



HISTORIC  
ENVIRONMENT  
SCOTLAND

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ALBA

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Last Reviewed: 2020

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# WESTSIDE CHURCH (TUQUOY)



We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.

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# HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

## WESTSIDE CHURCH (TUQUOY)

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# I SUMMARY

## 1.1 Introduction

The roofless remains of Westside Church, Tuquoy (also known as Cross Kirk<sup>1</sup>) and its enclosed burial ground are located on the south-west coast of Westray, one of the northernmost islands of Orkney. The stone-built ruin is thought to be twelfth century in date and comprises a simple Romanesque nave and chancel which was extended in the thirteenth century.

Immediately to the west of the graveyard lies a high-status Norse and medieval settlement (not in State care) which is associated with the kirk.

The church lies immediately above the eroding shoreline on the south shore of the Ness of Tuquoy (formerly called Kirk Ness) at around 5m above OD. The south side of the present graveyard is protected by a substantial sea wall, built probably in 1912-13 after the church came into State care<sup>2</sup>.

The site is a scheduled monument: SM 90312<sup>3</sup>. Today, the graveyard is managed by Orkney Islands Council, while the kirk is maintained and presented for visitors by Historic Environment Scotland. The site is accessible only by foot, either from the nearest road by walking down a track and east along the coast, or south across the fields from Tuquoy Farm itself (c. 10-15 minutes' walk). Westside Church is an unstaffed site open all year round, with information provided on-site via an interpretation panel. The annual number of visitors is not known, but estimated to be over 1000<sup>4</sup>.

## 1.2 Statement of Significance

Westside Church is of national importance, and forms part of the larger Norse and medieval site of Tuquoy. Amongst associated Norse sites in Orkney, Tuquoy is particularly threatened by coastal erosion.

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<sup>1</sup> N.B. The site is commonly referred to as 'Cross Kirk', however this document adopts the property name 'Westside Church' as defined within the 2014 Scheme of Delegation for Properties in Care.

<sup>2</sup> The site originally came in to State care in 1911, however an oversight meant that the Deed of Guardianship was not completed until 1934.

<sup>3</sup> 'Cross-Kirk (Westside Church), church & burial ground, Tuquoy, Westray' Scheduled Monument Description available at: <http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90312>

<sup>4</sup> Annual visitor numbers for 2018/19 were estimated at 1400.

Westside Church is significant on several counts:

- The site is one of the most refined of Orkney's medieval churches and a well-preserved example of a particular type of bicameral church<sup>5</sup> found in the Norse earldom of Orkney. It has high potential to contribute to our understanding of Norse ecclesiastical architecture and religious practice.
- As one of a distinctive group of small, Romanesque church buildings, it can contribute generally to our understanding of the 12th-century flowering of Norse culture in the Northern Isles – a period which reflects the wider Scandinavian and Continental contacts of the Orkney earldom, and which included the building of great monuments such as St Magnus Cathedral and the **Bishop's Palace**<sup>6</sup> in Kirkwall, the round church and **Earl's Bu** at Orphir, **Cubbie Roo's Castle** and **St Mary's Chapel** in Wyre, and **St Magnus Church** in Egilsay.
- Westside Church was elevated to parish church status probably in the late 12th or 13th century, and can contribute to our understanding of the process and development of ecclesiastical organisation at this formative time.
- Its significance is considerably enhanced by its association with a high-status Norse and medieval settlement which lies immediately adjacent and represents the nucleus of a wealthy manor farm in the 12th century. Partly investigated in the 1980s, this exceptionally rich site includes a 12th-century hall and, possibly, a tower or castle (identified by geophysical survey, but not excavated). The hall and kirk are probably broadly contemporary in date.
- The settlement site is also significant because it may be associated with historical people named in *Orkneyinga Saga*. The saga's account of 12th-century Westray indicates that this settlement was home to one of the island's leading families: Thorkel Flettir ('Flayer') and his

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<sup>5</sup> A two-cell church.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout the text, site names in **bold** are managed by Historic Environment Scotland and are publicly accessible. Access information can be found at: [www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/](http://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/)

sons, Thorstein and Hafliði. If so, it may have been Hafliði or one of his immediate descendants who instigated the building of Westside Church around the middle or later decades of the 12th century. Thorkel was an important ally of Rognvald in his struggle to acquire the Orkney Earldom in the 1130s.

- Together, the settlement and kirk retain high archaeological potential to contribute to our understanding of the organisation and economy of lordly estates, as well as of secular and religious daily life in Norse Orkney in this crucial period.
- The settlement site and its much longer-lived kirk also have rare potential to shed light on the process of ‘Scottification’ – the shadowy transformation from late Norse to medieval and later Orkney.

The above paragraphs outline the key significance of Westside Church. The following sections offer more detailed descriptions and analysis of the site.

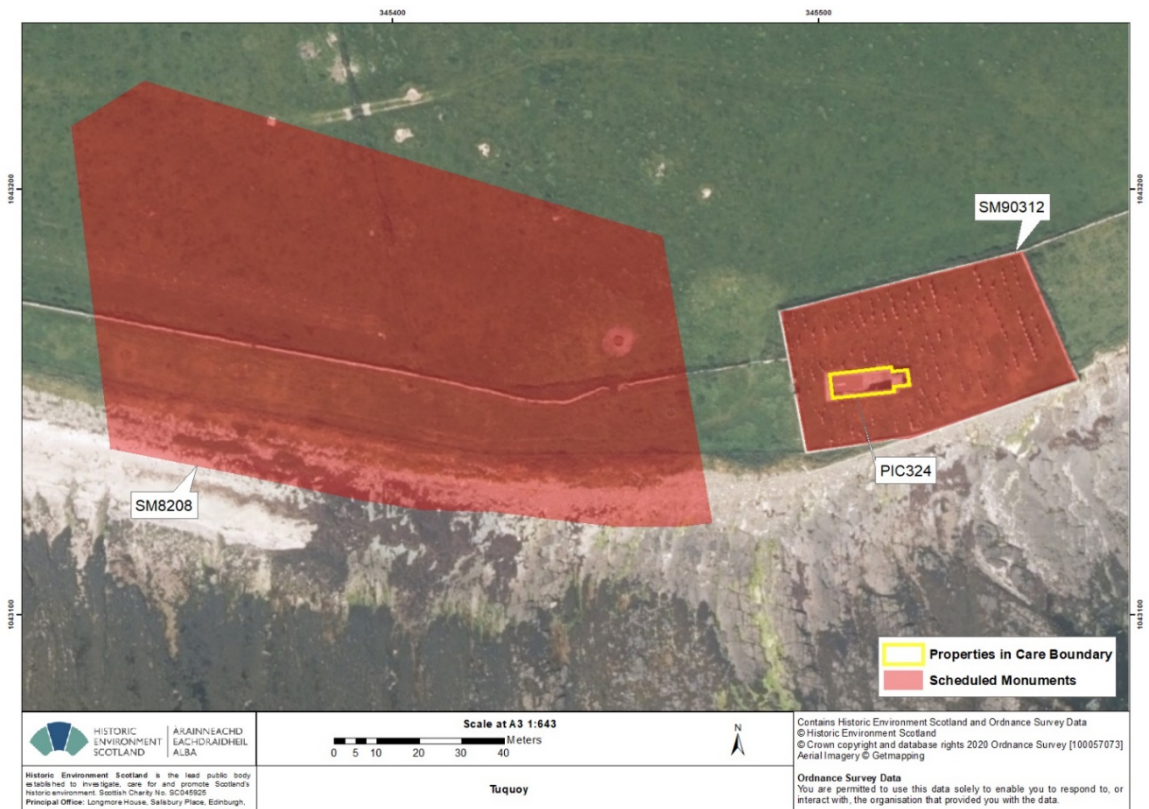
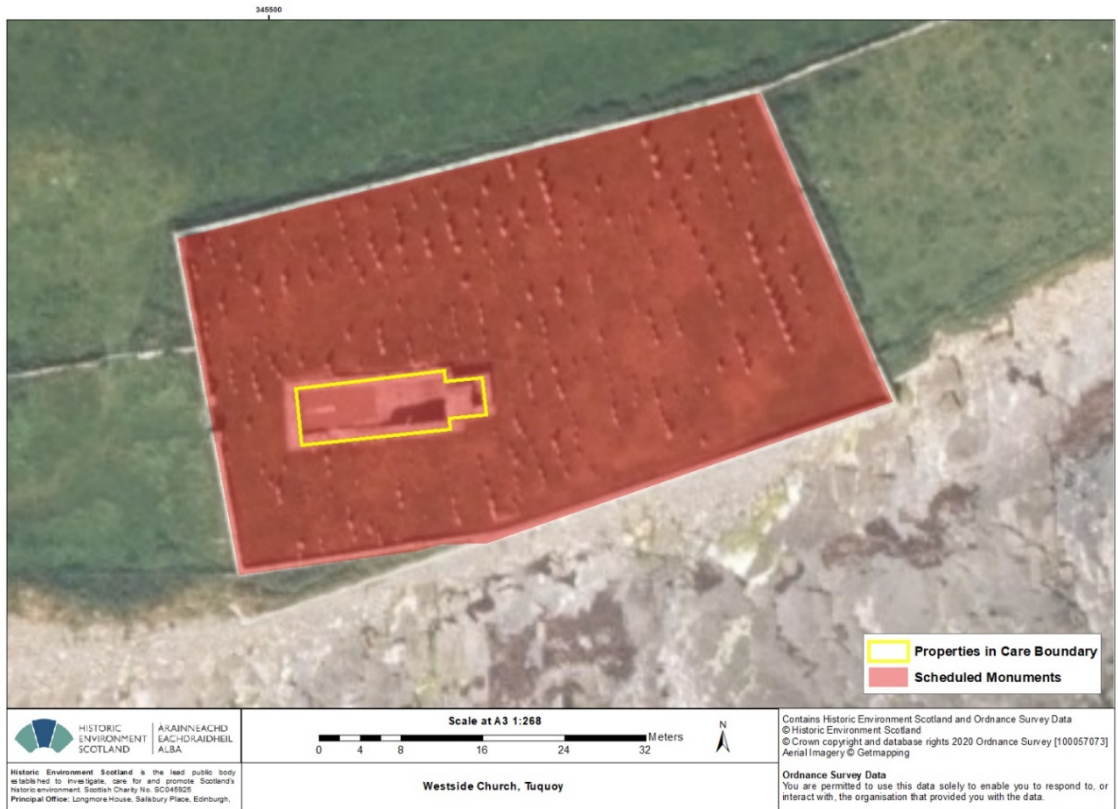


Figure 1: Westside Church Scheduled area and Property in Care Boundary (Top), and proximity to neighbouring Scheduled Monument: Tuquoy Settlement (Bottom). For illustrative purposes only.

