

Evie Old Parish Church



The Old Parish Church of Evie was dedicated to St Nicholas and once stood centrally in this burial ground. Orkney's parish churches were likely designated in the twelfth century as part of church reforms instigated by the shift of episcopal power from Birsay to Kirkwall and the associated building of St Magnus Cathedral. The parishes formed at this time remain in use today. In the years following this reorganisation, small proprietary chapels were extended to accommodate parishioners, and it is likely that a church stood on this site from at least as early as the twelfth century, if not before.

The dedication to St Nicholas suggests this church was either founded by, or closely associated with, the earls of Orkney, as the earls had a preference for this dedication. The cult of St Nicholas saw a revival in the eleventh and twelfth centuries when Nicholas's relics were stolen by Italian merchants and enshrined in Bari in 1095. It has been suggested that Earl Hakon introduced Nicholas dedications to Orkney after his penitential journey to Jerusalem and in this respect it is interesting to note that the Round Kirk in Orphir, also dedicated to St Nicholas, is similarly suggested to have been founded by Hakon after his return from Jerusalem.

Two early medieval carved stones have been found in the hinterland of the Sands of Evie, not far from this church, a cross-engraved stone and a Pictish symbol stone, indicating the longevity of this place as a religious centre.

References

St Nicholas church - canmore entry: <http://canmore.org.uk/site/2205>

Early medieval cross slab - canmore entry: <http://canmore.org.uk/site/2206>

Pictish Symbol Stone - canmore entry: <http://canmore.org.uk/site/2183>

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