



HISTORIC  
ENVIRONMENT  
SCOTLAND

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# CLICKIMIN BROCH



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# HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### CLICKIMIN BROCH

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# 1 Summary

## 1.1 Introduction

Clickimin Broch is set on a promontory jutting out into a freshwater loch on the outskirts of the town of Lerwick, Shetland. It comprises a small complex of ruined Iron Age drystone structures within a walled enclosure; the principal features are:

- enclosure wall;
- blockhouse<sup>1</sup>;
- broch<sup>2</sup>;
- several smaller fragmentary structures within the enclosure.

The site has been intensively studied<sup>3</sup>, excavated and consolidated so that much of the masonry visible today has been altered to some extent. Clickimin Broch was first scheduled in 1882 and taken into State care in 1888 under a guardianship agreement. The Office of Works undertook three seasons of extensive excavation and consolidation in 1907-9. Further excavations took place between 1953 and 1956, followed by consolidation to the configuration which has been maintained to the present day.

The immediate environs of the site, formerly farmland, now has a peri-urban quality with numerous housing developments quite close by. The most recent large-scale developments are a leisure centre (c. 1984) and a new campus for the Anderson High School, which nearly complete the encirclement of the loch.

Clickimin therefore presents a large-scale complex prehistoric monument in an unusually accessible setting, close to a centre of population.

The site is unstaffed and there is no access charge. It is accessed via a short gravel path from a gate beside the main road south out of Lerwick. There is on-street parking nearby. Within the broch, a short wooden stair and short original stone stairs give access to upper levels. Information is given on fixed panels.

## 1.2 Statement of Significance

Brochs are the only building type unique to Scotland. They occur mainly in the northern and western mainland and islands, with a small number found in the central, south-eastern and south-western mainland. They date from 400BCE to 100 AD and are characterised by a circular ground plan and tall tower-like walls with intra-mural passages, stairs and small chambers. Some, like **Mousa Broch** (also in the care of Historic Environment Scotland), are largely solitary towers. Others, like Clickimin, are surrounded by other structures,

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<sup>1</sup> A blockhouse is a type of Iron Age structure unique to Shetland, Historic Environment Scotland also manages the blockhouse at Ness of Burgi

<sup>2</sup> A broch is a type of Iron Age structure built on a circular ground plan and rising to form a tower; see Appendix 4 for an introduction to brochs.

<sup>3</sup> Appendix 1 gives a full account of the developing interpretations of the dating and development of this site.

including here the blockhouse. Blockhouses are believed to be unique to Shetland and have similarities to broch design and construction; another example is managed by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) at **Ness of Burgi**.

While brochs are a distinctive, celebrated and unique feature of Iron Age Scotland, there is no settled understanding of their original purpose, the circumstances of their conception, or their final finished form (roofed or unroofed). Clickimin is one of the most-studied examples of a broch and evidence from its excavations has been used (and abused) to support competing theories to explain the enigma of brochs.

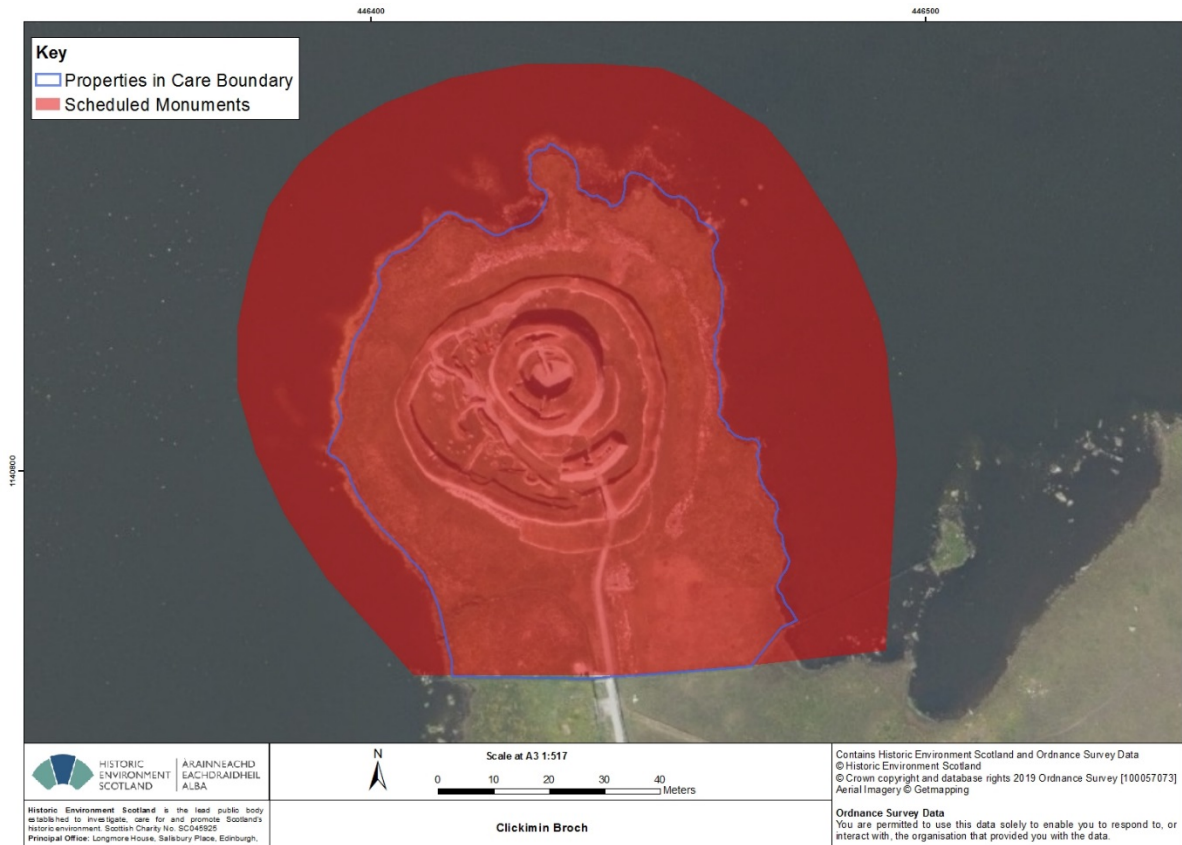
The detail of the competing theories developed to interpret Clickimin, and to extrapolate from it to an interpretation of brochs in general, is discussed in section 2.2 and Appendix 5. This revised Statement of Significance takes the position that the main structural elements at Clickimin (the surrounding wall, the broch and the blockhouse) were most probably all built over a relatively short period in the middle Iron Age, rather than over an extended period of several centuries. However, the extent of disturbance and re-building of the site means that definitive proof of this, or any other interpretation, must be heavily caveated.

With these provisos, the significance of Clickimin rests primarily on:

- Its survival, although heavily rebuilt, as a good example of a broch on an islet site. The importance of the remains as they survive and the potential for further exploration to add useful evidence bearing on construction, occupation and modification, especially given the ongoing debate over the site sequence and its importance;
- The variety of substantial Iron Age structures on this single site: no other known site has an outer enclosure wall **and** a blockhouse **and** a broch. The fact these three major structures, and other subsidiary structures, co-exist indicates a degree of integrated functions for the site, and this has important implications for understanding other related sites;
- Its value as part of a group, including what the site's location and siting, considered along with those of other brochs, say about the preoccupations of its builders;
- The history of efforts to conserve, maintain and present the site to the public, and their impact on the physical remains and in particular the history of the developing discipline of archaeology. In this, Clickimin offers a case-study of approaches current in the 1950's and 1960's and also shows how subsequent reworking of old evidence can contribute to new understandings;
- Clickimin as a subject for research and study, and the theories developed to explain and place it within its social context, are, for the

archaeology profession, an important part of the site's interest which has a great bearing on the general understanding of related broch sites.

A fuller account of the broader range of values which make up the significance of the site is given in the following pages.



Clickimin Broch: Scheduled Area and Property in Care Boundary. For more plans and images, see Appendix 4.

## 2 Assessment of values

### 2.1 Background

The monument's name (alternative spelling Clickhimin), and that of the loch, derive from an inn established nearby around 1740. Prior to that, the loch was known as the "Peaches" or Picts Loch. The site itself has been referred to as The Picts' Castle for at least two centuries.

#### Summary Description<sup>4</sup>

Located on a promontory in a freshwater loch, Clickimin was approached by a stone-built causeway. A much-rebuilt drystone wall runs around the periphery of the former island. Just inside the entrance through this wall stands a tall, rectangular blockhouse<sup>5</sup> of drystone masonry, which has some architectural

<sup>4</sup> For a fuller site description, see Appendix 5.

<sup>5</sup> This structure has been variously referred to as a blockhouse, gatehouse or forework. The term blockhouse is used in this document.

features more typical of brochs. Over 12m long along its outer face and 3m wide, the blockhouse curves gently in harmony with outer wall. It stands to just over 2m in height (having been rebuilt to this height in 1907-9) and contains small chambers and gallery within its walls.

Beyond the blockhouse stands the broch itself, the interior space of which has been reduced by secondary walling. The broch is about 20m in diameter with an internal space about 10m across and stands about 5m high. It was once taller, although its original height cannot now be determined. The broch as constructed had at least two oval chambers in the base of its thick wall. Above this level it was double-skinned, with a narrow gallery running around the entire circuit. The gallery is unusually low, and it is not as horizontal as is usual: these oddities may result from Victorian rebuilding. On the outer face of the broch, two further unusual features are evident. On the north-west side of the broch wall-foot is a short projecting spur of masonry, while on the north-east side is a small secondary entrance, at approximately the same level as the first gallery floor. The spur of masonry may have been added during consolidation in the 1900s, whereas the secondary entrance certainly pre-dates 1860 and may be Iron Age; either an original feature (which would make Clickimin unique) or a later modification (for which examples exist at a few other brochs).

Between the broch and the outer wall lie the remains of several small buildings. In the causeway, outside the enclosed area, is set a large stone slab bearing a pair of incised foot-prints. The date of this stone is not known; it may be ancient. Nor is it known when it was emplaced on this site. There are no other upstanding ancient sites of interest known in the immediate vicinity.

#### Excavation, conservation and access

The ancient structures have been subject to repeated campaigns of exploration, consolidation and maintenance since 1860, so that it is by no means certain how much of the visible stonework now precisely replicates what it replaced. Clickimin was taken into State care through a guardianship agreement 1888.

The site was partly consolidated in 1861-2 (mainly the broch, the buildings to its west and possibly the blockhouse), and again in 1907-9 (at which time the outer wall was rebuilt entirely on the east and north of the site, and major work took place around the entrance through the outer wall and to the blockhouse). Both campaigns were extensive and involved much rebuilding, some of it speculative. Around 1930, a cobbled path was laid from the public road to join the surviving causeway.

During the 1950s, a series of excavations and research was undertaken by John Hamilton of the Ministry of Works. Hamilton developed an elaborate theoretical narrative for the site (detailed in Appendix 3) which was very influential for the way that brochs and their underlying social context were interpreted and presented over many decades. More recently, Hamilton's narrative has been much revised, and the understanding of the site and its sequencing presented in this Statement (and in HES interpretation) differs

quite considerably from the earlier interpretation. What remains important though is Clickimin's role as an example of how theories and interpretations of a site develop and differ over generations of researchers.

A final major consolidation campaign followed the conclusion of Hamilton's 1950s excavations, but this did not alter the visible remains to nearly so great an extent as earlier work. The site has been maintained in that layout to the present day. A succession of interpretation boards has been provided on site over the years.

Over time, ever more thorough measured surveys and photographic /photogrammetric recording have been undertaken by the successors to the Office of Works. Much of this detailed work has concentrated on specific areas of concern in relation to structural stability, deterioration of stonework of wear from visitor footfall.

There is the intention for the entire structure to be recorded by laser scanning as part of the Rae Project, which will form the basis of regular monitoring of its condition.

## 2.2 Evidential Values

Because of the extent of rebuilding, the evidential values of Clickimin are problematic to assess. These values relate to the scientific and research importance and potential of the site and primarily relate to the fabric and deposits, and the location and siting.

### Fabric and deposits

In its excavated and consolidated state, the site is to a large extent the product of at least three major episodes of excavation and consolidation (see Appendix 3 for details). While it might be excessive to agree with a local councillor's assessment in 1910 that the site is now a modern structure, extreme caution should be exercised in any judgment based upon the details of the stonework now visible. Various commentators have claimed to identify differences in the style of the drystone masonry of different structural elements of the site, especially seeing the broch as better built than the remainder, but this is by no means self-evident. Likewise, without foreknowledge it is impossible to distinguish the entirely rebuilt section of the outer wall from that which survived but was consolidated in 1907-9.

