

V.—*Notice of the Excavation of the Brochs of Yarhouse, Brounaben, Bowermadden, Old Stirkoke, and Dunbeath, in Caithness, with Remarks on the Period of the Brochs; and an Appendix, containing a Collected List of the Brochs of Scotland, and Early Notices of many of them.*

By JOSEPH ANDERSON, Cor. Mem. S.A. Scot., and now
Keeper of the Museum.

[*Read before the Society, 9th June 1871.*]

THE BROCH OF YARHOUSE.

The broch of Yarhouse is situated in the southern edge of the loch of that name, on the estate of Thrumster, and about five miles south of Wick, Caithness. Before we commenced its excavation (for the Rhind Committee, by whom the funds were supplied from the Rhind Bequest,) it was a grass-covered mound, about 200 paces in circumference, and 18 to 20 feet high in the centre. It stood on a flat triangular projection of the shore of the loch, and was cut off from the land by a ditch now silted up, and varying from 25 to 30 feet wide.

This mound had been noticed by the late Mr Rhind¹ as a cairn of great size, surrounded by a wet ditch. It appears also, he says, to have been surrounded by standing stones, and he was of the opinion that it was chambered. Its excavation has disclosed the fact that it is a true broch, surrounded by outbuildings of a very remarkable character.

Secondary Interments.—In the progress of the excavations the first circumstance worthy of notice was the finding of the skull and other remains of a human skeleton, from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 feet under the green turf near the top of the mound on the side next the loch. On the other side, and at about the same level, we found another deposit of human remains, but, singular to say,

¹ See "Report to the Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, appointed to arrange for the application of a fund left by the late Mr A. Henry Rhind for excavating early remains. By John Stuart, LL.D., Secretary."—Proceedings, vol. vii. page 289.

not a vestige of any of the bones could we find, beyond an imperfectly preserved skull. Down near the base of the mound, in a cavity between two stones on edge, with a covering stone but no end stones, we found remains of another skeleton. Again, in the upper part of the chamber E. [see ground plan, p. 134], about 3 feet under the turf, we found human bones, including the piece of skull now exhibited, and close by them the inscribed bronze brooch (fig. 5), figured on page 141. Once more, within the chamber G, and nearly on a level with the base of the broch wall, at about the same distance under the turf, we found the remains of another human skeleton, among the ashes and refuse of the chamber floor, consisting of bones of the common domestic animals, broken and split, and sometimes half burned, mingled with potsherds of coarse hand-made and badly burned pottery. The inference from these facts seemed to be that at some period, possibly not extremely remote, but long after the broch and its surroundings had become a grass-covered heap of ruins, the green mound had been used as a place of interment.

The practice of burying in the green mounds covering the ruins of similar "pre-historic structures" (which is of ancient origin),¹ is not yet extinct. As to its ancient origin, Mr Petrie records having found a cemetery of short cists, overlying the ruined broch of Okstrow,² in Orkney. Mr Farrer records a similar instance at Saverough.³ Single graves have often been disclosed in the mould overlying the ruins of Caithness brochs when levelled or partially dug into for agricultural purposes. At Thrumster House (not more than half a mile from this broch of Yarhouse), where a mound,⁴ covering the ruins of a broch, was partially dug into, a skeleton was found in a full-length cist of flagstones set on edge. A similar burial in the earthy rubbish overlying a broch at Dunbeath was reported to me as enclosed in a long stone cist, and part of the cranium is preserved in the late Dr Sinclair's Museum at Wick. A long grave was found by us at the side of the door of the broch of Brounaben, explored subsequently to the broch of Yarhouse. In none of these instances was there any tradition even of the mound having ever been used as a place of interment.

¹ See page 154 *post*.

² See Mr Petrie's paper, *antva*.

³ See Proceedings, vol. v. p. 10.

⁴ The interior area of this broch is now laid out as a flower garden.

