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WESTRAY (ON Vestrey, West Isle), the second largest of the North Isles, is in many ways Orkney in miniature. It has been described as *The Queen of*

Puffin at Noup Head



the Isles with its good farmland, hilly moorland, magnificent cliff scenery and lovely sandy beaches. Westray is also the most prosperous of the North Isles, producing a large number of quality cattle and having much of Orkney's fishing fleet. Like other parts of Orkney, there are a diverse range of things to see and do.

Puffins For many visitors the Castle o' Burrian (HY504429) is an essential first stop. This rock stack set in a small natural amphitheatre and is a short walk (1,200m) from Rapness Mill. An alcove on the west

side is an excellent place from which to watch the many Puffins which nest in burrows on the stack and on the surrounding grassy cliffs.

The Westray Wife



Aerial view of Pierowall with Loch Saintear on bottom right, Aikerness top left and Papay on top right

Pierowall (HY437485) is one of the best harbours in the North Isles, the name derives from *Pier o'Wa*. *Wa*, (ON Vagr, Bay), is the old name of the area on the west shore of Pierowall Bay. *The Hofn*, (ON *Hofn*, haven), mentioned several times in the *Orkneyinga Saga*, is Pierowall, and much evidence of the Norse settlers has been found here in the form of graves in the links (dunes) to the north and west of the village. Pierowall is one of the few set-

tlements in Orkney which is not modern in origin.

Westray Heritage Centre in Pierowall features annual topical exhibitions. It gives an insight into Westray's past and present, with historical and genealogical information. There are hands-on things for children and a replica geo has birds. The Pierowall Neolithic stone has pride of place. It is open from May from September.

Pierowall from Broughton



WESTRAY ATTRACTIONS

Heritage Centre
St Mary's Kirk
Noltland Castle
Links of Noltland
Gill Sands
Grobbust Beach
Queena Howe Broch
Quoygrew Norse site
The Ouse
Aikerness Walk
Holm of Aikerness
Westray Airfield
Loch of Burness
Loch of Saintear
Noup Head Lighthouse
Noup Head RSPB Reserve
Gentlemen's Cave
West Coast Walk
Fitty Hill - highest hill
Bay of Kurbist
Knowe o' Burristae Broch
Knowe o'Skea
Mae Sand
Tuquoy Walk
Cross Kirk
Bay of Tuquoy
Loch of Swartmill
Swartmill Bay
Castle o' Burrian (Puffin)
Stanger Head (Puffin)
Bay o' Tafts
Faray & Holm of Faray



Noltland Links, Grobust



Archaeologists at work on Noltland Links, above Grobust



Historic Scotland

Clay Figurine

Archaeology Westray also has a large number of archaeological sites, ranging from the Neolithic to Medieval times. These include chambered cairns, settlements, burials, brochs, Viking houses and churches. A number of very interesting artefacts have been found in recent times.

Links of Noltland In the sand dunes above Grobust beach is

one of the most interesting Neolithic sites in Orkney (HY428493). The Links of Noltland are infested by Rabbits, whose burrows have destabilised the dunes. Combined with changes in the sand regime on Grobust beach, this has led to severe erosion.

A well-preserved building was excavated between 1978 and 1981. It consists of two rather irregularly shaped rooms, with small cells leading off. Radiocarbon dating gave a range 2900-2200 BC. The house built in a large hole in the sand which had been lined with midden in a manner similar to that used at Skara Brae.

Many artefacts, including Grooved Ware pottery, were found. The midden material contained skulls and cattle bones, plus skeletons of an Otter and a Sea Eagle. Evidence of cultivation and a quantity of Red Deer bones were also found. As at Skara Brae the ruins were protected by sand dunes. The house was then backfilled and the results are still unpublished.

In recent years the beach and dune system at Grobust has

Excavation of a Neolithic house in the 1980s



Grooved Ware Pottery from Noltland Links



changed, with much erosion revealing extensive archaeological remains. At present excavation is once again under way. In 2009 the *Westray Wife* was found here. This sandstone figurine has eyes, eyebrows, a nose, breasts and indications of clothing. Another was later found, this time made of baked clay and headless.

The extensive settlement includes an unusual building with a line of ox skulls in its foundations. A large farmhouse was surrounded by an impressive dyke, in the midst of clearly delineated fields. Later this building was used as a byre and finally became filled with rubble and midden. It was here that the figurine was found.

The Links of Noltland site was occupied for over 1,000 years, starting around 3000BC. The good reservation of bones, shells and other artefacts is allowing an insight into life in these times. But questions arise as to why complete deer were buried and for what purpose over 20 cattle heads were built into a house wall.

Pierowall Stone During quarry operations at Pierowall, a

Remains of chambered cairn and roundhouse, Pierowall



Point of Cott chambered cairn

carved stone was discovered with a spiral and lozenge design (now in Westray Heritage Centre) which may have been the lintel over the entrance to a chambered tomb of the Maeshowe type. This tomb had been demolished about 2100 BC and then used as a flint tool workshop. Finally a large round house was built here in the Iron Age.

Stalled Cairns Near Cleat, at the Point of Cott (HY465474), is a long stalled cairn which dates from about 3000BC. Nine stall slabs were visible above the surface in the centre of this grassy mound and traces of walling could be seen, but little is now left after a destruction excavation said to be due to erosion by the sea. The south side had a forecourt



Point of Cott chambered cairn plan

and was enclosed by low banks or *horns*. A further stalled tomb at Vere (HY458505) is a low mound in front of Vere farmhouse. The stall divisions can still be made out on the top of the mound.

