

The Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney

St. Mary the Virgin Church, Stromness

An introduction to:

The Orkney Islands (pp 2 - 10)

St Mary's (pp 11 - 18)

Quarrybrae, Stromness (our Priest's home) (pp19-23)



View of Stromness

Prepared: 16th October 2019

THE ORKNEY ISLANDS

National Press headline in 2019:-

‘Orkney crowned best place to live in the UK in Halifax quality of life survey’

Here are some of the reasons why.....

Location

An archipelago comprising some sixty-seven islands, of which eighteen are inhabited, Orkney (locals do not refer to ‘the Orkneys’) lies off the northern mainland of Scotland. Stunning scenery and rolling hills make up much of the landscape. A mere six miles of Pentland Firth separate South Ronaldsay (the most southerly island) and John o’ Groats in Caithness.



Landscape around Stromness

Population

Orkney has a total population of 22,190 people across all the islands. Most inhabitants live on mainland Orkney, with the remainder on the outlying islands. The City of Kirkwall, the thriving capital, is home to some 8,500 people; Stromness, the second largest town has some 2,200 inhabitants. Although the number of residents is slowly increasing, Orkney still has the lowest population of all the Scottish counties, giving a sense of space and tranquility.

Community

A strong community spirit is a noted feature of Orkney life and is much appreciated by island visitors. Whilst the elements can be challenging at times (powerful winter gales are not unknown) Orkney folk are quick to support and help each other. A low crime rate, low unemployment levels, good schools and health care all contribute to a general sense of wellbeing. This is supported by a wide spectrum of arts and crafts (the quality of light – at all times of the year – can be truly awe-inspiring). This is complemented by excellent recreational and sports facilities, cinemas, theatres, several amateur dramatic groups, writers, musicians, wildlife enthusiasts, as well as activities such as walking, climbing and diving to the wrecks in Scapa Flow. The list of activities is endless and limited only by the time available to pursue them!

Stromness has a good number of locally owned shops and cafes. Kirkwall is also well served by local retailers as well as national supermarkets. Contrary to popular belief, supply and delivery lines to Orkney are excellent and efficient, interrupted only occasionally by weather. Online shopping is therefore a practical alternative for items not available locally (for example, both John Lewis and the Wine Society deliver free of charge to Orkney Mainland addresses!) (this was not in the original text but has been added by the Warden – ED)

Climate

A common misconception about the Northern Isles is the further north you travel, the colder it gets. Not so in Orkney: the benign influence of the Gulf Stream and a maritime climate, result in the islands seeing little snow and frost in winter. Indeed, the average temperature in January often exceeds that of London. On the other hand, the summer temperatures rarely exceed 20°C, the sky never totally darkens and the quality of light inspires artists and photographers.

Unlike Western Scotland and the Hebrides, the rainfall is not usually especially significant. Orkney is also blessed in that it is seldom plagued by midges for any length of time.



Ring of Brodgar

Relatively mild winter temperatures notwithstanding, Atlantic storms can be fearsome: locals don their waterproofs and revel in coastal walks enjoying the dramatic scenes! The following calm, bright and sunny days offer a breathtaking contrast, highlighting a magical winter landscape. When that happens one can forgive Orkney anything!

History

Orkney's history can be traced back at least 5,000 years. The BBC television series *Britain's Ancient Capital* and Channel 4's *Time Team* experts have suggested "...that if the surface of Orkney is scratched, it bleeds archaeology".

Outstanding discoveries during the past century have resulted in parts of Orkney's West Mainland being declared a World Heritage Site. This includes the magnificent Neolithic village of Skara Brae, the standing Stones of Stenness, the Ring of Brodgar, and the chambered tomb at Maes Howe. Ongoing excavations at the now renowned and mysterious site of the Ness of Brodgar will challenge archaeologists for years to come.



Skara Brae Neolithic Village

Following centuries of Norwegian rule, Orkney became part of Scotland in 1468 when accepted by King James III in lieu of an unpaid dowry. Strong Viking influences can still be felt in place names around the islands and the Orkney flag closely resembles that of Norway.



