



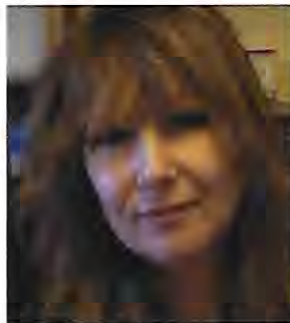
Orkney Archaeology Society

Newsletter No 12 Autumn 2014

Scottish Charity No SC030611 <http://orkneyarchaeologysociety.org.uk>

Editorial

*Helen K
Woodsford-Dean*
The Editor, OAS,
PO Box 6213, Kirkwall,
Orkney, KW15 1YD



our many members who cannot get to the lectures. On page 23 we provide a list of forthcoming OAS events.

On page 12, Caz provides an update on some very important funding obtained by OAS and how even more funding for OAS has since been raised!

Welcome to your Autumn 2014 newsletter, which I am guest editing again.

We have a wonderful newsletter with an amazing array of articles for you, fully reflecting the projects which OAS is involved in.

First up, we cover those issues important to members on pages 2 and 3, including an introduction to the new Chair of OAS: Martin Carruthers.

Pages 4-6 provides this year's news from the Ness of Brodgar excavations, whilst pages 7-11 captures the highlights from the excavations at The Cairns.

On pages 14 and 15 we have a brief summary of all the talks given to date in 2014, then on the pages that follow (pages 16-22) several of our speakers have provided a written account for the benefit of

Then, on page 13, we introduce Jenn Allison who is working on the vital project of updating the galleries at the Orkney Museum in Kirkwall.

Finally, on the back page, we have some slightly lighter material, hopefully for your delight.

Any constructive criticism is very invited, as are readers' contributions. Please email "Editor" via enquiries@orkneyarchaeology.society.org.uk

Would you like to save the OAS money AND help the environment? You can now opt to receive this newsletter by email in PDF format. About 20 members already do so but please remember to provide your email address so that we can send it to you!

Thank you,

Helen K Woodsford-Dean



Orkney Archaeology Society

New Chair of OAS!

New Chair of OAS

At our AGM in summer 2014, Nick Card resigned from his position of Chair of OAS, and Martin Carruthers took over. Martin has served on the OAS Committee for many years, so he is already familiar with the charity, but for those of you who don't know him, here is a brief biography by way of an introduction:

Martin Carruthers has been involved in Orcadian archaeology since his student days in the early 1990's, and has worked on sites such as Stonehall, Wideford, Mine Howe, Berstness / Knowe of Skea and the Ness of Brodgar and many others. Martin worked in commercial archaeology for ten years for a variety of field units and consultancies, and GUARD (Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division) in particular. He jumped at the chance to become associated with the Archaeology Department in Orkney when the opportunity arose. Martin has been a lecturer in Archaeology at Orkney College UHI, since 2006. His research is dominated by the study of the First Millennium BC/AD and the Iron Age in particular. He is the site Director of the excavations at The Cairns, South Ronaldsay; a very substantial Iron Age settlement with a broch at its heart. Martin lives in Kirkwall with his partner Amanda (also an archaeologist) and their two young children.



OAS Grants:

The OAS is able to give small grants to assist the work of Orkney archaeological research. Since February 2014 confirmed OAS grants totalling £2,395 have been made to:

Martin Carruthers (ORCA) to radiocarbon date a possible Viking hearth at The Cairns excavation—£720

Andrew Appleby (OPPRA) grant—£975

Erika Sutherland grant—£300

Julie Gibson (ORCA) contribution to Thing Trail—£100

Lisa-Marie Schillito grant towards travel and accommodation, preparation of samples and postage—£300



Orkney Archaeology Society

Membership Matters ...

A message from the OAS Membership Secretary

The OAS subscription year ends on 31st May with renewals due on 1st June. This apply to Ordinary, Family, Concessionary or Joint Concessionary members. Life members are not required to renew each year. Existing standing orders are automatically processed when we receive the payment from your bank.

For your information these are the subscription rates:

A membership statement is sent each year

Ordinary members	£15
Family Members	£22
Concessionary Members	£10
Joint Concessionary Members	£18
Life members	£150

along with the Spring Newsletter. Members are asked to review the information and their standing order carefully to ensure they are paying the right rate.

However, some members are **still** paying the old 2008/09 subscription rates on their standing orders, despite reminders on their statements each year. Some members do not provide sufficient details with their standing order, making it hard to trace who the payments are from. Some Life members are actually still paying their annual subscriptions!

The OAS committee has ruled that, **to be fair to those members who are paying the correct subscription rates, members who have not amended their standing order to pay the correct subscription from 1st June 2014 will no longer receive the OAS newsletter. If you need a new OAS standing order, please contact OAS on orkneyarchaeologysociety.org.uk**

You can renew your membership in person by cash or cheque at any OAS event, or at the OAS shop at the Ness of Brodgar excavation, or you can send a cheque payable to Orkney Archaeology Society to OAS, PO Box 6213, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1YD.

You can also renew your membership through the SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL tab on the top right of each page on the OAS website:
<http://orkneyarchaeologysociety.org.uk/>

This will allow you to pay your subscription by PayPal, credit card or internet banking online transfer. The website will also allow you to download the Membership Application forms.

If you have any queries, please attach details such as your full name, address and membership number. We have received some enquiries which we are unable to resolve as no details had been given on the letters, which can be frustrating.

