

PETROLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF LATE NORSE POTTERY FROM BROUGH OF
BIRSAY AND BEACH VIEW STUDIO SITE, BIRSAY, ORKNEY

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Two sherds of Late Norse pottery, one from the Brough of Birsay and one from the Beach View Studio Site, Birsay, were submitted for fabric examination in thin section under the petrological microscope. Munsell colour charts are referred to, together with free descriptive terms. The results are as follows:

BROUGH OF BIRSAY BB76 III (873)

Hard, fairly smooth, slightly sandy fabric with some vegetable impressions on the outer surface, very dark grey (2.5Y B3/) outer surface and core, lighter inner surface. Thin sectioning reveals a groundmass of numerous well-sorted quartz grains, average size 0.10mm and under, together with some small pieces of sandstone, flecks of mica and a number of elongate vesicles in the fabric where vegetable matter (?chopped grass or chaff) has been burnt out during firing.

BEACH VIEW STUDIO SITE, BIRSAY BV 79 IJ (330).

Fairly soft, rough fabric, containing frequent vegetable impressions (?chopped grass or chaff) both on the surfaces of the sherd and in the clay itself. Light brownish-grey (10YR 6/2) surfaces, reddish-grey core. Thin sectioning shows a fabric fairly similar to the sherd from Brough of Birsay.

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Comments

Both the Brough of Birsay site and the Beach View Studio site are situated on Middle Old Red Sandstone Deposits, capped with boulder clay, and are less than a mile from each other. It is quite possible, therefore, that the similarities in fabric between the two sherds merely reflect the use of similar raw materials at both sites. Alternatively, a common origin for these sherds should not be ruled out without a larger programme of analysis on pottery from both sites. Vegetable-tempered Late Norse pottery from Freswick Links has also been examined in thin section, but apart from sharing a common feature of vegetable-tempering, does not closely resemble the fabric from the two Birsay sites. The sherds from the latter two sites tend to be more finer-textured than the majority of sherds sampled from Freswick Links.