

has increased to 2,160.

Harbour Between 1688 and 1815 wars and privateers made the English Channel dangerous and much shipping chose to take the northabout route around Britain. Businesses were soon set up in Stromness to supply food, water and other stores to ships, which increasingly were calling here before departing far and wide. Login's Well supplied much of the south end of the town, as well as replenishing ships, as can be seen from the inscription.

Hudson's Bay Company This company was set up in 1670 to trade for furs with native people in Northern Canada, and its ships called at Stromness for supplies and to hire local men to work in the *Nor' Waast* until the late 19th century. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Orcadians made up a very large proportion of the Company's employees, and many settled in Canada. Today the local phone-books in Northern Canada have the same names as the Orkney equivalent and descendants of these settlers regularly come "home" to visit.

Whaling was another source of employment, and from the late 18th century ships bound for the Greenland whaling stopped at Stromness to take on young men as crew. At the peak, about 1816, there were up to 34 whaling ships calling at the town every year.

STROMNESS (ON *Straumnes*, Tidal Stream Point) and its excellent harbour is referred to in the *Orkneyinga Saga* as *Hafna-vagr*, Harbour Bay or Hamnavoe. Although the town looks older than Kirkwall in many ways, in fact as a settlement it is much newer. Like Lerwick in Shetland, Stromness owes its origins to its excellent harbour and the needs of shipping. The view from the ferry as it turns in past the Point of Ness and enters the harbour is of rows of stone-built houses

with gable-ends facing the sea, each with a small pier or slipway. No doubt Kirkwall looked very similar early in the 19th century before Junction Road was built.

The town started to develop in the early 1600s and by 1627 there were 480 people attending the Cairston Kirk. Over the next two centuries growth was rapid so that by 1821 there were 2,944 people in the parish. In 1901 the population was 3,180, but this fell to 1,998 by 1961. Since then it

Stromness inner harbour and boats



MV "Hamnavoe" arriving in Stromness from Scrabster

The first deep water pier was completed by private enterprise in 1879, and together with the advent of steamships helped to greatly increase the amount of trade going through the town. In 1824 there were four boatyards in Stromness, the biggest was built at Ness by John Stanger in 1836 and closed in 1926.

Pentland Firth Ferries The *SS Royal Mail* was built by Stanger in 1856, and provided the first regular crossing of the Pentland Firth. Several other

vessels have operated the service over the years, including four named *St Ola*. The first of these ran from 1892 until 1951. Before WWII the ferry called at Scapa and St Margaret's Hope on its way to Scrabster. Today it follows one of the world's most scenic shipping routes past the west cliffs of Hoy.

Herring In 1887, local fishing boats started to fish for Herring on the west side of Orkney. Within a few years the Herring Boom had

The Herring fleet setting sail as seen from Brinkie's Brae



STROMNESS ATTRACTIONS

TOWN

- The Harbour
- Graham Memorial
- Pier Arts Centre
- Lifeboat Shed
- Stromness Museum
- Login's Well
- The Cannon

WEST

- Point of Ness
- Stromness Golf Course
- Ness Battery
- St Peter's Chapel
- Warebeth Beach
- Breckness House
- Broch of Breckness
- Stennigar chambered cairn
- Stennigar standing stones
- Black Craig
- North Gaulton Castle
- Neban Point

EAST

- Copland's Dock
- The Holms
- Broch of Navershaw
- Bu of Cairston Castle
- Brig o' Waithe
- Howe Broch (site of)
- Deepdale standing stone

VIEWPOINTS

- Brinkie's Brae
- Battery viewpoint
- Warebeth
- Black Craig



were declining due to over-fishing and the boom was over.

Today Stromness remains a busy port with a few large fishing boats as well as many smaller lobster and crab boats being based there. Most of the vessels taking divers out to the German Battleships from World War I are also based in here.

Northern Lighthouse Board

The NLB base at the south end closed in October 2003, marking the end of an association, which had lasted for 100 years. The vessels *Pharos* and *Pole Star* remain regular sights around Orkney as they maintain the many lighthouses, minor lights and buoys. The NLB helicopter is also a familiar sight while it transfers stores or engineers to the various lighthouses.

Lifeboat The first RNLI Lifeboat to be stationed in Stromness, the *Saltaire*, arrived in 1867, a year after the emigrant ship *Albion* went ashore on the Point of Oxan on Graemsay. This full-rigged 1,225-ton ship was bound for New York with 43 passengers and 24 crew, and after twelve days of severe weather made for Orkney.

