

Lerwick wasn't always the capital of Shetland. In fact, it wasn't until the 16th century when it became an important station for the Dutch herring fleet that it began to grow as a community. What started as a scattering of huts along a winding shoreline track, soon developed into a thriving network of tightly packed narrow lanes. These led on to what is now Commercial Street – the town's main shopping area. It took over the role of island capital from Scalloway in 1708.

In the 19th century, new docks to accommodate the fishing fleet were created to the north of the town. Hay's Dock, at Freefield, was the centre of the island's fishing industry, the site of which is now home to Shetland Museum and Archives. The town continued to expand during the 19th century up beyond Hillhead, where the Town Hall is located, sprawling south into the area of Sound and north into Gremista.

Today, Lerwick is home to around 7,500 people and is still a thriving port town, welcoming commercial vessels, fishing boats and cruise ships all year round.

## A short history of Lerwick

The natural harbour attracts a wide range of visiting boats and the town has a lot to offer visitors with plenty of shops, cafes and tourist attractions, including Shetland Museum and Archives, Mareel arts centre and the ancient broch of Clickimin.

Lerwick, the islands' capital, takes its name from the Old Norse *Lerwick*, meaning 'muddy bay', and is sheltered by the island of Bressay.

# Welcome to Lerwick



## Lerwick

Britain's most northerly town



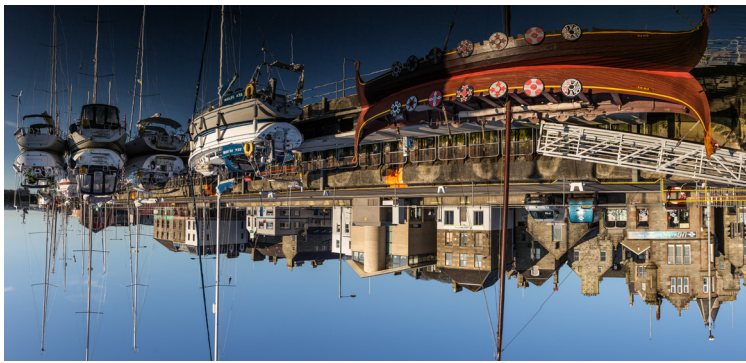
A scenic walk around Lerwick so it's worth scheduling a day or two of your time to explore the town and what it has to offer. There are lots of visitor attractions in Lerwick.

One of the best ways to appreciate the sights of Lerwick is on foot. A path follows the cliff top from Twageos Road to Bressay Road, providing an easy walk past the cemetery and around the **Knab**, where you can enjoy the viewpoint with its excellent vantage point overlooking Bressay Sound. Wave-washed slabs of gently sloping sandstone provide haul out points for the many common seals that can be seen basking around the Knab and at the **Sletts**. More energetic walkers can continue around **Brewick Ness of Sound**, passing **Pullar's Loch**, a good spot to see wildfowl and perhaps even catch a glimpse of an otter. The Ness also contains the remains of Second World War gun emplacements once designed to protect the south entrance to Lerwick Harbour.

Alternatively, take the pathway from **Clickimin** around the east side of the Clickimin Loch and on to the summit of **Stoney Hill**, from where the setting of Lerwick and its harbour can be properly appreciated. A hike along Cunningham Way, on the west side of the hill, will take you to **Sandy Loch**, the source of Lerwick's water supply.

## Things to see and do

Albert Dock David Gifford



Clickimin Broch VisitScotland / Stuart Brunton

Small boat harbour and Tolbooth The small dock to the south of **Victoria Pier** is the home of Lerwick's lifeboat, a 1997 Severn Class vessel whose coxswain and crew have been decorated for several extraordinary rescue operations. The *Swan*, a restored five herring drifter built in Lerwick in 1900, can often be seen here, though from May to September she's often used for sail training and cruises around the islands. The *Dim Riv*, an imaginative reconstruction of an old Norse galley, does trips around the harbour during the summer. You can also catch a boat trip here to see the seabird cliffs at Bressay and Noss.

The peach-coloured building next to the small boat harbour is known as the old **Tolbooth**. Dating from 1776, it originally housed the sheriff court and prison, though it later became a post office. Fishermen's Mission and today is the headquarters of the Lerwick Lifeboat Station.



Shetland Museum and Archives Promote Shetland / Euan Myles



Small boat harbour and Tolbooth VisitScotland / Kenny Lam



Shopping for knitwear Promote Shetland / Euan Myles



Dining out in Lerwick Promote Shetland / Euan Myles

## Useful information

### Bus services

See the Lerwick timetable on the ZetTrans website [zettrans.org.uk](http://zettrans.org.uk)

### Ferry to Bressay

A car ferry runs between Lerwick and the island of Bressay seven days a week. The ferry leaves from behind Albert Buildings.

