



## Orkney Archaeology Society

## Newsletter No 09 Spring 2013

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

### **Editorial**

*Andre Artymiuk*

The Editor, OAS, PO Box 6213, Kirkwall,  
Orkney, KW15 1YD

Welcome to your Spring 2013 newsletter.

As ever, with the OAS A.G.M coming up in June, there are a few 'administrative matters' to cover in the spring newsletter.

- The Committee propose to make some minor amendments to the OAS constitution
- Membership renewals are due on 1<sup>st</sup> June
- The Society is urgently looking for a new Membership Secretary since I am obliged to stand down after 5 years service at the A.G.M.

These are described in more detail in the body of the newsletter.

Continuing our theme of the role of archaeology in the education and development of young people from the last newsletter, I'm delighted to present an article on the N.A.B.O. Rousay Summer Archaeology club by Alison Kier.

Also relating to the role of archaeology and heritage in the wider community we have an article by Alice Lyall, the 'Heart of Neolithic Orkney' World Heritage Site coordinator on the development of the World Heritage Site 2014-2019 management plan and its associated public consultation process.

I know that many members will have been disappointed at the absence of excavation reports in the last newsletter. In this edition I am happy to include a report by Diana Coles and Mick Miles on last summer's excavation by the British Excavation Volunteers and Archaeological Research Society (BEVARs). The society would like to offer our thanks to Diana and Mick, and to all the BEVARs volunteers.

I hope you enjoy these and the other articles in this newsletter.

### **OAS Grants:**

The OAS is able to give small grants to assist the work of Orkney archaeological research. In the past six months OAS grants totalling £6,608 have been made to:

**Karen Hardy** (Institució Catalana de Recerca i Estudis Avançats, Barcelona) for sampling Dental Calculus from the Isbister tomb material (project reconstructing Neolithic diet)

**Lisa Marie Shillitoe** (University of Edinburgh). Daily activities and resources use in Neolithic Orkney.

**Nick Card** (ORCA) Ness of Brodgar specialist fees.

**Ingrid Mainland/Jane Downes** 2012 Community outreach project and archaeology in Rousay.

**Caroline Wickham Jones** (University of Aberdeen) Archaeological Diving in the Bay of Firth.



**Orkney 2013 Excavations**

At the time of going to press the OAS has been notified of the following planned excavations for the 2013 season:

**Rising Tides project**, Diving in the Bay of Firth 10<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> March 2013.

**The Cairns Excavation** (ORCA)  
17<sup>th</sup> June to 12<sup>th</sup> July

**2013 OAS Annual General Meeting**

*Andre Artymiuk, Membership Secretary, OAS*

The OAS 2013 AGM is to be held on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2013 at 7.30pm in the Town Hall, Kirkwall. All members are invited to attend.

The A.G.M. will be followed by a talk by Nick Card on the Ness of Brodgar excavation and post excavation activity.

In addition to the usual Chairman's address, Treasurer's Report on the society finances and adoption of accounts by member vote, Membership Secretary's report and re-election of the society Office bearers and committee, the membership will be asked to vote acceptance of the following amendments to the OAS constitution. The full text of the existing OAS constitution can be viewed/downloaded from the OAS website <http://orkneyarchaeologysociety.org.uk/index.php/documents/constitution>

**Amendment 1**

Section 11, Composition of the Committee. Amend paragraph 11.4 to remove reference to the Chairman of OAT being an ex-officio member of the OAS committee since OAT (Orkney Archaeology Trust) no longer exists.

Amended paragraph to read.

11.4 All Office-bearers and Committee members shall be elected annually at the Annual General Meeting.

**Green Farm Eday** (BEVARs)

18<sup>th</sup> May to 29<sup>th</sup> June

and

13<sup>th</sup> July to 24<sup>th</sup> August

**Ness of Brodgar** (ORCA)

15<sup>th</sup> July to 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2013

(Open to Public 17<sup>th</sup> July to 22<sup>nd</sup> August)

Check the OAS website for latest updates.

**Amendment 2**

Section 3 Membership

Amend paragraph 3.3 to allow, following a vote of the committee, the grant of honorary membership of an appropriate category to a person judged to have given significant service to the society, or to Orkney archaeology.

Amended paragraph 3.1 to read:

3.1. Any person who wishes to become a member shall lodge with the Membership Secretary a written application for membership (in such form as the Committee might require). In addition the committee may grant honorary membership of an appropriate category to a person voted by the committee to have given significant service to the Society, or to Orkney Archaeology.

**Amendment 3**

Section 3 Membership

Extend paragraph 3.3 to add new Junior membership category to support/encourage an interest in archaeology amongst young people.

