

temporary camp. Poss. dating to **7000 B.C.** or older. If confirmed would make this the oldest site of human activity found so far on Orkney. [Woodward, 2007]

**6,700** Earliest certain evidence of humans in Orkney. Charred hazel nut from **The Holm of Papay**. RCD **6820-6660 B.C.** [Orkney Museum] Unclear whether seasonal or permanent settlement.

6,200 The Storegga Slide - submarine landslide off Norwegian coast caused massive tsunami & inundation of 'Doggerland'. Extensive geological evidence along east coast of Britain. Inconceivable Orkney unaffected.

6,000 Lake Agassiz melt-through. Immense fresh-water influx to N. Atlantic caused rapid rise in sea level.

**5,000** Sea level stabilised to approx. current level.

**NEOLITHIC (3,600 – 2,200)** Population predominantly 'long-headed' **dolichocephalic** people arriving via west coast 'Atlantic' route. First settled farmers in communal settlements. Cattle, sheep, pigs, dogs, and cereal cultivation, especially barley. Red deer hunted, as well as fishing. Inhumation in communal tombs; polished stone and bone. 'Unstan' pottery, some decorated 3,600 - 3,200. Estimated population peaked ca. 10,000

**3,800** Start of Neolithic building boom. Construction of both stalled & chambered [Maeshowe type] tombs. Many remained in use for over 1000 years.

**3,600 - 2,800** Construction of **Knap of Howar**, Papa Westray on a site previously occupied. RCD. “The oldest house in Europe.” Evidence of even earlier occupation. Single family farmstead. Stone, bone & Unstan Ware pottery. Ferry to Papay from Kirkwall. While there, mourn the extinction of Great Auks – see **1813**. Westray, like most of the islands, has a heritage and visitor centre. The only Neolithic representation of a human found in Scotland, and the only Neolithic face in Britain, was found at the **Links of Noltland** on Westray, in 2009 and promptly dubbed the **Westray Wife** or **Orkney Venus**.

**3,500** Tree cover disappeared - partly deteriorating climate, partly human activity.

**3,400** **Quanterness**, RCD; first of ca. 12 Maeshowe-type tombs. Contained remains of at least 157 people. **Barnhouse** settlement begun; abandoned **2,800**. **Tomb of the Eagles** constructed at Isbister, southern end of South Ronaldsay. Filled in and abandoned **c. 2,500 B.C.** XI bus to Burwick then follow cliff-top path 1½ miles east.

**3,300** Earliest structures on **Ness of Brodgar** including one of Europe’s largest roofed structures: 80’ x 60’ An internationally important on-going dig, begun in 2012. Visitors welcome. Very instructive, on site talks.

**3,300 - 2,200** **Grooved Ware** pottery. Cultural significance of pottery styles & tomb types much debated.

**3,200** Maeshowe-type tomb at Newgrange, Ireland.

**VIKING ERA (780-1195)** Steatite vessels (soapstone) rather than pottery. (Steatite had also been imported to Orkney from Shetland during Iron Age.) Pagan inhumation with grave goods till converted to Christianity. Planked ships up to 50' long. Predilection for arson & hacking open spines of the living and hauling out heart and lungs in reverse Columbian necktie. Several ship burials e.g. at Skar on Sanday and 2 at Westness, Rousay. Original sites all now reclaimed by sea but some recovered artefacts displayed in Orkney Museum including the famous Skar whalebone plaque.

**750** Picts abandoned **Buckquoy**. Signs of Pictish decline & Norse domination throughout Orkney. What ultimately happened to the Picts in Orkney contentious; did they merge with the Vikings? or were they exterminated by them? Predominantly Norse place-names suggests the latter but no archaeological evidence.

**761** D. of Oengus. Dalriada regained independence by 768. Constantine mac Fergus rule Pictland 789-820. His son Donald ruled Dalriada. On Donald's death his father became the 2nd King of Scots and Picts.

