

*HAMEFARIN AND HOMECOMING: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL LINKS BETWEEN
SCOTLAND AND THE DIASPORA AND THE CREATION OF MODERN FESTIVALS*

Carole M. Cusack

INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Government promotion of 2009 as the “Year of Homecoming” was both a tourist marketing exercise and an opportunity to connect with the worldwide Scottish diaspora.¹ Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand have a sizeable population with ties to Scotland, and the tradition of homecoming specific to Shetland, Hamefarin (in the Norn dialect, first held in 1960) has a particular connection with the Southern Hemisphere.² The Hamefarin takes precedence for those of Shetlander background, as its specific cultural significance outweighs that of commercial, pan-Scottish events like the 2009 Year of Homecoming.³ Hamefarin is linked to Up-Helly-Aa, the boat-burning festival held in Shetland on the last Tuesday of January at eleven locations throughout the islands, with the capital Lerwick being the most important.⁴ The reigning Lerwick Guizer Jarl and his Jarl’s Squad began a new tradition of “reverse Hamefarin” in 1987 by visiting New Zealand, and this event inaugurated a fresh touristic attraction in Aotearoa.⁵ This article examines the creation of new traditions and the construction of imagined communities, both core activities in the maintenance of individual and communal identity, using the Hamefarin and the Year of Homecoming as case studies.

UP-HELLY-AA IN SHETLAND IDENTITY

Since the 1970s sociologists have observed that local festivals and ritual celebrations in Europe

Carole M. Cusack is Professor of Religious Studies in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) at the University of Sydney. Email: carole.cusack@sydney.edu.au.

¹ Alasdair Rutherford, *Engaging the Scottish Diaspora: Rationale, Benefits & Challenges* (Edinburgh: Scottish Government Social Research, 2009), p. 12.

² Marjory Harper, *Testimonies of Transition: Voices from the Scottish Diaspora* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 2018), pp. 9-10.

³ Nina M. Ray and Gary McCain, “It Was the Trip of a Lifetime”: Viking Ancestors, Their Descendents, and Their Legacy. Tourism Motivations and Behavior’, in Colin L. Campbell (ed.), *Marketing, Scarcity, Globalism, & Sustainability: Proceedings of the 2009 World Marketing Congress, Oslo Norway* (Cham: Springer, 2009), pp. 174-182.

⁴ James W. Levine, *Up-Helly-Aa: A Century of Festival* (Lerwick: Shetland Publishing Co Ltd, 1982).

⁵ Callum G. Brown, *Up-Helly-Aa: Custom, Culture and Community in Shetland* (Manchester: Mandolin, 1998), p. 179.

have tended to be revitalized, arresting a decline that began with the Industrial Revolution, for two principal reasons. The first function performed by festivals is as identity markers for local, regional, and national communities (in-group motivation). The second is as tourist attractions for an exponentially increasing global tourism industry which plays a large part in the local economy but also profits non-local business (out-group motivation).⁶ In the British Isles the Celtic regions tend to be neglected with regard to festivals, though in recent decades this has been changing.⁷ Yet, Shetland's premier folk festival (for tourists, locals, and scholars of multiple disciplines including anthropology, sociology, folklore, and tourism studies), Up-Helly-Aa, celebrated every year in late January in the capital Lerwick, and in ten other sites around the Islands, is one of the most impressive of all British rituals.⁸ The Guizer Jarl – the chief of the Jarl's Squad who takes on the identity of a Norse chieftain like Hakon Hakonson or Thorfin Karlsefni – leads the community in ritual actions which build up to the immolation of a Viking longboat they have constructed during the previous year.⁹ This theatrical ceremony is the apogee of Up-Helly-Aa, and is followed by a full night in the "halls," with entertainments including music, dances, and theatrical events that the women of each town host for the men. Up-Helly-Aa is an "invented tradition;" it incubated in the years between 1873 to 1906, as Callum Brown has demonstrated, and was linked to the growing Evangelical Christian presence in Lerwick, and to social and economic changes that altered the remote Shetland community dramatically.

