



HISTORIC SCOTLAND  
ALBA AOSMHOR

# JARLSHOF

LARGE PRINT AUDIO GUIDE SCRIPT



# 1 Welcome

*Narrator:*

Hello and welcome to Jarlshof. Today, you're going to discover one of the most fascinating archaeological sites here on the Shetland Islands or, indeed, in the UK. You should now be standing outside the visitor centre, from where you have a good view of the site in front of you.

About a hundred years ago, all you would have seen from this spot would have been a grassy mound with just one ruin, the tallest building just ahead of you. But that all changed on a stormy night in the late eighteen hundreds when fierce winds battered the island. Remains of earlier buildings were exposed, and the landowner of the site, John Bruce, started to dig. He found a number of structures that were later confirmed to be pre-historic. In 1925 he gave the site to the government, who, through Historic Scotland, still care for it today. *Their* excavations revealed the whole extent of this site.

Today, you're going to take a journey through 4000 years of human history.

We'll be looking at the remains chronologically. All you'll need to do is follow the directions at the end of each stop. Now and again, you'll also have the possibility to access additional information. If you listen to everything, your visit will last about an hour. You can pause a commentary at any time by pressing the red button. It will resume if you press the green button. The volume controls are marked with a loudspeaker symbol. Remember our stewards are here to help if you have any questions.

Before we head off, can I remind you to take care as you go around the site. Please stick to the path and don't walk on the low walls – the turf was laid to help consolidate the remains, and walking over it erodes it.

Let's now make our way to the first stop. With your back to the visitor centre, take the path that leads to the right. Continue along this path until you get to the information panel about the earliest houses. Press the green button when you're ready to continue.

## 2 The Earliest Houses

*Narrator:*

Below you is an excavated area containing some of the oldest remains on the site. These date back some 4000 years, to a time known as the Neolithic period. The stones mark the remains of a house, and if you look at the outlines, you'll get an idea of its dimensions. The house was oval in shape, and as such is similar to other houses of this time found in Shetland.

There is a black circular shape roughly in the middle of the space. This was the hearth, the focal point of the house. You'll see this again and again as we go round the site: Life in a prehistoric dwelling here on Shetland, and in other parts of Scotland, was conducted around the central warmth of the peat fire.

Behind the hearth you may be able to make out a large, roughly rectangular stone lying on the ground, with a smaller, round stone inside. *[Pause]* This is a saddle quern. It was used for grinding grain to make bread and gruel. The grain would have been put in the cavity of the lower stone and the upper stone would then have been used to grind it to a fine flour. You'll also see more of *these* as you go round the site.

The people who lived here grew grain, kept cattle and sheep and fished in the sea. If you look to the right, towards the edge of this area, you'll see another oval shape that looks a bit like a sandpit. This is what remains of the midden, or rubbish heap, that would have been located outside the house. A lot of what we know about the diets and lives of prehistoric peoples comes from the analysis of their rubbish. Look closely, and you'll be able to make out fish and animal

bones and mussel shells. Shellfish would have been part of the staple diet, as cockles and mussels could be collected in large quantities along the beach.

You may want to hear what made the first settlers choose Jarlshof as their new home. If so, enter 2-0-1 on your audioguide. Or, to continue, press the green button.

## 201. Layer: The Site

*Narrator:*

The farmers who settled here more than 4,000 years ago chose their land well.

*SFX Gentle sounds of sea (from the shore) and seabirds*

Jarlshof lies beside a shallow bay, which provided an ideal base for sheltered fishing and the collection of shellfish. It was also a good landing place for boats. The sandstone promontory on which the site is built, with its fresh-water springs, provided fertile land for agriculture and good grazing pastures. So it's no surprise that many generations lived here at Jarlshof, providing us with evidence of more than 4,000 years of settlement.

Now press the green button to continue.

## **1000. Directions**

*Narrator:*

Walk back along the path the way you came, until you reach a panel off to the right titled 'The Bronze Age Smithy'.

Press the green button when you're ready to here more.

