

STANHOPE DUN, PEEBLESSHIRE

by A. MACLAREN, M.A., F.S.A.SCOT.

I. INTRODUCTION

In his article describing the hoard of bronze objects discovered in 1876 at Stanhope, Peeblesshire,¹ Dr J. A. Smith made brief mention of 'an eminence', situated half a mile SW. of the place where the hoard was found, 'on which is said to be the remains of an old fort, which still retains the name of "Norman's Castle"'. The work in question is not marked on the O.S. maps, nor is it included by Christison in his survey of the prehistoric forts of Peeblesshire,² and its true nature was only recognised when it was examined during the survey carried out by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland in preparation for the *Inventory of Peeblesshire*. A rapid inspection of the site revealed that the remains were not those of a fort but a monument of the class known as the dun. The chief characteristics of this class of structure are a massive, well-built drystone wall, relatively thick in proportion to the small circular or oval area which it encloses, and a single narrow entrance-passage, leading through the wall and often provided with door-checks. The distribution of duns in Scotland is essentially western; they are found in Galloway, Ayrshire and Stirlingshire and are widely scattered along the coastal regions of Argyllshire, with outlying groups to the N. and E. Consequently it was surprising to discover an example in the upper Tweed valley, apparently an outlier situated a considerable distance away from the main areas occupied by similar monuments.

On the Commissioners' instructions, a small excavation was carried out during July 1959 with the object of recovering any information there might be regarding the date and affinities of the dun. The Commissioners are indebted to the Director of the A.R.C. Animal Breeding Research Organisation for granting permission to excavate and for generously presenting the finds to the National Museum of Antiquities. The writer would like to acknowledge his gratitude to Mr Hector Fraser, N.D.A., the Manager of the Stanhope Sheep Breeding Research Station, and to Mrs Fraser, for the great interest which they took in the work and for all their generous help and hospitality; to Mr J. H. Hendrie, M.I.MECH.E., F.S.A.SCOT., for his invaluable assistance throughout the excavation; and also to Mrs P. J. Fowler, M.A., F.S.A.SCOT., for her report on the penannular brooch.

II. THE SITE BEFORE EXCAVATION

Stanhope Dun stands on the east side of the upper Tweed valley, about 3 miles N. of Tweedsmuir and 4 miles S. of Broughton.³ Situated half a mile SSW. of Stanhope farm-house at a height of 1,000 ft. O.D., the dun and its outworks occupy a small but prominent rocky knoll which stands out from the steep north-west face of Laigh

¹ P.S.A.S., xv (1880-1), 316.

² P.S.A.S., xxi (1886-7), 13-82.

³ Nat. Grid ref. NT 117291; O.S. 6-inch sheet, Peeblesshire, XX N.W.

Hill, commanding a fine view over a three-mile stretch of the river Tweed extending from the Kingledoors valley to the SW. as far as the east flank of Rachan Hill to the N. The knoll is one of a number of such features composed of Ordovician and Silurian greywackes and shales isolated by subglacial chutes,⁴ which, together with numerous small watercourses, patches of outcrop and large boulders, break the outline of the hillside. Though overlooked by steeply rising ground to the E. and SE., the dun faces long slopes to the W. and NW. which fall steeply for some 350 ft. to the level haughland bordering the right bank of the river Tweed.

When first visited, the dun appeared as a mass of tumbled stones which covered the summit of the knoll and spread over the flanks for a considerable distance, particularly on the NW., N. and NE. Some valuable preliminary clearance by Mr Fraser had already located the entrance, which faced approximately S., and had revealed portions both of the inner face of the wall immediately inside the entrance, and of the outer face on the NW. The interior was heavily choked by the collapsed remains of the wall and partly overgrown by a tough covering of bracken and heather. Outside the dun on the E., S. and W. were the remains of a bank set on the inner edge of a broad shallow ditch; both features were interrupted on the S. by an entrance-gap situated roughly in line with the entrance-passage of the dun. To the W. and NW. of this gap the bank continued as a scarp only, and the ditch was reduced to a terrace. For a distance of about 45 ft. on the SE. traces of a slight upcast-mound were visible on the counterscarp of the ditch.

