

II.

NOTICE OF SOME RECENT BROUGH EXCAVATIONS IN SHETLAND. By GILBERT GOUDIE, TREASURER, S.A. SCOT.

The construction and typical significance of the Scottish Broughs have been exhaustively treated by Dr Anderson and by Sir Henry Dryden, Bart., the Rev. Dr Joass and the late Mr George Petrie, in the *Proceedings* of this Society, and in the *Archæologia Scotica* (vol. v. part i.). Dr Anderson has enumerated, and noted on the map, every brough or recognisable brough remain which could be identified at the time (1871), in Shetland and elsewhere. The result of the excavations now briefly to be described is to add two brough structures to the list of those previously known in Shetland.

I. BROUGH IN THE LOCH OF BRINDISTER.

The loch of Brindister is a small sheet of water in a desolate moorland about 5 miles from Lerwick, on the main road to the south. It is at a height of 217 feet above the sea-level, and its dimensions may be stated as nearly a half mile in length and a little more than a quarter of a mile in breadth.

Near the centre of the loch is a small holm, or islet, which, when the water is at full height, is in reality little larger than the area of the structure to be described. This structure, viewed from the margin of the loch, presented the appearance of a small, seemingly circular, ruin of no distinctly recognisable character. For ages it has remained practically undisturbed. No boat is near, and there has been little inducement to the trouble of bringing one from a distance. At no very remote period

a man adventured to visit the islet by paddling his way in a tub, and perished in the attempt. Lerwick boys, I am told, have visited it occasionally, by swimming, for the purpose of harrying the nests of the common gull, its only occupants.

When in Shetland in July last, I carried out a long cherished project of making my way to the islet, with a view to determining the nature of the ruin. A boat was conveyed by road from Lerwick, and, after a careful inspection, an attempt was made, with some willing hands, to clear away so much of the débris as would admit of some definite indication being obtained.

The drawing (fig. 1), taken from a photograph, shows the loch with

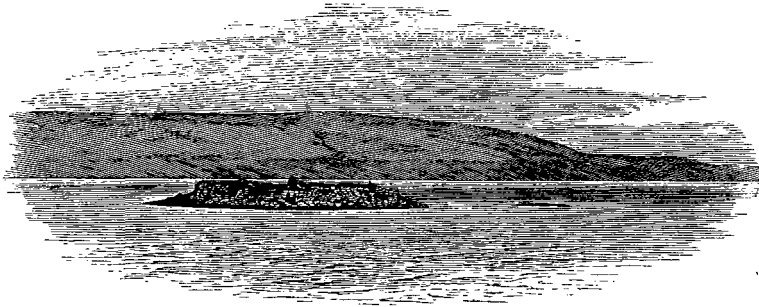


Fig. 1. Islet in Loch of Brindister.

the islet and ruin before the latter was interfered with. The Ordnance Surveyors appear to have examined it. At any rate, they have not hesitated to add to it the usually legitimate classification of such remains in Shetland by marking it as a "Brough."

By the removal of loose stones along the outside of the building, which was found in a state of great decay, a broad circular wall of rough masonry, composed of blocks of schistose rock, was distinctly shown. The next step was to clear out the entrance, which was on the side facing the north, and this was done to a certain extent, as shown in the photographs exhibited. The views Nos. II. and III. represent the entrance as untouched, the former from the area within, the latter from

the outside. View No. IV. shows the entrance, as cleared, looking inwards.

It now remained, after having cleared the entrance, and also partially the outer circuit of the main wall, to endeavour to determine the course of the wall on the inside. This was a matter of greater difficulty. The entire enclosed area was filled with *débris*, solidified and compacted by bird droppings, the seafowl having held possession, disturbed only at rare intervals, perhaps ever since the building ceased to be occupied. Sufficient displacement was, however, made to disclose, with greater or less distinctness, the inner circuit of the wall.

The general results of these partial excavations was to expose a circular wall of the following dimensions, viz.:—

Height, at highest point,	5 feet.
Thickness, varying, but usually about	8 "
Diameter of structure from outside to outside of wall—	
From north to south,	50 "
From west to east,	51 "
Width of doorway, 3 feet 9 inches to	4 "

Assuming the thickness of the wall to be from 8 to 10 feet, the open interior area would be 30 to 34 feet in diameter, quite a customary dimension in brough buildings.

The photograph No. V. shows the highest portion of the wall, as now partially cleared, on the outside.

The character of the building and the dimensions, so far as they go, are those of an ordinary brough, and I have little hesitation in assigning it to that class of structure. It is true that an 8 feet thickness of wall is narrow, but there are several instances of such walls 9 and 10 feet thick, and a sufficient height of the masonry is not left to admit of the special structural forms—staircase, chambers, &c.—being ascertained. The friable nature of the material employed, rough lumps of schist, worn and weathered with the blasts of ages, is ill adapted for a strong or lasting structure, and hence the state of confused decay.