Ness of Brodgar Excavations

Orkney was a centre of significant military activity in both world wars: the natural, almost landlocked, anchorage of Scapa Flow was the base for the Royal Navy's Home Fleet. In October 1939, the battleship HMS Royal Oak, anchored in Scapa Flow, was torpedoed by a German U-Boat resulting in the in the loss of 833 crew. In response, Winston Churchill secured the eastern approaches to Scapa Flow by constructing a series of concrete block 'barriers' linking Orkney Mainland to the four southern islands.

The so-called 'Barriers' now serve as an important road link to Burray and South Ronaldsay and the ferry port of St Margaret Hope.

With the return of peace, Orkney reverted to a tranquil normality that has not significantly altered in decades.

Commerce and Industry

The largest employer is Orkney Islands Council (OIC), followed by the Health Board. The staple industries within the county are agriculture (beef, dairy and sheep farming), fishing (offshore and shellfish). Tourism, together with arts and crafts, also provide significant employment.

In addition to a small oil terminal on the island of Flotta in Scapa Flow, Orkney is playing an increasing and important role in renewable energy. A growing number of initiatives in wind and wave technology are being set up in and around the islands, reflecting the County's vision and awareness of the climate change issues facing the world.

Other industries include the production of world class award-winning local produce - meat, cheese, ice cream, fudge, oatcakes, whisky, gin and beer.



The importance of the tourist trade is reflected in the number of hotels, guest houses, B&Bs and self catering cottages. Visitors are attracted by the many Festivals held each year: the Folk Festival (based in Stromness), the St Magnus International (Music) Festival and the Science Festival are amongst the main ones, but there are many others - for example: Blues, Nature, and Story Telling (also based in Stromness) .

Another significant draw is the wildlife and world-class scenery. There are frequent sightings of Orca (killer whales), dolphins, seals, porpoises, otters. The fact that Orkney is a birdwatchers paradise (puffins, curlews, nesting white tailed eagles - to name but a few) attracts a growing number of visitors..



One of Orkney's wildlife residents

Orkney has also been voted the best cruise destination in Western Europe, reflecting visitors' positive experience of warm welcome and high quality visitor experiences.

However, whilst the economic benefits of cruise tourism can be significant, the sustainability and environmental impact of the trade is part of an ongoing debate here.

Transport

Transport links between Orkney and mainland Scotland are excellent. Daily Pentland Firth crossings are provided by two ferry companies: one from Stromness, one from St. Margaret's Hope in South Ronaldsay, and a thrice weekly service to Aberdeen and Shetland. Islander discounts are offered on most services and each Islander receives vouchers covering the passenger fare (and cabin, if appropriate) for two annual return crossings.

Inter-island passenger and vehicle ferry services are provided served by OIC-owned Orkney Ferries. Loganair offers daily flights to and from the outer isles.



The *Hamnavoe* setting sail from Stromness

Loganair also operates flights from Kirkwall to Aberdeen and Inverness (30 mins. flight time) and to Edinburgh and Glasgow (approx.1 hour). There are also direct seasonal flights to Manchester and Bergen. An Air Discount Scheme (which applies to flights to and from Kirkwall) is available to island residents.

Orkney's infrastructure is amongst the best in Scotland and provides an excellent network of well-surfaced roads on both mainland Orkney and the islands.

Of course, weather can affect transport links, especially on stormy days, but short notice cancellations are few and every effort is made to keep disruption to a minimum.

Health

Orkney enjoys high quality health care provision. There is an excellent GP surgery in Stromness and a further two in Kirkwall, plus others scattered throughout the rural and island districts.

Orkney's brand new hospital, The Balfour, opened in June 2019 and offers a wide range of specialist services, including surgical, cardiac, gynaecological and rehabilitative care. Single en-suite rooms are provided for all in-patients. The care and professionalism of our medical staff is second to none .

Chronic medical or emergency cases requiring investigation or treatment in a larger hospital, are referred to hospitals on mainland Scotland. Flights and ferry transport are arranged and paid for by the NHS.

Education

The islands are blessed with first-class educational facilities. Most rural communities have a primary school (ages 5-12) and some of the islands have a junior secondary (ages 5-14). Kirkwall and East Mainland secondary students attend Kirkwall Grammar School and West Mainland students the Stromness Academy (described by an inspector as “a small school which delivers a lot” (there are approx. 350 on the roll)). Stromness also has a very good primary school.



