

Sue's diary uncut 1970

(NB the diagrams in the following are not to scale)

June 30th

Awoke at Birnam Youth Hostel. Primitive external toilets, old school rather like Deerness. Left at about 8.30 am, fine day. Drove through Cairngorms to Inverness, where we had lunch by the river. Round shops. Drove through pouring rain, Albert [the van] leaking, to Helmsdale Youth Hostel. Crowded. After supper walked to harbour and 'castle'.

July 1st

Helmsdale YH, wooden panels, converted church hall? Damp start - but Albert started OK! Had been parked in a field all night and was damp throughout. Drove to Thurso (Scrabster), up and down very steep coastal valleys, Albert juddering violently.

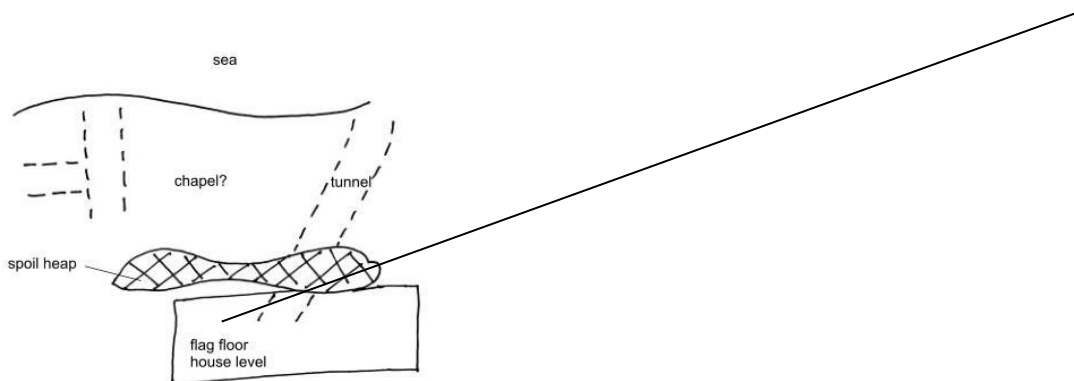


Arrived Thurso c. 10.30 am; after coffee in town and a walk on the beach drove on to Scrabster. Nervewracking to see Albert with his corrosion and suspension being hoisted aboard St. Ola.

Almost expected to see him crack like an egg! Not too bad a crossing - moderate swell, fine views of Hoy cliffs and Old Man. Drove to Deerness, got to school at about 6.00 pm. Walked down to the site. Original trench filled in now, and work concentrated on 'chapel' and tunnel.

July 2nd

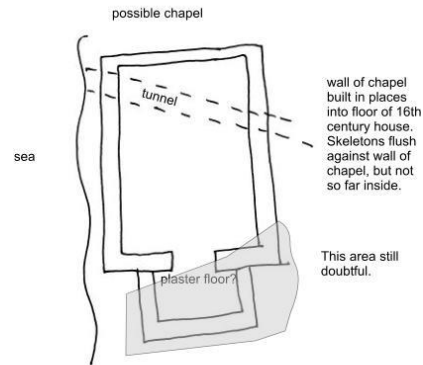
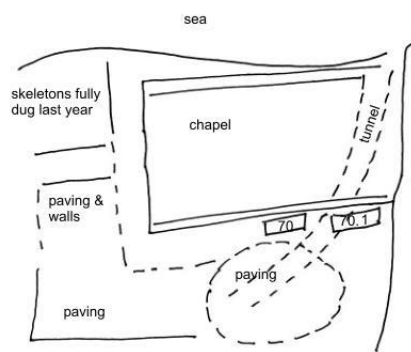
Deerness school seems very crowded - like sardines in the girls' room, and as a result the hot water soon runs out. Fine morning, went to shop and drove down to site in Albert. Dug away all morning here.