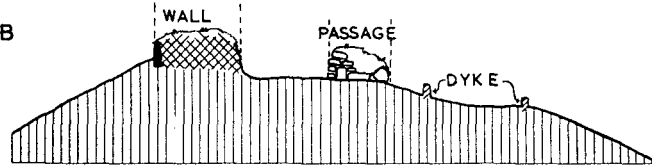
III. THE EXCAVATION

1. *The Wall*

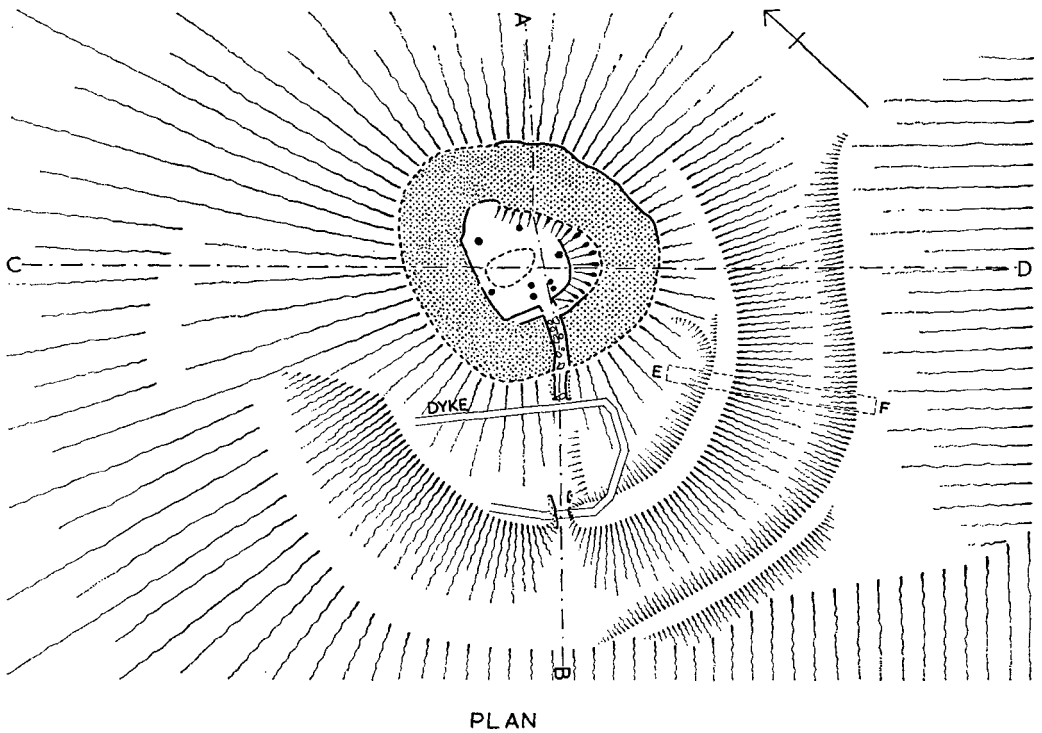
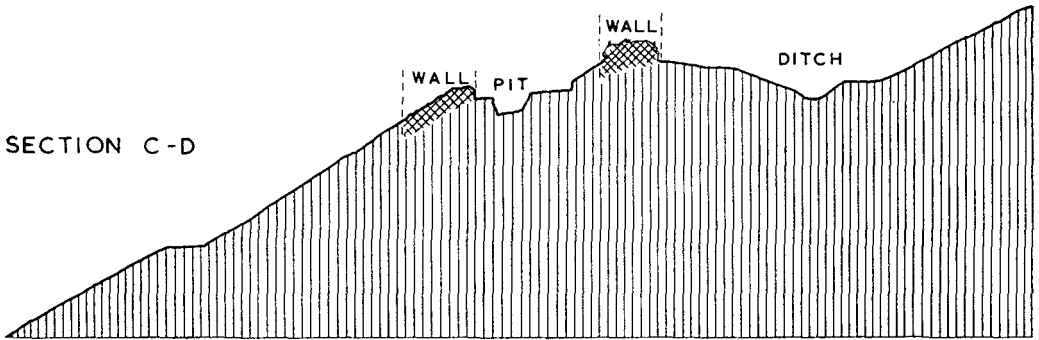
Investigation of the wall revealed that the outer face was only preserved for a length of 42 ft. on the east side, representing slightly more than one quarter of the total perimeter. Only the foundation course survived, consisting of large irregularly shaped blocks, mostly standing on end, but with a few laid horizontally. For the remainder of the circuit all the facing stones had either been robbed or had fallen away, and consequently it was possible to show only the approximate line on the plan (fig. 1). The inner face of the wall, which had been partly protected by the fallen debris which filled the interior, was in a rather better state of preservation, the foundation course being almost intact on the west side, and standing to a maximum height of 2 ft. The core of the wall was composed of loose stones, not laid and without any earth filling. Apart from at the entrance, where the wall measured 12 ft. in thickness, it was not possible to obtain an accurate cross-dimension. An approximate measurement, however, on the NE. gave a thickness of 14 ft. and a reasonable estimate would make the wall between 12 ft. and 15 ft. thick. The core material rose about one foot above the top of the facing stones, where they survived, and stood to a maximum height of just over 4 ft. above ground level. It is certain, therefore, that the faces would have been originally at least two courses high, giving a minimum height of about 5 ft., and judging by the quantity of tumbled wall material lying round the flanks of the knoll it is very likely that the initial