Given the complexity of the structures and the ambitious claims which have been made for the site's history of construction and occupation, it is unfortunate that Clickimin today offers only limited potential for future excavation. Even though Hamilton deliberately left small parts of the site unexcavated, he did this under the impression that the majority of the site lay undisturbed by earlier interventions. This view has since been demonstrated to have been mistaken. In addition, any sections of deposits which he left standing are likely to have been affected by 50 years of subsequent deterioration. As a result, it is not clear if and where any genuinely undisturbed deposits might lie within the in-care area: perhaps only under the walls of the major structural elements. If undisturbed areas can be



successfully identified after in-depth study of all the available evidence, these should be treated as extremely precious and should only be made accessible to extraordinarily well-designed research programmes. The partially-unexcavated perimeter of the site, outside the outer wall and extending below the loch level, probably retains higher potential for the recovery of waterlogged deposits and surviving organic remains, but relating these to the structural elements would likely prove difficult.

Ever-developing scientific techniques may in time offer new ways of examining the structure: it would be particularly interesting to know the cross-sectional make-up of the walls at various levels, particularly in the lower, solid-walled portion. It is not impossible that other wall-base cells in the broch may have been concealed in antiquity or in early consolidation: in particular, the absence of a guard cell (or cells) opening off the entrance passage is unusual for such a solidly constructed broch, and there are hints that there was a cell here, which was blocked to improve stability.

There have been a number of recent excavations at other broch sites in Shetland, notably at Upper Scalloway<sup>6</sup> and most recently and extensively at Old Scatness<sup>7</sup>. The results from these, combined with those from earlier excavations (such as at Jarlshof<sup>8</sup>), can help to calibrate the findings from Clickimin itself.

While the artefacts recovered during Hamilton's 1950s excavations survive (some in the National Museum of Scotland but with the majority in the Shetland Museum – some still in their 1950s labelled bags), the lack of a trusted stratigraphic record makes them less than ideal research material. That said, one aspect of the site's contested story might be tested by analysing the clay used to make the supposed "exotic" pottery sherds to see if it is of local provenance. While a local source would not rule immigration in or out (since new arrivals might have commissioned or made their favourite pottery forms locally), a non-local source would give new life to this now discounted idea.

#### Location and siting

The site's location is interesting, although modern development has obscured the Iron Age topography to a considerable extent. Clickimin is set back from the seashore on what was probably a loch island from early post-glacial until Iron Age times. It would have had a good seaward view, across the waters at the south entrance to what is now Lerwick Harbour, but if that was the main reason for its location, there are better sites nearer to the sea which could have been used.

The surrounding land (now largely built over) is of passable agricultural quality by Shetland standards, but by no means outstandingly fertile. The presence of the broch and its associated outer works on such an awkward site suggests

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<sup>6</sup> Sharples 1998

<sup>7</sup> Dockrill et al 2015

<sup>8</sup> Hamilton 1956

that defensibility, or the appearance of defensibility, was a significant factor in the choice of site: a site reached by a narrow causeway seems impractical as the centre of a farming estate. The term “fortress”, much used in earlier descriptions, seems not unreasonable.

Clickimin is not inter-visible with any other known broch site.

The surrounding geology is a flaggy sandstone of Middle Old Red Sandstone (Devonian) age, which was quarried into recent times along the shorelines (notably in the area still referred to as “da Sletts” (= the slates). There is also some pebbly conglomerate in these beds, and this appears in the broch. The shoreline doubtless provided material for the broch as well. The surrounding loch would have offered fresh water, although outside the defensive enclosure.

### 2.3 Historical Values

The historical values of Clickimin fall into three main areas:

- Its role in the development of “broch theory”, as researchers attempt to understand how and why brochs developed;
- As one among many broch sites, its contribution to our understanding of the Iron Age in Scotland, and locally in Shetland;
- The historical figures, events and stories associated with the site, including its history of preservation and presentation.

#### *Clickimin’s role in developing “broch theory”*

The origin and emergence of brochs as a distinct class of monument, with their unique combination of architectural features, has long provoked debate, principally between those who argue for a long, gradual process of experimentation across a wide range of structural types culminating in tower brochs, and those who favour the more sudden inspired “invention” of the tower form broch, which then spread rapidly.

Following Hamilton’s work in the 1950s, Clickimin was believed to demonstrate the validity of the “prolonged development” view. Hamilton developed a complex narrative for the site believing it developed as a series of ever more elaborate fortifications over many centuries, with the broch among the later developments on the site. Pottery finds of supposedly exotic origin were cited as pre-dating the broch, though subsequent researchers have cast doubt on the validity of this assumption and it is no longer given credence.

With the exception of MacKie, most who have assessed the site since 1980 have moved away from the “prolonged development” view, seeing Clickimin’s outer features essentially as elaborations and the broch itself as the core of a complex which was conceived of as a whole, and built over a short period – in years rather than decades, and certainly not centuries. Appendices 1 and 2 summarise current and previous understandings of the site.

In retrospect it looks naïve to have expected that “the problem of the brochs” could ever have been solved at a single site, but this view of Clickimin was largely accepted until the 1980s. From having been heralded as the answer to the problem of the brochs, Clickimin today is seen by many commentators as a warning against the perils of wishful excavation and over-enthusiastic interpretation. Stripped of its original deposits and repeatedly re-constituted in the course of its preservation, any new insights on brochs, their economy and social milieu are far more likely to derive from advances in knowledge at other sites which can be applied to Clickimin, rather than to be discovered there.

#### *Understanding the Iron Age in Scotland, and locally within Shetland*

The primary historical importance of Clickimin, and other brochs, is their ability to demonstrate Iron Age society and ways of living. They are such striking and singular structures that it is a constant frustration that despite an abundance of theory and interpretation (see Appendix 5), we do not actually know much for certain about who built these structures or why<sup>9</sup>. Consequently their value for the development of explanatory narratives is a collective one. No individual broch, however closely investigated, would be capable of answering all of the questions which might be posed, and for many purposes data from a large number of sites is necessary.

Therefore, our understanding of the nature of the society and circumstance that gave rise to Clickimin is largely conjectural. So far as can be gleaned from excavated finds, the material culture of brochs does not stand out from the generality of finds in other Iron Age sites, whether located in areas where brochs were common, or not. Almost all of the dated evidence for life in and around brochs relates to their occupation in primary and subsequent forms, and not to their construction, and it is likely to remain thus. Clickimin is a salutary reminder of this, with finds from within structures used to infer their dates of construction.

Widespread artefact types such as pottery, and finds of environmental remains such as animal and bird bones, suggest there was a coherent Iron Age material culture throughout Shetland, in which locally-restricted resources circulated relatively freely. This material culture changed relatively slowly over time, for example with the emergence of new forms of pottery. Evidence for contacts outwith Shetland is not particularly abundant, and what little there is seems to derive from deposits dating to some considerable time after brochs are built.

The exception always cited was Hamilton’s find of supposedly early Iron Age, non-local pottery at Clickimin. However, this is not now accepted in terms of either its early ascribed date or its exotic provenance.

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<sup>9</sup> Stuart in 1857 expressed things pithily: “there must have been something peculiar in the circumstances of the inhabitants to have given rise to these peculiar erections.” We are still far from understanding what this peculiarity might have been.

Iron Age social structure appears fairly “flat” and composed of largely self-sufficient groups, which might be termed “chiefdoms”. Recent work<sup>10</sup> analysing the resources needed for broch construction indicate that each broch represents the work of a substantial community, somewhat larger than a single extended family. What prompted the building of brochs, and whether the origin of their design was prompted by foreign or native inspiration is a matter of continual speculation. It is generally agreed that brochs (and some other enclosed constructions), were created in a social context in which two aspects were significant: defensibility and impressiveness. Brochs presumably provided enough defensibility to offer a degree of protection against raiding, which might be expected locally, though they would not have withstood prolonged siege warfare – which perhaps says much about how the builders perceived their wider world.

Brochs are often located in areas not especially favoured as agricultural land. One explanation for this may be that the broch represented a visible token of possession, of willingness to defend that holding, and the social status of the group or at least its leaders. Over time, some brochs which had been sited in naturally well-favoured areas went on to form the focus of more extensive villages (for example Old Scatness and Jarlshof) which lasted until the end of the Iron Age and in some cases beyond. Other brochs, located in less well-endowed locations, did not – and these form a substantial majority amongst known broch sites, with Clickimin falling among this category.

Within the general context, what makes Clickimin especially significant is the fact that the broch shared its space on the small islet with other substantial Iron Age structures in the form of the blockhouse and the outer wall. Additionally (on the balance of evidence) these structures appear to have been constructed over a relatively short period of time and were probably in use at the same time. While we cannot be certain about the precise functions of each structure, and in particular of the blockhouse, the impression is that life at Clickimin involved a range of different activities taking place in defined areas within a set of specialised structures.

This “short time-frame” interpretation of the building of Clickimin has implications: it would tend to rule out the idea that blockhouses and sites such as promontory forts represent a developmental sequence culminating in brochs. It would also tend to rule out the idea that such structures were built by those who could not “afford” a broch. Rather, it would appear that these different types of construction represented a palette from which Iron Age Shetlanders chose according to their specific needs and intentions – which we are still far from understanding.

Lastly, and not negligibly, Clickimin is a dot on the map of known brochs. The distribution patterns to which it contributes, in relation to other sites of similar date and to the wider landscape, have considerable potential to contribute to explanatory narratives which seek to understand the nature and function of brochs, and the society in which there were built.

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<sup>10</sup> Barber 2018

### *Association with historical figures*

The principal historical figure associated with Clickimin is the poet, novelist and antiquarian, Walter (later Sir Walter) Scott who visited Shetland in 1814. Scott's two consecutive visits to "Cleik-him-in" came before his keenly-anticipated visit to Mousa, and some of the descriptive terms he used at Mousa were first wielded in respect to Clickimin – for example "an old-fashioned pigeon house".

In the narrower realms of history and archaeology, several leading individuals have grappled with Clickimin: Sir Henry Dryden of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, G. P. H. Watson and Graham Ritchie of RCAHMS, Stewart Cruden and John Hamilton of the Ministry of Works. More recently, Euan MacKie (formerly of the University of Glasgow's Hunterian Museum) and Dennis Harding of Edinburgh University have taken issue around Clickimin, on opposite sides of the debate about the invasion versus home-grown theories of broch origins.

Clickimin is one of the earliest sites to be taken into State care after the 1882 Ancient Monuments Act and helps illustrate early conservation theory and practice; a fuller account is given in Appendix 3. Brian Smith, the Shetland Archivist (as of late 2018), has recently published<sup>11</sup> on the history of the site and the various theories about its date, development and use.

Clickimin is believed to be the earliest subject of a prosecution under the 1882 Act as the site had been subject to stone robbing over a number of years. In 1888 Hugh Mackay, a butcher who lived nearby, sent masons to Clickimin to prepare and remove stone for building. Mackay was duly charged and summoned before the Sheriff Court, where he was fined £9 10s and ordered to return the stone. This is believed to have been the first prosecution anywhere under the 1882 Act. Mackay's son went on to be the first official key-keeper for the site.

#### 2.4 Architectural and artistic values

The architectural and artistic values for Clickimin are primarily those embodied in the design and form of the on-site structures: these are fully described in Appendix 2. Again though, analysis in understanding the sequencing of the various elements is hampered by the lack of dating evidence and the effects of reconstruction activity. Additional interest lies in the depiction of the place in historic drawings and photographs (important in unpicking the more recent history of the site) and in the conscious attempts at reconstructions for interpretative purposes.

Alongside Gurness<sup>12</sup> and Howe of Howe<sup>13</sup> in Orkney, Clickimin has one of the most complex and varied structural assemblages excavated on a site with a broch at its heart. Acknowledging the underlying *caveats* regarding

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<sup>11</sup> Smith 2014

<sup>12</sup> Hedges and Bell 1987; Fojut 1993

<sup>13</sup> Ballin Smith 1994

reconstruction works, both the ground plan and the inter-relationships of the various structures on site, are of the highest importance for the study of brochs and associated and/or ancestral defensive structures (see 2.3 above).

There is some evidence that the broch tower was the initial structure built on site (see Timeline, Appendix 1) with the ring wall and blockhouse slightly later. There is no direct stratigraphic evidence, so this interpretation is based on comparison of the character of the stonework and the relative level of foundations. Circumstantially, this would seem to be the logical sequence to build, for ease of delivering large building stones to construct the broch rather than having to haul stone via the narrow entrance of blockhouse and /or the ring wall.

The broch appears to have been well-built in a strong, silty sandstone of a flaggy character. This is readily available near to the site, on the slopes to the west of the loch and on the seashore not far to the south. The same material was also used on all the other structures throughout the site. Although some have claimed to see the broch as displaying advanced, or careful, construction, this may be as much wishful thinking as reality.