Ness of Brodgar 2014

Nick Card

Unlike previous years at the Ness this year would on the surface seem quite a quiet affair – no discoveries like the carved stone ball in 2013 that caught the media's attention – however everything is relative. Under this veneer of peace and tranquillity the Ness as ever was a smouldering inferno of discoveries. Not only were there amazing small finds and new art, but also the biography of the site and individual structures was clarified, and the millennium of activity at the Ness extended both forwards and backwards.

Let us start in Trench T, where in 2013 we started investigations of the large mound at the tip of the peninsula. Last year this revealed itself as a monumental mound of midden – not simply a rubbish pile but with symbolic meaning reflecting the status of the Ness - *'...refuse heaps could have developed a particular symbolism, in certain societies assuming connotations of affluence and social success, even becoming marks of territorial dominance. Refuse has links with fertility where the value of green midden as fertiliser was recognised, and more generally to the cycle of death and renewal'* (Needham and Spence 1997, 85).



Vertical view of Trench T - the spread of stones define the fill of the Iron Age ditch

One oddity was the wall that had been cut into the mound but faced on the uphill side. This year it can now be explained with the discovery of its counterpart further up the slope - both walls forming revetting to a wide ditch that had been later infilled with rubble. This style of architecture is unknown in the Neolithic but can be paralleled in the Iron Age for instance at Minehowe (where the ditch was similarly not at the base of the mound but half way up its slope) and Gurness. So what we have is still basically a Neolithic mound that was later modified in the Iron Age. Iron Age activity on earlier sites can be seen on a number of other Orcadian sites such as the Howe, Rowiegar and Quanterness. Closer to home, Iron Age pottery was also discovered at the Stones of Stenness. It is sometimes worth reminding ourselves that this landscape that is renown for its Neolithic monuments was also experienced by later societies before our own.

At the foot of the mound the stump of a substantial standing stone was also discovered. This has yet to be fully exposed but could it form part of an approach to the Ness?

This was not the only standing stone discovered this year. At the start of the season Jim Rylatt the supervisor of Structure 12 pointed to two small orthostats just to the east of the building. Jim half-jokingly said to me that they were the tops of 2 standing stones, to which I scoffed at his suggestion. How I have had to eat my words as not only are they standing stones but they actually flank a newly discovered entrance into Structure 12. This entrance had eluded detection due to the east wall being badly robbed of stone in the past.



Two standing stones that flank the new entrance into Structure 12

The biography of Structure 12 was also much clarified this year. In its primary phase there were 3 entrances – north-west, south and east – that led into one of the finest buildings so far discovered at the Ness with immaculate masonry often enhanced by peck dressing. However like every other structure with the exception of Structure 1, it seemed to have suffered from collapse and subsidence. Rather than abandoning it, much of its walling was dismantled and then rebuilt. Unfortunately this rebuild was not up to the standards of the primary phase – the beautifully proportioned piers lost their elegance; dressed stone was reincorporated with the dressing facing into the walls not outwards; and the hearths that must have been truly monumental in the primary phase (yet to be proven) were roughly rebuilt with lesser slabs and not really aligned with the walls or piers. The south and NW entrances were blocked and a new entrance punched through its north wall and an annex or porch added.

As the central midden area between Structures 1, 8 and 12 was taken down yet another standing stone became more evident. This had been first revealed in 2013 and I had nick-named it the 'axis – mundi' of the site due to its central location

within the overall walled enclosure, its N-S alignment, and the way Structures 1 and 10 had been built to align with it. As the midden around it was removed wall lines appeared that seemed to form some type of enclosure around it with parallel walls forming a wide approach leading towards the original southern entrance of Structure 1. Around the stone itself a paved area is also becoming apparent – will this extend right across the area between the buildings to create some kind of central open area to the whole site?



Paved area around central standing stone

Meanwhile Structure 10 has lived up to its reputation for surprises. We always knew that the entrance was on its east side facing Maeshowe but due to robbing of the stone of the east wall the size and exact location was not clear. However as more of the fill of the robber cut was removed around the whole inner circuit of Structure 10 this year, a massive entrance paving slab was revealed, almost 2 metres wide and over a metre across. This slab defined what may well be the largest entrance to a Neolithic stone building discovered in Britain, but just reflects the rest of the monumentality of Structure 10.

The removal of more of the fill of the robber cut also revealed more drains associated

with Structure 10. We knew that there was a drain under the paved walkway that surrounds Structure 10 and one leading from the annex at its east end but new ones were revealed exiting under the back southern wall and also within the front wall. Watch this space as we wait for analysis of their fills so that we might ascertain what they drained.



The large threshold slab at the entrance to Structure 10

As ever the structural revelations were accompanied by a host of spectacular finds – spatulas, axes, maceheads, and even an Orcadian version of a Shetland polished stone knife etc. Some of these can be viewed at <https://www.facebook.com/AmericanFriendsNessBrodgar/photos/pcb.1475656456015606/1475655196015732/?type=1&theater>

Perhaps the most significant discovery however came from a small test trench we opened under the western robbed out wall of Structure 14. Not only did this reveal earlier buildings under Structure 14 but also a few sherds of round-bottomed carinated bowl that lay embedded on the surface of the natural boulder clay. These sherds are in stark contrast to the vast majority of the rest of the Ness's ceramics which are all bucket shaped Grooved Ware. Although some of the flint work from the Ness had

been recognised as having affinities with early Neolithic styles, these sherds confirm that there was human activity on the Ness from the early Neolithic – an exact date will be confirmed from our C14 programme. Coupled with the Iron Age activity mentioned earlier we now seem to be looking at the life of the Ness extending, though not continuously, over 3 millennia!



Structure 14 from Hugo's kite

We hope that this taster of this year's discoveries will entice more of you to visit us next year and follow us on <http://www.orkneyjar.com/archaeology/nessofbrodgar/>.