Part of the Pierowall Stone





Erosion of sand dunes and machair at Grobust

There is a prominent round cairn on a ridge near Powdykes (HY434436), where some upright slabs can still be made out. There are also remains of chambered cairns at Fitty Hill (HY433445), Knucker Hill (HY428470) and Couter's Hill

(HY422491). The Lum Head (HY422491) overlooks Grobust and may be the burial place for the Noltland Links settlement. None of these cairns is in a good state of preservation, but they are worth visiting for the view and

as part of a longer walk. No doubt many other cairns existed, but have been destroyed during subsequent millennia.

Bronze Age A badly eroded burnt mound near Gill Pier (HY450492) has many exposed broken burnt stones, over black earth. Several other burnt mounds also exist but are not obvious. No definite Bronze Age settlement has been identified as yet apart from the continued occupation at Noltland Links.

Iron Age There are numerous probable broch mounds on Westray, the best preserved of which is the Knowe o'Burrastae (HY432429) on the shore near Langskaill. The sea has eroded most of the inside, leaving a curved wall with a square doorway into an intramural passage. The mound is steep on the landward side and structures can be seen in the ground around it.

Queena Howe (HY425495, ON *Kvi Haugr*, mound field) is a prominent mound at the west end of Grobust. A series of stone structures can be seen in the eroded shoreline. These appear to be circular walls, the outermost of which has beach boulders built as a possible breakwater. The top has been dug into to reveal built stones. It is probably a substantial broch.

Berstness At the exposed headland of Berstness (HY440420) there are remains of a prehistoric settlement with

curving walls and a possible heel-shaped house. The layout of old field boundaries can be made out. The buildings are assumed to be related to the adjacent mound on the tidal holm to the south.

Knowe o'Skea is a large mound at Berstness (HY441418) which has been investigated by archaeologists for several years. This was originally thought to be a chambered cairn, but excavation has revealed a complex Iron Age burial and metalworking site. A large rounded building with a rectangular interior and very thick walls which had been repeatedly added to over perhaps 500 years was revealed. The interior had a central hearth and stone box beds but very little pottery or other domestic debris.

There were no burials within this building, but a large number of remains have been found in the structures and walls on the north side of it. Two of these small buildings were metalworking workshops. A metal pin was found by one of the skeletons and moulds for casting similar pins turned up. It may be that the metalworking was related to death and burial.

Until then, very few Iron Age burials had been examined. Remains of over 100 individuals have so far been found, over half of which were from young babies. There were few grave goods apart from shells buried with some of the infants. The high incidence of small babies is unusual but may just mean that



Knowe o'Skea from Berstness



Excavation work on the Knowe o'Skea

there was high infant mortality.

Some Bronze Age burials were also found in the mound, which may well have been built on a Neolithic chambered cairn similar to the one on the headland opposite. Thus the site may

have been in use as a burial ground for a very long time. The settlement which used the Knowe o'Skea as its graveyard may be situated to the north of the nearby farm of Langskaill, or at the Broch o'Burrastae.

Excavating a skeleton on the Knowe o'Skea



Knowe o'Burrastae Broch is on the shore near Langskaill

Queena Howe Broch, at the west end of Grobust





Mae Sand is a fine south-facing beach backed by dunes and machair

Viking Age The Viking graves found at Pierowall date from the 9th century. Those of men contained swords, spearheads, axes, knives and combs, while those of women had trefoil brooches, penannular brooches, tortoise-shaped brooches in pairs, bracelets, knives, combs and beads. Some boat-burials were present, and dogs or horses were sometimes buried in the same grave.

It seems that the Vikings became Christian quite soon after the main influx and there are at least two churches on Westray which were established in Norse times. In the past many such graves were uncovered, both in the Pierowall area and in the vicinity of Trenabie. The surviving records are scanty and most of the artefacts are now lost or

untraceable. The implication is of a substantial Viking presence at an early date in the north of Westray, which is not a surprise given the excellent harbour and agricultural land in the area.

Quoygrew, or Lower Trenabie (HY443506), on the north side of Rackwick, was first noted as two mounds near the shore where coastal erosion was revealing midden material and walling. Excavation has now revealed a series of structures stretching over 50m inland from the shore, the oldest of which dates from the 9th or 10th century.

The upper house was only finally vacated in 1937. The original house was built some distance from the shore, but about 1000AD a new building was put up near the shore which may have had to do with the extensive fishing which was being done from here.

During the 12th century and later this structure was extended several times, and at least 15 different fireplaces were excavated. Many steatite artefacts were found from this period, whereas from about 1500 manufactured pottery was being



Quoygrew Norse settlement, Rackwick

Quoygrew - eroding midden and buildings on shore



Quoygrew Norse settlement, Rackwick

used.

Until this series of buildings was excavated the only Norse houses which could be visited in Orkney were those on the Brough of Birsay. Quoygrew is the basis of a study into the transitions which took place in Orkney during and after the Viking Age, and the full results of studies on the many finds will be very interesting.

St Mary's Kirk (*Lady Kirk*) (HY439488), in the centre of Pierowall, dates from perhaps the 13th century but was much rebuilt in the 17th century, as seen from the carved skewputt (the lowest stone of the gable coping) on the east gable with the date 1674. What had been the chancel became the "laird's aisle", and there are two well-preserved and finely carved family gravestones from the same period which are now protected under a rather intrusive glass and steel object.

The kirkyard has many interesting old headstones, while the southern part to the west of the kirk itself covers a considerable mound, which may well enclose the missing Pierowall broch. While the oldest visible parts of the kirk may date from the 13th century it may overlie an even earlier church site.

