



## Chairman's Letter

Plans for this year's 17th May Constitution Day are now well advanced and, at present, around a dozen Norwegians are currently expected. This number, however, may yet increase. This year's events falling on a Saturday, there is likely to be less direct school participation and so, it being very much a day for children, we would encourage parents and grandparents to come along to the Tog with their young people. On a more sombre note, many of us were saddened

to learn recently of the death of Alan Skene, from Stromness. Although perhaps not too widely known within ONFA nowadays, Alan had nevertheless played a significant part in the teaching of Norwegian in the early days, at a time when there was a growing demand from "O" Grade students for a "Higher" qualification. Being Principal Teacher of Modern Languages at Stromness, Alan was asked to take the task on board and, despite having to first learn the language himself, a daunting challenge which few would have been prepared to

meet, there were by all accounts few, if any, failures, such was the enthusiasm that he generated. For many years afterwards he met with Norwegian language enthusiasts to speak, read books and poetry and listen to music etc. A married man with four of a family, Alan was for 20 years Stromness Church Session Clerk and a keen member of the Orkney Field Club. He died peacefully at Macmillan House, at the age of 91, and will be missed by all who knew him for his humour, patience and humility.

Hilsen  
Tommy



A range of events is being organised to mark the 850th anniversary of the death of the founder of the cathedral, St. Rognavald.

Already underway is the major exhibition, 'Orkney in the 12th Century: Earl Rognavald and his Earldom' at the Orkney Museum, Tankerness House, Kirkwall.

This year's St. Magnus Festival will feature a number of events related to and inspired by the life of Rognavald: in particular

The main focus of events will be centred around the visit in late August of two groups from Grimstad, the birthplace of Earl Rognavald. The groups will be made up of members of the Fjaere Kirk, which has existing links with St Magnus Cathedral, and from the local History Society.

Watch local press for further details of events or check on the ONFA website at [www.orkney.com/norway](http://www.orkney.com/norway).

## How old are the stave churches?

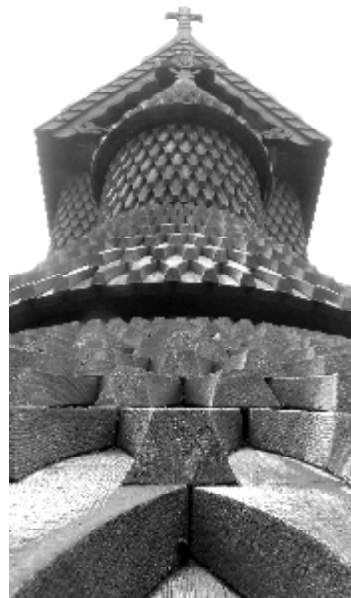
ONFA will join with the Scottish Society of Antiquaries and Orkney Heritage Society in presenting the Lindsay-Fischer lecture on 11 June.

The Lindsay-Fischer lectures were founded in 1980 in honour of Ian Gordon Lindsay (1906-66) and his friend Gerhard Fischer (1890-1977), both for their work on the historic architecture of Scotland and Norway respectively and for their achievement in promoting cordial relations between Scottish and Norwegian scholars. The Lindsay-Fischer lecture is given in Edinburgh and Aberdeen by a Scandinavian scholar, with the Fischer-Lindsay lecture given in Oslo and elsewhere by a Scottish scholar (this year by Ian Fisher). Recently the Strathmartine Trust agreed to help fund an extra date on the Scottish tour, to Kirkwall.

The lecturer is Dr Ola Storsletten, Research Scientist in the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research, who will present a com-

parison between the earlier datings of the stave churches based on stylistic and historical criteria and the latest dendrochronological results.

The lecture will be held in the St Magnus Centre at 7.30pm.

