



# THE OLD CHAPELS OF ORKNEY

The ecclesiastical sites known before the  
Reformation.

## Abstract

Immediately before 1472, Orkney Diocese was a suffragan of the Norwegian Archdiocese of Nidaros (Trondheim). Both the Orkney and Shetland archipelagoes are remarkable for the considerable number of ecclesiastical 'sites' which are to be found there, often in the most remote of locations. This paper reproduces the two articles published by J. Storer Clouston in the "Scottish Historical Review," recording the results of his investigations into the church and chapel sites to be found in the Orkney Islands.

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## The Old Chapels of Orkney, I.<sup>1</sup>

### *Editorial Preface.*

- In the following text, numbers given within brackets [...] correspond to page numbers in the original text.
- At the end of the second of his articles, Clouston included a summary list of the churches and chapels he had listed in the text.
- Throughout, no changes or alterations have been made to the spellings used by Clouston.

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[89] In the year 1701 a very worthy and pious divine called John Brand published an account of a tour of inspection into the state of the Church in Orkney and Shetland. While finding much that pleased him, this extremely Protestant gentleman was greatly scandalised by one shocking discovery. It seems that the islands were afflicted with a veritable plague of ancient popish chapels, and that in the shelter of their ruinous walls anti-Christ still lingered, tempting the parishioners to do all manner of ungodly things. They made pilgrimages to the more notorious of these chapels, laid votive offerings on their moss-grown altars, and even (adds Mr. Wallace, another divine, in his *Discription*) celebrated their saints' days, each district still venerating the memory of the papistical person to whom its particular chapel was dedicated. There could be no true Christianity in the Isles, said the Rev. Mr. Brand, till Government had taken the scandal in hand and razed the chapels to the ground, 'which might prove as the taking away of the Nest Egg.'

Since then time has done all too thoroughly the work which Government neglected. With only one or two exceptions, the Orkney chapels are no more, but it has fortunately proved possible to rescue a considerable body of information about them. From Wallace we learn that in his time (the latter half of the seventeenth century) there were thirty-one kirks in which public worship was still being conducted, and 'above a hundred' chapels. As he first held a charge in the North Isles and then was minister [90] of Kirkwall, and was, besides, a writer of high character and scholarly attainments,<sup>2</sup> this estimate of the number of chapels may safely be taken as something more than a loose guess. If we take the total number as certainly over 100 and probably not above a third more (i.e. 133) we shall be within pretty safe limits; and this estimate is supported by the known number in South Ronaldsay in the year 1627. As one of the South Ronaldsay parishes had five and the other four, and as both were rather larger than the average of the thirty-one parishes extant in Wallace's day, a figure, say, between 110 and 120 is suggested from this analogy.

The first step clearly was to identify as many of the sites as possible, and the means of information used have been:

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<sup>1</sup> Clouston, J.S. "The Old Chapels of Orkney, I.," S.H.R. xv. No.58 (Jan., 1918), pp. 89-105.

<sup>2</sup> See the account of him in Appendix ii, *History of the Church in Orkney*, vol. iii. Craven.



- a) The Report on the island of South Ronaldsay in 1627,<sup>3</sup> which gave a full list of the chapels at that date — a list that served as an invaluable basis for the study of other parishes.
- b) Various later works dealing with Orkney, which contain references to the chapels. Chief among these is the old *Statistical Account*, and the most important of the others are Wallace's *Discription* [sic.] and Brand's *Tour*.
- c) The 6 inch to the mile Ordnance Survey maps. These have proved a mine of information ; the sites of chapels and burying grounds being marked in large numbers all through the islands. To test their accuracy one naturally turned to South Ronaldsay. There the whole nine chapels, with their correct dedications, are recorded ; and, in fact, with very few exceptions, all the other individual chapels mentioned in the old *Statistical Account* and other places are in the maps. As a further test, the adjacent place-names were noted, and, in many cases, a 'Kirk Taing,' 'Kirk Geo,' 'Chapel Taing,' etc., confirmed the site. In some instances such a place-name served, further, to indicate a lost site.
- d) Personal inquiry, supplemented by information very kindly given me by correspondents. Almost the whole Mainland of Orkney and the island of South Ronaldsay have thus been [91] covered (most parishes pretty thoroughly), and the majority of the sites have been visited and examined.

The total number of sites collected by these various methods amounts to 102, there are one or two other probable but not yet fully established sites, and the existence of two more on Stronsay is known from the old *Statistical Account*; while the whole of the North Isles and most of the South are yet unvisited, and may have sites not shown on the map or mentioned elsewhere. It thus seems pretty certain that in those parishes where a thorough investigation has been possible, practically all the chapels are now located, and it also seems probable that even outside these parishes there remains no very great number to be found.

## TWO TYPES OF CHAPEL.

A general survey of these 102 chapels, simply looking at them on the map, shows that they can at once be divided into two classes on mere geographical lines :

- (1) Chapels on very small, sometimes uninhabited, islands or on desolate seaboard promontories.
- (2) Chapels evenly distributed all over the cultivated districts - and this class includes the vast majority.

With regard to the first class, Dr. Craven, author of the *History of the Church in Orkney*, gives the valuable opinion that they were of two kinds, (a) Chapels of Pilgrimage, such as the chapels in the Brough of Birsay, the Brough of Deerness, and Enhallow ; the oldest religious foundations in the islands. (b) Votive Chapels.

It is certain that neither of these two kinds could have been intended for anything in the nature of public worship. Their isolated position forbids this intention, as also the fact that they had no kirklands or emoluments appertaining to them. Their lonely situation also shows that

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<sup>3</sup>Printed in Peterkin's *Rentals*. The questions which the Reports of 1627 had to answer included an inquiry concerning any 'chapellanries' in the various parishes. By this it was clearly meant any 'kirklands' attached to chapels or altars in the cathedral and possessing solid value, and in that sense all the other parishes answered to it. South Ronaldsay gave a list of the local chapels as well.



they were never attached to any private estates or mansions. This class of chapel falls outside the scope of these papers.

Coming to the second, and by far the more numerous class, they present two salient features. In the first place, they were certainly secular or private chapels in the great majority of cases, and not part of the regular Church organisation. Direct documentary proof of this is to be found :

- a) In the case of the South Ronaldsay chapels. In 1627 seven of the nine chapels with their lands were in the possession of private landowners, while the ownership of one other, being unknown, must be [92] presumed to have been in private hands likewise. Three of them, it will be seen later, stood apparently on 'kirklands,' that is to say, lands belonging to religious foundations, apart from the bishopric estate [episcopal *mensa*]; and in these cases the chapels may either have been built by lay landowners and piously bequeathed to some religious foundation, or erected by churchmen. One stood on 'auld-earldom' land, but the others were certainly not only owned by private landowners in 1627, but stood on odal estates.
- b) In the sale of the chapel of Essenquoy along with the lands by William Sinclair of Warsetter in 1550.<sup>4</sup>
- c) In the reference to the Lawman's 'church' which was broken into and pillaged by order of the governor, David Menzies, before 1425.<sup>5</sup>

Equally convincing is the negative evidence of the different bishopric rentals, and of the 'Charge of the Temporality of the hail Kirklands,' none of which include these chapels or any lands attached to them.

Finally, there is the very significant fact that in the great majority of cases the chapels demonstrably stood on odal land.<sup>6</sup> In other cases, there is some doubt as to the exact nature of the land, owing to the mixture of odal, earldom and church lands in the townships where the chapels stood, and only in very few instances were chapels certainly erected on bishopric lands.

The second feature is the peculiar distribution of these chapels. This distribution will be shown presently in detail, but its general character may be gathered from two passages in the old *Statistical Account*. In his description of Orphir, the parish minister states, 'Roman chapels are to be met with in every district of this parish.' And it may be mentioned here that the specific and almost technical use of the term 'district' in connection with parochial affairs is illustrated in every book of kirk-session records, as will be realised better later.

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<sup>4</sup> *Records of the Earldom of Orkney*, No. cxxix.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* No. xviii. This was probably the chapel of Kirkness in Sandwick. In 1438 in the record of certain proceedings taken some unspecified number of years previously, John of Kirkness (alive evidently in 1438) is described as 'then lawman of Orkney,' implying that for some reason he had vacated the office. We also know that about 1421 the lawman of the plundered chapel was removed from office and William Thorgilson appointed instead, and further, that the former had a kinsman, John of Baddy. As 'Baddy' was tacksman of the links of Sandwick in 1492 and the name is not found elsewhere, and as the site of the chapel of Kirkness is right among the foundations of other buildings forming the House of Kirkness, it seems likely that John of Kirkness was the dispossessed lawman in question.

<sup>6</sup> In a few cases these lands had been 'conquest' by Earl William Sinclair between 1434 and 1471, but were odal previously.