Rain. Finding a very good flagstone floor, presumably of the 16th century house - increasing mud and intensive polytheneing. Lunch amidst drips and sitting in pools of water and mud - back to work quickly, drier on the site than in the tea tent! Massive reconstruction of tea tent followed, even with crude benches! Rapid work clearing back floor, so that it can be drawn and taken up to help work on tunnel - which is getting higher and might be widening out. It's about 40' long now. Finished at 5 - too wet to continue. After supper out to Don's cottage [Mossquoy] - he's cleared out the straw but it's still a bit of a wreck. Collected driftwood on beach near Mossquoy (Halley?) v. breezy, but sunshine between showers.

July 3rd

Digging all day, 9-4ish. Tunnel extending and more floor clearing from last year's remaining trench towards tunnel probe hole.



Lots of stone flags from 16th century house appearing all over the place. Skeletons on almost topsoil level under old spoil heap that Mr Delday had cleared away for us [above or below flagstone floor??]. Rudolph 70/1 cleared. Also found a mother and child presumably, lying in opposite directions. Mother had legs crossed below knee.

Silver penny found above tunnel but below floor in chapel, poss. v. early Saxon.

Went to Skail in the evening to meet Birmingham diggers, thence to KW to visit Grain Earth House, is it like our tunnel? To pub, but too many noisy Norwegian sailors! Drove to Italian Chapel, and couldn't start Albert again! Walked to St. Mary's to phone a message to Don at 10.15 pm, waited in village until 11.15, but no sign of rescue. Started to walk back to Deerness, got a lift for about a mile to Ocklester (?), then walked to main KW - D'ness road. By school [in Toab] found Don in dormobile, with a cluster of helpful Orcadians and a greasy-handed Reg: he too had broken down! Got the dormobile going, but it couldn't quite make it to the school in Deerness, left it just by road to Garth. We four who had already done a lot of walking got a lift from a passing car back to the school. Arrived 1.00 am. Meanwhile one of our number had been frightened by a local man, a bit the worse for alcohol apparently, who had wandered in a fairly aimable manner probably, into the washroom while she was washing, at about 11.30 pm

July 4th

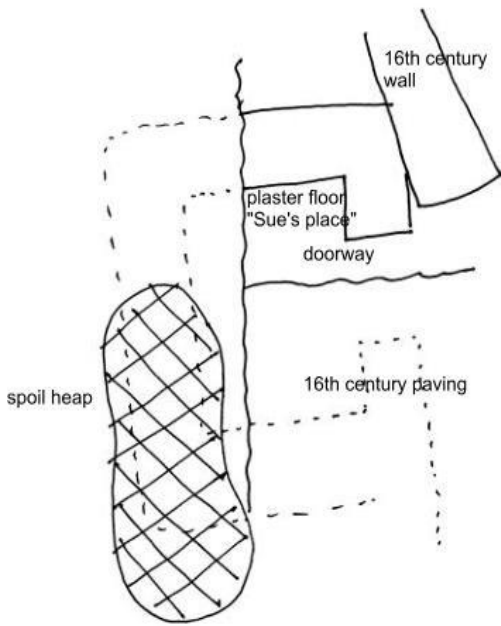
Hanging around for most of morning trying to sort out how to get to Albert with the dormobile broken down. Don hired a car from KW, and after lunch he drove us to Albert and we fiddled with the jammed starter motor and got it free. Waited for Don to help us to bump start him, but he had to take Reg to the airport at 2.30. So started Albert on the starter motor and drove to the school. Down to site: pick and shovel for 2 hours clearing spoil heap between chapel and tunnel probe hole. Evening Tony drove dormobile into KW when Don returned hire car. Don, Tony & I to pub, then drove to Audrey's cottage on Burray. Murder committed there a year ago last March [before she took it over]. Primitive and cold, sleeping bags and a smoky coal fire.

July 5th

Full day on site, joining up 2 holes of chapel and tunnel. Clearing down floors and walls in 'chapel' and 16th century house, and showing how floor of latter made use of wall of former, showing corners and joins, and a plaster floor [surely collapsed plaster from walls?]. Celtic chapel? and possibly Celtic bods. Seems like a sort of sanctuary on east end of chapel [cf. church on Brough of Birsay?]. Rubble and missing [robbed-out?] walls.

