VI.

AN EARLY ORKNEY CASTLE. By J. STORER CLOUSTON, F.S.A.Scot.

I.

Of the structure which forms the subject of this paper nothing but the bare foundations remain. As a rule only one or two courses of stones are left; and in many cases even these have vanished. Its interest lies in the singular character of the whole building. Even in Norway, surviving defensive structures of an early date are practically non-existent. How rare they are may be judged from the fact that Professor A. W. Brøgger of Oslo Museum, to whom I was recommended to apply for information, as the likeliest authority to have any to give, replied that there is no Norwegian material throwing any light on the subject. In the small Norse colony of Orkney one would scarcely expect what one fails to find in the old mother country; but here foreign influences were evidently at work, and, as will be seen later, there are actually the remains of several such fortalices in our islands. This, however, is the first to be excavated and described.

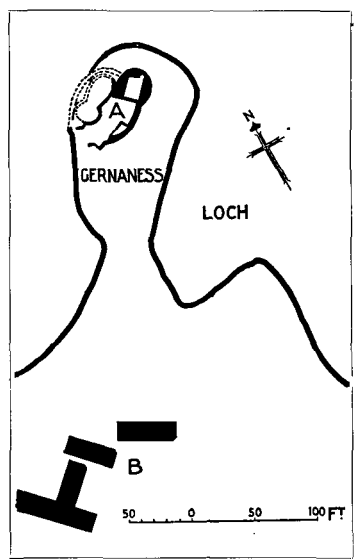

Fig. 1. Plan of the Site.

The two buildings within the courtyard of the castle—a drinking-hall and a bath-room—are, so far as I can discover, a unique find outside Iceland and Greenland. Certainly, if anything quite like these has been found in Norway, no reference to it is made in such recent works as *Norges Historie* and *Norges Bønder*, in the sections dealing with old dwelling-houses.

The position and immediate surroundings of the site are shown in fig. 1. The castle (A) stands at the end of a little peninsula called Gernaness (O.N. *Græna-nes* = green ness), in the loch of Stenness, just over 1 mile east of the tidal channel opening into the sea. Gernaness is roughly about 70 yards long and a little over 30 yards wide where the foundations are situated. It is quite flat, and only rises about a couple

of feet above average loch-level. The soil is particularly rich. Just above the inland end stands a group of buildings forming the double farm of the East and West Netherbigging of Clouston; the whole being sometimes styled in old deeds, "The House of Clouston." Some of these buildings, shown in the plan (B), are of great age.

What actually led to the excavations being made was the tradition of a chapel site at the end of the point. As these chapel traditions have always proved reliable, and as this was very specific—even to the extent of crediting the chapel with the distinction of having provided the stones for the dyke round the ness—digging was begun in the summer of 1924 in the hope of discovering its foundations. At first a stretch of east and west running wall seemed to indicate that we had found them, but this proved to be merely part of a small, much later structure (possibly a boat-house). Then at last we came upon foundations of a different and very unclerical kind, in the form of a clay-cemented wall, 8 feet thick, with one edge curved and the other straight.

Before long I was able to send a preliminary plan of the foundations to Mr G. P. H. Watson, F.S.A.Scot., who at once confirmed the view that already seemed the only possible conclusion. They were clearly those of a place of strength, of a date yet to be determined, but certainly not earlier than mediæval. In the course of last winter and this summer the excavations were completed, and there was disclosed a structure which may briefly be described as consisting, in the first place, of a primitive donjon or keep of unusual shape and dimensions; secondly, of a courtyard surrounded by a curving defensive wall; and thirdly, of at least two buildings and some stretches of rough paving within the court.

The difficulties of working out the plan were considerable. In fact, it has proved impossible to trace the foundations completely. The chief difficulty was the fact that, probably for many generations, the site had been used as a quarry whenever stones were required for building purposes. Not only had the walls been removed right down to the foundations, but the large stones on the outer edges of the foundations themselves had in many places been lifted too. Occasionally one could follow the line of the heart of a wall, if its direction were obvious; but when it came to fallen debris being mingled with this, the job was impossible.

Again, in one particular place (the area X, X in fig. 2), the Air Force, who commandeered this ness during the war in connection with an abortive seaplane station, had for some reason removed every vestige of the old foundations. A third difficulty was the outer dyke round the ness, since, for part of the way, it stands right on top of

the northern curtain-wall. And a final difficulty was the loch, which in winter, and even during spring tides in summer, rose through the excavations and flooded us out of certain areas. One particular December day, when we could work only on one or two islets in the flood, and a full gale was blowing the spin drift from the loch over us in showers, will not readily be forgotten.

Against these difficulties must be set one remarkable bit of luck. Once the foundations had revealed themselves as a place of strength, it was natural to think of other early Orkney castles on record in the saga. One such structure is mentioned as standing at Cairston, in Stromness parish,[1] and the recollection of a stretch of thick wall noticed some years before at the Bu of Cairston suggested a second visit. This disclosed the surprising fact that there still stand considerable remains of a clay-cemented keep-and-courtyard castle. They will be referred to again; meanwhile it is only necessary to say that they naturally helped materially to trace out the plan of the castle at Clouston.

II.

Fig. 2 shows the plan of the whole structure, so far as it has been possible to trace it with certainty. Wherever both edges were found, the wall is blocked in black throughout. Where edges are missing, but the heart of the wall is there and its course known, edges are shown by broken lines and the heart blocked black with a wavy border. Where the line can merely be inferred, only the probable edges are indicated.