[93] Still more significant is this quotation from the report of Mr. George Low, minister of Harray and Birsay: 'Remains of popish chapels are many, because every eyrsland of 18 pennyland had one for matins and vespers, but now all are in ruins.'<sup>7</sup>

It is this last clue that led step by step to the elucidation of the relationship between the chapels and the districts or divisions of the parishes, and though the discovery of the existence of *burial districts* actually come somewhat late in the inquiry, the whole question will be illuminated most clearly by dealing with them now.

#### THE BURIAL DISTRICTS.

A generation or two ago invitations to an Orkney funeral were issued as a matter of undeviating routine to all the neighbours living in the same district as the deceased. Relatives from a distance might of course be included, but otherwise the company was limited to the inhabitants of that district, who all made a point of attending. So much is remembered by the older people probably in every parish. In most parishes the precise districts are still known to a few, and in at least one parish the actual custom still persists.

But a few inheritors of ancient lore will tell one more than that. They say that at one time attendance at a funeral was compulsory for the inhabitants of the district, and they quote the specific case of a death from infectious disease, when people shrank from performing this duty but were compelled to do it.

And this is proved by a couple of entries in the Orphir kirk session records under the year 1715. On January 2nd a man in the township of Kirbister was cited to appear before the session because he 'had not laid down the burial warning and had not sent the same to Tuskerabist (another "town") which occasioned few to be present for carrying the corps of the deceased Jenet Gune to her burial place, and those that came were but weak boyes.' On June 17 the session, after considering the case, decreed that thereafter the relatives of the defunct should send word to the elder of the bounds telling him the time of the funeral (when obviously the duty fell on him of summoning all within his bounds). And it may be added that other entries [94] show that Kirbister and Tuskerbister formed one of the parish 'districts' or 'quarters.'

So much light can be thrown on the old ecclesiastical and social constitution of Orkney from a study of these burial districts in connection with the chapels that it seems well worth while dealing with the ascertainable facts parish by parish, in every case where a parish has been at all thoroughly examined. But first, to make clear the bearing of the data, a few facts of general import may be stated.

1. In the parishes of Harray, Birsay, St. Andrews, Rendall, and Firth (these for certain, and there may be others) the old burial districts are still remembered to-day under the names of 'erselands' or 'urslands.' In Harray and part of Birsay the 'erselands' are actually 18 penny lands; and we have already seen that there was traditionally a chapel for each 'eyrsland of 18 penny lands.'

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<sup>7</sup> In connection with this may be quoted this passage from a report on the island of Unst in Shetland given by the minister Low, and published in his *Tour*. 'There have been in the days of Popery no less than twenty-two chapels, the island being divided into twenty-two parts called Scathills (skatalds).'

2. We have also seen that in Orphir these burial districts were the elders' bounds, and further that there were chapels in every 'district.'
3. That, in certain cases at least, the elders were appointed for the urislands appears from several references. In the Holm Kirk-session Records, on January 19, 1701, it was decreed that money was to be uplifted for the seats in church by the elders 'in their several urislands and bounds.' And on Feb. 29, 1763, James Cromarty was nominated 'to supply the vacancy of an elder in the usland (sic) of Acrobister.' Again, in the account of a visitation of Westray by Bishop Mackenzie in 1678, occurs the passage; 'whereupon the Elders were ordained that each should bring the Inhabitants of his Urisland with him.'
4. Wallace, in describing the lawrightmen and their duties, says that they 'are commonly the Kirk Session Elders of the parish.' This from a parish minister is an authoritative statement, and its accuracy is proved by a comparison between lists of Sandwick lawrightmen and elders in the same year (1678), and of Deerness lawrightmen and elders in the years 1673 and 1680.

From these premises alone three conclusions already begin to emerge : That the burial districts being the elders' bounds were also the lawrightmen's districts. That there was at least one chapel in each of these districts. That in some parishes, anyhow, the districts were the urislands.

How far these conclusions are borne out when the islands are [95] examined parish by parish can only be seen by going into the parishes in some detail. To reproduce in a paper like this the full tabulated results would give it rather too much the instructive but depressing aspect of an income-tax return. One such fully detailed example may, however, serve to show the method in which the information has been arranged.

**Parish of Harray.** - Traditional 'erselands' or burial districts, with their chapels :

- I. (a) Knarston, 4½ penny land, Mirbister 3d. land = 7½d. land,  
(b) Garth 4½d., Corston 4d., Corrigall 2d. = 10½d.

According to some witnesses these are known to-day as separate erselands, but it will be seen that added together they form one true urisland of 18d. land, which no doubt came to be divided for convenience sake. At least one witness regarded them as a single erseland. One chapel, in Corston. Site plainly visible on top of a mound, which seems at least partly artificial. Foundations now flattened out into an irregular parallelogram lying east and west. Outside dimensions of this, 42 ft. by 24 ft.,<sup>8</sup> but these probably exceed considerably the real dimensions of the chapel. Tradition strong. Adjacent field called Kirkbrek. All Corston was odal land.

- II. Noltclet 4½d., How and Ramsgarth 4½d., Hunscarth 3d., Binbister 6d. = 18d., combined with Over Brough 9d. The only kirk in this erseland is the parish kirk in Overbrough.

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<sup>8</sup> The dimensions in the case of this and all the following chapels are only approximate. The foundations being in every instance grass-grown (save in the chapels of Thickbigging and Grimbister) one could only guess the inside lines of the walls, and this being so, it scarcely seemed worth while using a tape, and the measurements were simply obtained by pacing. They are, however, probably correct within a foot or two, and serve to give a good general idea of the size and proportion of these chapels.

Negative evidence of all witnesses strong that no other traditional site exists. Overbrough was all odal land.

III. Netherbrough 12d., Rusland 6d. = 18d. Two chapels.

IV. Grimeston 18d. One chapel, Marykirk in Isbister, on promontory running into loch. Foundations quite visible. Built either on top of or close beside an ancient broch. Lies east and west. Inside dimensions roughly about 30 feet by 15 feet, and [96] might be a few feet longer at west end. Possible chancel in addition, but indications are very vague. Anyhow it was a larger chapel than the average. All Isbister was odal land.

The erselands were clearly the four true urislands, with the odd half urisland thrown into one of them. They are exactly the same as the lawrikman divisions already deduced from independent evidence before this chapel investigation was begun.

There also seems to have been a chapel of the other sort. It is traditionally known as the 'Kirk of Cletton.' Reputed site is on a promontory on the loch shore quite away from all the inhabited townships. I found quantities of large stones clearly belonging to something more like a broch than a chapel, but a chapel may very well have existed there as well.

The other parishes examined may now be dealt with more briefly ; it being always understood, however, that each of them has been, so to speak, blue-booked in the same way.

**South Ronaldsay.** - This island (consisting of two parishes) was not personally visited. Inquiries were made by letter, but so far I have not got in touch with anyone who remembers the old burial districts. The divisions of the parishes and their proved connection with the lawrikmen were, however, dealt with previously.<sup>9</sup> We also know the nine chapels recorded in the Report of 1627, besides the two parish kirks.

Taking the North Parish first. In district I. was the chapel of St. Ola in North Widewall ; in II. were the two chapels of St. Colme in Hoxay and St. Margaret in the Hope ; in III. The chapel of St. Colme in Grimness, and in IV. the parish kirk in Paplay, besides the chapel of St. Ninian in Stows, which from its isolated position may perhaps have been one of the older type of chapels ; though according to the report it apparently had kirk lands attached. Anyhow, there were kirklands in Stows.

St. Ola was either on odal or 'pro rege'<sup>10</sup> land ; St. Margaret and St. Colme in Grimness were on odal land; and St. Colme in [97] Hoxay seems probably to have been on Kirkland. The parish kirk was either on odal or pro rege land.

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<sup>9</sup> Scot. Hist. Review for Oct. 1916, p58.

<sup>10</sup> The earldom estate consisted of 'bordlands,' 'pro rege,' and 'conquest' lands. The 'bordlands' were the remains of the original Norse earldom estate. They paid no *scat* and had never been *odal*. 'Conquest' were the *odal* lands acquired in the fifteenth century. 'Pro rege' presumably meant *odal* lands gradually acquired by the earls at intermediate dates. All three were strictly speaking 'pro rege' after their acquisition by the Crown in 1471, but the distinctions between them are always insisted on in the 1502-03 rental. The term 'auld earldom' covers bordlands and pro rege.

The South Parish had four divisions. In the district of Sandwick, etc., was the Rood Chapel of Sandwick. In Burwell, Windwick, etc., stood the two chapels of St. Andrew in Windwick and Our Lady in Halcro. In Isbister, etc., were the parish kirk at Burwick and the chapel of St. Colme, also in Burwick. In the fourth district of Gossigar, etc., no chapel was recorded, but there are two 'Kirkgeos' on the shore, which seem clearly to indicate a chapel which had vanished before 1627.

