THE TENTH HERMANN PÁLSSON LECTURE (2014)

How not to reconstruct the Iron Age in Shetland: modern interpretations of Clickhimin Broch[1]

… here conjecture would vainly seek for a reconstruction.
E.F. Benson, *The Luck of the Vails* (1901)

*Brian Smith**

THE broch of Clickhimin, known as 'the Picts Castle' by generations of Lerwegians, including mine, is one of the best-known Iron Age forts in existence. Clickhimin was the first monument in Britain to be protected in court by the Ancient Monuments Act of 1882, and it was mentioned in parliament in 1906. I shall return to those occasions in a moment.[1]

Antiquaries, architects and archaeologists have written about it at length: James Thomas Irvine[2] and Sir Henry Dryden[3] in 1866 and 1874; G.P.H. Watson[4] of the Royal Commission in 1930; Stewart Cruden[5] and W. Douglas

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1 I am grateful to Peter Anderson, Arne Kruse and Linda Riddell for inviting me to give the Hermann Pálsson Memorial Lecture in Edinburgh in November 2014. I never met Hermann, but like thousands of others I have enjoyed and admired his popularising scholarly work. Robbie Arthur, John Ballantyne, Logie Barrow, Blair Bruce, Alison Cullingford, Noel Fojut, Angus Johnson, Anna Ritchie, Ian Tait, Jonathan Wills and an anonymous referee gave me useful advice about sources and interpretations. The staffs of the National Library of Scotland, the National Records of Scotland, RCAHMS and the Shetland Library were very helpful. Gordon Johnston accompanied me to Clickhimin Broch, and discussed it with me, on many occasions.

2 Irvine 1866.

3 Dryden 1874.

4 Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland 1946. Watson visited Clickhimin on 21 July 1930 (RCAHMS, MS 36/113, 86 *et seq.*).

5 Cruden 1951.

Simpson[6] in the early 1950s; John Hamilton[7] (at book-length) in 1968; Noel Fojut[8] in 1980; Euan MacKie[9] in 2002. All these accounts are important, and I shall consider them in detail, especially Hamilton's and MacKie's. Clickhimin broch is the most written-about broch anywhere.

It is a complex site. There is a massive wall around the broch, and a curious structure next to it, which has been variously called a forework, blockhouse, gatehouse or bulwark. But no-one had any doubts, until the 1950s, that most of the structures on the small island were built at roughly the same time, as part of the same project, in the broch period proper: that is, about 20 to 22 centuries ago. When G.P.H. Watson visited Clickhimin in 1930, he wrote in his field notebook: 'The broch, bulwark and enclosing wall are of one time'.[10] Watson was a clever architectural historian, and he had good grounds for his opinion; it is an opinion I share, for reasons I shall explain at length. I end with some general remarks.

1

The climate of opinion about Clickhimin began to change sixty years ago. In 1953 the University of Aberdeen sent some lecturers to Lerwick, in an initiative called University Week. One of them was W. Douglas Simpson, the university librarian, an expert on feudal castles. He offered a lecture about brochs. In the process he examined Clickhimin, and came to some revolutionary conclusions.

Examining the forework, Simpson concluded that it was older than the broch. He said that it must have been conceived as the gateway of a much older fort, although that plan had been (he said) abandoned. As a result of this long period of development, he told his audience, Clickhimin broch might be 'specially important in the history of those structures'.[11] Simpson was the first person to hint that brochs might have a centuries-long architectural pedigree, rather than coming into existence abruptly 2000 or so years previously.

Another revolutionary was waiting in the wings. John Hamilton of the government's Ministry of Works had been excavating at Jarlshof from 1949

6 Simpson 1954.
7 Hamilton 1968a.
8 Fojut 1998, 16-41. A version of this section on Jarlshof and Clickhimin had appeared in his Glasgow Ph.D. thesis, 'The archaeology and geography of Shetland brochs', 1980.
9 MacKie 2002, 89-115, 174-204.
10 RCAHMS, MS 36/113, 102. C.S.T. Calder, accompanying Watson, wrote in his own notebook: '[f]orework of broch period, and complete entity', and cited 'J.W.P. and Mr Peers' (RCAHMS, MS 36/118, 46): John Wilson Paterson and Charles Reed Peers, fine architectural historians of their time. The forework was being discussed by impressive authorities.
11 *Shetland News*, 7 April 1953; cf. *Shetland Times*, 10 Apr. 1953, and *Shetland News*, 16 June 1953.

