

Book Review by Glynis Dickins

Shetland Mist is the beautifully written story of author Heather Leslie Hammer's great-great grandparents, Ann and Robert Leslie, who upon their marriage in 1829 settled into croft life in Dunrossness at Exnaboe, near the southern tip of Mainland. Subtitled *A Shetland Family in the Methodist Movement*, this story is as much about the Methodist tradition of worship and its impact upon the Leslie family who met with a small group of like-minded believers at Sumburgh.

In sharing the family story, Heather Hammer has recreated life through imagined dialogue between her forebears in the daily round of conversations and events that centered on living as crofters. Life was harsh and, like so many poorer folk of the times, the family worked incredibly hard to survive. But in the face of hardship and loss, particularly of men at sea, the story of Ann's faith shines through, both as an anchor and beacon, which held her family together despite the tragedies that beset them through the years.

Whether from writings left by the family or from Heather's well-informed words, Ann's prayer life is inspirational - and her strength shines through the most challenging times and trying circumstances. I particularly admired Ann's devotion to the Biblical psalms as well as understanding of Methodist traditions and teachings of thankfulness, care of others - and her confidence in asking the Lord for strength and endurance in all aspects of life and work. And if that included working on the Sabbath (something well and truly frowned upon by the Scottish 'Kirk'), then so be it! Put simply, Ann was not going to be 'held back' or 'dictated to' by (for example) the Kirk's doctrine of pre-destination.

I loved reading *Shetland Mist*. Thanks to Heather Hammer's imaginatively recreation of dialogue that drives the story, I simply could not put the book down until I reached the final page. There I will confess to being slightly disappointed with the story's end. What happened to Ann and members of her family who remained in Shetland after her son Robert emigrated to America? Perhaps it is because this story 'mirrors' that of my husband's great-great grandfather (Arthur Robertson), who like Robert Leslie, became the first member of his family emigrate, in our case to Australia - complete with his fiddle! Anyone with an ancestor or interest in Shetland should read this book.