The Rood and St. Andrew's chapels were on odal lands, the parish kirk and St. Colme on 'auld earldom,' and Our Lady seems to have been on kirkland.

In every case where there were two chapels, or a kirk and a chapel, the district was unusually large, well over an urisland. It seems likely also that the three extra chapels (judging from the lands they stood on) may have been church foundations and not secular chapels of the usual type.

As the sites have not been visited, such foundations as may exist could not be measured, but the dimensions of Our Lady in Halcro are given by Petrie (quoted by Dryden) as 21 feet by 14 feet inside, with walls 2½ feet thick.

So far I have not been able to learn that the term 'ursland' is known in the island. The actual divisions, as given above, varied from 9d. land to 27d. land.

**Firth.** - There are four traditional 'erselands,' which consist respectively of 15d., 11d., 16½d., and 13½d., apparently a case of the term urisland being by analogy used of districts somewhat less than 18d. land.

1. In the first (beginning at the Rendall border) was the chapel of Redland, now altogether vanished.
2. In the second was the chapel of Burness. A fragment of the foundations can be seen on the side of a large mound covering a broch.
3. In the third stands the parish kirk, and also a very small ruinous building at Thickbigging in Finstown, said to be actually part of a surviving chapel, and traditionally called the 'Black Chapel.' The fragment is roughly built; it lies about E.S.E. by W.N.W. and measures 10 feet 6 inches across. Almost 8 feet 6 inches of the side walls remain, but at that point a wall has been built across it, and beyond this hardly anything remains.
4. In the fourth 'erseland' is the most interesting find of all. This is the chapel of Grimbister, a fast decaying little building, of which the west gable and most of the side walls still stand. If I [98] am right in thinking that a fragment of masonry marks a dividing wall between nave and chancel, the dimensions are: nave about 22 feet by 13 feet, chancel about 10 feet by 13 feet. The side walls were originally about 6 feet 6 inches high and are 3 feet thick. The chapel lies E. and W. Like the Black Chapel, it is a very rude piece of masonry.

All the sites were on odal land, with the possible exception of Burness. That township consisted of 3½d. odal and 2½d. pro rege.

There is one more chapel in this parish, though clearly of the older type - the traditional chapel on a little uninhabited holm in the loch of Wasdale. This was not visited.

Reliable data regarding the lawrikman divisions in the seventeenth century are lacking, but the known roithmen at the beginning of the sixteenth century fit the four erselands very strikingly.



**Rendall.** Here the three lawrikman divisions deduced from the assize lists<sup>11</sup> are actually the three traditional burial districts. They are much larger than urislands, running from 23d. up to 30d. lands, yet tradition remembers the term 'ursland' being applied to them. In each of the three there was one kirk or chapel. The district of North Side (to which, from its geographical situation, the isle of *Gairsay* must have been attached) had the chapel of St. Thomas near the Hall of Rendall. The foundations are well marked, they lie E. and W., and are close to a large broch. The total length is about 30 feet, including a nave of something under 21 feet, and a chancel of about 9 feet, with a wall between : width of nave about 11feet, and of chancel about 9 feet.

In the district of *Gorsness* stood the old parish church, and in the district of *Isbister*, etc., the site of St. Mary's Chapel is well marked. It lies E. and W. on top of a broch, and as the east end of the mound has been cut away, a section is displayed showing the interior of the broch with the chapel above it. This seems to have been about the usual width, but as the east end has gone, the length could not be told.

St. Thomas was on odal land, the parish church might have been on odal or pro rege, and St. Mary's was on pro rege.

There is also a tradition of a small chapel called the 'Kirk of Cot' in the isolated hillside township of Cottascarth. As this was kirkland it was very possibly a church foundation.

**Stenness.** Interesting and unusual conditions obtained here, and in regard to them I have been fortunate enough to have my own inquiries supplemented by a very thorough independent examination of all the available facts by the Rev. G. R. Murison, minister of Stenness. There were only two kirk sites in the whole parish known to tradition - the parish church in the township of Stenness and a chapel in the township of Ireland. "Nowhere else in the parish is there a relic or a popular belief in support of a theory of more than these two kirks," writes Mr. Murison. Though the chapel has now vanished, "a side of the building was clearly visible, running east and west, almost - along the burn which passes the Mill and the Hall of Ireland," Mr. Murison tells me, and he adds that one witness can remember when a gable was also standing. Furthermore, the cornyard of the hall was once known as the 'grave-yard,' and contained numerous flat stones under the earth, overgrown by the grass.'

Both this chapel and the parish kirk stood on what was originally odal land, the site of the kirk having been bequeathed to the church by 'ane uthale woman' (Rental of 1502-03).

It is equally certain that tradition knows of only two burial districts, one comprising the towns of Ireland, Ottergill, Clouston, and Onston (1½ urislands), and the other the rest of the parish (2 urislands), which correspond to these two sites.

The feature of the two sites and the two large districts will be seen presently in North Sandwich also, but what was quite peculiar to Stenness was the existence of two separate and contemporary parish bailies, the 'bailie of Stenness' and the 'bailie of Ireland.'<sup>12</sup> It seems difficult not to associate this with the existence of a district entirely odal, having a private chapel, and a district mostly bishopric or kirkland possessing the parish church. There is no evidence regarding lawrikman districts, apart from this ; and there is no reliable tradition of the use of the term ' urisland ' for burial district in Stenness.

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<sup>11</sup> Scottish Historical Review for October, 1916, p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> Stenness Kirk-session Records.

**North Sandwick.** The conditions here were like those in Stenness, except that there is no sign of two bailies. There are only two kirk sites known, the parish kirk in North Dyke and the chapel of Kirkness, the burial districts were two areas of wide extent corresponding to these, and - in this case - these two districts are definitely the same as the known lawrikman districts in 1618.

Though both in North and South Sandwick exceptionally good, [100] traditional evidence was available, no trace can be found of any use of the word urisland. And this is not surprising, for the two districts of North Sandwick consisted, one of six urislands odd (most of them of very low value), and the other of about two ; while those in South Sandwick were in no case less than two urislands.

The foundations of the chapel of Kirkness are to be seen on a mound apparently covering some prehistoric buildings. They lie E. and W., and seem to include both a nave and a chancel. Both are about 11 feet wide ; the nave seems about 21 to 23 feet long, and the chancel about 9 feet.

The chapel stood on odal land, but North Dyke contained so many varieties that it is difficult to form any opinion regarding the parish kirk. Apparently it was not on bishopric or kirklands, but there is one striking fact which seems to connect its district peculiarly with the Church. The teinds of the whole of the district - and of no lands outside it - formed the endowment of the 'stouk' or Prebendary of St. Lawrence. The parish kirk itself, it may be added, had no connection with this prebendary, being dedicated to St. Peter. There is no other instance, so far as I know, of one of these districts being treated as a unit for any kind of ecclesiastical purpose - unless the separate bailie in Stenness comes under that head.

**South Sandwick.** The evidence here is very contradictory. We have two lawrikman 'quarters' in 1618, three large traditional burial districts, and five known chapel sites, so distributed as to suggest as many districts at one time ; and that is all it is safe to say.

The five sites are at Tenston, Lyking, Voy, Yesnabie, and Skail. Tenston and Lyking were chapels of the average smaller size, about 20 feet by 10 or 12 ; while Voy seems to have been a somewhat larger building. Tenston and Voy were on odal land, and Lyking apparently on bordland.

Of the other two chapels, one at Skail, close beside Skail House, has vanished entirely, but it is on record in 1679 when a circuit court was held in it.<sup>13</sup> It stands on bishopric land, a most unusual feature in these chapels. The last is the chapel of Yesnabie, referred to in the account of Sandwick by the Rev. Charles Clouston. I did not visit this site. It was on odal land.

**Orphir.** The Kirk-session Records, taken in conjunction with [101] traditional evidence, show six districts :

- I. Tuskerbister and Kirbister (12d.) ;
- II. Groundwater and Hobbister (15d.);
- III. Swanbister and Smoogro (12d.) ;
- IV. Bu of Orphir and Threepenny land of Orphir (12d.) ;
- V. Midland and Houton (12d.) ;
- VI. Petertown and Clestrain (11½d.).

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<sup>13</sup> Deed in Kirkwall Records Room.

The kirk and chapel sites are these :

In district I.

(a) Marykirk in Tuskerbister. This was a very small building about 11 to 12 feet long by 8 to 9 feet wide, lying almost due E. and W., and close to the old site of the houses of Oback.

(b) 'The Kirk o' Lian' in Kirbister, a vanished site, but remembered by tradition. The stones and bones of the graveyard were removed within living memory, and there is a very precise story of one large stone which used to be in the 'chancel' of the kirk, and which had two footprints in which the clergyman is said to have planted his feet when officiating.