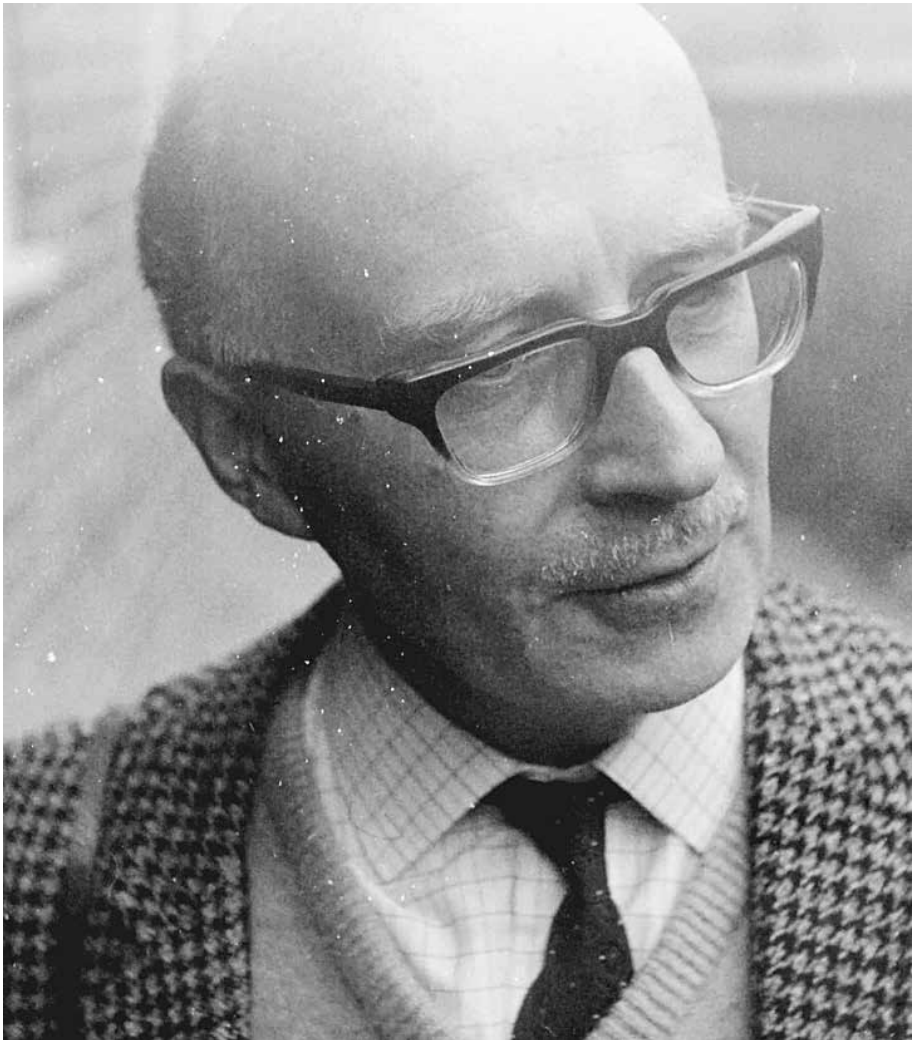

Figure 1. John Hamilton, 1969. ***Photograph: Jonathan Wills***

until 1952, and had uncovered structures there from several periods.[12] **(Figure 1.)** But he was disappointed by one result of his work. 'Unfortunately', he wrote,[13]

12 Hamilton 1956a.

13 Hamilton 1968a, xv. 'The object [of the Clickhimin excavation]', Hamilton wrote elsewhere, 'was to control the sequence of cultures observed at Jarlshof' (Hamilton 1954).

a lacuna occurred in the sequence. When the islands were being intensively colonized by Iron Age settlers in the last centuries B.C. Jarlshof lay abandoned. It was during this period that the broch towers of northern Scotland evolved. Certain evidence suggested that this missing phase was well represented at Clickhimin and that its excavation might add a new chapter to the Iron Age history of the islands and so throw light on the evolution of the brochs.