Up-Helly-Aa is a layered and multiple festival. The capital, Lerwick, is the central, most impressive and well-visited site, but the ten subsidiary village festivals with essentially the same format (Bressay, Brae, Mossbank, Scalloway, Northmavine, Hillswick, Ollaberry, Cullivoe, Uyeasound and Nesting) attest to the importance of the periphery and the regions.¹⁰ Men are at the core of the event; the Guizer Jarl is a man, as are members of the Jarl's Squad. Traditionally women participated only in supporting roles, as hosts of the "halls." However, in 2024 for the first time the presiding Guizer Jarl, Richard Moar, had his daughter Jenna (aged sixteen) and three of her female cousins in his Squad. This change came after the Shetland Islands council elected Andrea

⁶ Jeremy Boissevain, 'Introduction: Revitalizing European Rituals,' in Jeremy Boissevain (ed.), *Revitalizing European Rituals* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 13-14.

⁷ For example, the Beltane Fire Society's magnificent and involving public rituals, which sit half-way between revived Celtic Paganism and Scottish cultural demonstrations, which take place on Samhuinn (31 October) and Beltane (1 May) have gained widespread support and draw huge crowds. The Beltane Fire Society was formed in 1988 and the first Beltane and Samhuinn rituals took place in 1995. See 'About Beltane Fire Festival' and 'Samhuinn', *Beltane Fire Society* (2025). At: <https://beltane.org/about-beltane/>.

⁸ Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 43ff.

⁹ Andrea Racekova, 'Europe's biggest fire festival lights up Shetland', *BBC*, 29 January (2025). At: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c14n7gx1z6go>.

¹⁰ Carole M. Cusack, 'The Burry Man Festival, South Queensferry: Warding off Evil Spirits, Connecting with Nature, and Celebrating Local Identity', *Sydney Society for Scottish History Journal*, vol. 13 (2010), pp. 37-53.

Manson Provost and Emma Macdonald as political leader in 2022. The Council's female chief executive, Maggie Sandison, joined them in calls for change to participation rules, which resulted in the inaugural female Vikings of 2024.¹¹ The Junior Jarl leads the children's festival, which is an important participatory medium for transmission of the tradition to the younger generation. Involvement in Up-Helly-Aa demands great commitment from the members of the Jarl's Squad and from the Guizer Jarl in particular.



Figure 1. Up-Helly-Aa (1973). Photographed by Anne Burgess (Wikimedia Commons).

The Up-Helly-Aa Committee has responsibility for organising the event. The seventeen members - fifteen of whom are elected for a fifteen-year term, replaced one at a time per year – are led by the current Guizer Jarl, and the immediate past Guizer Jarl who is the current Master of Ceremonies. The Up-Helly-Aa Museum in Lerwick hosts the Committee meetings (and features a replica Viking ship on display, for visitors to experience all year round, as well as watch a film of the Up-Helly-Aa rituals).¹² Therefore, Committee members serve for fifteen years, building a longship annually, raising funds to mount the festival every year, with keen awareness that they are responsible for bringing tourists to the Shetlands (which brings in income and enhances the cultural reputation of the community). Just over twenty-three thousand live in Shetland, and the Lerwick event attracts approximately ten thousand; it is likely that only around ten per cent are non-locals, however.¹³

¹¹ Severin Carrell, 'First girls join Lerwick's Up Helly Aa jarl squad after male-only rule axed', *The Guardian*, 26 January (2024). At: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/jan/25/first-girls-lerwick-up-helly-aa-jarl-squad-fire-festival>.

¹² 'Up-Helly-Aa Exhibition', *Up-Helly-Aa* (2009-2025). At: <https://www.uphellyaa.org/up-helly-aa-exhibition/>.

¹³ In 2006 the Shetland Tourist Office said the non-Shetlanders at the festival in Lerwick numbered between six and nine hundred. See Lennart Fjell, 'Contemporary Festival: Polyphony of Voices and Some New Agents,' *Studia Ethnologica Croatica*, Vol. 19 (2007), p. 139.

