
Study Visit in Shetland

Study Visit in Lerwick, Shetland

The third and final study visit of the HerInDep project took place between 29 January and 1 February in Shetland. Andrew Jennings (PI) and Andrew Lind (CoI) welcomed colleagues from Charles University (Czechia) and Kaunas University of Technology (Lithuania) to UHI Shetland (Lerwick) for a programme of project meetings and first-hand cultural experiences.

Once the project team had completed their journey to Shetland by boat, plane and car, proceedings began with a meeting between the project team and local stakeholders. The stakeholders included our project partners, Shetland Heritage Association and Shetland Amenity Trust, as well as other third-party groups, such as Dr Marc Chivers, Director of Moder Dy, a local non-profit coastal and maritime heritage company. The meeting began with short (10min) presentations from each of the HerInDep teams (UK, CZ & LT) to provide useful context for the other participants. This was followed by a roundtable discussion between the team and the attendees on their experiences and views of/on heritage and depopulation in Shetland. The project team were able to capture and record these exchanges and answer questions from the stakeholders regarding HerInDep's objectives and upcoming plans. Discussion continued at dinner, which followed the formal session. The second day (30 January) began with a walking-tour of Lerwick, which featured several activities associated with UpHellyAa, including the revealing of the galley, the parading Jarl's Squad and the posting of the UpHellyAa 'Bill'. Jennings and Lind were on-hand to explain these activities and provide some background information regarding the history and culture of Shetland. Following lunch at the UHI Shetland campus, the team assembled for a project review meeting. This proved to be very productive; the team made plans for future activities (including the upcoming publications and organization of the Prague conference in 2025) and reviewed the progress of each of the national teams. This meeting was attended virtually by Nataly Trushina (CZ) and Conan Doyle (CZ). After all project business had been addressed, Jennings and Lind gave a lecture to the rest of the team on the history, development and importance of UpHellyAa in Shetland. This provided useful contextual information for that evening's events.

After grabbing some dinner, the project team took to the streets of Lerwick once more. They were able to secure an ideal vantage point to witness the UpHellyAa fire procession and celebrations. To ensure that the project team received the authentic UpHellyAa experience, following the procession they made their way to the Sound Hall in Lerwick upon the invitation of one of the hall's hostesses, Robina Barton (Secretary of the Shetland Heritage Association). Intrinsicly connected to the festival, the dozens of halls throughout Lerwick act as venues where Shetlanders come together to celebrate. At these halls celebrants eat and drink local produce, dance to traditional and modern music, and witness the 'acts' of the various 'squads' who perform a circuit of the all the halls, performing at each. The halls open from around 8pm and stay open until around 7am the following morning. Given the late night, the team reassembled the following day (1 February) at 3pm for a final team meeting and reflections session. During the reflection session they noted how inclusive, organic and community-led the festival was, commenting that it was a prime example of 'living heritage'! The project team's thoughts and comments were recorded by Jennings and Lind. With the conclusion of the study visits, the teams' attentions have turned to the publication of the special issue of the International Journal of Heritage Studies, due later this year.

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