

Yarrows  
ND 3083 4350  
Scheduled Site

(9)

Excavated by Dr Joseph Anderson in 1866-7, finds in the National Museum

Situated at the SW side of the Loch of Yarrows, this broch and some of its surrounding buildings were excavated by Dr Joseph Anderson in 1866-7. Before excavation the site appeared as a conical grass-covered mound, 5.5-6m high, standing on a triangular projection of the loch shore cut off from the land by a ditch. The ditch is still visible but is largely water filled because of the raised water level in the loch. It is not clear whether the ditch was originally intended to be water filled, but the site was obviously dry when Anderson excavated it. Water has now encroached into the broch and some of the surrounding buildings.

The broch is relatively well preserved, although there is evidence of some collapse since the excavation. The broch interior was fully dug out but the outer face appears to have been revealed only on the E and S arcs. The interior of the broch is full of water, hiding any structural features which may survive. Anderson recorded some partition walls in the interior which appear to have been secondary as they were founded on some depth of debris. The internal diameter of the broch as enclosed by the uneven inner face is 10.4m W/E, reduced to 8.9m by the addition of a secondary lining wall. The original wall of the broch is 3.7m wide at the entrance in the E, reducing to 3.2m on the SE arc. The broch has two entrances, one in the E, the other in the S, both of which appear to be original. The S entrance is broken down at its outer end.

Within the wall of the broch to the E of the S entrance there is a fully roofed curving chamber or gallery, preserved intact to its back wall at about 4.5m from the side wall of the entrance passage. To the W of the

entrance but offset from the chamber or gallery, there are the remains of a stair rising in the wall to the W. Seven steps of the stair are still visible.

(9)

Within the wall of the broch almost directly opposite the S entrance there is an entry from the interior, giving access to a curving cell. The entrance to this cell has apparently been blocked by the secondary lining wall around the broch interior. In the NW arc of the broch there are the remains of a gallery, 1.4 to 1.6m wide. It is not clear whether this gallery connects with the cell in the N arc of the wall.

Outside the broch on all sides a number of buildings were revealed by the excavation of 1866-7. It is clear from Anderson's report that these buildings are secondary to the original construction and use of the broch. The buildings SE of the broch are long and curving. When excavated they had rows of pillar stones set into their floors about 1 foot (0.3m) from the walls, presumably to support some kind of roof. Only one of these pillars is now visible. Similar buildings were excavated at the Wag of Forse, where they appear to have been built on top of the ruins of a broch. To the NE, NW and SW of the broch, the uncovered buildings are similar to buildings revealed at other broch sites in E Caithness.

Although all of the revealed external buildings are undoubtedly later than the first use of the broch, they appear to have been possibly founded on the remains of earlier buildings surrounding the broch. Anderson referred to a considerable depth of stones underneath their foundations, overlying the original soil, and mingled with ashes and food refuse. It is clear that the complex of buildings around the broch of Yarrows has neither been fully revealed nor excavated down to the natural level. To do so now would be to incur serious problems with the raised water table.

The finds recovered by the excavation included:  
grain rubbers and stones hollowed like mortars;  
stone pestles;  
pounders or hammer stones;  
whetstones;  
circular discs of slaty sandstone;  
stone balls;