In district II. was the now vanished chapel of Groundwater, and

In district III. was the chapel of Swanbister, the foundations of which are just visible.

In district IV. was the parish church on auld earldom land.

In V. were two chapels :

(a) The Kirk o' Myre' at Myre in Midland. It was apparently on top of other foundations, and from the little that can be seen seems to have been very small, about 15 or 16 feet by 9. It lies E. and W, and was on auld earldom land.

(b) Chapel of Houton, known as the 'Kirkhouse.' It also was apparently very small, but the traces are extremely indistinct. It probably stood on that part of Houton which was odal land.

In VI. was the chapel of Orakirk in Petertown, which stood on auld earldom land. The site can only just be distinguished.

There was also a chapel on the small island of Cava.

The chief features in this parish are the apparently small size of the districts as measured in pennylands, and the fact that in two of these seemingly small districts there were two chapels. The Orphir pennylands, however, contained a quite unusual number of merklands in them, and so these districts were actually of greater value at one time than the average urislands elsewhere. Also, it will be noticed that in the two districts which have two chapels each, one at least of these chapels was extremely small ; while in No. I. district the two towns forming it are separated by nearly two miles of moor.

There is no recollection of the term urisland in the parish, and no evidence as to lawrikman divisions.

**Deerness.** - [102] This parish I have not visited personally, but Mr. Magnus Spence has most kindly - and very thoroughly - collected all the available information for me. No one is so well qualified to deal with Deerness, and his researches are extremely unlikely to leave much of an aftermath.

The circumstances here are exceptional and significant. There were six urislands (true urislands and also traditionally known as 'Yureslands') to which the lawrikmen in the seventeenth century were allotted and the deacons to-day are likewise appointed, while the roithmen about 1500 fit them very strikingly. No parish, in fact, has more continuously and better defined districts. And yet there seem as definitely to have been only three kirk or chapel

sites, apart from the remote dedications on the Brough of Deerness and the little isle of Cornholm. These three are :

- (1) The parish kirk ;
- (2) the chapel at Kirbister on the farm called 'Bishops';
- (3) a chapel at Newark (anciently the 'town' of Meal).

Equally exceptional is the fact that every one of these three stands on bishopric land, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that these two exceptional features are closely related to one another, and also to a third feature, namely, that a large part of Deerness consisted of bishopric land.

There are a few more parishes which have been by no means thoroughly investigated, but of whose chapels or districts enough is known to justify a brief note regarding them.

*St. Andrews.*— Here the five lawrikman districts are definitely known.<sup>14</sup>

- I. In the district of Campston, Oversanday, and Stembister was the chapel of St. Peter in Campston.
- II. In Essenquoy and Yenstay was the chapel of Essenquoy.
- III. In Tankerness, Linksness, Whitclet, and Fea was the parish kirk.
- IV. In Tolhop was the chapel of St. Ninian.
- V. In Sabay and Foubister there is a place on the shore known as ' Chapel Taing,' pointing to a vanished chapel there.

Of these, the chapels of St. Ninian and St. Peter were in use at the end of the seventeenth century for the holding of bailie courts.

The term 'urislands' was applied to these districts in one bailie court record, and is traditionally remembered in connection with burial districts. Not one was an actual 18d. land; some were larger and some smaller, yet that was much about their average size.

*Birsay.*— In this, the largest, parish there seem to have been [103] seven burial districts. The two large districts of North Side and South Side appear to have had only the parish kirk between them (Birsay, it may be recalled, was once the episcopal see), and all Marwick had only one chapel. These were the regions of small and crowded urislands.<sup>15</sup> There was a fourth straggling district of less than an urisland in value, with the chapel of Hundland in it, and another isolated chapel on the burn of Kirkgeo amid the moors beyond the Hillside - a curious, lonely site, and yet with a traditional kirkyard hard by. Even more isolated and deeply embedded in the moorland was the chapel on the burn of Etheriegeo, between this straggling district and the first houses of Evie, but far removed from both.

And then there seem to have been three true urislands, one containing the chapel of Kirbister, another the chapel of Ingsay, and the third two chapels, one in Beaquoy and the other in Greenay. So that the tradition of a chapel in every eyrslan of 18d. land in this parish was only partially correct. These Birsay burial districts, however, whatever their size, are traditionally

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<sup>14</sup> See *Scot. Hist. Review*, Oct. 1916, p. 53.

<sup>15</sup> See *Scot. Hist. Review*, Oct 1916, p. 55.

remembered as 'erselands,' so that if Mr. Low had not been so careful to mention that they contained 18 pennylands, he would have been right enough.

In addition to these eyrsland and moorland chapels, there is in Birsay the well-known chapel on the uninhabited tidal islet of the Brough.

*Evie.* — Only three sites are known to map or tradition in this parish. On the shore stood the old parish kirk of St. Nicolas, upon the farm of Orquil, behind the present village of Evie.

Further north along the shore in the district of Costa was the chapel of St. Peter, or 'Peterkirk' as it is known to-day. The foundations of the east end can just be seen on top of a large broch. They measure 15 feet across, outside, indicating an inside width of 9 to 10 feet, but the ruinous walls of a modern enclosure have obliterated all the rest. St. Peter's stood apparently on the odal lands once known as Pow, while the four pennylands of Orquil can be identified as an early bequest to the Church by the pious odaller Gudbrand.

The third site is the remote chapel of St. Mary far up the burn of Woodwick, hidden in the moorland some way beyond the limits of cultivation, and yet traditionally endowed with a burial ground. It seems to be known to few in the parish, and though the site is clearly visible, nothing of the foundations can now be [104] traced. In the O.S. map it is styled 'The Kirk of Norrisdale,' but the correct local pronunciation is 'Norrensdale.' Undoubtedly it must have been connected with the chaplainry of Our Lady of Woodwick, an endowment which included most of the township of Woodwick.

The coincidence of the three chapels of Kirkgeo and Etheriegeo in Birsay and St. Mary in Evie, all erected by their pious founders on lonely moorland sites far up the burns that descend from this particular group of hills, is very curious and noteworthy. One seems to be here on the scent of something very different from a system of district chapels. The proximity of the three to the episcopal see at Birsay was pointed out to me by Dr. Craven. Possibly this may give a clue, and possibly also this wide and lonely region of moors may at one time have been credited with inhabitants more sinister than grouse and curlew.

As yet I have no information as to the districts of Evie, but it would seem pretty certain that only St. Nicolas and St. Peter can have been district kirks.

*Stromness.* — Only three lawrikman divisions are enumerated in 1618, but there were certainly five kirk sites, one in Cairston, one in each of the quite separate districts of Kirbister and Quholm (which together formed a division), and two in the extensive district of Inner and Outer Stromness - a district containing four urislands. Both here and in South Sandwick the chapels correspond so well with the natural divisions of the parish that they probably record the original system of districts, several of which subsequently became merged into their neighbours. Indeed, one would naturally expect to find a few such changes here and there in the course of centuries.

*North Ronaldsay.* — This island is divided into three parts by two long turf dykes running right across it, and the tradition is that a one-time owner divided it thus between his three sons. The tradition seems rather like an obvious popular explanation of something that calls for a story, but there the dykes still are (or bits of them, anyhow), and they are shown as entire in Mackenzie's charts. In the Ordnance maps three sites are given : The parish kirk of St. Ola (thus designated in Blaeu's Atlas) ; the chapel, evidently of St. Bride, at Bridesness ; and a chapel near the loch of Garsow ; and these three stood one in each of the three divisions.

[105] TWO GENERAL FEATURES.

To conclude this detailed survey of the parishes and their chapels, two general features may be noted.

In the first place, a tradition of a burial ground is generally associated with the chapel sites, and in a number of cases bones and what are said to have been stone coffins or tomb-stones have actually been found. This at once suggests the obvious origin of the burial districts. No doubt at one time each district buried its dead beside its local chapel, and then when the Church constrained or induced the people to bury in the parish graveyard, the duty of carrying the corpse thither was laid upon the inhabitants of the chapel district it came from. In fact, the same company simply had to make a longer journey.

The second feature is the proximity of almost all of these chapels to a broch or other prehistoric building of stone. Allowing for the complete disappearance of many such prehistoric habitations, it is quite possible that there are no exceptions. Not infrequently the chapels are actually erected right on top of them. Personally, I cannot doubt that this was simply for the utilitarian purpose of securing a handy quarry. Indeed, I believe that in this class of chapel there was rarely any other reason for the choice of a site.

A striking illustration is St. Thomas's Chapel near the Hall of Rendall, which was evidently built by the ancient owners of the Hall ; but instead of erecting it close to their house they built it three or four hundred yards away, beside a large broch, a senseless arrangement were it not for the excellent quarry they found there ready to their hands.

