Flitting Peats in North Yell

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This article is published both as a tribute to the memory of Eric Cregeen, who introduced me to the concept of oral history and encouraged me to collect it, and to that of Tom Tulloch from North Yell,[1] Shetland, who showed me how interesting it could be. Whether you call it oral history, or ethnology, or folk life including a bit of folklore, which is what I thought I was collecting when I first met Tom, what he told me about his own community was what mattered to him, and everything he told me interested me. Tom, with the help of his wife Liza, made the work of collection a more enjoyable experience than anyone else I have recorded — ethnological fieldwork can often be exciting, but though it may be pleasant to remember it is usually exhausting to do. Tom and Liza simply let me sit in their living room above the post-office in Gutcher, when Tom was not busy with his post-round or anything else, and listen to him telling me things: while Tom fed me with information and I scribbled notes, Liza fed me with regular tea and scones and sometimes more substantial meals. When I wanted to record something in detail I brought out the tape-recorder, and quite often we moved into the ben room. I have described this leisurely method of fieldwork and how it developed in more detail in the feature on Tom Tulloch in *Tocher* 30.[2]

What Tom told me brought out the close relationship between all aspects of a community's traditions, from stories, songs, sayings, dialect, music and dance through family history and relationships with landlords to the techniques of the many types of fishing and farm work, what you ate and how you got it, how you built, furnished, lit, heated and cleaned your house, and all the day-to-day details of life in a very different world. Much of this described ways of life that Tom himself (born in 1914) had not seen, but he learned a great deal from his mother, born Andrina Fraser, and her sister Maggie, born before the disastrous summer gale of 1881 put an end to the flourishing haaf fishery at Gloup, and heirs to family traditions stretching back in some cases to the seventeenth century. Moreover the family, including Tom's grandfather Charles Fraser, the local joiner and undertaker, lived in an eighteenth-century laird's house, the Haa o Midbrake — they had been moved into the empty house until the landlord repaired their dilapidated croft-house, which he never got round to — and were therefore able to provide rooms to lodge visitors from all over Shetland. The house had many other more local visitors, the joiner's customers and cronies, and after his death continued to be what Highlanders would call a ceilidh house. As the youngest of twelve children Tom lived on in the Haa until he felt it too was past repair in the 1950s and regularly heard his mother and aunt's conversations with each other and

all sorts of callers, from neighbours to sightseers and people (including Mrs Jessie Saxby) who had heard of their knowledge of local lore and history. Tom must have been interested enough from a fairly early age to pick up a good deal of what he heard, and the excellent oral memory which preserved it was no doubt another part of his inheritance from his mother.

The recording which follows, however, is oral history in the usual British sense of the term, Tom talking about something he and Liza remembered well from their own youth. Tom had a good memory not only for words but for actions: in his younger days he had done joinery work like his grandfather, making 'windows an doors an skylights an horse-harness an cairts an barrows and anything at wis just required aroont the croft. An besides that ... I shod dizzens o horses' as well as other blacksmith work and building, and butchering and salting mutton and pork for winter use for the whole neighbourhood — and working the croft and inshore fishing like everyone else. He could describe very clearly how to do such things, and I wish there had been time to record or even film many more such detailed descriptions before his death in February 1982, not very long after his retirement from the Post Office. My last visit to Gutcher in September 1978 had as its main purpose the recording of Tom's life story and other items for the feature that appeared early in the next year in *Tocher* 30. After filling two tapes on my first morning with Tom I left him to recover and spent 24 hours away with Jamesie Laurenson in Fetlar and Gibbie Basil Inkster in the Herra west of Mid-Yell, but when I came back I made this detailed recording about something Tom and Liza both had often mentioned and evidently felt strongly about, the work they had done in their summer holidays from school (between the ages of seven and fourteen) helping neighbours to bring in their peats.

The account transcribed below may not make it clear just how ambiguous Tom and Liza's feelings were about this work. It was evidently a very vivid memory. Tom was as keen to hand on the details of how this was done as he was about other aspects of local culture, and indeed was particularly interested in the pack-saddle, harness and other equipment used on the ponies carrying peat and other loads. It was one of the half dozen subjects he raised on my first short visit to him in 1970, and about that time he made a model of a pony with this equipment on its back, using the correct materials as far as possible. The recording makes it clear too that he was happy to explain all the details of the work, and that as children they had been proud if certain families asked them to work for them. It was also clear, perhaps more from Liza's reaction to the memory but from Tom too, that it had been extremely hard work for them as children, and had left little if any time for them to enjoy their summer holidays. Although they were actually paid for their work, at an average rate of two shillings a day, which in the 1920s must have been worth well over £5 today, they were expected to put most of their pay into family funds, or towards their own clothing, and were lucky if they had a shilling of it in their pockets on the local regatta day. In spite of the pay, which was surely an innovation since the turn of the century, they felt exploited, and remembered the experience as more like a labour camp than a summer camp.

Tom's account complements the excellent description in Alexander Fenton and Jamesie Laurenson's article on 'Peat in Fetlar' (Fenton and Laurenson 1964), which introduces the subject of this present article very usefully, in several ways. It says little of the peat-cutting or stacking, and nothing of the peat-boats and peat-houses which were part of the very different economy of Fetlar. But this difference in local methods of bringing home peat in different parts of Shetland, of which more below, must be emphasised. The north end of Yell was formerly part of the same parish as Fetlar, and shares some of that island's culture, but in other respects, including dialect forms, it is closer to its other neighbour, Unst. North Yell and Unst alone, as far as I know, used *riva-kishies* rather than regular *kishies* to carry peat. Tom's account also gives an insider's very detailed view of one part of the process, driving the ponies (or *mares* as they were collectively called, regardless of sex), which was almost exclusively carried out by children in North Yell — a custom no doubt originating in the *haaf* fishing days, when all the working men of most families were at sea until August and all the peat work after the actual cutting, and all the farm work until harvest, was left to the women and children and a few old men. Finally, the ponies also carried several other loads through the summer and autumn — hay, sheaves of corn, peat mould and *teck* (heather) — and perhaps others such as seaweed and dung for manure in the spring, but this would have been a smaller-scale, more intermittent operation which did not need to involve the children. As in most parts of Shetland the ground was too rough for horses to be used in ploughing, so carrying these loads was usually their only work.

