

Shapinsay

... The Viking sanctuary

Dealing with the sometimes mischievous, even malevolent, Orkney fairy folk in centuries past was always a problem and each island had one or more fairy doctors. In Shapinsay, according to the tradition, one such 19th-century 'trowie doctor' could be seen dancing and flapping his arms by night on a hilltop. The tiny folk did not, alas, make themselves visible on these occasions.

The green and fertile island of Shapinsay lies a pleasant 25-minute crossing by ferry from Kirkwall. The MV Shapinsay, commissioned in 1989 operates a regular service throughout the day.

As you sail out of the shelter of Kirkwall Bay, old gun emplacements can be seen along the Point of Carness while on the left lies Thieves Holm. Tradition has it that this little isle was home to banished thieves and witches but now it is the haunt of Cormorants, Kittiwakes and seals.

Crossing The String, the deep water exit from Kirkwall Bay, the Victorian turrets of Balfour Castle loom ahead. To the right is the uninhabited island of Helliar Holm with its automatic lighthouse.

Approaching Shapinsay Pier and ro-ro terminal the scene is one of warm stone colours of traditional drystone walls and the pleasing symmetry of the village street. Balfour village was built in the late 18th century as a home for smiths, carpenters and masons employed on the Balfour estate.

Much further back in time the calm waters of Elwick Bay echoed to the bustle of the 100-vessel Viking fleet of King Hakon which sheltered here in 1263 before setting off for the Battle of Largs.

Landscape

Shapinsay is low-lying with its highest point being Ward Hill at 210 feet (64 metres) from where on a clear day a breathtaking view of almost all the other Orkney isles is possible. The island is six miles (10 km) at its longest and in common with most of Orkney the island is made up of Middle Old Red Sandstone.

Interesting features of the island are its storm beaches or as they are known locally 'ayres' a name rooted in the Old Norse meaning a strip of sea water completely shut off from the ocean by narrow necks of land. Look for these at Vasa Loch, Lairu Water and for the natural process near completion at the Ouse.



paul hollinrake, shapinsay - charles tait

Archaeology

On the archaeological front Shapinsay has its share of mounds, cists, underground structures and brochs, partially or totally unexcavated. Burroughston Broch, which dates back to the Iron Age was excavated in the 1860s and is one of the finest examples in Orkney. Open throughout the year there is a small car park at the site.