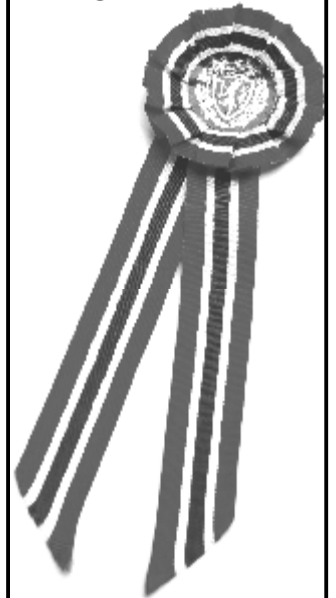


## Song of Norway

On 28th April a small but appreciative audience braved the elements to hear Bergen Mannskor perform in St. Magnus Cathedral. Their renditions of favourites such as Våren and Amazing Grace were well received and even those who did not already have

goose bumps from the cold must have felt a few at their finale of Ave Maria. Members of ONFA took the group on a tour the following day and they visited Highland Park before a Council reception and heading south on Wednesday.

## 17 May Programme



10.30am  
St. Olaf Cemetery  
Remembrance Service

1.00pm  
St. Magnus Cathedral  
Concert  
featuring  
Orkney Traditional  
Music Project

2.30pm  
'Tog'  
from the Pier Head  
to the Cathedral  
followed by  
Entertainment on  
the Kirk Green

7.30pm (for 8pm start)  
Constitution Day  
Party

Buffet and Dance  
at Stromness Hotel  
Tickets priced £15 from  
Orkadian Bookshop or  
Connie Grieve  
telephone Stromness  
850636.  
Bus from Kirkwall Travel  
Centre: 7.15pm (please book)

## For Norge 1939-1945



"IN MEMORY OF  
FOUR UNKNOWN  
NORWEGIAN  
SEAMEN..."

Each year our 17 May celebration begins with a short service of remembrance for the Norwegians for whom Orkney became the last resting place. It is a moving event and much appreciated by our Norwegian visitors. But what is the story behind these graves?

The Hosanger was a Norwegian cargo vessel managed by Westfal-Larsen & Co. A/S of Bergen. At 244 feet in length and 1599 tons she had been built in Bergen in 1911. She left Tananger on Jan 26 1940 in ballast for Leith. The 844 ton Faro, built in Bremerhaven in 1918 was sailing in ballast from Sarpsborg to Methil in Fife.

Norway was still neutral at the time, but the following night both ships, along with two Danish vessels, were torpedoed by a German submarine. U-20 had left Wilhelmshaven 21st Jan 1940, under the command of Harro von Klot-Heydenfeldt for operations around Orkney.

The astonishing website, [www.warsailor.com](http://www.warsailor.com) records the story of Magnus Sandvik. "When the torpedo hit at 23:00 on Jan. 27 he was just on his way up the ladder to the bridge to relieve the helmsman. He ran to the port lifeboat but it was destroyed, starboard lifeboat was stuck, all the lights had gone out. He had to jump overboard and stayed under water for a long time but the life vest they all had to wear at all times helped him get back to the surface, though as he came up again *Hosanger* sank and he was pulled under by the suction, but again he came up, then heard 2 of his shipmates call to him from a raft. According to this story another 2 men later joined them on the raft. He says they saw the lights from passing ships now and again, and as the day started dawning 2 trawlers came very near but never saw them.

"His shipmates simply quietly "went to sleep", 1 of the dead was washed away by the seas. Magnus was about to give in to the freezing cold himself when he spotted the destroyer. It went past him at first, but then came back. Lines were thrown down to him but upon seeing that he was unable to fasten them around himself, one of the men from the destroyer jumped overboard and swam to the raft to assist. The 3 dead sailors were also taken on board.

Sandvik was later transferred to a tug which took him to Kirkwall where he was admitted to a hospital. For a while he was unable to walk, had no feeling below his hips, but little by little, with the good care he received at the hospital he was able to move his legs again. He says the days spent there are among his fondest memories, but not so the memories of the day he had to help identify dead sailors, of whom there were many, as several ships had gone down near Orkney at the time. He was able to recognize 2 from *Hosanger*. The maritime declarations in Orkney and Norway also caused him great distress, leaving him feeling as if he himself was accused of sinking the ship. When asked his opinion on why he

had survived while his shipmates had frozen to death, he says he thinks it was due to the fact that he had been wearing wool undergarments while his mates didn't.

