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## On the fringe of Neolithic Europe: excavation of a chambered cairn on the Holm of Papa Westray, Orkney

Anna Ritchie

ISBN: 978-0-903903-47-9 (hardback)

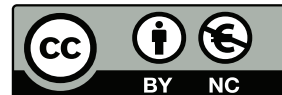
978-1-908332-31-8 (PDF)

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Ritchie, A 2009. *On the fringe of Neolithic Europe: excavation of the chambered cairn on the Holm of Papa Westray, Orkney*. Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. <https://doi.org/10.9750/9781908332318>

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excavation of a chambered cairn on the  
Holm of Papa Westray, Orkney

*In memory of John Rendall MBE of Holland, Papa Westray*

# On the fringe of Neolithic Europe: excavation of a chambered cairn on the Holm of Papa Westray, Orkney



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Edinburgh 2009  
SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF SCOTLAND

Published in 2009 by Society of Antiquaries of Scotland

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The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland is a registered Scottish charity no. SCO10440.

*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 0 903903 47 9

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Society of Antiquaries of Scotland gratefully acknowledges funding towards the publication of this volume from the Binks Trust, the Robert Kiln Charitable Trust and Historic Scotland.



Typeset in Bembo by Waverley Typesetters, Fakenham  
Design and production by Lawrie Law and Alison Rae  
Manufactured in Spain

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## Acknowledgements

This excavation could not have taken place without the permission, practical help and hospitality of the late John Rendall MBE, Annie-Jean Rendall and Neil Rendall of Holland, Papa Westray, and I offer them my deeply grateful thanks. From the loan of Ivy Cottage to the twice-daily boat service out to the Holm, every day of the excavation depended upon them, and they were always there for us, despite the heavy demands of running a farm.

I am very grateful to Graham Ritchie, Jean Comrie, Mary Harman and Jocelyn Grigg (now Jocelyn Rendall), who formed the core of the excavation team in both seasons, to David Lynn, Karen Moodie, Dave Reed, Richard Scott, Paul Sharman and Robert Waite for all their help on and off site, and to Harry Robinson who came to visit and stayed heroically to backfill in the rain. The photographs were kindly taken by Graham Ritchie, including a full photographic record of the surface of the cairn from which the details on the plans were drawn, and he also undertook most of the plane-table planning. The finished site plans and artefact drawings (except for the pottery drawings) are the work of Alan Braby, and Kevin Macleod was kind enough to scan and label all the illustrations, and I am very grateful to them both. The pottery was kindly drawn by Audrey Henshall. My thanks go to those who have contributed specialist reports or information: Patrick Ashmore, Marie Balasse, John Barber, Ross Barnett, James Barrett, Anne Brundle, Gordon Cook, G B Corbet, Thomas Cucchi, Camilla Dickson, Keith Dobney, Don Glass, Roger Jacobi, Jennifer Harland, Mary Harman, Audrey Henshall, Frances Lee, Christine Lefèvre, Monika Maleszka-Ritchie, Clare Owen, Rachel Parks, Dave Reed, Jocelyn and Neil Rendall, Rick Schulting, J Searle, Alison Sheridan, Anne Tresset, Robert Waite, Alwynne Wheeler, David Williams, and Paul and Grace Yoxon of the International Otter Survival Fund. I am particularly grateful to Alison Sheridan, who brought the site and its potential to the notice of scholars working on comparable material in the National Museum of Scotland and was instrumental in obtaining many of the radiocarbon dates. Dr Sheridan and Miss Henshall were also kind enough to read a draft of this report and to make very helpful suggestions. I am also indebted to the Society's referee, Professor Richard Bradley, for his comments and advice. The Society's production team, Alison Rae, Lawrie Law and Graham Lumsden, has been generous, as ever, with guidance and expertise, and I thank them for their help.

Funding for the excavation and post-excavation research was generously provided by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, the Society of Antiquaries of London, Orkney Islands Council, Historic Scotland, the Binks Trust, the Robert Kiln Charitable Trust and the Russell Trust, to all of whom I am deeply grateful. I am also very grateful to Historic Scotland for permission to excavate a Scheduled Ancient Monument and for paying for most of the radiocarbon dates and for the processing of wet-sieved material through the kind offices of Patrick Ashmore, Noel Fojut and John Barber (AOC (Scotland) Ltd). The Binks Trust, the Robert Kiln Charitable Trust and Historic Scotland have kindly grant-aided this publication for which I should like to record my thanks.

