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Coastline The parish has a dramatic and varied coastline. Costa Hill with the 125m cliffs at Costa Head lies to the west and overlooks a rugged coast which goes all the way to Grit Ness. The Sands of Evie, or Aikerness (ON *Akra-nes*, Arable Land Point), is one of the best beaches on the West Mainland.

There was a large expanse of sand dunes behind the beach, but these have been largely reduced by sand-extraction, and are only slowly regenerating. All the same the beach still makes a pleasant walk. It is very good for *Spoots* (Razor Fish) at extreme low tides.

The changing light affords a wide range of colours on the waters of Eynhallow Sound. This is also a good area to search for seaside plants. The car makes an excellent hide to observe wading birds and sea ducks. Seals are often to be seen, and Otters are quite common along the more sheltered shores.

Brochs In the short distance between Costa and Woodwick, there are at least six brochs, five of which are small compared to the massive Broch of Gurness. The Broch of Costa is the most westerly and sited to be invisible from the seaward. Bargar Broch (HY353277), at the Point of Hisber, was excavated in the 19th century and a Pictish silver hoard was found.

Apparently it was thrown into

EVIE (ON *Efja*, back-current in a river, referring to Aikerness Bay and the strong tide which sweeps past like a river) faces Eynhallow Sound and Rousay. The Bargar Röst, which forms between

Eynhallow and Costa is a ferocious tide-race which is at its most impressive when a Spring Ebb and a northwesterly gale coincide. The Vikings called it *Efjusund*.



Eynhallow Sound and Rousay from Bargar

Eynhallow Sound from Bargar Hill



Eynhallow Sound from the Sands of Evie - or Aikerness as it is called in Orkney

the sea by the farmer so that the Crown could not claim it! One can only speculate on the folly of this selfish person, spurred on by state greed. The remains of further two brochs lie nearby at Knowe of Grugar (HY35727) and Knowe of Stenso (HY364267), while there is a further one at the Craig of Ritten (HY401249), near Woodwick.



Costa Head has dramatic 125m-high cliffs, The Standard is an impressive stack

On the Rousay side there are at least a further 6 brochs in a line from the Westside to Brinyan. They are dotted all round the Wide Firth as well as the eastern approaches. This concentration of brochs must have been most impressive to visitors.

Knowe o'Aikerness In 1929, Robert Rendall the well-known poet, antiquarian and naturalist, was sitting on the Knowe o'Aikerness sketching the scene. One of the legs of his stool sank into a hole, and before long he had discovered

a flight of stairs leading down into the knowe. What was to become known as the Broch of Gurness was soon to be exca-

Summer sunset down Eynhallow Sound



EVIE ATTRACTIONS

- Broch of Gurness
- Broch of Bargar
- Knowe of Stenso
- Lowrie's Water
- Peerie Water
- Loomachun
- Bargar Hill
- Aerogenerators
- Sands of Aikerness
- Woodwick
- Birsay Moors RSPB Reserve
- Hillside Road
- Eynhallow Sound
- Costa Head



Aerogenerators on Burgar Hill

vated. The name Gurness is most likely a corruption of Aikerness.

Justice, 17th century-style
About 1630 a young girl was accused of child murder and sentenced to death in the manner of the times. She was

“to be taken to Olly Smith, the lockman, have her hands bund behind her back, convoyed by the said lockman to the oise mouth, and drowned in the sea to the death”. At a time when infant mortality was no doubt very high, it must have been

The first experimental aerogenerator was on Costa Hill



convenient to murder the mother rather than seek the real cause of death.

In four centuries we have not moved very far. Today mothers are still persecuted for infanticide by the establishment, and often imprisoned, only to be released when the experts are proven fallible.