⁴ R. J. Price, *Geog. Journ.*, cxxvi (1960), 487.

SECTION A-B



SECTION C-D



PLAN

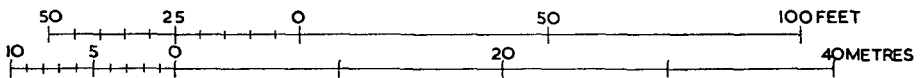


FIG. 1. General plan and sections

height of the wall was greater still. Owing to the irregularity of the ground there was a difference in level of about 2 ft. between the bases of the inner and outer faces on the eastern side, while on the western side the difference may have been as much as 7-8 ft., due to the steep gradient of the hillside. The wall had been reinforced against the tendency to collapse downhill by inserting long slabs at intervals into the thickness of the wall roughly at right angles to the line of the inner face. Three such bonders were found on the east side, the largest of them measuring 4 ft. in length, and the others 2 ft. 6 in. and 3 ft. 3 in. respectively.

2. *The Entrance*

The entrance passage, which ran at an angle through the wall, measured 12 ft. in length and from 2 ft. 6 in. to 3 ft. in width. Of the walls of the passage only the foundation course remained except for the north end of the east wall which reached a maximum height of 4 ft. in four courses, and for one point on the west wall where a single stone belonging to a second course survived. The stones used were large blocks, similar to those forming the faces of the dun wall, ranging from 1 ft. 3 in. to 3 ft. 3 in. in height, from 1 ft. 6 in. to 3 ft. 6 in. in length and varying in breadth from 7 in. to 1 ft. 2 in. The gaps between were tightly packed with small stones. The east wall was straight, but the west wall was slightly curved and neither was provided with a door-check. The floor of the passage sloped 1 ft. 3 in. down from inside to outside and a number of flat stones on its surface indicated that it had originally been paved.

3. *The Interior*

The interior was pear-shaped, with maximum dimensions of 25 ft. from N. to S. by 18 ft. transversely. In order to make full use of the limited area available and provide a reasonably level surface, the builders were obliged to terrace the eastern half of the interior into the hill-side, thereby forming a steep scarp on the east side which rose to a maximum height of 5 ft. 6 in. at an angle of about 40° from the floor level to the base of the inner face of the wall. To prevent this scarp from slipping downwards, a revetment wall was built against the foot of it, extending from a large patch of bare rock on the E. round to the entrance and again beyond it for a distance of 7 ft. further W. where it joined the inner face of the dun wall. This revetting was composed of thin slabs set vertically on end with their bases bedded in the natural subsoil. Their average height was 1 ft. 9 in. and none of them was more than 9 in. thick. On the E. side of the entrance the scarp rose sharply, but to the W. of the entrance the continuation of the revetment wall and the inner face of the dun wall were at approximately the same level, having a flat space between them 1 ft. 9 in. wide. It is difficult to account for this feature, but a possible explanation is that it would provide a convenient recess into which a door could be slid when not in use. The absence of door-checks in the entrance-passage strongly suggests that the door must have been situated at the inside of the passage, and the existing arrangement of stones may confirm this.

