

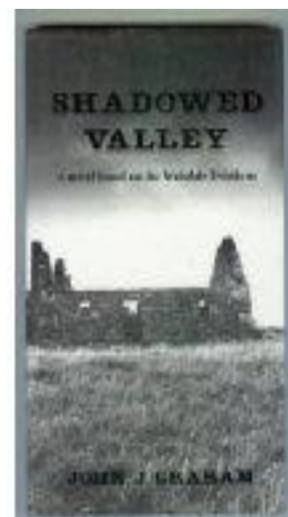


Shetland Museum and Archives
- Writing the North -

John J Graham

Shetland Museum and Archives are searching for a group of young people to form a media company to make a short film about the life of John J. Graham, the well-known Shetland author, and his novel 'Shadowed Valley', based on the Weisdale evictions in Shetland.

The purpose of the film is to highlight John Graham's works and give pupils the chance to read and investigate the tragic events described in the novel 'Shadowed Valley'.



Activity 1

The novel *Shadowed Valley* is about people being evicted from their homes by landowners in Weisdale, Shetland in the 19th Century.

Working in pairs or groups of 4, complete the following activities. These activities are designed to get you thinking about why the events detailed in the book happened, and what effect it had on the people concerned.

1. What do you know about people being evicted from their homes in the 19th century?

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2. What do you think might have happened to the people who were turned out of their homes? Make a note of your ideas.

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3. Talk about what you think makes a community. Think about how you would feel if your community was threatened. Make notes of your ideas.

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4. Nominate a spokesperson for your group. Share your answers with the rest of the class.

You may want to take a note of ideas from others in the class in the space below:

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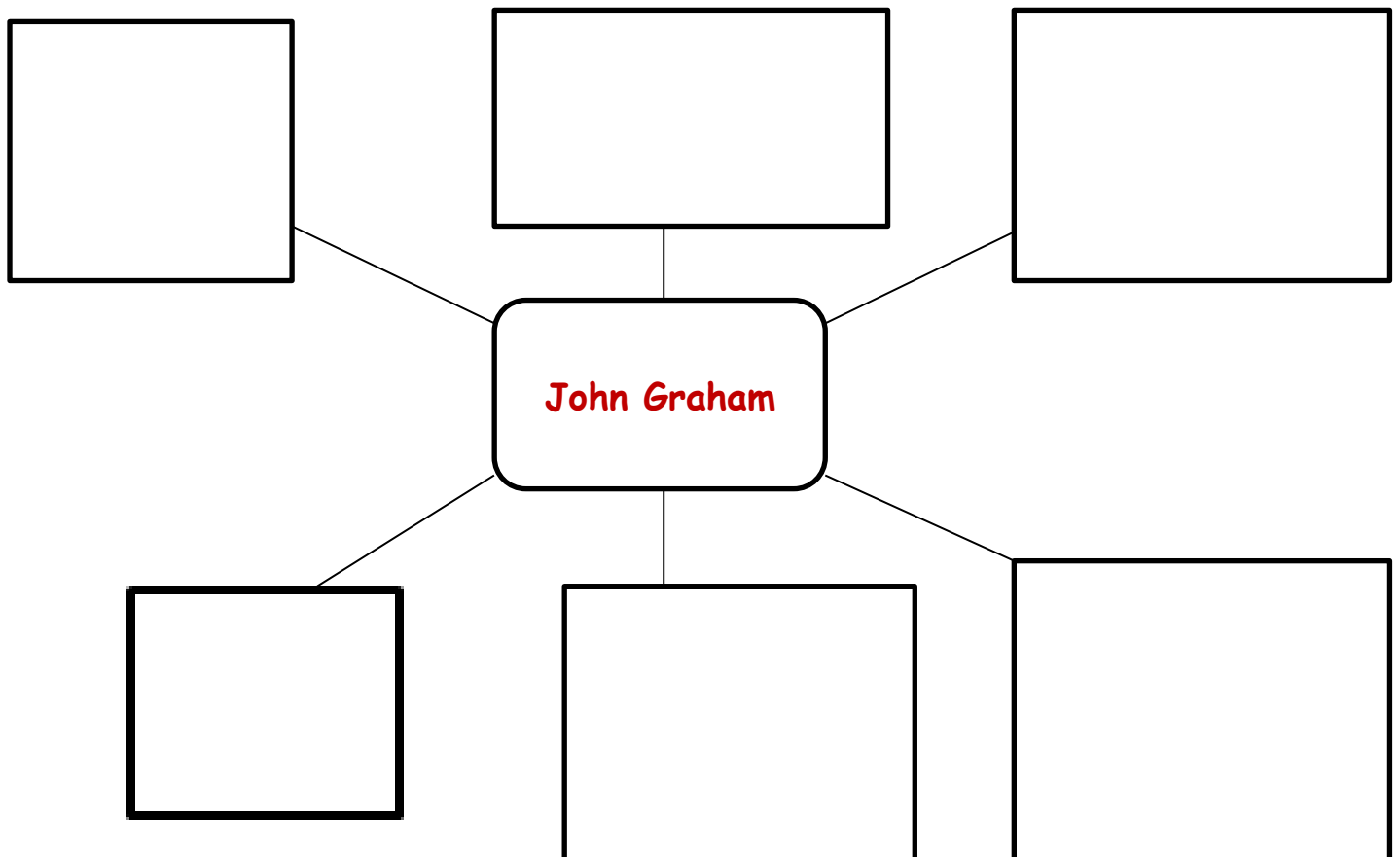
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Activity 2

