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BROUGH OF DEERNESS, ORKNEY. (NGR 596087).

Interim Report on Excavations and Survey 1976–77.

Excavations and survey under the direction of C.D. Morris of Durham University took place on this site on behalf of the Department of the Environment (Scotland) in September 1976 for a period of four weeks and in July 1977 for one week. Staff and volunteers were recruited through Durham University, and the Assistant Supervisor for the excavation was Sonia Thingstad (now Jeffrey) of Gothenburg University.

A. Excavation

Within the Chapel excavation was completed down to natural clay. Excavation of a clay layer in the body of the church suggested that it was a layer of build-up, for it occurred only in the eastern part and overlay a more extensive sandy gravel layer. In this layer a sherd of steatite was found. A small pebble feature in the sandy gravel layer seemed to be remnants of flooring, and clearly pre-dated the bench along the south wall, and some flagging

in front of the bench as located in 1975. A similar feature had a like relationship to a group of stones along the north side of the church — which possibly might represent the remnants of a second bench. Two further sherds of steatite were found in a clayey layer below, which overlay the natural grey and white clay, and many features in it. A depression in the natural clay contained a similary clayey fill (presumably levelling/build-up) and within it an exceedingly worn bronze coin, not as yet identified. The features that were located appeared to indicate either a timber phase or timber fittings. Shallow impressions of upright planks were traced across the east end in front of the stone altar, and behind the slots and holes apparently for a timber altar. Some of these had a clay or stone packing. There were also fugitive remains of a similar planking on the north side of the nave at a slightly different alignment to the stone wall. Apparently related to these were post-holes and slots at the western end. Here the indications were that the features clearly pre-dated the stone wall of the Chapel. The raised step to either side of the stone altar was seen to abut it rather than underlie it, and overlay more post-holes, which as yet do not seem to fit into a coherent pattern. The stone altar itself had clearly been disturbed in the past, and clearance of the disturbance showed that the altar had been of mortared stone, with a careful construction towards the base. Hopes of a relic cavity were dashed by examination of the stones immediately below the disturbance which were seen to overlay natural clay.

More small post-holes and features were encountered **outside the walls of the Chapel**, both to east and west. These underlay another sticky clay layer outside the Chapel, and were also cut into natural clay. In the sticky clay were found both steatite and pottery sherds, a pocket whetstone, and a tiny fragment of what appeared to be metal-woven braid. A second large grave appeared to be cut through from this level in the south-east corner of the enclosure; the filling of clay lumps and large stones combined with standing water had made the bones so fragile that cleaning and lifting was impossible. A clay-filled baby grave, orientated east-west, was excavated to the west of the grave uncovered in 1975. Both were cleaned and lifted where feasible; the baby grave had had a wooden coffin. Three further baby graves were found in a row immediately outside the east wall of the Chapel: very little bone remained in them. One was clay-filled, the others used slabs. All three were orientated east-west.

No other graves were found within the enclosure.

As for **the enclosure** itself, a tiny splayed entrance was found in the south wall near the western end, and the eastern wall particular was seen to be slightly curved. The construction was somewhat rough and ready and it would seem that the wall could not have been very high. Some shallow curving features in the clay might possibly represent an earlier perimeter to the cemetery, and the 'ditch' beyond the eastern wall, located in 1975, may well be part of it. Other features in the clay were noted, including several stakeholes (especially to the north) but no coherent pattern emerges as yet. A pumice or bone float and a stone pot-lid were found in a disturbed area outside the north-west corner of the chapel.

During the consolidation of **the walls of the Chapel** by the D.O.E., the outer face of the south wall was stripped. The opportunity was taken to examine a small part of the core of the wall. The conclusion would seem to be that the stone wall had a clay core at the base (presumably as a bedding) and above it a loose earth and stone core inside the dressed face of the walls. These faces exploit the effect of thick and thin slabs as a quasi-decorative feature. Finally, it should be noted that partially beneath the existing south wall the face of an earlier stone wall was examined. Seven or eight stones, together with three impressions, form a line on a different alignment; They may possibly be related to the plank impressions inside the north wall of the Chapel.

The Chapel is now in the process of being consolidated by the D.O.E. following the excavation.

B. Survey.

Clearance of the undergrowth during the 1975 excavation season indicated that a new survey would be appropriate, and observation from the air in 1976 showed that one or two structures in addition to those recorded by the Investigators of the Royal Commission in the 1930s could be detected. Tacheometric work under the supervision of Mr. F. Bettess took in the whole of the site, and the new plan of the site shows the existence of some eight or nine rectangular buildings not recorded hitherto, together with some annexes to buildings. In addition

several new circular depressions were located, mostly to the south of the Chapel and enclosure, but also two at the north end of the site. The smaller ones may prove to be the result of Army target practice in the War, but probably not all! On parts of the Brough, the nature of the turf obscured some building lines, but on others (notably the central area) there are indications that some walls may be superimposed on earlier features. In general, the plan of the buildings would seem to be on a more regular lay-out, particularly in the north western part of the site, than appeared hitherto.

C.D. MORRIS
August 1977.

BROUGH OF BIRSAY, ORKNEY (NGR HY 239285)

Excavations and survey 1977: Interim Report on work by Durham University.

Excavations and survey under the direction of Christopher D. Morris of the Department of Archaeology, Durham University, took place on this site on behalf of Durham University Excavations Committee and the Department of the Environment (Scotland) for a period of four weeks in July/August 1977. Staff and volunteers were recruited through Durham University.

1) Survey

This is now complete. An interim general site plan has been prepared for the reprinting of the DOE site guidebook, and a final site plan should be completed in the next year. The more detailed surveys of the different parts of the site were checked and corrections and additions made; Mr. F. Bettess of Sunderland Polytechnic supervised the extension of the survey to the south-west of the Guardian ship area on the cliff, where eight further buildings, first noted by Mr. Peter Gelling, have been plotted.

2) Excavations continued in the area to the west of the church.

a) **Area to the north of House N.** This area was opened to link up the previously excavated area with that of the current excavations and to investigate the nature of features there. The gulley traced south of, and under, House N in 1976 was traced