

Norse Mill Fence Line Orphir Orkney



Data Structure Report

October 2012

NORSE MILL FENCE LINE

ORPHIR

ORKNEY

KW17 2RD

WATCHING BRIEF DATA STRUCTURE REPORT

PROJECT No: 363

ORCA

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CLIENT: SCAPA FLOW LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP SCHEME

This document has been prepared in accordance with ORCA standard operating Procedures and IFA standards	
Authorised for Distribution by: R Aitken	Date: 24/10/12

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the results of a watching brief undertaken by the Orkney Research Centre for Archaeology (ORCA) on a line of fence post holes and a trench within the Scheduled Ancient Monument of the Norse horizontal mill, Orphir, Orkney Mainland (SAM No. 90236).

The work was undertaken to improve an existing fence line, create access to the Norse mill monument and to prepare an area for a tourist information board. The area monitored comprised of four post holes excavated to a maximum depth of 0.75m and a shallow rectangular trench excavated no deeper than 0.20m. The works were monitored under constant archaeological supervision on 17th of July 2012.

The results of the watching brief show archaeological deposits present at 3.85mOD, possibly relating to demolition rubble or an earlier road material from the Gyre road. However because of the limited size of the post holes it is not possible to determine the exact nature of the deposits.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report was commissioned by the Scapa Flow Landscape Partnership Scheme and forms the Data Structure Report for an archaeological watching brief carried out on intrusive ground works on the site of Earls Bu, Orphir, Orkney (hereafter referred to as 'the site') NGR: 333470 1004487 (HY 33470 04487), see Figure 1.

The site is located within an area designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM No. 90236 "The Monument known as Earl's Bu, Norse settlement and mill, Orphir"), and Scheduled Ancient Monument Consent was sought by the client for the works.

The works monitored include:

- The excavation of four post holes
- The excavation of a small rectangular pit for a tourist board plinth

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Standards and guidance specified by the Institute of Archaeologists (IFA 2001, 2008).

2 SITE LOCATION AND TOPOLOGY

The site is situated to the east of the 'Bu of Orphir' on the southern side of Gyre road National Grid Reference HY 333477, 1004492, see Figure 1. The site is located on the northern most edge of a grassed field containing a known Norse 'horizontal mill', to the east of the Orkneyinga Saga Centre. The site topography is mainly flat at approximately 4.30mOD.

The solid geology of the area is part of the Stromness Flagstone group (Mykura 1976), consisting of sequences of grey and black thinly bedded, in part laminated, dolomitic siltstone, shale and subordinate thin very finely-grained sandstone. These are overlain by glacial till; reddish or grey clay with locally derived rock and pebbles. The soils are part of the Bilbister series with Thurso series, colluvium and occasional peat; a moraine complex (Soil Survey of Scotland, 1982).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 PREHISTORIC PERIOD

Orkney is home to several internationally important prehistoric sites such as those within The Heart of Neolithic Orkney, a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site and there is an abundance of evidence indicating the Island's focus for Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Age and possibly Mesolithic activity.

Orphir is located on the southern coast of West Mainland of Orkney in an area that contains a number of Bronze Age burnt mounds. To the north of the site are two burnt mounds (grouped collectively under NMRS No. HY30SW 5). Once substantial, (c.50ft in 1925, then c.35ft in 1935, presumably the result of agricultural practices) the first now measures c.18m north-south by 6.5m east-west and is associated with evidence of internal stonework and burnt material. The second mound is smaller, measuring 7.5m in diameter and 1.2m in height, however this site has no recorded burnt earth or stones (RCAHMSa 2012). These two mounds collectively form the Scheduled Ancient Monument of the "*Monument known as Bu of Orphir burnt mound and mill dam*" (SAM No. 4725).

Located approximately 20m south of the site lies another Bronze Age burnt mound (NMRS No. HY30SW 15), this was partially excavated in 1993 and contained the remains of a Bronze Age pottery vessel and possible 'water tank'. (RCAHMSc 2012).

In addition to these mounds, the Local Antiquarian and Orkney Sheriff Clerk, George Petrie made note of a standing stone and stone 'celt' or axe found opposite the Saga centre in 1863 (NMRS No. HY30SW.11). In 2005 a stone, thought to be that recorded by Petrie was located in nearby farmyard (RCAHMSb 2012).

