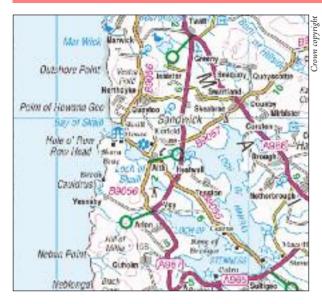
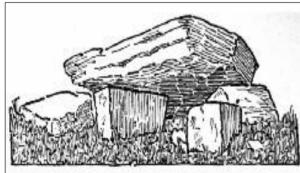
West Mainland - Sandwick



SANDWICK (ON Sand Vik, sandy bay) The Bay of Skaill has a beautiful, if variable, beach. This is one of the best places on the west side of the Mainland for wave-watching during westerly gales. Depending on winter storms, it may be sandy or all rounded pebbles and large boulders. At low tide the sand is exposed. The internationally renowned prehistoric village of Skara Brae is at the south end of the bay.

Skaill House dates from the 17th century, although there was almost certainly a large Norse farmstead near here long before that. The Loch of Skaill has many wintering wildfowl, while in summer waders are abundant around its edges. The south facing banks on the road past the loch are particularly beautiful in May with Primroses in flower. Later the loch shores are a sea of Meadowsweet and Irises in bloom.

The Stones of Via in the 19th century



Archaeology Although most famous for the Neolithic village of Skara Brae, Sandwick has many other interesting sites to visit. Sandwick offers a complete spectrum of archaeological and historic sites dating from before 3000BC to the 20th century.

Neolithic Age An ancient quarry at Vestrafiold, north of Quoyloo (HY239218) has for long been considered to be a likely source of monoliths used at the Standing Stones, Brodgar and Maeshowe. Several huge stone slabs still lie next to where they were quarried. Some still rest prone, set up on small stones to facilitate removal. The biggest is 5.5m in length.

Cruaday Quarry (HY247218) has also often been suggested as another possible source of the standing stones. There are more monoliths awaiting transport on the Northdyke hill above Huan.

Chambered Cairns There are no well-preserved chambered cairns in Sandwick to equal those elsewhere in Orkney. The Stones of Via (HY260160) near the Loch of Clumley, is a pile of large stones in a shallow depression about 80m in diameter. This enigmatic site may possibly be the remains of a chambered cairn which has been almost completely robbed out.

Other chambered cairns include Holy Kirk (HY249217) on the southeast side of Cruaday Hill and Russell Howe (HY249202) near West Bain.

Bronze Age Sand Fiold, the area of sand dunes at Skaill has been the site of several cist graves, the most recent and spectacular excavation being in 1989. A rock-cut hole 2m deep and over 3m square contained a large flagstone cist, one side of which could be opened. Inside were the remains of three burials. In one corner a large urn contained cremated remains and grass, while a mother and foetus had been placed in another corner, but not cremated. Finally more cremated remains lay in the centre and had been covered in something like matting.

The burials were made about 2000 BC, and so far this tomb is unique, other cists being much smaller and not re-used. The fact that not very much tangible evidence of the Bronze Age in Orkney has so far come to light may well indicate that much remains to be discovered.



The Bay of Skaill and Skara Brae from the southeast

Iron Age The Knowe of Verron (HY231198), an Iron Age site with evidence of metal working overlooks the north side of the Bay of Skaill. This is probably a small broch, which has been dug into in the past to reveal a flagstone floor, a central hearth and internal divisions. A vitrified stone, thought to be the base of a furnace, has disappeared.

The Broch of Stackrue (HY271151) near Lyking is cut through by the road, and was no doubt used as a quarry. Much of the surrounding ditch and rampart remains, as

SANDWICK ATTRACTIONS

BAY OF SKAILL AREA

Bay of Skaill Skara Brae Skaill House Knowe o'Snusgar St Peter's Kirk Broch of Verron Loch of Skaill

SOUTH TO STROMNESS

Hole o'Row Row Head Ramna Geo Broch of Borwick Yesnaby Brough of Bigging Yesnaby Castle Primula scotica Walk south to Stromness

## NORTH TO BIRSAY

Quoyloo Cruaday Quarry Vestrafiold monoliths Northdyke Outshore Point Walk north to Birsay

## INLAND

Voy Broch of Stackrue Burrian Broch Loch of Clumley and Broch Stones of Via Skeabrae Kierfiold House gardens Ring of Bookan Dyke o'Sean

Excavating the Sandfiold burial cist





Broch of Borwick, north of Yesnaby, has a settlement on its east side

well as substantial walling, which includes many large stones. In the field opposite the outline of an ancient chapel and graveyard can be made out.

