

EAST MAINLAND - HOLM



Aerial view of Holm and the Churchill Barriers

HOLM (ON *Homn*, haven or good anchorage) is pronounced "Ham". The eastern part of the parish is known as Paplay (ON *Papabyli*, home or settlement of Papae). According to the Orkneyinga Saga the Sigurd who married Earl Erlend's widow, Thora, the mother of St Magnus, lived here. The old church is on the shore at Howes Wick (HY513005) and this may well be the site of a much earlier Celtic church.

Picts A Pictish symbol

Castle Howe may be a Norse castle built on a broch



stone was found in Holm in the 19th century, but its exact provenance is unclear. The "Graemeshall Stone" may have been associated with the chapel that once stood near the mouth of the Graemeshall Burn at "Mass Howe", which may have been dedicated to Mary.

Castle Howe (HY514003), which strongly resembles the small stone castle of Cubbie Roo on Wyre, could be the remains of a large Norse stronghold, and it may be built on top of an

Iron Age broch. At the eastern approach to Scapa Flow and overlooking the fertile area of Paplay, this would be a good place to establish a stronghold. This large unexcavated mound may hide all sorts of secrets, but so far the visitor must use imagination.

World War I There was a battery near Tower of Clett at Graemeshall in World War I, originally four 12-pounders mounted on concrete parapets. These were replaced in 1916 with three American 4-inch quick firing guns. Blockships were sunk in all of the sounds now blocked by the Churchill Barriers.

World War II At the start of the war Kirk Sound was neither defended by guns, nor properly obstructed by blockships, thus allowing U47 free access to Scapa

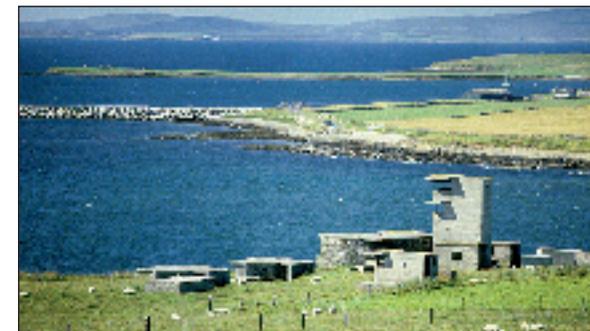
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Flow in October 1939. Soon after two 12-pounders were mounted on the WWI site.

Nearby a twin 6-pounder battery (HY495017) was installed by late 1940 in a concrete gun house with associated magazines and searchlights. A further twin 12-pounder battery was installed on the south side of Lamb Holm (HY487002). With the completion of the Barriers the guns were moved to other sites in October 1943. The Graemeshall battery is typical of many around Orkney shores and is mostly intact.

RAF Netherbutton Radar Station (HY463044), on the main A961, Kirkwall-Holm road, was the most northerly of the "Chain Home" of radar stations built in the late 1930s all the way from Land's End to Orkney. Each such station had 4 steel towers, which were the transmitting aerials, here on the west side of the road, and four wooden towers on the east side, which were the receiving aerials. Although all the towers have now gone, much remains of the site including the transmitter room (now a house), the powerhouse and several other buildings.

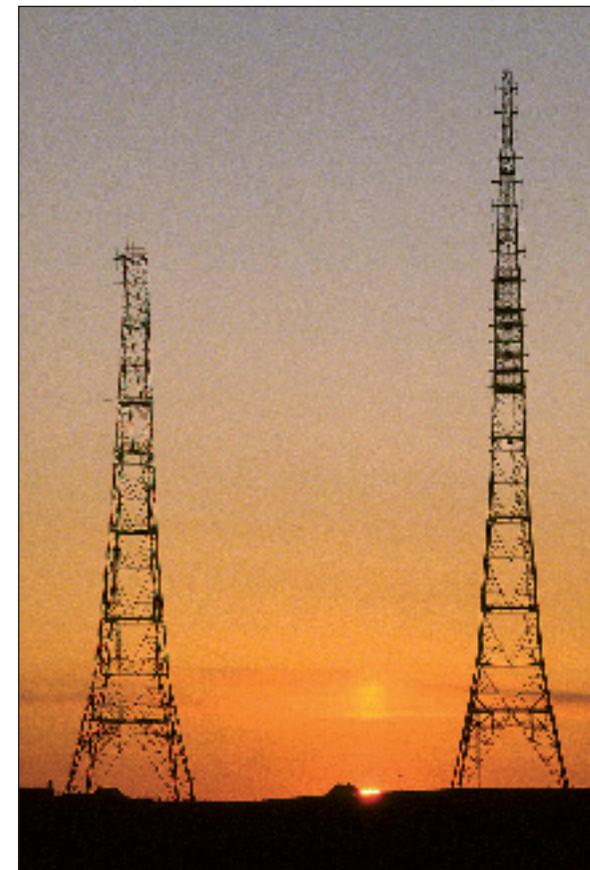
Initially the station used equipment from other sites and by 1st June 1939 it was operational, but with small 90ft towers and obsolete electronics. Four 350ft