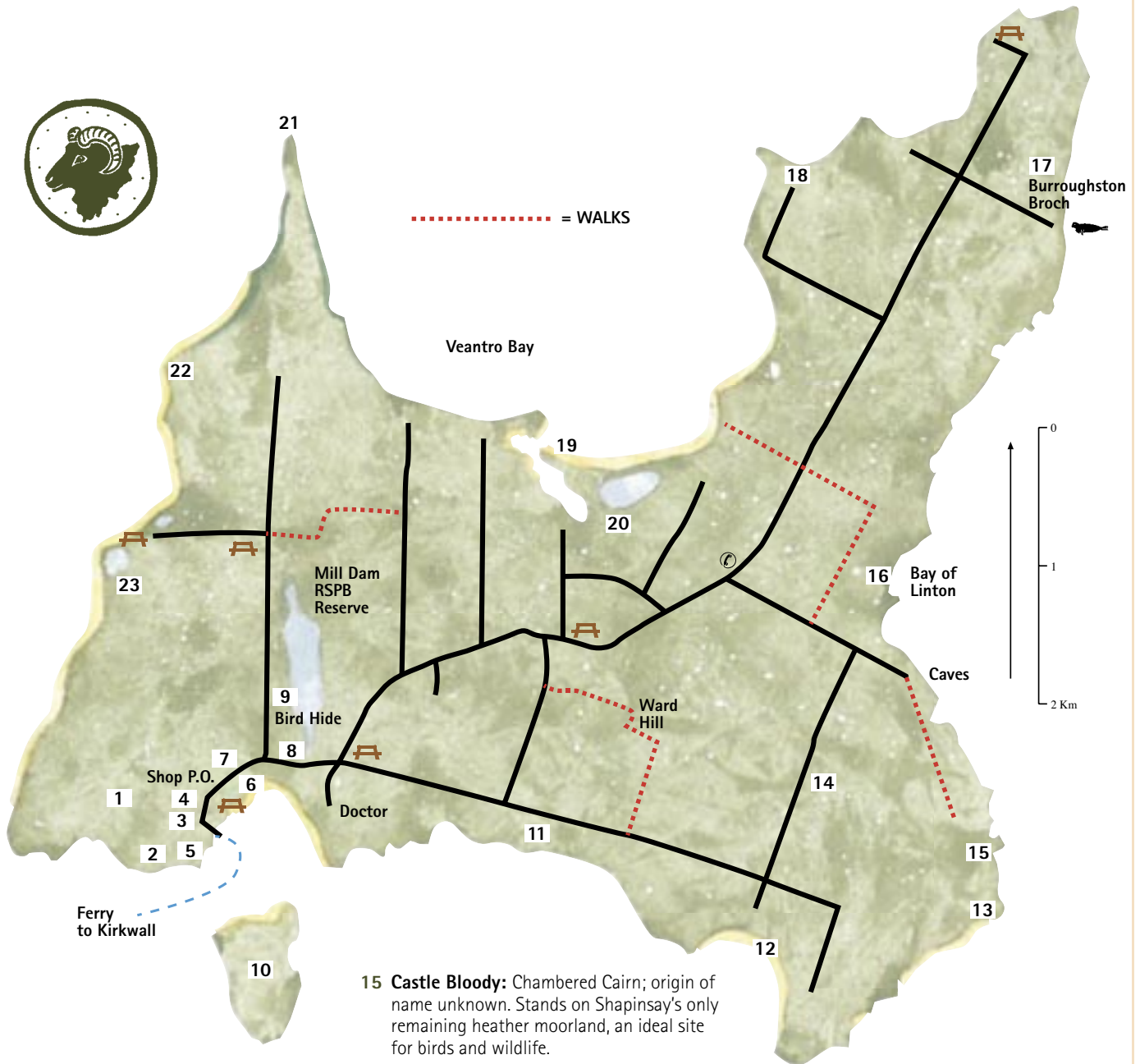
Please remember that almost all other antiquities are on privately owned land and permission to visit must be sought. The careful visitor is always welcome.

Points of interest

- 1 Balfour Castle:** Victorian castle built around the existing house of Cliffdale.
- 2 The Douche:** Dates from the mid 19th century. Reputedly used at one time as a salt water shower and is topped with a doo'cot.
- 3 Balfour Village:** Formerly called Shoreside it was built in the late 1700s as home for workers on the Balfour estate.
- 4 The Smithy:** Originally the village smithy with a sail loft above. Now the heritage centre, craft shop and restaurant.
- 5 The Gatehouse:** Former estate entrance to Balfour Castle and residence of the gatekeeper.
- 6 Gas House:** All that remains of former gas works; dates from the mid 19th century.
- 7 School – Community Centre – Playing Fields – Childrens' Playground.**
- 8 Elwick Mill** is a former corn mill now in the process of conversion restoration. A solid stone constructed building built in 1893 and last used as a corn mill in the fifties. Future proposals are for a pottery workshop and gallery on the ground floor, living accommodation on first and second floors and restoration of the mill workings and wheel. A temporary pottery workshop and studio is in the original single storey mill dating back to the 17th century which is situated next to the large mill. Shapinsay clay is now being used for certain items and is a rich firing terracotta clay. Visitors are welcome to see the goods being made. Open 10 - 4.30. Closed some Mondays.
- 9 Mill Dam, RSPB Reserve:** A hide overlooks this wetland reserve giving spectacular views. The reserve is home to many breeding birds including pintails and other ducks, waders, black headed gulls and the secretive water rail. In winter hundreds of ducks are joined by whooper swans and greylag geese.



elwick bay, shapinsay - charles tait



- 10 **Helliar Holm:** Uninhabited with automatic lighthouse. Contains broch, chapel site and cairn.
- 11 **Old Church & Kirkyard:** First church on the site dated from 1559. Present building was constructed in 1802 and the churchyard contains the Balfour family burial site.
- 12 **Bay of Sandgarth:** Sandy beach.
- 13 **Interesting Walk:** Including views of ruins, bird life and rock formations such as the 'Foot of Shapinsay'.
- 14 **Standing Stone:** Megalithic monument known as Mor Stein.

