

## Brochs

Shetland's most spectacular sites are some of the 80 visible Iron Age Brochs which are located around the coast. From the wall head of Mousa Broch there is a good view of both the Sound and of the Broch of Burrayland, opposite (at Sandwick). It is possible to see from one Broch to the next throughout the South Mainland, and part of their purpose must have been to act as a network of watch towers to guard the shores.

Inside the tower, we think there were several wooden floors and numbers of people could have lived inside. The area around the Broch was often enclosed - an outer defence in times of danger and, later, additional houses were built in this courtyard.



A broch was solid at ground level, other than where there were cells

Brochs are very enigmatic and so archaeologists have carried out major work at Old Scatness; unfolding the story of the Broch and the Iron Age Village which surrounds it. Clickhimin Broch, on the edge of Lerwick, stands several metres high and is easily accessible. Mousa is the best preserved Broch in Scotland (Brochs are only found within Scotland) standing 13 metres high with a staircase between the double wall to the top. Off the beaten track, the striking red granite Broch at Culswick, West Mainland, the well-preserved Broch at Burrayland, Yell, and the Broch on the edge of the Loch of Houlland, Eshaness, are just some of the treats in store for the walker.



Mousa Broch is 13m high with a staircase between the double wall at the top

Clickhimin Broch

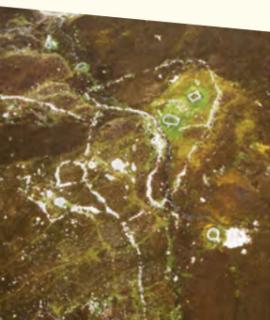


Wherever you look in Shetland you will be sure to find the remains of ancient Shetlanders who have been there before you. Low intensity use of the hill land in more recent times and the scarcity of timber means that these stone built remains are some of the best that you will find in Britain.



Staneydale temple on Shetland's Westside

In addition Mousa Broch, Old Scatness Broch and Iron Age Village and the multi-period site of Jarlshof are on the Tentative List for World Heritage Status. The island of Unst has over 60 probable Viking longhouse sites, some of which are excavated. Shetland is indeed a treasure trove from the past



Ancient fields, clearance cairns and houses can be found in many hillside locations in Shetland

### Ancient Crofts

Shetlanders having been working the land, keeping sheep and cattle, growing crops, for over 5,000 years. On the west side, visitors can follow ancient boundary dykes for miles across the hill. The Scord of Brouster has three excavated houses amongst the fields. There are five houses at Staneydale, together with an exceptionally large and very impressive building described by its excavator as a 'temple'.

Multi period site at Jarlshof



## Warning

Many of Shetland's sites are scheduled and it is illegal to dig into them or disturb them in any way, even if you do have the landowner's permission. Play safe and do not disturb any sites - they are Shetland's Heritage for everyone to enjoy.

The official record of the sites in Shetland, the Sites and Monuments Record, is held at Shetland Amenity Trust, Garthspool, Lerwick, Shetland, ZE1 0NY. Tel: 01595 694688.

If you find any objects when you are exploring, in Scottish Law, they must be reported. Staff at the Shetland Museum and Archives, Hay's Dock, Lerwick will be pleased to help you. Tel: 01595 695057.

## Some Useful Contacts

Shetland Museum and Archives:	Hay's Dock, Lerwick, Tel: 01595 695057
Unst Heritage Centre:	Haroldswick, Unst, Tel: 01957 711528
Fetlar Interpretive Centre:	Houbie, Fetlar, Tel: 01957 733206
The Old Haa:	Burrayland, Yell, Tel: 01957 722339
Tangwick Haa Museum:	Eshaness, Tel: 01806 503389
Scalloway Museum:	Main Street, Scalloway
Bressay Heritage Centre:	Leiraness, Bressay, Tel: 01595 820750
Hoswick Visitor Centre:	Hoswick, Sandwick, Tel: 01950 431406
Quendale Mill:	Quendale, Dunrossness, Tel: 01950 460969
George Waterston Memorial Centre:	Fair Isle, Tel: 01950 460405
Mousa Ferry:	Sandwick, Tel: 01950 431367