The gradual settlement of the structure has led, on more than one occasion, to bulging of the outer wall face and thus to instability. This may also have been the case in the Iron Age though it is hard to determine this due to the extent of rebuilding. The outer wall of the broch seems to have “slumped” and the “platform” on which it seems to stand may represent Iron Age attempts to rectify the bulging broch wall, rather than evidencing an earlier structure on the site. (The excavator in the 1900s also had to buttress some stretches of walling.) It is possible that as part of this strengthening, the guard cell that would normally be expected at the entrance passage was filled in, and/or that the structure was reduced in height. However it is not currently possible to evidence either of these propositions.

Later in the Iron Age, the broch was modified to contain a wheelhouse at its centre<sup>14</sup>. This reduced the broch’s internal diameter and probably blocked access to the ground floor wall-chambers. These interior additions are analogous to later Iron Age wheelhouses, and while the area sealed beneath this retains considerable archaeological potential, the “wheelhouse period” structure itself is not particularly distinguished in its architectural form. Such additions are more common than not in brochs which have been excavated in Shetland, with much better-preserved examples visible at Jarlshof and its near neighbour, the recently excavated Old Scatness.

Much of the reconstruction offered in 1968 for the various architectural elements, notably in Sorrell’s illustrations (see below, *Reconstruction Drawings*), is unsupported by excavated evidence at Clickimin or indeed at

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<sup>14</sup> Wheelhouses are a variation of Iron Age roundhouse, unique to the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland. The roofs of these circular structures were supported on internal stone piers which projected radially into the central area, creating internal compartments and resembling the spokes of a wheel.

any other site: the elaborate timber galleries inside the outer wall and especially behind the blockhouse are the most extreme examples.

### *Artists' representations*

Clickimin appears in a number of 19th century sketches and also some early photographs. These tend to emphasise the dilapidated nature of the site between interventions.

The earliest known example, dating from 1828<sup>15</sup>, shows the broch emerging from a tumbled mass of stone, with stretches of coursed masonry visible in the broch and in the outer walls. The loch level is shown as much higher than it became after late 19<sup>th</sup>-century drainage, with water lapping the outer wall, and shows the site in an open setting now lost to urban development.

A fine pen and ink sketch of 1875 shows a small stone structure at the end of the causeway nearest the site – this may have been erected after the 1860s work and appears to coincide with location of the foot-marked stone, but it may possibly be a repaired, ancient structure. In the latter case, it seems odd that it is not featured in Dryden's plans and sketches. The water level in this drawing is reduced from that in the 1828 sketch, though not fully down to its modern level<sup>16</sup>.

A George Washington Wilson image, around 1890, shows the broch, consolidated in 1861-2, rising clear above a tumbled mass of stone, with the loch level reduced to near its modern level<sup>17</sup>.

A 1906 image of ice being gathered from the frozen loch, with the site in the background, hints at a rather more ruinous state<sup>18</sup>: this would almost exactly coincide with the local MP's call for action, which led to Macleod's work on site. Macleod's work is evidenced by a few photographs held by HES (in the collections of the former RCAHMS) including a pair showing the blockhouse before and after extensive rebuilding and heightening<sup>19</sup>.

### *Reconstruction drawings*

The reconstruction drawings in Hamilton's 1968 report are some of the finest examples of Alan Sorrell's work, in his characteristic, rather gloomy, style. Sorrell is widely regarded as one of the classic depictees of imagined moments in the history of monuments, though the Iron Age inhabitants who feature in his Clickimin series seem rather anachronistic: more caveman than Celtic warrior<sup>20</sup>. Interestingly, there are a few unpublished sketches in RCAHMS collection and private hands of an alternative vision, some with etiolated figures featuring in a much more clean-cut and schematic version of

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<sup>15</sup> Flinn 1989 Plate XVI

<sup>16</sup> HES (Ex-RCAHMS collections) DP 149613

<sup>17</sup> Reproduced in Smith 2014, 9 (Figure 3)

<sup>18</sup> Reproduced in Henderson 1979 (Plate 88)

<sup>19</sup> HES (ex RCAHMS collections) SH 806 and A 52635

<sup>20</sup> Hamilton 1968, Sorrell drawings throughout.

Clickimin: the artist for these is unknown – they may even be Hamilton's own work.

More recent reconstruction drawings, used on site interpretation panels and in recent guidebooks, tend to be less stylised (and stylish) than Sorrell's classics. They clearly show the influence of changes in general broch theories – for example the abandonment of the idea of unroofed or partially roofed brochs in favour of fully roofed examples. They also show life within the broch as a vision of domestic felicity, which derives from the view prevalent in the late 1990 and early 2000s of brochs as the residences of comfortably-placed farming families rather than as the strongholds of embattled defenders or a military elite: an interpretation which is by no means proven.

If it could be assembled, a complete chronological survey of how Clickimin has been depicted in official and unofficial art would undoubtedly offer much of interest, not least showing how changing theories impact on how sites are imagined and depicted, and the extent to which reconstruction drawings are, and are not, based on the evidence of the sites they purport to portray.

## 2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

Clickimin sits on a low grassy promontory beside a small loch. It is bordered to the south (the line of approach for visitors) by one of the few remaining areas of open fields which have not been built over by the steady expansion of the town of Lerwick. It therefore offers a small oasis of tranquillity within easy walking distance of the town centre, and can be visited by itself or as part of a longer walking route which takes in the nearby coastline. Because it is seldom visited by large parties of organised tourists, it is usually possible to stroll around the site without feeling crowded. On the other hand, its proximity to the town means that it tends to suffer from regular, though usually minor, vandalism and anti-social behaviour, which can detract from the pleasure of the visitor experience. (As can the very occasional presence of small groups of archaeologists heatedly debating the latest version of the site sequence!)

## 2.6 Natural heritage values

Clickimin is not particularly noted for its natural heritage interest, and there are no natural heritage designations<sup>21</sup>.

The very well-manicured site does not lend itself to the support of wildlife, although a few starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* regularly nest in crannies in the stonework. The commoner species of gull are also regularly present, though black-headed gulls *Larus ridibundus* have ceased to breed on the far side of the loch.

The broch offers a viewpoint across the loch, which is visited in winter months by a range of wildfowl, especially ducks and swans. Like all of Shetland, the oceanic location and the presence of a sizeable and skilled local community of ornithologists results in occasional rarities being sighted around the loch,

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<sup>21</sup> Checked against SNH online database 15 November 2018



but there is no evidence that the presence of the archaeological site is a factor in their settling at Clickimin rather than elsewhere.

Otters *Lutra lutra* formerly frequented the loch but are now very rarely seen.

The geology is of some interest<sup>22</sup>. Middle Old Red Sandstone beds (Devonian, about 400 million years old), typically flaggy in character, make up the underlying strata and outcrop on the nearby shoreline as well as the hillside to the west of the site. In the past these have been quarried for building – both for the structures on site and in later years for wider building purposes. The local stone is not so fine as that available elsewhere in the islands, for example on Mousa, and tended to be used more for simple walling rather than for quoins, lintels or other specialised building needs. At one time, the shortage of readily available stone in the immediate area led to the site itself being quarried. This ceased following a prosecution in 1888.

## 2.7 Contemporary / Use Values

Clickimin is well-used by local residents; its proximity to Lerwick encourages casual visits, and school groups also visit from time to time. Minor vandalism and occasional anti-social behaviour are sometimes an issue.

Clickimin features in most Shetland tourism information resources, including online, and is an objective for many first-time (and repeat) visitors, particularly independent travellers. Larger organised tour groups, for example cruise liner passengers, tend not to be taken to Clickimin, partly because of the greater attractions of Jarlshof and Mousa, and partly because parking immediately beside the site access path is limited.

Clickimin is much less evident than either Mousa or Jarlshof in the work of local artists, including photographers.

While recognition of the uniqueness of brochs in general, and of Mousa and other Shetland brochs in particular, has led to a locally-led campaign towards nomination of several broch sites as part of a bid for UNESCO World Heritage Status, Clickimin does not belong to the group of sites proposed, primarily due to doubts about the authenticity of the structures as now displayed, but also due to the ongoing debate over the site sequence. [“Mousa, Old Scatness and Jarlshof: the Crucible of Iron Age Shetland” was accepted onto the official UK Tentative List for World Heritage Status in 2011<sup>23</sup>.]

## 3 Major gaps in understanding

A wide range of unanswered questions surround brochs in general, despite two centuries of excavation, study and theorising (see Appendices 3 & 4).

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<sup>22</sup> Mykura 1976 pp 62-64

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.shetlandamenity.org/world-heritage-status> accessed 6 September 2018

This section examines those questions to which Clickimin might offer evidence:

- **When were brochs built and how do they relate to other Iron Age structures?** It is unfortunate that the very attractive and dramatic narrative for Clickimin published in 1968 is no longer tenable, because this was undoubtedly a major aspect of the site's interest for casual visitors and archaeologists alike. There is little of the surface of the site which has not be deliberately or accidentally disturbed during three major excavations. The best hope of surviving in situ dating evidence lies buried below the wall-bases of the various upstanding structures: accessing, or even assessing the potential for this would involve disturbance to the fabric. Given the much-consolidated and altered nature of that fabric, this might not be considered less unthinkable than at some other, less altered, sites.
- **Where were the first "true" brochs built?** At present this question cannot be resolved, since many early excavations (as at Clickimin) took place before the advent of modern scientific techniques such as radiocarbon dating. The question of local or national primacy could only be explored through the excavation of many other broch sites. Clickimin has in the past been advanced as the place in which brochs first appeared, at least in Shetland. While the supposed evidence for this is no longer accepted, it must be remembered that an early date has not actually been disproven. The presence on site of other structures, including the blockhouse and the outer wall, make Clickimin worth continuing consideration as ideas about broch origins continue to be debated.
- **Was Clickimin built by (and/or for) long-resident Shetlanders or by recent incomers?** This cannot be answered on the basis of existing evidence. Most current opinions would favour the physical work of constructing Shetland's brochs being done by Shetland hands, but opinions differ as to who might have initiated this. Views on this latter point have included: an elite who invaded in force (from Orkney or even from south-west Britain), an immigrant elite who came in smaller numbers but brought new ideas which changed Shetland society, or an emergent local elite seeking to increase territorial control or responding to some external threat. Evidence may emerge, from new excavations or analysis of artefacts, to support one or other of these ideas more strongly: the museum-curated, excavated material from Clickimin still has the potential to contribute to such studies.
- **How did environmental conditions change over time, before, during and after the establishment of the site?** It is believed the loch has never been dredged, which means sediments on its floor might allow paleo-environmental analysis to modern standards. This would help to establish a more accurate history for the loch itself (was it ever a sea inlet, when did that cease, are the flooding episodes claimed by the excavator valid?). At the same time, such work might establish a chronology for changing land-use in its small catchment.

- **What potential is there for re-examination of finds** e.g. pottery from the site which may yield more information with modern investigative techniques.

Additionally, as a structure which attracted early and repeated antiquarian attention and was later to become one of the earliest Scheduled Monuments, and Properties in Care in Scotland, Clickimin has a very high potential to offer evidence towards topics of more recent interest, including:

- **Changes in how conservation philosophy and practice have developed over time, especially for drystone prehistoric constructions.** Clickimin's history of exploration, detailed in Appendix 3, is one of the classic examples of well-intended archaeological intervention, with three separate generations, each working to the best of current standards, only to be criticised by following generations. Yet these actions undoubtedly saved the structures, and the site's setting, for us to enjoy: without them the remains might well have been destroyed by now.
- **The development of concepts such as the importance, significance and value of heritage, at regional, national and international level.** Clickimin offers a very important example of how monuments have come to be valued, with Britain's first ever prosecution for damaging a protected monument occurring in 1888. From the 1930s onwards, diffusionist models of social change came into vogue, and Clickimin has played a major role in explanatory narratives for the appearance and spread of brochs based upon diffusionist hypotheses.
- **The changing role of physical and virtual reconstruction in relation to prehistoric sites.**

#### 4 Associated properties

4a Associated properties managed by HES

- **Jarlshof** (broch and associated remains, Shetland – excavations completed immediately prior to Clickimin and strongly influenced expectations at the latter site)
- **Ness of Burgi** (fort, Shetland – similar to blockhouse element at Clickimin)
- **Mousa** (broch, Shetland – the archetypal broch tower)
- **Gurness** (broch and associated remains, Orkney – has external enclosure, as does Clickimin)
- **Midhowe** (broch and associated remains, Orkney – has forework which may be analogous to Clickimin blockhouse)
- **Càrn Liath** (broch, Highland – has external enclosure, as does Clickimin)
- **Dun Dornaigil** (broch, Highland)
- **Dun Beag** (broch, Highland)
- **Dun Telve** (broch, Highland)
- **Dun Troddan** (broch, Highland)
- **Dun Carloway** (broch, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)

- **Edin's Hall** (broch and associated remains, Scottish Borders – heavily rebuilt after early excavation)

4b Associated property managed by another organisation

- **Old Scatness** (broch and associated remains, Shetland)

4c Other associated sites

A number of other broch sites have been subject to work to make them more accessible to visitors, although this has often been done as part of time-limited funding programmes. Examples of such sites include Nybster and Dunbeath (Highland), while at time of writing a major excavation and consolidation programme is under way at Clachtoll (Highland).

