



Kirbuster

The name Kirbuster is derived from Old Norse *kirkju-bólstaðr* meaning 'church – farm settlement'. Taken in the past to have indicated the presence of a church at the named place, this need not be the case. Instead, it could be that the farm was in some way linked to a church, either through ownership (the rents were paid to the church) or geographical note (i.e., near to a church or a church was prominently visible from the farm). There are ten Kirbuster names in Orkney of which four have evidence of a church building. Kirbuster in Birsay is one of the four. There is evidence here of a small medieval church having once stood near the farmhouse on a slight elevation called Kirkie Brae on the north side of the burn. It is likely that this is one of the many small churches that were founded in the North Atlantic in the eleventh and twelfth centuries to serve the pastoral needs of the inhabitants prior to the implementation of the parochial system in the mid twelfth century.

The church was a small building located where several tracks meet and at the only fording place of the burn, so central to the locale. The road that passes by the chapel is called Massgate (one of several such names in Orkney) and, as the name suggests, it leads to the parish church.

There are no signs of the church today, but a baptismal font discovered in the nearby Boardhouse loch, and now in the Episcopal Church in Stromness, may have come from it. The font, made of red sandstone, has been putatively dated to the fifteenth/sixteenth century, and has on one side an illegible coat of arms. This indicates the church may have continued in use beyond the Middle Ages as a private chapel or a chapel of ease, though supporting documentary evidence of this is lacking.



This area like so many Orkney tunships has rich evidence of habitation and burial dating from prehistoric times.

References

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