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SHETLAND

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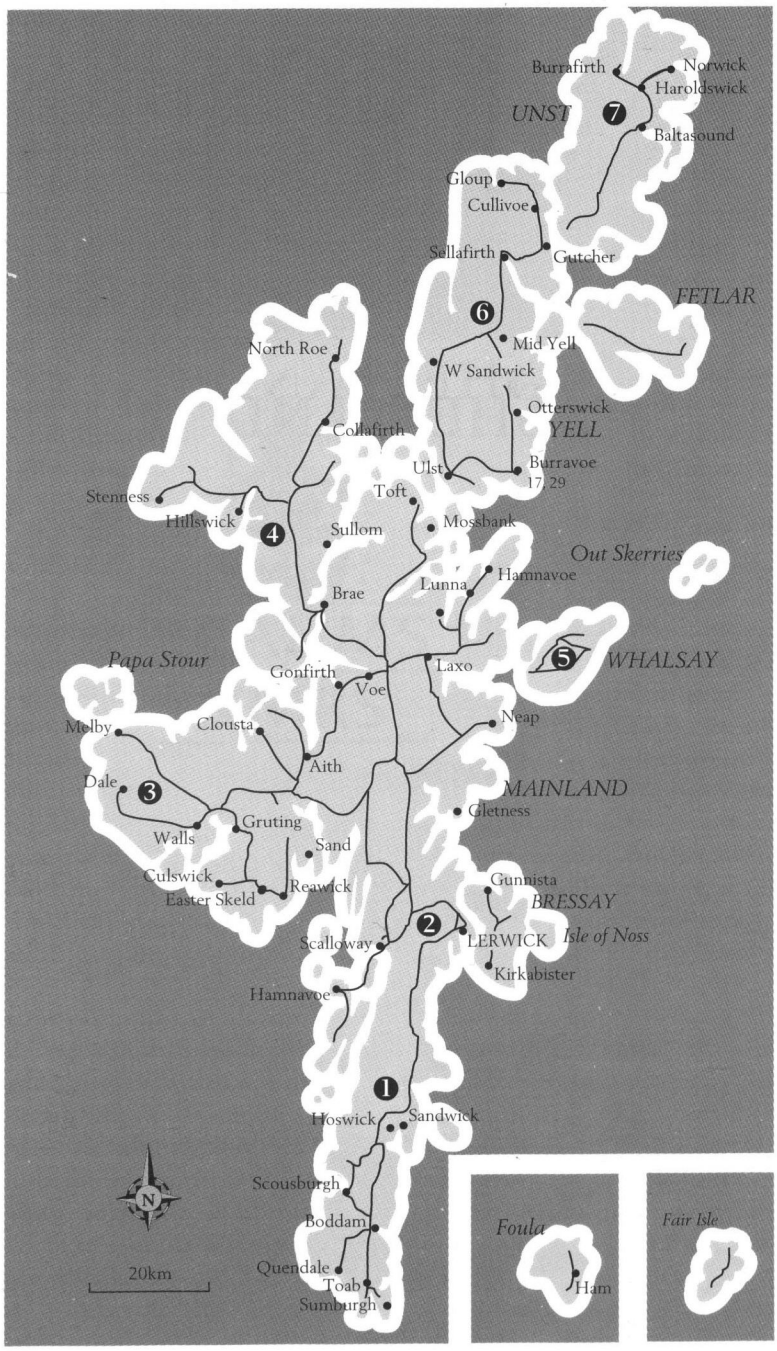

EXCURSIONS

1 Lerwick to Sumburgh

2 Lerwick to Scalloway

3 Walls to Sandness

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SHETLAND

Anna Ritchie

Series Editor: Anna Ritchie

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FOREWORD

Twentieth-century Scotland has a heritage of human endeavour stretching back some ten thousand years, and a wide range of man-made monuments survives as proof of that endeavour. The rugged character of much of the Scottish landscape has helped to preserve many antiquities which elsewhere have vanished beneath modern development or intensive deep ploughing, though with some 10,200 km of coastline there has also been an immeasurable loss of archaeological sites as a result of marine erosion. Above all, perhaps, the preservation of such a wide range of monuments should be credited to Scotland's abundant reserves of good building stone, allowing not only the creation of extraordinarily enduring prehistoric houses and tombs but also the development of such remarkable Scottish specialities as the medieval tower-house and the iron-age broch. This volume is one of a series of nine handbooks which have been designed to provide up-to-date and authoritative introductions to the rich archaeological heritage of the various regions of Scotland, highlighting the most interesting and best preserved of the surviving monuments and setting them in their original social context. The time-scale is the widest possible, from relics of World War II or the legacy of 19th-century industrial booms back through history and prehistory to the earliest pioneer days of human settlement, but the emphasis varies from region to region, matching the particular directions in which each has developed. Some monuments are still functioning (lighthouses for instance), others are still occupied as homes, and many have been taken into the care of the State or the National Trust for Scotland, but each has been chosen as specially deserving a visit.

Thanks to the recent growth of popular interest in these topics, there is an increasing demand for knowledge to be presented in a readily digestible form and at a moderate price. In sponsoring this series, therefore, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland broadens the range of its publications with the aim of making authentic information about the man-made heritage available to as wide an audience as possible. This is the second edition of the series, in which more monuments, museums and visitor centres have been added in order to reflect the way in which the management and presentation of Scotland's past have expanded over the last decade. The excursion section proved very popular and has been both expanded and illustrated in colour.

In the first edition, Orkney and Shetland were covered in a single volume, but in this edition each of the two island groups has a volume to itself. This expanded book on Shetland reflects the rich archaeology and architecture of the islands, from prehistoric landscapes to twentieth-century wartime defences complete with guns. The author is a freelance archaeologist, a member of the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland and a Trustee of the National Museums of Scotland. She has pursued a special interest in the archaeology and history of the Northern Isles over the last thirty years.

Monuments have been grouped according to their character and date and, although only the finest, most interesting or best preserved have been described in detail, attention has also been drawn to other sites worth visiting in the vicinity. Each section has its own explanatory introduction, beginning with the most recent monuments and gradually retreating in time back to the earliest traces of prehistoric man.

Each major monument is numbered and identified by its district so that it may easily be located on the end-map, but it is recommended that the visitor should also use the relevant 1:50,000 maps published by the Ordnance Survey as its Landranger Series, particularly for the more remote sites. Shetland is covered by sheet nos 1, 2, 3 and 4. The National Grid Reference for each site is provided (e.g. HU 348673) as well as local directions at the head of each entry.

An asterisk (*) indicates that the site is subject to restricted hours of opening; unless attributed to Historic Scotland or the National Trust for Scotland, the visitor should assume the monument to be in private ownership and **should seek permission locally to view it.** It is of course vital that visitors to any monument should observe the country code and take special care to fasten gates. Where a church is locked, it is often possible to obtain the key from the local manse, post office or general store.

We have made an attempt to estimate how accessible each monument may be for disabled visitors, indicated at the head of each entry by a wheelchair logo and a number: 1=easy access for all visitors, including those in wheelchairs; 2=reasonable access for pedestrians but restricted access for wheelchairs; 3=restricted access for all disabled but a good view from the road or parking area; 4= access for the able-bodied only.

Many of the sites mentioned in this handbook are held in trust for the nation by the Secretary of State for Scotland and cared for on his behalf by Historic Scotland. Further information about these monuments, including details of guidebooks to individual properties, can be obtained from Historic Scotland, Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh EH9 1SH. Key abbreviations used in this volume are: NMS National Museums of Scotland;RCAHMS Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

ANNA RITCHIE
Series Editor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is always great pleasure in coming to Shetland, not just for the beauty of the islands and the interest of their archaeology and history, but also for the warm welcome extended to visitors. Many people have helped me in the preparation of this volume, either personally or through their own published work. Their publications are gratefully listed here in the bibliography, and I owe a particular debt to the work of Miss Audrey Henshall on chambered tombs, Dr Noel Fojut on Shetland prehistory, and Mr Mike Finnie and Mr John Gifford on architectural history. I should like to record special thanks for advice and information to the Shetland archivist Mr Brian Smith, the Shetland archaeologist Ms Val Turner and Mr Alan Blain of the Shetland Amenity Trust, Mr Tommy Watt and Mr Ian Tait of the Shetland Museum, and staff at Shetland Islands Tourism. As always, my husband Dr Graham Ritchie has been an important source of encouragement and practical support.

The inventory and archives of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland were an invaluable source of information, and I am very grateful to the staff of the National Monuments Record. It has been a privilege to work with HMSO and latterly The Stationery Office, both as series editor and as author, and I should like to thank in particular Mr Malcolm Steven, Dr Susan Hemmings, Mr Alastair Fyfe Holmes and Mr Peter Allan. The maps were computer-generated by the Cartographic Unit of The Stationery Office, and the site plans on pp.126,134 (right) are also the copyright of The Stationery Office.

Mr John Sowrey has specialized in Shetland photography for many years, and he has been very generous in providing a number of illustrations for this volume, for which I am most grateful.

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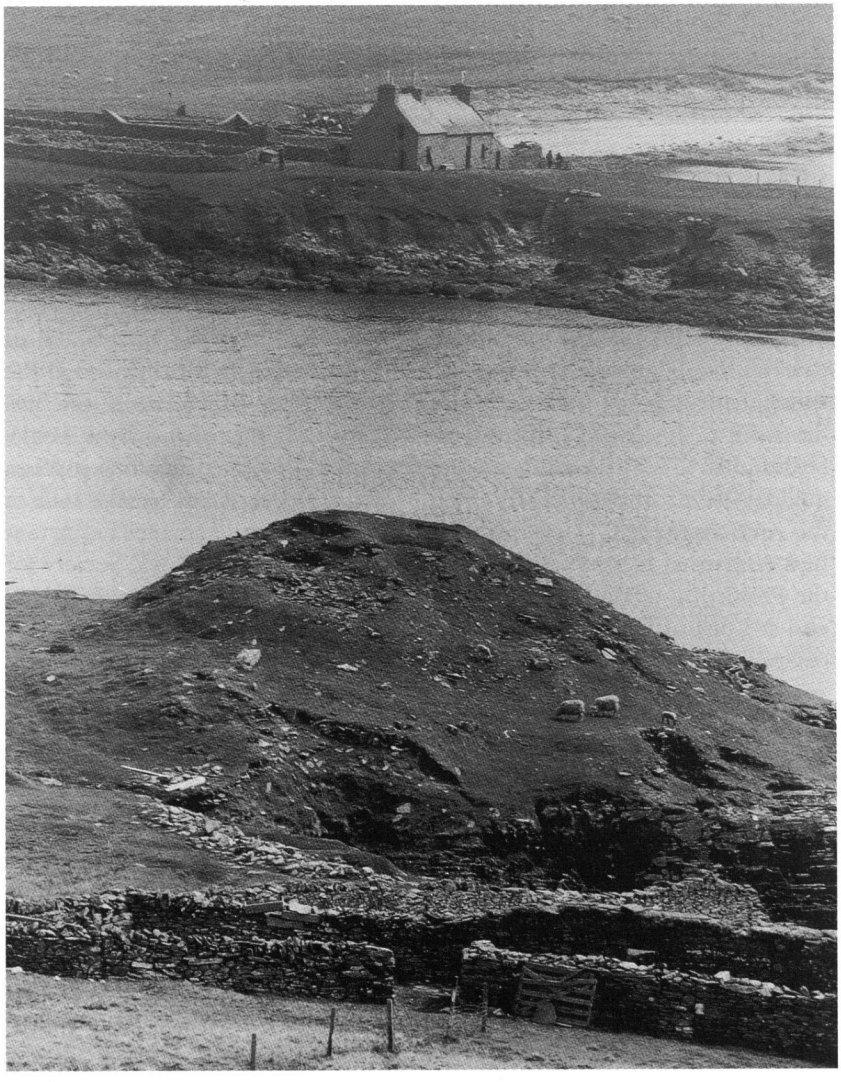
INTRODUCTION

Nowhere in Shetland is far from the sea

There are more than a hundred islands in the main Shetland group, and they stretch for more than a hundred kilometres from the rocky stacks of Muckle Flugga in the north to the precipitous cliffs of Sumburgh Head in the south. The island of Foula lies 23 km to the west and Fair Isle lies 39 km to the south, like a stepping stone on the way to Orkney. True to its name meaning 'bird isle', Foula has more to offer bird-watchers than visitors looking for traces of the remote past, although the island was certainly inhabited as early as three thousand years ago. The rest of Shetland has a longer history of human settlement over some five and a half thousand years, and there are many visible traces to prove it.

The islands display a dramatic landscape of long sea lochs or voes and equally long ridges and promontories. In effect, the voes are drowned valleys, submerged by rising seas since the last major ice age some 10,000 years ago. It is impossible to stray far from the sea in Shetland, and life here has always been dependent on the sea for transport and food. But strong winds since about 3000 BC have also ensured that the sea has been steadily eroding the land, even carving out rock arches and stacks, narrow geos along faults in the bedrock, and gloups or caves. The natural defence afforded by fearsomely high cliffs was a great boon to the builders of forts, but erosion over succeeding centuries has left many of them in very precarious situations. There are plenty of sheltered harbours and fertile lands, however, enough to ensure both early colonization by farming communities and later invasion by Viking and Scottish land-seekers.

Shetland thus has a diversity of landscape that is matched by the extraordinary number of names by which this archipelago has been known over the centuries. The Old Norse name was Hjaltland, which is thought to derive from *hjalt*, the term for the cross-piece between the hilt and blade of a sword, which might describe the shape of central mainland, with Northmavine as the hilt and Dunrossness as the blade. It must be admitted that this is easier to appreciate with the help of a modern map than it can have been without such a visual aid. The spelling of Hjaltland was already becoming Shetland by the end of the 13th century, alongside various other forms such as Yealtaland and Yetland used in subsequent centuries. The Y form was derived from pronouncing Hjaltland without the H, and this became first written and finally pronounced as Zetland, the official name for Shetland during the 19th and most of the 20th centuries. Another variant was Zealand. For some writers, Shetland is also the Thule mentioned by Classical Greek and Roman geographers, but it is clear that Thule lay beyond both Orkney and Shetland, and that it should be identified as Norway or more probably Iceland.



The range of Shetland's monuments - a broch on one side of Noss Sound and a farm with a pony pund on the other

The natural heritage

There is a surprising difference between the Shetland landscape and that of the Orkney islands, only about 125 km to the south - surprising that is until the difference between their geology is appreciated. Shetland consists of a complex series of granites, gneisses and schists, and relatively little of the sandstones and flagstones that underlie the gentler Orcadian landscape. Indeed, Shetland falls into two distinct parts in geological terms, either side of a north-south fault, known as the Walls Boundary Fault, which is thought to be a continuation of the Great Glen Fault of mainland Scotland. Certainly the Shetland landscape has much in common with that of the north-west Highlands. Aside from shaping the scenery, the bedrocks of Shetland have had an important, and limiting, effect upon what could be achieved in architecture and how well buildings have survived. It was much easier for early Orcadians to build well and durably than for their contemporary Shetlanders. Even in later medieval times when there was the benefit of lime mortar to hold the masonry together, fine sandstone was imported from the Orkney island of Eday to provide the dressed stone surrounds for windows and doors, and for the cornerstones of buildings. Chambered tombs built with rough boulders tend not to survive as well as those built with neat flagstone walls, though they can be equally impressive. But there was good stone to be had in some areas. Shetland's finest surviving prehistoric building is the broch, or stone-built tower, on the small island of Mousa, where the bedrock belongs to the Old Red Sandstone series of excellent building stone.

In the past, seabirds have been almost as important a marine resource as fish, for they provided meat, eggs, feathers and oil. Today, the bird reserves are an essential aspect both of natural conservation in the islands and of tourism. Foula has the largest colony of Great Skuas in Britain and in the summer plays host to the rare Leach's Petrel, while Fair Isle is a welcome haven for a huge variety of birds on their way to other parts of the world. Shetland is a vital breeding ground for many seabirds, including puffins, guillemots, razorbills, gannets and fulmars, as well as Arctic species such as the Arctic terns and skuas. Scottish Natural Heritage manages important bird reserves at Hermaness in Unst and on Noss, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds cares for reserves in the islands of Fetlar and Yell, and at Loch of Spiggie in south mainland. There are also designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest, such as Ronas Hill in north mainland where arctic alpine plants grow, for Shetland abounds in species of plants specially adapted to the local climate. This is also a wonderful place in which to see the otter in its natural habitat.

Early travellers to Shetland

Even before the unique qualities of the archaeology of the islands were understood, their remote location and archaic lifestyle made Shetland a favourite destination for intrepid travellers of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Their journals are an absorbing source of information, none more so than that of Sir Walter Scott, who was delighted to be invited to

join the Commissioners for the Northern Lighthouses on 'a voyage in the Lighthouse Yacht to Nova Zembla and the Lord knows where in the summer of 1814'. That voyage took him to Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles, and, in the pages that follow here, there are many references to the journal kept by Scott on that occasion, for his observations illuminate many areas of traditional life in Shetland. But Scott was one of many such erudite travellers, and there are nuggets of information to be gleaned from all.

'A Zetland farmer looks to the sea to pay his rent.' Sir Walter Scott could have had this scene in mind, drawn in 1801

Much of what fascinated many of these early travellers can still be seen today, especially the remains of the hundreds of tiny corn mills that dot the Shetland landscape. Even older antiquities were noticed and sometimes help to explain what survives today. In some cases, mention was made of important antiquities that have since been lost, such as the Pictish symbol stone at Sandness.

The prehistory of Shetland

Prehistory for Shetland begins in the fourth millennium BC, but that is the conclusion based on current evidence, and it may well be pushed back by new evidence in years to come. As yet, there is no reason to believe that there was any permanent human settlement before the earliest farming communities arrived in the first half of the fourth millennium, although seasonal fishing parties may have visited the islands previously. Traces of the presence of such fishing parties may have been destroyed by coastal erosion, as may traces of the very earliest farmers. On the other hand, apart from fish and seabirds, there was little to attract hunters, for the isolation of the islands after the last glaciation had the effect of making them out of bounds to the larger mammals. The early farmers were obliged to take with them the young cattle and sheep on which their lifestyle depended, along with seed corn for the crops of barley to be harvested in the new land.

Living off the land and the sea - the broch at Burraland with its ruined village and a modern hayfield

Where did they come from, these daring colonists with the ingredients for a lifestyle that would continue, little changed, for five millennia? Despite the fact that Lerwick is almost equidistant from Aberdeen and Bergen, there is no real evidence as yet for any contact across the North Sea before the start of the Viking Age in the late 8th century AD. The earliest farmers appear to have come from northern Scotland, direct from Caithness rather than via Orkney because their culture developed rather differently in Shetland than in Orkney. Nevertheless, intervisibility with Fair Isle and Orkney seems to have been an important factor, for the colonization extended no farther than the eye could see. The Faroe Isles away to the north-west and invisible even from Shetland were to remain uninhabited for another 4000 years.

The task that confronted these pioneers was formidable. Their boats were primitive, either logboats or skin-covered boats, and navigation probably depended on the accumulated experience of the earlier hunting and gathering population. What compelled them to explore and colonize as far north as the eye could see?

Shetland was certainly more inviting then to arable farmers than it is today. The climate was a little warmer, enough to allow reliable grain harvests and to make sea voyages easier. There was a wider variety of vegetation in the islands, including light woodland with birch and alder, and an astounding bounty of large driftwood borne across the Atlantic from North America. Such driftwood would have helped to balance the relatively poor quality of

building stone available. But by about 3000 BC, the native woodland had been devastated by increased offshore wind-speeds and a deteriorating climate, resulting in the virtually treeless landscapes of today.

Nevertheless, the success of the early farming communities was such that their houses and tombs survive even today, five thousand years later. But it was a fleeting success that ensured their survival. They were too successful, in the sense that their intensive farming methods seem to have resulted in exhaustion of the soil and a far more difficult exercise in survival for their descendants. This process seems to have taken place throughout Scotland, but in agriculturally marginal areas such as Shetland the result was even more devastating than in richer areas such as Orkney. This may explain why Shetland has no spectacular monuments of early prehistoric elitism to match those of Orkney, such as the great stone circle of the Ring of Brodgar or the exquisite chambered tomb of Maes Howe.

Nevertheless, few areas in Britain can rival the prehistoric landscapes that survive in Shetland. The individual monuments may not be outstanding as evidence of human endeavour, but there are complexes of houses, tombs and field walls that add up to an extraordinary insight into a way of life that flourished five thousand years ago. And in the case of the great hall at Stanydale (no. 56), a glimpse survives of a society capable of communal organization beyond that of the family unit.

After this initial phase of colonization and development, there is little sign of innovation through the second and early first millennia BC. Chambered tombs went out of use as elsewhere in Britain, but there has been limited excavation of the individual burials in cists that succeeded them. It is unclear to what extent Shetland shared in the various fashions in pottery and in weapons made of the prestigious new bronze. But standing stones were erected, mounds of burnt stones accumulated on seasonal hunting sites, and at least one bronzesmith worked at Jarlshof to meet local demand for swords and cloak pins (no.39). Jarlshof is a truly remarkable place, for its buildings span the whole of prehistory and take historic times down to the 17th century. The wheelhouses that nestle in the courtyard beside the broch are the most complete to be found anywhere in Scotland.

As yet, the social mechanisms that demanded the development of fortifications in the second half of the first millennium BC are barely understood in Shetland, but they resulted in some of the most spectacular and best preserved monuments to be found in the islands. There are promontory forts, island forts and broch-towers, and a special form of fortification unique to Shetland, which is known as the blockhouse. It is currently thought that the latter may have served a ritual rather than practical function. There are a few artefacts of Roman origin from Shetland, but they are likely to have arrived at second hand in Roman times or later, for the closest that the Roman military machine came to Shetland was when Agricola's fleet sailed round Orkney and saw Shetland in the distance.

A pair of footprints carved on a stone at Clickhimin may relate to the inauguration of Shetland rulers

Picts and the introduction of Christianity

In mainland Scotland, the most lasting effect of the Roman presence was to stimulate the native Celtic tribes into a federation of tribes, the better to withstand the Roman threat. That federation was to develop into the kingdom of the Picts by the mid 6th century. There are scant historical sources for this period, but they imply that Orkney was a partly autonomous region within the Pictish kingdom. The status of Shetland is unclear, but there is enough archaeological evidence surviving to suggest that the islands were part of the same cultural province, even if they were not governed directly by the Pictish king. There are symbol stones, burials and artefacts of Pictish type, together with components of slab-built shrines that were a special feature of the Pictish Church. Indeed more fragments of such shrines are known from Shetland than from any other area of Pictland. The superbly carved side-panel from Papil on the island of West Burra depicts hooded clerics wearing book-satchels, including one, perhaps elderly, monk on a Shetland pony, all in a procession towards a monumental prayer-cross of Irish type. Could this be an allegory for the Christian conversion of Pictish Shetland?

Christianity comes to Shetland - the Monks Stone from Papil

To judge by the surviving evidence, Christianity was accepted in Shetland from at least the 8th century onwards. Place-names incorporating the element *papar*, such as Papil in West Burra and in Noss, and Papa Stour, reflect Old Norse names for places where the Norsemen encountered Irish missionaries. In Iceland, *papi* is a nickname for the puffin as well as for churchmen, and it has been suggested that *papar* names might refer to the presence of either (or both, as puffins and Christian hermits tended to inhabit the same remote spots). The cross-slab from Papil (see p.92) includes two bird-men as well as Christian motifs, and they appear to have been added by a different stone-carver's hand, perhaps an irreverent Norseman making a point about puffin-clerics. The design of the Papil cross-slab is echoed by another slab from Cullingsburgh in Bressay (no.37),

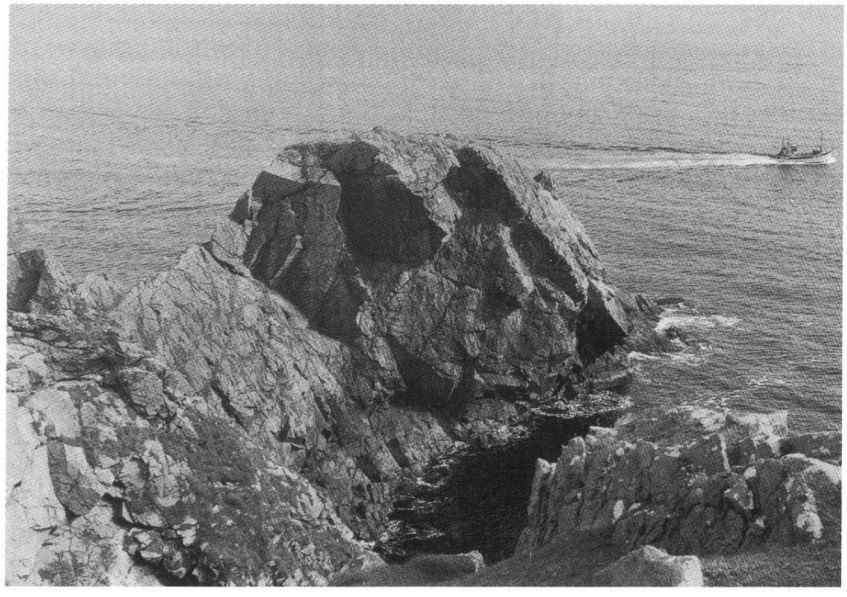
The bilingual cross-slab from Bressay

this time carved on both sides (one side shown here and the other on p.99). It also bears an inscription in ogham (groups of strokes on either side of a central base line) along both narrow faces, which includes both the Gaelic word for cross and the Norse word for daughter. The ogham alphabet was introduced into the Northern Isles from Ireland, and its use on this stone ilustrates not just the Irish element in the population of late Pictish Shetland but also the linguistic mixture of Irish Gaelic and Norse speakers in the 9th and 10th centuries.

Papil and St Ninian's Isle (no.38) are the earliest attested Christian sites, but there are probably others yet to be discovered. As well as early church-sites, there are in Shetland a number of remote hermitages on promontories and rock stacks, such as Burger Stack in Unst (HP 661139).

The Viking Age

The first record of a Viking raid on the monastery at Iona dates to AD 795, and it is likely that by then such raids were mounted from secure base-camps in the Northern Isles. These Viking warriors came ultimately from the west coast of Norway, and they were not slow to see the advantages of settling permanently in Shetland and Orkney. Virtually all the place-names of Shetland are of Norse derivation, and they demonstrate how effective was the linguistic blanket that the incomers threw over the islands. Norse settlement was clearly in large numbers and rapidly dominated the existing native population. The bulk of the archaeological evidence for the Viking Age in Shetland consists of pagan burials, domestic farms and chance finds of artefacts, such as the glorious silver brooch from Gulberwick (in the Shetland Museum). There should be many more Viking sites to be found, but is only in recent years that there has been an intensive campaign of fieldwork, which has identified a number of house-sites in Unst. There was also a flourishing steatite industry at this time, both in Unst and in south mainland (no.40).



Perilous isolation on Burgar Stack

The Norse earldom of Orkney, Caithness and Shetland was established in the late 9th century and was based in Orkney. But the earls were often in Shetland, particularly on their way to and from Norway, and some of these occasions are recorded in *Orkneyinga Saga*. Although Law Ting Holm is not mentioned in the saga, it would certainly have been a place to which the earls would come to dispense justice and settle disputes (no.42). In the course of the 10th century, the Norse settlers gradually adopted Christianity and ceased placing gravegoods in their burials, although the official conversion of the earldom took place in 995, by order of the Norwegian king Olaf Tryggvason. The bishopric of Orkney and Shetland was founded in the 11th century, and the following century saw the building of many small churches throughout the islands. In 1154, the bishopric was included within the Norwegian province of Nidaros (Trondheim), and there it remained until 1472, when it was transferred to the see of St Andrews.

Later times

The Norse earldom itself was split in 1194, and Shetland was placed under the direct control of the Norwegian Crown. In 1469 the islands were pledged to Scotland as part of the complex negotiations surrounding the marriage of King James III to Margaret, daughter of King Christian I of Denmark and Norway. By this time there was already a strong Scottish element in the Northern Isles, and their annexation by the Scottish Crown in 1472 confirmed their allegiance to Scotland rather than Norway. It did not however guarantee smooth relations between ruling Scots in the islands and the Scottish Crown, and the Stewart earls were particularly ambitious during the years of their rule from 1567 to 1615. The two castles of Scalloway and Muness belong to this turbulent period (nos 27, 28).

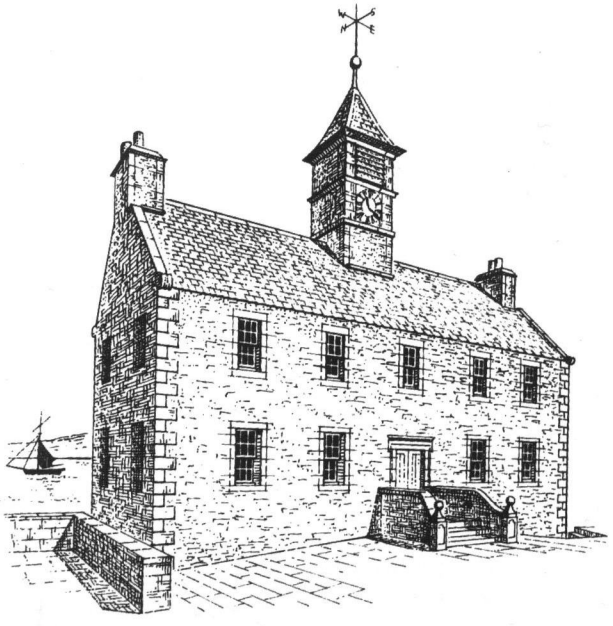
In terms of the surviving architecture, one of Shetland's strong points is the number of laird's houses built in the 17th and 18th centuries which still exist. Some have been altered and extended, but many look much the same today as when they housed the leading families of the islands. Another special feature are the trading booths built at good harbours to serve an increasing North Sea trade network from the 15th century onwards, though none of the surviving booths can be dated earlier than the 17th century. They are sturdy and attractive buildings, and, along with the remains of later fishing stations, they are a tangible link with an essential element of Shetland's past.

Scalloway took over the judicial role of Tingwall at the start of the 17th century, but the importance of the town was overtaken by Lerwick when the North Sea coast became the focus of trade and military activities. The advantages of Bressay Sound were recognized first by Dutch fishermen and followed with the construction of Fort Charlotte in the later 17th century (no. 2). The huge expansion of herring fishing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries made Lerwick's fortune, and its affluence can be seen in its civic and private buildings (no. 10). Like Orkney, Shetland possessed considerable strategic value in the two World Wars of the 20th century, and

some of the surviving military relics of those wars are unusually well-preserved. Again Bressay Sound was a vital anchorage, protected by gun batteries and booms at either end, and Swarbacks Minn on the west coast provided a haven on the fringe of the North Atlantic.

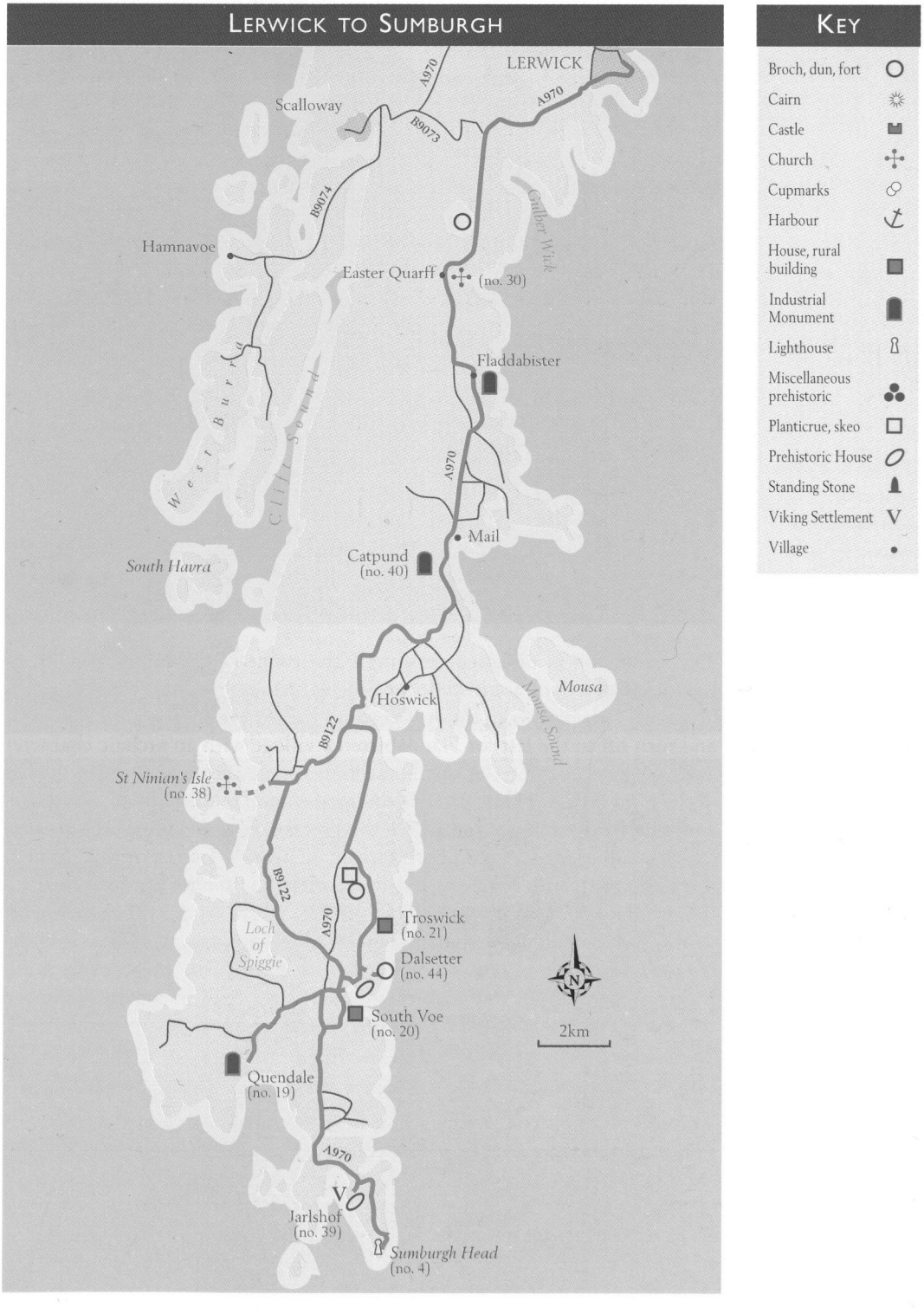
It was perhaps the vast scale of Shetland's cliffs that made the provision of lighthouses a little less urgent than in Orkney, where low-lying islands became invisible in high seas. Fire beacons had been in use since Viking times, if not earlier, and the first lighthouse was provided on Sumburgh Head in 1821 (no. 4), in an effort to help ships avoid the treacherous 'roost', where currents from the Atlantic and the North Sea met with awesome force.

From the 4th millennium BC to the 20th century, visible traces of Shetland's built heritage are many and varied and sometimes unique. There is much still to be understood, by fieldwork or excavation, or by delving into the written or oral archive, and it is this evolving history that makes the islands both a delight to visit and an irresistible challenge.



This fine tolbooth graced Lerwick in the 18th century

EXCURSIONS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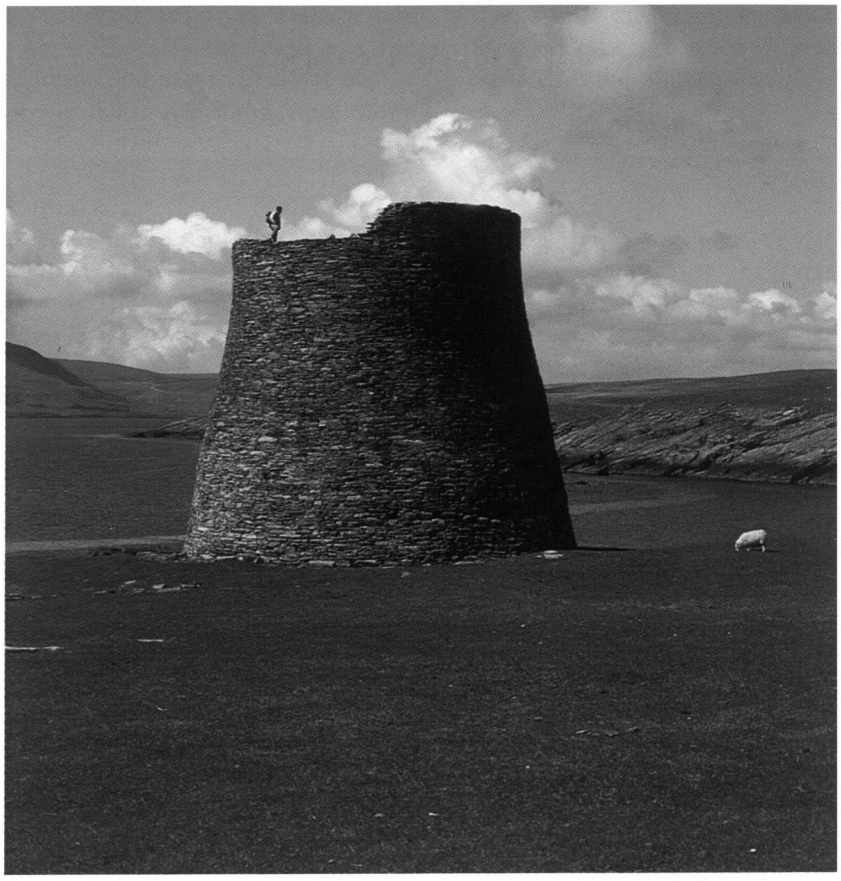
(no. 30)
Gulber Wick
Fladdabister
West Burra
Clift Sound
Mail
Catpund
(no. 40)
South Havra
Hoswick
Mousa
Mousa Sound
B9122
St Ninian's Isle
(no. 38)
Troswick
(no. 21)
Loch of Spiggie
Dalsetter
(no. 44)
South Voe
(no. 20)
Quendale
(no. 19)
Jarlshof
(no. 39)
Sumburgh Head
(no. 4)
N
2km
KEY
Broch, dun, fort
Cairn
Castle
Church
Cupmarks
Harbour
House, rural building
Industrial Monument
Lighthouse
Miscellaneous prehistoric
Planticrue, skeo
Prehistoric House
Standing Stone
Viking Settlement
Village



The magnificent broch of Mousa

This excursion is designed to sample the range of monuments south of Lerwick, but it does not include the broch of Mousa (no. 45), which requires at least a half-day. Take the A 970 south from Lerwick for almost 10 km, and turn off to the left for Fladdabister, a village with an archaic character and two good examples of small lime kilns visible above the shore to the left of the road (HU 437321). After rejoining the main road south of the village, continue to Cunningsburgh to see the prehistoric and Viking-Age steatite quarries along the Catpund burn (no. 40). This new stretch of road has cut through the steatite outcrop, and the modern toolmarks are very clear on the rock face. Continue south to HU 399226, where the B 9122 branches off to the right; a side-road west to Bigton allows a pleasant walk across the remarkable sand tombolo to St Ninian's Isle (no. 38). Continuing south through Scousburgh, the Loch of Spiggie on the right is an RSPB Nature Reserve and a Site of Special Scientific Interest, famous for its autumn and winter wildfowl, especially the whooper swans that gather here in hundreds.

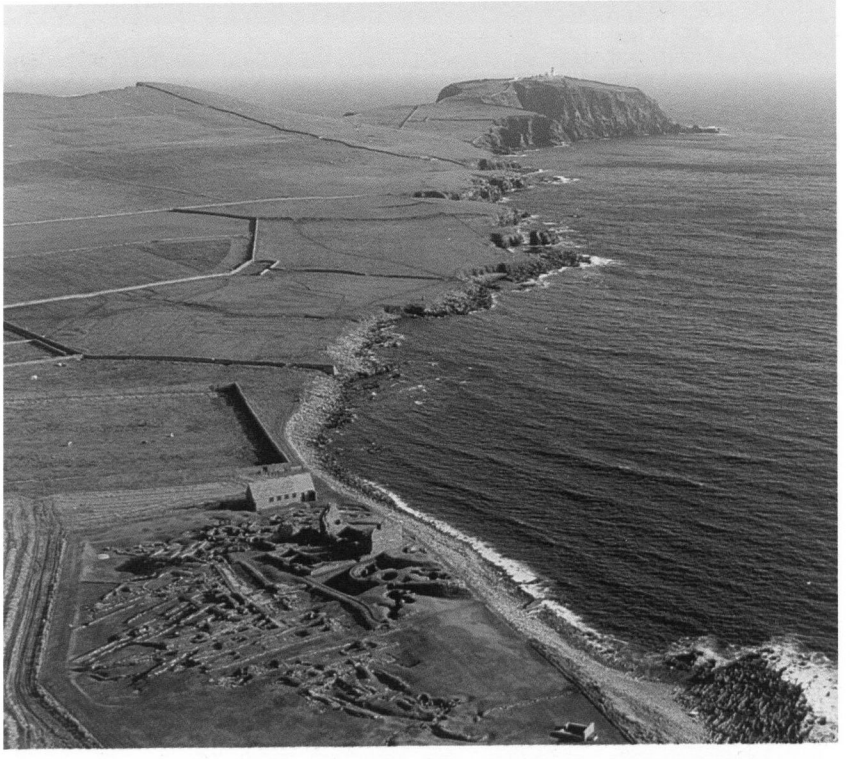
The B 9122 joins up with the A 970 in time to take a signposted minor road to the croft museum with its restored horizontal mill at South Voe (no. 20). Continue south and rejoin the A 970 to Sumburgh to the lighthouse (no. 4) and the superb multi-period settlement at Jarlshof (no. 39). Return north on the A 970, and after about 6 km take the left-hand turning to Quendale to see the restored vertical mill (no. 19). Return northwards and cross the

A 970 to follow the coast road through Boddam to see the neolithic houses and broch at Dalsetter (no. 44), and the horizontal mills on the Clumlie Burn above Troswick (no. 21). Incorporated into the steading at Clumlie (HU 404181) is a broch excavated in the 19th century. It stands 2m high, a guard cell is visible on the right of the entrance and some of the internal fittings survive within the broch. South mainland has many planticrues, which are mostly square or rectangular, bu two fine circular examples can be seen close to the road just past the Clumlie track. Continuing north, rejoin the A 970 to return to Lerwick. After passing Easter Quarff with its 19th-century parliamentary church (no. 30), pause in the layby beside the Loch of Brindister on the left of the road, where a tiny and well-preserved fort can be seen on an island in the loch.

