

HERITAGE SUB GROUP LOOKS AT LANGSKAILL, SKEA, AND QUOYGREW



PICTURED LEFT: THE DIG AT KNOWE OF SKEA 2004 © SIGURD TOWRIE

ONCE AGAIN we were fortunate to have archaeologists Dr. James Barrett from York University working at Quooygrew and Hazel Moore and Graham Wilson from EASE Archaeology, Edinburgh working at the Knowe of Skea and Langskail Farm.

2005 revealed much more information from the dig at Quooygrew, which now needs funding to consolidate the site for the future. In addition, Dr Barrett hopes to secure a new tranche of funding to enable his team to continue to work here at Quooygrew over the next decade.

Langskail dig points to brutal Viking invasion of the isles

REPORT AND PHOTOS COURTESY OF SIGURD TOWRIE

FURTHER INVESTIGATION of the hole which appeared at Langskail 40 years ago, appears to show that all evidence of pre-Norse culture disappears abruptly with the arrival of the Scandinavian settlers, fuelling speculation that the islands were taken by force. Archaeologists say their work has also thrown new light on Orkney's earth houses.

The results of the six-week archaeological dig look set to resurrect the debate on how the Norse took over Orkney.

For decades, scholars have argued about the manner in which the Norsemen settled in the Northern Isles. Did they drive away, enslave or slaughter Orkney's Pictish inhabitants, or settle and integrate peacefully with them? The preliminary results from Langskail seem to hint at the former. There, the archaeology shows that the use of a centuries old settlement and cemetery coincided with the arrival of Scandinavian settlers. In effect, the pre-Norse culture appears to vanish entirely from the area. The dig, which drew to a close in October, uncovered remains dating from the early Iron Age right through to the 14th century AD – a period of use of almost 2,000 years.

SUB GROUP

Chair: Peter Needham
Douglas Leslie, Jenna Hume, Sandy MacEwen, Linda Hagan, David Stephenson, Allan Forrester, Jim Corse, Maggie Drever.



PICTURED ABOVE: QUOYGREW 2004 © SIGURD TOWRIE

"Quooygrew is a Viking Age, medieval and post-medieval rural settlement. It covers an area of about 1 hectare and includes a coastal fish midden, multi-phase buildings (partly eroding into the sea) with undisturbed ash floors, a 'farm mound' of kitchen midden and a plaggan infield. All appear to date between the 9th and 16th centuries.

The purpose of the project is to rescue this important site from coastal erosion and, concurrently, to answer fundamental research questions regarding sites which span the gradual transition in northern Scotland from being Norse to being Scottish in influence and identity.

The site is also particularly critical to our understanding of the intensification in the use of marine resources (especially deep sea fishing for cod) which seems to underpin this Viking Age - medieval transition."

...Quoted from the Historic Scotland web site.

AMERICAN VISITORS TO TAKE FORWARD GENEALOGY PROJECT

VISITING PROFESSORS Jim Wood and Pat Johnson from Pennsylvania State University spent three months here in summer 2004, along with their students who stayed at The Barn. They spent much of their time surveying the buildings of South Hammer, plotting dykes on survey maps of the island and looking into the history and genealogy of buildings and people of Westray. One afternoon the students gave an excellent presentation to Council officials in the main debating chamber at the Council Offices in Kirkwall. The presentation outlined their ideas of how it would be possible to rescue the buildings of South Hammer and make it a viable visitor resource in the future.

Much of the team's work involves genealogy, and to that end their database of Westray residents and buildings is growing steadily. There has been a great deal of work and consultation done over the past eighteen months in an attempt to integrate Sam's genealogical database into a toolkit to take forward plans to put Westray's genealogy online, create a part-time job and raise revenue for the heritage centre. Unfortunately due to lack of support from those consulted, this project will be shelved, and a similar type of project is now likely to be taken forward by another island. The good news is that the Americans plan to hand over their database to the Heritage Centre on its completion.

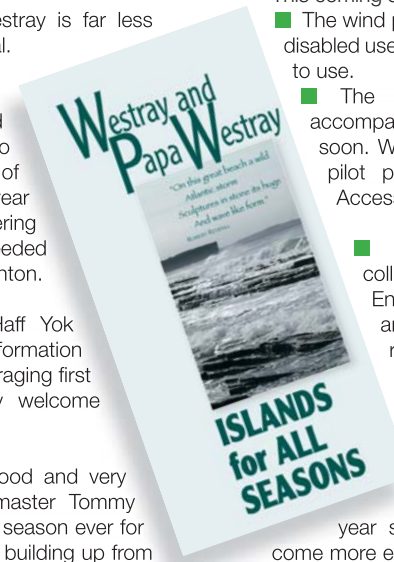
TOURISM

Tourism in Orkney is undergoing great change, and at the moment great uncertainty. Orkney Tourist Board will cease on April 1st, and Visit Orkney will be under the umbrella of Visit Scotland. It, hopefully, is all for the good.

The Tourist Association web site www.westrayandpapawestray.com has been upgraded and as soon as the BBC "Voices" tape is edited will also have ten 30 sec. snatches of Westray voices.

The visitor scene in Westray is far less stressful and controversial.

The wide range of accommodation and attractions continues to increase and to be of excellent quality. This year there are six new self catering homes and a much needed extra B&B at No.1 Broughton.



Westraak Tours, The Haff Yok café and the Tourist Information point have had an encouraging first year and are extremely welcome additions to the island.

Shops again report a good and very busy summer. Harbourmaster Tommy says 2004 was the best season ever for yachts. The numbers are building up from 42 in 1999, 96 in 2001 (the first year of the pontoons) to 150 in 2004.

The yachts have come from all over the world, eg. America, New Zealand, France, Holland. A yacht from Mississippi was sent from Shetland to use the drying out pad. The owner and his wife stayed nearly a week and declared it "the best grid ever".

Hopefully, as the word is spread, the Marina and the Northern Isles will become more and more popular with yacht owners.

The new leaflet "Westray and Papa Westray, Islands for all Seasons" aims for a lengthening visitor season. The promotion Westray Winter Warmers was on offer again this winter.



This coming season promises:

- The wind powered electric car converted for disabled use and available for visitors and locals to use.
- The new circular walks, with an accompanying leaflet, are to be opened soon. Westray, Papay and Sanday were a pilot project for core paths under the new Access to the Countryside code.

The Tourist Association, in collaboration with the reformed Environmental Sub Group of the Trust and ECO, are trying to organise a really good clear up of the island through Bag the Bruck on April 16th and 17th.

The annual Dance Weekend is May 27th & 28th. We hope for better weather at that time of year so that dancers from Papay can come more easily. A large number of visitors are already booked and enthusiastic about joining the classes and coming to the family Dance.

Smart new signs detailing local places of interest supplied by the Community Council will be fitted at piers, airport and in the centre of Pierowall village near to the hotel.

A film maker, Jamie Doran, is planning to film three 50 minute films on Westray throughout the seasons for German TV, then it will be offered to 40 + other countries. He wondered if we could cope with the visitors, who, he assured us, would come after the films were shown.

We will see – but at the moment it is looking promising for the future.