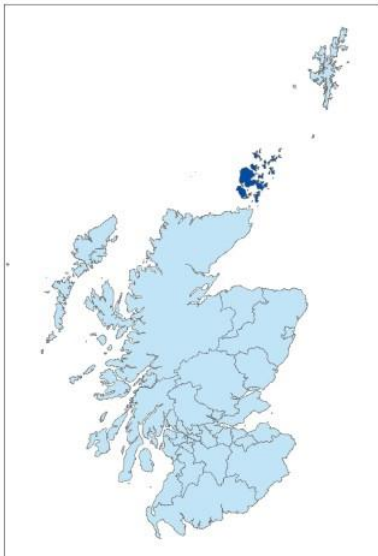


DOROTHY GRAVES MCEWAN (RCAHMS) – ORKNEY

July 26, 2013 Historic Environment Scotland Day of Archaeology 2013, Excavation, Prehistory #myarchaeology, Canmore, David V Clarke, Dorothy Graves McEwan, Gordon Childe, Neolithic, Orkney, Prehistoric Orkney, RCAHMS, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Skara Brae, V. Gordon Childe, World Heritage Sites in Scotland



*Orkney 'Contains Ordnance
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2011'*

My name is Dr Dorothy Graves McEwan and I am the Skara Brae Project Cataloguer at RCAHMS. [Skara Brae](#) is the best preserved Neolithic settlement site in Western Europe, and through this distinction has become a World Heritage site beloved by many people the world over. This unique site captured the imagination of antiquarians in the 19th century. It continues to fascinate archaeologists, myself included, to this very day.

My reasons for loving Skara Brae are entirely personal. In 2004, in the early days of research for my PhD, I took a trip up with my boyfriend (now husband) to visit archaeological sites in the Highlands. Eventually, we pointed the car north and just kept driving until we came to John o'Groats. We



*My first ferry ride
to Orkney.
Copyright the
author*

looked at each other and said, "Why not?"

Onto the ferry we went, and the next thing I knew, I was staring at the glorious remains of a settlement that reminded me so much of The Flintstones that I had to laugh. At that moment,

standing above House 7, I realised I was entranced by the Scottish Neolithic. It has since become a research passion.



Skara Brae; house 7. Copyright RCAHMS (SC346480)

An average day of my work currently consists of delving into containers of archive material that was created by archaeologists Dr David V Clarke and Dr Alexandra Shepherd, who in the 1970s excavated material from Skara Brae's middens. A midden can be considered a fancy archaeological word for the 'trash' heap, where literally anything and everything can be found deposited. It is by excavating the midden so carefully that Clarke and Shepherd have been able to open a

door into the past that might have otherwise remained closed forever. By combining their work with Prof V Gordon Childe's iconic excavations in the 1930s, we know so much more about the daily life of the people who built and lived at Skara Brae.

The midden has revealed an extensive diet including plants, shellfish, fish, wild birds, deer, and pigs. They created stone, wooden and bone objects and tools. They even possessed artwork: beautiful pieces such as carved stone balls and incised decorations that appear on some of the stonework.



Skara Brae: Vere Gordon Childe in hut 8. Copyright RCAHMS (SC372285)



All of this and so much more will be forthcoming in a final report by Dr Clarke and Dr Shepherd. In the meantime, it is my job to catalogue the material into a singular Collection that any member of the public can easily consult online or in person at RCAHMS.

This is what I've chosen for Day of Archaeology, but why not tell us your favourite archaeological sites in Scotland on Twitter using [#MyArchaeology](#).

*Skara Brae Finds Photograph:
Bone and stone objects,
including mattocks and carved
stone objects. Copyright
Historic Scotland (SC1165931)*