Several boats, including the mail steamer immediately gave assistance, and although everyone was taken safely off the wreck, sadly 11 were drowned when one of the small boats capsized. The *Albion* had gone ashore about

1pm and such was the force of the seas, wind and tide that she had totally broken up by 5pm.

There was a lifeboat house and slipway at the Point of Ness at first, but this was unsatisfactory and new ones were built in 1902, with the first motor lifeboat, *John A Hay* coming in 1909. In 1916 the Stromness Lifeboat was refused permission to go the aid of survivors of *HMS Hampshire*, much to the disgust of the people of the town, who believe that many of the crew could have been saved.

The *J.J.K.S.W.* came into service in March 1928. She was a 51ft *Barnett* type specially designed for the station. In March 1930 the trawler *Ben Doran* went ashore on the Ve Skerries in Shetland. The sea was too high for local boats to assist so the Stromness Lifeboat was called on 55-hour mission. Sadly when she got there the wreck had gone and all the crew were lost. The Aith lifeboat station on the Westside of Shetland was established in 1933.



Aerial view of the Stromness street looking south from the Pier Head



Old and new Stromness Lifeboats at the slipway in May 1955.

reached Stromness. A new pier was constructed at the Point of Ness in 1893, and accommodation was built for the gutters and curers. The season lasted for two months from mid-June and at the peak there were up to 400 sailing boats fishing out of Stromness. By 1908 catches

Stromness Lifeboat - "17-16 Violet Dorothy and Kathleen"



"SS St Ola I" (1892-1951)



"MV St Ola II" (1951-1974)





"St Ola" III leaving Stromness (1974-1992)



"St Ola IV" in Hoy Sound (1992-2002)

In May 1955 Archibald & Alexander M Paterson replaced the long-serving J.J.K.S.W. and was in turn replaced by the Arun class Joseph Rothwell Sykes and Hilda M, which was moored rather than stored in the lifeboat shed.

The station now has a "Severn"-class boat capable of

25 knots, "17-16 Violet Dorothy and Kathleen", which is moored in the harbour, and came into service in 1998. The lifeboat shed is no longer in RNLI use and is occupied by Scapa Scuba, but retains many interesting artefacts relating to the services of the various boats which were based there.

The Street The main street twists and turns along the shore among the houses, which are built out into the sea on the one side and into the hill on the other. Narrow closes emanate into the flag-stone paved street, which still has cobbles up the centre, a reminder of the days of horse transport. There are many evocative names - one close is



Graham Memorial Fountain



Khyber Pass



Boys fishing for Sillocks

"The Cannon" viewpoint, on Stanger's Brae



Processing Herring at Stromness



Dundas Street in the late 19th century

fittingly named "Khyber Pass"! The town has retained its attractive character, with development tending to be away from the old street.

Graham Place is named after Alexander Graham who, with other Stromness merchants in the 18th century opposed the exclusive foreign trading rights which Kirkwall held as a Royal Burgh. Stromness businesses had to pay a special tax to Kirkwall and the final success of this campaign in a ruling by the House of Lords in 1754, freed Stromness from

John Rae in his inflatable boat



Victoria Street in the early 21st century - little change

its obligations towards Kirkwall, thus allowing its merchants to trade freely abroad. The town finally became a burgh in 1817. Graham died penniless in 1783, but he is commemorated at the Pierhead Fountain by the grateful town.

Stromness Museum was founded in 1837. The present building, erected in 1858, has displays on Orkney maritime and natural history, including the Hudson's Bay Company, whaling, fishing, shipping, and the German Grand Fleet scut-

tled in Scapa Flow. Natural history exhibits include Orkney birds and their eggs, mammals, fossils, seashells, butterflies and moths. It is a fascinating little museum, and well worth a visit.

Perhaps of greatest interest are the artefacts relating to Dr John Rae. He was born at the Hall of Clestrain in 1813, and worked for many years as a doctor and surveyor for the Hudson's Bay Company in Canada. Today he is most remembered for establishing the fate of the Franklin

John Rae's fiddle





Captain's parlour at Stromness Museum

Expedition, which set out in 1845 to find the Northwest Passage.