### 3 The Bronze Age Smithy

*Narrator:*

Here in front of you are the remains of another oval shaped house. This house was probably built and rebuilt several times, and you can see that its structure is slightly more complex than that of the house we just looked at, with additional partitions to create little alcoves. These were probably used as sleeping areas or for storage.

We've made a leap in time, but, as with so much we'll discover today, the evidence we have is of evolution rather than change – the people who are living at Jarlshof now are the descendants of those whose lived in the earlier houses we've seen, and they're building in a very similar way to their ancestors. This continuous occupation also means that houses were often re-used for different purposes. Artefacts found on this site suggest that this house was eventually used as a smithy, probably around 800 BC. If you'd like to hear more about this, enter 2-0-2. Or to continue, press the green button.

If you'd like to hear more about this, enter 2-0-2 or to continue press the green button.



## 202 Bronze Age Smithy (contd)

*SFX: metal working (hammering on metal, molten bronze being poured into moulds, sound of hot metal being cooled in water)*

*Narrator:*

Around 800 BC, this house was used as a smithy. You have to imagine a central hearth with the charcoal brought to a glow. Molten bronze was poured into clay moulds to cast tools, weapons and elaborate ornaments.

Bronze is made of an amalgamation of copper and tin, and the nearest tin deposit was in Cornwall. So we shouldn't imagine Jarlshof as a remote village, cut off from the rest of the world. Most certainly, its inhabitants would have had trading links with other settlements around the North Sea. Bronze objects and perhaps the raw material for making bronze would probably have made it to Shetland on a long route of barter and exchange, where they would have been used and reused.

To continue, press the green button.

## 4 The Bronze Age Smithy (Interior)

*Narrator:*

Let's now enter the Smithy for a closer look. This house is typical of Shetland houses built around 2000 BC. Looking at the walls, you can appreciate how solid these constructions were, built to withstand the rain and the wind. The stone would have come from the nearby cliffs, where large slabs could easily be found. The roof would probably have consisted of turf on a wooden structure. Wood on Shetland was scarce, though probably less so than today, and the settlers would have mainly used driftwood.

Although we've moved on in *time* from the very first house we looked at, life at Jarlshof has not changed significantly. It's still a small farming community – pigs and ponies have been added to the cattle and sheep, and an early form of barley, known as bere, is being grown. Here, as in some of the other houses, you can see the characteristic quern-stones, rubbed smooth by years of grinding.

Feel free to wander around the houses in this area, but do take care and please remember not to step on the low stone walls. When you're ready to continue, press the green button.

## 5 Iron-Age Village

*Narrator:*

Standing here with the sea to your left, you'll see more excavated remains of buildings in front of you. These look much more complex, and it's more difficult to recognise the contours of the houses. This is because we're actually looking at remains from two different periods: houses that can roughly be dated to around three thousand and two thousand five hundred years ago respectively.

Continuous occupation means that throughout the ages, houses would have been built on top of the remains of older houses. At Jarlshof, some very clear choices were made when the remains were first excavated. This led to two things: in some cases, later layers have been discarded, to reveal what lies beneath, and in other cases they have been left undisturbed and we can only guess at what they might conceal. Who knows what evidence of earlier houses lies beneath the medieval and 17<sup>th</sup> century ruins we'll see later on our tour?

Press the green button when you're ready to continue

### **300. Directions**

Make your way back to the path and follow it around by the seawall. Press the green button when you're over looking the sea, with the remains of a house to your right.

## 6 Iron Age Village – contd.

*Narrator:*

We're not sure whether these rooms were separate houses, or whether they were cellular chambers, all belonging to one house. Whatever the case, they're huddled together, providing maximum protection against the cold and the rain.

These dwellings look very much like the houses we've seen so far, and you might have noticed some of the recurring features like the central hearth, but as we continue, you'll see that new developments were taking place.

Something must have prompted the inhabitants of Jarlshof to try out new architectural experiments. Now walk along the path till you come to a room with a black grille on the ground. Press the green button when you're there.

