The name Orkney derives from ON Orkneyjar, Seal Islands, however the Ork part is much more ancient. Diodurus Siculus, in about 59BC, referred to Orkney as the Orcades, quoting from a much earlier report by Pytheas from about 320BC. Writing in c.70AD, Pliny the Elder referred to the Orcades and stated that "Cape Orcas lies across the Pentland Firth from the Orcades...there are 40 Orcades separated by moderate distances." Cape Orcas is probably Dunnet Head in Caithness.

The Old Irish name for Orkney was *Innse Orc*, Isles of the Orks.

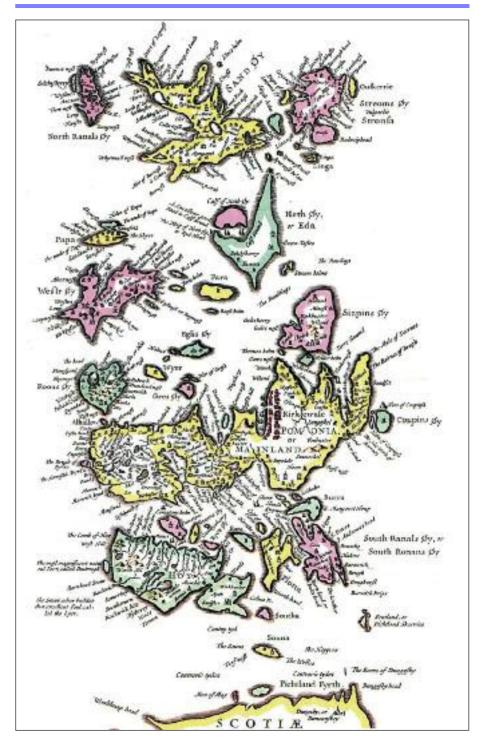
The Vikings also referred to Maeshowe as *Orkahowe*, suggesting is that *Orc* was the totemic name of the inhabitants in former times and was recognised as such by the Norse. In Old Irish *Orcan* means pig, however in Gaelic *Orc* also refers to a small whale or dolphin. In fact Pliny himself calls this kind of whale *Orca*, and today the *Orca* or *Killer Whale* (*Orchinus Orca*) is still frequently seen around *Orkney*. It should also be noted that in Old Norse *Orkn* refers to a kind of seal.

The Vikings were nearer the mark and Ork probably means Sea Pig

which could mean either a small whale or a seal. Wild Boars were never a major feature of Orkney but small cetaceans such as Orcas, Grampus, and other Dolphins, Pilot Whales as well as Grey and Common Seals were probably even more numerous in prehistoric times than now.

Seals or Selkies, (ON Selr, Seal), are also traditionally respected and the subject of much folklore in Orkney. Thus the name Orkney or Orcades most likely always meant Seal Islands and the people were thus Orcs or Selkies.

DERIVATIONS OF THE NAMES OF ORKNEY'S ISLANDS Modern Name Norse Name Derivation Mainland Hrossey Horse Island (from its shape) Rolf's Isle Rousay Hrolfsey Egilsay Egilsev Egil's Isle or Church Isle Holy Isle Eyinhelga Evnhallow Spearhead-shaped Isle Wyre Vigr Garek's Isle Gareksev Gairsay West Isle Westray Vestrev Papa Meiri Big Island of the Papar (priests) Papa Westray North Ronaldsay Rinansey Ringan's Isle Sandy Isle Sandey Sanday Eday Eiðey Isthmus Isle Gain or Profit Isle, or Beach Isle Stronsay Strjonsey Papa Stronsay Papev Minni Small Island of the Papar (priests) Hiálvandisev Helping Isle or Hjalpandi's Isle Shapinsay Helliar Holm Elliarvik Holm Elwick Bay or Cave (Hellia) Holm Twin Isle (with Holm of Grimbister) Damsay Daminsey Kolbeinsey Kolbein's Isle Copinsay High Isle Hov Háey Walls Vágaland Land of Bays Flat-ey Flat Isle Flotta Sheep isle Fara Faer-ey Cava Kalf-ey Calf Isle Grim's Isle Graemsay Grímsey Burray Borgarey Broch Isle South Ronaldsay Rögnvaldsey Rognvald's Isle Sviney or Swefney Swine Isle or Sweyn's Isle Swona Pettland-sker Pictland Firth Skerries Pentland Skerries



130

Orkney Placenames

History & Culture

The vast majority of place names in Orkney are derived from Old Norse, with a very few earlier elements. Orcadian pronunciation is distinctive, and is derived from the *Orkney Norn*. Irish Gaelic influence never reached the islands, and despite the influx of people from other parts of Britain over the years, many of the old words have survived. This glossary includes many of the most common placename elements, but it is not exhaustive, and fuller details can be found by referring to the *Further Reading* section. References to many placenames is included in the text. The glossary is set out as follows:

Place name, prefix or suffix as in use today; Old Norse derivation, English translation

a, o, or; A, burn aith; Eid, isthmus ayre; Eyrr, gravel beach -back; Bakki, banks barth; Barth; projecting headland berry; Berry, -ber; Berg, hill

bigging; Bygging, building -bister, -bist; Bolstadr, farm, dwelling

breck-; Brekka, slope brett-; Bratt, steep brim; Brim, surf bring; Bringa, breast bro-; Bru, bridge bu, -by; Bu, Baer, farm

-buster, -bister, -bist; Bolstadir, house -clett, cleat; Klett, low rock, stone-built house

-croo; Kro, sheepfold

cumla-, -cuml; Kuml, burial mound

dale, -dall; Dal, valley deep-, jub-; Djup, deep Evie; Efja, eddy ey, ay, a; Ey, island far-; Faer, sheep

-fell, -fea, -fiold; Fjall, hill firth, -ford; Fjord, wide bay

foul; Fugl, bird foul; Fugl, bird furs-; Fors, waterfall garth; Garth, enclosure geo-; Gja, chasm -gill; Gil, narrow valley gloup; Glup, throat gra; Gra, grey graenn; Graenn, green

grind; Grind, gate grut-; Gryot, gravel ho-; Ha, high

hack-; Hagi, enclosed pasture ham, hamn-; Hafin, harbour hammar; Hammar, crag -hellya; Hellir, cave -hellya; Hella, flat rock

-hellya; Hella, flat rock hellya; Helgr, holy hest; Hest, horse holm; Holm, small island hope; Hjop, shallow bay

-house,-ass; Ass, ridge howe, hox-; Haug, mound hund; Hund, dog

hous-, -house; Hus, house kame; Kamb, ridge -keld, kelda; Kelda, spring kir-, kirk-, -kirk; Kirkja, church knap; Knapp, knob, hill-top langa-, -land; Langr, long -lee; Hlith, slope ler: Leir, clav

ling; Ling, heather mel-; Mel, sandbank, dunes moul, mull; Muli, muzzle, lip

mous-, muss-, -mo; Mor, pl.mos, moor

muckle; Mykill, large, great myre; Myri, wet meadow -ness; Nes, nose. point nev; Nef, small headland noup; Gnup, peak

noust; Naust, boat beaching-place

od-; Oddi, sharp point oyce; Oss, burn-mouth peerie, peedie; ??, small quholm; Hvamm, grassy slope -quoy; Kvi, cartle pen ram-; ramn-; Hrafn, raven -ret; Reyy, sheepfold ro-; Raud, red

ro-; Raud, red russ-; Hross, horse scap-; Skalp, ship

seater, -setter, -ster; Setr, out-pasture

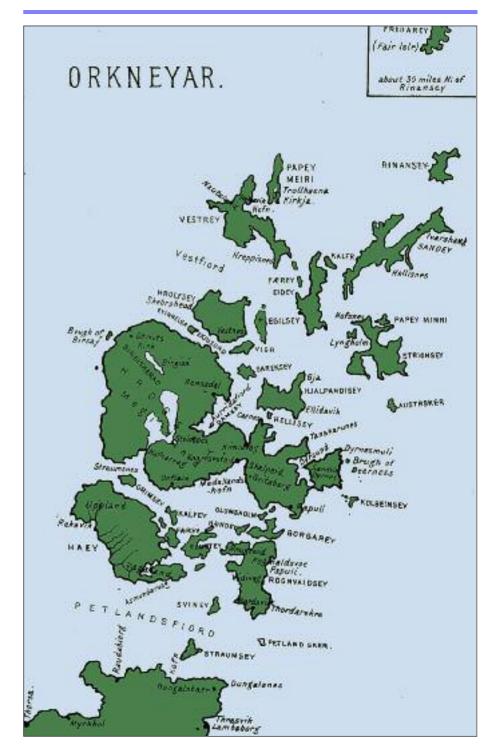
selli-; Sel, setter hut
-shun; Tjorn, small loch
-skaill; Skali, hall, house
skel-; Skal, soft rock
skerry; Sker, skerry
skip-; Skip, ship
skippi-; Skipti, boundary
stack; Stakk, pillar rock
sten-, -stain; Steinn, stone
-ster, -sta; Stadr, homestead

strom-; Straum, tide?stream swart-; Svart, black -taing; Tangi, tongue ting; Thing, assembly

stove; Stofa, house

-toft, -taft; Thopt, site of dwelling -ton, -town; Tun, enclosure too; Thufa, mound

vel-, -wall; Vollr, valley voe, -wall; Vagr, bay waith; Vath, ford ward, wart; Varda, beacon watten; Vatn, water wheetha-; Hvit, white wick; Vik, bay