Several brochs and burnt mounds line the shores of the Loch of Stenness, including those at the Ness of Voy and Redland. There are also broch sites below Tenston and Burrian on the west side Loch of Harray. Ruins on the

Penannular brooch from the Skaill Hoard

Holm of Kirkness may be a chapel.

The Broch of Clumley is unusual for Orkney in being situated on a small inland loch on an islet with stepping stones. Although none of the Sandwick brochs are very large, most have of structures around them.

Skaill Cemetery During renovation work at Skaill House 15 skeletons were discovered outside the south wing and under the gravel in front of the east porch. Initial studies suggest that these are early Christian, possibly Pictish. Other ancient skeletons were found under the hall in the 1930s.

Norse Longhouse Until recently the only Norse evidence from Sandwick was placenames and the Skaill Hoard. Recent geophysical studies and excavations on the Howe o'Snusgar have revealed Viking Age buildings. The longhouse so far excavated dates from around AD1000 and has over 1m high. A byre and outbuildings are also present. Artefacts.found include evidence of metalworking, as well as pottery, steatite and iron objects.

The Skaill Hoard In 1858 David Linklater was digging above the shore near the kirk.



Bracelet from the Skaill Hoard

Bracelet from the Skaill Hoard



when he came across some silver items. Before long 10 brooches, 14 necklets, 27 armlets and a large numbers of coins, ingots and small pieces of silver amounting to 7kg in all had been found. The Skaill Hoard, as it came to be known, was soon in the hands of the state, and was transferred to Edinburgh, where it remains.

The quality of the workmanship is exquisite. The most spectacular are the penannular brooches, with Mammen-style designs. The dates of the coins show that the hoard was deposited around AD950, as the newest was made in Baghdad in AD945. The Skaill silver was made around AD940.

Most of the brooches seem to have been made by the same craftsman, with Irish influences. Many of the coins, hack sliver and ring money pieces are of originate in the Middle Eastern origin, possibly in payment for trade goods or slaves.

St Peter's Kirk, at the north end of the Bay of Skaill was built in 1837 as the Sandwick Parish Church under the Reverend Charles Clouston, a forebear of Storer Clouston

St Peter's Kirk, Bay of Skaill



The Broch of Stackrue, near Lyking

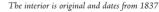


Norse longhouse at the Knowe o'Snusgar, Bay of Skaill

the author and historian. It is a rare survival of a 19th century Scots Presbyterian kirk in its most austere form. By the 1960s, St Peter's was used occasionally for worship and by the 1970s, only for funerals, the last being in 1984.

A 1988 a report by the Presbytery of Orkney advised

that the kirk was a liability, and recommended demolition even though it was an A-listed building. It was acquired for £1 in 1998 by the Scottish Redundant Churches Trust, which has completely renovated the building. Today the church is open to visitors and hosts concerts, weddings and other events.









Looking north from the Brough of Bigging, Yesnaby

SOUTH FROM SKAILL There are fine walks to the south from the Bay of Skaill. The Hole o'Row (HY224190), on the southwest side of the bay, is a large cave which has pierced right through the headland, and through which the sea breaks in rough weather. Care should be taken on the slippery rocks.

Row Head (59m) is the start of one of the finest stretches of cliff scenery in Orkney. There

The Hole o'Row is a natural arch

are good views from here both to North and South along the coast, and the walk from here to Yesnaby is very fine. The Ness of Ramnageo is the western tip of a long narrow geo which terminates in a cave.

Borwick (ON Broch Bay, HY224168) has a ruinous broch perched precariously on the edge of the cliff above the Noust of Borwick. This can provide excellent shelter for

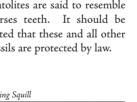
wave-watching, but must have been a damp and draughty place to live. On a wild winter's day this cliffbound bay can seem very remote.

Yesnaby (HY220162) is one of the most attractive places anywhere in Orkney to visit. The less energetic can admire the view from their car, or from the shelter of the WWII military buildings, which were used for gunnery practice. Primula scotica, Grass of Parnassus, Spring Squill and Sea Plantain can be seen from the side of the road here, growing on the Maritime Heath.

South from the car park is the Noust of Bigging, where fishermen used to pull up their boats, sheltered by the Brough of Bigging, another excellent place to watch huge Atlantic waves smashing into the cliffs on a rough day. Few places give a better impression of the power of the sea than this spot during a northwesterly gale!