Thank you again to OAS for all your continued support.

P.S. In case any of you missed it the Ness also featured in the cover article of the August edition of National Geographic magazine - <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2014/08/neolithic-orkney/smith-text>

Excavations at The Cairns 2014: A Photo Essay

Martin Carruthers

The following images represent a few snapshots from the life of the field season at The Cairns in Summer 2014. The project aims concentrate upon a very substantial Iron Age settlement with a broch at its heart. Overall, the site sits within a single field in south-east South Ronaldsay that contains evidence for occupation from at least the Neolithic period to the 12th Century AD, a record of human life in Orkney of perhaps some five thousand years.



Elevated shot of the broch and associated later features (image courtesy of Hugo Anderson Why-mark)



Another elevated shot looking across the site (image courtesy of Hugo Anderson Why-mark)

We were blessed by a visit from Hugo (who also took wonderful pictures at the Ness of Brodgar) this season armed with his camera pole and kite and he busily set about taking some great elevated images of the site for us. It is always very helpful to gain this height above the site and really clarifies a sense of what is going on. The massive thick walls of the broch are especially evident on the lower right of the image and there are no less than seven individual hearths dating to the post-broch late Iron Age village also visible in the image.



A view across the interior of the broch during excavation looking towards the south-east



Interior of the broch towards the end of this year's excavations showing flag floors emerging

Gradually, a clear picture is emerging of the history of the broch. From the radiocarbon dates we know that its end came a little earlier (some time during the latter first to mid Second Centuries AD) than some brochs in Orkney, and thereafter it continued to be the focus of late Iron Age settlement and activity. Only in the last season or two of digging have we been able to start to delve into the earlier life of the broch. We are now able to reflect on the layout of the interior based on the disposition of the internal stone fixtures and fittings and reflect on the ways people moved around the space and identify specific activity areas within the broch. It is planned that the work inside the broch will continue until we have completely excavated all of the occupation deposits and finds inside down to the foundation level. This will represent a feat rarely achieved, or achievable, in Scottish Iron Age studies and should greatly contribute to our understanding of what brochs were actually for and whether that changed over time!



Excavating an extensive spread of pottery inside the broch

The spread of pottery was located immediately under a large slab that we lifted in the process of excavating the interior of the

broch this year. There were around 170 sherds altogether and it appears that they make up the remains of two or three smashed entire pots that were dealt a death blow by the big slab being hurled in quite forcefully at the end of the use of the broch! Also caught under this slab were two conjoining fragments of a stone lamp.



Close up of the excavation of a decorated rim sherd (at centre) from the same pottery spread

The pottery from The Cairns from previous years has mostly been plain, well-fired and undecorated, often with a sandy texture and orange hue. This year with the more intensive push into the earlier broch deposits we began to encounter a radically different ceramic type. This pottery was generally very black, slightly less well fired, but carried many more decorated pieces than we've become used to. Here's one of our UHI BA Archaeology students (on his first ever excavation) teasing away silt to reveal a decorated rim. The appearance of the new styles of pottery are important as they are confirming other evidence for the dating of the site.

We had suspected for several seasons that our underground building, the earthhouse, or souterrain was entered through a pit entrance in the floor of one of our post-broch, late Iron Age buildings: House H.

This year we were able to locate the entrance, visible in the image still with its roof lintel in place. However, we were able to recognise that the entrance pre-dated the construction of House H, so our story of the souterrain, it's life and travails has become even more complex and we can look forward next year to getting closer to the actual above ground activity areas that were contemporary with its use: the holy-grail of souterrain studies!



Souterrain entrance discovered - UHI Archaeology student Holly Young about to take a photograph of the opening into the underground structure



Two of the clay moulds for fashioning bronze 'Ring-headed' pins, around 30 fragments were unearthed altogether

The moulds discovered this year were a startling set of finds to make. We have always been aware that metalworking was taking place on the site; we've even got what we interpret as a late Iron Age smithy and workshop on site. However, the quantity and the quality of the moulds found this year was surprising and a real source for celebration. They are one of the largest collections of such moulds from an Iron Age site in Scotland and they should eventually tell us quite a lot about craft and 'industry' in the Iron Age. The moulds are almost all for the production of Ring-headed pins a specific type of Middle Iron Age pin that was worn to hold the hems of garments like cloaks together, and several of the better preserved examples we found show that the finished pins were intricately decorated with a series of beaded segments around the ring itself. One authority on Scottish Iron Age bronze working insists that the presence of these kinds of craft-working on sites of the period always denotes very high social status sponsorship of metalworking. Contextually speaking, the concentration of the pin moulds over a very small area appears to indicate that this was where the moulds were actually broken open, after a successful cast, to redeem the finished pins and it probably means we are very close to where the pins were being produced. So we are holding out for the exciting prospect of further direct insights into the world of producing Iron Age bling!

This cell was a remarkable find relating to the construction and layout of the broch building itself. The cell is one of three so far found embedded within the walls of our broch that were constructed as a piece with the broch. They are all unusually constructed, in one way or another, and they are corbelled and in two cases were

found to have been rendered or plastered with colourful clay smeared on the stone face of the cell interiors. This year the 'red cell' (distinguished from its previously excavated larger counterpart nearby that was rendered in yellow clay!) was carefully excavated to reveal an exquisitely constructed mini-chamber (the red and white scale is in 10 cm divisions). The chamber was built in such a way as hundreds of tonnes of weight of the broch masonry above must have borne down on the little, slender upright slab at the entrance to the cell, and yet no subsidence occurred in the period between its construction, over two thousand years ago, and the present. The careful detailing of the cell is a reminder that for all the massive, monumental building work involved in the brochs there was equally impressive care and skill lavished upon intimate architectural details like these cells.