Then, as to the modern practice,—continued, no doubt, down from ancient times in places where burial-grounds, connected with ecclesiastical sites, were far distant, and roads were neither so common nor so good as they are now,—there is a notable instance at Camster, where a green mound, bearing all the external appearance of covering the ruins of a broch, is still used as a place of interment by the people of the district. It is not connected by tradition with any ecclesiastical site; but, even if it were, the next instance which I adduce will show that an ecclesiastical site has been superposed upon a ruined broch.¹ Having long suspected that the church of Canisbay (close to the Pentland Firth, and within sight of John O'Groats) was built on a green mound covering the ruins of a broch, I visited the churchyard in company with the Rev. Mr Macpherson, minister of the parish, and found that one side of the mound on which the church is built showed unequivocal traces of the refuse-heap usually attached to a broch. Mingled with the human remains of recently opened graves was a large proportion of more ancient remains of a totally different character, consisting of the bones of the ox, the sheep, deer, horse, swine, and seal (?), the bones of birds and fish, and the shells of the common shore shell-fish—principally buckies and limpets. The long bones of the animals were broken and split, and often half charred; the deer horns cut, sawn, and sometimes split. Pestles or pounding stones occurred here and there; and, on questioning the grave-digger, we also learned that he had been in the habit of exposing dry-built walling, and at certain places of digging up ashes, deer horns, shells, bones of what he called whales, and which probably were so, and occasionally quern stones. A very good specimen of a pot quern, which he unearthened subsequently to my visit, is now preserved at the manse.

It seems, therefore, that many of these green mounds or "Tullochs," as they are called in the north of Scotland, had been used as places of interment in the early ages of Christianity,² and that the skeletons we found overlying the brochs of Yarhouse and Brounaben were those of persons who had been

¹ Barry, in his "History of the Orkneys," mentions that St Triduana's Chapel, in Papa Westray, had been built on the ruins of a Piet's house.

² A curious instance of Christian burial in a Pagan tumulus is recorded in the Annals of Loch Cé, under the date A.D. 1581:—"Brian Caeoh O'Coinnegain, an eminent cleric, died, and the place of sepulture which he selected for himself was, *i.e.*, to be buried at the mound of Baile-an-tohair," &c., &c. (Annals of Loch Cé, vol. ii. p. 437.)

buried there long after the ruined structures had become grass-covered mounds.¹

Structure.—The broch of Yarhouse (to the description of which we now return) was found, when excavated, to be of the common form (see the