The relatively low cliffs, with their dramatic shapes and warm colours, take on different aspects depending on the weather and season. On a fine summer s evening all is peace and the colours of the rocks are enhanced by the evening light. On the other hand in a winter's storm the cliffs become dark and brooding as clouds streak past and the sun comes and goes on huge waves.

Fossils Just north of the car park there is an exposure of stromatolites, which are fossilised cyanobacteria (bluegreen algae) which lived in the Devonian period, about 350 million years ago. These photosynthetic primitive organisms fixed carbon and released oxygen into the environment. Some of these stromatolites are said to resemble horses teeth. It should be noted that these and all other fossils are protected by law.









Yesnaby Castle with Thrift



Row Head from the south



Borwick in midwinter Yesnab







1970s to prevent exploratory

drilling of these deposits. Few

issues have so galvanised the

local community as this and a

sign in Stromness saying, NO

URANIUM - Keep Orkney Green

and Attractive, Not White and

Radioactive has only recently been

replaced by a Welcome to

Voy There are good vantage

points near Voy to watch

waterfowl on the Loch of

Stenness, as the road passes

close by the shore. From the

road above the farm of Upper

Voy the view takes in a lovely

combination of fields, hills,

water and sky with the greens,

browns and blues so typical of

Stromness"one.

Orkney.

Yesnaby Castle in an equinoctial gale

Yesnaby Castle The Castle Yesnaby (HY218153) stands in its own bay, Garthna Geo. The Old Man of Hoy can be seen from here, dwarfed by the higher St John's Head. Yesnaby Castle has often been used as practice by those about to climb its larger brother. On a clear day the Sutherland hills in the distance extend all the way to Cape Wrath.

Uranium Ancient igneous rocks outcrop at Yesnaby from beneath the Stromness flagstones. Uranium occurs in these basal beds which are also exposed at Stromness and on Graemsay. A vigorous campaign was fought in the late

The Brough of Bigging, Yesnaby from the north



## NORTH FROM SKAILL

There is a fine coastal walk from the Bay of Skaill north to Marwick in Birsay. From the Knowe of Verron there are fine views over the bay and to Row Head. The path passes a series of small geos and low cliffs to Outshore Point, This is one of the few places on the Mainland to see Puffins.

Vestrafiold has already been mentioned as the area from which at least some of the standing stones were quarried. Cruaday Quarry is still a source of flagstones and fish

Quoyloo has a secret valley with an old kirk, a brewery in the old school and an interesting shop and general store. There is a tearoom and craftshop at Lower Appiehouse, run by photographer and artist Pam Farmer, with lovely views across Sandwick.

WWII airfields In WWII. two airfields were built in the West Mainland. Much of the area has now been cleared, but some of the buildings, including the control tower at Twatt,

The Ness, Voy, at the northwest of the Loch of Stenness



have so far not been destroyed. There are plans to this turn into Interpretation Centre in future.

These airfields were important as staging posts and training bases later in the War, and a large variety of aircraft types used them. Twatt Airfield (HY265230) was commissioned as HMS Tern on 1st April 1941 and was greatly used for disembarkment of carrier-borne aircraft of many types.

Skeabrae Airfield (HY270205) was commenced by the Admiralty, but handed over to the Air Ministry in May 1940. The first active service units arrived in August 1940, but it was January 1941 before Hurricanes of 3 Squadron RAF were based here.

Air defence remained important throughout the war and although there were only a few actions latterly, this underlines the effectiveness of the system. There was also a Ground Control Interception Station at Skeabrae.

Kierfiold House is the large whitewashed house which overlooks the Loch of Skaill from the north. It has a large walled garden which is sometimes open to the public in the summer. Apart from the displays of flowers and shrubs, this is an excellent place to seek out butterflies and bumblebees.



The Loch of Stenness from Upper Voy, looking southeast towards the Orphir Hills



Yesnaby Castle with Thrift in Jun



Dramatic summer sky over the Loch of Skaill

Aerial view of Skeabrae Airfield today





Aerial view of Skara Brae, aligned to the plan opposite

SKARA BRAE (HY232188), by the south shore of the Bay of Skaill, is unique. This remarkably well-preserved Neolithic village is one of very few archeological sites where it is actually possible to imagine the life-style of the inhabitants.

