TEXTILES IN SHETLAND TODAY

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Textiles in Shetland have always been connected to production. Historically, items were made for trade and sale, or for practical use as clothing or in the home. But the necessity of producing textiles for economic reasons is, and always has been, inseparable from the experience and creativity of making. Underneath the iconic images lies an interesting picture of the individual and shared identities that have been shaped by Shetland's textiles over the course of centuries.

The relationship between Shetland's people and textile production has not always been a happy one. Production of textiles in Shetland has inevitably decreased in the twenty-first century, as have all types of craft all over the industrialised world. Shetlanders no longer rely on wool, knitting and weaving to survive. This is not a bad thing. With the absence of necessity comes the freedom to enjoy, investigate and embrace a shared past.

That long history of textiles extends into the present and continues to play an important role in Shetland's culture and economy, in the daily lives of people. Just like the absence of a specific method of knitting or making, there is no single way in which textiles have affected people in Shetland as a whole, or as individuals. One way of trying to grasp some of the impact is by looking at how textiles inspire, influence and drive Shetland's designers, craftspeople and artists today.

Shetland's designers and makers are diverse in their approach, but share common influences related to familial and historic links and to the landscape of the ides. Behind the people making, there are a number of organisations which fuel, drive and support textiles in Shetland today. Leading this is the Shetland Museum and Archives. The organisation as a whole nurtures a sense of identity, confidence and

inspiration for the public as well as makers, while the shop commissions some of the best of the isles' craft. The result is a real thirst for locally made textiles, particularly in traditional designs as well as modern variations. As one of the most tangible and identifiable elements of Shetland's past, textiles allow people today to connect with their heritage.

There are several other organisations dedicated to keeping Shetland's culture of textiles alive. The Shetland Textile Museum gives equal space to exhibiting its historic collection together with new design in the premises at the Böd of Gremista, a former fishing station and the birthplace of Shetland's foremost knitting patron, Arthur Anderson. The Ann Sutton Foundation in Yell provides residencies for weavers to help bridge the gap between education and industry. The Shetland Guild of Spinners, Knitters, Weavers and Dyers works to preserve traditional hand skills, while responsible businesses help nurture emerging talent. The Shetland College has been instrumental in teaching the latest generation of designers through a degree programme in Contemporary Textiles. Perhaps the most impressive aspect about of Shetland textiles today is the way that these organisations come together with the crofting community through the annual textiles festival, Shetland Wool Week.

Textiles have become so deeply rooted in Shetland's culture and heritage that it is impossible to imagine a future without them. The symbolic, cultural and physical remainders of centuries of production will ensure that textiles in Shetland are never a distant memory but remain as part of a way of life, a badge of identity and a living, breathing craft.





