## 7 The Broch

*Narrator:*

The black grille covers a well or underground chamber set into the ground of this building. In fact, we're standing in only half a building – the sea, through coastal erosion, has claimed its due. You have to imagine the stone walls continuing round behind you to form a circular structure. Just think how imposing it must have been. Today, these stone walls are almost two and a half meters high - higher than any walls we've seen so far - but originally, they would have been even higher.

Around 400 BC, this was a new type of building and one that's unique to Scotland: a broch. And if you look through one of the openings set into the stone wall, you'll be able to see what it is that distinguishes a broch from the buildings we've seen so far: *[Pause of 3 sec]* Brochs have two walls, an inner and an outer wall. Structurally, this is a very efficient way of building. To build up high, a single wall would have to be very thick, using a large amount of material. By using the mutual support two thin walls give each other, brochs could more easily be built to greater heights. Parts of the cells between the walls are visible here; feel free to walk around and explore these in more detail.

We can't be totally sure why people started to build brochs, or even what they were used for. But most scholars today believe that these buildings were semi-fortified farmsteads belonging to important families who wanted to make their mark. The sheer imposing nature of the structures was

therefore both a sign of status and a means of defence. If you'd like to hear more about brochs, enter 2-0-3. Or to continue, press the green button.

## 203. Layer: Brochs

### *Narrator:*

More than two hundred brochs survive in Scotland, and they are found exclusively in the North and West. They're tall, massive roundhouses, though few, if any, would have been as high as the broch on the island of Mousa, not far from here, which even today still rises to an impressive 13 meters. They have no windows in their outer walls, and generally just one entrance, which would have been protected by a thick wooden door. At Mousa, the inner and outer walls have horizontal slabs of stone laid within them to create a staircase. This staircase leads to different gallery floors within the walls, so providing additional accommodation or storage space, and to a look-out gallery at the top. The broch at Mousa is just 13 miles north of Jarlshof, on an island off the east coast. You can visit this, and the broch of Clickimin, just outside Lerwick. They too are cared for by Historic Scotland. You might also like to visit the neighbouring Old Scatness broch run by the Shetland Amenity Trust.

In most brochs, the central ground floor space would probably have been used as the main living quarters, with a hearth in the centre and a water-cistern or, like here, a well. Alternatively, it could have been used for storage or as a byre, a place to keep livestock. Above this central space, timber galleries and internal floors may have been constructed, providing additional living areas and storage space. And although the matter is often debated by archaeologists, it is generally thought that brochs would have had roofs.

Press the green button now to continue.



## **600. Directions**

*Narrator:*

Continue along the path now and take the next pathway that leads off the right. Stop when you get to a courtyard area and press the green button to continue.

## 8 The Broch Courtyard

*Narrator:*

It's quiet here, and if you're visiting on a windy day, you'll immediately have noticed how protected this area is. Even on a calm day, it's hard to hear the sea and yet we're only a few metres away. This is the broch courtyard; the wall to your right as you entered is the broch's outer wall.

If you now go deeper into the courtyard area – mind your head while stepping through the stone doorway – you'll enter part of another roundhouse. *[Pause – 3 sec]* You'll immediately see the hearth beside the far wall. *[Pause]* Look around you: the roundhouse has developed into what's known as an aisled house; square stone columns, or piers, some of them freestanding, have been built both to support the roof and to divide the living quarters into convenient compartments. The walls of these chambers would have been sealed with yellow clay.

In our next stop, we'll discover how this aisled structure developed even further to form a very specific type of building. Return to the path, and press the green button when you're there for directions.

## **700. Directions**

*Narrator:*

Continue along this path - we're going to look at the house you reach by taking the second path on the right. As you enter, you'll immediately see a large square hearth in the centre. when you're there.

As you enter, you'll immediately see a large square hearth in the centre. Press the green button when you're inside the wheelhouse.

## 9 Wheelhouse

*Narrator:*

This is a wheelhouse. And if you look at the way the interior's been designed, it's easy to see how this type of building got its name. The different compartments are built like the spokes of a wheel, with the central living area around the hearth as the radial point. This clever way of using stone piers to both support the roof and divide up the floor space is only found on the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland.