Amend sentence 1 of section 3.3 to read

3.3. There shall be six categories of membership:

Add Additional Membership Category to read

**Junior Member:** shall be any person under the age of 18 years who wishes to support the objectives of the Society. Junior members do not have voting rights at an AGM. Junior members are not required to pay a membership subscription. On reaching the age of 18 years a junior member will be invited to rejoin as an appropriate standard membership category.



## The Neolithic Settlement at Green Farm, Eday.

*By Diana Coles & Mick Miles.*

Green Farm is situated on the southern coast of Eday and here, over the past few years a Neolithic settlement site has been under investigation by BEVARs. The site was first noted in 1994 when a few flints and possible Skail knives were found by Matilda Webb during field walking (Webb 1996). The then landowners continued to find flints and possible coarse stone tools, culminating in the find of an unfinished polished granite macehead in 2004. This prompted them to dig a number of crisscrossing trenches in the vicinity of the find, which in turn led to the discovery of a possible hearth.

In 2006 a geophysics survey carried out by Orkney College suggested extensive archaeological remains, including a possible structure comparable to House 1 at the Knap of Howar on Papa Westray in association with the potential hearth (Moore 2006).

In 2007 we were invited by the landowners to re-excavate and record what they had done and to assess the potential of the site for further research. A limited program of work confirmed the presence of Neolithic structures and produced a variety of coarse stone tools, including many Skail knives together with quantities of worked flint and prehistoric pottery.

Over the course of the next two years we expanded the area under investigation, revealing most of Structures 1 and 2 and a drainage gully running downhill between them, however damage to the upper parts of this area from agriculture made interpretation of overall site stratigraphy problematic. In form Structure 1 indeed proved to be like the earlier Neolithic Knap of Howar, however the material we were retrieving pointed to a later Neolithic date.

Following a change of ownership we were able to expand our trench beyond the damaged area in 2010. In doing so a further building, Structure 3 was revealed and this appeared to be conjoined with, and similar in form to Structure 1 (Plate 1).



Plate 1. View looking SW of trench in 2011, structure walls outlined in yellow & gully in red. Structure 3 in foreground with Structure 1 above & Structure 2 to top left.

To date we have fully excavated around 50% of the trench including most of Structure 1 and about half of Structure 2, as well as all the area outwith them, whilst Structure 3 remains at an early stage of investigation.



The evidence suggests that the site was first cleared of all soil down to natural boulder clay. Structure 1 was then constructed of local grey and red sandstones together with sand. The interior walls were a single contiguous run of these stones, surviving up to a maximum of three courses high and broken only by two small gaps which retained stone packing for presumed posts. The stones had been carefully levelled on a bed of sand, which spread internally to form part of the floor of the building. The gap between this line of stones and the wall of the gully was filled with large loose stones and compacted fine sand. The volume of sand on site suggests that it was situated near a dune system.

Much of the interior of Structure 1 has now been excavated. It had two compartments partially separated from each other by stones protruding inwards at the pinched midpoint of the building and each compartment had a hearth. Both hearths were constructed in and around bowl-shaped pits and these were associated with a number of runnels and covered drains set into the floor.

The lower SW hearth was a complex feature with at least three identifiable phases associated with several different layers of occupation. It had a V-shaped channel running beneath it with 'mousehole' openings cut into the stones at either end (Plate 2).



Plate 2. View of hearth in 2012 looking NE along V-shaped channel to "mousehole" at upper end.

Against the upper end stone there had been a D-shaped pit, whilst at the lower end the hole led into a runnel, which joined other runnels & drains which all led out through the entrance of the building.

Over 40 separate contexts were directly associated with this highly complex structure and a more detailed paper is currently being planned for next year.

The upper NE hearth was a simpler construction with a single on-edge slab propped up on stones placed within the pit below. There was no evidence of this arrangement having been used as a hearth and it is likely that only the basal charcoal fill of the pit may have been related to such use, as the upper pit fills sealed in this charcoal and showed no evidence of having being subjected to heat themselves.

Throughout Structure 1 we found shallow scoops in the boulder clay, often in



association with the network of runnels. From these and also from other scoops and pits outwith Structure 1 there is strong evidence for deliberate depositional practices, often with the placement of quartzite pebbles, both worked & un-worked, flints and coarse stone tools. In some cases these were placed on a slight platform in the centre of a scoop.

In the second season of excavation a grey sandstone slab was found lying flat on the ground with silting above and below it. This silting overlay the main runnel cover in the entrance to Structure 1. This makes it very likely that it was placed there after the building had been demolished. It has several pecked motifs, a triangle and horned spirals, upon its upper face and had clearly originated from a larger panel of artwork, possibly originally from a chambered tomb. It is possible that the slab was placed in the entrance as a deliberate act of closure as the pecking is fresh and shows no signs of wear (Coles et al 2010) (Plate 3).