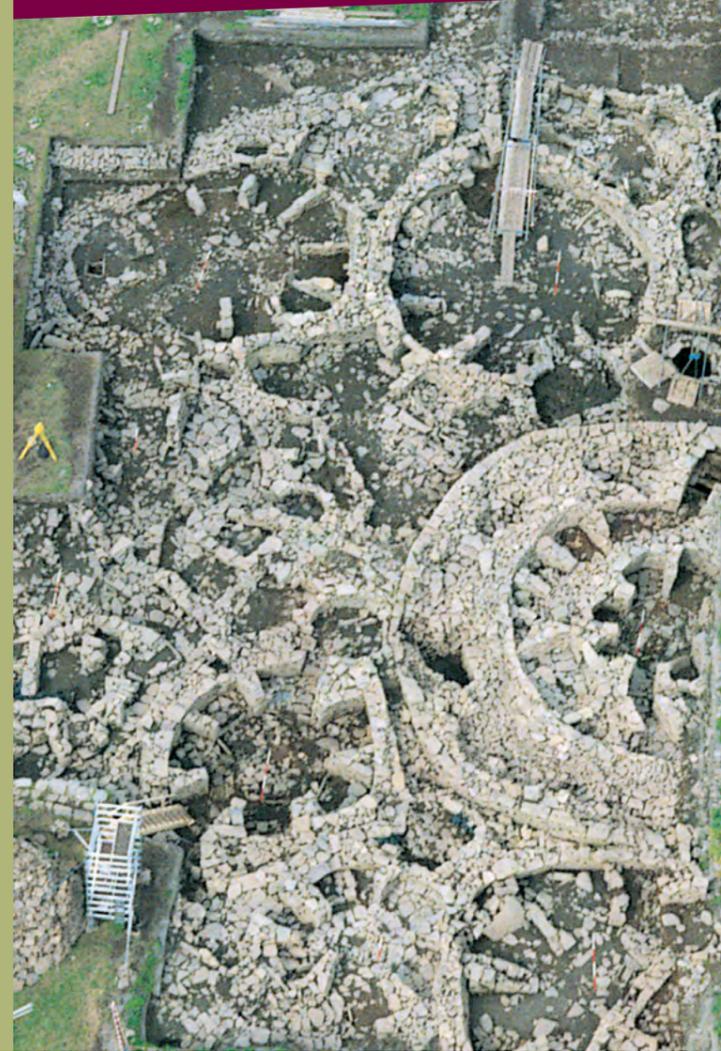
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2013

# Archaeology

heritage  
Shetland  
culture

## Discover yesterday tomorrow



## Houses for the Dead

The earliest Shetlanders were buried in cairns, the majority built in the shape of a heel. The remains were laid in a small chamber in the centre. Who was buried in them? We do not know - there aren't enough for the whole population and the chambers are small. Perhaps the bodies were laid out for animals and birds to eat, and just a few bones from each person were put inside the cairn. A ceremony might have taken place in the concave façade at the front of the cairn. Even so, there was not room for many people inside.



A burial chamber or cist in Pettigarh's Field on the island of Whalsay

The biggest cairns are on hilltops (e.g. Ronas Hill) but there are also very impressive cairns on lower land - usually on knowes which command good views. Punds Water and Vementry are examples not to be missed.

## Standing Stones

Standing stones have been erected throughout Shetland from prehistoric times to the present day. They formed boundary markers, navigation aids and others were memorial stones. Among the dramatically placed stones are Newing, Nesting; one along the road to Muness, Unst and one in the garden of Leagarth House, Fetlar, where the Stone of the Ripples was later moved and set into the landscaped grounds.



The largest standing stone in Shetland is at Boardastubble, near Lund, in Unst

## Burnt Mounds

If you find a turf covered heap of fist-sized, heat-shattered stones beside a burn, it will be a Bronze Age Burnt mound.

Burnt mounds are usually crescent shaped and might have a box of stone slabs visible in the centre. Archaeologists debate their use. Were they cooking sites, meat being boiled in the trough by heating stones in a fire and placing them into the water? Experiments at Tangwick demonstrated that this was difficult. Perhaps water was taken from the trough and poured over hot stones to create steam for a sauna or to make felt, or was it for a more smelly purpose, such as tanning or fulling? Burnt mounds were usually well away from the houses. Cruester, Bressay, demonstrates how complex these sites can be. There are some spectacular burnt mounds on Fair Isle but with over 300 on the mainland alone, they are easy to find.

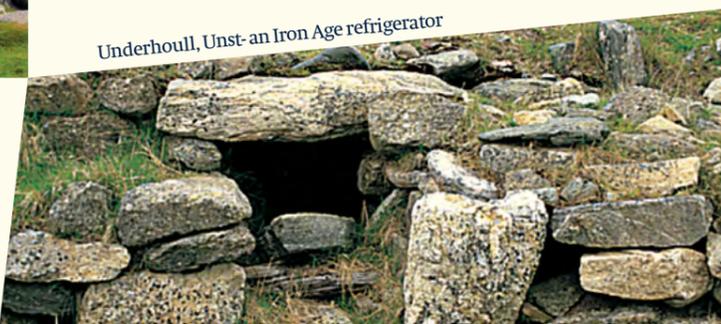


Tangwick, Eshaness. Excavated burnt mounds seem to have industrial buildings beneath them