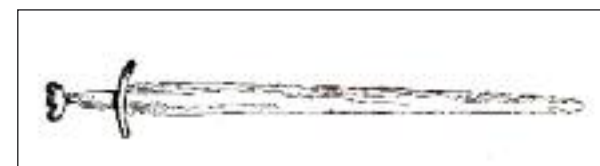
Norse pin and ring found near Pierowall



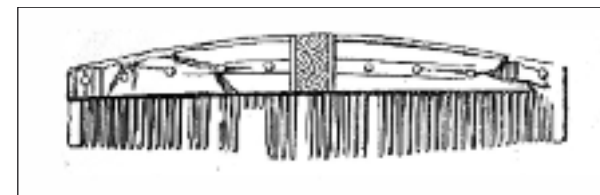
St Mary's Kirk dates from the 13th century



St Mary's Kirk graveyard, Pierowall, is a probable broch site



Norse sword found near Pierowall



Norse comb found near Pierowall

Norse tortoise brooch found near Pierowall





The Cross Kirk at Tuquoy dates from the 12th century

Cross Kirk Near the south shore at Tuquoy, the Westside or Cross Kirk (HY454431) is one of the best-preserved medieval churches in Orkney. Probably built by Hafliði Thorkelsson of Tuquoy in the mid-12th century and dedicated to the Holy Cross, the old part is largely intact, despite nearly being demolished in the 19th century.

Apparently a very sensible older person asked that “*the Dane’s work not be pulled down.*” It consists of a nave and chancel, which was originally vaulted. The nave was extended at a later time to the west. The adjacent cemetery is still in use and contains a number of interesting headstones.

There are also the remains of a considerable Viking Age settlement nearby, with massive walls being exposed by erosion along the shore. Excavations have revealed a complex of buildings, flagstone floors, drains and midden deposits. Part of a large hall was discovered, with some 12th century runes on an internal wall. Many Norse artefacts were found, including steatite bowls, pottery and metal objects.

There may have been a small defensive tower on the extensive site, but only the part in danger of erosion has been examined. Although the farmstead here was no doubt impressive when built, unfortunately its foundations seem to have been on sand, and consid-

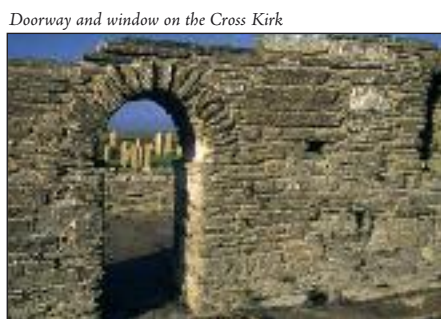
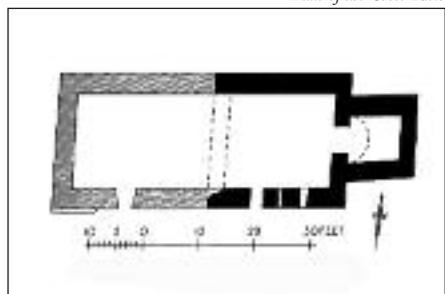
erable repairs and remodelling went on during its occupancy.

Further visible evidence of the Norsemen comes from the many boat nousts around the coast. These have been maintained over the centuries as shelters for boats at the top of the shore and are very similar to those found in Norway. The Westray skiff is not very different from the type of small boat used in Norse times and may still be seen in use today. The abundance of these nousts suggests that fishing and the sea were as important in Westray in the past as at the present.

Peter Kirk The remains of a chapel, Peter Kirk, with its surrounding ancient graveyard, lie west of Russland in Rapness (HY500402). It appears to be built on top of a broch as erosion has revealed stonework and pottery. There was said to be another near Cleat, while near Surrigarth, there was a farm called “*Old Kirkhouse*” and the name Kirbest also suggests a chapel site. Very little remains to mark these ancient Christian sites.

Holm of Aikerness The foundations of a small chapel under-

Plan of the Cross Kirk



Doorway and window on the Cross Kirk

lie a sheep shelter on this tiny islet. Seven nuns are said to have been buried here, and the chapel was built to commemorate them. At high tide much of the Holm is submerged, but at low springs a large skerry is revealed. Terns nest in summer, and many seals haul out.

Noltland Castle (HY429487) is a fine example of a fortified Z-plan house. Much of Westray was Bishopric property and the Castle was built as a result of the various political intrigues during the time of Mary Queen of Scots. Some confusion exists over the exact date of the building, but the main structure was commenced about 1560 on the instigation of Gilbert Balfour.

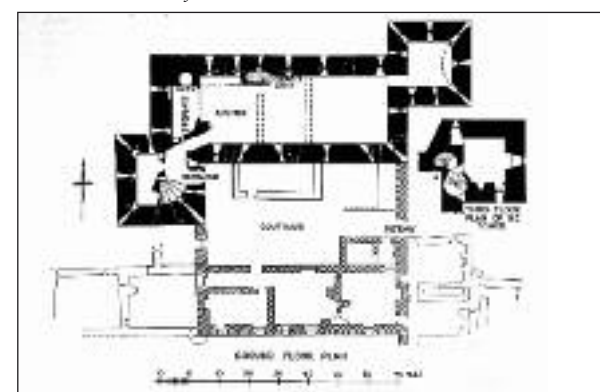
He was Sheriff of Orkney and Master of Mary Queen of Scots’ Household. He had received grants of land in Westray from his brother-in-law, Adam Bothwell, Bishop of Orkney, in 1560. Balfour was involved in the murders of Cardinal Beaton and Darnley and was finally executed in Sweden in 1576.

The Castle was prepared to shelter Mary if she had man-

Noltland Castle ground floor kitchen



Noltland Castle exterior from the southeast



Old plan of Noltland Castle

aged to escape from Loch Leven Castle. Further additions were made in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the south range and courtyard and later further extensions to the east and west were added. It was never properly finished, but does have some interesting detail, including a large stair-

way with carved newel at the top, which is an addition by Earl Patrick Stewart.