Plate 3. Overhead view of decorated stone in entrance of Structure 1.

What is clear is that the building was demolished during the Neolithic as the occupation layers are covered by a layer of demolition material over which lies midden material containing large quantities of later Neolithic material. This midden layer was laid up against the nearby Structure 2 and the spread has been traced across much of Structure 1, within the damaged lower end of the drainage gully and up to 7 metres South of Structure 2.

This structure is too slight to have been a building and it seems more likely to represent a small enclosure, although the northern limit has yet to be established. And there is an inner, partial circuit of small stones. There is an entrance to the southeast within which was a clay-lined sub-rectangular pit. The pit contained three flat slabs sealed in by this lining and covered by a small linear cairn. Beneath the slabs was only natural boulder



clay, the surface of which bore the marks of finger fluting as though the clay had been dragged up to line the sides of the pit. It is difficult to interpret the function of this feature, the obvious use as paving being contradicted by their being under a cairn.

At the centre of Structure 2 is a large sandstone slab which has been carefully levelled by the placement of a number of small stones. A cut feature runs below the slab which has yet to be excavated. The soils within the enclosure are different to the midden, but were also found to be artefact rich. Propped up against the slab were a small stone with a cup-mark pecked into it and a rounded quartzite cobble which appeared to have been deliberately placed, whilst nearby the star find of last season was found, a red sandstone polissoir that had been heavily utilised on both sides, with ground out bowled surfaces and deep grooves (Plate 4).



Plate 4. Polissoir from Structure 3

Although further research is required, it very much resembles the type of polissoir normally associated with the polishing of stone axes. If so it would add to the repertoire of stone working carried out on site, which includes macehead manufacture. Many knapped flakes of speckled granite have been found and at least one probable unfinished macehead of the same material as the one that led to the site's discovery.

We have retrieved many thousands of pieces of worked chert and flint, complete with representatives of all the stages of manufacture from water-rolled beach pebble down to micro-debitage, as well as utilised pieces/tools, clearly indicating that knapping took place on site. The source of the flint is clearly local as the range of pebbles on site can still be easily found on the beach below. We have also seen angular lumps of flint from nearby fields that probably derive from the natural boulder clay and which are also represented in the assemblage of worked material.

It would seem that the site was ideally situated for the collection of a wide variety of material that had been used at Green. These include Rousay flags, Eday marls and metamorphic rocks, all of which have been utilised for building the structures. Smaller sandstone, granite and particularly quartzite cobbles were available and frequently used for a wide range of coarse stone tools.

It is difficult to be definite about imported material, since such a wide variety of rock is found in the boulder clay, however we have found what has been tentatively identified as haematite. A number of polished flakes of tuff have been recovered, one clearly from an axe and visually, a convincing match for the Group VI, Langdale series. In addition there is a miniature axe and the blade end of an axe of unknown provenance, the source for both probably not being Eday. The latter was interesting in that the broken end but had been fashioned so that it would stand blade upright. Finally, a number of pieces of possible & probable Arran Pitchstone have been found.

Organic remains are limited. Bone has not survived well, although quantities of comminuted bone have been recovered from in and around the hearths suggesting that bone may have been consumed as fuel. Worked bone is currently represented by just one pin fragment and other surviving unburnt bone has been largely small and fragmentary.

A large number of environmental samples have been taken from all levels of the site and these are currently awaiting specialist analysis. Early indications suggest that charred seed is present in many of these and these should provide us with good dating evidence, as well as further information on diet and environmental conditions.

The best indication for dating at present comes from the remaining constituent of the

Green assemblage, pottery. This has been assessed by Ann MacSween

Her analysis of the assemblage from the first five seasons concluded that the pottery dated to the Neolithic, possibly around the early third millennium BC, but that two phases of Neolithic activity might be represented (MacSween 2012).

In discussing the assemblage she noted that other Orcadian Neolithic sites might be representative. It was noted that other Orcadian Neolithic assemblages such as that from Tofts Ness on Sanday (MacSween 2007B) did not have a substantial decorated component but had similar traits to the Green assemblage, such as plain, flat and internally-bevelled rims and bucket-shaped vessels.

Shell tempering was used along with rock tempering in phases 1.1 to 2.3, the earlier Neolithic phases, at the site of Pool on Sanday (MacSween 2007A), being replaced by the almost exclusive use of rock temper in the later phase 3 assemblage. The pottery from phase 2 at Pool is decorated with incised lines whereas that from Phase 3 has applied decoration.

One find with applied decoration and around 30% of rock fragments was suggested as the best indicator from Green so far of pottery similar to the later Neolithic phases at Pool, and also found at many of the well-known Grooved Ware assemblages throughout Orkney including Skara Brae, Barnhouse and Links of Noltland (MacSween 2012).



