

I.

NOTES ON THE EARL'S BÚ (OR BORDLAND) AT ORPHIR, ORKNEY,
CALLED ÖRFJARA IN THE SAGAS, AND ON THE REMAINS OF
THE ROUND CHURCH THERE. BY ALFRED W. JOHNSTON, F.S.A.
Scot.

In the Orkneyinga Saga¹ it is mentioned (A.D. 1127-28) that Earl Haraldr lived at his *bú* in Örfjara. In 1136 :—

“Earl Páll had a great yule feast, and prepared for it at his *bú*, which is called Örfura (Iorfiara, Flateybook). . . . There were large farm-buildings (*húsa-bær*) there, and they stood on sloping ground, and there was a slope at the back of the houses. And when one came on the brow of the slope Örridafjörðr was above it (*i.e.*, on the other side, beyond); in it lies Damisey. . . . There, in Örfjara, was a large drinking hall, and there was a door near the east gable, on the southern side wall, and a splendid church stood before the hall door, and one descended from the hall to the church. But as one entered the hall a large slab was to the left, and inside many large ale-casks, and facing the out-door was a room.” The Saga goes on to relate the dispute between the two Sveinns, resulting in the slaughter of Sveinn breastrope, after which Sveinn Asleifarson was taken by his accomplices “into the room facing the out-door, and he was there pulled out through a skjá-window.² There Magnús Eyvindarson has a horse ready saddled and took him away behind the houses and on to Örridafjörðr. Then they took ship, and Magnús brought Sveinn to Damisey.”³

In order to identify the site of the Earl's *bú* in, or called Örfjara, it will be instructive to compare a list of Earls' *bús* and residences mentioned in the Saga, with a list of *bús*, bulls, or bows and bordlands of the Earldom, enumerated in the Rentals of the Earldom.⁴

With regard to bordlands, Captain F. W. L. Thomas writes :—“The Earls of Orkney must, from an early period, have had mensal farms, and these are marked in the Old Rental as ‘bordland,’ literally table-land ;

¹ Icelandic Sagas relating to the Settlements and Descents of the Northmen in the British Isles. Edited by Vigfusson and Dasent. Published by the Master of the Rolls. *Orkney Saga*, caps. 58, 69, 70.

² Skjá (*r*) is a transparent membrane stretched across a window, and used instead of glass.

³ MS. translation by Ión Stefánsson, Ph.D.

⁴ Peterkin's Rentals.

thus the Bú, *Ból*, N. of Orfer, where the Earls usually dwelt,¹ was bordland."² Colonel David Balfour writes:—"Bordland, N. Bord, *mensa, cibus*. The guest quarters of the King or Jarl, and therefore exempt from skatt."³

We find the Earl of Orkney faring about the Islands in 1137, collecting his land rents, when he would undoubtedly have resided at his bús and bordlands.⁴

As the islands were frequently divided among several Earls at the same time in accordance with udal succession they must have had their separate headquarters, for which purpose their bús and bordlands would probably be utilised.

Bordlands of the Earldom landed estate, which paid no skatt. From Rentals 1503-1595.

[Earls' Palace Birsa.]
N.B.—This is not included in the rental, as the whole of Birsa was churchland, in 1503.

[Kirkwall Castle.]
N.B.—Mentioned in Charters of Earldom.

Burray, Bú of.
Burwick in South Ronaldsay.
Hoy, including its Bú.
Orphair—Bú of Orphair, with Midland, Howth, and Orakirk.

Earls' Residences, 11th and 12th Centuries. From the Orkneyinga Saga.

Earl Thorfinnr (d. 1064), after his pilgrimage to Rome, resided almost always at Byrgis-hérad, where he built Christ Church (chapter 37).

Earl Páll II. at Byrgis-hérad 1137 (chapter 60).
Earl Rögnvaldr II. at Byrgis-hérad 1155 (chapter 108).

Earl Rögnvaldr I. at Kirkju-vágr 1046 (chapter 34).

Earl Haraldr, who lived mostly in Caithness, died at his bú in Örfjara 1127 (chapter 58).