Victoria Street, Stromness

Orkney College in Kirkwall is a campus of the University of the Highlands and Islands offering everything from vocational skills to degree courses. Given the County’s history, it is no surprise that it is a major centre for archaeological studies.

Note, though, that English and Scottish educational systems are different, and students moving from England and approaching or preparing for public examinations should investigate the adjustments needed. We would be delighted to arrange for candidates and potential students to meet local academic staff.

There are also numerous opportunities to attend OIC and independently-run Adult Education courses.

Conclusion

Life in Orkney is vibrant, enriching and never dull and great emphasis is placed on community spirit. A word of caution, though: despite islanders' welcoming nature and their recognition of the valuable roles fulfilled by those who choose to settle here, it is always suggested that incomers ease themselves into local life *gently*. Change for the sake of change does not sit comfortably with Orcadians and nothing is guaranteed to upset local sensibilities more than a new arrival who seeks to foist new practices and ideas on the community!

However, for the incomer who has thoroughly researched the benefits and the occasional drawbacks of life in Orkney (and who is ready to accept the way of life, climate, and challenges posed by geography), a wonderful, fulfilling, and enriching future is assured.



HISTORY OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN CHURCH, STROMNESS



Interior of St. Mary's Church, Stromness

St. Mary's began in 1885 as a mission to "churchmen residing (in Stromness), the tourists and shipping", on the recommendation of Archdeacon J. B. Craven, who had founded St. Olaf's in Kirkwall in the previous decade. Both churches were part of the resurgence of the Scottish Episcopal Church after more than a century of proscription following the Jacobite Risings in the first half of the 18th century. At the time, Stromness was still a thriving harbour for whalers and trading vessels to the Continent and to North America, most notably as the last port of call for ships that serviced the Hudson's Bay Company enterprise in Canada.

The first priest-in-charge was the Rev. James Stuart and services were held at 8 Alfred Street, in a building referred to as *The Humph* after its owner Mrs. Humphrey. *Inter alia*, this had served as a military hospital, ballroom and school. The present church on Church Road, situated within a complex of buildings then called *Hutchinson's Quoy*, was purchased by the Diocese in 1888. It had previously housed the Masonic Lodge Mercantile and before that the Reformed Presbyterian Church (Cameronians). Parts of St. Mary's are among the oldest structures in Stromness. The medieval baptismal font was given to the church by the Marquess of Zetland after it was recovered from the Boardhouse Loch.

The exact provenance of the red sandstone bowl into which is carved a Craigie family shield is still a subject of speculation.



Medieval baptismal font in St. Mary's

St. Mary's was solidly established by 1906 at which point it had 45 members and 24 communicants. Sunday morning services were pretty well attended, though it was the evening service that drew impressive numbers of 60 to 70 people, according to reports. In the same year, a house with garden at 31 Dundas Street was given to the church for a parsonage. Such was the confidence of the congregation that plans were drawn up for the construction of a new church in the Neo-Gothic style, an ambition hitherto unfulfilled!

For reasons not entirely clear, St. Mary's and St. Olaf's were linked in the early 1940s, and remained so through the rest of the 20th century. In the latter decades of that century, reports in the parish magazine tell of Bible Study, Sunday School, and social events involving an active membership. St. Mary's supported Mary Gardner, a member of the church, in her mission as part of the Wycliffe Bible Translators organisation. According to letters published in the church newsletter, Mary worked on remote local languages from the Sudan to Laos.

The Rev. Ingrid Cosby, already active in the ministry of St. Mary's Church, was one of the first women to be ordained deacon in the Scottish Episcopal Church in 1986, and became the first woman in Orkney to be ordained priest in 1996. She then took pastoral responsibility for St. Mary's, working with the Rector of St. Olaf's to strengthen Episcopal ministry in Orkney. Along with her husband David, she contributed to the material well-being of St. Mary's and in the year before her death in 2014 initiated a substantial renovation of the church,

St. Mary's exquisite stained glass windows, by Shona McInnes, were installed in 1996 as a memorial to Dr. Richard Petrie, longtime physician in Stromness, a legacy from his daughter Dr. Adeline Petrie. At the same time, Peter Davis, art teacher and organist at St. Mary's, created the church's distinctive and much valued Stations of the Cross. Patricia Bain's tapestry - now behind the altar - also dates from this time and was a gift from David Cosby.