Elsewhere on site, we are at an early stage in the excavation of Structure 3, another building, however it is already apparent that it was in use after Structure 1 had been demolished. It remains however to establish whether or not the two buildings had had a contemporaneous phase, possibly as one extended structure or whether Structure 3 had replaced Structure 1.

These and other outstanding research questions will have to await our return to Eday next year.

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### **Acknowledgements.**

The work at Green is largely paid for by the Membership of BEVARs, however we are grateful to both the Robert Kiln Trust and Orkney Micro Renewables for their generous contributions. Grateful thanks are also due to both Chris and Peter Mason, the original landowners and to Val & Allan Welsh, the current owners, for their hospitality and support.

Concessionary membership subscriptions should be renewed annually, renewal subscriptions being due on 1st June each year. Life members are not required to renew each year. Existing Standing order renewals are automatically processed when we receive the payment from your bank.

### **Membership Matters**

*Andre Artymiuk Membership Secretary*

As the membership year draws towards its end on 31<sup>st</sup> May it is time to think about annual subscription renewals. Ordinary, Family, Concessionary or Joint



Subscription rates remain unchanged at:

Ordinary membership	£15
Family Membership	£22
Concessionary Membership	£10
Joint Concessionary Membership	£18
Life Membership	£150

Once again I have included your Membership Statement with this newsletter. Please review the information on the statement carefully and notify me of any changes required either by post to the OAS Po Box or using the contact page on the OAS website.

You can renew your membership in person by Cash or Cheque at any OAS event, or at the 2013 Ness of Brodgar excavation OAS shop, Or you can send a cheque payable to ORKNEY ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY to the **OAS, Po Box 6213, Kirkwall , Orkney KW15 1YD.**

The OAS website includes the facility to renew your membership subscription through our online shop by PayPal, Credit/Debit Card or Internet Banking online transfer. The subscription renewal link is at the Top Left corner of each webpage. The website also allows you to download membership application forms and volunteering registration forms and gift aid declaration forms.

Finally, since I am required by the constitution to retire as Membership Secretary at the 2013 AGM, I would like to thank the OAS committee and the membership for your support over the last 5 years. I would also like to thank the many society members and members of the general public who have entered into correspondence with me on a diverse range of subjects, you have made my role most enjoyable. I'm sure my successor in the role will enjoy being Membership Secretary as much as I have done.

## The Summer Archaeology Club 2012

*Ailson Keir*

Last summer, as part of the community outreach for the Orkney Gateway to the Atlantic Project on Rousay, I co-ordinated a Summer Archaeology Club for local kids on the island.

The aim of the club was to engage local children in the archaeology and folklore of their island through the on-going work of the Orkney Gateway to the Atlantic Project. The programme of activities and events undertaken by the club linked together the archaeological work undertaken at the Neolithic settlement of Rinyo, in the east of the island, with the excavations at the Knowe of Swandro on the west coast.



Edith, Magnus, Ahmi, Kjartan, Duncan, Ewan, and Siobhan hold up different materials sorted from their soil samples.

The children worked closely with archaeologists from each project and local artists to investigate Rousay's rich archaeological remains, learn archaeological skills, explore various concepts about



landscape change over time, and use archaeological and creative techniques to investigate a folktale.

Club highlights include excavating a trench on the beach at Swandro in search for surviving archaeology; sorting artefacts and examining animal bones;



Ewan, Kjartan, Ingrid, and leader Siobhan excavating a test trench in the beach at Swandro.

and carrying out an archaeological investigation of a suspected Hogboon Mound at Eastaquoy.



Ewan, Kjartan, Catherine, Isla, Andrew and Gavin investigating a suspected Hogboon mound at Eastaquoy.

Local artist Rebecca Marr and local film maker Mark Jenkins were on site during the Hogboon investigation to help the kids creatively record their findings.



Gavin using the clapper board during the filming of our Hogboon investigation.

At the end of the club last year we presented all our hard work to the Rousay community by holding a public exhibition and film screening in the Primary School.



Kids from the Summer Archaeology Club watch themselves on the big screen.

Visit our webpage to find out more about last year's summer club – it is full information, photos, and a film we made!

<https://sites.google.com/site/summerarcheologyclubrousay/home>





The children showing off their Hogboon mound finds and the photographs they took of them at the public exhibition in the Primary School.

Planning for this year's summer club is underway – and this time it will be open to

children from all over Orkney. As well as being an aspect of the community outreach for the Orkney Gateway to the Atlantic Project, the youth club is also a component of my on-going PhD research into community participation and coastal archaeology in the north of Scotland. You can keep updated about what we get up to this year by visiting and liking our Facebook page @ Summer Archaeology Club Orkney College.