Aerogenerators Attempts to harness the energy of the wind have been made in Evie since the early 1950s, when a prototype aerogenerator was installed on Costa Hill. Unfortunately it blew down in a big gale in 1953. In the 1980s several experimental wind turbines were built on Burgar Hill (HY343261, 259m), and now 6 large turbines generate electricity. The location was chosen due to the high average windspeeds. Issues such as nature conservation and amenity limit the number of possible sites in Orkney for such developments.

Research is also being conducted on the tidal flows of Eynhallow Sound to see if it would be a suitable location to install an experimental tidal generator. While the amounts of energy involved are very large, the engineering problems are also huge.

Birsay Moors RSPB Reserve spills over into Evie, and there is a bird-hide at Lowrie's Water (HY345257) on Burgar Hill, from where breeding Red-throated Divers

can be observed without causing any disturbance. The adults' calls can often be heard as they fly back and forth from their fishing grounds. Although breeding numbers have dropped here, it has not been shown to have been caused by the wind turbines

From the hide all of Orkney's moorland birds may be seen, including Merlin, Hen Harrier, Short-eared Owl and Whimbrel. Take the signposted road off the A966 for access. Parts of the Reserve can also be reached by the many peat tracks which lead into the hill.

Marine Animals In recent



Red-throated Diver (Loom)

years Basking Sharks have been seen in Eynhallow Sound, perhaps feeding on plankton stirred up by the rapid change in depth in the Burgar Röst which goes from less than 10m to more than 20m in a short distance. Common Seals are often seen

hauled out along the shore, or foraging among the seaweed, especially near the Broch of Gurness. Otters may also be seen in Evie, and the Burn of Desso at Aikerness and the Woodwick Burn being likely spots in the gloaming.



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Woodwick Burn and woods





Aerial view of the Broch of Gurness from the northeast

THE BROCH OF GURNESS (HY383269) is one of Orkney's best-preserved brochs. The domestic buildings around it are more extensive and have survived better than those at any other broch. The view down Eynhallow Sound is one of the finest in Orkney. The excellent defensive position, adjacent good farmland, a fine beach for

hauling boats and nearby fishing grounds make it easy to see why the site was chosen.

Ramparts The broch was originally surrounded by three massive ramparts and ditches at least 2m deep. Erosion has removed part of the north of the site, so the original layout is unknown, but the central area is about 48m in diameter.

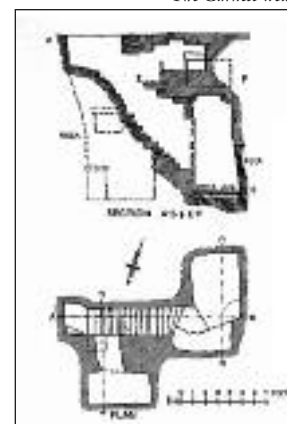
The Broch is about 20m in diameter with walls about 6m thick and an internal space of at least 80m². If Mousa Broch in Shetland is typical, the Gurness structure could have originally reached 13m, but the Shetland broch is regarded as a late example. The tower would have been an excellent source of building stone once it had fallen out of use.

1930s site plan of the Broch of Gurness



RCAHMS

The Gurness well



RCAHMS

The Entrance to the settlement is via a causeway over the eastern ramparts and ditches. There are outer and inner gateways to pass through before the main doorway of the broch itself is very impressive with a characteristic large lintel. The 6m passage with guard cells on either side was defended by a massive wooden door, whose jambs, hinges and square bolt holes call all be seen.



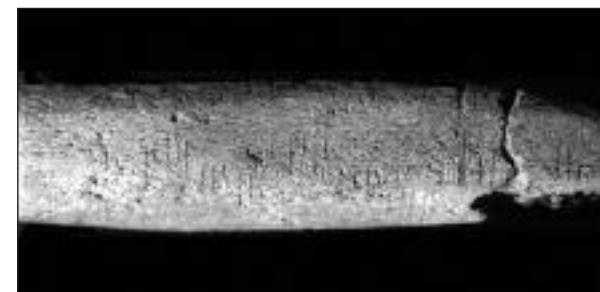
Broch of Gurness and Eynhallow Sound from the south



Rebuilt Pictish Shamrock house at the entrance

Interior Originally there was a central hearth and an underground well with steps going down to a collecting tank, while the subdivisions seem to be a later addition. Stone cupboards and fittings survive, but originally much of the interior would have been wooden, with a first floor supported on the scarcement about 3m above the floor.