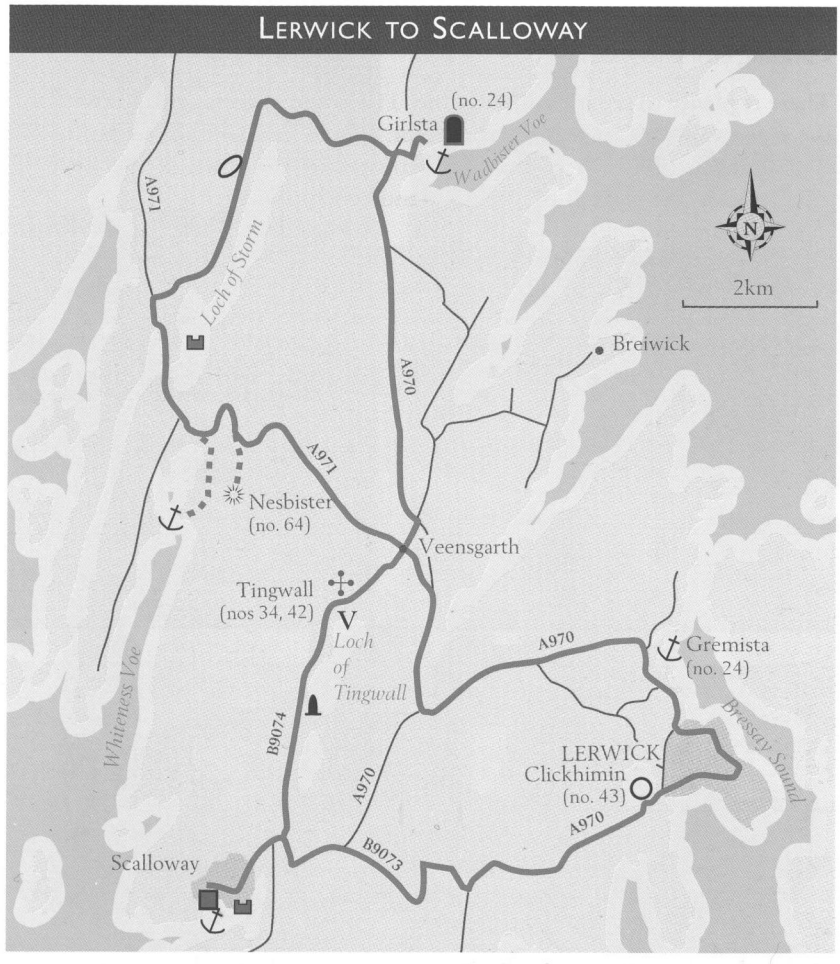
On the steatite outcrop beside the Catpund Burn, a blank for a square vessel has been removed

The Shetland Croft Museum at South Voe

Quendale Mill is a monument to 19th-century endeavour



Jarlshof and Sumburgh Head from the air



Leaving Lerwick by the north-bound A 970, pause on the outskirts to visit the Böd of Gremista (no.7). After about 5 km, take the left fork (A 971) towards Walls. From the viewpoint carpark on Wormadale Hill, it is possible to walk south along the ridge to the burial cairn on Nesbister Hill (no. 64). The main road descends the hill to the head of Whiteness Voe, where a track leads south along the east side of the voe towards the small booth at Point of Nesbister (HU 394449; see p.53), which makes an interesting contrast in scale to the Gremista booth. White Ness and Strom Ness are two long narrow promontories separated by Stromness Voe, and the road passes over a bridge near the head of the voe where it meets the Loch of Strom. The ruined Castle of Strom can be seen on a tiny island close to the west shore of the loch (HU 395475; see p.85). One km farther north, take the minor road on the right along the lochside to see the early prehistoric house at HU 403502. Follow the road eastwards to its junction with the A 970, turn left and almost immediately right to Girlsta with its 19th-century mill and limekiln (no. 24).

Return to the A 970 and turn left to follow the road southwards, taking the right-hand turn at Veensgarth on to the B 9074 for Scalloway. This passes the church at Tingwall (no. 34) with its interesting graveyard, and the Viking-Age assembly place of Law Ting Holm (no. 42). The road skirts the

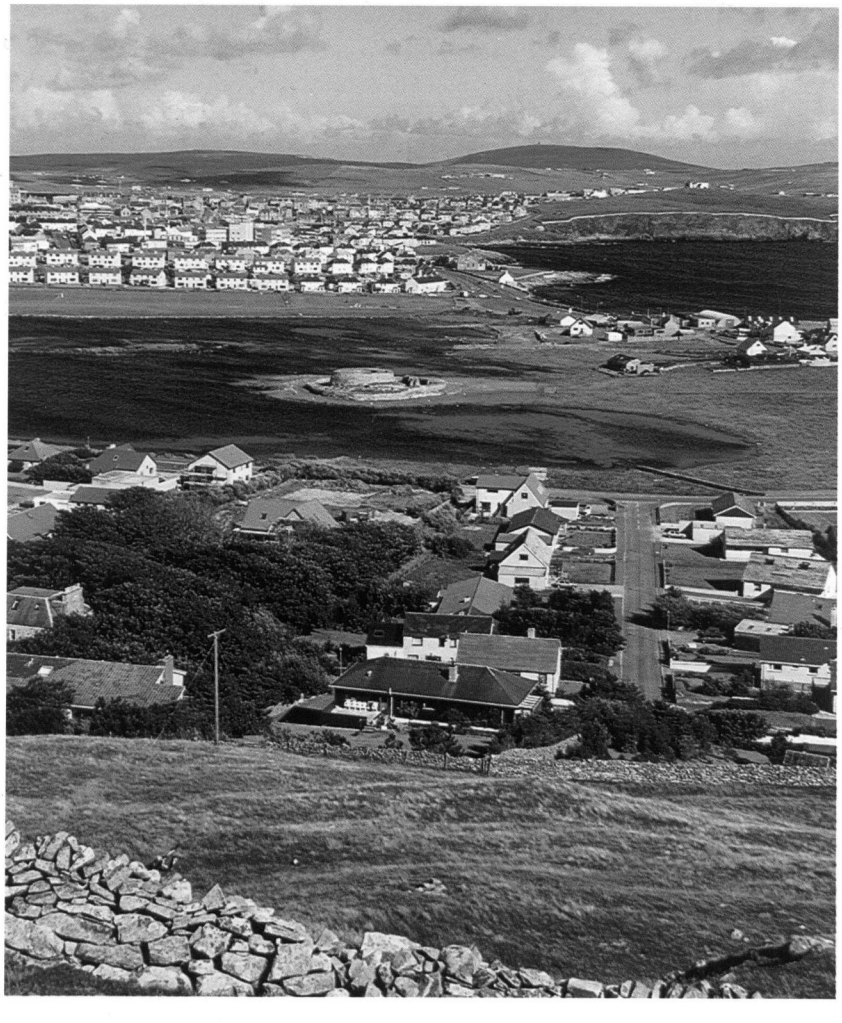
Loch of Tingwall and, at the southern end of the loch, a tall prehistoric standing stone (no. 61).

There is plenty to see in Scalloway (no. 11), before returning to Lerwick via the A 970 and B 9073, which crosses the hills to join another stretch of the A 970 south of Lerwick. On the outskirts of the town is the Loch of Clickhimin with its well-preserved island-broch (no. 43).

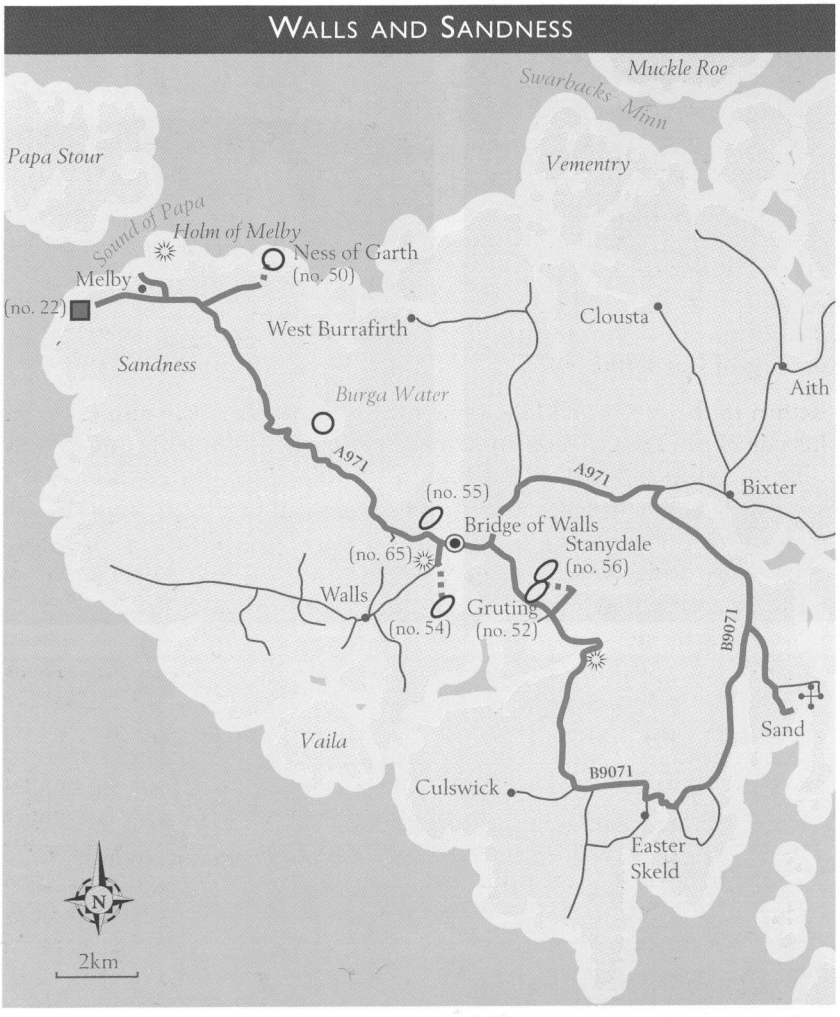
Scalloway Castle was built in 1600 as an emblem of Earl Patrick's power

The Old Haa of Scalloway retains its elegant doorway

The Böd of Gremista reminds Lerwick of its roots as a fishing station



Amidst modern Lerwick, the broch of Clickhimin stands isolated in its loch

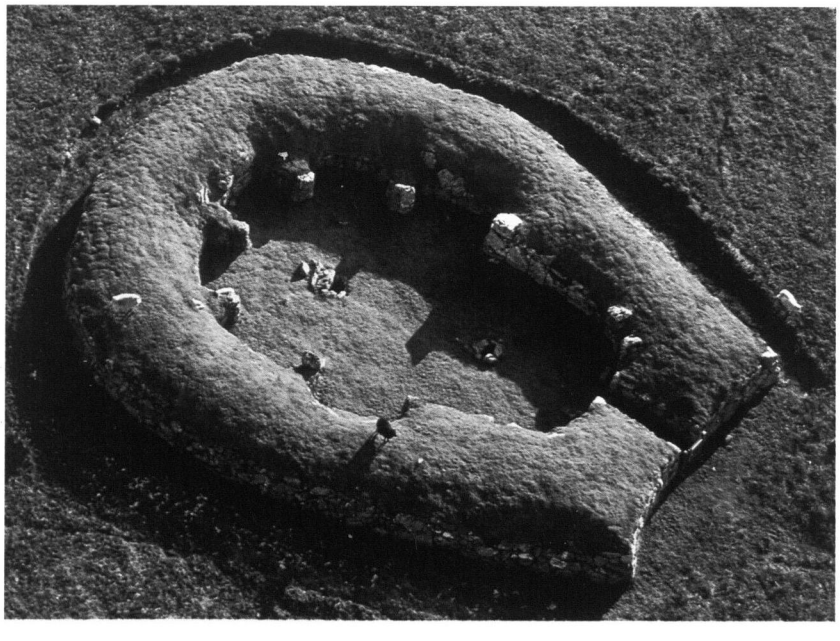


A prehistoric landscape at Scord of Brouster

This excursion begins at the western end of the A 971 at Melby, where there is a good view of the island of Papa Stour (if you wish to visit the island, the ferry runs from West Burrafirth farther east along the coast, reached by road from the A 971 east of Bridge of Walls). Closer to Melby is a small island known as the Holm of Melby, on which there are no fewer than three chambered cairns, one of them a trapezoidal version of a square cairn. This would seem to have been used as an island of the dead in early prehistoric times. About 1 km from the end of the A 971, a minor road leads west to Huxter, where there is a very interesting series of horizontal mills (no. 22). Return to the A 971 and, after about 1 km, take the minor road on the left which leads eastwards to Crawton to visit the prehistoric promontory fort of Ness of Garth (no. 50).

Return to the A 971 and follow the road south-eastwards, pausing on the hillside above Burga Water to admire the fine stone-built fort on its tiny island in the loch (HU 234539). The Bridge of Walls area presents a densely settled prehistoric landscape, and the hillsides are dotted with houses and cairns, with ancient field walls threaded amongst them. As the road approaches Bridge of Walls, the houses and enclosures of the settlement of Scord of Brouster are on the left (no. 55). Turning right at Bridge of Walls itself, the great stoney mass of the Gallow Hill cairn is close to the road on the right after almost 0.5 km (no. 65). From here it is well worth walking though the aptly named Stany Fields along the west side of the Voe of Browland to visit another settlement complex at Pinhoulland (no. 54).

Return to Bridge of Walls and continue east for about 1 km, taking a minor road on the right to Gruting. Close to Gruting School is another group of houses and fields (no. 52), and the other side of the ridge is the great 'temple' of Stanydale (no. 56). The next turning on the left leads, after almost 1 km, to the signposted footpath to Stanydale. Return to the Gruting crossroads and turn left; after some 2 km there are the remains, close to the left side of the road at HU 295484, of a fine heel-shaped chambered

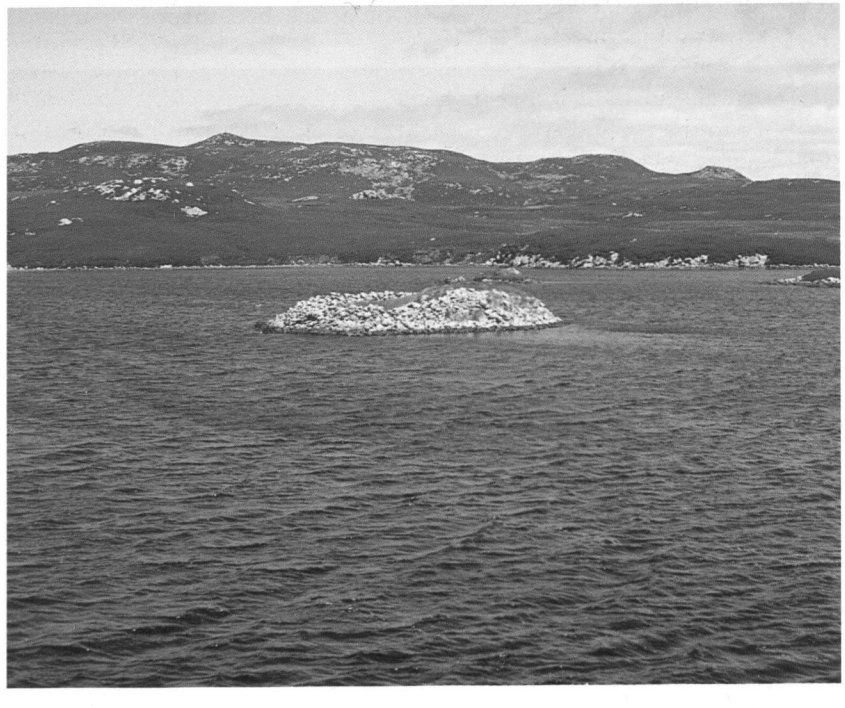


The great house at Stanydale holds a special place in Shetland prehistory

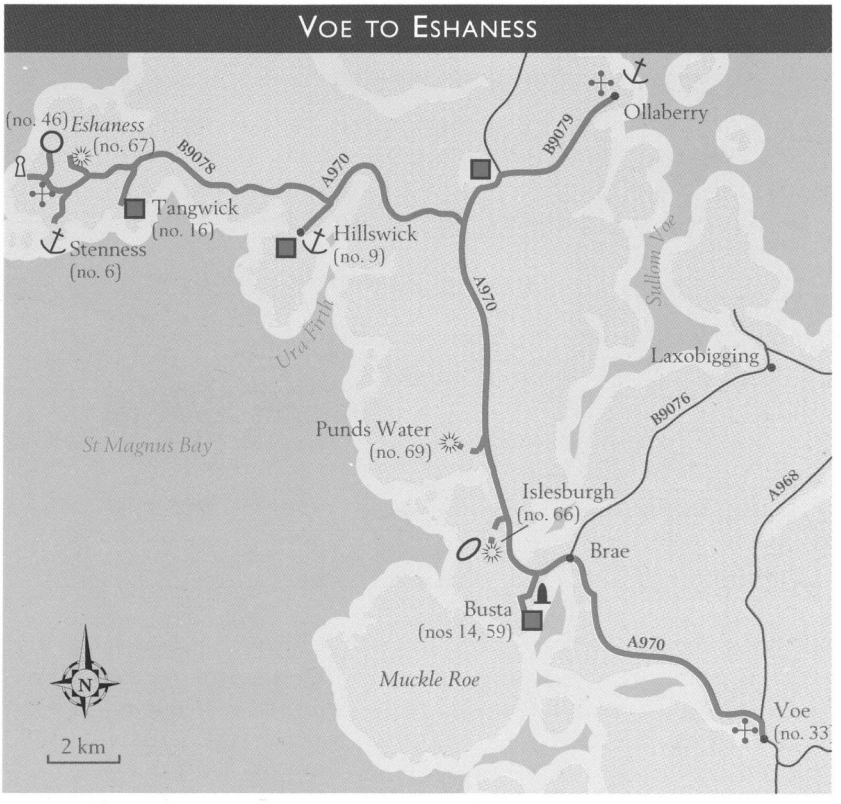
cairn known as Seli Voe. A rocky outcrop acts as one tip of the concave facade, and the cairn is 6.7 m deep. The entrance passage leads into a rectangular chamber.

Continuing south, the road joins the B 9071; turn left and follow the road through Easter Skeld and Garderhouse back to the A 971. A detour can be made from about 1 km north of Garderhouse to see the old church at Sand, where the chancel arch stands intact (HU 345473).

The rest of the church at Sand has been demolished, but the chancel arch stands proud



The island dun in Burga Water



Starting at Voe, some 30 km north of Lerwick on the A 970, visit the old church overlooking Olna Firth (no. 33) before continuing to Brae. Beyond the village, turn south on a minor road along the west side of Busta Voe to see the massive standing stone (no. 59) and the enchanting old house at Busta (no. 14). Returning to the A 970, continue northwards over the narrow Mavis Grind, somewhat romantically regarded as separating the Atlantic from the North Sea, and visit the well-preserved chambered tombs of Islesburgh (no. 66) and Punds Water (no. 69). North again, the B 9079 leads off to the north-east to the fishing station of Ollaberry with its fine 19th-century pier and post-crane, and, in the graveyard of the modern church, a grandiose 18th-century funerary memorial apparently attached to the rubble gable of the earlier church.

Return south-westwards to the A 970, noticing the stone-walled sheep pund on a promontory in Eela Water on the right just south of the junction. After about 2 km, take the west fork to Hillswick with its white-painted timber St Magnus Hotel (no. 9). Just over 1 km north-east of Hillswick, the B 9078 leads west to Eshaness, where some of the most beautiful seascapes in Shetland are to be enjoyed. Once past Braewick, take the minor road south to visit the 17th-century Tangwick Haa (no. 16). Return to the B 9078 and continue south-westwards, visiting the excellent chambered tomb known as the March Cairn (no. 67) to the right of the road past Muckla Water, before reaching the road end at Stenness with its 19th-century fishing lodges (no.6). The plain concrete cross on the hill above was erected in 1927 by the Board of Commissioners for Northern Lighthouses as a sea-mark to guide the boats landing supplies for the Eshaness lighthouse.

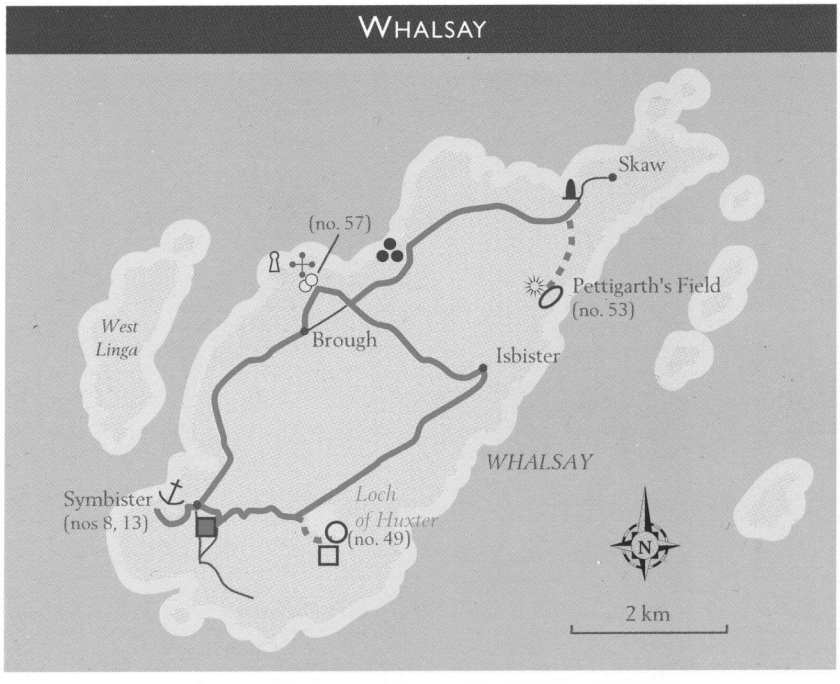
The standing stone at Busta in a rare snowscape

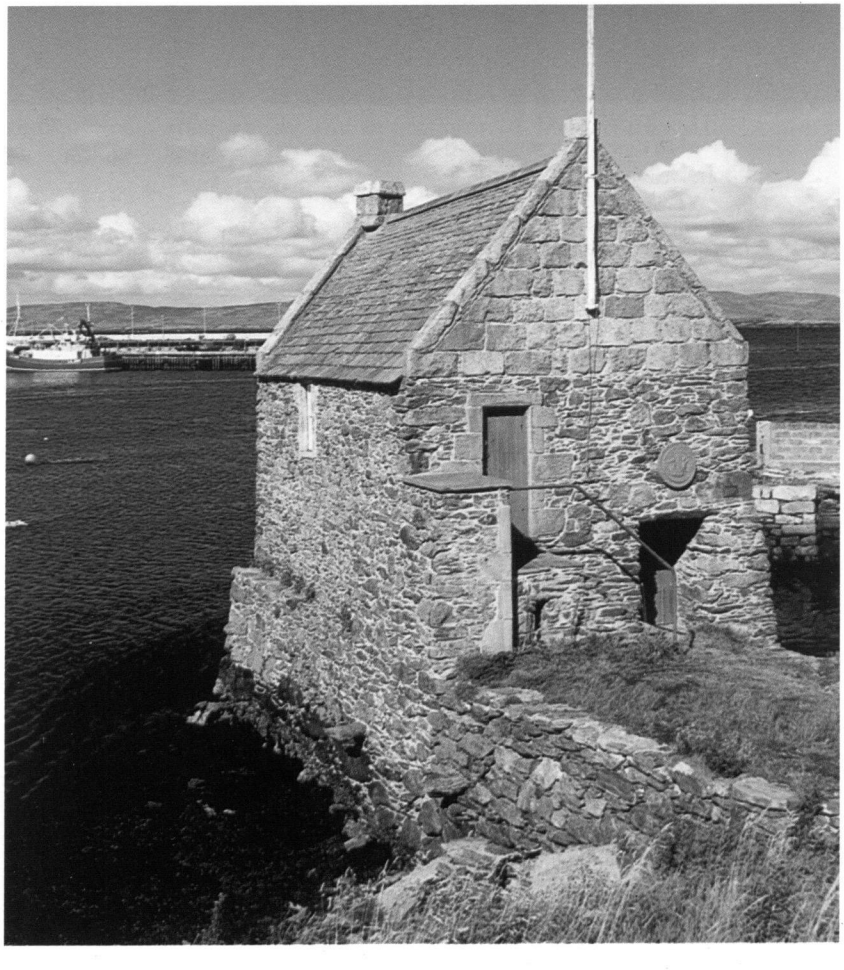
Returning north, a minor road to the west leads to Eshaness lighthouse (1925-9), now part of a private house. On the way, take the track to the south-west to the old burial ground of Cross Kirk. The foundations of the rectangular medieval church can be seen, with an entrance in the west gable, although the interior is filled level with the surviving walls. An impressive monument to the Cheynes of Tangwick is carved with two coats of arms and emblems of mortality and is probably of 18th-century date. Among later memorials is the sad inscription to Donald Robertson who died in 1848, 'a peaceable, quiet man' whose untimely end was caused by an apothecary who mistakenly sold him poison (nitre) instead of Epsom salts. From the carpark at Eshaness, the island broch in Loch of Houlland can be visited over rough moorland (no. 46).

A tomb for the ancestors at Punds Water

Tangwick Haa and tiny Dore Holm

An impressive island broch in Loch of Houlland





Ancient and modern in the harbour at Symbister - the old Pier House has been restored

An island fort with a blockhouse in the Loch of Huxter

The island of Whalsay presents a most interesting microcosm of Shetland history and environment, most of which can be appreciated within a day. The island has been inhabited since the early days of human settlement in Shetland, and ite prehistoric monuments together with unique later survivals of Hanseatic trade are among the most remarkable of Shetland's man-made heritage.

The passenger and car ferry from Laxo Voe on the adjacent mainland (reached from Lerwick via the A 970 and the B 9071) docks at Symbister, a harbour used by Hanseatic and later merchants from the 16th century onwards, who built trading booths and storehouses (no. 8). Take the road northwards along the west side of the island to see the cup-marked rocks at Brough (no. 57). Below Brough the lighthouse on Suther Ness guards the entrance into Linga Sound (HU 550653), while adjacent Kirk Ness (both are virtually islands joined to the mainland by narrow isthmuses) is so-called because the existing church stands on the site of an early medieval church, recalling the location of St Ninian's Isle church (no. 38). A platform in the churchyard may mark the position of the earlier church.

Continue north-eastwards towards the road end at Skaw; a good example of a burnt mound may be seen from the road at Challister (HU 565655), and, again from the road, a standing stone in a somewhat odd location close to the shore of Skaw Voe (HU 589664).

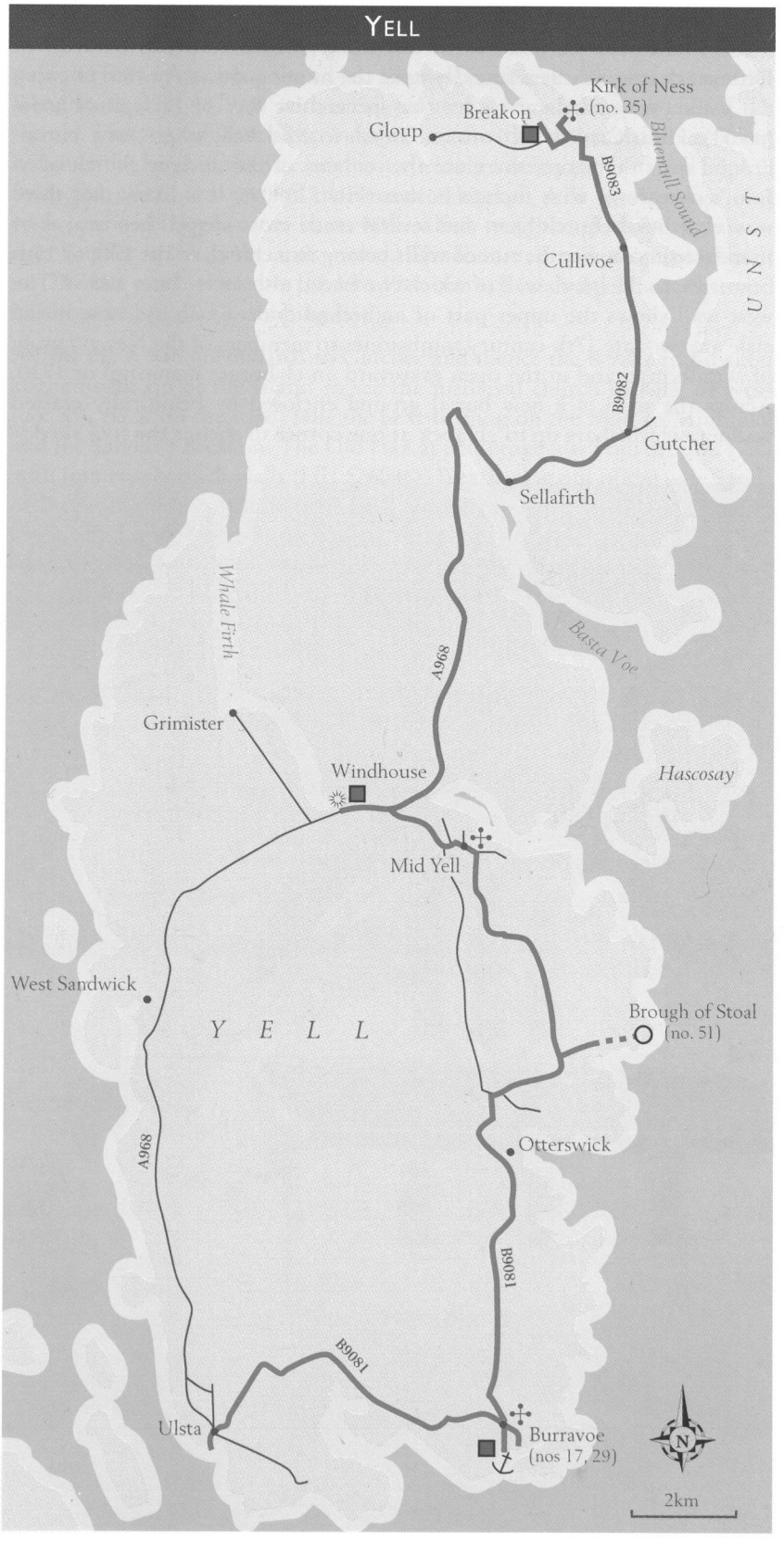
The easiest way to reach the remarkable early prehistoric structures above Yoxie Geo is probably to follow the peat track from Muckle Breck (HU 587660) south-westwards past planticrues into the moorland to the chambered tomb known as Pettigarths Field (no. 53), with its commanding view of the ancient settlement area below (the Benie Hoose is hidden in a dip of the land). An alternative route offering magnificent views of the steep

cliffs and geos is to walk from the road end at Skaw (HU 594666) southwards alongside the airstrip and then follow the coast to Yoxie Geo.

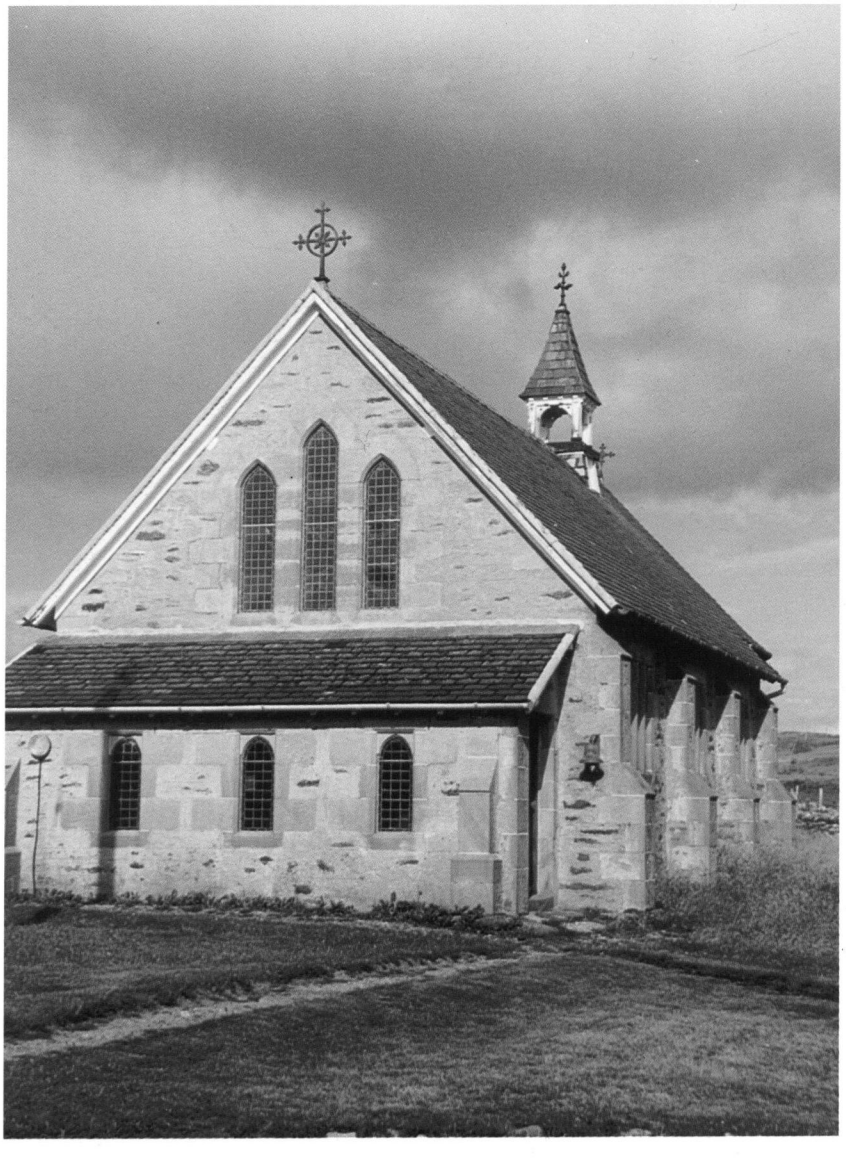
Return to the cross-roads at Brough and turn left via Isbister towards the Loch of Huxter; the interior of the island is almost entirely peat-covered, governing the distribution of modern settlement and still providing an invaluable source of fuel. Between Isbister and Nuckro Water there is a fine series of planticrues to the right of the road. A track leads down from the road to the west shore of the Loch of Huxter, whence a very wet and boggy walk over old peat banks round the south shore will lead to the islet fort (no. 49; only in a dry season should the visitor attempt to cross to the fort along its rocky causeway), but it can also be viewed distantly from the road. Much stone has been robbed from the fort to build planticrues on the adjacent shore.

Continuing west to Symbister, visit the fine Georgian house (no. 13) before returning to the harbour.

The Georgian elegance of Symbister House


YELL
Kirk of Ness
(no. 35)
Breakon
Gloup
Bluemull Sound
B9083
Cullivoe
U N S T
B9082
Gutcher
Sellafirth
Whale Firth
A968
Basta Voe
Grimister
Windhouse
Hascosay
Mid Yell
West Sandwick
Y E L L
Brough of Stoal
(no. 51)
Otterswick
A968
B9081
B9081
Ulsta
Burravoe
(nos 17, 29)
N
2km

From the pier at Ulsta, take the B 9081 to Burravoe to visit the Old Haa (no.17) and St Colman's Church (no.29). Continue northwards to Otterswick and, if it is a fine day, take the minor road to Aywick to enjoy the walk over moorland to see the spectacular fort of Brough of Stoal (no.51). From Otterswick continue north to Mid Yell, where, in a burial-ground near the shore, there are the remains of the ancient church of St John's overgrown with fuchsia bushes (HU 513909). It is likely that there was a medieval church here, and several crude cross-shaped headstones of that date survive, but the ruined walls belong to a church of the 17th or 18th centuries, to the north wall of which two burial aisles were later added. The west wall shows the upper part of an arched doorway. In the west burial aisle are two late 17th-century tombstones to members of the Neven family of Windhouse, and in the open graveyard an elaborate memorial of 1730. Across the road is a new burial ground enclosed by beautifully crafted walling, which soars up to an apex at one corner to shelter the tool shed.



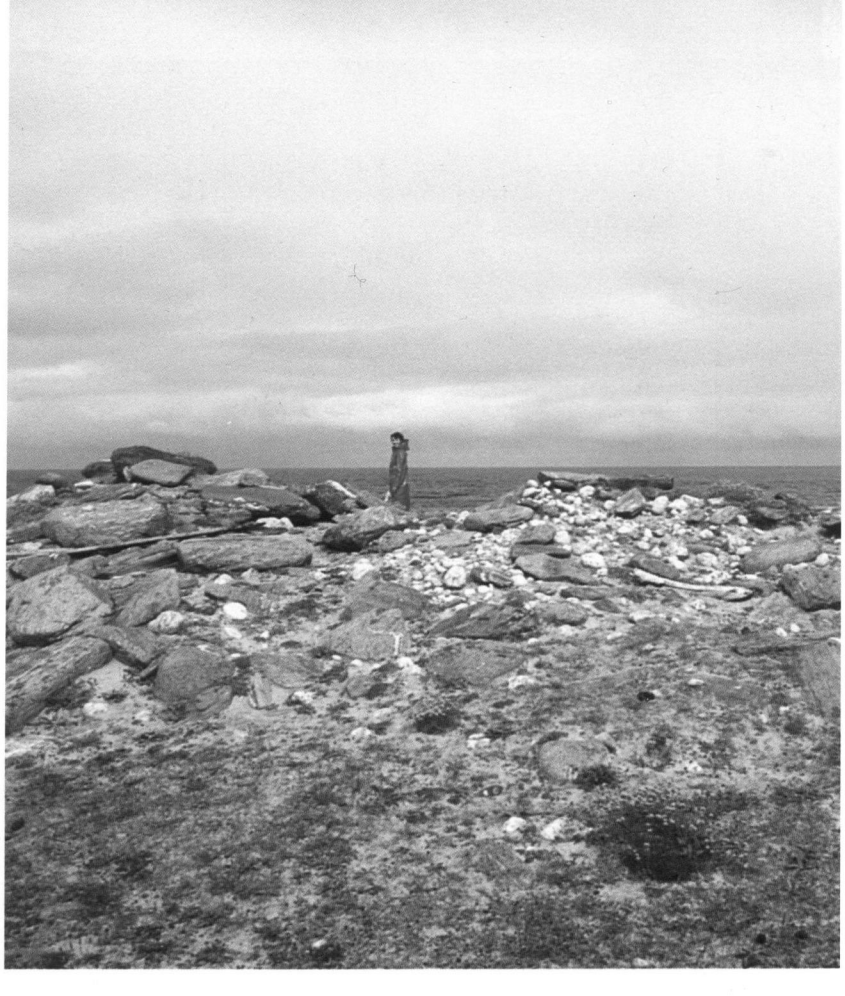
The delightful church of St Colman at Burravoe

Beyond Mid Yell the B 9081 joins the A 968; turn left and after 1 km park beside the bridges. Follow the east side of the burn towards Whale Firth, past the first telegraph pole, to see the well preserved chambered tomb of Windhouse (HU 487918) with a tall pointed stone at the west end of the facade. This is a substantial heel-shaped cairn with a trefoil chamber, facing out over the head of the voe, and it is the only known tomb in Yell. Uphill from the cairn and east of the second telegraph pole is a sunken oval enclosure with large stones in its wall, which may be a prehistoric house-site. Farther uphill is the aptly-named Windhouse, a ruined mansion built in 1707 but much altered in the late 19th century (its lodge beside the road has been restored as a camping böd).

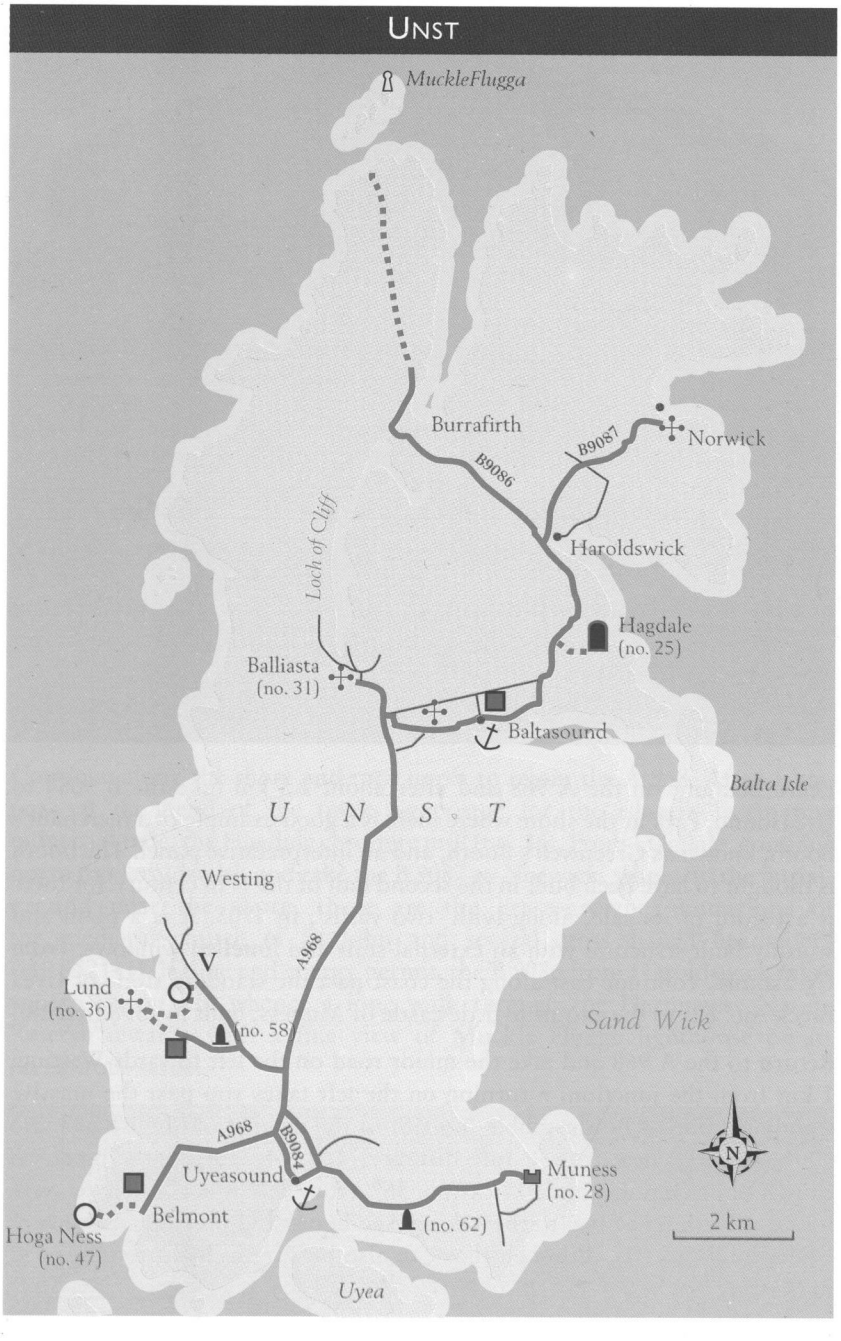
Follow the A 968 northwards to Gutcher and thence the B 9082 to Breakon at the north tip of the island to see the medieval church of Kirk of Ness (no. 35). Back on the road, take the next turning on the right to Midbrake and the Sands of Breakon. The Old Haa at Midbrake was built around 1735 with immensely thick walls (HU 526046). Weathering out of the pale Sands of Breakon are cairns and enclosures, tantalizing glimpses of a prehistoric landscape buried beneath the sand. Unlike most of Yell, the whole area at the north-east tip is very fertile, and there are planticrues and greenhouses, fine pasture and hayfields where the hay is dried on triangular wooden frames.

A solid haa at Burravoe

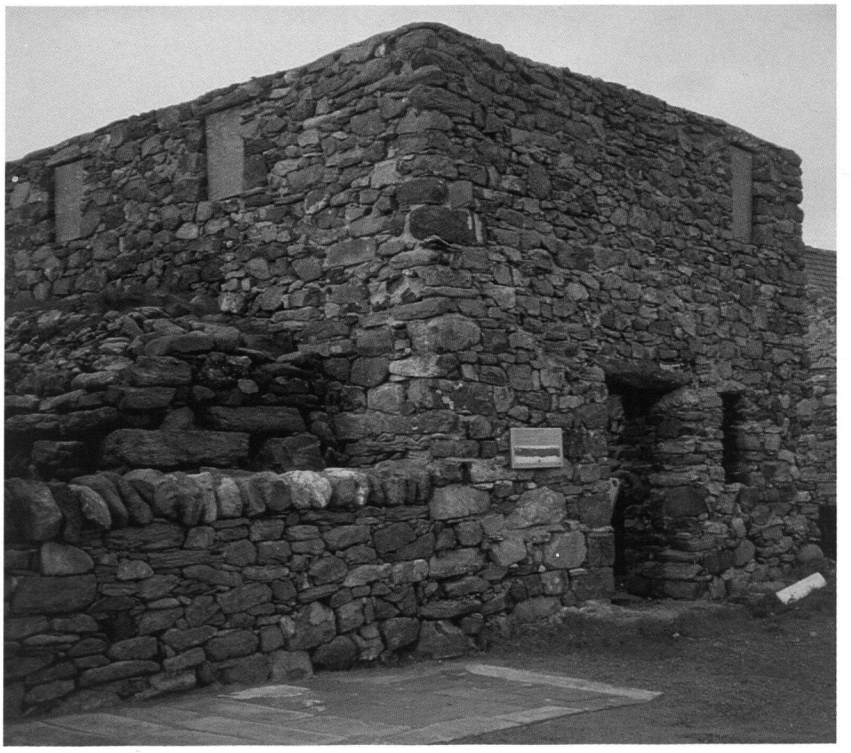
The top of an arched doorway rises from the turf at Mid Yell



Cairn amongst the sand-dunes at Breakon



From the pier at Belmont, park at the head of the bay to visit the broch of Hoga Ness with its dramatic ramparts (no.47). Walking along the shore, you will pass the original entrance to the grand mansion of Belmont, built around 1780; in front of the gate piers are good examples of sunken boat nausts, and attached to the estate wall on the west of the gateway is a small lodge, which has been converted to a dried fish store by reducing the windows to slits.