A beautifully constructed cell or chamber within the wall of the broch during excavation, note the reddish clay render still adhering to the walls after 2000 years!

Large fragment of whalebone under excavation in the upper fills of the ditch; one of the UHI MSc Archaeology students: Ian Clements (left), and Site supervisor: Mic Page (right) carefully working to reveal the substantial bone



Looking into the broch wall chamber after full excavation; the wall render has been carefully removed for scientific analysis

The confirmation, during the excavations, of the existence of the ditch that we had suspected from geophysical surveys was a major research objective achieved this year. Satisfyingly, even from the very targeted and preliminary investigation that was possible, it appears very much as though the soily fills of the ditch share the very good animal bone preservation that we have encountered across the whole site. At present we have recovered in excess of 20,000 pieces of animal bone and by the time we have finished on site this bone and its contextual information will represent a major resource for exploring Iron Age farming, animal management and depositional practices.





The long hearth (lower centre) set within the background of the earlier broch

At this point during the excavation we really began to see the beautifully intricate and careful construction details of this very substantial hearth. Despite, at one time, considering the possibility that this inordinately long hearth-setting might be a Viking feature we now believe that it is an original feature contemporary with the construction of the Late Iron Age building within which it sits. It appears therefore to have been part of the initial formal foundation of this building which we increasingly suspect was the very social and political hub of the post-broch settlement on site, perhaps where decisions were made, hospitality was extended to relations and guests, and where important business was taken care of. Later this year we will receive our first radiocarbon dates for the feature.

We draw on a healthy mix for our team that includes staff, students and volunteers at The Cairns. As site Director, I would like to personally express my gratitude to the many dozens of diggers and researchers who, over the years that the project has been running, have given so generously of their time with good cheer and with such consummate care and skill. We always welcome expressions of interest from the public if they are interested in participating in future seasons....



Some of the excavation team towards the end of the field season this year set against Windwick Bay; the beautiful landscape setting of our project



The UHI Archaeology Institute's very own Dr James Moore excavating the long hearth in Structure B, note a very fine pair of stone sockets that would have supported posts for a long bar across the hearth that would have been for suspending pots over the flame

2014 OAS fundraising roundup

Caz Mamwell

The OAS successfully applied to the Big Lottery 'Awards for All' fund for £10,000 towards the new OAS Exhibition Trailer.



**AWARDS
FOR ALL
SCOTLAND**

LOTTERY FUNDED

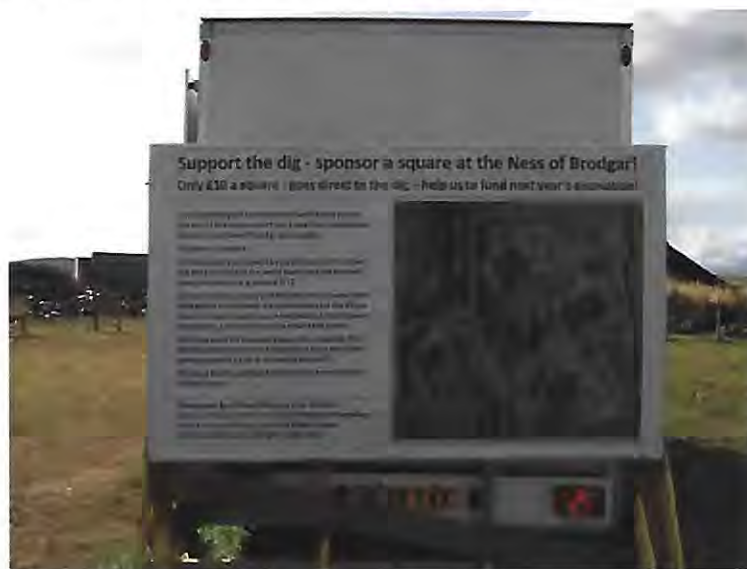
The 'Awards for All' project summary is:

The Orkney Archaeology Society supports the management and development of Orkney's archaeological and historical resources and provides opportunities to learn about archaeology on Orkney. This project will provide a mobile display caravan that will be used by the group to deliver exhibitions and project activities across Orkney. The project meets the Awards for All outcome: people have better chances in life.

The trailer arrived in Orkney in the second week of July and so was deployed at the Ness of Brodgar, it is hoped that much more extensive use can be made of it in 2015, particularly as an exhibition facility at some of Orkney's other excavations.

Crowdfunding for the Ness of Brodgar viewing platform was successfully organised via the YIMBY Justgiving funding platform, with nearly £2,800 raised to cover all the costs of erecting the 2014 platform. The initial target of £2,000 was achieved in just 3 days due to the generosity of the Orkney public and of our many friends from further afield – a big thank you to all.

The 'Sponsor a Square' board at the Ness of Brodgar was very much a team affair. The original concept came from Ness director Nick Card, and ran for the 2012 & 2013 seasons on a smaller, but nevertheless successful scale, raising around £2,000 for the dig each year. The 2014 board was sponsored, designed & built by two local tourism businesses, with day-to-day support and co-ordination ably provided by OAS volunteers, notably Annabel Eltome. This 2014 team effort raised a staggering £12,090, which gives a grand total of £14,724 when the Gift Aid is included.



“Future-proofing” the Neolithic Archaeology Galleries at The Orkney Museum

Jenn Allison has recently started as Archaeology Project Officer at the Orkney Museum to work on the new curatorial project to design and pilot a flexible model of display and interpretation in the Neolithic galleries.