Sometimes, it is true, a chapel will be close beside what was once an important house, and very frequently it will be on the sea or loch shore, and these situations naturally suggest other reasons for the choice of site. But then again the chapels are often very far from the shore, and a field or two away from any dwelling. The one thing they did keep near was a ready-made quarry in the shape of a mass of masonry bequeathed to the wood and steel loving Northman by the vanished race of stone-hewers.

J. Storer Clouston.

*(To be continued.)*

## The Old Chapels of Orkney II<sup>16</sup>

[243] Only after the first part of this paper<sup>17</sup> had gone to press did its writer turn to a source of information he ought to have thought of before, and consult the New Statistical Account (published in 1842). Two interesting and important additions to the existing literature on the subject came to light thereby. One, relating to the parish of St. Andrews, gives a second bit of direct evidence proving the relationship of chapels to urislands.

‘In different parts of the parish,’ says the minister, ‘are to be found ruins, now almost levelled with the ground, which are called chapels. We could particularise at least four, each in a separate division of the parish, called an ursland, and situated near, or in the midst of a considerable extent of good ground.’

We have thus in the parish of St. Andrews direct positive proof that the lawrikmen were appointed to the urislands and that the chapels stood each in an urisland, and tradition remembers the burial districts under the name of urslands ; and we further know their exact extent and that they were only approximately true urislands, and did not actually each contain 18 pennylands.

As the parish kirk is separately dealt with in the account, this passage also confirms my conjecture as to the existence of a fourth chapel (that of Sabay, now only indicated by the place-name (‘Chapel Taing’)).

The other fresh information is contained in the account of Lady Parish, in Sanday, and gives a number of interesting facts. Most of them must be left till the North Isles can be overtaken, but the following passage may be quoted for its general import, and for its author’s anticipation of my own views on the reasons for the choice of chapel sites :

‘They (the chapels) are all surrounded by, or in the immediate vicinity of, good land, and generally near a well or fresh water loch. None of them are found on the moor or hill ground.

[224] Several have been built close by the ruins of other buildings; such situations may have been chosen for the ready access to stones which they afford, ... ‘

Coming to the general conclusions to be drawn from this survey of the parishes over the greater part of Orkney, there can be no doubt now that the chapel districts, burial districts, and *lawrikman* or *roithman* districts were identical, and that they were based, as a rule anyhow, on the *urisland*

But there seems to be another conclusion which follows just as certainly from the various facts, and this is that though the chapels were secular in their origin, and remained for the most part secular, yet they must have been used for public worship by the inhabitants of the district, and in all probability were intended for that purpose. Their very distribution seems to make this conclusion unavoidable. The presence of the burial-grounds confirms it. The fact that only in a very few cases is a chapel found in the same district as the parish kirk is significant. And, finally, we have a few surviving pieces of tradition which agree in regarding the ancient chapels as places of public worship for the neighbourhood.

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<sup>16</sup> Clouston, J.S. “The Old Chapels of Orkney, II.” S.H.R. xv. No.58 (Jan., 1918), pp. 224-240.

<sup>17</sup> See S.H.R., xv., 89.

There is, for instance, the statement of Low, already quoted, regarding their use for matins and vespers. We have also seen the tradition of the Kirk of Lian and its clergyman. And then there is a quaint tradition associated with the chapel of Beaquoy, in Birsay. They say that the 'priest' (that is what they still call him) occupied his leisure time in making 'caisies,' or straw baskets. He made a caisie, in fact, every day of the week, except Sunday. But he was a little absent-minded, and one day when busy at his usual employment he was astonished to see the people trooping towards the chapel. Hurriedly he counted his caisies - and found he was making his seventh !

Since writing these lines, yet another piece of evidence has come to light in the account of Lady Parish alluded to above. The writer states that 'none of these chapels have exceeded twelve feet in length, and from eight to nine in breadth,' dimensions much below the ordinary size of chapel on the mainland. Further, he names seven of these chapels, and seems to indicate that there were others still. Even seven (besides the parish kirk) is a very large number for a parish the size of Lady, and the conclusion seems obvious that the small dimensions were due to the large supply of kirks in proportion to the population, and that they were therefore built for public worship. And it is noteworthy [225] that the same feature of numerous chapels, of a very small size in the case of two out of the only three that can now be measured, has already been seen in Orphir.

A system, therefore, of privately built and owned chapels, each serving as the little church for the people of a small district, was then the old order of things in Orkney.

#### THE ORIGIN OF THE CHAPEL SYSTEM

When we seek for analogies to guide us in dealing with the unwritten constitutional and ecclesiastical history of Orkney, we turn naturally to two places : to the old mother country of Norway, and to the sister colony of Iceland. And, different as they were in certain features of their constitutions, yet in church matters both Norway and Iceland show us essentially the same design, so that it may safely be taken that this design will be found in the Orkneys likewise.

In Norway the state of the case about the year 1191 is very explicitly described in this passage from *King Sverri's Saga* (chap. 117): 'About this time much discussion arose between King Sverri and the Archbishop . . . one subject of dispute between them was the old law and practice by which the King and the bonder should build churches, if they wished, at their own home steads and their own cost, and should themselves have control of the churches and appoint priests thereto. But the Archbishop claimed rule and authority in each church as soon as it was consecrated, and over all those whom he permitted to officiate there.' The dispute terminated in the Archbishop leaving the town 'in the utmost haste,' and fleeing to Denmark, where he abode in comfort for a long time.' Many a medieval monarch must have envied King Sverri his happy knack of handling the clergy.

It is clear, then, that in Norway at the end of the twelfth century the King and the landowners were still in the saddle, where they had been set 'by old law and practice.' In Iceland we find the same system of the greater lay landowners building and continuing to control the churches, except that here the spiritual power eventually prevailed and secured not only the kirks, but the valuable estates with which they were endowed. In Iceland we also have some glimpses of the actual process of church building, which show how the laity were egged on by the early clerics to take the very steps which afterwards gave the Church so much leeway to make up.

[226] Christianity crossed the North Atlantic and reached that sub-arctic island in the last years of the tenth century. After a brief conflict, the efforts of a few zealous missionaries conquered the commonwealth completely, and straightway the chieftains, who had hitherto been the priests and upholders of the heathen temples, took to church-building with the perfervid energy of proselytes. In this pious work they were given a very remarkable word of encouragement, for we read in *Eyrbyggja Saga*, 'This promise by the clergy made men very eager in church-building, (namely) that a man should have room in the Kingdom of Heaven for as many men as could stand in the church he had built.'

Thus inspired, they built so diligently that the Saga goes on to inform us, 'but there were no priests to perform hours at the churches, though they were built, for there were few in Iceland at that time.' In short, Christianity had arrived ahead of the clergy, and in consequence the churches were for a long time afterwards run very much as the old temples used to be, simply by the chief lay families.

Returning to Orkney, we know that Christianity was only introduced there in the year 1000 ; that the first bishop who apparently resided in the islands, certainly the first to be acknowledged by the chapter, only began his episcopate in the twelfth century; and that the influence of the Church and its effect on everyday affairs must have been small down to the thirteenth century, since the very detailed Saga which covers the whole twelfth century hardly mentions it as a factor. Yet before the end of that century Orkney had produced two lay saints.

A system of chapels founded and maintained by the leading laymen seems therefore to be the natural result of these conditions, exactly as it was in Norway and Iceland, and that it actually was the result is abundantly clear from the facts we have just surveyed.

#### GROWTH OF AN ECCLESIASTICAL SYSTEM

How the parish kirks arose and gradually supplanted the chapels, and the bishop obtained control of these and of all the clergy, is a problem on which the available data certainly do not throw enough light to enable one to give any sort of assured, much less dogmatic, answer. At the same time, they do give certain hints and suggestions which are well worth making some [227] brief reference to, if only to tempt some better qualified authority into the field. The following very tentative deductions apply necessarily only to the Mainland and South Ronaldsay, since for them alone any sufficient data are as yet available.

One factor that seems of decided importance is the existence of large bishopric estates in certain parishes at an early date. The two early rentals give one an idea of where these lay, simply through their not referring to them at all. In the case of most bishopric land the complaint is made that the scatts or duties were included in the earl's or king's 'auld rental,' and have been wrongfully withheld by the bishop and the 'kirkmen.' The 1492 rental is particularly specific on this question, giving lists of such lands at the end of each parish entry. Now, no such claim is ever made with regard to the large bishopric estates in Birsay and in the eastern half of St. Ola, so one may take it that these were original endowments first of the bishopric when established at Birsay and then at Kirkwall.

These parishes would naturally from the beginning be centres of strong Church influence, and in St. Ola I have so far found no trace of any secular chapels, while in Birsay a very large tract of country lay under the parish kirk, with chapels dotted only in the outlying districts.

