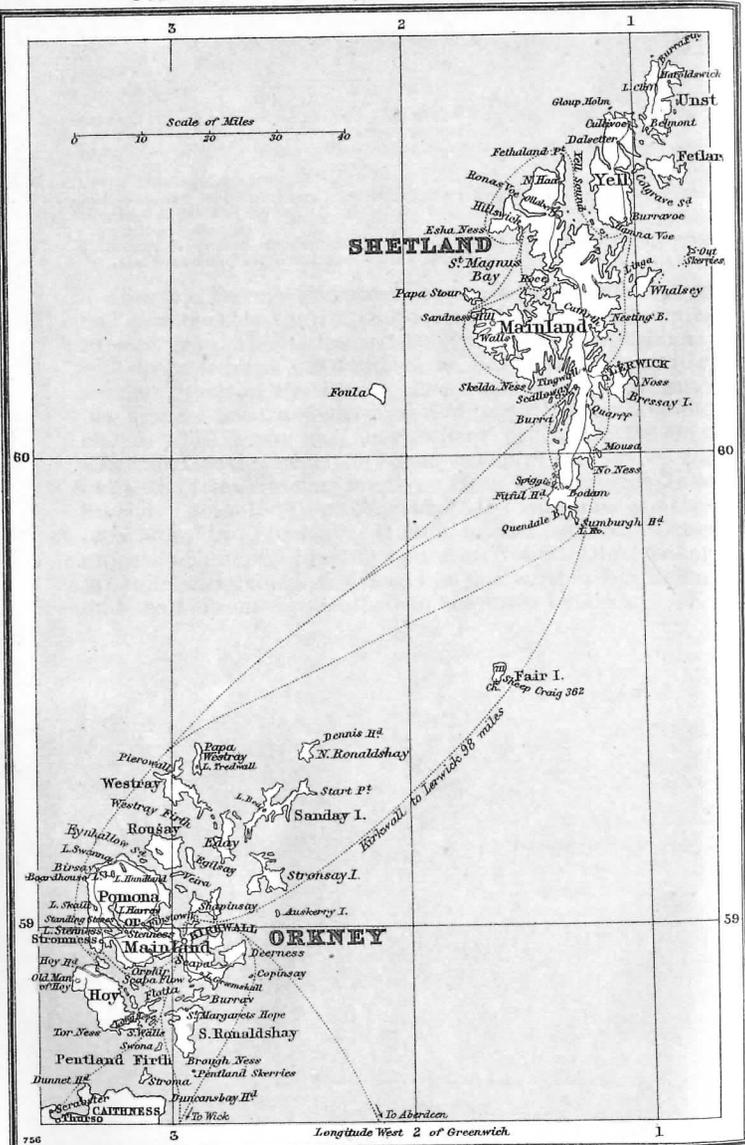


# ORKNEY AND SHETLAND ISLANDS



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## THE ORKNEY AND SHETLAND ISLES.

ALTHOUGH these two groups are at least 50 miles apart they have certain features in common. In the first place, so far as holiday-makers are concerned, the climate of both Orkney and Shetland is much milder than one might suppose from a consideration of their latitude (Shetland is in approximately the same latitude as Bergen, and farther north than Oslo). The mean temperature of Orkney is about 46 degrees; the average annual rainfall from 30-37 inches. A happy effect of the northern latitude is the length of the day in summer. In June, the sun rises about 3 a.m. at Kirkwall and does not set until nearly 9.30 p.m., and even then daylight is not succeeded by the darkness of night, and it is often possible to read by ordinary light at midnight, and even without the aid of infra-red and other plates it is possible to take photographs.

As to attractions for visitors, the saying is "Shetland for scenery, Orkney for antiquities"—and one might add "either for angling." There is also golf, tennis and bowls and the two "capitals" have their cinemas and local newspapers.

The place-names recall that for centuries the Islands were part of Norway, and the vigour with which the Norwegians sailed the neighbouring seas is illustrated by the Norse tinge in many place-names on the mainland. The isles belonged to Norway after the Hebrides had been ceded to Scotland in 1266 (p. 153), but in 1468 they were pledged by Christian I for the payment of the dowry of his daughter Margaret, who married James III. The dowry was not paid and the isles were annexed by Scotland in 1472.

In extent, the Orkneys are about 48 miles from north to south and 35 miles east to west. Only about a score of the islands are inhabited. The total area is 376 square miles, and the population about 25,000. The Shetlands measure nearly 70 miles from north to south and about 30 miles from east to west. Of the hundred islands

fewer than thirty are inhabited. The mainland is 55 miles long, but so irregular is its outline that a walk round the coast would cover 480 miles, although no part of the island is more than 8 miles from the sea. The area of the group is 550 square miles, and the population some 25,000. From the north of Orkney to the south of Shetland is 50 miles, and half-way lies lonely Fair Isle. From the mainland of Scotland to the south of Orkney is a matter of 7 miles.