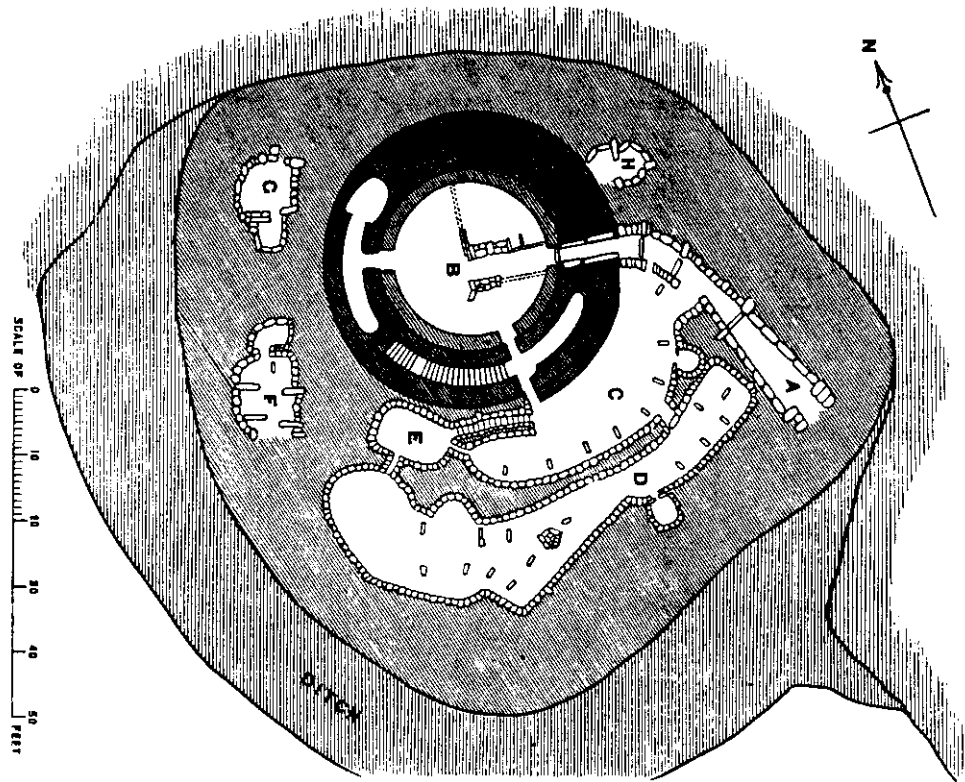


Fig. 1.—Ground Plan of Broch of Yarhouse and its Outbuildings.

annexed ground-plan). The circular wall is 12 to 13 feet thick, and at the highest point about 15 feet high. The area enclosed, B, is approximately circular, and about 30 feet diameter. The chambers, in the thickness of the

¹ Layard found that the mounds covering the ruins of the palatial edifices of Assyria, notably those of Nimroud, Kalah Shergat, and Baasheika, had been used as burial-places both by the ancient and the modern successors of the people who built them. The graves of the modern nomadic tribes were met with immediately under the surface, and below them the sepulchral deposits of a much earlier race, accompanied with vases of pottery having a close resemblance to early Egyptian forms. These, he says, undoubtedly prove that at a very early period the ruins were completely buried and the contents of the mounds unknown.

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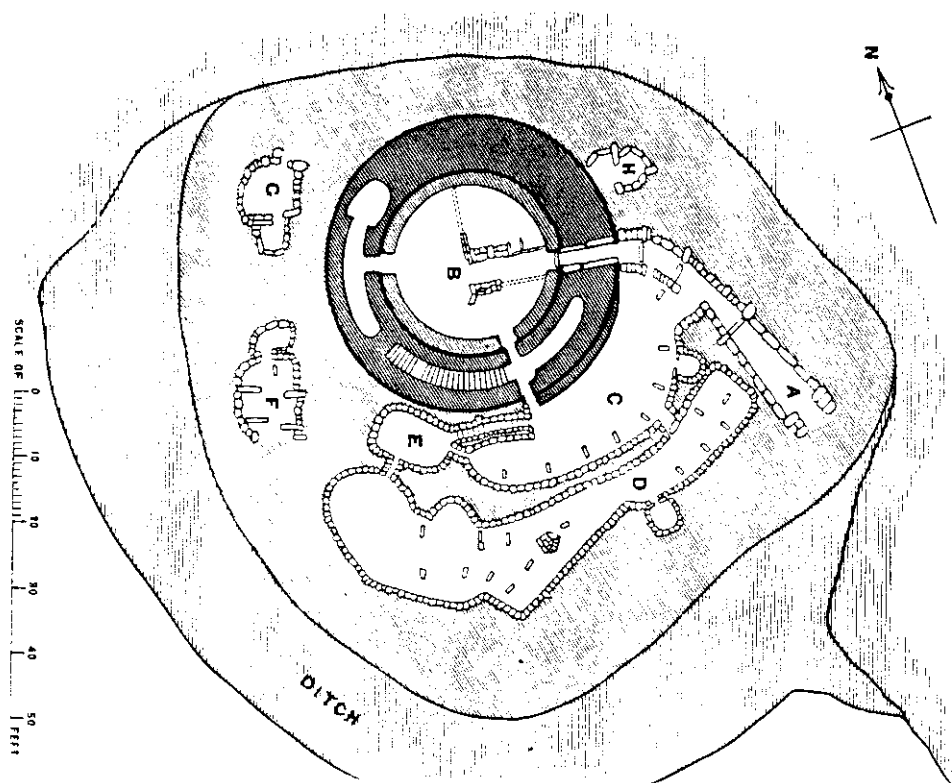


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wall, are about 6 feet high and 3 feet wide, and, with the exception of the squarish one on the side opposite the doorway, they have their roofs remaining entire. They are roofed by flat covering stones, till near the ends, where the roofing is formed by overlapping the stones of the ends and of the side walls to form a kind of rude arching. One of these chambers, as usual, is at the foot of the stair. The stair is 3 feet wide, and extends upwards for 21 feet of sloping height. Sixteen steps up there is a landing, with a light-hole looking into the interior of the broch. Above the doorway, opening from the interior into the staircase, there are three openings in the wall to lessen the weight upon the lintel, as well as to admit light to the bottom part of the stair. (See woodcut, p. 173).