## 2 ASSESSMENT OF VALUES

### 2.1 Background

The remains of Westside Church consist of a nave and chancel, both square-ended in form. The church shows two major phases of construction: an original nave and chancel; and a later extension to the west which more than doubled the length of the nave. The original nave, approximately 5.65m long by 4.15m wide, was entered from the south through a round-arched doorway. Its floor and the line of the west gable are represented by paving laid in 1912 by the (then) Ministry of Public Buildings and Works (MOPBW) after the site came into State care. The walls of the original nave and chancel are well preserved, standing up to 2.25m high, while the later extension to the nave is much reduced, with walls standing only around 0.50m high. The chancel was entered through an arch and its roof is a barrel vault. Traces of plaster still adhere to the walls in the original (east) part of the building.

The present graveyard is roughly sub-rectangular in form and contained within a dry-stone wall. Traces of an earlier sub-rectangular enclosure are apparent to the north and east of the church in the form of a turf-covered bank, 0.50m high, defining an area approximately 50m east-west by 25m north-south. The orientation of the enclosure is slightly at variance with that of the church, which may suggest that there had been an earlier chapel on the site.

Immediately to the west of the graveyard lies an extensive Norse and medieval settlement (not in State care) which is associated with the kirk. Partly investigated in the 1980s<sup>7</sup>, the settlement includes a high-status 12th-century hall, some 70m to the west of the kirk, and possibly a tower or castle (not excavated). The hall and kirk are probably broadly contemporary in date. Analysis of an account of 12th-century Westray in *Orkneyinga Saga* suggests that this settlement was home to one of the island's leading families: Thorkel Flettir ('Flayer') and his sons, Thorstein and Haflidi. As a consequence, the hall has been nicknamed 'Haflidi's Hall'. If this is correct, it may have been Haflidi or one of his immediate descendants who instigated the building of Westside Church around the

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<sup>7</sup> Owen 1993; 1999; 2003; 2005



middle or later decades of the 12th century. The settlement is scheduled separately from the kirk: SM8208<sup>8</sup>.



*Figure 2: view from north-west, with internal paving demarcating the original footprint of the nave, before its extension to the west. © Crown Copyright: HES.*

## 2.11 Historical Context

By the 12th century, Orkney was entirely Norse in character and had been part of the Norwegian kingdom for many decades. This period was the floruit (the most active period) of Norse culture in the Northern Isles<sup>9</sup> and included the building of great monuments such as St Magnus Cathedral and the **Bishop's Palace** in Kirkwall, the round church and **Earl's Bu** at Orphir, **Cubbie Roo's Castle** and **St Mary's Chapel** in Wyre, and **St Magnus Church** in Egilsay.

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<sup>8</sup> 'Tuquoy, settlement W of Cross-Kirk, Westray' Scheduled Monument Description available at: <http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM8208>

<sup>9</sup> Comprehensive accounts of this period are provided in Batey, Jesch & Morris, 1993; Crawford, 1987, 2013; Graham-Campbell & Batey, 1998; Owen, 1999; Pálsson and Edwards, 1978; and Thomson, 2001, amongst other sources.

The Scandinavians who first arrived and settled in Orkney around AD 800 were famously pagan, and maintained their pagan traditions well into the 10th century, leaving a rich archaeological legacy of accompanied pagan graves. The Norwegian king Olav Tryggvesson is credited with converting Norway and the Atlantic Islands to Christianity around the year AD 1000. According to the sagas, the recently converted King Olav was on his way back to Norway in 996, sailing round north Scotland through the Pentland Firth, when he put in to the bay of Osmundwall in south Hoy.

Here he found Sigurd, earl of Orkney, about to set off on a Viking expedition with three ships. He asked the earl to come over to his ship and, at the point of a sword, forced him to accept baptism and be Christianised, together with all his people. Jarls' Saga adds that, as a result: 'all Orkney embraced the faith'. In truth, it is likely that conversion of the islands was a gradual and complex process and may have begun in the preceding century; but Olav's intervention would have galvanised widespread teaching of the new beliefs and encouraged the building of churches.

After the founding of a bishopric at Birsay in c.1050, the earls would have led the way in building churches on their estates, followed by other members of the earldom family and other powerful members of society, mainly the earl's leading men (chieftains and warriors: Old Norse *gøði* and *hirðmenn*). In the Orkney earldom, church and chapel sites are almost always associated with the high-status settlement names and known estates of powerful members of society. It was in this context that the wealthy and influential magnate who lived in the settlement at Tuquoy decided to commission a church, probably in the 12th century.

The formation of ecclesiastical organisation in the earldom involved establishing parishes, either based on pre-existing territorial units or newly established ones. As in most of northern Europe, this was primarily a 12th-century development: in Orkney it was probably initiated under the supervision of the long-lived Bishop William 'the Old' (1103-1168). Within these 'new' parishes, one church was designated the main parish church, where renders (tithes) had to be made; and the parish churches were also the only churches to be used for baptism and burial. Against this background it is significant that, in time, Westside Church (aka Cross Kirk) became the parish church of the West or Cross parish in Westray. It is also testament to the high status of the adjacent Norse and medieval settlement.

## 2.12 Site Description

Westside Church shows two major phases of construction:

- an original nave and chancel; and
- a later extension to the west which more than doubled the length of the nave.

The church is aligned almost exactly west to east (N 82° E) and is built of irregularly coursed, local schistose rubble, laid in lime mortar. Traces of plaster still adhere to the walls in the original (east) part of the building, particularly around the chancel arch and barrel vault, and the south window and entrance. No traces of plaster have been noted in the later west extension to the nave.

The present nave measures up to 14.30m west-east by 4.25m transversely, within walls 0.8m to 1.15m wide. The later extension to the nave is much reduced and stands only around 0.50m high. There is a scarcement, 2.60m long and 0.20m wide, at the south-west exterior corner of the extended nave and, just to the east, the remains of an apparent entrance in the south wall (visible in Figure 2). This may have been the only entrance into the building after it had been extended<sup>10</sup> or it may be a product of the early 20th-century works. The entrance (as currently visible) is splayed, 0.85m to 1.07m wide, and has a rebate for a door frame. The west jamb is of carved sandstone which, although much eroded, displays traces of two roll mouldings. This has been compared to work of the 16th or 17th century<sup>11</sup>. The absence of plaster from the extension may suggest that the interior of this later building was lined with timber. Three gravestones are situated in the west end of the nave. One covers two burials dated 1868 and 1903; another is dated 18\*0 (possibly 1840); and the third is marked by a plain head and foot stone.

The original nave to the east was approximately 5.65m long by 4.15m wide. Its floor and the site of the west gable are represented by paving laid in 1912 by the (then) Ministry of Public Buildings and Works (MOPBW) when the site came into State care (Figure 2). The butt joints between the earlier and later phases can be traced in both the north and south walls. The joint in the south wall is located 6.50m from the interior south-east corner of the nave. The masonry immediately to the east of the joint has been disturbed and is set back 0.20m from the line of the interior wall face. The disturbance extends 0.85m from the butt joint and presumably represents the site of the earlier (west) gable wall. The joint in the north wall is located 6.65m from the interior north-east corner of the nave and it is noticeable that the basal course, which would formerly have turned south to form part of the west wall, has been cut back. There is no trace of a corresponding

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<sup>10</sup> MacGibbon and Ross 1896, 125

<sup>11</sup> Lamb 1983, 37, No. 148

scar to the east, where the walling has presumably been re-faced. The butt joints therefore define the exterior angles of the earlier nave.

The walls of the original nave and chancel stand up to 2.25m high. Even allowing for the fact that they have been consolidated and partially repaired (see below), they are much better preserved than those of the later nave. The original nave was entered from the south over a raised threshold and through a round-arched doorway, 0.70m wide and 1.70m high, built without rebates (Figure 3). The jambs are parallel and were built with projecting imposts to carry the temporary centering used in the construction of the arch. Additional support for the centering was also provided by setting the soffit of the arch some 0.10m back from the line of the jambs. This entrance was 'stopped up' (blocked), possibly when the nave was extended<sup>12</sup>, or later.

A round-arched window was situated to the east of the original south entrance (Figure 3). This window is 0.30m wide and 0.80m high externally, and 0.50m wide and 1m high internally. The window is splayed, has an inclined sill and has been built without rebates. The arch springs directly from the impost.

Between the entrance and the window, there is a deliberate void through the south wall. This opening has sides 0.15m to 0.20m long and is located 1.30m above the paved floor. This feature may be a put-log hole, associated with the construction of the south wall.

