

NOTICE OF BUILDINGS DESIGNED FOR DEFENCE ON AN ISLAND IN
A LOCH AT HOGSETTER, IN WHALSAY, SHETLAND. BY ARTHUR
MITCHELL, M.D., LL.D., SECRETARY. (Read at the meeting of the Society
on 9th June 1879).

At Hogsetter, about a mile and a half from Simbister, in the island of Whalsay, Shetland, there is a loch, which covers a square mile or thereby; and in this loch there is a small island, on which there are buildings, obviously designed for defence, and having characters which are unusual and interesting. I shall most easily and quickly explain the nature and extent of these buildings by reference to the following sketch (fig. 1), which I made on the occasion of a visit to Whalsay in 1863, and which is roughly drawn to scale. I shall speak of the buildings as they existed at the time of my visit.

The island is reached by a causeway (G), about 33 yards long, which runs from the shore obliquely to the buildings on the island—the direction of the causeway being apparently chosen with a view to take advantage of the shallowness of the water in that line.

The space A on the island (about 70 feet \times 75 feet) is enclosed by a ruinous stone wall or rampart (B), which is about 3 feet thick, and, as it now stands, about 3 feet high.

Nearly opposite the island end of the causeway (CC) this wall is joined to a dry-stone building, about 12 feet thick and 40 feet long. The upper part of this building has fallen down, and lies as rubbish on each side (EE and CC), but about 8 feet in height remain.

Through this mass of masonry there is a passage or doorway (D), which

is $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide and $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, and of nearly equal width all along its course. The roof of the passage still remains.

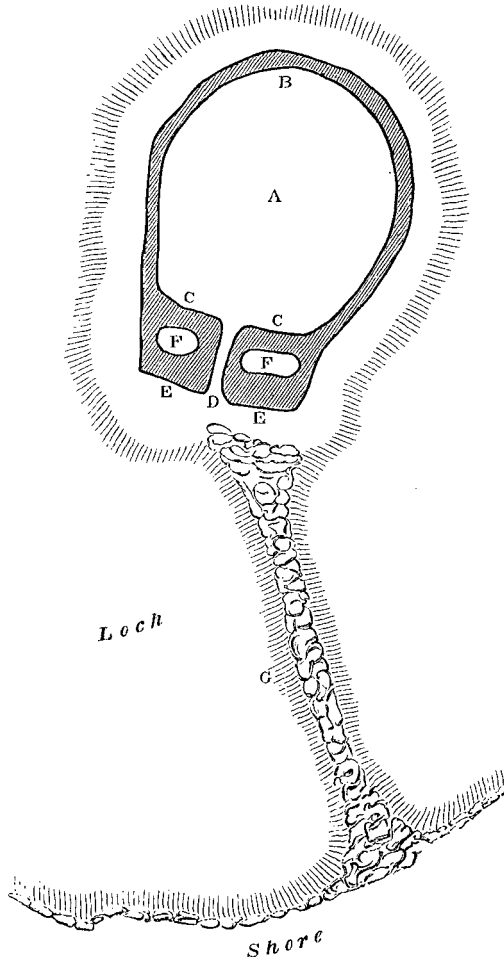


Fig. 1. Plan of an island in Hogsetter Loch, with buildings on it, and causeway leading to it. Roughly to scale.

On each side of the entrance-passage, and in the thickness of the wall, there is a chamber (FF) of a beehive construction, closely resembling the chambers found in the walls of brochs. These two chambers can only be entered from their ruinous roofs. The proper entrances are concealed by rubbish. They may, however, be soon apparent, as the rubbish is being removed to build a school. Above the two existing chambers there appear to have been other two, forming a second tier; but no stair giving access to them remains.¹

The description I give here of the buildings on this island is almost an exact transcript of notes made on the spot at my visit in 1863. The interest which attaches to them depends on their seeming alliance to broch buildings.

Many brochs have areas attached to them, or rather surrounding them, which are bounded by such a wall as encloses the space A on this island, though these walls are generally in complete ruin and covered with mould and grass. This last feature—especially in Caithness—is one which seems to characterise the ruins of brochs. In northern districts at least, green cairns of large size frequently turn out to be brochs in ruin when they are explored. It is difficult to say why the true cairn usually keeps its greyness, showing no tendency to become covered with earth and vegetation, and why the opposite is true of the ruins of drystone buildings like brochs.