Secondary Structures.—Round the inside of the broch wall an interior wall, nearly $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet thick, is built against the main wall, and at the doorways is partially bonded into it. This inner wall rises to a height of 8 feet, and forms a level ledge or scarcement all round at that height. The main wall still stands, 7 feet higher. It seems to me that this interior wall belongs to a secondary occupation of the broch, from the following considerations:—Its foundation does not go down to the foundation of the main wall; it terminates exactly at the height to which the partition walls that cross the interior area appear to have risen, as shown by the height of the long stones on end that were found built into them; that these partitions are really later constructions is established by the fact of fully a foot deep of ashes and refuse being found beneath their foundations. One other fact speaks strongly in favour of the later construction of this inner wall. In the floor of the central area of the broch we found a granite rubbing stone nearly 2 feet long; its flat face was well worn. Noticing another granite stone built into the inner wall, about half-way up, we pulled it out, and found it to be also a rubbing stone, which had been used as a building stone. There was also a small square bink or bole in the inner wall, and, though this is a common feature of the later outbuildings round the brochs, I have never seen or heard of it in the wall of a broch itself.

The partition walls, which divided the central area into a passage and several compartments, were partly built and partly formed of long slabs set on end across the wall. Other slabs, set on edge in the direction of the wall, formed a substitute for built walling for part of the length of two of the partitions. Such of these long stones as were unbroken rose to a height

of about 8 feet, which was also the height of the scarcement, and it seemed probable that the whole of the interior walls were parts of one structural plan, designed at some later period of the broch's existence (most likely after the ruin of the upper galleries), to form supports for a roof that would convert into a place of shelter the central area, which in the original structure must have been open to the sky.

Outbuildings.—The outside buildings connected directly with the broch are the two curious, long, and irregularly shaped enclosures C and D with the oval cell E. (See fig. 1, p. 134). C and D have each a small cell off the side furthest from the broch. The walls of all these still stand to a height of from 3 to 10 feet, and the passage, leading from the broch stair into the oval chamber, had the roof on it throughout its entire length, the only instance I know of a roof remaining on any part of the outbuildings of a broch. This passage was less than 3 feet high, and only 16 inches wide at the narrowest part. The whole length of the outer enclosure is nearly 100 feet, and it varies in width from 6 to 20 feet. The length of the other enclosure is 70 feet, and its width about 12 feet.

These places are chiefly remarkable for the way in which standing stones are set round them, and in them, at varying distances from the walls (see ground plan of enclosures C and D in fig. 1, p. 134). One or two of these standing stones appear to have been dressed to shape by blows applied alternately to the opposite sides of the stone along the edge, so as to make it roughly straight. Some of them are slabs, others are long stones as thick as they are broad. The little cells off the outside of each enclosure have slabs contracting the door-way. The outer wall of the outer enclosure seems pieced together in different styles of building. There is an irregularly shaped pillar of masonry in the centre of the floor, rising to the same height as the walls.

The use of long narrow slabs set up across the thickness of the walls, and of broader, thicker slabs set with their broad faces forming part of the face of the wall, which is built over the top of them, is entirely confined to the outbuildings and inside partitions of all the brochs I have seen. Ortholithic masonry, as it is called, is also a striking feature of the chambered cairns, but they are all much more carefully built than these cells and enclosures surrounding the brochs.