I may say here that throughout almost the entire excavations I have had the assistance of Mr Thomas Brass, an old and experienced mason, and at every turn I relied on his expert knowledge of Orkney masonry. We lifted and replaced stone after stone at various points, to test the presence of building clay, the bonding at junctions, and the question of whether we were dealing with true foundations or debris which resembled foundations; and as Mr Brass was an exacting critic,

[1] Since a guess that Knarston (near Scapa), not Cairston, should be the true reading, has found its way into print in works of some authority, it is perhaps as well to record the facts. The guess was based on the saga anecdote that when Earl Harald and his men left their ships and took refuge in the castle, one man was so frightened that he ran all the way to Kirkwall; the point being that Cairston is too far from Kirkwall. But, seriously considered, it is quite incredible that a fighting-man of that—or any other—age should be so panic-stricken before he was even attacked. A second battle did take place near Knarston two years later, in which the same Earl Harald was surprised in the night and put to flight with considerable slaughter, and the anecdote evidently really refers to this encounter. The saga reading *Kjarreksstaðir* is quite explicit and is repeated later. Knarston was well known to the saga writer, being mentioned several times, so that such a mistake as the guess implies would be most improbable on general grounds.

nothing was passed without a severe examination. The site was then surveyed by Mr T. H. Clouston, F.S.A., by the method of stringing it into 10-foot squares.

Beginning with the keep (K), the foundations of the south-east wall are intact for most of its length, and show the style of masonry we found throughout all the thicker walls. The outside stones are large flat blocks, the inner edge stones not so large, and the interior a mixture of various shapes and sizes; the whole being laid in building clay. This wall has a maximum thickness of 8 feet.

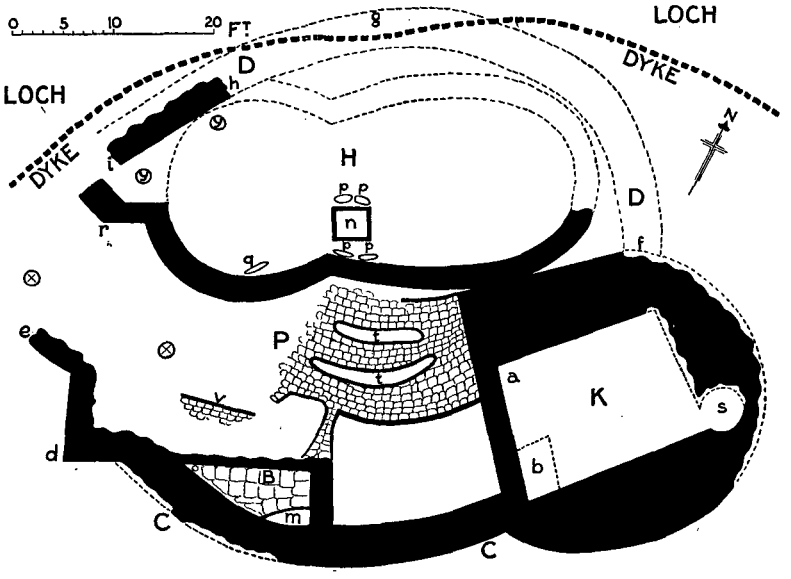

Fig. 2. Plan of Castle on Gernaness, Clouston, Orkney.

The north-east wall has lost all the edge stones on both sides, but the core debris lies in a rough curve on its outer side.[1] A few stones still in position, and forming part of a circle, evidently mark the base of a narrow circular stair (S) approximately 4 feet, or a few inches over, in diameter. It was placed not exactly in the corner, but so as to bring the door into the end wall. One can thus tell the position of the east corner within a few inches. In the plan this north-east wall has been assumed to reach a maximum thickness of 8 feet also. This is certainly very nearly right, but of course is only an approximation.

[1] Running through this debris we found what seemed to be a paved slip-way in connection with the later shed or boat-house. The large edge stones of the keep wall had been used to build these two structures.

Part of the north-west wall has been quite destroyed, but at several places both edges were found, and the thickness could be told exactly. It is 8 feet thick at one end and 6 feet 3 inches at the other, and it has no curve. The south-west wall is also quite straight, and is only 2 feet 4 inches thick. The door must have been placed at *a*, opposite the paving outside.

Inside, the keep is 13 feet wide, and as nearly as possible 19 feet long on the south-east side and 17 feet on the north-west. The earth and clay floor is intact in the middle, but has been cut into round the sides in tracing the walls. In the south corner is a large hearth-stone (*b*), once exposed to great heat, and now much broken, but approximately 5 feet by 3 feet 6 inches originally. Below it are layers of clay and stone, and the whole fireplace thus formed is built into the south-west wall—*i.e.* the two have been built up together to the level of the hearth-stone.

The curious line of the curving south curtain-wall (C, C), with its sharp salient at *d*, is shown on the plan, and at *e* it ends abruptly. So far as both edges can be traced, it is 4 feet thick, and in every respect like the south-east wall of the keep, except that in some places we could find no signs of building clay. The outer stones are equally large (one that became displaced required two men to roll it over). For the latter part of its course no inner edge can be found, and its thickness cannot be estimated.

The junction of the north curtain-wall (D, D) can be located at *f*, from the presence of a small strip of roughly coursed stones beyond, but no edges can be found. For the first part of its course, from *f* to the dyke round the ness, it passes through a devastated area, every large stone worth removing having been lifted. At *g*, under the beach outside the dyke, traces of it were found. Finally, after it emerges again from under the dyke, its inner edge from *h* to *i* is plain, but we dared not dig further out for fear of bringing the dyke down. At *i* it seemed to vanish, but owing to the inrush of water the conditions were very difficult there. Its thickness can nowhere be told, but presumably it was 4 feet, like the south wall.

Coming now to the two buildings within the courtyard, B is the bathroom, the *baðstofa* of the sagas. It is just over 12 feet long by 5 feet wide at the widest end. The floor is paved with large flat stones, and slopes down from the corner *o*. At *o* were found several burnt stones, one of the tests of an Icelandic *baðstofa*, and at *m* is a long hole with a clean curved edge, evidently to run the water off into the soil. When one adds to these features the impossibility of there being any other use for such a small, odd-shaped, paved chamber, the nature

of this apartment is quite obvious. It is bounded on the east by a wall 2 feet 4 inches thick bonded into the curtain-wall. The whole inner edge of the north wall is extant, but the outer edge is gone and its thickness cannot be told.