In front of the individual alcoves, you can see upright slabs. These would have supported partitions so that the alcoves could be raised above the ground.

If you look to the top of any one of these alcoves, you'll see that the stone walls start to tilt in. *[Pause]* Stone slabs would have been used to close the gap, covering the chamber and creating a so-called corbelled roof. Turf would then have been laid on top. The weight of the roof would have been supported by the radial piers.

A wheelhouse was a well protected, even cosy house, and shortly we're going to visit another example that will allow you to appreciate even better just how well-built these houses were.

But first, walk out of this wheelhouse and continue along the path. It veers right, up a slope. On the left, in the distance, you'll be able to see a family memorial. Stop when you can see it and press the green button, so I can tell you a little bit about it.

## 10 Bruce Family Memorial and Pictish Remains

*Narrator:*

Members of the Bruce family are buried at this family memorial. You may remember from the start of the tour that this site used to belong to this family and that it was a Bruce who started the excavations here. Bruce family descendants still live nearby.

Not far from these gravestones, there are also remains from the Pictish period. The Picts were a Northern Scottish people, and by the year 600 Shetland had come within their political orbit. We shouldn't think of them as new settlers, though. The people who lived here in the Pictish period were probably descendants of the former inhabitants. A stone incised with a cross found on the site suggests that at some point they converted to Christianity.

We won't be discussing the Pictish remains on our tour, but please feel free to visit them later if you have time. For now, we'll continue on this path until we come to the second sloped entrance on your right. Press the green button when you get there.

## 11 Directions

*Narrator:*

We're about to see one of the most complete structures on this site. Now walk down into the house – mind your head, the doorway's quite narrow – and press the green button when you're inside.

If you'd prefer to stay up here, please feel free to listen to the commentary anyway. But if you'd prefer to move on, enter 900 on your audioguide.

## 90. Wheelhouse

*Narrator:*

This is one of the best-preserved wheelhouses in Scotland. The walls almost reach their original height and you get a real sense of what these houses would have looked like, and how protected you would have felt here on a stormy autumn day.

Let's imagine ourselves back in time ...

*SFX to recreate atmosphere of a wheelhouse. Peat fire (hissing, not crackling), sound of wooden loom being worked, cooking in clay pots, children laughing*

In the centre a peat fire burns in an open hearth, clay pots and wicker baskets are filled with grain and barley and there's a smell coming from one of the pots filled with seal fat. Smoked and dried fish, fowl and meat are hanging between the stone piers, ready for the winter. In the corner, a woman is working the loom, and her daughter is using a small iron tool to carve a whalebone pin. Her younger brothers and sisters are playing with bone gaming dice.

It would have been much darker in here then, as the roof would have been covered with peat. But the fire would have given out a faint glow and seal oil was used in primitive stone lamps.

Make your way back to the path now, and press the green button to continue when you're there.

## **900. Directions**

*Narrator:*

Continue along the path again until you come to some steps leading down on the left. Stay on the path and press the green button.



## 12 Norse House

*Narrator:*

We're going to stop here for a moment, and look at the remains visible to the left of the path. We've moved on in time again, to around 850 AD, and to a new culture that becomes dominant in Shetland. These houses were not built by the people who lived in the wheelhouses and brochs; the settlement you see here was built by Norse colonizers.

Around 850, these Norse settlers, the people often known as Vikings, came to Jarlshof. And they stayed. The settlement you see in front of you was occupied till around 1300. You may think that it looks large, like a village, but it was in fact just one large farm and a few houses. These were built, rebuilt and added to by at least twelve generations of farmers.

Walk down the steps now, and stop when you've reached the gravelled area. Press the green button when you're ready to hear more. You can also listen to this commentary from up here on the path if you prefer.

### 13 Norse House (Interior)

*Narrator:*

Looking at the foundations around you, the difference between these houses and the earlier ones we've been looking at becomes immediately apparent: these buildings are *rectangular*. The new settlers imported their building style from home: Norse longhouses. But they had to make some adaptations to suit their new environment.