Upon the whole, I am inclined to be of opinion that the wall never reached an elevation approaching the supposed normal altitude of brough buildings (say 40 feet). The quantity of *débris*, little of which could

ever have been removed, does not correspond with any safe assumption of a large cubic mass having existed on the spot.

But no such massiveness or altitude was demanded by the situation. The approach must have been almost inaccessible to an assailant, if the boat or raft for communication with the shore were kept moored by the castle side, as the transportation of floating material could not be but attended with trouble and difficulty. A moderate height of the circular rampart, or main wall, say 10 or 12 feet, would have presented a fairly adequate strength in the circumstances, to have enlarged which would have been unnecessary expenditure of energy. A fortalice of this kind may, I apprehend, be appropriately denominated a brough, though not exhibiting the full development of the normal features. It possesses, at anyrate, the circular main wall of massive proportions which is the essential characteristic of such structures.

Time did not allow me to pursue the investigation further, and I do not know that there is much occasion for doing so. It is, of course, possible that the clearing out of the interior might bring to light some relics of the occupants sufficiently interesting to repay the small expense required for the undertaking.

It should not be omitted to be mentioned that at no great distance in the same neighbourhood, Brindister, a brough of the usual massive character and dimensions is situated on the brink of a high cliff overlooking the sea. The entrance doorway is on the outward face, so that hostile approach to it would be of enormous difficulty. One or two defenders at the entrance could thrust any number of assailants over the cliff into the sea below, as only one could approach at a time.

II. BROUGH AT CLUMLIE, PARISH OF DUNROSSNESS.

This excavation was a work of a totally different kind—the bringing to light a structure which for ages had never been exposed to human eye, and whose existence up to this time had been matter of mere conjecture.

Clumlie, now a ruinous and almost deserted village, is a place of great antiquity, appearing as a predial settlement, in the same way as till recent times, in the earliest known rentals of the lordship of Shetland,

subject to its skatt and other duties payable to the island Earls. Not only is this the case, but, ecclesiologically, there seems to be evidence to carry it back to the era of Celtic Christianity prior to the advent of the Norsemen in the ninth century. On its north side to this day the site of a chapel, cell, or oratory, is pointed out, dedicated, as we may venture to assume, to Columba, the primal saint of outlying districts of the west and north, whose very name the village or township seems to have absorbed in its own designation,—passing, by an easy transition, from the Celtic form *Columcille* (as in Skye) to Columlie, Clombly, the loch and town of Clumlie. We have thus on the spot, first, a probably aboriginal Celtic settlement, in earliest times pagan, afterwards Christianised; and, second, a Scandinavian village, in continuation of the same, from the ninth century downwards to modern times. Little now remains that can be safely attributed to the Celtic period beyond the name, the site—which is entirely cleared—of the little district sanctuary, and the buried structure now partially disintombed, which has to be described. But the Scandinavian element, of which the modern is the legitimate successor, has left its imprint deeply graven on the soil around it. Every rig, rock, knoll, hill, or enclosure in the township bears its descriptive name in expressive Norse, of which the following, as examples, may be given, viz.:—

Name.	Probable Form in Old Norse.	Meaning.
Lingard,	Ling-gardr,	Heather-farm.
Bu-gardsty yard,	Bu-gards-teigr-gardr,	Town yard.
Yaback,	Hjá-bakki,	High bank, or ditch.
Stoorishon,	Stor-shon,	Big pool.
Ramnagio,	Hramna-gjá,	Gio, or creek of rams.
Vills,	Vellir,	Fields.
Virdifell,	Vördu-fjall,	Ward, or signal hill.
Helliberg,	Hellu-bjerg,	Flat rock (by the sea).
Runtie-gate,	Hraun-teigr gata,	Rough place road.
Natshag,	Nauts-hagi,	Cattle pasture.

These are only a few of the Scandinavian descriptive names which have lingered on through later centuries, though their meaning has ceased to be understood, and some of them are now unknown to the rising generation. The removal of one or two old families from the

immediate neighbourhood would lead to their extinction, most of these being minor names which did not come under the review of the Ordnance Surveyors, and are therefore not recorded on the map.

But for the present, in dealing with the ruined structure, we pass over a thousand years of Scandinavian occupation, and find ourselves face to face, as we shall see, with a substantial relic of the preceding Celtic inhabitants.

The natural situation is a rounded elevation rising gradually from the surrounding level, and terminating in a conical hillock, into the south side of which the ancient village, consisting formerly of several dwelling-houses and numerous attached office-houses, is built. The circumstance of so large a quantity of stone buildings being centred at this spot was itself a significant indication of a quarry having been ready to hand, and the force of this indication was soon demonstrated.