Greenwell's Booth has stood at Uyeasound for three hundred years

Leave Belmont on the A 968 and after about 2.5 km take the B 9084 to Uyeasound. Park at the shore where there is a good example of a merchant's booth, known as Greenwell's Booth, and an interpretative panel. The booth is thought to have been built in the second half of the 17th century, for there is a record of its sale, along with 'two yards', in 1705. It is a plain and sturdily built structure with an external stair and lintelled windows. From Uyeasound, continue east along the coast past the standing stone of Uyea Breck (no. 62) to the exquisite little castle of Muness, built in 1598 (no. 28).

Return to the A 968 and take the minor road on the left towards Westing; 1 km from the junction, a turning on the left takes you past the massive standing stone of Bordastubble (no. 58) to the derelict old house of Lund (18th century; view from a safe distance) and, on foot, to the medieval church of St Olaf at Lunda Wick (no. 36). From here it is possible to walk round the attractive bay to the Viking-Age house and prehistoric broch at Underhoull (no. 41), although they can also be approached from the road to Westing.

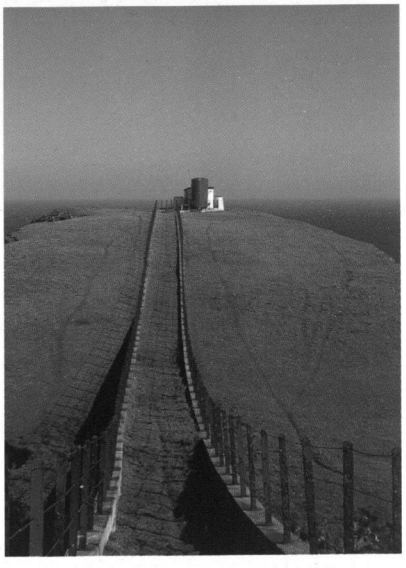
Back on the A 968, continue north towards Baltasound, forking left for the ruined 18th-century church at Balliasta (no. 31). From Balliasta, the road into Baltasound passes the modern church of St John's, built on the site of a church of the 1820s, which is said to have seated a congregation of 2000. This is a graphic reminder of how the population of the islands could swell seasonally with the arrival of the fishing fleets. The road along the north shore at Baltasound skirts the old haa of Buness, which may go back to the 17th century (HU 628090); its walled garden has two gateways at the shore, one with ball finials and the other with pyramids. Close to the east gate is the old jetty with three booths.

The bulk of Bordastubble standing stone dominates its landscape

Continue along the shore and turn north to rejoin the A 968. After 1 km, park at the head of the track signposted for the island's fascinating industrial relic, the Hagdale chromite mill (no. 25). From Hagdale, continue north to Haroldswick and take the B 9087 to Norwick, where, in the burial-ground near the shore, there are the grass-grown foundations of the medieval church of St John and several cross-shaped headstones (HP 652141). If time and energy permit, the B 9086 from Haroldswick takes you to Burrafirth, whence a long walk through the Hermaness Nature Reserve rewards with a fine view of Muckle Flugga lighthouse on its precipitous stack.

Tranquil St Olaf's overlooks Lunda Wick

Muness Castle was built in the latest fashion



Unst's industrial past at Hagdale (Far Left)

Coastguard station on Malcolm's Head, Fair Isle

The Isle of Fethaland was an important fishing station

MILITARY ARCHITECTURE AND LIGHTHOUSES

Fort Charlotte is surrounded but not engulfed by modern Lerwick

The Northern Isles hold a special attraction for visitors with an interest in military and naval warfare. Fort Charlotte at Lerwick, begun in 1665, is a rare and well-preserved survivor of the series of forts of geometric design initiated in Scotland under Cromwell's rule and culminating in the mid 18th century in the remarkable military achievement of Fort George, Inverness-shire (unfortunately nothing is visible today of the two forts built by Cromwell at Kirkwall). Fort Charlotte was built originally against Dutch aggression in the 17th century, but it received substantial reconstruction in 1781, again as a result of hostilities with Holland during the American War of Independence, and it was then that the fort at Lerwick was re-named after Queen Charlotte.

In 1902, the German High Seas Fleet anchored in Bressay Sound, almost certainly on a reconnaissance exercise at a time when relations between

Germany and Britain were deteriorating. Shetland, like Orkney, had considerable strategic importance during the two World Wars of the 20th century, in monitoring shipping in the North Atlantic. Throughout 1917, convoys of merchant ships from all over Britain gathered at Lerwick and were escorted from there across the Atlantic by warships equipped to fend off German U-boats. Gun batteries were established at either end of the island of Bressay, on Bard Head (HU 516357) and Score Hill (HU 513447) where the guns still survive, and on the Knab headland north of Lerwick.

On the east side of Shetland, the shelter of Swarbacks Minn between Vementry and Muckle Roe was used as an advance base for the Scapa Flow fleet in Orkney, and a rare survival from the First World War may be seen on the small island of Vementry, in the form of gun emplacements guarding the entry to Swarbacks Minn (no.1).

The role of Fair Isle in the two World Wars has been little recorded but there are remains of a number of military installations (see chapter 10).

In the Second World War, an RAF base was developed in Sullom Voe, and the harbours at Lerwick and Scalloway were protected by gun batteries. Concrete blocks set as anti-tank devices against the possibility of German invasion can still be seen at Mavis Grind at the head of Sullom Voe (HU 340684). The most colourful episode in Shetland's role in the war was the so-called 'Shetland Bus', a daring enterprise that sent Norwegian agents and ammunition by boat to German-occupied Norway and returned with refugees. This vital traffic was organized first from Lunna House (see no. 32), and then from Kergord House in Weisdale, when the boats set out from the Prince Olav slipway in Scalloway. A display about the 'Shetland Bus' can be seen in the museum at Scalloway.

1 Swarbacks Head, Vementry

AD 1918.

HU 290619. At the N tip of the island, accessible on foot from the short boat crossing at Vementry Farm on the mainland.

It seems extraordinary to come across such an intact fragment of the coastal defences of the First World War in this peaceful seascape. High on Swarbacks Head the gun emplacements are a stark and potent reminder of the role of the Northern Isles in the war effort. Their remote location made it uneconomic to retrieve even the six-inch guns, which still stand on their platforms. Their task was to guard the entry to the sheltered waters of Swarbacks Minn, which acted as a safe have for ships of the Royal Navy. Bunkers and hut foundations are also still to be seen.

A First World War gun silhouetted on Swarbacks Head

Be sure to visit the fine chambered tomb (no. 71) on your way across this beautiful island.

2 Fort Charlotte, Lerwick

17th and 18th century AD.

HU 475415. Within the N part of the town, overlooking the harbour.

Historic Scotland.

The substantial remains of this impressive fort have been surrounded by modern Lerwick, but, when it was built in the 17th century, it stood isolated and forbidding on a cliff to the north of the village, with its gun-ports looming over Bressay Sound. Because its fire-power had to be concentrated along its east side, the plan of the fort is less regularly geometric on plan than was normal; it is roughly pentagonal, with a massive seaward wall which is

Barrack blocks inside Fort Charlotte

The south gate into Fort Charlotte

angled rather than straight in order to increase the range of the nine gun-ports massed along it. Each of the five bastions set at the angles of the rest of the fort-wall was also provided with gun-ports, up to a maximum of five in the west bastion. Although the building of the fort began in 1665 (designed by no less a man than John Mylne, Master Mason to King Charles II), it was burnt by the Dutch in 1673 and lay in disrepair for more than a century until 1782 when it was renovated by the Chief Engineer for North Britain and renamed Fort Charlotte in honour of the Queen. The 18th-century fort had three gates, with the main gate between the west and south-west bastions, and a gun-track led from the north gate out to the Knab headland, the first formal road to be built in Shetland. Within the fort, on three sides of a central parade-ground, were built accommodation blocks. The main west block provided barracks for the garrison, with officers' quarters in the projecting bays at either end, the north block consisted of ground-level kitchen and stores and first-floor accommodation for the Commanding Officer, and the south block held guard-rooms and artillery stores.

For a time in the mid 19th century, Lerwick's prison was within the fort buildings. Between 1881 and 1910, Fort Charlotte acted as a training centre for the Royal Naval Reserve, providing a reserve body of seamen trained in gunnery. The fort was 're-armed' in 1995, when Historic Scotland installed four replica 18-pounder cannons of 18th-century type on the original gun-platforms. The Shetland Field Studies Trust is now housed in the old fort, with a small display of natural history.

LIGHTHOUSES

Measures designed to improve safety at sea have created a range of monuments from major lighthouses to unlit beacons and even cairns of stones that act as navigational markers. Shetland possesses seven major lighthouses, each consisting of a circular tower to carry the light and low ranges of keepers' accommodation.

Sumburgh Head, notorious for its shipwrecks, received its lighthouse in 1820 (no.4), but the equally notorious Fair Isle coast remained unlit until almost the end of the century. Concern for the safety of Royal Navy ships prompted one of the most difficult of all British lighthouse-building projects on the rock-stack of Muckle Flugga, off the north coast of Unst, in 1854 (HP 606196). The spectacular location of this 19.5 m tall lighthouse can be appreciated from the Hermaness National Nature Reserve at the north end of Unst. This is a major seabird Reserve, with more than 100,000 breeding gannets, kittiwakes, fulmars, guillemots and razorbills, together with 30,000 pairs of puffins.

Major lighthouses were also built on Out Skerries and Bressay (no.3) in the 1850s. By the end of the 19th century, minor, unmanned lights consisting of little more than a small tower were becoming common, each with a local attendant keeper who paid twice-weekly visits to maintain the light. Most of the lights were placed on the east coast, where traffic was heaviest, and the west coast remained poorly lit. An easy lighthouse to view on the west coast is at Eshaness, built by D Alan Stevenson in 1929 and now part of an attractive private residence (HU 205785).

3 Bressay lighthouse

AD 1858.

HU 488376. On Kirkabister Ness on the SW coast of the island. A regular daily car and passenger ferry runs to and from the island from Lerwick.

Bressay is yet another island dominated by a hill named the Ward, suggesting that it was used in Norse times as a hill on which beacons might be lit to warn of enemy movements. The lighthouse guards the southern entrance to Bressay Sound in much the same way that the broch of Mousa to the south guarded Mousa Sound some two thousand years ago. The north end of the Sound is protected by the lighthouse on Easter Rova Head on the mainland north of Lerwick. Designed by David and Thomas Stevenson and built during 1856-8, the lighthouse tower has a corbelled parapet and a cupola lantern. There are two fine ranges of keepers' quarters, and the station was equipped with a fog horn.

The road ends at Kirkabister Ness, but from here it is possible to walk south-eastwards along the coast to the Bard, where a 6-inch gun on its mounting survives from the defences of the First World War (HU 516357).

Sumburgh lighthouse in 1975

4 Sumburgh Head lighthouse

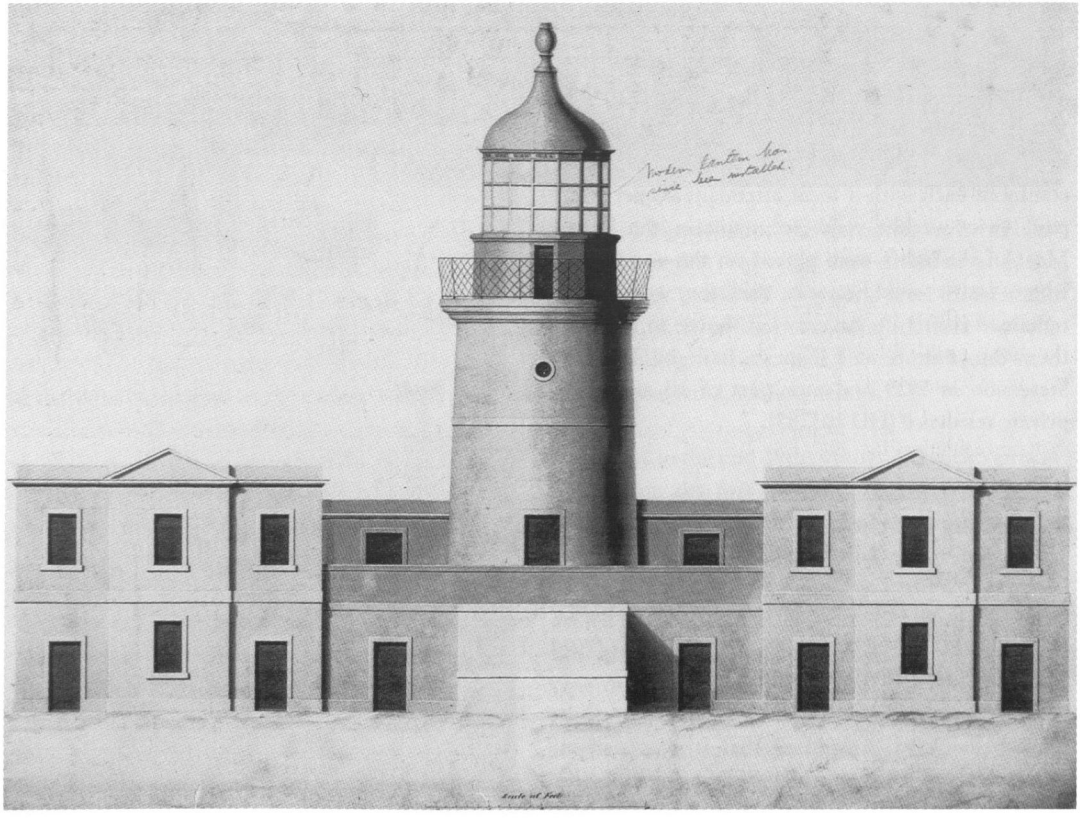
AD 1820.

HU 407078. From Sumburgh Airport, take the minor road leading S to the top of Sumburgh Head.

'It is proposed to have a light on Sumburgh-head, which is the first land made by vessels coming from the eastward; Fitful-head is higher, but it is to the west, from which quarter few vessels come.' Thus wrote Sir Walter Scott in his journal in 1814, and a lighthouse was duly built on 'this tremendous cape' by Robert Stevenson six years later (colour photograph on p.24). The great height of the headland itself meant that only a short tower was needed, and it was built with three floors rising to a lantern cupola (later replaced with a modern lantern). The design of the original lantern and the elegant keepers' quarters can be appreciated from the drawing showing the landward elevation. Part of the keepers' accommodation is now used by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, for Sumburgh Head is home to one of Shetland's largest colonies of puffins.

Just off Sumburgh Head is the notorious roost, a stretch of water so turbulent that its breaking waves can be heard even on calm days. This is a tidal stream, where opposing tidal forces from east and west meet. A fine jetty was constructed on Grutness Voe to serve the new lighthouse (HU 405100), and it is still used by the ferry for Fair Isle.

There was a large prehistoric promontory fort on Sumburgh Head. It was mostly destroyed when the lighthouse complex and its approach road were built, but the remains of one of the earthen ramparts can be seen alongside the modern road at HU 406080. This may well have been the 'borg' or fort that inspired the name Sumburgh.



Sumburgh lighthouse as designed in 1819

2 HARBOURS AND TOWNS

Packing herrings into barrels at Lerwick in the 1880s

Trading relations between the Northern Isles and Norway developed during the Viking Age but became more formal with the activities of Hanseatic merchants from the early 15th century onwards, increasing with the relative economic freedom that came with the pledging of the islands in 1468 and 1469. Shetland became heavily involved in Hanseatic trade in the later 15th and 16th centuries, although it was apparently never as strictly regimented as the Hanseatic ideal demanded. Shetland goods ought to have been traded only through the market in Bergen, but in reality there was unofficial trade direct with individual Hanseatic merchants, despite constant complaints from Bergen. From the trading records kept by Hanseatic towns, as well as from merchants' tombstones in Shetland (see no. 36), we know the origins of the merchants who came to Shetland: they came from Bremen, Hamburg, Lübeck, Danzig and other Baltic ports, setting out in the spring and returning in the late summer. The main attraction of Shetland in trading terms was fish, but the merchants also bought butter, wool and feathers, and with them for sale to the islanders they brought beer, meal, salt and cloth. Traditionally the fish were split open and dried on the beach, but by the 17th century Shetland herring was also being preserved in salt in barrels - the forerunner of the herring boom of the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Commercial Street, Lerwick

The merchants needed trading-booths and storehouses, which they built or rented, and many of these interesting buildings survive today, but as yet there is just one that can dated as early as Hanseatic times. This is Greenwell's Booth at Uyeasound in Unst, which seems to have been built sometime in the second half of the 17th century (see Unst excursion).

The Hanseatic trade came to an end in the early years of the 18th century with increasing pressure to pay customs, a decisive drawback imposed by the Act of Union in 1707. An important new market for dried fish from Shetland was established in the 1730s in Spain, and this was to remain a major source of income until the late 19th century.

By the end of the 18th century, inshore fishing grounds were almost exhausted, possibly as a result of climatic change as much as intensive fishing, and larger boats were needed to fish in deeper waters. This became known as the haaf fishing, from the Old Norse word *hav*, meaning open sea. Shore stations for processing the fish were established as close as possible to the fishing grounds. These required good pebble beaches on which the salted fish could be dried and shelter for the boats in bad weather.

Remains of 19th-century fishing stations with their drying beaches may be seen in several places, including Fethaland and Stenness (nos 5, 6). These are harbours that failed to develop, whereas other harbours such as Ollaberry (HU 365805) outlived their status as fishing station and survived into modern times. As well as the larger fishing stations, there were individual fishing böds, each with its drying beach, which housed fishermen and their equipment during the fishing season. One of these, the Böd of Nesbister, has been restored for use as a camping böd for low-cost holidays (HU 394448); built in 1844, the böd stands on a rocky point on the east side of sheltered Whiteness Voe, adjacent to an extensive pebble beach. It is a typical small rectangular building, with an external stair leading to a loft.

Although it had its good times and bad times, fishing was a more vital part of Shetland economy from the 15th century into the 20th century than it was for Orkney, where fishing remained a part-time occupation. As Sir Walter Scott remarked, 'A Zetland farmer looks to the sea to pay his rent'. With the development of large-scale commercial fishing in the 19th century, Shetland witnessed scenes of intensive activity at many of its excellent harbours, and Lerwick was an extraordinary sight, with Bressay Sound full of ships and its beaches lined with women gutting the fish.

TRANSPORT

Visitors to Shetland in the 19th century were united in their reactions to the few stretches of road that existed by then. 'Shetland roads - I should have rated them along with the wind and the rain - are execrable..' wrote one visitor in 1862. In his journal, Sir Walter Scott records riding on Shetland ponies from Lerwick to Scalloway on Sunday, 7th August 1814, partly on a road that terminated in a bog. 'An ill-conducted and worse-made road served us four miles on our journey.' He also mentions, without comment, a short length of road made by his friend Parson Turnbull of Tingwall. This must be the road described in the *Statistical Account* of 1797 as being under construction at that time, 16 feet wide and surfaced with clay and gravel. A paved road is recorded as the approach to Busta House (no.14), but this was a feature designed more to impress visitors than as a real amenity. Although surfaced roads were not strictly necessary for wheeled vehicles, the use even of modest carts was rare before the later 19th century. Even in Lerwick, there was only the one paved street running parallel with the sea (Commercial Street), and the narrow alleys that descended the hillside were stepped and impassable for carts. The town's existence was focussed on the harbour. Travel overland was on foot or pony, and boats remained the primary means of transport.

In the mid to late 19th century, a number of road-building projects were set up throughout the Highlands and Islands as a means of relieving extreme poverty. They were known as 'meal roads', because the labourers were paid in meal (oatmeal or flour). Two good stretches of a narrow 'meal road' survive unaltered in Papa Stour, and they consist of a surface of small stones edged with larger kerbstones (HU 163606 and 167612). Where the road crosses a burn, there is a culvert formed of large flat slabs.

5 Fethaland fishing station, North Mainland

19th century AD.

HU 375943. The A 970 terminates at Isbister, and a footpath leads N along the E side of the promontory towards Fethaland.

It is a long walk out to Fethaland but very beautiful and well worth the effort (colour photograph on p.44). This was an ideal spot for a fishing station, for the north tip of the promontory narrows before it becomes the Isle of Fethaland, resulting in a sheltered harbour and a wide sweep of pebble beach on the east side. The remains of more than twenty stone-built fishing lodges can be explored. Most of them stand to roof level since their remote location has saved them from stone-robbing for dykes. About sixty boats would have been based here between the beginning of June and the middle of August, and the fish would have been salted and dried on the beach.

Farther round the east coast at HU 377942 is a very steep outcrop of steatite at Cleber Geos (cleber is the local name for this rock). Clearly visible are the remains of quarrying for bowls, and this is likely to be of prehistoric or Viking date. There are also many 19th-century graffiti.

6 Stenness fishing station, West Mainland

19th century AD.

HU 214770. Park carefully at the end of the B 9078, some 10 km W of Hillswick, and walk through the gate and down to the beach below.

The location of Stenness is very similar to that of the Fethaland station, for the wide shingle beach is sheltered from the force of the Atlantic to the west by the Isle of Stenness (this time a real island) and the Skerry of Eshaness. It is, however, easier to reach, and a good view of the beach and its ruined lodges can be had from the road end. A rocky outcrop divides the beach into two, and there is the shell of a substantial lodge on the outcrop, with others farther round the bay in both directions. The buildings are rectangular and of stone, and, because they were occupied for such a short period each summer, it is possible that they were partially dismantled at the end of the season. The roof-timbers in particular were too precious to leave behind. As can be seen from the photograph taken in the 1880s, the roofs were finished with freshly cut turves.

Some 40 to 50 boats operated from Stenness, but the drying beach also coped with catches made by about 14 boats from the island of Uyea, where there was no suitable beach.

7 Böd of Gremista, Lerwick

18th century AD.

HU 464431. Take the A 970 N out of Lerwick; at the point where the road turns inland, take the minor road to the right which leads N along the shore to Point of Scattland, turning right again almost immediately to the shore itself and to the Böd.

The Böd of Grimista is most famous as the birthplace in 1792 of Arthur Anderson, co-founder

Fishermen's lodges at Stenness in the 1880s

The Böd of Gremista once stood beside a busy fish-drying beach

of the P and O Line, MP for Shetland and initiator of the Shetland Fisheries Company aimed at improving the lot of Shetland fishermen. His father was in charge of fish-curing at Gremista. The Böd is a large rectangular building facing the shore, two storeys high with an attic, with white harled walls and a roof of Caithness slates. Restoration has included external wooden storm shutters to the windows. It was at one time the office and stores for a company who dried fish on the shore. The ground floor provided storage space, with accommodation for the family on the upper floors. It is now a museum, and one room explores Arthur Anderson's role in what was originally the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company.

The excellence of Symbister harbour may be judged from the series of piers and buildings that represent constant activity from the 17th century onwards. At one time the entire harbour was lined with a sea-wall, but this has suffered erosion by the sea; there are two modern piers and a rock-built

The Pier House during restoration

8 Pier House, Symbister, Whalsay

18th century AD.
HU 539623. Take the car ferry from Laxa Voe to Symbister harbour on Whalsay, follow the harbour road round to the NE side of the harbour.

breakwater on the south-west side of the harbour, with a small inner harbour and a large warehouse with an arched entrance. The earliest buildings lie on the eastern side of the large harbour.

The Pier House is an attractive small building set at the end of its own jetty to one side of its own small stone-lined harbour. It has recently been restored very skilfully as a visitor centre. Even the slates on the new roof are held by traditional wooden pegs. Set gable-end to the sea, this two-storey building has a separate entrance to each floor in the landward gable, the upper storey being reached by an external stair. The upper storey served as living quarters with a fireplace, as well as having access to the windlass mechanism set in its external projecting bay. Goods were hoisted from the boat below into the ground-floor storeroom, through double wooden doors that could be closed with a bar. The walls are almost a metre thick, built of rubble with good freestone dressings to the windows and upper doorway; the upper part of the gables built of neat stone blocks are of later date.

Whalsay Sound and the harbour are twice mentioned in 16th-century records in the Bremen State Archives, but the surviving booth is probably of 18th-century date. Old maps show that the road leading down the hill to the booth was once known as the Bremenstrasse. The larger and much altered house facing on to the small harbour was probably in origin a Hanseatic booth as well. Another early storehouse stands on the shore a little to the south, though converted to modern use with new doors on the landward side and a corrugated iron roof. The original arched entrance may be seen in the seaward gable, and the narrow slits in the long walls (many now filled by small stones) were designed to provide the maximum ventilation and minimum light required to store such goods as dried fish.

9 Hillswick, North Mainland

HU 281770. The A 970 N from Lerwick forks into two and the W branch ends at Hillswick.

A sheltered bay on the west side of Ura Firth accounts for the location of the village. One of the wings of Hillswick House is the Booth bar, which may have originated in the 18th century as a merchant's store. There are elaborately carved 18th-century tombstones built into the wall on either side of the entrance to the graveyard. Hillswick House itself was built around 1800 with dormer windows added in Victorian times. The present parish church was built in 1869, and the fortunes of the village expanded with a fledgling tourist trade towards the end of the century.

The most remarkable monument to that tourist trade is the St Magnus Hotel. It is remarkable because, in a treeless landscape, it is built of wood. It stands on the slope above the harbour, painted white and black to ensure that it was visible as the cruise passengers sailed into the voe. The materials were imported from Norway by the North of Scotland & Orkney & Shetland Steam Navigation Company, and their capacious hotel was erected in 1900. It has two stories and an attic, and the hall and dining-room retain their fine panelling of stained pine. The guests, who had embarked at Leith, were entertained with guided tours of Shetland with the hotel as their base. These cruises came to an end in 1971, but the hotel is still a welcoming sight.

10 Lerwick, Central Mainland

HU 4741.

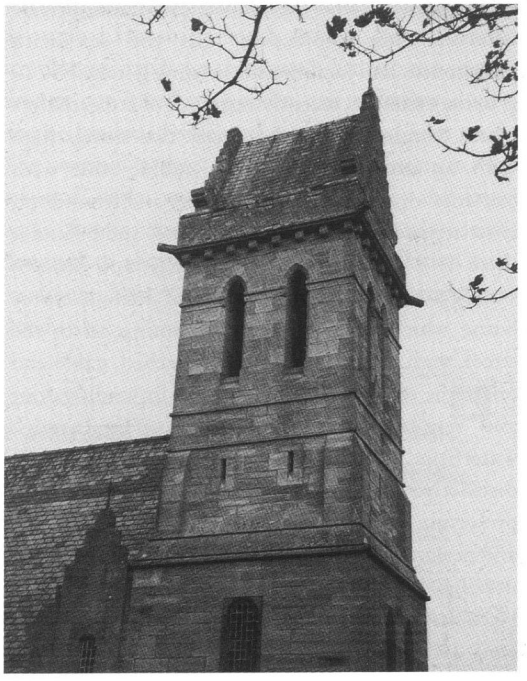
Bressay Sound is a kilometre wide stretch of water between the island of Bressay and the curve of the peninsula now occupied by the town of Lerwick, and it has provided ideal shelter for large numbers of ships, especially in the great days of the haaf and herring fishing. Yet Lerwick is quite a young town, founded only in the 17th century. Its bay was named by the Norsemen, *leir vik* or mud bay, but this part of Shetland was unattractive for early settlement, the land being relatively infertile, and it was Scalloway on the west coast that first developed as the capital for the islands. By the 17th century, Bressay Sound had been adopted by Dutch fishermen as a base, and a seasonal trading post developed at Lerwick specifically to do business with the Hollanders. But it was the war between Britain and Holland in the mid 17th century that led to the permanent foundation of the town, with the construction of Fort Charlotte (no. 2) to guard the anchorage in Bressay Sound for British warships.

The old waterfront at Lerwick

Lerwick tolbooth in 1855 (Left)

Apart from the fort, the oldest buildings surviving in recognisable form in Lerwick belong to the 18th century and are to be found along the seaward side of Commercial Street, the dwelling-houses fronting on to the street and the lodberries behind, private wharves built projecting into the sea with storehouses and facilities for landing goods. No. 10 is a fine example, recently restored, of a merchant's house fronting on to the street: two-stories high with an attic, the house is rubble-built with freestone dressings to the windows and front door, crowstepped gables and a slated roof, and behind it there is a lodberry. The buildings now known simply as The Lodberry consist of a single-storey house which acted as a shop fronting on to the street, with a two-storey house attached, gable-end on, to the rear, and a lodberry with its loading door and ventilated storehouse above. The Lerwick waterfront, like that at Stromness, has a very distinctive and attractive appearance, for the projecting lodberries are all slightly different in size and design, as their form, and latterly function, has developed over the last two centuries. The Queen's Hotel has converted its two lodberries, probably of early 19th-century date, to accommodation wings.

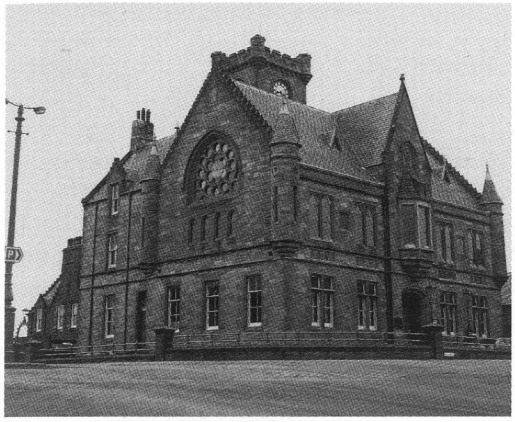
The Lodberry in 1959



The tower of St Magnus Episcopal Church

A restored 18th-century merchant's house is the Böd of Gremista (no.7), built beside a fish-drying beach at the very north end of modern Lerwick.

At the junction of Commercial Street and Church Road is the old town tolbooth, which was built in the late 1760s on the site of an earlier tolbooth of the 17th century. Most of the stone was quarried in Bressay, but the sandstone for the quoins and scrolled skewputts at each corner of the building was imported from mainland Scotland. A neat central clock-tower existed formerly, and can be seen in Dryden's illustration. This was added as a belfry in 1772 and a clock was added in the following decade, but the entire steeple was removed in 1927, thus altering the character of the building. But by then it was no longer a tolbooth. It had been quite unsuitable as a jail, because the basement cells were damp, and in 1838 Fort Charlotte became the main jailhouse. From 1878 the old tolbooth became a post office, and some of



Lerwick Town Hall

its original functions were taken over by the new Town Hall of the early 1880s. From 1912 the building was converted into a Fishermen's Institute and it is now occupied by the British Red Cross Society.

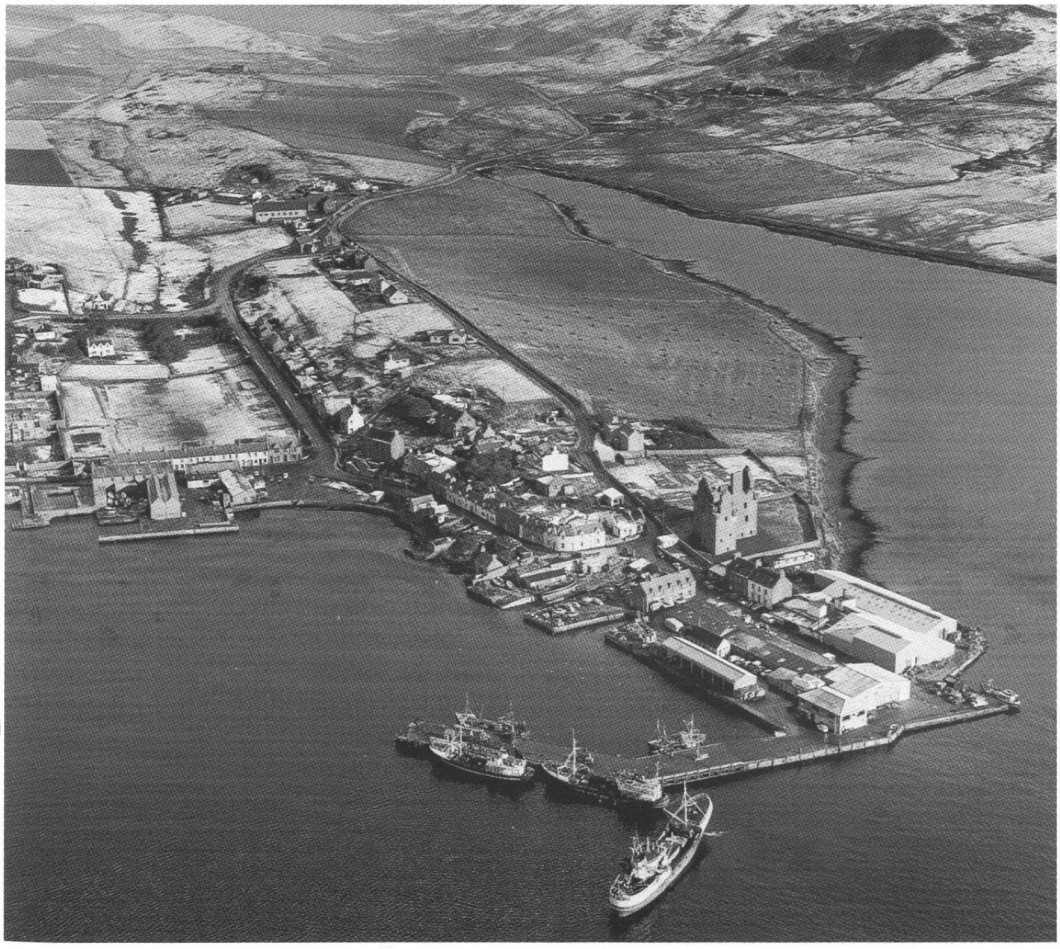
Several fine public buildings were erected in the late 19th century, including St Magnus Episcopal Church (1864) with its crenellated tower (1891) and stained glass, and the attractively modest Sheriff Court (1875), designed by David Rhind of Edinburgh. Far more ornate is the imposing Town Hall (1882-3), designed in Scottish Baronial style by Alexander Ross, with its angle-turrets, oriel window over the main entrance and crenellated clock-tower, together with many decorative details including a remarkable series of stained glass windows in the first-floor ballroom.

11 Scalloway, Central Mainland

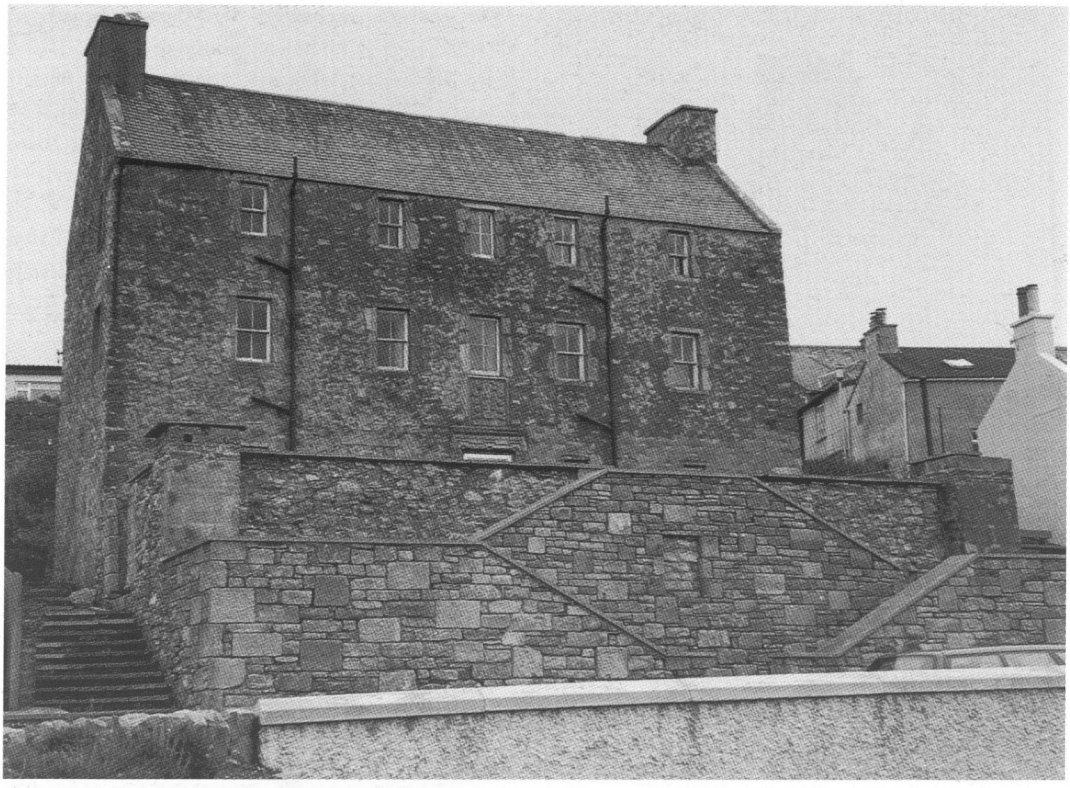
HU 4039.

9 km W of Lerwick on the A 970.

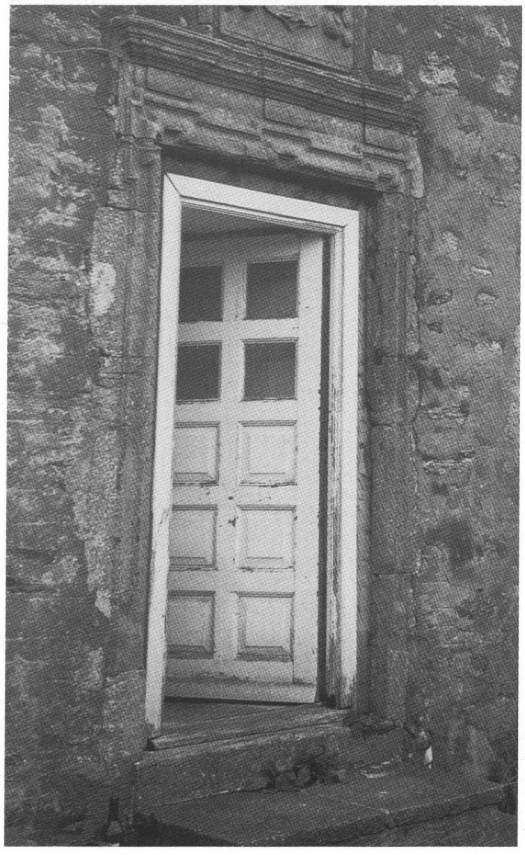
Scalloway was the ancient capital of Shetland, but it was overtaken in importance both as a harbour and as administrative centre by Lerwick in the 18th century. Its former dominance came about because



An aerial view of Scalloway in 1971, before the harbour was extended eastwards



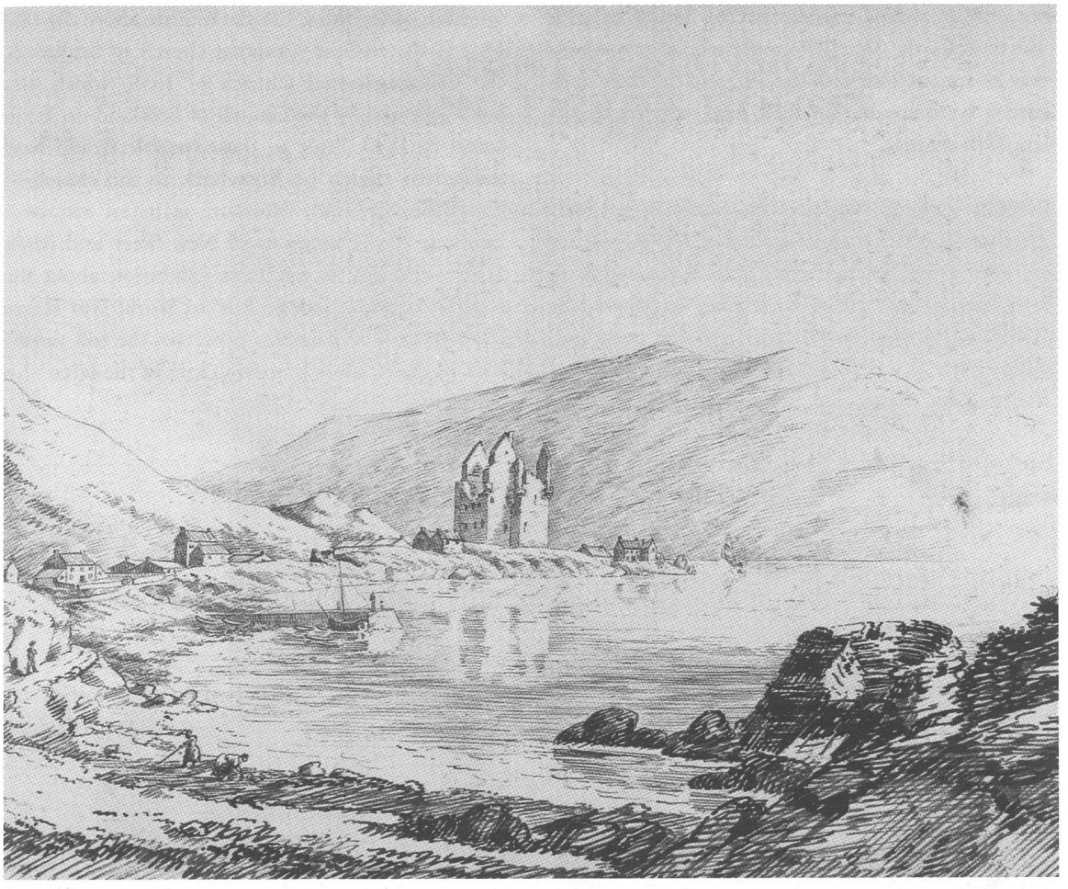
The Old Haa of Scalloway



Fading grandeur - the entrance into the Old Haa

Earl Patrick Stewart chose to build his tower house here in AD 1600, as his main residence in Shetland. His choice was probably dictated by political and economic factors. Firstly the old Norse judicial centre of the earldom was less than 5 km away, Law Ting Holm at the north end of the Loch of Tingwall (no. 42), and there were two important churches on islands to the south (Papil on West Burra and St Ninian's Isle, no. 38). Scalloway is an excellent natural harbour, for it is sheltered on the west by the Ness of Westshore and to the south by the island of Trondra, and there is likely already to have been a fishing community here. Certainly in 1665 it was described as consisting of 'about 100 poor houses and one pretty stone house', the latter being Earl Patrick's castle (no. 27). The number of inhabited houses had dwindled to thirty-one by the end of the 18th century, but the town's fortunes revived with the expansion of the fishing industry in the 19th century.