You need to get to know John J. Graham and find out about his interest in Shetland. Complete tasks 1-3

Task 1:

Find out some of the facts about his life. (See biographical details). Use the mind map below to detail all the information you find - this could help you share all the things you discover.



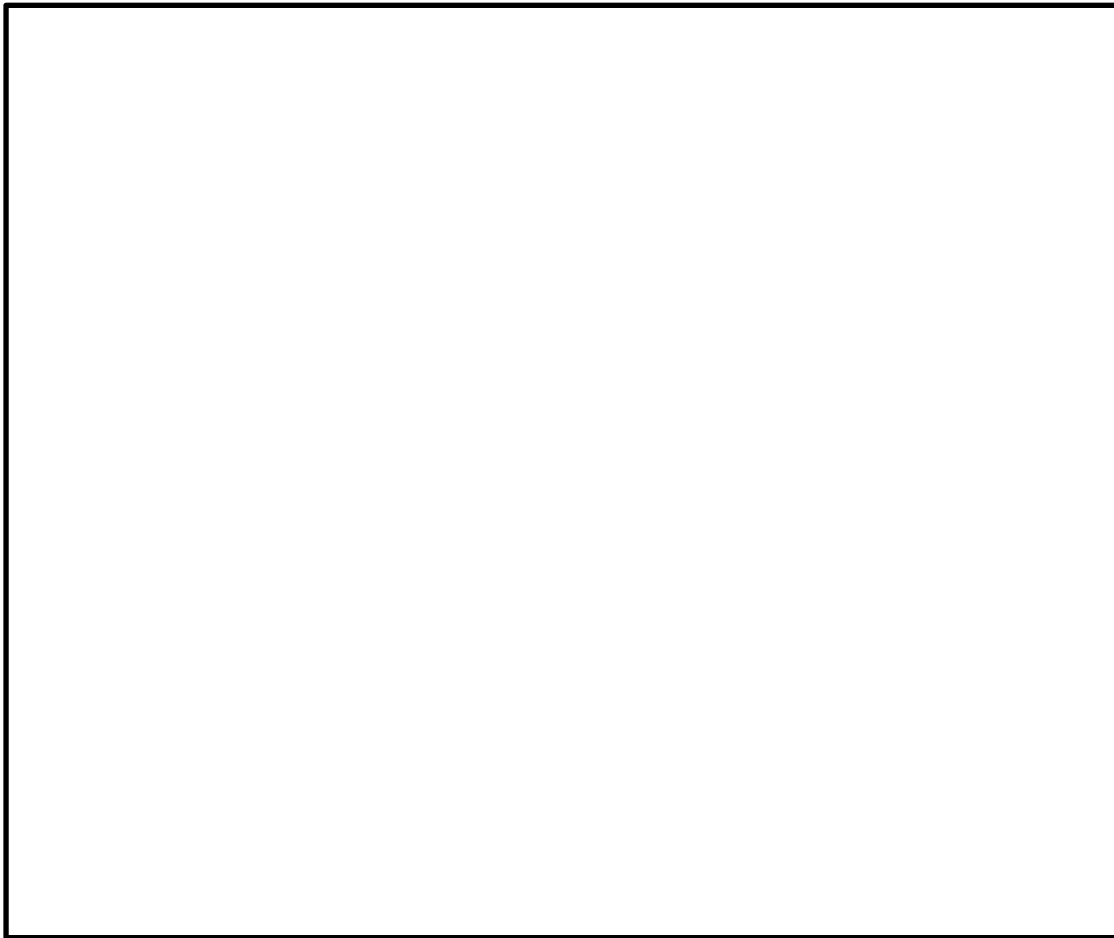
Task 2:

Find out about the clearances in Shetland and the area where the story of '*Shadowed Valley*' is set. Make notes of your findings and feed back to whole group.

I found out:

Task 3:

When feedback has taken place, you should already have some interesting information. Each person should then write a paragraph or two about John J. Graham and his interest in the Shetland clearances.

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for students to write their paragraphs or two about John J. Graham and his interest in the Shetland clearances.

John Graham biographical details

John J Graham was born in 1921 in Lerwick. His parents were hard-working crofters, and he spent his childhood in Weisdale and Tingwall. One of his first jobs was at a merchant's shop in Aith. While he was working there one of his colleagues read him the Shetland poem *Scranna* by J. J. Haldane Burgess. It was the first time he had heard local verse, and it sparked an interest that was to last the rest of his life.

During World War 2 John was a pilot instructor and later served in bomber command. After the war he attended Edinburgh University. He enjoyed studying English there. When he graduated he worked as an English and history teacher in Lerwick, and eventually became headteacher of the Anderson High School. In the 1960s John was one of the people who helped persuade the local council of the need for a museum, and in the 1970s he helped establish an archives office. His love of literature and Shetland saw him edit and write several books. The best known are his two novels *Shadowed Valley* and *Strife in the Valley*, but his Shetland dictionary was a bestseller too. Along with his brother Lollie John edited the literary magazine the *New Shetlander* for almost 40 years. He also wrote a book about the history of education in Shetland.

John Graham died in 1998, but his books will always remind us about him, and about his dedication to Shetland .

Activity 3

NOW you need to discover some of the splendid storytelling skills of John J. Graham. Your study will focus on the novel '*Shadowed Valley*', first published in 1987.

Homework task: Read the 3 extracts from *Shadowed Valley* (Texts 1-3)

Section A: 'Shadowed Valley': Text 1

Task 1:

Using text 1, discuss the following with your group at school:

- When is Martinmas? What other two pieces of information can you find in the text to help you imagine the weather conditions?
- What clues does John J. Graham give in the opening paragraph to suggest that something significant is going to happen?
- Who do you think "He" is? What do you think his "deevil's wark" might be? How do you know "He" had been there before?
- In the fourth paragraph, how has John J. Graham used sentence length to create a sense of tension?
- Which descriptions do you find particularly powerful in helping you to imagine the scene?
- Which two sentences give you a sense of Hakki's feelings?
- Why do you think Seemon's expression shows a "flicker of uncertainty"?
- How successful do you think Graham has been in making you want to read on?
- In your view, has the use of dialect made the story more - or less - convincing?