Hamilton headed to Clickhimin in 1953, the year of Simpson's lecture. He imagined that the site 'remained virtually untouched' when he arrived,[14] and that Shetland's long Iron Age would be found there intact.

He and his squad worked at Clickhimin for five seasons. Sure enough, Hamilton found what he was looking for – or thought he did. He discovered a Bronze Age house and an early Iron Age roundhouse. And he filled up the gap from Jarlshof: he went one better than Simpson by finding not one but two pre-broch forts, whose architecture and furnishings he described in loving detail. According to Hamilton the pre-broch fort-dwelling inhabitants of Clickhimin had lived and worked in wooden tenements, the predecessors of similar arrangements in the broch itself. In all he located and portrayed seven phases of settlement on the site, covering 1,400 years.

Hamilton was a persuasive writer, and a cunning publicist. He let slip details of his alleged discoveries at a public lecture in Shetland in 1956,[15] and published essays incorporating them in 1962[16] and 1966.[17] He enlisted Alan Sorrell, a brilliant artist, to draw reconstructions of the supposed archaeological periods at Clickhimin. Hamilton was whetting a public appetite for archaeological revelations.

Then in 1965 the Ministry of Works announced that John Hamilton had solved the problem of the brochs.[18] The press was ecstatic. 'The mystery of the brochs solved at Clickhimin', trumpeted the *Illustrated London News*;[19] 'Dig reveals origin of Scottish towers', according to the *Daily Telegraph*; 'Mystery north brochs were tenements: secrets of "high life" in Iron Age revealed', announced the *Press and Journal*.[20]

14 The phrase occurs in a manuscript by Hamilton in RCAHMS, MS/163/4. Internal evidence suggests that it may have been written just prior to a lecture given by him to the Prehistoric Society, which Alison Cullingford tells me was on 26 February 1959.
15 *Shetland News* and *Scotsman*, both 21 Aug. 1956
16 Hamilton 1962.
17 Hamilton 1966.
18 The Ministry's press release is in NRS, DD27/1184.
19 An article written by Hamilton, 11 Sept. 1965.
20 Both 3 Sept. 1965.

And in 1968 Hamilton's big book on Clickhimin, a brilliant piece of imaginative writing, finally appeared. Reviewing it for the *New Shetlander* my friend the late Father Brian Riordan rapturously summed up its contents in a sentence: 'Clickhimin islet gave house-site to successive human occupants for 1,400 years!'[21]

Hamilton's book became holy writ for archaeologists. There were a couple of querulous reviews, by Horace Fairhurst[22] and Robert Stevenson,[23] but most readers, then and sometimes now, swallowed its conclusions whole. In their synoptic book about Scottish archaeology Graham and Anna Ritchie wrote, following Hamilton, that '[t]he archaeological importance of Clickhimin centres not on the broch but on the Iron Age forts that preceded it'.[24] Over the years a vague idea emerged that there might be something wrong with Hamilton's schema, but it has remained vague. Noel Fojut published a clever critique in 1998, but even he went along with one or two of the schema's main features. As we shall see, Euan MacKie has criticised it, only to produce another version of it. In the latest edition of Barry Cunliffe's *Iron Age Communities in Britain*, a standard text on its subject, we find the Hamiltonian view of Clickhimin in its original form.[25] I shall now argue that that view is unsustainable and absurd.