The great hall is spacious, but the conditions in the dungeon-like kitchen cannot have been so salubrious. On the first floor there are apartments, and a probable strong room with

Noltland Castle stairway to first floor with newel





Midsummer sunrise from Gallo Hill with Loch of Saintear, Bay of Pierowall and Papay

secret compartments while there is an attractive courtyard on the south-east side.

The castle belonged to Balfour of Faray prior to 1728, when it was sold to Jerome Dennison, a merchant in Sanday. He is said to have helped several lairds, who had supported the Jacobite cause in the 1745 rebellion, to hide in Gentlemen's Cave near Noup Head. He refused to answer questions about the lairds and the roof was said to have been pulled off the castle in retaliation.

It may still have been partly habitable after that, as in a 1761 marriage contract between Dennison and a Helen Traill

part of the *Mansion House of Noltland* was to be left to her in the event of his death. This may have been the buildings in the courtyard rather than the castle itself.

There is a panoramic view of Pierowall harbour from the parapet of the castle, which is remarkable for the number of gun loops, 71 arranged in tiers. The basement gunloops had wooden gun-mountings fitted and there are even two in the kitchen. The Orcadian author Eric Linklater compared the castle to a ship-of-the-line, while others have suggested that it was built for a man with a bad conscience.

Spanish Armada In 1588 one small boatload of survivors from a ship of the Spanish Armada is said to have reached Pierowall. Their ship, which had lost its rudder and main-mast in a storm, sank in the Dennis Röst off North Ronaldsay. *The Dons*, as they were called, settled along the North Shore and married local girls, taking Orkney surnames. The mixture of Norse and Spanish blood seems to have produced very good seamen and some of the traits - dark hair and eyes and a quick wit - can still be seen in Westray people today.

Shipwrecks were common in the days before lighthouses and other navigational aids. In about 1730, during a severe storm from the north, a ship went ashore at Rammigeo (HY451525) on the Head of Aikerness. In the morning a little boy was found clasped to his drowned mother's breast, alive but cold. Another version says that he was washed up tied to a piece of a mast.



"Queen of the Isles" leaving for Wart Holm to clip the sheep

The boy was adopted by the Rendalls of Seaquoy and since no one knew his name he was called *Archie Angel*, after the assumed homeport of the ship, which was found on a name-board in the wreckage. Although the name *Angel* has died out, there are still descendants of Archie Angel in Westray today.

Witchcraft In July 1627 a Westrayman, Benjamin Garrioch, and three companions went fishing one day, despite a warning from his girlfriend that something terrible would happen. They were caught in the fog and failed to return whereupon she became suspected of witchcraft. After the death of her father she took to going out in bad weather in his boat, but always returned. Later, in spite of saving a ship which was in danger of being wrecked, or perhaps because of this, she was tried in St Magnus Cathedral and condemned to be tied to a stake and worried to death by the hangman.

That day some Naval vessels had arrived in Kirkwall and there was a wild night of celebration in the town. Even the hangman and prison guards became comatose. Benjamin and his companions had been picked up by a British Navy ship and pressed into service. When he found out about Jane's plight he plied the hangman and jailers with whisky and made good their escape on the ship that she had saved. Many years later a visiting Kirkwall man happened past a



Brough farmhouse dates from the 19th century and has been recently renovated

shop called *Benjamin Garrioch* in Manchester, where the couple were thriving. Again this may be fanciful legend, but it still remains a fine story.

19th century Westray has many interesting domestic and farm buildings which reflect its fertile agricultural land and relative affluence. The extensive beaches which are good for sea-

weed collection, and thus kelp-making, allowed the lairds to make plenty of money during the Kelp Boom, some of which was spent on houses. These include several 18th and 19th century mansions, such as Brough, Cleat and Fribo, as well as several mills and the large fishing store at Gill Pier.

Fishing Westray was the only



A few larger trawlers are still based in Westray

Many small boats fish for crabs and lobsters





Noup Head (76m) is an RSPB Reserve has a lighthouse built in 1898

Orkney island to be much involved in the Cod fishery. Although English smacks called at Stromness or Longhope for crew as well, they preferred the Westraymen, who had for centuries gone to the haaf fishing up to 80 miles offshore in open boats of the sixa-reen type. Thus developed an

industry which by the 19th century was employing 7 or 8 small sloops of about 30 tons. The Herring fishery was never very important in Westray, unlike in Stronsay.

The English smacks returning from Icelandic waters, where they had fished since the 13th or 14th century, landed chilled and

gutted cod at Pierowall, where it was salted and dried, before being shipped south. They also had large tanks in their hulls and by this means kept the bulk of their catches alive for sale in England.

Fair Isle also has a very old connection with Westray as a former part of the Bishopric Estate. Until 1630 it was much more closely related to Westray than Dunrossness in Shetland. Many Fair Isle folk moved to Westray, Stronsay or Kirkwall to seek a living, including ancestors of the author. Strong family ties exist to this day. Fair Isle can be clearly seen on a clear day from Fitty Hill.

Noup Head (76m, HY392500) has a lighthouse, completed in 1898. It was the first to use mercury flotation for its revolving light and became automatic in 1964. The accommodation block was demolished at the time and thrown over the craig. The lighthouse is now powered by a solar array, installed in 2001. The cliffs on the west side of Westray are about 8km (5

There is now a small Gannet colony on Noup Head



Serried ranks of Guillemots line the many ledges



miles) long, and the most northerly 3km (2 miles) are an RSPB Reserve. In May and June the ledges are crowded with Auks and Kittiwakes and hold Orkney's largest "seabird city", when the noise, activity and aroma of the tens of thousands of breeding birds are quite spectacular.

In Britain, the Westray cliffs are second only to St Kilda in terms of numbers of breeding seabirds. The smell and noise that greet the visitor from this vast seabird colony never fails to impress. Good views of Guillemots, Razorbills, Kittiwakes, Fulmars, Puffins and Black Guillemots can be had from the clifftops.