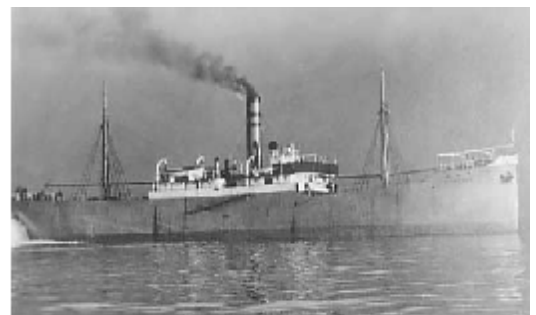
"On March 20 1940 the 721 ton *Tora Elise* was en route to England in convoy when she was attacked by a group of Heinkel aircraft. Norway was still neutral. The captain and 2 deck crew were badly wounded. D/S *Cygnus* went to assist and 1st Mate S. J. Svendsen of that ship took command of *Tora Elise*. The captain was found on the aft hatch, bleeding heavily from his injured legs, and on the deck amidships the bodies of the 2 mates were found, as well as the able seaman and the 2 injured deck crew.

"The ship was examined, and in addition to other damage the aft hatch was found to be destroyed and open, and as the seas were growing heavier in the increasing wind it was decided to head for Orkney, for fear the open hold would fill with water and sink the ship. The compass proved to be unreliable and at 01:25 the engines were stopped as they estimated to be off Auskerry light. With the help of a trawler which came to assist, *Tora Elise* was guided through the mine fields and into Kirkwall. In the morning a patrol boat with doctors came alongside, and after the injured had been given first aid they were transported to hospital. The casualties were also taken ashore that day; they were buried in Kirkwall on March 23. The crew set about repairing the damages, and on March 24 *Tora Elise* departed Kirkwall, and arrived Bergen 3 days later."

There are four unknown crew members buried at St. Olaf's but the following information was researched in 1987 and translated by Captain Carl Johan Melsom of *Jupiter* together with Ms Olava Øverland of *Aftenposten* and translated into English by the late Mrs. Margaret P. Spence. The full text, which contains more genealogical information, is on the ONFA website at [www.orkney.com/norway](http://www.orkney.com/norway).

### D/S HOSANGER

Sjøman - Adrian Bjaarstad  
2.2.1898 - 27.1.1940 from Fana  
Sjøman - Arthur M. Melkersen  
21.9.1896 - 27.1.1940 from Hadsel  
Sjøman - Søren Knutsen Nese  
22.7.1908 - 27.1.1940 from Tysnes  
Sjøman - Carsten Larsen  
28.10.1916 - 27.1.1940 from Bergen  
Sjøman - Thorvald Rasmussen  
6.12.1908 - 27.1.1940 from Bergen



D/S HOSANGER

## D/S FARO

Sjøman - Trygve Lund - 13.8.1897 - 27.1.1940 from Vestnes  
Sjøman - Storm Louis Jensen - 2.11.1900 - 27.1.1940 from Berg.  
Sjøman - Harry Lier 27.1.1940 from Oslo.  
Sjøman - Martin Holmen - 24.2.1921 - 27.1.1940 from Skjeberg.  
Sjøman - Johan Brandvik - 18.1.1917 - 27.1.1940 from Kristiansund.

## D/S TORA ELISE

Sjøman - Stian Hansen  
11.8.1918 - 20.3.1940 from Dypvag.  
Sjøman - Anders Gulliksen  
2.6.1887 - 20.3.1940 from Arendal.  
Sjøman - Berner Berntzen  
15.11.1895 - 20.3.1940 from Hisøy.  
Soldat - Martin Sylte  
3.8.1907 - 6.5.1940 farmer, Oyer. Born 3rd August 1907 in Ringeby. Sent to work on Setnesmoen to get it ready as an airfield. Was wounded in the leg during a bomb attack and put into field hospital. During the evacuation of Andalsnes he was in an English hospital ship, which brought him to Orkney where he died.  
Sjøman - Ottar Vabø -  
17.2.1905 - 8.5.1940, fireman, Austrheim. Born 17th February 1905 in Lindas, son of teacher Olav Olson Vabu and Erikka née Nordland. Married in 1930 in Bergen to Aslaug Bergljot Mjanger. 3 children. Was in S.S. ELNA E which sailed from Bergen on 4th May 1940. Was ill when the ship came to Kirkwall, was put in hospital and died there on 8th May the same year.