Earl Páll II. lived at his bú in Örfjara 1136-37 (chapter 69-71).

Earl Rögnvaldr II. at his bú in Örfjara 1154 (chapter 103).

Earl Haraldr Maddadson in hiding at the bú in Örfjara 1154 (chapter 103).

¹ Only two Earls, Páll and Haraldr, are mentioned as dwelling at Örfjara; it is spoken of as a bú of Earl Rögnvaldr, and Earl Haraldr Maddadson was in hiding there at that time.

² *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, 1884, p. 254.

³ *Oppressions of the Sixteenth Century in the Islands of Orkney and Shetland*. Glossary, s.v. Bordland.

⁴ *O.S.*, chapter 71.

Bordlands of the Earldom landed estate, which paid no skatt. From Rentals 1503-1595.

Earls' Residences, 11th and 12th Centuries. From the Orkneying Saga.

Netherlyking in Sandwick. Westrey — Swartneill, Wabuster, and Bú of Rapness.

Earl Rögnvaldr II. at Hreppis-nes in 1155 (chapter 107).

Sanday—Gryndleith, Bús of Brugh, Halkisness, Tofts, Walls, Lopness, and Tresness.

? Earl Rögnvaldr I. in 1036 fared first to those bus which his father Brúsa had owned (chapter 26). We are told that Earl Brúsa had the northernmost part of the islands (chapter 22).

Stronsay — Holland; and probably Clestrain and Musbuster, as they paid no skatt.

? Papa Stronsay paid no skatt, and probably bordland.

Earl Rögnvaldr I. killed at Papey in litlu, where he had gone for his yule malt 1046 (chapter 34).

Earl Rögnvaldr II. in 1136-38 had a bú called Knarrar-stadir (chapter 81). This is supposed to be the modern Knarston near Scalpa in St Ola. In the Rental 1503 Knarstane in St Olavis parish is described as *pro rege, i.e., Kingsland*, and formed part of the landed estate of the Earldom. It paid skatt, and was not bordland.

The Saga mentions the *bú in Örfjara* and the *bú called Örfjara*. The Rental of 1503 mentions *the bull of Orphair*. In one instance in the Rental of 1503 the spelling *Bow* occurs, viz., the *Bow of Burray*. In the Rental 1642 *Bow* is used throughout. *Būe* is the form in Murdoch Mackenzie's Charts, 1750; and *Bu'* is now adopted by the Ordnance Survey. The pronunciation is uniformly *bōō*, and appears always to have been so. The question is whether *bull* is derived from O.N. *Ból* or *Bú*. The Saga always uses *bú*, which, although a generic term, appears to have become associated with place-names in Orkney and Shetland. However, *Bú*, as now used in Orkney, is still a sort of generic term—it is always the Bú of such and such a place, precisely in the same way as used in the Saga. In Orkney and Shetland *ból* is still used, as in Iceland, for a pen for cattle. *Ból* as a place-name in Orkney appears in the termination *bister = bólstadr*. The *ll* in

bull appears to be a Scottish addition. In illustration of the Scottish influence on Orkney place-names, so far as the letter *l* is concerned, take *vágr* pronounced *voe* in Orkney; in Scotch this becomes *waw* then *wall*, as in *vágur*, *wawis*, *walls*, and *Kirkju-vágr*, *Kirkwaw*, *Kirkwall*. The true words are preserved in the folk-pronunciation *Waas* and *Kirkvaa*. In the case of Hrólfsey, the *l* has been absorbed in the foregoing long vowel, and we now have Rousey. In the same way as the Scotch pronounce gold *gowd*, by a mistaken contra-analogy we occasionally find *fold* for *fowd* (*i.e.*, *foged*).¹ *Boll*, a seed pod, becomes *bow*, where, as in many Scotch words, the double *ll* is changed into *w*.² And by a contra-analogy the Orkney bú becomes *bull*. This Icelandic *bú* is still in use in some Scottish place-names, meaning a house or village, *e.g.*, the Bow of Fife, the Boo of Ballingshaw.³