Jenn’s background is in Museums and Galleries, with a variety of experience from curation, to events programming and social outreach. The last few years she has been working on business change projects in the public sector and is delighted to be back in the world of Museums and particularly to be involved in working on the display of some of the World’s most important Neolithic artefacts. Archaeology has been a strong interest of Jenn’s since she was little, and she is very much looking forward to learning more and meeting people as she goes.

It has been 30 years since the Neolithic galleries were last updated and they are not reflective of the current understanding and international importance of Neolithic life in Orkney.

Jenn explained: “The idea is to create a working methodology which utilises the forever changing understanding of the past through excavation and research, in a way that far better engages our visitors. We



want displays to reflect the amazing developments and discoveries to date, and to enable flexibility to maintain up to date stories well into the future.”

The 15 month project will be split into four key phases.

- Phase 1: market research with residents and visitors to gain an understanding of what they would like to see developed
- Phase 2: research of current Archaeological understanding and Museum display including detailed interviews and discussions with local and national professionals working in Archaeology and Cultural sectors
- Phase 3: develop the methodology and pilot exhibition
- Phase 4: evaluate the methodology and pilot exhibition

Throughout September, Jenn conducted market research surveys across the Islands. She has been out with the Orkney Islands Council Library van service as well as conducting interviews in Kirkwall and Stromness town centres. The market research phase is almost complete, with a final report on the findings due at the end of October.

Moving onto phase two, Jenn will be looking to work with as many folk involved in Archaeology in Orkney as possible. She hopes to hold focus groups and interviews to discuss in greater detail the potential developments of the new Neolithic galleries. If you haven’t registered your interest in taking part already, you can contact Jenn at the Council on 01856 873535, extension 2522 or email jennifer.allison@orkney.gov.uk.



Postholes, Pits and Prayerflags:

Excavating the birthplace of the Buddha

A talk by Keir Strickland, Archaeology Department, University of the Highlands and Islands, Orkney College

7.30 p.m. Tuesday 11 March 2013

Lecture Theatre Orkney College

Entry by donation All welcome



Dr Simon Hall

Saltire Scottish First Book of the Year 2010 winner



Making The Stones Speak:

Orkney & Shetland Archaeology in the Fiction of Naomi Mitchison & Margaret Elphinstone

7.30pm Tuesday 25 March 2014

Lecture Theatre, Orkney College, Kirkwall

Entry by donation All welcome

And the opportunity to purchase signed copies of Dr Hall's *The History of Orkney Literature*

Illustration by Cecily Webster

Scottish Charity 030611



Orkney Archaeology Society Scottish Charity no: SC030611

7.30pm Thursday 17 April 2014

Lecture Theatre, Orkney College



Looking for Orkney's past woodland: investigating submerged forest sites across Orkney

A lecture from Scott Timpany
Environmental Geoarchaeologist ORCA Marine

All welcome Entry by donation

Orkney Archaeology Society—summary of events and talks summer 2014

Keir Strickland started the programme of events with a lecture on March 11 entitled "Postholes, Pits and Prayerflags: Excavating the birthplace of the Buddha".

Dr Simon Hall's talk in March enthused us all to read and thoroughly enjoy Naomi Mitchison's "Early in Orkadia", and Margaret Elphinstone's "The Sea Road". In addition, although not specifically set in the North Isles, nor covered by Dr Hall's talk, Margaret Elphinstone's "The Gathering Night" about Mesolithic Scotland, is another novel of Scotland's prehistoric past to be recommended, with a lot of the author's research done via Caroline Wickham Jones.

On 17 April Scott Timpany of ORCA: gave a talk on "Looking for Orkney's past woodland: investigating submerged forest sites across Orkney". A summary of this talk is provided on pages x-x of this newsletter.

Then on 20 May, OAS held its AGM and Caroline Wickham Jones gave a talk on "**The Changing Landscape of Orkney in Early Prehistory**".

On 19 June, Nick Card gave an update on the Ness of Brodgar—up to date news on this exciting excavation is provided on pages x-x of this newsletter.

Professor Colin Richards gave a talk entitled: "Building a different Neolithic for Orkney" on 1 July.

Then on 29 July, Owain Mason and Nela Schloma-Mason gave 2 short talks. A summary of Owain's talk is provided on pages x-x of this newsletter and Nela's on pages x-x.

In November, Martin Carruthers is due to provide an update on The Cairns—**up to date news on this excavation is provided on pages x-x of this newsletter.**

Whilst in December, a talk is eagerly anticipated by Professor Mark Edmonds & Hugo Anderson Whymark .



Orkney Archaeology Society

Scottish Charity no: SC030611

AGM 19.30 Tuesday 20 May 2014 St Magnus Centre,
Kirkwall

with guest speaker Caroline Wickham Jones

The Changing Landscape of Orkney in Early Prehistory



Entry by donation. All welcome

Orkney Archaeology Society Summer Series



Ness of Brodgar: the ongoing saga

Orkney Theatre, Kirkwall Grammar School

Thurs 19 June 2014 8.00pm

Talk by **Nick Card** of ORCA, site director

Entry by donation Doors open 7.00 pm



Orkney Archaeology Society Summer Series



Building a different **Neolithic** for Orkney

Orkney Theatre, Kirkwall Grammar School

Tues 1 July 2014 8.00 pm

Talk by Professor **Colin Richards**

of Manchester University

Free entry Doors open 7.00 pm

Donations welcome



Orkney Archaeology Society

Scottish Charity no: SC030611



8 pm Tuesday 29 July 2014

St Magnus Centre, Kirkwall

2 short talks: Owain Mason on **Rinyo & the Later
Neolithic of Orkney** & Nela Scholma-Mason