#### THE ORKNEY ISLES.

**Access.**—Steamer between Thurso (on L.M.S. Railway) and Scapa Pier (14 miles from Kirkwall) every weekday, the crossing taking just under 3 hours. From Leith and Aberdeen by steamer about three times weekly in summer; less frequently in winter. For current details apply *North of Scotland and Orkney and Shetland Steam Navigation Company*, Matthews' Quay, Aberdeen. *Air Services* from Aberdeen and Inverness, *via* Wick.

The Orkney Isles number sixty-seven, of which twenty-nine are inhabited, and they extend northward for upwards of 48 miles. The western coasts present to the Atlantic an almost unbroken front of lofty cliffs, the abode of innumerable sea-birds. Everywhere the coast teems with fish; and seals, otters, whales, and porpoises are by no means uncommon.

In calm weather the stretches of sea that, like Scapa Flow, are land-locked by the islands, resemble a vast lake, clear and bright as a mirror, and are without a ripple, save for the gentle impulse of the tide. But during a storm the grandeur of the Orkney land and sea-scapes is fully revealed. Thick driving mists sweep over the hilly districts, and upon the weather shore, especially if this be on the west side, beat waves of a magnitude and force of which few strangers can have formed any conception. On the west side of Hoy, and at the Black Rock, north of Stromness, they climb cliffs 300 feet and more in height, tear away the soil and hurl large boulders through the air.

Kirkwall and Stromness, the largest towns in the Orkneys, are on Mainland, sometimes erroneously called Pomona. Both towns have golf courses. (Kirkwall—18 holes. Visitors: men, 2s. per day, 7s. 6d. per week, 10s. fortnight, 15s. per month. Ladies, 1s. 6d., 5s., 7s. 6d. and 10s. Stromness—18 holes: 2s. per day, 7s. per week, 15s. per month. Ladies, 1s. 6d., 5s., 10s.)

#### KIRKWALL.

Kirkwall (*Hotels: Queen's, Kirkwall, Castle, St. Ola's, Corsie's (temp.)*) stands at the head of a fine bay which

indents the centre of the north side of the island. Its narrow streets and lanes, and its houses, with thick strong walls and small windows, which turn their crow-stepped gables towards the street, seem to speak of its Norwegian origin. The grand old Cathedral was begun in 1187 and dedicated to St. Magnus. (*Admission, free, in summer every weekday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and in early mornings, on arrival of Aberdeen steamer; winter 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*) Its architecture resembles that of Trondheim, in Norway. The oldest parts are the transepts and three bays of the choir; the first five bays of the nave are only slightly later. The nave is interesting on account of its massive Norman pillars. It is less than 50 feet wide, but this very narrowness gives an impression of height. Note the various "mort brods," each with name of the deceased and various symbolic designs. Recently the whole of the Cathedral has been thoroughly restored.

In 1268 Haakon, King of Norway, was buried here, but his remains were afterwards removed to Trondheim. Twenty-seven years later the Maid of Norway (*see p. 29*) died on board ship off South Ronaldsay, but there is no foundation for the legend that she was buried in Kirkwall Cathedral. Among the tombs in the nave-aisles are those of two nineteenth-century explorers: W. B. Baikie (1824-65: Africa) and John Rae (1813-93) "the intrepid discoverer of Franklin." In the vestry are some old brazen alms plates, one engraved with a picture of Paradise and inscribed, "Had Adam gedaen Gods woort wys soo vaer hy gebleven int Paradys Anno 1636" ("Had Adam obeyed God's word we should have been in Paradise"). Two skeletons, discovered in 1926 in pinewood chests within two pillars, are held to be those of St. Magnus (assassinated in 1114) and his nephew St. Rognvald.

The view from the top of the tower is interesting, and useful to those who find difficulty in getting their bearings in this island of extremely irregular coastlines.

Close to the Cathedral are the remains of the Bishop's and Earl's palaces; the latter a fine specimen of sixteenth-century domestic architecture. Wideford Hill, in the neighbourhood of the town, commands an uninterrupted view of all the Orkney Isles. On the north-west slope of the hill is a prehistoric chambered construction which

is under the charge of the Commissioners of H.M. Office of Works. A similar structure may be seen on Cuween or Kewing Hill, Finstown. Across a narrow isthmus, where the main island is nearly cut in two, and nearly 2 miles from Kirkwall, is Scapa Pier, at which the mail boat from Scrabster calls. It is on the wide expanse of Scapa Flow, one of the principal bases of the Grand Fleet during the War. Here the Germans scuttled their Fleet in May, 1919, six months after the fateful surrender.