## 5 Keywords

Broch; Blockhouse; Forework; Causeway; Iron Age; Prehistoric; Solid-based; Intra-mural stair; Guard cell; Entrance passage; Inter-visibility; drystone

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*[Note: The exact dates of printing and publication of the volume containing the above paper remains unclear. Containing a range of longer papers about brochs by different authors, with illustrations of a quality much superior to that possible at the time in the Society’s Proceedings, it may have appeared in sections, only being bound up as a composite volume some years afterwards: research into the records of the Society of Antiquaries have so far failed to clarify this. Dates ranging from 1875 to 1890 have been offered by different commentators, but this account cites the known date on which Dryden presented his paper to the Society, 13 May 1872.]*

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## Appendices

## Appendix 1: Timeline

*Note: this is a simplified and shortened timeline and differs considerably from that set out in the 1968 excavation report summarised in Appendix 3.*

### **Iron Age (middle)**

Construction of broch and causeway, sometime after 400 BC, followed shortly by construction of blockhouse (probably soon after broch) and outer wall, which may originally have butted onto the ends of the blockhouse

Instability in broch wall: masonry platform constructed to shore up broch wall

Insertion of masonry walling inside broch central space, possible reduction in height of broch

Construction of small buildings outside the broch, on the west side of the site (including the so-called “Bronze Age house”)

### **Iron Age (late)**

Construction of several sub-circular houses, partially dug into the accumulating mound of remains (including the house behind the blockhouse)

c. AD 600 Site abandoned and slowly deteriorates

### **19th century**

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| 1814    | Walter Scott visits  |
| 1861-2  | First campaign of excavation and consolidation (concentrates on the broch tower and possibly the blockhouse)   |
| 1874?   | Wall constructed across north end of causeway to exclude cattle, which can now gain access as loch level has been lowered  |
| c. 1881 | Systematic removal of stone for building   |
| 1882    | Site is scheduled (as the term was originally understood), being named on the Schedule to the Ancient Monuments Protection Act which was passed on 18 August 1882          |
| 1888    | Systematic removal of stone for building – successful prosecution.   |
| 1888    | State (Office of Works) takes on responsibility for maintaining the site and for providing access and interpretation, though title to the land remains with the proprietor |

## **20th century**

- 1907-9 Second campaign of excavation and consolidation (repairs the broch again, heightens blockhouse, rebuilds looted outer enclosure wall on east side of site, partially clears small buildings on west side of site)
- c.1930 Access path constructed
- 1930 Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland investigators visit, prepare record drawings (possibly simply adapting Paterson's of 1919) – not published until 1946
- 1953-7 Third phase of excavation and consolidation
- c.1970 New access path constructed, boundary fencing adjusted to present lines
- 1992 Scheduling Amended

## **Appendix 2: Site Description**

Note: This description is of the visible structure and attempts to avoid assertions about their date relative to each other unless this is clearly demonstrated on site. (The construction sequence proposed by Hamilton, and more recent alternative versions, are described separately – see Appendix 3. See also a full site description in Mackie<sup>24</sup> )

The structures are described in the order encountered by a modern visitor approaching the site.

The site occupies a promontory in a freshwater loch: this was an island before the lowering of the loch level began in 1874. The area around the loch has been largely built over since the 1940s, but was formerly farmland, though little of it was of good quality.

The modern access path leads from the main road downhill toward the broch. Its northern end runs parallel and just to the west of the remaining portion of the ancient stone-built causeway, which was formerly more extensive. Set into the northern end of this causeway is a large slab of stone into which are carved two small footprints, side by side and two small cup-marked features, one between and behind the heels and one between and ahead of the toes. This is now sheltered by another large slab raised on low walling. The date at which the stone and its shelter were emplaced is not clear: the stone may be ancient. The shelter does not appear clearly on any illustration prior to 1875.

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<sup>24</sup> MacKie 2002, 90-96 for a more detailed description (although some of the dates given are incorrect)

There is a slight dip between the end of the causeway and a low stone-edged platform which has been called a “landing stage”: this attribution is now doubted.

Beyond this is the sole entrance through a solid stone-built wall which encircles the former island. This wall is of variable thickness, but towards the entrance its width expands noticeably, suggesting some elaboration – perhaps a slightly greater height with lintels spanning the narrow entrance passage. It stands between 1m and 1.4m high, and shows signs of multiple building phases.

Once into this enclosure, a substantial block of drystone masonry looms straight ahead. This has been variously termed a blockhouse, a gatehouse and a forework: the term blockhouse is used in this document. Over 12m long along its outer face and 3m thick, the blockhouse curves gently in harmony with outer wall, and stands to just over 2m in height, having been rebuilt to this height in 1907-9. A narrow passageway passes through it, with the indents of a vanished door-frame and a bar-slot half-way along. Above this entrance passage is space which also gives access to a gallery in the thickness of the blockhouse wall. This gives access to the tops of two oval chambers within its thickness: these appear to have no other entry point. A stone stairway, inserted or heavily repaired at a later date, ascends from the blockhouse’s western end. A ledge or scarcement runs along the back (inner) face of this blockhouse at the same level as the gallery.

The area beyond the blockhouse passage appears to be the foundations of a small, roughly circular, building, partly dug into the large masonry platform above which rises the steep face of the central broch. This platform is present only on the south and west of the broch.

Moving clockwise around the site from the front of the blockhouse, there are the remains of several slightly-constructed buildings, accessed from an irregular passage. These butt up against the inner side of the outer enclosure wall. The most northerly building has an oval plan with side chambers, a long-lived plan which has been dated at other sites from the Neolithic to the pre-Norse times (c. 3000 BC to c. AD 700). Just before this house is reached, the entrance passage to the broch opens up to the right.

The broch entrance passes first through an outer masonry platform, about 1.5m high, passing under a massive outer lintel which is set at an angle. It is not possible to determine on superficial evidence whether this outer platform, which occurs only on the south and west of the broch, is earlier or later than the broch itself.

The broch is about 20m in diameter with an internal space about 10m across. It stands to about 5m high and was once taller, although its original height cannot now be determined. As is common in brochs, the passage expands about half-way along, where there are upright slabs against which a wooden door frame could have fitted. The side walls of the entrance passage walls have been much rebuilt: earlier accounts suggest that a chamber (or “guard-

cell”) opened off the right-hand side entrance passage, and hints in the walling support this idea. The broch as constructed had at least two oval chambers in the base of its thick wall. Above this level it was double-skinned, with a narrow gallery running around the entire circuit. The gallery is unusually low, and it is not as horizontal as is usual: these oddities may result from Victorian rebuilding. There is a chamber above the inner end of the entrance passage, which allows a downward view between the stone lintels which roof the entrance passage. On the outer face of the broch, two further unusual features are evident. On the north-west side of the broch wall-foot is a short projecting spur of masonry, while on the north-east side is a small secondary entrance, at approximately the same level as the first gallery floor. The spur of masonry may have been added during consolidation in the 1900s, whereas the secondary entrance certainly pre-dates 1860 and may be Iron Age, either an original feature (which would make Clickimin unique) or a later modification (for which examples exist at a few other brochs).

Within the broch’s central area, walling has been constructed up against the inner face of the broch wall, partially blocking access to the chambers in the broch wall-base. This has reduced the interior to an oval plan. A square stone hearth (reconstructed) and the remains of a number of stone-packed post-holes are visible in the floor.

The remainder of the area enclosed by the outer wall, lying to the north and east of the broch, contrasts with the “busy” area to the south and west. It is largely flat, with just a few small upright stones hinting at the vanished presence of structures.

### **Appendix 3: Clickimin’s discovery, excavation, consolidation and interpretation – shaping a contested narrative**

Although brochs attracted increasing antiquarian attention from the early 18th century, as part of a growing upsurge in such interests and in leisure travel, Clickimin’s relatively ruinous state meant it did not initially exercise the same level of fascination as several other brochs. For example, the Reverend George Low, touring in 1774, did not single out Clickimin for attention: he illustrated Mousa, West Burrafirth, Burray (Yell) and Snabrough (Unst), as well as the blockhouse site at Loch of Huxter (Whalsay) which has close affinities with Clickimin<sup>25</sup>.

Walter (later Sir Walter) Scott visited the site on successive days in 1814<sup>26</sup>. On Thursday August 8<sup>th</sup> he visited with Captain McDiarmid of the Lerwick garrison. He found little to retain his attention that day, commenting merely that “These Duns, or Picts’ Castles, are so small it is impossible to conceive what effectual purpose they could serve excepting a temporary refuge for the chief.”<sup>27</sup> The following day, however, he was persuaded by a local proprietor and old acquaintance of his father, one Mr Mowat, to re-visit the site, and this time gives a more detailed description. Though Scott’s text is confusing in

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<sup>25</sup> Low 1894

<sup>26</sup> Scott 1982

<sup>27</sup> Scott 1982, 27-28

certain respects, it constitutes the most detailed published description which pre-dates the major works undertaken in 1861. Scott wrote:

*“It is of considerable size and consists of three circular walls, of huge natural stones admirably combined without cement. The outer wall seems to have been simply a bounding wall of bulwark; the second or interior defence contains lodgements such as I shall describe.”*

*“This inner circuit is surrounded by a wall about sixteen or eighteen feet thick... The wall is not perpendicular, but the circle lessens gradually towards the top, as in an old-fashioned pigeon-house. Up the interior of this wall there proceeds a circular winding gallery ascending in the form of an inclined plane, so as to gain the top by circling round like a corkscrew within the walls. Tis is enlightened by little apertures (about two feet by three) and also – it is said – by small slits, of which I saw none. It is said there are marks of galleries within the circuit, running parallel to the horizon; these I saw no remains of; and the interior gallery, with its apertures, is so extremely low and narrow – being only about three feet square – that it is difficult to conceive how it could serve the purpose of communication.”*

*“At any rate, the size fully justifies the tradition, prevalent here as well as in the south of Scotland, that the Picts were a diminutive race...”<sup>28</sup>*

Scott's description, as mentioned, is problematic. Three walls become two, but this does not seem to be because he counted the inner and outer skins of the broch as two separate walls – he refers to the gallery within the wall (singular). He also refers to the broch as the *inner* circuit, which may suggest he saw the blockhouse as constituting part of a middle circuit between the outer wall and the broch, but does not otherwise describe this. This lack of clarity is doubly unfortunate given the later rebuilding and contested interpretation of the site and its sequence.

Hibbert visited in 1822, and gives an account which offers complementary details:

*“...the foundations of a small circular burgh; contained within the wall of it are several distinct chambers...about 10 or 12 feet in length and 3 feet in width. On certain places on the north and north west of the building, straight walls have been extended from the exterior or the burgh to the water's edge, by which means an additional defence has been rendered and small enclosures formed for the temporary protection of cattle. South of the holm stepping stones communicate with the shore; and to guard this exposed point a mural outwork of a concentric form shelters this part of the fortress. In one place, I traced the remains of a subterranean passage which led to the water's edge, whereby a supply of fresh water might be obtained for the use of the little garrison which was engaged in defending the holm.”<sup>29</sup>*

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<sup>28</sup> Scott 1982, 31

<sup>29</sup> Hibbert 1822, 280

**Note: Content from here to the end of this section is based largely on the thoughtful discussion published in 2014 by Brian Smith, which should be consulted for more detail and comprehensive list of sources<sup>30</sup>.**

Sketches made in the decades following Scott's visit show a ruinous site which was still being actively destroyed. In 1849 it was reported that "very few traces of its original construction are left".

Sir Henry Dryden visited in 1855 and sketched what was then visible. Dryden's first visit to Shetland was the trigger for work at Mousa supported by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (which later received Dryden's drawings and reports), which led to the owner of Mousa clearing and repairing the broch there.

Not to be outdone, the Shetland Literary and Scientific Society, led by their Secretary, Robert Neven Spence, took up a subscription to excavate Clickimin. They concentrated on the broch, which they dug out to reveal "a passage in the centre the wall, stairs, doors and chambers". Work ended in January 1862 when the money ran out. Although not recorded, it seems that work was also undertaken to the blockhouse at this time, as Dryden was able to record this feature in detail on his return in 1866. His plans and sections show just how much had been revealed by this amateur but by no means careless work. His description and especially his drawings expand on the short account published by Irvine<sup>31</sup>.

Casual vandalism and systematic stone-removal resumed after this work, despite repeated local protests. In 1884 the proprietor, Lady Eliza Nicholson, announced that she would initiate prosecutions against anyone who removed stones or damaged the site. (The recently passed 1882 Ancient Monuments Protection Act had opened up this possibility, by making Clickimin a protected or "scheduled" monument.)

