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Orkney A Historical Guide

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Orkney lies only 20 miles north of mainland Scotland, yet for many centuries its culture was more Scandanavian than Scottish. Strong westerly winds account for the scarcity of trees on Orkney and also for the tradition of well-constructed stone structures. As a result, the islands boast a large number of exceptionally well-preserved remains, which help us to form a detailed picture of Orcadian life through the ages. Sites and remains to be explored include settlements from the Stone Age, stone circles and burials from the Bronze Age, Iron Age brochs, Viking castles, the magnificent cathedral of St Magnus in Kirkwall, Renaissance palaces, a Martello tower from the Napoleonic Wars and numerous remains from the Second World War.

For much of its history, Orkney had its own language, culture and institutions. The prehistoric inhabitants created monuments which are unmatched anywhere in Europe, and the medieval period saw the magnificent earldom that expressed itself through the Orkneyinga Saga and the building of St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall. Like Shetland, Orkney was heavily influenced by Viking traders and raiders from Scandinavia, and for a long period it formed an outlying part of the kingdom of Norway.Over 500 years ago, however, the islands lost their Scandinavian links and since then have had a sometimes difficult association with mainland Scotland. More recent times have seen the use of Orkney as a strategic stronghold during two world wars, and the far-reaching impact of oil and gas exploitation in the North Sea. This classic book covers the whole fascinating story and will be of interest to readers far beyond the rocky shores of Orkney itself.

Bradt's new guide to Orkney is written by experienced writer and journalist Mark Rowe, author of Bradt's hugely popular guide to the Outer Hebrides and something of a specialist in more remote parts of Scotland. Orkney comprises 70 islands, 19 inhabited, and the focus of this guide is the 13 major inhabited islands. Masses of background information is included, from geography and geology to art, architecture and archaeology, with significant coverage of wildlife, too, as well as all the practical details you could need: when to visit, suggested itineraries, public holidays and festivals, local culture, plus accommodation and where to eat and drink. Wildlife lovers, walkers, bird-watchers, beach lovers, archaeology enthusiasts, genealogists, foodies, couples seeking escape and cyclists are all catered for, and this is an ideal guide for those who travel simply with curious minds to discover far-flung places of great cultural, historical and wildlife interest. Orkney is extraordinary. Home to Skara Brae, the most important Stone-Age village in northern Europe, it is also the site of the Neolithic henge of the Ring of Brodgar and Maeshowe chambered tomb, the entrance to which is aligned with the setting sun on the winter solstice. In fact, Orkney has so many archaeological sites it has been designated Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site. Here, too, you'll find the Old Man of Hoy spectacular 140m-high sea stack, Scapa Flow, scene of the dramatic scuttling of the German Fleet in 1919, and Marwick Head nature reserve, the definitive wildlife location, dramatically perched on cliffs and a wonder-world for bird lovers. The archipelago also offers the world's shortest scheduled commercial flight - just two minutes, between Westray and Papa Westray - and is the location of Scotland's only wine festival and the UK's most northerly distillery. Food lovers won't be disappointed either with an astonishing number of local food outlets and family producers, some going back more than 100 years. Whatever your interest, whatever time of year you visit, and whether you're a first-time or repeat visitor, Bradt's Orkney is the ideal companion for a successful visit.

Caroline Wickham-Jones provides a highly readable and informative overview of Orkney's archaeological heritage, illustrated with beautiful photography.

The Orcadian archipelago is a museum of archaeological wonders. Its largest island, Mainland, is home to some of the oldest and best-preserved Neolithic sites in Europe, the most famous of which are the passage grave of Maeshowe, the megaliths of Stennes, the Ring of Brodgar and the village of Skara Brae – evidence of a dynamic society with connections binding Orkney to Ireland, to southern Britain and to the western margins of continental Europe. Despite 150 years of archaeological investigation, however, there is much that we do not know about the societies that created these sites. What historical background did they emerge from? What social and political interests did their monuments serve? And what was the nature of the links between Neolithic societies in Orkney and elsewhere? Following a broadly chronological narrative, and highlighting different lines of evidence as they unfold, Mark Edmonds traces the development of the Orcadian Neolithic from its beginnings in the early fourth millennium BC through to the end of the period nearly two thousand years later. Juxtaposing an engaging and accessible narrative with beautifully evocative photographs of Orkney and its monuments, he uses artefacts, architecture and the wider landscape to recreate the lives of Neolithic communities across the region.

Written around AD 1200 by an unnamed Icelandic author, the Orkneyinga Saga is an intriguing fusion of myth, legend and history. The only medieval chronicle to have Orkney as the central place of action, it tells of an era when the islands were still part of the Viking world, beginning with their conquest by the kings of Norway in the ninth century. The saga describes the subsequent history of the Earldom of Orkney and the adventures of great Norsemen such as Sigurd the Powerful, St Magnus the Martyr and Hrolf, the conqueror of Normandy. Savagely powerful and poetic, this is a fascinating depiction of an age of brutal battles, murder, sorcery and bitter family feuds. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

The Orkney Islands are a place of mystery and magic, where the past and the present meet, ancient standing stones walk and burial mounds are the home of the trows. Orkney Folk Tales walks the reader across invisible islands that are home to fin folk and mermaids, and seals that are often far more than they appear to be. Here Orkney witches raise storms and predict the outcomeof battles, ghosts seek revenge and the Devil sits in the rafters of St Magnus Cathedral, taking notes! Using ancient tales told by the firesides of the Picts and Vikings, storyteller Tom Muir takes the reader on a magical journey where he reveals how the islands were created from the teeth of a monster, how a giant built lochs and hills in his greed for fertile land, and how the waves are controlled by the hand of a goddess.

Their names bespeak a rich past. From the Norse Hjaltland comes the modern Shetland: islands nominally Scottish, steeped in Nordic culture, closer to the Arctic Circle than to London. Important Neolithic sites are at Skara Brae and Maes Howe in the Orkneys. Holy Iona, island center of Celtic Christianity, the Isle of Man, former seat of rule over the Irish Sea, and Anglesey and Islay, homes of medieval courts at Aberffraw and Loch Finlaggan, are just a few of the more than 6,000 islands that form the archipelago known as the British Isles. The offshore isles are home to half a million people. Focusing on the eight islands or chains that have long supported substantial populations, this history tells the stories of Shetland, Orkney, the Hebrides, Anglesey, the Channel Islands, the Scilly Isles, and the Isles of Man and Wight, from their Neolithic settlement, to Roman, Norse and Norman occupation, to the struggle to maintain their uniqueness in today ' s world. Instructors considering this book for use in a course may request an examination copy here.

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