Graemeshall coastal defence battery and Churchill Barrier No.1

metal transmitting towers were built in 1940, and the station was fully complete in July 1941, by which time the German air threat was much diminished. Netherbutton originally was linked to the Wick operations room, but from October 1940 it reported to the Combined Gunnery

RAF Netherbutton was a WWII radar station then a BBC TV station



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St Mary's in about 1900

and Sector Operations Centre at Kirkwall (the "Black Building"), which then controlled all of Orkney's anti-aircraft guns and fighter squadrons.

At the end of the war the station was re-equipped, but by 1955 it was redundant. The station closed in 1958, but then found a new use as a television relay station. One of the towers was raised to 411ft and the transmitter block used for the equipment. The remaining two towers were finally dismantled in 1986 by the same company which had built them 47 years previously, when the BBC moved to Keelyleang. Orkney Wireless

Howes Wick and the Old Kirk with Roseness in the background



Museum in Kirkwall has various artefacts relating to this and other aspects of radio in World War II.

St Mary's Village, and its sheltered Bay of Ayre was a busy place during the Herring fishing season. Before the building of the Barriers a ferry ran from here to Burray. The name is from an ancient chapel, whose site is now lost. It may well have been near the broch, as the Loch of Ayre is also known as St Mary's Loch, but it was more likely at "**Mass Howe**", near the mouth of Graemeshall Burn where an inscribed Pictish stone is said to have been found in the 19th century.

A French Raid There is an attractive old storehouse at its eastern end with a steep roof and crow-stepped gables, which was built in 1649. It was looted in 1694 by two French privateers which sailed into Holm Sound, after kidnapping three fishermen who were forced to act as pilots. The store was originally used for the collection of goods used to settle skat, the tax due under Udal Law.

The French landed on Lamb Holm and stole all of the animals there as well as supplies of grain, meal and butter. They also smashed a boat and took household goods, before landing next to the storehouse and taking everything of value. Beacons had meanwhile been lit and soon over 400 people, many of them armed, were watching helplessly. The laird fired his cannon but its range was too short to reach the ships.

Graemeshall House (HY488017) has a large private collection of antiques collected by Norris Wood over 55 years, the "Norwood Collection". There are five rooms of exhibits, and a small chapel. The house was originally built about 1626 by Bishop Graham as an extension to the older House of Meall and has since been extensively modified. Open May to September, admission charge.

Wildlife St Mary's Loch

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St Mary's from Lamb Holm

and Graemeshall Loch are both good spots for wintering wildfowl and unusual vagrants during the migration seasons. Both can be observed using the car as a hide. Holm Sound and St Mary's Bay are also particularly interesting in winter with Long-tailed Ducks, Velvet Scoters and Great Northern Divers. Otters frequent the shores and are sometimes seen around the Barriers. Occasionally pods of Dolphins appear, no doubt chasing shoals of Mackerel or Herring.

Walks There is a pleasant walk out to the point at Roseness (ND520990), where there is a new lighthouse. It is possible to continue along the low cliffs to

Old storehouse built in 1649

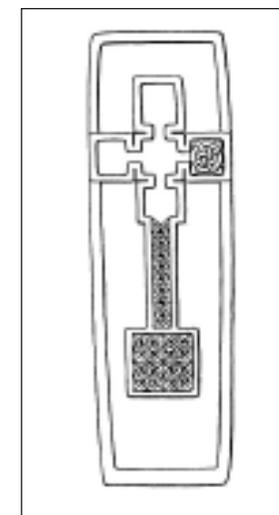


Dingieshowe in Deerness. There are good views from here to the east to Copinsay and southwards to the South Isles.

St Mary's There is a fine circular coastal walk via Skaildaquoy Point, and Howequoy Head to the Bay of Sandoyne. Return by side roads to the Loch of Ayre with its ruined broch and wildfowl.

Paplay The area around the Old St Nicholas Kirk on the shores of Holm Sound is particularly attractive. The Beaches at Wester Sand and Howes Wick are small but interesting, and are good places to look for migrant waders. The fertile east part of Holm is known as Paplay.

Graemeshall houses the "Norwood Collection"



"Graemeshall" Pictish stone

The many small roads and viewpoints are well worth exploring. Greenwall is one of the oldest inhabited houses in Orkney.