3.2 NORSE, MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The site falls within the area designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument "The monument known as Earls Bu, Norse settlement and Mill, Orphir" (SAM No. 90236).

Just south of the site are the remains of the Norse horizontal mill (NMRS No. HY30SW 15). Originally thought to be an Iron Age souterrain the site was excavated in 1990 and although not much of the internal mill features survived, there was evidence for an upright timber support for the water wheel. The mill structure also contained later Norse midden deposits thought to represent occupation material from the nearby 'Earls Bu' (Batey 1992: 34). This structure is noted in the Northern Isles due to its early date and. Batey argues that this is the earliest demonstrable example of a 'Norse Mill' in Orkney (Batey 1992: 40).

The foundation remains of 'Earls Bu' (NMRS No. HY30SW 2) a series of Early medieval/Norse buildings, are situated to the south west of the site, directly south of the Orkneyinga Saga Centre. The first recorded investigation of the site was in 1758 with other archaeological investigations in 1899 – 1901. The majority of the site was uncovered in the 1930 when the site was taken into guardianship (Batey 2003a: 60). It is generally accepted that this is the drinking-hall mentioned in the Icelandic text, *Orkneyinga Saga* dating to c. AD 1200 (Batey 2003b: 30).

Also mentioned in the *Orkneyinga Saga* South of Earls Bu is St. Nicolas Church otherwise known as the Round Church or the Round Kirk (NMRS No. HY30SW 1.00). This is a circular Romanesque style church with an east facing hemispherical apse dating between 1090 and 1160 and represents the only medieval church of this plan in Scotland (Batey 2003b: 30). The design may be based on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, but a Scandinavian origin for the design of the church has also been suggested (Batey 2003b: 30).

A Rune inscribed stone (NMRS No. HY30SW 1.01) was found in 1953 during the demolition of a later 18th century parish church located here. While the exact circumstances of the discovery are unknown it is likely that this stone was taken from material from the Round Church (Hagland 1993: 370).

3.3 POST MEDIEVAL/ MODERN PERIOD

Blaeu's Atlas of Scotland, 1654 depicts the area of Orphir ('Orfer') as being home to several churches along the coastline, one of which may represent St Nicholas' Church.

Thomson's Atlas of Scotland, 1832 confirms that Gyre Road is in existence by this time, depicting a Church located on the north side of the road. This may represent the local Parish Church built in 1705 and demolished in 1829. This was replaced by another Church at a small distance to the south (RCAHMSd 2012) in the 18th century, but little trace of this survives today, being demolished in 1952.

The Bartholomew Survey Atlas, 1912 shows Gyre Road and the more recent (1829) 'Orphir Church' located to the south of Gyre Road.

4 FIELDWORK AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

As part of a condition within the Scheduled Ancient Monument Consent an archaeological watching brief was undertaken on the site in order to record any deposits associated with the Norse settlement of Earls Bu, the Norse mill race or any earlier prehistoric activity. The works formed part of a series of measures designed to mitigate the impact of the proposed development on potential archaeological deposits present.

The principal objective of the watching brief was to identify and record any features or objects of archaeological importance that could be damaged or destroyed by the works, while minimising any delays or disruption to the development project.

Other research objectives were:

- What was the nature and level (mOD) of natural topography?
- What is the character, nature and depth of deposits identified?

5 FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY

All works were carried out in accordance with the ORCA Standard operating procedures as set out in the ORCA fieldwork Manual (*in prep*).

All ground breaking was undertaken by hand and under constant archaeological supervision. Any archaeological features encountered were recorded using standard pro-forma sheets and a running photographic record was maintained.

6 FIELDWORK RESULTS

A series of four post holes and a shallow rectangular trench were dug approximately 20m north of the Norse horizontal mill on the verge of the Gyre road. The work was undertaken to replace an existing fence line and the shallow rectangular trench will act as a sunken base for a tourist information plinth (see Figure 2).