The chancel is entered through an arch, 1.25m wide at the base, 1.15m wide at the impost and standing 2.10m high (Figure 4). The jambs are inclined, but otherwise the arch has been constructed in the same manner as the original doorway. The chancel measures 2.80m east-west by 2.10m north-south, within walls 0.75m wide on the north and south, and 0.90m wide on the east. The roof of the chancel is a barrel vault (*Figure 5*), 0.40m thick, the base of which has been set back at the springing to accommodate a temporary wooden centering.

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<sup>12</sup> MacGibbon and Ross 1896, 125



*Figure 3: Entrance and round-arched window, with possible put-log socket in centre of image. Image c.1930, looking north. © Crown Copyright: HES.*



*Figure 4: 1981 image of arch leading to barrel-vaulted chancel, looking north-east. Note traces of plaster adhering to walls within nave. © Dr. Raymond G. Lamb.*



*Figure 5: 1981 image looking north-west. Note remains of the barrel vaulted chancel roof. © Dr. Raymond G. Lamb.*

The present graveyard is roughly sub-rectangular in form and contained within a dry-stone wall (Figure 1). It measures up to 75m east-west by 40m north-south and is densely populated with graves of various ages, including into the 20th century. Traces of an earlier sub-rectangular enclosure are apparent to the north and east of the church in the form of a turf-covered bank, 0.50m high, over which a number of 19th-century burials have been inserted. The bank defines an area approximately 50m east-west by 25m north-south, enclosing an area of roughly 0.12ha. Part of the earlier enclosure may also be indicated by a mounded area which lies to the west of the present graveyard wall. The orientation of the enclosure is slightly at variance with that of the church, which may also suggest that there had been an earlier chapel on the site.

### 2.13 Dating

The dating of the Northern Isles' churches is fraught with difficulty; few have been scientifically excavated and all are lacking in architectural embellishment and readily diagnostic datable features<sup>13</sup>. A general dating bracket of the mid-10th to 12th centuries has been proposed<sup>14</sup> for the many

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<sup>13</sup> Crawford 1987, 183; Lowe 1987, i, 57-91; Gibbon 2006

<sup>14</sup> Barrett 2003

small churches in Orkney, including on the **Brough of Birsay**, often cited as one of the earliest<sup>15</sup>; and there is architectural and archaeological evidence of 10 churches having been modified to become parish churches between the late 12th and 14th centuries<sup>16</sup>.

Westside Church is conventionally dated, on architectural grounds, to the 12th century<sup>17</sup> and the plan-form and arch-types of the original building have been described as Romanesque<sup>18</sup>. A 12th-century date or later can also be suggested on the basis of the lime-mortared and plastered masonry<sup>19</sup>. The clearest evidence for the 12th-century date of Westside Church, however, is afforded by its historical and archaeological context – as an adjunct to a high-status Norse settlement, similar to those seen at Orphir, Wyre, Rendall and elsewhere.

The significant extension to the nave has been considered to represent a material expression of the site's elevation to parochial status<sup>20</sup>, which is commonly believed to have occurred in the late-12th or 13th century<sup>21</sup>. However, a 15th-century or later date has been suggested for the nave extension by Dietrichson and Meyer<sup>22</sup>; and the identification of the later south door jamb as probable 16th- or 17th-century work could suggest that the extension (and not just the doorway) may have been added considerably later, though this seems unlikely. It is interesting to note that **Lady Kirk**<sup>23</sup> in Pierowall village, similarly a medieval foundation, was heavily remodelled in the 17th century<sup>24</sup>. It is always difficult to determine the sequence of modifications in structures built of undifferentiated Orkney flagstone. Moreover, the lack of documentary evidence for any church refurbishments before the Reformation is exacerbated in the case of Westside Church by the gaps in our knowledge of the nature and extent of 18th-century repairs and early 20th-century consolidation works (see below). It would be prudent, therefore, to treat any interpretation based on architectural elements built into the extension with a great deal of caution.

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<sup>15</sup> Fawcett, forthcoming

<sup>16</sup> Gibbon 2006; forthcoming a

<sup>17</sup> MacGibbon and Ross 1896, 126; Dietrichson and Meyer 1905, 29; RCAHMS 1946, ii, 344

<sup>18</sup> Radford 1962, 181

<sup>19</sup> RCAHMS 1971, 145

<sup>20</sup> Clouston 1932a, 144; Ritchie and Ritchie 1978, 73; Lamb 1981

<sup>21</sup> Clouston 1932a, 155-156; Lamb 1981

<sup>22</sup> Dietrichson and Meyer 1906, 29

<sup>23</sup> Also known as **Pierowall Church**

<sup>24</sup> Lamb 1983, 37, No. 150

## 2.14 The date of abandonment

Westside Church continued in use, probably for some 600 years, during which the church saw repeated repairs as well as the significant extension to the nave. In the early 17th century, records show that Westray had two functioning parish churches: Cross Kirk, and Lady Kirk (at Pierowall). The parishes were viewed as separate units, with the number of communicants in the parish of Cross being 'eleven score and 16' and, in Lady parish, 'nine score and 14'<sup>25</sup>.

Rendall<sup>26</sup> states that most of the parish churches in Orkney were in a ruinous state by the 18th century. As there was no money to build new churches after the Reformation, the existing parish churches remained in use and were gradually altered for Presbyterian worship, even as their fabric deteriorated due to lack of finance<sup>27</sup>. After the Reformation, heritors became responsible both for the upkeep of the church and the minister's stipend, which they were often loathe or unable to sustain – a situation which became particularly acute during Episcopalian/Presbyterian feuding from the 1690s onwards<sup>28</sup>. Westside Church was not immune; although the records concerning its ruination, restorations and final abandonment are somewhat contradictory.

According to the then minister, Armit, writing in the 1842 *New Statistical Account*, Westside Church remained in use until around 1777: '... originally a place of Roman Catholic worship but latterly of Presbyterian until about 65 years ago it became ruinous and a new church was erected on the other side of the island'<sup>29</sup>. This contradicts the report written for the *Old Statistical Account* by Izat in 1793 which states that Westside Church was in use in 1793, though had seen an earlier period of abandonment:

There are three churches or places of worship in this parish, two in the island of Westray, one of which is called St Mary's, and the other Westside Church ... and the kirk or place of worship in the islands of Papa Westray ... The minister preaches in these different parts of worship by rotation .... For a considerable time there was only one place of worship in the island of Westray, and this too becoming ruinous in the last incumbent's time, the heritors at last thought of

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<sup>25</sup> Peterkin 1848, No. III Art. XIX; OA: D21/1/8

<sup>26</sup> Rendall 2009, 69, 103-7

<sup>27</sup> Rendall 2009, 72

<sup>28</sup> Rendall 2009, 69, 95

<sup>29</sup> *New Statistical Account* 1842, 125



building a central church for the whole island; but however beneficial to the heritors, minister, and people, this scheme was entirely dropped, and upon this the heritors resolved to have two places of worship as formerly, to the great inconveniency both of the minister and people<sup>30</sup>.

A trawl through the 18th-century North Isles Presbytery records<sup>31</sup> reveals that a protracted dispute took place between various heritors from 1719 to 1735 with respect to their seat entitlements, indicating that Westside Church was then very much in use and being furnished with pews. In March 1746 both parish kirks in Westray are described by Cowan, the then minister, as 'ruinous'. In May 1746, Balfour, on behalf of the heritors, proposed that a 'central' kirk should be built to replace them and, in the meantime, that the North Kirk (Lady Kirk) should be repaired and preached in when the weather allowed. In July 1746 the Presbytery appointed a visitation with workmen, who deemed the West Kirk (Cross Kirk) to be 'entirely ruinous'. The Presbytery's decision was that the North Kirk should be repaired and the West Kirk rebuilt and Cowan was instructed to obtain the funds from the heritors. Subsequently, in November 1746, Cowan reported that Lady Kirk is 'now repaired', but the West Kirk 'continues in the same ruinous condition as formerly'.

In 1747 the West Kirk was still not rebuilt and the Earl's representative suggested taking the 'legal method' for rebuilding. The next mention of the West Kirk occurs in March 1754 when a second heritor petition to build a central kirk in the parish was approved by the Presbytery, suggesting that the existing provision in the island was still inadequate.

In 1763 the Presbytery met in West Kirk (Cross Kirk) following a petition to assess the condition of the two island kirks and the manse, but: 'The Presbytery, as there was no roof on the kirk, adjourned to the manse'. Following the visitation, workmen estimated the cost of repairs to the North Kirk at £34 12s and to the West Kirk (Cross Kirk) at £61 10s – almost double. The heritors were written to and asked to pay their shares, but there is no evidence that any rebuild of Westside Church actually took place.

The kirk is next mentioned in April 1775 when James Stewart of Brough submitted a third petition for the building of a new church in Westray in

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<sup>30</sup> Old Statistical Account 1795, 254

<sup>31</sup> Orkney Archives: OCR/3/2

place of the 'ruinous church in the West Parish' (presumably Cross Kirk). In May of the same year, the heritors petitioned concerning the location of the new church and described St Mary's Kirk (Lady Kirk) as 'lately repaired'. By August there is a reference to the kirk 'lately built' and the kirk 'lately repaired': a separate archive account of expenses for repairing the North Kirk supports this<sup>32</sup>. This dating coincides with Armit's (1842) account of a new kirk having been built in the east of the island, apparently a more convenient location for the parishioners. This also suggests that, by 1775, the area around Tuquoy was sparsely populated. From then on, the two Westray kirks in use were the North Kirk (Lady Kirk) and the East Kirk (the new church built to replace Cross Kirk). The Presbytery met at the East Kirk in September 1788<sup>33</sup>.