Motors run between Kirkwall and Stromness, at the south-west corner of the island. The winding road is about 15 miles long. There is an inn at Finstown, about halfway. A little beyond the ninth milestone is the far-famed Mound of Maeshowe, a large, chambered construction, which can be explored by visitors. (Key at the neighbouring farm of Tormister, 6d.) Close to Maeshowe, where two large lochs, Harray and Stenness, open into each other, are the greater and the lesser circles of the Standing Stones of Stenness, objects of supreme archaeological interest, although "The Stone of Odin," mentioned in Sir Walter Scott's novel, *The Pirate*, no longer exists. The principal circle, the *Ring of Brogar*, has a diameter of over 120 yards and is surrounded by a deep trench. About a dozen of the stones still stand, the average height being about 10 feet. Nearer the road and the hotel two stones, respectively 15 and 18 feet high, are all that remains of another circle.

Stromness (*Hotel: Stromness, 50 rooms; R. and b., 8s.*), the "Venice of the North," contains much that is of interest; as does Birsay (*Barony (Fishing) Hotel*) where are the ruins of the Earl's Palace. On the Brough of Birsay, which is accessible at low tide, are the remains of a Viking settlement and of a mediaeval monastery. On the west coast of the island and at the southern edge of the Bay of Skail is the exceedingly interesting prehistoric village of Skara Brae. Active excavations since 1928 have revealed a group of stone huts connected by covered passages, besides furniture, implements, ornaments, and one or two skeletons of the former inhabitants. The settlement probably belongs to a Stone Age later than that of the Scottish mainland. Other notable early monuments which have been developed by the Commissioners of H.M. Office of Works are the Knowe of Gurness on Aiker Ness, 11 miles north-west from Kirkwall, and the

broch and neolithic burial construction at Mid Howe on the island of Rousay.

Towards the north-west corner of the island is Marwick Head, off which sank, on June 5, 1916, H.M.S. *Hampshire*, while conveying Lord Kitchener and his staff to Russia. On the headland is a monument to their memory.

The island of Hoy comes next in size to Mainland. Its steep, dark-tinted hills are the highest in the group, and its cliff scenery is the most imposing in the British Isles. It is, however, difficult of access, and lacking in accommodation for travellers, at least at the northern end, where most of the wonders of its cliffs, mountains and antiquities are situated. It contains the Dwarrie Stone and the Carbuncle (a mass of sandstone) on Ward Hill, the legends attached to which play an important part in the plot of *The Pirate*. But the most noteworthy feature of the island is the Old Man of Hoy, an isolated pillar of rock, 450 feet high, facing the Atlantic about 4 miles south of St. John's Head. The latter is 1,141 feet high and is probably the loftiest vertical sea cliff in the British Isles.

The Isle of Egilsay, one of the most interesting of the group, contains the ruins of *St. Magnus Church*, in which the patron saint of Orkney and Shetland, St. Magnus, was murdered by his colleague in the government of the two archipelagos, in the early part of the twelfth century. It possesses a round tower. On Eynhallow, the Holy Isle, in the strait between Rousay and Mainland, are the remains of an ancient monastery.

South Ronaldsay, the most southern of the group, has an area of about 18 square miles. It contains the village of St. Margaret's Hope, near which is the Broch called the Howe of Hoxa. Other islands deserving mention are Burray, Shapinsay, Stronsay, Sanday, Eday, Westray (on which is the ruined Castle of Noltland) and North Ronaldsay. Stroma, in the Pentland Firth, belongs to Caithness.

#### THE SHETLAND ISLES.

Access.—Communication between the mainland and Shetland is maintained by the *North of Scotland and Orkney and Shetland Steam Navigation Company*, whose steamers run between Lerwick, Aberdeen and Leith (Edinburgh) three or four times weekly. Current particulars respecting fares and times of sailing may be obtained from the Manager, Aberdeen.

*Air Services* to Sumburgh and Lerwick from Aberdeen and Inverness.

The Shetland (or Zetland) group lies 48 miles to the north-east of the Orkneys. Midway between lies the

Fair Isle, a lonely island battered and crumbling rapidly beneath the assaults of the Atlantic and the North Sea. These two oceans join forces south of Sumburgh Head, where they form the turbulent tideway of the "Roost," which may be avoided by travellers taking the direct route from Aberdeen to Lerwick. Fair Isle gives its name to the patterned knitted wear for which the Shetlanders are famous; in 1588 it was the scene of the wreck of *El Gran Grifon* of Armada fame, one of a host of vessels which have found an untimely grave on the rocky shores of the island.