### SPECIALISTS' ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rick Schulting and Mike Richards would like to express their thanks to Anna Ritchie and the National Museums Scotland for permission to undertake the analysis, and to Alison Sheridan of that institution for facilitating the sampling. Funding for the dating was provided by a grant from Historic Scotland. Thanks to Patrick Ashmore for discussions concerning the calibration and the  $\Delta R$  offset for Scottish waters, and to Tom Higham and Peter Ditchfield of the School of Archaeology, University of Oxford, for providing and discussing the faunal isotope values associated with the AMS measurements, and in particular for re-analysing the 'marine' lamb in record time.

Marie Balasse and Anne Tresset would like to thank the Région Ile-de-France for its financial support. Stable isotope analyses were performed at the Service de Spectrométrie de Masse Isotopique at the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle in Paris (SSMIM), with technical support of Joël Ughetto. The analyses were paid by an ECLIPSE II program ('Climatic constraints and development of Neolithic husbandry in Western Europe at the Atlantic/Sub-Boreal boundary, 4th millennium bc') funded by the INSU (CNRS). We would also like to thank

Anna Ritchie as well as Jerry Herman and Alison Sheridan (National Museums of Scotland) for permission to sample the animal teeth from Holm of Papa Westray and Knap of Howar. We are grateful to Rick Schulting (Oxford University) and Michael Richards (Max Plank Institute Leipzig and University of Durham) for access to their raw data on these two sites.

Carrie Wright would like to thank Alison Sheridan and the National Museums Scotland for providing access and permission to analyse the Neolithic HPWN sample and Terry O'Connor and the University of York for providing access and permission to sample the modern NR sample, and to Marie Balasse for providing the unpublished HPWN ovis10 M3 graph. Sample preparation for instrumental analysis and iodine analysis were performed at the Department of Environmental Chemistry & Technology and Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA. This research was conducted as part of a Marie Curie PALAEO short-term research fellowship, under the supervision of Profs Don Brothwell and Matthew Collins.

Monika Maleszka-Ritchie offers grateful thanks to John Rendall for information about the use of limpets in Papay in recent times, to Jocelyn and Neil Rendall for surveying limpet habitats in Papay and the Holm today, and to Jeannine Hazlehurst for her comments on a first draft of the marine shells report.

Jennifer Harland and Rachel Parks are grateful to Mark Edmonds for commenting on their contribution, and to Anna Ritchie and Alison Sheridan for arranging the fish bone project.

Mary Harman is grateful for help with animal bones given by J R Baker.

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## Summary

The stalled cairn of Holm of Papa Westray North (ORK 21) in the far north of Orkney was excavated in 1854 and 1982–3. It was preceded by a small cell in a round cairn, which was amalgamated within the rectangular cairn of the stalled chamber. The cell was filled and walled off within the life of the stalled chamber, and the latter, with its entrance passage, was similarly filled at the end of its use, with evidence of deliberate selection of organic material included in the filling, particularly limpet shells and red deer antler. The remains of a minimum of eight to nine human individuals were found within the tomb, and the remains of neonate lambs show that sheep had access to the stalled chamber before it was sealed. Plain bowls were associated with the chamber deposits and Grooved Ware and beaker with secondary structures outside the cairn. Radiocarbon dates indicate that the tomb was in use for burials during the period from about 3520 cal BC to about 2900 cal BC and thus was contemporary with both the settlement at Knap of Howar in adjacent Papa Westray and the stalled cairn at Point of Cott in Westray. Stable carbon isotope and iodine analysis of teeth has demonstrated that the Neolithic sheep on the Holm were eating seaweed in the winter months, and isotope analysis of human bones indicates that the local population had a diet that included a small amount of marine protein. Vole remains exhibit the features that make the modern Orkney vole unique and thus confirm that this divergence from the European norm dates back to later Neolithic times. The fishbone assemblage indicates both otter and human activity within the chamber.