In 1797 Izat, in a report to the Presbytery, stated that there were two kirks in Westray 'lately built', the East and North Kirks, and he complained that the East Kirk, being 'insufficiently built', was itself 'going fast to ruin'. This is in complete contradiction to his 1793 *Old Statistical* report where he makes no mention of the East Kirk at all. In 1845 Brothie described the East Kirk as 'so dilapidated as not to admit of repair and inadequate to accommodate the church-going population'. He proposed that another new church should be built and the heritors agreed. The new church was built immediately west of the ruined East Kirk and was complete by 1846.

This detailed account demonstrates the cyclical processes of ruination and repair evident in the parish churches of Westray, which undoubtedly resulted in the repair and, possibly, rebuilding of Westside Church on more than one occasion. The crucial record for understanding when Westside Church was finally abandoned is that of August 1775 when the new, and more conveniently located, East Kirk was completed. The fact that Armit was unaware of Westside Church being used between the 1770s and his time would seem to suggest that it was abandoned by 1775, if not earlier – *contra* the *Old Statistical Account*.

The only contradiction to this timeline is Izat's account, written in 1793<sup>34</sup>, where he commented that he was preaching in Westside Church, but all the other evidence would suggest that he must have meant the East Kirk. Izat's reference to 'two places of worship as formerly' might mean not that the two churches were in the same two places as before, but only that

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<sup>32</sup> D2/43/11

<sup>33</sup> Orkney Archives: OCR3/2

<sup>34</sup> Old Statistical Account 1799 (1978), 360

there were once again two functioning churches in the island (albeit that one had shifted location). If this is the case, then we do not need to assume that Westside Church was still in use in 1793<sup>35</sup>.

On the basis of the combined documentary evidence, it seems most likely that Westside Church was in poor or ruinous condition from 1746, though perhaps repeatedly poorly repaired and preached in from time to time until 1775. Tudor, writing in 1883, said that the church: 'was suffered to go to rack and ruin under the enlightened ministry of Cat-killing Blaw'<sup>36</sup>. William Blaw was minister in Westray from 1699-1734. This might support the hypothesis that Westside Church was not fit for use by 1746 but, given that the records show that ruinous churches were common in the 17th and 18th centuries, and continued to be preached in even after the roof and/or walls had begun to collapse, there is no reason to suppose that Westside Church was any different. The particular 'rack and ruin' in this case could well have been accentuated as part of the feud between William Blaw and his father-in-law, the notorious Traill<sup>37</sup>.

## 2.2 Evidential values

### 2.21 Condition, completeness and extent

Westside Church is a well-preserved example of a type of medieval bicameral church found in Orkney. No known archaeological excavations have been undertaken in the church or graveyard, although samples of the mortar have recently been analysed by Mark Thacker as part of the HES-supported Tuquoy project (Appendix 3). However, archaeological recording and trial excavation of the adjacent high-status Norse settlement has cast new light on the significance of Westside Church in late Norse and medieval Orkney, and demonstrates that the kirk should be seen as one component of a much more extensive and significant site.

### 2.22 The association of church and farm

One of the most important aspects of the site is its relationship to the eroding Norse settlement immediately to the west, which has seen limited archaeological investigation.

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<sup>35</sup> Old Statistical Account 1799 (1978), 359

<sup>36</sup> Tudor 1883, 379

<sup>37</sup> Rendall 2009, 95-6

The association of farm and church is a well-recognised phenomenon in areas of Norse settlement in Britain and elsewhere in the North Atlantic province, although the origins of the development are unclear in those areas where the incoming Norse encountered an indigenous Christian population<sup>38</sup>.

Farm and church associations occur throughout the Greenland settlements<sup>39</sup> and in Iceland<sup>40</sup>, and the phenomenon has also been recognised in the Faroe Islands. Excavations at Sand, for example, uncovered the remains of a small timber nave and chancel church, which was succeeded by a slightly larger stone-clad building of the same design. The remains of a hall-like building and evidence of other domestic structures were found immediately outside the churchyard<sup>41</sup>. The primary settlement and church at Sand have been dated to the 11th century on the basis of a coin hoard discovered in 1863.

The widespread use of timber in early church construction, at Sand and throughout the North Atlantic province<sup>42</sup>, and the discovery of a primary timber chapel beneath the later stone-built church on the Brough of Deerness<sup>43</sup>, and possibly also below St Nicholas' Chapel on Papa Stronsay<sup>44</sup>, indicates that the early stone churches in Orkney and Shetland may sometimes have replaced earlier timber-built churches or chapels. Nothing is known of the sub-surface archaeology of Westside Church itself, but the evidence for an earlier enclosure suggests it is possible that here, too, the remains of an earlier timber church may survive beneath the present structure.

The close association of church and settlement is also recognised in Orkney where 115 of the 205 pre-Reformation churches are associated with the main habitation focus of a single large farm. Of these, 31 are parish churches, leaving only four parish churches without a known close association with a settlement. A further 52 churches (including the four parish churches noted above) are located in settlement areas, but are not obviously associated with a single farm, which means that only 32 churches

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<sup>38</sup> Clouston 1918; 1932a; Cant 1972; 1984; Lowe 1987; Gibbon 2006; 2007; 2012

<sup>39</sup> Krogh 1983; Roussell 1944

<sup>40</sup> Vésteinsson 2000

<sup>41</sup> Krogh 1975; Diklev 1981

<sup>42</sup> Ahrens 1981, 571-630

<sup>43</sup> Morris 1986

<sup>44</sup> Lowe 2017, 114-115

are located away from known habitation centres<sup>45</sup>. Of particular relevance in the case of Westside Church, churches are often associated with large earldom, bishopric and, less often, udal farms (sometimes denoted by Old Norse *bu* or *bær*)<sup>46</sup>. The association of *bu* and church was first extensively explored by Clouston who identified the characteristics of these *bus* as their size, the presence of *umbesettars* ('attached farms'), their location by the shore and the presence of a chapel<sup>47</sup>. In the decades since then, Marwick, Thomson and Gibbon have expanded on Clouston's work to show: the wider evidence for possible 'attached farms' on non-*bu* estates, the significance of *bær*- farms, and the increased number of parish churches associated with *bu* farms from four to eleven<sup>48</sup>.

At Tuquoy, the presence of a parish church, together with the rental evidence<sup>49</sup>, may identify this area as a lost earldom or udal *bær*<sup>50</sup>, or what Thomson terms a 'single manor farm'<sup>51</sup>. That the area was of some considerable importance is reflected also in Lamb's interpretation of the *Orkneyinga Saga* account of Westray in the 12th century, specifically, his identification of Thorkel Flettir and his family as the prominent land-holders in the south-west part of Westray at this time<sup>52</sup>.

The early 12th-century round church at Orphir, which stood outside the earl's 'drinking-hall'<sup>53</sup>, forms an obvious parallel to Westside Church in the context of its setting. There are also clear parallels with **St Mary's Chapel**, Kolbein Hruga's Castle (known today as **Cubbie Roo's Castle**) and the *Bu* farm in the island of Wyre<sup>54</sup>. The castle is dated on saga evidence to c.1150<sup>55</sup>, and the church is believed to date to around the same period since, in all likelihood, it was also built by Kolbein Hruga as part of his estate<sup>56</sup>. Tammaskirk and the nearby Hall or Bu of Rendall have also been assigned a mid to late 12th-century date on the basis of the saga

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<sup>45</sup> Gibbon forthcoming a, Table 1

<sup>46</sup> Gibbon 2007, Table 3

<sup>47</sup> Clouston 1927b

<sup>48</sup> Marwick, 1952; Thomson 1990; 1993; 2008; Gibbon 2006; 2007, Table 3; forthcoming b

<sup>49</sup> Thomson 1990

<sup>50</sup> Marwick 1952, 34-5

<sup>51</sup> Thomson 1990, 46

<sup>52</sup> Lamb 1981: *contra* Clouston 1927a, 333

<sup>53</sup> *Orkneyinga Saga*, ch 70; Dietrichson and Meyer 1906, Fig. 43; Taylor 1938, 385; RCAHMS 1946, ii, Nos. 483, 485, 174-5

<sup>54</sup> RCAHMS 1946, ii, Nos. 618, 619, 234-9

<sup>55</sup> *Orkneyinga Saga*, ch 84

<sup>56</sup> Gibbon 2012, 170-1

evidence<sup>57</sup>. In short, the historical and archaeological context of Westside Church is closely paralleled at Orphir, Wyre and Rendall, among other sites in Orkney, and in general by the farm-church settlements of the North Atlantic province<sup>58</sup>.

### 2.23 Previous disturbance of the site

Westside Church continued in use well into the 18th century and experienced repeated repairs, probably throughout its life, which make it a challenge to unravel its physical history. Moreover, the records concerning its repairs, ruination and final abandonment are somewhat contradictory (see Section 2.1 Background, above). The cyclical processes of ruination and repair evident in the parish churches of Westray undoubtedly resulted in the repair and, possibly, rebuilding of Westside Church on more than one occasion. The combined documentary evidence suggests that Westside Church was in poor or ruinous condition from 1746, though perhaps repeatedly poorly repaired and preached in from time to time until 1775. The graveyard has continued to be used for burials up to recent times, which will inevitably also have disturbed archaeological evidence.

The first detailed survey and record of Westside Church was provided by Henry Dryden in 1870<sup>59</sup>. Dryden's account has formed the basis of more recent surveys by RCAHMS in 1930<sup>60</sup> and Raymond Lamb<sup>61</sup>. A hitherto unpublished record of the church by the architect T. S. Peace provides an independent account of the building from his visit in 1878 and excerpts are noted below<sup>62</sup>.