The broch at Clickimin, near Lerwick, which is situated on a small island in a fresh-water loch,² is surrounded by a ring wall or fence. (See fig. 2).

West Broch at Houbie, on Tresta Voe, Fetlar, which is built on a pro-

¹ George Low, in his "Tour through Orkney and Shetland in 1774," published in Kirkwall in 1879, figures the buildings on the island in Hogsetter Loch at page 177, and calls them a broch "of a peculiar construction." He shows in his drawing an entrance to each chamber from the enclosed area, and he gives no indication of a second tier of chambers.

² Brochs on small islands in fresh-water lochs, with causeways to them, are not rare.

jecting cliff, has on the landward side a first and second wall of defence. The plan of these walls is shown in fig. 3, taken from a rough sketch which I made more than fifteen years ago.

In my notes regarding this broch I have recorded that the ramparts or walls are apparently formed of dry stone and earth, and that in some parts there are indications of their having originally had a well built face. The ditch between the two walls and between the inner wall and the broch varies from 6 to 8 feet in depth. The cliff on which the broch is built is from 40 to 50 feet high.

Low has figured this broch and its mural surroundings, and his plan, as it appears to me, does not differ in any essential particular from mine.¹

These and nearly all other statements in this paper I take from a Journal kept many years ago when I had frequent occasion to visit remote parts of

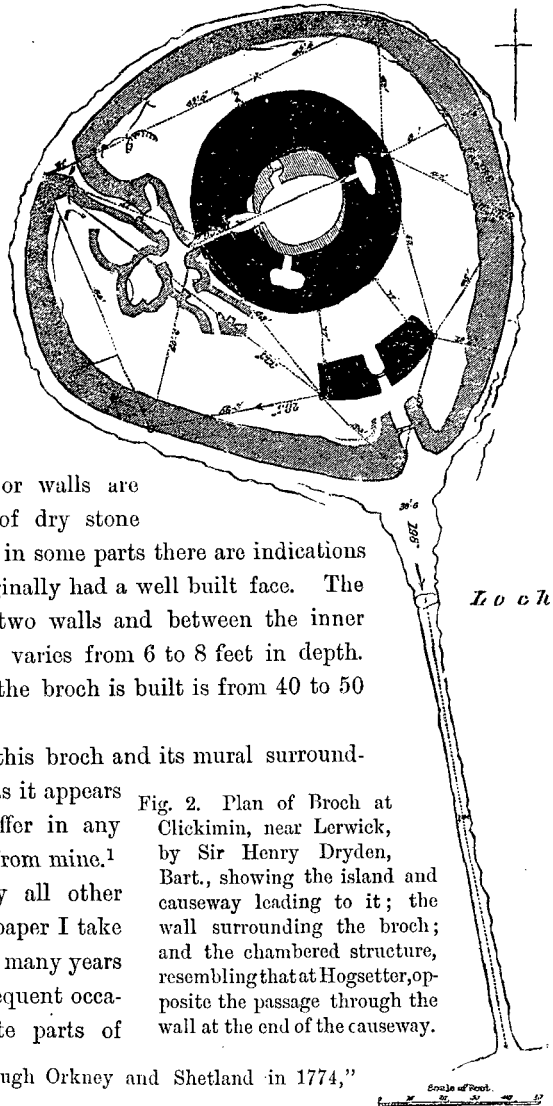


Fig. 2. Plan of Broch at Clickimin, near Lerwick, by Sir Henry Dryden, Bart., showing the island and causeway leading to it; the wall surrounding the broch; and the chambered structure, resembling that at Hogsetter, opposite the passage through the wall at the end of the causeway.

¹ Low's "Tour through Orkney and Shetland in 1774," p. 169, Kirkwall, 1879.