The surface of the interior was composed of crumbled rock and hard packed soil through which patches of outcrop protruded in places. There was no indication that the floor had ever been paved. Eight post-holes were found, set near the perimeter of the floor area, six of them (Nos. 1-6 on fig. 2) forming the outline of a roughly circular building measuring about 16 ft. in diameter, with the entrance,

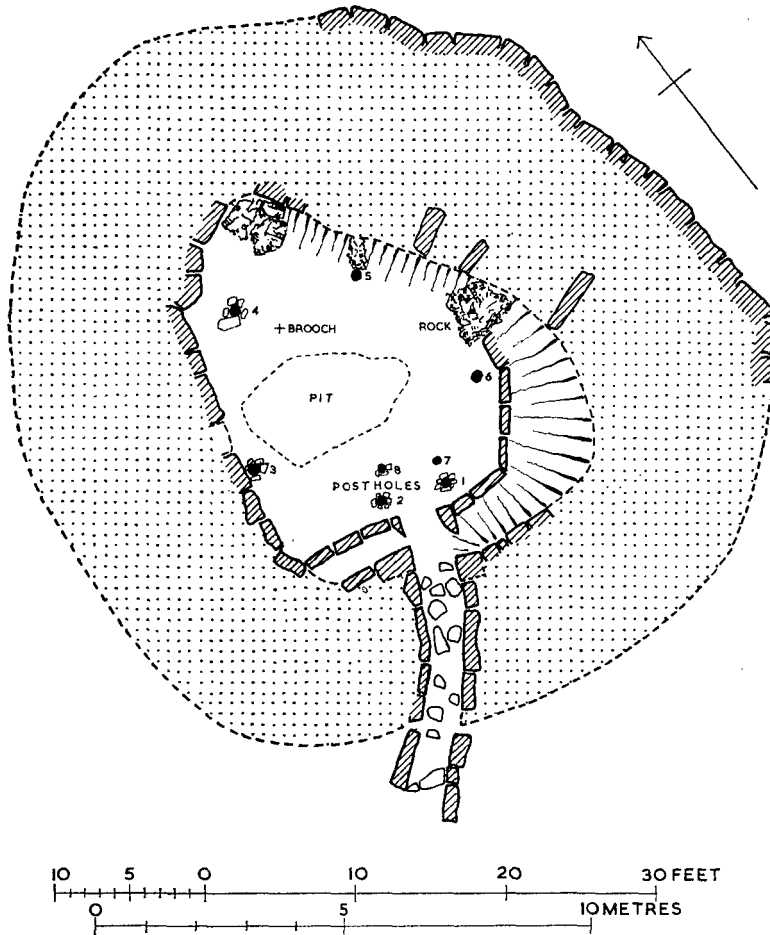


FIG. 2. Detailed plan

some 4 ft. wide, situated in line with the entrance-passage through the wall of the dun. These holes were all one foot deep and varied from 4 to 6 in. in diameter, Nos. 1-4 having packing stones round them and filled with soft black filling containing a few tiny charcoal fragments. Post-holes Nos. 7 and 8 were shallower and wider than the others and probably held the ends of props supporting the doorposts standing in holes Nos. 1 and 2. It is impossible to say whether or not there was originally a central post, as the post-hole in which it would have stood had been

destroyed by a large pit occupying the centre of the interior. This pit, which measured 11 ft. by 6 ft. and was 3 ft. deep, was visible prior to the excavation as a depression half filled with heather roots and debris. When completely cleaned, it was found to contain no occupation material whatsoever but only rubble and loose earth. Though no direct stratigraphical or other evidence remained to show the relationship of the pit to the dun, it seems most likely that it was dug by treasure-seekers and indeed might be associated with the comparatively recent stone dyke built of dun material to form a small enclosure or sheep-shelter immediately outside the dun to the SE. While there was no trace of a formal hearth anywhere in the interior there were several small patches of burning scattered here and there. It is possible that a hearth had been situated somewhere in the area occupied by the pit, and that its presence had attracted the looters as a likely spot for treasure hunting.

