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978-1-107-64616-2 - Cambridge County Geographies: Orkney and Shetland

J. G. F. Moodie Heddle and T. Mainland

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1. County and Shire

The word *shire* is of Old English origin, and meant charge, administration. The Norman Conquest introduced an alternative designation, the word *county*—through Old French from Latin *comitatus*, which in mediaeval documents stands for shire. *County* denotes the district under a count, the king's *comes*, the equivalent of the older English term *earl*. This system of local administration entered Scotland as part of the Anglo-Norman influence that strongly affected our country after 1100.

The exceptional character of the historical nexus between the Orkney Islands and Scotland, makes it somewhat difficult to fix definitely the date at which Orkney can be fairly said to have first constituted a Scottish county. For a period of about one hundred and fifty years after the conditional and, to all intent, temporary cession of the Islands to Scotland in the year 1468, Scottish and Norse law overlapped each other to a large extent in Orkney. And although during that period the Scottish Crown both invested earls, and appointed sheriffs of Orkney, yet so long as Norse law subsisted in the Islands, as it did largely in practice and absolutely in theory until the year 1612, it is hardly possible to consider Orkney a Scottish county. The

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relation of the Islands towards Scotland during this confused period of fiscal evolution bears more resemblance to that of the Isle of Man towards England at the present day. When, however, in the year 1612 an Act of the Scottish Privy Council applied the general law of Scotland to the Islands, although the proceeding was in defiance of the conditions of their cession, Orkney may be held to have at last entered into the full comity of Scottish civil life, and may thenceforth, without impropriety or cavil, be considered and spoken of as the County or Shire of Orkney.

The Latin name *Orcades* implies the islands adjacent to Cape Orcas, a promontory first mentioned by Diodorus Siculus about 57 B.C. as one of the northern extremities of Britain, and commonly held to be Dunnet Head.

The Norse name was *Orkneyar*, of which our *Orkney* is a curtailment. The name *orc* appears to have been applied by both Celtic and Teutonic races to some half-mythical sea-monster, which according to Ariosto, in *Orlando Furioso*, devoured men and women; but the suggested connection between this animal and the name of the county appears a little far-fetched, although the large number of whales in the surrounding waters is quoted to support it.

2. General Characteristics and Natural Conditions

Orkney occupies the somewhat anomalous position of being a wholly insular shire whose economic interests

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are overwhelmingly agricultural. Most of the islands are flat or low; and in several, such as Shapinsay, Stronsay, Sanday, and South Ronaldshay, the proportion of cultivated land exceeds 70 per cent. of their total areas. In the Mainland, however, there are large stretches of hill and moorland, while in Hoy and Walls



Rackwick, Hoy

the natural conditions of by far the greater portion of the island closely approximate to those of the Scottish Highlands. Rousay is the only other island which is to a large extent hilly; but Westray and Eday have some hills, and Burray, Flotta, and several other islands considerable stretches of low-lying moor. The general rise of the land is from N.E. to S.W. A height of 334 feet is attained at the Ward Hill at the south end of Eday,

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880 feet at the Ward Hill of Orphir, in the S.W. of the Mainland, 1420 at Cuilags, 1564 at Ward Hill, and 1309 at Knap of Trowieglen, the three highest points in Hoy and in the whole group. Exceptionally fine views are obtained from Wideford Hill (741 feet), near Kirkwall, and from the Ward Hill in Hoy, the varied panoramas of islands, sounds, and lakes perhaps gaining in grace of outline more than they lose in richness of detail from the woodless character of the country.

Taken in detail, and viewed from the low ground, however, the general aspect of much of the country is bleak, and only redeemed from baldness by the widely-spread evidence of a vigorous cultivation. Yet for reasons of a somewhat complex texture, involving meteorological conditions, historical and archaeological considerations, and a touch of all-round individuality, the Islands rarely fail to cast a spell upon the visitor. One might quote many distinguished writers to vouch for this fact, but an Orcadian poet has depicted the telling features of his native land, both physical and psychic, with unerring accuracy and skill.