## Yarrows, Loch of Yarrows

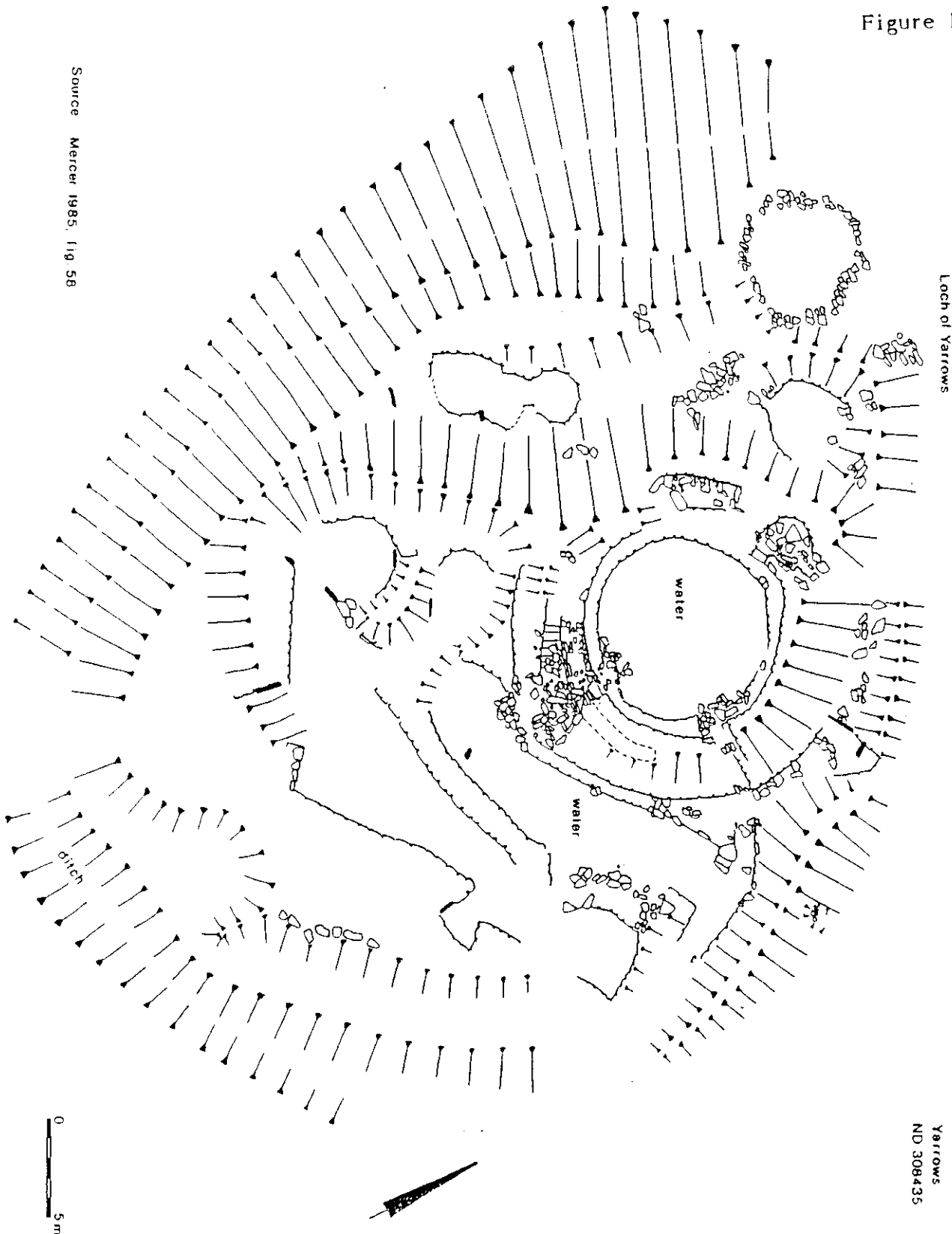
- Location*                    *On the SW side of the Loch of Yarrows reached from the A9 by a C-class road and a farm track*
- Access*                        *Cars best parked at the end of the C-class road, fairly long walk on foot along track and down through field*
- Ownership*                   *Harmsworth, Thrumster House*
- Interpretive Potential*      *(1) the broch was excavated by Joseph Anderson in 1866-7 one of the earliest broch excavations in Caithness - Anderson first developed theories on the nature and dating of brochs*
- (2) the broch is well preserved and there are external buildings*
- (3) it is sited on a loch edge, cut off from the land by a deep ditch - an unusual feature in Caithness*
- Disadvantages*              *(1) access to the site is not as easy as to some of the sites near the Museum*
- (2) the tenant farmer is disturbed by visitors to the broch*
- (3) the interior of the broch is water filled from the raised level of the loch which is used as a reservoir. There are some advantages in that the whole area around the S of the loch is rich in archaeological remains of many periods*

- spindle whorls;
- a ring and armlet of bronze;
- a few fragments of iron knives;
- pottery;
- bones of reindeer and red deer.