The earldom landed estate in Orphir parish consisted of a compact district of three túns, viz., Orphir, Midland, and Houton, with the rúm or farm of Orakirk. These are all described in the Rentals of 1503 and 1595 as bordlands of the *old earldom*, *i.e.*, the Norse Earldom, paying no skatt. This estate was separated from the tún of Swanbister on the east by a tongue of the Common and by a large tract of rough uncultivated land, and the Fidge of Piggar, stretching from the Common down to the coast. From the name Grind (= a house near a grind or gate in the surrounding tún wall), mentioned along with Hangabak in 1503, there is presumptive evidence that the Common at one time extended down to the coast. There is also evidence that the Common behind Houton also extended along the hill top down to the coast, dividing the estate on the north-west from Peterton. We gather this from the fact that Orakirk, which is situated on the shore to the north of Houton, is quoyland, *i.e.*, an enclosure from the Common, and the place between it and Houton is called Midquoy. That Orakirk is an old quoy is evident from its

¹ *Mémoires de la Société Royale des Antiquaires du Nord*, 1845-1849, p. 225. Munch on Scottish and Irish local names.

² *Jamieson's Dictionary of Scottish Language*, s.v. Bow.

³ *Ibid.*, s.v. Boo.

pennyland valuation. The early date of this valuation is lost in antiquity. Later quoy's are not so valued.

The whole estate was bounded on the north and the east by the Common, from which it was divided by a wall, and on the south by the sea. There are no walls separating the three túns from each other, merely recognised boundaries—the burn of Too-gill between Houton and Midland, and the ridge of a brek, called Glensbrek, between Midland and Orphir. It formed an ideal estate. Midland and Houton, with the only haven in that part of the Mainland—where King Hakon moored his galley on his return from his expedition to Scotland—and Orphir, with broad lands for farming, extensive meadows, hill-pasture, peat-ground, and a good fresh-water stream,—sheltered by a range of hills on the north (including the indispensable ward or beacon hill), facing the south, and with a safe land-locked sea in front, stocked with salmon trout and other fish. Kerlin-skerry, belonging to the Bú, used to be noted as a place for seal-hunting.

With regard to the name Orphir, as applied to the present parish of that name, we do not know when ecclesiastical parishes were formed in Orkney, nor do we know whether existing civil districts were adopted for that purpose. The Saga does not mention any ecclesiastical or civil district. Byrgis-hérád does not necessarily refer to a civil district, as hérád is used for any district, valley, or country, bordered by mountains, or within the same river basin.

It is noticeable in the names of parishes in Orkney that they are mainly taken from the dedications of the churches, or the names of the túns in which the churches are situated. The parish of Orphir consists of a group of túns, and takes its name from the tún of Orphir in which the parish church and the Bú of Orphir are situated.

The Saga merely mentions the Earl's bú in, or called Örfjara, so that the name Örfjara is clearly that of the Homestead. The tún is the unit of Orkney topography. The original tún by enlargement, and subdivision through udal inheritance, became a group of farms. The site

of the original tún, however, remained the principal farm, the bú or head bú of the enlarged tún.

The Bú of Orphir must have been the original farm from which the tún took its name. The tún of Orphir is described in the Rental of 1503 as consisting of the bull of Orphair ninepenny land, and a group of surrounding farms called the threepenny land of Orphair.

The present Bú of Orphir is situated at the head of the Hope o' the Bú, also called the Bay of Orphir. Between the farm buildings and the shore is the parish church and churchyard, and in the churchyard are the ruins of the Round Church of Orphir. Immediately to the north, outside the yard wall, are the foundations of extensive buildings recently excavated. The ruins and the church stand on a gentle rising ground at the foot of the south-east declivity of Midland Hill. At the east end of the site and of the ruins the ground slopes down abruptly to the stream. The Saga states that the houses stood on a slope, which may either refer to the declivity of Midland Hill or to the rising ground on which the ruins stand. The Saga description is extremely loose and brief. It takes Sveinn "away *behind the houses* and on to Örridafjörðr," and mentions a *brekka* or *leiti*, a slope *behind the houses*, from which Damsey could be seen, both of which are four and six and a half miles distant respectively.