6.1 POST HOLE 1

Post Hole 1 was located at the north west end of the site, south of Gyre Road at the corner of the turn off towards the Orkneyinga Saga Centre. The post hole was 0.60m in diameter and was excavated to a total depth of 0.65m (see Plate 1). At the base of the post hole was natural reddish-yellow glacial clay, 0.10m of which was excavated into **(006)**. Above the clay was a thin 0.06m layer of brown grey clay silt subsoil **(007)**. Context **(007)** was sealed by **(005)**, a deposit predominantly of fragments of flagstone, ranging from 0.2 to 0.30m in size, with some smaller sub-rounded sandstone elements present also. This layer of flagstone may represent a spread of demolition material derived from nearby buildings, or alternatively could be a metalled surface, such as a road or track.

A 0.25m subsoil layer of brown grey clay silt with infrequent inclusions of small to medium sized stones **(003)** sealed the stone layer **(005)**. Overlaying that was mid-brown gritty sandy silt subsoil **(002)** and a mid-brown grey gritty silt topsoil **(001)**. Cutting through the topsoil **(001)** was a shallow rough drainage ditch running parallel with the wall outside the Orkneyinga Saga centre, the drain was filled with plastic and modern glass **(004)**. There were no finds retrieved from the deposits with this posthole, so dating them has not been possible.

6.2 POST HOLE 2

Post Hole 2 was located directly to the east of Post Hole 1 (see Plate 1) and measured 0.60m in diameter and was excavated to a depth of 0.73m. At the limit of excavation of the post hole was a 0.05m layer of horizontally orientated fragments of flagstone **(013)**. This is likely to be the same deposit as the flagstones present in Post Holes 1 and 3 (Contexts **005** and **018** respectively). This was sealed by a thick 0.40m layer of yellow brown sandy silt with a very high density of small round stones and pebbles with a small amount of charcoal flecking **(012)**. This layer was also present in both Post Hole 3 (**17**) and may represent older road material from Gyre Road or part of a track way. Sealing this was 0.08m of mid-brown silt subsoil **(011)** containing a small amount of gravel inclusions. Overlaying that was a thin 0.03m very yellow orange layer of sand **(010)** and 0.17m thick mid-brown silt topsoil **(009)**.

6.3 POST HOLE 3

Post Hole 3 was located to the east of Post Hole 2 and measured 0.60m in diameter

and was excavated to a depth of 0.76m. The bottom layer (**018**) of Post Hole 3 was made up of the same flagstone surface as was present in Post Hole 1 and 2 (**005** and **013**). The layer measured 0.16m in depth with slightly and comprises flagstone fragments, ranging from 0.20m – 0.06m (see context **005** and **013**). Overlaying that was a thick 0.40m layer of yellow brown sandy silt with a high density of small round stones and pebbles with trace amounts of charcoal flecking (**017**). This layer was also present in Post Hole 2 (**012**) and looks to be a continuation of road track material. Sealing that was (**016**), a mid-brown gritty sandy silt subsoil infrequently containing small rounded stone inclusions. This is covered by a very thin layer of sandy silt (**015**) and a 0.15m layer of mid-brown sandy silt topsoil (**014**).

6.4 POST HOLE 4

Post Hole 4 is situated to the far east of the site measuring 0.60m in diameter and was excavated to a depth of 0.65m. This post hole was dug into a firm mound of topsoil heaped against a stone wall and so mostly truncates modern material. At the excavated limit of the post hole was a 0.15m layer of dark brown clayey silt containing small sub-angular stones (**021**). Sealing that was a 0.30m layer of brown silt with occasional gritty inclusions. Context (**020**) and above this was a 0.20m layer of brown silty topsoil (**019**).

6.5 TRENCH 1

A shallow, 1m by 0.50m trench was dug to act as a base for a tourist information plinth. The total depth of excavation was no deeper than 0.20m and only the topsoil (**022**) was disturbed.

6.6 INTERPRETATIVE ISSUES

The post holes were initially dug out at a 0.60m in diameter that tapered in to around 0.45m towards the bottom of the holes, this gave only a limited look at deposits present. In addition to this, there was no dating evidence from the deposits present and interpretation on this basis is limited.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The natural deposit identified in the base of the post holes was a bright reddish yellow glacial clay seen at a depth of 3.75m OD, 0.55m below ground level.

Post Holes 1, 2 and 3 contained a layer of horizontally orientated flagstone fragments. This deposit was either a layer of flagstone rubble, possibly from demolition deposits of one of the churches known to be located near here. It may also represent a rough external metttled surface. No finds were retrieved so it is unclear what the date of these layers are.

