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**KIRKWALL** (ON *Kirkjuvagr*, Kirk Bay) is first mentioned in the *Orkneyinga Saga* when Earl Rognvald Brusison built a church here and dedicated to his foster father, King Olaf of Norway, who was killed at a battle at Stiklastad in 1030. Rognvald returned to Orkney about 1035, after being in Sweden and Holmgard (Novgorod) in Russia, to share the Earldom with Earl Thorfinn the Mighty for about eight years.

*Orkneyinga Saga* states that Thorfinn's base was in Birsay, and Rognvald was the first Earl named as living at Kirkwall and thus may have been the builder of the first large drinking hall here as well. He was killed on Papa Stronsay by Earl Thorfinn, with the help of Thorkell Fostri, in about 1046, while collecting malt to make ale for Yule.

Kirkwall was the natural place

for a settlement to form, being central in the islands, and having the Oyce, or Peerie Sea, which sheltered by the Ayre but was accessible by boats until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, making it a perfectly safe harbour. It is also only 2km from Scapa Bay, the head of the Norse referred to as *Knarrarstadir*, now called Knarstone, a landing place for merchant ships. The fertile land of St Ola must have attracted the first Neolithic

*Kirkwall Harbour Basin on a summer evening, the Girnel is on the right*



settlers also, but so far no evidence of their presence has been found, probably because they picked the best sites, which have since been built on multiple times.

**Iron Age** Although there is little to see today, there were at several brochs in the area. The large mound, upon which Spence's Paper Shop now sits, at the south end of Broad Street, is almost certainly the site of one of Kirkwall's brochs, while another other is said to have been situated at



*Sketch map of Kirkwall from 1766*

the mouth of the Papdale Burn. There was a round-house at Grain, of which only the cellar, or Earth House



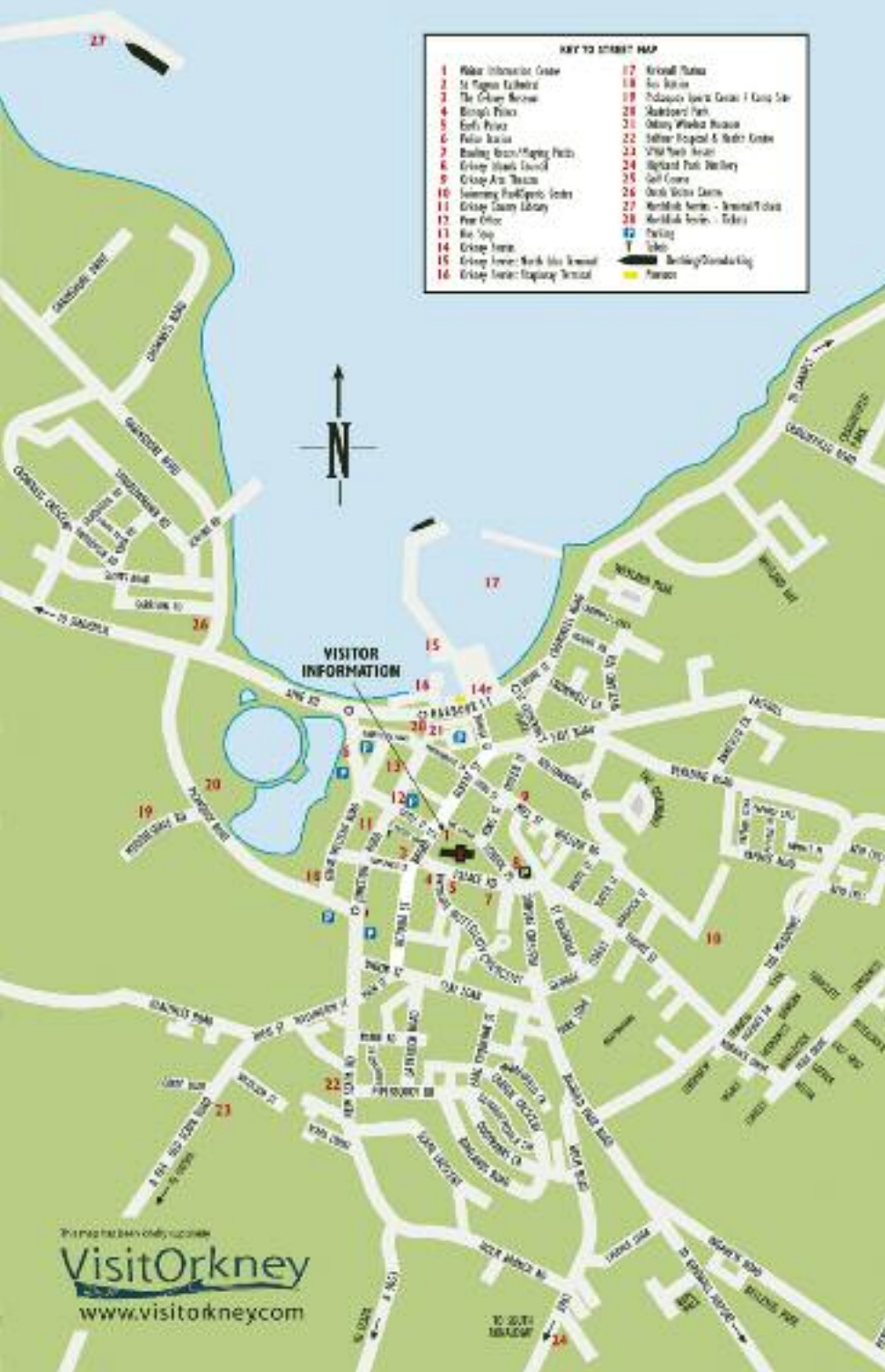
*The Earl's Palace and St Magnus from Brandyquoy in 1815*

*Kirkwall Roads in 1815 by William Daniell*



*Coat of arms from The Bridge*

- KIRKWALL - PLACES OF INTEREST**
- St Magnus Cathedral
  - Orkney Museum
  - Earl's & Bishop's Palaces
  - St Magnus Centre
  - Town Hall
  - The Reel (Wrigley Sisters)
  - The Street
  - Harbour and Basin area
  - Orkney Library & Archives
  - Old St Olaf's Kirk
  - Wireless Museum
  - Fusion Nightclub
  - Pickaquo Centre
  - Skateboard Park
  - Swimming Pool
  - Bowling Green
  - Golf Course
  - Highland Park Distillery
  - Ortak Visitor Centre



Aerial view of Kirkwall from the south

remains, as well as a large hog-backed grave-slab in the Orkney Museum and an aumbrie, a stone cupboard, in the vestry of the present St Olaf's Church on Dundas Crescent. All date from a later rebuilding.

Celtic priests (*Papae*) had a settlement between the Papdale Burn and the sea, and it is likely that the first Norse church was built here in 1035. This would have been timber-built. The remains of St Olaf's Kirk visible today include an attractive archway in St Olaf's Wynd off Bridge

Street, a hog-backed grave-slab in the Orkney Museum and an aumbrie, a stone cupboard, in the vestry of the present St Olaf's Church on Dundas Crescent. All date from a later rebuilding.

**The Street** The seat of the Bishop was transferred from Birsay to Kirkwall under Bishop William in 1136. With the building of the Cathedral and Bishop's Palace, and construction of the Earl's Castle, Kirkwall rapidly grew.

By the time of the grant of the Scottish Royal Charter in 1486, there were two clear parts, the Laverock, or Episcopal part, and the Earl's or King's part.

The division is thought to be about the line of St Magnus Lane off Broad Street. By tradition the Ba' Games held at Christmas and New Year originate in rivalry between the men of the Burgh, the *Up the Gates*, and those from the Laverock, the *Doon the Gates*.

Bridge Street looking north from The Bridge



St Olaf's archway





Kirkwall Harbour Basin in 1924

**Bridge Street** The original form of the town, the narrow winding street, with many lanes, and houses often gable-on to the street, has not changed much over the centuries. Originally the settlement followed the shore of the Peerie Sea and this shape is still retained by Bridge Street and Albert Street today.

In Rognvald Brusison's time the town consisted of two rows of houses along what are now Shore Street and Bridge Street. The Earl's Castle or Hall was to the South, on the edge of the Peerie Sea in the area formerly occupied by Robert Garden's business.

A devastating fire destroyed all the old buildings here in 1938, including the oldest part, a house called *The Gallery*, which consisted of two wings, gable-on to Bridge Street joined by a block parallel to the street with, so as to form a courtyard which was separated from the street by a wall with a balcony.

Although the first record of this house is from 1433, when it was owned by John Law, it seems that this is the site of Earl Rognvald Brusison's *skali*, or drinking hall, and later of Earl Rognvald Kolson's much more prestigious house. Later still it was the town house of the Traills and it was

The "Groatie Hoose", now relocated to Tankerness House Gardens



Kirkwall from below The Mount or Cromwell's Fort with the marina and pier on the right

David Traill who built the *Groatie Hoose* in the garden, incorporating some of the ballast from Pirate Gow's ship. It was the first Kirkwall Hotel, before being bought by Robert Garden, an itinerant salesman who became a very successful merchant. The *Groatie Hoose* has now been moved to Tankerness House gardens.