Scalloway Castle is the oldest surviving building, but its situation has been greatly altered by 20th-century expansion of the harbour-works below. When it was built, it stood close to the tip of Blacks Ness overlooking the voe on either side. The Old



Scalloway in 1801 with the Castle and, on the left, Gibblestone House

Junction of Blacksness Brae and New Street in the 1900s (Bottom)

Haa or Muckle Haa was in existence by 1750, and it is a stately if dilapidated house, with its double stair to the street below. The steps were added in the 19th century to ease access to New Street and the modern level of the reclaimed shoreline. The house is a substantial three stories, and its entrance was once very elegant, with its moulded surround and armorial panel above. The panel commemorated the marriage in 1750 of the Scalloway merchant James Scott and local heiress Katharine Sinclair, who owned land both in Scalloway and in Burra.

By the end of the century, the prosperous Scott family was feeling the need for a more modern house, which they built farther west at the head of the bay. This is Gibblestone House, which is visible on the left of the drawing of 1801, with the original pier in front. It was designed as a two-storey house with symmetrical wings and a walled garden, to which in Victorian times were added bay and dormer windows and a pilastered porch at the entrance. Another mansion existed at Westshore

but only its walled garden survives intact today. It was built for the Mitchell family, whose burial-aisle may be seen at Tingwall (no.34), and the trees in its garden were notable for their rare size even in the late 18th century.

On the seaward side of New Street is an early merchant's booth, while among the 19th-century cottages lining its landward side is one with an intriguing plaque on its wall. This was carved by William Johnson, who was an inventor and philosopher as well as a stone mason, and who thus recorded his ideas (and his prejudices) about the working of the tides. On the hillside above the Old Haa is the earliest surviving church in Scalloway, the Congregational Church of 1838, which was soon followed by the Church of Scotland on Main Street in 1840. Prior to these, people would have walked or ridden on horseback to the church at Tingwall. Scalloway Museum is in an attractive building at the junction of New Steet and Main Street, and has an excellent exhibition about the exploits of the 'Shetland Bus' of World War II (see chapter 1). The Kiln Bar preserves the tall vented roof of the original kippering kiln of the later 19th century.

New Street today, with William Johnson's white-painted cottage

3 COUNTRY MANSIONS AND LAIRD'S HOUSES

A typical location for a laird's house, at Burrastow

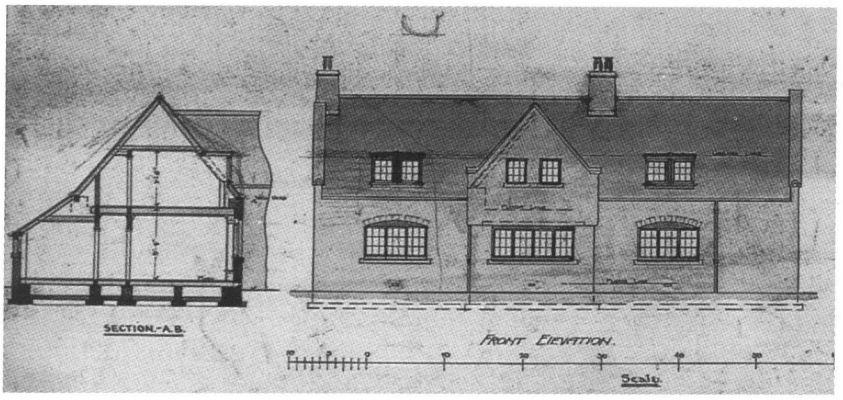
There is a considerable variety of domestic architecture in Shetland, from laird's houses of the 17th century to quite ambitious mansions of the 19th century (vernacular buildings are discussed in the next chapter). More laird's houses survive virtually in their original form than in Orkney, and the wealth accrued from the sale and export of fish in the 18th and 19th centuries allowed island lairds to adopt architectural fashions current in Scotland.

Around 1835 an elegant Georgian mansion was created at Symbister on Whalsay (no. 13). This was unusual in being an entirely new building, for most designs of the 19th and 20th centuries involved enlarging an existing house. Indeed most rural houses, great or small, surviving today represent the culmination of structural additions or modifications over the years, and it can often prove difficult to identify the original house. This is particularly true of Busta House (no. 14), which seems to have grown almost imperceptably into the harmonious building of today. Sand Lodge in southern mainland appears to date mainly from the mid 19th century, but there are older elements and its history goes back into the 17th century (HU 437248).

One of Shetland's grandest houses of recent centuries was built on the island of Vaila between 1895 and 1900 by a Yorkshire industrialist, Herbert Anderton (no. 12). Little attempt was made to incorporate the existing late 17th-century house other than as an appendage, and the new Vaila Hall was built in Scottish Jacobean style with castellated parapets, crowstepped gables and, as a local note, turret-supports with alternate corbels echoing those at Scalloway and Muness castles (nos 27 and 28). Another castellated design was adopted for Brough Lodge on Fetlar, built in the 1820s for the island laird Sir Arthur Nicholson. It is now uninhabited and ruinous, but its former grand pretensions can still be appreciated from a safe distance. The house itself consists of a two-storey battlemented block between two single-storey blocks, and alongside are a service court and a walled garden. On higher ground beyond the house, there is a castellated round tower.

A considerable loss to Shetland's architectural heritage is a timber building that burned down in the early years of the 20th century: the Clousta Hotel in Aithsting. This was a custom-built hotel for gentlemen fishermen, designed by the famous Scottish architect, R S Lorimer, in 1894, and it was set in some of Shetland's most beautiful scenery, amongst the lochs and hills and voe-indented coastline of north-west mainland. It was designed as a low cruciform building of one storey and attic, with attractive windows and varied rooflines, and it was to be built in harled stone with a slate roof. These building materials proved too expensive to transport to such a remote spot, and Lorimer translated his design, less successfully, into a two-storey timber house. It is thought that Lorimer may also have designed Vementry House, a harled building with striking red granite dressings and crowsteps (HU 308597).

There is a terrible stage between inhabited house and romantic ruin in which the desolate shell stands with gaping windows and rotting woodwork. Such a house is the well-named Windhouse in Yell, set on the exposed flanks of the Hill of Windhouse above Whale Firth (HU 488918). First built in 1707, it was enlarged and modified in the late 19th century with wings and crowstepped gables; at the roadside, its lodge has been renovated as one of Shetland's inspired camping böds. In contrast to the mansion of Windhouse, Belmont in Unst still looks as if it could be restored as a comfortable residence (although again it should only be viewed from a safe distance). It was built as a fashionable mansion of the late 18th century



The front elevation and section of the Clousta Hotel as originally designed by RS Lorimer

for Thomas Mouat, with a projecting pedimented central bay and low walls linking the house with its flanking pavilions (HP 565010). It gazes serenely over the sheltered Wick of Belmont, and there are still gate-piers and boat nausts at the shore below.

The most impressive house surviving from the early 18th century is Gardie House on Bressay (no. 15), in which Sir Walter Scott dined most comfortably in 1814.

The typical laird's house or haa of the 16th and 17th centuries is a plain rectangular building of two storeys, and a good number survive, some virtually unaltered and some greatly modified, each according to its family's fortune. The Old Haa of Burravoe and Tangwick Haa are good examples of barely altered houses, both now restored as visitor centres (nos 17 and 16), whereas others have been subsumed within later and grander schemes (eg Busta House, no. 14). At Buness in Unst (HP 628090), the original block of three bays was doubled with the addition of another three bays, but the plain character of the traditional haa was maintained. The North Haa at West Sandwick in Yell was enlarged by a second block set parallel at the rear, and its appearance improved by the addition of porch and wings (HU 445880). The two most ambitious houses were the Old Haa of Scalloway (no. 11) and the Haa of Sand (HU 343472), both with three storeys and five bays and an ornate entrance with an armorial panel. The Haa of Sand was built in 1754 by Sir Andrew Mitchell of Westshore at Scalloway, and he was allowed to remove many fine dressed stones from Scalloway Castle for the purpose, including two complete doorways.

The two Orcadian palaces at Kirkwall and Birsay and the castle at Scalloway (no. 27) take pride of place among the surviving properties of Earl Patrick in the early 17th century, but there are also remains of a 'house and fortalice' that he owned on Sumburgh Head (no. 18). From contemporary documentary sources, it seems that Sumburgh (now known as Jarlshof) was used as an administrative centre in the time of Earl Robert, Patrick's father, for it housed the local law-court when necessary, but it is unlikely that this very modest building was in any real sense a formal residence for either Earl (see p.86).

DOVECOTES

In mainland Scotland and Orkney, most landowners of any substance included a dovecote on their estates. Keeping pigeons for the table provided variety of diet and, in the winter, a much-needed extra source of food, and the fact that the pigeons fed indiscriminately off crops in the vicinity was a disadvantage only to poorer neighbours. In Shetland, however, dovecotes are rare and there are no examples of the rectangular type with a sloping roof, known as the lectern dovecote, which is common elsewhere. There is a square dovecote built as a tower to the domestic range behind Symbister House (no. 13), and a cylindrical dovecote at Busta House (no. 14). Each has a single chamber lined internally with small nesting-boxes.

12 Vaila Hall, Vaila

AD 1696 and 1895-1900.

HU 226468. On the N side of the island; access by boat and by prior arrangement with R H Anderton, Burrastow House, Walls.

The small island of Vaila lies just off the coast of south-west mainland Shetland, and a beautiful view of the island and the house may be enjoyed by climbing the hill above Burrastow on the adjacent mainland across Wester Sound. Vaila itself rises to a height of 80 m OD on the south side where there are dramatic cliffs and stacks, and on the lower slopes there are a number of burnt mounds (see chapter 9) which testify to the attraction of the island in prehistoric times. In recent centuries settlement has been concentrated in the north-western part overlooking Vaila Sound. On the shore here are the ruins of a fishing station established in 1837 by Arthur Anderson. This was the Shetland Fishing Company, and its object was to break the lairds' monopoly of fishing; it was a successful enterprise for a few years into the 1940s.

In 1576, King James VI granted permission to Robert Cheyne to build 'ane hous and fortice' on Vaila, but, if this intriguing castle was ever constructed, no trace of it survives today. More than a century later the island was acquired by James Mitchell of Girlsta, who was a merchant of Scalloway and who built himself a house there in 1696. This was a plain rectangular block with crowstepped gables, consisting of two storeys and a garret, and it is now the south side of the Victorian house. The original entrance, which opens directly into the Great Hall, still retains its moulded stone surround and battered armorial panel carved with the arms and motto of the Mitchell family and the date 1696. The old doorway well suits the Great Hall with its Jacobean oak furniture and baronial air.

In 1893 the island was sold to Herbert Anderton, a Yorkshire mill owner with interests in Shetland wool; he commissioned a large new house in Scottish Jacobean style as well as building a house for his farm-manager and a boat-house with a studio above at the east pier, and restoring the old tower west of the big house as an observatory. The new Vaila Hall was built in the final years of the 19th century in a style popular since the middle years of that century, though less elaborate than many. It is a solid two-storey building, facing west, with crowstepped gables to match the old house and embellished with corbelled wall-heads, castellated parapets, a circular corner-tower and castellated turrets supported on decorative corbelling.

Burrastow House on the adjacent mainland (HU 223478), now a hotel) illustrates in its main block the type of house to which the original old Haa of Vaila belonged. On the way to Burrastow from Walls, there are two horizontal mills (see chapter 4) close to the road at HU 215485.

13 Symbister House, Whalsay

Early 19th century.

HU 543623. About 1 km SE of the pier, ferry from Laxa Voe.

Set conspicuously above the harbour, this is the most outstanding Georgian mansion in the Northern Isles, with its imposing facade and symmetrical layout of domestic offices behind (colour photograph on p.36). It was built at great expense by Robert Bruce of Symbister in the 1830s, replacing an earlier house, and since 1940 it has been converted into a school, losing some of its original character, including its elegant wings. The house consisted initially of two storeys with a basement, but there is now an attic; the impressive entrance with its columned portico is reached by a stair. The ground-floor windows were originally rectangular within round-arched recesses, but they have been enlarged to fill the recesses, altering the balance of the house.

On the west side of the house, above a gateway in a screen-wall leading to a rear entrance, there is a fine armorial panel in excellent condition, which may have come

from the earlier house. It bears the date 1750 and the arms and initials of John Bruce Steuart and Christina Gifford, together with those of the sculptor John Forbes. The formal ranges round a courtyard behind the house include stables and coach-houses, embellished with classical urns. The east range has a central belfry and the west a dovecote tower, the latter decorated with an extraordinary quatrefoil recess filled with stone balls.

14 Busta House, Brae, West Mainland

16th and 18th centuries AD.

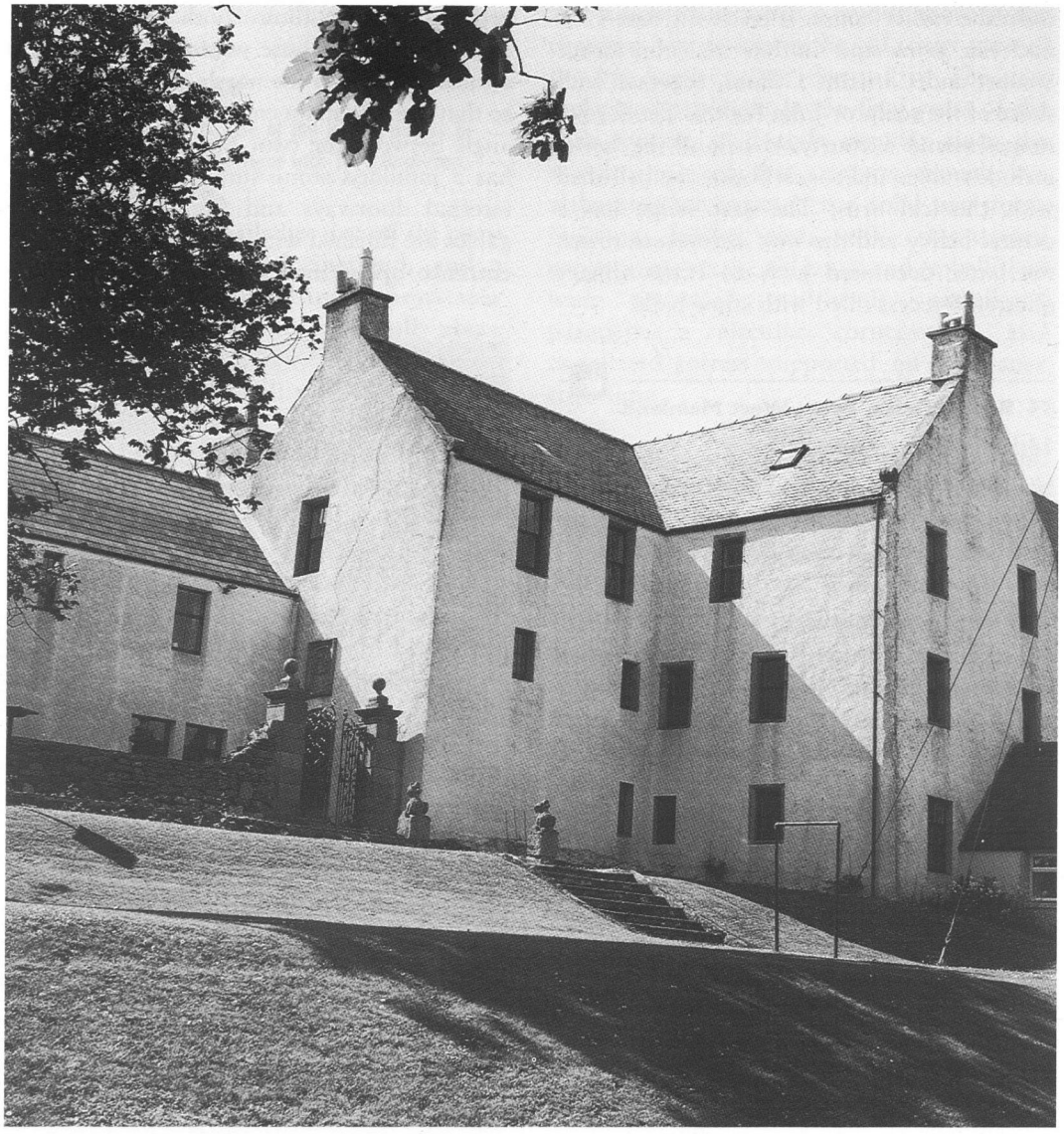
HU 345667. On the A 970 between Voe and Hillswick, take the minor road about 1 km beyond Brae which leads S along Busta Voe; signposted (now a hotel).

The immediate surroundings of Busta House are sufficiently sheltered to have allowed trees to mature around it and yet it enjoys a magnificent view across Busta Voe and beyond. An early 19th-century visitor so admired the garden with its mountain ashes, plane trees and elders after a long and bleak journey that he wrote: 'nothing can give greater cheer to the fatigued vision, when so long satiated with the superfluous waste of bare and tenantless scatholds'. At that time Shetland possessed very few surfaced roads, but Busta had its own paved road stretching out some 1.5 km into that bare landscape. The composite house of today is the result of several phases of building, and the overall effect is very pleasing, from the house itself to its terraced grounds embellished by pairs of carved stone gargoyles. These were acquired many years ago during restoration of the House of Commons in London!

The original 16th-century house was a modest two-storey rectangular building with crowstepped gables, which was bought by the Gifford family in the 17th century. A new three-storey mansion was added in 1714, at the time of the marriage of Thomas Gifford and Elizabeth Mitchell, and the carved stone armorial panel over the entrance is the same as that over the entrance of their burial aisle at Voe (no. 33), together a phase of building that provided for the future both in life and in death. The new house was added somewhat asymmetrically to the north gable of the old, so that the new main entrance opens on to the angle between the two. The arched doorway has a moulded stone surround, as do some internal doorways and fireplaces, and the gables are finished with spiral skewputts. The entrance opens into a stair-wing projecting from the main block, and the stair itself has a fine stone balustrade.

Elegant Busta House

Below the house is a small stone-built harbour, and, on the headland to the north-east (HU 347669), there is a circular dovecote, roofless but otherwise intact, which is likely to date from the early 18th century.



The seaward elevation of Busta House

This cylindrical dovecote served Busta House

15 Gardie House, Bressay

AD 1724.

HU 487420. The ferry from Lerwick lands at Maryfield, and Gardie House is visible along the coast to the N.

Gardie House gazes serenely out over Bressay Sound. It has seen Lerwick develop from a village into a town, and the Sound teeming with sailing boats. It was built for William Henderson of Gardie in 1724 and passed through marriage to the Mouats of Garth in Delting in 1799. It was 'Young Mr Mouat' who entertained Sir Walter Scott here in 1814,

and who was commended by Scott as a moderate improver. At that time the house was still as first built, a square block of two storeys with rusticated quoins (corner-stones) set off by harling. It stood in a walled garden, with a central main gate and an archway flanked by piers with ball finials at either end of the seaward wall, and its own pier. Around 1905, a square entrance porch was added, apparently reusing the original door surround, along with small single-storey wings. The original seven-bay design had grouped the windows as a central set of five flanked on either side by a larger gap and another window. This allowed the architect of the early 20th century, John M Aitken of Lerwick, to add a pedimented attic over the central five bays. To lighten the effect, he made three rather than five windows in the attic.

There is a U-shaped court of domestic offices at the back of the house, built perhaps in the later 18th century. Sometime in the 19th century, the archways in the garden wall were made into corniced boathouses.

16 Tangwick Haa, Eshaness, West Mainland

17th century AD.

HU 232776. From the B 9078 about 6 km W of the Hillswick junction, a signposted minor road leads S to Tangwick.

This is a typical example of a small laird's house, with its thick walls coated in harling. Here the harling has given the building a comfortable rounded appearance, as if wrapped in a blanket (colour photograph on p.33). It was renovated in 1978 as a visitor centre for Northmavine, and one room is furnished in the way that the original 'best' room would have appeared. The house is a rectangular block consisting of two storeys, with a gabled roof of slates and a chimney in each gable. An extension looking very much like a trading booth has been added to the south-east side. The buttresses flanking the entrance to the main house may have been needed to counteract the slope on which the house was built.

The Haa stands end-on to the shingle beach below, which would have been its main access point before roads were built.

17 Old Haa of Burravoe, Yell

AD 1672.

HU 520794. Near the shore on a minor road about 0.5 km S of the A 968 at Burravoe.

This 17th-century house was built at a point from which all boats attempting to enter the shelter of narrow Burra Voe could be monitored, and the original track to the shore passed through its courtyard. The modern road passes just south of the intact east entrance, but the rest of the courtyard has been demolished. The house has been restored and contains a local history exhibition (colour photograph on p.39).

An excellent example of a laird's house, this is a substantial rectangular building with crowstepped gables from which the remains of the courtyard walls project on the south-west side. At some stage it became necessary to strengthen the long walls of the house by adding massive buttresses, which do little to alleviate its stern exterior. The wooden porch is modern. The gateway in the south wall of the courtyard has a rounded arch above which is an armorial panel within a moulded stone surround; it bears the date 1672 and the initials R T for the laird, Robert Tyrie.

In the early 19th century an old trading booth on the shore of Burra Voe was still owned and operated by the family living in the Old Haa, selling goods imported from Scotland.

Robertson's Stores at the pier is a 19th-century warehouse, but, along the shore to the south-west, a broad stone-built arch attached to a modern shed is all that survives of the old booth. On the promontory beyond is a large mound covering the remains of a broch and topped with a good example of a skeo for drying fish.

18 * Jarlshof, Sumburgh, South Mainland

Early 17th century.

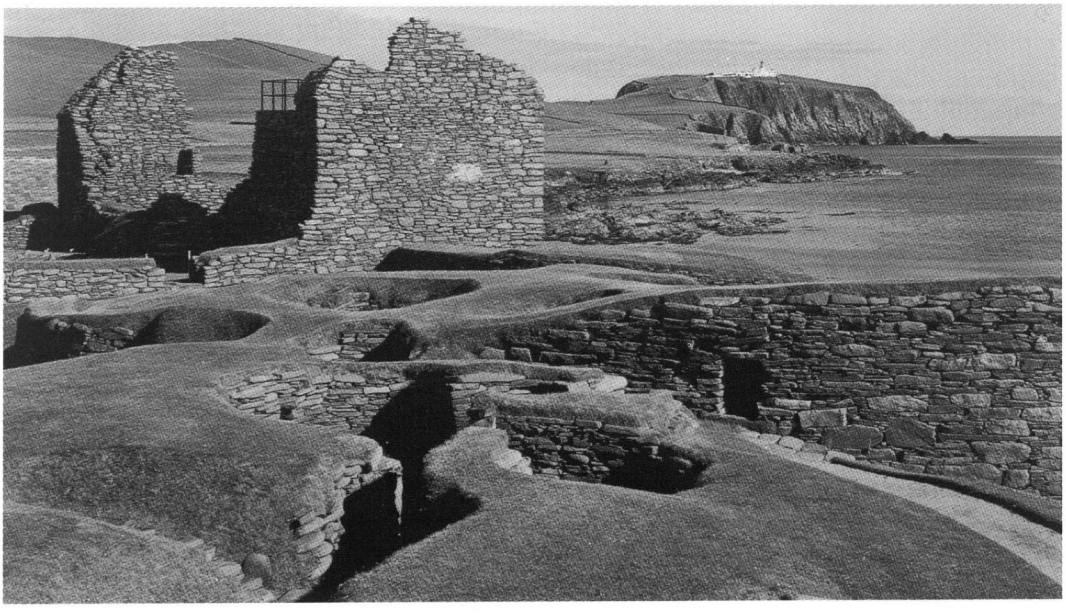
HU 398095. At the S tip of the Shetland mainland, near Sumburgh Hotel, S from the A 970.

Historic Scotland.

The latest in the long sequence of buildings (see no. 39) on this important site is the early 17th-century laird's house which overlies part of the prehistoric broch (in fact the broch proved a useful source of building stone for the house). Contemporary Shetlanders knew this house as Sumburgh, and, by the time that Sir Walter Scott re-named it 'Jarlshof' in his novel *The Pirate*, its ruins were virtually buried in wind-blown sand; the passage at the beginning of the novel in which Scott describes the house as he imagined it to have appeared in the late 17th century is fictitious, though probably close to the mark: 'a rude building of rough stone with nothing about it to gratify the eye or to excite the imagination'. It was, nevertheless, a substantial building with two upper storeys, and its accompanying domestic buildings formed the other three sides of a central rectangular courtyard.

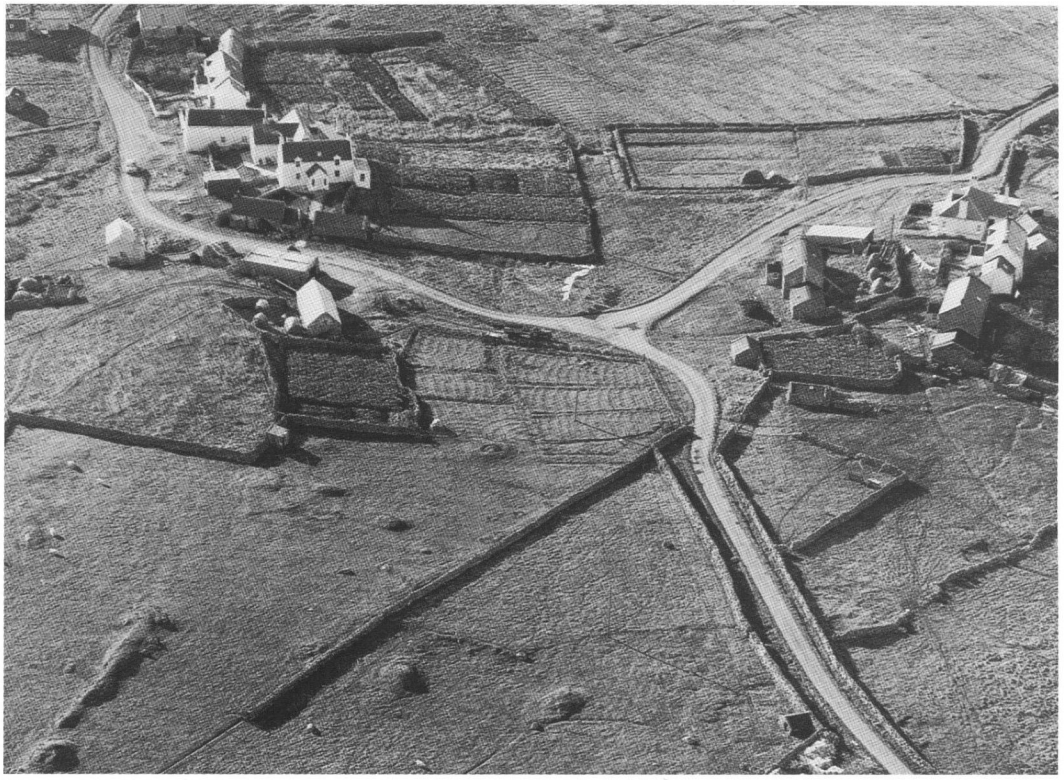
The dwelling-house, the south block, was a simple rectangular house, 18 m by 7 m with walls more than a metre thick; the ground-floor was divided into two storerooms, and an external stair (known as a forestair) led from the courtyard into the two rooms on the first floor, each with a fireplace set into the gable wall. There was evidently a garret in the roof space, because a small window survives at that height in the north-west gable. Although the upper floors are incomplete and the building roofless, this is the best preserved block; it was flanked by outhouses of which only the east block survives to a height of almost 4 m, while the building on the north side of the courtyard functioned as the kitchen block. This survives little higher than a metre, but it was originally the house built in Earl Robert's time which was later superseded in 1605 by the house built by Earl Patrick on the south side of the courtyard.

The old house at Sumburgh had a brief and turbulent existence. By the end of the 17th century it was in ruins and a new house, of which no trace now survives, had been built nearby, itself replaced by the 19th-century building that is now the Sumburgh Hotel. The latter was designed in 1866 by David Rhind as a Baronial mansion with bow windows and a round tower surmounted by a conical roof, but later additions have detracted from the impact of a once attractive house.



The laird's house at Jarlshof inspired Sir Walter Scott

4 FARM STEADINGS AND RURAL INDUSTRY



A multi-layered farming landscape at Isbister, Whalsay

Traces of the rural past are an absorbing aspect of the Shetland landscape, from the crofts of the 19th century back to those of five thousand years ago. There has been little change in the basic use of the land, except that warmer climatic conditions allowed more cultivation of grain in early prehistoric times than in recent centuries, and even some rural industries have a remarkably long history.

The idea of the longhouse or byre-dwelling, in which people and domestic animals live under one roof, seems to have evolved, at least in Shetland, in late Norse times (see Jarlshof, no. 39), and it re-appears among the farmhouses of the 18th and 19th centuries. Dating evidence is insufficiently precise to show whether the difference between the longhouse and the dwelling with separate byre is simply chronological or whether it reflects social status, but certainly by the mid 19th century a separate byre was more normal, sometimes built at right angles to the dwelling but usually parallel to it.

Other buildings on a small farm might include a stable for ponies, various storehouses and a barn with a corn-drying kiln. Such barns often incorporate a pair of opposing doors in the long walls, through which a

draught could be created for winnowing the grain, separating the grain from the chaff, and a clay threshing floor. The object of drying the grain was to make it easier to grind, and this was done in the tall circular kilns that are such an attractive feature of many old farms (some kilns in northern Shetland were rectangular). The method used can be appreciated particularly well at the Croft Museum (no. 20). Externally such a kiln is beehive-shaped, narrowing towards the open top, but internally the base narrows as well, and the whole structure could be more than 4 m high. From within the barn, there were two openings into the kiln: the main access to the wooden drying floor, where straw across the wooden spars provided a shelf for the grain, and a flue from the fire area below, where peats were laid to create a steady but not roaring source of heat. Each batch of grain would take 6 to 8 hours to dry.

WATERMILLS

A very special feature of the Shetland landscape is the small horizontal watermill. Several hundred existed at one time, and their ruins are still a familiar sight, though sometimes hidden in steeply-cut water-courses. Visitors to the islands were often struck by the small scale of these mills, including a Scottish minister who in 1845 recorded: 'one of their small, miniature corn-mills lay in our course, and interested our curiosity. The only aperture was so small, that entrance was impossible to one of ordinary dimensions. On looking in, we saw an elderly female knitting a stocking, and occasionally throwing in a handful of bear (bere, barley) into the smallest conceivable millstone, which again was made to revolve by a microscopic horizontal wheel without. How she got in was a mystery only equalled by the problem of how she could get out.'

A horizontal mill in the Tingwall valley around 1842

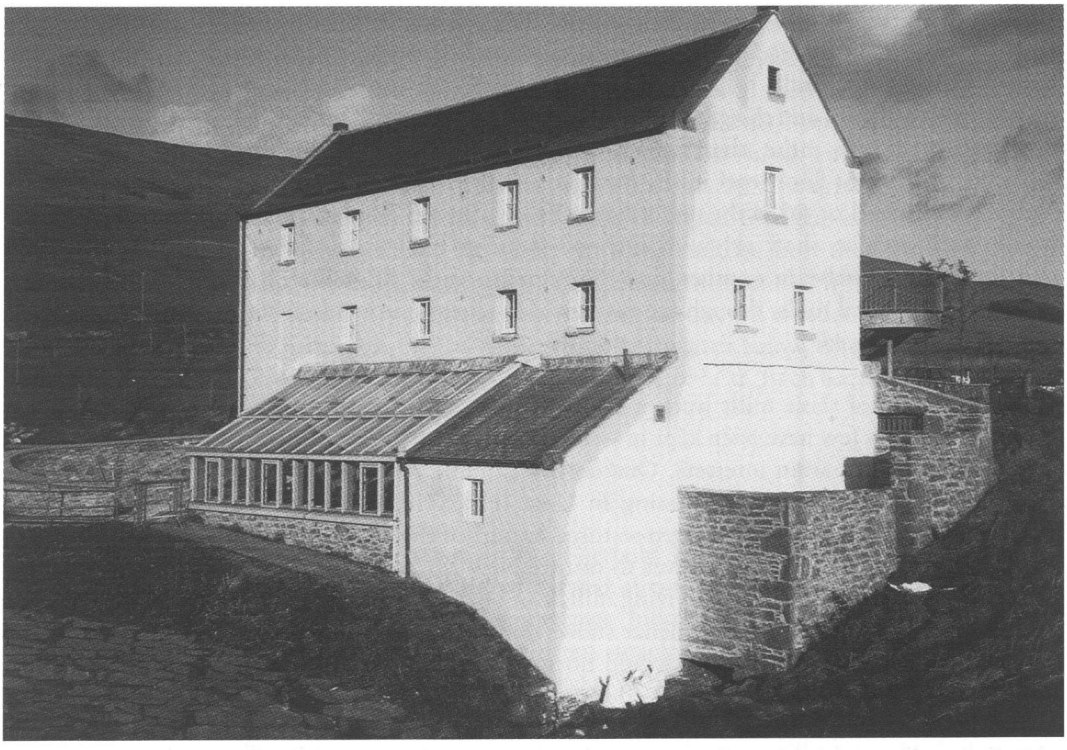
These mills are small, rectangular drystone buildings, normally windowless and with one door, roofed with flagstones and turf or thatch. They are known as horizontal mills because their water-wheels are set horizontally rather than vertically, and their mechanism is very simple, to the extent that they are really no more than water-powered hand-querns. The two millstones are set at floor-level in the meal-house, the upper stone rotated by the water-wheel or tirl in the under-house below; the tirl consisted of an iron-bound wooden shaft set with inclined wooden blades or feathers, usually eight to twelve in number, and the remains of the tirl can still be seen in many ruined mills, though the fittings of the meal-house above have usually been removed.

Quite a number of these mills were still in use up to and during the First World War, and a few have been kept in working order until recent times by farmers with antiquarian interests. One on the Clumlie burn in southern mainland (no.21) and one in Westing in Unst (HP 571056) are still in working order. Another mill has been restored as part of the Shetland Croft Museum (no. 20), and there are plans to restore New Mill on the Gilsetter Burn in Fair Isle. None of the surviving mills can be dated earlier than the 18th century, but documentary evidence shows that there were mills at least as early as the 15th century; they would normally be demolished and re-built on the same spot. A good water-course could support several mills, as at Troswick (no.21), Huxter (no. 22), the Gilsetter Burn in Fair Isle and those below Dutch Loch in Papa Stour (HU 163607), the latter served by a 'meal road' (see p.53). Milling was mostly done in the winter months when water-power was greatest, and it was a slow and tedious process.

Horizontal mills are sometimes known as Norse mills, and excavation has revealed the foundations of such a mill at Orphir in Orkney, dated to the Viking Age. But there is no evidence to prove a Scandinavian origin for them and an earlier Irish influence is equally plausible. The remains of a number of Irish examples have been found in water-logged conditions with preserved timber parts, and tree-ring dating of the wood has shown them to be of Dark-Age date between AD 630 and AD 926.

In the Northern Isles, horizontal mills have also been known as click mills or clack mills because of the distinctive sound that they made during operation. The meal was fed into the millstones from a wooden hopper and shoe suspended above, and it was jiggled gently from the shoe or feed trough into the millstones by a clapper; this was usually a stone on the end of a string attached to the shoe which rattled along on the moving millstone.

Equally interesting at many sites are the external arrangements made to manage the flow of water into the mill, for each had its own stone-lined lade upstream feeding into a timber chute that directed the water on to the water-wheel, and at the head of the lade the sluice had a wooden gate which could be slotted into position to close the sluice and divert the water. These arrangements are particularly well preserved at Huxter (no. 22), as is the dam and first sluice-gate at the feeder loch itself.



The great Kergord Mill (now Weisdale Mill) lacks its water wheel

One of the largest vertical mills in Shetland, set in sheltered Weisdale, is Kergord Mill (1855; HU 394530), a substantial two-storey block which unfortunately lacks its wheel.

Now known as Weisdale Mill, the building has been renovated for use as an art gallery, a museum of Shetland textiles and a cafe. Another vertical mill has been renovated at Girlsta (see no. 24), while Quendale Mill has been restored to its original purpose (no. 19).

With such plentiful and strong water-courses, Shetland had little need of the windmills used in Orkney and elsewhere in Scotland. The base of one windmill can be seen on the small island of South Havra, off the coast of south mainland (HU 361269). It stands on the highest point of the island (42 m OD), and it consists of a hollow stone cylinder with slots into which the wooden superstructure could be fitted to face the wind.

PUNDS

A pund is a large stone-built enclosure of a type that is unique to Shetland. Square in plan, the walls rise to peaks at the corners in order to prevent the enclosed animals from climbing out. The four surviving punds are often known as pony punds, but only the example on Noss (no. 23) was certainly used for breeding ponies, and the others may have been built for breeding sheep (Kirkabister on Yell, Swinister on Dales Voe and Garth on Sullom Voe in north-east mainland). In recent years, the same design with high corners has been adopted for the walls enclosing extensions to graveyards. That at Mid Yell is a particularly fine example of the stonemason's craft, and there is another at Breakon in the north of Yell.

Planticrues beside the Loch of Huxter in Whalsay

PLANTICRUES

Planticrues or planticrubs are a familiar and attractive feature of the Shetland landscape. They are small stone-built enclosures, round, square or rectangular and between 3 m and 9 m across, in which young cabbage plants were raised in the shelter of high walls, out of the wind and away from grazing animals. There was no entrance, although some have had gaps for gates knocked out of the wall in recent years; originally access was by projecting stone footholds or by short wooden ladders. Nets could be strung across the smaller planticrues to keep off birds. Very often the walls are built with a basal course of large boulders and smaller stones above, a technique that shows a continuity of tradition from very early times, for the same method can be seen in neolithic houses and tombs. Particularly well preserved examples may be seen on Whalsay (see Whalsay excursion), where they have remained in use into recent times, and where their distribution seems to have been related to a freshwater supply rather than to proximity to the owner crofts. Other good examples can be found in Bressay, South Nesting and on the east flanks of the Hill of Strom (HU 398487).

SKEOS

At one time, virtually every farm and croft would have had a skeo (Norwegian *skjaa*, drying-house) for drying fish, sea-birds, beef and mutton, but they were going out of use by the early 19th century and few now survive. They were also used as cold stores for cheese and butter. They were small oblong buildings set in exposed places to catch the wind, their rough stone walls constructed to allow the wind to blow through, and just a narrow doorway. They were roofed with thin turves. The walls of a very small skeo may be seen at the shore below Pinhoulland in Walls (HU 262498; see no. 54), its interior only about 3 m by 1 m with thick rubble walls. A good example of a larger skeo is perched on top of the broch-mound at Burravoe in Yell (see no. 17).

BOAT-ROOFED SHEDS

Occasionally small sheds may be seen in Shetland which use upturned old boats as convenient roofs. There is one beside a field-dyke at Greenland, Walls (HU 227492) and another at Norwick in Unst; such sheds were mostly used to shelter lambs or ducks, though one in Lerwick, beyond the south end of Commercial Street, is now used as a garage.

A shed roofed with an old boat at Greenland near Walls

ANCIENT DYKES

Field boundaries have been constructed since very early times, and Shetland has stone-built examples going back to the 3rd and 4th millennia BC. More substantial turf and stone dykes were built as territorial boundaries and as agricultural barriers between upland grazing and cultivated land. The Feelie Dyke on Fair Isle clearly separates the hill grazing from the arable lands of the southern part of the island (see chapter 10), whereas the treb dyke known as the Funzie Girt in Fetlar appears to be an ancient territorial boundary (no. 26). The treb dykes are difficult to date, but the fact that they appear to be earlier than tunship divisions, which may themselves relate to pre-Norse land divisions, has led to the very reasonable suggestion that they may originate in the 1st millennium BC.

RURAL INDUSTRY

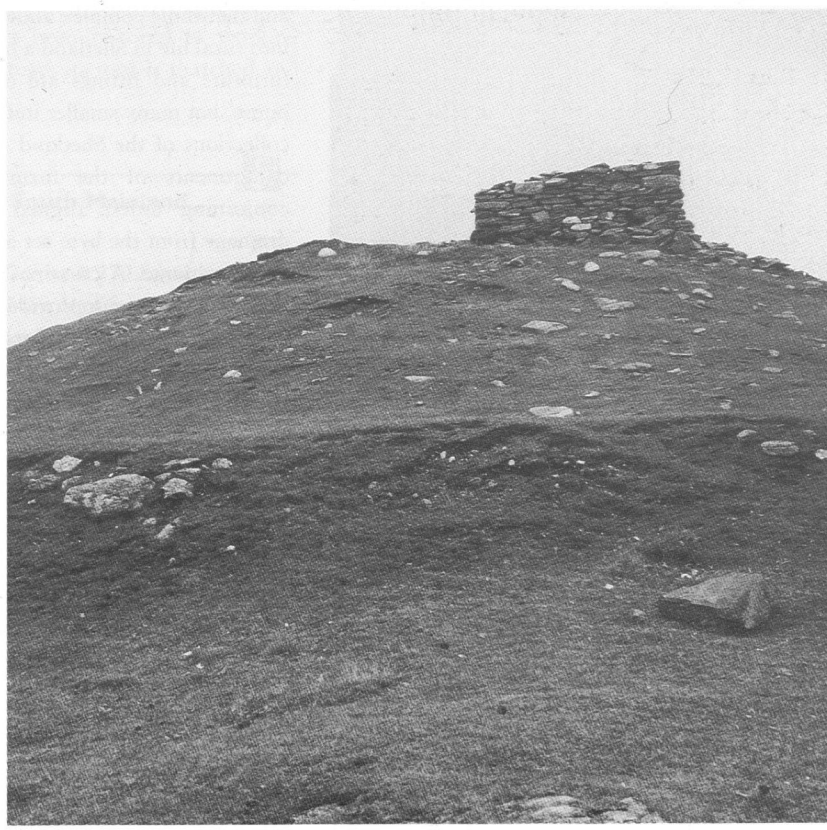
There are several monuments surviving by which the various rural industries of Shetland may be traced.

The use of lime for fertilising the fields led to the construction of drystone limekilns, of which a few examples survive, usually built near the shore or near a loch, close to a limestone quarry. They were tall circular structures in which alternate layers of peat (as fuel) and limestone broken into small lumps were burned; the remains of two early 19th-century kilns survive at Fladdabister (HU 437321), which supplied the building trade in Lerwick

and farmers in southern Shetland, and a well-preserved kiln of the later 19th century may be seen at Lunna (HU 484693; see no. 32). On a larger commercial scale was the limekiln at Girsta (no. 24).

Shetland's easily quarried steatite or soapstone was the basis of a most important manufacturing industry in the Viking Age (see chapter 7), as well as in prehistoric and medieval times. This soft stone was made into vessels, weights and many other domestic objects.

Britain's only source of chromite ore lies in Unst, whence some 50,000 tons were extracted between 1820 and 1944, first for use in the chemical industry and later for the manufacture of chrome-magnesite bricks. A Free Church minister visited Unst in September 1845 and noted 'the hills where they procure the chronate of iron, which is the source of a considerable revenue to this island'. He was also struck by the lack of trees, and suggested that the islanders might adopt the plan devised (but never carried out) by Sir John Sinclair for relieving the treeless landscape of Caithness. This was to make cast-iron trees and place them in commanding positions in the countryside. A horse-powered mill for crushing the chromite ore survives at Hagdale (no. 25).



A skeo crowns the old broch-mound at Burravoe in Yell

The dwelling house at South Voe with the barn and corn-drying kiln alongside (Right)

The beautifully restored Quendale Mill

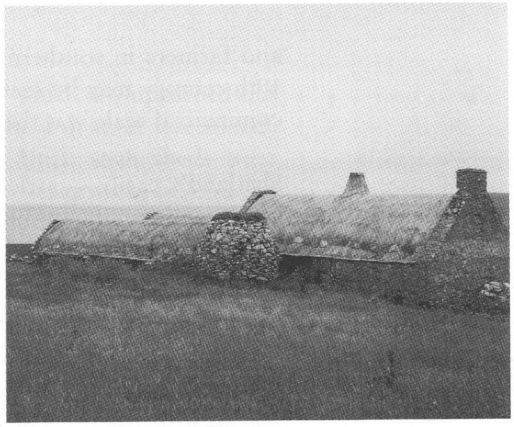
An aquaduct serves the over-shot water-wheel at Quendale (Bottom)

19 Quendale Mill, South Mainland

AD 1867.