Dryden's survey is important because it is the earliest detailed account of the site and it provides some information that would otherwise have been lost. For instance, the east gable wall of the chancel had fallen shortly before 1870, but Dryden was told by a local informant that it had previously had an east window, similar in form to the one in the south wall of the nave. Dryden also recorded a red sandstone gable mount, lying loose in the graveyard<sup>63</sup>. The stone was 0.43m long, 0.28m high and 0.30m

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<sup>57</sup> Clouston 1932b; Lowe 1987, i, 75-7

<sup>58</sup> Gibbon 2006; forthcoming a

<sup>59</sup> MacGibbon and Ross 1896, 124-126

<sup>60</sup> RCAHMS published in 1946: ii, 344-345, No. 1032

<sup>61</sup> Lamb 1983, 37, No. 148

<sup>62</sup> Peace 1878

<sup>63</sup> MacGibbon and Ross 1896, 126

wide at the base, tapering to a width of 0.18m at the top; a square recess, with sides 0.10m long, was present on the underside of the mount<sup>64</sup>. No trace of this stone can now be found.

Dryden's account is also important for the information it provides about the condition of the church when it came into State care in 1911. It is difficult to distinguish the 20th-century work from the original fabric, since much of the present masonry has been re-pointed, but Dryden's (1870) record helps us to determine the extent to which the building was repaired and consolidated.

The church (but not the graveyard) came into care in 1911 although, through an oversight, the Deed of Guardianship was not completed until 1934. Consolidation works were carried out over several weeks in August-September 1912 by a local builder under the supervision of His Majesty's Office of Works (HMOW). At that time, the church was owned by I. S. Omand Esq of the Tirlot Estate, Westray. The site was scheduled as a monument of national importance in 1921 and rescheduled with its graveyard in 1999. In the same year, the then owner, Mrs Crombie, passed ownership of the whole site to Historic Scotland, although the graveyard continues to be maintained by Orkney Islands Council.

Unfortunately, many of the earlier files and papers have been destroyed, but the earliest surviving file<sup>65</sup> states that repairs commenced on 10 August 1912 and contains photographs (dated 1912) showing the church after the completion of works. On 2 September 1912, J. W. Paterson, Clerk of Works, wrote:

I visited the above on 31/8/12 & found the vegetation and earth had been removed from all walls & from top of vault. While half of the floor had been levelled. The vault has been pointed in Arden Lime mortar, composed of Aikerness & Westray sand combined in 4 & 1 respectively, & mixed with lime in 1 & 1. This appeared to be rather far[?], so altered to 3 of lime & 5 of sand. The top of vault has been well cleaned and grouted in cement & finished by pointing in Medusa. The pointing of the walls of the older portion of Church is nearly completed & the whole is cleaned out ready for pointing. The internal thickness of walls has been originally bedded in clay! Tops of high walls over oldest portion waterproofed with rough slabs selected from an

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<sup>64</sup> Dryden 1870: original drawings in the NRHE. See: <https://canmore.org.uk/collection/1309068> and <https://canmore.org.uk/collection/1543097>

<sup>65</sup> PRO: SC 23402/2A

adjacent quarry & pointed in Medusa cement. The lower walls where seen are ready for slabbing & will be pointed in lime. The old plaster has been preserved as far as possible. The work is being done in a thorough workmanlike manner & with the exception of one or two places not being "full" enough pointed from an artistic point of view is quite satisfactory.

On 1 February 1913, Mr Paterson typed up a summary of the works:

The walls of the Church, which were much overgrown and extremely loose, have now been thoroughly cleared from all vegetation and earth, and the joints pointed in Arden Lime mortar. The wall-heads have been slabbed and pointed in cement and Medusa waterproofing. The Vault over the Chancel was pointed in Lime on the underside, grouted in cement from above, and pointed on top with cement and Medusa. The floor was laid with rough faced slabs bedded on concrete. This building is now in a thoroughly good state. The work was carried out by Mr John Firth, Builder, Kirkwall, at a cost of £68, and is a very creditable job. Aikerness and Carness Sand was used on the job.

A handwritten note added a few days later by 'C.R.P'<sup>66</sup> says: 'The Chancel arch was also thoroughly grouted and pointed'.

However, examination of Dryden's drawings and elevations suggests that much of the north-east angle of the nave, and possibly part of the original south entrance as well, may have been substantially rebuilt, presumably during the 1912 works. The doorway, for example, is described as 'nearly complete' and the published illustrations show the arch-head as missing<sup>67</sup>. The condition of the arch-head is unclear in Dryden's elevation drawings<sup>68</sup>. Fortuitously, Peace (1878) includes a description of the arch in his account, stating that the arch 'both sides for about a foot of which are still perfect has a radius of 1ft 3 inches'. Given this description, the blank section of arch in Dryden's elevation drawing (Figure 6: the small [blue] ellipse) can be seen to equate with the missing section as described by Peace.

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<sup>66</sup> Presumably the hugely influential Charles Reed Peers, who at this date was in office as the first Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments.

<sup>67</sup> MacGibbon and Ross 1896, 125, Figs. 95-96

<sup>68</sup> MacGibbon and Ross 1896, 125, Figs. 93-94: original drawings in NRHE



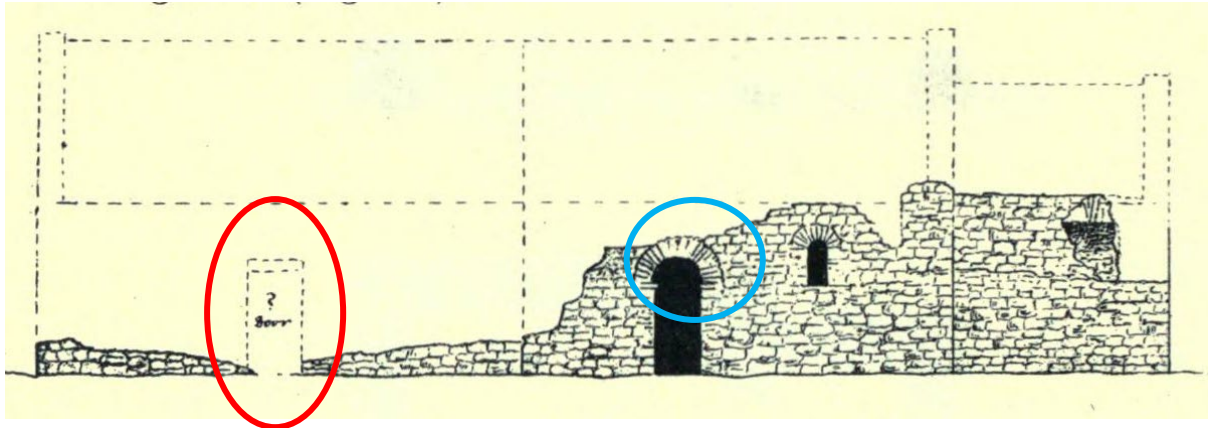


Figure 6: Dryden's south elevation (from Volume 1 of MacGibbon and Ross, *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Scotland: From the Earliest Christian Times to the Seventeenth Century* 1896, p124). Annotations added.

There is no record of the precise extent of the disturbance when the concrete-bedded floor was laid in the early 20th century, other than the Clerk of Works' comment that 'half of the floor had been levelled'. However, it is clear – as a result of comparing the impost and arch heights of the chancel and south entrance – that the present (1912) floor is at least 0.30-0.40m above 'the old floor' seen, but not described, by Dryden in 1870. This may imply that there was originally a step down into the church. Again, Peace (1878) provides valuable information. He states:

The floor [of the nave] is not visible and numbers of interments have been made inside the walls after the building was disused as a place of worship, the crumbling and weathered tomb stones, most of them unhewn slabs of grey slate, lying throughout the space at various levels.

This strongly suggests that there may have been considerable disturbance before and during the 1912 work.

Further rebuilding is indicated by considering Dryden and Peace's accounts of the doorway in the south wall of the extension to the nave. Dryden states:

Of the elongation little more than the foundations remain; but it is evident that there was not a door in the west end or north side, so that it must have been somewhere in the south wall, between the old blocked doorway and the south-west angle<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>69</sup> Dryden in MacGibbon and Ross 1896, 125

Similarly, Peace (1878) writes:

The nave walls at every other part are broken down within 2ft of the ground and below the existing window sole [sic] level, so that it is now impossible to say what other openings may have been in it. I did not find any trace of a west door in the modern part.

There is no description by either Dryden or Peace of an actual doorway entrance in the south wall and, in Dryden's elevation, his suggested doorway location is annotated with a question mark (Figure 6: the large [red] ellipse). Tellingly, neither mention the west jamb with its roll mouldings, described as 16th or 17th century in date by Lamb<sup>70</sup>, nor the rebate for a door frame. While they may not have been visible in the 1870s due to vegetation growth and the build-up of material inside the church, it is therefore possible that they may relate to the 1912 consolidation works, rather than being *in situ* remains. The lack of conclusive pre-1912 evidence of this doorway is particularly relevant as some surveyors<sup>71</sup> have interpreted these features as possible dating evidence for the extension of the nave, but this is clearly unreliable.

The historical record states that there were 236 communicants in the parish in 1627<sup>72</sup>. Given the small size of the original nave (which is comparable to small churches which were not elevated to parish churches), it is almost certain that the nave had been extended prior to this date in order to accommodate this number of congregants. Though difficult to establish securely, eight other churches in Orkney display architectural evidence of alteration dating from the late 12th to 14th centuries<sup>73</sup>, and it remains most likely that the nave at Westside Church was extended at around the same time. The combined evidence is of several phases of alterations and repairs to the kirk when it was in use, both before the Reformation and after; while the late 19th-century accounts of the kirk testify to the considerable work that was undertaken at the site in 1912 when it came into State care, including the rebuilding of walls and substantial clearing of the interior.

