

ORKNEY

O5. Paplay, Holm

Ward of Paplay	HY 5255 0126 SMR no.?	NMRS no. HY50SW15	RCAHMS 1946, 55
St. Nicholas's cemetery	HY 5104 0064 SMR no. ?	NMRS no. HY50SW14	RCAHMS 1946, no. 375

Soil Survey of Scotland Class 41- 51 (41 between Holm and Paplay and 51 east of the burn). 41 is the best class of land in Orkney, as Birsay and Sanday

(FIG.05.1)

Barry accounts for the name of the district of Paplay as:

'probably derived the name from the people who at a very early period inhabited that fertile and beautiful district. They [Holm and Paplay] have long been united under their present name, and form one of the most compact and prosperous parishes in the country' (Barry 1805, 25-6).¹

Similarly, Smith suggests that the Paplay places, 'always the most fertile spots of a parish', had acquired their name through 'their being allotted for the residence of the papae or priests in the times of popery' (1842, 226). Low noted that the soils of the parish were generally thin, but that there was a lot of arable ground, 'producing small Oats and Bear or Big, and a large quantity of Flax' (1774, 50).

Paplay is a large district comprising two urislands or a 36d land (Clouston 1924, 66; one urisland of skatted land and another of quoyland according to Marwick, 1952, 89, although this is 'pretty certainly' bordland according to W. Thomson). The earldom rental covering the years 1497 to 1503 makes clear that the former odal lands of Paplay and Greenwall (now the farm lying immediately to the north of St. Nicholas's and apparently created as a *bu* from lands taken from the *Bulle of Skail* and from other farms in the fifteenth century) had been acquired by Earl William Sinclair from the native Paplay family before 1460. In the same rental, the sett of the parish of Holm took place at *Sanct Nicholauis's kirk of Greinvall* (Peterkin, no. I, 11, 14, 16; Clouston 1924, 66; Clouston 1927, 44-5, 47; Marwick 1952, 89-91; Lamb 1995, 25). In 1614, William Sinclair was tacksman of Holme and Paplay, while Greenwall was linked with Paplay in the paying of teinds (Peterkin, no. II, 121). In 1627, all the lands of Holme and Paplay are described as bishopric lands, although they 'of auld were king, bischop, and uthell' (ibid., no. III, 49).

Holm and Paplay lie on the south side of the high ground running parallel to Holm Sound; the small island of Lamb Holm, which lies within the sound, also belonged to the parish (Brand 1701, 50). The sound was a safe harbour (ibid., 48; Wallace 1693, 10) and - prior to the formation of the Churchill Barrier's - also gave access to Scapa Flow. St. Nicholas is the patron saint of sailors and this may be significant in explaining the common dedication of churches in Orkney to this saint (Craven 1891, 72). The united parishes measure approximately 4-5 miles by 1-2 miles in width (Low 1774, 50; Barry 1805, 25; Smith 1842, 204). According to Scott, the name, Holm - derived from 'haven' and pronounced 'ham' - was spelt in this way to distinguish it from other places of the same name (*FES*, Vol. VII, 217); Marwick explains the two forms as due to scribal confusion (1952, 89). Although Paplay is the only *papar* placename to be applied to a parish, it seems to have begun to fall out of use after the Reformation. The ministers who wrote the Old and New Statistical Accounts differ in the title they give their parish (Alison 1792; Smith 1842) and Paplay continued to be shown as a district name on numerous maps (Blaeu 1654; Mackenzie

1750; Aberdeen 1769; Sawyer and Bennett 1781; Depot Generale de la Marine 1803; Arrowsmith 1807; Thomson 1822), in other sources the conjoined parishes were referred to solely as Holm (e.g. by Monteith in 1633 (1845, 3)). With the exception of Blaeu, all the maps show a church in association with the name, Paplay, while Moll shows a building approximately where the church now is, although he does not give a name to the district (Moll 1745a).

Parish History

Holm and Paplay are entered as separate parishes in the early rentals, although Marwick believed that there would seem to be 'no justification for such a division' (Marwick 1952, 89), as Paplay on its own was much too small to form a parish.²

The parish of Holm and Paplay, now known simply as Holm, was a parsonage and mensal church of the bishopric of Orkney at the Reformation, while the cure was a vicarage perpetual (Cowan 1967, 82; *contra* Clouston 1918, 228). This arrangement appears to have been of long standing, as was the allocation of half the teinds of Paplay and Quoyes to the prebend of St. John in 1627 (Peterkin, no. III, 49; Clouston 1947, 240-1; Cowan 1967, 82). This prebend, the other half of which comprised a number of farms in the parishes of St. Ola and St. Andrews, was assigned to the upkeep of St. Magnus Cathedral from at least 1486, although Bishop Reid did attempt to transfer it to the minister of St. Ola in 1544 (Clouston 1947, 240; Mooney 1947, 51, 70). Holm was apparently one of the few Orkney parishes which had only one church and it must, therefore, be significant in this context that this church was not centrally located and is said to have lain in the district of Paplay (Brand 1701, 50; Smith 1842, 226).