HU 371133. From the A 970 about 4 km N of Sumburgh Airport, take a minor road to the west for Quendale.

Water draining down the steep slopes of Fitful Head was harnessed at Quendale to drive a mill with a vertical wheel (4.3 m in diameter with wooden buckets). The mill has been beautifully restored to working order with financial help from Shetland Amenity Trust, and it contains displays about the mill and life in Dunrossness. The T-shaped mill stands on a slope, allowing a single storey above a lower floor connected to the wheel. Not only is the wheel intact, but a fine wooden aquaduct carries the water to the top of the wheel. A footpath leads to the dam.



20* Shetland Croft Museum, Voe, South Mainland

19th century AD.

HU 398146. Near the S tip of Shetland, some 5 km N of Sumburgh Airport, on a minor road to the E of the A 970; signposted.

The restored buildings that form this museum include not only the immediate steading with its house, byre and barn but also a typical corn mill, and the whole complex allows a fascinating insight into rural life in Shetland a hundred years ago. The furniture and fittings are mostly original to the house, but many smaller items have come from the collections of the Shetland Museum. The various components of the farmstead were built as conjoining units, aligned downslope to help drainage from the byre set at the lower end of the dwelling range. A cross-passage between the byre and the living-room provides access as well to the barn built alongside the north wall of the house. Another door in the opposite wall of the barn allowed the creation of the cross-draught necessary for winnowing. The circular corn-drying kiln is at the upper end of the barn, and a storeroom at the lower end. At the upper end of the house, beyond the living- room, there is the bedroom with a wooden box bed and a wooden cradle. Both the dwelling range and the adjoining barn are roofed with thatch over a timber frame, held against the wind by ropes and stone weights. The west gable of the dwelling range incorporates a stone-built chimney, but there is an interesting reconstruction of a thatched smokehole midway between the two gables which served the original living-room hearth.

Horizontal mills on the burn at South Voe

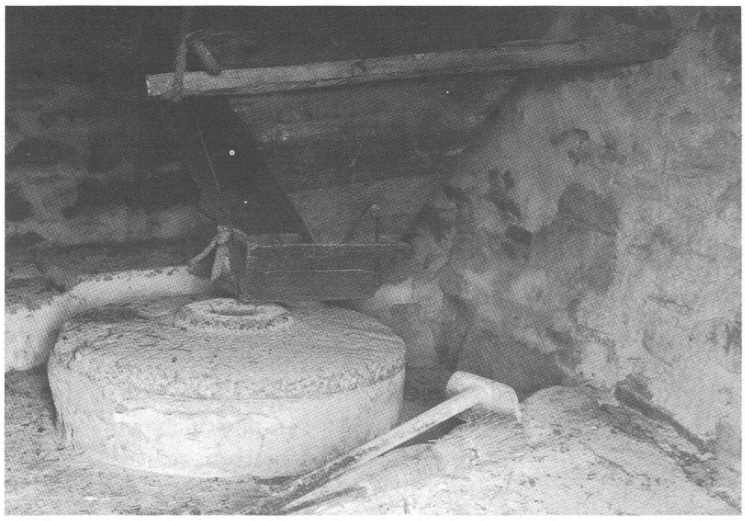
A path leads downhill to the south-east to the mill (HU 401145), the lowest of three clack mills on a tiny burn running fast down to the sea. Though very small, it would be quite adequate in performance and has been restored to working order. Like the farmstead, its roof is thatched and held by stone weights.

21 Troswick mills, South Mainland

18th-19th century AD.

HU 405172-409167. On the A 970 Lerwick to Sumburgh road, some 9 km N of Sumburgh, take a minor road SSE to the Loch of Clumlie.

From the road at the south end of the loch, the line of mills astride the Clumlie Burn is a fine sight, falling away south-south-eastwards to the sea. There are nine mills in all, mostly quite ruinous except for the lowest building which was restored in 1929 and is still in working order, with a 12-feathered tirl (this latter mill may be visited by taking the road to Troswick Farm down the north-east side of the burn). Each mill has its sluice a short distance upstream. Between the loch and the road, in a very boggy area at the head of the burn, there are the remains of two, probably successive, dams, the larger retaining the groove for its sluice-gate and the smaller having a wooden frame for the gate.



Inside the lower mill at Troswick, the wooden hopper and feed-trough direct grain into the millstones (photographed in 1933)

Close to the road just north of Clumlie are two fine circular planticrues.

22 Huxter mills, West Mainland

18th-19th century AD.

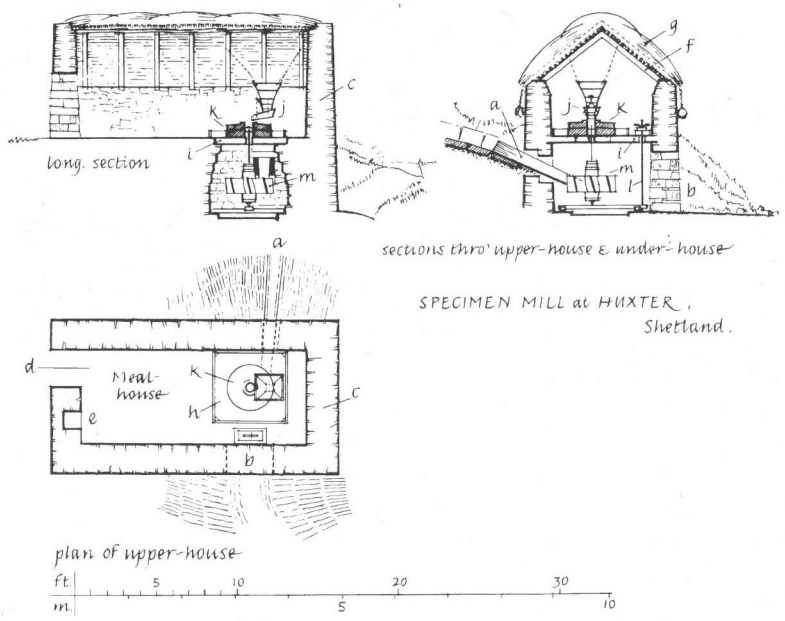
HU 172571. Take the A 971 from Lerwick to Sandness; about 1 km before the road terminates at the pier at Melby, fork W on a side road to Huxter. From the road end, walk W along between the houses and the sea and across a field to the burn.

Lowest of the Huxter mills with its stone-lined lade

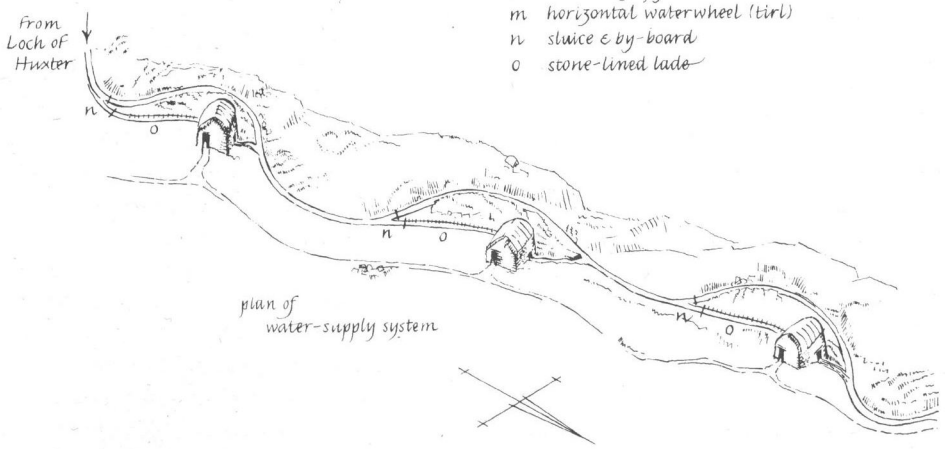
The burn runs only a short distance from a small loch to the sea, but it falls steeply in its lower reaches, creating ideal conditions for small mills, and the loch itself has an excellent feeder burn that falls from a height of some 200 m OD in the hills to the south-east. There are three mills in the steeply-cut lower reaches of the burn, the last of which went out of regular use during World War II but was kept in good order until recently.

Each mill is arranged identically on the burn: the mill itself is built astride the direct route of the water-course, with a wide meander round it on the west side into which the water could be diverted, when the mill was idle, by means of sluice-gates. The timber gates are missing but their vertical slots are visible. Each rectangular building is about 5.5 m by 3 m, with an entrance only 0.6 m wide in the east gable, and the roof surviving on the lowest mill consists of heather thatch over turf and branches carried on a wooden frame. The little window over the door of this mill is very unusual and likely to have been a late modification. This last mill still has its millstones, and all three have remains of their horizontal wooden water-wheels, that in the uppermost mill retaining six of its original nine blades or feathers. The lades are beautifully constructed with stone linings, feeding the water into wooden chutes which direct it on to the inclined feathers of the wheels.

It is worth following the burn up to the Loch of Huxter to see the well-constructed stone dam and concrete sluice-gate setting, the stones for the dam almost certainly robbed from the adjacent broch. The latter has a recent sheep stell built on top of it, but the outer base of the broch wall is visible on the loch side, the broch entrance with a lintel still in position is incorporated into the stell, and, on the south side, the sheep are clearly using the broch entrance passage and the entrance into a guard cell as a means of getting in and out of the stell. To the



a water-chute
b outfall opening
c rubble walling
d doorway
e aumbry
f coupled rafters
g heather thatch on turf & branches
h wooden meal tray
i stone slab floor
j wooden hopper & feed-trough
k millstones
l tentering apparatus
m horizontal waterwheel (tirl)
n sluice & by-board
o stone-lined lade



The Huxter mills

south of the loch are two burnt mounds which, unusually, have been given names: Little Brownie's Knowe (HU 173566) and Muckle (Big) Brownie's Knowe (HU 171563). There is a magnificent view to the north of the island of Papa Stour, on which an important late Norse settlement has been discovered and partially excavated at Da Biggings.

23 Noss Pony Pund, Noss

AD 1870.

HU 530410. At Gungstie, where the ferry lands from Bressay.

The whole of the island of Noss is a National Nature Reserve administered by Scottish Natural Heritage. It is home to breeding colonies of gannets, fulmars, guillemots, kittiwakes, razorbills, puffins and many more, and there are also areas of beautiful wild flowers. The island is some 313 hectares in extent, sloping up eastwards to the formidable cliffs of the Noup, and Sir Walter Scott in 1814 described its attractions. 'The eastern part of the isle is fine smooth pasture, the best I have seen in these isles, sloping upwards to the verge of the tremendous rocks which form its eastern front'. It was this fine pasture that encouraged the Marquis of Londonderry to acquire the lease of the island in 1870 in order to breed Shetland ponies for use in his coal mines in County Durham. The pony pund at Gungstie was built for breeding ponies with 'as much weight as possible and as near the ground as it can be got'.

Shetland ponies are the smallest of the native British breeds, with a maximum height of 1.07 m, and they can be as small as 0.7 m in height. Despite their size, they are strong and hardy, with a thick coat and long mane and tail which makes them well able to withstand the cold Shetland winds. The earliest known image of one of these ponies is carved on the Monks Stone from Papil (see p.14).

The pony pund was restored in 1986, and there is an informative display. Lean-to shelters with slate roofs line the inner face of the enclosure, and there

The massive limekiln at Girlsta

are stone-built pens in the central area. The house of Gungstie may date from as early as the 17th century, and its later outbuildings include a corn-drying kiln. The croft and the pony pund are visible in the background of the photograph on p.11.

24 Girlsta limekiln, East Mainland

AD 1872.

HU 430504. From the A 970 some 15 km north of Lerwick, take a minor road to the E signposted Girlsta.

A neat little industrial complex nestles at the head of Wadbister Voe, served by a small pier. The limeworks was in production until the 1930s, burning limestone from the adjacent quarry, and it provided work for many South Nesting men. Peat in vast quantities was used in addition to coal to fuel the massive kiln, and the lime that it produced was sent for use in building projects in Lerwick as well as being used locally as fertiliser. The kiln is rectangular and tapers slightly as it rises, and its stonework is bound near the top with a reinforcing iron rod. The back of the kiln is set into the hillside, and the draw arch at the front is intact, giving access to the furnace within. The kiln was lined with brick, and it was capable of burning 70 tons of lime at a time with the help of 14 tons of coal and 10 tons of peat.

Nearby, the vertical mill was also built in the 19th century, harnessing the outflow from the Loch of Girlsta. The mill wheel, 3.66 m in diameter, still survives, and the building has been restored for Melbrook Fisheries, an innovative salmon hatchery using re-cycled water. The new revetment below the mill has been built in megalithic style using massive boulders.

25 Hagdale chromite mill, Unst

Mid 19th century.

HP 640103. Signposted on the A 968 2 km N of Baltasound; rough footpath leading downslope to the E.

The chromite ore occurs within a thick band of serpentine and is concentrated in the area of Balta Sound and Hagdale. The ore appears to have been exploited from the 1820s onwards, and by 1840 there was a large quarry at Hagdale which was operated until 1862. The mill is thought to have been built around 1850 for the purpose of crushing and thus concentrating low-grade ores.

This is a very attractive relic of Shetland's industrial past, with its yellow drystone walling. It has been partially restored, and, although it is now roofless, recesses on the inside of the circular wall suggest that it may have had some form of light roofing. There is a single entrance and slits in the wall to allow daylight.

The mill is sited astride a small burn that rises in a pond to the west of the mill and runs down to the sea at Wick of Hagdale. The water was directed through the mill by means of small openings at ground-level on the west and east sides and stone-lined channels across the mill interior. At the centre is a circular stone-kerbed recess containing an iron-bound millstone, and another such stone with an iron tyre lies alongside. A paved walkway for the pony or pair of ponies surrounds the central pit. The smallest ponies in Shetland came from Unst and north Yell, and they would have been ideal for the mill.

Research is still in progress on the exact mechanism used here. Similar devices for crushing ore are known elsewhere in Britain, for example in Derbyshire and Devon, where they were set up in the open air. An iron-clad millstone was fixed vertically to a horizontal axle, and the axle was attached to a central pivot. The horse was harnessed to the other end of the axle and walked round in an anti-clockwise circle, and the vertical millstone crushed the ore placed in its path. At Hagdale it seems likely that the vertical millstone was set to run round the perimeter of the central recess, where the running water would carry away the debris and the heavier ore would remain in the recess. The octagonal stone with a large square perforation is likely to have been a weight (see p. 44)

26 Funzie Girt, Fetlar

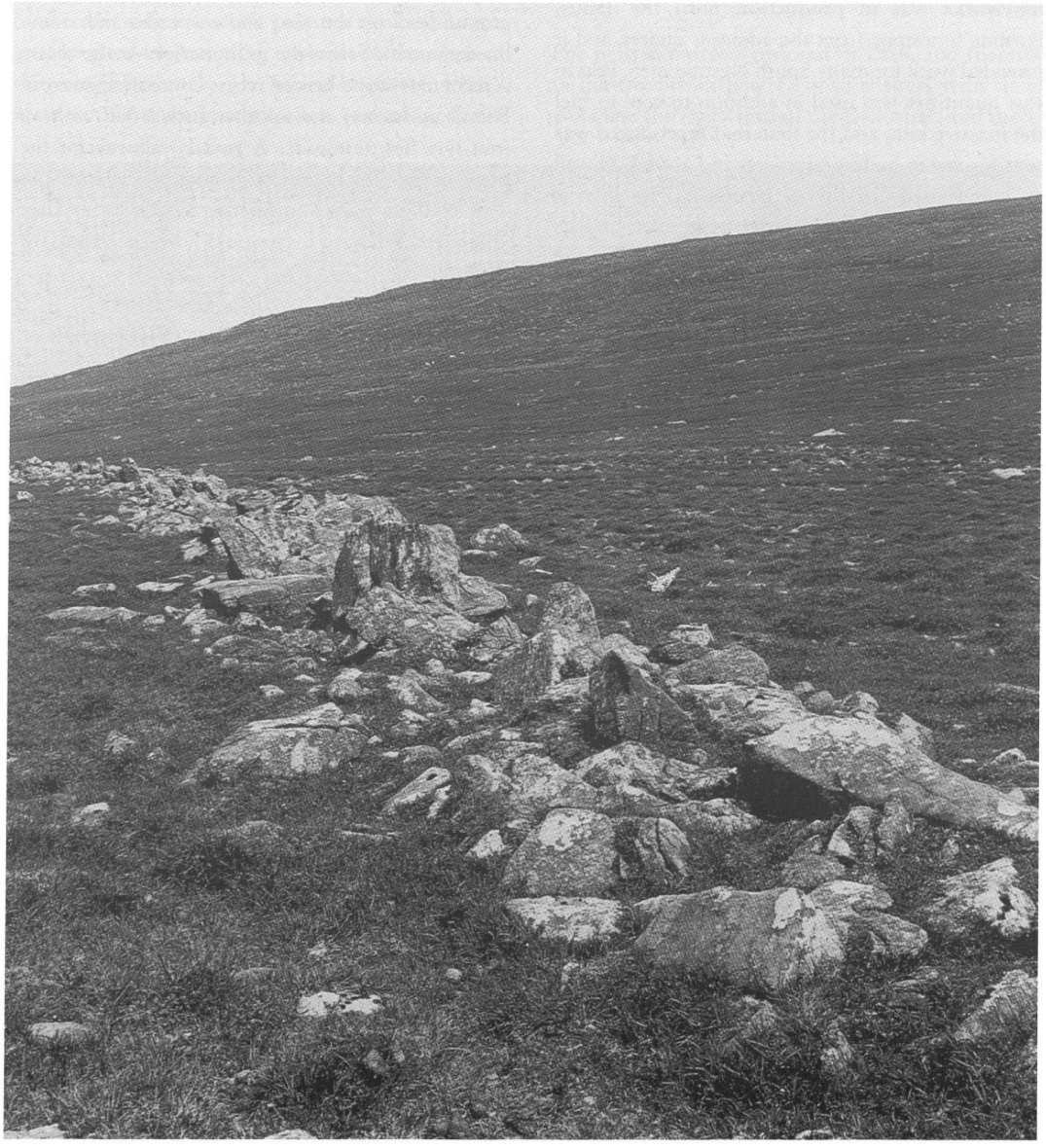
Date uncertain but prehistoric.

HU 616930-626944. The ferry for Fetlar leaves from Gutcher in Yell and lands at Oddsta on the NW tip of the island. Within a RSPB Reserve.

Also known as Finnigirt, the old name was Finnigord, the Finns' dyke, and the various folk

myths attached to it suggest that it was built in prehistoric times as a land division. It winds across from the Houbie area on the south coast to the cliffs of East Neep on the north coast, passing west of the summit of Vord Hill, and thus divides the island into two roughly equal parts. Its southern end is destroyed, but it is well preserved on the open moorland north of the modern airstrip and especially on the western and northern flanks of Vord Hill. It was built of large slabs and boulders set on end, and it was originally about a metre wide.

At HU 618928 south of Vord Hill, there is a circle of large boulders known as Hjaltadans. The circle is about 11 m in diameter, with a earthen circle within it and two upright stones at the centre. It is probably a burial place of the third millennium BC, and its design relates it to the Rounds of Tivla on Unst (see under no.68).



The Funzie Girt on Fetlar is an ancient boundary

5 MEDIEVAL CASTLES OF THE FAR NORTH

Earl Patrick's castle at Scalloway

The 1590s were a troubled time for the earldom of Orkney and Shetland. Earl Robert Stewart died in 1593, and his son Patrick was faced with an uncertain future in which King James was seeking to increase his revenue from the Northern Isles and refused to acknowledge Patrick's right to the earldom. It was seven years before Patrick was confirmed as Earl, in March 1600, and he lost no time in building a castle at Scalloway. Two important and wealthy families in Shetland were potential threats to his power in the 1590s, the Sinclairs of Brough who were descended from the last Sinclair earl, and the Scottish Bruces of Cultmalindie and Symbister. The lands owned by the Sinclairs included the earliest surviving castle in Shetland on an island in the Loch of Strom (HU 395475). This was a simple square keep, some 6 m across, similar to Cubbie Roo's Castle on Wyre in Orkney, and part of it still stands almost 3 m high. Whereas Cubbie Roo's Castle was defended by encircling walls and ditches, Strom was protected by water. Its date is uncertain but it may have been built as early as the 12th or 13th centuries. But the old Castle of Strom was no longer a factor in the struggles of the late 16th century, whereas the castle built in 1598 at Muness on Unst by Laurence Bruce was a new symbol of wealth and power to rival the Earl, his nephew.

The castles of Scalloway (no.27) and Muness (no.28) were built to the Z-plan favoured in the later 16th century, in which the main block had towers at two opposing corners (in the case of Scalloway at just one corner). The advantage of this design was not only the provision of extra accommodation, but also an increased potential for defence. Strategically placed gun-loops could cover the ground around the castle more effectively, and the entrance could be placed in the angle between tower and main block, where it could be protected from two directions. There seems to have been a strong element of fashion rather than necessity that dictated the extent to which a castle was provided with gun-loops and shot-holes. At this stage in the development of hand-guns, they were in practice almost ludicrously ineffective compared with the longbow and the cross-bow, both of which were much faster to load and more accurate. It has been estimated that the hakbut might fire six or seven one-ounce balls per hour, whereas a good longbowman could fire twelve arrows per minute.

Both castles were built of rubble walls with harled exterior faces, and dressed blocks of red sandstone were used for window and door surrounds, external corners and decorative features. The sandstone was imported from the island of Eday in Orkney. Forced labour was used to build Scalloway, and the hapless workers were obliged to work for nothing and to feed themselves as they did so. Architectural similarities suggest that the same master mason was behind the construction of both castles, most probably the Earl's Master of Works, Andrew Crawford (whose tombstone can be seen at Tingwall, no. 34). Earl Patrick might well have allowed his uncle the services of his Master of Works in an attempt to gain his political support. Crawford also built the Earl's Palace in Kirkwall in 1606, which shares a distinctive decorative device with the two Shetland castles. This is the alternating corbels and imitation shot-holes that adorn the projecting tiers of masonry supporting the turrets. In some ways, Muness is a more sophisticated building than Scalloway, particularly in having glass rather than iron grilles in its windows.

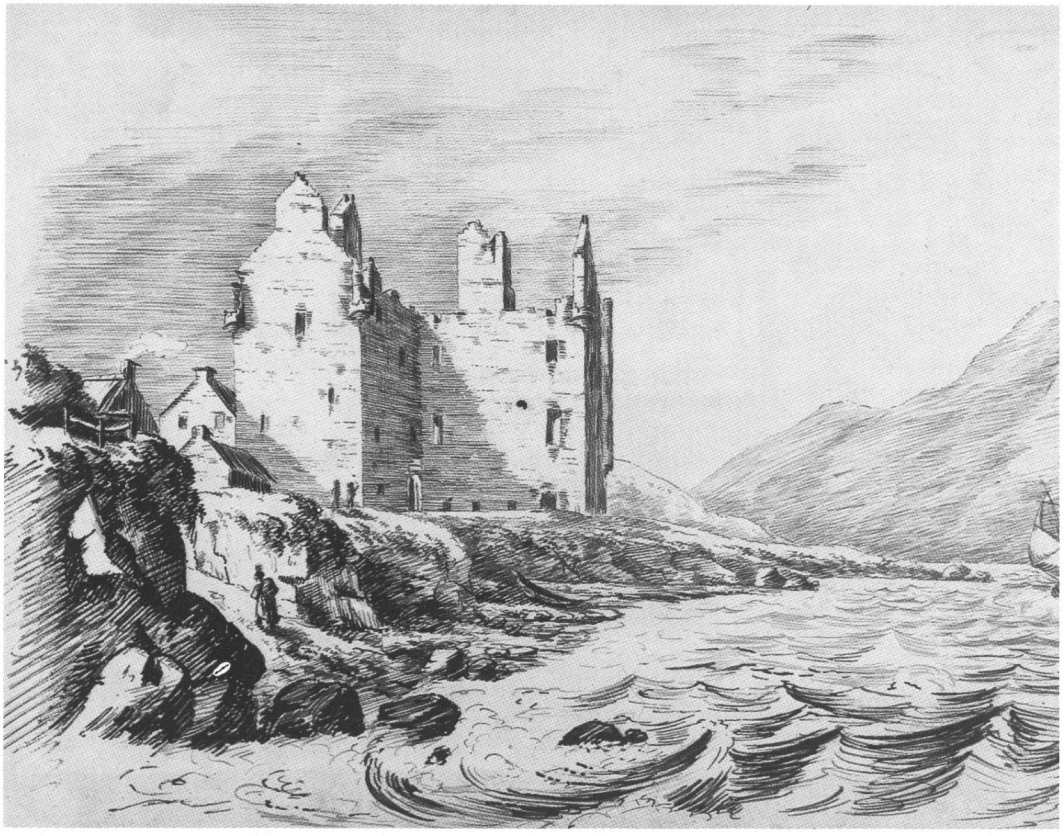
The Stewart Earls also had a house at Sumburgh (no. 18), initially a rubble-walled rectangular block to which there is a euphemistic reference as Earl Robert's 'Palace at Dunrossness'. A new block was added in 1605, parallel to the first and thus creating a courtyard, but even then the idea of a 'palace' seems incongruous, particularly in contrast with Earl Patrick's splendid palace built in Kirkwall the following year. And yet high quality building existed, not just at the castles of Muness and Scalloway. On the coast north of Lerwick, excavation at Kebister has revealed the work of a master-mason. This was a teind barn, where payments in goods of tithes and rents were stored, and a carved panel identifies it as the property of Henry Plancouth, Archdeacon of Shetland from 1501 to 1529. It is likely that other buildings of high status and good quality remain to be discovered. Perhaps we are wrong to identify Jarlshof as Earl Robert's 'palace', simply because no other building of appropriate age has yet been found at Sumburgh.

27 Scalloway Castle

AD 1600.

HU 402393. In Scalloway, above the harbour, some 10 km from Lerwick on the A 970; signposted.

Historic Scotland.



Scalloway Castle in 1801

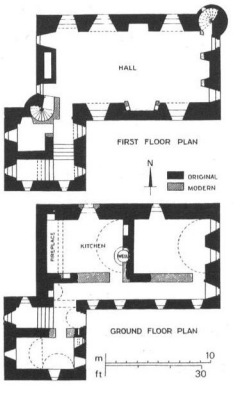
The basic design of this castle consists of a rectangular main block, some 18 m by 10 m, with an 8 m square tower at its south-west angle. It has four storeys and an attic, and turrets at each corner, and it is intact apart from the roof and the two uppermost floors. The entrance is sited in the tower, strategically close to the angle with the main block, and it is covered by a circular gun-loop at ground-floor level in the tower. Many if not all of the windows were originally furnished with gun-loops, but there has been much alteration. Surviving in the window-sills of the second floor of the main block are quatrefoil gun-loops, while there are circular gun-loops in the north-east turret. Both types were also used at Muness.

The doorway would have looked splendid when the carved panels above it were intact. At the top there is a weathered armorial panel, and the empty double panel below may also have held armorial carvings. It has been suggested that the double panel held the arms of Patrick Stewart and his wife, with the royal arms above. The bottom panel was carved with an inscription, now so worn as to be barely discernable, but fortunately it was recorded in the 18th century. It read 'Patrick Stewart Earl of Orkney and Shetland/ James V King of Scots/ That house whose foundation is on a rock will stand/ but if on sand it shall fall/ AD 1600'. There has been much speculation about the meaning of this enigmatic statement about foundations, but it is possible that it should simply be taken at face value, as a reflection on the strong foundations of the castle and the strength of the family that built it.

The tower is mostly taken up by the stairway and landings, and the major rooms are in the main block. On the ground floor is a large kitchen with a

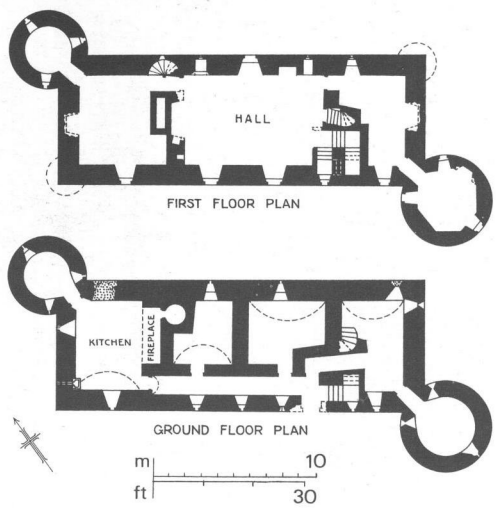
The entrance into Scalloway Castle is guarded by a gunloop almost at ground level

massive fireplace and well, together with a storeroom. The whole of the floor above is taken up by a spacious hall served by nine windows and two fireplaces. An account of the ruined castle written in 1701 mentions decorative wall paintings and suggests that the great hall may have been a colourful and sumptuous sight in its heyday. The upper floors were divided into private apartments, and there were also small rooms on the upper floors of the tower and in the turrets.



Plan of Scalloway Castle (Right)

The castle was a major building project for Earl Patrick in 1600, but it seems unlikely that he spent much time there. His rule in Shetland was very harsh and led to his arrest in 1609, when he was taken to Edinburgh. His son Robert attempted to restore the family fortunes by instigating a rebellion, but it failed and both he and his father were executed in Edinburgh in 1615. Apart from a brief period of garrison by Cromwellian troops in the mid 17th century, the castle was left to fall into disrepair, though admired by visitors, until it was taken into State care in 1908.



Plan of Muness Castle

28 Muness Castle, Unst

AD 1598.

HP 629011. At the SE tip of the island, some 4 km along a minor road from Uyeasound.

Historic Scotland.

It is fitting that the most northerly castle in Britain should be an exceptionally fine architectural achievement. Muness is a small and beautifully proportioned defensive residence, compact and suited to a laird's family and yet up-to-date with contemporary fashion farther south as befitted its Scots laird, Laurence Bruce of Cultmalindie in Perthshire (colour photograph on p.44).

The castle consists of a long rectangular main block, 22.3 m by 7.9 m, with circular towers at the north and south corners (the south tower is slightly larger than the north). The ground floor and the first floor survive virtually intact, but the second floor and roof were demolished many years ago. There were small turrets at the west and east corners of the missing upper floor, for the corbelling that supported them is still visible, adding a decorative note. The roof over the main block is likely to have been gabled, with conical roofs on the towers. There is a pleasing variety of gun-loops from relatively plain to quatrefoil.

The entrance is at ground-level on the south-west side of the building, covered by gun-loops both in the main block and in the south-east tower. The door surround was brought here in 1959 from the old house at Lund, on the grounds that it may have been removed from the castle in the first place, but some architectural historians believe it to be work of the late 17th century rather than contemporary with the castle. The original carved panels survive above the door, the upper with Bruce's arms and initials and the lower with an inscription about the building of the castle.

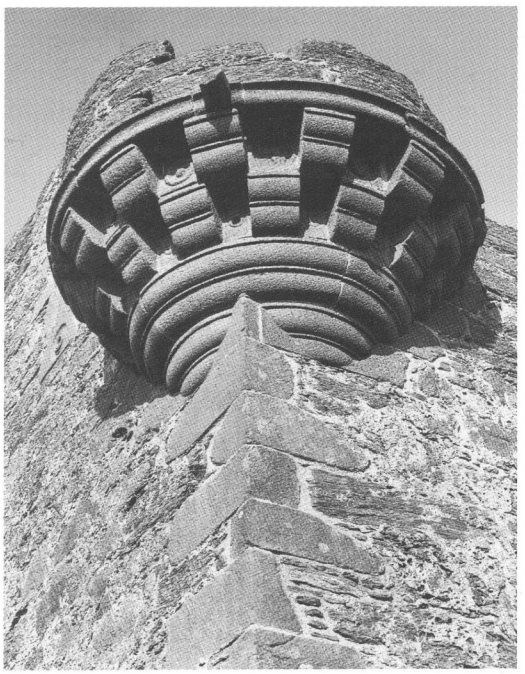
List ze to knaw yis bulding quha began
Laurence the Bruce he was that worthy man
Quha ernestly his airis and offspring prayis
To help and not to hurt this vark aluayis
The zeir of God 1598

Listen you to know this building who began
Laurence the Bruce he was that worthy man
Who earnestly his heirs and offspring prays
To help and not to hurt this work always.
The year of God 1598.

Above the entrance into Muness Castle are an armorial panel and an inscription

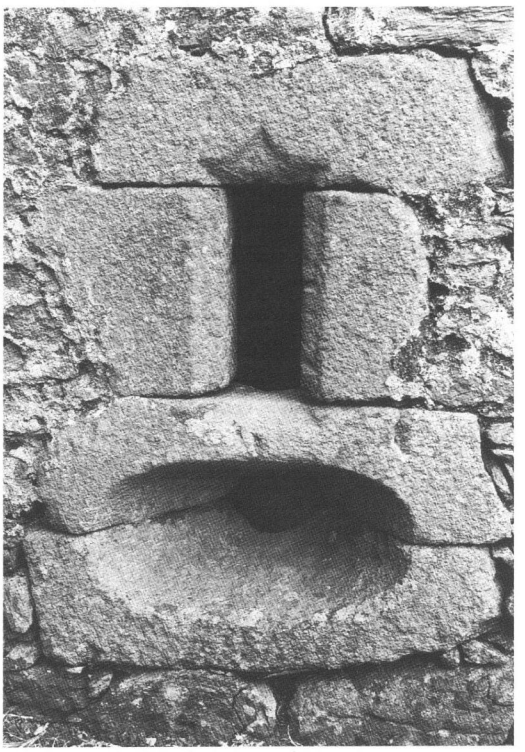
Muness was built not by a Shetlander but by a Scot, Laurence Bruce of Cultmalindie in Perthshire. He was a half-brother of Earl Robert Stewart and through him acquired lands in Unst and the means to build a fine castle there. Muness would have been a very comfortable residence, furnished with rugs and tapestries and probably gaily painted ceilings. There are traces in the ground south of the castle of outbuildings and possibly terraced gardens.

One of the gun-loops at Muness



Decorative corbelling supported a turret

Inside the castle, the ground floor contains three storerooms and a large kitchen, all with vaulted stone ceilings, as well as a small room in each tower. The kitchen has a huge fireplace, with a circular oven for baking bread, and a sink in one corner. On the first floor, reached by a spacious stairway, there is a large hall with a fireplace (and a small alcove in the side of the fireplace where the salt could be kept dry). It is also served by a spiral stair from the storeroom, probably the wine cellar, below. Chambers at either end have fireplaces in the gable walls, and the larger north-west room was probably the laird's private quarters, with its own little stair to the bedchamber above. The towers provided spacious closets. There were also three rooms on the second floor.



Laurence Bruce gave the castle to his second son, Andrew, in 1617. It was attacked and burned by foreign privateers in 1627, less than decades after building began, and this splendid residence was never the same again. It was uninhabited before the end of the century, and the Bruce family sold it in 1718.

6 CHURCHES AND TOMBSTONES

The chancel arch at Sand has survived eight centuries beside the sea

The various religious movements of the 19th century resulted in new buildings in Shetland as elsewhere in Scotland, but most were modest in size and design. The Episcopalian church of St Magnus in Lerwick is an interesting building where the chancel walls were stencilled in red and gold in the 1860s (see no. 10), and St Colman's at Burravoe is a very attractive example of distinctive church architecture around the turn of the century (no. 29). A number of new rural churches and manses were built in the Highlands with government funding after an Act of Parliament of 1823. All built to a standard design, these became known as Parliamentary churches, and one church and two manses were thus built in Shetland (no.30).

The Reformation led to no major changes to the medieval churches of Orkney and Shetland, for their simple layout was easily adapted to congregational worship. Natural wastage coupled with sheer old age brought about the abandonment of many churches. The pity is that so many were then deliberately demolished in the late 18th century when new parish churches were built.

The new churches of the 17th and 18th centuries were simple rectangular buildings, sometimes with a laird's aisle projecting from one long side, eg St

Olaf's Church, Voe (no. 33). From 1581 onwards, burial within the church was forbidden, and family mausolea were built either separately in the churchyard or attached to the outside of the building.

A number of finely carved, even elaborate, tombstones of the 16th century and later may be seen, some still in family burial aisles (eg no. 33), and there are several interesting stones commemorating Hanseatic merchants and foreign seamen (eg nos 36, 37).

This fine Pictish cross-slab from Papil is carved with clerics with their crosiers and book-satchels, the Evangelist symbol of the Lion of St Mark, and two extraordinary birdmen with axes

Medieval churches

Shetland has many remains of medieval churches and chapels, for leading families seem to have built small chapels on their estates for local use. Those that survive are those that were not demolished and rebuilt in later times, as happened to most of the major churches. Unfortunately this was the fate of almost all the churches with tall round towers, known as 'steeple-kirks', which were once a special feature of the Northern Isles. The exception is the church that still survives on Egilsay in Orkney. Formerly there were similar churches at Stenness and Deerness in Orkney (the latter with twin towers) and at Tingwall, Ireland and Papil in Shetland, most of which were demolished in the late 18th century. The towers at Tingwall and Papil are recorded as 'between sixty and seventy feet high' (18-21 m). Their architecture links these churches with a group on either side of the North Sea, which were built in the early 12th century, and they demonstrate the extent to which the Northern Isles were participating in the mainstream of contemporary ideas. Their location points to wealthy local patronage. Tingwall was the judicial centre of Shetland at this time (no. 34), and Papil was already an ancient focus of Christianity as shown by its surviving 9th-century sculpture. There are traces in the churchyard at Papil of the site of an earlier church (HU 368315). The site at Ireland (HU 377219) is on the mainland close to St Ninian's Isle (no. 38), and their proximity may lend weight to the idea that St Ninian's may have been a monastic establishment.

Many of the early churches were simple rectangular buildings, although in some cases, like St Ninian's Isle, a chancel was added. As they survive today, these small medieval churches give an impression of bleak austerity, but their plain architecture would have been countered by colour and lightness in their interiors, and in some cases there was architectural embellishment in the form of stone-carving, since removed or lost. Traces of plastering indicate that the rubble walls were smooth and light in colour (and may have been painted). Internal furnishings might include woven wall-hangings, carved and painted wooden fittings and silver chalices and candlesticks. Seating, if any, would be narrow stone or wooden benches set along the walls. Roofing would be flagstones, turf or thatch on a wooden frame.

A number of churches bear the name 'cross-kirk', but it implies dedication to the Holy Rude rather than architectural design as a cruciform church.

In Shetland, both Norse settlements and churches tend to be in coastal locations, exploiting both the better land and good harbours for fishing

boats, and it is noticeable that the churches are very often not at the immediate head of the bay but just round to one side, so as not to occupy prime economic locations. A good example is St Mary's Church, Sand (HU 346472), overlooking Sand Voe, where the chancel arch is astoundingly intact whereas most of the rest of the church is reduced to its base-course. In 1841 this church had a thatched roof.

Early tombstones

The elaborately carved cross-slabs of the 9th and 10th centuries at Papil and Cullingsburgh were exceptional monuments. There was nothing to equal the effort and expense until the 16th and later centuries. Small headstones incised with simple crosses or crudely shaped into crosses were the norm, and examples can be seen at Norwick, Framgord and Lunda Wick (no. 36) in Unst. There is just one example of a distinctive fashion of the 10th to 12th centuries known as the hogback tombstone, although there were several in Orkney. This is a recumbent stone placed lengthwise over the grave, shaped and carved to imitate a house with a curved roof-ridge, and it is a style that was invented in the 10th century by Scandinavian settlers in North Yorkshire. In Scotland, hogbacks are mostly found in central and eastern areas, no further north than Angus, and the group in the Northern Isles must represent direct contact by sea with these areas further south. An unusually small hogback, only 1.2 m long, was found on the west side of the church on St Ninian's Isle (no. 38) and is now in the Shetland Museum. Made of steatite, it is plain but well-shaped with a flattened ridge, and it belongs to the 11th century. The stone must have been transported to the island, probably in a finished state, from the Cunningsburgh area on the other side of mainland (see no. 40), which is the closest source of steatite, a variety of talc.

At Framgord in Unst (HP 619029), where there are the remains of an early chapel, the churchyard contains both simple cross-slabs and six coped tombstones. The latter are related to the hogback tradition but have straight ridges and date to the 12th or 13th centuries. The son of Laurence Bruce of Muness was buried here, and his tombstone may be seen in the east end of the church; it is very weathered but bears a coat of arms and an inscription. The initials AB used to be visible beside the coat of arms, identifying Andrew Bruce, who inherited and completed the castle at Muness in 1617 (no. 28).

29 St Colman's Church, Burravoe, Yell

AD 1898-1900.

HU 520797. At the junction of the B9081 in Burravoe.

This charming and well tended Episcopal church was designed by RTN Speir and built with the finest materials (colour photograph on p.38). It has a rectangular nave with small external buttresses and an apsidal chancel, and there is a little spire over a ventilator at the east end of the nave. The walls are built of rubble with good sandstone dressings. The interior is light and airy, with an open timber kingpost roof-frame and beautifully crafted wooden pews and altar. The altar frontal is painted to show the Worship of Heaven.

30 Easter Quarff, Church, South Mainland

AD 1830.

HU 428355. To the E of the A 970 at Easter Quarff, South of Lerwick.

This is one of the least altered of the surviving Parliamentary churches in Scotland, apart from the bellcote which replaced the original in Victorian times. It conforms to the normal T-plan, the interior still has the original pulpit, and the windows have wooden astragals and rectangular panes. The accompanying manse is on the other side of the modern main road, and it is a typical of the single-storey design for Parliamentary manses (now in private ownership). Another such manse, completed at the same time, exists at Sandwick (HU 430241), where the existing church was enlarged in 1826.

31 St John's Church, Balliasta, Unst

AD 1764.

HP 602095. Just over 2 km E of Baltasound on a minor road off the A 968.

This substantial ruin was the former parish church, and it is clear from the mound on which it stands that it was built on the site of an earlier medieval church. Balliasta, Norwick and Lund were the three original parish churches of the island, but only Balliasta was demolished and rebuilt in the 18th century. The church has been much altered over the years. It is a simple rectangular building, which was extended at the east end, re-using an original doorway. The inside face of the wall shows holes for timber joists, which suggests that there was once a wooden gallery and explains the fact that there are windows at two levels. One of the lower windows in each of the north and south walls has been extended to ground level in order to act as a doorway to the burial lairs that were established within the ruined church. There are memorials of the Edmondston family of Buness belonging to the 19th and 20th centuries. A low opening at the east end of the north wall may have given lepers the chance of benefitting from services.

32 Lunna Church, North Mainland

18th century AD.

HU 485690. On the narrow neck of land leading to Lunna Ness, just to the E of the minor road leading N from the B 9071 and Vidlin on N mainland.

Still in use as the parish church, this building has a particularly light and attractive interior. It was built in 1753, possibly on medieval foundations, by Robert Hunter of Lunna as a simple rectangular church with a porch, and it was renovated both in 1830 and 1933. An oddity is the small annexe on the south side with a small opening into the church, which has been interpreted both as a 'squint' for the priest to keep an eye on the altar while resting and as a 'leper hole', a small opening in the wall of the church through which the afflicted could listen to the service and receive communion without distressing the rest of the congregation. On balance the former explanation is thought to be the most likely. Built into the wall of the porch are two 17th-century graveslabs, which came from the Hunter family mausoleum that existed before the church was built. Inside the church, a fine 18th-century memorial is set into the wall beside the pulpit.