There has been a pronounced revival of the performance of rituals, the observance of local festivals, of interest in folklore, and of media coverage and touristic visits to “traditional” events in Britain since the 1970s.¹⁴ Scholars attribute this to a number of factors, including local communities’ concern to cultivate a distinct identity, given the homogenisation of world cities evidenced in chain stores (Starbucks, McDonalds, fashion brands), the rise of indistinguishable non-places (international airports, sporting venues, shopping malls), and a range of phenomena that erase difference and render destinations around the globe dully interchangeable.¹⁵ Callum Brown first experienced Up-Helly-Aa in 1993 and saw that the festival “symbolically constructed the islands as a separate nation, distinct from both Scotland and Britain” through its focus on the Shetlands’ geographical closeness to, and shared history with Scandinavia.¹⁶



Figure 2. The climax of the rituals at Up-Helly-Aa, the immolation of the Viking longship (Wikimedia Commons).

In fact, Shetland was governed from Scandinavia from around 800 CE and had “a distinctive culture both in the material sense - settlement pattern ... economy and technology based upon farming and fishing; and socially, in the form of the Norn language, a derivative of Old Norse ...

¹⁴ See Lally Macbeth, *The Lost Folk: From the Forgotten Past to the Emerging Future of Folk* (London: Faber Music, 2025); Adam Scovell, *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur Publishing, 2017); and Rachael Ironside and Stewart Massie, ‘The folklore-centric gaze: A relational approach to landscape, folklore and tourism’, *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture*, Vol. 13, Issue 3 (2020), pp. 227-244.

¹⁵ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 1997 [1995]).

¹⁶ Euan Hague, ‘The Emigrant Experience: The Scottish Diaspora’, *Scottish Affairs*, No. 31 (2000). At: www.scottishaffairs.org/backiss/pdfs/sa31/sa31_Hague.pdf.

and a distinctive way of life in the form of traditional customs and folklore.”¹⁷ The Shetland Islands became part of Scotland in 1469 when King Christian I of Denmark gave his daughter, Princess Margaret, in marriage to King James III of Scotland, and Shetland was part of her dowry. What Angela Watt terms “perceived Nordic-based heritage” remains important in the twenty-first century.¹⁸ In-group motivations resist incorporation into larger identities and reinforce local ties; in the case of the Hamefarin, however, the local is exported from the Shetlands to the southern hemisphere and creates ties based on shared culture.



Figure 3. King Christian I of Denmark, unknown artist (1400s). (Wikimedia Commons).

THE HAMEFARIN: NEW ZEALAND REACHES OUT TO SHETLAND, AND SHETLAND REACHES BACK TO NEW ZEALAND

Out-group motivations can gain traction in small and remote communities if they offer the possibility of increasing the (legitimate) membership of the community and also represent entrepreneurial and financial opportunities. The Shetland Tourist Office, for example, has a

¹⁷ Hance D. Smith, ‘The Scandinavian Influence in the Making of Modern Shetland’, in John R. Baldwin (ed.), *Scandinavian Shetland: An Ongoing Tradition?* (Edinburgh: Scottish Society for Northern Studies, 1978), pp. 22-33.

¹⁸ Angela Watt, ‘The Implications of Cultural Interchange in Scalloway, Shetland, with reference to a perceived Nordic-based Heritage’, Doctor of Philosophy, University of Aberdeen, 2012.

mission to both tourists proper and to Shetlanders around the globe.¹⁹ Callum Brown has observed that emigration from the Shetland Islands from 1870 to 1930 had resulted in a significant diaspora community. That many of Shetland origin who now lived at extreme distances felt emotionally connected to the homeland was undeniable; the Shetland Society of Wellington (New Zealand) was founded in 1922, and “[i]n May 1928, the Shetland Society of New Zealand held one of the first overseas Up-Helly-Aa festivals in Wellington, with a galley, a Jarl and his squad and most of the trappings of the original. Further Up-Helly-Aa festivals followed ... and the images, songs and ritual of the Lerwick original became an international symbol for the ‘roots’ of exiles.”²⁰ Diaspora yearnings for connection with authentic Shetland culture gave rise to the Hamefarin, a second invented tradition for Shetlanders living internationally, who were encouraged to return to the Shetlands for a visit.²¹ The first of these happened in 1960, and Hamefarin, like Up-Helly-Aa, attracts relatively small numbers, although at around five hundred visitors is significant for tourist revenue.