**787** First Vikings in southern Britain. Lindisfarne Abbey raided in 793. Worse was to follow.

**794-806** "Devastation of all the isles by 'Gentiles'" i.e. Vikings (Annals of Ulster); Skye, Hebrides, Ireland, Ulster all raided, including Iona in 795, 802 & 806 after which the monastery moved to Kells.

800 **Buckquoy** site used and over-built by Vikings.

839 Battle of Strathearn. Vikings thrashed the Picts. Beginning of the end for the Picts.

843 Union of Picts with Scots under Kenneth MacAlpin. Picts melt away as mysteriously as they arrived but may survive in 10% of modern Scots' DNA

871 Iceland settled by Vikings. RCD.

872 Battle of Hafrsfjord. Supposedly established Harald Harfagri as king of all Norway who then set about subjugation of outlying Norse settlements including O.

c. 900 Earldom established. Offered first to Earl Rognvald of Møre who declined in favour of his brother **Sigurd I**.

**900-1230** Span of events covered by **Orkneyinga Saga**. Several translations; the best by Sir G.W. Dasent [1894] is scarce. Others by Taylor [1938], and Pálsson and Edwards [1978] still in print.

c. 900 The Gaelic word **Alba** first used to describe Pictland i.e. what is roughly modern Scotland. It is not known what the Picts called themselves nor the territory they occupied. Etymology of 'Orkney' also unclear.

**950-970 Skail Hoard** buried. Re-discovered 1858 it was the largest silver hoard found in Scotland. Burial of such hoards is symptomatic of social upheaval or war.

**1455** Orkney and Caithness earldoms re-united under Earl William.

**1468** The Impignoration. Orkney pledged by Christian I of Denmark on betrothal of his daughter Margaret to James III of Scotland. The marriage ended 300 years of competing Norwegian and Scottish interests. England now enemy No. 1. The redemptory sum was fixed at 50,000 florins of the Rhine (equivalent to £24,166, 13s. 4d.) w'out interest or time limit and Norse Law to prevail.

### **SCOTTISH (1468-1707)**

1469 Shetland Impignorated for 10,000 R.F.

**1470** Excambion of Orkney and Shetland earldoms by Scottish crown.

**1472** Transfer of Orkney see from Nidaros [Trondheim] to St Andrews. Part of ongoing Scottification of Orkney. William Tulloch appointed bishop. A brutal and oppressive collector of revenues [Mackenzie, 1750] he systematically undermined Orkney odal law in favour of Scottish feudal law. [Balfour, 1860] Not the first, worst or last petty tyrant.

**1486** Kirkwall granted Royal Burgh status by James III. Ownership of Magnuskirk, i.e. the cathedral, conveyed by charter to the burgh with the “schools and all lands belonging to said schools” plus other endowments. cf 1851

- 1492** 1st of 2 rentals compiled by Henry Sinclair. 2nd in **1500**.
- 1507 1st licence to print in Scotland
- 1513 Battle of Flodden. Henry Sinclair and King James IV of Scotland among the dead.
- 1524 Union of Kalmar dissolved. {Relationship of Norway/Orkney thereafter?}
- 1529** Battle of Summerdale. Last pitched battle in Orkney - between feuding members of Sinclair family. Essentially resident Orkney Sinclairs led by James Sinclair of the Brecks v. southern Scottish Sinclairs. Orkney contingent victorious with considerable slaughter of adherents of defeated party in both Orkney and Shetland.
- 1535** Grant of 1st feu in O. to James Sinclair signalling wholesale erosion & misappropriation of odal rights.
- 1540** King James V's first circumnavigation of Scotland. Visited Orkney, first Scots king to do so.
- 1541** Lawthing & Lawman abolished by James V. Replaced by Sheriff Court & Sheriff – further Scotification.
- 1557** Orkney victory at Papdale. English naval force repelled with, according to some, 500 killed including 3 captains and the Admiral, Sir John Clare.

kelp and its tools of manufacture. With better harvests the next year, things returned to 'normal'.