H is the hall or *skali*, lying roughly east and west. The whole of one side, nearly half of one end, and part of the other are clearly traceable as the foundations of a wall, varying from 2 feet 6 inches to a little over 2 feet thick, and composed of large stones, flat and pretty thick, which follows a series of peculiar curves. What remains of the west end is part of a nearly true circle having a radius of 11 feet. The side wall then swings into a waist and out again, but though the rest of the side and the other end are curved, the curve is much flatter and nothing like circular. It may be added that though some stones have slipped a little out of position (there is only one course left, by the way), the wall is perfectly distinct, and there is no question about this being its actual line. As it passes the keep, it and the north-west wall of the keep overlap several inches, showing that the *skali* wall must have had a slight scarcement. Its varying thickness seems to indicate a 2-foot wall above, with a scarcement sometimes as much as 6 inches and sometimes less.

The rest of the east end and most of the other side wall have, like everything else in this area, been completely removed. But towards the west end a new and very curious state of things is met with. The area marked Y, Y is quite different from the rest of the ness. Instead of the ordinary stony subsoil, our spades suddenly began to go deep into a peaty substance which my fellow-diggers declared to resemble nothing so much as the old-fashioned heathery bedding used for animals, mixed with dung, and at one place a large number of shells of limpets and periwinkles mingled with it; it goes far down below loch-level, and was there a long time before the castle was built. It looks as if we had here the refuse pit of some much earlier prehistoric structure; and, if so, it is possible that the curtain-wall (C, C) owes its curved form to its having been founded on an older wall. I am indebted to Mr J. Graham Callander for the opinion that the supposititious structure can scarcely have been a broch, but might quite well have been such a prehistoric fort as is depicted in Anderson's *Scotland in Pagan Times*, p. 261, standing on a very similar site in the loch of Hogsetter in Shetland. This suggestion, however, must merely be taken as indicating a possibility. The foundations of the curtain-wall along *h*, *i* are laid deep down through the peaty substance, so deep that owing to the inrush of water it was impossible to get to their bottom.

It is just when it comes to this area that the west end of the

skali stops abruptly and the curious elbow *r* branches out towards the curtain-wall. With the aid of damming and bailing out the water we searched this area thoroughly, but nothing else could be found. It will be seen from the plan that if the end of the *skali* were to continue to swing round on its 11-foot radius, the *inside* would just touch the curtain-wall. The probable explanation of all this would seem to be that the builders only discovered the presence of the soft area after most of the foundations of H had been laid, and thereupon altered their methods till they got past this obstacle. Probably the rounded end was completed by a wall of wood supported on a few piles.

It is impossible to reconstruct the hall in its entirety. In the plan I have assumed that the missing walls resembled the surviving and followed the broken lines shown; since the hall would be an exceedingly odd-shaped apartment otherwise. On the other hand, this leaves a curious gap between it and the outer wall (D, D) (whose general direction is certain from the edge *h*, *i*). One has, in fact, a choice of two odd reconstructions, and the one indicated in the plan must merely be taken as the solution which suggests itself to me personally as the more probable.

The inside length can be told accurately as just over 40 feet. The extreme inside width at the west end was as nearly as possible 17 feet, if the existing curve were continued, and approximately 16 feet at the other end on the same assumption. The floor of hard earth (just like the keep) is still intact over parts of the west end. Wherever we broke through this floor we found a pavement of large flat stones a little above normal loch-level. The floor was thus first roughly paved, and then covered with a thick layer of earth and clay.

A most interesting feature is the large hearth built into the south side wall, just as the other hearth was built into the keep. It consists of a rectangular hearth-stone (*n*) 4 feet by 3 feet 3 inches (mischievously broken after we had found it), red with fire, and round it a ring of stones set on edge, of which four (*p*, *p*) are still in position, with the space between packed hard with earth. At *q* is another stone on edge, evidently part of a second fireplace. The hearth-stone is gone, but burnt earth is thick at this spot. No doubt there was a third fire on the other side of *n*. In fact, the area of strongly burnt earth extended well to the east of it, indicating that the line of three hearths stood pretty close to one another, all built into the south wall.

One or two interesting questions are raised by this *skali*. Why was it constructed with such a remarkable curved outline? An answer is suggested by a study of the various temple sites discovered in Iceland, where alone can be found buildings resembling this singular hall on

Gernaness.[1] Briefly, these heathen temples were long-shaped structures, divided into two unequal parts by a thick cross wall. The longer part was, in effect, a kind of *skali*, with fires in the middle and benches along the walls, where feasts were held on holy days. The shorter, and more sacred, part contained the images of the Gods and the altar, and it had in most instances a *semicircular end*, with a dome roof, exactly resembling a Norman apse. There was no door in the cross wall, and this sanctuary had a separate outer entrance. As a rule the longer room was rectangular, but in a few cases it also shows a curved outline.

These temples varied greatly in size and considerably in outline and proportion, and had no system of orientation; but they all had the cross wall, and none had hearths in the rounded sacred end. Hence the absence of this cross wall and the position of the hearth at the neck where it should be, together with the other fireplace inside the circular end, and the presence everywhere of strongly burnt earth and animal bones (a feature almost entirely lacking in temple sites, where traces of fire seem singularly slight), show definitely that this structure cannot have been a temple latterly. Nor is it possible to reconcile the stronghold as a whole with any type of building existing before the introduction of Christianity into Orkney in A.D. 995.