Raestands out as the foremost 19th century expert in arctic travel and survival. He adopted and adapted the techniques of the indigenous people which was against the ethos of Victorian England. Despite his outstanding successes he was never acknowledged by the British state for what he was. His memorial can be seen in St Magnus Cathedral. Stromness Museum has his innovative inflatable boat, violin, and many other interesting related artefacts.

Pier Arts Centre



Distillery Across the road from the museum, where a housing development called Mayburn Court now stands, was the site of the "Old Orkney" Distillery, established in 1828. As it was built on a hill, pumps were not needed except to fill the Wash Still. The small Pot Stills had a capacity of 300 gallons and one had apparently previously been used illicitly, as when the building was being demolished a concealed still was found within one of the walls.

In 1887 the distillery produced 7,000 gallons of Highland Malt, but it was closed in 1920. The

Temperance Movement gained much support in the town after World War I and between 1920 and 1947 the town was "dry". The poet and author George Mackay Brown lived in a house on this site for many years.

Pier Arts Centre The Pier Arts Centre buildings were originally the premises of Edward Clouston, Orkney's recruiting agent for the Hudson's Bay Company between 1836 and 1867, and latterly the home of local artist Sylvia Wishart. The picturesque old premises were renovated in 1979 to house a permanent collection of works of the St Ives School (Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson and others) donated by Margaret Gardiner.

The Centre had a major redevelopment in 2005-2007 with a new extension that fits in very well with the original buildings. It acts as a focal point for the Orkney artistic community. There is a regular exhibition programme, as well

Pier Arts Centre

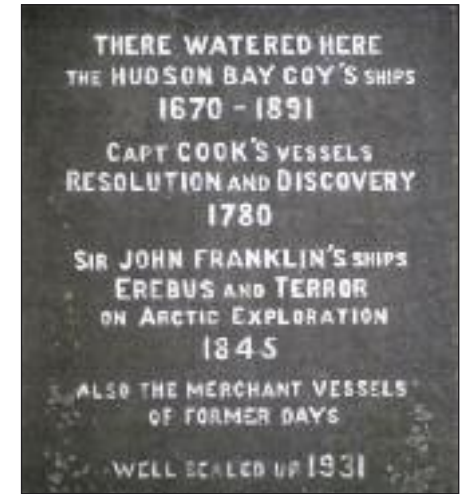


Stromness Museum artefacts from the WWI German Fleet

as a diary of educational events.

As George Mackay Brown said in 1988, "*The Pier Arts Centre in Stromness has, in the brief decade of its existence, been an "alma mater" for all the arts and artists in Orkney. It has also, of course, kept open house to artists and their work from every country and continent. May it still be there, in its lovely setting, and flourishing mightily, after ten decades have come and gone.*"

Old Vatted Stromness Whisky label



Login's Well on Stanger's Brae

The Cannon on Stanger's Brae at the South End is said to have come from an American privateer, the *Liberty*, captured in 1813. It was fired whenever ships requiring men or provisions entered harbour.

The public seats here are an excellent place to sit and watch the boats coming and going in the harbour. A nearby house on the shore has a dinghy with davits in the garden. On summer evenings Snipes and Yoles take part in points races and make a pretty spectacle.

Login's Well is just down the hill. It was sealed up in 1931, after supplying the town and countless visiting ships for many years. These included in 1780, Captain Cook's ships *Resolution* and *Discovery* on their way home from the South Pacific after the death of Cook. In 1845 the two doomed vessels of Franklin's failed bid to find the Northwest Passage, *Erebus* and *Terror* also made their last call here..

Events The quaint narrow streets and intimate nature of

Old Vatted Stromness Whisky advert





Stromness from the ferry

Stromness make it popular with visitors, and several events take place during the year, including, in late May, Orkney Folk Festival. Traditional music has undergone a revival and this successful festival, which was established in 1983, attracts a wide variety of local, as well as visiting, musicians. Events are spread over the islands during

Stromness from the Ness



the last weekend of May with Stromness as the main venue.

In June the town shares events and performances of the St Magnus Festival with Kirkwall, while in July the Stromness Shopping Week takes place. The Shopping Week Queen is crowned on the Monday and the town has a gala week, culminating in a

Fancy Dress Parade and firework display on the Saturday night. More recently several other events have been started, including Orkney Jazz Festival, in April, Orkney Beer Festival, in August and Orkney Blues Festival in September..