The presumption that both the inside partitioning and the outside

buildings were later adaptations of the original structure, is strengthened by the fact that the foundations of other partition walls, dividing the interior of the broch on different plans, were found at three different levels in the course of the excavations, the last sub-division of the area having taken place at a period when upwards of 8 feet of rubbish, derived from the dilapidation of the structure, had accumulated over its original floor. Up to the height of the scarcement, also, the stones which formed its inner face were reddened and rent into small cubical fragments by the action of fire, and the crevices were full of ashes of peat and wood, and refuse of bones. This burned appearance, which is as noticeable as in an old limekiln, is the first thing that strikes a visitor, and is usually accounted for by supposing the broch to have been destroyed by fire. I have seen the roofless walls of an evicted crofter's house in the hills as completely burned all round to a height of three or four feet by the herds and peat-cutters of the district resorting to it as a shelter in bad weather. By kindling their peat fires against that portion of the wall which at the time best suited the direction of the wind, they gradually burned the stones all round.

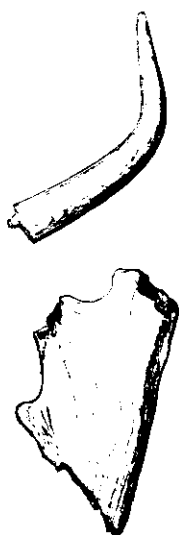
The little cells, F, G, and H, (fig. 1, p. 134), unconnected with the broch bear a close resemblance to the structures described by Captain Thomas as Bothan,¹ and may be of comparatively recent origin. In the little one H, and the larger one F, no manufactured relics were found, the floors, which are roughly paved, being but slightly covered with peat ashes. In the other one G, some fragments of pottery, a piece of a stone vessel, apparently of steatite, and the human bones, probably from an interment, as I have previously noticed (p. 132), were found.

CONTENTS OF THE BROCH.

Animal Remains.—The animal remains in the broch of Yarhouse were mostly destroyed by the damming back of the water of the loch many years ago, so that, as we found after we had cleared out the area B, the floor was submerged every winter to the depth of 3 or 4 feet. This will account for the absence of implements of bone in the collection. The bones met with were those commonly found in other brochs, indicating

¹ Proceedings, vol. ii. p. 153.

the ox, the horse, the swine, the sheep or goat, the dog, and one or two species of birds, and fish. The shell-fish were the limpet, periwinkle, whelk, trochus, buccinum, cockle, and mussel. The horns of the red deer were very abundant, often split and cut into short lengths of 3 or 4 inches. The most interesting discovery in connection with this broch was the occurrence of portions of the antlers of the reindeer in the outer enclosure D, as described in Dr J. A. Smith's paper on the occurrence of the reindeer in Scotland.¹ Two of these fragments of reindeer horns are here figured. They were submitted to Professor Owen, and by him pronounced to be portions of the antlers of *Cervus Tarandus*.



Figs. 2 and 3.—Portions of Reindeer Antlers found in the Broch of Yarhouse.

The relics found in the broch and its enclosures were chiefly obtained from the layer of ashes which covered the whole of the floors. The only difference observable between the character of the relics found within the broch, and those found in the outside enclosures, was that several objects of metal—iron and bronze—were found in the larger outbuildings, and none in the broch itself. The ash-bed was of considerable thickness, and seemed to have accumulated along with the rubbish to a height, in some places inside the broch, of several feet.

Pottery.—The pottery was of the usual coarse hand-made kind, some fragments indicating vessels of a globularly bulging shape with everted rims, bearing in their form and texture a close resemblance to the hand-made vessels described by Martin as manufactured in Lewis at the date of his visit (1703) by the females of the island, “some for boiling meat and others for preserving their ale, for which they are much better than barrels of wood.” A set of this coarse hand-made pottery, which has continued to be made and used in Harris until within the last few years, is exhibited in the Museum, and one of its commoner forms is shown in the accompanying woodcut (fig. 4).² In these Lewis crogons, as they are called, we have an

¹ Proceedings, vol. viii. p. 290.