**The Ting and Parliament Close** The lane on the west side of Stevenson's paper shop at the Bridge is of historic interest. A group of three houses, of which the ruin of one remains, formed three sides of a square called Parliament Square. The site is now occupied by the Hydro

Doorway in Parliament Square



Electric shop and offices, previously the Commercial Bank. In Norse times this was the site of the main Orkney Ting or Parliament. After the centre of the Earldom had moved in from Birsay, Kirkwall was the obvious place to hold this assembly, next to St Olaf's Church. This central location beside the Papdale Burn was probably a meeting place long before the Vikings.

During the visit of James V in 1540, the Scottish Parliament met at Parliament Close. In these days parliament met once per month, and since the King and Court often moved about it had to as well. All that remains today is an interesting old sandstone doorway and carved lintel. The Common Land of the Ting has long since been appropriated, and under Scots, but not Udal Law, is no longer Common Land.

**Peedie Sea** Many houses date from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and there are interesting putt stones, at the bottom of cross-stepped gables, lintels and

carved stones visible along the street. The town faced onto the Peedie Sea, and the street owes its shape to the shoreline. In 1829 the first bridge was built between the Ayre and the Grainshore. This was a lifting bridge to allow the passage of boats, but by 1858 a stone-built bridge had blocked it off.

In 1859, the Harbour Act was passed, and in 1865 the old town's appearance was transformed by the building of Junction Road. Changes and developments have continued piecemeal to this day, with rapid expansion of the town between, and after, the two World Wars. The Peedie Sea

has largely gone and much has changed, but there is still much to remind us of the past.

**Harbour** Harbour Street and Shore Street were once called the *Ramparts*, no doubt partly defences against the sea, and partly cannon-armed precautions against the *Common Enemy*. By the late 1400s, houses had started to appear, and the first was on the site of the present St Ola Hotel. Not long afterwards The Gernel, now Orkney Sailing Club, was built to hold the oats, bere, malt and meal. These were paid in lieu of cash for rental and skat, due to the Earldom Estate. The nearby Corn Slip was used to land the goods.

Shore Street before demolition for replacement with BP oil tanks





"Earl Sigurd" served the North Isles for over 30 years, here at Eday Pier



"Orcadia III" was to serve the North Isles for nearly 30 years

Before the first pier was built, ships moored off in Kirkwall Bay, goods being transferred in small dories, or *flit boats*.

Unfortunately recent harbour improvements have totally covered the attractive sandstone Corn Slip, West Pier and harbour front with concrete and steel. The road is wider, but some of the appeal of the Basin has gone. Shore Street was also much more

attractive in the past, with rows of houses gable-on to the sea. Sadly they were demolished and replaced by oil tanks when planners were less enlightened about preserving the past.

On the site of the Kirkwall Hotel, which was built in 1890, there stood a building called *Traill's Folly*, on account of its size and style, and opposite this was the original small

Kirkwall Lifeboat "Grace Paterson Ritchie" at the entrance to the Basin



pier. In 1809 the new pier was begun, opening in 1811. The West Pier was built in 1813, and the face of the *Rampart* was built in the same year. The builders felt a direct injustice on the part of the Government, as no public assistance was forthcoming. Perhaps the Government and EU aid given in support of the current pier expansion goes some way to alleviate this, albeit about 200 years later!

**Shipping services** The first regular summer steamship service to the South was started in 1833. This caused an immediate boost to the local economy, but it was 1850 before a winter service was included. Finally in 1865, the North Isles received their first regular steamer service, run by the first *Orcadia*. This ship ran until 1931, having been joined by the first *Earl Thorfinn* in 1928, with the *Earl Sigurd* following in 1931.

These steamships ran for over 30 years until they were replaced by the *Orcadia* in 1962 and later the cargo boat *Islander*. Ro-ro services began in 1991 to the outer North Isles and today the vessels *Varagen*, *Earl Thorfinn* and *Earl Sigurd* continue these services from Kirkwall. The *Shapinsay* runs the service to that island.

There are always fishing boats and cargo ships coming and going at Kirkwall harbour, which has recently undergone considerable expansion. With

the opening of the new pier west of the town near Crowness to serve the ferries to Aberdeen and Lerwick, Kirkwall Pier now handles much less traffic. Nowadays many cruise ships call at Kirkwall in summer, ranging from small vessels to the largest in the world. Many can now dock at the new pier.

**Kirkwall Marina** is well sheltered it from northerly gales by its breakwater and usable all year round. This facility has transformed pleasure boating and is a great boon for the rapidly increasing number of local and visiting yachtsmen and women.

**Kirkwall Lifeboat** The RNLI lifeboat station was established in 1972 after extensive trials with the 70ft *Grace Paterson Ritchie*, which was based here until 1988 when she was replaced by the *Arun* class *Mickie Salveson*. The station has been served by the present *Severn* class *Margaret Foster* since 1998. She is berthed in the Basin and has a range of 250 miles with a maximum speed of 25 knots.

Bridge Street



St Magnus Cathedral is a prominent landmark

**St Magnus Cathedral** dominates the town, and is a prominent landmark, which can be seen from many direc-

tions. It was originally built just above the shore of the Peerie Sea, and as it took shape it must have been a

Current Kirkwall Lifeboat "Margaret Foster" at her West Pier berth





Palace Road with the "Moosie Too'r" and refurbished old houses

marvel to everyone. The Cathedral was founded by Earl Rognvald Kolson in 1137. Despite the development of the town the building continues to be its dominant feature, being visible from north and south.

**Kirkwall Castle** does not exist now, except for a plaque on the Lloyds TSB Bank in Castle Street, but the history is of considerable interest. The first drinking hall was probably built by Earl Rognvald I about 1040, most likely near

The interior of the Bishop's Palace with the "Moosie Too'r" and St Magnus



the site of Old St Olaf's Church, and was no doubt expanded over the years by succeeding Norse Earls, perhaps with defence as well as drinking in mind.

About 1380, Earl Henry St Clair, built a new Castle, without Royal Assent, on the shore of the Peedie Sea, to the northwest of the Cathedral. Of his successor, Henry II, it is said that his "little Court of Orkney was the most refined and elegant in the whole of Europe" and that "Half a century before Columbus commenced his search for a patron the Venetian navigator Zeno had been commissioned by Earl Henry to help him retrace the footsteps of the early Scandinavian discoverers of the Western World."

The Castle only had one siege, in 1614, in the time of Earl Patrick Stewart who had been tried by the Scottish Privy Council, and imprisoned in Dumbarton Castle in 1610 for his misdeeds against the people of Orkney. His son Robert proceeded to Orkney on the pretext of gathering rents, took over Birsay Palace, and collected men. They soon had the Castle, Girnol, Earl's Palace and Cathedral in their hands.

It is said that the Castle was well stocked with munitions, so when the Earl of Caithness arrived in August 1614, with 60 soldiers and two large cannon, it took some time to capture it and Stewart. The castle

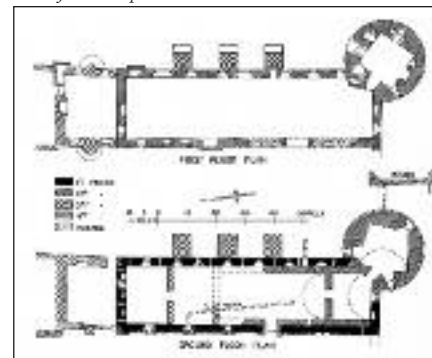
was demolished in 1615, and but for the intervention of Bishop Law, the Cathedral might well have gone as well. Robert Stewart was hanged on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1615, and his father beheaded one month later. Neither was missed by any in Orkney.

**Bishop's Palace** or *Place o' the Yards*. William the Old (1102-1168), Bishop at the time of the building and consecration of St Magnus Cathedral, was most likely the first to have a permanent residence at Kirkwall. Previously the Bishop stayed either at Birsay, or on Egilsay.

After his disastrous expedition of 1263, which ended in the Battle of Largs, King Haakon stayed at the Bishop's Palace, and died there that winter. By 1320 it was ruinous but it was subsequently repaired and extended by Bishop Reid during 1541-1558, when the *Moosie Too'r* was built.

The gate set into the East wall was once across the entrance

Plan of the Bishop's Palace



RCAHMS



The "Moosie Too'r" and buttressed west wall of the Bishop's Palace



Tankerness House is now home to Orkney Museum

to the Watergate, and there was a square tower on its eastern side, which was called the *Massie More*. This tower may well have contained the Bishop's living quarters. There is a good view of the

town from the top of the *Moosie Too'r*. The small statue set into the tower was for long thought to be of Bishop William, but recent studies suggest that it more likely represents Earl Rognvald Kolson,

Tankerness House gardens





The great hall of the Earl's Palace from the Bowling Green



The Earl's Palace was built about 1600 but was uninhabitable by 1705

founder of the Cathedral. The original is now in the Orkney Museum, Tankerness House, at the south end of Broad Street.