Scotland. I have no opportunity of verifying the statements, but I believed them to be correct when I recorded them. It is possible that I might now see some things differently, because our knowledge of

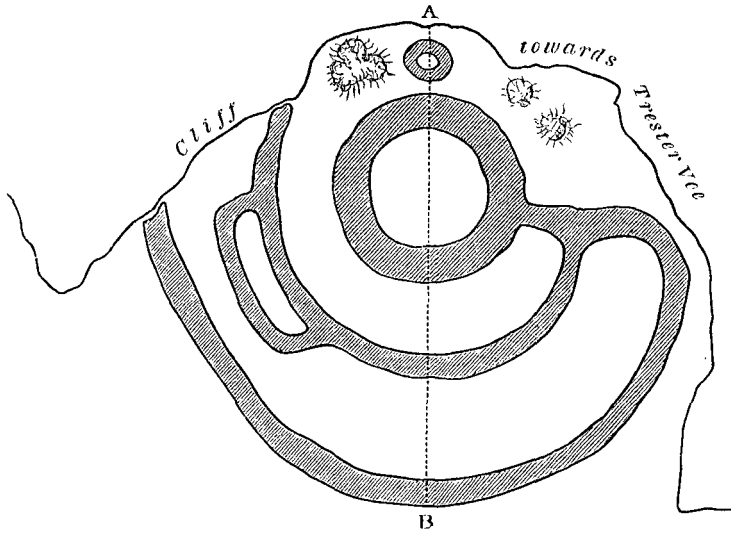


Fig. 3. Rough Ground-plan of the Broch at Houbie, Tresta Voe, Fetlar, showing its walls of defence. (*Trester* on the woodcut should be *Tresta*.) The plan is roughly to scale, and the length of the line AB is about 160 feet.

brochs has been much widened of late, but I scarcely think it probable that this would materially affect the statements I take from my Journal.

The broch in Fetlar near Lady Nicholson's house, called Snaburgh, has also a double wall of defence. Here also the broch is situated on a cliff, which has been so largely eaten away by the sea that only a small portion of the broch remains.

Pennant in his "Arctic Zoology" gives a drawing of this broch, or camp

as he calls it, which Low¹ had given him, Hibbert in his "Description of Shetland" reproduced the drawing (fig. 1 of his Plate of Antiquities), but he states (p. 387) that he cannot assent to its correctness. He says that a "considerable part of the defence has been washed away by the sea in its inroads on the coast." Thinking that the walls when complete must have enclosed a quadrangular space, he writes of the fortification as

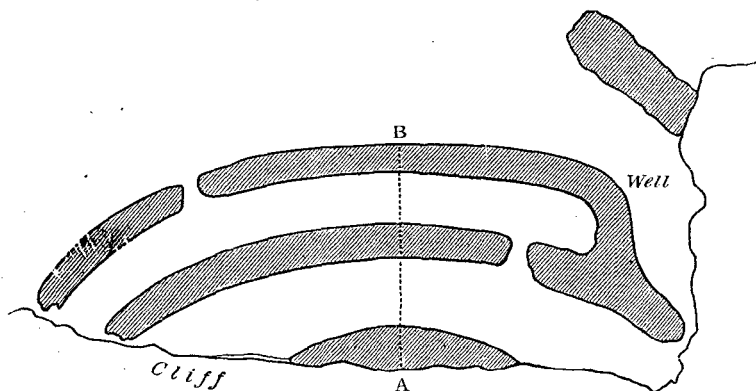


Fig 4. Plan of Ruins of Snaburgh, near the House of Brough, in Fetlar, from a rough sketch made more than fifteen years ago, showing the walls of defence. All that remains of the Broch is the portion at A. Roughly to a scale of $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch to 10 feet.

a Roman camp. Indeed, in the plan as he gives it, the walls are restored and are made to enclose a quadrangular space. The plan, however, which I made, and which I give as fig. 4, renders it evident that the walls are nothing but walls of defence to a broch of which only a small portion remains. I think I correctly indicate the site of the well, which is referred to by Low and Hibbert. The ditch between the inner wall and the broch is deep—upwards of 11 feet, and the ditch between the two walls is about 6 feet deep.

¹ See Low's "Tour through Orkney and Shetland," p. 166, Kirkwall, 1879. He says that the fortification "never has been circular," and that it "consisted of a central oblong stone work, surrounded with a double ditch and wall."

In these two Fetlar brochs the value of the walls as a means of defence is intelligible, but in the case of other brochs the plan and arrangements of the walls are very complicated and puzzling, as for instance, at the Broch of Brow in Dunrossness, a plan of which, also made in 1863, is given in fig. 5.