There are no indications of the contexts of the finds which could have come from any level in what appears to have been a lengthy occupation of the site.

Figure 16

Source Mercer 1985, fig. 58



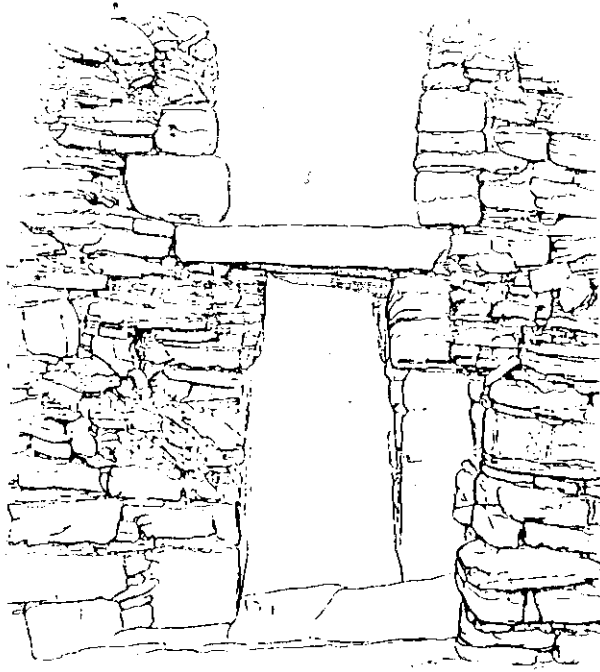


Fig. 196.—Interior aperture of Doorway in Broch of Yarhouse.  
(From a Photograph.)