2

First we must deal with Hamilton's fond belief that Clickhimin had 'remained virtually untouched' from the Iron Age until his arrival there in 1953. He acknowledged that the broch had been 'partially explored' by antiquarians in the early 1860s, and that there had been what he called 'a certain amount of structural consolidation' of it by the government's Office of Works before the First World War.[26] That was all: a minute amount of interference. As we shall see, these phrases are a ludicrous description of what had happened at Clickhimin in the previous 100 years.

21 Riordan 1967, 26. Without doubt the most fulsome remark was by Patrick Crampton: 'Harold Macmillan predicted a wind of change blowing through Africa. How strong this wind proved to be! Clickhimin will blow a wind of change through the history of Britain and north-western Europe. To those who are prepared to accept the implications of Clickhimin in the way I do, this wind has begun to blow' (Crampton 1968, 165-6).

22 Fairhurst 1971.

23 Stevenson 1970.

24 Ritchie and Ritchie 1981, 107. Hamilton had said that the alleged fort phase at Clickhimin 'is the most important one from the archaeological point of view' (Hamilton 1966, 116).

25 Cunliffe 2005, 327.

26 RCAHMS, MS/163/4.

By the 1820s Clickhimin broch and its associated structures had fallen down, the inevitable result of a millennium of abandonment. A visiting Methodist drew it, a ruin, in 1828;[27] another wrote, a decade later, that '[i]t appears at a distance, merely a vast mass of stones'.[28] The dilapidation was ongoing. An American poet, visiting in 1849, observed that improvers, if that is the right word for them, had been 'pulling down the Pictish castle, on the little island in the freshwater loch called Cleikimin … till very few traces of its original construction are left'.[29]

That was the situation in 1861, when the Shetland Literary and Scientific Society, encouraged by their secretary, Robert Neven Spence, took up a subscription with a view to excavating the broch. Henry Dryden had sketched it in 1855,[30] and we can see clearly from his rendering how ruinous it had

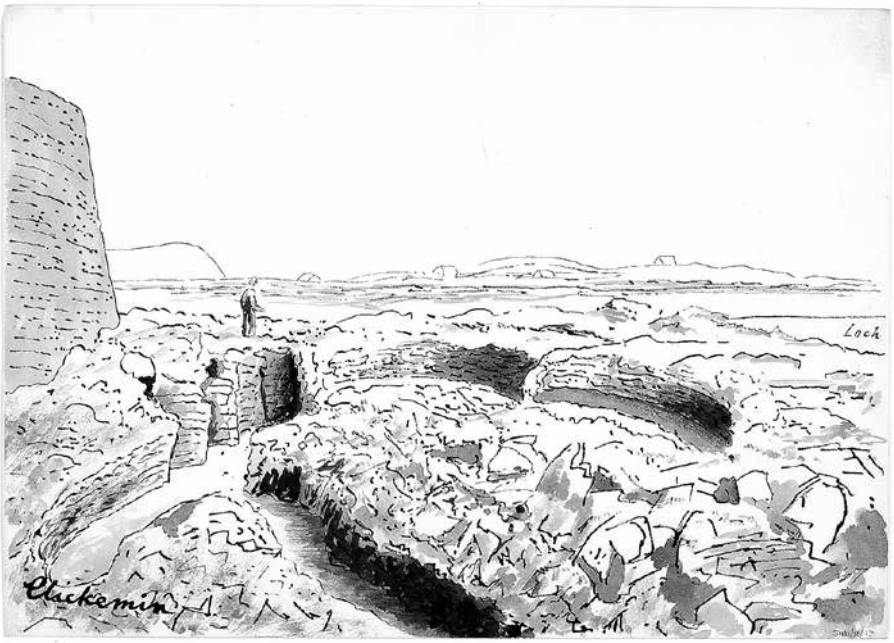

Figure 2. Sir Henry Dryden's sketch of Clickhimin, following the 1861-2 excavation. It reveals the view that the broch-denizens had of the coast and headland to the east, now almost entirely obstructed by housing. ***Photograph: RCAHMS***

27 Flinn 1989, plate XVI.
28 Catton 1838, 67.
29 Bryant 1851, 420.
30 RCAHMS, SHD 8/11. The date of the sketch is on the cover of the portfolio.

become. The ringwall was a huge mound of debris. In the winter of 1861 labourers attacked the work enthusiastically, and, it appears, with care. It wasn't a partial exploration, as Hamilton suggested, but a major excavation.