Land of the whirlpool, torrent, foam,
 Where oceans meet in maddening shock ;
 The beetling cliff, the shelving holm,
 The dark, insidious rock ;
 Land of the bleak, the treeless moor,
 The sterile mountain, seared and riven ;
 The shapeless cairn, the ruined tower,
 Scathed by the bolts of heaven ;
 The yawning gulf, the treacherous sand ;
 I love thee still, my native land !

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Land of the dark, the Runic rhyme,
 The mystic ring, the cavern hoar,
 The Scandinavian seer, sublime
 In legendary lore ;
 Land of a thousand sea-kings' graves—
 Those tameless spirits of the past,
 Fierce as their subject Arctic waves,
 Or hyperborean blast ;
 Though polar billows round thee foam,
 I love thee !—thou wert once my home.

With glowing heart and island lyre,
 Ah ! would some native bard arise
 To sing, with all a poet's fire,
 Thy stern sublimities—
 The roaring flood, the rushing stream,
 The promontory wild and bare,
 The pyramid where sea-birds scream
 Aloft in middle air,
 The Druid temple on the heath,
 Old even beyond tradition's breath.

If we allow a little for the softer side of the picture, a side perhaps best typified by the fine old buildings of the little island capital, and the spell of the lightful midsummer night, which is no night, the lines of Vedder form a fair compendium of the natural conditions and general characteristics of the Islands to-day, although much of the “bleak and treeless moor” of the poet's youth has long since been converted into smiling fields of corn.

3. Size. Situation. Boundaries

The Orkney Islands extend between the parallels 58° 41' and 59° 24' of north latitude, and 2° 22' and

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3° 26' of west longitude. They measure 56 miles from north-east to south-west, and 29 miles from east to west, and cover 240,476 acres or 375.5 square miles, exclusive of fresh water lochs. The group is bounded by the North Sea and the Pentland Firth on the south, the Atlantic on the west, Sumburgh Roost on the north, and the North Sea on the east. Our measurements take no account of the distant Sule Skerry, an islet of 35 acres lying $32\frac{1}{2}$ miles north-west of Hoy Head, and inhabited only by lightkeepers and innumerable birds. The archipelago is naturally divided into three sections: the Mainland in the centre, the South Isles including all islands to the south, and the North Isles all to the north, of the Mainland. The Mainland—the Norse *Meginland*, or *Hrossey*, *i.e.* Horse Island—covers 190 square miles, and is 25 miles long from north-west to south-east, and 15 miles broad from east to west. It is divided into two unequal portions, the East Mainland and the West Mainland, by an isthmus less than two miles across, which connects Kirkwall Bay on its north sea-board with Scapa Flow, a large and picturesque inland sea, now well known as a naval base, which lies between its south coasts and the encircling South Isles. The name Pomona, stamped on the Mainland by George Buchanan's misapprehension of a Latin text, is never applied to the island by Orcadians; and here be it also said that Hoy and Walls, the largest of the South Isles and the second in size of the whole group ($13\frac{1}{2}$ miles long by about $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles broad, and covering 36,674 acres), although one island geographically, is colloquially

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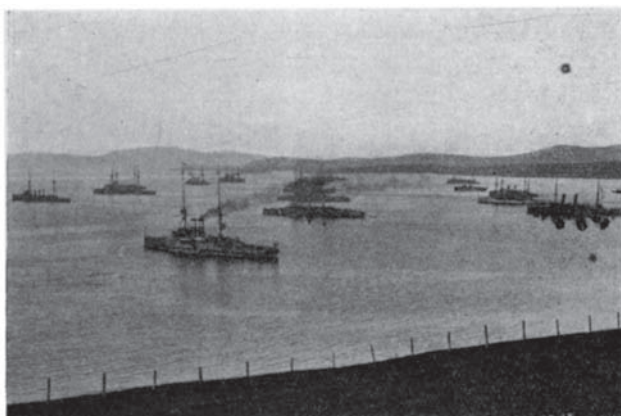
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two. The principal of the other South Isles are South Ronaldshay, 13,080 acres; Burray, 2682 acres; Flotta, 2661 acres; Græmsay, 1151 acres; and Fara, 840 acres. Scapa Flow is connected with the Pentland Firth to the south by Hoxa Sound, with the Atlantic to the west by Hoy Sound, and with the North Sea to the east