Golf Course There is an excellent Golf Course at

Dundas Street



Stromness. The game was originally played on the links at Warebeth and the present course was set out in 1924, when the Club bought the farm of Ness. There is a modern clubhouse now, as well as a bowling green and tennis court. The complex is shared with Stromness Sailing Club, which has points racing during the summer, as well as an annual regatta. Traditional Orkney yoles, some renovated, others new, regularly sail here.

The Stromness Ba' In former times old Orkney football and shooting took place on New Year's Day, and latterly on Christmas Day also. By 1884 the Ba' was being played in the streets in the Kirkwall style between Southenders and Northenders. In 1904 a Boys' game was first played.

The Town Council did not approve and on New Year's Day 1924 the last game was played. The excuse to ban the game was the fitting of a new plate glass window to a cafe. The Council continued for some years to renew its ban, which was accepted. This was probably because the game was an imported event, rather than an indigenous tradition with a long history.

Stromness Yule Tree A different tradition which survived until 1936 was the Stromness Yule Tree, during which a tree was acquired on Christmas Eve by the young men of the town. The Southenders and



The Stromness Ba' in the early 1900s



Stromness from the Holms in the 1890s



The Orkney Folk Festival is one of many Stromness-based events

Cameron Stout made a triumphant return from winning "Big Brother"





Leaving Stromness on the ferry



Stromness from Brinkie's Brae in 1910 - "St Ola I" is arriving



Snipes sailing in Stromness Harbour



Stromness from Brinkie's Brae in 2005 - more houses but the same fine view - "Hamnavoe" leaving

Northenders attached chains and ropes to it and they took part in a form of tug o'war in the streets until one of the goals was reached.

In this case the Council also disapproved, but did not actually try to ban the event. However since half the fun

was deciding whose tree to take without permission, when the Council insisted on having the owner's consent to have his or her prize specimen cut down this had a dampening effect.

Nowadays such behaviour would be frowned upon and

Stromness is undergoing a renewal development which will transform the harbour area to the whim of today's planners and architects. The town however grew organically, which is probably its principal attraction. Hopefully they will not succeed in destroying this magic.

Sunset over Hoy Sound from the Point of Ness



EUROPEAN MARINE ENERGY CENTRE (EMEC)

The European Marine Energy Centre was established in 2003. Its Mission Statement is "To be the internationally acknowledged leading test and certification centre for marine energy converters." Its base is in the Old Academy.

Off Billia Cru below the Black graig, it has test berths for wave energy convertor devices, situated along the 50m water depth contour. It also has a tidal energy convertor test site of the southwest of Eday in the Fall of Warness. Each test berth is connected by cables to an onshore substation which passes electricity to the National Grid.

The aim is to stimulate and accelerate the development of marine power devices by providing a realistic testing environment and services for the development and certification of energy conversion devices. EMEC collects data on weather, waves and tides from its two sites. Developments at Kirkwall, Stromness and Lyness harbours by OIC underpin the status of Orkney as a major marine energy development location.

GEORGE MACKAY BROWN



Orkney produced several fine scholars, artists, authors and poets in the 20th century, including Edwin Muir, Eric Linklater, Hugh Marwick,

Stanley Cursiter, Margaret Tait and many others, but none was as prolific or so well known in his own lifetime as George Mackay Brown. This gifted poet and story-writer published more than 30 books and several of his stories were televised. He won many awards for his work, which is internationally famous.

His absorbing, lovely stories and poems are essential reading for anyone who likes Orkney. Sadly he died in April 1996 and was buried in Stromness after a service in the Cathedral on St Magnus Day. The poet Edwin Muir said that "Grace was what most shone out from all George Mackay Brown's writing." To this must be added a quiet passion for Orkney and Orcadians.



Interior of one of the 6in gun houses with ready use lockers and gun mounting

NESS BATTERY is situated to the west of Stromness Golf Course. It was first established at Linksness in 1914 with 2 12pdr quick fire guns from a warship. Later 2 more were placed at the Point of Ness. In 1915 twin 6in American guns were installed in 2 batteries. A third had 3 5.5in guns. Orkney Territorial Army personnel manned the smaller guns and Royal Marines the larger ones.

In 1938 the present Ness Battery was built with 2 twin

One of the twin 6in gun mountings in WWII



6in mountings, with a rate of fire of 72 rounds per minute.. Underground magazines with concrete and brick ancillary buildings were constructed. A prefabricated *Jain* wooden camp to house 141 Coastal Battery, a Battery Observation Post, a Fire Command post, and searchlight housings were also installed.