July 6th

Day off. Kirkwall shopping, then in convoy with dormobile and Audrey to Tingwall to catch boat, Osprey. Chugged to Wyre to see Cubbie Roo's Castle, and a 12th century church that is built similarly to ours. So are we Norse? Then boat to Egilsay to see St Magnus Church. Lunch in churchyard. Boat to Rousay. 3 landrovers took us from pier to Midhowe Broch and Cairn. Walked back to pier - picked up by Landrover at Blackhamar Cairn. Back to KW for fish and chips Some of us to pub while others went to see the Churchill Barriers. Two Austrian lads had arrived meanwhile at the school.



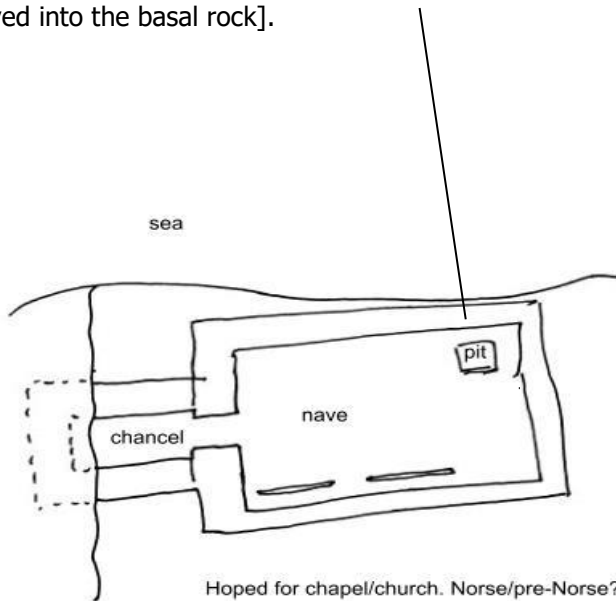
July 7th (Tues.)

Digging. But first of all into KW shopping for food for tomorrow. Carried on digging at 'Sue's Place', uncovering more floor and proving existence of wall. Two of us busy making pastry and baking jam and syrup tarts all evening. Our turn to cook tomorrow.

July 8th (Wed.)

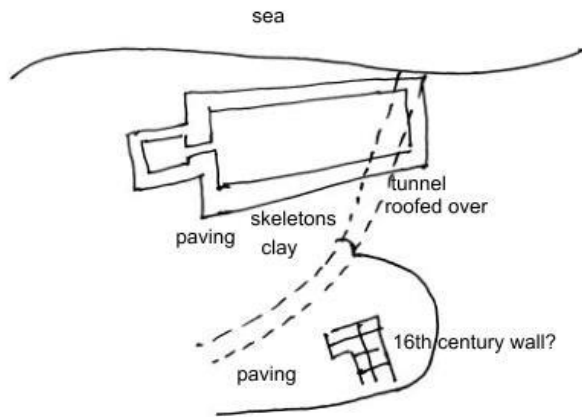
Didn't see the site all day. Up at 7 to get breakfast, gave them porridge, cooking for 28! Another York arrival made it 29. Cooking lunch all morning, boiling bacon. Dash down to site in Albert to make coffee, and back to shop to buy matches to light camping gaz so we could make coffee! Baked potatoes back at school for lunch at 1.00. Collected diggers from site. Meal much appreciated: stewed/boiled bacon, pineapple, carrots, onions and lentils, - and syrup tart and custard. Everyone too full to dig properly ...and masses of washing up. Swept rooms, made egg sandwiches for supper. Tea at 4.30 in the school, and most people left to visit Skara Brae in Mr Laughton's coach. Made flapjacks. No one back by 10 or 11, so gave up and went to bed. They had overcooked soup when they did get back.

Not many bodies so far this year - mainly babies from north of the chapel. Interesting hole - in clay filled with soil and rubble (within chapel? see diag.). Tunnel still goes on - 50', but now seems to be only floor [carved into the basal rock].



Thursday July 9th.

On site all day, in "Sue's place". not enough scope to make it anything. The 16th century floor must be drawn so we can take it up and go down there. Moved over to tunnel to find more wall and corner.