Questioning "It's ritual": Folklore in Archaeology

All welcome Free Entry

Donations gladly received in support of Orkney's Archaeology

**Looking for Orkney's Woodland:
investigating submerged forest sites on
Orkney**

*Dr Scott Timpany – Archaeological Institute
UHI*

In April 2014 I presented a paper to the OAS on how the OWL (Orkney's Wooded Landscape) Project is currently investigating the submerged forests of Orkney in order to examine the actual woodland that existed in areas across Orkney in order to gain a better understanding of its form and character. The talk sought to bring to the attention of the audience the potential these submerged forest sites have in informing us of how the landscape has changed in these areas over time. Mainly found in the intertidal area of sheltered bays around the coastline of Orkney, these peats and tree remains provide us with the materials (e.g. pollen, seeds, buds, wood) needed to reconstruct the landscape of these areas, which would have been terrestrial woodlands rather than coastal areas when they were alive in the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods; thus they provide a window into Orkney approximately 7000 years ago.

The talk aimed to highlight that despite the potential of these sites to yield important information on the past woodlands of Orkney they have been relatively little studied in comparison to terrestrial sites (e.g. pollen studies concentrated on West Mainland). Therefore the OWL project will go some way to readdressing the balance. The talk also examined the potential of these sites to contain archaeological materials and how one site in the Bay of Ireland, Stenness has already revealed such evidence, in the form of a split oak

trunk that was deliberately deposited into the peat in the Late Mesolithic period and seemingly abandoned.

Since delivering the talk I have been busy completing fieldwork in Orkney as part of the OWL project. The spit oak trunk at the Bay of Ireland has subsequently been recorded, sampled for tree ring analysis and lifted from the peats. The analysis of the rings and pollen from the peats is ongoing but from previous analysis we know that the trunk was deposited into a sedge and reed swamp environment fringed by willow-carr woodland. From macroscopic (observable by eye) and microscopic (only observable under the microscope) charcoal recorded in the peats we also know that people were deliberately burning the wetland prior to this period. Other fieldwork has taken place at Otterswick, Sanday where with the help of local volunteers the submerged forest and peat has been sampled and the analysis of pollen, seeds and wood from this deposit is currently taking place. Further fieldwork has also taken place on Rousay where more trees have been recorded at Bay of Moaness and new intertidal peats recorded at the Bay of Scrimpo.

I hope that in the coming year I shall be able to inform you of the results this work is yielding and the story of Orkneys past woodlands, which is unfolding.

Cleaning the plank up



Sampling tree remains

Questioning 'It's ritual': Folklore in Archaeology

Nela Scholma-Mason

"But you must never forget that a day in the life of one of those people was just as full of important incident and meaning as a day in your own lives" (Sally Green, "Prehistorian: Biography of V.Gordon Childe" 1981, p. 111).

With the above remark Professor Gordon Childe enlivened one of his lectures on the Lower Palaeolithic. Keeping the "human element" in Archaeology can be challenging, as material remains never tell us the full story. And yet, the one element people are most interested in is the life stories that shaped the sites and artefacts they visit.

My OAS talk in July dealt with the problem of unknowable sides of artefacts – "the untold stories", for want of a better phrase. The functional purpose and age of an object can be inferred from its tangible attributes, yet we only need to think about the way we use our objects in the present day to realise that there is often more to them than only the functional purpose they were initially made for. They remind us of people, places or events to name but a few. Crucially, objects outlast people. They become buried, lost, found and buried again several times; they are re-used and become re-interpreted over and over again. Also the time archaeologists spend with newly dug artefacts is limited and represents merely a small dent in an artefact's timeline.

As part of my talk I addressed the phrase "*It's ritual*". This refers to a common joke amongst archaeologists that is usually

applied in situations where the purpose of an object or landscape area cannot easily be explained. This phrase as such is not problematic, yet it depends on how it is applied. After all, most things we undertake in our own daily lives are "rituals". It is important, therefore, to try and base this statement on more solid grounds: *Why* do we think something is "ritual", and why do we think this particular "ritual" would have mattered to people in the past? Most importantly, "*It's ritual*" forms part of our endeavour to make sense of the past. Whilst Archaeology as an academic subject is a more recent establishment, an interest in the past is not.

As part of my PhD research at the University of York I am examining the use of folklore in Archaeology, with a focus on the Norse on Orkney and their perceptions of the prehistoric landscape. The core intention of this is to find ways to shed light on to past mentalities based on what survives of their ideology. Obviously this requires a careful methodology in light of the numerous changes that were made to some tales throughout the centuries, yet there are early sources indicating that other tales have shown remarkable consistency. When stripped down to their core message, most folk tales serve as explanations of the surroundings; as coping mechanisms for questions concerning life, wellbeing and death, and as means of influence on both smaller and bigger social scales.

When studied carefully folktales can aid in bringing aspects of a "human element" into Archaeology. Crucially, it can provide a more solid basis to the postulate that something is "ritual" by not only stating *that* something may be ritual, but also what we base this idea on. This in turn can aid

dissemination to the wider public by nourishing people's interest in the way people in the past dealt with life, fear and joy. It also encourages the upkeep of interdisciplinary work, enabling cooperation between several subjects focusing on people's ways of living in the past and dealing with the remains of a more ancient past. After all, their days were filled with emotions, events and countless questions about life – much like our days are.

Addendum to "Clay Structures"

Andrew Appleby

Ed's note: this photograph (below) was received too late to form part of Andrew's excellent article "Clay Structures" in the Spring 2014 edition of the OAS newsletter. In that article, Andrew described his experiences and success in creating clay ovens, such as those which may have been used during the Neolithic period. This photograph shows a clay feature, possibly an oven, preserved at the Ness of Brodgar and excavated during the 2013 season.