### Visitor information point

Lerwick iCentre, Market Cross | +44 (0) 1595 693434

### Museums

Shetland Museum and Archives, Hay's Dock  
Shetland Textile Museum, Bòd of Gremista  
Up Helly Aa Exhibition, St Sunniva Street

### Public toilets

Harbour House opposite Victoria Pier  
Knab | King George V Play Park

### Shops

Commercial Street | Commercial Road  
For information, see [livinglerwick.co.uk](http://livinglerwick.co.uk)  
Toll Clock Shopping Centre

### Leisure centre

Clickimin Leisure Centre | +44 (0)1595 741000

### Health centre

Lerwick Health Centre, South Road | +44 (0)1595 693201

### Hospital

Gilbert Bain Hospital, South Road | +44 (0)1595 743000

### Police 101

### 2024 | Disclaimer

All details believed to be accurate at the time of going to print.





↑ South end of Commercial Street Jonathon Butler

### Lodberries

At the south end of Commercial Street you'll find the **Lodberries**, built in the 18th century. The word lodberry comes from the Old Norse *hladberg*, meaning a place where boats could be brought alongside for loading or unloading. In Lerwick, they consisted of a jetty with a store or house built out into the sea where boats could pull up and drop off their cargo direct to waiting merchants. Their sea frontage also made them convenient for the covert smuggling of gin, tobacco and tea. Today they are mainly private residences, the best known and most photographed of which was used as the home of DI Jimmy Perez in the BBC's *Shetland* drama series.

### Commercial Street

Stone-flagged **Commercial Street**, the heart of the town, is the first port of call for most visitors. Winding between tall stone buildings it gives a unique character to one of the finest small town centres in Britain and the hub of much of Shetland's social and business life. Here you can pick up local knitwear, including hand-knitted Fair Isle, as well as trinkets, souvenirs and local fudge to take home with you. There are also several cafes and restaurants serving local produce. You will also find the main tourist information centre at the town's **Market Cross**.

### Town Hall

Lerwick's **Town Hall** is a beautifully preserved building with Scots Baronial and Gothic influences designed by Alexander Ross and completed in 1883. Rich stained glass – best seen in late afternoon or early evening sunlight – depicts characters from Shetland's history. A guidebook and phone app are available.

Across the road from the Town Hall, prominent crow-stepped gables lend the more restrained **county buildings** a particularly Scottish flavour. They house the sheriff court, police station and cells, and also featured in BBC's *Shetland* series.

### Shetland Library

**Shetland Library** occupies the building at Lower Hillhead. Built in the 1960s, it has recently been extensively modernised and redecorated. There's free Wifi available throughout the library and public computers you can book to use.

Below the library, on King Harald Street, you'll find the **King George VI parks**, comprising a well-equipped play park and adjacent flower park with a tennis court, bowling green and miniature golf in the summer months.

