrants and those who remained in Shetland appears to have been important not only to the migrants. The graveyards of Shetland exhibit numerous instances of headstones or memorials to Shetlanders who died in New Zealand, evidence that although the migrants were far from home, family and friends in Shetland considered it important that they be remembered at home after their death. This practice does not appear to have been so common in other parts of Scotland. Only nine monumental inscriptions in the cemeteries of Aberdeen, for example, the county that contributed 7.37 per cent of Scottish migrants to New Zealand, mention a person who had died in New Zealand.[57] This is in striking contrast to twenty-five headstones in Shetland, most of which were for whole families, not just one individual. In hindsight, it was not astonishing that everyone I met at the Shetland Family History Society in Lerwick in November 2007 still had

[53] Obituary of Jane Fea Spence, Moukaraka (reprinted from *Hokianga County Times* New Zealand), *Shetland Times*, 28 March 1908, D6/292/14/p45, Shetland Archives; Obituary of William Sievwright, Solicitor, New Zealand, *Shetland Times*, 19 June 1909, D6/292/15/p88v, Shetland Archives.

[54] 'Death of 'Bob Sinclair': A Shetlander's Strange Adventure', *Shetland News*, 21 February 1891, 5.

[55] Letter from William Fraser, Invercargill North, to 'Dear uncle John and Aunt': a voyage by sea from Southampton to New Zealand, 19/02/1923, D38/29, Shetland Archives.

[56] Letter from Laurence Mathewson, Otago, New Zealand, to 'My Dear Beloved Parents', 1 December 1881, D23/151/47/14, Shetland Archives.

[57] Migrant figures based on the NZSG data, 1840–1920.

personal connections to New Zealand.

Conclusion

Although it may fairly be said that Shetland was an aberrant part of Scotland and the Shetland Islander migrant experience peculiar among Scots, Shetland was not a nation within a nation and Stout's 1871 pronouncement that the Shetland immigrants were 'in habits, in character, in fact [in] everything except language … like the Norwegians' was clearly overstating his case.[58] New Zealand's Shetland migrants were rather more like their fellow Scotland-born contemporaries in habits – character and language, in their tendency to settle near fellow Scots and in their enthusiasm for migration to New Zealand – than they or their descendants perceived. Nevertheless, in terms of the specificities of the migrant profile, for example the demographics, the specific way in which they were singled out by New Zealand Government schemes, and the way in which the migrants were (and are) remembered by those who remained behind, it is true that Shetland migrants were as different from their Scottish mainland contemporaries as Shetland was from Scotland itself. A sense of identity separate from a Scottish migrant identity is maintained in New Zealand to this day, most obvious manifestations being the continuance of Shetland Societies in New Zealand, an annual Viking ball – an adaptation of the annual Shetland 'up helly aa' festival – and a separate 'special interest group' for Shetland descendants within the New Zealand Society of Genealogists. Whether this Shetland identity has been maintained in the other parts of the world Shetland Islanders settled or if it is peculiar to the Shetland-New Zealand strand of this diaspora remains to be investigated.

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[58] Robert Stout to Colonial Secretary, 18 September 1871, 1.