Figure 4. The Shetland Society of Wellington centenary logo (2022).

The American anthropologist Jonathan T. Church researched the 1960 and 1985 Hamefarins, using the lens of government and administrative planning through which to examine issues of identity and community. The establishment of the Shetland Islands Council (SIC) in 1975 provided a focus for the branding of local culture, and its tenth anniversary in 1985 was the springboard for the Hamefarin planned for that year.²² Church notes that the “original” Hamefarin in 1960 was a speculative affair that had not even originated in Shetland:

¹⁹ Robey Callahan, ‘Ethnic Politics and Tourism: A British Case Study’, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (1998), p. 834.

²⁰ Brown, *Up-Helly-Aa: Custom, Culture and Community in Shetland*, p. 179.

²¹ Jonathan T. Church, ‘Political Discourse of Shetland: Confabulations and Communities’, PhD (Anthropology), Temple University, USA, 1989.

²² Jonathan T. Church, ‘Confabulations of Community: The Hamefarins and Political Discourse on Shetland’, *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (1990), pp. 31-42.

In 1958, a Mr. John L. Arcus of Wellington, New Zealand, wrote to Zetland County Council and Lerwick Town Council (the civic authorities that would become known in later years as Shetland Islands Council) to suggest that a ceremonial return of those of Shetland extraction worldwide be organised for 1960. The suggestion was taken forward, and in March 1959 an executive committee was formed, under the chairmanship of school headmaster George W. Blance. The committee was charged with welcoming the visitors, organising events across the isles and ensuring that the returning exiles met with a favourable impression of the post-war Shetland.²³

Around eighty individuals, ranging in age from ten to almost eighty, arrived in Lerwick on 20 May 1960, on the ship *St Clair II*. During their week-long visit to the Shetlands, they experienced a programme of “concerts, church services, coffee mornings, tea parties, factory visits, shopping trips, slide shows and talks.”²⁴ The publicity and goodwill that was generated by this entirely new event was deemed to be invaluable for Shetland. The community could imagine that the tide of depopulation and economic depression that had dominated island narratives since the mid-nineteenth century might turn, and that a prosperous modern future for the Shetlands might eventuate.

The 1985 Hamefarin was a more self-conscious strategy on the part of the Shetlands, that was framed as a celebration of the return of emigrants or their descendants, a welcoming of exiles, and a demonstration of the prosperity acquired by the Shetlands since the 1960 Hamefarin, which included the transformation made by North Sea Oil, and the construction of Sullom Voe Terminal that began extracting oil in 1978.²⁵ There were explicit connections made with the earlier event. Church observes that: “After twenty-five years the simple passage of the sash of Viking Princess from the former Princess of 1960 to the present Princess of 1985 was an act of appropriating the memory of the first Hamefarin in the reproduction of the second.”²⁶ When the 1985 Hamefarers arrived they were able to travel readily throughout the length and breadth of the Shetlands, as the North Sea Oil infrastructure had modernized the community. Further, there was a notion of cultural exchange that was not present in the 1960 ceremonies. Church comments that:

the reception ended with the exchange of gifts between the Wellington New Zealand Shetland Society and the Shetland Islands Council. Presented to the Convener for all of Shetland by the Society was a beautiful hand-carved Maori canoe - presented because the Maori, like the Shetlanders ‘had for many centuries been a seafaring race’. In return, the Convener presented a replica of the official coat of arms of the Shetland Islands Council,

²³ Anon, ‘1960 Shetland Hamefarin’, *Shetland Hamefarin 2010*. At: <https://www.shetlandhamefarin.com/1960-shetland-hamefarin>.