Regular maintenance of the church by Historic Environment Scotland and its predecessor bodies has continued to the present day, most recently in 2011 when the 100-year old cement-based mortars on the wall-heads were

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<sup>70</sup> Lamb 1983, 37, No. 148

<sup>71</sup> e.g. Dietrichson and Meyer 1906, 29

<sup>72</sup> Peterkin 1848, No. III Art. XIX; Orkney Archives: D21/1/8

<sup>73</sup> Gibbon 2006, BIR0, BIR1, EDAO, EGIO, EYN1, REN4, STP6, WELO

replaced with lime mortar. The church is currently stable and in good condition, although the Conservation Strategy (2001) notes that the modern sea wall is a long-term cause of concern.

## 2.24 Archaeological potential

There are traces of an earlier sub-rectangular enclosure to the north and east of the church in the form of a turf-covered bank, 0.50m high, over which a number of 19th-century burials have been inserted. The bank defines an area approximately 50m east-west by 25m north-south, enclosing an area of roughly 0.12ha. Part of the earlier enclosure may also be indicated by a mounded area which lies to the west of the present graveyard wall. The presence of this enclosure may suggest that the 12th-century kirk was preceded by an earlier chapel, perhaps of timber, as at the Brough of Deerness<sup>74</sup>, or it may represent the remains of an earlier enclosure of the 12th-century kirk (now enclosed by a sub-rectangular drystone wall). The orientation of the earlier enclosure is slightly at variance with that of the church, which may also suggest that there had been an earlier chapel on the site. This hypothesis could only be tested by archaeological investigation of the earlier enclosing bank, and beneath the floor of the kirk and in its immediate vicinity.

While the degree of previous disturbance of the structure of Westside Church itself, has limited potential to unravel the history of the kirk by further investigation of the present building (with the possible exception of further mortar analysis), any structural interventions should continue to be archaeologically monitored. This is especially the case for any ground disturbance beneath the floor of the kirk or in its immediate vicinity which could test the hypothesis that there may have been an earlier chapel on the site. It is also quite possible that Norse settlement remains pre-dating the kirk may survive in the graveyard and beneath the church.

The archaeological potential of the associated Norse and medieval settlement immediately to the west of the site is exceptionally high. This has been demonstrated by the 1980s and later fieldwork. Indeed, this is one of Orkney's most significant, coastally eroding sites. A geophysical survey of the immediate area (Appendix 4), carried out in 2017 and 2018, revealed an extensive spread of anomalies surviving to the west and north of

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<sup>74</sup> Morris 1986

Westside Church, again demonstrating the high archaeological potential of the site, despite its continuing attrition by the sea<sup>75</sup>.

## 2.3 Historical values

### 2.31 Close association with people or events

The Icelandic *Orkneyinga Saga*<sup>76</sup> relates events in 12th-century Westray in some detail in order to tell the dramatic story of Rognvald's invasion of Orkney from Shetland in 1136. Because of Westray's strategic position, the saga writer was at pains to describe the three leading men who then controlled the political life of the island.

These were: Kugi, a wise and wealthy man based at Rapness (*Hreppisnes*); Helgi, a sturdy and trustworthy man who lived in the village (*þorp* = Pierowall, also called *Höfn* = harbour); and Thorkel Flettir ('Flayer'), a substantial but quarrelsome man, and his two unpopular sons, Thorstein and Haflidi. Thorkel Flayer's farm is not named, but we believe that he lived at Tuquoy. Thorkel was killed in the ensuing political game and nothing further is heard of Thorstein, but Haflidi managed to emerge on the right side, with his wealth and status enhanced. For this reason, the hall at Tuquoy has been nicknamed 'Haflidi's Hall'. If this is correct, it may have been Haflidi or one of his immediate descendants who instigated the building of Westside Church around the middle or later decades of the 12th century.

In this context, it is interesting to note that a local folk-memory describes the original nave and chancel church as 'the Danes' work'<sup>77</sup>. There is no historical evidence for the date of the extension to the nave, which is believed to have occurred when the church was elevated to parish church status, probably in the 13th century (see above). However, it is noteworthy that while the extension to the nave was later substantially robbed and reduced almost to ground level, the original church ('the Danes' work') was allowed to stand, almost complete. This may indicate continuing respect in post-medieval times for the church's Norse origins, as well as its pleasing architecture.

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<sup>75</sup> See Moore and Wilson 1998 for coastal zone assessment of Westray

<sup>76</sup> *trans* Guðmundsson 1965; Taylor 1938; Pálsson and Edwards 1978

<sup>77</sup> MacGibbon and Ross 1896, 125

## 2.32 The Evidence of the Dedication

Dedications to the Holy Cross or Rood are relatively common in the Northern Isles. Altogether in Orkney, a total of 129 dedications to 31 saints have been recorded. By far the most common dedication is to Mary (with 33 instances), followed by Peter (19), Columba/Colm (13), and then Cross (9)<sup>78</sup>. In other parts of the earldom, the dedication patterns are notably different; for example, the Cross dedication occurs only once in Caithness and six times in Shetland<sup>79</sup>. The popularity of the Cross dedication is generally associated with the Crusades and, in a local context, could be related to the documented visits to the Holy Land of the Orkney Earls Haakon and Rognvald in c.1120 and c.1152 respectively<sup>80</sup>.

There are strong indications that the dedications as a group can be located within the context of 12th-century Orkney but, unfortunately, contemporary records are sparse: the 1492 rental is the earliest surviving source for most dedications. Although written some 300 years later than the likely date of most of the churches, this rental does pre-date the Reformation and is likely to reflect the original dedications. Dedications to Nicholas have been linked with earldom estate churches (as at Orphir), suggesting that the widespread revival of this cult in Britain extended to Orkney where Nicholas was a favoured saint of the earls<sup>81</sup>. Indeed, the combination of universal, Scottish and Irish, Scandinavian and local dedication names indicates the widespread nature of the influences on the Church in the joint earldoms of Orkney<sup>82</sup>. In Westray, Sanday and Stronsay, the parishes are named after the parish church dedications, indicating that the parish units date from the medieval period and that these internal island divisions are directly linked to parochial church reform. In Westray, Westside Church aka Cross Kirk gave its name to the parish of Cross, later referred to as the West parish, while Lady Kirk (in Pierowall) gave its name to the parish of Lady, later known as North parish. At Westside Church, therefore, the dedication name, if original, may serve to emphasise the 12th-century date for the kirk which has been proposed on other grounds.

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<sup>78</sup> Gibbon 2006, 173-6

<sup>79</sup> Gibbon 2006, Appendix 8

<sup>80</sup> *Orkneyinga Saga*, ch 52, 86-89; Taylor 1938

<sup>81</sup> Gibbon 2006, 175; Crawford 2017, 5.3

<sup>82</sup> Gibbon 2006, 283-88

### 2.33 Runic inscription

Among the copious finds from the adjacent settlement was a complete runic inscription<sup>83</sup>. This was incised on the narrow face of a substantial stone slab, which was found in a re-used position – built into a later partition wall within the 12th-century hall, with the inscription upside-down. It follows that the inscription was carved (the right way up!) when the slab was built into a substantial earlier wall, possibly one of the walls in the original hall. The slab is subtriangular in shape, with maximum measurements of 0.77m long x 0.40m wide and approximately 0.10m thick.

The inscription is interpreted as: **+þorstæin ænarssunr ræist runar þesar**, and translated as: ‘þorsteinn Einarsson carved these runes’. The name **þorstæin** appears in a number of Norwegian inscriptions (for instance, one at Atrå Church 1, Telemark, from about 1180), but unfortunately it has not proved possible to identify this particular þorsteinn Einarsson elsewhere. No man of this name and patronymic appears in *Orkneyinga Saga* or in *Diplomatarium Orcadense et Hialtlandense I*; and the only bearer of both in *Landnámabók* and *Sturlunga Saga* is a north-Icelandic chieftain, nicknamed *ranglátr*, ‘the unjust’, with whom there is no reason to connect this inscription. A number of 12th-century men named þorsteinn appear in *Íslandske Annaler indtil 1578*, but none has the patronymic Einarsson.

Of course, we should not expect all of the important people in Norse Orkney to appear in the few surviving historical texts or sagas, but þorsteinn Einarsson’s absence from the saga may suggest either that he was in the service of the Tuquoy settlement chieftain or that he was a visitor to Tuquoy, from elsewhere in Orkney or further afield. Whoever he was, this apparently casual graffito demonstrates that this was a literate society, in its upper echelons at least. þorsteinn Einarsson may have chosen to carve the Norse equivalent of ‘Kilroy was here’, but he did so using common runic spellings and regular grammar. He was clearly comfortable carving a message in runes and it is reasonable to assume that this level of competence was nothing out of the ordinary.

Interestingly, the formula and spelling of the Tuquoy inscription are exactly paralleled elsewhere in Orkney – at Maeshowe, in inscription 15: **Hrǫlfr[?] ræist runar þesar**<sup>84</sup>. This dates probably from the mid-12th century and may have been carved by one of the men who set out on crusade from

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<sup>83</sup> Owen and McKinnell 1989

<sup>84</sup> Barnes 1994, 118-23, no 15 (= Farrer 1862, inscription XXII)

Orkney in 1151 and returned in 1153-54. A similar date would fit the Tuquoy inscription well enough, but the runological evidence only allows a dating to the 12th century or later – in other words, broadly contemporary with the building of Westside Church.

