

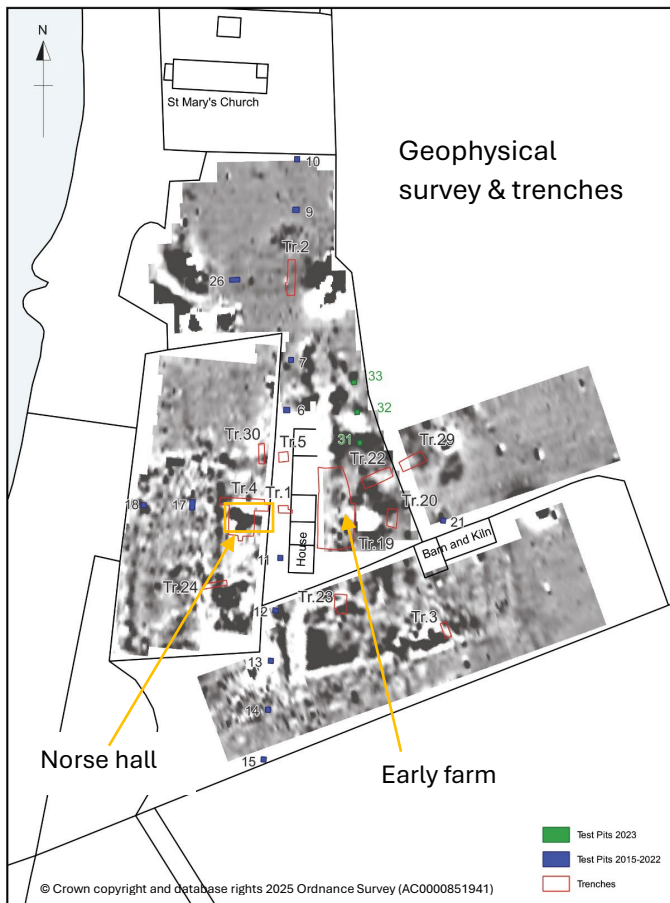
Skaill: 1000 years of a Rousay farm

The Norse Hall was exposed in 2019 on the western side of the settlement mound. Radiocarbon dates suggest a 11-12th Century date (although excavation has been limited so far). The full length of the building was not established (>14.5 m long) but the full width was identified (5.5 m wide internally).

In 2015, geophysical survey (magnetometry) around the farmstead at Skaill established the presence of a complex series of anomalies within a settlement mound. Areas of enhancement that indicate anthropogenic activity (burning, midden) and linear anomalies that indicate boundaries and enclosures were identified. A series of earthworks are visible on the ground surface around the farmstead - banks, terraces and enclosures. These correspond with the geophysical anomalies. Together these suggested that there was a complex settlement mound below the standing buildings.

Skaill is located on the western coast of Rousay rich in sites dating to the Neolithic, Iron Age and Norse periods. At Skaill, excavations have revealed a Norse Hall and medieval farm which developed up to the 18th century. Large buildings revealed during excavations on the eastern side date from the 13th - 14th century. The early farm was replaced in the late 18th century when the house and kiln barn were built - these buildings still stand today. Below the ground, there is around 1.5m of structural archaeology. The UHI Archaeology Institute have been investigating Skaill since 2015.

In the 12th century, Skaill was most likely part of the Westness estate, known from *Orkneyinga saga* as the home of Sigurd of Westness and the largest estate on Rousay comprising the districts of Inner Westness, Outer Westness (where Skaill was located) and Quandale. Norse sites in this area include a fortified tower known as The Wirk, a large house (attributed to Sigurd), a Pictish-Viking period graveyard as well as a Norse boathouse.