But the close general resemblance of the hall to some of these temples, and the extreme difficulty of explaining its outline otherwise, seem to me to raise a very strong presumption that we have here the shell of a temple converted into a drinking *skali*. Since the hearths were built into the walls, the walls must have been pulled down at these points and built up again, the cross wall has been completely removed, and the elbow *r* probably added; but apart from the presence of the fireplaces and the elbow, and the absence of the cross wall, the structure is, to all appearances, an ancient heathen temple.[2]

[1] The authorities here are the descriptions of temple sites, with plans, by Sigurd Vigfusson, Brynjulf Jonsson, and Jon Jonsson in various numbers of the Icelandic *Arbok* (*hins. Isl. Forn.*) from 1882 to 1896; and a short summary of their features by Professor A. Bugge in *Norges Historie*, I. i. p. 208.

[2] Some support for the view that the *skali* was originally a *hof* or heathen temple is to be found in the place-names in Clouston. In 1666 a perambulation of the township took place, and the record of this (preserved in the Kirkwall Record Room) gives a list of the "sheds" or fields with their old names. At one place, within a couple of hundred yards or so of Gernaness, there were three close together, called "the Home," "Tursland," and "Lundago." On referring these names to Mr Marwick, he expressed the opinion that the juxtaposition of Tursland (*Thorsland*) and Lundago (apparently from *Lundar*, the genitive of *Lundr*, a grove, used with special reference to the sacred groves at temple sites) is decidedly suggestive. Home might well be from *Hof-vin*, temple-pasture, but an alternative derivation is possible here. It is not easy, however, to find alternatives for the other two, and their presence close together seems significant.

Again, what were the arrangements within the hall? Once more one can but grope in the dark—or perhaps this time one may venture to say in the firelight, for it is at least certain that where the two known fires were, there can have been neither seats nor doors. Also one may fairly point out that the regular rule in the old Norse halls was a door in the west end with a porch before it, and here at the west end there was apparently a chamber (between *h i* and *r*) that might well have been a porch. Further, if one supposes a door into the circular end immediately to the north of the elbow *r*, it would be exactly in the centre line of the hall. Again, it would be highly convenient to have another door opening under cover from the keep, and actually keep and *skali* do overlap along several feet. A passage through the double wall is at least suggested by this. And, moreover, it would account for this end of the north-west wall of the keep being made so much thicker than the other, and the two buildings being thus squeezed together.

As to seating arrangements, one has only this practical consideration to go upon—that the best way, in order to get in as many people, and yet leave as much space as possible, and also to give as many guests as possible a wall at their backs, would be to have one bench against the wall, following the curves, with a series of narrow trestle tables in front, and another row of benches on the other side of them. If one assumes the hall to be seated thus along the ends and north side, between the supposititious doors, and allows 1 foot 6 inches per man, thirty-eight could sit on the outer bench and thirty-two on the inner, seventy in all if the *skali* were packed.

The early arrangement in these halls consisted of fires down the middle and one row of benches along each wall. But in this case the fires against the side wall prove that the *skali* was not of the early type. Towards the end of the eleventh century, King Olaf Kyrre altered the *skali* arrangements in Norway, and in the middle of the thirteenth century we certainly find guests sitting in two rows at a royal feast.[1] So that it seems a fair assumption to suppose this was the arrangement here, rather than that the floor space was gratuitously wasted and the hall only half filled.

The only other recognisable feature within the courtyard is a wide stretch of paving (P) down the centre—the *stett* of Icelandic homesteads; a fairly well-known feature. There is a branch leading towards the

[1] The alterations made by King Olaf are briefly and somewhat vaguely described in chap. ii. of his saga in *Heimskringla*. They included the removal of the fires from the middle of the floor, and the introduction of what is termed an *ofn*, or stove of stone. The Norwegian halls being of wood, the building of the fire against the wall was of course impossible, unless it were encased in such a stone *ofn*. The description of the royal feast in 1247 is given in *Hakon's Saga*, chap. ccliv.

bathroom, and apparently a separate stretch marked *v*, but the work of the quarriers and Air Force has made it impossible to define the boundaries of these pavements, except at the east end of the courtyard and the edge at *v*. They consist throughout of two or three layers of flattish stones. A narrow strip of it would be indistinguishable from the foundations of an ordinary wall.

A curious feature is the pair of long curving openings in the pavement (*t*, *t*). They have definitely formed sides and ends, and there was clay in them when they were found. I can think of no other probable purpose for them than drinking-troughs for cattle. Such strongholds as this must have been intended as refuges for animals as well as men in time of invasion or raid. Moreover, there is an actual account in *Hakon's Saga* of the garrison driving a herd of cattle into the *utkastali* (outer castle or courtyard) of the castle of Wyre in Orkney, in the year 1230, preparatory to standing a siege.

It is quite possible that some other building may have stood in the west end of the courtyard, but if so, it can only have been very small; and we can now reconstruct the whole castle, apart from this possible small outbuilding, as consisting of a large hall and a bathroom in the court, a kitchen in the base of the keep (the large, strongly fired hearth seems to make this certain), and some rooms above. Long vanished though these rooms are, there is one interesting clue to the number of floors. An old Stenness tradition relates that there once stood a house at Netherbigging so high that one could see the sea over the ridge of land at the back. Actually, if the keep were in the neighbourhood of 40 feet high, one could see from the battlements the tidal outlet of the loch (called the "Bush") nearly to the sea itself, and certainly one could see a ship at sea. We may thus take it that the tower actually was of that height, and therefore contained three floors above the kitchen, two probably used as sleeping-chambers and one for stores.[1]

This stronghold, as can be seen from fig. 1, was well placed defensively at the end of the ness, with the landward side strengthened by the keep and salient. The disadvantage of the site was its very slight elevation above the water-level of the loch. Measurements taken in July, when the loch was pretty low, made the floor of the *skali* 1 foot 5 inches above loch-level, the hearth of the *skali* 1 foot 8 inches, and the floor of the keep 1 foot 10 inches. So far as we could calculate the

[1] It is an interesting fact that this keep, partly rounded and partly rectangular in form, bears a marked resemblance to the tower of the old Cross Kirk of Stenness depicted in Low's *Tour* (1774), p. xxiii, and described in the description of the drawing as a steeple in the form of a semicircle. It was actually straight-sided where it was attached to the kirk and the rest of it was round. These two singular towers stood in adjoining townships—a striking coincidence. The church tower has long vanished.

highest loch-level in a quite abnormal flood the winter before, the keep floor was only 4½ inches above this, which would imply that the *skali* floor was actually flooded. Presumably the loch-level was somewhat lower in past centuries (this is supported by local tradition, and also by the depth of the refuse pit). At the same time, it must always have been a damp situation in winter, and it is not unlikely that this fact may have had something to do with the ultimate abandonment of the site.

III.

In order to arrive at any conclusion as to the date of this fortalice, it is necessary to glance for a moment at the castle of Cairston. It is to be hoped that before very long this most interesting relic may be properly examined and described. Meanwhile, fig. 3 shows all that is necessary for the present purpose. The castle consisted of a courtyard (C), 70 feet square outside, the curtain-wall of which is still standing for part of its height along considerable stretches. In one corner was a rectangular keep (K), 19 feet 6 inches by 12 feet 8 inches inside, the outer walls being simply the curtain-walls produced, and, like them, 4 feet thick. The longer inner wall is 8 feet thick, and the shorter 2 feet 6 inches. In the outer corner a circular angle tower projects, 5 feet 9 inches in diameter inside, with walls just over 2 feet thick, evidently to carry a stair. All these walls are clay cemented and bonded together, and from this latter fact and the ancient and consistent appearance of the masonry, it is certain that the whole structure was erected at the same time and has never been added to.[1]

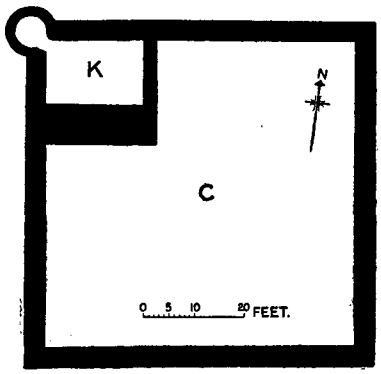

Fig. 3.—Plan of Castle of Cairston, Orkney.

No attempt has yet been made to look for buildings within the court, but taking it as it stands, the essential resemblance to the castle at Clouston is apparent. The main difference is that at Clouston the two outer walls of the keep have been made much thicker and swung round the narrower stair; thus making the whole keep into an angle tower. But it is evident that these two primitive, clay-cemented strongholds, with so many details practically identical, must belong to the same general period. As it is recorded in the nearly contemporary *Orkneyinga*

[1] On a final visit of inspection I was accompanied by Mr T. Brass, and the structure was pretty carefully examined.

Saga that Cairston Castle was attacked on 29th September 1152, it appears evident, on the face of it, that both castles must belong to a period not later than the middle of the twelfth century.

In the days when a fortalice attributed to William the Conqueror or Malcolm Canmore was considered comparatively juvenile, nobody would have questioned this apparently obvious conclusion. Since then, however, the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction, and archæologists have grown exceedingly canny. It seems not unlikely—judging from the ebb and flow of opinion to be observed over periods of time in other fields—that the pendulum has swung too far. But it is at any rate an excellent thing that all claims to antiquity should be thoroughly examined. It is necessary then to go, as briefly as possible, into the whole evidence; the crucial point at issue being—Are the existing ruins at Cairston the remains of the castle known to be there in 1152, or was the old stronghold completely demolished and replaced by a later one?

In the first place, it is perhaps as well to make it clear that whatever the 1152 stronghold was like, it was not a timber fort. Orkney has been treeless since the ninth century, and both here and in Iceland the proof is overwhelming that stone (or in Iceland stone and turf) was the only building material used, save in exceptional cases, early in the settlement of Iceland, where timber was imported. In Iceland, innumerable early house and temple sites prove it. In Orkney, good building stone is plentiful, and the many prehistoric structures provided it already quarried. All the old churches and chapels were of stone, and also the only two dwelling-houses in the *Orkneyinga Saga* where the material is specified.[1]

With regard to early defensive structures erected by the Norse Vikings in the lands they conquered and settled in, the evidence which Professor Alexander Bugge has collected in his *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse paa Nordbœrnes* (pp. 230–46) demonstrates one of the most remarkable qualities of the race—their plasticity—the genius they possessed both for adapting themselves to new conditions and for picking up hints from every new thing they saw. They grasped the fact at once that an invading force requires a secure base, they noted the fortifications already in places existing on the continent of Europe, and in a short time they were introducing earth, stone, and timber defensive works wherever they settled in Ireland and England. But in Norway, Bugge specially notes

[1] Old Icelandic house sites in district after district are described in the various volumes of the *Arbok hins Islenzka Fornleifafelags.* The two houses referred to in the *Orkneyinga Saga* are mentioned in chaps. cv. and cxiii. One was in Sanday, the other in Caithness, and in both cases there was a "secret door" filled with loosely piled stones. Obviously there would be little secret about such doors if the rest of the walls were made of any different material.

that when King Olaf, in 1016, erected the "borg" of Sarpsborg of "stones, turf, and timber," he "has had foreign models in his eye."

This seems the more certain when one turns to Iceland, where the Norsemen settled in an empty land. In Iceland such defensive works appear to have outnumbered the snakes by one, since only a single specimen of a stronghold is known, and that one is mostly the creation of nature.[1] It must be added that there are also one or two saga references to a *virki* or work; this word, together with *vigi* and *borg*, being used to signify all kinds of primitive earthworks or other early defensive structures—including the Pictish brochs. In Iceland no traces are left, however, of any of these save the one I have mentioned.

In the Faroes there is one saga reference to an "earthwork" which the chieftain Ossur Hafgrimson threw up round his house at the end of the tenth century.[2] In Norway, in very early days, such primitive "works" seem to have been not uncommon as refuges for the people of a district.[3] But throughout saga-time generally the absence of anything like castles is as conspicuous as in Iceland. The only instances recorded of what can really be called "castles" were two or three built by the kings for the protection of certain towns.

The first of these, however, is significant. In the year 1100 King Magnus Barefoot had built a stronghold of "turf and wood" on the Isle of Kvaldinsey, in the Vener Lake, as a defence against the Swedes, and this fort was termed a "borg." But in, or soon after, the year 1116 his son, King Sigurd, for the defence of the town of Konghelle, "built there a great castle and dug a great ditch round it; it was made of turf and stone; he built houses in the castle and erected a church there."[4] Here we have stone used as the material; and the term applied to the structure in the saga was *kastali*, a new word manufactured out of the Latin *castellum* to describe a new thing. Twice again this castle is referred to, and each time as a *kastali*. It included, as we can see, a very large courtyard, and it was erected a few years after King Sigurd returned from his crusade through the Mediterranean to the Holy Land. The foreign inspiration is thus manifest. It may be noted, furthermore, that in a long list of the edifices built by King Hakon Hakonson in the thirteenth century, given at the end of his saga, three *kastala* are included, and twice at least the term referred specifically to a tower or

[1] This is the *Borgarvirki* described in *Arbok Isl. Forn.* for 1899. It consists of a large flat depression in the top of an outcrop of basalt rocks, with the only entrance closed by a wall—the sole artificial part of the fort.

[2] *Færeyinga Saga*, chaps. xxii. and xxiv.

[3] *Norges Bønder*, p. 45.

[4] Both these references are from *Heimskringla*; Magnus Barefoot's saga, chap. xii., and the saga of his sons, chap. xix.

keep. Hence it would seem that a fortalice including a donjon or keep was implied by the word.

One thing at least is certain from these various references, taken together with the fact that stone castles only appeared in any part of Western Europe in the eleventh century, and were not introduced into England till towards the end of it. No Orkney castle could possibly be earlier than the twelfth century; nor would it be reasonably likely to find one before 1116. Also, the whole conception of such a structure was foreign and imported.

But somewhere about the year 1120 Earl Hakon of Orkney also made a journey to Jerusalem as a penance for the murder of St Magnus, and being an exceedingly able penitent, it may be assumed that he was no less observant than King Sigurd. He had won, moreover, his kinsman's share of the isles by force; by force alone it was likely to be retained, and it is a fact that within the next few decades the saga mentions three castles in Orkney, besides one at Thurso, the word *kastali* being used each time.

The earliest recorded was the castle on the little isle of Damsay, already built by 1136. A large *skali* is also mentioned there; exactly the same combination as at Clouston. There are said to be no visible traces of this structure, but I have not been there yet to see. Then we have Cairston, already there in 1152. And finally we have what is the test case, the castle on the isle of Wyre. The *Orkneyinga Saga*, an accurate record for the events of this period, states that the chieftain Kolbein Hruga built there a "good stone castle; that was a safe stronghold." Kolbein was a Norwegian who married an Orkney heiress and settled on her estates. He was certainly still in Norway in 1142,[1] and was certainly well established in Orkney by 1155;[2] while his son Bjarne became bishop in 1188.[3] The castle may thus be safely dated as round about 1150–70, probably nearer 1150.

Again, in *Hakon's Saga*, another most reliable saga, written in 1264, there is an account of the murder of Earl Jon of Orkney by Hanef, the royal sysselman, in 1230. Hanef and his friends thereupon retired to the castle of Wyre, "which Kolbein Hruga had built," gathered stores and a herd of cattle (kept in the *utkastali*), and stood a siege by the earl's friends; and so strong was the castle that all efforts to take it were fruitless.

The ruins of this castle still exist, and are still known as "Cubbie Roo's" (Kolbein Hruga's) castle; so that a better pedigreed castle it

[1] *Heimskringla*, saga of Inge and his brothers, chap. xiii.
[2] *Orkneyinga Saga*, chap. cvii. (Rolls ed.).
[3] *Dip. Norv. Tillaeg til syttende samling*, p. 297.

would be hard to find. We know, moreover, from contemporary records that it was a place of real strength, built of stone, and including a courtyard. Notes given me this summer, through the kindness of Mr James Craigie, show that the one exposed wall of the keep is approximately 6 feet thick and 28 feet long outside, and that it is built with hard run lime. (Mr Craigie brought me one or two fragments to examine.) Grass-covered debris indicate the courtyard, and there are traces of external earthworks in addition.

Besides these three castles mentioned in the sagas I have now come across two more. One at Skaill in Westness in Rousay (shown me by Mr John Logie), at the old seat of Sigurd of Westness, Kolbein's contemporary and kinsman, would be well worth excavating. Enough can be seen at present to show the presence of a square, lime-cemented keep of much the same dimensions as the keep on Wyre, together with the grass-covered foundations of the courtyard wall, traceable for 37 feet beyond the keep and flush with its face, and then turning back at right angles—exactly the same arrangement as at Cairston.[1] The other castle is the one described in this paper.