- 15 **Castle Bloody:** Chambered Cairn; origin of name unknown. Stands on Shapinsay's only remaining heather moorland, an ideal site for birds and wildlife.
- 16 **Linton Chapel:** Probably dates from 12th century, although little remains at ground level. It's said that a lintel from the chapel was used in building a byre on a nearby farm in the early 1900s. The lintel was promptly returned when two of the farmer's cattle were discovered hanged in the byre.
- 17 **Broch of Burroughston:** Archaeological site excavated in the 1860s. Good point for viewing seals.
- 18 **Quholme:** Birthplace of American writer Washington Irving's father.
- 19 **Odin's Stone:** Large black stone lying on beach below tide line. (6'6" x 4' 6") noticeably different from surrounding

- stones on the beach. Origin unknown but traditionally associated with Norse god 'Odin' or 'Woden'.
- 20 **Lairo Water and the Ouse:** Examples of sea water enclosed by 'ayres'. Easily accessible for walking and birdwatching.
- 21 **The Galt:** Good walk, bird life and seals sometimes visible. Access by prior arrangement please. t: 711350.
- 22 **Gun Emplacements:** Former battery used in World War II.
- 23 **Vasa Loch:** Third example of water enclosed by an 'ayre'. Good site for birdwatching.

Wildlife

Bird life abounds on Shapinsay but this island is particularly noted for its gull and tern colonies, courting Shelducks, hunting Hen-Harriers and Arctic Skua. Most of the locally abundant waders can be seen at close quarters. The R.S.P.B. has recently built a hide overlooking the Mill Dam on the west side of the island. From here many species of nesting birds and wildfowl can be viewed. Best places for observing the island's wildlife which includes an otter colony at the Ouse, Laird Water and Vasa Loch, the craggy east coast.

In spite of considerable cultivation in summer Shapinsay's verges and waysides are carpeted with wild flowers.



milldam RSPB hide - charles tait

Balfour castle

The Balfour family originated in Fife and the foundation of the Balfour estates in Orkney was by the gift of church land to Gilbert Balfour in a charter from the bishop of Orkney in 1560. By 1790 the Balfours were on the farm at Elwick and owned a large part of the island. Balfours occupied the castle until David Hubert Ligonier Balfour died in 1961 leaving no heirs. He had already sold the 830 acre farm of Balfour Mains to the Zawadzki family and on his death they also acquired the castle. Balfour Castle has just come under new ownership.

Heritage centre

The Shapinsay Heritage Centre, located in the Smithy, Balfour village, has a fascinating and impressive display of photographs, documents and artefacts relating to the island's history. A restaurant and craft shop are housed in the same building.

The land

Visitors will immediately notice how green and lush this intensively cultivated island is. Shapinsay's medium and small farms specialise in quality beef and lamb, exporting over 1500 cattle and over 2000 sheep annually. These animals go mainly to Aberdeenshire farms for further fattening and frequently go on to win prizes at major agricultural shows through Britain. A feature of Shapinsay, most obvious from the air, is its square ten-acre fields and straight roads. These result from the activities of the 'improvers' in the 1850s under the guidance of Col. David Balfour who completely changed the face of farming on the island. In the 26 years between 1848 and 1874 the area under cultivation went from 700 acres to over 6000 acres. Now all the farms are owner-occupied with modern steadings and the latest equipment alongside some crofting activity in traditional Orkney stone steadings.

Crafts

Traditional and modern crafts including painting, pottery and glasswork have been carried out on the island in recent years and may be purchased locally.

Services

Accommodation

Accommodation providers listed below are members of VisitScotland's Quality Assurance Scheme and have been graded as part of the national scheme. Please refer to the disclaimer on the inside of the back cover.

COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL

Balfour Castle (★★★CHH) - private castle accommodation with own chapel for weddings. t: 01856 711282. e:balfourcastle@btinternet.com www.balfourcastle.co.uk.

BED & BREAKFAST

Hilton Farmhouse (★★★★B&B) - (Licensed) 4 star bed and breakfast less than a mile from ferry terminal. Relaxed and informal atmosphere in a quiet rural setting yet only 25 mins by ro ro ferry from the main town of Kirkwall. Relax and savour in our new conservatory dining and breakfast area with panoramic sea views. We specialise in high quality home-cooked food with own or local produce. Courtesy transport to and from ferry. Contact Stanley or Catherine Bews. t/f: 01856 711239. e: info@hiltonorkneyfarmhouse.co.uk. www.hiltonorkneyfarmhouse.co.uk.

Monquhanny (★★★B&B) - B&B or B&B and evening meal. 1 twin or 1 double en-suite. Traditional home cooking using local produce, Italian and middle eastern food a real interest. Judi Wellden, t: 07776 152192. e: enquiries@orkneystainedglass.com.

Accommodation providers listed below are not participants of VisitScotland's Quality Assurance Scheme. Please refer to the disclaimer on the inside of the back cover before booking.



shapinsay pier - charles tait

Leisure Activities

Holidays with **Orkney Island Holidays**: a unique one-week blend of guided birdwatching, wildlife, archaeology and local history, exploring the very best of Orkney. En-suite accommodation, delicious food, friendly relaxed informative holidays. Illustrated brochure from Paul and Louise Hollinrake, Shapinsay 10, Orkney KW17 2DY. t. 01856 711373, e: holidays@orkney.com, www.orkneyislandholidays.com.

Heritage Centre and Craft Shop, The Smithy, Balfour Village. Open daily May - September.

Community Centre, for indoor sports and games during the school holidays; for details see local information boards.

David Holmes, Elwick Mill, Pottery workshop and gallery, open daily. t: 01856 711211.

Orkney Stained Glass. Glass and fine art studio, workshop and gallery. Specialising in traditional stained glass, contemporary jewellery making, glass work and watercolour paintings. We offer residential glasswork courses. Full accommodation, friendly personalised tuition and materials are included in the package. Come and visit our gallery for a unique gift, or try our one-day taster courses. For details contact Judi Wellden on t: 07776 152192 or visit our website at www.orkneystainedglass.com e: enquiries@orkneystainedglass.com.

Farm of Garth. Rare farm breeds and organic wool. Open daily from 1 June to 30 September. Guided farm tours also available by prior arrangement. Further details see www.farmofgarth.co.uk or contact Nickie on 07880 928885 or 01856 711350.

Other Services

General Merchant, T. Sinclair, Balfour village, licensed grocer, petrol, calor gas. t: 01856 711300.

Hilton Farmhouse, Licensed conservatory restaurant with panoramic sea view. Serving quality food made with own or local produce. Wi-fi access. Open all year for teas, coffees, homebakes and light lunches. Bookings preferred for lunches, suppers and evening meals. Charter boat available for evening meals. Please phone 01856 711239, e: info@hiltonorkneyfarmhouse.co.uk www.hiltonorkneyfarmhouse.co.uk.

Post Office, Mrs S. Sinclair, Balfour Village. t: 01856 711300.

The Smithy Restaurant, Balfour Village. A meal out with a difference; lunches, evening meals and a' la carte in stylish licensed restaurant. Sea food specialities. Relaxed lunches or an evening cruise. Bookings advisable. t: 01856 711722.

Pat Hazzledine - **Painting holidays** and courses. t: 01856 711263, www.shapinsay.biz e: pat.hazzledine@shapinsay.biz.

Church of Scotland, service Sunday 12 noon.

Resident Doctor t: 01856 711284.

Healthy Living Centre. t: 01856 711346.

Tours & Visits

MV Charles Ann for Sea Fishing, Diving and Island Trips. Mr Harvey Groat, Housebay, Shapinsay. t/f: 01856 711254. Mobile 07884470600.