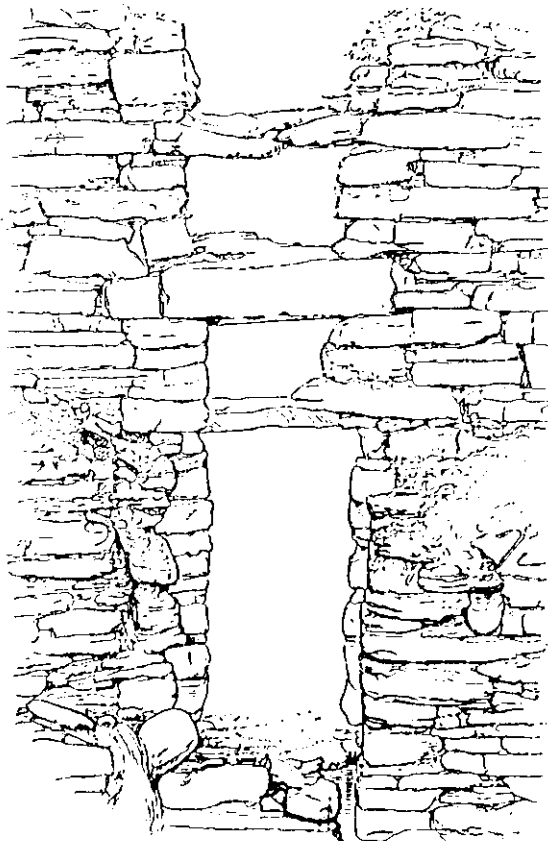


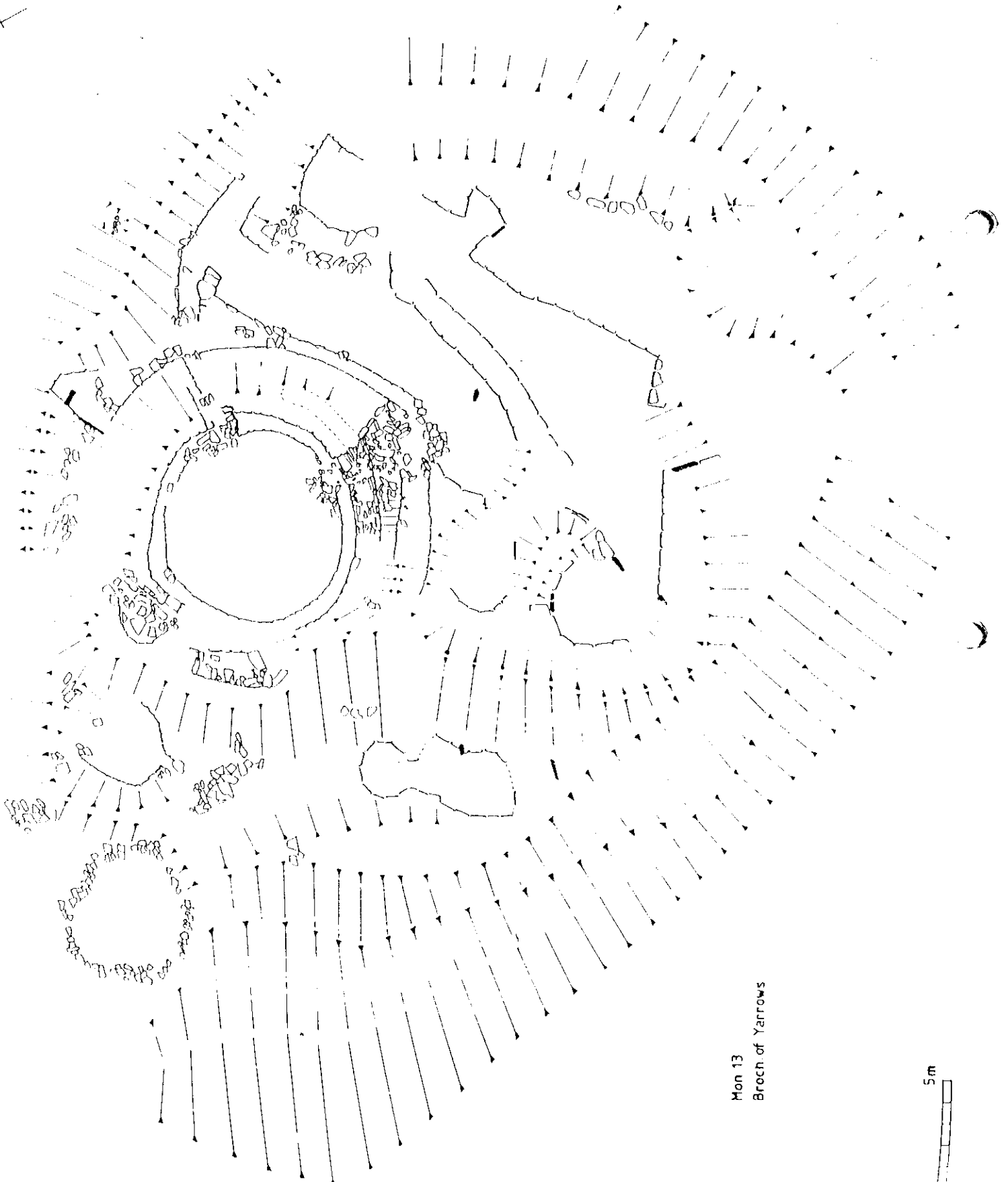
Fig. 197.—Entrance to the stair and window-like openings over it, in the Broch  
of Yarhouse. (From a Photograph.)