Please get in touch with me if you want to know more about the club or my research:

[Alison.keir@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:Alison.keir@uhi.ac.uk)

## Managing Orkney's World Heritage Site

*Alice Lyall World Heritage Site coordinator*



In 1999 the Heart of Neolithic Orkney was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List for its “outstanding testimony to the cultural achievements of the Neolithic peoples of northern Europe”. Inscription on the World Heritage List, however, is not the end of the story, but the start of a new stage in its history – once a site has been inscribed it must then

be managed to preserve its Outstanding Universal Value for the future.

“Outstanding Universal Value” is a term used by the World Heritage Committee to mean that a Site is of such importance to all humanity that it transcends national boundaries. Governments that have ratified the World Heritage Convention have an obligation to ensure that the World Heritage Sites in their territories are managed to protect their Outstanding Universal Value.

Each Site has a Management Plan to support this, in accordance with UNESCO Guidelines.

The sites that comprise the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site are well known: Skara Brae settlement, Maeshowe chambered tomb and the Barnhouse Stone, the Stones of Stenness and the Watch Stone,



and the Ring of Brodgar and associated monuments; all of which are in the care of Historic Scotland on behalf of Scottish Ministers.



**Skara Brae – World Heritage Site (in purple)**



**Stenness-Brodgar area – World Heritage Site (in purple) and Buffer Zone (in green).**

The Site, however, cannot be understood or managed in isolation from its setting, and so the Site Management Plan (2008-13) was developed in a Partnership of the four organisations that have an active role in managing the Site and access to it: Historic

Scotland, Orkney Islands Council, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

This year the Management Plan is due for review and revision. When this process is completed the new Heart of Neolithic Orkney Management Plan will be in place from 2014-19, when progress will again be reviewed

**Looking back at the 2008-13 Plan**

Much work has been done by the Partners and other key stakeholders over the lifetime of this Plan, and the new Management Plan will include an assessment of the progress made in 2008-13.

Some of the key achievements of the last five years include:

Staged upgrades to interpretation across and around the WHS, with new panels at Stones of Stenness and at Barnhouse, temporary panels at the Ness of Brodgar excavation, and the publication of an updated Skara Brae guidebook. New tours have been introduced at Skara Brae and an update to the visitor centre film is due to be launched this Easter. Pedestrian access to the WHS has been improved with a new pathway between the monuments on the Stenness-Brodgar peninsulas connecting existing RSPB and Orkney Islands Council path networks. Historic Scotland and Orkney Islands Council worked together to design, fund and project manage this work.



The HONO Research Committee held a highly successful international symposium, Neolithic Orkney 2010, as the first step in reviewing the HONO Research Strategy. Look out for the Committee's final Research Strategy on Historic Scotland's website soon [www.historic-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk). The Heart of Neolithic Orkney was also included in the government's 'Scottish 10' project, a programme to digitally scan and record the Scottish World Heritage Sites alongside five other internationally important Heritage Sites. More information about this project can be found at [www.scottishten.org](http://www.scottishten.org)

To protect the Outstanding Universal Value and setting of the Site the new Orkney Local Development Plan includes policies that focus on the WHS, and the accompanying Supplementary Planning Guidance for the WHS was shortlisted for a Quality in Planning award from the Scottish Government.

The World Heritage Ranger Service continues to go from strength to strength. Some of their successes include annual increases in the number of people taking their guided walks, a successful programme of school visits, new joint walks with the RSPB at Brodgar, and tours and open days at the Ness of Brodgar excavation.

There have been challenges and lessons learned over the past five years too. The medium term future of Skara Brae is assured – monitoring and repair of the sea-wall is ongoing – but addressing coastal erosion

around the whole of the Bay of Skail will be a long-term challenge. The popularity of the WHS with a whole range of different visitors is to be celebrated – but also brings management challenges. There is still work to be done to help communicate a better understanding of the Heart of Neolithic Orkney as a coherent entity whose designation connects Orkney and Scotland with an international network of World Heritage Sites and potential partners, as well as a set of individual sites that are each hugely valuable in their own right.

### **The Review Process**

The Steering Group, made up of representatives of the four Partner organisations, recently took part in a Visioning event to set out their vision for the future of the Site and agree the key issues to be addressed in the new Plan. The following week Stakeholders were invited to a workshop afternoon, which built upon the results of the Visioning exercise and drew on the participants' experience of the existing Management Plan. Discussion at both these events was positive and enthusiastic. Among other topics, participants emphasised the importance of visitor management, local engagement, and the current and potential benefits of WHS status.

### **What Next?**

The next step in the consultation process is a Public Consultation Workshop on March 21<sup>st</sup>. This Workshop will build on the outcomes of



the Visioning exercise and Stakeholder workshop, identifying local concerns and priorities for action by capturing participants' reactions and their inputs on the issues which the new plan should address.