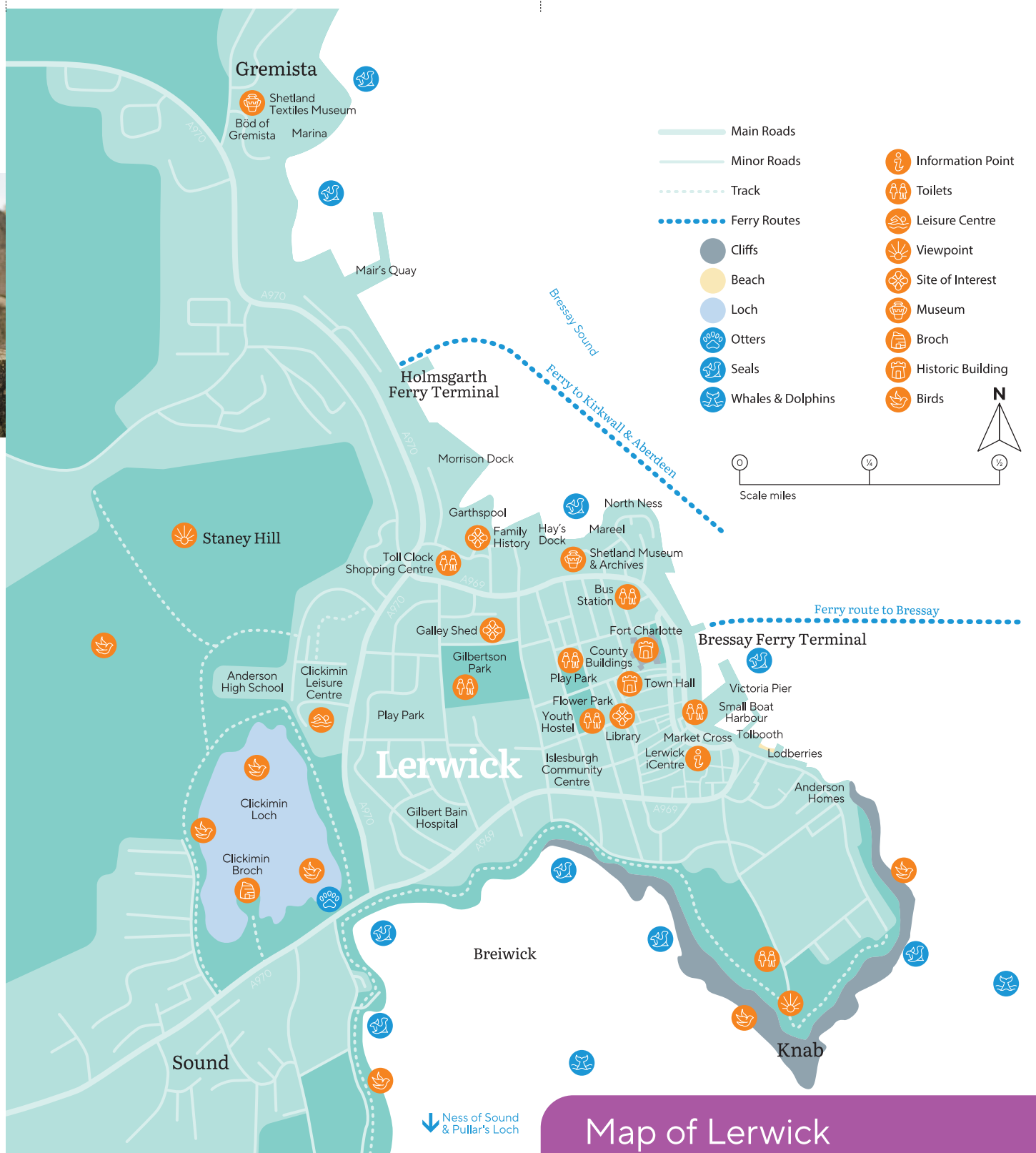
### Fort Charlotte

At the northern end of Commercial Street you'll find **Fort Charlotte**, from which there are excellent views of Lerwick Harbour across to Bressay. Built in the 1660s, its pentagonal form was intended to house a garrison, defend the landward area and deny the use of Bressay Sound to any enemy. Unfortunately, it was burned by the Dutch in 1673 and lay ruined until 1782 when the barrack blocks seen today were built. Named after King George III's wife Queen Charlotte, it is the most complete surviving fort of its type.

### Mareel

**Mareel** arts centre, which houses two cinemas, a live music venue and recording studios, is next door to the museum. A range of films are shown daily and there are frequent concerts reflecting a range of musical genres. There is also a cafe-bar providing light refreshments.

↓ Mareel David Gifford



## Map of Lerwick



↑ Hay's Dock David Gifford

### Up Helly Aa exhibition

On the last Tuesday in January, nearly 1,000 torch-bearing guizers march behind a Viking longship (galley), which is burnt with great ceremony following a day of festivities and as a prelude to a night of revelry. The Up Helly Aa exhibition, in the St Sunniva Street **Galley Shed**, is open during the summer months, displaying memorabilia, photos and videos.

### Shetland Museum and Archives

**Shetland Museum and Archives** is located at the historic **Hay's Dock**. It is an invaluable resource for both visitors and locals, introducing Shetland's story and providing a gateway to other local sites of interest.

The archives hold the written record of Shetland's past dating back to the 15th century. There is also a large oral history collection, musical archives and microfilm copies of local newspapers, parochial records and census records. All these can be viewed in the search room.

The building also includes a cafe-restaurant serving local produce; a shop selling local crafts and gifts; an exhibition space; and a 120-seat auditorium. It is open Tuesday to Sunday and entry is free.

If you are tracing your Shetland ancestors, you can contact Shetland Family History Society at [secretary@shetlandfhs.org.uk](mailto:secretary@shetlandfhs.org.uk). The society resides at the **Shetland Amenity Trust** building at Garthspool and is open by appointment.

### Clickimin

Lerwick's largest open public space is around the **Clickimin Loch**. The **Clickimin Leisure Centre** has superb sports facilities and an excellent leisure pool.

### Clickimin Broch

At the southern end of the loch is **Clickimin Broch**, one of Shetland's major archaeological sites. It seems that the earliest structure, a Bronze Age house, was built on this small holm in the loch around 600BC. In the Iron Age, further houses, a defensive ring wall, an impressive block house and the Broch tower, were constructed.

Up Helly Aa  
David Gifford

