

Report of the Heritage sub group

For the past year the Heritage sub-group has been treading water, not wishing to take any project forward until it has a clear view of what archaeology is around either hidden or easily accessible on the island.

To this end, the Trust commissioned EAST Archaeology to do a detailed study of the island, pulling together all the information they had gathered over several years of visits here. The cost of this study was outwith any budget the Trust has so we put in an application to the Lottery, which was turned down for various reasons. However, a second application last year was successful and we now have the first draft of the 134 page report.

This is an extract from the introduction to the report:

1.2 It brings together an up to date summary of all of the sites and monuments which have been recorded on the island, together with summaries of the findings of the modern archaeological excavations which have taken place there. A brief outline is provided for each known site, together with fuller summaries of key sites. It outlines a range of options for consideration as future heritage projects and provides ideas as to how these may be taken forward.

2.1 The need for a review of the archaeological resource of Westray was identified by the Westray Development Trust as part of its initiative to develop and promote the heritage profile of Westray. Long term changes within the local economy (see Tony Jarvis' report) have seen a decline of the more traditional industries of farming and fishing and at the same time revenue from tourism has formed an increasingly important source of income and employment on the island. While it is generally accepted that tourism alone cannot uphold the local economy, it is believed that it may be developed to provide increased opportunities in the future.

2.2 Within this context the promotion of local heritage is particularly important. With so many potential destinations available to the visitor, Westray needs to be able to offer a distinctive and unique experience if it is to successfully compete with its competitors.

Heritage is not alone among the attractions which the island has to offer: Westray possesses a wonderful natural environment, tranquil surroundings and a strong sense of community. Other destinations in Orkney can provide a similar experience and thus to be successful in attracting visitors, Westray must promote those elements which are specifically found only here.

If any Westray resident would like to receive a copy of this report when it is completed, or can't wait and would like to read it as a draft now, it can be supplied as a pdf file if you contact Sam Marcus or Peter Needham. The Heritage sub-group always welcomes input from any member of the community.

Peter Needham

Ancestral Tourism Project

One project, which was suggested during the year, was a result of Sam's attending a genealogical tourism course on Mainland. The project was proposed and adopted by the Scottish Executive Steering Group. Preliminary work on the Westray and Papay Ancestral Tourism Project is now underway. The project will take all the graveyard and house records which exist in Westray (owned by the WBPT), add to them similar records from Papay, which may have to be created, and then use an existing database of 29,000 Westray and Papay names of residents, (predominantly deceased), to create one huge archive.

This archive will be generated and then made accessible over the internet. Genealogical tourists and family historians will be able to trace their family history, see the gravestones and houses where their families lived, on payment of a fee for limited time access. It will also be accessible in the Heritage Centres in Westray and Papay. The project will create employment for a manager and two assistants for three years, and at the end of this period a homecoming is planned which will also help island businesses involved in tourism. Once funding has been secured the jobs will be advertised locally.



The project was launched at Hopetoun House in Edinburgh just before Christmas 2003 at a gathering of national tourism businesses, called "Trading on the Family Tree"

and the Westray project is featured in the Ancestral Scotland promotional literature.

Reports can be downloaded at www.scotexchange.net/ancestraltourism.

Once again, Westray is leading the field, not just in Orkney but in Scotland, with innovative ideas in order to promote our community and generate tourism. It is hoped that at the completion of the heritage project the team will act as ambassadors to the rest of the country and teach other communities how to document, and then promote, their own heritage.

The Heritage sub-group consists of representatives of various member groups on the island. Anyone who is particularly interested in joining the sub-group should contact Sam or Peter.

Peter Needham

See you at the
AGM 14th April