Noup Head has off lying skerries called the Grip of Cleaton

Recently a small number of Gannets have been nesting here since 2003. By 2010 there were nearly 200 pairs present. Just inland, the much depleted colony of Arctic Terns should not be disturbed, but the birds

may be observed from a distance. At other seasons Noup Head makes an excellent spot for sea watching, for whales in late summer, and for migrating seabirds in spring and autumn.



Ramni Geo and Lawrence's Piece

Noup cliffs looking south over Deil Piece



Kelda Ber is a rock stack still joined at the top



The northwest coast of Westray from Bis Geos to Kirbest with Fitty Hill on the right and Pierowall in the right background

West Coast Walk There is a very satisfying waymarked walk down the west side of the island from Noup Head to Kirbest which takes in Fitty Hill (HY430448, 169m), the highest point on Westray.

The rich maritime heath vegetation is spectacular in summer with Thrift, Grass of Parnassus, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Sea Campion, Spring Squill

and many other plants adding colour in a succession which lasts from April through until late August. *Primula scotica* grows here, as well as a number of plants which are normally associated with high altitudes farther south.

Arctic Skua, Great Skua and Arctic Tern also nest in this area. Apart from the wildlife there are many dramatic vistas

of cliff scenery to the west and south towards Rousay and Birsay, which are balanced by the fine views over Westray and the North Isles, especially from the top of the hill.

Gentlemen's Cave Below North Hill, Gentlemen's Cave (HY398486) can be reached by a long ledge on the cliffs. It was used as a hiding place by some lairds, who had supported the

Fitty Hill (169m) from Skelwick with the Bay of Tuquoy on the centre left



Gentlemen's Cave with Birsay in the background

Jacobite cause. in 1745 The Hanoverian Government took reprisals after the failed rebellion which included the burning of leaders' houses. The coast here has many caves, natural arches and interesting geos. Great care should be taken in the vicinity of the cliffs, especially after rain or on a windy day. Access to the cave should only be attempted with local knowledge and by the suitably equipped.

Follow the coast south past the attractively situated farm of Bisgeos, which has recently been renovated. The bay with



Mae Sands from the west

the storm beach below the farm is called North Bis Geo and is dramatic when a big sea is running. Either follow the coast the whole way to Skea Hill (HY422441), or the ridge from Knucker Hill (113m), with its chambered cairn on top, to Fitty Hill (169m) for excellent views. After Inga Ness (HY417439) follow the coast and either return to the car park at East Kirbest, or continue along the shore past Muckle Water to the Knowe o'Burristae, a ruined broch.

There is a natural arch at Cuin Geo on the point of Berstness,

while the Knowe of Skea lies to the south of the ness. There are fine views across the Westray Firth to Rousay from this shore. Either take the road back, or follow the attractive beach at Mae Sand with its extensive sand dunes on to Cross Kirk (HY453432) at Tuquoy with its Norse remains, before returning to Pierowall.

North Coast Walk Other ideas for interesting walks include taking the road to Noup Head from Pierowall, and visiting Noltland Castle, then crossing Noltland Links,

Grobuist from the east





Northeast Westray, clockwise are Grobust, Rackwick, Bow Head, Aikerness, The Ouse and Pierowall

where a Neolithic village lies buried in the sand, and which are a blaze of colourful flowers in summer, to Grobust Beach. There is a good view along the cliffs to Noup Head from here and often good surf to watch. Continue along the shore to Rackwick, where *tang* often gets washed up in huge quantities and until recently was dried for processing into alginates. Visit the Quoysgreu Norse site at the north end of the bay and then return along the road to Pierowall.

Aikerness Walk A walk around the Aikerness shore at the north-east end of the island is relatively easy going along the low coast and apart from Seals, and many seabirds, with luck Otters may be seen, especially in early morning. The coast can be followed from Gill Pier right around to Rackwick, passing an eroding Burnt Mound (HY451492) on the way. There are good views across to Papay from near the airfield at Skaill. On the Holm of Aikerness (HY470525) there

was a small chapel, but it was probably incorporated into the present hut on the island.

There are several small sandy coves along this coast which can be good for finding *Groatie Buckies* and other interesting shells. A dangerous tide race, the Bow Röst, forms off Bow Head in certain conditions. Return via the west side, where low cliffs and small geos are topped with maritime heath. Visit Quoysgreu before returning to Pierowall.

Sand o'Gill at Pierowall is good for waders and gulls



Groatie Buckie on Aikerness Beach



Rapness Walk The walk starts from the Old Mill at Rack Wick (HY502424), and follows the cliffs past the Point o'Burrian with its many Puffins during May, June and July. At Stanger Head there are interesting caves and the attractive Bight of Stanger Head. The Geo o'Rustling Stones is also good for Puffins. The track leads west from here back to the road.

By continuing southwards along the coast, the Rapness walk can take in Gentlemen's Ha' Cave (HY517419), where some 18th century Jacobite lairds are said to have hidden. Access is difficult and should not be tried without local knowledge. Weatherness, at the south end, has an interesting off-lying rock called The Ship. Nearby Sand Geo can be a good place to seek *Groatie Buckies*. Return past the large quarry which was used to build the ferry terminal. The wild flowers along this stretch of coast are particularly colourful in summer and there are good views across to the Red Head of Eday and Holm of Faray. Manx Shearwaters have been seen here in the gloaming.

South Rapness Walk From the Ferry Terminal take the road south towards Rapness Jetty. There are attractive small sandy beaches at Sands of Helzie and East Sous. Follow the coast from the jetty for about 800m to the Point o'Huro (HY497388), the southernmost tip of the island.