The first wall here completely encircles the broch. It is only about 7 feet from it, and is about 4 feet broad at the base. The second wall, which,

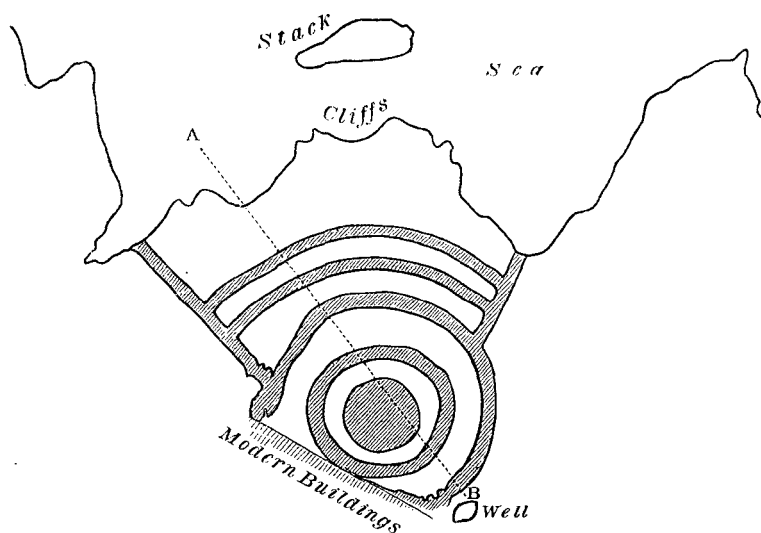


Fig. 5. Rough plan of Broch of Brow, Dunrossness, Shetland, showing walls of defence.

as indicated on the plan, is partly effaced by modern buildings, is about 12 feet from the first, about 10 feet wide at its base, and about 6 feet high. The third wall is low and narrow, and only runs between the flanking walls shown on the plan, which are also low and narrow. The fourth wall is lower still, and like the third, only runs between the flanking walls. It is difficult to see the use of the third and fourth walls

which are on the cliff side of the broch, and which do not appear ever to have been strong. Nor is the use of the low walls, which I have called flanking walls, readily apparent.¹

All the brochs as yet referred to here are situated on the seaside; indeed, nearly all Shetland brochs are so situated. But brochs situated far from the sea are also provided with their walls of defence. For instance, the broch near Brora, in Sutherlandshire, known as Cole's

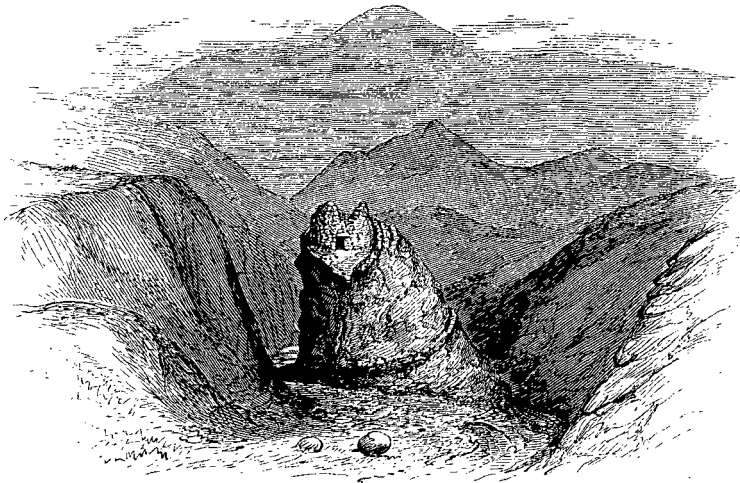


Fig. 6. Broch known as Cole's Castle, near Brora, in Sutherlandshire.

Castle, is situated on the top of an eminence, precipitous on one side; and on the side which is not precipitous there are two walls or ramparts—one at the top and another more than half-way down.

I have the courage to give here a woodcut (fig. 6) intended to show

¹On the hill-side above this broch there are many curious circular structures, and numerous small mounds about 8 feet in diameter. Near these last is a tumulus called the *Fairy Knowe*, which is about 14 feet high. It appears to have been opened, and seems to me to have contained a stone-built chamber.

the curious position of this inland broch, which is taken from a sketch by myself. It does not quite correctly do what it is intended to do, yet I think it fairly shows the main features of the position.

In my Journal I have a rough plan of the plateau (about 45×15 yards in size) on the top of the eminence or rock on which this broch is situated, showing the position and extent of the wall. This plan is reproduced in fig. 7.

