

Report on EMAS tour of Orkney 19th - 27th April 2022

Historically EMAS study tours have started in London where participants boarded a coach, but for the Orkney tour we assembled in The Royal Highland Hotel Inverness having made our own way there. After a night in the hotel we visited Nybster Broch in Caithness before getting the ferry at Gills Bay for Orkney. Most of Wednesday 20th April was spent travelling and we arrived at The Kirkwall Hotel, where we were to spend the next six nights, at 3.15pm. In the late afternoon we looked around St. Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall. Upon entering the massive Norman columns were testament to the fact that masons who had worked on Durham Cathedral were used here. Before dinner, which was included, Scott McCracken gave us a lecture on Neolithic Orkney focussing on the UNESCO World Heritage Group which set the scene for the tour.

Thursday 21st April began with a visit to the Stones of Stenness followed by the Maeshowe Visitor Centre where we had a talk by Sarah, a curator. Maeshowe itself was closed so we just saw the mound from the road. From here we travelled back to Stenness Stones and walked past them to Barnhouse Neolithic Settlement where at least thirteen houses were discovered in 1984. After lunch we took in the Ring of Brodgar and Skara Brae.

Friday 22nd April was spent on Rousay where the first stop was Taversoe Tuick Chambered Cairn where Christine guided us down a ladder to see the two chambers. Blackhammer Chambered Cairn was next and because it was closed we couldn't go inside so just walked around it.

Onwards to Midhowe Chambered Cairn which is covered and has walkways from which one is able to view the construction. We were able to eat our supplied packed lunch here while looking out to sea. This was our last stop for the day and we headed back to the ferry and on to the hotel. Before dinner we had another splendid lecture from Scott on Skapa Flow and its significance in World War Two.

Saturday 23rd April we went to the south of South Ronaldsay to Isbister Cairn, known as The Tomb of the Eagles. This site was discovered by Ronald Simison whilst digging for flagstones on his farm in 1958. His two daughters Kathleen and Freda, have been running it but it is now closed permanently due to family reasons. We walked to the cairn and crawled through a low entrance to see the chamber. A walk along the clifftop to Liddle Burnt Mound followed but the site is completely overgrown and nothing is now visible.

Next in complete contrast to the pre-historic sites we crossed the Churchill barrier to see the Italian Chapel built as a place of worship by, and for, Italian POW's. Back to Kirkwall for lunch and a visit to the Earl's Palace and The Tankerness House Museum.

Sunday 24th April began with the Brough of Birsay. We had expected to only

view it from the mainland but, as the tide was low, we were able to cross the causeway to walk around the area. After crossing back we looked at the Earl's Palace in Birsay and a small Church of Scotland building now run by St. Magnus Church Birsay Trust. Before lunch we went to Barony Mill, the only working water mill in Orkney. We enjoyed a tour of the building where Bere Barley is milled and were invited to buy Bere products in the shop afterwards. Following lunch was a visit to Kirbuster Farm Museum and Broch of Gurness with its Pict House and Iron Age Broch Village.

Monday 25th April, our penultimate day, and the first call was Orphir Round Church, one of only two medieval round churches in Scotland. Here there was an unmanned visitor centre which had a small display and a film outlining the Orkneyinga Saga. After this we went to Stromness to look in the museum and use some free time to explore the town and buy lunch before moving on to Unstan Chambered Cairn which has five compartments accessible through a low narrow entrance. Next was Rennibister Earth House where Christine again guided us down a ladder into the chamber. Scott explained that the function of earth houses is uncertain.

Tuesday 26th April was a day of travel by bus and ferry to return to the Scottish mainland and Inverness for our last night. The last archaeological visit of the trip was Clava Cairns, a short distance east of Inverness. This is the most visited prehistoric site in Scotland. After a night in The Royal Highland Hotel we dispersed on Wednesday morning to make our own way back home.

The trip was excellent in content thanks to Christine and Scott. Each day was well planned and full but never rushed. We were very lucky with the weather which, although chilly, was rain-free for the whole tour.

Linda Parry