4. *The Outer Works*

The outer works, which enclosed the southern half of the dun, consisted of a ditch with a substantial rampart on its inner edge and a slight upcast bank on its counterscarp. Their general purpose was to form a screen to cover that side from

SECTION E - F

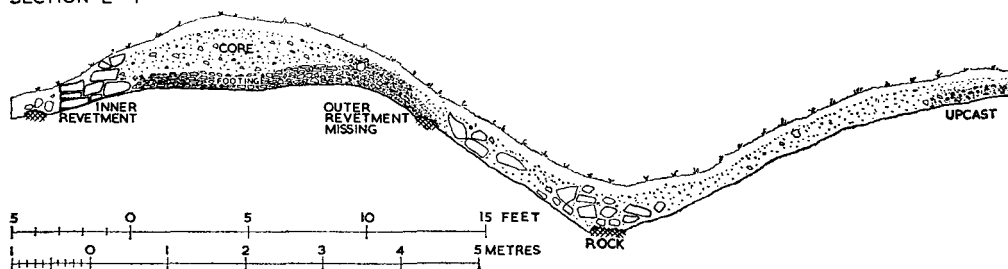


FIG. 3. Detailed section

which there was reasonably easy access and in particular to provide extra protection covering the entrance to the dun. The steepness of the northern flanks of the knoll rendered unnecessary any extra defensive system round that side.

A section E-F (fig. 3), which was cut across the ditch and rampart on the SE. revealed that at this point the general width and outline of the ditch had been to a great extent influenced by the natural configuration of the ground. Here a natural depression already separated the knoll from the steeply-rising hillside beyond, so that the construction of the ditch only involved the deepening of an already existing profile. The ditch was partly rock-cut and measured 25 ft. in width and 6 ft. in depth, the scarp being steeper than the counterscarp. The rampart built on its inner edge was composed of loose soil and small rock fragments thrown up from the ditch resting on a 9-inch footing of flat stone chips and pinned at front and back with a solid stone revetment. The overall thickness was 14 ft. and the maximum height 3 ft. making a total height of 9 ft. from rampart crest to ditch bottom. The

inner revetment survived to a height of 1 ft. 3 in. in three thin courses, but the outer revetment had been dislodged and the stones belonging to it had fallen forwards and were found lying on the scarp and blocking the bottom of the ditch. Their original position, however, was clearly indicated by an intrusive band of dark earth which had accumulated at the front edge of the rampart core filling the space originally occupied by the revetment.

A small quantity of ditch material was found to have been cast up on the outer edge of the ditch to form a slight bank on the lip of the counterscarp. The maximum height of this bank was 12 in., and though the full breadth was not proved by excavation, it is unlikely to have been more than about 6 ft. There was no indication of any revetment.

A small area was cleared at the entrance through the rampart on the SW. The construction of the modern dyke, which rode over the rampart on either side of the entrance and across the entrance-passage, had seriously damaged the original structure. After removing the dyke, however, parts of the footings of the revetments of the rampart-ends were found to be still roughly in position. These consisted of three large slabs on the NW. side and two on the SE., leaving a passage measuring about 4 ft. in width. What remained of the revetment on the NW. side was 8 ft. in total length and stood to a height of 18 in. at most.