**Discovery** It is said to have been first revealed after a severe northwesterly storm and extremely high tide in 1850. In fact the suare catacombs in the Downs of Skaill were commented on by James Robertson, who visited in the 1760s. It thus seems that the village was known about long before the 1850 gale.

Recent work has shown that this prehistoric community was occupied for at least 500 years, from before 3100BC to

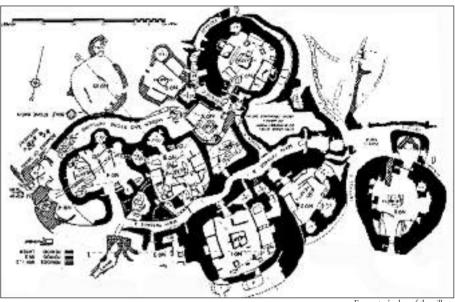
Professor V Gordon Childe with visitors in the 1930s



about 2500BC. There is evidence of earlier layers dating from 3500BC, while secondary usage continued until about 2200BC.

Excavation Four houses were cleared out in the 1860s, but no further work was done until the site was taken into state care in 1925. A great number of artefacts were recovered which were on display in Skaill House along with some of the Skaill Hoard silver, before being claimed by the National Museum.

In the meantime further storms washed away most of hut 3 and part of hut 1. After 1925 a sea wall was built to protect the site from further damage. Professor V Gordon Childe was brought in to supervise its recording and conservation in 1929.



Excavator's plan of the village

The complexity of the ruins and the need to preserve the structures made a proper stratigraphic excavation impossible, but clear evidence of several phases of occupation were revealed. This also means that a great deal remains for future investigators to reveal.

Skerrabrae The name Skara Brae is a recent 20th century corruption of Skerrabra, as it is still known locally, the brae part being a mapmaker's corruption. It is perhaps from ON Skjaldbreiðr, Broad Shield, as the former mound resembled a Norse shield.

Alternatively the name may come from ON Skerabreiðr, Broad Skerry, referring to the large area of rocks which protects the site from the west. In former times the settlement

was probably separated from the sea by sand dunes and dune slacks, which have since been eroded away.

Village Having been protected within a large dune for over 4,000 years, the village is remarkably preserved. The group of seven houses is connected by a covered close, all of which were buried to the tops of the walls by midden. This

clay-like mixture of refuse consists of ashes, shells, bones, sand and other domestic detritus, which has been a major factor in protecting the site from erosion. It seems that the occupants built the midden around their houses intentionally as an integral part of the construction.

The material appears to have been stored and used deliber-

Hut 1 before being taken into State care





Hut 7 is now hidden by a turfed over roof and is the lowest level

ately rather than simply piled round existing houses. The earlier house appear to have been free standing like those at Barnhouse.

Houses The houses vary in size from over 6m square to barely 4m square, with a maximum surviving wall height of 2.4m. The designs are quite similar with beds, dressers, tanks in the floor, cupboards in the walls and cells off the main room. A system of stone-lined drains, which connect to several of the sidecells, serves the village, to remove rainwater, and no

Replica of hut 7 at the Visitor Centre

doubt domestic waste of various types. Childe describes green slime being found in the drains, but unfortunately none

Each house has a central fireplace and a doorway exiting to the main passage. These were small, about 1.1m high by 0.6m wide, and very carefully constructed. There was provision to fasten the doors from the inside. The dressers are prominently placed facing the entrance. In the later houses, stone box beds stand beside the sidewalls.

was kept for later analysis.

Two older women were buried









The interiors are surprisingly spacious with a floor area of up to 36m<sup>2</sup>. Damp-proof courses had also been invented over 5,000 years ago. The foundations of the houses have a layer of blue clay in the bottom course, which would have worked as well as polythene does today.

The earliest houses resemble those at Barnhouse, with beds recessed in the walls, while the later ones are larger with freestanding boxbeds. During the 500 years or more of primary occupation the buildings were repaired, modified and rebuilt, apart from hut 7, which is built on a clay base directly on the sand.

under one wall, perhaps before the house was built. It has been suggested that this was a foundation burial and that the hut had a different use to the others. Although no drains have been found leading from hut 7, two of the compartments had thick layers of green sludge.

What remains today is like an animal skeleton. There would have been driftwood from America available for furnishings and materials such as animal sheepskins, leather and eider down, as well as caisies, cubbies and the original Orkney chairs. There is no evidence of fabrics being used and no remains of anything to do with weaving. No spindles or whorls were found. However fibres from Nettle stems were probably used to make fishing lines and nets, and perhaps clothes. Heather stems would have provided ropes and wool was undoubtedly used to make cloth, perhaps by felting rather than

The roofs would have been supported by couples made of driftwood or whalebones and covered with skins or turf, held down by heather ropes and straw simmons. There was probably a central hole to let out the smoke and let in some light. House 7 has holes in the top courses of stones, which look like they are for the fitting of joists.

weaving.