Mon. No. WAR 13 Broch of Yarrows (Fig. 58). At this site no doubt can attach itself to its broch status, the site having been excavated by Anderson in 1866-67. The broch is 16m in external diameter and was just under 10m in internal diameter prior to the addition of an internal wall cladding to 2.50m height where its upper limit serves as a scarcement, presumably to support the joist-ends of a second storey. Anderson recorded partition walls within the interior of the broch recorded upon a plan executed by Sir Henry Dryden in 1867 and published by Curle (RCAHMS, Fig. 37, p. 150). These are no longer visible as the interior of the broch is flooded to some considerable depth due to the artificially raised level of the Loch of Yarrows. These partitions were apparently constructed upon a considerable depth of domestic refuse which lay directly on the broch floor and are therefore presumably secondary insertions. The wall of the broch expands from an average 3m of thickness to 4m at the S entrance to provide for a long passage whence a mural gallery 4m long opens to the E side, and a stair leading to the second storey opens from the W wall. This entrance is certainly primary to the broch's construction and the slight discontinuity in the inner wall face on either side of the E entrance would suggest that this second means of ingress was also part of the initial building conception. There is some evidence that these entrances may have been deliberately narrowed by the insertion of a new wall face on its N side. A third mural gallery exists in the NW sector of the broch wall which does not comply in position or layout with Dryden's survey. Furthermore survey in 1983 recorded that the inserted scarcement wall sealed off the entrance to this NW gallery and did not respect it as shown in Dryden's survey.

On all sides of the broch structure except the N (where the loch is very close) peripheral structures occur comprising, on the S, long galleries with stall-type upright slabs recorded within them at regular intervals by Dryden, none of which are visible in the site's dilapidated condition today. Curle himself in another context draws attention to these features as the best available parallels for the 'galleried dwelling' type of structure located frequently in SE Caithness and notably, in an excavated context, at the Wag of Forse. At the Broch of Yarrows (*pace* Dryden's survey) the N wall of the inner of the two southern galleries can be clearly seen to be a secondary cladding built against the broch wall in a differing masonry style. These galleries are therefore secondary to the broch construction but the alignment of both entrances of the broch would imply that they were built when the interior of the broch remained in use. The Wag of Forse was re-surveyed in detail in 1984 and will be published in Volume IV of these survey accounts but suffice it to say here that a precisely similar relation of broch to galleried dwelling was noted there. The S and W sides of the monument are protected by a ditch of varying width, the profile of which suggests possible re-modelling at some stage.

13. Broch. 'South Yarrows'. External diameter of broch: 16m. Height: 3m. Dimensions of whole complex: 48m x 56m. A broch complex situated on a low spur now surrounded by the waters of the recently heightened level of the Loch of Yarrows. The W and S sides are defined by a ditch. The broch consists of a circular wall up to 4m thick, enclosing an area 8.50m in diameter. There is a gallery exposed on the N side. Entrance to the E. Scarcement intact on the inner face. Outworks surround the broch from the NW southwards to the E side, and consist of subrectangular structures. Elevation: 100m OD. ND 308435.

(7).



Mon 13  
Broch of Yarrows



## THE BROCHS AND THEIR CONTENTS.

In 1866 and 1867 I excavated the Broch of Yarhouse, situated in the south end of the loch of the same name, about six miles south of Wick, in Caithness. The ground plan of the structure is shown in Fig. 194. Its appearance before excavation was that of a conical grass-covered mound, 200 paces in circumference, and 18 to 20 feet high. It stood on a low flat triangular projection of the shore of the loch, and was cut off from the land by a ditch now silted up, and varying from 25 to 30 feet wide. In the upper part of the mound we found portions of two human skeletons, at a depth of from  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 feet under the turf; and at different places on the sides of the mound, lower down, the remains of three other skeletons were met with. These skeletons were not enclosed in cists, but simply embedded in the earth and stones of the mound. They were not deep enough to have any determinable relation with the structure of the Broch below. They were all incomplete and the bones in disorder, though this might perhaps be accounted for by the movement of the loose material of the slope of the mound in the course of ages. The inference appeared to be that they were casual interments made in the mound long after it had become a grassy knoll. This was also the conclusion to which Dr. Joass came with respect to the burials in the mound at Kintradwell. It is easy to see how such a practice might have arisen in remoter districts, where burial-grounds connected with ecclesiastical sites were distant and roads were few. In point of fact, there is evidence which seems to connect the custom with the later Paganism of these northern parts. Mr. Petrie found a small cemetery of stone cists, containing interments after cremation, overlying the ruined Broch of Okstrow, in Orkney. In this case, the mound which covered the ruins must have been chosen as a place of heathen sepulture because it was a mound. A grave containing two oval bowl-shaped brooches, and therefore belonging to the heathen Viking time, was found in the upper part of a mound covering the ruins of a Broch at Castletown, in Caithness. I found a single burial in a stone-lined grave laid close to the doorway of the Broch of Brounaben, not far from Yarhouse; and burials were found in the mounds covering the ruins of the Brochs of Thrumster and Dunbeath, in Caithness. It is therefore probable that in all such cases the interments that are found immediately below the surface of these mounds belong to a time when the Broch had been so long in ruins that it appeared to those so using it as a natural grassy knoll.