An interesting feature in connection with the dun's entrance was the presence of what appeared to be a continuation of the passage-way beyond the line of the outer face of the dun wall. Massive slabs, similar to those forming the side-walls of the entrance-passage, extended outwards for a distance of 7 ft., one on the W. side and three on the E. side. A narrow flat stone, broken into two pieces, lay across the passage so formed and was placed in such a way as to suggest that it had been put in deliberately to form a step. Owing to the steepness of the slope leading up at this point from the outer rampart to the wall of the dun it is not unlikely that a series of steps may have been used.

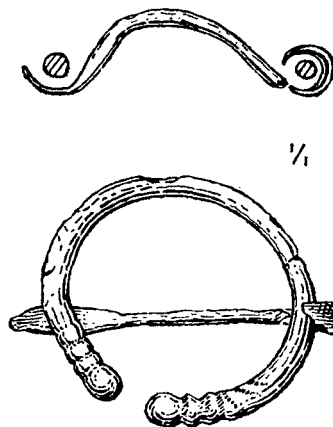


FIG. 4. Penannular brooch

IV. THE FINDS

The following is a list of the finds, all of which were recovered from the interior of the dun.

1. Penannular brooch of bronze (fig. 4). Circular, internal diameter $1\frac{1}{8}$ in. The thickness of the ring increases towards the terminals which take the form of

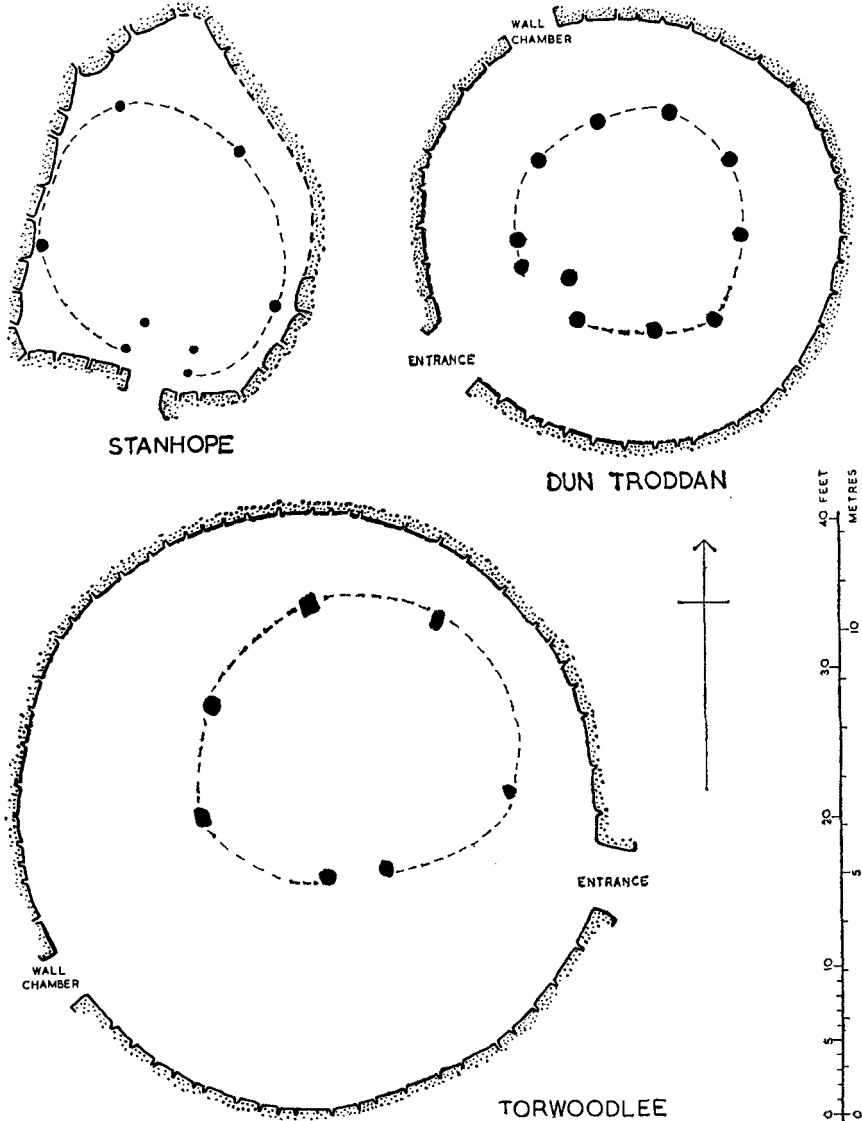


FIG. 5. Comparable structures

rounded knobs separated from the ring by ridges or collars, three on each side. The pin is hinged by being wound round the ring and is arched with a flattened point. Broken in modern times. For full report see Appendix.