The results of all three events will help shape the 2014-19 Management Plan. However, the consultation process does not end there.

Later this year when the full draft Management Plan has been prepared there will be a further opportunity for the public to comment on the whole document. Finally, the new 2014-19 Management Plan will be launched at an event in Orkney, and will be freely available to download from the Historic Scotland website.

More information:

You can download the current HONO WHS Management Plan 2008-13 from the Historic Scotland website Free Publications section:

[www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/freepublications](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/freepublications)

Find out more about World Heritage and management at UNESCO's World Heritage Centre: <http://whc.unesco.org>

Contact the HONO WHS Coordinator:  
[alice.lyall@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:alice.lyall@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

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**THE OAS**  
Orkney Archaeology Society

**NEEDS YOU**

The Orkney Archaeology Society is seeking a volunteer to fill the role of MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY effective from the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013. If you would like to join the OAS committee and take over this important role please speak to a committee member at any OAS event, or contact us by email [enquiries@orkneyarchaeologysociety.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@orkneyarchaeologysociety.org.uk). The role requires very basic computer skills (Word processing and spreadsheets, OAS Laptop provided), attendance at monthly OAS committee meetings and enjoyment of communication with society members and members of the public. A full handover will be given.



## Obituary: Ronald and Morgan Simison

*John W Hedges*



I first met Ronald Simison, and his wife Morgan in 1972, in company with Colin Renfrew. This is 'long ago' in archaeological terms, but a time of rapid change, the cusp between the old ways and what was then called 'the new archaeology'.

Ronnie had discovered (and partly investigated) Isbister chambered tomb on his land in 1958, and Colin Renfrew, then digging at Quanterness chambered tomb, thought this would be a convenient source for more radiocarbon dates – dates that were to put such sites in their true chronological context. Accordingly, the three of us walked out to the clifftop near Isbister, to what is now known as 'The Tomb of the Eagles'.

On the way back, perhaps with the quiet humour he had, Ronnie pointed out to us 'another site' he had identified on his land .... it was Liddle burnt mound.

I was asked (through the Orkney Heritage Society) to excavate Liddle burnt mound : my wife Sandra Melia and I used to come up from university in the summers to do this and other sites. Then we moved up to a 'but and ben' near Liddle. After which there were more

sites, in Orkney and nearby ..... right through to the 80's. Some of these sites were rather important in elucidating prehistory, but none more so than Isbister and Liddle



In all this time – when not digging or away writing up – Ronnie and Morgan were my close friends and neighbours: we saw a lot of each other. Archaeology was a frequent topic of conversation and they would visit sites I was involved with that were being dug – Ronnie even went up to Shetland for the purpose.

The chambered tomb of Isbister itself was constantly mentioned by the Simisons, they being 'certain-sure' that they had been told by 'the powers that be' that it would be excavated. But nothing happened and I came back to Orkney one time to find that Ronnie had excavated it himself – this is years ago – and, for the times, he had done rather a good job. Funds were then made available for retrospective recording, analysis and for writing up: and, having left Orkney (owing to the pressures of work), I not only produced a report on Isbister Tomb but also the popular book 'Tomb of the Eagles'.

Altogether, 'the tomb' and 'the burnt mound' proved very popular and people 'just started coming'. At first, a conservatory attached to the farmhouse at Liddle was used as a small



museum and a place where Morgan welcomed visitors and gave them 'the story' before they went out to see the burnt mound and tomb – not infrequently accompanied by Ronnie and/or the dog.

Soon, the pressure of interest was such that there had to be a fully-fledged visitor centre, with car park, displays, and guides. It is now run by two of the daughters (Kathleen and Freda) and there is still very much a feeling of their parents about it.

After his wife's death (1996) Ronnie was awarded a well-deserved MBE (2009). She deserved one too. They gave a lot.

As a footnote, I should mention that Ronald Simison's ability to spot archaeological sites was remarkable - and he used to go out for walks in the general area for the purpose. This was the inspiration for, and foundation of, work which Barry Constantine and I have been doing over the last three seasons, and which is currently in the process of being written up.

You can order a copy at

<http://orkneyarchaeologysociety.org.uk/index.php/publications>



## REVIEW: RISING TIDES REVISITED – The Loss of Coastal Heritage in Orkney.

*Bryce Wilson*

Perhaps the best known 'rising tides' archaeological rescue on an Orkney shore was the spectacular Scar Norse boat burial in Sanday, snatched from the jaws of the Atlantic some twenty years ago. Half of this site had already been claimed by the sea. Much work has since been done in recoding and from time to time excavating threatened sites around Orkney's many miles of eroding coastline. 'Rising Tides Revisited – the Loss of Coastal Heritage in Orkney', first published in 2008, gives a clear picture of many such sites, with a very readable text by the County Archaeologist Julie Gibson, and lavishly

illustrated by the photographer Frank Bradford. This up-dated edition visits a wide range of coastal sites, from the Mesolithic to the medieval and the modern.