But this is all ancient history isn't it? Well no.

Last year members of the Fusa choir visited and they knew the family of Magnus Sandvik, who survived the War and served as a ship's captain. Unsurprisingly he never forgot the events of that winter's night in 1940. The story still resonates and they were pleased to hear of our simple act of remembrance.

Just a few months ago we received an e-mail from Leonard Chester who had come across our website. He wrote, "On the 20th March, 1940, I was the Royal Marines Bugler (aged 14 years 8 months) who attended the burial of Stian Hansen, Anders Gullisen and Berner Berntzen who were killed on D/S Tora Elise. I have since had their photographs from the Vare Falne, the Norwegian National Roll of Honour, together with a lot of information on their homes and families and the fact that Berner Bentzen was the first Norwegian Freemason to die in WW II. I have been back several times to visit their graves, it was an occasion that I cannot forget."

Neither should we. The service takes place at St. Olaf's Cemetery at 10.30am on 17th May.



## How Orcadians helped Norway gain Independence

*So what's all this 17 May stuff about then? Bjorn Kahrs of VNO explains Norway's circuitous route to Independence and the part played by Orcadians.*

We can celebrate Norway's Constitution Day the seventeenth of May thanks to some named and some unnamed Orcadians.

How is it possible to allege this?

It is of course not due to only the Orcadians, but among the unnamed press ganged sailors in the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic wars were Orcadians and in the exhibition in Stromness Museum just now you will see a naval hat, epaulettes and dress sword on display that belong to Captain John Baikie RN. He was just one of the helpers in the process leading up to Norway declaring themselves independent of Denmark in 1814. Some other names are George Gaudie from North Ronaldsay, and a man by the name of Kent who lived in the island of Rousay and had been Admiral Nelson's cabin boy.

Let us look at some simplified Norwegian history. We are back in 1801 and Denmark-Norway wants to stay neutral during the Napoleonic Wars together with Russia

and Sweden. Did the British like this? The answer is no and Admiral Hyde Parker with Lord Nelson as his second in command had their naval fight outside Copenhagen and stopped any plans for a league of neutrality in the fight against Napoleon. Of course the Danish-Norwegian king was not very pleased. He is less pleased in 1807 when the British Navy with Orcadian sailors on board capture nearly all the ships from his navy and as a result the king enters an alliance with Napoleon. Two more years pass and Sweden loses Finland to Russia in 1809.

Sweden had for years wanted Norway as part of their kingdom and after a coup in that same year as they lost Finland the nobility dethroned the Swedish king. But in a way kept him on grass. After an interim period of another year or two a very rich French general Jean Baptiste Bernadotte was installed/adopted as the Crown Prince under the name of Carl Johan and was in fact the Swedish ruler. In an agreement in St. Petersburg, Sweden joins the allies with the promise of getting Norway from

Denmark as a compensation for the loss of Finland after the war. Of course that was if they won the war against Napoleon.

At Leipzig Napoleon is defeated and starts to withdraw to France followed, by among other allied forces Carl Johan with his Swedish forces. He does not trust his partners. Will they fulfil the earlier agreement? He therefore decides to turn into Denmark with his forces (Maybe he did not want to fight his old countrymen on French soil or maybe he had the hope of being the new French king?) After a short fight Denmark waived Norway to Sweden in the peace agreement in Kiel on January 14<sup>th</sup> 1814.

Norway was to belong to the king of Sweden, not to Sweden. But Carl Johan has to turn back to his allies fighting Napoleon on the Continent. This is the time span that Norway uses to declare itself an independent state. This is done by the Danish Crown prince Christian Fredrik who has been in Norway since 1813 as vice-regent. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 1814 he calls for an election for delegates to a legislative assembly to meet at Eidsvoll. They meet for about 6 weeks write the new Norwegian constitution and signs it on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May. The same day they unanimously elect Christian Fredrik as the Norwegian king. By this the Danish Norwegian kingdom ceased to exist after nearly 450 years (434 to be exact) and in this strange year Norway had their second king.