The account which follows is my transcription from SA 1978/87, a tape recorded from Tom and Liza Tulloch at Gutcher Post Office on the evening of 27 September 1978. It can mostly be left to speak for itself, with the help of a short glossary of dialect words and terms and a note on features of the dialect and its transcription. A few notes explain or amplify other points. Three matters, again all concerned with differences within Shetland, seemed to deserve very long notes and have instead been treated as appendices. Appendix A summarises information I have recorded in other parts of Shetland and Orkney about the variety of methods used to bring home peats. The other two are mainly transcriptions from Tom Tulloch's words on a tape recorded four years earlier, SA 1974/208: Appendix B on the use of bent grass in North Yell, and Appendix C on the North Yell use of 'teck'.

I had hoped when I first planned this article several years ago that it could be checked over by Liza Tulloch, but sadly she died in September 1992, when I had the text of the interview roughly transcribed but not ready to send. I am grateful to her son Lawrence Tulloch for correcting my slips in transcription and interpretation.

Tom Tulloch: Flitting Peats in North Yell

Noo when we were bairns the most o wir summer hoalidays wis spent caain the horses, flittin hom the peats an hey an mul[3] an later on the coarn at hairst time. An even afore

wir summer hoalidays started we would speak among wirsels at the schūl, 'at this fokk or the next fokk wis axed wiss to com an caa horses tae them: and they were some fokk better tō work to what was consider't to be the best fokk, and the fokk 'at fed you best an the fokk 'at peyed you best!

But it wasna a very agreeable job at the best o times: you were usually called aboot five o'clock i the moarning, becaze they were a considerable competeetion among the fokk to see wha could be first to the hill. And we would hae to go up to the girse an feetch in the horses an help to bent[4] them: you first pat on the flaakie ipae them, wis the first 'at geed on, and then the clibber. And the clibber wis made up oot o the clibber brods and the clibber shank and the clibber neebie, and the pin that connectit this pieces together wis caa'd the varnickel pin.[5] And then the strap that geed inunder — the piece o rop 'at geed innunder the mare's belly to hadd on the clibber was caa'd the wymegirt; and they were a V-shapit piece o rop fae the wymegirt up to the clibber 'at they caa'd the gointer. An efter the flaakie and the clibber wis on, then the maeshies geed on. An efter you were gotten on the maeshies, then the riva-keeshies[6] geed on. An that was a ... kishie made oot o a net, oot o simmonts. An when you were gotten all the horses riggit, then you set oot fir the hill.

AB: A moment ... How exactly did the maeshies and the riva-kishies, how were they fitted on?

TT: Oh yes, yes. The ... maeshie wis a coorse net made oot o the simmonts, and they were a ... loop, a long loop o simmonts at each end, and the piece 'at wis nixt to the clibber, it was hookit ower the tap o the clibber right doon at the mare's back, and that wis caa'd the lower fettle. And then the ither end of the maeshie, the ither loop 'at wis there hookit ower the neebie o the clibber, and they ay caa't that the upper fettle. And the riva-kishies when they were empty wis jist hookit ower the neebie o the clibber, but of coorse when they were full of paets then they were set in i the maeshie. They were set in i the maeshie on their boddom efter they were been fill't wi paets, and then they were long paets laid in ipo the top 'at they caa't the layin-in paets. And then you lifted up the upper fettle o the maeshie an hookit him ower the neebie o the clibber, and that turn't the riva-kishie upside doon: but this big layin-in paets hinder't the ither paets fae runnin oot. An when the mares cam to the stack, 'at you took a maeshie aff o the neebie o the clibber, then the riva-kishie wis the right way up again, he stūd upon his boddom.

But when you were gotten aal the horses riggit an set oot fir the hill, the owlder fokk wis wi you, the layers-up. An you hed to tak a kishie wi some grub an a bucket wi some fier (fire), an you went to the hill and they got this fier kindled, and of course they were plenty o paets to keep him goin what wis efter o the day. An if they were six mares then they would divide them op into two lots o t'ree, and a bairn caa'd 'next the hill' and the ither een caa'd 'next the toon'. The wān 'at caa'd 'next the toon' wis the wān that wis caain next to the hooses, and the wān that wis caain 'next to the hill' wis the wān that wis caain next to the paet banks. An if they hed more as maybe six horses

then they divided them op into t'ree lots o three, and they were a third bairn 'at caa'd, an that wis caa'd 'i the middle'.

An this gūd on fae the aerly moarnin until brakfast time, an that wis maybe a cup o tay an a boiled eeg i the hill, made ipo the oapen fier, an wan o the layers-up relieved you while you ate this, and then you pat the ither bairn to the hill and so on till every boady wis hed their brakfast.

The bairn 'at wis caain next to the hill wis expected to help wi the layin up ipō the mares. You — they would tell you to go an feetch in the mare an you — the fokk 'at wis layin up while you were been away would a been fill't the riva-kishies wi paets an hed them staundin a peerie bit apairt, an you led the mare wi the hālters in atween the two riva-kishies and then haeld on her heid while they laid up upon her. And this gūd aheid wi aa the mares, and the bairn 'at wis caain next to the stack wis supposed to help wi the takkin aff o the mares — tak aff wān side, ir if he wisna aeble to tak aff the side then he wis supposed, ir wis expected, to empty tha paets oot o the riva-kishie an ... pit him back ageen ipō the clibber. But that wisna aal that aesy becase we were warkin wi wir bare feet an very aften the paets ran ipo wir feet an hortit wir taes. And it wis faerly coamon for wiss to ... strik wir feet on stons an hort wir taes, an we sometimes would look fir a lag o oo stuck in upon a brae and row aroont wir taes to protect them, to hinder the straes fae brakkin in tae them, fir it wis very soār!

