

22nd September

Memory verse

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits:
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;
who healeth all thy diseases;
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;
who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Psalm103: 2-4

Lessons from all over the world today so plenty of use for your atlas. By the time you have finished you will have travelled from the Orkney Islands to China via the English Channel and Myanmar!

Something to read from archaeological history¹

Let's start with the Orkney Islands for this fascinating story.



Skara Brae² is a well preserved village containing ten buildings that are half underground. Although it is difficult to know how accurate the dating is, some modern archaeologists believe it could be so old that it is older than the pyramids of Egypt, and the ruins of ancient Sumer in Mesopotamia.

Skara Brae's buildings were covered with sand, probably for thousands of years and this has helped their preservation. The walls and some of the passage roofs are still standing. Not only that, but many of the buildings even have their contents preserved as well.

William Graham Watt (1776-1866) was born on 22nd September. He was the first person to investigate Skara Brae in about 1850, when a storm and high tide undermined some sand dunes and parts of Skara Brae became exposed. He found “a vast hoard of primitive relics”. A well documented excavation by George Petri (1790-1866) resulted in records and plans of the site. After that, the site was left to the elements until 1913.

William Balfour Stewart was the next investigator. You can see his map of what he found on the next page. He worked alongside Professor W. Boyd Dawkins and their findings were published in *Proceedings Of The Society of Antiquaries Scotland*, April 13, 1914 He wrote:

During August 1913, while on a visit to Skaill, with permission from the Trustees of the late Mr W. G. T. Watt of Breckness and Skaill, I commenced to clear the principal dwelling, and passage, which is shown on the plan, copied from that made by Mr Petrie in 1867.... A large quantity of sand and weeds had to be removed, to place the dwelling and passages in order, prior to the arrival of Professor Boyd Dawkins and other archaeological friends. After



1 For more information and pictures see <https://blogaboutbritain.co.uk/skara-brea-part-1/> and <https://blogaboutbritain.co.uk/skara-brae-part-2/>.

2 Thanks to Abigail Barker for the photographic illustrations.

clearing out passage AA on the south side—the furthest explored portion in that direction reported by Mr Petrie—the passage marked BA was discovered. This passage is 3 feet high, and is built with a sloping roof. It reaches a cross entrance at C. From this point an admirably built passage, leading in a northerly direction, was opened. This passage is 3 feet 9 inches in height, 3J feet in width, and 6 feet 4 inches in length, with a flat roof, and is built without any binding material. It takes a westerly direction at the spot marked D. This passage is interesting, as it is the only one to be seen at Skara complete with its roof. All the other passages previously discovered are open, though Mr Petrie believed that they also were roofed originally. Just beyond this passage is a recess KEF, which opens into another habitation, not yet explored, at the spot marked E.

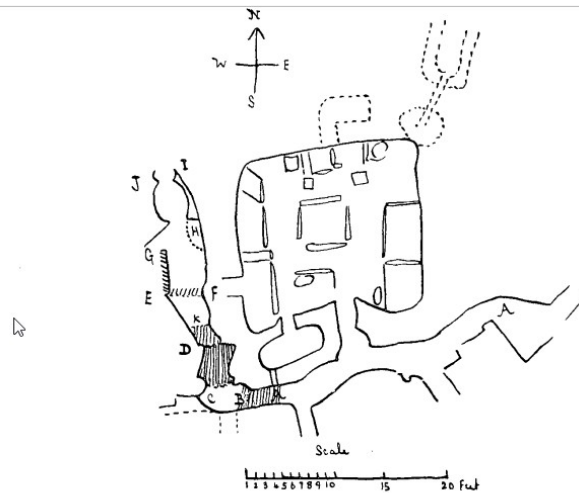


Fig. 1. Sketch Ground-plan of part of the Ancient Dwelling at Skara Brae, Skail, Orkney.