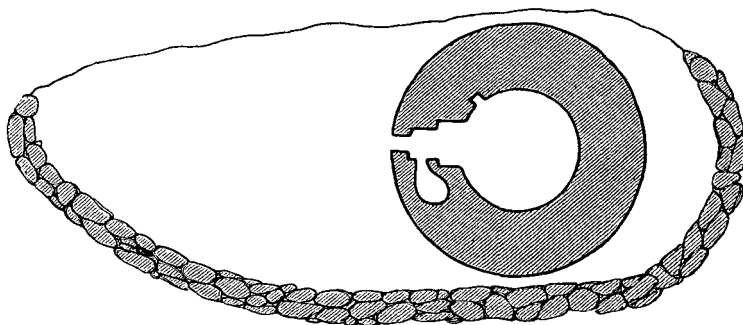


Fig. 7. Plan of the plateau on the top of the rock near Brora, in Sutherlandshire, on which the broch known as Cole's Castle is situated.¹

The upper side of the woodcut, where no wall is shown, corresponds with the precipitous side of the rock. The position of the second wall, more than half-way down the rock, is seen on fig. 6. Like the higher wall, it comes to an end (and necessarily so) when it reaches the precipitous side of the eminence.

¹ This woodcut (fig. 7) gives also a plan of the broch, so far as I was able to make it out. I only discovered one chamber, which entered from the side of the doorway by an opening 2 feet wide. The size of the floor of the chamber I made 5 feet by $8\frac{1}{2}$ feet. The roof had fallen in. I counted eight presses in the walls of the broch, from 1 to 2 feet square, and about 18 inches deep. The press given in the plan is believed to be in its true position. I have recorded the diameter of the internal area of the broch as being about 22 feet, and the thickness of the walls as being about 12 feet. The size of the door of the broch as given in my Journal is $5\frac{1}{4}$ feet high and $2\frac{3}{4}$ feet wide. I have also two sketches showing the appearance of the mason-work of

An interesting and simple illustration of a wall of defence in connec-

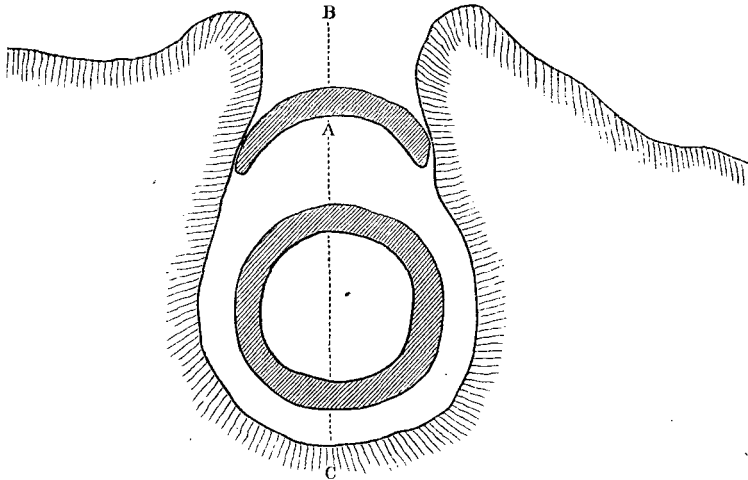


Fig. 8. Plan of Broch known as the Grey Steel Cairn on a peninsula in Loch Rangag, in Latheron, Caithness-shire.

tion with a broch, occurs at Loch Rangag, in the parish of Latheron in Caithness. There is a broch there, known as the Grey Steel Cairn, the door and the general appearance of the broch itself, both of which I reproduce here as figs. 9 and 10.

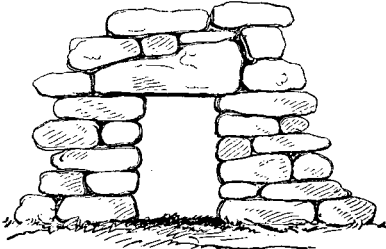


Fig. 9. Door of Broch known as Cole's Castle, near Brora, in Sutherlandshire.

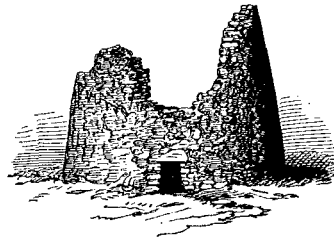


Fig. 10. General appearance of Broch known as Cole's Castle, near Brora, in Sutherlandshire.