**Tankerness House** originally housed two church officials in separate manses. After the Reformation these became the private home of Gilbert Foulzie, Kirkwall's first Protestant minister, who joined the buildings with the present arched gateway in 1574. From 1642 it was the town house of the Baikies of Tankerness, who owned it until after WWII.

They were among the most successful of Orkney's merchant lairds, whose town houses lined the streets of Kirkwall. The book by

Hossack, *Kirkwall in the Orkneys*, now reprinted, is a fascinating source of information on the buildings of Kirkwall and about the people who lived and worked in them. Tankerness House, with its sheltered gardens, is regarded as one of the finest surviving town houses of its period in Scotland.

**Earl's Palace** or *Newark in the Yards*. This rather fine house was built by Earl Patrick Stewart using forced labour, after he had obtained a grant of the Bishopric in 1600. It was only occupied briefly by its tyrannical first owner. The astonishing grace and elegance of the architecture contrasts strongly with the evil of the Stewarts. The Palace was finished about 1607, and was almost immediately taken over by Stewart's archenemy, Bishop Law.

In 1615 the palace gained a new tenant, Bishop Graham. With the disestablishment in of the Bishopric in 1638, the tenancy passed to Robert Tulloch of Langskaill, but it was "not well used by him". In 1647 the Earl of Morton leased the Earl's Palace for 19 years, and was succeeded as tenant by his son, Robert, who invited the Marquis of Montrose to stay. The latter spent a month there in 1650 in preparation for a doomed attempt to replace the Stewarts on the throne, before being defeated at the Battle of Carbisdale near Bonar Bridge.



Earl's Palace Great Hall from the east showing corbelled windows



Plan of the Earl's Palace

RCAHMS

In 1671 Bishop Andrew Honeyman took over the Palace and records suggest that while it was still in use in 1691, it was uninhabitable by 1705. Thus this beautiful, yet tragic, house went from foundation to ruin in a century. Sometime about 1750, the slates and timbers were stripped from its roof and sold. In 1849 the Board of Woods and Forests suggested that the Palace should be made into the Court House and County Jail, rather than allow it to fall down.

The Bishop's and Earl's Palaces are cared for by Historic Scotland, but only

open in summer. The Great Hall and apartments are particularly impressive, and who knows, in future some benefactor may yet pay for its refurbishment. The grounds are very pleasant, with perhaps the best views being from the Kirkwall Bowling Green behind the Palace.

The ground floor consists of a massive kitchen and large store-rooms and has a well which is probably much older than the rest of the building. An impressive stairway gives access to the first floor with its large Great Hall and apartments. This splendid room was said to have rivalled that

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Broad Street and the Kirk Green today - not much change in 120 years

of any castle in Scotland in its time with its large vaulted windows and huge fireplace. The corbelled windows must have been particularly impressive when they were intact. Today they make a fine background for many brides

**Town Hall** The present Town Hall was erected in 1884 and replaced a fine old building. In 1953 the Orcadian stated that, "Even during the last century the cathedral setting took a very heavy knock, when some fine-looking



The Orkney Museum, Broad Street

old houses were destroyed, and in their place rose that architectural monstrosity, the Town Hall, a monument to pretentiousness if ever there was one". The building is useful for meetings, functions and festivals and incorporates a very

handy cafe. There are several large Stanley Cursiter paintings mostly of St Magnus Cathedral. A large wall plaque lists all Ba' winners since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Orkney Museum** Orkney Museum on Broad Street provides a vivid introduction to Orkney's prehistory through displays of artefacts ranging from the Neolithic first settlers to the Viking period, among them a rare whale bone plaque from a Viking boat grave excavated at Scar in Sanday.

There are many other exhibits from recent excavations, which in previous times would have been stored in Edinburgh. Hopefully this trend will continue so that more artefacts may be seen in their proper context. New displays are being developed on more recent history, and the museum holds regular exhibitions. Two rooms are furnished in period.

**Wireless Museum** The Orkney Wireless Museum at the Kiln Corner near the Harbour was originally created by James MacDonald and based in St Margaret's Hope. He worked on Naval and RAF

Orkney Wireless Museum at the Kiln Corner



The new Orkney Library and Archives was opened in 2003



Albert Street in about 1880



Albert Street today

electronics during the war and thereafter set about acquiring examples of the technology of the era. The museum has on display a very interesting collection of communication equipment and memorabilia. In particular there is much relating to Scapa Flow in WWII, especially to do with radar and air defence.

**Library & Archives** Kirkwall has one of the oldest libraries in Scotland. Now called the Orkney Library, and in new premises on Junction Road, it was founded in 1683 by William Baikie as the *Bibliothek of Kirkwall*. Apart from an excellent selection of books for lending, it also has a very good Orkney reference room, as well as a vast archives section. Tel (01856) 873166

Visitors can have temporary membership and Internet access is available. The Orkney Family History Society exists to encourage the study, collection, analysis and sharing of family history and genealogy in Orkney. They have an office in

  
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St Magnus Centre library window

the library which is staffed by volunteers.

**St Magnus Centre**, the refurbished and extended St Magnus Hall, has a main hall, meeting rooms, coffee area, friends room, study library, office space and toilets. It is situated south of the Cathedral and is worth a visit for the view alone. The Centre is much used during festivals and other events as well as for functions. The library has a fine stained glass window donated by Brigadier Sidney Robertson in memory of his wife, Elsa Croy.

**Fusion** is Kirkwall's nightclub and music venue which has regular and visiting DJs and live performances. The name is influenced by the concept, which is a blend of club, bar and live performance music venue.

Wrigley Sisters' Centre of Music



Pickaquo Centre has sport and, leisure facilities and a cinema

The varied programme ensures that there really is something for everybody. The club is situated on the Ayre Road, near the harbour in a former fish processing building.

**Pickaquo Centre** The *New Phoenix Cinema* is part of the Pickaquo Centre, and normally shows films several times per week. The centre provides everyone with the opportunity to experience and enjoy a diverse range of sports and leisure activities. It is used for a many purposes including live music performances, functions, conferences and shows and incorporates a cafe.

**The Reel** in Broad Street is an innovative new feature created by the Wrigley Sisters. This extremely talented duo have travelled the world playing their unique style of traditional music and have released

many albums. The centre has a shop, cafe and upstairs live music is frequently played. Tuition is also available.

**Kirkwall Shopping** For its size, Kirkwall has a remarkable selection of interesting shops. These range from designer jewellery and knitwear, bookshops with many local interest publications, craftshops, sports shops, traditional independent butchers and fishmongers, grocery and hardware stores to electrical and camera outlets.

Although a few chain stores are present, The Street is mainly home to independent retailers. In recent times several new and interesting food shops have opened. Further outlets have reopened under new ownership or use. Many of these shops sell local food

Fusion - Kirkwall's nightclub



and drink, which reflect the wide range of traditional and modern products made in Orkney.

**Archaeology** Very little excavation has been done in Kirkwall due to the modern town covering all of the original settlement. Remains of small piers have been found along what was the east shore of the Peerie Sea but opportunities were lost when the Kilm Corner and Auction Mart sites were redeveloped. The former Garden's yard must be a prime site for investigation before it is redeveloped. Strangely, archaeologists do not seem much interested.

Evidence of the past can be seen in the form of several small slipways on the west side of The Street, which once faced the Peerie Sea. Perhaps the best example is at the Ivy House, at 43 Albert Street. Other examples are not so easy to see as they are in back gardens, under paths, or behind closed gates.

**Inscribed stones** There are numerous lintels and other inset stones on buildings in The Street with inscriptions, usually referring to the marriage of a couple who once lived in the house, and perhaps built it. Many of these artefacts date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when Kirkwall was developing fast. The most elaborate is on Tankerness House, but the less ornate are equally interesting, and fun to seek out.



Broad Street about 1870 with the Old Tolbooth on the left, H. Wilson, Sadler was replaced by J&W Tait's soon after. Note the gasworks chimney.



Laying the foundation stone of Kirkwall Town Hall in 1884. The Commercial Hotel was sadly demolished to build the Victorian edifice.

**Kirkwall Past, Present and Future** A visitor from the past to the Kirkwall of today would notice many changes, but also a lot of things which have survived the centuries. Buildings in The Street get renovated, extended and in a few cases replaced entirely at regular intervals. Broad Street was largely in its present form by 1884 and changes have been largely cosmetic.



Initialed stone in Bridge Street

34 Victoria Street was the site of the mansion of Traill of Elsness. IT HS - John Traill and Helen Stewart 1679.. Now on the wall of the Orkney Hotel







Kirkwall Harbour East Basin and marina at midsummer from Cromwell Road



Harbour Street and the Corn Slip in the 1920s

ities for the Eastern Basin area created by the marina break-water.

Industrial fashions also change with sites of former

gasworks, power station, merchants yards, garages being redeveloped. All manner of enterprises have moved to Hatston Industrial Estate, to be replaced by a mixture of

town centre housing developments, small offices, shops and other businesses. Thus, in contrast to many other towns, Kirkwall town centre is undergoing a very favourable revival.