Task 2:

Using a variety of voices, including a narrator, prepare a reading of the text and present it to the whole class.

Section B: 'Shadowed Valley': Text 2

Task 1:

Using **text 2** discuss in your group, what had happened to the people who had previously lived in the fourteen empty houses: Where had they gone? How would they have travelled? What would they have been able to carry with them? What would the future hold for them?

Task 2:

Can you pick out two examples of how John J. Graham has used the weather to bring a chill to the events in the story.

Task 3:

EITHER draw a six-frame version of this part of the story, using captions taken from the text OR write two or three verses of a song entitled 'Da Sodger Cam Ta Pit Dem Oot'.

Section C: 'Shadowed Valley': Text 3

Task 1:

Using **text 3**, talk about why you think John J. Graham might have used the phrase "The sleet shower was upon them". Might he have wanted the reader to think that there was something else that was cold, sharp and unwelcome?

Task 2:

This is a very dramatic part of the story, which can't fail to have an impact on the reader. Make a Word Wall to display some of the powerful words and phrases used by the writer to affect the reader, eg lunged, stomped, shrill cry

Task 3:

Imagine yourself as Tammie, Osla or Da Sodger. Re-tell in your own words what happened to your character



Shadowed Valley: Text 1

All eyes were on the voe that Martinmas morning. Folk peered from doors, stood at lee gables sheltering from the nor-east bite and the runs of sleety showers. Seemon had been on amp since daybreak, hirplin in and out, muttering to himself.

"Tak rest, boy," said Baabie, "He'll never manage da voe wi dis wind."

"Maybe no, but dat'll no hinder him fae comin ta cerry oot his deevil's wark"
"His words tailed away as he grasped the door-jamb, eyes fixed southwards.
"Dere he is wi dat sam! Comin on for Huxter apun a horse - an he has a gang wi him - lat me see - der ane - twa - yae, der tree o dem."

They all gathered in the door and, sure enough, there were the four riders coming on steadily towards Huxter. Nobody spoke. All eyes fixed on the line of four, dark figures advancing north along the voe. Hakki's eyes flicked to the three toonships below, still and desolate in the grey morning light. What had given them life and meaning was now no more. They were mere shells and here was the man who had emptied them. He thought of Mary Ann, of Hansi, and of Jessie, and a wave of anger surged within him.

The riders came on steadily for the Voehead, then struck up towards Moostoft. But they were to find an empty house, for Rasmie had gone, flit earlier in the week to a peerie place on the west side of the voe near Soond. They circled the house then headed down towards the burn.

Seemon turned his head. "Gie me me staff, lass. I'm gyaan doon by."

"Seemon, could du no keep oot o dis. Dir naethin du can do noo."

A hand went up to the brim of his cap and wedged it firmly on his head. "No, I ken dat. But I'll maybe see at fairplay is dune."

Hakki sensed something in the wind. "Can I come wi you, faider?" he appealed.

Seemon half-turned, a flicker of uncertainty on his face. "Yae, du laekly can," he said, then set off down the hill.

'Shadowed Valley': Text 2

The past few days had seen the life draining away from the three toonships. In Hoove, the Morrissions had finally been persuaded to flit to Hoosigert to John and Maggie; Gibbie and Ellie Hunter with their family of eight and his elderly mother, had set off for Gonfirth; others had left for places in Tumlin, Aith, Hestinssetter, Nesting, seeking refuge in barns and derelict houses, or for a few nights with relatives before finding somewhere a bit more permanent to lay their heads. Gibbie and Tamar Hunter in Northoose, poor aald bodies verging on their eighties, were taken in by their nephew Andrew in Graven. Some had gone to a single room in Lerwick - the first stage of a long journey to America, Canada, Australia or New Zealand. And so, When Martinmas dawned, the only life left in the fifteen houses was Peerie Tammie and his mother.