And this gūd on all day: the same procedure gūd aheid at denner time, an maybe a cop o tay in the efternūn. And they were a graet lock o that owlder fokk 'at kempit the wān wi the ither to see wha would bide in the hill longest an do the biggest day's-wark.

An that wis a case o wiss drivin the horses, we werena leadin them, an we were caain them in ... bunches. An some o the horses 'at wis kind o ill-vickit would ha' teen i their heids til ha' set aff, and then you were expectit to ... go and feetch them, no matter whar they gūd, an ... they said 'The horses wis rin aff!' And sometimes the leeds would go ower ipo you an that wis considered to be ... a braw catastrophe. An if the layers-up wisna in agreement the wān wi the ither, ir if wān wis stronger as the ither, then it ... wisna a ooncommon thing at aal fir the leeds to — wān side to be haevier as the ither, and the leeds would go skave. And this would put wiss bairns caain in a great consternation in case 'at the leeds did go ower. And sometimes if it wis the case 'at they were flittin graet big long mossy paets 'at didna brak very raedily, then they would never wark wi riva-kishes at all: they would jist big the paets in i the maeshies, an laid that up, an they caa'd that 'bōldeens'.[7]

And when the day's flitting was done we were ālways very gled to get hom because we were tired an we were run fir saeveral miles durin the coorse o the day: in fact they were some times 'at you were comin to the stage 'at you were nearly creepin! But even when you cam hom you were expected to help wi the aff-bendin o the horses an pittin the bendies inside into some shed or some protection fae the wadder, fir the owlder fokk took graet care o the mares' bendies and they never left them forth all night, they aalways wantit to keep them dry. An efter the bendies wis teen aff, 'at they [the

ponies] got their full tether restored ageen, then we were pitten wi them to pit them to some shålter or pit them oot ipae the girse.

And then we'd ha' been teen in an we would ha' gotten wir sopper an hed to wåsh wir feet an go to bed, and we would ha' been called almost at the crack o dawn the followin moarning: an this was repeatit until such times that the paets wis hom. An if it wis a kind o generous fokk 'at you were warkin fir, i wir time the remuneration fir a day's caain — it would ha' been maybe fourteen or fifteen 'ooers — wis two shillins a day. But ... we were ay fairly prood even o wir day's pey or wir week's pey, whitever it might till ha' been.

An even after the paets wis feenished flittin, this same procedure güd aheid wi the flittin hom o the müld — that was whåt wis used fir the beddin o the kye an the lambs through the winter time. And the hey wis flit intö the yard ipö the mares jist the sam wey, ither as they didna need ir use riva-kishies fir that: that wis jist biggit in i the maeshies withoot them being pitten in in any contaeners. An i the hairst time it wis the sam wi flittin in the coarn: the shaves wis jist biggit in. But when they were flittin in the coarn ipö the maërs, the mares hed a habeet o tryin to aet the coarn, an this wis tried to be preventit as faur [as] it was poassible, an sometimes they would hae a peerie kishie 'at they caa'd a cuddie[8] that they would smook ower the maër's möls so 'at they couldna get aetin. An if they didna hae a cuddie then they were a flat piece o wuid, wi a string atil it 'at güd aroont the maër's heid, that they pat i their mooth to prevent them fae aetin the coarn, that they caa'd a kaepar.[9] An that wis the wey 'at the moast all stoff wis shiftit i ... wir young days, 'at they were no ... tractors an a graet lock o the grund wisna suitable fir ta wirk even horses an cairts if you'd haed them.

AB: And was it normally with all the flittin — was it just the peats that the bairns helped with or did they help with everything?

TT: No, the bairns helpit wi aal the flittin, but when we were flittin hey or coarn, insteed o the maërs being driven they were aalways led, by the tether. Fir the flittin o the paets they were driven.

AB: And how were they kept together, the three o them?

TT: Oh, they got used to that, the mares ... They just went together, and usually there was a leader — they were aalways wån 'at wis first. An if it 'been such a thing 'at that leader wis laid up an got her leed last it would ha' been no time until shö wis leadin ageen: shö passed the ither wåns, and the ither wåns acceptit this. They seemed to get to know this, 'at this wis their leader, and they accepted her as a leader.

AB: And the müls that they took in for the kye to lie on ... what was this? Just peat mould?

TT: It wis just ... dirt, it wis mould aff o a ... peaty grund. Hit would ha' been gotten loosened op wi the frost in winter, and then dried up i the spring o the year, and ye scrapit it aff: it might till ha' been, dependin on the quäntity o frost it wis been in winter, it might til ha' been an inch ir inch an a half thick, an you scrapit it up while it was dry, an pat it into roogs an catter'd it op wi feels until such times as you could get it hom.

AB: And what was that put into then?

TT: When it was teen hom hit was usually pitten until a shed of some description, a barn, ir, yees, they were hooses, a kind o inferior whality o hooses that they would ha' just ha' caa't the müldy hoose — it was used for noathing ither but to keep müld atil.

AB: Yes, but I mean when you were bringing it home was it in kishies or ...?

TT: Oh, no, it hed ... it ether heed to be in bags, but afore bags was — the jute fir the hemp bags[10] wis plentiful, it wis flit i the straēn kishies, not the riva-kishies: the riva-kishies wis net but the straēn kishies wis — could howlt the müld.

AB: Yes ... I'm not very clear how it ... wouldn't come out of the straēn kishies unless you could fix the lips together ...