Intriguing?



Rinyo, Orkney's other Neolithic site

O.D Mason

The following is a short summary of ongoing research into the ceramic material from Rinyo, Rousay, based on a lecture I gave to OAS earlier this year. This research forms one element of my overall PhD into ceramic traditions of the late 3rd millennium in the Highlands and Northern Isles of Scotland. Here I outline the current sequence and a preliminary discussion of possible interpretations of the complex ceramic assemblage at this site.

The island of Rousay is perhaps better known for its vast array of tomb sites, earning it the moniker, 'the Egypt of the North'. Chamber tombs are only one type of Prehistoric site in Rousay. The island is replete with a miscellany of sites including burnt mounds, field systems and settlement sites. Few of these have been investigated, the notable exception being the settlement site at Rinyo. The site was discovered in 1937, though finds of flint and other stone tools had long been noted at the site (Childe 1938). Following initial prospecting by James Yorston in 1937, the site was dug over two seasons in 1938 and 1946 by Gordon Childe and Walter Grant. These excavations uncovered a complex series of structures, showing multiple phases and modifications. The full extent of the site, covering around 2000 sqm has since been shown through geophysical survey in 2010. Importantly as well, Rinyo is not an isolated monument but part of a wider archaeological landscape, which includes the tomb at Bigland round and various lithic scatters.

Our primary sources for understanding the site are the reports written by Childe and

Grant, as well as the artefactual material recovered from the excavation. Frustratingly the published excavation reports are vague on certain matters of stratigraphy. Stratigraphy is crucial to building temporal sequences and understanding the relationship of structures and features to each other. Through this we can build a crude chronological sequence for the site. This is crucial in order to phase the finds from a site, which in turn is important in refining the chronology of the stratigraphic sequence. Without a proper sense of where a find came from its potential as dating evidence is undermined.

In the case of Rinyo this is particularly unfortunate given that the ceramic data for the site suggests a lengthy occupation, running through the later Neolithic and into the Earlier Bronze Age. Rinyo has the claim to fame of being the only site in Orkney to have produced what is described as classic Beaker (Clarke 1970: 520), in spite of Childe's somewhat disparaging remarks (Childe). Crucially this long sequence is important to our overall understanding of ceramic development in Orkney as a whole. Similar lengthy sequences such as that at Pool have already proven deeply beneficial to our understanding of the emergence and development of Grooved Ware (MacSween). Whilst Pool suffered from issues of stratigraphy, it was possible to compile a sequence that ran from baggy vases to more classic Grooved Ware types. An analysis of the data available for Rinyo could suggest a similar sequence, and it is this sequence that I wish to discuss in the remainder of this brief note.

The current sequence for Rinyo is based not on Childe's work but on Stuart Piggotts' three stage division (1954: 327-328):

Rinyo II: Associated with Skara Brae A Class (Grooved Ware) and a sherd of Beaker

Rinyo I: Pottery of Skara Brae B and C class (Grooved Ware)

Pre- Rinyo: Plain sherds with rim profiles and textures approximating to those found in Orcadian chamber tombs (i.e. Unstan ware)

This sequence may represent an oversimplification of the matter, and certainly based on the current available data, it is hard to be confident about such divisions. Looking at the ceramic data we can identify a variety of traditions, which could equate with distinct chronological periods. This material was reviewed by David Clarke, in which he critiqued Childe and Grant's interpretation of the early pottery (1983).

Clarke in his review cast doubt on the attribution of the few round based sherds to the Unstan tradition, and indeed given the scarcity of such sherds in the assemblage, along with uncertainties over stratigraphy it would be hasty to describe these as such. Interestingly the baggy vessels from the earlier phases bear an outward similarity to the baggy vessels from the secondary phases at Pool on Sanday. This material has been variously described as early Grooved Ware (MacSween 1992: 267). The possible presence of such material at Rinyo is an intriguing possibility, and reasserts the potential importance of Rinyo to our overall understanding of the development of Grooved Ware. Grooved Ware similar in decoration to sherds from Skara Brae and other late Neolithic Orcadian sites is noted in the later phases, and constitutes the bulk of the ceramic material.

Based on a reading of the material, the emergence of 'classic' Grooved Ware at Rinyo appears to coincide with the development of structures D, E and F, followed by a series of midden deposits and then structures D, C, A and G. The earlier material relates to structures H and G which are cut by these later structures. The final phase of Rinyo comes in the earlier Bronze Age when the 'Beaker' is deposited in Structure A. Whilst the vessel appears to be from a stratified context, its exact relationship to the rest of the assemblage is unclear. Beaker like sherds have been found at other sites with largely Grooved Ware traits, so its position in a Grooved Ware assemblage is by itself not unusual. Indeed across the UK there is a high degree of overlap, and potential admixture, between vessels of the Grooved Ware and Beaker traditions. It is important in this regard to not view pot types as static but as open, taking on a variety of traits and features beyond those designated in traditional typologies (i.e Jones 2007). The single available date for Rinyo from a cattle bone (Fig 1), supports the notion of a later phase, overlapping into the earlier Bronze Age, although we lack a specific context for this date.