2. Quartzite rubbing-stone roughly triangular in shape, measuring $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. in length by 4 in. in greatest breadth and 3 in. in maximum thickness. A smooth facet has been worn on one side of the apex, indicating that the stone had been used as a tool for grinding or polishing, though its precise purpose is unknown.

3. A number of long, flat water-worn pebbles which show signs of wear at various points on their surfaces. Probably used as hones.

In addition several dozen pot-boilers were found.

V. DISCUSSION

Direct evidence for dating the occupation of the dun is provided only by the brooch, which was probably manufactured late in the first or early in the second century A.D. Slight though it is, this evidence is consistent with the date assigned to the dun at Castlehill Wood, Stirlingshire, excavated in 1955.¹ The quartzite rubbing-stone can be paralleled by examples found in the all-timber farmstead at Glenachan Rig, Peeblesshire,² situated some $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles NW. of Stanhope, and by one from Braidwood, Midlothian.³ They have been recorded in the 'pre-Roman level' at Traprain Law, at the Wag at Forse, Caithness, at Jarlshof and elsewhere. Their purpose is uncertain, but they appear to have formed part of the equipment used late in the first millennium B.C and early in the first millennium A.D.

Structurally, the most significant feature discovered is the setting of post-holes inside the dun. Had this been an isolated phenomenon, it might have been supposed to have belonged to an earlier or a later period of occupation than that represented by the dun itself. But similar settings have already been recorded in two other contemporary structures (fig. 5), namely the broch of Dun Troddan in Glenelg, western Inverness-shire,⁴ and the broch at Torwoodlee, Selkirkshire.⁵ These three cases suggest therefore that, where timber was available, the occupants of brochs and duns and allied contemporary structures erected impermanent, replaceable shelters within the protection of their walls, very much in the tradition of timber construction practised elsewhere in the country at that time.

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, xc (1956-7), 24-51.

² *P.S.A.S.*, lxxxiii (1948-9), 10.

³ *P.S.A.S.*, lxxxv (1950-1), 99, fig. 5. The excavators at Torwoodlee assumed that the post-holes were associated with the earlier hill-fort on this site, and not with the broch, but search for similar settings of post-holes within the fort but outside the broch produced negative results.

⁴ *P.S.A.S.*, xcii (1958-9), 22, fig. 5.

⁵ *P.S.A.S.*, lv (1920-1), 86, fig. 3.

APPENDIX

REPORT ON PENANNULAR BROOCH

by Mrs P. J. Fowler

The bronze penannular brooch is Type A3, with knob and collar terminals.¹ The hoop of the brooch is much corroded and particularly worn at one spot where the pin-head of the brooch must have rested. The terminals, too, are worn though distinguishable. The pin is much curved and has a flattened 'spade-point', both indicative probably of a date early in the series because of the closeness to the first Scots penannular brooches which all have these two features (e.g. Traprain Law).

This brooch is a member of a widely-distributed class, both in time and space. Possible, though not exact parallels exist at Newstead, Corbridge, and from near Blandford. It is often found on sites with Roman military occupation and is probably of late first or early second century A.D. manufacture, though it could of course have been worn for some time after that. On this reckoning the Stanhope Dun could have been occupied in the second and third centuries A.D., but might also belong to the first century A.D. Though it is impossible to date these penannular brooches very closely, the pin of the Stanhope example points to it being early, and it could well have been obtained from a Roman site.

*The Society is indebted to H.M. Treasury for
meeting the cost of the illustrations for this paper*

¹ *P.P.S.*, xxvi (1960), 149-77.