**Annual Events** Many community events take place in Kirkwall during the year, but by far the biggest, oldest and most all-embracing is the Ba' Game played in the streets on Christmas and New Year's Days. These tussles between the Uppies and Doonies are very Kirkwallian and draw together a large fraction of the community in a unique sort of way. The town hosts several other events and festivals including the St Magnus Festival in June and the County Show in August, but the Ba' is really the only one which is very specific to Kirkwall and Kirkwallians.



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### KIRKWALL & ST OLA TIMELINE

- c.3000BC Quanterness cairn
- C.600BC Grain Earth House
- c.200BC Brochs being built
- c600 Celtic "Papae" settle
- c800 Norse arrive
- 1035 Earl Rognvald Brusison St Olaf's Kirk & Hall
- 1136 Earl Rognvald Kolson Bishopric to Kirkwall
- 1137 Cathedral work begins Bishop's Palace started
- 1263 King Haakon dies
- 1380 Kirkwall Castle built
- 1486 Kirkwall Royal Charter
- 1540 King James V visits
- 1540's Bishops Palace renovated
- 1560 Reformation
- 1600 Earl's Palace started
- 1614 Stewart Rebellion
- 1650s Cromwell's Castle
- 1683 Kirkwall Library founded
- 1750 Earl's Palace roofless
- 1798 Highland Park Distillery in street
- c.1800 Ba' played in street
- 1811 New Pier opens
- 1813 West Pier built
- 1829 Bridge on Ayre to Grain
- 1833 First regular steamship
- 1838 Gas Company formed
- 1850 Winter steamship service
- 1858 Fixed bridge seals Ayre Road
- 1859 Harbour Act
- 1865 Junction Road built North Isles steamship starts
- 1876 Piped water and sewerage
- 1884 Town Hall built
- 1903 WR Tullock first car owner
- 1910 Electric Theatre opens
- 1923 GPO telephone service
- 1924 Burgh power station opens
- 1928 Albert Kinema opens
- 1933 Regular air service begins
- 1938 Hatston Airfield built Garden's fire, Bridge Street
- 1947 Albert Kinema burns down
- 1955 Phoenix Cinema opens Papdale Infant School opens
- 1958 TV transmissions start
- 1967 Loganair service to Isles
- 1973 New Grammar School opens
- 1977 First St Magnus Festival Radio Orkney begins
- 1981 Lingro Broch destroyed
- 1992 Ro-ro ferries start to N Isles
- 1999 Pickaquooy Centre opens
- 2002 New pier at Hatston
- 2003 New Kirkwall Library
- 2004 Orkney Riding Centre



Burgh of Kirkwall seal in 1675



Broad Street in about 1930 from the east.

Christmas Day 1911 Men's Ba' - note all the hats





St Magnus Cathedral from the southwest

**THE STORY OF ST MAGNUS** After the death of Earl Thorfinn the Mighty in 1065 the succession passed through his sons, Erlend and Paul, who were forcibly replaced by Sigurd, son of King Magnus of Norway in 1098 during a great expedition to the west. King Magnus took with him the sons of Erlend and Paul, Magnus and Haakon, but Magnus refused to fight.

It is said that during a great battle in Anglesey Sound, he sat down on the foredeck. When the king asked why he would not fight he said that he had nothing against anyone there. Ordered by the King to go below, he instead took a psalter and sang during the battle, and did not shelter himself.

After this incident Magnus Erlendson slipped away and took refuge with his relative,

the Scottish King, for some time. Then in 1103 he and his cousin Haakon Paulson succeeded to the Earldom, the former returning from Scotland to claim his patrimony. The following year Magnus married Ingarth who was a Scottish noblewoman. Thus already the dual nature of the Orkney Earldom, Norwegian and Scottish, was well established.

The story goes that Magnus never consummated his marriage, taking a cold bath whenever he felt enamoured by his wife. While the *Saga* does not mention any children of the marriage, neither is there any evidence for his chastity, which may well be an invention to fit in with his saintly status.

The *Saga* states, "So long as they remained friends there were good times and peace in Orkney." However Haakon became jealous of the popularity and greatness of his kinsman and finally a serious argument broke out at a session of the *Ting* at Tingwall. Blows

were averted only by them agreeing a meeting on Egilsay on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1116 (or 1117) to resolve their differences. Egilsay was Bishopric land and thus they were to meet on neutral territory.

**Martyrdom** Each Earl was to take two ships and an equal number of men. Earl Magnus arrived first and seeing Earl Haakon coming with eight ships, he suspected treachery, and went into the church to pray. He then refused help when his followers offered to defend him. Haakon and his men sought out Magnus the next morning. He was praying when they came up to him, and he made three offers: to go to Rome or Jerusalem and not return, to go into custody in Scotland, or to be maimed and imprisoned. Haakon accepted the last, but the chiefs wanted one of them dead.

Magnus remained cheerful and fell on his knees in prayer. Haakon standard bearer, Ofeig, vehemently refused to kill Magnus. Haakon then ordered his cook, Lifolf, to do



St Magnus Cathedral from the southeast

the deed. Magnus gave his tunic to him, and prayed for his murderers, forgiving them for their offences against himself. Finally he told Lifolf "to hew him a mighty stroke to the head, so that he was killed as a lord and not a thief."

Thora, mother of Magnus, had ready a banquet to celebrate the Earls' meeting, which she stoically continued and she persuaded Haakon to allow Magnus to be buried at

Christ's Church at Birsay. Soon after, a heavenly light was said to be seen over his



St Rognvald plaque

St Magnus plaque



St Magnus' skull with large gash

St Magnus Cathedral from the northwest in 1815 by William Daniell



South transept door



St Magnus' skull with large gash





St Magnus Cathedral nave from the west door

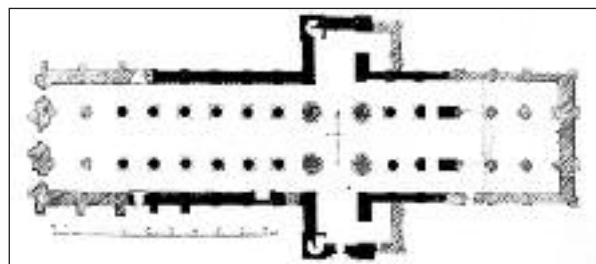
grave. Men in danger prayed to him and their prayers were answered. Many miraculous cures of illness occurred.

**Earl Rognvald** Magnus' nephew, son of his sister Gunnhild and Kol of Agdir in Norway, was meanwhile growing up. King Sigurd of Norway gave him half the

Earldom and the name Rognvald, because his mother thought the name would bring good fortune. The incumbent Earl Paul Haakonson strongly resisted Rognvald's attempts to claim his share.

Kol advised Rognvald that an indirect approach might succeed and to him "to seek help

Plan of St Magnus Cathedral



RCAHMS

where it is likely to be had effectually - from the holy St Magnus. You must promise that if you gain your dominions you will build a stone minister at Kirkwall, more magnificent than any in these lands, dedicate it to Earl Magnus the Holy, endow it with money and have his relics and the Holy See established there."

Earl Paul was kidnapped by Sweyn Asleifson whilst hunting Otters at Westness in Rousay and taken to Atholl, where his sister was married to Earl Maddad. Paul never returned to Orkney, and was possibly killed by Sweyn.

In addition to St Magnus Cathedral at least ten churches in Norway as well as the ruined cathedral at Kirkjuvagr in the Faroes are dedicated to Magnus Erlendson. There are also seven in Iceland and five in Shetland. The cult of St Magnus was a strong one and for centuries people from as far away as Iceland and Norway came to his shrine. During the reformation all the shrines would have been dismantled and the bones hidden in the pillar where they remain today.

### Building of the Cathedral

The Cathedral building was commenced in 1137, under the supervision of Kol, on the edge of the Peerie Sea. Earl Rognvald is said to have laid the foundation stone on 13<sup>th</sup> December, Santa Lucia's Day. Work initially went ahead quickly, with the choir being

complete within five years. However Rognvald's funds ran low and it was only by threatening to pass a law stating that the Earls had inherited all Udal possessions, that he managed to raise sufficient funds. Each farmer agreed to pay one mark per ploughland to buy back the Udal rights which they had really never lost. In this way St Magnus Cathedral was financed by the Orkney people themselves, and uniquely became their property.