The outstanding question is the nature of this earlier Bronze Age phase. Was it just a discrete dump of material, or was there as at Crossiecrown and the Ness of Brodgar further activity taking place? Without further excavation this remains an open question, but such work would be illuminating not just in understanding Rinyo but in examining the overlap between the Neolithic and Earlier Bronze Age in Orkney. Our data for this period is still patchy, but work at Tofts Ness, Crossiecrown, the Braes Ha'Breck and the Ness of Brodgar has already been a boon to our understanding. Rather than the

traditional recession model (Ritchie 1995: 86), the picture instead is more complex. Whilst it would seem that larger sites were in a decline, a process perhaps extending to 2300 BC, activity at reduced levels continued at smaller sites such as Crossiecrown. Could this be an instance of a boom and bust Neolithic, with activity scaling down? At present this is a speculative train of thought that will need ratification through more detailed analyses. No doubt though many secrets and tantalising answers still lie buried at Rinyo.

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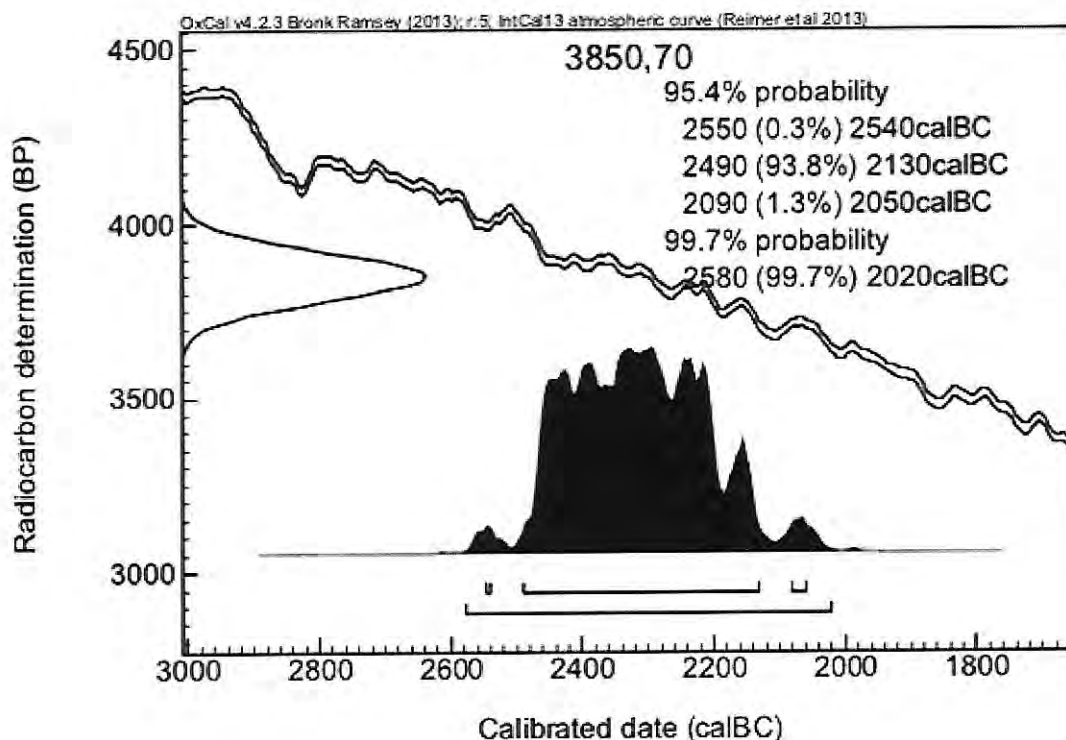
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Orkney Archaeology Society Upcoming Events for winter 2014

In addition to these events, OAS have various other events taking place, so please keep an eye on the OAS website: www.orkneyarchaeologysociety.org.uk, OAS Facebook page and The Orcadian newspaper for other speakers and events.

Date	Event	Venue
<p>Wednesday 19 November 7:30pm</p>	<p>Colleen Batey will give a talk jointly hosted by OAS & Orphir Community Council, entitled <i>The Earl's Bu, Orphir: A Norse Economic Hub</i>.</p> <p>Colleen's talk will bring together previous work at the Earl's Bu, Orphir with new discoveries and interpretations. This is an exciting opportunity to hear from Colleen who, with Chris Morris, last excavated the site, establishing that it was an economic hub in the Late Norse period. The new information will fill many gaps in our current knowledge about the Norse in the Northern Earldom.</p> <p>Talk, tea and bakes, raffle to raise funds for the The Orkneyinga Saga Centre which is run by Orphir Community Council, and OAS shop. Entry free. Donations to OAS & Orkneyinga Saga Centre very welcome.</p>	<p>Orphir School</p>
<p>TBC December</p>	<p>Mark Edmonds and Hugo Anderson Whymark, will be talking about their Leverhulme Trust funded project "Working stone, Making Communities: Technology and Identity in pre-historic Orkney."</p>	<p>TBC</p>



Back Page Funny!

OAS member Bernie Bell sent in this photograph and text:

“My next door neighbour, is Fiona Driver of fiddle-playing fame. Fiona is a young person of many talents, one of them being photography. Fiona and her young chap, Graham, went for a walk at The Ring of Brodgar, and took this photo, which I think is an absolute hoot! We all know that something had to be done about erosion on Salt Knowe, and so, the 'rabbit-proof' netting, was put in place, and the big wire fence was placed round Salt Knowe. But, rabbits laugh at lock-smiths, and to mis-quote Thomas a Kempis: 'Man proposes, bunny disposes'. Here is a bunny, in it's burrow, cocking an almighty snook at human efforts to exclude bunny-kind, from the Knowe. The

temptation to send this to the OAS Newsletter, could not be resisted, so, here it is.”

Thanks Bernie, that made me smile and I hope it does the same for our other readers. If any other OAS members have humorous photographs (with an archaeological theme) we are always pleased to consider them for publishing in the newsletter—Ed.