They concentrated on the broch itself, and cleared a vast number of stones from its interior and environs. 'We found the walls,' Spence wrote to a friend, 'on removing the debris, standing as when built, in some parts 20 feet high on the inside of the principal tower'.[31] They discovered 'a passage in the centre of the wall, stairs, doors, and chambers',[32] and a large hearth. When the chilly work ended, in January 1862, for lack of money, real progress had been made. Dryden came back in 1866, and his sketches of the broch, inside and out, show how skilful the amateur excavation had been.[33] **(Figure 2.)**

There was another problem in the offing, however. In 1865 the anthropologist James Hunt paid a visit to Clickhimin. 'I was sorry', he said,[34] 'to observe the small care which the inhabitants of Lerwick had for this interesting relic; and was informed that some of these enlightened people amuse themselves by mounting the hollow walls and throwing down the stones from the top. When there, I saw the fireplace in the middle had been recently broken by one of these Goths.'

The vandalism went on. A contributor to the local press complained in 1884 that Lerwick boys were in the habit of spending religious holidays there, 'throwing down', as he said, '… portions of the Pagan habitation – all by way of showing their profound contempt for heathenish beliefs in general, and their zeal for the cause of Presbyterianism in particular'.[35] A few months later Lady Nicolson, the owner of the property, announced that she would initiate prosecutions against people who took stones away from the broch, or damaged it in any way.[36]

The problem came to a head in 1888. Hugh Mackay, a butcher who lived nearby, decided to build a stable. Where better to get stones for it than the broch? To the outrage of the community he dispatched masons there to prepare and remove stones. A local antiquary tipped off the police, and Mackay was taken to the sheriff court. As I said before, it was the first case heard anywhere

31 NMS, Manuscript 534, Shetland Historical Collections, vol. 1, letter by Robert N. Spence to J.T. Irvine, 10 September 1862.
32 *Shetland Advertiser*, 6 Jan. 1862.
33 RCAHMS, SHD 8/13-14.
34 Hunt 1865-6, 304.
35 *Shetland Times*, 19 Apr. 1884.
36 *Shetland Times*, 19 July 1884.

under the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1882. Mackay was fined £9 10s. and instructed to return his plunder.[37]

The case made news throughout the country,[38] and the Shetland News editorialised on the subject. 'We would suggest', it said,[39] 'that the proprietrix should put the Brough under the charge of the Commissioners of Works. … Protection of some kind is needed, if it is desired to save the building from complete demolition, and probably nothing better could be done to ensure that protection than the placing of the Brough under the charge of the Commissioners of Works.'

The government agreed. General Pitt Rivers, the chief inspector of ancient monuments, went to Cheltenham to put the proposal to the aged Lady Nicolson. She objected at first: she thought that '[a] peaceful, loyal and affectionate population had been converted into a hostile and lawless one by political agitations' – probably she had the Crofters Act in mind – 'and she anticipated no good from the meddlesome interference of government in her private affairs'. But Pitt Rivers sweet-talked her, and she signed a deed whereby Clickhimin broch came into state care. The Office of Works put up a notice-board to say that it was now in charge, and that vandals would be prosecuted.[40] The future looked bright for the broch.

But the damage had been done. It is worth looking at a photograph by George Washington Wilson, from around 1890, which shows how ruinous the site had become, thirty years after the excavation.[41] **(Figure 3.)** It looked as it had done when Dryden sketched it in 1855, only worse. By 1906 the situation was becoming intolerable: an architect who visited the broch that year reported that it 'would probably in time if not properly looked after have been converted

37 Police report in SA, AD22/101/1888/16; procurator fiscal's precognition in SA, AD22/2/23/17; *Shetland Times* and *Shetland News*, 7 Apr. 1888. