

III.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE RUINS OF THE BROCH OF DUN TELVE, NEAR
 GLENELG, EXCAVATED BY H.M. OFFICE OF WORKS IN 1914.
 BY ALEXANDER O. CURLE, F.S.A. SCOT., DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEUM.

The brochs of Dun Telve and Dun Troddan, more commonly known as the brochs of Glenelg, from the adjacent hamlet on the shore of the Sound of Sleat, are situated in Glen Beg, a valley running east and west, and parallel to Glen More, at the mouth of which lies the village. Dun Telve is about two miles distant from the shore, while Dun Troddan lies a quarter mile or thereby farther up the glen on a prominence projecting from the mountain side. Both brochs are now under the charge of H.M. Office of Works.

Glenbeg is a narrow glen with steep mountain slopes on each flank, breaking off here and there by the side of the burn flowing through it into areas of haugh-land. From one of these, and close by the bank of the burn, rise the ruins of Dun Telve (fig. 1).

About the year 1720 Alexander Gordon visited both these brochs, and has left us a description of them in his *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, accompanied by a view in front elevation of Dun Troddan, and in sectional elevation of Dun Telve. The former of the brochs then stood erect to a height of 33 feet presumably above the ground-level, with its circumference almost complete, except for a gap in the upper part of the wall at one side; but Dun Telve was even at that time in a very ruinous state with only about one-half of its wall remaining. Pennant paid them a visit in 1772 in the course of his voyage to the Hebrides, and the description which he has left of Dun Telve is worth quoting in part for the purpose of comparing the state of the ruins at that date with their condition in 1914, after a lapse of 142 years. It runs: "The more entire side appears of a most elegant taper form; the present height is thirty feet six inches; but in 1722 some Goth purloined from the top seven feet and a half, under pretence of applying the material to certain public buildings. By the appearance of some ruins that now lie at the base, and which have fallen off since that time, I believe three feet more may be added to the height, which will make the whole about forty-one." At the present day the highest elevation is 33 feet 6 inches, the increase on Pennant's figure being possibly due to the removal of the debris and accumulated soil at the base of the wall, and it is thus satisfactory to note that in height at least there has been no notable diminution since his time. Of the broch itself (for there are remains

of outbuildings, to be noted hereafter), only about one-third of the periphery except at the ground-level remains (fig. 2). True to its type, it has formed at base, as seen on the plan (fig. 3), an almost complete circle, with a diameter over all of 60 feet; a slight flattening on the outer periphery, noticeable on the plan towards the south-east, being probably due to dilapidation. The entrance to the interior is from the west by a passage through the wall 13 feet 6 inches in length. At



Fig. 1. Broch of Dun Telve—exterior view.

the exterior the entrance has a width of 3 feet 3 inches. This width with an increase of only a few inches the passage maintains for 4 feet 9 inches, where slabs set in the wall opposite to each other form checks for a door; and immediately contract it to 3 feet. Behind the door the passage has a width of 4 feet 4 inches, and inward from this point it gradually expands to 5 feet 3 inches, slightly contracting again to 4 feet 8 inches at the inner opening. Behind the door-checks on either side occur the usual square sockets in the side walls for the bar to hold the door. On the right side passing inwards, at a distance of

2 feet 6 inches from the position of the door, is the entrance, 3 feet wide, to the guard-chamber shown on the plan, extending in the thickness of the wall for a length of 18 feet and attaining a greatest breadth of 5 feet. With the exception of a portion of one flagstone, the roof of the entrance passage has entirely disappeared. The interior courtyard has a diameter of 32 feet. At a quarter of the way round the circumference to the left is an entrance 3 feet 3 inches wide, giving

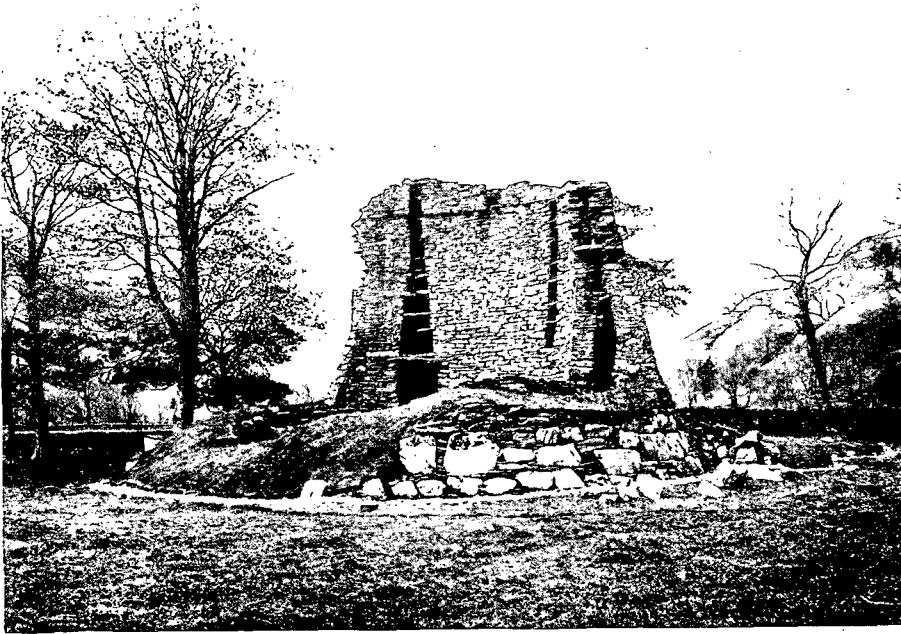


Fig. 2. Broch of Dun Telve—interior view.

access on the right to the stair, still existing for seventeen steps, and on the left to a chamber some 9 feet in length. As seen in the sectional plans (fig. 4) and view (fig. 5), there runs around the interior at an average height of 6 feet 6 inches above ground-level a ledge formed of single stones firmly built into the wall and projecting some 6 inches. This is continued along one side only of the entrance passage as if for the ends of the roofing slabs to rest on. At a height of 29 feet 6 inches above ground a similar ledge occurs, shown on the sectional plans (fig. 4). The use of such ledges or scarcements, of frequent occurrence in brochs,

: BROCH DUN TELVE .
: GLENBEG, INVERNESS-SMIRE :

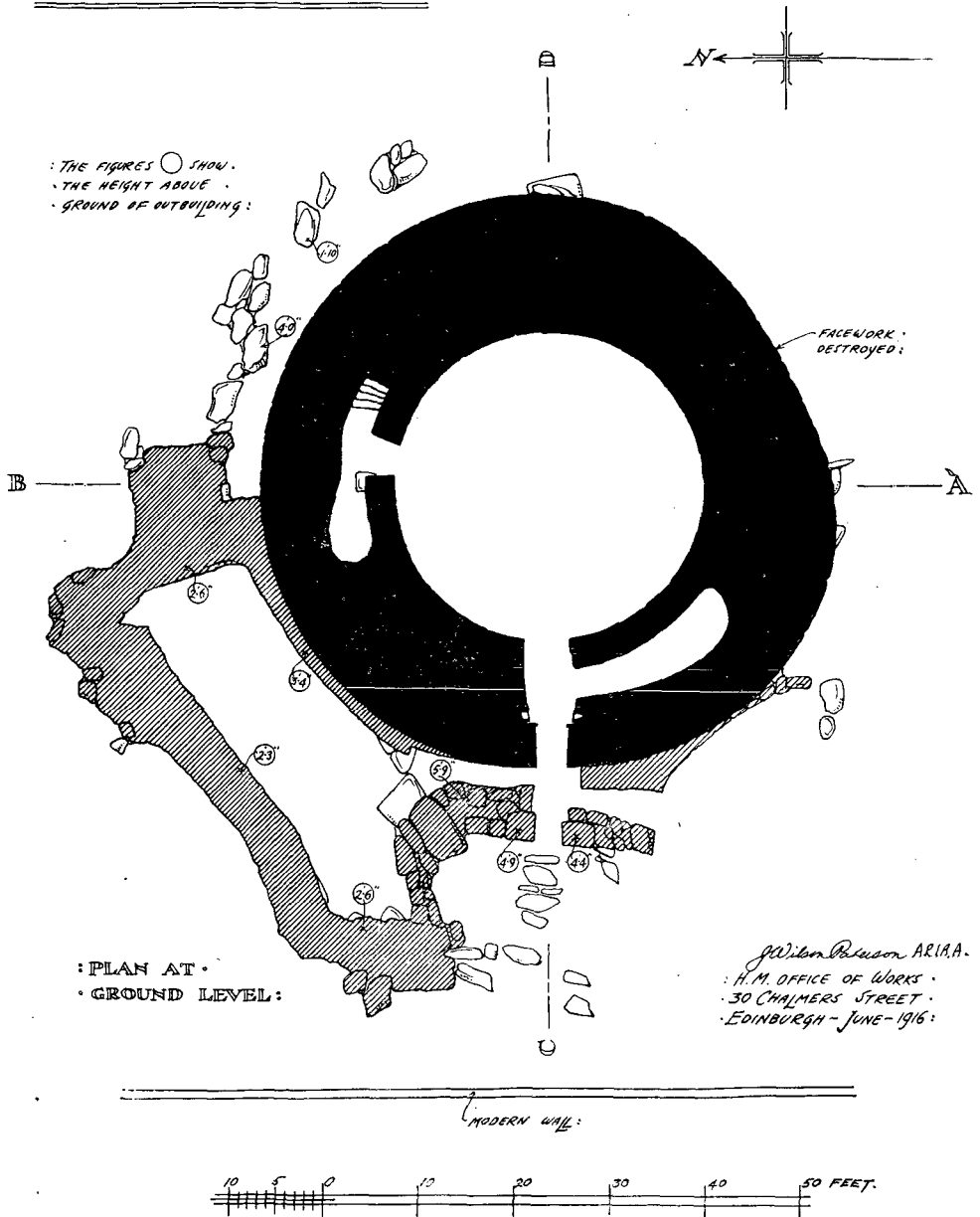
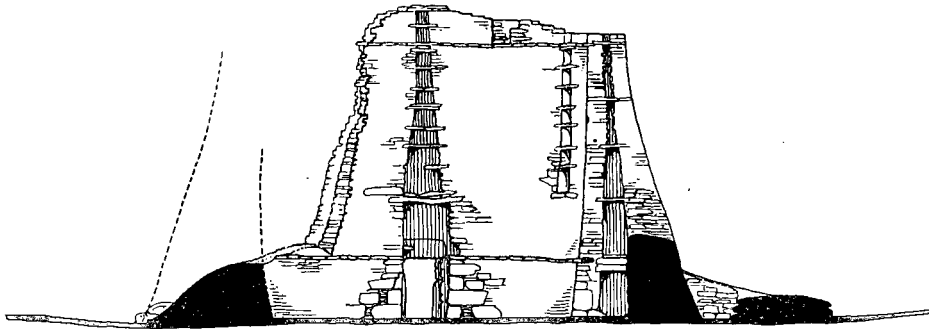


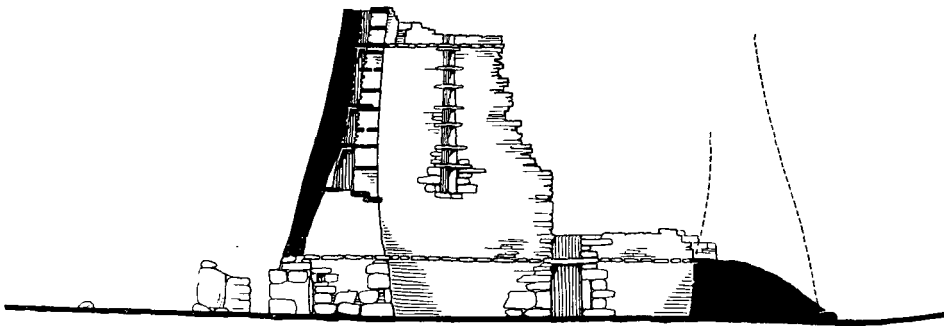
Fig. 3.

THE RUINS OF THE BROCH OF DUN TELVE, NEAR GLENELG. 245

: BROCH DUN TELVE ·
· GLENBEG, INVERNESS-SHIRE ·



· SECTION ON LINE A.B. ·



· SECTION ON LINE C.D. ·

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· H.M. OFFICE OF WORKS ·
· 30 CHALMERS STREET ·
· EDINBURGH - JUNE - 1916 ·

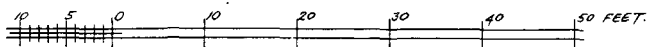


Fig. 4.

has never been satisfactorily explained. It is conceivable that where one occurs at a comparatively low level it may have supported the roof of an arcade surrounding the courtyard, an arrangement which characterises the galleried dwellings or "wags" in Caithness; but where, as in this case, a ledge is found at a height of nearly 30 feet, such an hypothesis is clearly untenable. The natural explanation would be that it was intended to support a roof, but if this was the case there must



Fig. 5. Broch of Dun Telve—Interior, showing Ledge.

have been some opening in the centre to allow light to penetrate to the courtyard below.

In the elevation of the structure, so far as remaining, are four galleries and a portion of a fifth, shown on the sectional plans—the lowest commencing at the level of the top of the doorway and of the lower ledge. Each is separated in the usual manner by single slabs forming the roof and floor of the respective galleries. The lowest gallery has a height of from 5 to 6 feet, a breadth of 2 feet 6 inches on floor and of little more than 2 feet at roof; the masonry on the

walls is neat and carefully finished. It extends towards the main entrance but is not carried over it, terminating against a wall of solid masonry some 2 feet 6 inches thick. At 15 feet back from this termination, at E on the plan at first gallery level (fig. 6), the gallery is purposely blocked with an arrangement of large slabs built into either wall, crossing it horizontally, and placed sufficiently close to prevent any passage between them. In this way there has been formed a cell or chamber on the first floor. No light opens into it from the interior of the broch, but in this respect it would be no less gloomy than the usual chambers in the lower part of such buildings. There are two entrances into it, both through the roof, or floor of the gallery above, at the spots marked F and F on the plan at second gallery level (fig. 6). These seem to be original. It will be observed that one is directly over the cross-slabs forming the end of the chamber, so that these could be used as steps by which to ascend or descend into it. The gallery at this level is carried over the top of the entrance passage in the small portion of the broch that remains. In this section of it the flooring slabs have been almost entirely removed, but below the level where they existed may be seen, as shown on the plan (fig. 6), the stepped flags which have formed the roof of the guard-chamber.

On the second floor the gallery continues without interruption from end to end through the existing portion of the wall. It has a height of about 5 feet 6 inches, a breadth at floor-level of little over 2 feet, and at roof of about 1 foot 6 inches. As is the case in the lower gallery, the masonry along the sides is smooth and neat, as shown in the view (fig. 7). The galleries above, two in number, with a portion of a third, are of a different character. They are so narrow, with a width of a little over 1 foot, that they could never have been intended for inhabitation nor even for passage, an inference that is strengthened by the rough condition of the masonry on the wall-faces.

In the remaining segment of the broch there are two vertical rows of window-like apertures in the inner face of the wall, one rising above the doorway and commencing at the level of the floor of the first gallery, and the other some 15 feet round to the north of it, commencing at the level of the floor of the gallery above (see sectional plans, fig. 4, and interior view, fig. 2). In the first of these the openings are wider than in the other, starting above the doorway with a width of nearly 5 feet, but above the level of the roof of the second gallery they diminish rapidly to 1 foot 3 inches at the top. The lowest opening is now co-extensive in height with the lowest gallery, but originally this space was probably divided by a cross-slab. The opening reaching from roof to floor of the second gallery has been divided into two, at

: BROCH ·
 · DUN TELVE ·
 · GLENBEG,
 · INVERNESS-SHIRE :

: PLAN AT SECOND ·
 · GALLERY LEVEL :

--- DOTTED LINES ·
 SHOW PLAN AT TOP :

F - SHOWS ACCESS TO ·
 GALLERY BELOW ·
 E - SHOWS STONE TIES :

: PLAN AT FIRST ·
 · GALLERY LEVEL :

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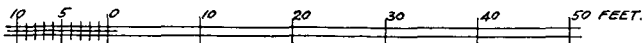


Fig. 6.

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a height of about 2 feet 6 inches, by a lintel, and similarly upwards the apertures have an average height of some 2 feet. In the second row the openings are smaller and more uniform in size, with breadth of about 1 foot 10 inches at the bottom of the lowest, diminishing to



Fig. 7. Dun Telve—view showing Galleries in section.

1 foot 5 inches at the uppermost, and a height similarly varying from 3 feet to somewhat less than 2 feet. In addition, there is evidence of another row of openings rising from the top of the entrance to the stairway, and of a fourth which commenced at the higher ledge half way between the two remaining rows. In the latter position there

are now the remains of a single aperture, but in Gordon's plan this is shown complete, with two additional openings rising above it.

The exact intention of the galleries in brochs and of the apertures which open into them has been the subject of some speculation. It has been assumed that the galleries were used for inhabitation, and that the apertures were for light, but such explanations do not quite explain all the peculiarities of the case. In Dun Telve only the two lower galleries were of sufficient width to admit of their occupation by human beings, and the careful manner in which the wall faces of both were finished smoothly seems to indicate some such intention; but so narrow were the upper galleries, and so rough was the building of their side walls, that it is quite evident the use of the latter as places of occupation, or even as passages, was not contemplated. The most plausible theory to account for the construction of the upper galleries is that which attributes them to the necessity for reducing the weight on the roofing slabs of the second gallery and minimising the thrust on the lower gallery walls. Thus the flags which divide them horizontally were the necessary bond ties, and served the purpose likewise of working platforms in the process of construction. Presuming that the lower apertures were intended to give light to the lower galleries, the continuance of the openings upwards in the wall was in like manner to relieve the lower lintel from a dangerous weight of material, which could only have been met otherwise by the use of heavier lintels than were easily obtainable with the means at the disposal of the builders.

To the outside of Dun Telve are considerable remains of outbuildings. Some 8 feet back from the entrance stand two upright blocks of stone (fig. 8) 4 feet 9 inches and 4 feet 4 inches high respectively, and 3 feet apart, with the remains of building in rear of them and apparently marking the entrance to an outer passage. From them stretch outwards, with a slight trend towards the north from the axial line of the entrance to the broch, a row of paving slabs. Proceeding inwards, passages diverge to left and right, the former leading into a large oblong enclosure, and the latter also apparently leading to an enclosure of which only a portion of the wall adjacent to the broch remains. To the eastward of the end of the larger enclosure a number of large stones, shown on the plan (fig. 3), appear to be the remains of a wall. Such enclosures about the entrance to a broch are not unusual, and when of the dimensions of the complete enclosure here, some 43 feet by 12 feet, they were probably intended for protection of the flocks and herds of the indwellers.

The relics found were not numerous but are of interest. There were three stone cups, all handled and formed from micaceous schist (fig. 9).

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No. 1 measures $2\frac{1}{8}$ inches in diameter over all, with a handle $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch in breadth and $1\frac{3}{16}$ inch in length; No. 2, $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches in diameter over all, with a short handle $1\frac{3}{8}$ inch in breadth and $1\frac{1}{8}$ inch in length; No. 3, $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches in length over all, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in breadth, with a handle, which



Fig. 8. Dun Telve—view towards the Entrance from outside.

is flat and stumpy, $1\frac{7}{8}$ inch in breadth and $1\frac{7}{8}$ inch in thickness. Other brochs which have yielded stone cups are Carn Liath, near Golspie, Cinn Trolla, at Kintradwell, and the broch at Stoer Head, all in Sutherlandshire. Vessels of stone have here been much in vogue, for in addition to the foregoing there were three segments of two round dishes

fashioned from micaceous schist. The larger, to which two fragments belonged, had been a comparatively shallow bowl without ornamentation of any sort, and having an estimated diameter of $10\frac{1}{4}$ inches; the smaller, represented by the other fragment, was probably also a part of a bowl-like vessel, and had a diameter of only $5\frac{1}{8}$ inches. On the outside, $\frac{3}{8}$ inch below the lip, occurs a convex moulding $\frac{5}{16}$ inch in breadth, the inter-

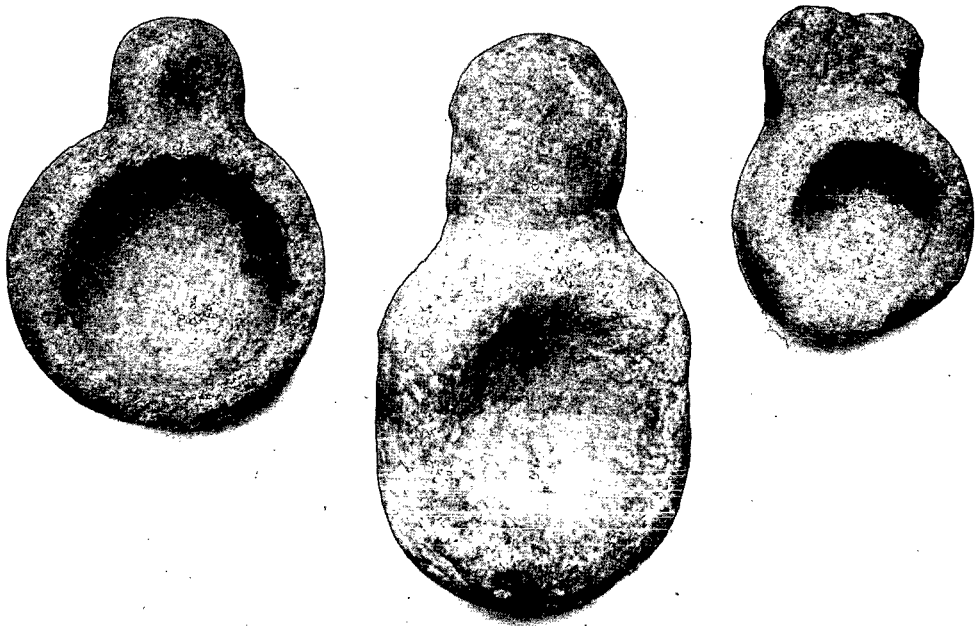


Fig. 9. Cups of Micaceous Schist from Dun Telve.

vening space being ornamented with a series of chevrons, a style of ornamentation not uncommon on stone cups.

Nine fragments of pottery were found, representing five different vessels: the base of a cooking pot with a diameter of $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches, parts of the side of the same vessel or of one similar, and two fragments of the mouths of what appear to have been globular pots with somewhat broad everted lips. One of these shows a single chevron incised on it immediately below the lip. All these pieces of pottery are hand-made, and

resemble the sherds found in kitchen middens in the Western Isles. The only other piece of pot is more problematical. It is a fragment (too small to indicate dimensions) of the side of a vessel, peculiar in that it is wheel-made. It has a distinct gloss or polish on its outer surface, which is