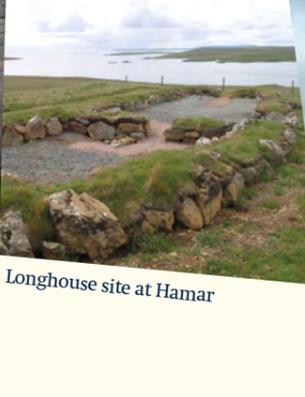
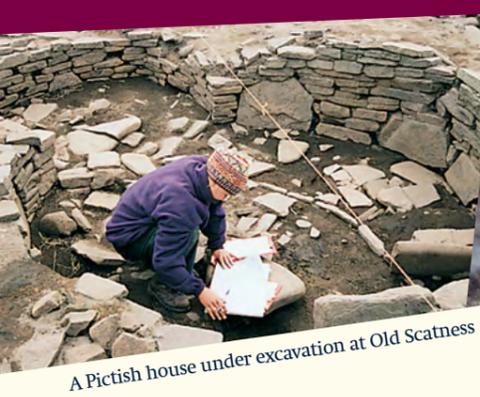
## Souterrains

Shetland's earliest refrigerators, these small underground passages which widen out slightly at the end, would have been good places for storing salted meat over the winter. However, occasionally they are found inside houses, under hearths (e.g. Jarlshof). Perhaps grain or items which needed to be kept dry were stored here. Crawl down a lit souterrain at Jarlshof, or, for the more adventurous smaller person, disappear into the souterrain at Wadbister, Bressay (take a torch).

Underhoull, Unst - an Iron Age refrigerator



# Archaeology in Shetland



A Pictish house under excavation at Old Scatness

Life in Pictish times

Longhouse site at Hamar

Viking times replicated at Brooke Point, Haroldswick

Many ruinous 12th century chapels stand in graveyards still used today as at Lund, Unst



Pupil Stone - a replica stands in the churchyard

## Picts

By the 7th century AD, Shetland was firmly part of Pictland, and the most enduring legacy of these people is their art work: carved stones and silverwork. Carved stone slabs have been found at Cullingsbrough, Bressay (where intriguingly the graveyard has been built over the broch), and Pupil, Burra. Mail, Cunningsburgh was the find spot of several rune and ogham stones and the Mail Figure. Some of these stones are on display in the Shetland Museum and Archives.

## St. Ninian's

When the chapel on St Ninian's Isle was excavated, the remains of 7th century stone shrines were found, showing that the island was important in early Christian times. The chapel which is still visible is rather later in date (it lies over an earlier one). There are replicas of the silver treasure found here in the Shetland Museum and Archives. Interpretation is provided on site and the spot where the treasure was found (inside the chapel, near the altar) is marked with a stone pillar.



St. Ninian's Chapel, reached via a beautiful tombolo

There is a whole Viking village at Jarlshof. The principle Viking parliament (or Althing) was situated in the fertile Tingwall Valley, where an islet projects into the loch. It had good acoustics and good access from both East and West Shetland.

## Soapstone

The properties of soapstone (*kleber*) were known 3,000 years before the Vikings ever came to Shetland. The Vikings did not make much pottery but mainly relied on natural materials. They carved stone bowls straight out of the rock. The shapes of the bowls were left in the hillside, and can be easily seen at the largest quarry, Catpund, Cunningsburgh. Cliff faces at Fethaland, North Mainland are also covered with these marks.



Evidence of where bowls were carved out of Catpund soapstone

## Chapels

By the 12th century there were numerous chapels throughout Shetland. Most of these are now very ruinous but take time to visit Lund where there is a fish carved on one of the window lintels. Framgord has fascinating crosses in the surrounding graveyard, as well as a Viking or Norse farm outside. Both these sites are in Unst, as is Kirkaby, where the early circular graveyard is still visible.



Replica objects carved in soapstone during the living history project at Old Scatness

## Monks & Hermits

Priests set up chapels in the heart of Shetland (eg: Pupil, Burra and St Ninian's Isle) but the small cells on remote stacks and peninsulas either housed monks and hermits or were places of retreat for the priests themselves. Examples include Da Birrier, Yell (best viewed from the air), facing a similar settlement on the Kame of Isbister across Yell Sound. Today, these are still some of the most inaccessible places in Shetland.