A hearth was found in the corner at F, with an earthenware pot, and charred bones, too soft and broken to remove. Across the hearth, between E and F, a stone is standing 3 feet 10 inches [1.17m] in height; and between E and G a stone lies, 5 feet 5 inches long and 1 foot 4 inches [1.65m] high.³

Little work seems to have been done after that for a long time and in 1924, another storm flattened one of the houses. The next investigator was Vere Gordon Childe (1892-1957) an Australian archaeologist who undertook an extensive investigation. He discovered that the original houses had been deliberately built sunk in to the earth. This insulated them and gave protection from storms. When the houses were dug out of the earth by the previous investigators they were more vulnerable to the weather, which is why one fell down in the great storm of 1924. The houses had square rooms and stone hearths. There was even stone furniture such as dressers, beds and seats as well as a proper sewage system.



But how did the ancient inhabitants of Orkney arrive on the island?

Nowadays you cannot navigate over the **Arctic Ocean** because of the ice. However, that has not always been the case. “If the sea ice on the Arctic Ocean did not form until a minimum of 500 years after the Genesis Flood, it is possible that ancient mariners found a route that allowed them to depart [from] north-west Europe, navigate the Arctic Ocean and enter the **Pacific Ocean**. These adventurous seamen could have chosen a direct route across the **North Pole** or a more conservative course along the coast of either **Canada** or **Russia** to reach the **Bering Strait**, the gateway to the Pacific Ocean. A nearly direct route for mariners leaving **north-west Europe** would be to navigate northward along the British Isles to ... the **Orkney Islands**....”⁴ Can you **trace** the route?

³ *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries Scotland*, April 13, 1914 pp.344-345.

⁴ https://creation.com/images/pdfs/tj/j19_1/j19_1_65-72.pdf

Grandfather Longlegs: a story to read from World War II⁵

September 22nd is the anniversary of the execution in Burma by the Japanese of a great soldier, Major Hugh Paul Seagrim (1909-1944).

Today Burma is called Myanmar. Burma was once a British colony. During the Second World War the Japanese wanted to conquer China. But the Chinese Nationalists were being supplied by the Allies via the Burma Road. The Japanese invaded Burma to cut this supply route, with the support of Burmese Nationalists, telling them that Japan would make Burma independent of Britain. But there were people in Burma who did not want independence from Britain and were sure the Japanese would not grant real independence to Burma in any case. One such group was the Karen people, many of whom were Christians. They had heard the gospel through the work of Baptist missionaries in the nineteenth century associated with Adoniram Judson about whom we learned in June.⁶ The Karen lived in the south-eastern part of Burma where there are mountains.

After training at Sandhurst, the young Seagrim had joined the Indian Army and eventually the Burma Rifles. He loved the country of Burma and its people, exploring remote and mountainous areas in the company of some of the local Karens. In this way he got to know both the terrain and his own men extremely well. He learned their language in just a few weeks. This was because he was dyslexic. In those days no help was given to dyslexic people and they were often treated as stupid. Seagrim had trained his memory to an amazing extent to compensate for his difficulties and he used his super fit memory to learn the Karen language.

As a result of his great local knowledge during the British retreat from Burma, Major Seagrim was able to go back behind the Japanese lines and organise a Karen resistance movement which helped to hold the Japanese back.

When the British were expelled from Burma in March 1942 Major Seagrim decided to remain and live with the Karens, in preparation for the day when the British would return. He stayed behind the Japanese lines for over a year, passing valuable military intelligence to the Army by radio, work which led to the award of the D.S.O. in 1943. The major shared the Karen way of life with all its hardships and as he did so he became interested in the faith of so many of them – the Christian faith. He began to read the Bible, going through it again and again. As he read and studied he discussed it all with his Karen friends. Through this means God opened his eyes and he became a Christian. He decided that, when the war was over, he would not return to Britain but would stay with the Karen people and help his Christian Karen friends to evangelise the rest of their people.

It was not long before the occupying Japanese found out that a British officer was living with the Karens. But even under torture the Karens would not give Major Seagrim away. Eventually the Japanese captured a Karen man who knew Major Seagrim. They gave him a week to lead them to where Major Seagrim was in hiding otherwise they would put his whole family to death. When Major Seagrim found out he at once gave himself up to the local Japanese commander to prevent this awful reprisal.