²⁴ Anon, ‘1960 Shetland Hamefarin’.

²⁵ Callahan, ‘Ethnic Politics and Tourism: A British Case Study’, pp. 818-836.

²⁶ Church, ‘Confabulations of Community’, p. 34.

a Viking galley flying a raven emblazoned sail, saying: 'I hope when you look at it you will remember the Shetland that is now; the Shetland that used to be and the Shetland that will be in the future'.²⁷

The popularity of the Hamefarin is unsurprising; the Shetland Societies in New Zealand include Auckland, the Bay of Plenty, Hawkes Bay, Manuwatu, Canterbury, Otago, and Wellington. Further, Marjory Harper has argued Scottish identity is inextricably bound up with the Victorian-era Romanticism that was fostered by the poet and novelist Walter Scott, among others, and which resulted in the invention of a sizeable number of new traditions that are now understood to be crucial to Scottish identity. These include clan tartans, Highland games, and the kilt as national dress.²⁸

What is interesting is how quickly after the 1985 Hamefarin that this new tradition fused with Up-Helly-Aa. The inaugural reverse Hamefarin was in 1987: this phenomenon was a party of Shetlanders making a formal visit to New Zealand. The Lerwick Guizer Jarl and the Jarl's Squad quickly assumed prominence, becoming as Brown noted, "a vital element in the Hamefarin whether at home or abroad [as] they now travel to form the focus of the event."²⁹ This points to the specifically Shetland and Norse-oriented view of identity and culture that is promoted in these invented traditions. The next section looks at "homecoming" as a theme in broader Scottish attempts to connect with the diaspora. However, the specifically Shetland Hamefarin is bound up with potentially separatist politics, with some Islanders wishing to join Norway, and a powerful and specific idea of "home" being marketed that involves explicitly Shetland cultural elements (such as the magnificent archaeological site of Jarlshof Prehistoric and Norse Settlement, and the great Iron Age brochs - drystone towers - including Mousa, Culswick, and Clickimin).³⁰ This exclusivity can be perceived as strengthening local identity, but on occasion has a negative impact; Charlotta Malm notes that after the 2005 Guizer Jarl Peter Fraser refused entry to a group of non-local journalists to elements of the Up-Helly-Aa festival that year his role in promoting Shetland tourism was severely curtailed.³¹

²⁷ Church, 'Confabulations of Community', p. 35.

²⁸ Marjory Harper, 'Homecoming Emigrants as Tourists: Reconnecting the Scottish Diaspora', in Sabine Marschall et al. (eds), *Tourism and Memories of Home: Migrants, Displaced People, Exiles and Diasporic Communities* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2017), pp. 32-52.

²⁹ Brown, *Up-Helly-Aa: Custom, Culture and Community in Shetland*, p. 179.

³⁰ Nina M. Ray and Gary McCain, 'Homecoming, Hamefarin and Hijacked Country-of-Origin Perceptions: The Motivations of Irish and Scottish Legacy Tourists', *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies*, Vol. 5, Issue 2 (2012), pp. 117-139.

³¹ Charlotta Malm, *A Place apart? Debating landscapes and identities in the Shetland Islands* (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis 2013), p. 85.

SCOTTISH DIASPORA IDENTITY AND THE 2009 “YEAR OF HOMECOMING”

In 2024 Scotland’s population was approximately 5.5 million people. Scotland is an emigrant nation; between 50 and 90 million people around the world claim direct Scottish ancestry or more distant connections to the land. The contemporary Scottish diaspora is overwhelmingly born outside Scotland, yet a large percentage maintain links with Scotland in varied ways, facilitated by the tourism industry, family and clan societies, and interest in cultural activities like folk music and Scottish dancing.³² Euan Hague notes that donations and support from diaspora Scots for cultural bodies, such as the National Museum of Scotland (NMS), are actively solicited. The NMS exhibit “Scotland and the World” sets up the idea that Scotland has a “culture of mobility” and David Forsyth of the NMS has campaigned (in tandem with the National Library of Scotland) for memorabilia and items concerned with emigration to be donated or lent to museums in Scotland, so that this important aspect of Scottish history and culture can be properly documented.³³

