



**Lerwick Waterfront –** In recent Years there has undoubtedly been significant change in the North Ness, Hay's Dock and 'Shearer's' areas of Lerwick. Even at a glance, one is struck by the quantity of buildings in the left-hand picture that no longer exist. The 'Barrel Factory' at the North Ness, Young's Seafood Building, the old huts and sheds at Brown's Road, Althing Seafoods, and in the foreground are Shearer's old sheds, which are now home to Shetland Line. Note also the lack of Malakoff slipway cover, which would now be clearly visible from this angle. The slow march of industry away from the centre of Lerwick coupled with changes in economic activity and focus rendered many of these buildings obsolete.



was Thulecraft, using the premises for their polystyrene box-making operations. Perhaps in the not too distant future Robertson's Oil Depot might also find a new home elsewhere. Nevertheless, at Hay's Dock the new Shetland Museum and Archives will no doubt breath new life into a once dilapidated area.



**Old St Clair and Dry Dock** – this picture was taken at the same time as the one at the top left. Much change has taken place down on the foreshore at Holmsgarth as Northlink took over the contract for the North Isles from P&O in October 2002 and built their new terminal facilities. The old tradition of ‘seeing off the North boat’ is now an entirely different affair. Tighter security and stricter passenger safety measures mean that instead of saying farewell to loved ones whilst shivering on the pier, one is now only allowed as near to the ship as the foot of the stairs in the passenger terminal. Safer and more comfortable as this may be, a certain element of romance has been lost as the climax of the seemingly endless quarter of an hour – after the ship was ‘secured for sea’ and before the mooring ropes were taken aboard – was strolling down to the very end of the pier as the ship pulled away. Even more enthusiastic waving then ensued as those on board made their way to the after decks in order to catch a last glimpse of their friends or family on the end of the pier. The walk back from the pier end to the P&O car park – sometimes involving paper hankies – was usually accompanied by a sense of sadness mixed with satisfaction. Not satisfaction in the sense that those to

whom you were saying farewell had finally gone, but satisfaction in the fact that you had stayed for the duration and those who were southward bound had been given a ‘proper’ send off.

Another interesting aspect of the above picture is of course that the dry dock is now no longer with us since the Malakoff took the decision that it had ceased to be economically viable. Arguably, though it may not have been the most picturesque of structures it did for a number of years provide a modicum of shelter to the dedicated pier waver, particularly during a cold northerly breeze. In some respects it was no surprise that due to stiff competition from larger ship chandlers in the south and on foreign shores, the dry-dock became unsustainable. In any case – for better or worse – the shorescape of Lerwick will no doubt continue to evolve to the tune of the free market economy and facilities like the dry dock will live on only in memory, photographs and the Malakoff’s balance sheets.



**An inter-island ferry becomes ensconced in the dry dock – photograph courtesy of Douglas Garden.**



Seen here with her 'mouth' removed and windows masked for painting – photograph courtesy of Douglas Garden.



Estonian trawler anchored in Lerwick harbour – photograph courtesy of Douglas Garden.

The *Old St Clair* and *Dry Dock* picture can make further comment on the wider economy as one observes the klondykers in the distance behind Bressay. Most prevalent in the 60s, 70s and 80s, they came to Shetland in considerable numbers to tranship fish caught locally, process it on board and then head back to Eastern Europe and the Baltic States. Latterly crewmembers often came ashore and were a common sight in and



Klondyker anchored in Bressay sound – photograph courtesy of Aubrey Jamieson.

around Lerwick, particularly on fine days. Life on board these ships was fairly rudimentary to say the least so the crews enjoyed the jaunt ashore despite not having very much money to spend'. One could generally tell that there were 'Russians' on Da Street due to the unique aroma of Eastern bloc cigarette smoke. It is interesting to note that the Soviet vessel *Kvant* pictured on the right is flying the Union Flag and the Estonian flag between the mastheads, although it also has the Russian tricolour flying from the jackstaff. In seafaring tradition the world over, the jackstaff (flagpole at the stern of a vessel) is considered the most important location for displaying one's colours and as such should not be tampered with in a sacrilegious manner. During the 1980s, when Moscow was beginning to loosen its hold on member states of the Soviet Union, nationalism was an increasingly powerful force in the push for independence. It could therefore be ruminated that those on board this ship would not risk interfering with the Russian tricolour on the jackstaff, but still, in order to make a point were proudly displaying their Estonian flag high up in the rigging whilst at the same time giving us a friendly nod of recognition by flying the Union Jack.