Neighbours had tried to lukk an tise him to leave. Magnie Anderson o Hamrigert had offered them a bed, but Tammie wouldn't hear of it. The more folk pressed him the more agitated he became. "Dis wir hoose!" he shouted. "Me bide here wi mam! Nobody shift wis!" And on the Wednesday night when Magnie made his final visit he found the door steekit and Tammie shouting defiance behind it.

"Keep doon!" Seemon said, bending down as he moved along the hillside, an eye constantly on the horsemen, now crossing the burn at Graven. They stole down along the Everabister yard-daeks and crossed to a lammie-house about twenty yards in front of the houses. They rounded the corner and Hakki gave a gasp of surprise for there crouched along the wall was a group of local men. Nothing was said but Uncle John signalled them to squeeze into the shelter of the wall along with the others - Uncle Geordie, Seemon Anderson o Graven, Magnie o Hamnigert and his sons, Andrew and Peter. A grey sleety lump drifted down the valley towards them. The men's faces were grim - even the usually jolly Magnie. Hakki suddenly felt cold.

Uncle John eased his head up to the corner. A quick look and he slid back, finger to his mouth for silence. "Der at Hoove noo," he whispered. Hakki couldn't resist a quick skoit but got a sharp tug on his jacket from his father, and a frown. But he had caught a glimpse of three men opening doors and Da Sodger sitting watching from his horse.

Then came the steady thud of hooves as they approached Everabister. They heard the crash of Janny's door being thrown open and a man's voice: "Everything's away here!" Then along to Erty's and the same again. Another pause then a dull thump followed by a shout: "Dis door is steekit!" The men's

eyes met in a look of anticipation. Hakki peered cautiously round the corner. Da Sodger had dismounted and was striding across to the door. He stopped, squared his shoulders, and delivered three resounding bangs with his fist.

"I say, you in there! I ask you to quit this house immediately!

There was silence.

"Do you hear me? Open this door this minute!"

Still no reply. Da Sodger stepped back a few paces. "Right men," he ordered, "break it down!"

'Shadowed Valley': Text 3

The sleet shower was now on them and, as the men hesitated, he shouted angrily: "Do you hear me? Break that door down!"

A short, squat man, his face almost concealed in a dark whisker, stepped up to the door and lunged at it with his foot. The door was a poor botched affair, made from wreck-wood. A couple of blows and it splintered from top to bottom. Another and it fell apart revealing a restin-chair propped up behind, a table, chairs and a kirn.

"Go away, bad man! Came Tammy's shrill cry. "Dis wir hoose - me an mam's!"

Da Sodger stomped up and down, collar turned up against the sleet. "Get all that furniture outside!" he shouted. "And make it smart!"

They broke off the pieces of the shattered door, hauled the restin-chair on to the briggistanes, carried out the other bits of furniture, then paused and looked enquiringly at Da Sodger. A strange silence had fallen on the scene.

Da Sodger scowled. "Well, what are you waitin for? Bring dem out!"

Two of the men re-entered the house and were immediately met with a hail of peats. "Git oot!" Tammy screamed. "Laeve wis alane!"

There was the sound of a scuffle, more screams from Tammy, then the squat man appeared, holding the peerie fellow, arms pinioned and legs thrashing. When he saw Da Sodger his struggles and screams reached a frenzy. "D-d-d-du's ahint aa dis, du d-d-d-deevil at du is!"

The other man came out leading Osla by the arm, bent and walking with a limp. She clutched her dark hap tightly round her pale, begrimed face. She put out a hand on the back of the restin-chair and as the man released her arm she slumped down into the seat. She seemed numbed, almost in a stupor, oblivious even to the screams of Tammy. Her hand stroked the arm of the restin-chair - something familiar in the midst of bedlam.

Da Sodger walked slowly up to Tammy. He stood erect, feet apart, hands clasped behind his back. "Well, Tammy, I always knew du was a fule, but I tocht du wid have enoff sense not to go against da law."