Patricia Bain's tapestry

St. Mary's Congregational Life

Description of Parish

The Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Stromness is situated half way up Church Road, in the centre of Stromness, the second largest settlement in Orkney. The town has a winding narrow main street with a number of local shops, cafes, B&Bs, the Pier Art Centre and two hotels. Stromness is a gem, with its quirky streets, and individualistic buildings proving a magnet to visitors who stroll along the flagstone roadways. Stromness Academy with its modern buildings and facilities is close by.



Victoria Street, Stromness

Worship and the Congregation

Comments left by visitors to the church provide ample evidence of St. Mary's welcome – amongst them:

Lovely welcome, joyous worship, fab cake!

Lancashire

Blessings - O so wonderful

Alaska

A very welcoming church - a little gem.

Gloucester

We were so pleased to worship God here with you today

Australia

Visitors from all over the UK and the World seek us out and are always made to feel wanted and welcome.

There is a vibrancy at St Mary's, and though small, congregational numbers are steadily rising. A principal tenet of church life here is to make everyone feel welcome everyone – whether Orkney resident or visitor, the aim being to ensure all feel part of the life of the church. We are hopeful that this aim is being achieved, as witnessed by the following comments from new members of the congregation:

- *welcoming of everyone who is drawn to the church regardless of their gender or background.*
- *a sense of openness, acceptance and adventure*
- *a feeling of joy & hospitality - which seem so important - backed up by deep spirituality.*
- *a very caring and special place of which I am very glad to have been welcomed as a member.*

At St. Mary's we aim to:

Celebrate the love of God

Care for each other

Cultivate personal growth

Communicate the Gospel in words and actions

We are a mixed congregation of people from all walks of life, most of whom have their roots in other parts of the British Isles - mostly mainland Scotland and England. There are 28 on the church roll, compared to a handful five years ago and the average attendance has grown from 5 to 16 at the 10.30 am Sunday Eucharist though, of course, visitors increase those numbers during summer months.

In March 2015, Tom Miller, a retired priest from America, arrived as locum. He had been Canon for Liturgy and the Arts at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York and knew St. Mary's and Stromness from summer visits over a number of years. In September of that year he was appointed Priest-in-Charge. In addition to Sunday services, St. Mary's introduced weekday prayer and meditation as well as ecumenical services and events in co-operation with Stromness Parish Church and Stromness Baptist Church. St. Mary's hosts ecumenical Carol Services and Hymn Sings at Pentecost and other occasions. Members also participate in the Holy Week Walk of Witness.

Our worship is firmly grounded in the traditions of the Scottish Episcopal Church. Sunday services follow the 1982 Eucharist of the SEC - for the most part spoken - with hymns and sermon. Our Organist, Kate Lewis BA ARCM, has set some of the Eucharist to music with an eye to creating a full St. Mary's Mass setting. The congregation is musically literate and enjoys singing. Other resources, such as *Common Worship* and other Anglican books of Common Prayer, are also drawn upon. Generally open to exploring the range of traditions when judiciously introduced(!), the congregation is also provided with *Hymns Old & New with Common Worship*, which includes the lectionary and texts of hymns.



Kate Lewis playing the new Allen organ in St. Mary's

Two of our number are licensed to take Services and two are Lay Readers. A lay member is also authorised to lead worship when clergy are away. We ensure that newcomers are welcomed at the door and that clear guidance is given on following the Order of Service.

Lay participation in worship is positively encouraged with members leading prayers of intercession and lesson reading. Worship at St. Mary's could be described as 'middle of the road' Episcopalian, enthusiastic - yet correspondingly relaxed.

St. Mary's is fortunate to have excellent bakers amongst its congregation: tea, coffee and home bakes are served in the hospitality room after each Sunday Service and Thursday Meditation - lively discussion usually ensues! A surprisingly wide range of topics emerge - offering great chance to engage with visitors and congregation alike.