TT: Ah well, the straēn kishie wis set up on its bottom, it wisna turned upside doon ... like the riva-kishie ... The straēn kishie wis älways set up the right wey up and the maishie teen an pitten up aroond it.[11]

AB: And all the bendies would be made out of bent, would they?

TT: In ... North, aroont wir direction, aal the bendies wis made oot o bent: ... but ... here in Yell, North Yell at the Saunds o Breckin wis the most usual place fir to get bent. In ither places t'rough the isle, insteed o usin bent it wis floss 'at wis dried ... an made into the simmonts, an although the floss didna hae such a boannie appearance whan it wis feenished, that wis much more durable as the bent ... Yes, yes, it lestit much longer as the bent, but it wis more difficult to wark wi an didna hae such a nice appearance.

AB: And I suppose you would be ... got to flit your own peats, for your own ... toon ... without being paid for it.

TT: Oh yes, yes, this wis very aften the case, an if you — any body didna have suffeecient horses o their owen, ir ... they might till ha' hed horses an ... no bairns, then you would unite, an some body would provide the horses an some ither body would provide

the bairns ... The horses wis very aften united: this would ha' gone aheid atween freends an ... neighbours.

AB: Yes. And if you were helping somebody else, would you stay at their house?

TT: Ah, well, this used to be done, but this wis ... til a graet extent aboalished ... i my time, but it wis known o: they wir a few places 'at you stoppit aal night at, but generally you geed hom to yoursel. But you were expected to turn oot bright an aerly i the — a moarnin, although you wir goin hom to yoursel.

AB: And ... while you were ... leading in the peats, then there would be ... somebody actually building a stack?

TT: Yes yes, they wir ālways a man at the ... hom end tō — biggin the stack, an they took graet - graet care an graet paens ipō the biggin o the stack, becase they were dependin on the paets fir aal haetin purposes, an tō a saertain extent in some hooses fir light as weel as haet, an it wis essential that the paets be dry an properly lookit efter. An it wis a considerable art to big a paet stack so 'at it ... repell't the waater.

AB: But it would be quite usual for a crofter to have half a dozen ponies of his own?

TT: Oh yes yes, it wis quite coamon fir a crofter to hae suffeecient ponies tō do his owen turn wi, but if it wis such a thing 'at he didna happen to hae in, as A'm alraedy said, that wis a case o unitin wi some ither body.

AB: And these would be kept just on the scattald most o the time, would they?

TT: They were kept on the scattald ... unless the time 'at you were usin them; they always got the benefeet o some green grass the time 'at you were usin them, but before an efter that then they were turn't loose i the hill, just on the scattalt.

[*Tape turned over*]

TT: When wir day's wark ... o flitteen wis ower, 'at we came til it wis the hidmast thryte — that wis the hidmast time to the hill wi the maērs, then we would start an — and roar 'Hoitna!' That wis ... aevidently 'Feenish!' fir that day, an we would roar 'Hoitna hoitna hoarn!' And then they were ālways something added on to that to mak it rhyme:

Hoitna hoitna hoarn,
We'll flit no more till the moarn!

An we would sometimes roar:

Hoitna hoitna hoarn,
The grey coo o Skyla's aetin i the coarn!

An that gūd ahead at the close nearly o every day, but 'at when the paets wis completely an entirely feenished that wis intensified!

Liza Tulloch: I'm sure that the mares kent that!

AB: And what sort of ages would you be when you were doing this?

TT: Well you raelly werena expected to be caain horses until you cam schūl age.

AB: Which was seven?

TT: Yes, that wis seven. An you werena expectit to be caain horses efter you left the schūl.

AB: An that was fourteen.

TT: That wis fourteen, yes. Efter that you were — got a stage op, you were promoated aither til a layer op or then the bigger o a stack!

AB: (laughs) Yes. But that you would do just for your own peats, would you, or ...?

TT: No, there were sometimes fokk 'at didna hae ... youths o their owen would employ you, fir a layer op, but then your wages ... increased a bit, maybe to t'ree shillins a day, an the same fir biggin a stack. An the fokk 'at you were biggin the stack fir, they wid ... nearly every night they wid inspect the stack an they wid point oot tō you any improvements 'at they wanted upon it for the followin day! ... That you werena giein enoff o tilt ipō the peats i the proper direction to rin oot the waater, ir if you were biggin the paets too loosely, as the stack settlet in they wad be inclinet to faa ower ipae their side — aal that wis pointed oot tō you! An you dare not pat any kind o any mūld i the — among the paets, the paets hed, each wān hed to be as far as possible hented up wi haund, so 'at you didna pat mūld in i the stăck, becase mūld t'rough the winter time helt the waater an hed a taendency o makkin the paets weet.

AB: ... And what would be the average length o time — would it take as much as a week to build the stack for one house, or ...?

TT: Nnnnooo, scarcely a week ... Maybe the staundin pairt o a week, but ... fife days would ha' shifted a ... firin o paets, a twalmonth's firin o paets. But usually they didna wark the horses more as t'ree days at the wān time, and then geff them a raest. But they hed more maercy ipō the hoarses as whāt they hed ipō the baerns 'at wis caain them, becase that wisna ooncoamon fir fokk 'at wis maybe short o gettin baerns to caa, then they would [ha'] kent the day 'at you were goin to rest, and ... they would seek you to caa to them that day!

AB: You said the pay that you had, you were allowed to keep for yourself, but you were expected to ...

TT: Mak useful, mak right use o it ...

LT: We usually got the two shillins but I ālways gave mine to Mother becase my father was never able to work: he hād the rheumatism, ir arthritis or somthing. So we ālways gave to Mother, but we got this two shillins every day fir warkin.

TT: We got the two shillins a day fir caain the horses, but it really wisna teen fae wiss be wir paerents, but we were expectit to mak some useful use to it, ether to buy something to wear ir something fir wir feet, ir mak a contribution towards buyin something useful.

LT: An sometimes we laid it op afore ... The Regatta,[12] to hae a shillin i wir poaket fir the Regatta comin on, ir something like that.

