

MORRISON FAMILY OF LAXFIRTH



Lolly Morrison



Benji Morrison

Laurence H Morrison, 2nd Lieutenant, Royal Engineers. Laxfirth, North Nesting.

Benjamin G Morrison, Private, 8th Scottish Rifles. Laxfirth, North Nesting. Wounded in Palestine, November 1917. A poet and writer.

Their parents were William Morrison and Helen Manson, they had a sister Ann Grace.

Benjamin Morrison

He wrote easily, lightly, and with remarkable rhythm, and he could vary his scansion to suit his theme.

[*Shetland News* obituary, 17 October 1935]

Benjamin George Morrison (1890-1935) was a Shetland poet who served in World War One. His family originated in Laxfirth, North Nesting, although much of his life was spent in Lerwick. His mother, Helen Manson, died when he was three. His father died not too long after. A sister died young in 1911. His aunt Mary Manson brought him up. By World War One he was working in Glasgow and joined the Scottish Rifles. He saw action in Palestine, was wounded in the head by shrapnel, returned to the U.K., and went on to France.

His post-war life featured disablement and ill-health. A short career as a Merchant Navy steward led to him contracting malaria. Unfit for further service he retrained as a hairdresser in London, aided by his brother Captain Laurence Henry Morrison. His health deteriorated further and he lost the use of his right hand and left leg. He returned to Shetland and his aunt, dying after some years of further difficulties.

He wrote poetry for most of his life, along with articles. *He'll Give Them Back*, a poem, was published in the *Shetland Times*, January 1914. The *Shetland News* of February that year saw a dialogue by him about the position of cottars in Shetland.

His obituary in the *Shetland News* noted that his best work was done after the war, with publication outside the islands. Probably this brought him much needed income. At one point an article won him a radio as a prize.

He published one volume of poetry during the war, largely inspired by his soldiering in Palestine Desert Sands 'Neath Silver Stars (Warrington, March 1918). Only one poem features Shetland dialect -- Knittin fir da Boys. For Britain's Sake is patriotic, inspired by a recruiting poster. There's humour in a poem about chicken served in hospital, and another in praise of a VAD – V.A.D. (Voluntary and Delightful). It isn't difficult to imagine his work finding a market in magazines and newspapers, it's fairly conventional, and reassuring. If there is suffering there is also consolation, and being remembered. He stated in his introduction.

They pass and smile the children of the sword (I have seen that smile beautiful in death), but never from our lives they pass.

Two poems by Benjamin Morrison

KNITTIN' FIR DA BOYS.

Bi a cloddy fire dey sit
Lookin' ower some maps
While dir busy fingers knit
Jersey, Stocking, Belt or Mitt,
Fir da sodjer chaps.

“Here,” says Jeanie, “is da place
Whar dir fechtin doon;
Whar wir boys da Germans face.
O! dat sic a wicked race
Might dis battle rue.”

Katie, in a low, saft voice,
Answers fir da rest:--
“Lass; dis toucht maks me rejoice!
Love o' honour I' wir boys
Shöre will stand da test.”

“Fir dir, ye ken, as true as steel,
An' dey'd never stoop
E inhuman blow ta deal;
Prood we trooly oucht ta feel
O' each British troop.”

“Courage rins trou every vein,
Truth is dir seal;
Honour dey will aye retain,
On dir names sall rest nae stain
Whether woe, or weal.”

Quick da oors each idder shase,
An' da fire burns low;
Dan each lassie loves ta trace
E dear laddie's laachin' face
I' da embers' glow.

Still dir knittin' needles ply—
Tho' da night grows aald—
Sped bi touchts o' boys 'at lie
'Neath a bleak an' sunless sky
I' da trenches caald.

I' dis wark some Shetlan' lasses
Every oor employs:
Nae matter what dir creed, dir
class is;
Da best wie dir time ta pass is
Knittin' fir da boys

FOR BRITAIN'S SAKE.

There is a call—it sounds more louder—clearer,
As if 'twere only given yesterday,
And, tho' by thought of parting you've grown dearer,
When duty calls, how can I bid you stay?

There is a call—“Your King and country need you,”
For Right and Liberty to lend a hand:
Go forth, my boy, and may God's blessing speed you
To help in saving our dear Motherland.

There is a call—a call from hearts grown weary
Of this dread strife, but courage stays my fears,
And, tho' for sundered hearts days will be dreary,
My seal of love is smiles—not sighs or tears.

List to the bugle call; yet sounds it clearer!
Death may be thine; to me life's shrouded woe:
Hope gives us strength as parting-ways draw nearer,
And thus, for Britain's sake, I bid thee “Go”!

[NOTE .—The above verses, written on 25 th October,
1915, were suggested by recruiting poster “Go! It's your duty,
lad; join to-day.”]