

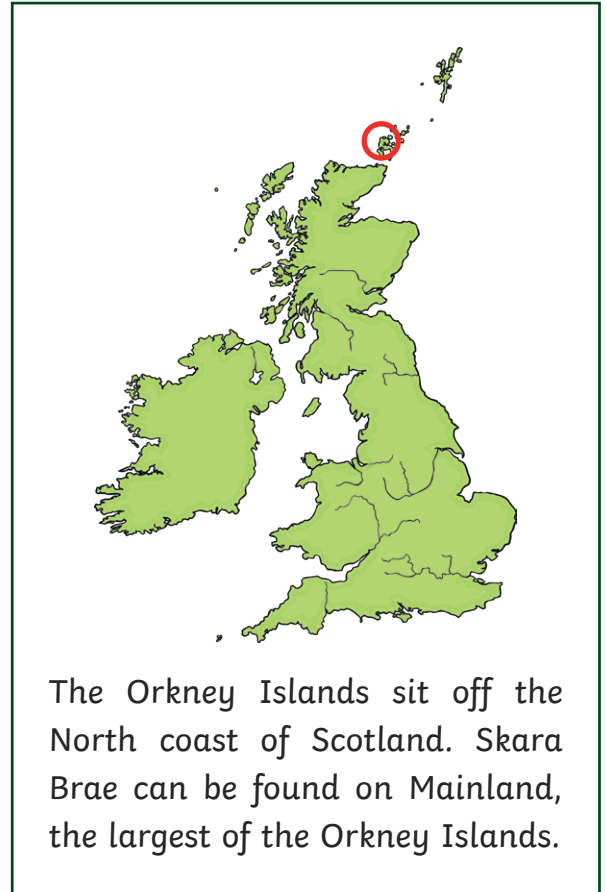
Skara Brae

Skara Brae is a remarkably well-preserved Stone Age Village built in the Neolithic period, around 3000 BC.

It was discovered in AD 1850 after a heavy storm stripped away the earth that had previously been covering what we can see today.

The Houses

The remains of eight houses stand on the site. They were not all built at the same time, so at some point the original village was added to. Apart from one building, which stands slightly separate from the others, the layout of the houses is very similar. The houses were linked by covered passageways. The earlier houses had more of a circular shape. There was one main room with a fire pit in the middle and beds built into the walls at the sides. Each house had a set of stone shelves called a dresser. The later houses were slightly bigger and more rectangular, although the corners were still rounded. They still built stone beds, but not into the walls. The fire pit and stone shelves remained. Although the doorways seem very small to us, early humans were shorter than we are today. Lower doorways would also have helped keep the weather out. The doors were stone slabs and could be bolted shut.



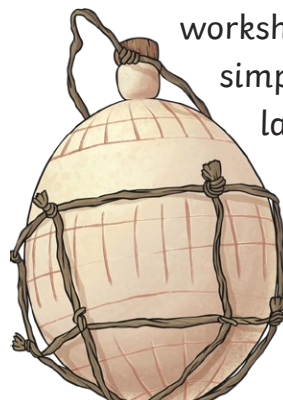
House 7

At first glance, house seven is the same as all the others. However, it's worth looking a little more closely. Some interesting facts about house seven:

- The bodies of two women were found in a stone grave under a wall. They were buried before the house was built. This could have been part of a ritual.
- The door could only be bolted from the outside. The people inside the house would not be able to leave of their own free will.
- Unlike the other passageways, the passage to house seven went only to house seven.

House 8

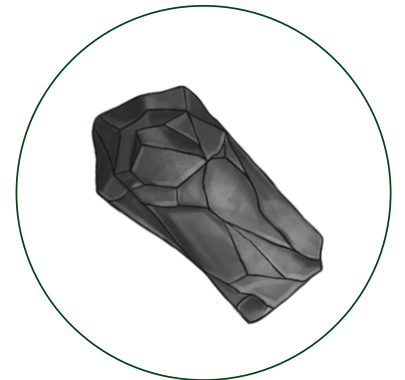
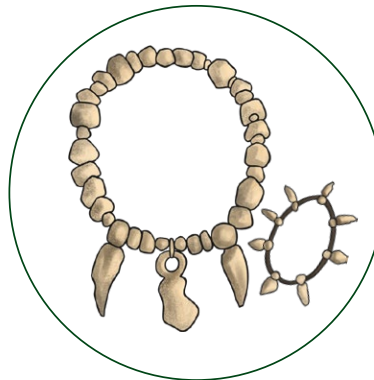
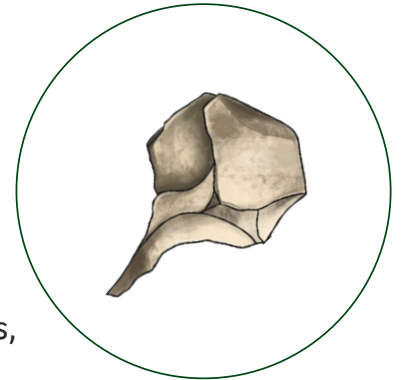
Unlike the other houses, all built closely together and linked with passageways, house eight stands alone. It had carved patterns on the walls and no beds or shelves. It could have been a workshop or meeting place, or simply built on the site at a later date.