The present *St. Nicholas's church* (SMR NO.79) and burial ground are described below, but the OS 1903 map marks the site of a St. Nicholas church at Mass Howe, some distance to the north-west, near to Graemeshall. Mass Howe is a large hillock located on the east side of a sandy bay, behind which is a small loch. Although surrounded by a number of the natural mounds and lying on level ground, to the north of which the ground rises quite sharply, Mass Howe remains a very prominent feature in the landscape. Even though it is annotated as the site of St. Nicholas's church, no mention of any structural remains is made in the Name Book (NB, Orkney, Book 9, 67; Clouston 1918, 235; RCAHMS 1946, 107, no. 373; NMRS no. HY40SE8, HY 4909 0181). Mass Gate, translated by Marwick as 'church road' (1923, 63), is marked immediately to the north east of Mass Howe. Both names are shown on the current edition of the OS 1:10000 map and the OS surveyor in 1964 noticed the low footings of a rectangular structure, lying on an east-west axis, on top of the mound, but could find no local traditions concerning the site. It seems more likely that Mass Howe should be equated with Scott's assertion that there was also a chapel in the district of Paplay (*FES*, Vol. VII, 217), than that the location of the parish church has shifted.³

The only other possible chapel site within the parish lies at Kirk Point on the southern tip of Lamb Holm, described in the 1595 rental of Orkney as attached to Holm parish, one of the two small islands lying between the Mainland and Burray. All traces of the small building noted in the Name Book as locally believed to be the site of a Roman Catholic chapel, have now been removed by the modern road and adjacent military installations (Peterkin, no. II, 15-6; Clouston 1918, 235; RCAHMS 1946, 107, no. 374; NMRS no. HY40SE5).

Church Sites and Sculpture

The RCAHMS survey of Orkney in 1946 suggested that the rounded mound on which the present church and graveyard of St. Nicholas stand resembled the site of a broch, the surveyors noting a wall protruding through the summit of the mound to the north of the graveyard (RCAHMS 1946, 107). Later OS surveyors have been less convinced by this evidence for prehistoric activity; however, further substantial walling has been carted away from the site and a cup-marked boulder was recovered amongst the stones of one of these walls, along with many animal bones, shells and barrel-shaped red clay beads (NMRS no. HY50SW14, HY 5104 0064). Looking from the north west, it is clear that there is a very prominent mound lying to the west of the church itself and cut by the graveyard wall. No stonework is apparent in this area, but the soil at the base of the wall is very black. The lower ground to the north of the church appears to have once been quite marshy, before it slopes gently upwards to the farms which frame the skyline.

A cross slab, now in St. Margaret's chapel at Graemeshall, was found either in the floor of the church 'some years ago' or in 'an out-building at the Kirk of Holm' (Craven 1891, 9; Allen and Anderson 1903, 21-3; Græme 1936, 55; RCAHMS 1946, 102, no. 359; Fisher 2002, 45; there is a small outbuilding against the north wall of the graveyard, just to the east of the church). The slab is edged with a raised moulding, similar to that outlining the cross itself; the latter contains interlace, different on each part of the cross (Allen and Anderson 1903, 21-3), and recent dating would put it in the tenth century (Fisher, 2002, 45). Another gravemarker, 'a smaller sepulchral slab, incised with three swords', of medieval date, is also now at Graemeshall (Craven 1891, 104; PSAS 1901, 150; RCAHMS 1946, 102, no. 359), while there are a number of other seventeenth century graveslabs in the churchyard (RCAHMS 1946, 100-1, no. 358). These finds do not actually confirm the use of this site for religious purposes from the Early Christian period onwards (pace Craven 1901, 13, 72), but certainly from the early medieval period, reinforcing the probability the parish church has always been in this location (see above). The present church was built in 1818, but was taken over by the army in 1939 and has not been used since; the pews have been cleared out, although the pulpit is still in place (Smith 1842, 226; Burgher 1991, 33; information from OS surveyor in NMRS).