The Rev. Alexander Pope states, in 1758, that large and deep foundations were found underground in the lands of the Bow, near the church, but that there were no local traditions as to the Earl's Palace.¹ Mr George Petrie states, in 1861, that the immediate neighbourhood of the Round Church abounded with numerous traces of ancient buildings believed to be the remains of the Earl's Palace.² Some years ago, the writer pointed out to the Rev. W. Caskey, incumbent of the parish, the spot where the Earl's Bú would have stood in relation to the Round Church, in accordance with the description in the Saga. At that time there were no indications of any ruins, and the locality of

¹ *Torfeus, Hist. Orkney*. Translated by Rev. Alexander Pope, p. 107, foot-note.

² *Archæological Journal*, vol. xviii., Round Church of Orphir.

previous excavations was unknown. In 1899 the grave-digger came across foundations in the north-west corner of the churchyard, lying from west to east. As this would correspond with the south wall of the Earl's Bú, Mr Robert Flett of Bellevue, Hon. District Secretary of the Viking Club, made two excavations to the eastward in line with the supposed wall, with the result that it was again struck. In 1900 Mr Flett and the writer made a series of excavations, tracing the buildings to their eastern extremity. In 1901 they made a careful excavation at that part where the doorway would be, in accordance with the Saga description, with the result that such an opening was found (see plan, fig. 1). The wall, so far as excavated, measures about 136 feet in length. The western extremity has not been traced; it probably terminated at the west end of the churchyard, as no trace could be obtained outside. Beginning at the west end of the yard there is a continuous length of about 104 feet of dry built random-coursed wall, 4 feet thick, without footings or scarcement; this terminates eastward at the supposed doorway, opposite the church. It was not possible to excavate immediately east of this to find the other jamb of opening, owing to the present church road wall. But 6 feet $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches to the east, on the other side of the road wall, was found the return wall of another building in the same frontage line. This latter building has walls 4 feet thick, but built with mortar, and therefore probably of later date. The jamb of the opening showed no signs of a door frame or fastening. In a line with the jamb of the door on its north side, and standing on end, was found part of a large flat stone 5 inches thick.¹ The bottom of the foundation of this wall is level with that of the Round Church. In the doorway, alongside of the stone on end, and 2 feet 4 inches above the foundation level, was another flat stone 5 inches thick, lying on its side, which may have been the threshold of a door, or otherwise a portion broken off the stone on end. If it was the threshold, then the floor of the Bú must have been 2 feet 4 inches above that of the church, which would accord with the Saga statement

¹ Is this the slab mentioned in the Saga?

EARL'S BÚ & ROUND CHURCH,
ORPHIR, ORKNEY
PLAN & SECTIONS FROM EXCAVATIONS & MEASUREMENTS MADE
1899-1901

PARISH CHURCH BUILT 1829 REPAIRED 1750
WHEN A JAMB OR AISLE WAS ADDED ON
THE NORTH FOR THE HONEYMAN FAMILY
TWO-THIRDS OF THE ROUND CHURCH BEING
PULLED DOWN AND USED. DEMOLISHED 1829
APPROXIMATE POSITION FROM PLAN
& DESCRIPTION BY THE LATE JAMES'S
JOHNSTON OF COLUISTER