Evidence suggests that since the last Ice Age sea levels have risen about eight metres, slowly submerging early settlements and dividing large islands into groups of smaller ones. Over the past twenty years a quickening of this process, often put down to global warming, has been observed. A colossal number of sites around Orkney, more than eight hundred, are under threat, and as many more are heading that way:

*Piers, jetties, sea dykes, fish traps, stone quarries, all exist in the land between the tides .... every land-based type of site is threatened and being damaged too, farms from all periods, prehistoric tombs, graveyards and churches, gardens, fields, and even the remains of woodland.*

At a national level, British archaeology is under-funded. Julie Gibson makes the point that Orkney's archaeology is of national and international importance, 'the centre of a maritime world stretching from the North Sea



to the North Atlantic'. It is a major factor in Orkney's economy, repaying investment many times over.

Skara Brae and the Tomb of the Eagles, not to mention the spectacular on-going excavations at the Ness of Brodgar, bring visitors from around the world for a vivid appreciation of the distant past. But this book encourages visits to lesser known sites around the islands, and participation in recording the most vulnerable, all of which add to the riches of Orkney archaeology, and many of which are fast disappearing:

*It is probably true that your view of any site is going to be a one off. And it will be different again the following year. Parts of the site will go, and new details will be exposed ... You may wish to record or monitor sites yourself: take photos with at least a general view and close-ups of detail ... let the County Archaeologist know about your observations.*

The book includes sound advice on access, many of the sites being far from car parks and official pathways. Happy hunting!

### **Letter from your Cyprus correspondent!**

*Keith Brown OAS Committee Member*

Cyprus and Orkney, at first sight, appear to be poles apart; East versus West, heat compared to cool and dry as opposed to wet. Look a little closer, however, and there are some remarkable similarities.

Both are islands separated from substantial land masses by a difficult stretch of water. Each island has a fairly close knit population with strong family ties. Cyprus has a great wealth of archaeology spanning some 14,000 years since the first identified settlers whilst Orkney also has an abundance of archaeology covering 12,000 years.

Where things differ considerably reflects their positions, some 2,300 miles apart, with Orkney somewhat isolated in the north and Cyprus strategically placed between three continents, namely Europe, Asia and Africa.

The very first settlers in both Orkney and Cyprus were 'hunter gatherers' using nature to provide their day to day living, hunting animals, gathering plants and berries and constructing temporary shelters from trees and shrubs. This state of existence continued

for over 4000 years in Orkney until the first farmers arrived bringing a radical new culture with them. For the first time the people built permanent houses from stone and wood. In Cyprus this massive change happened some 2000 years earlier indicating that the farming culture took a long time to travel westwards until it arrived in Orkney.

Orkney was not immune to invasion, Picts, Vikings and Celts to name a few. However, Cyprus has been invaded dozens of times in its history, from Anatolia, Asia Minor, Phoenicia, Greece, Rome, Crusaders, Ottomans, British and Turks to name just some. The consequences of this, together with its location, are far reaching. Ceramics came to Cyprus 6500 years ago but took the best part of a further 1000 years to arrive in Orkney. Similarly copper was first used in Cyprus five and a half thousand years ago but metal did not arrive in Orkney until two thousand years later.

Every new influx of cultures has left its mark on both islands. In particular the early farmers have left the substantial remains of stone built villages with circular houses at both Skara Brae and Choirokoitia. (Both these sites have World Heritage status.) In Orkney the Vikings have left us some superb



archaeology as have the Greeks and Romans in Cyprus.

Perhaps the biggest difference of all is the way the two islands look after their archaeology. I am sorry to say that Cyprus does not appear to cherish its history in the way that Orkney does. Sites here in Cyprus appear to be poorly looked after, little or no interpretation is available and Greek and Roman sites are littered with potsherds and ancient broken tiles. A visit to the Ness of Brodgar dig will show just how much care

archaeologists in Orkney take in removing and recording every artefact.

My own view is that the continuous occupation of Orkney and the sense of 'belonging' to the past is in stark contrast to the Cypriot attitude that seems to only see as far back as 1974 and the Turkish invasion, partition and continued occupation of the Northern part of Cyprus and the sharp divide of being a southern 'Greek' or Northern 'Turkish' Cypriot.

### Maeshowe Land Drain.

*Andrew Appleby, OAS Vice Chair*

Whilst driving to work one February morning, I noticed some land drainage taking place in a Tormiston Farm field close to Maeshowe.

As I am always prospecting for Orkney clay resources, I decided to speak to the digger driver. When I saw the trench I was delighted to discover some of the finest clay I have noted so far in Orkney.