In 1888 Hugh Mackay, a butcher who lived nearby and had also been involved in lowering the loch level, sent masons to Clickimin to prepare and remove stone for building (probably not for the first time, since he had also been accused in 1881). Mackay was duly charged and summoned before the Sheriff Court, where he was fined £9 10s and ordered to return the stone. This is believed to have been the first prosecution anywhere under the 1882 Act.

Following widespread national newspaper coverage of the court case, the Inspector of Ancient Monuments, General Pitt-Rivers, visited Lady Nicholson at her home in Cheltenham and persuaded her to pass the site into State care, which she did (albeit with some reluctance) in the same year. An official notice was erected to mark this change, with a warning that vandals would be prosecuted.

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<sup>30</sup> Smith 2014, 1-31

<sup>31</sup> Irvine 1866; Dryden 1872

But little else seems to have followed, except for the ongoing deterioration of the site. By 1906, this had progressed so far that the long-serving MP for Orkney and Shetland, Cathcart Wason<sup>32</sup> raised the matter in the House of Commons. By chance, the Office of Works was about to commence work on Lerwick's new Post Office – a splendid building on the seafront, which is still in use. The Clerk of Works for the Post Office project, Henry Macleod, was instructed to repair the broch as well: it is not known if he had any previous experience of working with ancient monuments.

With a squad of labourers, Macleod worked sporadically on the site over the next three years. While surviving records are very limited it seems clear, from photographs taken before, during and after, that Macleod was responsible for the consolidation and heightening of the blockhouse, the excavation and consolidation of the outer wall – almost three-quarters of which he appears to have rebuilt from ground-level, it having been removed by Mackay and others – and of most of the structures between it and the broch, as well as refreshing the 1860s consolidation of the broch itself.

There is no record of any archaeological oversight and it is not known if any architectural historian offered input: unfortunately, detailed Office of Works records have not been located and there was no publication, only brief notes and a few photographs survive in the collections of HES<sup>33</sup>. It seems Macleod “repaired” the site so thoroughly that in 1910 a local councillor observed that “...the monument has been destroyed. It is a modern structure now; it is not an ancient monument.”<sup>34</sup>

From 1910 onwards, the stonework was maintained during occasional visits from the Office of Works squad. In 1930, the Royal Commission visited and planned the site, with scant reference to the relatively recent work which had shaped its appearance. G. P. H. Watson, RCAHMS investigator, drew the conclusion, based on the character of the stonework, that “the broch, bulwark [=blockhouse] and enclosing wall are of one time.” In 1951, in the first of a series of guide booklets<sup>35</sup>, Stewart Cruden of the Ministry of Works described the structures but did not offer an explicit sequence – although he regarded the platform at the foot of the broch's southern and eastern wall as possibly buttressing for an unstable broch, he conceded it might be older than the broch tower, and he saw the blockhouse as broadly contemporary with, or even later than, the broch – both views with which more recent scenarios would support.

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<sup>32</sup> Wason was a member of the Viking Club, later The Viking Society for Northern Research, founded in London in 1892. Around 1906 it had largely transformed itself from a social club for those from Orkney and Shetland into a serious society with research at its heart, largely philological and historical rather than archaeological. (Source: Townsend, JAB 1993 “The Viking Society: A Centenary History”, *Saga-Book* 23 (1990-3), 180-212.)

<sup>33</sup> HES (ex RCAHMS collections) SHD/8/107

<sup>34</sup> Councillor Sutherland, quoted in the Shetland news of 7 May 1910 (reference courtesy of Brian Smith)

<sup>35</sup> Cruden 1951



The view that all the structural elements were broadly speaking of broch period (defined then as in the last century BC or the early centuries AD), apart from some later modifications, was first challenged in the early 1950s by W. Douglas Simpson, who suggested something very different. His view was that the blockhouse pre-dated the broch and went with a version of the outer wall which was later modified. He argued that brochs had developed over an extended period of time, and came to believe that Clickimin might be “specially important in the history of those structures”. [These ideas, which Simpson aired in a public lecture in Lerwick in April 1953 and published the next year<sup>36</sup>, had almost certainly been discussed with John Hamilton of the Ministry of Works, who was excavating at Jarlshof at the time, and on Hamilton’s own account first occurred to Simpson in 1950<sup>37</sup>. Certainly, Hamilton went on wholeheartedly to adopt and expand upon Simpson’s views.]

Hamilton began work at Clickimin in summer 1953. He brought an explicit agenda to his task: disappointed at Jarlshof by the lack of evidence there for the arrival of overseas invaders (the arrival of the broch men<sup>38</sup>, who he firmly believed had built the brochs, he hoped to find that evidence at Clickimin.

Hamilton placed himself under the impression that the site “remained virtually untouched”<sup>39</sup> before he started to excavate between the standing structures. Quite how he reached this view is a mystery, since the extent of the 1861 work would have been apparent to him had he consulted Dryden’s and Irvine’s publications. Macleod’s work in the 1900s was rather less well known (Simpson for example did not mention it in his 1954 paper) but there were living witnesses in Lerwick. One of his local workmen (who wished to remain anonymous) reported in later years that “we told him all this but he did not want to hear” (in a 1977 conversation with Noel Fojut, then a research student at Glasgow University).

Excavating over five seasons, Hamilton found what he interpreted as evidence for a long and complex sequence of occupations and distinct construction events. Although he conceded that many of the deposits he excavated were “mixed”, he stuck firmly to his position that the site was largely undisturbed – something which may have been true only for the lowest levels within the broch.

Hamilton offered glimpses of his evolving and increasingly elaborate interpretation in public lectures and essays. He wrote up a monograph on the site over several years. In 1965 this was sufficiently advanced for the Ministry of Works to announce that Hamilton had solved “the problem of the brochs”. When fully published in 1968, Hamilton’s sequence for Clickimin spanned 1400 years and involved a full-scale Celtic invasion, several episodes of defensive building, a dramatic flood and parallels drawn from early Irish

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<sup>36</sup> Simpson 1954

<sup>37</sup> Hamilton 1968, 11

<sup>38</sup> Hamilton 1968, 4

<sup>39</sup> Smith 2014, 4, footnote 14 for Hamilton’s use of this phrase

literature about cattle-raiding and kingship. Enlivened by Alan Sorrell's moody reconstruction sketches, the report was widely reviewed and its claims were taken, at least by the interested public, at face value. Hamilton's sequence became the standard story of the site for a generation<sup>40</sup>.

In bare summary, Hamilton's published sequence runs thus<sup>41</sup>:

700 BC	Late Bronze Age farmstead established (the small house just before the outer end of the broch entrance passage) on a promontory in a shallow inlet of the sea.
500 BC	Iron Age farmstead (a round house on the site of the later broch) <i>Invasion of Celtic settlers from south-western Britain or north-western France</i>
400 BC	Iron Age fort – first phase (the outer wall and the blockhouse) <i>Site flooded following a major storm, which blocked seaward drainage with a shingle beach and converted the bay into a freshwater loch</i>
250 BC	Site abandoned
100 BC	Iron Age fort – second phase (the ringwork = large masonry platform at the base of the broch, plus modification of the outer wall)
BC/AD	Broch built on abandoned ringwork
200 AD	Wheelhouse (structures inside the broch and modifications of structures outside it)
600 AD	Late Wheelhouse period (the causeway, foot-marked stone and huts behind the blockhouse and elsewhere on site)
800 AD	Site abandoned

Soon after publication, some with a detailed knowledge of the Scottish Iron Age expressed doubts about the published account, doubts regarding both the security of the stratigraphic sequence and the validity of the supposed evidence for invasion<sup>42</sup>. But by and large, Hamilton's sequence, set out compellingly and with great circumstantial detail, became widely accepted for two decades. It is still widely cited in general publications.

Reappraisal of Hamilton's scenario resumed a decade later, as part of wider questioning of the invasion hypothesis for the origin of Scotland's brochs and also in the course of a systematic survey of all Shetland's broch sites. In

<sup>40</sup> Hamilton 1970 – the official guidebook, reprinted in 1983 and later.

<sup>41</sup> Hamilton 1968, 3 (Figure 3)

<sup>42</sup> Stevenson 1970, 123; Fairhurst 1971, 121

1980, in his unpublished PhD thesis, Noel Fojut had argued that the supposedly early Iron Age pottery at Clickimin did not come from securely stratified contexts, and was able to cite Hamilton's own publication in support of this conclusion, showing that much of it came from deposits in excavation areas outside the outer wall. He further suggested that the crucial "imported" pottery was of post-broch, not pre-broch, date and that it was probably locally produced. Based on unpublished evidence supplied by the now-retired excavator, Fojut was able to show that the proposed early Iron Age roundhouse could not have existed. He also suggested that the site had not been occupied in the later Bronze Age at all<sup>43</sup>. Although widely discussed with other broch students, it was not until 1998 that Fojut's reappraisal was published, along with a proposal for a shorter and rather simpler sequence<sup>44</sup>.

By this time, evidence had emerged during road improvement works to the south east of the site which ruled out Hamilton's supposed middle Iron Age flooding episode and instead suggested that the site had remained an island up until recent times.

Euan MacKie described and discussed the site in his corpus of broch sites, published in 2002<sup>45</sup>. Although he slightly amended the relationships of the outer wall, the blockhouse and the broch, he showed more respect for Hamilton's conclusions about the stratigraphic and artefactual sequence than had Fojut. Having inspected the site on several occasions and also having examined the pottery in the Shetland Museum, in 2008 MacKie revised his views again, with a more radical re-dating of the sequence (albeit one which still retained the key features of Hamilton's 1968 narrative)<sup>46</sup>. In this, MacKie discounted the by now widely expressed doubts over the contextual security of the excavated artefacts and the nature of the so-called "exotic" pottery, arguing confidently for an arrival from north-west France in the 6th century BC. In stark contrast, Dennis Harding observed that "In terms of absolute chronology, the Clickimin sequence remains entirely speculative."<sup>47</sup> Harding's view seems the more reasonable conclusion, given Clickimin's extremely chequered history.

Since then, two further significant publications have appeared. Brian Smith, Shetland Archivist, produced a detailed exposition covering the site's history before Hamilton's excavation, a discussion of the reception which Hamilton's report received, an analysis of many points in Hamilton's interpretation which are not substantiated by sound evidence and an account of more recent views<sup>48</sup>. Smith offered an even shorter sequence of construction: essentially a single scheme of building undertaken over a few years which had then been obscured, rather than revealed, by repeated excavation and consolidation – this was in essence a return to the view prevailing until 1953. And 2015 saw the publication of the Iron Age phases at Old Scatness, in which the

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<sup>43</sup> Fojut 1980

<sup>44</sup> Fojut 1998

<sup>45</sup> MacKie 2002

<sup>46</sup> MacKie 2008

<sup>47</sup> Harding 2009, 125

<sup>48</sup> Smith 2014

artefactual analysis solidly supported the views of Stevenson, Fojut and Harding and others in placing the crucial pottery forms, which Hamilton had cited as evidence for invasion, firmly into the post-broch period (at Old Scatness at least, no earlier than 200 BC)<sup>49</sup>.