TT: Yes, an it wis ... til a graet extent at that time, that wis the oanly means 'at we hed o aernin a shillin at all!

APPENDIX A: PEAT FLITTING METHODS IN THE NORTHERN ISLES

The information summarised below is based mostly on my recordings and notes from various parts of Shetland and Orkney since 1970 (sources given only for detailed accounts), supplemented by a few references from the school of Scottish Studies Central Index. It is far from a comprehensive list, but it adds some details to the useful outlines in Fenton 1978: 212–3, 229–32, and Nicolson 1978: 92–3, particularly on the use of sledges in the South Mainland of Shetland. Precise dates were seldom given, but all informants were over the age of 55 in the 1970s and talking mainly of practices remembered from their own youth, so this information generally applies to the early years of this century, before and after the First World War, seldom after the Second.

1. *Boating peats.* In Orkney the island of Eday (including the Calf of Eday) was a source of peats for people in North Ronaldsay and Sanday, as is well-known, but also for

(North) Faray, and at times for parts of Westray (Rapness) and Stronsay, as well as the commercial export of peat to distilleries in Mainland Scotland which lasted until 1939. Peats from Flotta were boated to parts of South Ronaldsay and Burray, and from Hoy (the North part of the island) and Rysa Little to Graemsay and Longhope in the south part of the island of Hoy.

In Shetland peats were boated from Whalsay to the Out Skerries (and within Whalsay flitted by boat to Isbister across the Loch of Isbister). Some peat for Whalsay may also have been cut in Nesting on the Mainland.

Peat for Papa Stour came from different places for the tenants of the two heritors of the island: Aithsness on the Mainland belonged to the Nicolsons, Papa Little to the Busta estate, and peat was cut accordingly (sometimes cut for Papa men by Mainlanders from Aith), and brought home in October when the haaf fishing and harvest were over (SA 1974/213 B, Willie Georgeson, Papa Stour/Scalloway).

When the peat ran out in the Ness of Muness, Unst, people around Uyeasound and Snarravoe used to boat it from Yell (between Gutcher and Cullivoe) and the small island of Linga (noted from Henry Hunter, Muness, 1974, and his relative James Hunter, Bressay, 1975).

Burra Isle and (South) Havra people boated peat from the Cliffs and Deepdale on the Mainland (see Nicolson 1978: 92 and detailed account for Havra below). Nearby Trondra took it from the smaller islands of Papa and Hildasay off Scalloway. Robert Slater there (SA 1974/215 B) described how the women rowed a haddock boat to these islands: the Trondra women were notable oarswomen, able to beat a Navy team at a regatta and row with corn to the mill at Weisdale ten miles away, and some could cut their own peats or at least flay the bank. If they were lucky, he said, they might get a man for skipper — others might have said cox: he played the part between the ages of 11 and 15! This was finished by about 1936. The Trondra people held rights to banks in Papa, but paid five or ten shillings a year for a piece of moor in Hildasay.

2. *Other Details.* In many parts of Shetland there were workable peat-banks in the 'hill' (scattald, common pasture) quite near the edge of the arable ground of the crofts: so I was told by old Mrs Mowat at Setter, by Selivoe, Sandsting, in 1975 that the peat there used simply to be built into stacks in 'the hill' where it was cut, about half a mile from the houses, and brought home on people's backs in kishie-loads as it was needed. This was all right unless there was heavy snow! On the other side of the Mainland, in South Nesting, Andrew Hunter gave me a full description of using the clibber and maeshie to load kishies of (as I understood) peats on a pony's back (SA 1975/162), but three years later (SA 1978/72) he told me that in his area peat had normally been carried a mile and a quarter from the hill in kishies on people's backs, though nowadays it was brought by lorry from near Sandwater.

Where it had further to come, ponies with clibber and maeshie were usually more use than carts (which few people kept) over the rough ground, but in parts of the South Mainland sledges or slypes seem to have been quite regularly used. Robbie

Bairnson, later first curator of the Dunrossness Croft House Museum, who lived nearby at Wiltrow, told me in 1970 that they brought peat from the hill ground to the north (on the slopes of the Ward of Scousburgh?) down to the road on a horse-drawn sledge with a box-shaped body, something like a large fish-box by the sound of it, with two-inch broad planks two inches apart, on two runners. It tended to go too fast over floss or rushes. The women and boys, with any working men who were not at sea and those old men who were not at home to build the stacks, took charge of this (SA 1970/233 B).

In one place in the South Mainland, Tresta (not identifiable on the O.S. 1" map), there was actually a wire transporter set up to haul sledges of peat earlier this century, shown in one of J. D. Ratter's photographs.

The most remarkable account I have recorded, however, came from the late John Williamson, New Grunnasound, East Burra Isle, a native of the now uninhabited island of Havra (SA 1974/212 A3). As noted above, Havra peats were cut in or above the valley of Deepdale on the west coast of the Mainland, not far from the banks used by the people of Sandwick on the east coast, and boated home from Bodi Geo, round the corner, where they were stacked to await fair weather (or earlier no doubt the end of the haaf fishing, when the men would have time for home work) about the third week of August. 'Blue' peats in the third row from the top, or lower, were not taken because they were too brittle when dry, and would not have survived the rough journey by sledge and boat. The Bigton men brought horses to take the sledges from the peat bank or the nearby hill dyke to the top of the steep slope down to the sea: from there people, mainly children from the ages of eight to fourteen, pulled or rode them down to the geo, because they would have run on the horses' heels. It was fun bringing them down, less fun taking them back up, though they were then empty. These sledges were just frames with crossbars and galvanised runners, and the kishies were supported not by planks but a network of haddock lines, like the 'handbarrows' used to carry seaweed and so on. A big sledge would hold four kishies (made of willow in his time), a child's one only two or at most three.