The Castle o'Burrian in Rapness is a good place to see Puffins

Return via the low rocky shore via the Point o'Peterkirk (HY500401) on the west side of Rapness. Here there is a large ruined chapel built on the site of an old broch with various walls exposed which may relate to different periods. The Knowe of Hamar is a burnt mound at the east end of the Bay of Tafts. Here a fine sandy beach is backed by links and

sheltered from the west by the low headland of Twiness.

Beaches There are many good sandy beaches on Westray, so that no matter the air of wind a sheltered place will always be found for a picnic. Most notable perhaps are Grobust (HY430495), exposed to the north and spectacular in a gale, south facing Mae Sand



Shells on Aikerness Beach

MV Varagen approaching Rapness terminal





Puffins at the Castle o'Burrian, Rapness

(HY445423), which has attractive sand dunes and east facing Swartmill Bay (HY480462), facing Papay. Rackwick (HY500426), usually lacks sand but has interesting pebbles and often much seaweed. At the south end Sands o'Woo (HY512408) and Bay of Tafts (HY496416) are good for a stroll whilst awaiting the ferry. There will always be a sheltered bay, beach or cove somewhere on the island!

Birdwatching Apart from the west cliffs, Westray has a wide range of habitats which are attractive to birds. The salt-marshes and flat beaches at Letto Sands, Bay of Tuquoy (HY455450), The Ouse (HY450510), and the beach at Sand o'Gill, Pierowall are good places for waders. There are several good vantage points from where the car may be used

as a convenient hide.

The lochs of Burness, Saintear and Swartmill all hold breeding waterfowl in summer. Curlews, Redshanks, Oystercatchers, Golden Plovers and Lapwings all nest here and may be seen feeding on the fields. Their calls typify Orkney on a summer's evening.

During migration times unusual species often turn up on Westray. Overwintering species include Whooper Swans, Greylag Geese and various ducks such as Goldeneye, Long-tailed Ducks, Scoters, Widgeon and Pochard.

Castle of Burrian Rapness, at the south end, offers the best place in Westray to see Puffins. Afternoon and evening tend to be the best times to see these attractive little auks, which are

present from May until late July. The Castle is the site of an early Christian retreat. On the top of it there are remains of two or more buildings, as well as walling.

Craft and Industry There are a whole range of crafts producers on Westray which can be visited. They range from traditional and modern knitwear and Orkney chairs to jewellery, artwork cushions and throws as well as souvenirs and other products.

The local Fish Factory at Pierowall processes much of the shellfish and some of the whitefish caught by the Westray fleet. Visitors are welcome and fresh or frozen seafood can be bought.



WESTRAAK

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See the current *Isles of Orkney*
brochure for further places to visit.

PIEROWALL HOTEL



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WESTRAY SERVICES

Getting To Westray

Sea Orkney Ferries, Tel 01856 872044 and **Loganair**, Tel (01856) 872494, operate daily services to the island from Kirkwall. Please refer to their latest timetables for details. Car and Bicycle hire is available locally and minibus tours are also run. A minibus connects with ferries and meets the Papay boat. Connections with Papay by boat from Pierowall and by plane.

Tours Westraak, Pierowall
Tel 01857 677 777 see advert

Local Transport

M&J Harcus, bus service,
Pierowall Tel 01857 677212

T Rendall, Papay Boat service,
Pierowall Tel 01857 677216

Where to Stay and Where to Eat
The Pierowall Hotel dates from the

early 19th century. This friendly, family-run hotel has comfortable rooms and serves "perhaps the best fish and chips anywhere", with a large variety of very fresh fish, and other produce ***INN, Tel 01857 677472.

B&B and Self Catering For the full range of available accommodation see the current VisitOrkney and *Isles of Orkney* brochures.

The **Haf Yok Cafe** in Pierowall is run by Westraak and serves delicious homebakes, soup, tea and coffee.

Shops

WFM Brown, Baker, Pierowall

WI Rendall, General Merchant,
Pierowall

JC Tulloch General Merchant &
Post Office, Pierowall

Peter Miller, Shop & Sub Post
Office, Skelwick

Westray Heritage Centre, Pierowall



Crown copyright

exposed by a severe storm.

With walls still standing to 1.6m, intact doorways, stone partitions, knocking stones and stone benches, the buildings are remarkably well-preserved. Many artefacts were found during excavation, including large amounts of pottery of Unstan Ware type, similar to that associated with the Orkney-Cromarty type of chambered cairns.

The site was occupied prior to the building of the houses, as domestic midden lay beneath the foundations. Large numbers of flint, bone and stone tools were found, as well as bones of cattle, sheep, pigs and deer mixed with large numbers of oyster and other shells. Limpets were present in huge numbers and may have been used as bait for fishing. Whales and Seals were exploited and many species of birds, especially the Great Auk, were hunted. Evidence was also found of cereal-growing.

The larger house was divided in two by a stone partition and had a wooden bench, as well as wooden posts holding up

PAPAY, or PAPA WESTRAY (ON *Papey hin Meiri*, The Larger Isle of Papae (Celtic clergy). The island lies to the east of Westray, is about 7km (4.5mi) long by 2km (1.25mi) wide and is generally low-lying with a maximum eleva-

tion of 48m at the North Hill (HY498550). Very fertile, the island has been inhabited for at least 5,500 years. Its modern claim to fame is an entry in the "Guinness Book of Records" for having the shortest scheduled air route in the world, between Papay and Westray, a distance of 2.4km (1.5mi), taking under two minutes flying time!