It is probable that the construction was far enough advanced for consecration and the reinterment of St Magnus before Rognvald made his trip to the Holy Land in 1151. The Cathedral at that time consisted of the Crossing, Choir, an Apse with the shrine

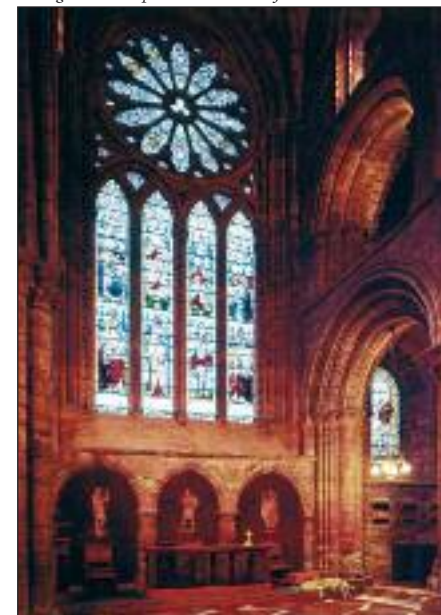
of St Magnus at the east end, part of the Nave and the Transepts. Considerable additions have been made over the years. In the early 13<sup>th</sup> century the choir was extended and the impressive east window added while the nave was extended westwards. Twin towers were planned for the west gable, but never completed and the building was essentially complete by the early 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The relics of St Magnus were found in 1919 in the southeast rectangular pillar of the choir, and remain there today. The wooden box that contained them is in the Orkney Museum. The skull has a large cleavage consistent with being struck by an axe. Rognvald's remains are in the north pillar. In 1848 the grave of Bishop

William the Old was found. He died in 1168 and had been Bishop for 68 years. A small inscribed lead plate provided clear identification.

**The Cathedral Today** The bones of St Magnus (with a great cleft in the skull) now lie in the North choir pillar, while those of St Rognvald lie in the South one. The Cathedral of today may differ from that imagined by Kol, but is probably all the more impressive. About 69m long, by 30m across the transepts, and with only 5m between the pillars the church has a feeling of great size and good proportion inside. The Old Red Sandstone, used skillfully in its various colours by the Durham masons, lends warmth to the graceful but solid structure.

St Rognvald's Chapel at the east end of the choir



Northwest aisle looking west





The "Mort Brod"



The "Mort Brod"

Before the restoration there were many chapels and shrines and the walls were decorated. Today's uncluttered church may lack these medieval things, but the many interesting old gravestones, often decorated with skull and crossbones, the memorial to John Rae the 19<sup>th</sup> century Arctic explorer, who is buried in the grave yard, a statue of St

*A tour of the galleries, passages and tower is fascinating*



Olaf gifted by Nidaros Cathedral for the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1937 and a Tapestry from Hordaland for the 850<sup>th</sup> all add to the interest and feeling of a continuous past. There are many interesting carved stones decorating the older parts of the church and in several places masons marks may be discerned.

The graveyard has a large number of fascinating old headstones, not least the one of the person who died on 30<sup>th</sup> February! There are attractive views of the Cathedral and Bishop's Palace from various parts of the kirkyard. Changes in the masonry clearly indicate the various construction periods. The exterior is particularly impressive when floodlit against a moonlit winter sky. The copper cladding on the spire was renewed in the 1990s and is slowly weathering.

Considerable restoration work was carried out in the 19<sup>th</sup> and



13<sup>th</sup> century graveslab



The Consecration Stone from 1151

20<sup>th</sup> centuries and maintenance continues today, with the aim of preserving the building for the future. The Cathedral is unique among churches in that it has never belonged to the Church, but has always been the property of the people of Orkney. At various times the Church, the Government and the Town Council have claimed owner-

ship. In 1486 King James III thought he owned it after the Impignoration, and "granted it to the Magistrates, Council and Community of Kirkwall." Since the Norwegian Crown did not ever have any claim to the Cathedral, neither did the Scottish King.

By the 1840s the Cathedral was in very poor repair. The Government Board of Woods and Forests, which had taken over the Bishopric Estates, assumed that the Cathedral must form a part and "took it over" in 1845. They did a considerable amount of much-needed work, but in 1851, they were persuaded that it did in fact belong to the people, not the State.

The contractor at the time, Samuel Baikie, stated that, "During the years 1847-48 the operations of repairs were chiefly confined to the rebuilding of the parapet walls of the nave and transepts together with a considerable portion of the wall heads and string courses under these parapets that had fallen much in decay and was admitting water to an almost ruinous extent through the wall heads, so much so, that after a time of rainy weather the interior kept up a dropping for some weeks afterwards and sent a chill damp in throughout the building."

He continued, "The interior was receiving no small share of attention, especially throughout the nave and transepts, the floors of which had accumulated to such a height as to conceal all



John Rae memorial

## JOHN RAE

John Rae graduated as a surgeon in 1833 at Edinburgh University. His first job was as the surgeon aboard the Hudson's Bay Company ship *Prince of Wales*. He subsequently spent 10 years in northern Canada as a doctor, trader and explorer.

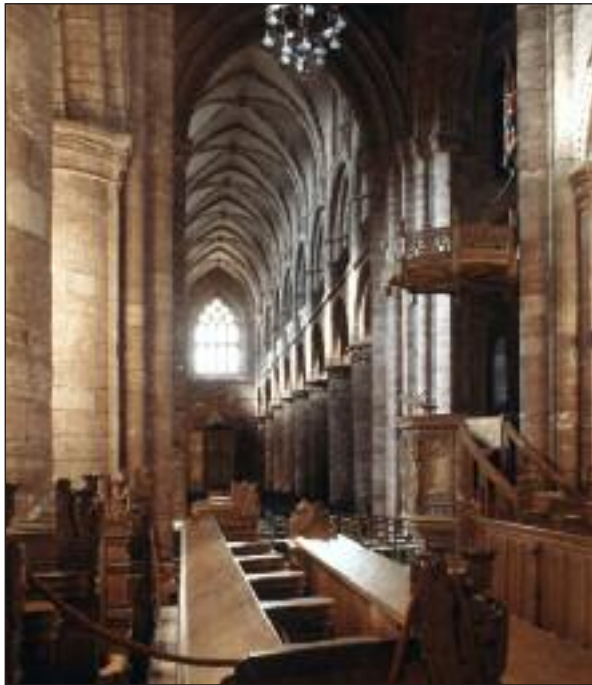
The Franklin Expedition left in 1845 with *HMS Erebus* and *HMS Terror* to find the Northwest Passage. By 1848 it was clear that they were lost and several expeditions were sent. Rae learnt much about survival and travel in the Arctic from the Inuit and the Cree Indians and adopted many of their survival techniques. He travelled light lived off the land for months at a time, unlike the massively equipped naval expeditions.

He surveyed over 1,000 miles of the Arctic coastline, during which he discovered Rae Strait, the missing link that so many expeditions had failed to locate. In 1854 he learnt of the fate of

the Franklin Expedition from a group of Inuit, who had found the final camp of the survivors at the Back River. Rae recovered artefacts from them which proved the fate of Franklin and his men, including that they had resorted to cannibalism.

His report of the fate of the Royal Navy ships and crew did not go down well in London. Lady Franklin, with the help of many people including Charles Dickens, set out to discredit Rae. He was not honoured for his discoveries. In 1859 a cairn and the final encampment were found, confirming Rae's report.

He continued to do survey work in the Arctic, including for a telegraph link which would take a northerly route across the Atlantic. He died in 1893 in London, and was buried in the Cathedral graveyard. He is commemorated by a fine memorial in St Rognvald's Chapel, where he lies asleep with his gun, dressed in Arctic survival clothes.



The nave from the crossing

the bases of the columns in those parts and the columns themselves mugged up in rather a hideous manner with the memorials of the departed.

“These were all removed and placed along the side walls in an orderly manner as now seen, the floor excavated of earthy matter to an average depth of about 20 inches and repaired with native

flagstones, thus showing the bases of the columns at a reasonable height and as no doubt the original founders had intended.”

The Church of Scotland tried to claim ownership in 1925. In 1929 they agreed that the Provost, Magistrates and Councillors would for all time retain the fabric of the church.

St Magnus Centre is to the east of the kirkyard



A bequest of £60,000 by Sheriff Thoms paid for very substantial renovation work from 1913 to 1930. The somewhat eccentric Thoms had been Sheriff of Orkney, Caithness and Zetland during 1870-1899. Today the Society of Friends of St Magnus Cathedral raises funds to pay for repairs and maintenance.

There are many interesting tombstones standing against the inside walls, the oldest of which is 13<sup>th</sup> century and is mounted in the northeast aisle near St Olaf. Most date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and have well-preserved lettering and symbols of death. The *Mort Brod*, hanging in the northwest aisle, is a curious memorial. There are various flamboyant monuments from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, notably that to John Rae, of Arctic fame.

Nowadays small plaques are in favour, but it is rather sad to note that only male Orcadians of letters are so far commemorated. In the north aisle near

17<sup>th</sup> century tombstone in the nave



the choir the memorial to those lost on *HMS Royal Oak* in WWII is a poignant reminder of more recent history.