St. Mary's has good relationships with local arts organisations, including the Stromness Writers' Group, which meets regularly in the church. An ambitious music programme is emerging with a series of recitals prompted by the purchase of a new organ. St. Mary's has become a venue for local performers; a songwriting workshop for young composers is now a regular feature, as is an annual *Foy*, (a music and poetry event involving the community). The George Mackay Brown Fellowship, among others, has used St. Mary's for readings and *renga* sessions. Given the number of artists, writers and musicians in Stromness, there seem to be endless possibilities for bringing people into St. Mary's through the arts.

St. Mary's is also exploring a call to ministry through retreats, quiet days and pilgrimages. A committee including Orkney Episcopalians has formed to plan a series of events in the coming year, and St. Mary's supports the work of The Well, a branch of the Epiphany Group already well established in Orkney. During Lent there have been discussion groups for members of the congregation and it is hoped that this will continue during Advent and, possibly, other times of year.

Cordial relations are enjoyed with the other churches in Stromness: Baptists, Church of Scotland and the independent Grace Church Orkney.

St Mary's Finances

St Mary's has been blessed by generous and thoughtful donors – in terms of both time and funding. A significant endowment by a former incumbent provided funding for major building works and, of course, Quarrybrae itself.

During an interregnum some ten years ago, when the regular congregation was reduced to two, through the faith and hope of those individuals, the church was kept open, and the fabric maintained and improved.

Today, (as has already been mentioned) St Mary's congregational roll has increased to some 28 and continues to grow. Regular, generous, donations help cover day to day outgoings whilst also enabling us to build up both an endowment fund and a music fund. The latter enabled us to replace our aging organ with a new Allen organ in 2019 and helps pay for musical events.

In short, St Mary's finances are in good health and continue to be prudently managed by our Vestry Committee.

A copy of the Inspected September 2019 Accounts will be available shortly and on request.

The Vestry Committee

St. Mary's is cared for by an engaged and dedicated Vestry Committee, currently comprising:

Chair	Priest in Charge (<i>ex officio</i>)
Vicar's Warden/Diocesan Lay Rep	Nick Lewis (<i>ex officio</i>)
Treasurer	Paul Cooper
Communications/Outreach	Carrie Dodge
Secretary	Kate Lewis

The main role of the Vestry, which usually meets every quarter, has been the funding and upkeep of the church and adjacent vestry building. Refurbishment of the latter's external surfaces has continued to plan and on budget.

Our next project will be the internal refurbishment of the Vestry Building to provide improved space for hospitality (on the ground floor) and a meeting/conference room upstairs.

Musical events are helping us raise St. Mary's profile in the community and, we hope, will encourage both congregation and regular giving to grow.

Quarrybrae, Hillside Road, Stromness, KW16 3HR



Please note that all the photos above and below were taken on 17th October 2019 and are before the commencement of refurbishment and decorative works which include complete replacement of kitchen and all white goods and the conversion of the utility room (not currently used) into a study with external entrance. The garden – potentially beautiful as it is – is in need of serious attention which it is now getting!

Quarrybrae was bequeathed to the Diocese in 2014 by the estate of The Rev. Ingrid Cosby, who with her husband David were long-time generous benefactors of the church.

Built around 1980 when the Cosbys moved to Orkney, Quarrybrae is a detached bungalow situated in Hillside Road about one mile from the church in a quiet residential area. It is close to the Stromness Swimming Pool and Fitness Centre.

The house comprises two double bedrooms and one single, a bathroom with shower and WC, separate WC, living room, a good sized kitchen/dining room and a study* with separate entrance door.