The floor was found covered in pieces of material used in the manufacture of tools.

What Else Was Found There?

- Animal bones including cattle and sheep, as well as barley and wheat grown nearby, suggest a farming community.
- Plentiful remains of fish and shellfish indicate they were also skilled fishermen. Large piles of limpets were found but these weren't necessarily part of their diet; they may have been used for bait.
- The lack of weapons found suggests that life was peaceful.
- Richly-carved stone objects might have been used in religious rituals.
- Bone tools, along with the absence of tools for weaving, indicate that animal skins were used for clothing.
- Many examples of jewellery were found including pendants, pins, necklaces and beads.



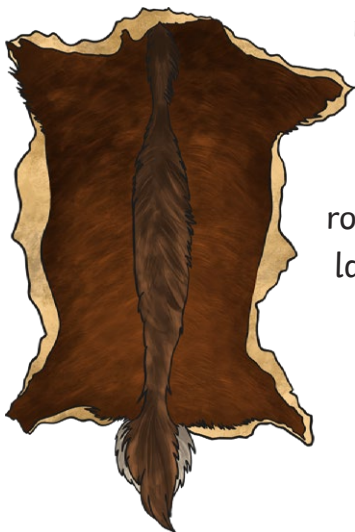
Light, space and warmth

There were no windows but there may have been a smoke hole in the roof. There would have been some light from the fire. As wood was scarce in the Orkney Islands, they were more likely to have burnt seaweed, dried animal dung and peat. With straw and heather to make mattresses and animal skins for blankets, it would have been relatively cosy - at least compared to

outside! The walls of the houses were built against 'midden' - piles of discarded rubbish that would have protected the walls from the elements, as well

as provided a layer of insulation. None of the houses still have a roof, so they must have been made from something that has since perished.

A common early roofing material in Orkney was seaweed, fixed with ropes and stones. They could also have used straw, animals skins or turf, laid over a frame of driftwood or whale bones found on the shore.



Skara Brae Questions

1. Draw an arrow and label the location of Skara Brae on the map.



2. What do you think House 7 was used for? Why?

3. What do you think House 8 was used for? Why?

4. Can you describe a difference between the earlier houses and those built later?

5. What was an advantage of a lower doorway?

6. What could you find in the centre of each house?

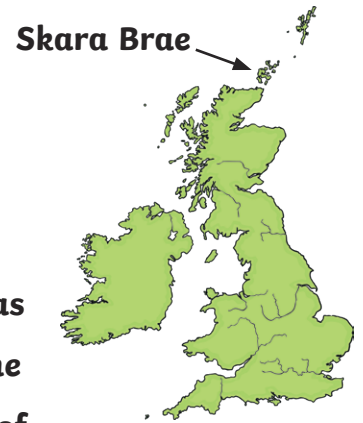
7. What might the roof have been made from?

Skara Brae Questions

8. Draw a diagram of the inside of a Skara Brae house and label the different items of furniture you would find.

Skara Brae Answers

1. Draw an arrow and label the location of Skara Brae on the map.



2. What do you think House 7 was used for? Why?

Student's own response such as: House 7 could have been used as a jail. I think this because the door could only be bolted from the outside. The people inside the house would not be able to leave of their own free will. Also, the passageway at house seven did not lead to any other houses.

3. What do you think House 8 was used for? Why?

Student's own response such as: House 8 could have been used as a workshop or meeting place. I think this because house 8 stands away from the other houses. It has carved patterns on the walls and no beds or shelves. Also, the remains of tools were found inside.

4. Can you describe a difference between the earlier houses and those built later?

Student's own responses which should include one of the following.

- **The early houses were built in a circular shape. Houses which were built later were bigger with a more rectangular shape with rounded corners.**
- **Early houses had beds which were built into the walls of the house. Houses which were built later had stone beds that stuck out into the centre of the room.**

5. What was an advantage of a lower doorway?

A lower doorway would have helped to keep the weather out.

6. What could you find in the centre of each house?

A fire pit is found at the centre of each house.

7. What might the roof have been made from?

Student's own response such as: We do not know what the roof of the house was made from as it has rotted away. A common early roofing material in Orkney was seaweed, fixed with ropes and stones. They could also have used straw, animal skins or turf, laid over a frame of driftwood or whale bones found on the shore.

Skara Brae Answers

8. Draw a diagram of the inside of a Skara Brae house and label the different items of furniture you would find.

Students will draw and label their own versions of the inside of a house. They should include some of the following features:

- **one main room with no windows, a small doorway and a smoke hole in the roof;**
- **a fire pit in the middle of the room;**
- **beds built into the walls at the sides;**
- **a set of stone shelves called a dresser;**
- **straw and heather mattresses with animal skins for blankets.**