The emotional motivations of diaspora Scots are complex and multiple. The idea of a homeland to which one can return has its foundations in nostalgia and the memory of a place one may never have experienced, in a history that is possibly more fiction than fact. Prior to the twentieth century New World diasporic populations rarely returned home, as the distances were vast and the mode of travel, by ship, too slow to be practical for holiday journeying. In the twenty-first century global migration has resulted in increased levels of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, such that many feel alienated from these diverse communities that do not specifically reflect their individual or family experience.³⁴ This displacement can fuel the desire for a “remembered or imagined homeland” which anchors alienated people and creates community around the idea of an organic society without “cultural confusion.”³⁵

From the last decade of the nineteenth century, documentation of return trips by emigrants to New Zealand becomes more frequent, and as in the case of the Shetlands discussed above, by the 1920s Scottish organisations assisted diaspora Scots to return. For example, in 1928 over six hundred Scots migrants to Australia returned to Scotland on what was termed a “national pilgrimage.”³⁶ The language used to describe these journeys is powerful. “Pilgrimage” has religious overtones, “quest” marks the trip out as in search of a valuable goal, “homecoming” implies that the traveller will be their true and authentic self when they arrive, and Scotland as

³² For example, the Scottish Genealogy Society, founded in Edinburgh in 1953, offers help with tracing ancestors. At: <https://www.scotsgenealogy.com>. The Scottish Association of Family History Societies (SAFHS), a registered charity, provides similar services. At: <https://www.safhs.org.uk>.

³³ Euan Hague, ‘The Emigrant Experience: The Scottish Diaspora’, *Scottish Affairs*, No. 31 (2000), n.p.

³⁴ Duncan Sim and Murray Leith, ‘Diaspora Tourists and the Scottish Homecoming 2009’, *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, Vol. 8, Issue 4 (2013), pp. 259-274.

³⁵ Sim and Leith, ‘Diaspora Tourists and the Scottish Homecoming 2009’, p. 260.

³⁶ Sim and Leith, ‘Diaspora Tourists and the Scottish Homecoming 2009’, p. 261.

“homeland” marks it out as of greater value and more of an emotional drawcard than other destinations.³⁷ For those not connected to a regional homecoming – the Shetland Hamefarins of 1960, 1985 and 2010 (and the special Millennium Hamefarin of 2000)³⁸ or the Orkney Homecoming in 1999, for example – the Scottish national embrace of the idea of Homecoming as an event plan with global appeal, a “welcoming back to their homeland of members of the diaspora,” has powerful appeal.³⁹



Figure 5. Edinburgh Castle (Wikimedia Commons).

2009 was an appropriate year to launch the Homecoming concept internationally, as it was the 250th anniversary of the birth of the national poet Robert Burns (1759-1796). Duncan Sim and Murray Leith describe the programme of events as follows:

In addition to events focusing on Burns’s anniversary, other key themes were Scotland’s contributions to the world, including golf, whisky, invention and innovation (the Scottish Enlightenment), and the country’s culture, heritage and people. Perhaps the centrepiece event of the year, reflecting the heritage focus, was The Gathering, which took place in July in Edinburgh. This was a clan gathering which included Highland Games, a parade up the city’s Royal Mile and a clan pageant on the Castle Esplanade. An economic evaluation of the Homecoming suggests that it brought 72,000 additional tourists to Scotland and the net additional expenditure which they generated was £53.7 million ... Many of the jobs

³⁷ Paul Basu, *Highland Homecoming: Highland Homecomings: Genealogy and Heritage Tourism in the Scottish Diaspora* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), *passim*.

³⁸ Calum Robertson, ‘Celebrating a Scottish past: construction, contestation and the role of government’, *World Archaeology*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (2018), pp. 337-346.