Friday [July 10th]

Still on tunnel, and on that corner and wall, tidying it up, and a bit of scraping around "stiffs". Rain basically. Out in eve to see Orphir round church - definitely not like ours! - and Onstan chambered cairn, thence to pub in KW.

Saturday [July 11th]

Rain, so had the afternoon off to go to KW. Spent morning continuing tunnel probe hole with pickaxes and Tony. PM shopped and visited museum in KW. Bonewashing in evening.

Sunday July 12th

Fairly damp off and on. Late down to site c9.30. Took up floor over 'chancel', and went downwards and found its north wall just where it should be. Very satisfying, even more plaster floor and walling against that wall. Very mucky clay. Two more new arrivals were put on hard labour all day.

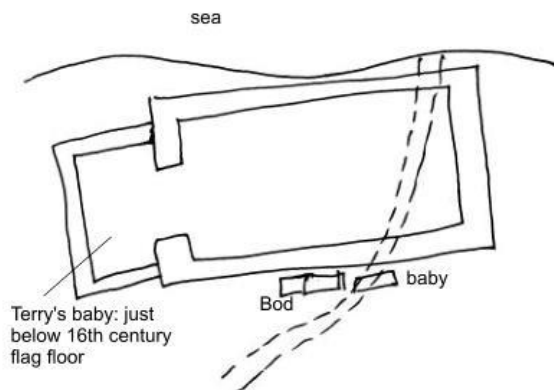
Monday July 13th

Day off - so up very early. One group off in vehicles to KW to get bus to Stromness and then boat to Hoy. We drove to Stromness, after shopping Don drove to Yesnaby. Walk along clifftop - v v windy. great breakers over rocks and cliffs. Foam flying. Spray. Fighting against the wind. Visited old mill [Dounby click mill?]. Stromness, then to a beach looking for fossil fish. KW, Scapa Bay, Lingro broch. Fish & chips, back to school. Tony changed round tyres on Albert in evening.

Tuesday July 14th

Fine-ish morning, looked hopeful.

Took up floor over remains of chancel, and started to go downwards, but rain stopped play. Under canvas for rest of day, scraping away at a clay level alongside nave (north), found a baby skeleton between roofing slabs of tunnel.

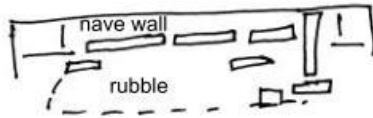


Terry's baby: just below 16th century flag floor

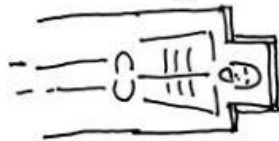
Wednesday July 15th

Levelled off chancel floor to plaster level, except for bit where a baby skeleton has been found. Then moved to yesterday's skeleton and cleaned it up, and got it out. Cleaned up Bod's grave

Bod's grave side view



Slate slabs arranged as a "coffin".

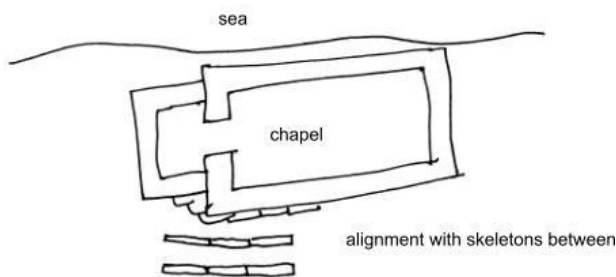


Cleared it right down to surrounding level. Then found a slate layer with skull and skeleton beneath. Kind of coffin, apparently a 7 or 8 year old child.

Drove in Albert to Stromness to meet another York digger off the St Ola. Would have shopped in KW but half day closing. Briefly to the site to collect people, before going off in the evening to visit earthhouses etc.

Thursday July 16th

Normal digging day, clearing down in skeleton area, and finding "viking longhouse alignment". Babies between rows of stones, but not far down, along the outside of the nave. Chancel floor cleared completely up to spoil tip and photographed. Bod cleaned up and removed. I made mid-morning coffee, despite lack of matches and water initially.