Within all human memory, or human knowledge, this hillock, known as the "Brae of the North Yard," has been simply a huge grass-grown mound, the superficial layer, wherever exposed, being earth, and small stones closely compacted, and showing nothing suggestive of constructional remains being underneath. Judging, however, by perfectly legitimate analogy, the Ordnance Surveyors in this case also came to the conclusion that the mound was a brough, and so designated it on the map. This was quite in accordance with my own belief; but it was impossible absolutely so to determine without evidence yielded by actual excavation: it might have turned out to be a chambered mound, like Maeshowe in Orkney, or New Grange in Ireland.

It was not until the month of July last year that I had an opportunity of putting the matter to the test. Some workmen were available at the time, and with the hearty concurrence of Mr Bruce of Sumburgh, the proprietor of the ground, the excavation was proceeded with.

There was nothing to indicate any specially promising point to begin at. The first essay resulted in nothing; but in the next we speedily struck upon what proved to be a well-built doorway, very near to the surface on the east side. This doorway, which was obviously the main entrance to the structure, was blocked with stones and earth to near the top. This was entirely cleared away, and, by further excavation at either

side of the entrance, at the outside, the curvilinear form of the main wall soon became apparent.

The passage on both sides is extremely well built, of the usual kind of brough masonry, without lime mortar. The passage walls are entire, with the exception of one or two stones on the top at the outer face; the height is 5 feet. The lintels are all gone except the three innermost, which remain in position, two on face and one on edge. The width of the passage is $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet. The doorway facing the interior is formed by upright jambs of the full height of 5 feet. The length of the passage, that is, the thickness of the main wall which it intersects, is 11 feet 2 inches on the south side, and 11 feet 4 inches on the north side. The floor of the passage is pretty carefully paved, with a well-formed small drain from the interior area passing underneath it. The building stones are of varying sizes; one stone in the passage is 4 feet $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by 6 to 7 inches thick; and all look as fresh as if they had been newly built, from which I infer that destruction must have come before the building had had time to grow old, and that its overthrow was so complete as to ensure its further preservation by its being completely covered up, at any rate in its lower stages.

The entrance passage is unbroken by chambers or lateral passages proceeding from it. The staircase and detached chambers, if any, must therefore open from the interior area by independent passages. The interior was found to be closely packed with débris and earth to a much greater height than that of the remaining portion of the wall, and it was impossible to interfere with it unless by a completed excavation, which would be equivalent to the removal of the conical hillock piled up within and upon the central area and the main wall.

It is scarcely necessary to say that to any one acquainted with buildings of this kind, the fact of this being a brough of the ordinary type, whatever variation of minor details there may be, admits of no dubiety. It only remained to pursue the evidence by continuing the excavation so as to follow up and disclose the circular course of the main wall. This was accordingly done for a distance of 70 feet on the east and north-east sides. In this direction its height gradually declined from the entrance, most of it, on the outer face, being not more than from 1 to 2 feet high.

The inner face is certainly very much higher. The tentative measurements, taken from the portion of the outer circumference laid bare, go to show that the brough has been a large and imposing one.

Circumstances at the time did not admit of my prosecuting the excavation further, and it was suspended, only, I hope, to be renewed at some future time. The place, and the archaeological indications associated with it, are of more than ordinary interest, and I am hopeful that a thorough excavation might be productive of satisfactory results. The stones now exhibited are the only specimens of human manufacture found, with the exception of some querns and grain-rubbers discovered close by some years ago.

It may be observed, in conclusion, that the broughs in this parish of Dunrossness have been very numerous. Not to speak of the castle of Mousa, the most perfect in existence, situated in the immediately adjoining parish of Sandwick, which is ecclesiastically united to Dunrossness, there are, in Dunrossness proper, brough remains at the following places, viz.:—At Levenwick (on the confines of Sandwick parish), at Clumlie, at the Brough (near Boddam), at Scousbrough, at Lunabister, at Waterbrough, at South Voe, at the Broken Brough, at East Shore—nine in all.

None of these Dunrossness broughs have been touched by the explorer except those of Levenwick and Clumlie. The excavation of the former occupied my attention in several successive holiday seasons (see *Proceedings* of the Society, vol. ix., 1871, p. 212). The attempted exploration of the latter has just been described.

The nearest brough, on the south, to that of Clumlie, is at a small farm bearing the designation of, *par excellence*, The Brough. All is gone but the foundations of the main wall and the massive surrounding ramparts, which are on a scale, for size, surpassing anything of the kind elsewhere known to me. Not a stone is visible,—all being covered with soil, and grass grown. The buildings of the cottage and offices adjoining are trifling in extent, and it is scarcely conceivable what can have become of all the stones of so great a structure. Their gradual removal must have been spread over an enormous period.