When excavated, the Broch of Yarhouse consisted of a circular wall, 12 to 13 feet thick, enclosing a central area, 30 feet in diameter. The height of the wall remaining was about 15 feet. The doorway which passes straight through the wall is about 6 feet high and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  wide, slightly narrower at top than at bottom, and well built with long flat slabs, some of which were 8 feet in length. The opening of the doorway into the interior area and recess above it are shown in Fig. 196. There were no guard-chambers or bar-holes, and the checks for the door were quite on the inner side of the wall. But this Broch stood on what was practically an island, cut off from the land by a ditch 25 to 30 feet wide, and the access to the doorway was carefully protected by the outworks to be subsequently described. Opening from the



interior area to the left of the doorway was the entrance to the stair (Fig. 197), which also gave access to an oblong chamber at the stairfoot. The stair itself was 3 feet wide, and 16 steps up there was a landing, with a light hole or window looking into the interior of the Broch. Above the entrance to the stair there were also three windows, placed vertically over each other—all that remained of a vertical range of windows, such as we have seen in the case of Mousa, Dun Carloway, and the Glenelg Brochs. On the side of the area opposite to the doorway was an oblong chamber in the thickness of the wall, roofed in the usual manner by overlapping stones. In this Broch, as at Kintradwell, there was an interior wall, of inferior masonry, built against the main wall, and partially bonded into it at the door openings. This inner wall was  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet thick, and rose to a height of 8 feet, where the wall-head formed a level scarcement all round the interior. Partition walls (shown at B in ground plan, Fig. 194) ran half way across the area from both sides of the doorway, and that on the right of the entrance bent at a right angle towards the Broch wall. These partitions were partly built, and partly formed of long slabs set on end. They rose to about 8 feet—the same height as the scarcement. The partitions and the inner wall forming the scarcement were founded on an accumulation of rubbish largely mixed with ashes and food refuse, which covered the original floor of the Broch to the depth of 12 to 14 inches. They were therefore clearly secondary constructions, made to adapt the Broch to the purposes of a secondary occupation. Outside the Broch wall are two long irregularly-shaped enclosures, and several smaller cells. The outer enclosure (D in plan, Fig. 194) is 100 feet in length, and varies in width from 6 to 20 feet. The length of the inner enclosure (C) is 70 feet, and its width about 12 feet. They have each a little cell, provided with door checks opening off them. In some places their walls remained entire to the height of 10 feet, without showing any sign of overlapping for a roof. Both these large oblong enclosures had irregular rows of long slabs set on end in their floors, as if to divide them into cattle stalls. A long covered way (A) leading to the entrance of the Broch traversed the N.E. end of these enclosures. It varied from about 3 feet wide at the door of the Broch to about 5 feet wide at the outer end, and had checks for doors at four different places in its length. The secondary character of all these exterior constructions was obvious from the fact that underneath their foundations there was a considerable depth of stones overlying the original soil, and mingled with ashes and food refuse. It was also evident that various occupations of the interior of the Broch had taken place from time to time, when the original floor had become covered with rubbish to a considerable depth. Partition walls were met with at three different levels, dividing the internal area on three different plans; the last being a partial partition, utilising only one side of the area, at a time when the original floor had become covered with 8 feet of stones and rubbish.