The picture on the right shows a different view of the *Kvant* and from this angle the red band around her funnel with the hammer and sickle can be clearly observed (on an enlarged version of the picture at any rate). This is in itself a symbol of a bygone age, when Soviet power was at its height and seemed so well established. So much so that events at the close of the 1980s – when it all came crashing down – took much of the world by surprise.

**Conclusion** – from these photographs and crude observations it is possible to conclude that shipspotting, harbourwatching or whatever you want to call it, can actually lead to a better understanding of what is taking place in the wider world. Lerwick harbour could be considered a microcosm of certain general trends across Western Europe and even the United States.<sup>ii</sup> Industry is being pushed to peripheries of human settlement whilst town or city centres are increasingly given over to service type economical activities. Given the threat of international



**The *Kvant* seen from her rear port quarter – photograph courtesy of Douglas Garden.**



**Another Soviet ship anchored in Lerwick Harbour – photograph courtesy of Douglas Garden.**

terrorism, and an increased focus on personal health and safety it is little wonder that ‘waving the boat off’ now takes a significantly different format than even just a few years ago. Empires have risen and fallen over the last few millennia and many of these events have been recorded for us in writing<sup>iii</sup>. The television allowed an entire ‘western’ generation – from the comfort of their sitting rooms – to witness the break-up of the Soviet Union. In the ‘electronic age’ information can be so readily accessed that we perhaps simply *look* at what is taking place in our cities, towns or harbours without fully appreciating the reality of what is occurring. This section of *Hidden Corners Revealed* is therefore trying to encourage the observer to by all means use electronic sources, but to go beyond these and discover the wealth of pictorial and written information accessible in the Library, along with that which can be obtained through a deeper, more informed observance of the physical world outside.

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<sup>i</sup> Several 'Shetland Life' articles concerning Russians in and around Lerwick can be accessed in the Shetland Collection at the Shetland Library, these include –

Brown, Karl, 'Making Friends with the Russians', *Shetland Life*, no 67 (May 1986), pp. 41 – 42.

Herning, Derick, 'Making Friends with the Russians', *Shetland Life*, no 63 (January 1986), pp. 6-8.

Nicolson, James, R 'Making Friends with the Russians' *Shetland Life* no 62, (December 1985), pp. 4 – 7.

Smith, Douglas, 'Making Friends with the Russians' *Shetland Life* no 63, (January 1986), p8 & 18.

See also – Irvine, James W., *Lerwick, The Birth and Growth of an Island Town* (1985: Lerwick), Lerwick Community Council p249. Shelved in Shetland Collection at Z941.11.

<sup>ii</sup> See – J Esser and J Hirsch (1989) 'The crisis of fordism and the dimensions of a 'post-fordist' regional and urban structure' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.

Susan S. Fainstein, Ian Gordon and Michael Harloe (1992) *Divided Cities: New York & London in the Contemporary World (Studies in Urban and Social Change)* Blackwell Publishers.

Academic Essay 'Critical Analysis' by Trevor Jamieson tries to explain some of Esser and Hirsch's work in the context of Glasgow and Chicago, with discernable parallels between the two cities themselves and general trends in Lerwick. **Click the link on previous page for access to a PDF of this essay.**

<sup>iii</sup> A multi-volume edition of Edward Gibbons' *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* is held at Dewey No 937 in the Shetland Library.

See also – Eric J Hobsbawm *The Age of Empire 1875 – 1914* Weidenfield & Nicolson (1987: London), shelved at Dewey No 940.28 in the Shetland Library.