In Evie and Deerness there were also large bishopric estates, and though the scatts of these were claimed by the king, lands so extensive must have taken a long time to accumulate, and the influence of the Church must probably be dated as early. In both cases we have seen that there were few chapel sites, and the peculiar connection of each site with bishopric land has been noted in Deerness.

The next circumstance that seems significant is the conjunction from the earliest known date (before the Reformation) of another parish with each of these (except St. Ola) to form a charge. Birsay had Harray, Evie had Rendall, and Deerness had St. Andrews. The suggestion which I venture to make is that the Church was content to extend her influence gradually and as opportunity arose into these conjoined parishes, finding perhaps a permanent habitation in one of the chapels at a comparatively late date.

In the mainland there were two other such conjoined charges, Stenness with Orphir, and Sandwick (North and South) with Stromness. Here again a peculiarity has already been noted in one parish of each of these couples : the large parish kirk districts [228] in both Stenness and North Sandwick, with the feature of the separate bailie in one case and the prebendary in the other. In both cases there is also another rather singular feature. In the other half of the parish - the chapel half - two of the largest landowning and most influential of the old native families had their seats; two such families in each instance, both owing allegiance, as it were, to the one chapel. Now, it seems at least very probable that in both cases these were two branches of some great family of 'gœðings' (chieftains holding office and rank under the earl), and it may well be that the relationship of the early bishops William and Bjarni, to so many of these Orkney chieftains was used by them to obtain a Church establishment in the other half of the parish. Anyhow we have a certain conjuncture of circumstances which will at least bear that as a possible interpretation.

In South Ronaldsay we find the two parishes conjoined with the island parish of Burray, and only in two instances (apart from St. Ola, which included Kirkwall and its cathedral) did single parishes form a charge - Holm and Firth. There are no data for any explanation of these ; nor, indeed, would one be justified in laying too much stress on any of the explanations I have attempted. They are only suggestions which can but claim to put the facts, so far as they are known, into some sort of relationship to one another.

Another little gleam of light (though it does not illumine very widely) is thrown by the two legacies of the lands on which the kirks of Evie and Stenness stood. In both these cases we know that the lands in question were odal, and yet that the churches on them actually were the parish kirks when the bequests were made, for they were given to 'The Kirk of Evie' and 'The Crose Kirk in Stanehou' respectively, and in each case the scatts were subsequently withheld by the parish vicar. And we can also get some rough idea of the dates at which these gifts were given. The Rental of 1502-03, in which both are recorded, states that the Evie land was bequeathed by 'Johne of Guendaleis grandsire (great grandfather) callit Guidbrand,' which puts the date as round about 1400 ; while in the Stenness case the fact that the benefactress was merely styled 'ane uthale woman' shows that she had lived and died so long previously that her name was no longer remembered by all and sundry. And this, so far as it goes, is consistent with the belief that those were two parishes in which the Church had established herself at an early date. [229]

## THE AGE OF THE PARISHES

All this implies that the parishes existed before there was any ecclesiastical system, and there is one pretty conclusive piece of evidence which proves that, though the chapels were antecedent to the ecclesiastical parishes, yet parishes as geographical units must have been older even than the districts. Again and again when we pass from one parish into another we pass likewise from one system of division into another. Going, for instance, from Firth with its quasi-urislands we come into Harray with its true urislands. Crossing from thence to Stenness we find two large divisions, while going over the Orphir border we get six small 'quarters,' and thus it always is as one passes from parish to parish. Obviously, therefore, parish boundaries existed before the districts were definitely arranged.

And this is backed by an argument from the true technical urislands, the eighteen pennylands laid out for the gathering of scatt. These fit into the parishes in such a way that it seems practically certain that the parishes were designed at least as early as scatt was laid upon the islands, and that takes one to the very beginnings of the Norse earldom.

What, then, were the parishes originally? The view that they were the units of representation when the early island lawthing was created has been treated in some detail in another essay on this subject,<sup>18</sup> and all the facts we have just reviewed go far to show that they can have been nothing else.

## THE CHAPEL DISTRICTS

We have already seen that the provision of those early secular chapels was far from haphazard. They were attached to definite districts, and on the very interesting question of the origin and exact significance of these districts a few conclusions can be pretty safely drawn.

It has been shown that they were natural geographical areas as a general rule ; yet their standard size in each parish and the frequent coincidence of this standard with the urisland of the scatt gatherer show that they must certainly have passed through the hands of some constitution-reforming ruler. No natural process could have given such results, and very possibly one passage in the *Orkneyinga Saga* may give the clue to the actual man.

[230] In chapter 55, under the date 1116-26, we learn that Earl Hakon Paulson 'set up in Orkney new laws (tog) which pleased the bonder much better than those which had been before.' The term tog meant 'law' in the wide sense, and was frequently used for 'constitution,' and it seems much more likely that this was its sense here, for all the evidence and probabilities are against the supposition that any change in the Orkney laws, sweeping enough to justify the above passage, took place at any time.

Further, we know that in parish after parish the districts were made identical with the urislands, and it is quite certain that the word 'urisland' was first used as a technical term for a given taxable area, and was then borrowed and applied to the district, simply as a district, which happened to coincide with it.

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<sup>18</sup> Introduction to *Records of the Earldom of Orkney*, Scot. Hist. Soc.

Now, a study of the urislands, quite apart from their connection with these districts, enforces the same geographical conclusion with regard to them. So long as it was not too glaringly inconsistent with equity, an eyrir, or ounce of silver, seems to have been laid on each group of adjacent townships (or on one town if it were large enough) simply for convenience sake. For such a plan would greatly simplify the work of assessment. And one proof that this actually was the case is to be seen in the subsequent wide difference in value between two urislands of the same type and in the selfsame parish ; a difference often far too great to be accounted for on the theory of improvements effected in one of the cases by the primitive methods of agriculture then in use.

The probable root of the connection between districts and urislands would then seem to be thus : That when it came to defining the districts systematically the urislands (being themselves in so many cases natural areas) were taken as the standard wherever it was possible. Hence in numerous parishes they were identical, in others where the districts approximated more or less to urislands they took the name, and to-day the term urisland is only remembered as a district, and its original significance as an area of taxation has long since been absolutely forgotten.

All this throws a new light on that passage in *Hakon's Saga* often quoted as being the only early allusion to the Orkney urislands, a light which is reflected back on to the problem of the districts. The passage occurs in chapter 328, describing the king's winter in Orkney after the Largs expedition, and runs :

'King Hakon then made a list of the urislands (eyris-tonð) for his lendirmen and company chiefs for their support, to keep the bands that were with them, and so with all the urislands.' And [231] then a few lines later : 'but the other lendirmen and ship captains were in the country on those urislands which were allotted to them.'

It seems much more probable that the allusion is to the urislands as districts than to the urislands as taxable areas. For one thing the King of Norway had nothing to do with the minutiae of the Orkney fiscal arrangements, and for another there seems more practical point in his billeting his men on the districts.

That these districts were thus defined for the purpose of readjusting the representation of the bonder at the Lawthing and other chief courts seems to follow from their known connection with the lawrikmen or roithmen in subsequent centuries. And from the widely varying number of districts in different parishes we may conclude that in all probability the new system provided for only so many representatives per parish attending the head thing at any one time, however many or however few the districts in it were.

Finally, looking to the evidence of the roithmen's names in the extant decrees at the beginning of the sixteenth century, it would seem as though the theory of parish representation gradually fell into desuetude, and that though district representation still continued, only such districts as had odallers wealthy enough to leave home and constantly attend 'ogangs' and courts far and near actually contributed a roithman (except possibly to local courts).

This at least seems the likeliest interpretation of the course of events from the origin of districts to the final decay of the old constitution.

One thing more we can safely add. These little kirks were obviously built by the one man recognised as the proper person to build a kirk for the neighbourhood. And in a society based entirely on land this would obviously be the greatest landowner. But each odaller was but a

sharer in the lands and redemption rights of his kin, and we know enough about the odal family estates in later times to be certain that in those earlier and palmier days the estate of a greater family would absorb the best part of an urisland (often far more than that). The districts may thus be looked upon as originally groups of landowning kinsmen, or as the spheres of influence of the *stormenn* or magnates - the heads of houses.

From this it follows that districts of a sort - groups of odal kinsmen roughly expressed in land - must have existed from the very beginning, and what Earl Hakon (if it were he) presumably [232] did was to redress to some extent inequalities in these, and distribute the legislative and judicial power among a greater number of the 'best' families (for we find it was c the best landed men' who represented these districts in later records). And in order to understand the popularity of such a measure it must be remembered that a 'best' family in that old Norse society included divers quite small portioners, not to speak of well-descended, impecunious gentlemen with remote redemption rights. It was, in fact, a miniature clan.