The major was sent to Rangoon (now Yangon) as a prisoner of war where he made a lasting impression on the camp. The Japanese guards called him “Big Master”. One fellow prisoner who was a pilot said of him: “I believe him to be the finest gentleman I have ever met. He had the greatest concern for the Karens and a complete disregard for his own life.” At the camp Major Seagrim organised Bible study groups among the prisoners and prayed for the Japanese staff and prison guards. Together with eight others he was sentenced to death. He pleaded that the others were following his orders and as such they should be spared, but they were determined to die with him.

5 Information from Charles Fraser-Smith, *Men of Faith* (Carlisle, 1986)

6 See the lesson for June 27th.

The Japanese executed Major Seagrim on 22nd September 1944 as being responsible for the guerilla warfare waged against them.

But the Karens carried on. Within a year of Seagrim's death, British Special Operations Executive made weapon drops to those who had been in the Burma Rifles and they formed themselves into very effective guerilla groups. Their widespread action was of enormous help to the British reconquest of Burma.

How far can you swim?



Did you read about Captain Matthew Webb and his cross channel swim in the lesson for 28th July? On September 22nd 1961, another channel swimming record was set by Antonio Abertondo from Argentina. Antonio had learned to swim in a river as a child and he became a champion swimmer in rivers and in the sea. In 1950 he swam 168 miles down the river Plate in 61 hrs. He once swam 291 miles down the Mississippi River in 3 days, 9 hours. Known as *El gordo* (the fat), he managed to swim for more than a hundred hours. As a swimmer he performed many unique feats, swimming from Capri to Naples and back and across the Straits of Gibraltar. He crossed both the Dardanelles Strait and the Bosphorus Strait, as well as swimming long distances in the Mississippi, the Nile, the River Plate and the Hudson. “He did not earn money from these feats,” his daughter explained in an interview, “he did it because he loved swimming and could do it well.” She added that being on the cover of the top Argentine sports magazine, *El Gráfico*, gave him great satisfaction.

On 22nd September 1961 Antonio became the first person to swim the English Channel, there and back in one go. The swim took him 43 hours and five minutes with just four minutes rest on the French side of the channel.

Use your atlas to find the places where Antonio made his famous swims. Which do you think was the most difficult?

A typhoon and strange hymn

On 22nd September 1874 a typhoon⁷ destroyed St Paul's Catholic Cathedral in Macao, near Hong Kong in China, which had stood since the seventeenth century. All that remained was the facade, which is still standing today. You can see it in the picture below. Britain ruled Hong Kong at the time of the damage, although Macao was ruled by Portugal. The Governor of Hong Kong, Sir John Bowring, seeing the cross remaining on top of the ruined church building wrote the well-known hymn which begins:



*In the Cross of Christ I glory,
Tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime....*

...which is a nice little tale – until you dig into it a little deeper. What, exactly, did Bowring mean by “the Cross of Christ”?



John Bowring was a Unitarian. Unitarians teach that Jesus was an inspired man, a great teacher, and an example to follow but *not* God. By the time of the tornado, Bowring was already famous for having remarked, “Jesus Christ is free trade and free trade is Jesus Christ,” which he explained as meaning that Free Trade is “intimately associated with religious truth and the exercise of religious principles.” It is no accident that the phrase “wrecks of time” is from an earlier poem from the

⁷ We will be looking at typhoons next month in the lesson for October 17th.

Deist⁸ Erasmus Darwin's⁹ *Temple of Nature*, Canto III, a poem that sets out the author's theories about life in terms of pagan deities in a way that reminds us of the Freemasonry¹⁰ that he participated in. The words of Bowring's hymn are innocent enough, as far as they go, but their meaning in reality is far from that of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 6:14. Whatever the Cross of Christ symbolised to Bowring, it was not the death of God's Son as the sacrifice for sinners. Perhaps the emphasis Bowring's mind was on the word *story* in the third line. A Christian might equate "sacred story" with "the Bible", although "sacred history" would be a better term. But a Freemason, for instance, might consider that *All the light of sacred story* included the "light" of the "sacred stories" of other religions.

What does the cross of Christ mean to you? Are you trusting in Christ's death on that cross to save you from your sin? In the end this is everything.

8 See the lesson for 3rd March.

9 See the lesson for April 18th.

10 You may recall the lesson on this subject from 24th June.