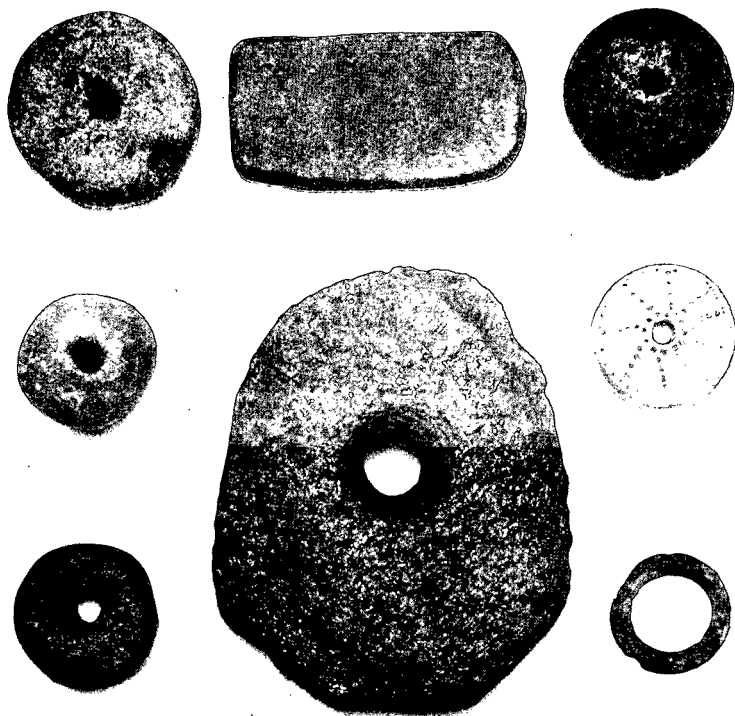


Fig. 10. Whorls, Sharpening-stone, etc., from Dun Telve.

of a brown tint, while the inside is dark grey. Adhering to this fragment are many particles of mica, and as some of these also appear to be in the body, it promotes a suggestion of manufacture in the neighbourhood where micaceous schists prevail.

I do not think this fragment is Roman: it may be early mediæval; it does not appear to be late.

There were found five whorls (fig. 10). One of them, of steatite, measuring $1\frac{7}{16}$ inch in diameter, is decorated similarly on both sides with a row of small punctulations round the edge, and nine radial lines of similar markings proceeding from the centre. Another, almost spherical in form, is made of sandstone, and measures $1\frac{5}{16}$ inch in diameter at right angles to the perforation, and $1\frac{1}{8}$ inch through it. One of schist is lenticular in shape, with an incised line round the circumference, and measures $1\frac{11}{16}$ inch in diameter; the remaining two are discoid and of schist, measuring $1\frac{7}{16}$ inch and $1\frac{3}{8}$ inch in diameter. Additional relics consisted of a perforated disc of micaceous schist $4\frac{5}{8}$ inches by $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter; an oblong sharpening-stone of clay-slate, bevelled on the edges, $2\frac{1}{16}$ inches in length by $1\frac{7}{16}$ inches in breadth; two pieces of iron slag; a small ring of bronze, plano-convex in section, $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter; an oblong flake of claystone which has been used as a sharpening-stone; a portion of a hone of micaceous schist, and two pounders showing slight abrasion at one end.

With the exception of the last four relics, a portion of the larger bowl-like vessel of schist, the largest of the stone cups, and four duplicate pieces of pottery, all the relics have been presented to the National Museum by Lady Scott, to whom the broch belongs.

Seven quern stones and two broken pieces were found, all belonging to circular rotary querns.

It remains to acknowledge my indebtedness to H.M. Office of Works for enabling me to describe the broch by rendering me every assistance in the shape of plans and photographs; to Mr C. R. Peers, the Inspector of Ancient Monuments, for his good offices; to Mr J. Wilson Paterson, Architect in charge of Scottish Monuments, who prepared the plans; and to Mr J. Gillespie, of the Office of Works, who took the excellent photographs used as illustrations.