The well is a complex structure built in a hole about 4m by 5m quarried out of the rock. It includes a 18-step stairway, chambers with corbelled roofs and a cistern at the bottom with an elaborate roof. Although it may have



Ogam-inscribed knife handle

Cell, doorjams and socket for bar inside the entrance



Interior detail of the Broch of Gurness



NMS

Orkney Museum



The Broch of Gurness remains impressive from the sea

been used as a well the overall impression is of something symbolic rather than purely practical, especially in view of the similarities to Minehowe in Tankerness.

Village Within the space between the broch and the ramparts the settlement might

have accommodated up to 30 families. This village appears to have been occupied while the broch was in use and it may be that the whole complex was planned from the outset. Houses share side and back walls and are furnished in stone, with hearths, cooking tanks, drains, box-beds, stor-



Viking female burial with oval brooches, sickle and knife

Viking brooch in Orkney Museum



Orkney Museum



Iron Age pottery found in the 1930s

age cupboards, drains and even a toilet. There are smaller rooms off the main living rooms as well as small sheds and open yards.

The broch itself may have been constructed before the 2nd century BC or earlier and occupation continued into Pictish times. Bone artefacts such as weaving combs, pins, hair combs and other tools were also present. Bronze pins and a penannular broch which could have been made on the site were also found. Pottery included a variety of sizes of vessels, some almost complete. At least one fragmentary Pictish symbol stone was also present.

Ogam Inscription An iron foundry was in use at the site and many Pictish artefacts, including an Ogam-inscribed bone knife-handle with an iron blade were found. A recent transliteration of this inscription suggests that it is in fact in Old Norse and reads, "IN EITTE MUN MATS, In Memory of Mats", (or perhaps Kvamms). The context of this find is unknown, but the argument is persuasive.

Roman Finds Parts of a



Broch of Gurness from the south east showing ramparts, ditches and entrance causeway

Roman amphora from AD60 or earlier were also found in the 1930s. These were used to transport wine or olives. Roman pottery was also found at Oxtro and Midhowe brochs, while coins were recovered from the Broch of Lingro. Whether the artefacts are the result of trade, exchange or direct contact will probably never be known.

Pictish Houses The houses at the entry gate were rebuilt in their present position as they were removed to expose earlier structures during excavation. One, with five cells off a central room, is typically Pictish, while the other is oblong. They are the only such houses on view in Orkney and resemble the

houses which at the Point of Buckquoy in Birsay.

Viking Grave The grave of a well-off 9th century Norse woman who had been buried with two large matching oval bronze brooches at her breast was discovered in the eastern

rampart near the entrance. She wore a finely woven cloth garment and an iron necklace. An iron sickle was at her right side and a wooden-handled knife at her left. These objects can be seen in the Orkney Museum.



Interior of the broch from the west

Cell, doorjams and socket for bar inside the entrance



Interior detail of the Broch of Gurness





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RENDALL, (ON *Rennudalr*, Valley of the Renna), a small stream, may originally have formed one estate, probably including Gairsay, belonging at one time to Sweyn Asleifson, the famous Viking so often mentioned in the *Orkneyinga Saga*, and his family.

Iron Age The string of brochs which line the shores of Evie and Rousay continues along the Rendall coast. Tingwall (HY401229) has a large broch mound above the ferry terminal. There are smaller examples at Wass Wick, near the Hall of Rendall and at Knowe o'Dishero. The broch north of

St Thomas's Kirk with nearby broch mound, Gairsay is in the background



the Hall of Rendall has been severely eroded by the sea, but a large part of the west side remains, along with extensive ruins. Iron Age pottery and a bone weaving comb have been found here.

St Thomas's Kirk and graveyard lies just to the north. This 12th century Norse kirk was most likely built by the local Viking chieftain, in this case perhaps even Sweyn himself. Since there is no kirk or graveyard on Gairsay this was undoubtedly the place of worship and burial of the "Buckies", or Gairsaymen. Recent storms and high tides have exposed

some of the medieval burials to the east of the kirk on the top of the shore. They have been removed, and after research will be reburied.

Dooocot There is an interesting 17th century Dooocot (HY422207) at the Hall of Rendall. Unique in Orkney, this structure has four external courses of flagstones to discourage rodents. A hole in the roof allows access for pigeons which nest in gaps in the internal stonework. The nearby Holm of Rendall has a colony of Arctic Terns, with some Sandwich Terns.

Another ruined chapel sits amid a graveyard on the north side of the Bay of Henderayre, just south of the Knowe of Dishero. In this case a high sea-wall protects the site.

Mossetter A typical old Orkney Farm Steading at Mossetter (HY390197) down a track off the A966 has many features found in longhouses. This three-roomed building is on a slope, with the byre at the bottom. Man and beast used the same entrance, cattle turning left, humans right into the living room.

Neuk beds and other recesses in the walls are reminiscent of Midhowe Broch and Skara Brae. The house was originally a firehouse, with a fire-back and smoke went out through the roof as at Kirbuster Farm, but a chimney was installed to slightly improve the amenities.



Wasswick WWII Coastal Battery at Queenamuckle

Views and Walks Rendall may lack the spectacular coastline and sites of interest of some parishes, but it offers attractions all of its own. The views across the Wide Firth from the Gorseness Road to the North Isles are very fine, especially from the top of Gorseness Hill (HY409202) and nearby Enyas Hill with its probable chambered cairn.

Otters The low banks along this sheltered shore are the haunt of Otters, which may sometimes be seen swimming just offshore. They are frequently seen around the Bay of Isbister and in the Cruan Burn.

Birds The Loch of Brockan (HY395190) and nearby Oyce

Female Hen Harrier



There is a large broch mound at Tingwall

of Isbister are good places to see wintering and migrant wildfowl and wading birds, while the RSPB Reserve at Cottascarth (HY369195) with its hide is perhaps the best place in Orkney to see Hen Harriers. Nearby there are fine views to the east from the Lyde Road (HY369186).

Moorland Walk The road up Milldoo Hill (HY358208, 211m) to a radio mast starts south of Tingwall. It is a stiff but interesting moorland walk, with superb views across the Bay of Firth to Shapinsay and beyond, as well as to Kirkwall and the East Mainland.

Tingwall (ON *Thing-vollr*, Ting Field, HY403228), a large broch mound near the shore, is one of several meeting places of the Norse "Ting". This is probably where the Earls Magnus and Haakon had their disagreement before the fateful meeting on Egilsay. Tingwall would have been a convenient meeting place for people from the North Isles and West Mainland.

There are other *Ting* place names in Orkney, such as Dingieshowe (ON *Tings-haugr*, Thing Mound) in Deerness. The main Ting was undoubtedly-

ly held in Kirkwall after it became the seat of the Earl, probably at *Parliament Square* which was near the Bridge over the Papdale Burn, where the Hydro Electric shop is now.

World War II The Wasswick Battery at Queenamuckle (HY420226) remains virtually complete. Two 12-pounder guns were mounted here to defend the Gairsay Sound entrance to the Wide Firth. Manned by 151 Coast Battery, the guns saw no action, but were probably effective by merely being there.

Ferry Terminal Tingwall is the departure point for the car ferry *Eynhallow*, which serves Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre with several crossings per day.

Hall of Rendall Dooocot