APPENDIX B: BENT IN NORTH YELL

In most parts of Shetland floss, the common rush, was twisted into cords or simmonts to bind the straw in kishies, flackies and so on, and to make maeshies and other items of pony harness. Where it was available, however, bent, or marram grass, were generally preferred as being finer (though not necessarily stronger or longer lasting). In Orkney it was more plentiful on sandy soils and 'bent bands' were used to bind cubbies and caisies and other straw work until coir yarn became generally available. The Sands of Breckin in North Yell provided one of the few prized supplies of bent in Shetland, so Tom Tulloch knew about its use. The following account recorded from him on tape

SA 1974/208 B2 arose from a discussion of shared rights, dividing seaweed, lotting rigs and so on. It is not always clear from the context when the sound 'shaer' means 'shear', in the sense of cutting a crop, and when it means 'share'.

[The bent that] grew Nort' at the Sands o Breckin, it was consider't to be a very praecious commodity, and it was oanly a saertain number o the people 'at had a share there, everybody didn't have a share there ... At wăn time the bents was so scarce that the whoale lot o it was shoarn an collected in a pile and then divided, so ... the small sheaves 'at it was put or tied up intŏ was called baets, baets o bent, and you were entitlet to so many baets o bent fir every mark o lănd 'at you hed, and that was the diveesion there. And when aal the best bent was shoarn, the privileged few got a chance to share the out-crop, so to speak, and they were tearin this aff the shaerers! But ... aevidently this wis died out. I do remember the bent bein shoarn wi conseederable gusto: it was never touched, you daren't go dere an take wăn scrap o bent until a saertain day. And the people aal hurriet there, it was more or less a Klondyke ...

AB: What sort of an area did it cover?

TT: Well, it's much graeter now, but ... it's spread ... It ... at that time I doan't think surely would ha' been moare than an area o three-quarters of an aecre. But the whoale o that area was not bent, they were a saertain amount o grass in the centre, becase bent oanly thrives where the sand is loose, very loose, and through the time, when the sand settlet down the bent hed a tendency o dyin out ...[At one time] it nearly became extinct. It would appear laek that, for they were some boady 'at was taellin aboot the bent on the Saund o Breckin, and this man 'at was taellin aboot it said, 'My faither telt me 'at his faither telt him 'at his faither's faither telt him 'at Ringan Spence telt him 'at they were at one time, 'at they were a hundred and twenty baets o bent 'at grew ipŏ the Saunds o Breckin!' So that would nearly imply 'at this 120 baets o bent was a very big quăntity o bent, and that 'at it was less at the time 'at this man wis spaekin. But Ringan of course was the Shaetland name for Neenian, and that Neenian Spence was one o the lairds 'at was in the Haa of Houllan, and it's on raecord when that Neenian Spence was in the Haa o Houlland ... [Ninian Spence of Houlland died in 1710 (Grant 1907: 300).]

[I've watched my father taking one of the dried] baets o bent and loosenin the band on them, not taekin it completely off, but loosenin the band, and then grippin ... it firmly i the top an shaekin it, an then all the short straws would fall oot, and perhaps he would oanly get what he raeckon't two saerviceable bits o bent out o three ... That short straws was aevidently no use fir the windin purposes. And after it had

gone through all this process then it was taeken an stoared in a dry place in the dwellin house, and taeken doon through the winter, and that oalder men would sit the whoale length o a winter night an winnd the bent. I never did any bent windin, but I mind me father sittin windin night after night, hundreds o fathoms o bent.

LT: They, aal the owld men wānd ...

TT: Yes, they all wānd ... And ... the bent, down where it was cut aff o the grount they were perhaps maybe aboot three inches o a hard stalk, approachin the thickness o the knitting needle, and then there would maybe be three small stalks comin out o this.

LT: Would they caa that pickin the bent?

TT: Yae, that wis efter it was wund — but this hard stalk was not wound in along wi the rest o the rop. When they hed to lay in new strānds this hard straw was always left stickin out, an when they were feenished their night's winndin o the bent then they would go back over this wi a poacket knife an snip all this hard ends off, an clean it up, and they would say 'at they were pickin the bent. And this hard end was composed o two or three different layers ... And wiss as bairns, we would take this aends, an you could pull oot a centre piece, and then we would light them in the fire and we would smoake them!

[Bent simmons]: They wis oanly used for the moare sophisticated purposes, it wis by way o bein a valuable proaduct. But the rops or the simmonts 'at wis used fir the teckin o the hooses, an also fir the linkin o the coarn skroos was wound out o the straw, and that was caa'd gossie simmonts ... Farther sooth through the isle, of coorse, as we're alraedy said, the bent wisna very coamon, if it existed at all, and the better class o simmonts was wound oot o the floss.

AB: ... The baets o bent, were they just like an ordinary sheaf o corn?

TT: Yes, a miniature sheaf o corn.

... They would plait the baets o bent at the tap and then tied it ... two together, an hang them over maybe a rop abuff the fier, and that was the reason o the pleatin at the top. And this was to finish off the dryin.

APPENDIX C: STRIKING TECK

This conversation immediately follows that in the previous Appendix, on SA 1974/208 B3. In the following year two other people mentioned teck to me. Mrs Joan Leask in the Mainland district of Aith also said that it was 'struck' with a 'teck scye' to feed cattle, but described it as a mixture of heather and hibba, a coarse grass that grew

among the heather. Jamesie Laurenson in Fetlar described it as a mixture of heather and the burra (heath-rush) which grew with it, and used for bedding more than food for the cattle (cf. Fenton 1978: 424). Only in Yell does heather alone seem to have been used as a replacement for scarce hay, as peat mould was used as bedding in the byre, to replace the straw that would all have been needed for making kishies and so on and for thatching — for which the plentiful heather in Yell was apparently not used at least in Tom's memory. However, he speaks in the main interview above of carrying hay on the ponies in his own time, and not of carrying teck; the description below may refer mainly to his mother's youth, when the larger population would have had no arable land to spare for hay.