Following this clue of spheres of family influence, it seems probable that the larger districts found here and there, where one kirk supplied a considerably wider area than usual, were originally associated with outstanding chieftains. And as some confirmation of this conjecture, we actually find that as late as the end of the Norse regime every chapel or kirk in any of these extra large districts, which can be directly connected with a known family, was still associated with one of the most important and wide-acred surviving in Orkney. The instances I have in mind are the chapels of Ireland, Kirkness, and St. Thomas in Rendall, and the kirk of Paplay. When it is remembered that such larger kirk-areas are only very occasionally met with, and that six out of the ten largest landowning families are found within the bounds of these four districts, this bit of direct evidence acquires some significance.

Of the foregoing conclusions some are frankly tentative - deductions that appear reasonable, given the facts available (which are few enough, but still are indubitable facts). But that the chapels had the same secular origin as the early churches of Norway and Iceland, and were, like them, mostly founded and maintained by the chief landowners, that the chapel districts were intimately connected with representation of the bonder at the Lawthing by those landowners, and that the districts were based, generally speaking, on the urislands ; all these conclusions seem inevitable on the evidence.

J. Storer Clouston.

[233]

## Old Kirks and Chapels in Orkney

O.S. = 6 inch to mile Ordnance Survey.

Stat. Acc. = *Old* Statistical Account.

b.g. = Burial Ground marked in O.S.

Comm.'s: Communicants in 1627.

### A. SOUTH ISLES.

*References.*

*Adjacent Place-Names.*

#### SOUTH RONALDSAY, NORTH PARISH.

*Parish Church.*

St. Peter's, East Side.

*Chapels.*

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|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. St. Colm in Hoxay.                 | O.S., Report 1627. |
| 2. St. Margaret, Ronaldsvoe.          | O.S., Report 1627. |
| 3. St. Colm, Grimness.                | O.S., Report 1627. |
| 4. St. Ola, Widewall, b.g.            | O.S., Report 1627. |
| 5. St. Ninian, Stows, East Side, b.g. | O.S., Report 1627. |

#### SOUTH RONALDSAY, SOUTH PARISH.

*Parish Church.*

St. Mary, Burwick.

*Chapels.*

- |                                |                      |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Rood, Sandwick, b.g.        | O.S., Report 1627.   |
| 2. St. Colm, Burwick, b.g.     | O.S., Report 1627.   |
| 3. Our Lady, Halcro, b.g.      | O.S., Report 1627.   |
| 4. St. Andrews, Windwick, b.g. | O.S., Report 1627. ' |

Total dispersed kirks = 10 (the two at Burwick being closely adjacent).

Communicants 1627, ' 5 or ? hundred.'

### SWONA.

*Chapel.*

- |                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1. St. Peter's. | O.S., Report 1627. |
|-----------------|--------------------|



*References.*

*Adjacent Place-Names.*

PENTLAND SKERRIES.

*Chapel.*

1. St. Peter's.	Report 1627.
-----------------	--------------

BURRAY.

*Parish Church.*

St. Lawrence.	O.S.
---------------	------

No chapels discoverable. Communicants 1627 = 100.

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FLOTTA.

*Parish Church.*

Dedication ? on Kirk Bay.	O.S.	Kirk Bay.
---------------------------	------	-----------

(The site of a chapel is marked on O.S., but so close to parish church as to suggest it was really the old parish kirk.)

WALLS.

*Parish Church.*

St. Columba, Osmond Wall.	O.S., Proc. of Soc.	Kirk Hope.
	Antiq., xxxii. 50.	

*Chapels.*

1. Red Kirk, in north of S. Walls.	O.S.	Burn of Redkirk.
2. Snelsetter.	Tradition only, see Moodie Book.	
3. Chapel at Brims, b.g.	O.S.	Kirkgeo.
4. Fara.	O.S.	Kirka Taing.

(St. John's at Seatter ? Was there an old dedication here ? The present dedication suggests it.)

Total kirks, 5 or 6. Comm.'s 1627=453.



*References.*

*Adjacent Place-Names.*

HOY.

Parish kirk, but no sign of chapels.

GRAEMSAY.

*Chapels.*

1. St. Colm's, on N.W. point.

O.S.

2. (St. Bride's) at Corrigall.

O.S.

Bride's Noust hence  
dedication inferred: site  
only given in O.S.).

B. MAINLAND.

ST. ANDREWS.

*Parish Church.*

St. Andrews, Tankerness.

*Chapels.*

1. Essenquoy.

Records of Earl of  
Orkney, p. 240.

2. St. Ninian, Tolhop.

O.S., St. Andrews  
Bailie Court Book  
(Kirkwall Record  
Room).

3. Sabay, site not given, inferred  
from place-name.

O.S., place-name only.

Chapel Taing,  
under house  
of Sabay.

4. St. Peter's Kirk, Campston.

O.S.

St. Peter's Pool.

(Total kirks, 5. Comm.'s 1627 = 325.)



*References.*

*Adjacent Place-Names.*

HOLM.

*Parish Church.*

St. Nicolas.

*Chapel.*

1. Lambholm.

O.S. Kirk Point.

2. St. Nicolas near Graemshall.

O.S.

(Comm.'s 1627 = 200.)

DEERNESS.

*Parish Church.*

Sandwick.

*Chapels.*

1. Brough of Durness.

O.S., many records.

2. Cornholm.

O.S.

3. Newark.

4. Kirbister.

(Comm.'s 1627 = 268.)

ST. OLA.

*Parish Church.*

St. Olaf and St. Magnus — no record of chapels.

ORPHIR.

*Parish Church.*

Bu of Orphir.

O.S., remains still here.

*Chapels.*

1. Orakirk.

O.S., I. Omand,

Orakirk.

Orkney Herald,

29th Aug., 1906.

2. Houton Head.

Omand (as above).

3. Bay of Myre.

Omand (as above).

4. Swanbistor, b.g.

O.S.



- |                               |   |           |
|-------------------------------|---|-----------|
| 5. Groundwater.               | O.S.  | Kirkshed. |
| 6. Oback in Tuskbister.       | Statistical Account and<br>present tradition. |           |
| 7. Cava, b.g.                 | Barry, 2nd edition,<br>p. 43                  |           |
| 8. Kirk o' Lian in Kirbister. |   |           |

STROMNESS.

*Parish Church.*

In Innertown. O.S., ruins still there.

*Chapels.*

- |                                  |                        |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Breckness, in Outertown, b.g. | O.S., Craven, ii. 166. |
| 2. St. Mary's, Quhome.           | O.S.                   |
| 3. Kirbister.                    | O.S.                   |
| 4. Bu of Cairston.               |                        |

(Total kirks, 4. Comm.'s 1627 =-480.)

SOUTH SANDWICK.

No Parish Church apart from that in North Sandwick.

*Chapels.*

- |                                |                       |           |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| 1. Voy, b.g.                   | O.S.                  |           |
| 2. Lyking, b.g.                | O.S.                  |           |
| 3. Tenston, St. Duthac's, b.g. | O.S., also on record. | Doehouse. |
| 4. Yesnabie, b.g.              | O.S.                  |           |
| 5. Skaill.                     | Craven, ii. 175.      |           |

NORTH SANDWICK.

*Parish Church.*

St. Peter's, North Dyke.

*Chapels.*

- |              |  |           |
|--------------|--|-----------|
| 1. Kirkness. | O.S., Ecclesiological<br>Notes on Man. | Kirkness. |
|--------------|--|-----------|

(Total kirks in Sandwick, 7. Comm.'s 1627 = 700.)



BIRSAY.

*Parish Church.*

Christ Kirk, Barony.

*Chapels.*

- |                      |                         |                  |
|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Marwick, b.g.     | O.S.                    |                  |
| 2. Ingsay.           | O.S.                    |                  |
| 3. Hundland.         | O.S.                    |                  |
| 4. Hillside.         | O.S.                    | Burn of Kirkgeo. |
| 5. Kirbister.        | O.S.                    |                  |
| 6. Beaquoy, b.g.     | O.S.                    |                  |
| 7. Greenay, b.g.     | O.S.                    |                  |
| 8. Chapel in Brough. | O.S., and many records. |                  |
| 9. Etheriegeo.       |                         |                  |

HARRAY.

*Parish Church.*

St. Michael's. Many records.

*Chapels.*

- |                           |      |           |
|---------------------------|------|-----------|
| 1. Mary Kirk, Rusland.    | O.S. | Kirkquoy. |
| 2. St. Mary's, Grimeston. | O.S. |           |
| 3. In Corston.            |      |           |
| 4. In Netherbrough.       |      |           |
| 5. Kirk of Cletton.       |      |           |

(Total kirks (apart from Brough), 15. Comm.'s 1627 (combined parish = 800.)