A large stone over the door of a broch, like that over the door of Cole's Castle

which is situated on a peninsula jutting into the loch, and across the neck of this peninsula, between the broch and the shore, there is a single wall of defence, about 6 feet thick. Large stones are used in its construction. It is shown in fig. 8, taken from a sketch which I made in 1864. As far as I could make out, the inside diameter of the broch is about 25 feet and the thickness of the walls about 12 feet.

So much for walls of defence in connection with brochs; but it is not the fence enclosing the space A on fig. 1 which appears to give the structure on this island its alliance to broch structures, so much as the chambered building between the ends of the wall opposite the termination of the causeway. I have alluded to the fence or wall, rather to show that its presence in connection with the chambered building on the

(fig. 9), is not uncommon, but I have never seen a more remarkable one than that over the door of Dun Dornadilla or Dun Dornagil, a remarkable broch in Strathmore, about seven miles inland from Loch Eriboll. It is situated on a knoll by the road side, and near the banks of the river. Figs. 11 and 12, which show the appear-

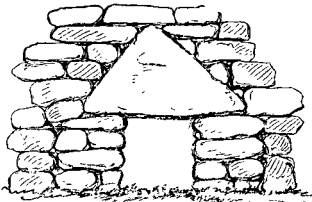


Fig. 11. Door of Dun Dornadilla, in Strathmore, Sutherlandshire.

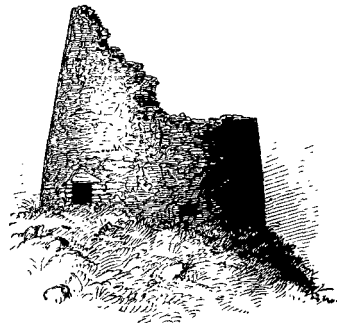


Fig. 12. General appearance of Dun Dornadilla, in Strathmore, Sutherlandshire.

ance of the door and of the broch itself, are taken from sketches I made in August 1864. The size of the lintel is 4 feet 10 inches in length, and 3 feet in height. I record in my Journal that I observed no walls of defence round Dun Dornadilla like those round Cole's Castle.

Island in the Loch of Hogsetter, does not interfere with the notion of an alliance, than to show that its presence there establishes an alliance, though there is certainly a striking similarity between the structures on the Hogsetter Island and the wall and detached chambered building on the island in the loch at Clickimin, as will be seen from the plan on page 306 (fig. 2). If the space A on fig. 1 had been occupied by a broch, the Hogsetter and Clickimin buildings would have resembled each other so closely as to be fairly called identical.

The thickness (about 12 feet) of the Hogsetter building, which is about 40 feet long, is very much the same as that of the walls of brochs. Within the building there are chambers, which entirely resemble those in brochs. And further, the passage through the building, forming the entrance to the enclosed space, as regards size and many of its other characters, closely resembles the doorway of a broch.

As already pointed out, strength is given to the view that there is an alliance between the Hogsetter and Broch structures by the fact that at Clickimin (see fig. 2), attached to the broch there, and forming part of its outworks, there is a chambered structure—a linear mass of masonry—almost as closely resembling the building on the island in the loch of Hogsetter as two buildings can resemble each other.

It has been thought that the thickness given to the walls of a broch was more for the purpose of enabling the builders, who neither shaped their stones nor employed cement, to construct a lofty edifice, than for the simple purpose of getting strength, and that it naturally or readily occurred to them to construct chambers in walls which were so thick. That view, however, will scarcely explain the presence of chambers in such a structure as that at Hogsetter, which never probably reached any great height, and which connects the ends of a rough low wall, probably never more than 4 or 5 feet high and 3 or 4 feet thick. It is, of course, as difficult to account for the chambers in the building to which I have referred at the Clickimin Broch.

Whatever the explanation may be in the one case, it appears probable to me that it is the same in the other.

And this suggests my concluding reflection, which discloses my object in directing the attention of the Society to the structures on the island on the Hogsetter Loch—namely, that the next step in the study of brochs will probably be made through an examination of the varieties they present. It is quite certain that there are brochs and brochs as well as Dukes and Dukes, and whether I am right or wrong in believing that there is an alliance between the Hogsetter buildings and Broch buildings, it is certain that there are buildings which are unmistakably allied to brochs, but which could not be described as *round* towers, because they are not *round*.