Post Holes 2 and 3 also contained a mixed sandy layer of varyingly sized rounded

stones. Given its proximity to the Gyre road this could be this could represent an earlier version of the east-west running road, slightly to the south of the current Gyre Road. There was no dating evidence present which limits interpretation at this stage.

Post Hole 4 was dug into a mound of topsoil heaped against a wall and did not contain any of the archaeological deposits. Similarly only the topsoil was disturbed for Trench 1 and nothing of archaeological interest was recorded.

The small and limited nature of post holes and the lack of finds present on the site makes it difficult to make a definitive assessment on the character of these archaeological deposits.

8 PUBLICATION AND ARCHIVING

Archive preparation and deposition will be undertaken with reference to the appropriate repository guidelines and standards, and, where necessary, the Museums and Galleries Commission (MGC) and the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (UKIC) standards and guidelines. The project archive containing the original site records will be submitted to the RCAHMS or the Orkney SMR, as appropriate.

Findings have been submitted to the national record via the OASIS system (see Section 9), and a short report for Discovery and Excavation Scotland will be generated.

Information on the results of the report will be made public in digital form so as to be included in any further research into the archaeology, history and development Orkney.

9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Julian Branscombe and the Scapa Flow Landscape Partnership Scheme for commissioning the work. Thank you also to the onsite contractor Magnus Johstone for his assistance on site.

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11 NMRS OASIS FORM

OASIS ID: orkneyre1-132060	
Project details	
Project name	Norse Mill Fence Line
Short description of the project	A watching brief was undertaken by Orkney Research Centre for Archaeology (ORCA) on July 17th 2012, on a line of fence post holes and a shallow trench at the Scheduled Ancient Monument of the Norse horizontal mill, Orphir. The results of the watching brief show that the post holes contained the possible remains of a road surface above the natural glacial clay. However because of the limited size and number of the fence post holes and lack of dating evidence full interpretation is limited.
Project dates	Start: 17-07-2012 End: 17-07-2012
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	363 - Contracting Unit No.
Any associated project reference codes	HY30SW 15 - NMRS No.
Any associated project reference codes	90236 - SAM No.
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM)
Current Land use	Cultivated Land 1 - Minimal cultivation
Monument type	EXTERNAL DEPOSIT Uncertain
Significant Finds	NONE None
Investigation type	""Watching Brief""
Prompt	Scheduled Monument Consent
Project location	

Country	Scotland
Site location	ORKNEY ISLANDS ORPHIR Norse Mill Fence Line
Postcode	KW17 2RD
Study area	5.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	HY 3477 4492 59 -3 59 17 10 N 003 08 42 W Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 3.75m Max: 3.75m
Project creators	
Name of Organisation	Orkney Research Centre for Archaeology
Project brief originator	Scapa Flow Landscape Partnership Scheme
Project design originator	Orkney Research Centre for Archaeology
Project director/manager	Rosalind Aitken
Project supervisor	Samuel Voke
Type of sponsor/funding body	Other Charitable Trust
Name of sponsor/funding body	Scapa Flow Partnership Scheme
Project archives	
Digital Archive recipient	RCAHMS
Digital Media available	"Text"
Paper Archive recipient	RCAHMS
Paper Contents	"none"
Paper Media available	"Photograph", "Report"

Project bibliography 1	
Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
Title	Norse Mill Fence Line, Orphir
Author(s)/Editor(s)	Voke, S/Aitken, R
Date	2012
Issuer or publisher	ORCA
Place of issue or publication	Scotland
Description	A4 spiral bound printed report, Figures in colour
Entered by Sam Voke Rosalind Aitken (Archive.ORCA@orkney.uhi.ac.uk)	
Entered on	24 October 2012

X:\ORCA\ORCA Projects\363 Norse Mill Race_Orphir\363_Earls Bu Orphir\Geomatics\CAD\001current\basemap\Figure 1_Earls_Bu_Orphir\Basemap\Figure 1_A4.dwg(ORCA FIG 1 A4)***** 23 May 2014