² For the use of this cut, which is taken from “Characteristics of Old Church Architecture in the Mainland and Western Islands of Scotland,” (Edinburgh: Edmonston

interesting example of the survival to the present time of the form and fashion of the domestic pottery characteristic of the broch period. One or two pieces marked with the peculiar pattern made by pushing the finger-

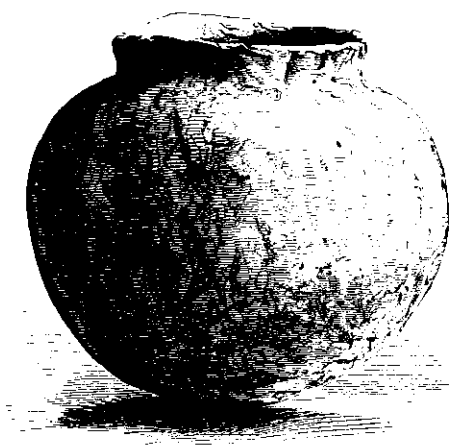


Fig. 4.--Crogan from Island of Lewis.

tip obliquely into the soft clay, occurred in the interior area of the broch. This pattern is the prevailing style of ornament on the pottery of the neighbouring sepulchral chambered cairns.¹

Stone Implements.—The only flint object found in the broch was a small conical core about an inch in length, from which facets had been struck longitudinally all round. One very similar, but scarcely half the size, was found in the chamber of the long sepulchral cairn on the top of the hill. These points of resemblance, though suggestive of a connection between the brochs and the chambered cairns, may possibly be accidental.

Stone pestles or pounders were very numerous. They are simply oblong water-rolled pebbles of all sizes that can be conveniently grasped in the hand. Some of these are abraded by use at one end only, others at both ends.

and Douglas, 4to, 1861.) I am indebted to the author, Mr Thomas S. Muir. See also p. 172, note.

¹ It is also the common ornamentation of the pottery of the Swiss lake dwellers, and has been found in the Long Barrows of the South of England.

Of rude mortars and rubbing-stones we found nearly a dozen. Typical specimens of these are among the objects exhibited.

Allied to the pestles or pounders are the stone balls so commonly found in the brochs. There are specimens from the brochs of Yarhouse, Brounaben, Old Stirkoke, and Bowermadden. These stone balls, which are usually about 3 inches in diameter, have often smooth flattened spaces on one or more sides, and one from the Yarhouse broch presents three flattened faces formed by striking off three segmental flakes of equal size contiguously from the globular surface.

Of whetstones, as they are called, we got a few. The smallest of these are more like what are termed touchstones. The largest one I rescued from the window of the farmer's kitchen, in which it had done duty again as a whetstone for several weeks after it had been found in the broch of Old Stirkoke. The thin flattish one from Yarhouse bears a remarkable resemblance to one in the Museum, which was picked up on the Birkle Hill, Keiss, by Dr Arthur Mitchell.

A large number of thin circular discs of slaty sandstone, roughly chipped to a round form,¹ and varying from $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches to 14 or 15 inches in diameter, were found. These discs, which are found in all the Caithness and Orkney brochs, seem to have served the same purpose for the domestic pottery which was served for the sepulchral pottery by the precisely similar discs which are occasionally found as urn covers, and still more frequently with the urn inverted on them. They are presumably jar covers or pot lids.

A small roundish water-worn pebble of quartz, about an inch and a half in diameter, with a hole not quite a quarter of an inch wide drilled through it, is precisely similar to one found in Kettleburn broch by the late Mr A. Henry Rhind. They were probably worn as amulets.

The round flattish water-worn pebbles which occurred in considerable numbers, having short scratched markings in all directions over their flat

¹ Within the memory of persons now living, it was customary in Orkney to use thin slate stones, roughly chipped to a circular or square form, for parching corn to make 'burstan.' The stone was surrounded with a border of soft clay to prevent the corn from falling off into the fire when it was stirred. The name for this curious cooking utensil was "hellig," corrupted from the old Norse "hella"—a flat stone. When the corn had been parched, it was roughly ground by a quern, and eaten with milk or cream. "They'll hae burstan and buttermilk every day," was a proverb expressive of luxurious living.

surfaces, puzzled me much, till one evening, when returning from the broch, I passed by a fisherman's house, at the gable of which sat the fisherman endeavouring to sew a piece of tarry sailcloth with a rusty sail needle. I should have passed without noticing what he was about, had it not been that his vexation, very audibly and forcibly expressed, at the non-success of his efforts, led me to observe him more closely. Then I noticed that he was using just such a stone as this in the palm of his hand, instead of the usual sailor's thimble, and that the needle head was slipping and ripping the surface of the stone, just as this, which I procured as a characteristic specimen on my next visit to the broch, is scratched and ripped. I will not say that these are "thimbles," at least until we get needles of metal from the brochs. There are two bronze needles in the Museum from the shell mounds at Reay, where they are associated with very modern looking pins, but I never saw needles of the period in the brochs, except once when I got from the Old Stirkoke broch a fine bone needle, about 3 inches in length, with a circular eye, bevelled on both sides. It was sent to Sir John Lubbock.