Engine rooms, water tanks, and remains from WWI complete the visible remains. The huts have survived as they were until recently used by the

Territorial Army. One still has wall murals dating from WWII which depict English village scenes.

The Battery defended the western approach to Scapa Flow. It was one of only two such emplacements in Orkney that was operational at the start of WWII.

Traffic was strictly controlled, and vessels that failed to communicate were given a shot across the bows. On one occasion, the *St Ola*, commanded by Captain Swanson was entering Hoy Sound after a German aircraft had dropped mines. It took several shots to convince him to go around the other side of Hoy.

Orkney was as an overseas posting for the British forces, with all the attendant perks and privileges. The usual rotation was 6 months. Ness Battery had a compliment of

over 100 but there was constant movement of personnel spending only a short time there before moving to other locations.

The Battery Observation Post (BOP) and gun emplacements are of cast concrete, and remain in good condition apart from rusted steel beams. The hutted camp originally had corrugated iron roofs. It is now a unique survivor with many original features.

The officers' quarters had a toilet block, a kitchen, and a mess with an ugly brick fireplace. Ordinary soldiers were quartered in four huts, with stoves for heating. The mess hall has a large mural painted on three sides of the interior walls. Allegedly the fourth wall featured a crest with the words, *Come the four corners of the earth, and we will sink them!*

The battery never fired a shot in anger and must have been a cold, damp posting. However it served its purpose along with the rest of the Scapa Flow defences in WWII.

Loading a 6in gun in WWII



Murals in the mess hall



Ness huts with the BOP in the background



Ness BOP, with the Royal Navy above and the Army below

Personnel at work in the Ness BOPs





North Gaulton Castle is about 2.5km north of the Black Craig

WALKS Stromness and the surrounding parish offer much to the walker based in the town.

Town The harbour and especially the muddy area at the north end are good places to seek out migrant birds such as Glaucous, Iceland or even Ring-billed Gulls in winter. A brisk climb to the top of Brinkie's Brae (HY252096, 94m) gives a good panoramic view of Stromness, Hoy Sound and Scapa Flow.

The small lanes at the back of Stromness also offer good

walks, the mostly granite rocks providing a contrast in terrain to the rest of Orkney. There are particularly good views east over the lochs from the track above Cauldhame (HY240130) and above Newtonhill (HY241121).

Point of Ness On a summer evening the stroll via the Point of Ness (HY257080) past the golf course, to Ness Battery (HY248079) and back is very pleasant. This gun battery was equipped with 6-inch guns in both World Wars, and includes protected gun houses, magazines and observation

Breckness House was built by Bishop Graham in 1633



towers. Its function was to protect the Hoy Sound entrance to Scapa Flow. There is a fine viewpoint at Citadel above the Battery.

The Battery is unique in that 4 of the accommodation huts have survived, one of which still has murals on the walls. The site was used by the Territorial Army until recently, during which time the huts were maintained. Visits are possible by arrangement.

Warebeth The path continues round the shore to St Peter's cemetery with its ruined church and scant remains of a broch, to Warebeth beach, no doubt named after the large amount of seaweed, or "ware" which gets washed up here. Return via the road through Innertown.

Breckness From Warebeth a path runs along the shore to Breckness (ON *Brak-ness*,

(Sea Crashing Point, HY224093), where the ruins of a fine house built by Bishop Graham in 1633 can be seen. This was an important bishopric property in the days of the Norse Earldom.

The Broch of Breckness has mostly been eroded away by the sea, but enough remains to show that this was originally an impressive structure. The sandstone beds here show particularly clearly. In a field above the beach of Stennigar (ON *Steina-gardr*, Stoney Farm, HY231095) is a dilapidated chambered cairn whose entrance faces the Kame of Hoy. Two small standing stones are nearby.

Cairston Leave Stromness by the Cairston Road and take the path by the shore, from where there is an interesting coastal walk to the Brig o'Waith (HY281113). The Holms can only be reached at low tide and were used during the Herring Boom for boat repairs and curing. Copland's Dock was a hive of boat building and repairing activity, but now lies quiet.