**Marwick’s Hole** is a dungeon between the southeast aisle and the south transept chapel. Men and women were held here as late as the 18<sup>th</sup> century to await their fate after being sentenced. Originally prison-

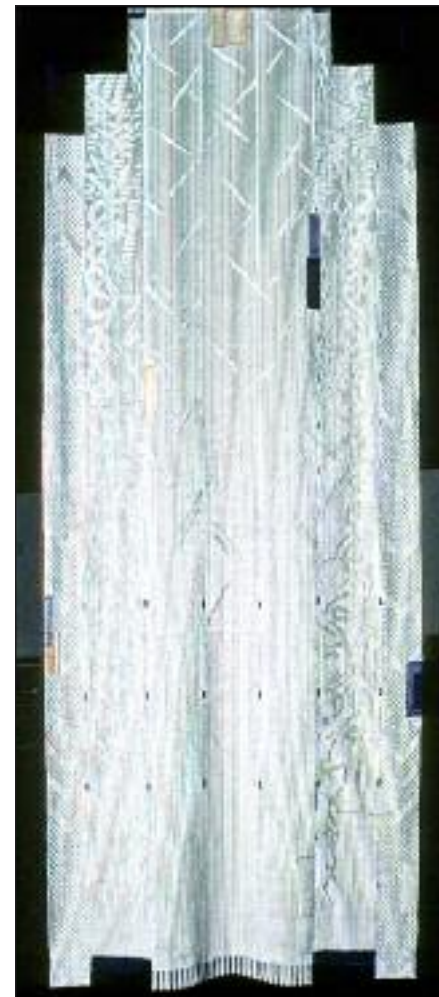
ers were deposited to the chamber via a chute from above, but the Protestants stopped this and delivered their unfortunates by ladder.

The hangman’s double ladder in the south triforium is a reminder of what was then a common punishment. Witches were *worried at the stake unto death*, however it seems that some at least did

manage to escape, often with the assistance of their family or friends.

The east end of the choir was dedicated as St Rognvald’s Chapel in 1965. Old wooden panels are incorporated in the communion table, chair and lectern. Carved figures representing Kol, Earl Rognvald and Bishop William were designed by artist Stanley Cursiter.

Hordaland tapestry



One of the many interesting tomb stones

“HMS Royal Oak” memorial



For the 850<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1987 a new window was commissioned by the Society of Friends for the west window. This modern design was created by Crear McCartney and unveiled by the Queen. He has created nearly 80 stained glass windows in the UK and USA. It compliments the ancient Cathedral and casts a beautiful light down the nave. Most of the other stained-glass windows came from the Thoms bequest.



Panoramic view of Kirkwall from the tower

**St Magnus Festival** During the Festival each June the Cathedral is venue to many performances, providing an evocative backdrop to the wonderful music being played. This successful Arts Festival has gone from strength to strength and is now very much

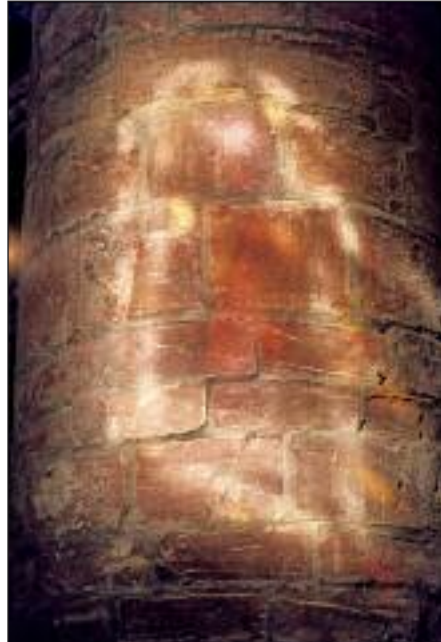
on the Scottish and indeed International calendar. This event was largely the inspiration of the composer Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and the poet George Mackay Brown. Many of the composer's works have been premièred at the

Festival, several of which have been collaborations with the Stromness poet. The first Festival was formed around *The Martyrdom of St Magnus*, which is based on George Mackay Brown's novel, *Magnus*.

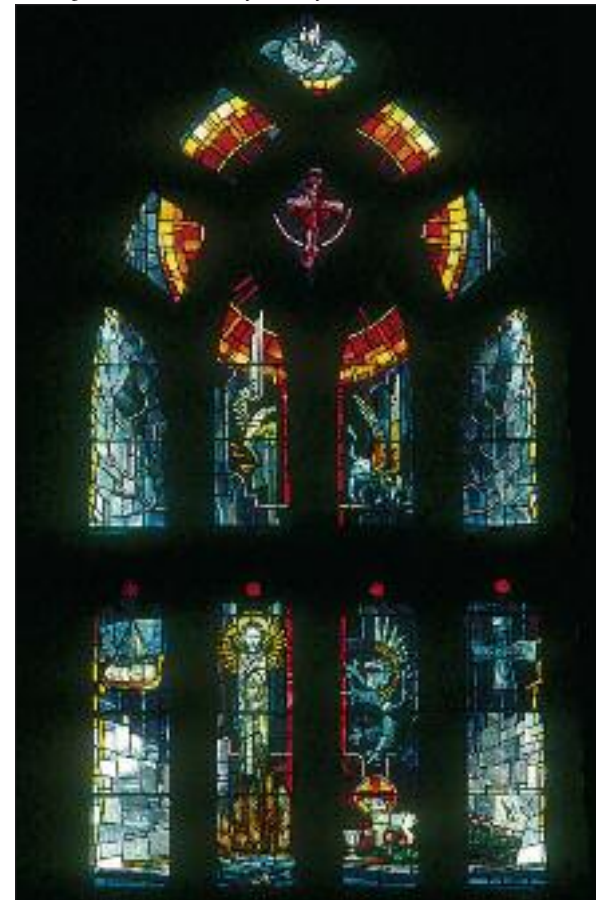
St Magnus window paid for by the Thom bequest



Light on a pillar from a window



Stained glass in the west window of the nave from 1987



## ST MAGNUS CATHEDRAL TIMELINE

- 1116 or 1117 Murder of Magnus
- 1136 Rognvald wins Earldom
- 1137 Construction begins
- 1152 Choir and part of nave built
- 1158 Death of Earl Rognvald
- 1168 Death of Bishop William
- c 1200 Crossing rebuilt
- early 1200s East end extended
- early 1300s Tower built
- late 1300s Transept chapels
- c.1400 West gable complete
- 1486 Kirkwall Royal Charter
- 1528 Bells cast in Edinburgh
- 1544 Bishop Reid
- 1560 Reformation Gilbert Foulzie last priest first minister
- 1614 Stewart Rebellion
- 1650s Cromwell's men billeted
- 1671 Spire destroyed by lightning
- 1845 State claims ownership
- 1851 Kirkwall reclaims Kirk
- 1903 Thoms bequest
- 1913-1930 Restoration
- 1925 Church claims ownership
- 1937 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary St Magnus Pageant
- 1958 Society of Friends
- 1965 St Rognvald Chapel
- 1972-1974 Major repairs
- 1977 First St Magnus Festival
- 1987 850<sup>th</sup> anniversary, new west window, Hordaland Tapestry Children's Pilgrimage
- 2001 St Magnus Centre opens
- 2005 Public toilets installed





A large scrum on Broad Street

**THE BA'** Every Christmas and New Year's Day the Ba' is contested in the streets of Kirkwall. The games are a very important part of the town's calendar to every keen player and spectator, but derided as barbaric and senseless by those who do not appreciate this ancient tradition. They are also very much a Kirkwall phenomenon, although there are a number of keen country players.

The game seems to have evolved to its present form around 1800, or slightly earlier, but is in fact much older. Old style football was a very popular diversion in Orkney and elsewhere. Its origins are undoubtedly ancient as there are records from Greek and Roman times of ball games being played.

Mass football seems to have been played in Roman-occu-

piated Britain, and likely long before that. The French game of *soule* was very like the Kirkwall Ba', according to contemporary descriptions. It died out about the start of WWI due to official suppression, just like similar traditions elsewhere, and did not restart after the war.

The Norse also liked sport, including ball games, and it seems that each parish had a *Leaquo*y (ON *Leik-kvi*, games field). A loose form of football had occurred for a long time before 1800 on the *Ba' Lea*. It was held every Old Christmas Day and Old New Year's Day, as well as often after weddings and for other special occasions. It was not until the mid-1800s that the Gregorian calendar was universally adopted in Orkney.

Eager hands at the throw-up



Street football was popular in the past in Britain and France and was mostly played on Shrove Tuesday or *Fastern's Een*. However it only now survives in a few towns in Scotland and the north of England, such as Jedburgh, Duns, Ancrum, Sedgfield, Alnwick, Ashbourne and Workington. Where it has survived the game has become like the Kirkwall one in most cases, with fixed goals and more hand than foot play. In each case the tradition has had to be defended against petty officialdom.



A good throw by Brian Anderson

In Kirkwall, the two sides are the Uppies and the Doonies, or more correctly, *Up the Gates* and *Doon the Gates* (ON *Gata*, path or road). Originally the side any individual held allegiance to was decided by whether he or she was born up or doon the gate. The boundary is the Mercat Cross and a line east west through it. With recent housing developments and with most births being in hospital, this tends to be decided by family loyalties nowadays.