132

Orkney Language



Favor i ir i chimeri. Helleut ir i nam thite, gilla cosdum thite cumma, veya thine mota vara gort o yurn sinna gort i chimeri, ga vus da on da dalight brow vora, Firgive vus sinna vora sin vee firgive sindara mutha vis, lyv vus ye i tumtation, min delivera vus fro olt ilt, Amen: or "On sa meteth vera."

But John, Robert Rendall

But John, have you seen the world, said he, Train and tramcars and sixty seaters, Cities in lads across the sea – Giotto's tower and the dome of St Peter's?

No, but I've seen the arc of the Earth,
From the Birsay shore like the edge of a planet,
And the lifeboat plunge through the Pentland Firth?
To a cosmic tide with the men who man it.

Cragsman's Widow, R Rendall

He wis aye vaigan b'the shore, An' climman amang the craigs, Swappan the mallimaks, Or taakan whitemaa aiggs.

It's six year bye come Lammas, Sin' he gaed afore the face, An' nane but an aald dune wife Wis left tae work the place.

Yet the sun shines doon on a' thing. The links are bonnie and green, An'the sea keeps ebban an' flown-As though hid had never been.

Sanctuary, Allison Leonard

There is one place where I may lay my head: The inquiring mind from roving has returned Tired with the immortal passions of the dead. The flame of intellect, a star that burned Aeons afar, cold, clear and very bright, All rayed with beauty in the dreaming dark, Sinks with the constellations of the night Into perspective. Oh, the passing mark Of pain fades with all unimportant things Like an old unremembered fear. I shed Falseness. Alone I'll take the path of kings But at the journey's end I'll lay my head In that one place where I can be at rest-Upon the healing quiet of your breast.

The Bloody Orkneys, Cap H Blair RN.

This bloody town's a bloody cuss --No bloody trains, no bloody bus, And no one cares for bloody us --In bloody Orkney.

The bloody roads are bloody bad, The bloody folks are bloody mad, They'd make the brightest bloody sad, In bloody Orkney.

All bloody clouds, and bloody rains, No bloody kerbs, no bloody drains, The Council's got no bloody brains, In bloody Orkney.

Everything's so bloody dear, A bloody bob, for bloody beer, And is it good? No bloody fear, In bloody Orkney.

The bloody flicks are bloody old, The bloody seats are bloody cold, You can't get in for bloody gold, In bloody Orkney.

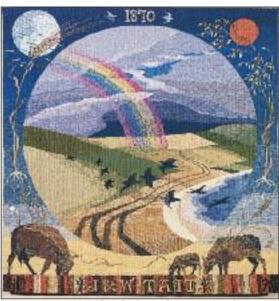
The bloody dances make you smile; The bloody band is bloody vile; It only cramps your bloody style In bloody Orkney.

No bloody sport, no bloody games, No bloody fun, the bloody dames Won't even give their bloody names In bloody Orkney.

Best bloody place is bloody bed, With bloody ice on bloody head, You might as well be bloody dead, In bloody Orkney.

Tennyson

See what a lovely shell
Lying close to my foot...
What is it? A learned man
Could give it a clumsy name.
Let him name it who can,
The beauty would be the same.



Tapestry by Leila Thomson for J&W Tait's 125th anniversary

What is an Orcadian from the Storm GMB 1954

First the aborigones
That housed Skara Brae from the sand
Then the Picts,
Thoe small dark cunning men
Who scrolled their history in stone...
And then the tigers from the east over sea,
The blond butchering Vikings,
Whose last worry on sea or land
Was purity of race, as they staggered couchwards
After a fill of ale.
Finally, to make the mixture thick and slab,

The offscorings of Scotland, The lowliest pimps from Lothian and the Mearns Fawning on the train of Black Pat,

And robbing and raping ad lib,

But that's not all.

For many a hundred ships have ripped their flanks

On Rora Head, or the Noup,

And Basque sailor lads and bearded skippers from Brittany Left off their briny ways to cleave a furrow

Through Orkney crofts and lasses.

Not to speak of two world wars

And hordes of English and Yanks and Italians and Poles

Who took their stations here:

By the day the guns, by nigh the ancestral box-bed.

Only this morning I delivered a bairn

At Maggie O'Corsland's

With a subtle silk-selling Krishna smile.

A fine mixter-maxter!