A small mound in a field

Parts of the Broch of Breckness being eroded by the sea



Howe Broch was excavated totally in the 1980s



Aerial view of Ness Battery

above the Bay of Naversshaw is an early Iron Age site, which was excavated in 1978. This large roundhouse was occupied about 600BC and had no surrounding buildings or defences. The interior was paved, with a large hearth and adjacent cooking tank. This type of house is thought to be the precursor of the brochs.

The *Orkneyinga Saga* relates that in September 1152, Earl Harald Maddadson took refuge from his cousin Erlend and Sweyn Asleifson in the Castle of Cairston. Above the shore at the Bu of Cairston (HY274095) are the overgrown remains of Cairston Castle which probably dates from the 16th century and no doubt incorporates the previ-

Ness Battery from the Citadel





Aerial view of Outertown from the west

ous Norse site. There is said to have been a church dedicated to the Holy Rood nearby.

Howe Broch At the farm of Howe a large-scale destruction excavation was carried out in the early 1980s on

Howe Broch. This yielded large amounts of information, but sadly the whole structure was necessarily destroyed in the process. This site was occupied from the Neolithic Age until Viking times. It provided a picture of continu-



Geo north of the Black Craig formed by an igneous intrusion eroding away

Winter sunset over Hoy from Warebeth



ity and change over the centuries and is described in the introduction. Continue along the shore to the Bush, the shallow estuary of the brackish Stennes Loch, and finally, the Brig o' Waithe is reached.

Deepdale Returning by the main road, there is an interesting standing stone (HY272118) overlooking the Loch near Deepdale. This was originally one of a pair, the other was knocked down by a farmer while ploughing in the 1970s and never re-erected. From here there are good views over the loch to Brodgar.

West Coast It is possible to carry round the shore past the



North Gaulton Castle is about 2.5km north of the Black Craig

storm beach of Billia Croo to the top of the Black Craig (HY220110, 111m). There is also a carpark at the end of the Outertown road beside the ruined cottage of Fletts. A path leads to the old Coastguard hut from where there are good views of Hoy and Hoy Sound.

The coastline north of the Black Craig is spectacular, with several geos and burns which cascade over the cliffs. There are stunning views along the cliffs to Hoy and the north of Scotland on a clear day. A marked path goes on to Yesnaby (5km, 3mi) and Skara Brae (3km, 2mi). A study of the local bus

Thrift in flower



timetable will reveal suitable connections to return to Stromness.

North Gaulton Castle (HY216134), a large rock stack just north of Neban Point (HY216132). Some years ago Rover landed a car on the top by helicopter as part of an advertising campaign. There are many attractive rock formations between Neban Point and Yesnaby. Although never far from habitation in reality, this piece of coastline feels very remote and isolated with only the ocean and birds for company. A farm track leads back to the public road at Cauldham.

STROMNESS TIMELINE

- 1152 Castle of Cairston in "OS"
- 1590 Inn on eastern shore
- 1627 480 people at Cairston Kirk
- 1633 Breckness House built
- 1670 Hudsons Bay Co set up
- 1702 HBC ships start to visit
- 1754 Traders win case v Kirkwall
- 1770s Whalers arriving
- 1780 Captain Cook's ships visit
- 1813 Liberty cannon captured
- 1816 Whaling at peak
- 1817 Burgh of Barony
- 1828 Stromness Distillery starts
- 1837 Stromness Museum founded
- 1856 First steamer to Scrabster
- 1867 RNLI lifeboat established
- 1887 Start of Herring Boom
- 1893 New pier at Point of Ness
- 1895 NLB shore station built
- 1892 St Ola I begins long career
- 1901 Population reaches 3,180
- 1920 Stromness votes to go "dry"
Distillery closed
- 1924 Last Stromness Ba' game
- 1927 End of Herring Boom
- 1930 North Pier built
- 1931 Login's Well sealed
- 1936 Last Stromness Yule Tree
- 1947 Stromness votes to be "wet"
- 1949 Stromness Shopping Week
- 1951 St Ola II in service
- 1974 St Ola III in service
- 1979 Pier Arts Centre opens
- 1981 Howe Broch excavated
- 1982 First Orkney Folk Festival
- 1992 St Ola IV in service
- 1996 Death of George M Brown
- 2003 NLB closes base
MV Hamnavoe on duty
EMEC opens
- 2004 Stromness marina complete
- 2005 Pier Arts Centre renovations
- 2009 Oyster 1 installed at EMEC
- 2011 Town Centre renovations

Grey Herons are often seen near the Brig o' Waithe

