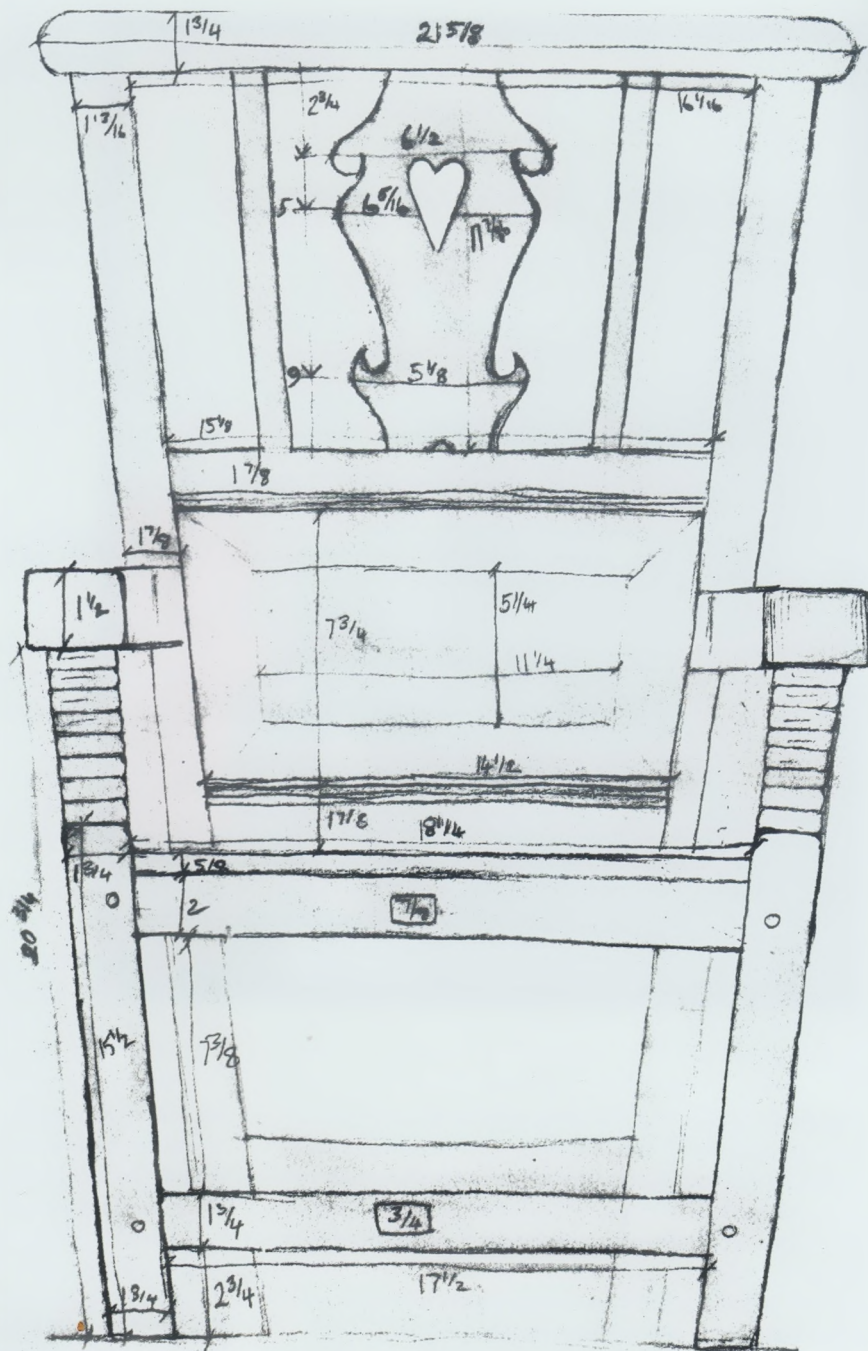


Eve Eunson, *The Fair Isles Chairs Project* (Lerwick: Shetland Museum and Archives, 2020). 28 pp. £12.

In 2018 Eve Eunson, an architect by training and a native of Fair Isle, began to record every example she could find of a chair made on the island. Located between Shetland and Orkney, Fair Isle has a population of seventy, occupying 1,900 acres. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when 400 people lived there, a number of crofters and fishermen maintained good woodworking skills and employed driftwood to make furniture, among them Eve's own great-grandfather. After she had carefully measured and drawn over seventy chairs, the Shetland Amenity Trust supported Eve in reconstructing three distinct chair types in three different workshops: with Cecil Tait in Shetland, with Kevin Gauld in Orkney, and with Stewart Thomson on Fair Isle. An exhibition of these and nine historical examples opened in November 2020 at the Shetland Museum in Lerwick (and closed February 2021). A booklet about the project is available at £12 from <https://shop.shetlandwoolweek.com/pages/the-fair-isle-chairs-project> (or google 'shetland wool week shop').



Eve Eunson drawing of chair made by Jeremiah Eunson, her great-grandfather. Photo Eve Eunson.

In regional terms, the several variants of Fair Isle chair drew on an unusually wide range of other traditions including those of Shetland, Orkney and Norway. Those traditions in turn had roots not only in specific people and landscapes but in chair-making centres yet further afield. Such workmanlike vernacular chairs are of a character not often encountered in Britain but more familiar in Ireland, or in older and rarer examples of joiner-made furniture from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Eunson, alongside Tait, Gauld and Thomson, is concerned not so much to perpetuate a tradition out of time as to thoroughly understand a regional past and to continue into the future a culture of ability and creativity in craft. On one chair the oak is finished with peat ingraining while another features a splat transcribed from a drawing using a CNC router, with some hand finishing thereafter. Most conspicuous is the unique Fair Isle

straw-back. Made with the same black oat straw as the Orkney chair, it is knotted with cotton rather than stitched with sisal, and can be further distinguished by timber dowels concealed within the rear corners. The Fair Isle Chairs Project can be warmly commended as a contribution both to furniture history and to community resilience.

*Stephen Jackson*