1746 Battle of Culloden. Basically ended the Scottish clan system – irrelevant in Orkney.

1747 Highland dress banned post '45. Restored 1782. Also irrelevant in Orkney.

**1750** Murdoch Mackenzie's Survey of Orkney produced first reliable sea charts. His map of North Scotland & the Isles can be seen in Orkney Museum. Potatoes introduced ca 160 years after Raleigh brought them to England. Did much to alleviate suffering when grain harvests poor or failed.

**1752** Gregorian calendar introduced but Julian used in parts of Orkney till well into 19th C. and as late as 1930s in North Ronaldshay. See calendar at end for 'old' dates.

**1755** Population of 23,381 of whom only 7 were entitled to vote in the 1758 election [source?]

**1756** Culmination of the Pundlar Process begun 1733. Judgement found in favour of the status quo.

**1758** House of Lords judgement broke Kirkwall's Royal Burgh monopoly on trade, favouring Stromness traders on whose behalf Alexander Graham brought the action which bankrupted him in the process.

- 1770-1840** Kelp boom years. [Berry] Dominated the economy.
- 1780s** Crops failed '82-5 and '88-9. So bad most of the rabbits starved.
- 1789** First lightbeacon – N. Ronaldsay. Followed by Pentland Skerries in 1794; Sule Skerry in 1895
- 1791-9** First ('Old') Statistical Account of Scotland. Initiated and overseen by Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster.
- 1793** Population 23,654 up 1.17% [source?]
- 1795** First printing press in Orkney [P.O.A.S. xi p. 68]
- 1801** Population 24,445 up 3.34% [1st mod. figure.]
- 1804-40** Straw plaiting a major cottage industry, employing as many as 7,000 - mostly women. Ended by 1871. Excellent display in Orkney Museum.
- 1811** Population 23,238 - down 4.94%
- 1811-20** Worst of Sutherland clearances. Further major Highland clearances continued 1840-54
- 1813** Last Great auk *Pinguinus impennis* shot on Papa Westray by scabbert William Fowlis.  
[Groundwater] Globally extinct by 1844

- 1970** Huge North Sea Fortes Field discovered, followed by Brent in 1971, and Piper in 1973.
- 1971** Population 'low' of 17,077 - down 8.91%
- 1973** Discovery of Piper oilfield 100 miles east of O.
- 1974** Orkney Islands' Council created after opposition to proposed 'Unitary Highland Council'. Flotta oil terminal developed.
- [1975]** Crown successfully challenged under odal law over crown's claim to Flotta foreshore pipeline royalties.
- 1976** First oil piped from Piper to Flotta. Claymore, Tartan and others followed.
- 1977** First oil exported from Flotta.
- 1979** 1st Scottish Devolution Referendum. "Do you want the Provisions of the Scotland Act 1978 to be put into effect?" Overall: Yes = 51.62% No = 48.38%  
Orkney: Yes = 27.89% No = 72.11%
- An amendment to the act stipulated that if fewer than 40% of the total electorate voted in favour, then the Act would be repealed. As only 32.9% overall voted in favour, the Act was repealed.
- 1980** Proposal under Thatcher to mine uranium halted by local opposition led by Marjorie Linklater and spurred

on by, among others, Peter Maxwell Davies' *The Yellow Cake Revue*.

**1981** Population 19,039 – up 11.49%

**1988** Pipa Alpha fire. 167 dead, many from Orkney.

**1991** Population 19,325 – up 1.5%

**1997** 2nd Scottish Devolution referendum.

1] “I agree/do not agree there should be a Scottish parliament.”

Overall: Agreed = 74.29% Disagreed = 25.71%.

Orkney: Agreed = 57.3% Disagreed = 42.7%

2] “I agree/do not agree that a Scottish Parliament should have tax-varying powers.”

Overall: Agreed = 63.48% Disagreed = 36.52%.

Orkney: Agreed = 47.4% Disagreed = 52.6%.

Orkney one of only two contrarian authorities on tax-varying powers.

**1998** Scotland Act re-established Scottish Parliament

**1999** 1<sup>st</sup> elections to new Scottish Parliament.

**2001** Population 19,222 - down 0.53%

**2002-8** **Ness of Brodgar** complex revealed. See more under **3,300** and **2,300 B.C.**