In this interview there is an audible smile in Tom's voice in all the sentences I have marked with an exclamation mark.

AB: It was referred to as teck?

TT: Teck, yes ... It was the haether cut off.

AB: Fine — fairly fine heather?

TT: Well, of course the heather all through Shetlan is fine in compare tö the haether 'at you get in Scotlan!

AB: So you set it up in front of the cow to eat what she wanted, an the rest was used for bedding?

TT: Yes, the rest was used for beddeen. An there ageen, each croafter hed his portion o the hill 'at he was allowed to strick teck on. Teck draws they caa't them. And it was cut wi the Shetlant scye, the teck — that wis usually refer't til as the teck scye. And at that time there was very little hay in Shetlan, fir it was — ground that could cultivate was ... all cultivated. So the quantity o länd that was used for hay was very, very little. And the scye wasn't referred til as bein a hay scye, it was a teck scye. An they didna refer til it as mowin teck ... They referred to mowin hay, but they didna, never referred to mowin teck, it was strickin teck: fir that was the, weel more the impression 'at it gave you, they were strikin this off. The scye was liftit completely clear o the ground an they feetched a swipe with it, fir the teck roots or stalks bein very hard it wouldna have been easy til ha' mown them aff just wi a circular sweep, so you hed to strike at them and it was called strikin teck.

AB: But it would be quite difficult to lift it off if there was a good bit of hard stalk left, wouldn't it, or could you pick it up fairly easily?

TT: Well of course them 'at was strikin the teck knew the... right places to go to, an it wasna just any kind o haether 'at was selectit fir teck, it was only the haether 'at they consider't to be suitable.

AB: The name suggests that it was also used for thatching.

TT: Ah yes, of coorse that's true, it was used for thatching, an that was aalso used as beddeen fir the human bein... Yes, fir the people. Hit was consider't to be by wey o bein a...pretty luxurious baed, a teck bed. They would select the heather cowes aal about the saem length, an placed them in i the bed very tightly, and then put straw on the top. And no doot that resembled a interior spring!...

And a maeshie, a maeshie o teck of course was a pretty unruly bundle, an when they were rowin a boat, the — what shall I call it, from the oar? When you pull't the oar through the water an lifted it up of course it caused a disturbance in the water — it still does that when you're rowin a boat! — and...the skill ir the strength o your rowin was judged be the whantity o water 'at you could dislodge ir disturb, and that disturbit waater wis referred til as 'vills'. An anyboady 'at wis a very expaert ir a very strong rower...they would say 'at they were aeble to pit up a vill laek a maeshie o taeck!

AB: But if it was used for thatching would you use it instead of the straw, the hallows of straw you lay on the roof, or was it just used for the simmonds?

TT: Weel this is a thing 'at I'm not paerfectly sure of. I never saw a roof thatched wi heather ... no, not even wi heather simmonts: I did know 'at heather simmonts was in existence, but I never saw heather simmonts bein used, or yet did I see haether bein used as thatch.

GLOSSARY AND FORM OF TRANSCRIPTION

The transcriptions in this article, like those in *Tocher* (see Bruford 1979: 341–3 for an earlier note on transcription practice) are impressionistic rather than strictly phonetic: they try to give the flavour of the dialect and accent without making the words too difficult for anyone who reads English to recognise. Shetland spelling conventions are not dogmatically adhered to, notably in the case of *th*; most Shetland texts write *da* and *dat* for 'the' and 'that', but to my ear there is usually a distinction in the speech of most Shetlanders from the North Isles and North Mainland at least between the way they pronounce the initial consonants of 'they' and 'day'. *T* for unvoiced *th* is commoner in Tom's speech, and has been rendered as *t'*. I do not write *ch* for *j*, which is usually unvoiced, but the next step, *sh* for *ch* may be shown.

On vowels, the umlaut indicates much the same sounds as in German for *ö* and *ü*. I use *ä* where an *a* is shorter or higher (more like *e*) than in standard English; occasionally it, like *ë*, indicates a diaeresis, where a long vowel or diphthong breaks into two distinct syllables (*maër* for mare, though this like many features may vary from one time to another that the word is used; where the sound could not be a diphthong, as in *fier*, I have dispensed with the symbol). Otherwise *ae* ideally indicates a long open *e* (French *è*, which would ideally be written *ai*) replaces *ea*, *ee*, or short *e*, as in *paets*. Similarly *oa* can be used to show a broader long *o*. I use *oo* or *ow* in preference to *ou* for clarity; if *ou* is left in a standard English spelling it is pronounced as in standard English. Otherwise I generally follow the Scots Style Sheet in omitting apostrophes after *wi*, *o*, *-in* and so on, though they are used for letters omitted at the beginning of a word (*'at*). Some vowel differences from standard English can be shown by omitting a final *e* (*hom*, *cam*).

The north Yell and Unst dialects often make a short *e* into *ee* (*eeg* for egg). This part of Shetland regularly uses *wh* for *qu* (so *white* may mean quite); I occasionally use old Scots *quh* for an intermediate form like Welsh *chw*. Another local peculiarity is turning the long *a*, written *aa*, of other parts of Shetland into *au*, especially before nasals (*laund*). In fact as final *d* is often, but not always, unvoiced to *t* (and final or even medial *v* to *f*) 'land' may end up as *launt*. Other endings like *-in(g)* and *-ion* are lengthened, and the pronunciation of *pronoonsiaesheen* can be quite impressive.