Scandinavian houses were traditionally built of wood, but wood was scarce on Shetland. So the settlers had to use the materials available, stone for walls, turf for insulation, and heather, turf and grass for roofing. They didn't have to make do without timber altogether though – after all, Bergen, in Norway, is just 48 hours by sailing boat from Jarlshof, and for a seafaring nation like the Norsemen this was an easy trip.

The short distance between Norway and Shetland may also be one of the reasons why the Norsemen settled here in the first place. It's misleading to think of Jarlshof as remote and isolated. In a time when it was easier to travel by sea than by land and when the North Sea was criss-crossed by important trading routes, Jarlshof was easily accessible. It had good sea links to the South and North West, and the first Norse settlers found fertile land and a pre-existing settlement that made it easy to build a farm.

To hear more about life in the Norse settlement, enter 2-0-4. Or to continue, press the green button.

## 204. Layer: Norse Settlement

### *Narrator:*

The first house built here by the Norse settlers was relatively simple, and consisted of just a main room and a kitchen. It occupied the middle part of the remains you're standing in at the moment and was over 21 metres long and 6 metres wide. A long fire would have run down the centre of the building, flanked on either side by stone benches or platforms. Nearby stood smaller buildings: a byre, where livestock was kept, a smithy, and a structure which is thought to have been either a bathhouse or a temple. There were also slaves' quarters, and it's probable that these slaves were the descendants of the people who'd built the wheelhouses. Later, around the year 1100, 250 years after the first Norse settlement, this house was lengthened to the proportions you see today. The byre now became part of the house, with the people living in one end and the animals in the other.

Over the generations, more houses were built - probably by the growing family of the Norse settlers. Like the people before them, they kept cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, ponies and hens and grew wheat and bere, the type of barley grown by the early inhabitants of Jarlshof and one which is still grown in a few places in Orkney and Shetland today. They also grew flax, which was spun into linen thread used for fishing lines, nets and cords, and possibly even for sails. With their boats, they went out net-fishing and deep-sea line-fishing. Finds suggest that the activities of fishing and sealing became more important over the generations. They also hunted wild fowl, especially seabirds that were rich in oil.

Every part of the animal, be it domestic or wild, was used. Meat was salted to be preserved over the long winter

months, bones were used to make tools and ornaments, and the hides were used for shoes and other leather goods like thongs and belts, and probably the smith's apron. Seal and seabird oil was used in lamps.

And in the long winter months, time in the longhouses was spent with heroic tales of Norse mythology.

If you'd like to hear an extract from the Orkneyinga Saga, written in Iceland around the year 1200, recounting the settlement of Orkney and Shetland with a heroic spin, enter 2-0-5. Or to continue, press the green button.

## 205. Layer: Orkneyinga Saga

*Music and/or SFX (high seas, battle sounds) to accompany narration*

*Male Voice:*

Harold fair-hair fared one summer west across the sea (...). He laid under him Shetland and the Orkneys and the Southern Isles; he fared west too as far as Man, and laid waste the tilths of Man. He had there many battles, and took as his own lands so far west that no king of Norway has ever owned land further west since. (...) But when king Harold sailed from the west, then he gave to earl Rognvald (...) Shetland and the Orkneys; but earl Rognvald gave both lands to Sigurd his brother: he was one of king Harold's forecastlemen. The king gave Sigurd the title of earl when he went from the west, and Sigurd stayed behind there in the west.

[Later] Einar sailed west to Shetland, and there folk gathered to him; after that he went south into the Orkneys (...). There a battle arose (...). After that he laid the lands under him, and made himself the greatest chief. He first of men found out how to cut turf out of the earth for firewood on Turfness in Scotland, for they were ill off for wood in the isles. Einar was a tall man and ugly, one-eyed, and yet the sharpest-sighted of men.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Icelandic Sagas, Vol. III, The Orkneyingers Saga, translated by George W. Dasent (1894), original text written between 1192 and 1206  
Internet text contributed by Northvegr.org

*Narrator:*

Now press the green button to continue.