Oldest house in Orkney The island has the distinction of having the oldest known stone dwelling in Orkney. The Knap of Howar (ON *Knappur haugr*, Round Mound, HY483518) was protected by a thick layer of windblown sand and, like Skara Brae, was

Knap of Howar - passage



Knap of Howar - entrance to larger house



Knap of Howar - interior of smaller house



Knap of Howar - front of houses with entrances with larger house in foreground



Knap of Howar - knocking stone



Knap of Howar - aumbries & upright



Knap of Howar - aumbry



Knap of Howar - larger house showing flagstone divisions



Knap of Howar - smaller house interior showing divisions and cupboards

PAPAY ATTRactions

Knap of Howar
St Boniface Kirk
Munkerhouse
North Hill RSPB Reserve
Fowl Craig
Mull Head
North Wick
South Wick
Old Pier
Holland Farm
Hookin Mill
St Tredwell's Chapel
St Tredwell's Loch
Bay of Burland
Bay of Moclett
Bothican, beach & machair
Backaskaill burnt mound
Holm of Papay
Chambered Cairns on Holm
Diss o'the Holm



Papay from southwest, Vestness & Bay of Moclett in foreground, St Tredwell's Loch in centre, North Hill in background

the roof. The rear area seems to have been the kitchen. Two quernstones, complete with knocking stones were found here. The smaller, slightly later house was divided into three, has cupboards in the walls and had a stone workbench against one wall. The layout echoes that of the smaller stalled chambered cairns.

The oldest dates from the lower midden deposits were about 3600BC, while the most recent were from floor deposits, from about 3100BC, suggesting that the site was occupied for at least 500 years.

Bronze Age In the Bronze Age, the dead were buried in small

mounds such as on the North Hill, near the Loch of Hyndgreenie (HY496539). On both sides of St Tredwell's Loch the remains of the Gairsty Dyke or *treb-dyke* (HY499505), which used to divide the island into the North and South Yards in Bronze Age times, can be seen.

Iron Age At the Bay of Moclett the remains of the Broch of Bothekan (HY493497) are now completely covered in sand. There are also extensive Iron Age and later buildings and midden to the north of St Boniface Kirk - very probably another broch.

At St Tredwell's Loch a small peninsula (HY496509) has a

large mound with extensive Iron Age remains overlain by later structures. There is an "underground tunnel" leading to a round structure. The tunnel is probably part of the intramural gallery of the broch that once stood here.

Early Christian sites St Tredwell's Chapel, which is dedicated to St Triduana, was one of the most visited pilgrimage places in Orkney. The chapel seems to have been substantial, with thick walls and evidence of tracery work. It is built on top of an Iron Age broch, and later walls and structures have further complicated the site. T

Triduana was a nun who was said to be part of a mission to Pictland from Northumbria in about 715AD, and whose beautiful eyes were so admired by the King of the Picts, Nechtan, that she plucked them out and sent them to him skewered on a thorn branch, to retain her virtue over her physical beauty. She had previously established a medieval culture centre at Restalrig, Midlothian. The chapel in Papay dedicated to her

St Tredwell's Chapel is built on top of a broch on a small peninsula



was in particular a place of pilgrimage for anyone with eye problems.

St Boniface (675-754AD) was a well-known English missionary who worked mostly in Germany and the Netherlands. In 722 he was made Bishop of Germany west of the Rhine and was so successful that he was made Archbishop of all Germany in 728. He travelled constantly and was joined by many followers from England. He and his followers were massacred in Frisia in 754AD. One of his sayings shows his great inner strength, *"In her voyage across the ocean of this world, the Church is like a ship pounded by the waves of life's different stresses. Our duty is not to abandon ship, but to keep her on course"*.

At this time the Christian mission was spreading throughout the Pictish Kingdom, including Orkney and Shetland, and it is likely that the Papay Kirk was dedicated to St Boniface because of his renown, or perhaps after his martyrdom. St Boniface Kirk (HY488526) is attractively situated above the shore of Papa Sound, on the west side north of the Knap of Howar. This complex site also has extensive Iron Age, Pictish and Norse remains. The existing church dates substantially from the 12th century, having been extended in 1700 and was abandoned in 1929.

The building became ruinous, but this interesting old church was renovated in 1993 and it is again in regular use. An unusual feature is the loft gallery,



St Boniface Kirk dates from the 12th century or earlier



Norse hog-backed tombstone



Interesting grave slab

which is reached by an external stairway. It is the only church in Orkney to have survived the Reformation intact and to still be in regular use today, apart from St Magnus Cathedral.

The name Munkerhouse applies to some of the ruins and

suggests the presence of monks when the Vikings arrived, while another name Binna's Kirk suggests the existence of an older chapel site here, perhaps dating from the mid-7th century. Two Celtic crosses have also been found in the graveyard, confirming the Pictish origin of the

St Boniface Kirk is still in use after over 900 years





Holland Farm Bothy - folk museum

chapel. The 11th century Norse hog-backed gravestone in the kirkyard has been linked to the burial of Earl Rognvald Brusison on Papay c.1045, but it could easily commemorate someone else entirely.

Boat nousts are common along the shore, as in Westray. Good examples are at Cott (HY499530), where most catches are said to have been landed, Noust (HY498518), where there is a particularly large noust in a small sheltered geo and Skennist (HY496520), where there are seven stone and turf nousts as well as ruins of fishermen's cottages. The last derives from ON *Skeida noust*, a skeid being a fast longship, or warship. This site is also very sheltered and would be an obvi-

ous place to beach a large ship.

Holland At Holland Farm (HY488515) there is a fine 19th century farm steading with an interesting circular horse engine house, doocot and corn drying kiln. The main part of Holland House was probably built for Thomas Traill, a son of Patrick Stewart's chamberlain, who "acquired" the estate in 1636. Nearby stands the base of a post-windmill said to have been used until the 1940s. The farmer has turned the bothy into an interesting folk museum. Hookin Mill (HY501512) on the shore near St Tredwell's Loch, dates from the 19th century, and is now roofless, but the millstones and undershot wheel can still be seen. The poor head of water meant it could only be

used at low tide.