I have said that Wyre is the test case. We know for certain (from the 1136 Damsay castle) that there was a type of stronghold in Orkney known as a *kastali* before it was built. The Bu of Cairston was old "bordland," *i.e.* the private property of the earls, and therefore any castle there was erected by one of them. If, then, the existing ruin be later than Wyre, we have a primitive, relatively weakly designed, clay-cemented stronghold, erected by an earl, to replace an older fortalice, *after* a private landowner had built the well-designed, powerful, lime-cemented castle in Wyre. That is, plainly, the only alternative to accepting the ruins as those of the 1152 *kastali*; and some extraordinarily strong reason would have to be adduced for advancing such a view. Otherwise the primitive, clay-built castle of Cairston must be put down as anterior to Wyre, and of the Damsay type, on the ground of construction, even apart from the 1152 reference. The castle of Clouston seems somewhat better designed defensively than Cairston, and therefore is perhaps a little later, but its similar clay binding, and the practical identity of some of the details, such as the two inside walls of the keep (*i.e.* facing the courtyard), one quite thin, the other very thick, the internal dimensions of the keep, and the thickness of the curtain-walls, show that there certainly cannot be much difference in their dates.

[1] I am indebted to Mr Hugh Marwick, F.S.A.Scot., for fuller notes of this structure than I made myself when I saw it some years ago.

It may be added that their design is in every respect consistent with those of the eleventh- and twelfth-century continental and English castles, illustrated and described by Viollet le Duc and Clark. Both keeps belong essentially to the early rectangular type, as is shown by their interior shape; though two of the outer sides at Clouston are rounded. It is worth noting that the resultant outline, partly curved and partly rectangular, is almost exactly that of the very early towers in the wall of the Visigoth stronghold at Carcassonne, illustrated in Viollet le Duc's *Dictionnaire*; and also of the twelfth-century keep of Château Gaillard, built by Richard Cœur de Lion. Both at Cairston and Westness the courtyards are rectangular, while the court at Clouston is curved in outline, and seems to have been roughly pear-shaped when it was intact. The possibility of the curtain-walls having been founded (partly at least) on those of a prehistoric circular-shaped fort has already been mentioned, but since early courtyards had various forms, it is not necessary to look beyond the mere preference of the builders.

Owing to the constant disturbance of the ground to get stone, no objects of any value for dating purposes were found at Gernaness during the recent excavations. Everything we collected, including a few hammer-stones, fragments of pottery and pieces of stag's horn, and many bones of domestic animals, were sent to the National Museum of Antiquities, and Mr Graham Callander was able to pronounce definitely that nothing could be identified with any particular period. But at one time a mound of earth covered the site, and in the year 1879, when this was being carted away and spread over the fields of the farm, four gold rings, two twisted and two plain, undoubtedly brought from the castle, were found in one of the fields. These are now in the National Museum, and are rings of the Viking age, usually associated with a period earlier than the twelfth century. But actually the only other twisted ring in the Museum closely resembling these was found in Bute, along with pennies of David I. of Scotland, and Henry I. and Stephen of England, whose reigns all fell between 1100 and 1153; a very singular piece of corroborative evidence for the date of the castle.[1]

To this may be added the evidence of the large *skali* characteristic of the Viking period (though in this case late in that period, as we have seen), made the weightier by the known combination of *kastali* and *skali* at Damsay. And there is the evidence also of the old houses (B in fig. 1), which replaced the castle as the "head house" or

[1] These five rings are all described by Dr Joseph Anderson in *Scotland in Pagan Times*, pp. 106–8.

manor-place of the property, and which probably date from the fifteenth century.[1] Even supposing they were the immediate successors of the castle, which is by no means certain, the period of its demolition which they indicate puts the probable period of its erection very far back indeed.

In view of this agreement of all the evidence from every side, there can scarcely, I think, be reasonable room for doubt that the structure may safely be dated as between 1120 and 1150.

Early though this may seem for an Orkney castle, looking to the later dates which are attributed to the earliest Scottish castles, there are certain general historical facts to be remembered with regard to Orkney at this period. In the recent great *Norges Historie*, Professor A. Bugge says: "The eleven hundreds were a great epoch in the Orkneymen's saga. It was St Magnus', Earl Rognvald's, and Bjarne Kolbein's son's time; a time of architecture and sculpture, of literature and culture." Nor is this an exaggerated picture. Taking architecture alone, St Magnus' Cathedral was begun in 1137, the round church of Orphir (one of only six known in Great Britain) was certainly built before 1136, and St Peter's, Birsay, and Egilsay Kirk are also held to be somewhat earlier than St Magnus'. And this implies that good masons and imported building traditions were in the islands then. As for castles, we have reviewed the evidence of their presence. In fact, at that particular epoch the civilisation of this remote archipelago had reached, in certain things at least, a point surprisingly high: much as happened in certain islands of the Mediterranean some thousands of years before.

IV.

If the date of this castle can be held to be established, there is very strong evidence to show who its builder was. He must obviously have been one of the greater magnates of the day, and in chapter lix. of the *Orkneyinga Saga* (Rolls ed.) a long list is given of "noble men of earls' kin" in Orkney at that very period. In this list one is safe to say he must be included, especially as it is very comprehensive and contains the names of several men, well born but by no means of the

[1] One of the houses was described in *Proceedings Orkney Antiq. Soc.*, vol. ii., and documentary evidence cited showing it was at least as old as the early sixteenth century. Since then I have found that the only house of similar plan (in Kirkwall) was ruinous by 1677, so that a date well back in the fifteenth century seems likely for both. Another old dwelling-house at Netherbigging has one-half of it clean gone, and there is documentary evidence that this was the case in 1664; while a byre on the end of it is described as the "auld byre" in 1646.

first importance.[1] Out of the whole list only one family is possible, as the residences of all the others are known. This family consisted of the four sons of the earlier chieftain Havard Gunnason, all themselves "gödings" or vassal chieftains of the earl. On this evidence one of these four must have been the builder, and this is so far corroborated by the fact that their father Havard came from Earl Hakon's half of Orkney, which consisted mostly of the West Mainland.[2] Of the four, it is not likely to have been Magnus the eldest, since he was chieftain or war lord of Sanday in 1136, or Thorstein the third brother, as he is also found in the North Isles.

