

Dr. Jakob Jakobsen

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It was in 1909 I think that I first had the honour of meeting Dr. Jakobsen. I had just graduated that year, and was casting round for a theme on which I might attempt some original research. I knew of Jakobsen's great work in Shetland, and I wondered if I might, on a much more modest scale, do for Orkney something like what he had done so magnificently for Shetland. So, hearing he was to visit Orkney that year, I wrote and asked him if he could visit Rousay, my own native island, where my sister occupied a schoolhouse and would be very pleased to put him up for a week or longer. To our great pleasure he agreed to come, and for me that was an unforgettable and momentous week. For it confirmed my vague idea of research on the Orkney Dialect and Place-names, and I was granted a Carnegie scholarship of £100 to enable me to go round the isles and collect material. He was most kind and helpful in every way. I took him round to meet suitable 'authorities', and during his stay in Rousay he added vastly to his stock of Orcadian words and lore.

At the end of my scholarship year, however, I was faced by the task of earning a living, and having been appointed English Master in a Lancashire Secondary School I worked there for four years, at the end of which I married (4 days before the outbreak of the 1914-18 war), and about the

same time was appointed Headmaster of the Burgh School in Kirkwall. Having so much official work to do in connection with my school duties I had little time for working on my dialect research, and it was not until 1929 that the results were published by the Oxford University Press as *The Orkney Norn*. That work had already been submitted for a D. Litt. degree at Edinburgh University in 1926.

After 1909 Jakobsen visited Orkney two or three times, and on one of these visits he delivered a public lecture in Kirkwall. It was on that occasion that a learned Kirkwall lawyer, Mr. Drever (himself a Scandinavian scholar) in moving a vote of thanks paid Jakobsen a true and memorable compliment. Referring to his great work on Shetland Mr. Drever said: »This is not the work of a fugitive dilettante; it is unique and everlasting.«

His last visit was in 1914. In the spring of that year he had had a serious nervous break-down through overwork and other strain, and was for some time in a nursing-home in Denmark. One thing however which helped his recovery was his appointment to a Lectureship in Aberdeen University. There he delivered a series of lectures before coming up again to Orkney for his last visit.

This was, however, not his last *sight* of Orkney, for the following year after visiting Faroe he was returning to Denmark on board a steamer *The Botnia* which was intercepted by the British Navy and brought into Kirkwall Bay for examination. He was not permitted to go ashore, but an Orkney friend was allowed to go on board and talk to him.

And then in 1918, before the war ended, to the great grief of all who knew him and his work, he died at the relatively early age of 52. The value and importance of that work it is difficult to over rate — not only for Shetland but for Scandinavian philology as a whole. Perhaps the most readily available evidence of that fact may be seen in that great Norse scholar Alf Torp's *Nynorsk Etymologisk*

Ordbok where on almost every page reference is made for purposes of comparison to some word or words recorded from Shetland by Jakobsen.

Though he had previously produced a vast amount of work, including *inter alia* a Faeroese *Ordsamling og Register* (as Part II of Hammershaimb's *Antologi*), a doktor-thesis on *Det Norrøne Sprog på Shetland*, a splendid monograph on *Shetlandsøernes Stednavne*, and a preliminary review of Orkney's dialect — *Nordiske Minder især Sproglige på Orknørne*, etc. etc., there is no doubt that he regarded his huge *Etymologisk Ordbog over Det Norrøne Sprog på Shetland* as his *magnum opus*. Only three parts of that work had been published before his death — the large fourth and final part appearing three years after. But he had practically completed it all in Ms.

It was through that great work that I came into touch with his able and devoted sister Anna, Fru Horsbøl. She had definitely dedicated herself to the fulfilment of her beloved brother's earnest wish to have his *Ordbog* printed in English as well as in Danish so that it might be more accessible to Shetlanders and others who could not read Danish. With that end in view she had got into touch with Sir Wm. Craigie, our great lexicographer and part-editor of the vast *Oxford English Dictionary*. He had warmly encouraged her, and afterwards she came up here to Orkney and consulted me. She was an admirable English scholar herself, but she doubted whether she could adequately translate the *Ordbog* into good idiomatic English. I too gave her all the encouragement I could, and offered to read over her translation as she made it. That help she gladly accepted, and decided to make the attempt. The proofs were also examined by Dr. George Watson of the Oxford Dictionary and finally by Sir Wm. Craigie himself. It was a massive undertaking for a woman of her age, but she carried it through most ably and gallantly. The translation finally appeared in two large volumes —

An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn language in Shetland, published in London by David Nutt, the first in 1928 and the second in 1932. In the Preface she made generous acknowledgment to those who had helped her.

One might have thought that the fulfilment of such a task might have satisfied her that she had amply carried out her filial duty. But her energy seemed unbounded, and barely had this first task been concluded when she embarked on another — the translation and publishing of his *Shetlandsøernes Stednavne*. Again she had the same help, and again in the Preface made generous acknowledgment. The translation was published in 1936 as *The Place-Names of Shetland*. The value of that volume was also vastly enhanced by the inclusion of an Index to all names dealt with, which she had compiled herself and added.

In Faeroe and elsewhere, and especially in Shetland, all should be deeply grateful to the great scholar who left such work for posterity, but in that connection surely the self-sacrificing labour and energy of his devoted sister should never be forgotten.

ÚRTAK

Kanningarúrslit *dr. Jakobsens*, sum eg fyrstu ferð hitti í 1909, eggjaði mær til at fara undir sama rannsóknarstarv í Orknøyum, sum *dr. Jakobsen* hevði avrikað í Hetlandi. Men av ymsum atvoldum kom eg ikki at lata úr hondum úrslit míni (*The Orkney Norn*) fyrr enn í 1929.

Um granskningararbeiði *dr. Jakobsens* er at siga, at ilt er at meta ov høgt tann týdning og tað virði, sum tað hevur havt ikki einans fyri Hetland, men fyri alla norðurlenska málfroði.

Ongantið eigur at verða gloymt, hvussu ósjálvsekin systir hansara, *Anna Horsbøl*, stuðlað av kønum bretum, týddi og gav út høvuðsverk *dr. Jakobsens* (*An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland*, London 1928, 1932, og *The Place-Names of Shetland*, 1936).