The Home Fleet in Scapa Flow

by Holm Sound. The largest of the North Isles are Sanday, 16,498 acres; Westray, 13,096 acres; Rousay, 11,937 acres; Stronsay, 9839 acres; Eday, 7371 acres; Shapinsay, 7171 acres; Papa Westray, 2403 acres; North Ronaldshay, 2386 acres; and Egilsay, 1636 acres. This section of the archipelago is itself divided into two portions by the waterway formed by the Stronsay and Westray Firths, which runs from

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south-east to north-west through the islands, and offers an alternative to the Pentland Firth or Sumburgh Roost passages for vessels passing between the North Sea and the Atlantic.

The whole archipelago includes some 67 islands, besides a score or more of islets, but only 30 are inhabited, and four or five of these are occupied solely by light-house attendants and their families. Small uninhabited islands many of which are used as pasturage, are known as “holms.” The largest uninhabited island is the Calf of Eday, of 590 acres, but some 10 of the inhabited islands are of less area than this.

4. Streams and Lakes

The streams of Orkney are, of course, mere burns of a few miles in length, draining the high ground, and save for the cheap motive power which they offer to farmers and millers, of interest only to anglers. Nowhere in Orkney are trees so much missed as along the burnsides, and for that reason the Burn of Berriedale, a branch of the larger Rackwick Burn, in Hoy, whose steep banks are covered with poplar, birch, hazel, and mountain ash, is a sort of Mecca to the aesthetic Orcadian. The broad estuary of the Loch of Stenness, which disembogues into the Bay of Ireland, though of trifling length, is the nearest approach to a river that the Islands can present. It is known as the *Bush*.

From a spectacular point of view the many lakes of Orkney go far to compensate the county for the absence

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of rivers. So many are they that it is hardly possible to get out of sight of salt or fresh water in the Islands. The great twin lochs of Harray and Stenness, at once joined and separated by the Bridge of Brogar, give a strong dash of picturesqueness to the whole central part of the West Mainland ; and still more beautiful



Loch of Kirbuster, in Orphir

are the secluded and hill-surrounded Heldale Water and Hoglinns Water in Walls. Other lochs are Boardhouse, Swannay, Hundland, Isbister, Skaill, Banks, Sabiston, Clumly and Bosquoy in the West Mainland ; Kirbuster in Orphir, Tankerness in the East Mainland ; Muckle Water, Peerie (*i.e.* little) Water, and Wasbister in Rousay ; St Tredwell Loch in Papa Westray ; Saintear and Swartmill in Westray ; Muckle Water in

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Stromsay; and Bea, Longmay, and North Loch in Sanday. The total area of Orkney lakes is about 20,000 acres. In most of them fishing is free, in others permission to fish is readily obtainable. The Loch Stenness trout is, according to Gunther, a distinct species, but this is a vexed question among the learned in such matters. Heldale Water contains Norwegian char in addition to trout.

5. Geology and Soil

The geological formation of the Orkney Islands is, in its main features, of a very simple nature. If we except a comparatively small strip of land running northwestward from Stromness to Inganess in the West Mainland, and a still smaller patch in the neighbouring island of Graemsay, practically the whole county is underlain by the Old Red Sandstone formation. The two small areas above-mentioned—practically one, save for the intervening sea—are occupied by older crystalline rocks, consisting of fine-grained granite, and micaceous schist at times running into foliated granite, the whole traversed by veins of pink felsite. These formations are flanked on either side by a narrow band of conglomerate of the Middle Old Red Sandstone period, composed of the rounded pebbles of the underlying schist and granite. Of the Old Red Sandstone two divisions are found in the Islands—the Middle or Orcadian, and the Upper Old Red Sandstone. There are also in various parts but especially in Hoy and