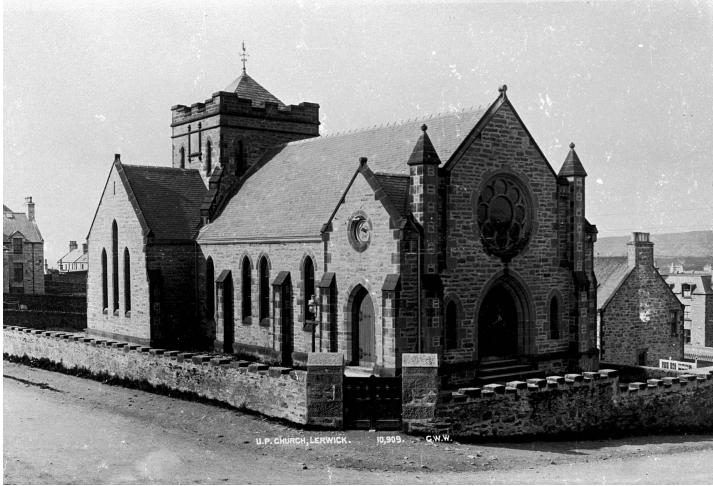


Lerwick's New Town

The early Free Church gathered in premises built for it in 1839 near the top of Hangcliff Lane (not far from their more recent building). But as the lanes of the town became ever less desirable and the 'New Town' of Lerwick more so, the decision to



St Ringan's in the 1930s (courtesy of Shetland Museum)

build a new sanctuary on the Hillhead was made in the early 1880s. The period of 1880 – 1914 was for many of Lerwick's inhabitants one of prosperity and progress. Although some improvement in the town was evident as a result of the efforts of pioneering businessmen such as Arthur Anderson and William Hay, the herring boom ushered in a period of a more general dispersal of wealth. 'The herring

boom brought prosperity for local traders. Shop premises on Commercial Street were plate-glassed, and above the Street a 'new town' grew at Hillhead: a grid of spacious streets and mostly detached houses ... whose main artery, Hillhead, ran parallel to Commercial Street but half a mile away at the top of the hill'.ⁱ Possibly in response to prevailing attitudes among their southern counterparts, a heightened sense of civic pride infiltrated the consciousnesses of Lerwick's business elite. 'Probably several influences contributed to this. The Industrial Revolution in Britain had created exiting times for industrialists, and, with Shetland not now nearly so remote as it had been, probably there was a spin-off from that situation to the moneyed class in Lerwick'.ⁱⁱ Lerwick's own 'new town' began to take shape and numerous imposing buildings were erected including St Ringan's Church in 1886.ⁱⁱⁱ Unlike many contemporary developments, Lerwick's new town 'sprawl' did not lead to a confused and ill-considered or ill-advised townscape. Quite the contrary and in credit to the architects and craftsmen of the time, Lerwick's 'new town' was considered to be able to 'compare favourably with many towns in the south of greater population and greater wealth'.^{iv}

ⁱ Callum G Brown, *Up-helly-aa: Custom, culture and community in Shetland* (Manchester University Press 1998), p129.

ⁱⁱ James W Irvine, *Lerwick: the Birth and Growth of an Island Town* (Lerwick 1985), p174.

ⁱⁱⁱ Irvine, James W (1985), p153.

^{iv} Thomas Manson, *Lerwick During the last Half-Century 1867 – 1917* (Lerwick, Lerwick Community Council 1923) republished (1991), p231.