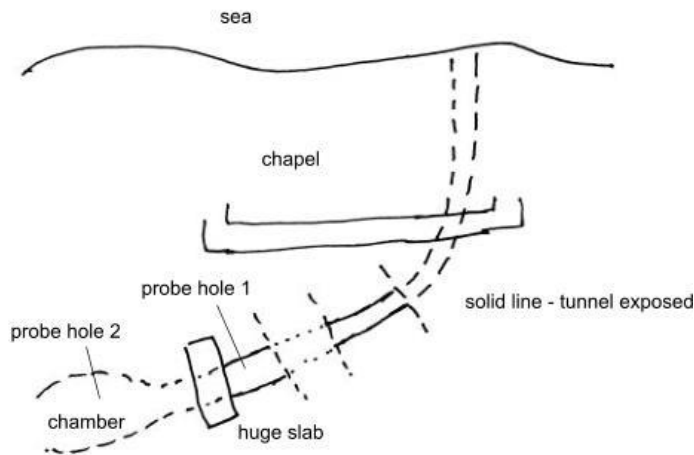


Friday July 17th

Cooking all day. In morning made sandwiches (toasted cheese and took them hot to the site) and syrup tarts. Cooked chaotic rissoles for supper - late! 36 at least. Flapjacks in evening and jam tarts.

Saturday July 18th

Tunnel digging all day. Huge slab on floor, can't reach sides. Are there walls? Clearing back sides of probe hole 1 through almost solid clay and down to basal red sandstone. Probe hole 2 being cleared efficiently. Small tunnel between PH1 and PH2 suitable for talking through. Found skeleton on a slab, or rather half of it, in PH2.



Sunday July 19th

A small party spent the day visiting Auskerry. Rest of us worked on site. Tony and I on tunnel: me clearing through between PH1 and PH2 - propped up - wearing hard hat. Skeleton appeared to be on a plinth?

Monday July 20th

Day off. To KW in morning. Bought Norwegian jumper and Skara Brae pendant. Lunch back at school, then to Gloup and Brough of Deerness, choppyish but nice sunny day. Then drove in Albert to Birsay, worked tides right and wandered round site. Back to KW and fish & chips. Back to schoolhouse. 2 people arrived from Durham for Living Orcadians Project. Bone comb found in PH2, fragments, could be Pictish or early Norse.

Tuesday July 21st

In PH2 trying to meet PH1. Found skeleton going from PH2 east/west oriented. Left site at 2.45 to drive to Stromness to meet a friend from home. Ferry was an hour late but he wasn't on it. Spent extra time listening to a ceilidh band and pipe band. Drove in Albert to Skara Brae in evening - pouring rain. Pub.

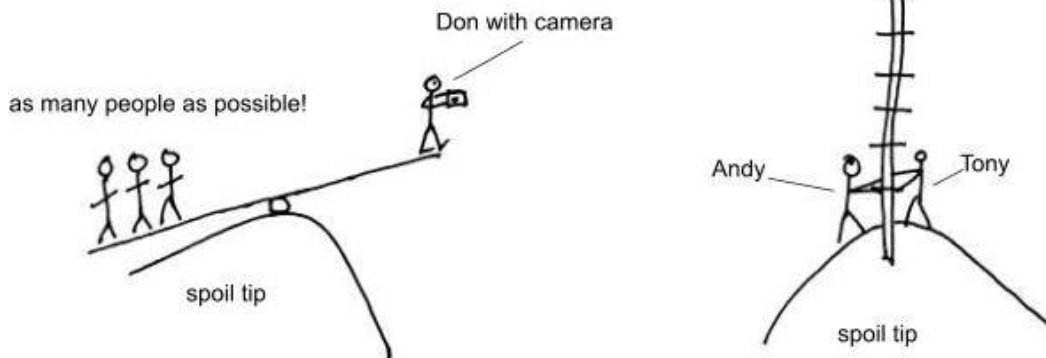
Wednesday July 22nd

General exodus. A large group all went their separate ways - some doon sooth and some to Shetland. Place seems deserted. Clearing up the site, but new skeletons still emerging, a baby and an adult. I cleared PH1 down to basal rock more or less, and spent afternoon cutting string and generally destroying the masterpiece of triangular forces: i.e. the polythene sheeting - incredibly difficult. Back to schoolhouse and found the visitor expected yesterday there. He'd had one lift from Dunkeld to the Deerness School! Lovely sunset. Swam at lunchtime - quite warm really, once you're numb. Best day here so far.