A big scrum on Broad Street just after the throw up

Which side *ferryloopers* (incomers) and people from the isles or rural areas take is either determined by the route taken on their first arrival in Kirkwall, by family influence, or by the side their friends play on. Originally the New Year's Day Ba' was the only game played. Although the Christmas Day

At the Uppie goal, Mackinson's Corner



In the Basin, the Doonie goal







*The Uppies struggle to push up into Victoria Street*

game became established sometime before 1850, it was only in the 1870s that it became really popular, partly because this was a normal working day for many people. The Boys' Ba' also became official about the same time.

The Men's Ba' is thrown up at 13:00 at the Market Cross on the Kirk Green opposite the Cathedral, usually by an older Ba' stalwart, but very occasionally by some public figure, with up to 200 players eagerly awaiting the chime of the bells. The Ba' disappears into the scrum, which may spend some considerable time on Broad Street. Much exciting surging and turning play often occurs on this wider part of the street, which can frequently determine the final outcome.

Large numbers of spectators line the Kirk Green and crowd around the scrum as it moves. Apart from the action of the game it is a great social occasion. Occasionally the Ba' appears out of the scrum and someone makes a dash through the crowds of onlookers. To the casual observer this can happen at any moment, but the seasoned Ba'-watcher can often see what is happening long before the Ba' suddenly erupts. Breaks sometimes occur on Broad Street, but can occur anywhere where one side gains sufficient control.

The Doonies have the benefit of a flat push to Albert Street,

while the Uppies have a hard haul up an incline to the top of Tankerness Lane. The game may proceed down St Magnus Lane, or Castle Street onto the open Junction Road. Once there either side may gain the upper hand by means of a smuggle and run, or the scrum may become immobile in one of the many closes and yards. Play here is often rather loose and spectacular breaks occur regularly, sometimes with success, but more frequently being impeded by the crowds of spectators.

However if the Uppies manage to enter Victoria Street, or the Doonies Albert Street, the opposition have a much harder time, due to the narrowness and the press of often many hundreds of keen watchers. All the same the Ba' may be restricted for several hours in any of the many lanes and neither side never gives up the struggle until the end is reached. Indeed breaks and smuggles can occur at any time, including very near the opposing goal.

The Doonies goal is the sea, normally within the Basin of the Harbour, but so long as it is immersed in the salt water of Kirkwall Bay, the Ba' has gone doon. The Uppies must round Mackinson's Corner and touch the Ba' to the wall at the junction of Main Street with New Scapa Road, opposite the Catholic Church. This is also known as Sandison's Corner, the Long Corner or The Old Castle.



*The Doonies have a flatter push down Broad Street*



*Once in Victoria Street the Doonies have a hard time fighting back*



*Once in Albert Street there is little the Uppies can do*



*The Ba' makes an appearance at the bottom of Union Street*

*Heading towards the Uppie goal, but the Doonies keep up the fight*



*An Uppie rally at the Big Tree*

*But the Doonies push on down the street*





*The Uppies are well in control and about to engineer a break*



*Well down Victoria Street, the Uppies in control*



*The Ba' must touch the wall at Mackinson's Corner to be Up*

*A triumphant Uppie winner*



Once Up or Doon, lengthy argument often ensues before a popular winner is acclaimed. Tradition says that an Uppie win means a good harvest, while a Doonie success will bring good fishing.

When the winner is finally decided, many players of both sides repair to the his house, where much needed refreshment rapidly appears and enemies during the game revert to being the best of friends. To Ba' enthusiasts the ultimate honour is to have the trophy, the Ba itself, hanging in the living room window.

The Boys' Ba' is now thrown up at 10.00 and is open to boys under 16. It can last for a few minutes, or several hours and often has not been resolved when the Men's Ba' is thrown up. Indeed on a few rare occasions the boys' game has continued for some time after the men's game has finished. The boys too elect the winner after each game. Many gain their apprenticeship to the adult game and go on to become Men's Ba' winners.

In Christmas 1945 and New Year 1946 the spirit of equality prevailing after the WWII encouraged Women's Ba's to be held for the first and only times so far. Apparently the menfolk did not like their ladies to be taking part in such a violent kind of game and the experiment has to date not been repeated, although there have been attempts. All the same many women take a

strong part in the game, mostly with their voices, but quite often by pushing. Girls frequently appear as players in the boys' Ba' as well.

The town takes on an appearance of siege during the period of the games with shutters and barricades on all the shops and houses on possible routes. Cars come near at their very real peril, while young children and elderly people are well advised to keep clear. However, due to the great sense of the camaraderie of the game, very few players get hurt badly so that if the scrum collapses, or someone is hurt, or passes out, the game stops to allow them to be extricated.

At one time there was concern that the Ba' might die out and it certainly has peaks and troughs of enthusiasm. At present the tradition is in no danger of extinction and seems to go from strength to strength. In the past various authorities such as Town Councils, sheriffs and others have tried to ban it or relocate it from the street.

It seems that any all such attempts are futile and doomed to total failure for the foreseeable future. Although it may seem an anachronism in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Ba' is in fact a very important for Kirkwallians. The tradition is very well supported and apart from the game itself, it is a great social occasion for all who participate, whether as players or spectators.



*Steam often rises from the scrum*



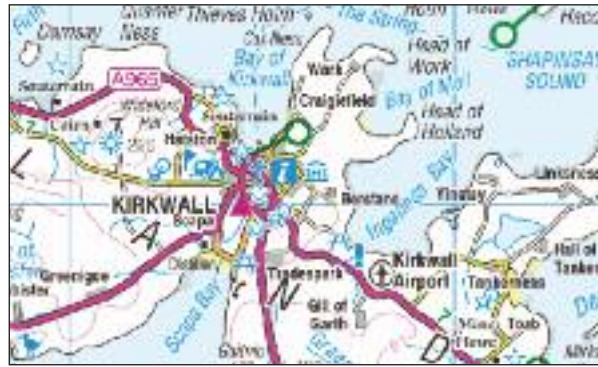
*A very large pack nears The Bridge , the Doonies can smell the water now*



*The Doonies must get the ball in the sea - usually the Harbour Basin*

*The Doonies winner on New Year 2011*





Crown copyright

**Highland Park Distillery** is the most northerly malt whisky distillery in the world, and has an excellent visitor centre, where an audiovisual programme provides a good introduction to Orkney, as well as to whisky-making. There are guided tours of the distillery and an opportunity to taste the product. The shop sells a variety of Highland Park branded goods as well the full range of malts.

**Hatston** was one of the first airfields in Britain with surfaced runways. Commenced early in 1938 and called *HMS Sparrowhawk*, the station was very busy in World War II,

with over 200 squadrons using its facilities during that time. *Skua* dive-bombers from Hatston attacked the German cruiser *Konigsberg* at Bergen in April 1940 and were thus the first aircraft to successfully sink a large warship.

*Swordfish* from Hatston also attacked the *Scharnhorst* in June 1940 with torpedoes, but were unsuccessful. In May 1941, it was a *Martin Maryland* aircraft from Hatston which found that *Bismarck* had left Bergen and started the search for that ship. A squadron of torpedo-armed *Albacores* was ready to attack the battleship, but it was grounded by bad weather and

Aerial view of Kirkwall and St Ola from the northeast



she escaped towards Iceland, only to be disabled by *Swordfish* from *HMS Victorious*, which again had Hatston as the shore base.

Used until 1948 as the civil airport for Kirkwall, and as housing until the late 1960s, Hatston is now Orkney's main industrial estate, the hangars, apron and slipway finding long-term civil use never considered by the builders in 1939. In the recent past many new industrial buildings housing businesses as diverse as jewelry manufacturers, fish processors, marine engineers and printers show how Orkney's economy is diversifying.

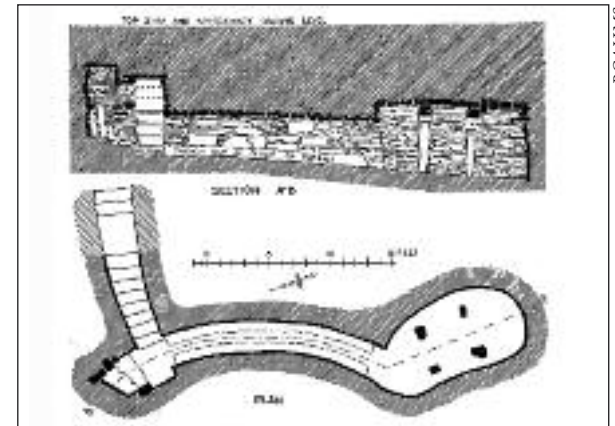
The **Grain Earth House** (sign-posted from Ayre Road) is a *souterrain* which is reached by a flight of steps, and a sloping passage. Discovered in 1827, the earth house contained no relics, but there was a large pit full of ash, burnt wood, animal bones and shells nearby. The dry-stone walls and lintelled roof enclose a chamber 4m by 2m, which was probably used

as a food store. Little remains of the associated roundhouse, but the structure probably dates from the early Iron Age, or about 600 BC.

