

## Dave Donaldson, Dispecta est Thule. Audio Description (Transcript)

### Track 1: Introduction

I'm Jane Matthews of Shetland Arts and I'm going to describe the two exhibitions of photographs by Dave Donaldson that showing are under the same title, Dispecta est Thule.

The first of these is outdoors, along the pavement on Twageos Road in Lerwick and is running from 1 May to 1 June 2024. The other is in the Upper café bar at Mareel and will be on show for a lot longer, at least until November 2024. [Staff at the front desk at Mareel will be able to advise further, on how long exactly.

### Track 2: Background

Dispecta est Thule is latin and means 'Thule is seen'. Thule is the Greek and Roman name for the most northerly known land in the Atlantic. This phrase is taken from the Anderson High School insignia where it appears alongside the school motto, 'Dö Weel and Persevere'.

In 1862 the Anderson Educational Institute was opened in Lerwick, named after Shetlander Arthur Anderson, entrepreneur and co-founder of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company. It later became the Anderson High School which, with the addition of many buildings, remained on this site for 155 years, until the school's relocation in 2017 to its new site at Clickimin Loch.

Shetland Islands Council's redevelopment plan will transform the Knab to meet the future needs of Lerwick and the community of Shetland as a whole. The only original buildings that will remain are the Institute, the Bruce Hostel, the Janet Courtney Hostel and the Science Block.

In partnership with SIC, Shetland Arts commissioned local photographer Dave Donaldson to document the demolition and clearing of the site. Dave is a Shetland-based photographer whose editorial and commercial work is well-known throughout the Isles and for this project he worked closely with contractors Central Demolition to get safe, regular access to the site.

### Track 3: Twageos Road exhibition

The exhibition at Twageos Rd is showing from 1 May to 1 June 2024, outdoors on the railings in front of the old Anderson Institute.

From Mareel, the best walking route to Twageos Road is through town, along Commercial Street then by the Lodberries, with the sea always to your left. Commercial Street turns into Twageos Road as the road rises uphill a little with a long metal handrail on the pavement on the right-hand side of the road. Once the handrail ends, keep going along Twageos Road, crossing two side roads until you arrive at the gates of the old school entrance. This is where the exhibition begins, on the railings at the side of the pavement, to the left of the gates.

The images are large, just over a metre on their longest edge and there are 11 installed along the railings with a text panel the same size. All the photographs are black and white, taken during the demolition process and I am going to focus on three of these images to describe here. The first is immediately to the left of the text, so the second panel along from the gates.

It shows a part-demolished section of the school buildings on an overcast day but, like all the images in the exhibition, there is a lot of contrasting dark and light areas which make the images feel dramatic. In the foreground are two large pieces of demolition kit lying on the ground; a huge, claw-like shearing arm and an excavator digging bucket but there are no people in the image and the scene is

deserted. The roofline may be recognisable to those who knew the school, with the ornate turret of the old Institute building centre left and the old school clock tower centre right. The clock on each of the two sides of the clocktower is showing a different time; 11.40 on one side and nearly five to 2 on the other. Beneath the clock tower is an exposed section of what was the main hall which has been ripped open to the elements. The stage, a few windows, radiators and a fire door are the only sections that remain and there is exposed timber and metalwork in the roof and walls, with rubble and broken timber all over the ground. The stone walls and slate roof of the Institute to the left of the image remain intact as this building is listed and won't be demolished.

To the left of this is an image from inside one of the school buildings. It is a dark, eerie space with an access route through the centre of the picture marked out by striped plastic tape and lit by bare bulbs. There is exposed pipework overhead and the whole space has been stripped of all its fittings, furniture and walls. All that remains are metal supports and a heap of metalwork and panelling on the right side of the picture. Parts of the floor are wet and the space looks deserted.

The last image I will describe is another interior photo, mounted three along to the left from the last described photograph. It's taken in an abandoned, part-stripped classroom, lit from the left by natural light from the window. The composition is centred on a white roller-board on the wall of the classroom on which there are still notes and a pie chart from when the classroom was last used. The hand-drawn pie chart is labelled with brands of crisps and to the right of it the words 'Marketing, Mrs Lamming's stuff' and a smiley face. Around this untouched whiteboard the room has been stripped, the ceiling structure is exposed and wiring hangs to the floor. The dark carpet is covered in bits of broken ceiling tiles, plaster, light fittings, wiring and bits of timber and around the sides of the room are the old units and

worktops piled up with dismantled ceiling panels. There is an empty shelf unit on the right by the classroom door.