Although no previous church was in use at Lunna in 1753, the existing church was not the first to be built here. Adjacent to the churchyard, and approached through an unexpectedly grand gateway, is a large irregular mound (probably of prehistoric origin) on which a chapel with an enclosure had been built perhaps in the 12th century. Its foundations are clearly visible as a

rectangular building with an entrance to the south-west, but it is not known when the church went out of use.

The imposing gateway is a landscape feature belonging to Lunna House, which overlooks the site, built in the late 17th century as the seat of the Hunter family and expanded in the 18th and 20th centuries (now a hotel). Incorporated into the external front of the house is an armorial panel which has been moved from its original position and which commemorates the marriage in 1707 of Thomas Hunter and Grisella Bruce. The house was for a time the HQ of the Norwegian resistance movement in the Second World War, and the base for boats ferrying armaments and men across the North Sea to occupied Norway (see chapter 1).

On the shore of West Lunna Voe is an excellent example of a circular beehive-shaped limekiln (HU 484693), while farther round the voe to the north is a superb prehistoric burnt mount of classic crescent form (HU 484694, see chapter 9).

33 St Olaf's Church, Voe, North Mainland

Early 18th century AD.

HU 404636. On the N shore of Olna Firth just off the A 970.

Although roofless, the walls of this substantial rectangular church survive in good condition; it is built of harled rubble with freestone surrounds to the windows and arched doorways, and the iron fittings for external storm shutters can be seen on the window jambs. The most interesting feature is the burial aisle built as a projecting wing in the centre of the north side of the church; the upper storey, reached by an external stair, was used as a vestry and originally had access to an upper gallery within the church, and the ground floor was the burial aisle of the Giffords of Busta (see no. 14). An arched entrance in the north gable is embellished with an armorial panel above, bearing the arms of Thomas Gifford and Elizabeth Mitchell with their initials and the date of their marriage in 1714. Inside there is a fine graveslab set into the long wall

The gaunt shell of St Olaf's at Voe

The burial aisle of the Giffords of Busta

on either side, each carved with the Gifford arms and the motto 'spare nought' above, and a long but now illegible inscription on the lower part of the slab.

To the north-west of the modern graveyard wall, there are traces of an earlier curvilinear enclosure, perhaps belonging to an earlier church.

34 St Magnus Church, Tingwall, Central Mainland

AD 1788-90.

HU 418437. The B 9074 runs the length of the Tingwall valley and can be reached at the N end from the A 971 Lerwick to Walls road or at the S end from the A 970 Lerwick to Scalloway road. The church is at the N end of the Loch of Tingwall.

This plain rectangular church was still quite new when Sir Walter Scott heard his friend the Reverend Turnbull preach here on Sunday, August 7, 1814. Scott would have been pained to know that the church had replaced a fine medieval steeple kirk. With its sparkling white harling and semi-circular

The Gifford arms on a graveslab at Voe

The burial aisle of the Mitchells of Westshore and St Magnus Church at Tingwall

topped belfry, it is nevertheless welcoming. The porch was added in the mid 19th century, but the late 18th-century interior is intact, with panelled gallery on columns and an elegant pulpit.

In the churchyard to the south is the turf-grown burial aisle of the Mitchells of Westshore (see no. 11), dating from the 17th century. Its entrance archway is finely moulded, and it now contains several carved tombstones of the 17th and 18th centuries. One commemorates Andrew Crawford, Master of Work to the Earl of Orkney and Shetland, who was responsible for the construction of the Earl's Palace at Kirkwall and probably the castles at Scalloway and Muness (nos 27, 28). There is also, nearby in the churchyard, an elaborate 17th-century stone sarcophagus, carved with two shields for Mitchell and Umphray and emblems of mortality in relief (John Mitchell and his wife Jean Umphray). Elegiac couplets on both long sides read:

Because of the sin of one man is death busy all the world over,
But through the grace of One has come the gift of life and salvation.
Monuments made of marble moulder at last and fall,
Virtue alone remains eternal after death.

This sarcophagus used to serve as a social resting-place for men who arrived early for the Sunday morning service, some of whom may have walked several miles - the tomb could seat up to eight people!

A grand sarcophagus in the churchyard at Tingwall

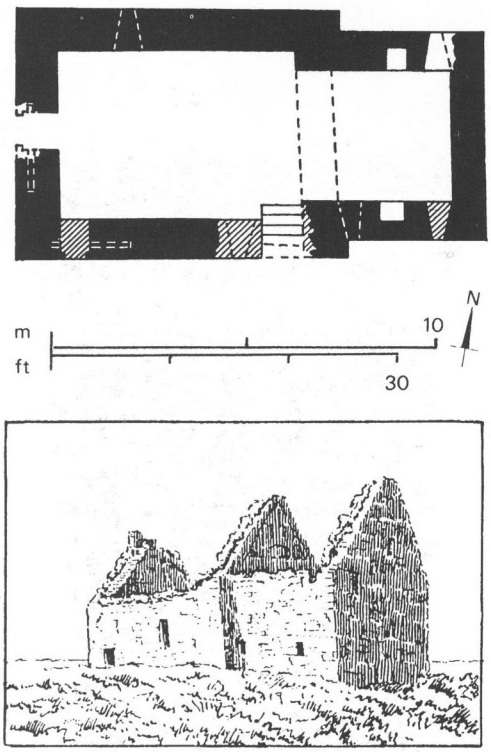
35 Kirk of Ness, Breakon, Yell

Medieval.

HP 532049. From Gutcher, take the B 9082 N towards Gloup at the N end of the island. Just short of the minor road to Breakon is a turning on the right to the modern burial ground beside the old church; carpark.

There are three *papa*-names at this north-east tip of Yell (Papil Bay, Papil Ness, Loch of Papil), suggesting that it was a centre of Christian worship in very early times (see chapter 7). The three parish churches were at Breakon, Reafirth and Hamnavoe, all replaced by later churches on different sites in each locality. Kirk of Ness at Breakon was not abandoned until 1750, and its walls were still intact a century later, but since then its ruins have become buried in wind-blown sand. Much of the lower part of the interior is still visible. It consists of a short rectangular nave and square chancel, and there was once a semi-circular chancel arch. The main door was in the west gable, but a second door existed at the west end of the south wall. An interesting feature that can still be seen in the chancel is a recess in each of the north and south walls, probably designed to hold church vessels. A bronze bell from the church is in the Shetland Museum.

In the old burial ground are a number of small plain gravemarkers. The new extension to the burial ground is enclosed by a fine drystone wall, which rises to a peak in one corner to accommodate and shelter the shed.



Plan and sketch of Kirk of Ness in 1855

36 St Olaf's Church, Lunda Wick, Unst

12th century AD and later.

HP 566040. Close to the SW shore of Lunda Wick, a walk of almost 1 km from Lund farm, some 5 km NW of Uyeasound.

The ruins of this simple rectangular church represent the sole example of the several medieval churches of Unst to survive in recognisable form, for it was not abandoned until 1785. It occupies a classic situation on the shores of a sheltered bay on the west coast of the island. The east end of the church has been rebuilt on the original foundations, but the rest dates from the 12th century and displays characteristically small windows and a doorway in the west gable with inclined jambs and a semi-circular arch. On the underside of the lintel over the east window in the south wall, there is an incised drawing of a fish. It is tempting to see this as an example of Pictish graffiti (see chapter 7), re-used in the medieval

St Olaf's Church at Lunda Wick (Right)

church, but it is not a typical Pictish fish (normally salmon), and this particular window is thought to be a later insertion.

In the churchyard are examples of crudely shaped stone crosses used as headstones, similar to those at Norwick. The church went out of use in the 18th century, but its earlier importance may still be gauged from two unusual 16th-century tombstones preserved there. Inscribed in Low German, one commemorates Segebad Detken in 1573 and the other Hinrick Segelcken in 1585, both men being Dutch merchants from Bremen. Segebad Detken's inscription records that 'he carried on his business in this country for 52 years'.

37 St Mary's , Cullingsburgh, Bressay

Medieval.

HU 521422. From the ferry at Maryfield, take the road E to Setter, and follow on foot the track E round the shore of the Voe of Cullingsburgh.

There is much of interest along this very pleasant walk, from the ruined horizontal mills on the Burn of Setter to the 19th-century fishing booth near the church. Only the lower part of the walls survive of St Mary's, and they are thought not all to be of medieval date. The original church is likely to have consisted of the usual rectagular nave and chancel, which was later enlarged with the addition of transepts, thus creating a cruciform church. There is an old record of enlargement in the early 17th century, and St Mary's seems to have been replaced a hundred years later by a church built in the main Maryfield community on the west coast.

Gathered into the ruins of the church, there is a very weathered table-tomb, along with two 17th-century tombstones, one commemorating 'ane vertuous & discreit gentlewoman', Agnes Gifferd who died in 1628. The other bears an inscription in Dutch to 'the brave commander', Claes Jansen Bruyn of Durgerdam, who served the Dutch East India Company and died in 1636. His ship is known to have been on its way home from Mozambique when it encountered severe gales and lost many of its crew through disease. Having reached the shelter of Bressay Sound, its unfortunate captain died the following day and was buried here.

The history of this church-site goes back into the 9th or 10th century, for an important cross-slab of that date was found sometime before the mid 19th century near the church. The stone had an extraordinary subsequent history, for it was first taken to Gardie House, then to the churchyard south of Gardie House, thence it was sent to Newcastle for exhibition in 1852 and twelve years later from Newcastle to the museum in Edinburgh (now in NMS). The design of the stone appears to copy many of the features of the earlier cross-slab from Papil, and it bears an inscription in ogham letters (see p.17).

Even earlier than its ecclesiastical use, there was an iron-age broch on the site, now marked by the large stony mound beneath the north-west corner of the churchyard.

This cross-slab from Cullingsburgh was a brave attempt to carve an intractable stone

38 St Ninian's Isle, South Mainland

12th-13th centuries AD.

HU 368208. South from Lerwick on the A 970 take the B 9122 SW towards Scousburgh; at HU 383200 take the signposted minor road off to the W; park and walk across to the island.

A sand tombolo led pilgrims to the little church on St Ninian's Isle

Excavations in the 1950s revealed the remains of a medieval church first built in the 12th century and enlarged in the 13th century into a church with a rectangular nave and possibly apsidal chancel; it is likely that this church had been abandoned and then demolished in the mid 18th century, after which its ruins had been entirely hidden by windblown sand until the excavation. The church had been built on the site of an earlier chapel with its accompanying graveyard, and it was in this earlier chapel that the famous silver treasure had been buried, beneath the nave of the medieval church. 28 silver objects had been buried for safe-keeping, together with part of the jawbone of a porpoise, in a wooden chest made of larch in a small pit beneath a stone slab, sometime around AD 800 (NMS; replicas in Shetland Museum, Lerwick). The slab was itself part of an earlier cross-slab, and the excavations produced an important collection of Early Christian stones, together with a hogback tombstone of 11th-century date. Some of the stones represent components of finely decorated Early Christian stone shrines (Shetland Museum), comparable to those from Papil (see p. 14).

St Ninian's Isle today is accessible at virtually all times across a massive natural causeway of sand, and it is likely that, even in Early Christian times, the island was accessible at low tide, a situation very similar to that of the Brough of Birsay in Orkney. There was also evidence of prehistoric occupation beneath the later structures, at which date the island may have been more truly an island. The sand causeway is known as a tombolo, and this is an exceptionally fine example.

A wealth of Pictish silver - bowls, spoon, brooches and sword fittings (Right)

7 VIKING-AGE MONUMENTS

Jarlshof is a unique experience of time, for its buildings span four thousand years

The Viking Age changed the course of Shetland's history for seven hundred years. From being an outpost of the kingdom of the Picts, the islands were suddenly given a new perspective and a role in the development of the North Atlantic. Their new overlords were Norwegians, and the Old Norse tongue soon clothed the Shetland landscape with new names, many of them old favourites from their homeland. As in Scandinavia, it is normally considered that the Viking Age in the Northern Isles covers the period from about AD 800 to about AD 1150, although Scandinavian influence on the islands remained strong for several centuries later. The settlement at Jarlshof (no. 39) spans this period, and there are important traces of contemporary industrial activity at the Cunningsburgh steatite quarries (no. 40). Smaller farms of the period include Underhoull (no. 41) and a number of other house-sites in Unst. Stones inscribed with the Scandinavian runic alphabet have been found at Cunningsburgh and elsewhere, and stray artefacts of Scandinavian origin have been found throughout the islands, such as the silver brooch from Gulberwick and the bone combs from Unst which can be seen in the Shetland Museum.

Although there are few major Viking-Age monuments in terms of surviving visible structure, it is impossible not to be aware, as one explores the

islands, of the strength and impact of the Scandinavian colonisation, simply by absorbing place-names and their implications. One of the most important is Tingwall, in the hinterland west of Lerwick, which is derived from Old Norse *thing-vollr*, meaning 'assembly plain', and which remained the judicial centre for Shetland until the end of the 16th century (no. 42). Other names refer to places of Norse settlement, such as Kirkabister, 'church settlement', or landscape features such Selivoe, 'seal voe', and Clibberswick, 'cleber (steatite) bay'. A number of places are mentioned in *Orkneyinga Saga*, including Balliasta in Unst, but in general the *Saga* is not as helpful in pointing to the location of Norse settlements in Shetland as it is in Orkney.

Given the special importance of the sea as a means of transport and communication to the Vikings, it is not surprising that most of their settlements are located close to the coast and close to good landing places for boats. There have been few excavations, but the West Voe of Sumburgh and, on Unst, Lunda Wick and Sand Wick are proven foci of settlement, and there are many other ideal locations begging exploration. At the time of writing, a campaign of fieldwork and excavation on Unst has located some thirty possible sites of Norse houses. It is very noticeable that Viking-Age farms were often built literally on top of the ruins of earlier native sites, perhaps as a lazy way of getting building-stone or perhaps out of inbred

Sandwick in Unst was a focus of settlement in Pictish and Norse times

habit, good land being at such a premium along the fjords of their west Norwegian homelands that it was normal to rebuild on exactly the same spot. The pattern of settlement during the Viking Age was essentially one of scattered farmsteads rather than villages. The typical farm of the 9th and 10th centuries consisted of an oblong dwelling house, known as a hall-house, with separate out-buildings which might include a byre, a stable, a threshing barn and other storehouses, and even a bath-house. If the farm were occupied over several centuries, as at Jarlshof (no. 39), it is possible to trace the inevitable modifications and rebuildings that took place, and to see that, by the end of the 11th century, the true longhouse was becoming fashionable, with the addition of a byre for cattle at one end of the dwelling-house. In late Norse times from the 12th century onwards, houses became more complex in design with extra rooms and porches attached to their long walls.

The economic basis of such farms differed little from that of later times, or indeed from that of the existing native population of the islands: cattle, sheep and pigs were reared, and the sea was exploited both for fish and for shellfish to use as fish-bait. Cereal crops were cultivated, including bere (barley) and oats, and sometimes flax was grown so that linen cloth could be made. On the face of it, this was a normal farming life, essentially self-sufficient apart from some bartered goods such as soapstone cooking vessels or metal tools and jewellery. But there was another side to Viking life, one which continued even into the 12th century. This was raiding, the true viking expeditions for adventure and plunder. *Orkneyinga Saga* describes how one such farmer-viking lived, Svein Asleifarson: 'Winter he would spend at home on Gairsay, where he entertained some eighty men at his own expense. His drinking hall was so big, there was nothing in Orkney to compare with it. In the spring he had more than enough to occupy him with a great deal of seed to sow which he saw to carefully himself. Then when that job was done, he would go off plundering in the Hebrides and in Ireland on what he called his 'spring trip', then back home just after mid-summer, where he stayed till the cornfields had been reaped and the grain was safely in. After that he would go off raiding again, and never came back till the first month of winter was ended. This he used to call his 'autumn-trip'. Such expeditions added all sorts of exotic goods to Norse homes, for merchant ships carrying fine cloth, wine and other imports were as much targets for attack as houses on land.

Nor should the extensive foreign travels of many Norsemen be forgotten as a source of exotic goods and ideas; they went on pilgrimages to Rome and beyond and on crusades to the Holy Land in the 11th and 12th centuries.

On the island of Papa Stour, an important farm of late Norse times has been identified both from historical evidence and from archaeological excavation. In the 13th century it was one of the estates of Duke Hakon Magnusson, heir to the Norwegian throne, and it lay on the site of the modern farm of Da Biggings, on the best land in the island. Excavations in the 1970s and 1980s revealed a sequence of houses, including one built with a timber frame and a wooden floor, part of which had survived. This type of building was known as a stofa.

39* Jarlshof, Sumburgh, South Mainland

Medieval, Viking Age and prehistoric.

HU 398095. At the S tip of the Shetland mainland, near Sumburgh Hotel, S from the A 970.

Historic Scotland.

The multi-period site at Jarlshof is physically dominated by the ruined 16th-century laird's house (no. 18), but it is best known for its extensive Viking-age settlement, first discovered in 1933 and thus demonstrating Sir Walter Scott's percipience in inventing the name 'Jarlshof'. The proper name is Sumburgh, which derives from an Old Norse name, but it is impossible to know whether it was used in Viking times for this particular farm, for the whole headland or indeed for another Norse site as yet undiscovered in the area. The earliest recorded forms of the name in 15th-century documents are Svinaborg and Soundborg. Svinaborg may mean either 'Svein's fort' or 'fort of pigs'; if the latter, perhaps it was a derogatory term derived by the Norsemen from the ruins of the old broch, which must still have been quite impressive in Viking times. But there was also a large prehistoric fort on Sumburgh Head (see no. 4), to which the name may have been applied. Soundborg is likely to mean 'south fort'. Although Sumburgh Head is mentioned in *Orkneyinga Saga*, there is no hint of an important farm nearby, which suggests that, despite its prominence in the surviving

Portrait of a Pict
(Right)

At Jarlshof a maze of walling shows the growth of the Viking-Age farm

A stone disc carved with a Pictish symbol (Left)

archaeological record, Jarlshof may have been a place of little consequence in its own day.

The remains of the Norse buildings form such a complex tangle of superimposed walls that it can be quite difficult for the visitor to sort them out; the best place to start is with the earliest dwelling-house, House 1, the floor-area of which can easily be distinguished by its modern covering of white gravel. This was first built in the 9th century as a typical hall-house, some 21 m long, with a long open hearth in the centre of the hall, a row of timber posts down each long side to help support the roof, and low benches lining the walls; subsequent modifications added cross-walls and elongated the building, particularly by the addition of a byre at the east end, entered by a long paved passage-way. Outhouses belonging to the early hall-house included a possible bath-house outside the west end of the main building, which is visible as a small square structure with a central hearth. Most of the later Norse houses were built at right angles and to the north and west of House 1, each of them undergoing later modifications of design, and the entire complex is thought to date from the 9th to the 13th or 14th centuries to judge from datable objects found either in the buildings or in middens outside them.

The succeeding medieval farm built probably in the early 14th century is a rare early example of the sort of farm still being built in recent times (see chapter 4). It consisted of a dwelling-house and barn built parallel and close to each other, with a small circular corn-drying kiln set into one corner of the barn (only the northern parts of the two buildings now survive, the rest having been removed in order to expose prehistoric structures beneath). The farm seems to have been inhabited during both the 14th and 15th centuries.

The archaeological importance of Viking-Age Jarlshof tends to overshadow the earlier remains on the site, but these too are of considerable interest, both as individual buildings and as a sequence showing the development of a settlement that appears to have been continuous over some 2,500 years prior to the arrival of the Norsemen. Among the excavated structures, there are no major buildings that can be assigned to Early Christian times or more specifically to the Picts, but it is possible that our understanding of this period of the site's history is grossly incomplete: such

A paved path leads into a Viking-Age byre (Bottom)

buildings may lie undetected in unexcavated areas (such as under the 16th-century house) or they may have been destroyed by coastal erosion. Minor structures of this period seem to have been sunk into the ground with stone pillars to help support the roof, and they may have been storehouses.

There were certainly Picts on the site, because there are a few quite special Pictish artefacts, such as painted quartzite pebbles, a small stone disc incised with the double disc and Z-rod symbol, and sketches in Pictish style incised on fragments of slate. These include two male portraits in profile and two masted boats.

The two wheelhouses on the north side of the broch are particularly interesting and well-preserved examples of a distinctive type of dwelling that was built in the Western Isles of Scotland as well as in Shetland during the early centuries of the first millennium AD and earlier. This was a circular stone-built house in which radial piers not only divided up the internal perimeter of the house into storage and sleeping areas but also helped to support the roof, presumably a conical roof with a timber frame and turf or thatch covering. The hearth would be in the centre of the house. Partly overlain by the smaller wheelhouse are the remains of an earlier prototype, in which there is a gap between the piers and the house-wall. Less complete remains of wheelhouses survive both within and on the south-east side of the broch. The wheelhouse was a substantial and, at Jarlshof, a most beautifully designed and constructed house, the equivalent in stone of the huge timber house with its internal ring of wooden posts to be found in southern Scotland and beyond in late prehistoric times.

Inside a wheel-house at Jarlshof

The Catpund Burn cuts through outcrops of steatite

Only half of the broch survives, the rest having been lost into the sea, but the remains of two cells can be seen built into the thickness of the massively solid broch wall.

In front of the small museum are the earliest prehistoric houses, a series of circular and oval buildings spanning much of the first and second millennia BC, the later of which have attached underground storerooms or earth-houses. The best preserved of the earliest among them is Dwelling III, an oval house divided internally into small cells in the tradition seen elsewhere in Shetland, eg Pettigarth's Field, Whalsay (no. 53). It was within the ruined walls of this house that an itinerant bronzesmith from Ireland set up his workshop around 800 BC, supplying the inhabitants with bronze swords and axes and other goods; many fragments of broken clay moulds were found, as well as structural traces of the smithy.

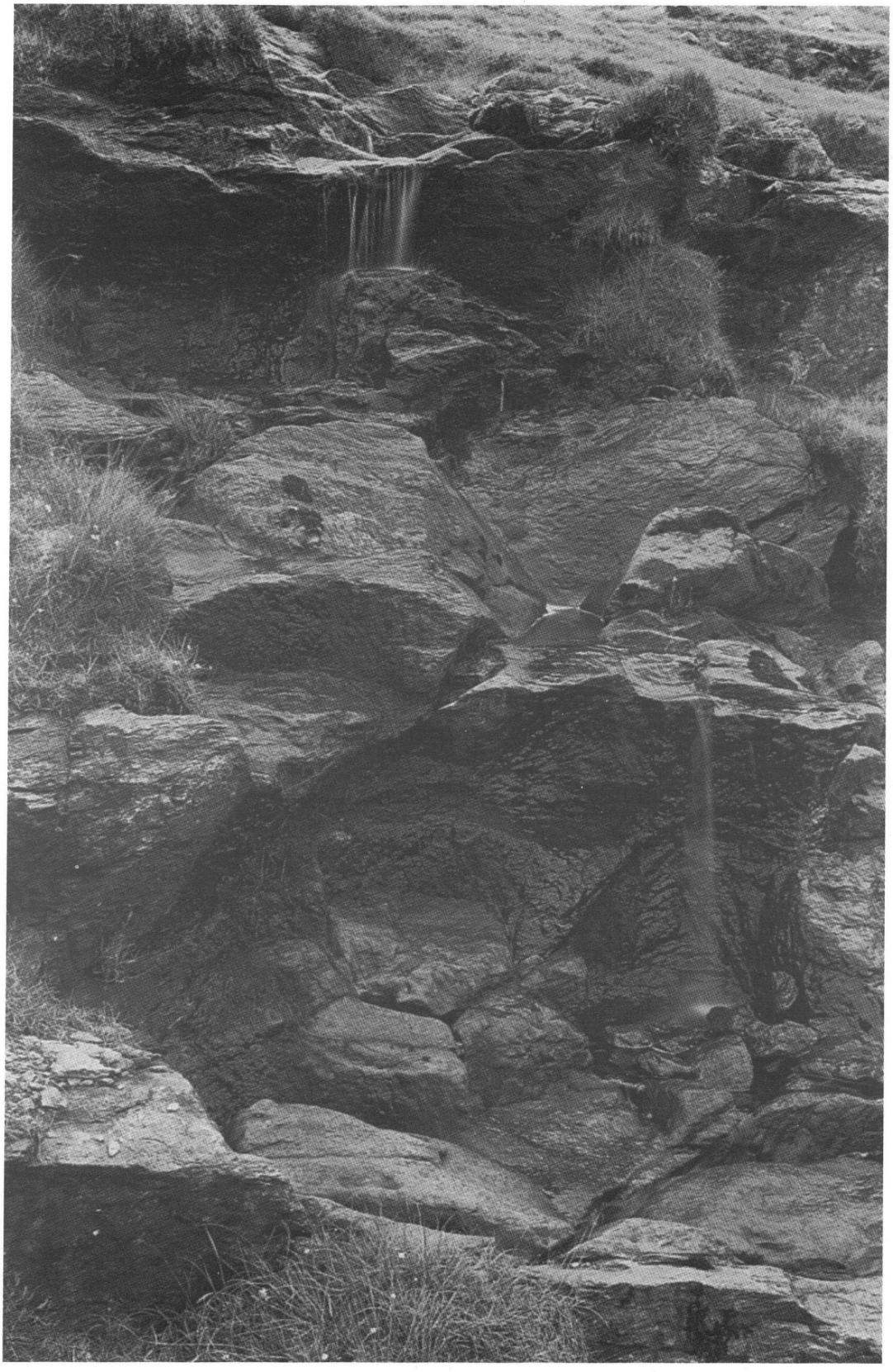
At the easternmost corner of the site, adjacent to the medieval farm, are a few lengths of walling representing an oval house belonging to the very earliest occupation. Abundant finds show links with late neolithic domestic sites in Orkney, especially with Skara Brae. As with all the early prehistoric levels on this site, it is likely that only a fraction of the original settlement has been excavated, more lying hidden beneath later structures.

40 Catpund Steatite Quarries, Cunningsburgh, South Mainland

Early medieval, Viking Age and prehistoric.

HU 423270. On the A 970 from Lerwick to Sumburgh, about 19 km S of Lerwick, there is a large layby close to the Catpund Burn.

The steatite quarries cover a very large area, almost 1 km long, from the shore below and to the east of the main road, rising on either side of the Catpund Burn to its headwaters in the hills to the west. As you climb up beside the burn, you will notice traces of quarrying both in the bed of the burn and on the rock outcrops on either side. Most obvious are the projecting blanks for vessels that were never removed and the round and rectangular depressions where such blanks were removed (see colour photograph on p.23), and the rock faces are covered with chisel marks. The method used in manufacturing steatite vessels was to carve out the rough shape of the bottom and sides of the vessel as



Traces of quarrying survive in the bed of the burn

These bowls from Jarlshof were products of the steatite quarries

if it were upside down on the rock, to detach this blank and to finish shaping its exterior and hollowing out the inside. The talcose rock is relatively easy to carve, being quite a soft stone that is soapy to the touch, hence its other name, soapstone, and it was used for a great number of purposes from early prehistoric times onwards. It is also known in Shetland as cleber from the Norse term *kleber*.

Higher up the burn is an excellent area of quarrying, exposed by excavation and now fenced off with a stile for access and an information board.

Excavations at Jarlshof (no. 39), some 24 km to the south, produced a variety of steatite vessels that can be matched by the blanks and discarded waste in the quarries, and steatite grit used to strengthen the clay for pottery vessels demonstrates that steatite was being exploited by the beginning of the second millennium BC. Steatite was being used most extensively in the Viking Age and early medieval times, when round, oval and square vessels were in fashion consecutively from the 9th to 13th centuries, as well as steatite line-sinkers for fishing, spindle whorls, beads and lamps (small oval dishes with a hole at either end so that they could be suspended, the wick immersed in oil). At this period the industry must have been organised on a mass market, commercial scale, with its products being exported not only all over Shetland but also to Orkney and Iceland, which lack any source of steatite.

Steatite outcrops elsewhere in Shetland as well, and there are traces of ancient quarries both on Fetlar and on Unst, particularly at Clibberswick on Unst (HP 651121) where near vertical cliff-faces were somehow worked in what must have been terrifying conditions. Steatite was also very extensively exploited in Norway itself, and work is currently underway to establish methods of petrological analysis which will allow the origin of steatite artefacts to be identified more precisely than is possible at the moment. Variety in the composition of the rock within a single deposit makes recognition of an object from one particular quarry very difficult.

41 Underhoull, Unst

Viking Age.

HP 573043. From the A 968 about 4 km N of Belmont, take the minor road on the left towards Westing; park in layby just past the broch mound and use gate into field.

The ramparts and ditches encircling the ruined broch are still very impressive. The Viking farm lies on the slope of the hill about 200 m below the broch, with access to the sheltered bay of Lunda Wick. The site was excavated in the 1960s and left open; although overgrown, the walls of the house are still clear, as is some of the stonework of the earlier iron-age farm on top of which the Viking house was built. Although little of the earlier buildings could be traced without demolishing the Viking Age remains, the corner that was exposed had an angular corner and an opening into a small

earth-house. This building had been replaced by another in which there was pottery contemporary in date with brochs. This may be a rare example of a 'peasant' dwelling close to a high-status broch.

The site had been deserted for many years before the Norsemen built their hall-house along the contour of the slope. The west end was rounded and the east end had a straight gable, and later annexes were attached to the south wall close to the main doorway. Artefacts from the site included a line-sinker for fishing, fragments of vessels and fragments of gaming boards, all made of steatite; they are in the Shetland Museum, along with an iron axe of Scandinavian type which was found in an eroding midden on the shore of Lunda Wick.

42 Law Ting Holm, Tingwall, Central Mainland

Viking Age and medieval.

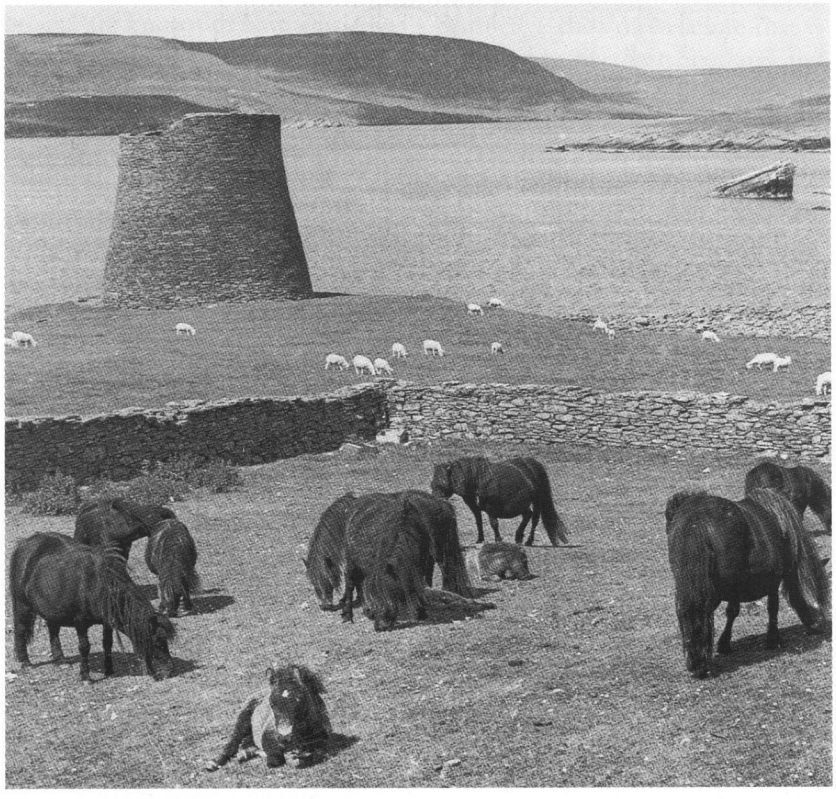
HU 418434. From the A 971 Lerwick to Walls road about 7 km from Lerwick, take the B 9074 S along the Tingwall valley. Park in the carpark beside the church (no.34) and walk down to the loch.

There is also a good view of Law Ting Holm from the carpark on the east side of the loch, where there is an information board. Tingwall was a good central location for an assembly place, and there was plenty of good pasture for the horses while their owners were at the assembly. At the north end of the loch is a small promontory with a low mound at its tip, and a stone-built causeway, some 40 m long and 1.7 m wide, linking the mound with the old shoreline of the loch. The mound was formerly a small islet, and the ground through which the causeway passes is still very boggy. The site has never been excavated. The holm was presumably the focus for the assembly, for very few people could gather there, and its situation guaranteed privacy.

According to tradition, Law Ting Holm was used between the 11th and the late 16th centuries. An account written at the beginning of the 18th century mentions 'three or four great stones' on the holm, where the judge and officers of the court sat, but this was again derived from tradition rather than contemporary information.

A Norse farm on the slope above Lunda Wick at Underhoull

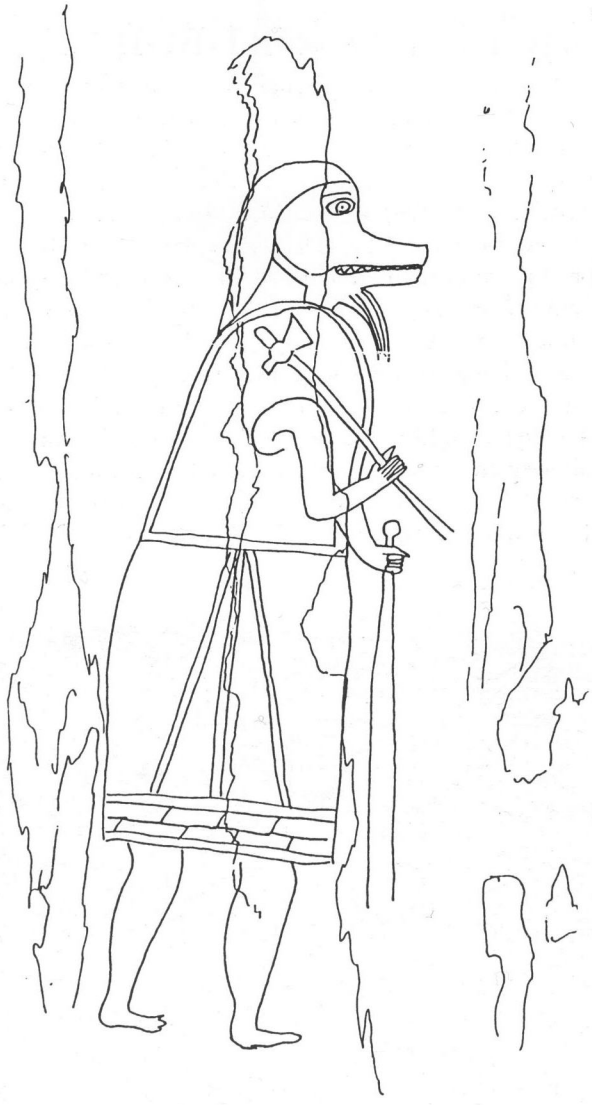
8 PICTS AND FORT-BUILDERS



Shetland ponies browse near the broch of Mousa

When the first Viking longships were sighted off the coasts of Orkney and Shetland, the islands were Pictish in their material culture and political affiliations, and it seems likely that, as with the later earldom and bishopric, the centre of power lay in Orkney, possibly at Birsay. There is an historical reference in Adomnan's *Life of Columba* to an Orcadian ruler of the mid 6th century, and there would no doubt have been a leading chieftain in Shetland. One important power-base can be identified at Cunningsburgh in south mainland, where the Norse place-name means 'king's fort' and where the steatite quarries (no. 40) provided extra wealth. The carved figure of a wolf-headed man was found in the churchyard at Mail in Cunningsburgh, and several ogham incriptions have been discovered in the vicinity. The foot-marked stone at Clickhimin (no. 43) implies that this was a place of some ritual importance at this time.

Unfortunately, little of the Pictish culture of the islands can be seen on the ground. None of the symbol stones or ogham-inscribed stones remains in its original position, and there has been relatively little modern excavation in Shetland on sites that might produce evidence of Pictish activities. There are semi-subterranean houses of this date at the western periphery of



This vigorous carving was found at Mail - is it a Pictish god?

Jarlshof (no. 39), and a small cellular house built between the broch and the blockhouse at Clickhimin (no. 43). It is likely that many broch sites where there are extensive remains of outbuildings would on excavation yield evidence of Pictish occupation long after the broch itself had ceased to be used. The Broch of Burraland on mainland opposite Mousa is a likely candidate, for there are obvious traces of external buildings (HU 446231). Excavation of a broch mound at Upper Scalloway yielded evidence of late occupation on top of the ruined broch complex, together with five painted pebbles, which are often a feature of Pictish settlements. There is also evidence that the blockhouse at Scatness (see no. 48) was not only still intact but still in use to some degree in the 8th century AD, and the same may have been true of the nearby blockhouse at Ness of Burgi (no. 48). Excavations at Sandwick on Unst revealed two square burial cairns of Pictish date, and a beautiful painted pebble has been found on Balta Isle.

BROCHS

The brochs of the Northern Isles are among their most spectacular prehistoric monuments. Indeed Mousa is the best preserved example anywhere in Scotland (no. 45), although there has been argument among archaeologists as to how typical a broch it is, particularly whether all brochs rose so high as Mousa's original height of more than 12 m. Several hundred brochs are known to have existed as a distinctive class of structure that is unique to Scotland, and they were concentrated in northern Scotland and the Western and Northern Isles. They are circular stone-built structures, with a single door at ground-level and no windows, and they seem to have been two storeys or more in height. Some were undoubtedly defensive towers but others may have been simply fortified houses. Their walls are characterised by immense thickness, and by a technique of building the wall, at least above basal level, as two skins with a hollow space between, the skins bonded together at intervals by lintel slabs; this hollow-wall technique allowed greater height to be achieved than would be possible with an entirely solid wall. There are often storage cells built into the thickness of the wall at ground-level, and guard-cells on either side of the entrance passage.

Beneath the boulders at the centre of this square cairn at Sandwick was a skeleton lying on its side

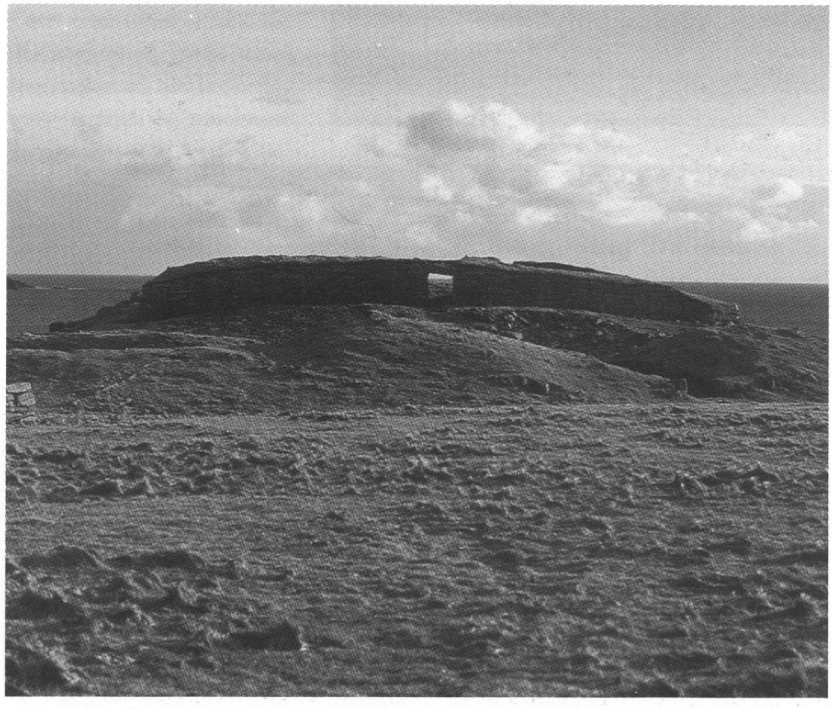
A broch and its ramparts takes up almost the whole of tiny Holm of Copister in Yell

In the case of most excavated brochs, the work was done, often very unscientifically, in the 19th century, and little is known of the sequence of building, but recent excavations in Orkney have clarified several points. The internal design of brochs seems to have been as carefully thought out as the main fabric, with a ground floor laid out round a central hearth, cooking tank and water cistern, and the perimeter subdivided into areas with specific functions by radial slab partitions. Upper floors would be built of timber, probably as galleries rather than complete floors. The earliest dated example is the demolished site at Bu, near Stromness, where the broch was evidently a fortified roundhouse, the home of a single farming family around 600 BC, and it seems that the idea of the broch was then developed further until, by the turn of the millennium, many were indeed fortified towers and some were accompanied by small villages of domestic buildings surrounded by outer defences formed by ramparts and ditches. Many, but not all, brochs were built in coastal locations, which has led to the idea that they were built against some sea-borne threat. That brochs were defensive in character is indisputable, and, now that their development can be seen as having taken place gradually over some eight to nine centuries (in the Northern Isles at least), they can be appreciated as a facet of the increasing turbulence and internecine warfare that characterises this period throughout the Celtic world.

FORTS

Forts without brochs were also used, where easily defended promontories have been fortified with one or more lines of rampart and ditch, eg Ness of Garth (no. 50), and in Shetland there developed a local type of fortification, known as the blockhouse, the design of which is clearly linked to the evolution of the broch. Just five examples are known at present, but one, Scatness (see no. 48), was only discovered a few decades ago and more may yet be found. These forts are characterised by their massive stone-built gateways, or blockhouses, in which there are guard cells within the thickness of the wall; two were built on islands in lochs, Clickhimin (no. 43) and Huxter (no.49), and three were built on spectacular promontories, Ness of Burgi and Scatness (no. 48) and Burgi Geos on Yell (HP 477033, a most interesting but extremely remote and dangerous site). In some cases the blockhouse is associated with a ringwall, but in others it is free-standing and demonstrates that prestige and appearance were more important factors in its design than pure defence.

It has been suggested that blockhouses were built as symbolic gateways that were used in some form of ritual warfare or rite of passage.



The approach to the blockhouse at Ness of Burgi

43 Clickhimin, Lerwick

Mid 1st millennium AD-mid 1st millennium BC.

HU 464408. On the A 970 in the SW outskirts of Lerwick, the Loch of Clickhimin is on the N side of the main road; signposted.

Historic Scotland.

The Loch of Clickhimin is a freshwater loch, despite its proximity to the sea, and its water-level was lowered in the late 19th century, thus altering the immediate environment of the archaeological site. This is now a promontory whereas previously it was a low rocky islet connected to the shore by a largely artificial causeway (this causeway still exists as a means of access across often boggy ground). The islet has had a long history of occupation spanning more than a thousand years, but by far the most conspicuous among the surviving visible structures are a broch and a blockhouse. The entire area within the ringwall, together with a strip outside the ringwall round the western part of the site, was excavated in the 1950s. As always with such complicated sites, structures belonging to the earlier phases survive only partially, having been robbed and built over in later times, and what does survive may be open to more than one interpretation (the excavator's version, with persuasive reconstruction drawings, is available in a detailed official site-guidebook).

Initially from around 700 BC, the islet seems to have been occupied by a small farmstead, of which one virtually complete small oval house may be seen to the north- north-west of the broch. Towards

The home of an Iron-Age chieftain at Clickhimin has an audience of modern houses

The massive blockhouse inside the fort at Clickhimin

the end of the millennium the entire islet was enclosed by a massive stone-built ringwall, with a free-standing blockhouse guarding the entrance to the fort. The blockhouse is really a huge prestigious gateway, with a central entrance passage through it (with bar holes for a wooden door halfway along) and cells built inside the wall on either side. Neither cell can be entered at ground-level, but the west cell is reached by a stone stair, while the east cell must have been entered by ladder from above. One is reminded strongly of medieval tolbooths, and perhaps on that analogy the east cell here was a prison.

The style of building shown by the blockhouse is very similar to that of the broch, and it may be that there was no long interval between the construction of the two. The broch has a massively solid wall-base and was undoubtedly a true tower, but there are features that reduce its defensive potential and suggest that its builders were confident of their external defences. Normally brochs have a single entrance and no other openings in the outer wall-face, but here there are two small subsidiary entrances, one virtually at ground- level which opens not only into the interior of the broch but also to a cell and stairway within the broch-wall and another, some 1.5 m above ground-level, which opens into a mural gallery. The main entrance has an ingenious device that can also be seen at other brochs, consisting of spaces between the roofing lintels through which people entering could be monitored from a cell above. Again as at other sites, the original ground-floor of the broch has been masked by the insertion of a later domestic roundhouse.

Finds included a wide range of domestic equipment and a few exotic imports, amongst which is a fragment of a Roman glass bowl which was probably made in Alexandria around AD 100 (the finds are in NMS). Domestic occupation of the islet seems to have continued into the mid first millennium AD, and the small trefoil-shaped house inserted behind the blockhouse conforms to a design known to have been used by the Picts. An enigmatic discovery was the foot-marked stone that now forms the threshold of the small outermost gateway at the end of the causeway, although this is unlikely to have been its original position. Such stones, bearing one or two footprints (shod feet rather than bare feet as the toes are not indicated), are elsewhere in Scotland and Ireland associated with Dark-Age traditions of royal inaugural ceremonies (see p.16).

44 Broch of Dalsetter, South Mainland

c 1st-2nd centuries AD.

HU 407156. On the A 970 between Sumburgh and Lerwick, about 4 km N of Sumburgh, take a minor road to the E through Boddam towards Troswick. Leaving the road near the new housing development at Dalsetter, walk E over rough grazing towards the coast.

The broch itself is much ruined, but the site is worth visiting to see the well-preserved outer defences of two ramparts separated by a ditch, which completely encircle the knoll on which the broch was built. The broch stands well back from the precipitous sea-cliffs to the east, and was probably a most substantial tower to judge by the ruined croft buildings (including a corn-drying kiln) and sheep-stells which have clearly been built of stone robbed from the broch and its external buildings. Traces of the latter may be seen between the broch and the outer defences, and the entire complex must originally have been quite an extensive settlement.

Beside the road, close to the new houses and within a small triangular modern field, are traces of a very early prehistoric settlement, with three clearly

Much of the stone from the broch at Dalsetter has gone to build sheep stells

visible oval house-foundations and ancient field-walls. Further to the north, to the west of the road beyond the Loch of Clumlie, the remains of another broch may be seen incorporated into the ruins of a farm; the broch itself is better preserved than at Dalsetter, having been cleared of debris to some extent, and its entrance passage and the curve of its massive wall is quite distinct (HU 404181).

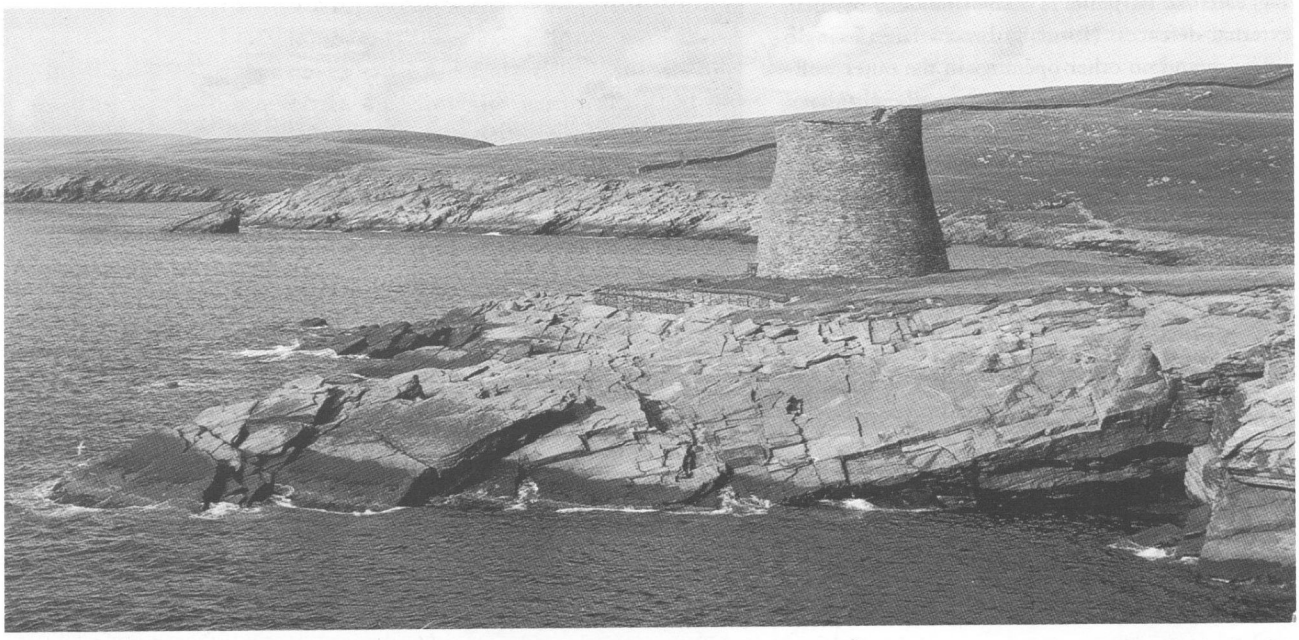
45 Broch of Mousa, Mousa

c 1st century BC-3rd century AD.

HU 457206. By prior arrangement, a ferry will take visitors to Mousa from Sand Lodge on mainland, reached by a side road from the A 970 some 20 km S of Lerwick; signposted.

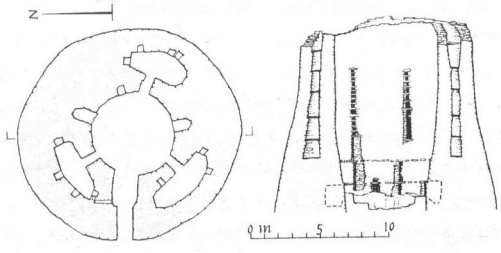
Historic Scotland.

Why this particular broch should have survived so well is a difficult question to answer. Its walls are beautifully built, but so were those of many another broch; the answer must be, at least in part, that it was abandoned intact, that for some reason there was no lengthy period of occupation on the site after the broch-tower was no longer necessary, when it could be used as a quarry for stone to build lesser structures. Or perhaps the tower remained intact simply because it was such a grand achievement and might be needed again, as it was some nine centuries later. The broch seems to have been well known to the Norsemen and must even then have been in excellent and usable condition, for it is mentioned twice in Icelandic sagas as Moseyjarborg. Best recorded is the occasion in AD 1153 when, as *Orkneyinga Saga* relates, Earl Harald arrived at Moseyjarborg with his men, in furious pursuit of his mother's suitor, Erlend.



The great tower of Mousa stands sentinel over Mousa Sound

Mousa is the embodiment of the romantic ideal of a broch - a stark tower set against a rocky seascape, human endeavour dominating both time and the elements. And however much the archaeologists feel obliged to hedge it round with doubts as to whether it is truly typical of brochs elsewhere, nothing can blunt the daunting and exciting effect of approaching Mousa by sea in a small boat, or blur one's appreciation of the achievement of its builders. Mousa is magnificent.



Plan and section of the broch of Mousa (Right)

Harald had rejected Erlend's proposal to marry Margaret, and Erlend had abducted the lady from Orkney and taken her to the broch at Mousa 'where everything had been made ready'. Earl Harald's forces surrounded the broch, cutting off all supplies, but they found that the broch was 'not an easy place to attack'. Sensibly the two sides negotiated, Erlend promised his support to Harald, who was still trying to win control over the earldom, and there was a reconciliation, allowing Erlend and Margaret to marry. While the old broch might not be the most comfortable or romantic of love-nests, it was clearly still an impregnable refuge, susceptible only to a long-sustained siege.

The broch stands on a low rocky headland on the west side of the island of Mousa; on the mainland opposite is the broch of Burraland (HU 446231), and the pair of them seem to loom like sentinels over the southern entry into Mousa Sound. Neither has been excavated, despite the fact that Mousa has twice been cleared out in recent times (1861 and 1919). Traces of a rampart may still be seen on the landward side of Mousa broch, and there are records of a few outbuildings, but it is clear that the broch was never the focus of a village. At a height of just over 13 m, the tower must be almost complete, lacking perhaps another metre above the present wall-head; its diameter is about 15 m at the base, tapering elegantly to about 12 m at the top. The solid base of the wall is immensely thick, so that the entrance passage is very long and the interior only 6 m across. There are no guard-cells opening off the passage, but there are three large cells within the wall entered originally from the broch interior just above ground-level, though their entrances are now on a level with later structures built inside the tower. The layout of the interior is almost entirely secondary to the broch, and represents a wheelhouse inserted in perhaps the 3rd or 4th century AD.

Two ledges projecting from the internal wall-face of the tower represent the floor and roof heights of an original timber gallery, at which level, reached now by a stone stair but perhaps originally by a ladder, there is an entrance leading to the stairway inside the broch-wall. It is still possible to climb this stair up to the top of the tower, and it is an experience that not only gives some impression of what it must have been like to live in such a broch

Mousa's impregnable wall is broken only by the entrance

but also allows a fuller appreciation of how the hollow wall of the broch was built. At the top, there is now a safety grill across the interior of the broch, but it is thought that originally the tower would be open down to the roof of the timber gallery, with the wall-top taking the form of a parapet. The alternative, and there is some argument on the subject amongst archaeologists, is that brochs were roofed over entirely at the top (which would make them very dark).

The island is now uninhabited, apart from sheep and ponies, but the ruin of the old Haa, a plain two-storey house, stands on the slope to the south-east of the broch, and the shell of a horizontal mill may be seen on the burn to the north-east. There were copper mines in the vicinity of Sand Lodge in the early 19th century, and the masonry jetty and three surviving winches for hauling boats on to the shore represent 19th-century fishery and boat-building activities.

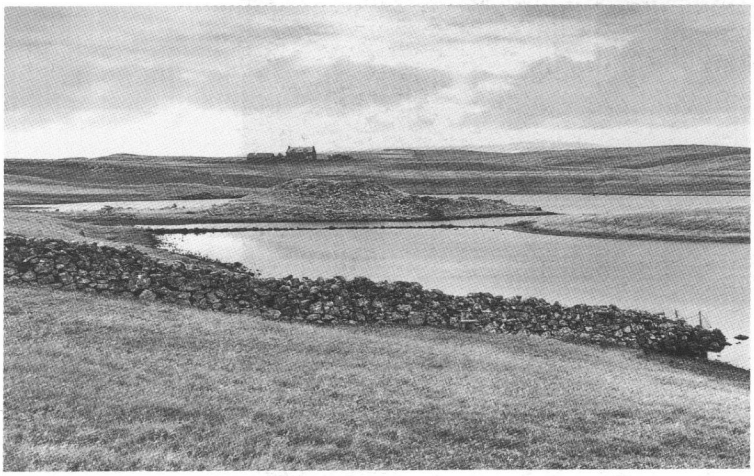
46 Loch of Houlland Broch, Eshaness, West Mainland

c 3rd century AD-1st century BC.

HU 213791. On the A 970 between Brae and Hillswick, take the B 9078, about 1.5 km before Hillswick, to Braewick and Eshaness. Park in the carpark beside the lighthouse, and walk NE to the Loch of Houlland.

The Eshaness peninsula is famous for the breathtaking grandeur of its Atlantic cliffs and for the glimpse of Foula on the horizon. A short distance beyond the Loch of Houlland are the

Holes of Scraada, where the natural rock vault of subterranean caves has collapsed and the sea booms far below.



An island stronghold in the Loch of Houlland

The broch and its external buildings occupy almost the whole of a small low-lying promontory in the loch, with such a narrow approach that it is almost an island. A very wide stone rampart guards access from the shore. Although ruinous, this is an impressive site, the sheer quantity of tumbled stone conveying a sense of the labour that went into its construction; the broch itself stands to a height of about 2 m, with an entrance on the south-west side, but its interior is full of rubble. Occupation of the promontory appears to have continued after the broch ceased to fulfil its original function, for there are traces of houses alongside built using stone from its wall, as well as structures built into the original defensive wall, and it would appear that the two outer lines of walling across the neck of the promontory were added at this later stage.

47 Broch of Hoga Ness, Unst

Late 1st millennium BC.

HP 557005. Park near the shore just N of the pier at Belmont, and walk W along the shore and across the Ness.

Although the broch itself is not well preserved, its encircling defences are quite spectacular. A small rectangular building of recent times stands on the north side of the broch mound; this is probably a skeo belonging to the nearby ruined croft, and the stones for its walls will have been robbed from the broch. The inner wall-face of the broch is visible on the south, and it appears to have been some 9 m in internal diameter. The broch is surrounded on its landward sides by two massive stone-faced ramparts and two ditches, with an entrance causeway on the north side. The broch stands somewhat to one side within the enclosed area, and there may well have been domestic buildings to its north and west. There has been severe coastal erosion; although Hoga Ness overlooks the Bluemull Sound between Unst and Yell, the currents here can be very fierce.

To the immediate north of the broch is an old cultivated field and clearance cairn belonging to the deserted croft, and a walled enclosure in front of the crofthouse itself.

48 Ness of Burgi, Fort, South Mainland

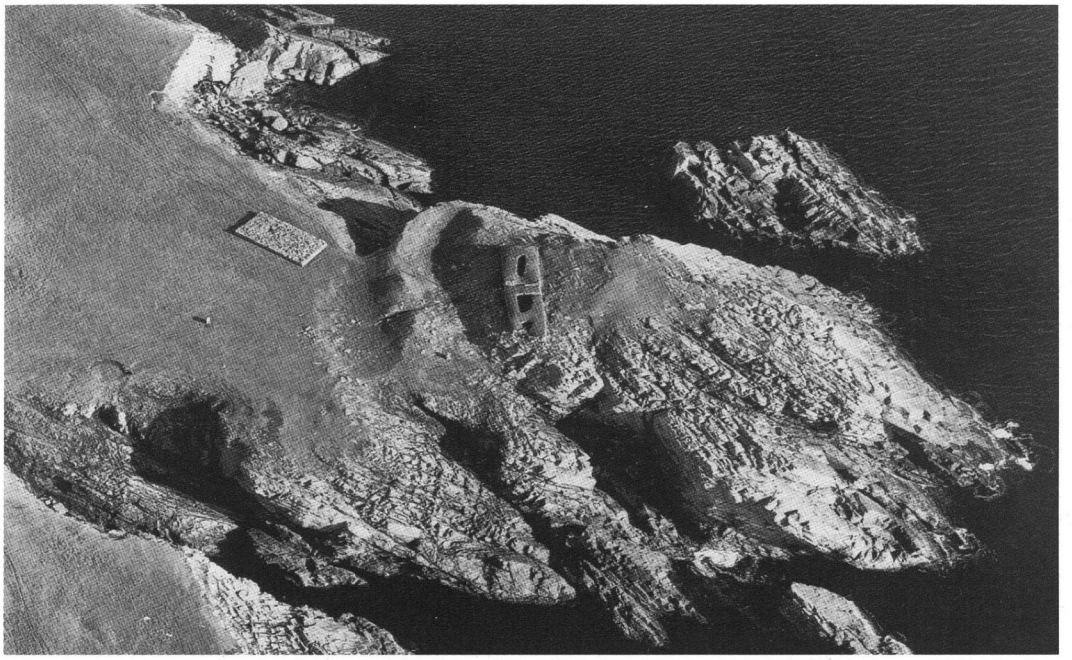
Late 1st millennium BC.

HU 388083. About 1.5 km before the A 970 terminates at Grutness pier near Sumburgh Airport, a minor road leads S along the Scatness peninsula; from the end of the road, it is a walk of just over 1 km to the fort (but access over the rocks is dangerous).

Historic Scotland.

The walk to Ness of Burgi is something of an adventure trail, for the headland is very rocky and precipitous and must be reached by clambering over bare and jagged rocks. Even allowing for erosion over the past 2000 years, this must still have been a daunting place, and the location may support the idea that this was a ritual fortification rather than a place to live. Another fort lies on Scatness, the next headland to the north (HU 388087). Both are examples of a highly specialised type of fort, characterised by the presence of a stone blockhouse.

Once across the storm-beach and on to the Ness of Burgi, there is a low outer rampart with an entrance on the east, where it would be visible from the main fort, and then an area of open ground in front of the latter. The stones from the excavation and consolidation of the site have been piled neatly into a low rectangular mound that looks persuasively authentic but is entirely modern, including the cist-like chamber built amongst the stones. The headland on which the fort stands has



Aerial view of the blockhouse fort at Ness of Burgi (and the neat rectangle of stones cleared from the excavation)

suffered much erosion and the area enclosed, now very restricted, would originally have been considerably more viable in terms of space.

The neck of the headland is spanned by two rock-cut ditches on either side of a massive rampart, once faced with stone, with a central entrance aligned with the blockhouse entrance. Although the south-west end of the blockhouse has been destroyed by erosion, the rest is in good condition and survives to the height (about 1.2 m) of the lintel-slabs roofing the passage, of which several remain in position. The entrance passage retains the checks against which the door would be closed and the bar-holes on either side into which the holding bar could be drawn; in both cases, the bar-hole extends into a mural cell, that to the north entered from the passage and that to the south entered from the fort interior. A third, largely restored, cell survives on the south, apparently entered from the end of the blockhouse as at Clickhimin. The cells would originally have had corbelled and lintelled roofs and lintelled passages, and the blockhouse probably rose to a height of some 2.5 m to 3 m. Nothing is known of the interior of the fort.

Ness of Burgi was excavated in 1935 and Scatness in 1985. Both produced a small amount of pottery and bone associated with fireplaces, and very little else. At Scatness it was clear that the blockhouse had been barely used and that there were no other buildings within the area of the fort. Erosion has removed almost half of the blockhouse, which was originally some 15.5 m wide and 4 m deep.

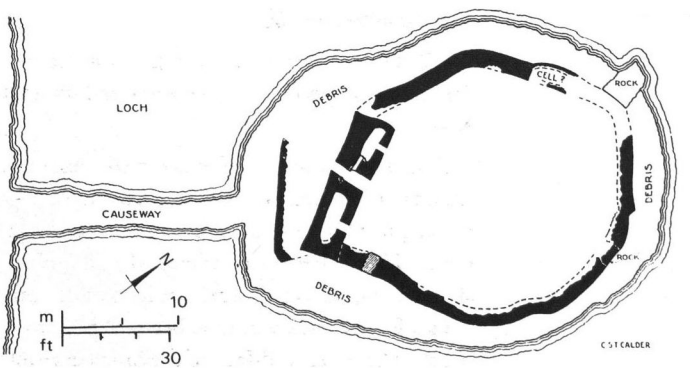
49 Loch of Huxter, Whalsay

Late 1st millennium BC.

HU 558620. From Symbister take the minor road NE towards Isbister; after almost 2 km, park and walk E round the S side of the Loch of Huxter (boggy).

The fort stands on an islet in the loch, connected to the mainland by a stone-built causeway which is accessible in dry summers. A rough wall of boulders bars the islet end of the causeway, but it is

Plan of the blockhouse fort at Loch of Huxter



unlikely to be contemporary with the blockhouse, which is aligned at an angle both to the boulder wall and to the causeway. The blockhouse is 12.5 m wide and 3.4 m deep, with a roughly central entrance passage. There is a cell in each block, entered from the back, and the door could be barred from inside the left-hand cell. An account of 1863 describes the roof of the passage as intact and the height of the blockhouse as about 2.4 m, with traces of an upper storey.

At a later date, a wall was built round the islet and incorporating the blockhouse. Only the lowest courses survive of this drystone wall, which was about 1.5 m thick. Stone has clearly been robbed from the fort to build planticrues on the adjacent mainland.

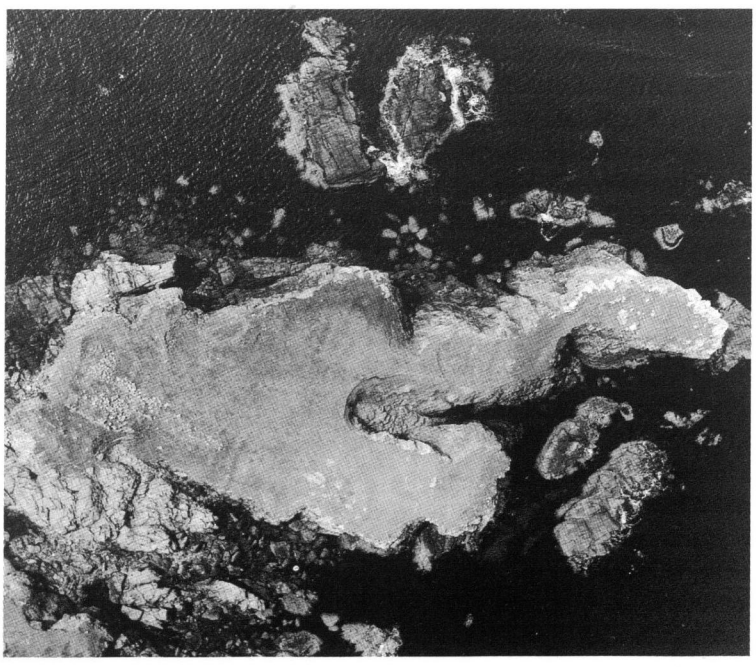
50 Ness of Garth, Fort, Sandness, West Mainland

Late 1st millennium BC.

HU 216582. About 2 km before the A 971 from Bridge of Walls terminates at Melby pier, take a minor road E to Crawton, and walk N down a track beside a small loch to the shore at Ness.

The fort of Ness of Garth from the air

There is clearly ferocious erosion along this exposed Atlantic coast, and the promontory on which the fort was built is not only now reduced in area but also separated from the mainland (though cut off only by high tides). This is a multi-ramparted promontory fort and the defences are best seen from the mainland. Traces survive of four lines of earthen and stone defence, the outermost now just a line of boulders but the next retaining a good wall-face built of rounded stones. Inside the fort, there are oval house-foundations visible as hollows in the turf along the eroded west side.



The remains of two horizontal mills, one with millstones and stone-lined lade intact, may be seen on the way to the fort, and, at the head of the track close to the public road, there is an excellent example of a crescentic burnt mound (HU 214577), a type of monument described in the next chapter. On the way back from Sandness along the A 971, pause on the hill above Burga Water on your left to admire the small stone fort or dun on its tiny island in the loch (HU 234539).

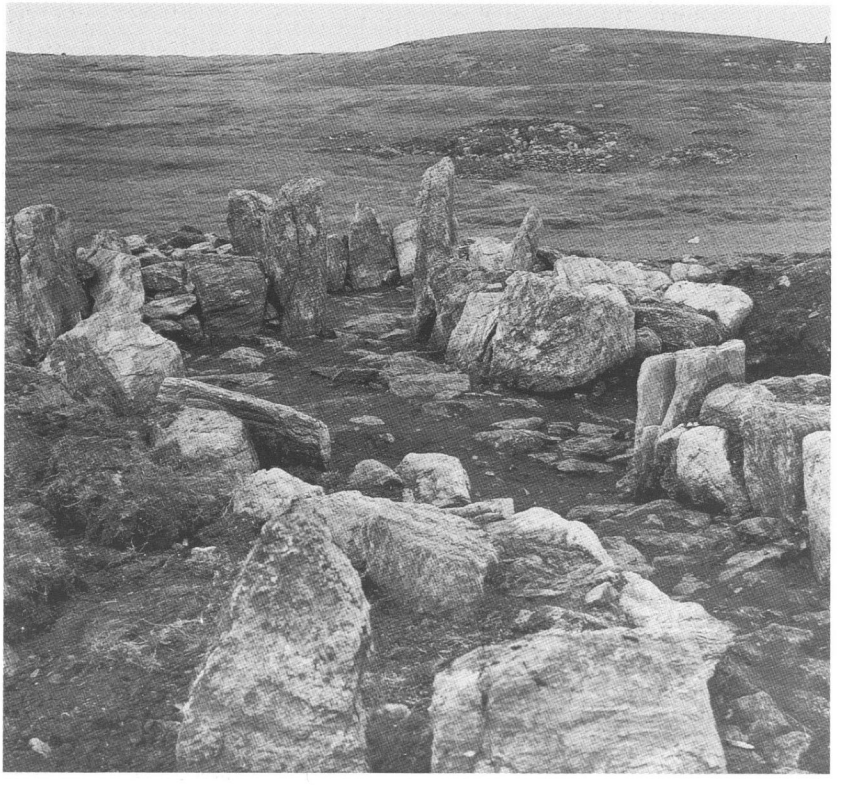
51 Brough of Stoal, Fort, Yell

Late 1st millennium BC.

HU 545873. On the A 968, some 7 km N of Burravoe, on the E side of the island, take the minor road NE to Aywick and the second turning on the right towards the coast; park at HU 535872 at the bend of the road. Walk along the track, through 3 gates, strike off E over the hill and through a 4th gate near the old croft of Stoal, and the fort is visible.

This dramatic coastline is indented with deep and sheer geos, two of which flank the eroded promontory on which the fort stands. The coastline is fenced off, and crossing the fence is not recommended, particularly as the fort can be seen very well from the safe side of the fence. There are three impressively well-preserved ramparts, each over 2m high, with ditches between them; they are visible in section from the west side of the chasm. The original entrance causeway must have been to one side and now destroyed. There are traces of internal structures, which could be the remains of a broch which has partly toppled into the sea but which may represent some less grandiose building. The situation and the defences are certainly very similar to those at the Broch of Burland on southern mainland (HU 445360), a spectacular but very dangerous site at which the broch is now so close to the precipice that it may one day disappear.

9 LIFE AND DEATH IN EARLY PREHISTORIC TIMES

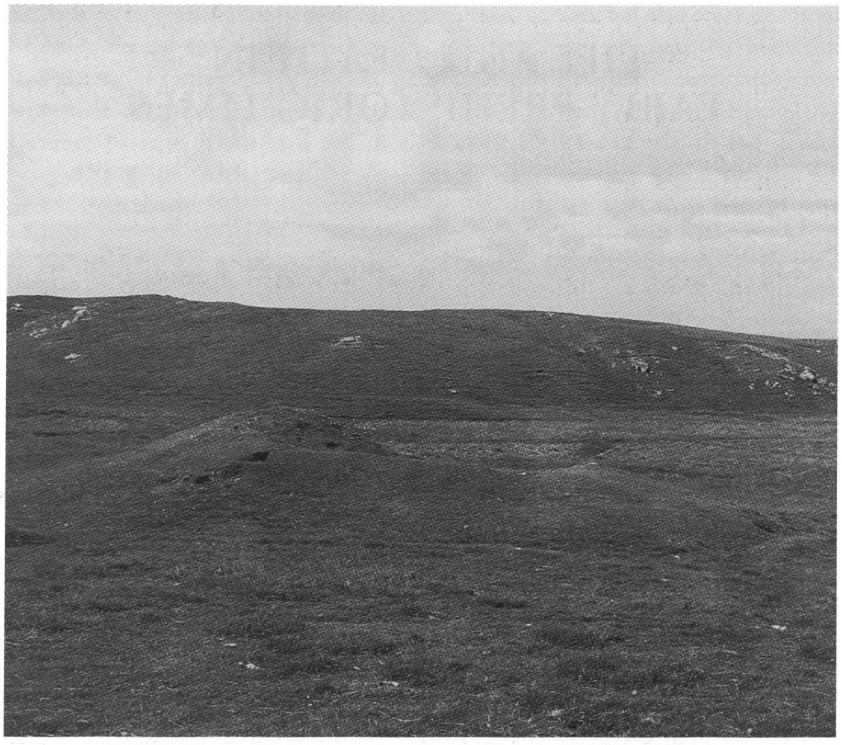


An early prehistoric house, known as 'The Standing Stones of Yoxie', in Whalsay

Towards the end of the 2nd millennium BC, a combination of climatic deterioration, bringing with it an increase in the formation of peat and barren moorland, and the effect of intense cultivation in late neolithic times seems to have led to a less affluent lifestyle in the Northern Isles. It is not easy to detect in the visible archaeological record the beginnings of the social pressures that led to the development of forts and brochs, but the enigmatic monuments known as burnt mounds were certainly used at this time.

BURNT MOUNDS

Judged by quantity alone, burnt mounds would be the single most important class of prehistoric monument in the Northern Isles, for over 400 are known to exist or to have existed in the past, and yet little attention was paid to them until the 1970s when three were fully excavated. Before excavation, burnt mounds appear literally as mounds of burnt and shattered stone, grass-grown but often with burnt stones visible here and there, and they are always located near a source of freshwater; in size they vary from a few metres across to thirty metres, and they are often crescentic in shape. Classic examples can be seen at Crawton (see no. 50), in Weisdale



A typical crescentic burnt mound at Crawton

(HU 395535), and at Burnside near Hillswick (HU 280784). At the latter site, the side-slabs of a stone trough can be seen within the crescent of the mound, and such troughs have frequently been encountered elsewhere, but the extent of the buried structures became apparent with excavations at Ness of Sound in Shetland and Beaquoy and Liddle in Orkney.

Burnt mounds are in fact cooking places, where stones were heated on a hearth and thrown into troughs of water so as to boil the water for cooking large joints of meat; the stones, burnt and cracked, were then discarded in an arc round the cooking area. Cooking was carried out in oval stone-built shelters, which may have been communal cook-houses serving people living close by, and scientific dating of burnt stone and pottery has shown that they were used between about 1000 and 400 BC. Finds of agricultural tools and cereal pollen, together with their distribution on good fertile soil, combine to demonstrate that burnt mounds belonged to farming communities. Very similar mounds occur elsewhere in mainland Scotland, England, Wales and Southern Ireland.

Although roasting would seem the simplest method of cooking meat, there is no doubt that boiling was a popular alternative and, amongst people whose pottery was not strong enough to use over the fire and who lacked metal containers, boiling in a stone or wooden trough was acceptably efficient. It had an important advantage over roasting in that the melting fat was not lost into the fire. There is evidence of this type of cooking in early Irish literature and, closer to home, in a description of the Hebrides in the mid 18th century: 'the meaner sort of people still retain the custom of boiling their beef in the hide; or otherwise (being destitute of vessels of

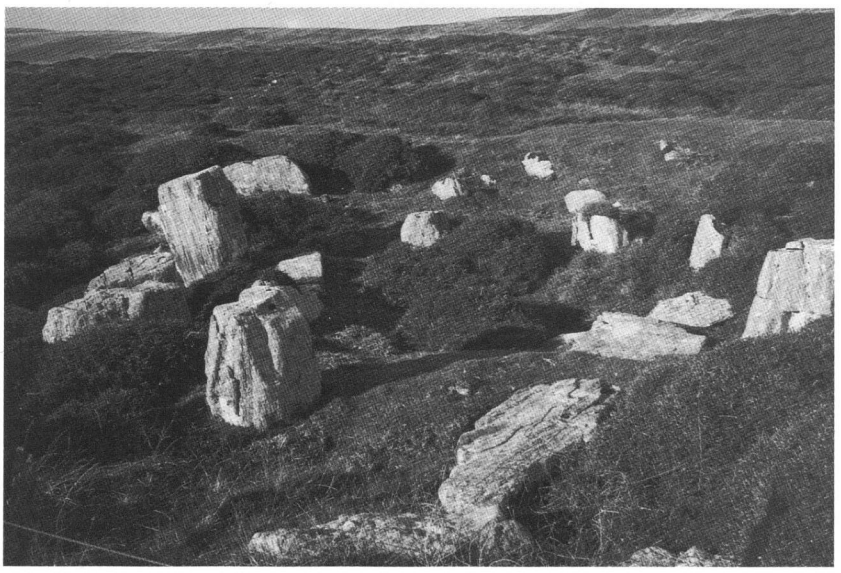
metal or earth) they put water into a block of wood made hollow by the help of the dirk and burning; and then with pretty large stones heated red-hot and successively quenched in that vessel, they keep the water boiling, till they have dressed their food.'

SETTLEMENTS

The widespread and substantial settlements and tombs of the earlier 2nd, 3rd and early 4th millennia reflect an era of economic stability amd long-lasting farms, when a milder climate even allowed the cultivation of wheat, and there was the labour and the incentive to build on a grand scale. Shetland possesses some remarkable fragments of complete prehistoric landscapes. In particular, the dense concentration of settlements, field-systems, chambered tombs and cairns in the area around Gruting Voe in west mainland offers a rare and exciting opportunity to appreciate the early prehistoric landscape and to gain some impression of the numbers of people living in these remote northern islands. Without excavation, it is impossible to judge how many sites were in use at the same time, but, even so, radiocarbon dates from the few excavated early settlements have demonstrated that each is likely to have been inhabited over a very long period of seven or eight centuries, and the use of an individual tomb was equally long or even longer.

There is a single house immediately beside the road that runs along the west side of the Loch of Strom (HU 403502; the house is on the west side of the road and a large modern sheep stell on the east side). Oval in shape and 6.7 m long, the massive upright stones are clearly visible, with a rectangular recess marked by the two largest stones on the left of the entrance.

This typical oval house with internal divisions appears to have continued to be built into the late 2nd millennium BC. Intensive exploration of the prehistoric landscape in South Nesting has shown that some of these houses were contemporary with burnt mounds.



An early prehistoric house beside the Loch of Strom

52 Gruting School, Settlement, West Mainland

3rd millennium BC.

HU 281498. On the A 971 Lerwick to Walls road, take the minor road about 1 km E of Bridge of Walls which leads SE to West Houlland and Gruting. After 1.5 km, Gruting School is on the right of the road beside Scutta Voe, and the neolithic settlement lies along the hillside between here and the head of the voe.

A prehistoric landscape at the head of Gruting Voe, with an oval house in the foreground

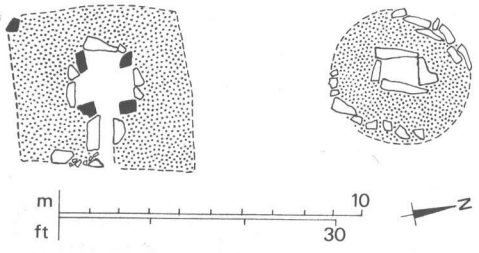
There are two oval houses associated with small cairns of stones cleared from the field, but the slope is so littered with boulders from the steep hillside above that it takes some time to pick out the man-made outlines. The best-preserved house lies to the north of the road, below the second telegraph pole counting north-eastwards from the school; the basal courses of its oval wall are clearly visible, together with the entrance at the downslope end. The oval chamber has a small cell opening off its uphill end (now filled with tumbled stones) and a stone bench recessed into its eastern wall. A second house of similarly oval shape is bisected by the road just before it crosses the burn at the head of Scutta Voe, and a third lies beneath the garage near the school.

53 Pettigarths Field, Settlement, Whalsay

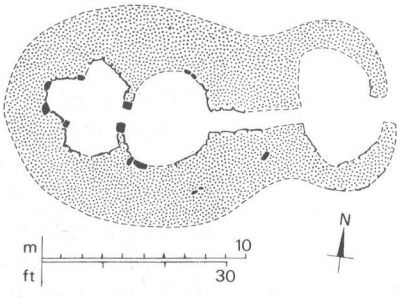
3rd-2nd millennium BC.

Houses HU 586652 and 587652, tomb HU 584653. On the slope above Yoxie Geo on the E coast of the island, about 1 km S of Muckle Breck on the Brough-Skaw road.

These two houses, known respectively as the 'Benie Hoose' and the 'Standing Stones of Yoxie', have been excavated and left open, and they are clear and well-preserved examples of early houses (the huge rectangular pile of stones close to the 'Benie Hoose' represents the debris removed from the house and from a superimposed planticrue by the excavators). Both houses are aligned downslope with their entrances facing east and seawards, probably to help drainage, and the builders of the 'Beenie Hoose' had to cut back into the hillside to achieve a level platform. The use of massive boulders in the thick walls led to the local name 'Standing Stones of Yoxie' for the lower house, because before excavation the tips of these sometimes pointed boulders protruded well above the turf. Both structures consist of a dwelling house



Plan of the burial cairns at Pettigarths Field



Plan of 'The Standing Stones of Yoxie' house

with one or two rooms and alcoves, and a long entrance passage leading out into an oval and probably unroofed courtyard, which is large enough to have been used as a small animal pen.

Both houses yielded broken pottey and stone tools, but the 'Benie Hoose' was littered with an astonishing total of more than 1,800 hammerstones, pounders, stone discs and other types of large tools, including many querns, all of which indicate a long period of occupation.

This flourishing and self-sufficient small community built its own burial-place overlooking the houses and fields, and this too reflects a long history for it consists of a chambered tomb and a later cist alongside. Both are very modest in size and design, and much of their stonework must have been removed in antiquity for dyke-building, for excavation has laid bare only their basal courses amidst a spread of tumbled stones. Originally the cairn covering the tomb was square and the entrance, facing the sea, leads through a narrow passage into a small oval chamber with three burial recesses divided off by large slabs protruding from the walls. Immediately to the north was later built a round cairn covering a large cist built with four massive slabs; the covering slab has slipped into the cist. Nothing is known about the original burials, unfortunately, because both tomb and cist had been thoroughly disturbed before excavation, but the two structures demonstrate as clearly as a modern graveyard the changing fashions in funerary architecture and rites over the years.

54 Pinhoulland, Settlement, West Mainland

3rd-2nd millennium BC.

HU 259497. On the W side of the Voe of Browland, about 1.5 km S of Bridge of Walls on the A 971 Lerwick to Walls and Sandness road.

The quickest route is due east from the farm of Pinhoulland, but to walk along the hillside above the Voe, having first visited Scord of Brouster (no. 55), is to become immersed in the prehistoric landscape. This is a nucleated settlement of eight well-preserved houses, some of a size equalling the great Stanydale house (no. 56), the whole complex, although unexcavated, with the appearance of having been inhabited over a very long period. Large clearance cairns and low field-walls testify to considerable agricultural activity.

55 Scord of Brouster, Settlement, West Mainland

3rd-2nd millennium BC.

HU 255516. On the A 971 from Lerwick to Walls and Sandness, take the Sandness fork at Bridge of Walls; the site is on the hillside above Brouster farm, to the N of the road, almost 0.5 km from the bridge.

Excavation of a house at Scord of Brouster

This is perhaps the most complete and comprehensible neolithic settlement complex in Shetland (colour photograph on p.28). The outlines of the houses, the enclosures and the many clearance cairns are readily discernible, even from the road, and recent excavations have laid bare many details of the settlement. The most obvious enclosure is close to the road, an irregular oval almost 60 m long enclosed by a stone wall, and a large oval house is attached to its north end. The entrance is at the downslope end of the house, and the interior, 7 m by 5 m, contains a central hearth and stone-built cells lining the walls, using massive boulders as subdividing piers. A radiocarbon date places the occupation of the house in the late 3rd-early 2nd millennium BC, but the site as a whole is likely to span a long period. At least three other houses lie further north, and their fields cover an area of about 2 ha. Close to the first house is a perfect circular ring cairn with a kerb of large

Scord of Brouster kerb-cairn as excavated

boulders, but radiocarbon dating suggests that this may be considerably later than the settlement, perhaps by one and a half thousand years.

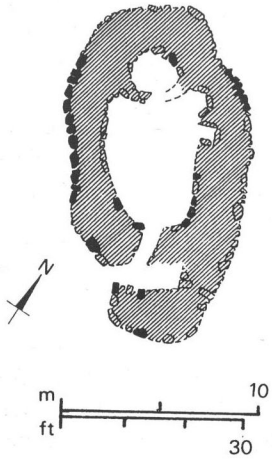
56 Stanydale, Settlement, West Mainland

3rd millennium BC.

HU 285502. The route to Stanydale is well signposted from the A 971 Lerwick to Walls road, where a minor road leading S leaves the main road some 3 km W of Bixter. The footpath over rough moorland is marked by black and white poles.

Historic Scotland.

The focus of this group of monuments is an astonishing structure known as the Stanydale 'temple', a house so large and so clearly related in design to heel-shaped tombs that it must be allowed a special status, perhaps as the hall of a chieftain, a tribal assembly-house, or a temple (colour photograph on p.29). It is acompanied by four smaller houses of the normal oval type, a system of field-walls and many clearance cairns; given the blanket of peat that has developed in this relatively low-lying pocket of land, the complex may well be more extensive than is visible on the ground today. The 'temple' and one of the smaller houses have been excavated, though only the 'temple' has been partially restored, and the excavated house is the first monument encountered along the footpath.



Plan of a domestic house at Stanydale (Right)

Inside the great house at Stanydale

It lies beside the third route-pole, and its plan is very clear, with walls surviving to a height of about 1 m; the entrance is downslope at the south end, entered through a porch, which would provide extra storage space as well as acting as a wind-break. Within the thick walls, which have an earthen core between stone faces, the house interior consists of a large room with a small cell at the far end, two alcoves built into the east wall, an almost central hearth and a stone bench along the west wall.

Some very large boulders were used at the base of the house wall, but in comparison the architecture of the 'temple' is on an altogether more massive and truly megalithic scale. It presents a daunting facade, a smooth curve of drystone walling broken by a central entrance passage. The wall has been restored to a height of about 1.5m, and the internal face includes some huge boulders estimated to weigh over 300 kg. The entrance passage is furnished with substantial inner and outer sill-stones, and it is likely that a portable wooden door would have been barred against the inner or outer end of the passage as required. Inside there is a single large hall, with two large axial post-holes for timbers supporting the ridge-beam of the roof, probably a turf-covered timber-framed roof. Fragments of wood surviving from one of these posts proved to be spruce and must have been driftwood borne across the Atlantic from North America. The hall is oval, and its inner half is furnished with six alcoves, symmetrically arranged and separated by stone piers; there is no central hearth but a series of small peripheral hearths (no longer visible). Stone tools and pottery were found, but no real hint of the purpose for which the building was designed apart from a pile of burnt sheep bones, which might perhaps point to some ritual activity (bone does not normally become charred in the cooking process).

The clearest section of field-wall is crossed by the footpath just downslope from the 'temple'; it leads away to the south-west where a series of enclosures are visible. Stanydale is separated from the Gruting School settlement (no. 52) by a high ridge known as The Hamars, on the crest of which, and visible from Stanydale, there is a large cairn surrounded by a megalithic necklace of boulders. Many stones have been robbed to build the adjacent sheep stell but the site remains impressive (HU 284500).

STANDING STONES AND ROCK CARVINGS

Standing stones, sometimes in pairs but normally single, occur frequently in Shetland, but none has been scientifically investigated and little is known of their purpose or precise date. They are usually set up in conspicuous positions, although not necessarily on the crest of hills or ridges, and the tallest can be more than 3 m high above the surface of the ground, implying that their total length, including the portion underground, may well be over 4 m in some cases. Sometimes the tops of the chocking stones are visible, jammed into the pit into which the monolith was set to keep it upright. From evidence elsewhere in Scotland, such stones may be associated with burials and there is some support for this idea at Beorgs of Housetter (no. 63), where two stones flank a cairn. It is also possible that they were set up as markers of one sort or another, territorial or astronomical, and, on balance, a date in the second millennium BC is most likely, but standing stones are particularly tantalizing fragments of an ancient landscape that we cannot hope ever to understand entirely. Several stones have become part of local folklore, often known as Giant's Stones, and some have been used in old customs until within the last century, particularly in the plighting of troths between lovers.

The fashion for rock art that produced startling great expanses of carving in Argyll seem not to have taken a strong hold in the Northern Isles. There is just one example of cup-marks carved on a living rock-face on Whalsay (no. 57), which resemble closely the cup-marks of bronze-age date elsewhere in Scotland.

Triple cup-marks on the rock face at Brough

57 Brough, Cup-marked Rocks, Whalsay

3rd or 2nd millennium BC.

HU 555651. On a knoll crowned with a television aerial beside the road.