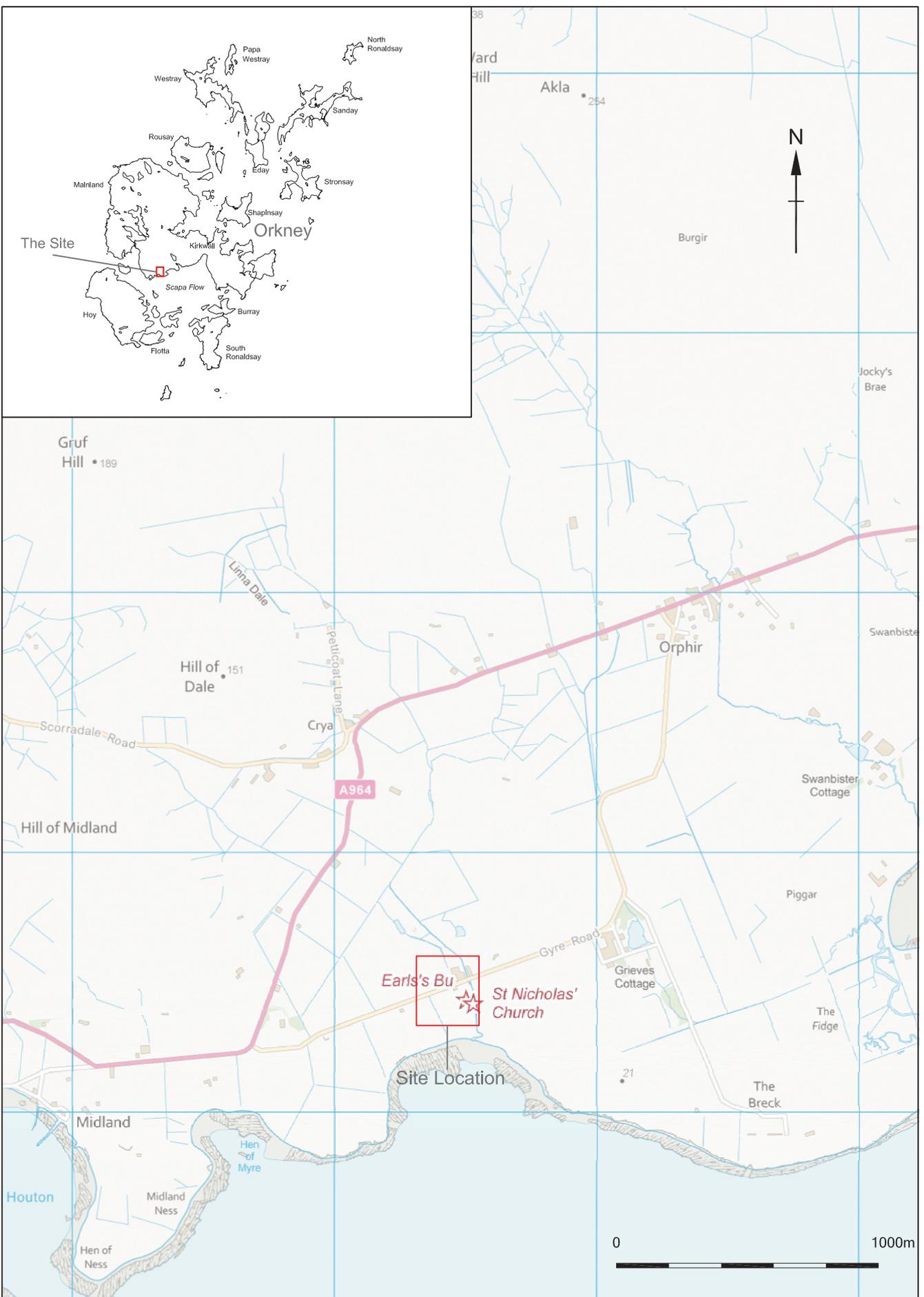


Figure 1. Site Location

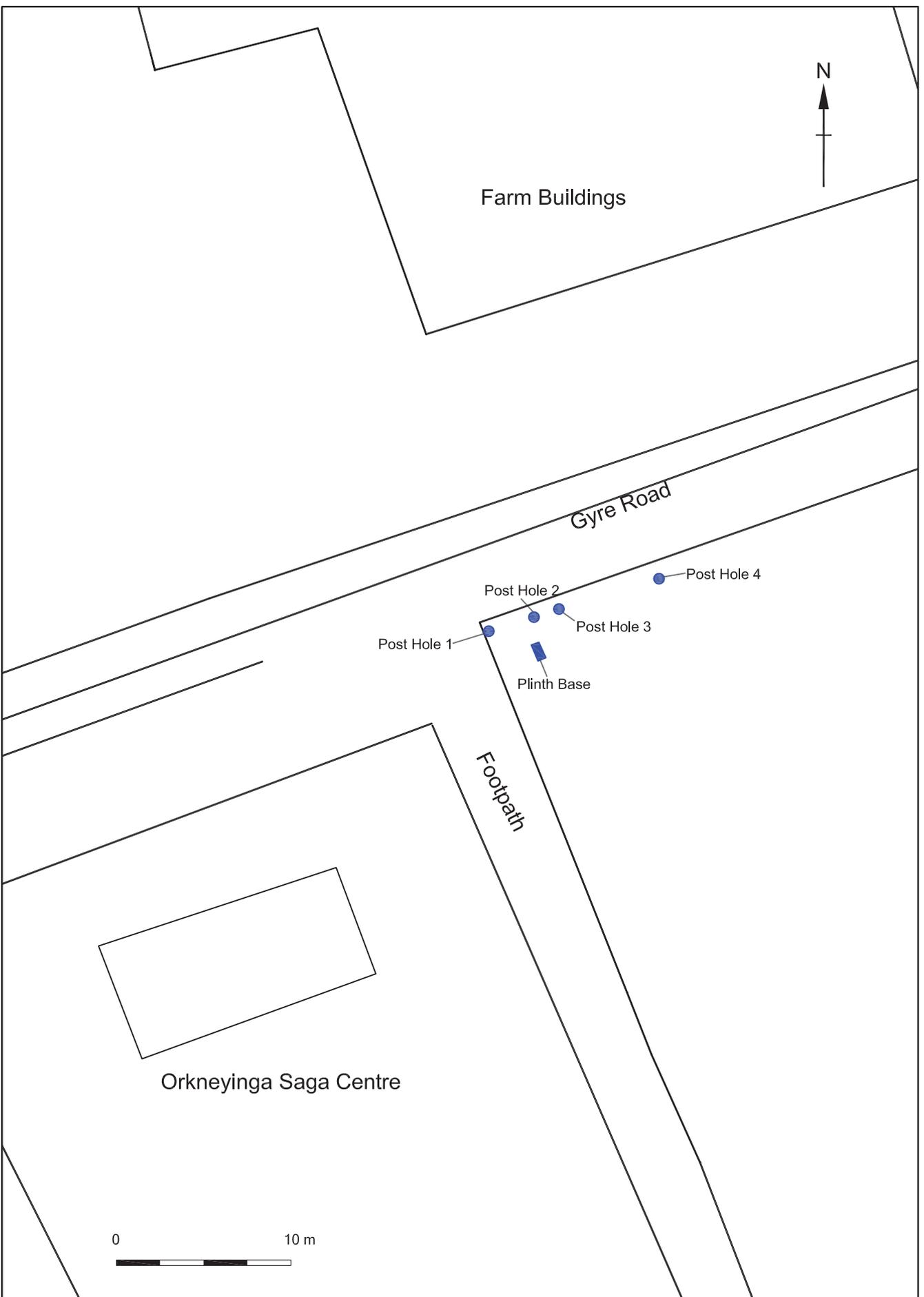


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Project Name: Earls Bu, Orphir	
Project No: 363	Scale: 1:20,000 @ A4
08/2012	SV Rev. No. 1

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X:\ORCA\ORCA Projects\363 Norse Mill Race_Orphir\363_Earls Bu Orphir\Geomatics\CAD\001current\basemap\Vers_2_Figure 2_Earls_Bu_Basemap_171012.dwg(ORCA FIG 1 A4)***** 23 May 2014



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for Archaeology

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Figure 2. Fence Post Locations		
Project Name: Earls Bu, Orphir		
Project No: 363	Scale: 1:300 @ A4	
08/2012	SV	Rev. No. 1



