



Dr Val Turner

Dr. Val Turner has been Shetland's Regional Archaeologist since the post was created in 1986. She has Project Managed two big excavations and public access projects on behalf of Shetland Amenity Trust: Old Scatness Broch saw the twelve-year excavation of an Iron Age Broch and Village, which has rewritten the story of Scotland's Iron Age; and Viking Unst saw the excavation of three longhouses and the construction of a replica longhouse and restoration of a replica Viking longship. Val is currently working on the nomination for Old Scatness, Jarlshof, and Mousa to become UNESCO World Heritage sites. She is a member of the

Society of Antiquaries of London, a member of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Stirling (she studied in Birmingham, Ironbridge and Stirling). Her publications include a book about archaeology for children, accessible guidebooks and articles, as well as a wide range of academic publications about Shetland archaeology. Val writes an archaeology column regularly for the local paper and has presented, and currently co-presents, monthly programs about archaeology and the environment for BBC Radio Shetland.

Why archaeology?

Well, it's a very silly story. I was always interested in reading as a child and my parents pushed me in the direction of history rather than English. One day, when I was 9 or 10, the teacher remarked that architects earned a lot of money. I thought "I wouldn't mind being an architect and digging up bones and earning a lot of money". My parents told me that architects didn't dig up bones and that archaeologists didn't earn a lot of money. But I kept on saying it in answer to the question which children were constantly asked those days: "What are you going to be when you grow up?" and people were impressed. When I got to 15 my father said that if I was going to keep saying this I should find out more about it and packed me off on my first dig – in the city of London. In the two weeks I was there I was put onto the site where they expected to find a monastery. As modern and mixed deposits kept going, they brought in a JCB to take off the upper layers. It went down and down – until a small hole appeared and there was an uprush of air. Yes, they had found the London underground (many archaeologists think that this story is apocryphal, but no – I was there and could tell you the site, the director and the details. But I won't). And it was all more fun than Guide camp, so my path was set!

What is your favourite site on Shetland?

Pinhoulland

What websites are your go to or favourites?

eBay

What's the best thing you ever found?

I didn't actually find it, but the Mail figure. There's a story attached to that one too – it used to be accessible on the internet as it was published in Current Archaeology's "My Favourite Find" series but it isn't there now. It seems to have been replaced by something which says that "some results may have been removed under the data protection act" – so I'll spare you from that!!

If you could time travel to any era/answer any question what would it be?

I have a fantasy that when I die I'll meet the people who lived at Scatness and at Pinhoulland and they'll tell me how little archaeologists got it right!!

Do you have a song/band you use for inspiration either in the field or the office?

Field - Hot Chocolate "No doubt about it"; Office - Kelly Clarkson "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger"

Be honest, does a part of you wish you were Indiana Jones?

He's male – why would I want to be that?

What's the worst thing that ever happened (i.e. "I dropped a 4,000 year old complete pot on the lab floor")?

That might be removed for data protection reasons too! But I can tell you that the late Mortimer Manson turned up trumps and poured oil on troubled waters.

What's the best thing that ever happened?

Oct 7, 1986. I was invited back down to see the Board after my interview in Clickhimin. A trustee said, "we've just asked you back down to wish you happy birthday". I stood there thinking "is that true or are they offering me the job?" They were – phew! (I'd told the other candidates that it was my birthday – I hoped that might put them off – how mean!)

Name someone in archaeology - or without - who inspires you?

I've met some very inspirational people over the years who have taken a kindly or helpful interest in my career - some of the most inspiring include Martin Carver, Jan Wills (the only female site director I've ever worked for and who profoundly inspired me as a cold and wet student on my first Easter vac from University), Roger Leach, Ian Simpson and of course the late Jimmy Moncrieff – when he was on my side anyway!

If you could debunk one myth or misinformed idea in/about archaeology what would it be?

That all archaeologists do is dig. And that Orkney has better archaeology than Shetland – have you ever been to Scatness? Orkney's just been better promoted by chance since the 1920s and its more accessible to the UK mainland. But we're catching up in those stakes now. And in case you are thinking "well, she would say that wouldn't she" – I was headhunted many years ago to do the same job but in Orkney. I couldn't understand why they thought I'd want to go there when I already had the best job in archaeology.