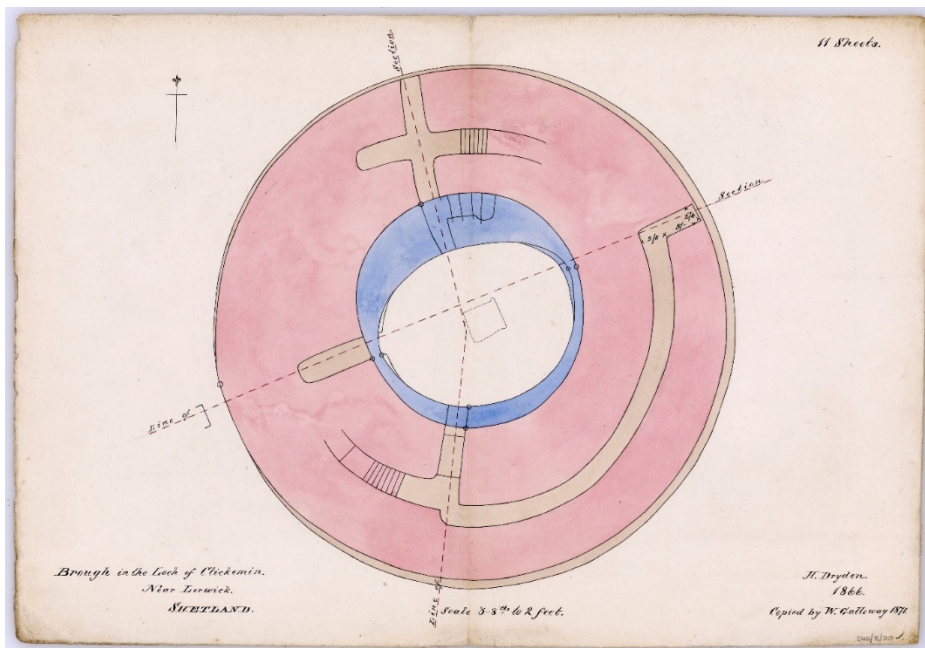
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<sup>49</sup> Dockrill et al, 2015, 313-40

## Appendix 4: Images



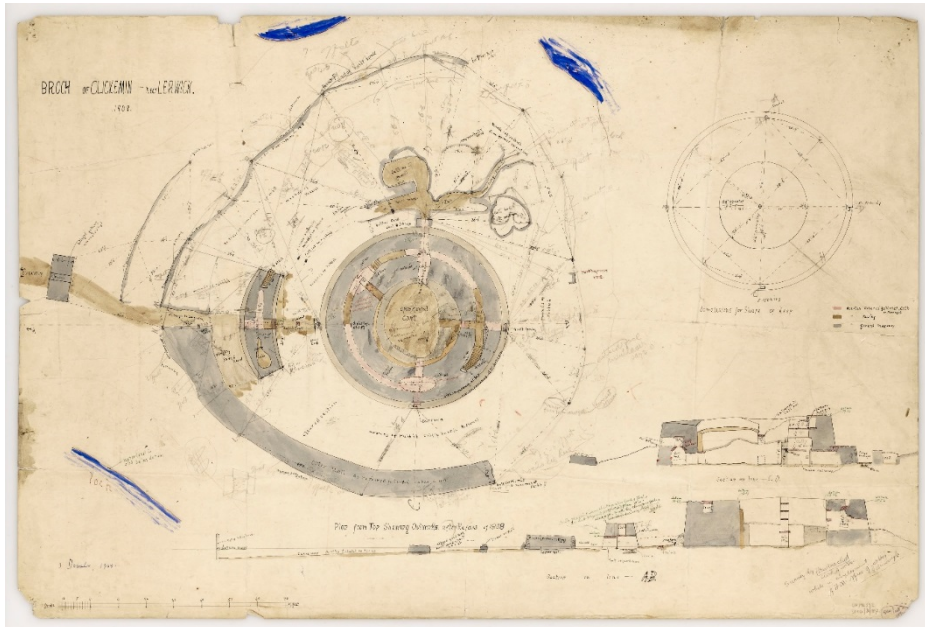
DP 260590 © Historic Environment Scotland. Aerial view in August 2017 showing the location: note the encircling suburban development



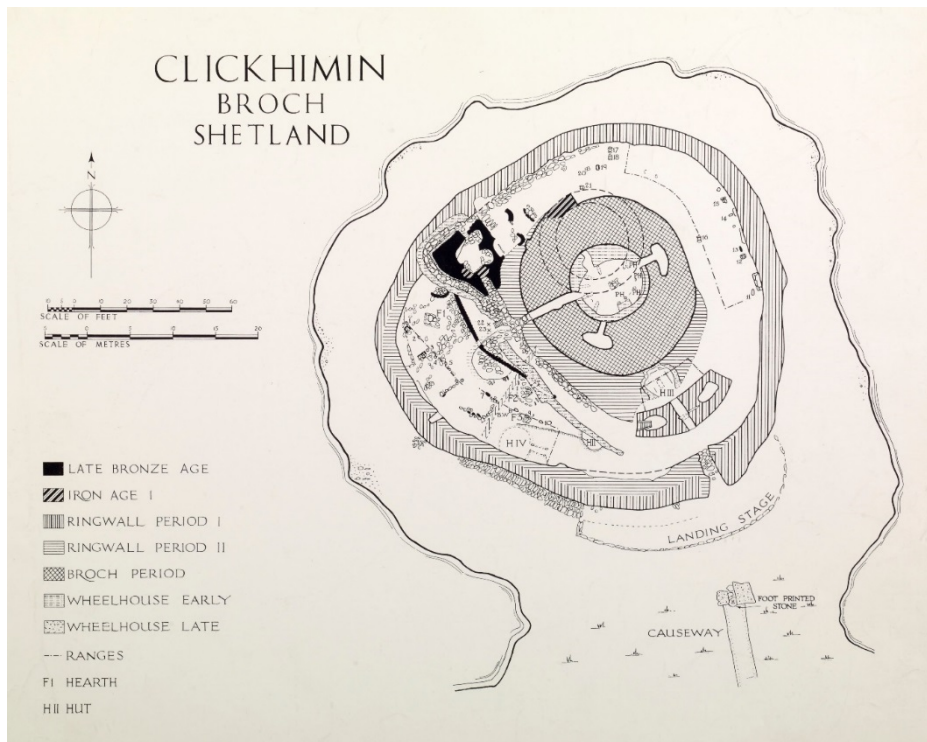
DP 149911 © Courtesy of HES (Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Collection). One of Dryden's neat plans from 1866, copied in 1871 by Galloway.



SC 1151590 © Courtesy of HES. - Unattributed photo apparently taken between 1861 and 1874 (on evidence of the loch level): note the modern blocking wall across the causeway.



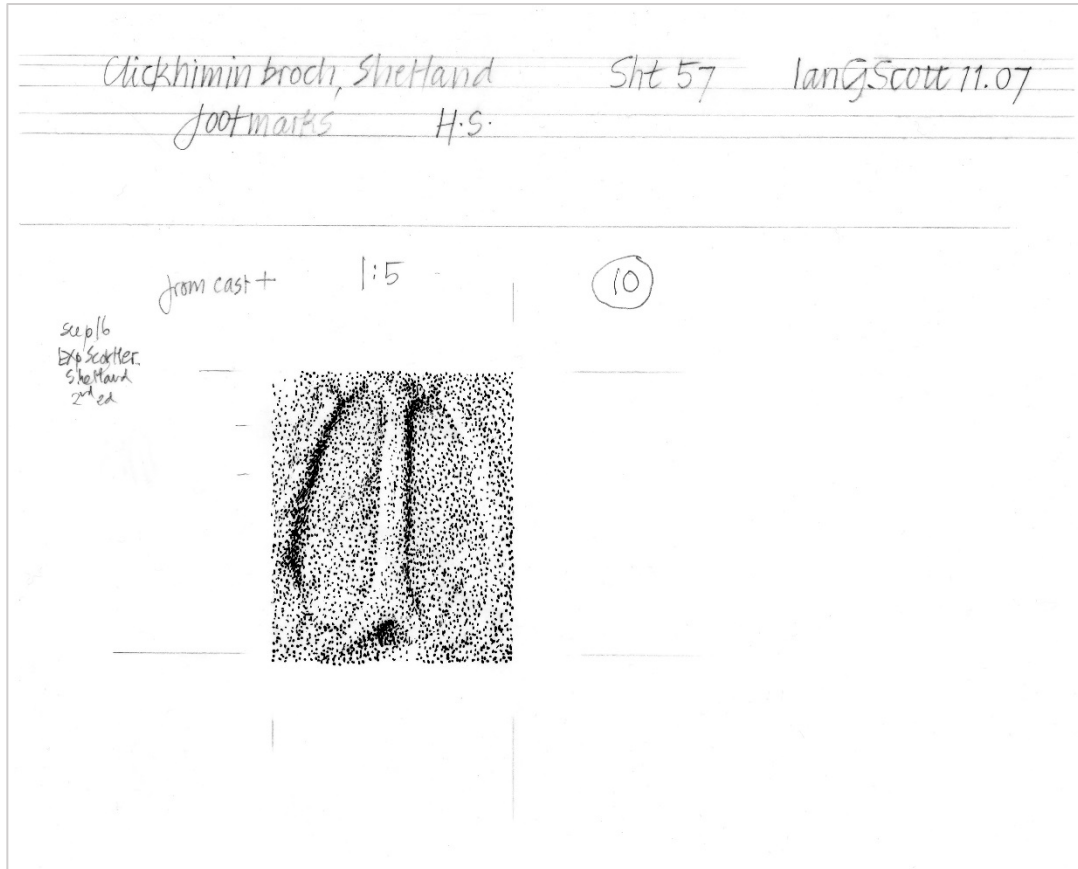
DP 194392 © Courtesy of HES. Macleod's site plan of 1908.



DP 228355 © Courtesy of HES. Hamilton's phase plan of 1968.



SC 1224136 © Courtesy of HES. The spur wall and second entrance in the broch wall.



SC 1134031 © Crown Copyright: HES (Drawing by I. G. Scott). Drawing of the 'foot-marked' stone.

## Appendix 5: A brief history of broch studies

### *Defining brochs*

For the purpose of this and other similar documents, the term “broch” is used to refer to what some researchers have called “fully formed” or “tower” brochs. There is no way of knowing exactly how many such structures once stood to heights approaching Mousa’s 13 metres plus, only that the visible surviving remains of many sites do not rule this out.

Dryden first attempted to define brochs in 1872:

“A broch is a circular tower formed of wall 10 to 16f thick at the base, enclosing a court from 24 to 38f diameter, with one entrance from the outside into the court. The usual thickness of wall is about 15f, and the usual diameter of the court about 28f. All were in outline truncated cones – that is, the outside of the wall “batters” or inclines inwards. The wall is also decreased in thickness towards the top by set-offs inside. The chambers of the broch proper are in the thickness of the walls, but there are usually partitions in the court of later construction. The original height of these towers of course varied, and except Mousa, we have no broch more than 20f high, but Mousa



is still 40f high and was somewhat more. No mortar was used in them, but probably the chinks were stopped with moss or mud just as in modern Shetland cottages.”<sup>50</sup>

There have been a number of definitions over intervening years, of which, that by MacKie in 1965, refreshed in 2002, remains the most influential. MacKie offered a tight definition of brochs, to distinguish them from other drystone structures of broadly similar date. For Mackie, for a structure to be classed as a broch required five essential characteristics which must all occur in combination: (1) a circular ground-plan, (2) a thick wall, (3) large size, (4) a ledge (or scarcement) on its inside wall face and (5) at least one “hollow wall feature” from a list of four: (5a) an upper gallery (that is, a hollow wall at a level higher than the ground level), (5b) a chamber over the entrance passage, (5c) a void or voids in the inner wall-face and (5d) an intra-mural stair at an upper level.

MacKie noted that some “classic” features of brochs, such as their narrow and well-built entrance passages, occur in other types of structure. He also excluded from broch-defining characteristics the possession of a hollow wall at the ground level only, and also the possession of a stair which starts at ground level unless it rises to a much higher level.

As MacKie noted, relatively few of the c.600 sites referred to as brochs can be shown to possess this set of features, and he proposed that “probable” brochs could be defined as possessing features 1 to 4 but not demonstrably possessing any of the hollow wall features, with possible brochs having “no diagnostic features exposed but which seem likely from their situation to be brochs”<sup>51</sup>.

The features of MacKie’s “brochs” and “probable brochs” are known to be present at no more than 15 percent of the 600-plus suggested broch sites in Scotland, and there is no knowing how many of the remainder might, or might not, reveal such features on excavation, which means that Scotland is known to possess at least 80 brochs but could in fact possess many more, not to mention sites lost or destroyed over the centuries before antiquarian interest.

Stepping back from technical structural definitions, it is common practice, where a broch has proved on excavation to be surrounded by a complex of smaller structures and sometimes also by outer walls and ditches, to refer to the entire site simply as a broch. (The Broch of Mousa is an example of a (more or less) solitary broch, whereas the Broch of Gurness comprises a broch surrounded by an extensive settlement and set within large ditches.)

Brochs are unique to Scotland, and one of Scotland’s few “endemic” prehistoric architectural forms. Their greatest concentration is in Orkney, Shetland, Caithness and East Sutherland, with more examples scattered rather more thinly across the Western Isles, Skye and the adjacent mainland,

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<sup>50</sup> Dryden 1872, 200

<sup>51</sup> MacKie 2002, 1-2

a few further south on the west coast and a handful of outlying examples in central, south-west and south-east Scotland.

*A brief account of broch studies*<sup>52</sup>

Brochs have been the subject of more research and discussion than perhaps any other type of ancient monument. It is necessary to review these antiquarian and archaeological debates in some detail, because the significance of Mousa (and other brochs in State care) lies to a considerable extent in how each site offers, or could offer, evidence in support of competing definitions of “broch-ness” and towards competing narratives about the origins, date, nature and purpose of these enigmatic sites. The outcome of a huge amount of study appears to be that very few of the key questions about brochs have been resolved, while at the same time new and even less answerable questions have been stimulated. All narratives rely to some extent on assumptions, and the most which can be hoped is that these are made explicit.

The word “broch” was being used by antiquarians alongside “brough”, “burgh” and “Picts’ House / Castle” by the early 1800s, and it was formally adopted by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in the early 1870s, though older usages lingered for a generation. Initially it signified a structure which was either, like Mousa, a tall-standing tower or which had a lower height but showed sufficient structural detail for its similarity with surviving tall-standing examples to be asserted with confidence.

