

## NEOLITHIC

The Neolithic period is associated with more permanent settlement, the introduction of farming practices, use of pottery, polished stone tools, the construction of monumental features in the landscape which include communal burial tombs. Although no domestic dwellings have yet been discovered on Stronsay, Neolithic archaeology is well documented. Funerary monuments of both early and late Neolithic include the Orkney-Cromarty stalled cairns as seen at Lambsness, and the Maes Howe type tombs like the Ward of Housebay. Recently, artefacts of Neolithic date, including coarse pottery and a cushion mace-head traditionally associated with settlements and to ritual activity, were discovered at Midgarth during field walking as part of the 2007 survey.



## BRONZE AGE

The introduction of metalworking with the production of copper and bronze artefacts characterises the Bronze age however this time also saw other significant changes such as the enclosure of parts of the landscape, in Orkney this is represented by massive linear earthworks known as Treb Dykes like the one at Burgh Head. There was also a shift from communal practice to individual inhumations or cremations in cist burials. Some were placed under mounds like the one at Cutters Tuo or, notably, Orams Fancy. The discovery of actual dwellings dating from the bronze age in Orkney generally has been illusive, however sites frequently attributed to this period and associated with domestic activity are burnt mounds which usually contain burnt stones, dark soil, charcoal and ash. Amongst the many documented examples on Stronsay Bleaching Knowe is perhaps the best known although the site has suffered such damage it is now very difficult to discern.

## IRON AGE

Unique to Scotland and prolific in Orkney, Brochs are circular, windowless, drystone structures whose thick outer walls, often built to two storeys or more have a distinctively cooling tower shaped profile. Developed over a period of time from simple roundhouses increasing in complexity to their monumental scale they are often the central feature of a more extensive surrounding settlement. The initial interpretation of purely defensive structure has given way over recent years to mostly domestic purpose with an emphasis in some cases to the importance of ritual interwoven in the daily life of their Iron Age communities. Many Brochs contain underground features and were contemporary with sites like Mine Howe, Tankerness. Ongoing research continues to bring interesting new interpretation to this time. Five Brochs have been identified on Stronsay, Greene Knowe and the Hillock of Baywest are now grassy mounds, the one at Hunton being ploughed out and is no longer visible however considerable stone walling and features remain at Benicuml and Lamb Head.



Lamb Head Broch

Scandinavia and the rest of Scotland, extends for a longer period than in England. Roman occupation did not extend to Orkney. The Iron Age therefore covers a period from c.500BC to around 800AD, with the last two centuries referring to the Pictish period when Orkney became Christian and when the islands were part of the Eastern Scottish kingdom of the Picts.

## VIKING, NORSE

The final centuries of the Scandinavian Iron Age also happened in Orkney. The arrival of the Vikings as raiders, traders and colonists started

sometime in the late 8th century. Around 1000AD Orkney became officially Christian. Two settlements considered to be of Norse date on Stronsay were identified along the shores of the Bay of Holland at Rothiesholm Sands and a short distance from Banks, known as the 'Navy'. Discovered during an assessment of coastal erosion, these two sites consisted of drystone structures, middens, pits and various finds of Viking/Norse date.



Rothiesholm Sands - Norse settlement site

There are several references to Stronsay in *'The Orkneyinga Saga'*, including a detailed description of the murder of Earl Rognvald Brusason on Papa Stronsay, by his uncle Earl Thorfinn, who went on to claim control of the whole of Orkney. Earl Rognvald's body was taken to Papa Westray for burial.

The Earldom placed a number of important people on Stronsay at a farm called Brekkur, firstly Valthjof, son of Olaf Hroffsson and subsequently to Thorkel Flayer, however Thorkel was attacked at the farm and burned to death along with eight other men. No farm of this name survives today so its precise location is unknown. However these written accounts along with the settlements identified along the shores of the Bay of Holland during archaeological surveys attest to a strong Viking/Norse presence on Stronsay.



Papa Stronsay

## MESOLITHIC

Stronsay's low lying fertile land so perfect for farming has attracted people to settle as far back as Neolithic times, however recent archaeological research indicates that there was human presence on Stronsay even earlier than that. As a result of findings from an archaeological survey undertaken in 2007



a site dated to the Mesolithic was discovered on land close to Mill Bay. Finds comprised a large amount of worked flint including examples of fine blade technology typical of this period, of particular importance were two tanged flint points thought to be of a very early date. A similar find had reportedly been made at Millfield Stronsay in the 1920's and these new discoveries seem to confirm human activity during the Mesolithic in this area of Stronsay. Post holes and more flint artefacts were uncovered during subsequent excavations in 2008-9. Mesolithic people were hunter-fisher-gatherers whose mobile lifestyle enabled them to exploit resources on a seasonal basis, the Stronsay site was most likely a temporary camp and further information on research into this exciting site is still pending.



Tanged Points & Flints from Links House excavations 2007.