## **1100. Directions**

*Narrator:*

Go back up to the path now, and continue along it until you reach the point where it rounds a corner. Stop here and turn to face the remains to the left of the path. Press the green button when you're ready to hear about the Medieval Farmhouse

## 14 Medieval Farmhouse

*Narrator:*

These remains look much more complex than those of the Norse longhouse we've just seen. They do not, however, indicate a radical shift. This house dates from a later period and was built by the descendants of the Norse settlers – it's simply an evolution of the former longhouse. We're looking at a medieval farmhouse built in the twelve hundreds.

You may be able to make out a small circular enclosure, which more or less divides the main rectangular room.  
*[Pause]* This is a corn-drying kiln. A fire would be lit at the entrance to the kiln and hot gases would then rise up through a wooden platform on which straw and grain was laid. Dried grain could be preserved longer, and this was vital for the inhabitants of Jarlshof at the time, as the climate was deteriorating and the winter months became longer.

In the twelve hundreds, Shetland was still dominated by the Norsemen and ruled by Norse earls. Jarlshof was owned by the Domkirk, or Cathedral, of Bergen. To hear more about the Norse history of Shetland, enter 2-0-6. Or to continue, press the green button.



## 206. Layer: Shetland Under the Norsemen

*Narrator:*

It's likely that the first Norse settlers came to Jarlshof simply in search of new, arable land. Scandinavian law at that time meant that any inheritance went to the first born, so leaving younger sons deprived of land and income. This made it necessary for them to find new areas in which to settle. At the same time, some of their fellow countrymen were looking for new trade routes and established market bases all around the North Sea. That's not to mention those who were out raiding in search of loot. Orkney and Shetland came under Norwegian rule; according to the Orkneyinga saga, by the ten hundreds the power of the Orkney leader, Earl Thorfinn the Mighty, extended to Shetland, the Western Isles and nine Scottish earldoms.

Norwegian, and later Danish, rule came to an end in the fourteen hundreds. But to this day, the Scandinavian influence can be felt in Shetland, and in the eighteen hundreds some of the so-called Viking traditions were revived. The most popular of these is Up-Helly-Aa, where every year, on the last Tuesday of January, a specially built Viking ship is burned at Lerwick.

We're going to move on now. Press the green button to continue.

## 15 Laird House (the Old House of Sumburgh)

*Narrator:*

If you now turn your back to the medieval farmhouse, you'll see the ruins of the Laird's House ahead of you. It's by far the tallest structure on the site and the only one that would have been visible when the site was discovered in the late eighteen hundreds.

This is no longer a Norse building. In 1469, Shetland came under Scottish rule, as part of a dowry following the marriage of James III of Scotland to Margaret, Princess of Norway and Denmark. Quickly, Scottish earls and farmers started to immigrate. The tall building you see in front of you dates from the early sixteen hundreds – but when Sir Walter Scott visited the site, some 200 years later, it already stood in ruins as it does today. To hear more about Walter Scott's interest in Jarlshof, enter 2-0-7. Or to continue, press the green button.

## 207. Layer: Yarlishof

### *Narrator:*

When Sir Walter Scott visited this site on his tour of the Islands in 1814, the Laird's house in front of you, and the lower ruins immediately surrounding it, were all that could be seen. He called it 'Yarlishof' and used it as the home of one of the characters in his novel "The Pirate", where the site is described in these words:

### *SFX: Storm*

### *Male Voice (Sir Walter Scott):*

"It has been long entirely deserted and the vestiges only can be discerned with difficulty; for the loose sand, borne on the tempestuous gales of these stormy regions, has overblown and almost buried the ruins of the buildings... It was a rude building of rough stone with nothing about it to gratify the eye, or to excite the imagination... The windows were few, very small in size, and distributed up and down the building with utter contempt of regularity. Against the main structure had rested, in former times, certain smaller compartments of the mansion house, containing offices or subordinate apartments necessary for the Earl's retainers and menials. But these had become ruinous; and the rafters had been taken down for firewood, or for other purposes; the walls had given way in many places; and, to complete the devastation, the sand had already drifted among the ruins, and filled up what had been once the chambers they contained, to a depth of 2 or 3 feet."<sup>2</sup>

### *SFX end on big thunder*

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted from: Sir Walter Scott: The Pirate (1821)

*Narrator:*

Now press the green button to continue.