It is worth noting in passing that “broch” does not seem to have been in popular usage for this class of structure: the only pre-1800 use of “broch” was in relation to the town of Fraserburgh, where Scotland’s first planned “new town” was created in the late 1500s and early 1600s, and referred to as “Fraser’s broch” or “Fraser’s burgh”<sup>53</sup>, suggesting that broch was a northern synonym for burgh. The nickname Broch is still in popular use today, especially in local newspapers, where it allows for a larger typeface and more striking headlines than does Fraserburgh<sup>54</sup>. And in the Western Isles and wider Gaelic-speaking area, the term “broch” was not used locally, even though the Old Norse root “borg” appears as “barp”- and “borve” in many place-names. The word dùn, a generic Gaelic word for fort, was used exclusively for all man-made prehistoric sites which appeared to be of a defensive nature.

As archaeological research and fieldwork progressed, the number of “possible” broch sites has risen to about 600<sup>55</sup>, although as time passed the majority of sites so designated were usually no more than large grass-covered mounds of masonry of approximately the right dimensions, which in

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<sup>52</sup> For a much more detailed treatment of the early years up to 1960 (but sadly partial and tendentious beyond that date) see MacKie 2002, 27-43

<sup>53</sup> Oram et al, 5

<sup>54</sup> One memorable headline from the Press and Journal, in 1980: “Broch man told lies to gain credit”

<sup>55</sup> Armit 2003

their physical appearance and siting appeared to informed observers less like a large burial cairn and more like a broch – a rather unsatisfactory approach, but one which persists in modern research.

A recent estimate is that only about 150 of 600+ “possible” broch sites show any details of built masonry at all, with about half of these, 70 or 80, either surviving as towers or showing sufficient structural evidence to suggest they could once have achieved such a height.<sup>56</sup> That said, when “possible” broch sites have been tested by full or partial excavation, or otherwise disturbed, they do prove more often than not to reveal features allowing them to be counted as brochs<sup>57</sup>. Additional “possible” sites continue to be added, and in some cases demonstrated to be brochs<sup>58</sup>. In summary, Scotland has at least 80 brochs, but may have many more.

It has been accepted from the early days of serious study that few other brochs had ever stood quite as tall as Mousa and the other partially surviving towers such as **Duns Telve**, **Troddan** and **Carloway**, though views vary radically as to just how many were towers at all. Scott in 1947 argued that only a dozen or so tall towers had ever existed across Scotland, with the rest simple solidly built low-rise farmhouses<sup>59</sup>. Graham immediately disputed this, based on data from Royal Commission surveys, and his view, that the majority of brochs were tall enough to be imposing, if not as lofty as Mousa, has been the prevailing view since then<sup>60</sup>.

Attempts to define “true” or “tower” brochs as distinct from a wider class of drystone-built forts and duns have tended to centre on the presence of specific constructional features: near-circular ground plan, hollow or galleried wall construction, single narrow entrance passage, staircase within the wall thickness, a wall thick enough to have supported a sufficient height to act as a defence, etcetera<sup>61</sup>.

Although early commentators tended to agree that brochs were originally unroofed towers, over time opinion has shifted to the extent that most commentators, while disagreeing about details, accept that brochs contained significant internal fittings, typically including one or more raised floors and some form of a roof, and that timber was the major component of these “now vanished” elements. However, such features are in all cases inferred, based on what makes best sense of surviving stone-built features such as scarcement ledges. Initially, it was suggested that broch roofs were “obviously” annular, lean-to structures leaving the centre for the inner space open to the sky (for light and smoke to escape)<sup>62</sup>. More recently, broch

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<sup>56</sup> Barber 2018

<sup>57</sup> E.g. Cloddie Knowe, trial trenched in 1988 (MacKie 2002 p 82)

<sup>58</sup> E.g. Channerwick, revealed in winter 2013/14 <http://scharp.co.uk/shoredig-projects/channerwick-broch/> accessed 6 September 2018 (illustration also shows Mousa used as the archetype of a broch)

<sup>59</sup> Scott 1947

<sup>60</sup> Graham 1947a and 1947b

<sup>61</sup> MacKie 2002, 1-2

<sup>62</sup> Curle 1921, 90-92

reconstructions have tended to feature conical roofs sitting on the wall-head or just below it, with the weight taken by stout posts<sup>63</sup>. Fojut (sceptically) and most recently Romankiewicz (more optimistically) are among those who have recently published on possible roofing structures<sup>64</sup>.

Physical evidence for such features is extremely rare amongst excavated broch sites, and even at the only two brochs where evidence of really substantial floor-set timber posts has been found, **Dun Troddan** (Highland)<sup>65</sup> and Leckie (Stirlingshire)<sup>66</sup>, these cannot conclusively be confirmed as having been constructed at the same time as the brochs<sup>67</sup>. The need for caution is emphasised by the substantial post-rings found at Buchlyvie (Stirlingshire)<sup>68</sup> and Càrn Liath (Highland – Sutherland)<sup>69</sup> which in both cases can be shown to relate to pre-broch roundhouses.

If all brochs were indeed fitted out in timber, this would have interesting implications for wider relationships, and poses the question of how quality timber for construction was obtained by those living in relatively treeless areas such as Shetland or the Western Isles.<sup>70</sup> The earlier view, that brochs as first constructed were not intended to be roofed, still has adherents, who offer an alternative view of brochs as a network of defensive lookout towers built in response to the threat of raiding or invasion. Smith has recently re-opened this debate by suggesting that Mousa and some other (although not all) brochs were never intended to be roofed<sup>71</sup>.

### *Broch origins*

The date and antecedents of brochs have been pushed progressively earlier. The idea that brochs were built by the Danes or Vikings<sup>72</sup> persisted for some decades, despite the outright rejection of this idea by Scandinavian antiquarians as early as 1852<sup>73</sup>. The alternative, that they were built as watch-towers by the native population against the Vikings, was also popular<sup>74</sup> and led to them being called “Picts’ House” or “Pictish Castle”. However, by the 1880s, it had become generally accepted that brochs were somewhat earlier, dating to what had come to be termed the Iron Age and constructed at a time when the Romans were expanding their Empire actively further south<sup>75</sup>.

As the discipline of archaeology developed, and in the absence of direct dating evidence, efforts were made to fit brochs into wider perspectives. The

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<sup>63</sup> For example that by Alan Braby, widely reproduced, e.g. in Armit and Fojut 1998, 15

<sup>64</sup> Fojut 2005b, 194-6; Romankiewicz 2016, 17-19

<sup>65</sup> Curle 1921, 90-92

<sup>66</sup> MacKie 2007, 1312-3 (see also MacKie 2016 for more detailed account)

<sup>67</sup> Fojut 2005b, 192-3

<sup>68</sup> Main 1989, 296-302

<sup>69</sup> Love 1989, 165

<sup>70</sup> Fojut 2005b, 196-9

<sup>71</sup> Smith 2016, 15

<sup>72</sup> Fergusson 1877, 630-9

<sup>73</sup> Worsaae 1852, 233

<sup>74</sup> Stuart 1857, 191-2

<sup>75</sup> Anderson 1883

idea of a series of “cliff castles” along the west coast of Britain, originating in Cornwall and gradually spreading north as they increased in architectural sophistication and complexity, was proposed<sup>76</sup>, and led to the dominance of various “diffusionist” models, in which brochs were seen as the strongholds of an incoming elite<sup>77</sup>. Elaborate “family trees” of Iron Age fortification across western Europe were drawn up, culminating in the broch, and these carried some influence well into the 1980s<sup>78</sup>.

The discovery in excavated broch sites of some types of artefacts with similarities to those found in southern England and Brittany was held to support this idea, with any thought that their presence might have arisen through trade being rejected. Clarke and others warned that many of the artefact types cited were much more broadly distributed and in some cases near-ubiquitous<sup>79</sup> in the middle Iron Age, and could not be relied upon to demonstrate invasion.

The fundamental problems for the immigration/invasion hypothesis as an explanation for the appearance of brochs, which has never been satisfactorily addressed, are (a) why the arrival of people from an area which held no structures anything like brochs should lead to their construction in their new homeland, and (b) why the limited amount of “exotic” pottery which is held to mark their arrival in the area (supposedly at Clickimin) might not have been obtained by trade or by gift exchange.

The idea that brochs were built by “warlike chieftains” to “overawe a subject population” remained popular<sup>80</sup>, although not with all commentators. Stewart in 1956 was typically concise in this respect:

*“Shetland at its best had two feudal castles, and all the local lairds of later times (very small fry indeed) would not have added up to the fraction of her hundred brochs, so it is useless to think of a lord controlling a group of serfs... We have a form of life based on a group much larger than the family, and a communal effort to meet some unprecedented sort of danger.”<sup>81</sup>*

The older, alternative view, that brochs were a unique local invention, began to be revived in the 1950s, notably in Shetland<sup>82</sup>. Broad contemporaneity with the Roman presence was still supported, but now with the added idea of brochs as refuges against slave-raiding, possibly by the Romans or by war-bands selling slaves into the Roman Empire. The persistence of immigration, if not invasion, as a stimulus was maintained, with the invention of brochs, probably in Orkney, by a “mixed” population<sup>83</sup>. At the same time, the idea was

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<sup>76</sup> Childe 1935

<sup>77</sup> Scott, 1948

<sup>78</sup> Hamilton 1968, 51

<sup>79</sup> Clarke 1971

<sup>80</sup> RCAHMS 1946 (visited/written 1930), 48-55

<sup>81</sup> Stewart 1956, 15

<sup>82</sup> O'Neill 1954

<sup>83</sup> Stewart 1956, 15-16

revived that brochs were built over a very short period and then abandoned or converted into non-defensive structures<sup>84</sup>.

The period of broch construction was still assumed to be in the last century BC and the first century AD (largely on the basis of a few Roman artefacts found in and around brochs). This allowed for several centuries of experimentation to “perfect” the broch, wherever it first emerged in its ultimate expression as a tower, although there was a tendency to push this date a little earlier, perhaps into the second or third century BC, with an increasing preference for local invention over external inspiration. There was general agreement that brochs as well-built as Mousa came late in any sequence of structures<sup>85</sup>.

The search for the architectural antecedents of brochs produced two competing theories. A western origin school saw brochs developing from simpler D-shaped enclosures with some broch features which occur in Skye and the neighbouring mainland, and which MacKie termed semi-brochs, via the “ground galleried” brochs of the west into the “solid-based” brochs of the north<sup>86</sup>. A competing northern origin school of opinion saw brochs arising in Orkney or Caithness (or even in Shetland, where a small number of so-called “blockhouse forts” contain broch-like features, such as wall-base cells, stairways and scarcement ledges)<sup>87</sup>. Dating evidence emerged in Orkney during the early 1980s for a few thick-walled roundhouses, such as that at Bu, near Stromness, dating to 600–500 BC, which some claimed as forerunners to brochs<sup>88</sup>, although these possessed few, if any, of the classic defining features of brochs.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, this led some to believe that Shetland’s brochs, and brochs in general, might go back as early as 600 BC<sup>90</sup>.

Until recently there have been few secure radiocarbon dates for the actual construction of brochs, since few excavators had dug under their massive walls. Almost all dates from broch sites related to deposits within and around them, and almost by definition later than the construction of the brochs on each site – and usually later by an unknowable length of time. This changed with the dating of Dun Vulcan (South Uist) from carbonised grain within the matrix of the wall. Taken with other material nearby, this suggested a construction date in the 1st century BC. Slightly less securely, the construction of a broch at Upper Scalloway (Shetland) appeared to have taken place in the 1st century AD<sup>91</sup>.

The radiocarbon dating of the construction of a fully-formed Shetland broch as early as 400 BC, at Old Scatness in southern Mainland<sup>92</sup>, has forced a radical

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<sup>84</sup> Stewart 1956, 15

<sup>85</sup> Fojut 1981, 226-7

<sup>86</sup> MacKie 1992

<sup>87</sup> Lamb 1980, Fojut 1981

<sup>88</sup> Hedges and Bell 1980, Hedges 1987

<sup>89</sup> Armit 1990 p 195

<sup>90</sup> Fojut 1981, p 34

<sup>91</sup> Parker Pearson et al 1996

<sup>92</sup> Dockrill et al 2015, 168-171

re-thinking of broch origins. The date, from well-stratified animal bone which was fresh at the time of its burial and lay directly under the well-built primary wall of the broch, has confirmed the growing suspicions that brochs were a considerably earlier development than had generally been supposed, at least in the north.

