

FORTIFICATION IN THE AREAS  
OF SCANDINAVIAN SETTLEMENT IN THE BRITISH ISLES

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The study of the prehistoric earthwork of Castell Bryn-Gwyn, Anglesey, has highlighted the problem of the identification of sites of a fortified nature built and occupied by Vikings. King Olaf, of Dublin, may well have re-defended this circular defence (Archaeologia Cambrensis, 1962), and one wonders about the extent of fortification, in a Viking context, in the British Isles. Dublin may have been defended in the manner of Hedeby or Birka but no archaeological evidence has yet come to light in the recent excavations. In the Isle of Man the motte-like structure of Cronk y Mur may have been built by Magnus Barefoot who might also have envisaged the re-occupied Iron Age promontory fort (with its small Viking house) of Cronk y Merriu as a signal station.

In the Danelaw, archaeological endeavour in York has revealed evidence for Danish defences which one can compare with recent discoveries in Arhus (Arhus Sondervold, 1971). James Dyer has also recently assessed the possibilities for the identification of Danish fortification in eastern England both of harbours and as defences of a D-shape and some remin-

iscent of Norman ringwork castles (Archaeology and the Landscape, 1972, ed. by P. J. Fowler, Ch. 9, 'Earthworks of the Danelaw Frontier').

The Orkneyinga Saga recounts the construction of a number of castles in the twelfth century in the north of Scotland. Small towers can be seen at Bucholie in Caithness, Old Wick, and at a number of other places including Wyre, in Orkney, where in the middle of the twelfth century Kolbein Hruga built a castle. There a tower stands within an enclosure, but the results of excavations are unsatisfactory, and it is not certain which came first. Other enclosures could still await identification as Viking and other towers may reveal evidence for an early origin. Some early sites may show influence from Britain of the continent but others may show a development from the dun sites of the Iron Age. The absence of a tradition of Viking fortification makes the problem of origin and development a difficult one.