Bronze.—The bronze relics from the broch of Yarhouse, which were all got in the outer enclosures, are—

A ring of bronze of unknown use, half an inch in diameter.

An armlet of yellow bronze, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. It is made of wire, about $\frac{1}{16}$ th of an inch in thickness, made square for half of its length, and twisted so that the corners form a spiral pattern, the other half of the circumference being the plain round wire. The ends seem to have been soldered together.

A flat circular bronze brooch (fig. 5), found with human bones in the upper part of the chamber E outside the broch. It is $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter, and is inscribed on the upper surface, in rude Roman characters, with the formula *ISVS NAZAR(?)*. This inscription, in full, *IHVSVS NAZARENVS REX IVDAEORVM*, occurs on some flat circular silver brooches of mediæval workmanship in the



Fig. 5.—Bronze Brooch found with Human Bones at Broch of Yarhouse. (Actual size.)

Museum. A flat copper or bronze brooch, of the same pattern, and bearing the last-mentioned inscription in full, was dug¹ up on the north side of the Little Ferry, in Sutherlandshire.

Iron.—It is difficult to say what the iron relics may have been. Some of those from Yarhouse appear like knives, and one from Old Stirkoke is not unlike the hilt end of an iron sword.

THE BROCH OF BROUNABEN.

I need not describe in detail the excavation of the Brounaben broch, which is situated about three-fourths of a mile from that at Yarhouse, and close by the cromlech described by Mr Rhind.² It is of the usual size and form, but has a stair on both sides, one of which had the entrance built up. In the chamber at the foot of the other stair were found the remains of a human skeleton, and close by the side of the door there was a long grave, shaped like a modern coffin, and constructed partly of stones on edge, and partly built. The skeleton was almost completely decayed. Some human bones were also found in the excavation outside the broch wall, where two standing stones appear. There seemed to have been some kind of enclosure similar to those at Yarhouse, round this broch. It differed from that at Yarhouse in having the interior area paved, and without any partition walls. There was a considerable depth of ashes, however, under the pavement. The site was very wet, and there was a good square drain underneath the pavement, round what had been a hollow fireplace near the centre. Kettleburn, explored by Mr Rhind, had also a drain. The Old Stirkoke broch had a fireplace.