Plate 1 - Post Hole 1 with context 005



Plate 2 - Post Hole 2 with context 013

12 APPENDIX 1 CONTEXT REGISTER

Context	Site Subdivision	Type	Description
001	Post Hole 1	Topsoil	Mid-brown grey, sandy silt. Fairly gravely with some small stones. Loose to firm topsoil.
002	Post Hole 1	Layer	Mid-brown grey sandy silt. Made up of gravel and small stones.
003	Post Hole 1	Layer	Light brown grey clayey silt (no gravel or sandiness), some small sub-rounded stones.
004	Post Hole 1	Drain cut	Drainage drain running along the wall of the Orkneyinga Saga Centre. Modern glass and plastic.
005	Post Hole 1	[Surface]	Layer of large flat stones, measuring from 25cm to 30cm
006	Post Hole 1	Natural Till	Layer of orange/yellow glacial clay or till.
007	Post Hole 1	Layer	Light brown grey clayey silt (no gravel or sandiness), some small sub-rounded stones.
008	Post Hole 1	Cut	Drainage ditch cut in topsoil. (filled by 004)
009	Post Hole 2	Topsoil	Mid-brown grey, sandy silt with charcoal flecking. Fairly gravely with some small stones. Loose to firm topsoil.
010	Post Hole 2	Layer	Layer of gritty sand, some small stones and charcoal flecking.
011	Post Hole 2	Layer	Mid-brown grey sandy silt. Made up of gravel and small stones.
012	Post Hole 2	Layer	Brown orange sandy silt, full of small rounded, sub-rounded stones and pebbles. Contains some larger flat stones and charcoal flecking.
013	Post Hole 2	[Surface]	Layer of large flat stones, measuring from 25cm to 30cm
014	Post Hole 3	Topsoil	Mid-brown grey, sandy silt with charcoal flecking. Fairly gravely with some small stones. Loose to firm topsoil.
015	Post Hole 3	Layer	Layer of gritty sand, some small stones and charcoal flecking.
016	Post Hole 3	Layer	Mid-brown grey sandy silt. Made up of gravel and small stones.
017	Post Hole 3	Layer	Brown orange sandy silt, full of small rounded, sub-rounded stones and pebbles. Contains some larger flat stones and charcoal flecking.
018	Post Hole 3	[Surface]	Layer of large flat stones, measuring from 25cm to 30cm
019	Post Hole 4	Topsoil	Mid-brown grey, sandy silt with charcoal flecking. Fairly gravely with some small stones. Loose to firm topsoil.
020	Post Hole 4	Layer	Dark brown subsoil silt.
021	Post Hole 4	Layer	Dark brown subsoil silt, fair amount of gravel material.
022	Plinth	Topsoil	Mid-brown grey, sandy silt. Fairly gravely with some small stones. Loose to firm topsoil.

13 APPENDIX 2 PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER

Frame	Site Subdivision	Description	Direction of shot
1	Post Hole 1	Shot of (005) pre-ex of the layer	W
2	Post Hole 1	Shot of (005) pre-ex of the layer	W
3	Post Hole 1	Shot of (005) pre-ex of the layer	W
4	Post Hole 1	Shot of (005) pre-ex of the layer	W
5	Post Hole 1	Shot of (005) pre-ex of the layer	W
6	Post Hole 1	Shot of (005) pre-ex of the layer	W
7	Post Hole 2	Shot of (013) base	S
8	Post Hole 2	Shot of (013) base	S
9	Post Hole 2	Shot of (013) base	S
10	Post Hole 2	Shot of (013) base	S
11	Post Hole 2	Shot of (013) in section	W
12	Post Hole 3	Shot of (018) base	S
13	Post Hole 3	Shot of (018) base	S
14	Post Hole 3	Shot of (018) base	S
15	Post Hole 3	Shot of (018) in section	S
16	Post Hole 3	Shot of (018) base	S
17	Post Hole 1	Shot of (005) after the layer was excavated, showing natural till	W
18	Post Hole 1	Shot of (005) after the layer was excavated, showing natural till	W
19	Post Hole 4	Shot of (021) limit of excavation	E
20	General	Shot of southern sheds and top of Norse Mill	S
21	General	Shot of Trench being dug	N
22	Plinth	Shot of topsoil that was removed for the plinth base	W