But it was short lived. When Carl Johan was safely back in Sweden after helping to defeat Napoleon he could concentrate on fulfilling the long Swedish wish of obtaining Norway and as I said earlier for the Swedish king. The major powers of Europe with Britain as the leader told little newly independent Norway, to accept the terms of the Kiel agreement.

They would not give any help in trying to stay independent. Well we had a short and not very heroic war with Sweden ending with an armistice in August 1814. Our political leaders managed to get into the peace agreement that the terms had to be accepted by our Parliament, the Storting, and that the new king had to be elected by the same Storting after the necessary changes had been incorporated in our constitution of 17<sup>th</sup> of May.

Why such favourable terms? Karl cont on next page

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Please hand to a committee member or post to The Membership Secretary, ONFA, Upper Settir Lyness, Orkney

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## Memberships

for 2008 were due at the AGM.

To renew your membership please use the form on the left.

If you would like to set up a Standing Order, please let us know.

If you require clarification of your membership status please contact the Membership Secretary.

If you would like to suggest an event or a speaker for an ONFA talk or if you have visited and would like to contribute words or pictures to the newsletter or to an ONFA meeting we will be delighted to hear from you.

Finally, when you have finished with this magazine, please recycle it: pass it on to anyone who you think may find it interesting.

Cont

Johan wanted a population which was friendly to him, not a Norwegian population in opposition, by being occupied by Sweden. So he gave us quite a few concessions which also saved him a lot of money. It is costly to run a war and a following occupation. Maybe he regretted that later, but at the time it was very convenient to him. In 1905 when we broke the union with Sweden these terms were very convenient to us. That is another story and cause for the Centenary celebrations in 2005.

In October the newly formed Storting elected after the terms of the 17<sup>th</sup> of May constitution meet. First on October the 10<sup>th</sup> to receive the wish of Kristian Fredrik to abdicate as newly elected king. Second to change the constitution, a work which was finished on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November. Then they could accept Kristian Fredrik's wish to abdicate. Thirdly on the same day the 4<sup>th</sup> of November elect the new Norwegian king Carl the 13<sup>th</sup> with Carl Johan as his adopted crown prince.

So what started in 1801 and 1807 with some Orcadian navy hands finished in 1814. That strange year when Norway had 3 different kings, first a Danish-Norwegian, than our own independent Norwegian king and finally the Swedish-Norwegian king who was elected and had to rule according to our own Norwegian constitution.

Well I hope this clarifies the history behind our 17 May celebrations. Friendship between Orkney and Norway has existed for over 1100 years and it still exists between our two organisations manifested once again in the celebration of our Norwegian constitution day in Orkney. We got our constitution with the help of, among others, some Orcadian sailors. We have all the personal friendships, which have developed between Orcadians and Norwegians. Friendship is something we as individuals have to look after and we will continue to do so for years to come.

## Norway on the Net

The internet opens up a whole new window on Norway and you can explore and get to know the country from the comfort of your home. In this series we highlight some useful sites.



Stavanger is the nearest Norwegian city to Orkney, being more or less due east of us. It is also European Capital of Culture for 2008 (alongside Liverpool).

Details of the programme of events can be found on [www.stavanger2008.no](http://www.stavanger2008.no)

The ONFA website provides links to many Norwegian sites and can be found at [www.orkney.com/norway](http://www.orkney.com/norway)



Loganair has launched direct flights to Bergen from Sumburgh. The flights, which are twice weekly provide an alternative to travelling via Airports in the South (especially for those wishing to keep the maximum distance from Heathrow Terminal 5!) or to combine a visit to our northern neighbours. The flights will run from 7th June until 30th Aug.

Times advised are:  
Saturday:  
BA 8663  
1440 Shetland Bergen 1700  
BA 8664  
1740 Bergen Shetland 1800

Tuesday:  
BA 8663  
1110 Shetland Bergen 1330  
BA 8664  
1410 Bergen Shetland 1430

The fares start at £59 one way including all taxes and flights can be booked on the British Airways website.