### 2.34 The evidence of early rentals and maps

The great Orcadian historian, (the late) Willy Thomson, analysed the historic documentary and cartographic evidence for Tuquoy and what follows relies entirely on his published paper<sup>85</sup>. The earliest known historic map is that by Murdo MacKenzie, whose survey dates from between 1744 and 1747. This is rather disappointing with regard to detail, but it does show that the West Side of Westray was a much more self-contained district than it appears today, when much of the former hill land has disappeared under the plough. In the 18th century, a single hill-dyke still enclosed a series of interlinked townships or ‘rooms’, separating the in-bye land from the rough pasture on the hill. Near Westside Church, Mackenzie’s map shows a loch which has now disappeared as a result of draining. Greater detail is shown on a map of Orkney commissioned by Sir Laurence Dundas soon after he purchased the Earldom Estate in 1766. This was used by Thomson<sup>86</sup> to plot the boundaries between the constituent ‘rooms’ of West Side: Tuquoy, Midbea, Noltland, Kirbist, Fribo and Garth. These ‘rooms’ relate readily to the districts enumerated in a series of skat rentals dating from 1492 onwards, and to entries in the *Register of the Great Seal* which record property transfers. Thomson’s Fig 2<sup>87</sup> also shows the pennylands of each constituent part, eighteen pennylands making the unit known as the *urisland* or ounceland. Tuquoy itself was one urisland, Midbea was one and a half, and Noltland appears originally to have been two urislands, known respectively as the Overtoun and the Outertoun.

Thomson<sup>88</sup> proposed that the core of this self-contained area was the urisland of Tuquoy, formerly the home fields or desmene, worked by a labour force accommodated on little holdings, mainly in the adjoining district of Midbea. Out beyond was Noltland, the ‘cattle-land’, with a predominantly pastoral land use on dangerously unstable soils, but housing communities of small-holders whose cultivation tended to cause problems, especially in times of population expansion. The margins of the settlement

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<sup>85</sup> Thomson 1990

<sup>86</sup> Thomson 1990, 39, Fig 2

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 46

consisted of systems of quoy and garths, originally associated with stock management but, even at an early date, giving rise to a considerable number of little farms. Beyond the boundaries of these arable and semi-arable areas lay the hill land which provided important resources of pasture and fuel.

Thomson's summary of the evidence of the earliest maps and rentals is here quoted in full:

'Whether this functional unity can be translated into terms of a single manor farm is not easy to determine ... Yet the landownership pattern as revealed in the earliest rentals – a core of Crown property in Tuquoy, with Bishopric and other church lands predominating throughout Midbea, Noltland, Kirbist, Fribo and Garth, and with only tiny scraps of udal property – is consistent with the broad picture of a single manor farm, confiscated by the Crown which thereafter shed most of the outlying parts as cathedral endowments. Both the King and the Bishop were absentees and, after the heady days of Thorkel and Haflidi, it seems that Tuquoy became a bit of a backwater. The result was static systems of management which in turn led to old patterns of settlement surviving long enough to be recorded on early maps and rentals.'<sup>89</sup>

His conclusion tends to support the archaeological evidence that the Norse settlement formed the nucleus of a high-status manor farm, of which Westside Church was an important part from the 12th century; but that, for reasons unknown, the original settlement was abandoned some time before the earliest surviving rental of 1492.

### 2.35 The lost name of the Norse settlement

It is a curious fact that the original name of the high-status Norse settlement adjacent to Westside Church has not survived. Today, the name 'Tuquoy' refers to a prosperous modern farm some 750m north of Westside Church. The name 'Tuquoy' also appears on the earliest historic maps, including that by Murdo MacKenzie, but it describes a unit of land rather than a specific settlement. The Norse settlement location is not named on any map.

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*



In common with almost all Orkney place-names, the name 'Tuquoy' is Norse in origin. The meaning of the first element 'Tu-' is uncertain, but it might derive from *too* (= a mound or hillock). However, the generic *kví* or *quoy* is a common element and almost invariably applied to tiny fields and marginal enclosures. From the earliest surviving rentals (from 1492 onwards), the area of Tuquoy was valued as one *urisland* or *ounceland* (= 18 pennylands), but out of nearly 200 Orkney urislands, it is the only one with a quoy-name. According to Hugh Marwick's chronology or hierarchy of Norse place-names, the name 'Tuquoy' should rank the very lowest in his scale of importance. It is definitely not the kind of name you would expect to be associated with an important place, so it seems likely that this minor name replaced whatever had once been the name of the principal settlement. It is easy to invent a plausible scenario – perhaps replacement occurred when the Norse site beside Westside Church was abandoned because of coastal erosion or encroaching sand-blow, with the result that a hitherto minor place became the new focus of settlement.

The earliest rentals refer to the urisland as 'Tuquoy and Ayre' (Are 1492, Air 1497). 'Ayre' may be named after the narrow strip of land between the Loch of Tuquoy and the sea, and could conceivably refer to the Norse settlement; but the name 'Ayre' could equally well have applied to another secondary settlement, perhaps somewhere in the inner part of the Bay of Tuquoy. In short, the settlement associated with Westside Church is not specifically named, either in *Orkneyinga Saga* or in any historic documents or maps. It remains a mystery.

## 2.4 Architectural and artistic values

*Orkney was one of the most inventive areas for church planning in the 12th century, though at that stage in its history it was not part of Scotland.*<sup>90</sup>

Westside Church, 'one of the most refined of Orkney's medieval churches' according to Lamb<sup>91</sup>, is a well-preserved example of a type of bicameral church found in the Norse earldom of Orkney. The basic form is well represented in the Northern Isles, but is rare elsewhere in Scotland. Three or four examples of medieval bicameral churches have been recorded in

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<sup>90</sup> Fawcett 2002, 27

<sup>91</sup> Lamb 1983, 37, No. 148

Caithness and further examples of the type are also known from the Western Isles<sup>92</sup>. In terms of distribution, the emphasis is culturally Norse, representing the medieval Christian descendants of the earlier Viking settlers<sup>93</sup>.

Westside Church is similar in size and proportion to **St Mary's Chapel** in Wyre and the chapel at Linton on Shapinsay and, like all but one of the Orcadian nave and chancel churches (**St Magnus Church**, Egilsay), the west side of the chancel has been built with projecting responds. This feature is rare in Shetland churches, where the chancel arch normally extends the full width of the chancel<sup>94</sup>.

On the basis of the surviving evidence, the construction technique of the Westside Church arches also appears to be typically Orcadian. The use of projecting impost, with or without a recessed soffit for a temporary wooden centering, can be paralleled in work in **St Mary's Chapel** in Wyre, the chapel at Linton (Shapinsay), St Nicholas' Chapel (Papa Stronsay<sup>95</sup>), the nave and chancel arches at **Eynhallow**, and in the entrances and east upper chamber in **St Magnus Church**, Egilsay. This feature can also be paralleled in the chancel arch at St Olaf's Church in Yell but, at Lundawick (Unst) and Uyea, the arch rises flush with the impost and is formed in a corbel fashion. In Orkney, the use of inclined jambs to form the chancel arch is unique to Westside Church, though it can be paralleled in Shetland in the west entrance of the church at Lundawick (Unst) and in the chancel arch of the chapel in Uyea<sup>96</sup>.

In the context of sites in the Northern Isles, the form of the original doorway, constructed with parallel un-rebated jambs, is unique to the bicameral churches of Orkney<sup>97</sup>. Identical entrance forms are found at Tammaskirk (Rendall), Linton (Shapinsay), **St Mary's Chapel** (Wyre), St Nicholas' Chapel (Papa Stronsay), and in the chapel on the **Brough of Birsay**. Splayed and rebated jambs are common in Shetland nave and chancel churches; and parallel and rebated jambs have also been recorded

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<sup>92</sup> RCAMS 1928, 1; Barrowman 2005; Barrowman 2008; Barrowman & Hooper 2006

<sup>93</sup> Cant 1984

<sup>94</sup> RCAHMS 1946; Lowe 1987

<sup>95</sup> See Lowe 2002, Fig 6.2

<sup>96</sup> Lowe 1987, ii, 182-91, 222-5

<sup>97</sup> Lowe 1987, i, 128

there<sup>98</sup>. It seems unlikely that geological reasons alone could explain the apparent singularity of the Orcadian nave and chancel church jamb form.

A south-westerly corner position for the entrance is also a common feature of Orcadian churches. Identical entrance locations are found in Tammaskirk (Rendall), Linton (Shapinsay) and **St Magnus' Church** (Egilsay), as well as in several single-cell buildings: Marwick Chapel (Birsay); St Tredwell's Chapel (Papa Westray); Rood Chapel (South Ronaldsay); and Brims Chapel (Walls). This feature is rarely found in Shetland churches, where the preferred entrance location is in the west<sup>99</sup>.

To summarise, in terms of construction technique and form, Westside Church is a fine example of a typically Orcadian, medieval nave and chancel church, differing in detail from those found in Shetland. In part, these differences may be due to the quality of the building stone available, but the homogenous nature of the Orcadian evidence suggests that it probably also reflects their date and preferred methods of construction.

## 2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

Today, Westside Church is a picturesque ruin in this island landscape. Its attractiveness is enhanced by its location right on the coast and its strong visual relationship with the sea.

At first sight, the kirk in its graveyard appears peaceful and solitary, with a sense of remoteness – a small ruined kirk from a bygone era, divorced from any obvious historical context. The buildings of the modern-day farm at Tuquoy lie some 750m to the north, but the views to and from the kirk are otherwise largely unencumbered by modern structures. On the landward side, the kirk is surrounded by relatively large, pasture fields, creating a patchwork of greens and straw colours, bounded by traditional field walls or post-and-wire fences, and often occupied by bulls and cows. Looking seawards from Westside Church, part of the long coast of the Rapness peninsula is visible to the south-east, as are the dunes of Mae Sand to the west. On a clear day, the island of Rousay can be seen rising from the sea some 10km to the south. The beautiful, sandy Bay of Tuquoy lies to the north-east, but is not visible from Westside Church.