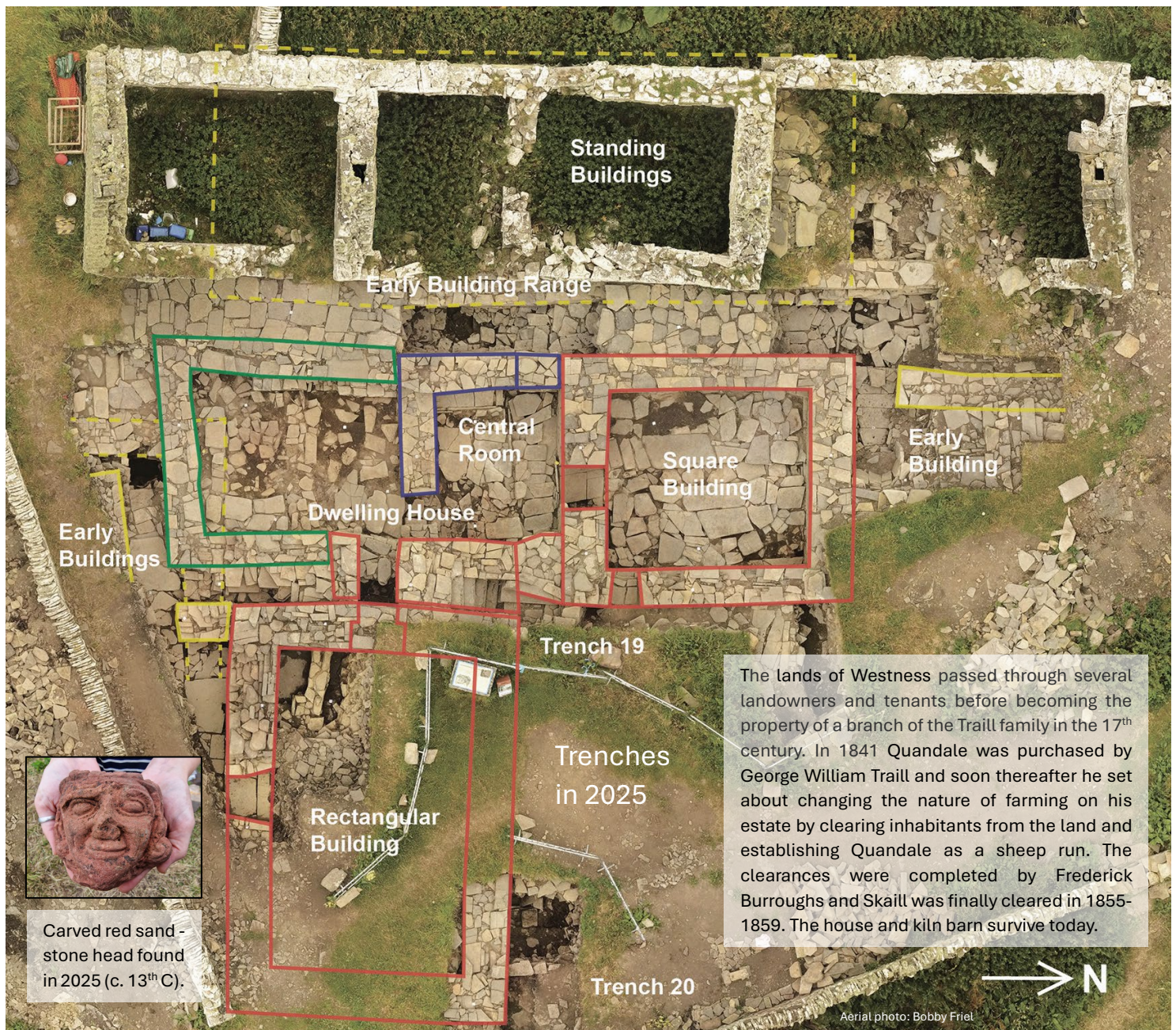


Main site phases:

- Norse Hall - 11-12th Century AD
- Early farmstead – c.13 – 18th Century AD
- Upstanding farmstead – early 19th C AD

Find out more:





Carved red sand - stone head found in 2025 (c. 13th C).

The lands of Westness passed through several landowners and tenants before becoming the property of a branch of the Traill family in the 17th century. In 1841 Quandale was purchased by George William Traill and soon thereafter he set about changing the nature of farming on his estate by clearing inhabitants from the land and establishing Quandale as a sheep run. The clearances were completed by Frederick Burroughs and Skail was finally cleared in 1855-1859. The house and kiln barn survive today.

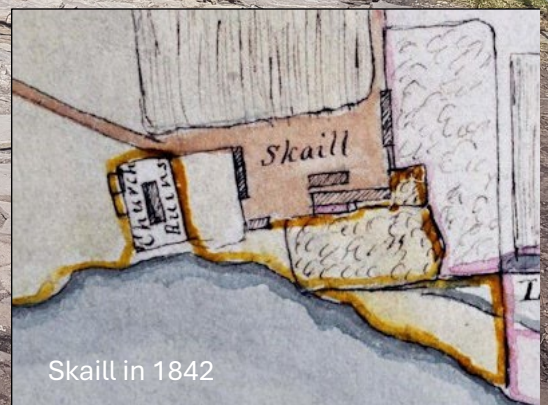
Aerial photo: Bobby Friel



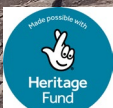
Norse pottery, medieval Scarbrough wares, coarsewares and more recent glazed wares have been recovered. Pottery was imported either from the Scottish mainland, Northern England or Continental Europe and ranges in date from the 13th to the 18th centuries. Post medieval pottery represented is dominated by vessels from North Germany / South Scandinavia in particular Tripod pipkin cooking vessels.

Animal bones from Skail are dominated by domestic livestock animals (cattle, sheep and pig) with other domestic animals (horses, dogs and cats) likely used as work animals. Wild taxa such as rabbits, seal and otter were also present. The cattle assemblage shows evidence of dairy production (butter was used to pay tax).

Fish bone remains are dominated by cod and ling in the early phases of the site, showing deep sea fishing. Saithe dominate later phases, showing a shift to inshore fishing in the last few hundred years.



Skail in 1842



Archaeology Institute

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