Apparently it was thrown into 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.

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 excavated. 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,
West Mainland - Evie

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 three large turbines generate electricity. The location was chosen due to the high average windspeeds prevalent in Orkney. 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), from where breeding Red-throated Divers can be observed without causing any disturbance. The adult’s calls can often be heard as they fly back and forth from their fishing grounds.

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.

Mammals

In recent 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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EVIE ATTRACTIONS
Broch of Gurness
Broch of Burgar
Knowe of Stенко
Lowrie’s Water
Peerie Water
Loomachun
Burgar Hill
Aerogenerators
Sands of Aikerness
Woodwick
Birsay Moors RSPB Reserve
Hillside Road
Eynhallow Sound
Costa Head

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Tel (01856) 751305

Red-throated Diver (Loon)
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 best 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.

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 and either Pictish or early Norse. They are the only such houses on view in Orkney and resemble the Pictish houses which were excavated at the Point of Buckquoy in Birsay.

The broch was originally surrounded by three massive ramparts and deep ditches and is likely to have been a tall tower. If Mousa broch in Shetland is typical, the Gurness structure may have reached 13m, but the Shetland broch is regarded as a late example, and may not be untypical. The tower would have been an excellent source of building stone once it had fallen out of use.

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. Within the space between the broch and the ramparts is a small village which might have accommodated up to 30 or more 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, storage cupboards and even a toilet.

The broch itself may have been constructed about the 1st century BC or earlier and occupation continued into early Viking times, until about the 9th century AD. An iron foundry was in use at the site and many Pictish artefacts, including an Ogam-inscribed bone knife-handle were found here.

Parts of a Roman amphora which dates from AD60 or earlier were found during excavations 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 are the remains of booty will probably never be known.

The “well” in the broch interior 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 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.

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 one of the ramparts. 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.

A recent transliteration of this inscription suggests that it is in fact in Old Norse and reads, “INEITTEMUN|MATS, in memory of Mats”. The context of this find is unknown, but the argument is persuasive. The knife-blade has sadly become lost since being found in 1931.
RENDALL, (ON Rennudar, 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 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.

There is an interesting 17th century Doocot (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.

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 “fireback” and smoke went out through the roof as at Kirbuster Farm, but a chimney was installed to slightly improve the amenities.

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