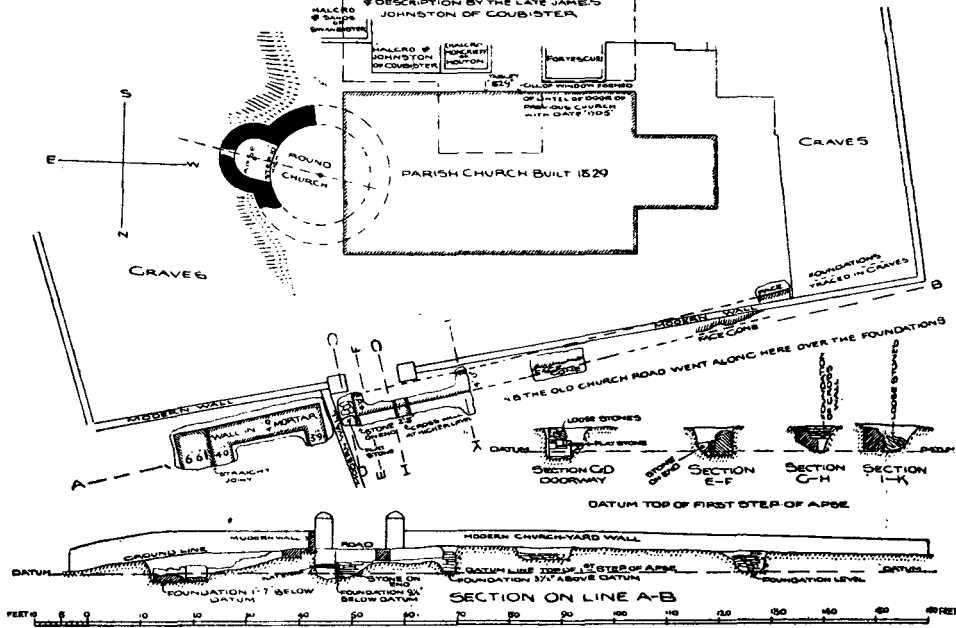


Fig. 1. Plan and sections, Orphir, Orkney.

that one went down from the Bú to the church. As the foundation of the cross wall to the west of the doorway is about level with the flat stone in the doorway, probably this was the floor level, and the space between the stone on end and the cross wall would be the ale-room mentioned in the Saga. If the stone on end is in its original position, then the fact that its lower portion is irregular shows that it was probably the socket underground, and is an additional proof that the flat stone in doorway was the floor level. The fact that the wall above the level of the flat stone, and above the foundation of the cross wall, has fallen down, while below it remains intact, appears to show that the

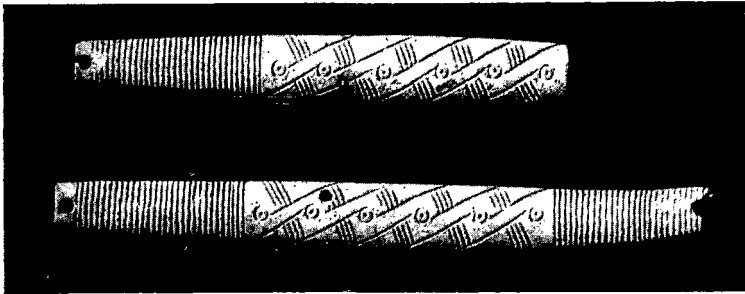


Fig. 2. The two halves of the midrib of a Bone Comb of the Viking period found at Orphir.

lower portion was buried foundation below the floor level. All along the north or inside of this wall the stones have fallen down, and are mixed up with quantities of bones, ashes, and oyster shells. The only articles found were the two halves of the ornamented midrib of a bone comb of the Viking period, shown in fig. 2, which were lying near the first step of the apse of the Round Church; and a round handle of deerhorn or bone from the westmost excavation of the wall of the Bú.

Up till 1829 the old church road, or 'masey gate,' crossed the stream immediately to the east of the church, and then branched into two sections going round outside the north and south walls of the churchyard, so that the wall now excavated was under the north road.

The whole site is now covered with 5 feet deep of débris above the clay upon which the foundations of the church and Bú are built.

The Round Church, of which all that remains is the apse and a small part of the wall of the nave on each side (see fig. 1 and fig. 3) is undoubtedly one of those twelfth century churches built in imitation of the church of the Holy Sepulchre.