³⁹ Sim and Leith, ‘Diaspora Tourists and the Scottish Homecoming 2009’, p. 263.

created were, however, short-term, and the situation was complicated by the fact that The Gathering (2009) Ltd., the company responsible for the Edinburgh event, actually went bankrupt, with Scottish Government loans required to keep it solvent during its activities.⁴⁰

This information shifts the focus away from the emotional and personal motivation of “coming home” and reveals that the Scottish national event had much in common with Shetland, in that it was conceived – at least in part – with the intention of boosting the economy. Research into the role of government and institutions in the Hamefarin has revealed the ways that even a small boost in tourism can affect a small community, and Calum Robertson notes that “[i]n pre-oil-boom Shetland, depressed, depopulated and largely forgotten, the organizers of the original Hamefarin can be seen to have cleverly matched two resources they already had– their past and the people that longed for it.”⁴¹



Figure 6. Glamis Castle. (Wikimedia Commons).

Arguably, the same economic and social motivations are at the root of the Scottish Government’s staging of the 2009 Year of Homecoming. The existence of a vast global Scottish diaspora is matched with the postmodern desire for an ancestral past that is likely more manufactured than historical. Yet, the event cannot be a “once in a lifetime experience;” the Scottish Government must attract those diaspora actors who will be delighted by the experience, will feel that the official narrative of the national character and culture “fits” them perfectly, and will commit to returning.

⁴⁰ Sim and Leith, ‘Diaspora Tourists and the Scottish Homecoming 2009’, p. 264.

⁴¹ Robertson, ‘Celebrating a Scottish past: construction, contestation and the role of government’, p. 339.

As Robertson says, the target is “the ‘roots’ tourism market: those who have the means to translate their emotional desire to return into reality, and, most importantly, ‘to do the whole thing again’.”⁴² James Bowness further connects “roots” tourism with “genealogical tourism” which emphasises family and ethno-nationalist ties as means to bond the community together.⁴³ The narrative of Scotland is disproportionately dependent on the perceived traditional culture of the Highlands and Islands, with the narrative of clan gatherings, Highland Games, folk rituals like Up-Helly-Aa, the prevalence of tartan, Scots Gaelic language, and the majestic and often barren landscape of the thinly populated north, as opposed to the populous, English-speaking, non-kilt-wearing Lowlands.⁴⁴ Sites of heroic battles (Bannockburn, Culloden), clan massacres (Glencoe), castles (Glamis, Stirling, Edinburgh), and whisky distilleries are the stuff of Scottish tourism.

CONCLUSION: SCOTTISH ‘ROOTS’ TOURISM AFTER THE 2009 HOMECOMING

The 2009 Year of Homecoming generated a sequel event in 2014, the year that the Scottish Independence Referendum failed in September. The Scottish Government and Visit Scotland were interested in the same kind of tourism strategy as that of 2009, that is, to attract a large number of diasporic Scots to “return home.” One significant difference in 2014 was the foregrounding of sport in the programme of around one thousand events available to these visitors. The Commonwealth Games and the Ryder Cup were highlights, but the Masters World Championship Highland Games also drew competitors from around the globe to the Scottish Highlands.⁴⁵ It seems the type of site or event that motivates a possible genealogy tourist can be extremely disparate. Nina M. Ray and Gary McCain, studying Orkney tourists, noted the powerful attraction of prehistoric archaeological sites:

In the case of Orkney, archaeology tourism, a part of heritage tourism, is becoming an important source of revenue. Increasingly, tourists visit sites such as the Neolithic village of Skara Brae, the chambered cairn of Maeshowe, and the Ring of Brodgar stone circle. [Paul] Basu proposes these ancient sites take on even more meaning for ancestral tourists because they believe the monuments were sacred sites to their own ancestors.⁴⁶

This interesting fact reveals certain tensions in the construction of local Homecoming events and national “Years of Homecoming” for the Scottish diaspora. Some people are attracted by the idea

⁴² Robertson, ‘Celebrating a Scottish past: construction, contestation and the role of government’, p. 340.