Da Birrier, West Sandwick, Yell

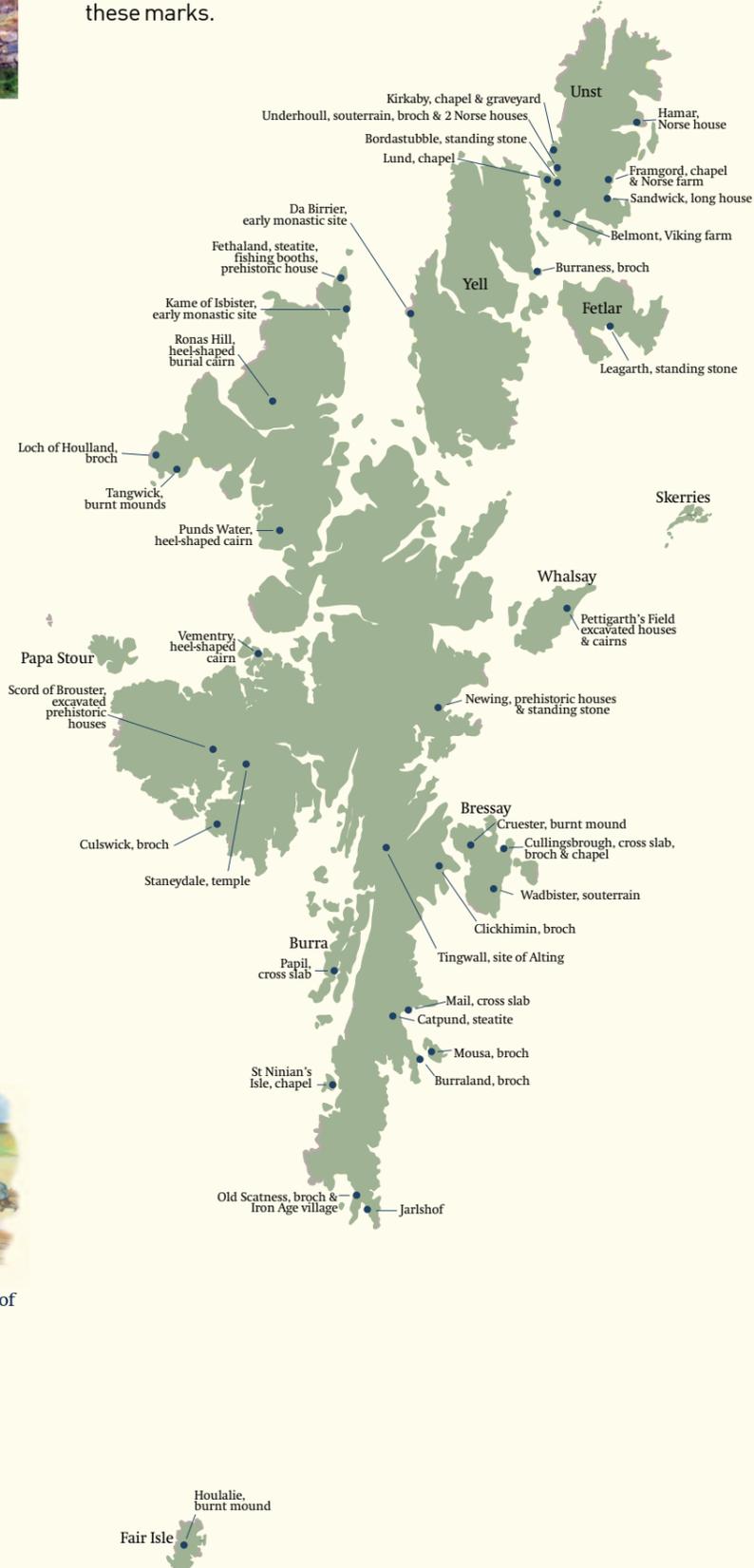
## A Haven for Vikings

Shetland was right in the middle of the Viking seaways, and so it is hardly surprising that some of them stopped here, built houses and established farms. They brought with them a new style of building, a new political system, new laws and a new language, all of which have left their mark. Archaeologists have excavated several of their longhouses in Unst, one of their first landfalls. How did these incomers fit in with the existing population? What difference did their flexible boats with keels and sun compasses and their advanced fishing weights make to Shetland's economy?

The Viking Unst project has excavated longhouse sites at Belmont, Hamar and Underhoull (Upper). These were altered through time and Belmont and Hamar longhouses were long-lived. Other interesting sites include the later Norse house on the beach at Sandwick. The longhouse at Underhoull (Lower) has an Iron Age souterrain next to it and a broch above it. At Brookpoint, Haroldswick there is a replica Viking longship (the Skidbladner) and a reconstructed longhouse, based on the excavation results.



Artist's impression of life in Viking times



3000 BC

Neolithic

2000 BC

Bronze Age

1000 BC

Early Iron Age

Mid Iron Age

0

Late Iron Age

Picts

Vikings

1000 AD

Norse

Crofting

Present

2000 AD