**Gaitnip** Above Scapa Bay, to the south of the town, the cliffs of Gaitnip (HY448053) give a panoramic view over Scapa Flow. *HMS Royal Oak* was sunk near here in 1939, and an oil slick and buoy mark the spot where over 833 men lost their lives on *Black Saturday*. Kirkwall people used to cut their peats in this area, but not many still exercise this ancient right nowadays.

**Scapa Distillery**, which produces Orkney's other distinctive malt whisky, sits on the west side of Scapa Bay. Visits may be possible, Tel (01856) 872071. Nearby, Robert Towers makes traditional Orkney Chairs with wooden frames. The wood was originally from driftwood or bits of old boats, while the backs are made from plaited oat straw.

**Orkney Riding Centre** at the Market Stance was recently



Grain Earth House - excavator's plan



Swordfish aircraft being armed with torpedoes at Hatston

opened and is available for hire by anyone in the community. It is 53m by 36m and the Orkney sand surface, which is groomed regularly, rides really well. There is a large cafeteria, kitchen, office and first aid

Swordfish aircraft at HMS Sparrowhawk in World War II



**ST OLA PLACES OF INTEREST**

**WEST**

- Wideford Hill
- Wideford Hill chambered cairn
- Orkney Riding Centre
- Hatston Airfield (WWII)

**SOUTH**

- Scapa Beach & Bay
- Scapa Distillery
- Lingro Broch (site)

**EAST**

- Highland Park Distillery
- Head of Work
- Head of Holland
- Carness
- Inganess Bay
- Bay of Meil
- Sands of Wideford
- Grimsetter Airport



Scapa Beach and Scapa Bay from the northeast

room, ample toilet facilities and storage areas. Above this is a viewing gallery and large unfinished area for future development.

**WALKS** Crantit Footpath leads from the bottom of the Holm Branch Road, south of the town to Scapa Beach via the Highland Park Burn. This formerly polluted waterway is now a pleasant stroll at any time of year, but especially in spring and summer for the wild flowers and birds, especially waterfowl and waders.

**Scapa Bay Footpath** is an interesting walk along the top of the banks. On the west side of Scapa Bay, there is a water-

fall, the outfall of the Orquil Burn. At Lingro, southeast of Scapa Distillery, there was a large broch (HY434088), similar to that at Gurness, with a large surrounding settlement. It was cleared out in an unrecorded excavation in about 1870. Unfortunately a less than enlightened farmer completely destroyed the site in 1981. The remains can be seen at the bottom of the cliffs.

This is not the only evidence in the Kirkwall area of late Iron Age settlement, as a broch is known to have existed between Spence's paper shop and the Royal Bank on Broad Street, and another is said to have stood in *Parliament Square*.

Aerial view of Highland Park, Scapa Bay with the Orphir & Hoy hills beyond



There may have been a large roundhouse at the old Saverock steading to the west of Hatston.

Return via the road at Dyke End (HY428078), or it is possible to continue all the way to Waulkmill Bay, passing the RSPB Reserve on the way. This quiet coastline with its low cliffs is home to many breeding birds, including Ravens and Peregrines. In winter is a good vantage point for watching wildfowl, including Great Northern and Black-throated Divers in Scapa Flow. Otters frequent these quiet shores also.

**Scapa to Inganess** A good cross-country walk starts on the Holm Road (HY450083) and follows the Heathery Loan Bridleway to Katty Maggie's Quarry. This can then be continued all the way to Inganess Bay, via the Wideford Farm Walk along the Wideford Burn to the Sands of Wideford (HY476087) and Inganess Bay. This burn has good scrub cover and is excellent for finding migrants during the migra-

tion seasons. Return to Kirkwall via the public road. A further Public Right of Way, Berstane Loan, leads from the Berstane Road to East Road.

**Head of Work** The Head of Work (HY484138) has an unusual horned Neolithic chambered cairn, 50m long by 15m wide, with curved horns at each end. This mound has not been excavated so far, but several upright stones and sections of walling may be discerned. There is a good view across to Shapinsay from here. The farm of Work (ON *Virki*, fortification), is built on what is probably a broch site. The Head of Work can be reached by taking the East Road out of Kirkwall and then following the Work Road which leads eventually to the headland. Return by following the shore to Carness (ON *Kalladar-nes*, Calling Ness, HY467147), and then the Carness Road back to the town. Gun emplacements from WWII can be seen on the headland which guarded the approaches to Kirkwall.

Alternatively follow the shore round past the Bay of Meil,



Head of Work chambered cairn is very prominent from the sea



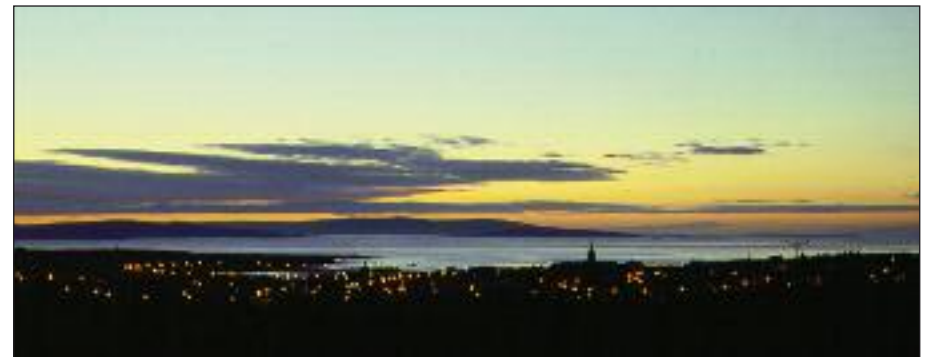
Part of the tanker "Vardefjell" which was beached at Inganess Bay in 1942

(ON *Melr*, sand), to the Head of Holland (HY488123) where quarrying of red sandstone for repairs to the Cathedral continues. It is thought that most of the original stone came from this area and that it was carried by boat to the shore upon which the kirk was built. The other source is probably Eday.

Return via the road which goes past Seatter Farm.

**Wideford Hill** is one of the best places to get an overall idea of the lie of the Orkney land and sea (HY412117, 225m). This makes a pleasant walk from Kirkwall and there is also a road to the top for people who prefer to drive. It is easy to see

Kirkwall from near the Highland Park at 01:00 midsummer





Panoramic view of Kirkwall Bay and Kirkwall from Wideford Hill

why the Vikings named this hill *Vidr-fiord*, after the Wide Firth which it looks out upon. From the indicator at the top, the panoramic view extends from Scotland in the distant South, to Fair Isle (ON *Fridarey*) in the North.

Kirkwall and the East Mainland are spread out to the east, and Copinsay stands out clearly against the sea. South Ronaldsay lies to the southeast with the Pentland Firth in the distance and to the south is the large expanse of Scapa Flow in the near distance, with Flotta and its Oil Terminal, backed by the Hoy Hills. It takes little to imagine the Flow full of war-

ships, or the square sail of a longship approaching.

To the north lies the Wide Firth and the North Isles beyond and to the west the West Mainland. The view is particularly fine on a midsummer evening as the sun sets. At least 10 lighthouses can be seen flashing from here and, on a clear night, the looms of several more are visible.

To the West lies the Bay of Firth (ON *Aurrida Fiord*, Sea Trout Firth), with the islands of Damsay and Holm of Grimbister and the village of Finstown in the background. The long ridge of Keelylang

hides most of Orphir, but there is a clear view over Stenness to Stromness, Harray and the lochs and Yesnaby stands out against the skyline. The Rendall Hills hide Birsay, but the tip of the large aerogenerators on Hammars and Burgar Hills can often be seen turning against the sky.

The North Isles are laid out in a maze of sounds, bays, hills and skerries, with the movement of the tide clearly visible on a calm day. Rousay's hills are to the North, with the conical shape of Gairsay in front. Behind lie Egilsay, Westray, Eday, Sanday, North Ronaldsay and Stronsay.

*Aurora Borealis*



The main chamber of Wideford Hill cairn showing the side cells

Shapinsay and Helliar Holm lie close-by to the northeast. Boats can be seen crawling across the sea while Loganair's Islanders and other aircraft buzz about all day.

At midsummer, the enthusiastic can stay here all through the *simmer dimm* and experience the changes in the sky as the sun skims under the horizon, setting at about 10:30BST over the Rendall Hills, and rising about 04:30BST over Sanday. A warm car and/or a cuddly companion are to be recommended!

**Wideford Hill Chambered Cairn** (HY409121) lies on the western side of the hill. This impressive Maeshowe-type cairn was excavated in 1935. Its three cells open off a rectangular main chamber which has a 3m high corbelled roof similar to Cuween Cairn. When first cleared in 1849 a large quantity of animal bones were found beneath the rubble and earth filling the chamber.

The quality of the masonry is high, but the exterior appear-



Wideford Hill chambered cairn, exterior was "repaired" in 1935

ance is not original as it was repaired by the excavator. The slightly curved entrance passage faces west over the Bay of Firth towards Cuween Cairn. The setting sun shines in here around the equinoxes. The

associated Neolithic settlement may at Rennibister, the farm near the shore to the north. This is described in the section on Firth.

Caldale Camp in WWI was a spotting balloon station

