

THE ORCADIAN DIALECT

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The Orkney Islands are located off the northeast coast of Scotland. There are about 70 islands of which 20 are inhabited. The first people on Orkney would have spoken a Pictish language which disappeared when the Norse settlers arrived in the 900s. The Norsemen brought their own language with them and for many centuries Norse was spoken throughout Shetland and Orkney, where it became known as Norn. In 1472 Orkney was handed over to Scotland. Scots became the official language and the Norn eventually died out.

In Orkney today the people speak a distinctive dialect of Scots that they call Orcadian. It is a mixture of words deriving from the Norn and Lowland Scots, with many unique terms which people from mainland Scotland would not recognise.

The Orkney Dictionary, by Margaret Flaws and Gregor Lamb (2nd Edition, 2001), contains a treasury of Orkney Islands language. Here is a short A-Y selection. The dictionary contains no entries for X or Z.

AIKELSPECKLED mouldy
BOOICK a large pimple
CORINOY a worried frenzy
DOONSITTEEN a property which a person gets but has not worked for
EKSIE- PEEKSIE evenly, equally
FEEFLY foolishly clumsy
GAFSE a deep bite in an apple
HUNDERSGRUND a plot in which it is possible to plant a hundred and twenty cabbages
IPER midden ooze
JENIE- FAE- THE- NEEPS an old-fashioned or badly-dressed woman
KLOWJUNG sheep, or people's, normal living territory
LADEBERRY a rocky shelf used as a pier
MOOGILDIN an ungutted coalfish roasted on hot embers
NUTHERAN humming or trying to sing
ODDLER the channel running through the middle of a cowshed
PURGAS a disgusting lump of something
QUEEBECK the call of the grouse
RUDGE the rattle of pebbles on a beach
SKAOOWAOO twisted, off the straight
TIRLICK a little windmill made for a child
URM small useless potatoes
VANDIT of a cow, having stripes on the side
WHASSIGO a person who creates a fuss over unimportant things
YULE- SKREP a smack on the bottom