

FACT SHEET 01: The Orkney Venus

- The figure is tiny, but remarkable. After 5,000 years in a ruined building this fragile object has been rediscovered remarkably intact.
- It measures 41mm tall, 31mm wide and 12mm thick.
- While its features are faded, it is still possible to see the carving of a human face – the earliest in the UK. The only other confirmed figures of a similar era are from Windmill Hill in Wiltshire (that has no head) and from Maiden Castle in Dorset
- The Orkney Venus (also sometimes called the Westray Wife) – is probably made from sandstone of a type found in Orkney – specialist analysis will be undertaken in due course.
- The head has a finely incised M-shaped line across the front which appears to be a brow line. Two parallel vertical lines from the brow to the lower edge seem to be a nose. There are two widely-spaced round dots for eyes, and a possible mouth.
- The head is sharply divided from the shoulder line of the torso by a deep groove.
- The torso expands from the shoulders to the base. What appear to be breasts are indicated by fine incision. The right breast is squarer and more emphasised than the left, which is diamond-shaped.
- A fine, apparently interrupted, V-shaped incised line runs from the right edge of the right breast to the mid-torso and up to the top of the left breast.
- The eyes were lightly impressed, probably by twisting a simple pointed implement. The outlines of the breasts were lightly and rapidly incised into the surface.
- Other decorative details, perhaps pigment, could have been lost.
- There is a clear lattice pattern on the back which might represent textile or clothing, such as a cloak, or, less likely, body decoration.