

Time Team, the iconic archaeological TV series, is set to dig a possible Viking Boat Burial in Shetland during Summer 2025.

Monday 23 June, 2025

Time Team experts Dr John Gater, Matt Williams and Jackie McKinley have joined forces with the Orkney Research Centre for Archaeology (ORCA), Shetland Islands Council and Viking Specialist, Dr Colleen Batey to investigate a possible Viking era boat burial, first identified by County Archaeologist, Dr Val Turner, back in 2023. The excavation has been granted Scheduled Monument Consent by Historic Environment Scotland. The Summer 2025 dig is the culmination of work focused over the last 2 years and will feature in a film planned for release by Time Team next year.

Dr Val Turner initially became aware of the site during an assessment for a housing planning proposal back in early 2023. Her investigations identified a 22.5-metre prominent and seemingly undisturbed mound on private land, with characteristic features associated with a potential Viking era boat burial.

"On seeing the site, I blurted out to my colleague. "But that's a Viking boat burial!" It's going to be nerve wracking, but an exciting few days until we find out if I was correct, thanks to the Time Team coming on board."

County Archaeologist, Dr Val Turner.

Viking boat burials are extremely rare and are usually associated with high-status individuals. If the mound does indeed contain a boat burial, then it would be an extremely important discovery and, as such, could significantly contribute to our understanding of the arrival and settlement of these seafaring Nordic invaders over a millennia ago.

There have been only a handful of Viking era boat and larger ship burials identified and confirmed through excavation in the UK. Locations include two at Westness on Rousay, one at Mayback on the north-east coast of Papa Westray (Orkney), two at Pierowall, Westray (Orkney) and one at Scar on Sanday, which survived as a ghostly outline with a series of rivets. The meaning of these boat burials is a subject of debate, but possibly could be part of a belief in the transportation of the dead to the afterlife.

In early 2023 on discovering the nature of the site, the Landowners contacted the Time Team to see if they would be able to lead in an archaeological investigation of the mound feature. Back in 2002, Time Team excavated a disturbed Viking boat burial at "Da Giant's Grave", Fetlar in Shetland, in partnership with Dr Colleen Batey and Dr Val Turner, as part of the Channel 4 series. The proposed new site has already been protected as a Scheduled Monument.

"This is a great example of how Time Team working together with local archaeologists, Historic Environment Scotland, enthusiastic Landowners and the support of our Patreon backers, can find a way to achieve what we all hope will be amazing archaeological results. We are all very excited about this project. "

Tim Taylor, Creator and Executive Producer of 'Time Team'.

Two surveys were conducted by Dr Nick Hannon, from Historic Environment Scotland and Time Team's Dr John Gater (SUMO GeoSurveys) in September 2023 and September 2024 respectively. The results of these surveys have proved very exciting. Time Team have been working with ORCA to put a project design together, with feedback from HES as the relevant regulatory body. The Team hope that this will prove or disprove the theory that the mound really does contain a Viking boat.

"When you walk over the earthworks and study the immediate surrounding landscape you sense the site could be very special"

Dr John Gater (Time Team and SUMO Geosurveys)

Time Team's Dr John Gater, Matt Williams and Jackie McKinley will join Dr Val Turner and experts from ORCA in excavation of the site.

"All of us at ORCA are excited to explore such an important site, especially with the added benefit of working alongside Time Team and sharing the story with a wide audience. Some of the excavation team

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have spent years living and working in Shetland and we're very much looking forward to learning about this site and helping to inform its long-term conservation.

Paul Clark, Senior Project Manager, ORCA

The Team will also be conducting a wider survey and evaluation of the area around the mound, bringing into focus other identified archaeological features which may contribute to the story. The site will also be secured through an extensive metal detecting and recording survey.

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