This has not entirely banished an attachment to the idea of immigration as a stimulus for changes in society which led to the appearance of brochs, although its continuing adherents now place the hypothetical arrival of the supposed highly skilled incomers into northern Scotland much earlier, perhaps even at the start of the local Iron Age (around 700-600 BC), the new date MacKie has suggested the arrival of the supposed high-status southern immigrants to Shetland<sup>93</sup>.

The arguments for this, are problematic in the extreme, due to the disturbed nature of the structures and deposits at Clickimin, which Hamilton largely failed to take into account<sup>94</sup>. At Clickimin, key pottery forms with internally fluted internal rims and sometimes black burnished exteriors, were held by both Hamilton and MacKie to mark the arrival of southern immigrants well before the broch was constructed. It was suggested as early as 1980 that these particular forms of pottery appear not before, but in fact well after, the building of the broch at Clickimin and probably elsewhere in Shetland<sup>95</sup>.

This interpretation has now gained strong support from the extensive excavations at Old Scatness, where these pottery characteristics consistently appear from the 1st century BC onwards – long after the construction of the broch. A similar date has been ascribed to comparable pottery at Dun Vulcan in South Uist. This change – which may or may not mark the arrival of incoming settlers – is therefore no longer relevant in terms of dating the first appearance of brochs, either in Shetland or in the Western Isles.

MacKie's recent suggestion that brochs were invented first in the north, possibly even in Shetland, and then later reinvented in the west<sup>96</sup> seems improbable, and the scenario suggested by Parker Pearson and collaborators more likely<sup>97</sup>, with the broch tower invented in the north and only spreading to (or being adopted in) the west considerably later. This is consistent with the fact that brochs are fewer in number and occur interspersed with other small stone forts which were unlikely to have stood as tall. The dating evidence from Clachtoll broch in West Sutherland, currently (2018) under investigation, should shed light on this, occupying as it does what might be seen as a step on the journey from north to west (or vice versa).

Reinforced by the new dating evidence, and following detailed architectural and engineering analysis, plus his own work at Thrumster broch and other sites in Caithness, Barber has suggested that, in the north at least, "classic",

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<sup>93</sup> MacKie 2008

<sup>94</sup> Smith, 2014, 4

<sup>95</sup> Fojut 1998, especially 29-31 (first discussed in unpublished PhD thesis 1980)

<sup>96</sup> MacKie 2008, 272

<sup>97</sup> Parker Pearson et al 1996, 58-62

“fully-formed” or “tower” brochs such as Mousa may in fact all be of relatively early date and built over a short span of time short duration (“perhaps only a single, say 35 year, generation...in the early fourth century BC”<sup>98</sup>), often being reduced in height not long after their construction and in some cases incorporated as the cores of more extensive settlements. This latter phase of conversion Barber sees, with many caveats, as being already underway in Caithness by 200 BC and continuing perhaps until AD 200<sup>99</sup>.

So, while the date of origin for some brochs has been pushed earlier, there remains good evidence that they were still being built around the turn of the millennia in Shetland, and possibly built for the first time then in the west. There is also some evidence which may suggest direct contact with the 1st – 2nd century AD Roman occupying forces in central Scotland on the part of the inhabitants of Leckie in Stirlingshire, one the “outlying” brochs which have always proved problematic to fit into the mainstream of broch theories: these have tended to be regarded as among the very last brochs to be built, and the broch at Leckie appeared to have been recently built at the time of the suggested Roman contact<sup>100</sup>.

The wide span of dates now available suggests that the narrative which best fits the evidence is that broch was a successful structural form which was first developed in the north, where it was quickly built in sizeable numbers. Brochs continued to be built in the north in appropriate circumstances over several centuries, and the architectural form was adopted further afield in later centuries. The artefactual evidence from Dun Vulcan does not suggest the Western Isles were colonised by force from the north, being more consistent with limited contact. The idea that Shetland may have been taken over by Orcadian broch-builders, as floated by Stewart in 1956, similarly lacks artefactual support. But this returns us to the core of the problem, that we still have next to no excavated evidence for Iron Age culture at the point of broch building, but only from later centuries.

That is probably as much interpretation as the available evidence can currently support, and debate will continue as to exactly what the “appropriate circumstances” were, which made building a broch a suitable response.

*How special are brochs, and what was their purpose?*

Many writers, including MacKie<sup>101</sup> and more recently Barber<sup>102</sup>, have emphasised the combination of architectural features which they felt pointed towards what Barber has termed “canonicity” – the intention of the builders of each broch to conform to a model which was clearly defined closely resembled other such towers, so far as geology would allow. MacKie posited a “professional” architect cadre<sup>103</sup> while Barber has recently pointed to the

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<sup>98</sup> John Barber pers. comm. August 2018

<sup>99</sup> Barber 2018

<sup>100</sup> MacKie 2007, 1314-5 (See MacKie 2016 for more detailed discussion)

<sup>101</sup> MacKie 1965

<sup>102</sup> Barber 2018

<sup>103</sup> MacKie 1965



engineering knowledge involved in constructing so close to the physical limits of buildability<sup>104</sup>.

Others have seen brochs simply as one end of a much wider spectrum of enclosed drystone structures which were all intended to serve the same broad purpose, presumed to be that of a defensible and impressive dwelling<sup>105</sup>.

Armit developed the idea of the “Simple” and “Complex Atlantic Roundhouses” to emphasise similarities within a larger class of approximately circular structures<sup>106</sup>, while Romankiewicz has since taken this further to include all thick-walled structures, regardless of plan form, which contained intra-mural spaces and could have been roofed<sup>107</sup>, though to refer to these all such structures as brochs seems unhelpful<sup>108</sup>.

These contrasting views are interwoven with debate and with assumptions about how brochs “worked” in practical and social terms: about whether they represented the communal homes of whole communities or only of landlords or chieftains; whether they were defensive at all, or solely intended to demonstrate status<sup>109</sup>, and also about how and when the tower form emerged: possibly early and as a brilliant stroke of creative genius, or possibly late and as the product of a gradual process of experimentation. (Although, as Barber has recently observed, the frequent use of the term “evolution” is inappropriate in a Darwinian sense – ideas may evolve but structures cannot.)<sup>110</sup>

#### *Brochs and Iron Age Society*

A further source of continuing debate has been the nature of contemporary society, ranging from early visions of a near-feudal society with immigrant overlords and their armed warriors living in brochs and levying rent and other support from subservient native, peasant farmers<sup>111</sup>, through one of embattled local communities seeking to defend themselves against raiders or invaders<sup>112</sup>, to one of peaceable, hierarchical farming communities building brochs not for defence at all, but as a symbol of their possession of the land and their prestige and to store accumulated wealth in the form of surplus grain<sup>113</sup>. Even though, as several commentators have observed, many brochs stand in locations where large-scale arable agriculture seems unlikely to have been any more viable in the Iron Age than it would be today<sup>114</sup>.

Almost all of the dated evidence for life in and around brochs relates to their occupation in primary and subsequent forms, and not to their construction, and this is likely to remain the case. We have no way of knowing whether

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<sup>104</sup> Barber 2018

<sup>105</sup> Barrett 1981, 207-17

<sup>106</sup> Armit 1991

<sup>107</sup> Romankiewicz 2011

<sup>108</sup> Romankiewicz 2016

<sup>109</sup> Armit 2005b

<sup>110</sup> Barber 2018

<sup>111</sup> Scott 1947, 1948

<sup>112</sup> O'Neill

<sup>113</sup> Hingley 1992, 19; Dockrill 1998, 493-7 et passim

<sup>114</sup> Smith 2014

society at the precise time brochs were built was similar to that in subsequent centuries, from which most of our excavated evidence derives.

The explanation for the regional distribution pattern of brochs probably lies in the nature of Iron Age ‘tribal’ groupings, but there is insufficient evidence to provide a satisfactory explanation. The types of artefact found in broch excavations also occur on non-broch sites and also beyond the so-called “Broch Province”, and brochs do not appear in some adjacent areas where physical conditions suggest they might, for example, in mid and south Argyll or Arran. In short, brochs do not align with a single distinctive “material culture”. Stuart in 1857 expressed things pithily: “there must have been something peculiar in the circumstances of the inhabitants to have given rise to these peculiar erections.”<sup>115</sup> We are still far from understanding what this peculiarity might have been.

It seems likely that each broch represents the work of a substantial community, larger than a single extended family, which controlled a distinct area of land (and perhaps sea) and that the broch represented a visible token of their possession, willingness to defend that holding, and the social status of the group or at least its leaders. People must also have continued to make their living from the land and sea, so access to resources would have been a constant concern. However, how their society was organised is not self-evident, and the unanswered question remains: what combination of circumstances led to the building of a broch?

So far as can be ascertained from excavated evidence, Iron Age society at the time of the brochs appears to have been relatively “flat”; composed of largely self-sufficient groups, which over time became associated into wider regional groupings that might loosely be termed “chiefdoms”. These various groups doubtless interacted, both productively (trade, social exchange and agreed marriage) and negatively (raiding to steal livestock and perhaps to take prisoners, and even to take over territory). Brochs presumably provided enough defensibility to offer a degree of deterrence against the less desirable forms of interaction which might be expected locally, though they would not have withstood prolonged siege warfare – which in itself says much about how the builders perceived their wider world.

Widespread artefact types such as pottery, and finds of environmental remains, such as animal and bird bones, suggest there was a coherent Iron Age material culture throughout Shetland, in which locally-restricted resources circulated relatively freely. This material culture changed relatively slowly over time, for example with the emergence of new forms of pottery. Evidence for contacts outwith Shetland is not particularly abundant, and what little there is all seems to derive from deposits dating to some considerable time after brochs are built, with the problematic exception of apparently early non-local pottery at Clickimin.

Over time, some brochs which were sited in naturally well-favoured areas went on to form the focus of more extensive villages (for example Old

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<sup>115</sup> Stuart 1857, 192

Scatness and Jarlshof) which lasted until the end of the Iron Age and in some cases beyond. Other brochs, located in less well-endowed locations, did not. Mousa is in the latter category. That fact may have assisted in Mousa's survival, since brochs which formed the centre of later villages seem to have been deliberately reduced in height and modified over centuries, until in some cases their stumps were entirely hidden beneath later buildings.

It is possible to imagine economic models for communities living in and around brochs, and while this might have been possible in the more favoured parts of Orkney or Caithness (both of which exported grain in late medieval times), neither the Western Isles or Shetland seem likely to have been able to support a subsistence economy founded principally on the cultivation of grain, though what grain could be produced would have been a valuable resource. Reliance on pastoralism and on the use of coastal and marine resources would have balanced such an economy more broadly, especially if exchange or barter operated between nearby communities with access to different resource bases<sup>116</sup>.

However, the feasibility of theoretical economic models is inter-twined with the particular model of social structure which is assumed. Primitive communalism, client-elite relationships, inter-group collectivities (very close to a chiefdom society), a proto-feudal or even a full-blown feudal system have all been suggested at various times. Each would have made subtly, sometimes radically, different demands upon the resources available. The sole indisputable fact remains that each broch must have been built by a locally-available workforce, sustained by locally-available resources for at least as long as it took to build.

Once built, brochs may well have served a variety of functions, or at least acted as bases for a mix of activities which varied widely from site to site and from time to time. Some brochs went on to become the cores of more extensive settlements, while others seem to have been abandoned not long after they were constructed. Many brochs undoubtedly served as farmhouses in later years, but whether any brochs were built primarily as farmhouses is likely to remain an open question. It is hard to escape the impression, especially when standing next to a broch such as Mousa or Dun Carloway, that brochs were originally defensive, if only in that they were intended to offer outward vantage, impress the viewer and suggest the invulnerability of their possessors, and that thoughts of agrarian domesticity were not paramount in their builders' minds. On the other hand, the broch at Edin's Hall gives much more of an impression of having been influenced by broch architecture but remaining rooted in a different tradition of very large wooden roundhouses – though if Edin's Hall's "broch" was roofed, which has been doubted, it would have been one of the largest roundhouses ever identified in northern Britain.

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<sup>116</sup> Fojut 1982a

## *Conclusion*

In conclusion, despite two centuries of study, most of the basic facts about brochs, beyond physical measurements of surviving structures, remain conjectural, with interpretations usually based upon a very small sample of evidence, selectively interpreted and fitted to “off-the-shelf” social models. The revision of explanatory narratives will continue as new evidence emerges and as old evidence is reviewed: every few years brings another brave attempt to present a unified and coherent account of the issues discussed here<sup>117 118 119</sup> only to see each effort, rather than unifying the field of study, simply add fresh fuel to debate.

It remains true, as Stewart sagely remarked in 1956, that “it is easier to guess *why* the broch came into being than *how*”<sup>120</sup>. But neither question has yet been answered conclusively.

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<sup>117</sup> Hedges and Bell 1980

<sup>118</sup> Armit 2003

<sup>119</sup> Most recently, Romankiewicz 2016.

<sup>120</sup> Stewart 1956, 21. Emphasis added.