As whales were much more abundant, strandings would have been more frequent 5,000 years ago. One Blue Whale ashore in the Bay of Skaill would have provided enough rafters for a village much bigger than this. The blubber would have supplied large quantities of oil, while the teeth, baleen and other parts would have all been used.



Hut 1 is the most complete apart can be studied from all angle



Waves breaking over the seawall onto Skara Brae

The street and doorways are narrow, so there may easily have been roof entrances to facilitate the moving of large objects like pots. Most likely

these roomy houses had internal galleries for storage and sleeping. There is no evidence for this but a visit to the replica house makes this obvious.

The Street is built from large stones and covered by lintels





Hut 8 is different and was probably the workshop, kiln and barn

The Workshop One building, hut 8, was apparently the workshop, as it has no beds and is differently arranged. It is to the south of the houses and was not surrounded by midden. Many fragments of chert, which had been heated, were found on the floor. In

the absence of flint this stone was used to make cutting and scraping tools.

There was a kiln probably for firing pottery, and for drying grain and malt. Large pots were made in sizes up to 60cm diameter, which were often



The north entrance to hut 8

decorated with geometric patterns. This is classed as Grooved Ware, which was also found at Barnhouse, the Standing Stones, Rinyo and in some of the Maeshowe-type chambered cairns.

The porch on the east end has opposing doors and has been interpreted as an area for winnowing of corn, while the building was probably also a grain storage and processing area, and may have been used to malt barley. The large pots could hold at least 100l and would have been used for storage, but may well also have functioned as containers for making ale. Apart from this usage, malted barley is very nutritious, and much more palatable to people and ruminants than the grain. Once dried, malt stores very well.

Lifestyle The inhabitants kept cattle, pigs and sheep. They grew barley and some wheat, fished the nearby waters, caught birds and gathered shellfish. Bone was much used for tools and jewellery, but wood was also used. Red



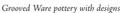




ochre made from haematite was found in small stone and whalebone containers, suggesting that decoration was also used. The soil conditions were not favourable for the preservation of wood and thus very little has survived.

However there would have been plenty of driftwood from North America and it is very likely that it was used for many purposes. The villagers must have had reasonably good boats to go fishing as they did. No doubt these craft had wooden frames with leather covering, sown and strengthened with nettle fibre.

Artefacts Many artefacts were discovered at Skara Brae including numerous circular stone pot lids, bone tools and jewellery. Four carved stone objects were also found, similar to others found in Orkney and elsewhere in Scotland. It has always been assumed that these special objects had some significant purpose associated with ritual and that somehow the inhabitants were totally different to people today.





Hut 8 from the south

Neolithic Art also appears in the many motifs which have been scratched on stones at Skara Brae, especially in huts 7 and 8 and in the street near hut 2. They may be seen by visitors on the east side of hut 8 and at the south entrance to the street. Made up of lozenges, chevrons, crosses and triangles, these motifs resemble those on Grooved Ware pots and similar inscriptions from Brodgar and Barnhouse as well as Maeshowe. Quoyness, Cuween and Wideford Hill cairns.



Incised design in hut 8







Hut 5 is earlier and has the heds built into the wall-

Perhaps the most famous is the lozenge and spiral pottery decoration much used by 20th century jewellers. Similar designs are found in southern Britain, Ireland and France. They may be on pottery, inscribed on objects or be pecked on stones. Their meanings remain unknown, but they are clearly much more than idle scratchings.

The enigmatic carved stone balls are of particular interest. Similar objects are found all over Scotland. They represent a considerable amount of work in design and execution which suggests that they have strong symbolic meanings.

Carved stone object - possibly a bull's head with geometric carvings

Skaill knives were common here, and are made by chipping shards off beach stones to give a useful sharp edge. One of these is decorated with the patterns already described. There is a pervasive feeling that these shapes and symbols have meanings, but if they do they remain elusive. No organic artefacts have survived with these symbols.

Pots containing haematite or red ochre were found. This may have been used for personal adornment. Another idea is that the pigment was mixed with oil to make paint. Recently several stones with their edges painted in various reds and yellows have been found at the Ness of Brodgar. Some are incised with lines and dots.