#### Track 4: Mareel

The exhibition in Mareel focuses on the demolition crew that's been working on the old school site at The Knab. There are 15 images in this exhibition, all black and white photographs, displayed along the mezzanine of the upper café bar in Mareel. All the prints are 60 by 40cm – so slightly smaller than an opened spread of The Shetland Times newspaper - either landscape or portrait orientation and they are framed with white mounts in black frames. This description of the work runs from left to right as you face the wall, from the wide landing along the mezzanine to the door out to the cinema foyer. It begins with the exhibition text which you can hear by listening to Track 2. The first image I will describe is immediately to the right of this text and is an image of the school's main entrance.

This image shows the entrance to the main school building on the upper right side of the picture, deserted and with the door open. There is vegetation growing up around the steps and the ramp leading up to the door and the sky is dull and overcast. The building is low and the architecture is typical of a civic building from the Sixties, with a mixture of timber cladding, stonework and rectangular metal-framed windows. The old school sign is still on the wall to the left of the main door. In the foreground the paving has been broken up and the bucket from a digger lies next to it. To the right there is some piping, an upturned box and a black rubbish bin on its side. The site looks abandoned and unloved.

All the images that follow this one are portraits of the people involved in the process of clearing the site, from Central Demolition, a company based in mainland Scotland. The specialist crew, that has been based in Shetland specifically for the demolition contract, is

represented here at work on the site, amongst the buildings and in areas of the school that may be recognisable to people who knew it. I'm going to describe four of these portraits, the first of which is the 5<sup>th</sup> framed image along to the right from the introductory text panel, of a man wearing a protective suit.

In this portrait photograph a member of the demolition crew is standing alone in a plain room facing the camera, with his hands behind his back, lit by natural light. Behind him are stacks of boxes labelled as containing disposable protective workwear. He is wearing a dark protective coverall with a hood, work boots and a respirator so that really the only bit of him that's visible are his eyes and it's hard to tell his expression. On the floor in front of him is a black case and a hard hat that has 'Blotty' hand-written on it.

Directly to the right of this image is a portrait of another member of the demolition crew, perching on a windowsill inside an abandoned room. People who are familiar with the old school may recognise this as C Block – looking out over the lawn in front of the Institute building. He's wearing work clothes; a hard hat, protective gloves and he has reflective strips on his short-sleeved t-shirt. His arms are tattooed, he's holding a crowbar that's resting on his shoulder and he's smiling at the camera. The right side of his face is lit by the daylight from the window but the left side is in shadow. He looks happy and relaxed.

To the right of this image is an action photograph, taken outside the abandoned school on a grey, overcast day. It's taken at an angle so the picture plane tilts to the left. In the distance is Bressay and Bressay Sound. One of the demolition crew is throwing a piece of furniture towards a heap of other bits of timber and furniture that have been stripped out from inside. He is in profile and has work clothes, boots, hard hat, gloves and a hi-vis vest on and he looks quite happy. The bit of a cabinet that he is jettisoning has 'Block C' hand-written on it, which is the building behind him, and the

photograph has been taken just at the point when the cabinet is leaving his hands.

The final image I will describe is the last image in the exhibition, furthest to right and closest to the door leading out to the landing by the cinemas. It is a group photograph of the whole team from Central Demolition. There are 10 workmen in total, 9 are standing in a line and one is behind, standing on the steps of a large digger. In the background is the partially demolished school – people familiar with the site will recognise the remains of the main hall and the clocktower behind it. It is a bright day with big sunlit clouds in the sky but the team is not in the sun. They are all dressed in hi-vis workwear and boots, with hard hats and they look happy to be posing for the camera in the rubble, as if they've briefly stopped what they're doing. The digger, with its huge hydraulic arm arching across the photograph looms behind the crew branded with 'Central Demolition Ltd' on it.