But he can be identified more exactly by one very convincing fact. All place-names ending in *staðir* ("stead" or abode), with exceptions so rare as to be practically negligible, were compounded with proper nouns—in the vast majority of cases with men's names or nicknames. *Klostaðir* (afterwards Cloustath, and now Clouston) is certainly such a case, and the nickname *Klo* (a claw) is only once found in all the sagas, the bearer being Hakon Havardson Klo, the second of the four brothers. In Norway, it may be mentioned, *staðir* names as late as this period are very rare, though a few are found. But in Orkney there are distinct suggestions that a number were formed after the Norwegian *staðir* period, and one striking parallel to *Klostaðir* was certainly *Jaddvararstaðir* in St Ola, named after its owner Jaddvor, natural daughter of Earl Erlend, and herself included in the same list.[3]

This double line of independent proof is sufficiently striking; but there is yet another bit of evidence. Almost next door to Clouston lies the township of Ireland, once containing one of the largest recorded

[1] The list was evidently intended as a full record of the chief families actually in Orkney at the time, and only one man of chieftain's rank at the period is found outside it. This was Eyvind Melbrigdason, a kinsman of Sweyn Asleifson. Sweyn's estates lay partly in Caithness, and from this fact and the name Melbrigda, Eyvind was apparently a half-Celtic Caithness chief in the earl's service. He certainly cannot have lived near Stenness, as he arrived in his ship at Westness in a matter of hours when Earl Paul gathered his forces there.

[2] See S. Nordal's edition of the *Orkneyinga Saga* (1913–6), p. 114: "Havard was on the earl's (Hakon's) ship; he was the relation-in-law and good friend of both earls, and always Hakon's councillor."

[3] *Jaddvararstaðir* is styled *Knarrarstaðir* or Knarston in the two English editions, but this is undoubtedly wrong from the facts related in the saga itself. The true form is given in the old Danish translation (see Nordal's edition of the *Ork. Saga*). It was evidently an alternative form of the original *Geitaberg* (Gaitnip), where Jaddvor actually lived (another family altogether occupied Knarston). Other known instances of these *staðir* names in Orkney as alternative forms are Flenstath *alias* Sands, in the early rentals, and *Skeggbjarnarstaðir* of the saga, which must have had an alternative, since it has disappeared. In all four instances these names were evidently superimposed on older names. In the case of *Klostaðir* it seems not unlikely that the name Stedhus, still traditionally attached to the existing group of old buildings, may actually be the original name of the township, since it may well be formed from the O.N. *steðja*, in the sense of "a level plain with perpendicular border"—an exact description of the land at this point. (See *Norske Gaardnavne*, xii, p. 95.)

odal "bus" or manors in Orkney, clearly an old chieftain's seat. In the twelfth century, when these chiefs were very powerful people with extensive estates, there cannot well have been two different families in such extremely close proximity; but the near presence of this great bu exactly fits the fact that there were four Havardson brothers, all gödings, and that Hakon was only the second of them. Ireland may therefore be taken to be their father's seat, and Clouston to be part of a younger son's share of the estate.[1]

Hakon Klo, whom this accumulation of evidence seems to associate pretty certainly with the stronghold on Gernaness, is only once mentioned in action in the *Orkneyinga Saga*; when he and his brothers, Magnus and Thorstein, pursued and slew the murderer of Earl Rognvald at Calder in Caithness in 1159. He appears several times, however, in this and other sagas in connection with his ancestry and marriage, and on that account figures also in several of the pedigrees in Munch's *Norske Folks Historie*. His mother Bergliot was a granddaughter of Earl Paul I. of Orkney; his wife Ingigerd was the daughter of the famous adventurer and claimant to the Norwegian throne, Sigurd Slembe, by the daughter of a great Celtic house in Caithness; and the youngest of his four sons married into a leading Icelandic family.

As for the chapel which formed the starting-point of these excavations, no sign of it was found. There is no room for it in the courtyard, and it presumably would not be placed outside to hamper the defence. Yet, as was mentioned before, the tradition is very specific, and in the course of extensive inquiries some years ago no chapel traditions proved to be wrong. Apparently, then, it must have been built on top of the foundations after the castle was pulled down and converted, as all old buildings in Orkney were—and still are, into something more immediately useful; which in that dark age included spiritual usefulness. Finally, when a conception of a more utilitarian Creator (little inclined to appreciate wasted building material) came into vogue, the chapel became a dyke. It seems the more likely that the chapel replaced the castle in actual fact, since it has entirely replaced it in tradition, save for the tale of the vague tall house. If so, one has further evidence that the castle was demolished a very long time ago.

[1] A traditional pedigree which supports the other evidence rather remarkably was mentioned in a leading article in the *Orcadian* of 25th February 1868. In connection with the ancestry of the distinguished physicist Balfour Stewart, it referred to his descent from the Cloustons of Clouston, "whose 22nd chief in direct succession" was stated to be Nicol Clouston, then of Netherbigging. At three generations to a century this takes one back to approximately 1130-40, the precise period at which a younger son, according to the other evidence, built the stronghold and settled there. It may be mentioned that the strict entail on the whole family, which in effect the odal laws created, caused an extraordinary adhesiveness of land and family, often over many centuries.

In conclusion, I should like to express my gratitude to Mr G. P. H. Watson, Mr J. Graham Callander, and Mr J. S. Richardson for their counsel and information, to Mr T. H. Clouston for his survey, and also for a form of assistance peculiarly valuable in such an expensive operation as excavation, and to Mr Hugh Marwick for his invaluable assistance with place-names. Everything I have said with regard to any name has been either information given by him, or has been checked and passed by him. To all those who assisted me in the actual work of digging my best thanks are also due. But especially do I feel indebted to Mr Tom Brass for his technical advice and common-sense judgment throughout the whole operations.