St. Nicholas's church and cemetery lie on a small promontory on the north side of the only sandy and partly sheltered bay, Howes Wick, on this part of the coast. On the south side of the bay is a probable broch known as Castle Howe (Clouston 1932, 38; RCAHMS 1946, 103-4, no. 361; NMRS no. HY50SW13, HY 5138 0030). This is a substantial mound on top of which is a later rectangular, stone-built structure. Both the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church are marked on the OS First edition map just to the north-east of St. Nicholas's; the latter now acts as the parish church (NMRS no. HY50SW44, HY 5035 0187). The Quoys - perhaps the land which went to support the prebend of St. John - is located just to the east of the two modern churches, with another farm, Skails, to the south-east. A cluster of houses and a large farm named Bu lie to the north east of St. Nicholas's church; the *Bull of Skaille* is named in the 1497-1503 rental of the earldom (Peterkin, no. 1, 13; Clouston 1927, 44; Marwick 1952, 90-1; NMRS no. HY50SW25; although the NMRS record has not located the farm, it is centred at HY 519 012 on the modern map). These names, along with the few details which are available about a Viking grave at Lyking, found in the nineteenth century a short distance to the north west of the present parish church (NMRS no. HY50SW17, HY 500 022), suggest that early settlement focused on the area inland of St. Nicholas's.

The importance of Paplay in the medieval period can be learned from its association with prominent individuals in the twelfth-century saga account. *Papuli* (Paplay)

formed part of the dowry of Gunnhild, a daughter of Earl Erlend and sister of St. Magnus, on her marriage to Kol, son of Kali Sæbjarnarson (chap.42). On the death of Erlend, Thora, mother of Magnus and Gunnhild, married Sigurd and 'they had the estate of Paplay' (chap.44, Taylor, OS, 204; Marwick 1952, 89). It must have been at Paplay where Hakon went to the feast which Thora had prepared for both himself and Magnus, when she asked for the body of her son in order to bury him (chap.52). Hakon Karl, the son of this second marriage, must have retained this farm, as on two occasions it is recorded that he received visitors at Paplay (Pálsson and Edwards 1978, 128, 195).

The Ward of Paplay is a prominent mound - now surmounted by a modern cairn and a trig point - on the summit of a hill overlooking the eastern side of the parish, just to the east of Bu. (NB, Orkney, Book 9, 86; Clouston 1932, 35; RCAHMS 1946, vol. I, 55; vol. II, 106, no. 365; NMRS no. HY50SW15, HY 5255 0126). Although there is no evidence to corroborate this, its strategic location and its association with the element ward or 'warth', has been taken to suggest a look-out point of some antiquity (Wallace 1693, 41-2; Clouston 1932, 35, 37ff; cf. Pálsson and Edwards 1978, 123, 129). Low notes a large cairn on Roseness, which he saw as part of a communication network, connecting Copinsay - and therefore the north isles - with the broch at Castle-howie and many of the south isles (1774, 52); ⁴it is possible that Low's Roseness cairn may be the Wart of Paplay, since he then goes on to describe Roseness-head (on the east side of which is a possible chambered cairn) as if it was separate.

Preliminary Evaluation of the two Paplays (ed.)

The name 'Paplay' as found in Orkney is assumed to be the equivalent of the Shetland 'Papil', and both derived from *Papa-byli* = 'settlement of papar' (MacDonald, 2002,20). But there are problems with this derivation.

These two sites have certain similarities in that they form districts within their medieval parish, both in fertile locations and less isolated or 'secluded' than the Papays. The S. Ronaldsay Paplay does not now appear to be so close to its parish church as the Paplay in Holm, but this may be simply a result of the contraction of the district in more recent times. Evidence for Iron Age settlement is suspected in the case of Paplay in Holm but only excavation of the mound on which the church stands will prove that, while early sculpture has only been found at S. Peter's in S. Ronaldsay.

The notable fact about Paplay in Holm is the high status of the estate in the Norse period and its association with the earldom family-renewed by Earl William at the very end of the Middle Ages. Its relationship with Holm may hint at a similar situation as mentioned under Papil in Unst (Site S5), that it could have been located to serve a nearby secular community, in this instance at Holm. The cross-slab is further evidence of the high status of the Norse landowners in the tenth century.

OS maps:

Ordnance Survey, 1879 (1882). First edition. 1:10,560. Sheet CXV.

Ordnance Survey, 1880 (1881). First edition. 1:2,500. Sheet CXV.9 & 10.

Ordnance Survey, 1900 (1902). Second edition. 1:2,500. CXV.9 & 10.

Ordnance Survey, 1970-1. 1:10000. Sheets HY40SE and HY50SW.

¹ Blau's map of 1693 shows the name 'At Papedale' in this location (Stone, 1991, 95)

² Nonetheless some significance may be attached to the fact that they are separately entered, and the high status of the estate of Paplay has to be taken into account.

³ Although the evidence for this dedication to St. Nicholas is late, and two such dedications in the same parish highly unlikely, it may be, as Sarah Grieve has suggested, that the separate nature of Holm and Paplay could have resulted in the same dedication being so close together.

⁴ This is not a broch site (info. from Sarah Grieve and see Grieve, 1999, 23, 67-70)