Tammy, still held firmly by the arms, was breathing heavily. His struggles had shoved his knitted cap down over one eye. He cocked his head to fix the other eye on Da Sodger. For a moment he gazed at him then he uttered a suppressed cry of rage, his face contorted, and he spat at his tormentor. Da Sodger swayed back, his eyes turned incredulously on the spittle trickling down his jacket. Then his body stiffened and he struck Tammy fiercely across the face with the back of his hand.

"You dirty trash at you are! Take dat, and" He was about to strike again when a voice rang out: "Dat'll be enoff!"

Da Sodger swung round to see Seemon emerging from behind the lammie-hoose followed by the others. He took a startled step backwards, eyes swivelling from his three attendants to the Weisdale men. "Du keep out o dis, Seemon Hunter, for dy own good. An dat goes for da rest of you. Dis is nothing of your business."

Seemon walked straight past Da Sodger as though he didn't exist and came to Tammy. His head hung loosely on his chest, blood spurting from his nose. The man holding him made no attempt to prevent Seemon as he took the peerie man in his arms and laid him in the restin-chair. As Seemon put him down John steadied his head and wiped away the blood with the empty sleeve of his own jacket. It was only then that Osla seemed to become aware of Tammy's state.

"O, my Tammy! My poor ting o boy! Wha's done dist a dee? O whit is dis at's come owre wis?" She leaned over and laid a tender hand on his bloodstained cheek.

"Never du mind, Osla," said John, "we'll mak sure nae mair herm'll come tae him. Du sood be prood o him. He's da only man here at hed da spunk ta stand up dad is deevil's tribe."

Application Form

Application for the rights and funding to make and produce a short film on the following subject:

.....*Shadowed Valley, by John J. Graham*.....

Name of Film Company:

.....

Address:

.....

Reasons why this film company should be chosen:

-

-

-

What skills could your company bring to this important project?
(See attached sheet for ideas)

.....

.....

.....

Give one key reason why your film company would produce the best results:

.....

.....

Signed: (all group members)

Date:

Shetland Museum and Archives
- Writing The North -

CONGRATULATIONS!

Your film company has won the rights and funding to make a short film about the life of John J. Graham, the well-known Shetland author, and his novel '*Shadowed Valley*'.

The purpose of the film will be to bring John J. Graham's work to the notice of a much wider audience, particularly young people who may never have had the chance to read and respond to the tragic events described in the novel '*Shadowed Valley*'.

Your film must aim to bring to life the writer and his tale of the terrible evictions that took place in Weisdale, Shetland.

Your film **MUST** include:

- Biographical information about John J. Graham
- Background material about the clearances in Shetland
- Some extracts from the book '*Shadowed Valley*' to show how powerful and dramatic his writing could be
- Soundtrack or soundscape to reflect the mood of the landscape or to enhance the terrible events that Graham describes

On the next page you will find some suggestions of features your film **MIGHT** include - but your group will probably have some very creative ideas of your own.

Your film **MIGHT** include some of the following:

- Location shots of the valley, ruined croft houses, tumbledown walls
- Some oral re-telling of the evictions, perhaps from different viewpoints
- A TV news report of events at Weisdale - with eye-witness accounts (Feel free to imagine TV had been invented!)
- A recently discovered newspaper report of the Weisdale evictions - making use of dramatic headlines
- A soundscape for the approach of the soldier and his men - using instruments, voices
- A dance inspired by the eviction of Tammie and Osla - perhaps with appropriate music or voices
- Some poems inspired by the landscape or the people or the tragic events - perhaps some in dialect
- A song or two telling the sad story of the clearances
- A series of pictures, with captions, depicting events in the valley
- A recently discovered letter from a woman who was evicted to a relative, telling how her life has been changed
- A map of the area where the story of '*Shadowed Valley*' is set
- The voice of Hakki, narrating, or remembering

NOW YOU HAVE A LOT OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS ABOUT JOHN J. GRAHAM AND HIS WRITING - IT'S TIME TO GET DOWN TO SOME SCRIPT WRITING AND FILMING.

It's time to be creative!