The Shetland group consists of about a hundred islands, of which twenty-nine are inhabited. The surface of the larger islands is hilly, the general trend of the ridges being north and south, broken here and there by narrow transverse valleys. The hills are covered to their summits with moorland, their dark surface contrasting strongly with the deep green of the valleys and cultivated coast lands, their monotony intensified rather than relieved by numerous small lochs—in winter sombre treeless wastes, in summer and autumn a medley of contrasting colours. The highest point in the islands is Ronas Hill, a mass of red granite, 1,475 feet high. From its summit a magnificent panorama of the whole islands may be obtained, and at midsummer the sun may be observed to sink slowly below the horizon, reappearing in an hour or two a little to the east. In June and July it is never really dark; indeed it is this aspect of the islands, the "summer dim," the long twilight with its everchanging shadows, that lingers longest in the memory.

The coastline is broken and rugged. Long winding voes or inlets of the sea, bordered by cultivated fields, and sheltered from every wind, run far inland. Bold headlands jut out into the ocean, rising at times into lofty cliffs that for grandeur and sublimity have few rivals. The Noup of Noss (592 feet), Fitful Head (928 feet), the Kame of Foula (1,220 feet), all sheer cliffs, form conspicuous landmarks. Lofty stacks, natural arches and deep caverns abound along the coast; some caves run inland for hundreds of yards and may reach the surface as pit-like openings, known locally as "kirns," at the bottom of which the sea foams and swirls. The Holes of Scraada in Eshaness is a well-known example, the Round Reeva in the Fair Isle, into which the islanders

are reputed to have thrown survivors of the *Gran Grifon*, another. The small island of Papa Stour, owing to the columnar jointing of its rocks, is honeycombed with caves.

#### MAINLAND,

the largest of the islands, is 54 miles long, but of very irregular outline. On it is Lerwick, the capital, a busy, cosmopolitan town in the herring fishing season, when its capacious harbour is crowded with vessels of many nations. It has two golf courses (1s. per day; 5s. per week), one (6 holes) near the town; the other (9 holes), in the island of Bressay, a mile by motor-boat. (*Hotels: Queen's; Grand (temp.) 35 rooms; R. and b., 7s. 6d.*)

Scalloway (*Royal Hotel*), formerly the chief town, is chiefly visited for the sake of the ruins of its castle, built in 1600 by Earl Patrick Stewart of evil fame.

To the east of Lerwick is Bressay, with the adjacent islets of Noss, a bird sanctuary, and the smaller Holm of Noss, formerly reached by a rope bridge, the Cradle of Noss. A pleasant excursion, when the weather is suitable, is the circuit of these islands by motor-boat from Lerwick; the cliff scenery is magnificent.

South of Lerwick is—

#### Mousa Island,

which contains the most perfect specimen of a Pictish broch in existence. This, known as Mousa Castle, is about 40 feet high and 158 feet in circumference at the base. It gradually decreases in width till within about 10 feet of its top and then again expands—an arrangement which effectually prevented an attacking force scaling its walls, while the small size of the doorway, which could be built up in case of attack, rendered access in that way impossible. Upwards of eighty of these brochs, all in ruins, occur in Shetland, occupying strategic positions on headlands or in lochs. That of Clickimin, near Lerwick, ranks next to Mousa.

The most northerly spot in the British Isles is a conical rock, the Muckle Flugga, rising nearly 200 feet out of the sea off the coast of Unst. On it stands a lighthouse, which in spite of its height—250 feet above the water—is sometimes swept by the waves. At the other extremity

of the group is Sumburgh Head, bearing a lighthouse, and its loftier neighbour Fitful Head. This district figures largely in *The Pirate*. Adjacent to Sumburgh House (hotel, golf, fishing) are the remains of an interesting succession of settlements which recent excavations have proved to be of Bronze Age, Iron Age and Viking periods. The site is under the care of the Commissioners of H.M. Office of Works (*open in summer 10-6 daily; winter 10-3 weekdays, closed Sundays*).

The inhabitants of these islands are engaged chiefly in fishing, farming, knitting and the rearing of sheep and ponies, for which the islands are renowned. Whaling was prosecuted from several stations on the west coast, but has been discontinued.

For rough shooting and all-round fishing, the Shetlands offer an attractive field. Rabbits are fairly abundant in many of the islands. There are also snipe, wild duck and golden plovers. The sea-fishing is splendid, and fine sport may be had with saithe off the rocks. Sea trout run large, and the lochs are full of brown trout. At most of the outlying islands seals are to be seen in great numbers. To the bird-lover and the geologist the islands are also of especial interest.