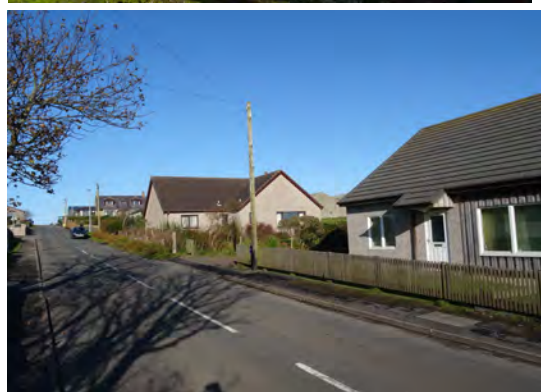
Approximate dimensions in metres:

Entrance lobby	1.8 x 6 (plus two walk-in cupboards)
Bathroom	1.8 x 2.2
Guest WC	1.9 x 1.3
Bed 1	4.8 x 2.8 (plus walk-in cupboard)
Bed 2	2.9 x 4.1
Bed 3	3.2 x 2.6 (plus walk-in cupboard)
Dining	4.2 x 2.5
Kitchen	4.2 x 2.8
Living	5.3 x 4.2
*Study	4 x 2.7
Garage	6 x 3.6

A driveway leads to a small garage; mature gardens surround the front and rear and there are impressive views towards Scapa Flow.

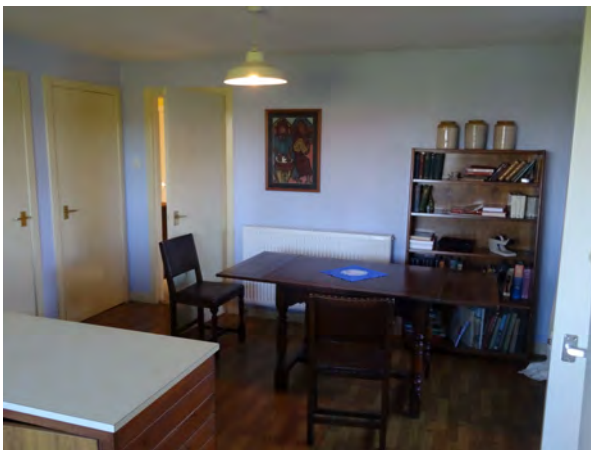
The entire property will be newly decorated, carpeted and curtained throughout (to a colour scheme chosen by our new Priest); the bathroom, kitchen are being completely refurbished and a new study created*. The kitchen will be fitted with cooker, fridge/freezer, washing machine, dryer and dishwasher. Heating and cooking are electric. Unless requested otherwise, the property will be left unfurnished.

Quarrybrae is perfect for a couple or small family and is an ideally located as it is close enough to the church for easy access but sufficiently distant to allow a measure of privacy.





Above, views of sitting room



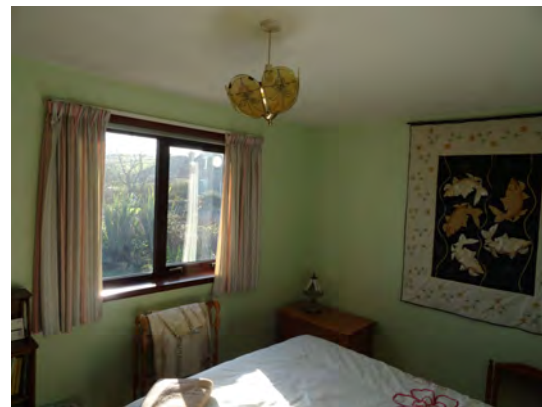
Kitchen/Dining Room



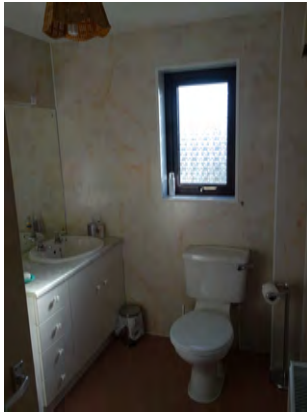
Third Bedroom (currently a study)



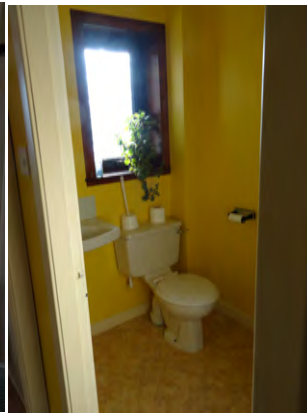
Guest/Second Bedroom



Main Bedroom



Shower/Bathroom



Guest WC



Utility Room