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<sup>98</sup> Lowe 1987, i, 128

<sup>99</sup> Lowe 1987, i, 124-8, Figs 63-68

The beach below the site is enticing to walkers and bird-watchers, but its main interest lies in the abundant archaeological remains of the Norse settlement spilling out of the low cliff. These are readily visible to visitors wishing to delve a little deeper. Westside Church may appear today to be an isolated ruin, but the wealth of remains in the adjacent cliff point to its origins as part of what was once a thriving Norse farm and settlement – the home of a Norse magnate in 12th-century Orkney.

## 2.6 Natural heritage values

Westside Church lies in a landscape type characterised by SNH as low-lying undulating island pasture, the key characteristics of which are undulating and variable topography which lacks strong features and has a mainly open character<sup>100</sup>. This landscape type is agricultural land of mainly improved pasture for sheep and cattle with, as in this part of Westray, randomly spaced farmsteads served by minor roads and tracks that rarely follow the coastline.

The area of Westside Church currently has no natural heritage designations and, apart from seabirds and marine life (notably seals), most visitors will not be especially aware of flora or fauna in the vicinity of the kirk. However, a 2002 audit of the natural history of Westray<sup>101</sup>, commissioned by the Westray Development Trust, revealed a wealth of flora and fauna on the island, which may reward the patient and observant visitor to this corner of Westray. Special mention should be made of the fulmars that frequently inhabit the archaeological remains erupting from the low cliff by Westside Church, and tend to spit at unwary visitors.

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<sup>100</sup> SNH Landscape Character Type 299: Undulating Island Pasture. [www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/LCA/LCT%20299%20-%20Undulating%20Island%20Pasture%20-%20Final%20pdf.pdf](http://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/LCA/LCT%20299%20-%20Undulating%20Island%20Pasture%20-%20Final%20pdf.pdf)

<sup>101</sup> Gray 2002

## 2.7 Contemporary/use values

Sometimes known as the ‘Queen o’ the Isles’, Westray is one of the northernmost Orkney islands, and one of the most fertile, with an economy based on farming and tourism. Today Westray has a population of just under 600 – slightly increased over recent decades. Several active and successful organisations promote the island, including the Westray Development Trust and the Westray and Papa Westray Tourist Association. There is an excellent Craft and Heritage Centre in Pierowall, and a number of independent operators offer guided cultural and natural heritage tours.

This island community also has strong religious roots, with three active churches today: the Church of Scotland, the Baptist Kirk and the Brethren Gospel Hall, as well as some Quakers. As a consequence of all these factors, the historic ruined kirks, Lady Kirk in Pierowall (aka **Pierowall Church**) and Westside Church at Tuquoy, are of high spiritual and cultural value to the Westray community. Cross Kirk’s graveyard is densely populated with graves and gravestones of a variety of ages. Although it is rarely used for interments today, in an island like Westray with a small, close-knit and longstanding local population, this historic graveyard has strong familial connections.

Westray receives fewer visitors than Orkney Mainland and the easier-to-reach islands, and not all of the visitors to Westray make it as far as Westside Church. Nonetheless, the community is rightly proud of and promotes its Norse heritage. Westside Church and the adjacent settlement are highly valued as an important component of that heritage and form part of the island’s general tourist offering.

## 3 MAJOR GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

- The full nature and extent of the associated Norse and medieval settlement immediately to the west of Westside Church remains to be investigated. The origins of this settlement pre-date the building of Westside Church, but probably not by more than 100 years or so, and the settlement was at its zenith in the 12th century when Westside Church was commissioned. The full context of the building

of Westside Church could only be discovered by further archaeological work on the settlement.

- The site overall appears to be one of a small group of high-status farm and church settlements in 12th-century Orkney, comparable to **Cubbie Roo's Castle** and **St Mary's Kirk** on Wyre, and the **Earl's Bu** and round church at Orphir. All three of these sites are relatively poorly understood archaeologically and have been little investigated in modern times, but together they have the capacity to transform our understanding of Orkney's 12th-century renaissance.
- The traces of an earlier burial ground enclosure hint at the possible existence of an earlier chapel pre-dating the 12th-century kirk, but this remains untested.
- The date of the extension of the nave of Westside Church remains unknown. It is proposed here that the nave was extended in the medieval period, probably in the late 12th or 13th century when Westside Church became the parish church. There is reasonable evidence to support this hypothesis (see above), but it remains to be confirmed. Similarly, there is continuing doubt about the existence or otherwise of a doorway in the south wall of the nave extension.
- On the basis of his analysis of the mortar, Thacker (see Appendix 3) has suggested that the 12th-century kirk may not be broadly contemporary with the excavated Norse hall. The distinctive type of mortar from the hall, known as *maerl*, is paralleled by the mortar from Cubbie Roo's Castle, also a 12<sup>th</sup>-century monument; but the mortar so far examined from Westside Church is of a different type. Further mortar analysis may cast more light on this apparent discrepancy.

## 4 ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

- Cubbie Roo's Castle and St Mary's Chapel, Wyre
- The Earl's drinking hall and round church, Orphir, mainland Orkney
- St Magnus Church, Egilsay
- Brough of Birsay, mainland Orkney
- Eynhallow Church
- Lady Kirk, Pierowall, Westray
- Bishop's Palace, Kirkwall

- St Mary's Crosskirk, Caithness
- Castle of Old Wick, Caithness
- Jarlshof, Shetland
- Broch of Mousa, Shetland (12<sup>th</sup>-century saga reference)

Associated Norse churches and settlements not in care

- St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall
- Linton Chapel, Shapinsay
- St Nicholas' Chapel, Papa Stronsay
- St Boniface and Mungerhouse, Papa Westray
- Tammaskirk, Rendall
- Skail, Deerness
- Pool, Sanday
- The Wirk, Westness, Rousay

Orkney Islands Council (OIC) has a network of 'Saga Sites' which includes Tuquoy, the node of which is a Visitor Centre at Orphir. OIC is also involved in a European-funded project, 'Destination Viking Sagalands'.

## 5 KEYWORDS

Norse, medieval, church, settlement, Orkneyinga Saga, Thorkel Flettir, Hafliði, lordly estate, manor farm, Romanesque, mortar, Westray, Orkney, Norway.

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### **Further Resources**

Canmore ID: 2810  
Site Number: HY44SE 1  
NGR: HY 4550 4315

Scheduled Monument Description:

<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90312>

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I: TIMELINE

11th century	Around this time, a Norse farm and settlement was established.
Early to mid-12th century	A Norse hall (and possibly a tower or castle) was built in the settlement, possibly by Thorkel Flettir or his son, Haflidi. It was only in use as a hall for a short time. A substantial workshop was built subsequently, incorporating part of the hall.
12th century	The wealthy magnate who lived in the settlement commissioned the building of a small stone church in the Romanesque style – Westside Church.
Probably 13th century	Westside Church becomes the parish church, and the nave is extended.
14th or 15th century	The Norse settlement is abandoned, but the kirk remains in use for Roman Catholic worship.
c.1560	Scottish Reformation. Westside Church is now used for Presbyterian worship. It may have been altered accordingly over subsequent decades, but funds for church repairs are in short supply.
Early 17th century	Westside Church aka Cross Kirk is one of two parish churches in Westray (the other is Lady Kirk) and has ‘eleven score and 16’ communicants.
1690s onwards	Funds for church upkeep become scarcer due to Episcopalian / Presbyterian feuding.
1719-1735	Documented disputes between heritors about seat entitlements show that Westside Church continued in use.
1746	Cross Kirk described as ‘entirely ruinous’, but almost certainly continued to be used.
1763	Presbytery met in Westside Church, but reconvened in the manse as the kirk by then had no roof. Cost of

	repairs to the kirk estimated at £61 10s (there is no evidence that the kirk was repaired).
c.1775	A new church, East Kirk, was completed. Westside Church was abandoned as a place of worship, but burials continued in the graveyard and within the church.
1870	Detailed survey of Westside Church by Henry Dryden.
1878	Record of Westside Church made by the architect, T S Peace.
1911	Westside Church (but not the graveyard) came into State care.
1912	Local builder undertook clearing and consolidation works under the supervision of the Office of Works.
1921	Site scheduled.
1934	Deed of Guardianship completed.
1999	Ownership of whole site passed to Historic Scotland. Site rescheduled with its graveyard.
2001	Historic Scotland produces Conservation Strategy.

## APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

No recorded excavations have taken place at Westside Church itself or in the graveyard (other than for grave-digging), but archaeological work has taken place on several occasions at the adjacent settlement site, as follows:

1982-83	Trial trench excavated over a series of substantial masonry walls with traces of external plaster. Cliff section cleaned and recorded.
1988	Cliff section straightened in segments, cleaned and recorded in detail, followed by 'tapestry excavation' (a 50cm slice excavated along the section to characterise the deposits). Excavation of a waterlogged pit-like feature on the beach.

- 1993 Further recording of parts of the cliff section following serious storm damage.
- 2017-18 Geophysical survey of the settlement site to the west and north of Westside Church.

In addition, in 2017 a pollen core was extracted from the now-drained Loch of Tuquoy. This has provided a long sequence of the vegetation history of the local area from prehistoric times to the present day, including the Norse and medieval period.

### APPENDIX 3: MORTAR ANALYSIS (MARK THACKER)

Thacker, M., Hughes, J. and Odling, N. 2019 'Animal, Vegetable or Mineral? Characterising shell-lime, maerl-lime and limestone-lime mortar evidence from the Late Norse and Medieval site of Tuquoy, Orkney.'

Available to download from <https://research-portal.uws.ac.uk/en/publications/animal-vegetable-or-mineral-characterising-shell-lime-maerl-lime->

### APPENDIX 4: REPORT ON THE GEOPHYSICAL SURVEYS 2017-18 (ORCA)

Available as a separate document on request from Historic Environment Scotland Cultural Resources Team, please contact [crtenquiries@hes.scot](mailto:crtenquiries@hes.scot)