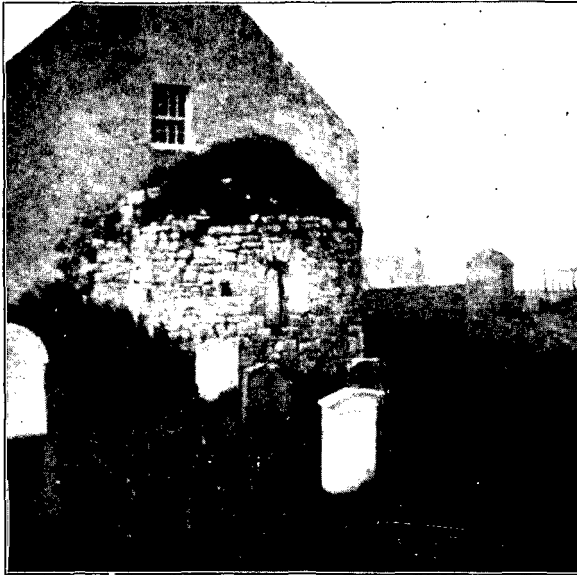


Fig. 3. Apse of the Round Church at Orphir.

With regard to the founder of the church, the Rev. Alexander Pope states, in 1758, that some thought it had been built by Earl Hákon after his return from Jerusalem, and adds that "Hákon, it seemed, chused Orphir for his seat." Dr Joseph Anderson states that Hákon "had his residence at Ophir,"¹ and that "he seems to have resided"² there, and probably built the church. The late Mr B. H. Hossack, in his recent

¹ *Scotland-in Early Christian Times*, Edinburgh, 1881, p. 29, foot-note.

² *Orkneyinga Saga*, Translation, p. xciv.

work, *Kirkwall in the Orkneys*, apparently founding on Dr Anderson, states that Hákon built the church. Thus the surmise of one writer becomes the fact of another. All these statements as to Hákon living in Orphir and building the church are mere inferences. We have no proof that Earl Hákon was ever even in Orphir. He may have visited Orphir, among his other búð, when on circuit collecting rents and skatts. We are not told where he lived, and merely know that he died in the islands. Earl Páll was living in Orphir in 1136, when the church was first mentioned, and his father, Earl Hákon, was the first and only Earl before that time who visited Jerusalem. If Earl Hákon built the church he probably did so after his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, between a few winters after he murdered St Magnus in 1116, and c. 1123 when he died.

The Rev. Francis Liddell in 1797 suggested that the Earl's Palace stood at Oback in the tún of Tuskerbister, in Orphir parish, as answering to the Saga description.¹ Oback is on the slope of the hill from which Damsey can be seen. Possibly he was misled by a tradition which says that the Earl of Caithness was slain at Oback after the battle of Summerdale in 1529.² Mr Liddell suggests that "The ruins of an ancient tower, of a circular form, and about 180 feet in circumference," in Swanbister, was probably the residence of Sveinn breastrope, from which the place took its name "Suenobister." This ruin, however, is the remains of one of the many pre-Norse broughs in Orkney and Shetland. From measurements taken by the writer in 1879 and 1901, the internal diameter is about 30 feet, which, with the 12 feet thick dry built walls, gives a circumference of about 170 feet.

Somehow or other, after this suggestion by Mr Liddell, *Sveinn* got locally confused with the *Earl*, and in a MS. map of Swanbister, in 1847, we find the Brough marked as the "ruins of Earl Sweyn's Castle."³ The transition from "Earl Sweyn's Castle" to "Earl's Palace" was then

¹ *O.S.A.*, vol. xix. p. 394.

² Peace's *Handbook to Orkney, Kirkwall, n.d.*, and J. T. Calder's *Hist. of Caithness*, 2nd ed., 1887, pp. 111-112.

³ MS. map by the late James Johnston of Coubister, Orphir, in the possession of James Johnston of Coubister, Orphir.

an easy one. Already, in 1842, the minister of the parish mentions the "Earl's Palace" at Swanbister.¹ In the advertisement of the sale of the estate of Swanbister, in 1844, it is stated, as an attractive feature of the property, that it was "in ancient days the residence of the Norwegian Earls of Orkney, the remains of whose palace are yet in existence."²

The new proprietor of the estate, buying it on that understanding, we are therefore not surprised to find Professor P. A. Munch writing in 1845-49, that the *inhabitants* still show the ground of the Earl's seat at Swanbister.³ As a matter of fact, this spurious tradition has never become folklore. The Brough at Swanbister is called by the inhabitants the "hillock o' Brecknay," from the name of the neighbouring farm.