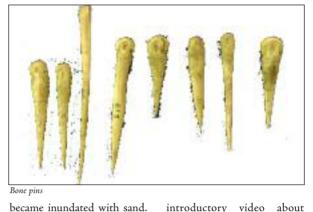
No evidence has been found of any material objects from outside Orkney, suggesting a self-sufficient life-style. That contacts with communities from further afield occurred is clear from the pottery and artwork. Boats good enough to fish off to the west of Orkney are certainly adequate to cross the Pentland Firth and traverse the coast of Britain.

Living and Dead The design of the houses for the living echoes that of the houses for the dead, the chambered cairns, with their entrance passages, main chambers, stone furniture and side cells, all covered with turf. There is no doubt that the ancestors were important to Neolithic society, just as they are today.

Abandonment of the settlement around 2600BC was very likely caused by encroaching sand, perhaps slowly as the dunes shifted and the surrounding land







became inundated with sand. A great storm could have caused the village to be overwhelmed. However some of the houses continued in use for at least 300 years after this, as shown by the multiple occupation layers in the sand which filled them.

Visitor Centre The nearby Visitor Centre has a good



Carved stone ball (replica)

Pendants with incised markings

on the site. The impressive replica of house 7 gives a dramatic idea of just how cosy and spacious they were. There is also a café and a well stocked

Skara Brae and the Neolithic

Age in Orkney. Hands on

interpretative displays and a

range of artefacts and dia-

grams give a good perspective



Carved stone ball (replica)



Lines carved on a bed end in Hut 7

Doorway to hut 1 from inside







Skaill House and Skara Brae from the east

SKAILL HOUSE is just inland from Skara Brae on the Bay of Skaill. It was first built for Bishop George Graham in about 1620 on the site of an older hall. There are stone fragments from Breckness House at Stromness. These include an armorial panel of the Graham family on the porch. The Bishop was forced

to resign in 1638 but he kept his properties and the Breckness Estate still ended up in the hands of his youngest son.

It has been added to by successive lairds, with major building work in the 1770s, 1880s and 1950s, culminating in the addition of the north



The spacious upstairs Drawing Roon

tower and wing giving the house its characteristic profile.

The present laird, Major Malcolm Macrae, restored the house and opened it to the public in 1997. During renovations, 15 skeletons were found next to the south wing and in front of the east porch. These are early Christian, possibly 7th century Pictish. Skeletons were also found under the hall in the 1930s, so the first builders of Skaill were probably unaware of this ancient burial ground.

Tour Visitors can now enjoy this laird's family home. The Dining Room with Captain Cook's dinner service from his ship the Resolution and the Library with its circular window are downstairs. The large Drawing Room and Bishop Graham's bedroom, with his bed are upstairs, while the Gun Room and Hall have sporting and military memorabilia as well as many other items collected during the lives of the past lairds.

Ghosts The house abounds with ghost stories. The Laird.

Bishop Graham's Bedroom with his original bed



a winner of the Sword of Honour at Sandhurst, is no believer in the supernatural. He swears that he heard footsteps late one night when he was doing up the flats around the courtyard. His dog raised her hackles and, barking loudly, ran out of the room. But there was no one there.

Countess Temple of Stowe attributed this to the ghost of Ubby, who many years ago built the small island in the middle of Skaill Loch by rowing out and dumping stones. He is said to have died on the island. Two recent tenants of the flats have also had strange experiences, one claiming that someone sat on his bed beside him, the other that their dog went berserk one night.

And one day cleaners saw a woman with a shawl over her head standing inside the doorway of the top flat. Later they discovered that the flat was empty at the time. But all of the stories agree that the ghost or ghosts of Skaill are friendly.

The house makes an fascinating visit, with its diverse

Graham armorial panel





The spacious upstairs Drawing Room



The Dining Room features some of Captain Cook's dinner service

exhibits and historical associations. The shop stocks a good variety of interesting things,

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mostly local and some unique to Skaill. Entry is by a joint ticket with nearby Skara Brae.

## Skaill House



Skaill House is open from April to October from 9.30am to 5.30pm every day (last entry 5.15pm). Joint tickets for Skara Brae and Skaill House are available from the Visitor Centre. Visits out of season can be arranged by appointment. There are two selfcatering apartments for rent at Skaill House, available all year.

> info@skaillhouse.co.uk skaillhouse.co.uk Tel (01856) 841501 Fax (01856) 841668

Skaill House from the southwest