Birds Papay is also famous for its birds and the whole north part of the island is an RSPB Nature Reserve which has a warden in summer, Tel (01857) 644240. There is a bird hide (complete with toilet) in an old coastguard lookout on Hyndgreenie Hill. The old-fashioned agricultural practices have helped make the island a paradise for birds, such as the elusive Corncrake, which have been lost to other parts of Orkney. There is a colony of Arctic Tern on the North Hill, accompanied by Arctic Skua and a few Great Skuas, as well as many waders, Black-backed Gull and Eider around the shores.

The birds are particularly attracted by the rich maritime heath plant community. This is unique to Orkney and the North of Scotland and results from the combination of soil type and the exposed situation, with many dwarf forms of normally larger species. These include sedges and herbs such as Dog Violet, Primrose, Spring Squill, Grass of Parnassus,

Holland Farm, a 19th century steading and Holland House on right, dating from the 17th century



Fowl Craig is a low cliff where seabirds breed in summer, and the site of a fowl deed in 1813

Heath Spotted Orchid, Mountain Everlasting and *Primula scotica*.

Fowl Craig on the east of the island (HY508545) is the site where the last Great Auk in Britain was killed in 1813. The final one of all was shot in Iceland not long after. This large auk was common in prehistoric times, its bones often being found in settlement sites and it had last bred on Papay in 1811 or 1812. The female of the last pair had been stoned to death in 1812. Both were mounted for display in a natural history museum! The cliff supports a small, but easily observed, colony of Guillemot, Razorbill, Shag and Kittiwake today. It is possible to observe the birds very closely here.

Migrants Papay is host to many migrants, common and unusual, in spring and autumn, while during autumn and winter

Long-tailed Duck, and Great Northern Diver frequent the bays. The lochs and their surrounding marshy areas are attractive to migrating waterfowl and waders. There are several good vantage points for observation, St Tredwell's Chapel being especially good. The Mull Head is perhaps the best spot in Orkney for sea-watching, Sooty and Manx Shearwater are seen in passing in large numbers each year along with good numbers of Gannet, Auk and sea duck. Richardson's and Long-tailed

Skua are also recorded in most years.

Beaches Like its larger neighbour, Papay has many attractive beaches. The Bay of Moclett (HY490496) has fine sands, as does the long beach of South Wick, on the east side near the old pier (HY498520). There is a good shingle and sand beach at North Wick (HY500535), while there are low cliffs at the north end. The west coast has alternating rock and sandy coves south of St Boniface.

Stonework and midden eroding out of the shore at Munkerhouse





Old pier at South Wick

Walks On Papay nowhere is very far away, but nevertheless a thorough exploration of the island could still take several days. A visit to the Knap of Howar and St Boniface Church, taking in Holland Farm and the South Wick makes a good circular walk. Those primarily interested in wildlife should head for the North Hill and Fowl Craig, while a walk around

the South End to St Tredwell's Loch and the Bay of Moclett is also very pleasant.

HOLM OF PAPAY On the Holm of Papay (for access information ask at the Coop), there are three chambered tombs, one of which is quite extraordinary. The South Cairn, or Diss o'the Holm (HY509518), a Maeshowe-type cairn, has a



Golden Mariana, the Westray ferry

Bay of Moclett at the south end - site of the Broch of Bothekan



"Islander" over Papa Sound

chamber over 20m long with twelve side cells, two of which are double and all of which are intact. The original height was at least 2.7m and the chamber oversailed to reach a ceiling width of 0.8m, being roofed with lintels.

On the southeast wall of the main chamber there are several carvings of dots, circles and other shapes. The entry passage faces southeast, in contrast to Maeshowe's southwest. No evidence remains of any contents of the tomb, which was first excavated in 1849. In 1929 the present protective concrete roof was added. The narrow central passage with its rows of side cells has been compared with the Skara Brae street, suggesting that the cairn may be a house for the ancestors.

The North Cairn (HY504523), an Orkney-Cromarty type, rectangular stalled cairn was recently re-excavated. Human bones from at least eight people, a substantial amount of plain pottery sherds, animal and fish bones were found. Outside were found some Beaker and Grooved Ware pottery frag-

ments. At the inner end of the chamber there is a small cell, which had been sealed up early on in the usage of the cairn. The whole structure had been filled with stones and earth plus some shells and fishbones, before it was finally closed up.

The island has a large colony of Storm Petrel (*Mootie*) and there are also many of Black Guillemot (*Tystie*), both of which breed among the boulders on the northeast shore. A late evening visit to the Holm to see the Storm Petrels flying around in the *grimlings*, or *simmer dimm*, is well worth the effort. The birds which are not incubating feed at sea during the day.

The Black Guillemot, on the other hand, is a confiding little bird, which may be observed closely. *Teistie Taing* at the south end could also be named *Selkie Taing*, as it is a popular place for seals to haul out, often in large numbers. The small beach at Bay of South Cruive is excellent for *Groatie Buckies* and other shells.

Holm of Papay - Tystie Taing and Bay of Cruive in foreground



Diss o'the Holm is a very large chambered cairn with twelve side cells



Cup marks carved in the cairn

PAPAY SERVICES

Getting to Papay The island is served by daily return flights by Loganair from Kirkwall Airport at a special subsidised rate due to the lack of a ro-ro vehicle ferry service. Special reduced fares apply for overnight stays, Tel 01856 872494. Orkney Ferries operates daily from Kirkwall via Westray. A feeder service runs from Pierowall to Papay Tel 01857 677216. There are two direct ferry sailings per week. See timetable for details of timetables, Tel 01856 872044

Where to Stay on Papay check the latest VisitOrkney or Islands of Orkney brochures.

Shop Papay Community Coop
Tel 01857 644321

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