Hilton Farmhouse, Special 2 night all inclusive tour package with dinner, bed and breakfast and farmhouse fare lunch. (Extra nights at a reduced rate) with two sharing a twin or double room.

Guided tours of Shapinsay. Historical, scenic and cultural. Bird and wildlife watching with experienced guide, transport, lunch and refreshments included. t: Catherine 01856 711239, e: info@hiltonorkneyfarmhouse.co.uk www.hiltonorkneyfarmhouse.co.uk.

Transport links

Shapinsay

Effective from 3 May until 27 September 2009

The daily service to the island of Shapinsay is operated by the modern roll-on/roll-off ferry **m.v. Shapinsay** (91 passengers and 11 cars). Bookings should be made at the Kirkwall Office telephone 01856 872044, f: 01856 872921, e: info@orkneyferries.co.uk.



		Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wed.	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Shapinsay	dep		0730A	0730B	0730B	0730B	0730B	
Kirkwall	dep		0815A	0815B	0815B	0815B	0815B	
Shapinsay	dep	0900A**	0900A	0900B	0900B	0900B	0900B	0900B
Kirkwall	dep	0945A	0945	0945	0945	0945	0945	0945
Shapinsay	dep	1030A	1030	1030	1030	1030	1030	1030
Kirkwall	dep	1130A	1130	1130	1130	1130	1130	1130
Shapinsay	dep	1330A	1330	1330	1330	1330	1330	1330
Kirkwall	dep	1415A*	1415	1415	1415	1415	1415	1415
Shapinsay	dep		1515	1515	1515	1515	1515	1515A
Kirkwall	dep		1600	1600	1600	1600	1600	1600A
Shapinsay	dep		1645	1645	1645	1645	1645	1645A
Kirkwall	dep		1730	1730	1730	1730	1730	1730A
Shapinsay	dep	1730A*						
Kirkwall	dep	1815A						
Shapinsay	dep	1900A						1900A
Kirkwall	dep	1945A**						1945A

A - Vehicles must be booked before 1430 hrs on Saturday. **B** - Vehicles must be booked before 1600 hrs the day before sailing. All other vehicle bookings must be made at least one hour before the departure from Kirkwall.

No Show Charges - All cancellations must be made not less than 24 hrs before the intended date of travel or full charges may apply.

* The sailings from Kirkwall at 1415 and from Shapinsay at 1730 on Sundays from 3 May will be used by the visitors to Balfour Castle and Village. Space for other passengers on these sailings will therefore be limited accordingly.

** Slight alterations will be made to these sailings on a few Sundays in June, July and August to allow connections with the other ships - details will be advertised by separate notices.

NOTES:

- 1) Vehicles must be available for boarding **15 minutes** and passengers **5 minutes** before departure times.
- 2) For conditions of carriage of passengers and cargo see notices exhibited in Company's vessels, offices and premises.

For full fares please enquire at Orkney Ferries Offices

BALFOUR CASTLE PACKAGE TOUR - 3 May to 6 September (Sundays only)

The 25 minute ferry trip takes you to the fertile island of Shapinsay and Balfour Castle. The castle was built around the existing house of Clifdale and completed in 1848, although the foundation of the Balfour Estates in Orkney goes as far back as 1560. The castle has now come under new ownership.

- Return journey with special close up viewing of Heliar Holm seal colony.
- Guided tour of Victorian Balfour Castle and walled kitchen gardens.
- Local home-baked tea served in the castle and visit to gift shop.
- Lunches available on request.
- Ro-ro ferry from Kirkwall 1415 or take a morning ferry and make a day of it.

N.B. All bookings through Balfour Castle. Tel. 01856 711282

Sundays (3 May - 6 Sept)				
Kirkwall	dep	1415	Adult	£15.00
Shapinsay	arr	1445	Children under 15	£7.00
Shapinsay	dep	1730	Children under 5	FREE
Kirkwall	arr	1800	Family Package (2 Adults & 2 Children)	£35.00
Ferry Fares not included in price				