There are no traditions now, no more than there were in 1758, in Mr Pope's time, as to the site of the Earl's Palace.

Professor Munch located Örfjara at Swanbister primarily because he found there a large flat tract of land which was sometimes submerged by the sea, and Örfjara, or its derivative Örfyri, he says was anciently used of a considerable extent of flat land covered at flood and dry at ebb, and in proof refers to two islands in Norway, now called Offersö, but anciently Örfyrisey, both land-fast during ebb. But, as will be shown later on, Örfjara, or its derivative Örfiri, is solely applicable to the reef or neck of land which connects a tidal island to the mainland, and consequently the only parallel names which Professor Munch can adduce are those of two such islands. The proper designation for a low ebbing shore is *út-firi*, neuter (Cleasby fem., wrong), a long foreshore where the water recedes far and leaves shallows running out from the beach.⁴ The tract of land referred to by Professor Munch is called the Fidge of Piggar, from O.N. *fit* = low-lying meadow beside water, which exactly describes the place. Swanbister is described in the Rental of 1503 as udal land paying skatt, and is not mentioned as having formed part of

¹ *N.S.A.*, Orphir.

² Advertisement in possession of the writer.

³ *Mémoires de la Société Royale des Antiquaires du Nord*, 1845-49, p. 252.

⁴ Dr Jón Stefánsson, at present engaged on an Icelandic-English Dictionary for the Clarendon Press.

the old Earldom landed estate. It was completely separated from the Earl's estate in Orphir. Professor Munch found that the site shown him, viz., that of the Brough, in relation to the adjoining site of a chapel, did not correspond with the Saga description, and there was no room for a chapel between the Brough and the shore, so he accordingly accepted the site of the chapel as that of the church mentioned in the Saga, and placed the palace in imagination to the north, suggesting that the Brough might have been one of the out-buildings.

Professor Munch says that Orphir seems in former times to have been the common name of the whole coast from Houton to Waulkmill, but quotes no authority. It has already been shown that Orphir, excluding the parish name, is alone applicable to the t \acute{u} n of that name (in which the B \acute{u} and Round Church are situated), the inhabitants of which are still spoken of by their neighbouring parishioners as the 'Orphir folk.' At most the name could only have included the Earl's estate of Orphir, Midland, and Houton, to which latter is attached a tidal island, called the Holm of Houton, an \ddot{O} r \acute{f} irisey, to which we must look for the origin of the name. Although Professor Munch visited Orphir, and consulted the Rentals, he makes no mention of the Round Church, or the B \acute{u} of Orphir, bordlands of the old Earldom.

The Saga, before relating the murders and Sveinn's flight, appropriately describes the relative position of the house and church, and the island of Damsey to which Sveinn fled, all of which are brought into the story. It says, behind the houses there was a *brekka*, a slope, or *leiti*, an elevation on the horizon hiding the view, from which Damsey could be seen,—the inference being that this elevation was on the road by which Sveinn fled. Professor Munch says that it could only refer to the Ward Hill, but that Damsey could not be seen from it, as the Keely-lang hills intervened. The Ward Hill is the highest hill on the mainland, and is a *ffall*, and not a mere *brekka* or *leiti*. The straight track from the t \acute{u} n of Orphir to the Bay of Firth, by which pedestrians still go, is through the moor, and after a long, tedious ascent the slak or hollow between the hills of Lyradale and Keely-lang is reached,

when the Bay of Firth (Örriðafjörðr) and Damsey suddenly break into view. The complete change of scene is striking. This can only be the elevation mentioned in the Saga, and it is part of the range of hills which Professor Munch said prevented Damsey from being seen from the Ward Hill. No one acquainted with the locality would ever think of going to Firth by way of the top of the Ward Hill, or expect to get a view of Damsey from it. The slak mentioned is the nearest point to Orphir from which Damsey can be seen, and it is on the direct and shortest route to Firth by which a fugitive would go.

