

IV.

NOTES ON THE BROCH OF COPISTER IN YELL SOUND, SHETLAND.

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Nothing is more astonishing to the rambler in the Shetland Islands than the number and magnitude of the ruins of the brochs, which must at one time have been such prominent features in the scenery. Mousa, which is the best known of these structures, was probably by no means an extraordinary example of its class. But it is strange that I have been unable to find in any work on Shetland to which I have access any notice of the Broch of Copister, which seems to me to have been a far more important structure than Mousa. It stands on a very small rocky islet at the southern entrance of Yell Sound, the broch and its outworks occupying the whole available surface of the holm, which rises with an almost perpendicular margin of about 20 feet high, at a distance of about 100 yards from the southernmost point of the island of Yell. Through the narrow sound which separates it from the island the tide runs even in calm weather like a mill-race, although at low water of spring tides it might be possible to reach the holm without a boat. Many stones have been taken from the broch for building purposes to the opposite island, and many others appear to have been wantonly thrown over the bank. In the huge pile of ruins that remains it is still possible here and there to make out some of the structural features—a bit of the stair and a foot or two of a gallery. The outer slope of the ruin is mostly covered with grass and peaty growth, and though I had no measuring apparatus with me I was impressed with the idea that the diameter of the central structure must be considerably greater than that of Mousa. Some idea of the external appearance of the central mound and its outer embankments will be obtained from the accompanying photographs. The most remarkable feature of this broch is the system of earthworks by which it was protected, chiefly on the landward side. Towards the narrow sound which separates the holm from the mainland of Yell, and which seems to be fordable at low water,

there are two lofty ramparts, forming parallel arcs of circles, supplemented at the corners by short sections of a third. A fair idea of these outworks is given by photo No. 3. I am fully sensible of the imperfect nature of my description of this interesting broch, but I shall be satisfied if it fulfils the object I had in view—to arouse interest in a striking and, so far as I know, a hitherto undescribed example of these peculiar structures, and perhaps to lead to a consideration of the important question of the possibility of obtaining a complete and systematic record of the present condition of the brochs of the North.