The bare rock-faces on the east side of this knoll display two well-preserved groups of pecked cup-marks, about thirty in all, but they lack the elaboration of rings and other markings found elsewhere in Scotland. The lower group includes three joined in a trefoil shape.

58 Bordastubble, Standing Stone, Unst

2nd millennium BC.

HP 578034. From the A 968 N of Belmont, take the minor road towards Westing and then the left turn towards Lund. The stone is close to the road on the N side.

This is a truly massive boulder of gneiss, 3.6 m high and a girth of 6.7 m (colour photograph on p.43). Its location on low-lying ground is not typical, and it may be that this natural glacial boulder proved too huge to move. An attempt seems to have been made to chock it into an optimum position.

59 Busta, Standing Stone, North Mainland

2nd millennium BC.

HU 348673. On the A 970 between Voe and Hillswick take the minor road about 1 km beyond Brae which leads S along the W side of Busta Voe; the stone is in a field on the E side of the road a short distance from the junction.

This is a very impressive standing stone in a spectacular situation overlooking Busta Voe (colour photograph on p.32). A stout monolith of granite which is thought to weigh some 20 tons, this stone must have required considerable labour and effort to erect, and it is interesting to see the top layer of stones used to wedge it into position in its pit. Immediately to the north-east there is another smaller stone, a squat triangular block, which must have been brought deliberately to this spot. Popular tradition has it that the larger stone was thrown here by the Devil from some hill in Northmavine.

60 Giant's Stones, Hamnavoe, West Mainland

2nd millennium BC.

HU 243806. From Braewick on the B 9078, take the minor road N to Hamnavoe. The stones are on the right of the road as it descends into Hamnavoe.

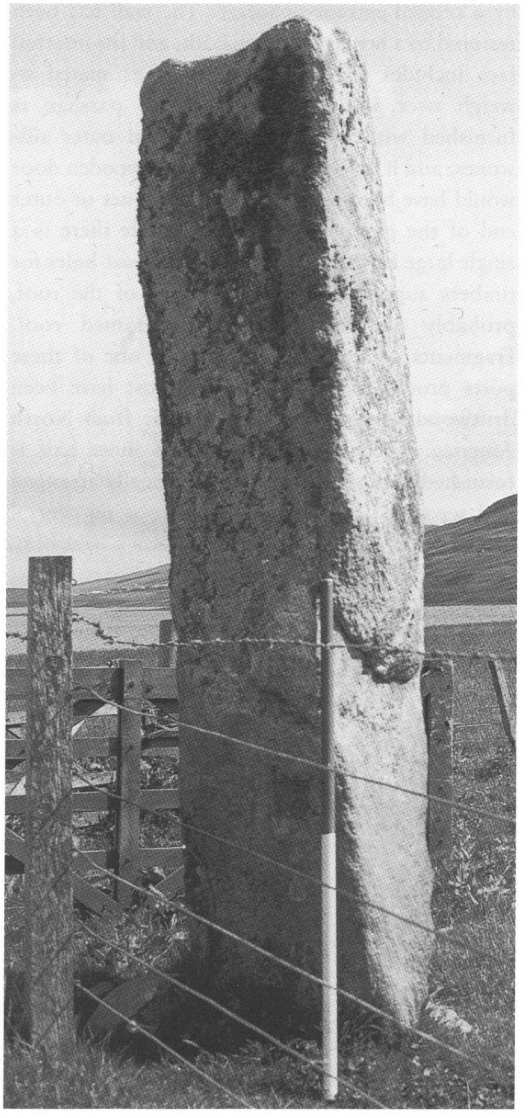
These two stones are set 20 m apart in an east-west line, but a third stone was recorded in 1774 and its relationship to the two surviving stones is not known. These are impressive stones at 1.8 m and 2.4 m tall, but there is no obvious reason for their location on this hillside. Their restricted visibility from the voe below means that they are unlikely to have been used as sea-marks.

61 Tingwall, Standing Stone, Central Mainland

2nd millennium BC.

HU 413420. Beside the B 9074 some 3 km N of Scalloway.

This 2 m tall stone is located close to the neck of land that separates the two lochs which almost fill the floor of the valley, the Loch of Tingwall to the north and the Loch of Asta to the south.



Standing stone at Tingwall

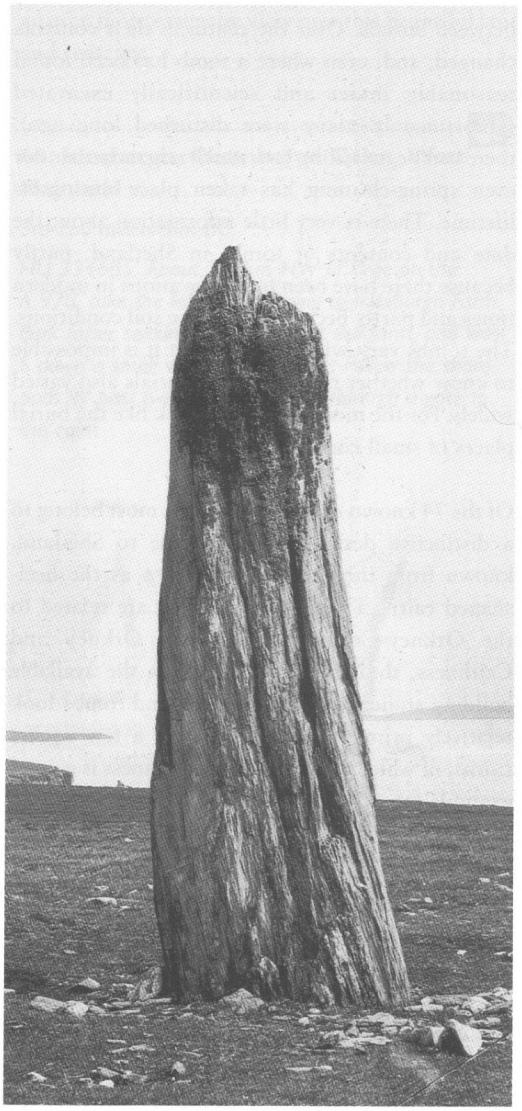
62 Uyea Breck, Standing Stone, Unst

2nd millenium BC.

HP 604005. From the A 968, take the B 9084 to the pier at Uyeasound, and follow the minor road round the bay towards Muness. The stone is close to the road on the right about 1.5 km from Uyeasound.

Most of the island's standing stones are squat boulders, but this is a slender monolith of schist, 3 m high, set on a slope overlooking Skuda Sound and the island of Uyea.

Schist was a good medium for tall stones, and there is another, 2.3 m high, known as the Ripple Stone, on Fetlar (HU 627905).



The graceful standing stone at Uyea Breck

BURIAL CAIRNS AND CHAMBERED TOMBS

By the early second millennium BC, the practice of cremating human remains and burying them in small pits or stone-lined cists or boxes beneath mounds had been widely adopted in the Northern Isles. In Shetland the covering mound tends to be stone-built (a cairn), and gravegoods are normally few in number and poor in quality (a few sherds of pottery, a steatite bowl or a stone disc would be typical finds from excavations). The cairns tend to be located on hilltops, but this impression may be biassed if there are mounds buried beneath the peat, as seems very likely. Some of the cairns that contain stone-built cists of massive proportions may be related to neolithic chambered tombs, for multiple inhumation burials in such cists are known to have taken place in neolithic times.

Evidence from the Scord of Brouster excavations suggests that some cairns may even belong to the 1st millennium BC. There, a large cairn with a boulder kerb was dated to this late period by radiocarbon analysis, although no trace of any burial had survived and the core of the cairn appeared to be an old agricultural clearance cairn. The sequence of burial structures in Shetland may be more complicated than it first appears, for there are two curious sites in the northern isles which may be cremation cemeteries. One is Hjaltadans on Fetlar, where a ring of stones and a concentric inner bank enclose a pair of boulders (HU 618928). The other, on Unst, is known as the Rounds of Tivla (HP 616107). This site is now very difficult to find in the broken ground of Crussa Field, and only one of the three Rounds recorded in 1774 survives intact; it consists of a concentric set of three low earthen rings with a low cairn in the centre (now topped with a modern marker cairn).

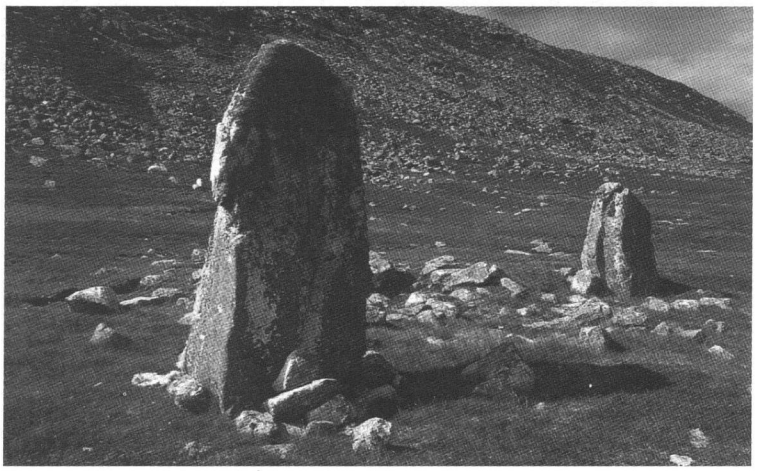
63 Beorgs of Housetter, Standing Stones and Cairn, North Mainland

2nd millennium BC.

HU 361854. Beside the A 970 from Lerwick, some 7 km before it terminates at Isbister.

Known locally as the Giant's Grave, this monument has an extraordinary setting: it stands on a narrow strip of boulder-strewn land between the Loch of

Housetter on the east and the Beorgs of Housetter on the west, a most precipitous rocky hillside that acts as a backfrop to this natural theatre. Not even the modern road that now corsses the stage can detract from its dramatic effect. And the builders of the Giant's Grave enhanced that effect by using the two colours of granite rock that outcrop on the Beorgs hillside: the two standing stones are red,



A pair of stones stands guard over the cairn at Beorgs of Housetter

while the cairn between them is built predominantly of white rock that weathers to pale grey. The standing stones are broad slabs aligned north-south, 2 m and 2.7 m high respectively, and they appear as sentinels to the ruinous cairn at their feet; a massive low slab set upright within the mass of stones in the cairn may represent one side of a former cist, and there is a hint of a formal kerb round the perimeter of the cairn.

About 90 m to the north of the Giant's Grave are the remains of a chambered tomb, familiarly known as the Towie Knowe or Fairy Mound. Both the tomb and the cairn to the south have been used as convenient sources of road metal in the past, and the tomb has also been dug into by early antiquaries. It is now an amorphous spread of stones, but it appears to have been a heel-shaped cairn with a central chamber opening to the east.

64 Nesbister Hill, Cairn, Central Mainland

2nd millennium BC.

HU 403454. On the summit of Nesbister Hill, a walk of about 0.5 km SSW from the A 971, some 13 km from Lerwick.

Of all the hilltop cairns in Shetland, Nesbister has been chosen as a good example to visit not only because it is reasonably well-preserved but also because the walk along the ridge is not arduous. Both its location and its architectural design are close to megalithic tradition, for the circular cairn, almost 8 m in diameter, has a drystone kerb and the central cist is built of massive slabs. The cist is visible now but originally it would have been covered by the stones of the cairn. Nothing is known of what was found in the cist or of when it was opened.

CHAMBERED CAIRNS

Chambered tombs were a combination of the family burial vault and the ossuary, designed to be used over and over again, their entrances sealed between burials. Over the centuries their contents changed, and, even where a tomb has been found reasonably intact and scientifically excavated (unfortunately many were disturbed long ago), there can be no telling how much rearrangement or even spring-cleaning has taken place during its lifetime. There is very little information about the date and contents of tombs in Shetland, partly because there have been few excavations in modern times and partly because of adverse soil conditions. The tombs vary widely in size, but it is impossible to know whether the number of burials also varied widely. For the most part, these look like the burial places of small communities.

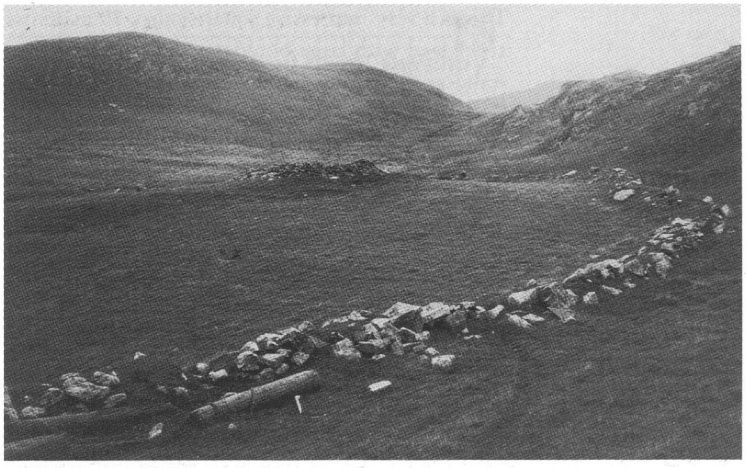
Of the 74 known chambered cairns, most belong to a distinctive design that is unique to Shetland, known from the shape of the cairn as the heel-shaped cairn. The chambers inside are related to the Orkney-Cromarty tombs of Orkney and Caithness, though the difference in the available building stone can make the Shetland tombs look relatively primitive. There are also a few square cairns, of which March Cairn in Eshaness is a good example (no. 67).

65 Gallow Hill, Chambered Cairn, West Mainland

3rd-2nd millennium BC.

HU 258508. Beside the A 971 Lerwick to Walls road, less than 0.5 km beyond Bridge of Walls, the cairn is to the immediate NW of the road.

Although its situation can be appreciated from the road, the cairn itself is now so low as to be difficult to pick out against a rock-strewn slope, for the stones of the cairn may well have been robbed in antiquity to build field-walls (see no. 55). Close to, however, it is still impressive, a huge round cairn with a kerb of massive boulders about 25 m in diameter, in the centre of which there are traces of very large stones enclosing a circular chamber. Nothing is known of its contents. Standing on the cairn, it is not difficult to ignore the modern road and to appreciate the sweep of the Voe of Browland and the landscapes on either side with their marvellously preserved early prehistoric settlements and field systems (nos 52, 54). Another chambered tomb at the head of the voe on the Ward of Browland at 100 m OD (HU 267515) commands an even more extensive view over this beautiful land and seascape.



An early prehistoric enclosure with a house at Islesburgh

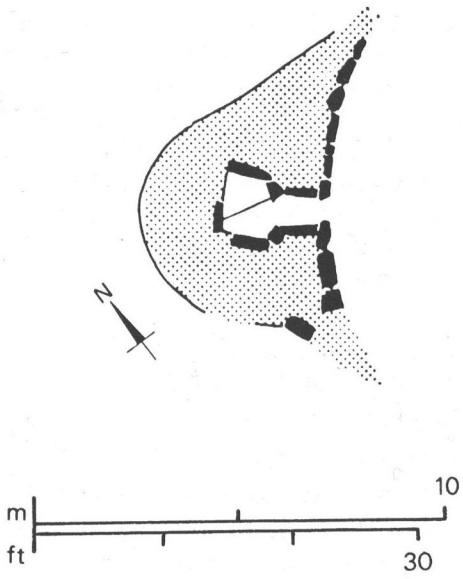
66 Islesburgh, Chambered Cairn, West Mainland

3rd-2nd millennium BC.

HU 334685. About 2.5 km NW of Brae on the A 970, take the left hand turning to Islesburgh Farm. Park (after seeking permission) at the farm, and walk S down a small valley to the shore. Follow the shore-path W past two stout poles and through a gate to the cairn.

The Islesburgh tomb is tiny and perfect. An excellent example of a heel-shaped cairn, it was excavated in 1959, revealing a concave facade with the entrance to the chamber in the centre. The tips of the facade are missing, but it must have been almost 9 m across, and the cairn is almost 5 m deep. A narrow passage leads into a small rectangular chamber, little more than a metre across. It is open to the sky now, but there would originally have been higher walls and a stone slab roof, with cairn material piled on top. There were no finds in the chamber.

Set on a slope, the tomb faces south-east over the sheltered voe. A short distance to the west is the site of a prehistoric house, which may well be the home of the people who built the tomb. A planticrue has been built on top of the house, but the north end of the house can still be seen. A hand quern for grinding grain lies a little to the south-east. The house is enclosed within a substantial walled enclosure, 61 m across, which runs down to finish above the shore, and a stream passes immediately west of the enclosure. The modern cairn to the west is a sea-mark for navigation.



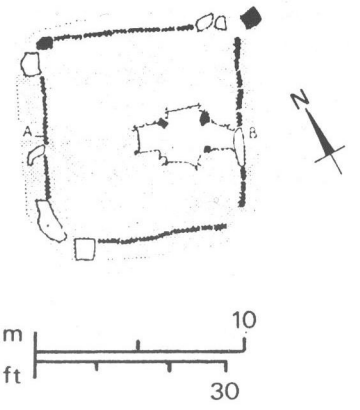
Plan of the heel-shaped cairn at Islesburgh

67 March Cairn, Chambered Cairn, West Mainland

3rd-2nd millennium BC.

HU 221789. On the B 9078 about 1 km W of Braewick, park out of the way at the end of the private track to Priesthoulland. Walk up the track and strike off to the right following the fence; once over a small rise the cairn is visible ahead.

This is a very impressive square cairn, 10 m across and edged with large boulders. Taller pillar stones stand at the corners, and a large recumbent stone lies across the entrance to the tomb. The cairn has been excavated, and the amount of stones cleared off the cairn gives some idea of its original height. A short passage leads into a cruciform chamber, the east side of which is still visible. In both the passage and the chamber, a layer of small stones had been laid down as a base for a paved floor at almost the height of the recumbent stone across the entrance. Before the excavation the passage and chamber were filled with earth and stones, possibly the original filling placed there when the tomb went out of use. Two tiny sherds of pottery, two small stone discs and a quartz tool were found amongst the filling, but there was no trace of any burials.



Plan of the square cairn known as the March Cairn

The less well-preserved remains of another square cairn, known as Muckla Water, can be seen a short distance to the north-east. The square kerb is clearly visible, as is the chamber, but all trace of the entrance passage has gone. Both cairns command a wide view to the south.

68 Muckle Heog, Chambered Cairns, Unst

3rd-2nd millennium BC.

HP 631107. On the A 968 about 1 km S of Haroldswick, park in the layby on the left just past the quarry and walk down the road a short distance to the S to the track which leads up to the Muckle Heog radio mast. Walk up the track, past the mast and up to the summit.

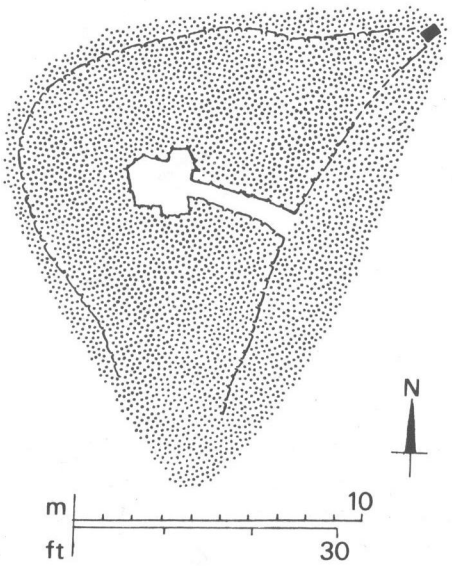
The cairn on the very summit is modern, and the prehistoric cairn is just to the south. It is sadly ruinous after much robbing and disturbance in the mid 19th century, but it is still a very large pile of huge boulders and conveys the awesome task of its builders. Two chambers or cists were found but neither is now visible, and the human and animal bones that were discovered are now lost. To judge by the debris on the north-west side of the hill, much of the cairn material was cast down to help build the modern field wall. From this vantage point, there is a good view of the second cairn on the lower ground.

Muckle Heog West cairn was a large heel-shaped cairn but is now much spread beyond the facade. Again very large boulders were used, and there are two large cists visible within the cairn (two more were seen in the 19th century). The back of the cairn has been destroyed by the modern wall, and it was originally about 15 m across.

69 Punds Water, Chambered Cairn, West Mainland

3rd-2nd millennium BC.

HU 324712. From the A 970 between Brae and Hillswick, a minor road some 5 km beyond Brae leads



Plan of the heel-shaped cairn at Punds Water (Right)

to Mangaster; about halfway along the minor road, walk WNW towards Punds Water, and the cairn is close to the S shore of the loch.

This is one of the best-preserved heel-shaped cairns, probably because it lies in what has become, since the formation of blanket peat, an inhospitable area of small lochs and moorland, although around 3,000 years ago its potential for farming would have been considerably better (colour photograph on p.32). The cairn was built on a low knoll and the kerb can be traced very easily, one or more courses high, showing that the lower part of the cairn had a vertical external face (there are tumbled stones beyond the original face); in the centre of the concave facade on the ESE side is a passage leading to a trefoil-shaped burial chamber. Both chamber and passage are now roofless, but their walls still stand over a metre in height, in places using very large stones.

A second tomb was excavated in 1959 on the west side of Punds Water, which was almost circular externally with an interior divided into five small benched cells round a central area, very reminiscent of domestic houses of the same period (HU 322714).

70 Ronas Hill, Chambered Cairn, North Mainland

3rd-2nd millennium BC.

HU 305834. Park in the layby on the A 970 about 0.5 km N of North Collafirth, and walk up the track to the radio mast on Collafirth Hill. Past the mast and west, climbing steadily first Mid Field and then Ronas Hill itself.

This is a very long and arduous walk, and Ronas Hill is often wreathed in mist, but on a clear sunny day the view from the cairn is well worth the effort, as is the cairn itself. Set on the highest point in Shetland (450 m OD), its very remoteness has ensured that this cairn has survived the centuries relatively unscathed. Its chamber is still roofed, although much of the covering cairn is now scattered. This was probably a heel-shaped cairn, and the passage, some 2.4 m long, opens into a rectangular chamber, 1.7 m by 0.9 m. The sides and back of the chamber are built with very large slabs, and a single slab forms the roof at a height of just over a metre. Nothing is known of the original contents.

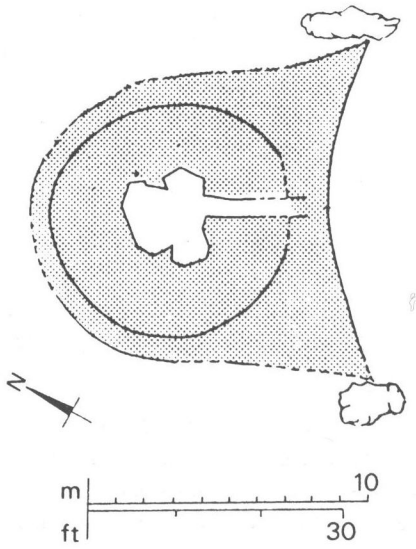
71 Vementry, Chambered Cairn, Vementry

3rd-2nd millennium BC.

HU 295609. On the A 971, Lerwick to Walls road, take the B 9071 at Bixter to Aith, where a minor road leads N along Aith Voe and terminates at Vementry. A small ferry to the island is available if booked in advance.

Its remote situation has ensured that this tomb survives in excellent condition; it was built on the top of Muckle Ward at 90 m OD, and the stiff climb to reach it is rewarded in clear weather by superb view over a beautiful area of Shetland. This is a heel-shaped cairn with a smoothly curving facade of excellent drystone walling, including very large stones at the base, which survives to a height of 1.2 m. There is no entrance through the facade, and this outer part of the cairn appears to have been built as a platform round a circular, originally domed cairn enclosing the burial chamber. A passage aligned on the centre of the facade leads into a roughly trefoil-shaped chamber, now unroofed and ruinous, although its walling is visible.

The island is also remarkable for the First World War gun emplacements on Swarbacks Head (no. 1). At Vementry farm on the mainland there is a well-preserved horizontal mill (HU 311597).



Plan of the heel-shaped cairn on Vementry

10 FAIR ISLE

Fair Isle from the air

Fair Isle was inhabited in prehistoric times, but the name by which we know it was bestowed by Vikings, to whom the island was a familiar sight on their voyages between Norway, the Northern Isles and the west coast of Scotland. Fritharey they called it, which is thought to mean either 'peaceful isle' or 'isle of sheep', and it is indeed a fair island, even though living there has never been easy. It lies roughly halfway between Orkney and Shetland, and, although in modern administrative terms the island is part of Shetland, in the past it has been owned both by Shetlanders and Orcadians. Since 1954, Fair Isle has belonged to the National Trust for Scotland, who have successfully developed a crofting programme for the islanders as well as the world-famous Bird Observatory: the study of breeding birds and an extraordinary range of migrant birds is one of the island's major attractions for visitors. More than 335 species of migrating birds have been recorded, from as far away as Central Asia, Siberia and North America, and 43 species of birds breed on the island, including some 25,000 pairs of puffins.

Fair Isle is made up of sedimentary rocks of Middle Old Red Sandstone age, and their formation slopes very steeply to the south-east; this has created a very rugged and beautiful coastline of steep cliffs and rock stacks, particularly on the west coast where the deep geos have been carved by the sea along fault-lines in the rock. There is of course another side to the beauty of such a coastline; combined with the strong currents that beset the island, Fair Isle has been the cause of a great number of shipwrecks, from famous sailing ships of centuries past to long forgotten fishing boats. It was presumably this dangerous aspect of the island that prompted German air-borne attacks on both lighthouses in World War II, in an attempt to increase the hazards to Allied shipping.

The North Lighthouse was built in 1892

Fair Isle waters contain one of the most famous of all Shetland wrecks, a ship of the Spanish Armada which, having barely survived battle with English ships in the English Channel, finally sank in Stroms Hellier on the south-east coast of Fair Isle on 28 September 1588. *El Gran Grifon* was a hired store ship, a 650 ton merchantman acting as the flagship for the Armada's squadron of supply ships, and it is said that, during the battle, she sustained forty direct hits in her hull from English guns. After its defeat, the Armada sailed northwards and ran into appalling gales and heavy seas; half the fleet floundered and the rest scattered, attempting to return home to Spain round the north of Britain. A vivid account of the final days of *El Gran Grifon* survives in Spanish in a diary kept by one of her sailors. It was a struggle against the elements in which attempts failed either to sail westwards between Orkney and Shetland or to flee east to Norway. Nor was it possible to land on any of the northern isles of Orkney in such perilous seas. Ultimately the ship managed to anchor off Fair Isle, and it appears to have sunk during an attempt to beach. Three hundred of her sailors and officers scrambled to safety, but food on Fair Isle was in such short supply that fifty died of starvation over the following six weeks before rescue could be summoned from the mainland of Shetland. The writer of the diary was clearly taken aback at the low standard of living on Fair Isle. He describes

The North Lighthouse as it is today, lacking the keepers quarters demolished in 1984

them as 'a very dirty people, neither Christians nor altogether heretics', who were living in 'huts more like hovels than anything else' and using as fuel a substance totally alien to a Spaniard, peat. There were only seventeen families living on the island, amounting probably to less than a hundred people, who must have been equally aghast at the sudden arrival of three hundred uninvited guests!

Underwater survey and excavation has led to the retrieval of a number of bronze and iron guns and lead ingots from the wreck, but the hull of the ship has disintegrated.

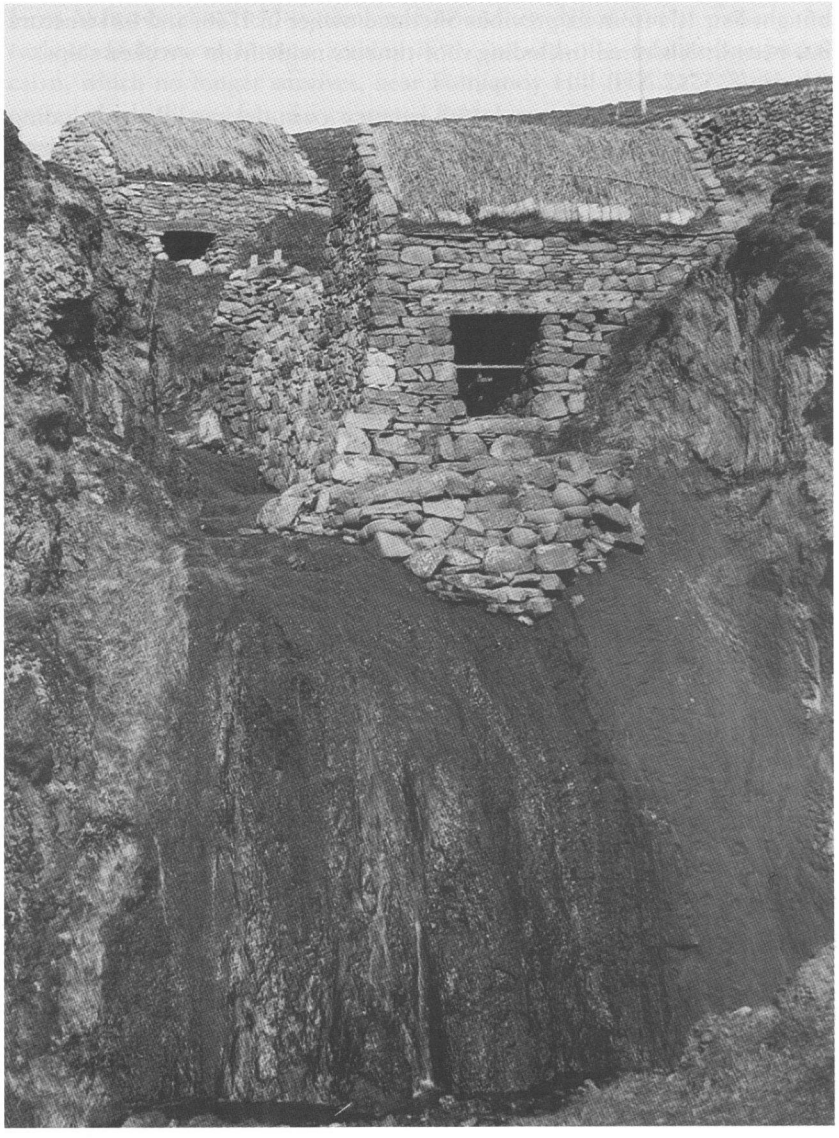
Despite its history of shipwrecks, Fair Isle had no lighthouse until 1892 when two were built to designs by the famous Stevenson family, one at the northern tip of the island (HZ 221740) and one at the south end (HZ 197698), neither of which is now manned. Prior to their construction, rockets were fired in times of thick fog to warn any vessels in the vicinity. The North lighthouse is so exposed that the foghorn was operated from within the lighthouse, and a handrail provided something to hang on to in the event of maintenance being required.

The location of the island between Orkney and Shetland has long given it a strategic value, recognized certainly since Viking times when *Orkneyinga Saga* records that Earl Paul had beacons built on Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay and several other islands so that each could be seen from the other and thus give warning of enemy approach from the north. 'There was a man called Dagfinn Hlodvisson, a stout-hearted farmer on Fair Isle, charged with the task of guarding the beacon there and setting fire to it if the enemy fleet were to be seen approaching from Shetland.' In the early 19th century a semaphore stance was set up for a similar purpose, and its base and one of its wooden arms still stand above the South Harbour (HZ 199699). The semaphore consisted of a tall pole with moveable arms, and it was used to signal shipping movements to warships patrolling between Orkney and Shetland, as well as on more domestic occasions.

A wooden semaphore pole above South Harbour, with the South Lighthouse in the distance

North Haven is the main harbour today, but South Haven and South Harbour at the south end were also much used in former times. A map of 1839 marks South Harbour as the 'usual landing place', and Hesta Geo round the point to the west as the 'landing place with offshore wind'. Fair Isle was not simply a convenient landfall between Orkney and Shetland, for it appears to have enjoyed a small role in North Sea trading. It is recorded that a laird in the 17th century built a booth for a Hamburg merchant; the booth no longer survives but it was probably the building labelled 'warehouse' on the same 1839 map.

On Malcolm's Head near the south end are the remains of a look-out tower, which was built during the Napoleonic troubles of the 18th century (HZ 195707). This was a stone-built tower about 5 m square, and the south wall survives to a height of more than 2 m. As might be expected from its



New Mill with Shirva Mill beyond, as they were around 1934

strategic position in the North Atlantic arena, Fair Isle has a number of monuments belonging to military and naval activities of the 20th century. The radar station built in the Second World War on Ward Hill has been largely demolished, apart from service buildings below the summit (HZ 210732). The most famous relic is the tailplane of a German Heinkel aircraft which lies in a ditch near the Burn of Gilsetter (HZ 213716), having crash-landed in 1941.

When Sir Walter Scott visited Fair Isle with Commissioners of the Northern Lights in 1814, he dined with the Master of Fair Isle at the Haa, then the largest house on the island, though very modest by Shetland standards. It stands above the South Harbour, then the normal landing-place, and it is a simple rectangular two-storey building with crowstepped gables and later porch (HZ 203700). It was probably built in the 18th century for their factor by an Orcadian family living on Westray, the Stewarts of Brough, who bought Fair Isle from its previous Shetland owner in 1766, and its structure has been little altered (including roof-timbers made from wrecked ships).

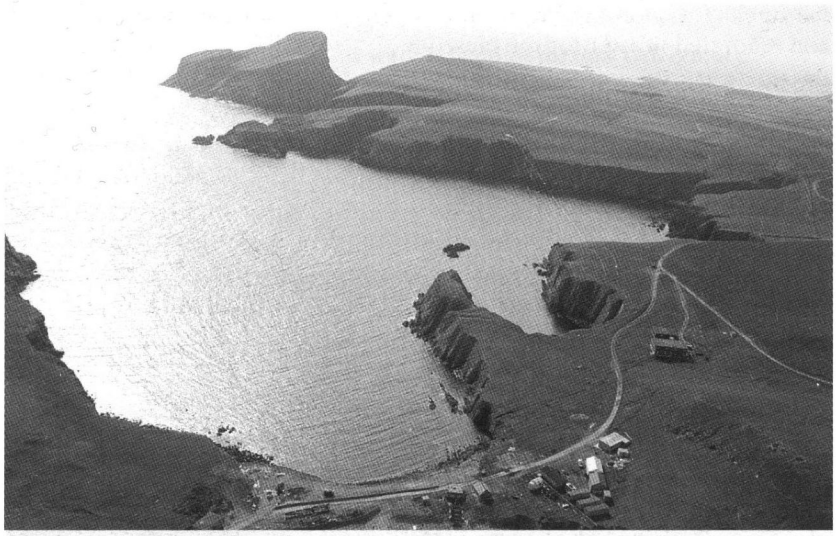
There are remains of several 19th-century corn-drying kilns, including standing examples at Springfield and Utra (HZ 206699; 200699), and there are some 37 examples of square or rectangular planticrues. There are also the ruins of a number of horizontal water-mills with their water-channels and dams, notably those on the Gilsetter Burn in the area of Funniquoy in the east part of the island. Shirva mill and New mill are specially worth a visit, particularly after the restoration work carried out by the National Trust for Scotland (HZ 217719). The photograph shows the two mills as they were around 1934, still with thatched roofs. Both are drystone-built and about 5 m by 3.5 m in area. Also of interest are the well-preserved boat-nausts to be seen at the shore around the South Harbour (HZ 200698, 202699). Characteristically boat-shaped, the upper tier of stone-lined hollows sheltered the long narrow Fair Isle yoles over the winter, while the lower tier were used over the summer.

The ancient Feelie Dyke and its stone-built neighbour

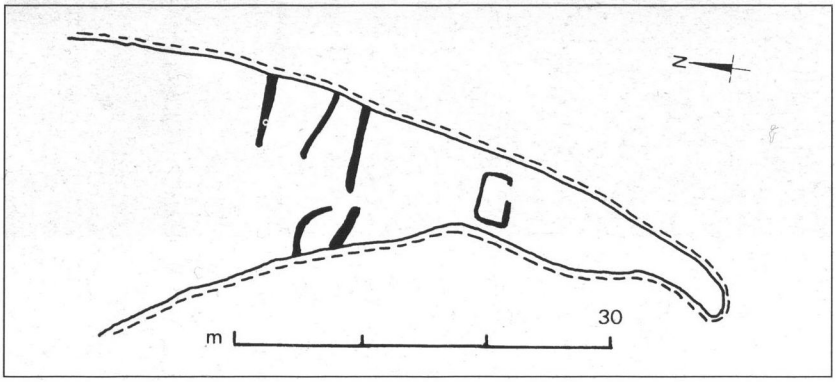
The earliest church on Fair Isle is likely to have been on the site of the demolished 18th-century church at Kirk Haven (HZ 200699). This was a plain rectangular building with a doorway in the west gable. A Methodist Chapel was built in 1886, and a Church of Scotland church in 1892.

The modern distribution of settlement is markedly confined to the southern half of the island, the northern uplands being used for common grazing, and it would seem that this economic division has a very long history. The ancient Feelie Dyke or turf dyke is still a conspicuous boundary, its route across the middle of the island underlined by the accompanying modern drystone dyke. Its date is uncertain, other than that it was in existence by the mid 18th century when it was recorded on a map, and it may well go back in origin to much earlier times.

Recent fieldwork has identified a number of prehistoric settlements in the form of hut-circles, field-systems and boundary dykes, but at present the earliest evidence of human activity is the record of a bronze-age burial cairn, which no longer survives, near Fuiniquoy Hill (HZ 212718), in the centre of which was found a cremated burial in a clay urn, dating to some time before 1000 BC. Fair Isle was quite densely inhabited during the first



The Landberg is Fair Isles's sole prehistoric fort (on the promontory in the centre of the photograph)



Plan of the Landberg fort

millennium BC, for there are about 28 burnt mounds scattered over the central portion of the island, as well as hut-circles and field-systems.

Nor did the island escape the social unrest and aggression of the later iron age, for the remains of a fort may be seen at The Landberg, a narrow and precipitous promontory between South Haven and Mavers Geo (HZ 222722) beside two excellent natural harbours. A series of three earthen ramparts with shallow ditches between them guard the gently sloping landward approach, while a natural rift caused by a rock fault across the narrow neck of the promontory provided a ready-made obstacle; at the top of the steep slope beyond stands the main rampart, with a few of the large stones of its outer face still visible. There has clearly been severe erosion over the centuries, but this can never have been the home of more than an extended family, presumably that of the chief of the island. Within the area of the fort is the foundation of a rectangular building, which could be of medieval or even Viking-Age date.

Fair Isle lies 39 km south-west of Sumburgh Head and may be reached by sea from Grutness, near Sumburgh, or by air from Tingwall, Lerwick. The George Waterston Memorial Centre includes a collection of traditional farm implements and domestic tools as well as displays about the island's natural history. It is housed in the Auld Schul, once used as the island school and renovated in 1981 for the museum.

A Shetland seascape

MUSEUMS AND VISITOR CENTRES

Shetland Museum, Lower Hillhead, Lerwick, custom-built in 1966, houses inportant prehistoric and Viking-Age artefacts, including finds from Jarlshof and St Ninian's Isle, as well as displays on maritime history, textiles and rural life.

Böd of Gremista, Lerwick, is an 18th-century fishing booth, restored to its former life, with a room devoted to Arthur Anderson and the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (no. 7).

George Waterston Memorial Centre, Fair Isle, has displays on island life and folklore, together with a reconstruction of a croft-house of around 1920.

Jarlshof, Sumburgh, has artefacts and information about this multi-period archaeological site (no. 39).

Old Haa, Burravoe, Yell, is a late 17th-century laird's house with displays of local interest (no. 17).

Pier House, Symbister, Whalsay, is an 18th-century merchant's booth, with displays on Hanseatic trade and Whalsay history (no. 8).

Scalloway Museum, Main Street, Scalloway, has a display about the 'Shetland Bus' of the Second World War, as well as other local history.

Shetland Croft House Museum, South Voe (no. 20), is a restored croft of the mid 19th century with a horizontal mill.

Tangwick Haa, Eshaness, has displays on local history in a 17th-century laird's house (no.16).

Tingwall Agricultural Museum, Gott, is housed in a working croft of the mid 19th century.

Unst Heritage Centre, Haroldswick, Unst, has displays on the island's herring industry and fine lace knitting.

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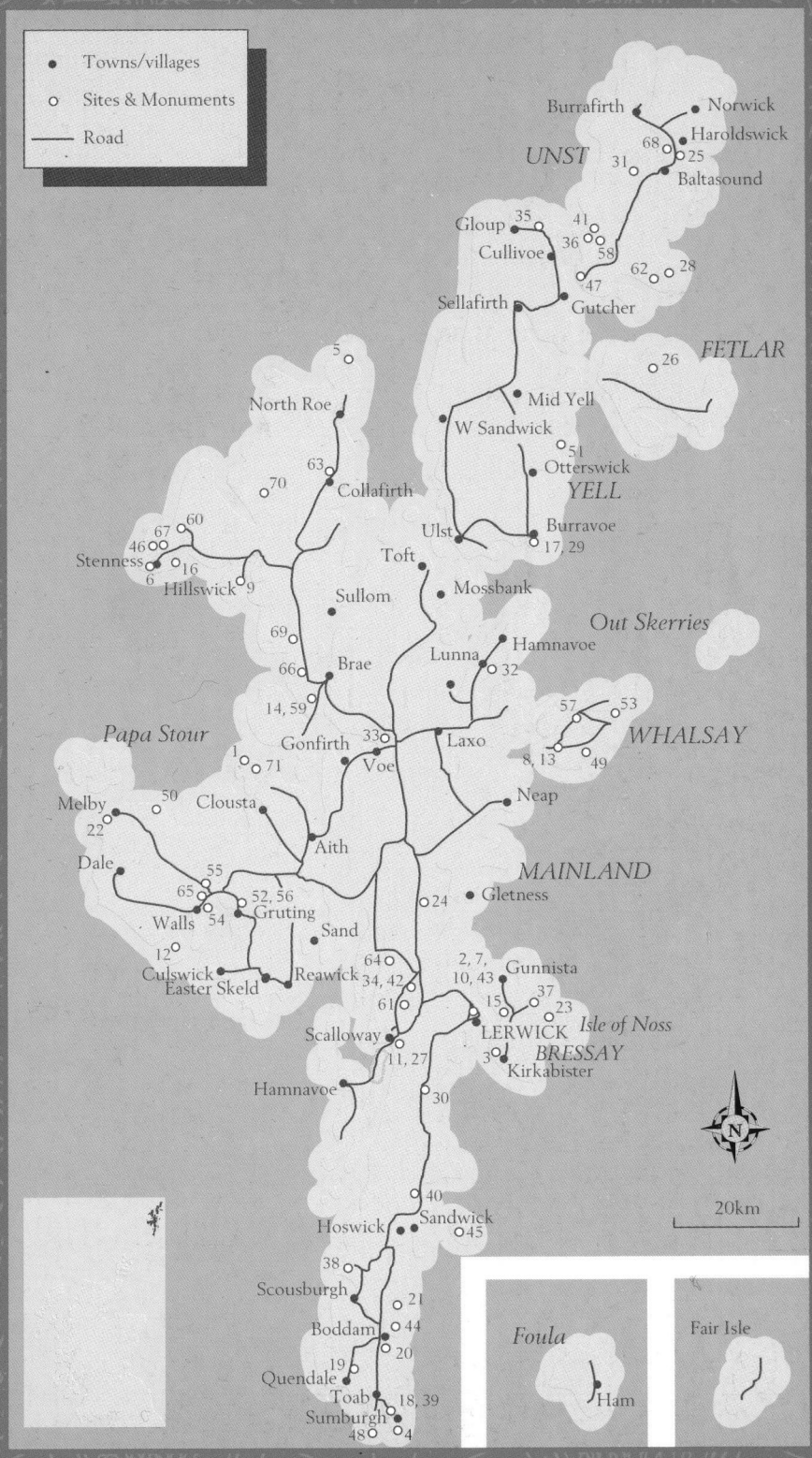
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