STENNESS.

*Parish Church.*

Cross Kirk, Stenness.

*Chapel.*

- |             |      |
|-------------|------|
| 1. Ireland. | O.S. |
|-------------|------|

(Comm.'s 1627 = 140.)



*References.*

*Adjacent Place-Names.*

FIRTH.

*Parish Church.*

*Chapels.*

- |  |                      |             |
|--|----------------------|-------------|
| 1. Burness.                            | O.S.                 |             |
| 2. Wasdale.                            | O.S.                 |             |
| 3. Redland.                            | Old Lore Miscellany, | Kirk Sheed. |
|  | vol. iii. p. 155.    |             |
| 4. Grimbister.                         |                      |             |
| 5. Black Chapel in Firth.              |                      |             |
| (Total kirks, 14. Comm.'s 1627 = 200.) |                      |             |

EVIE.

*Parish Church.*

St. Nicolas, in Stenso (or Garth). O.S.

*Chapels.*

- |                                   |      |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| 1. St. Peter's, Inner Costa, b.g. | O.S. |
| 2. Kirk of Norrensdale, Woodwick. | O.S. |
| (Comm.'s 1627 = 220.)             |      |

RENDALL.

*Parish Church.*

Gorsness. O.S.

*Chapels.*

- |                                 |      |
|---------------------------------|------|
| 1. St. Thomas, Hall of Rendall. | O.S. |
| 2. St. Mary, Isbister.          | O.S. |
| 3. The 'Kirk of Cot.'           |      |
| (Comm.'s 1627 = 180.)           |      |

## C. NORTH ISLES.

### *References.*

### *Adjacent Place-Names.*

### SHAPANSAY.

#### *Parish Church.*

Our Lady, Elwick.

O.S.

Kirk Banks.

#### *Chapels.*

1. Linton.

O.S.

Kirton, Kirkhill, Kirkiber.

2. Ettiesholm.

O.S., Stat. Account.

Kirkgeo.

(Comm.'s 1627 = 250. Old Stat. Ace. says, 'Several little chapels in various parts of the parish.')

### ROWSAY.

#### *Parish Church.*

In Outer Westness.

O.S., ruins still there.

#### *Chapels.*

1. Frotoft.

O.S.

Church Knowe.

2. Knarston.

O.S.

Kirk Noust, Kirkgeo.

3. Scockness.

O.S.

4. St. Colm's, Langskaill.

O.S.

5. Brettaness, Loch of Wasbister.

O.S.

6. Holm in Loch of Wasbister.

O.S.

7. Corse Kirk, Wasbister.

O.S.

(N.B.?Of these, No. 2 and No. 7 seem to have been the other two 'kirks of old' enumerated in the old report on Orkney Kirks (Craven, ii. 232), but presumably must be counted as 'chapels' in Wallace's computation, for he only gives thirty-one parish kirks, which means only one in Rowsay.

Nos. 5 and 6 are so close to 4 and 7 that they can scarcely

have been separate places of public worship. This would leave six such places in Rowsay.

*References.*

*Adjacent Place-Names.*

EGILSAY.

*Parish Church.*

St. Magnus Kirk.

WYRE.

*Chapel.*

I. Chapel of Wyre.

O.S., still there.

ENHALLOW.

*Chapel.*

1. Chapel of Monastery.

O.S., still there.

(Total kirks, Rowsay, Egilsay, and Wyre, 8. Comm.'s 1627 = 400.)

WESTRAY.

*Parish Churches.*

A. St. Mary, Pierowall.

O.S., ruins still there.

B. Cross, Tuquoy.

O.S.

*Chapel.*

1. Peterkirk, Rapness.

O.S.

Point of Peter-kirk.

PAPA WESTRAY.

*Parish Church.*

In Benorth the Yard. Still in use

(only instance apart from  
Cathedral).

*Chapel.*

1. St. Tredwall, Besouth the Yard. O.S., and many records.

(Total kirks, 5 (Westray and Papa). Comm.'s 1627 = 498 ; indicating about two or three lost chapels.)



*References.*

*Adjacent Place-Names.*

NORTH RONALDSAY.

*Parish Church.*

St. Ola, on present site.

O.S., Blaeu's Atlas  
(which gives the dedication.)

*Chapels.*

1. Bride's Kirk.

O.S.

Bridesness.

2. Chapel just east of Loch of  
Garsow.

O.S.

Kirk Taing, near lighthouse.

EDAY.

*Parish Church.*

Virgin Mary, East Side.

O.S., Stat. Acc.

Kirk Taing.  
Chapel Hill near by. (was  
there a chapel too?)

*Chapel.*

1. Hannah's Kirk, Greentoft.

O.S., Stat. Acc.

PHARAY.

*Chapel.*

1. Chapel on Pharay, b.g.

O.S., Stat. Acc. (which  
calls it a parish kirk).

STRONSAY.

*Parish Churches.*

A. St. Peter's, near Whitehall.

O.S.

B. Lay Kirk, near Rothiesholm, b.g.

O.S.

C. St. Nicolas Kirk at Holland.

O.S. (Dedication not  
given in O.S., but  
Blaeu's Atlas puts  
St. Nicolas Kirk on  
this site.)

Mells Kirk.

*Chapels.*



- |                                  |                     |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Chapel at Well of Kildinguie. | O.S.                |
| 2. St. Nicolas on Papa Stronsay. | O.S. and Stat. Ace. |
| 3. St. Bride's on Papa Stronsay. | O.S. and Stat. Ace. |
| 4. Auskerry.                     | O.S. and Stat. Ace. |
| 5. Linga Meikle.                 | Stat. Ace.          |

N.B. — There were 'at least' two more chapels on Stronsay itself in 1790 (Stat. Acc.), giving six kirks, apart from those on Papa and Holms. Comm.'s 1627 = 637.

SANDAY. — I. BURNES.

*Parish Church.*

St. Columba, near Scar.	Mackenzie's charts.
-------------------------	---------------------

*Chapels.*

- |                              |              |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Holms of Ire.             | O.S.         |
| 2. Chapel on West Side, b.g. | O.S. Kirkgeo |

(Only two practicable kirks. Comm.'s 1627 = 210.)

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SANDAY. — II. CROSS.

*Parish Church.*

Cross Kirk, Backaskail Bay.	O.S.
-----------------------------	------

*Chapels.*

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 1. Lambaness. | O.S.   |
| 2. Stove.     | O.S. (Also records.<br>Built in 1714, but<br>very probably on<br>older site. No other<br>kirk near.) |

- |  |      |             |
|--|------|-------------|
| 3. Chapel at Brough, not shown<br>but inferred from place-name.<br>(Four kirks. Comm.'s 1627 = 260.) | O.S. | Chapel Head |
|--|------|-------------|

*References.*

*Adjacent Place-Names.*

SANDAY. — III. LADY.

*Parish Church.*

Lady Kirk, at head of bay by O.S.  
Ellsness.

*Chapels.*

- |   |                  |                         |
|---|------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Tresness, not shown, but in-<br>ferred from place-names.   | O.S.             | Kirk Taing, Kirk Banks. |
| 2. Clet, site not shown, but men-<br>tioned by Wallace. (Place<br>name shown in O.S.)                           | O.S., Wallace.   | Kirk Taing.             |
| 3. St. Peter's, Sellibister.  | O.S.             |                         |
| 4. Arstas.  | O.S., Mackenzie. |                         |
| 5. Lopness, inferred from burial<br>ground, which alone is marked<br>in O.S.<br>(Kirks, 6. Comm.'s 1627 = 320.) | O.S.             |                         |

Note. — These make up the 102 mentioned early in this paper. The numbers of communicants in 1627 were originally included in the list in order to give some basis for calculating the probabilities of there being other chapels yet undiscovered. As the subject has developed, I question whether it is a safe basis. The figures are more instructive in parishes where all the chapels may be taken as found, when they give some idea of the proportion of kirks to population (it being always remembered that the figures are for the year 1627, while the chapels of course were pre Reformation).

It may also be mentioned that a considerable number of the sites have been personally verified since the list was drawn up. This is the case in every instance where no authority is quoted.

J. Storer Clouston.  
(1918)



J. Storer Clouston, OBE., died on Orkney on 23 June 1944 and, it is to be assumed, the copyright of this work has now expired.

Clouston's family are said to have descended from Havard Gunnason (fl. 1090), Chief Counsellor to Haakon, Earl of Orkney, and their estate on Orkney at Clouston, in Stenness, is clearly marked on maps {NGR: HY 29940 11225}. Together, Clouston, and his fellow members of the *Orkney Antiquarian Society*, had a voluminous wealth of knowledge and understanding of all things 'Orcadian', and the work reproduced here is still an invaluable source of reference for modern-day scholars of the Church in those parts.



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