Thursday July 23rd

Another fine and lovely day. Albert had to have another new generator last night. Spent first part of morning swapping and disinfecting rooms in school - needed a good clean out. One of our number had been carried off to hospital in the middle of the night with gastro-enteritis, so disinfecting of all loos etc. Men move into the kitchen, and women into the former men's room, leaving the former women's room for the Boyces. Very dusty day on site and warm too. It looks very clean. Don was photographing from various precarious positions.

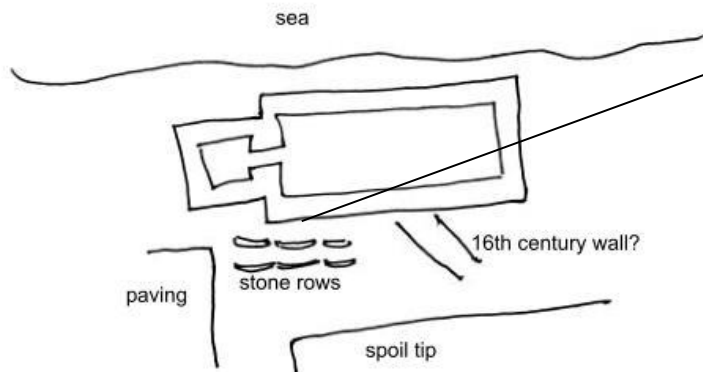
Site photography.
2 methods not approved by HSE.



In evening drove Albert to South Ronaldsay. Lovely sunset.

Friday July 24th

Another departure at 7.30 to get the St Ola. As a result everyone up early. Down to site clearing down here.



Swam briefly at lunchtime. Hoped to find another skeleton to line up with the others but no joy. Drove into KW in the afternoon final shop and sightsee. Climbed to top of tower of St Magnus Cathedral. Quiet evening around fire in new ladies' room: most people gone to Grope in the Neeps - a revue in Stromness for Shopping Week.

Saturday July 25th

Bone washing in morning after shopping at Co-op, and in afternoon. Another fine day. Left at 6.30 for KW for last fish & chip supper. Some of us to the pub (i.e. Buckingham) while rest went to a lecture on fossilised fish. It went on till 11.00, and as Scottish bars close at 10.00 we had to hang around for an hour in Albert. Drove to Stromness for end of Shopping Week firework display.

Sunday July 26th

Cooking again all day. Syrup tarts, jam tarts. Sandwiches for lunch in school. In afternoon prepared for supper sausages, fried onions, baked beans and potatoes, and cooked flapjacks for our journey down south. After washing up Albertians and friend into KW with Don for final drink. He gave us evangelical books he had bought by mistake in the auction! Loaded up Albert.

Monday July 27th

Up at 6. Left at 7. Tony drove Albert to St Ola at Stromness. Watched him loaded, and went to have breakfast in Stromness Hotel. Boat left on time to the sound of yet another pipe band. V. calm crossing. Drove to Helmsdale to collect an umbrella left at Youth Hostel on the way up and ate lunch. Drove to Kingussie Youth Hostel.

Tuesday July 28th

Drove to Birnam Youth Hostel to collect a thermos flask left there on the journey up and onwards to Edinburgh. Ate lunch admiring Forth bridge, drove into the town and visited Museum of National Antiquities, - lots of bone combs like ours. Drove on to Jedburgh. YH is an old castle, massive stone structure, up spiral staircases to the dormitories. Huge be-antlered dining hall. Down to look at town in the evening.

Wednesday July 29th

Drove to York. Lunch in Goodricke.

Thursday July 30th

Drove to Barnsley Station to put Tony on the train. Down motorway to Rugby and on to Southampton, and home along the A27, arrived at about 8.15.