The following remarks as to the derivation and significance of the word Örfjara are founded mainly on a correspondence with Mr Eiríkr Magnússon of Cambridge and Dr Jón Stefánsson :—

Örfjara, derivative Örfiri, Icelandic, neuter, is solely applicable to the reef or neck of land connecting a tidal island (Örfirisey) to the mainland. It is derived from ör= out of, a negative prefix, and fjara= (1) low water, opposite to high water flód, (2) foreshore, or the part of the beach dry only at low water, and covered at high water. Örfirisey would thus mean "out of ebb island," *i.e.*, showing above the water-line at ebb-tide. There is no difficulty in the way of the term Örfjara extending from the appendage to the adjacent parts of the mainland. The Holm of Houton must therefore be the original Örfirisey and the adjoining land Örfjara. But how came the name to be restricted or transferred to the present Bú and tún of Orphir, and the name Örfirisey discarded?

There are two solutions. (1) The whole district of the Earl's estate from Houton to Orphir may have been originally called Örfjara, and the name afterwards restricted to the Earl's Bú; or (2) Houton, adjoining the tidal island, may have been the original Örfjara, and the Earl's Bú first erected there, and afterwards shifted to its present site, taking the name with it. In either of these cases, when the name got attached to the abode, and people no longer understood the exact meaning of Örfirisey—which must have got lost very early in Orkney, considering that the same took place in Iceland—the term Örfirisey became meaningless to people

and Hólmr took its place. Örfrisey, just outside Reykjavik, has for a long time gone under the name Effersey as though it were named after some person called Effer, which shows how utterly unconscious the Icelanders themselves became of the sense of the old name. Even this island figured for a time as Hólmr. Professor MacKinnon of Edinburgh University writes that there are nine or ten Örfriseys in the Hebrides, where the name is changed in Gaelic to Orasa, the *f* and second *r* being discarded—*f* aspirated and *r* merged in *s*. The name on the maps appears wrongly as Oronsay. There is also an island Örfasey at the south of Yell in Shetland. Örfriseyjar occurs in the *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, i. 597. In Norway, Örfyrisey occurs in the middle ages, and Offersö in three places in modern Norway.

Houton is probably the Icelandic Há-tún, or high tún, which is descriptive of the place as it lies on the hill side. This name is found in many places in Iceland, but is not recorded in any Saga relating to Norway. It is a curious fact that almost all the Há-túns in Iceland are small tenements within or on the land of a manorial or main estate; and what seems tolerably certain is, that when the manorial abode was erected, Há-tún, even if it was the older abode, became the inferior house and remained so ever after.

Even Midland is not without significance. From the name of one of its farms Myre, Icelandic Mýrr, a swamp, which is still descriptive of the place, it would be unsuitable for farming purposes, and Midland would be an appropriate name for this unprofitable land which divided the *bú* from its Há-tún or *out-bú*. The Norse term Medalland could only be given to a place which lay between two localities that had distinct names. Midland is mentioned as early as 1263, when King Hákon was there,¹ so that we may be quite certain that at that time, and in 1136, Örfjara was solely applicable to the Earl's *Bú*. Another important inference that may be drawn is that Midland implies a connected district of three places. This may refer to (1) the Earl's three farms, (2) the tripartition and re-naming of the original district

¹ *Hákonar Saga*, Rolls Edition, chapter 328.

of Örfjara, or (3) the middle place between the original Örfjara and the shifted abode of the Earl.

It is now hoped that it has been proved that the Earl's Bú in, or called Örfjara, mentioned in the Orkneyinga Saga, is identical with the present Bú of Orphir—which in 1503 was described as bordlands of the old Norse Earldom—and that the foundations recently excavated at the Bú of Orphir and the ruins of the Round Church are those of the Earl's Bú and kirk, to which they answer in every particular as described in the Saga.

With regard to the preservation of the ruins of the Round Church : The east end of the present parish church, which is of the usual barn-type, stands on the western half of the site of the nave of the Round Church, the foundations of which are buried underground. It is now proposed to pull down the parish church and build a new one further west, excavating the foundations of the round nave and preserving the ruin as an ancient monument. If the ruin of the Round Church is to be preserved, something must be done soon, as the vaulted roof of the apse is in a very precarious state, owing to the action of the grass roots eating away the mortar and disintegrating the masonry.