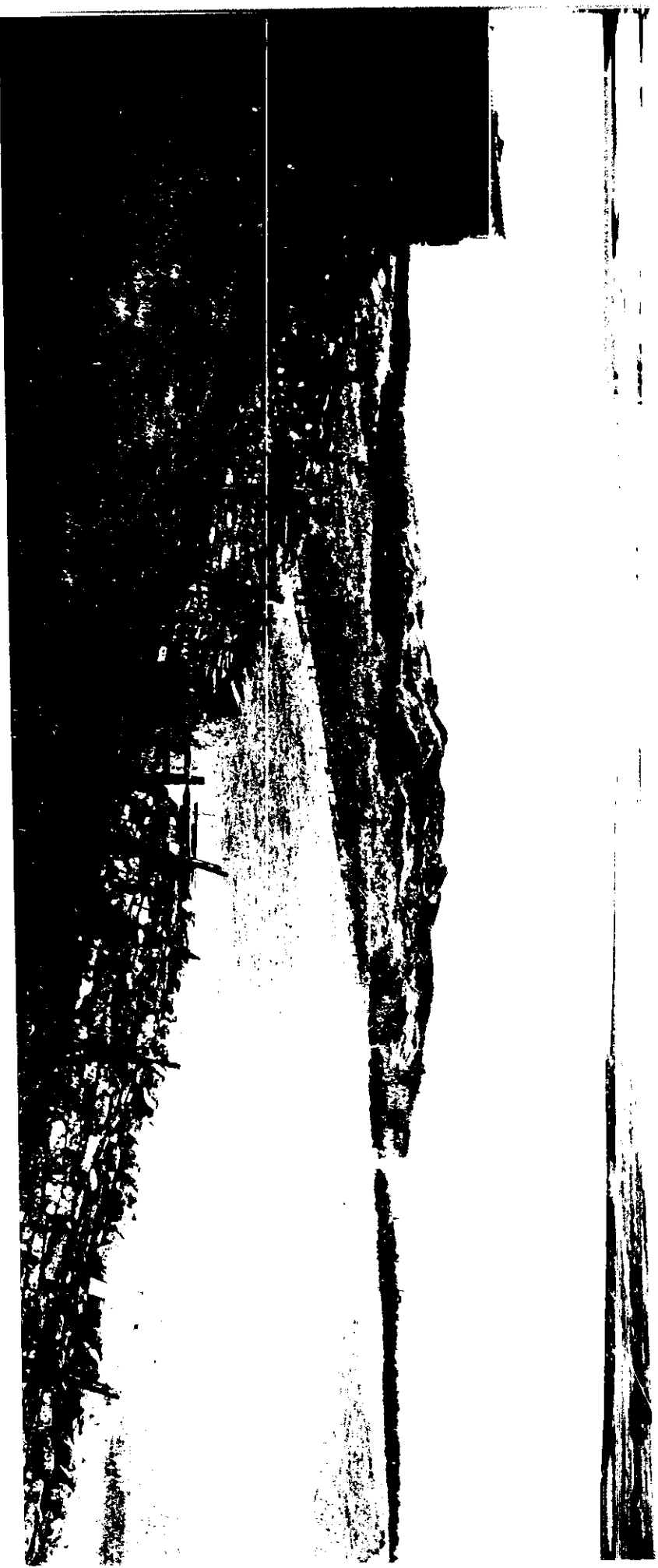
THE BROCH OF OLD STIRKOKE.

This broch, which was cut into by the farmer as a convenient quarry to furnish stones for drains, was a grass-covered mound, 120 paces in circumference at the base, about 12 feet high, and nearly 40 feet in diameter

¹ New Statistical Account, Sutherlandshire, p. 33.

² Report on the Rhind Excavation Fund. By John Stuart, LL.D., Sec. S.A. Scot. Proceedings, vol. vii. p. 294.

BROCH, S. YARROWS



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J Anderson

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Iron.—It is difficult to say what the iron relics may have been. Some of those from Yarhouse appear like knives, and one from Old Stirkoke is not unlike the hilt end of an iron sword.

THE BROCH OF BROUNABEN.

I need not describe in detail the excavation of the Brounaben broch, which is situated about three-fourths of a mile from that at Yarhouse, and close by the cromlech described by Mr Rhind.² It is of the usual size and form, but has a stair on both sides, one of which had the entrance built up. In the chamber at the foot of the other stair were found the remains of a human skeleton, and close by the side of the door there was a long grave, shaped like a modern coffin, and constructed partly of stones on edge, and partly built. The skeleton was almost completely decayed. Some human bones were also found in the excavation outside the broch wall, where two standing stones appear. There seemed to have been some kind of enclosure similar to those at Yarhouse, round this broch. It differed from that at Yarhouse in having the interior area paved, and without any partition walls. There was a considerable depth of ashes, however, under the pavement. The site was very wet, and there was a good square drain underneath the pavement, round what had been a hollow fireplace near the centre. Kettleburn, explored by Mr Rhind, had also a drain. The Old Stirkoke broch had a fireplace.

THE BROCH OF OLD STIRKOKE.

This broch, which was cut into by the farmer as a convenient quarry to furnish stones for drains, was a grass-covered mound, 120 paces in circumference at the base, about 12 feet high, and nearly 40 feet in diameter

¹ New Statistical Account, Sutherlandshire, p. 33.

² Report on the Rhind Excavation Fund. By John Stuart, LL.D., Sec. S.A. Scot. Proceedings, vol. vii. p. 294.