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Printed by: The Orcadian

Financed by: Awards for All Lottery Fund

Published by Stronsay Development Trust

A Company Limited by Guarantee Registered in Scotland

Company Number SC271553

A Scottish Charity Number SC038888

<http://www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/SDT>

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With thanks to Julie Gibson, Nick Card, Kat Fryer for  
guidance and advice

ORCA for artefact photographs

RCAHMS List "Eday and Stronsay" 1984

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Cover pictures left to right:-

Tanged Points from Links House Excavation. Stack near Kirbister

Papa Stronsay

Ward of Housby

Hillock of Baywest. Cushioned Mace Head from Midgarth

Broch at Lambhead

Stronsay  
Development  
Trust



## Discover Stronsay's Ancient Archaeology



# TMI LINE

**10,000 years BP**  
(End of last Ice Age)

**MESOLITHIC**  
(Middle Stone Age)  
8,000 BC to 3,500BC

**NEOLITHIC**  
(New Stone Age)  
Mid 4th Millennium BC to 2000BC

**BRONZE AGE**  
2,000 BC to 500BC

**IRON AGE**  
Early-c500 to 200BC  
Middle-c200 to AD300  
Later AD 300 to 800AD

**LATE IRON AGE**  
(Pictish, a time when Orkney was politically and culturally aligned with the east coast of Scotland)  
600 - 800 AD

**VIKING**  
800AD to 1065AD  
(Earl Thorfinn the Mighty, and establishment of Earldom)

**LATE NORSE EARLDOM**  
1065 to 1240 AD  
(Peak of Earldoms power under Rogwald Kolsson, c.1200 Orkneyinga saga composed in Iceland)

**1468**  
Orkney passed to the Scottish Crown



**Greenhill (Green Knowe)**  
Brooch

Situated in a corner of the airfield this 40m diameter brooch mound was traditionally regarded as an abode of 'The Trows'. Investigations in 1905-6 to evaluate coastal erosion on the site revealed a bank with an entrance passage surrounding the brooch, outbuildings were revealed in the section and hearths and middens were discovered in the brooch's interior.



**Oram's Fancy**

Chert Burials/Cairns

On the east side of the road in fields at Hanton, close to ruins of a cottage known by this name, three cairns situated in a straight line on a SE to NW axis, stand in an elongated slightly raised area of rough grass. A number of cists/cremation urns were discovered in the late 19th century during excavations of the site. This is most likely to be of Bronze Age date when there was a change from the communal burial practices of the Neolithic to individual inhumations and cremations.



MESOLITHIC SITE

CISTS

TREB DYKES

NORSE SETTLEMENTS

CHAMBERED CAIRNS

BURNT MOUNDS

BROCHS

STACK SITES

MADE UP ROADS



**Navy**

Norse Settlement

Along the shore not far from Bunko in the Bay of Holland this site was originally recorded as a burnt mound, however recent archaeological work along with stray finds indicate settlement of Vikings/Norse origin. Remains of drystone structures, a paved area and pit as well as middens deposits were recorded. Some pottery fragments were also recovered.



**Hillock of Baywest**

Brooch

Situated in a marshy area which may once have been an inlet, this substantial brooch mound reaches a height of 3.2m with a diameter of 22.5m it rises from a much broader area.



**Ward of Houseby**

Thought to be a Moss-Howe type and therefore of later Neolithic date, the 2.5m high mound stands on the headland along the coast behind the present farmstead. Explored in 1928 it was discovered to contain a passage running NW then turning W before branching out at right angles either side. The entrance to the cairn is now blocked. Evidence of settlement use is indicated by the discovery of midden deposits and Iron Age Pottery.

**Bennicmill**

Brooch

Along the shore SW of Hanton this extensive brooch settlement remains 70m long x 10m wide and 1.5m high. In 1928 a brooch was found on the other side of the site. In 1989 excavations uncovered further evidence in 1989 including pottery and a hoard of metal and plate.



**Lambness**

Chambered (Stalled) Cairn

At Lamb Ness features erect slabs arranged in a way that suggests a stalled cairn of the Orkney-Cromarty type, these cairns are dated to the early Neolithic.



**Cutters Tuo**

Bronze Age Burrow

A Chambered cairn situated at Grice Ness. This prominent, turf-covered mound is a fine example of a bell cairn, the 13m diameter 0.9m high central knoll rises from the central platform, some stones are visible projecting from the top and on the west of the cairn.

**Bleaching Knowe**

Burnt Mound

Situated close to the water treatment works just outside Whitehall Village are the remains of two burnt mounds 15m apart, unfortunately so badly damaged by road construction little is now visible. Burnt mounds are associated with domestic activity and usually attributed to Bronze age date.

**Links House**

Mesolithic Site

Discovered during an archaeological survey in 2007, the site of recent and ongoing research. Finds and features indicate human activity dating back to the Mesolithic period.



**MILL BAY**

**Wart of Kibbuster**

Chambered Tomb

A ploughed-down amorphous rise in a field east of the farmhouse is the only visible indication remaining of the chambered structure discovered by farm-workers in 1925, it was described as having passages opening to E and W of the main chamber.



**Tams Castle**

Stack Site (Beremonger)

On the summit of the stack known as Tams Castle are two enclosures, one contains the debris of a small building of good masonry which is thought to possibly be the remains of a Pictish or Norse hermitage or perhaps a Viking Castle.



**Burgh Head**

Treb Dyke

This isolated flat bottomed ditch which has a bank on either side, the outer being approx 1m high and 4m broad is an example of a Treb Dyke, an ancient field boundary, representing another feature of the Bronze age where there was an increasing desire to enclose areas of the landscape. Other examples of these massive linear earthworks can be found at Odness Farm and Kibbuster.

**The Brough of Burgh Head**

Stack Site (Pictish or Norse hermitage used by monks. Or perhaps a Viking Castle) The brough is a high precipitous stack separated by a vertical chasm from the mainland cliff, a substantial wall incorporating a gateway lined with erect slabs is situated along its landward edge.



**Lamb Head**

Brooch

Situated on the promontory of Lamb Head, immediately seaward of the narrow isthmus, lies the most impressive of the five brochs identified on Stronsay. The NW entrance of the broch comprises a passage with beehive cells either side which served as door checks (guard chambers). The broch is estimated to be around 65m wide having walls 160 thick at its greatest.