Later I spoke to Arnold Mathers, the farmer, asking if I could take some sacks of it for use in our OPPRA Neolithic pottery experiments. He was delighted, as long as it wasn't tons of the stuff so he couldn't have enough left to backfill properly.

However, whilst there, I did notice a couple of other things. In the section of the trench in front of the famous monument there seemed to be quite a dip into the clay strata. This was around thirty feet across and filled with stone rubble. I was not sure that it was entirely natural? Thinking about it I remembered that Maeshowe is actually capped with very fine clay to keep the sepulchre watertight. I had often wondered where this splendid material had the clay level disappeared! It dipped considerably. Instead there appeared a thick

come from and just how it had been prepared?

It struck me that perhaps this subterranean feature might just be the clay quarry for that exceptional material? However, if the clay underlay the Tomb itself, then it could have come directly from the ditch round it?



The two black lines indicate the approximate situation of the 'Clay Pit'  
The black arrow points to the visible patch of peat deposit five feet below the turf.

This clay deposit however stretched some way along another trench, which went up the side of Maeshowe's outer bank towards The Stoneyhill Road. What intrigued me was that



deposit of rocky rubble. This rubble covered an only just visible, dark peaty level around five feet below the field's surface.

I just wondered if this peat was evidence for standing water quite close to Maeshowe? Had it been deliberately filled and levelled by the Neolithic builders? Or was it a comparatively recent event?

Arnold quoted, "What a weet, mossy piece that is there," Most likely his reason for putting in a land drain.

I have looked at old photographs and illustrations, but none really indicate a wetland or a lochan landscape. Could this mean that Maeshowe was actually built next to a mere or marsh? Perhaps rubble from the



surrounding ditch was dumped there to 'Landscape' it for some reason?

One often gets scorned for making wild conjecture, but I think it would be well worth coring this area as a test. Perhaps a C14 test of the peat layer would help to say whether the land infill was recent or of great antiquity?

If a Neolithic date, or Norse, for that matter, was to be established for the peat layer, this could add so much to our understanding of the local topography of either epoch.



Three photographs of the drainage trenches (Arrowed) by Maeshowe

## Orkney Archaeology Society Upcoming Events

For the latest updates on OAS events visit the OAS website <http://orkneyarchaeologysociety.org.uk>

Date	Event	Venue	Time
Thursday 18th April 2013	Scott Timpany of ORCA Marine Bronze Age Peat Cutting in the Scottish Highlands	Orkney College Lecture Theatre Kirkwall	7.30pm
Wednesday 8th May 2013	Historic Scotland Scheduling team Marine and Conflict Heritage	St Magnus Centre Kirkwall	7.30pm
Wednesday 15 <sup>th</sup> May 2013	Historic Scotland Scheduling team Current scheduling work in Orkney	St Magnus Centre Kirkwall	7.30pm
Friday 24 <sup>th</sup> May 2013	Norwegian Archaeology Society social evening	St Magnus Centre Kirkwall	7.30pm



	2 talks, one on Orkney's archaeology, second on Norway, refreshments and an opportunity to meet Norwegian counterparts and hear how others pursue their interest in archaeology. All members of OAS are invited to welcome our Norwegian counterparts to Orkney		
Wednesday 19 <sup>th</sup> June 2013	OAS AGM followed by Nick Card (ORCA)  Ness of Brodgar excavations on the Ness to date, excavation and post excavation discoveries thus far	Town Hall Kirkwall	7.30pm AGM  8pm Talk
July/August date to be confirmed	2 speakers, one event  Owain Mason on Beaker pottery of the Highlands and Islands and Nela Scholma-Mason on Norse settlers in a prehistoric landscape	To be confirmed  Check OAS website	
July/August date to be confirmed	Hugo Anderson Whymark  Talk on work in Kilmartin Glen	To be confirmed. Check OAS website	
August/September date to be confirmed	James C Richardson, National Geographic photographer – a wonderful opportunity to hear from a world-renowned professional	To be confirmed. Check OAS website	
September/October date to be confirmed	Orkney College Archaeology Dept, University of the Highlands and Islands Current PhD research in progress	To be confirmed. Check OAS website	
December date to be confirmed	Dr Simon Hall, Saltire Society 1st prize winner in 2010 for his book <i>The History of Orkney Literature</i> , will talk about archaeology and the work of Naomi Mitchison and Margaret Elphinstone. This is a major piece of work for the Society by Dr Hall, principal teacher of English at Kirkwall Grammar School, and will be the Society's Christmas event for 2013, with the opportunity to purchase signed copies of <i>The History of Orkney Literature</i> and share a glass of wine.	To be confirmed. Check OAS website and Autumn Newsletter	