The most noticeable difference in the grammar of the Northern Isles is the formation of the perfect tense with the verb to be rather than to have: 'we're seen' rather than 'we've seen'. Other past tense forms in strong and irregular verbs are usually similar to mainland Scots (*pat* for put, *geed* for went, *wänd* for wound) as are forms like *didna*, or *they are/there*, *they were* for there is, there was. Shetlanders tend not to use the neuter pronoun, and things are 'he' or 'she' rather than 'it'. Another peculiarity in North Yell seems to be the doubling of prepositions, so that 'under' becomes 'inunder', 'in' 'in atil', and even 'out of' is 'oot ot o'. Some of the most characteristic Shetland speech, finally, uses no strange forms of words, but simply uses the words in a way that may puzzle readers or delight them: 'what was efter o the day' rather than 'the rest ...', 'the staundin pairt of a week' (greater part ...), or 'ither as' for 'except that'.

References below are mostly to SND (the Scottish National Dictionary), the most recent authoritative source for most Shetland forms, sometimes also to Jak. (Jakobsen 1928–32). ON = Old Norse.

aff-bendin	unharnessing
as *can mean*	than
axed	asked
baet	small sheaf (or bent)
bend, bent	harness (verb)
bendies	harness (noun)

big (verb)	build
bigger, biggit	builder, built
brods	boards
burra	the heath-rush (*cf* lubba below)
caa	call *or* drive
catter op	cover roughly? (not in SND, but *cf* catter-batter)
clibber	pack-saddle
cowes	clumps (of heather)
cuddie	small basket (see SND)
feel	turf (SND fail)
fettle	carrying-strap (of a kishie)
flaakie	mat (of straw and or floss simmonts)
floss	the common rush
forth, fort'	out, outside
gointer	saddle-strap (SND gointack, Jak. gongtag)
gossie simmonts	coarse straw rope (SND gorsimmen)
gŭd, gud	went
hallow	bundle or armful of straw
hent	lift, grip
hairst	harvest, autumn
hidmast	last (hindmost)
hit	it
howlt	hold
ill-vickit	awkward, capricious (of animals: *cf* Scots ill-trickit and SND sv vik)
ir	or, *sometimes* are
kaepar	(see note 9)
kemp	compete
kishie	flexible basket of straw and bent or floss simmonts
lag o oo	lock of wool
lay up; layer up	load (verb), make a pile; loader
leed	load (noun)
(a) lock	a lot (SND lock n.[2])
lubba	heath-rush (burra) and similar coarse grasses (SND)
maeshie	a carrying-net of simmonts (SND maise, from ON meiss, basket)
mark	a merkland: rental unit of land once valued at 13/4d
mōls	muzzle (SND mull)
mossy	boggy; of peat, soft fibrous upper layer
mŭl(d)	loose earth, peat dust (SND muild)
neebie	top of clibber (see SND kneebie, ON knipa, peak)

peerie	little
riggit	harnessed
riva-kishie	net basket (see note 6)
roog	pile, small stack (ON hrúga)
scattald	hill ground, common pasture (see SND sv skatt)
scye	scythe
simmonts	hand-twisted rope of straw, floss, here usually bent grass
skave	askew (ON skeifr)
skroo	(corn) stack (SND scroo, ON skrúf)
smook	put on or off (garment) (SND smoo)
straēn	straw (adjective)
teck (noun)	thatch, fine heather (see Appendix C)
teck (verb), teckit	thatch, thatched
thryte	trip, turn? (not in SND or Jak.)
varnickel pin	connector on clibber (SND varnagel)
vill	wave from oar-stroke
wir	our, *sometimes* were
wiss	us
wymegirt	belly-band (wame-girth)

NOTES

1. 'North Yell' is not a separate island, but the northern end of the island of Yell, which shares some features of dialect and culture with the neighbouring island of Unst rather than the rest of Yell, and from the Reformation to 1868 formed a separate parish with its other neighbour Fetlar. Physically, however, North Yell is like the rest of the island — a vast blanket of peat bog where the cultivation or settlement never seems to have been attempted beyond a coastal fringe less than a mile deep.
2. Tom Tulloch's own words in *Tocher* 30 (Bruford 1979) are the main source for the information in the introduction.
3. See account below, pp. 55–6, for how this peat 'mould' (earth, mud, or when dry, dust) was obtained.
4. *Bend, bendies, aff-bendin* all apply to the horse's harness as a whole. The terms describe the action of putting it on.
5. For the parts of the clibber see Fenton and Laurenson 1964: 10–12 and fig. VII *Varnickle* is stressed on the second syllable.
6. The riva-kishie (the v often sounds more like an f) is peculiar to Unst and Yell according to Jakobsen (1928–32) and I have not heard of it being used in the southern half of Yell. Fenton 1978: 249 quotes a Fetlar form *reppakishie* which suggests that it may occasionally have been used there, but I think I remember Jamesie Laurenson mentioning it as an Unst speciality. Jakobsen's suggestions about the derivation of the first element, if followed through, seem contradictory and overlapping, but SND *sv riv*[2], to sew roughly, seems the most convincing.
7. This word may simply be 'buildings', but it is not Tom's usual pronunciation of that.
8. The word 'cuddie' was most often used for a 'bait cuddie', a small straw or docken basket 10–15m across used to hold fishing bait.
9. Jakobsen (1928–32) derives this from ON *keppr*, a cudgel (*cf* Gaelic *cabair*, a beam?) but the Scots verb *kep*, to catch, restrain, etc., seems a more likely origin: *cf* SND sv *kepper*, which favours this origin though citing Norwegian *kipling* in the same sense.

10 The wording here is interesting: it suggests that the first sacks imported to Shetland for local use were of (hempen) canvas, and the term 'hemp bags' remains in use even after jute became the usual material.

11 Normally when straw kishies were used to carry peat they were held upside down in the maeshie like riva-kishies in North Yell, but for peat mould the *fettle* (carrying-loop) of the kishie seems to have been hung on the horns of the clibber before the maeshie was hooked on to them to hold the kishie in an upright position.

12 Regattas (which now in fact normally involve sailing rather than rowing races) have been the occasions of the most significant regular summer social gatherings for Shetland district communities this century.

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