## 1300. Directions

*Narrator:*

Now walk through a gap between stone walls and enter the Laird's house. You'll pass the old courtyard, now overgrown by grass, where you can see gravestones. Legend tells us that these are the graves of sailors, shipwrecked in the stormy seas around the island. But it seems much more likely now that this site was used as a temporary burial ground when, in the seventeenth century, the nearby church at Quendale was overwhelmed by a great sandblow.

Press the green button when you're inside the Laird's house.

## 16 Laird House (Interior)

### *Narrator:*

You're now standing in what is known as the 'Old House of Sumburgh', the place Sir Walter Scott called 'Yarlshof' in his novel "The Pirate". It would originally have had two floors, the basement being used for storage and with a hall and chamber on the first floor. If you look carefully, you can see the holes where the supportive beams would have been. The remains of the fireplaces on the first floor are visible on either side.

### *Early 17<sup>th</sup> century music*

*SFX: fire, clinking glasses and discreet laughter in the background*

This house is thought to have been built by Earl Patrick Stewart. He was the son of Robert Stewart, himself an illegitimate son of King James V who received the lordship of Shetland in 1581. The building on the other side of the courtyard is thought to be the remains of an earlier house that Earl Robert had built, and which he called 'his palace at Dunrossness', in which as the local magistrate he held his court. It was transformed into the kitchens when this house was erected.

### *Music ends*

Both Earl Robert and Earl Patrick had a reputation for being particularly cruel landowners. To hear more about them, enter 2-0-8. Or press the green button to continue.

## 208. Layer: The Stewart Earls

*Narrator:*

During the years of Robert Stewart's administration of Shetland, the islanders kept sending complaints about the harshness of his rule to the King, and in 1575 he was briefly imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle. Little changed after his return, and there are indications to suggest that he considered himself, in all but name, king of Shetland and Orkney. Although he died peacefully in his own bed, he did so only after defeating an armed expedition sent to take him to trial for new misdeeds.

His son Patrick was no better. Headstrong and independent, he was imprisoned on several occasions. He was charged with treason by James IV, and, after a failed revolt led by his son, was beheaded in Edinburgh on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February 1615.

It is of course possible that the Stewarts' fierce temperament and tyrannical nature were exaggerated by their enemies and that new legends of cruelty were invented after their deaths. They must after all also have been cultured Renaissance men, bringing some of the artistic and architectural refinement of the Scottish mainland to the Northern Isles. Their houses at Jarlshof were very modest in comparison to some of the other buildings they constructed on the Islands, like Scalloway castle on Shetland and their palaces of Birsay and Kirkwall on Orkney. Perhaps this indicates that Jarlshof was only very occasionally used by the Stewarts themselves, and mainly meant as a base for their representatives on this part of the island.

Press the green button now to continue.

## Goodbye

### *Narrator:*

The ruins of the Laird's House link us back to the present day. In 1592, Earl Patrick Stewart leased some of the land here to William Bruce of Symbister. He later retrieved his claim and, after a violent property dispute, broke into the house, removing what he could, and ruining everything else. The Bruces moved to another house nearby, and it was one of their descendants, John Bruce, who discovered the site at the end of the eighteen hundreds and started the excavations.

### *Music*

Our tour ends here. But there's a viewing platform from which you can survey this extraordinary site. Feel free to climb up to it. It's amazing to think that from up there you can see the remains of 4000 years of human settlement.

If you've enjoyed your visit to Jarlshof, you can also visit other brochs at Clickimin and Mousa, the Stewart's magnificent castle at Scalloway, and other pre-historic remains at Staneydale and the Ness of Burgi. Our stewards will be happy to direct you.

But for now, thank you for listening. Please remember to return your audioguide as you leave.