⁴³ James Bowness, ‘Masters Highland Games and imaginations of home’, *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2020), pp. 441-452.

⁴⁴ Basu, *Highland Homecomings: Genealogy and heritage tourism in the Scottish diaspora*, *passim*.

⁴⁵ Bowness, ‘Masters Highland Games and imaginations of home’, 441-452.

⁴⁶ Ray and McCain, ‘Homecoming, Homecoming and Hijacked Country-of-Origin Perceptions’, p. 119.

of authenticity, of walking in a landscape that their ancestors walked in, and soaking up an atmosphere of Scottishness that resides in the land and in archaeological monuments, rather than in tourist-friendly spectacular events. These, however, are a small group, and the vast majority of Scottish roots tourists are content to sample whisky at distilleries, attend Highland Games, visit museums and cultural institutions, attend the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, and most importantly support the economy by spending lavishly.

Viewed from the perspective of Shetland or Orkney oriented societies and diaspora groups, the Scottish Government's "Years of Homecoming" are generic tourist festivals that lack distinctive features that the Shetland Up-Helly-Aa and Hamefarin have as a matter of course; that is, they do not provide an entrée into a specific local culture that the diasporic group identifies with. The Shetland Society of Wellington's centenary was celebrated in 2022 and was reported in the *Shetland News*: "A representative of the Māori people who hold guardianship of this part of Wellington led the event with a speech, a hymn and a prayer. We paused to acknowledge the death of Queen Elizabeth II, with a lament led by a piper from the City of Wellington Pipe Band [explained President Peter Glensor]." ⁴⁷ The activities of the Wellington group, despite being geographically remote from Shetland, are of interest to the local Shetland community and thus merit coverage in the newspaper. The story is accompanied by a photograph of the mural completed for the centenary, which features two former New Zealand Prime Ministers with Shetland ancestry, Sir Robert Stout and Helen Clark.



Figure 7. The mural in Island Bay, Wellington, on the contribution of Shetlanders to Wellington. It features two former NZ prime ministers, Sir Robert Stout and Helen Clark. (Photograph Peter Glensor).

⁴⁷ Chris Cope, 'Isles links celebrated as New Zealand society marks centenary', *Shetland News*, 14 September (2022). At: <https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2022/09/14/isles-links-celebrated-as-new-zealand-society-marks-centenary/>.

Robey Callahan has argued that “[t]he *Shetland Times* and now the [online] *Shetland News* do foster a sense of community among local people as well as *emigres* abroad and to mainland Britain.”⁴⁸ This is unique to small, distinct communities. This kind of intimate relationship between members of diasporic organisations and the community which they identify as home is simply not present in the national Scottish Homecoming Years. Ray and McCain noted that both Shetland and Orkney chose “not to participate in the Scottish Homecoming 2009, since they organize their own homecomings.”⁴⁹ This reveals that the issue is not the invented nature of the event or its recent emergence that renders the national Year of Homecoming phenomenon unappealing, but the fact that it is generic and pays no attention to the specificity of the diaspora Scots’ personal narratives, rather promoting a broad historical and cultural narrative that leans on mythic tropes and touristic stereotypes. Up-Helly-Aa and the Hamefarin are recent Shetland invented traditions but have been embraced because they speak directly to the local community, and that community has then offered participation in these Shetland rituals to members who are geographically remote but share in the distinctive story of Shetland identity.⁵⁰ Therefore, Hamefarin is a more powerful draw for diasporic Shetlanders than Years of Homecoming ever could for those of more general Scottish background.

⁴⁸ Callahan, ‘Ethnic Politics and Tourism: A British Case Study’, p. 825.

⁴⁹ Ray and McCain, “‘It Was the Trip of a Lifetime’: Viking Ancestors, Their Descendents, and Their Legacy. Tourism Motivations and Behavior’, p. 179.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Up-Helly-Aa: Custom, Culture and Community in Shetland*, *passim*.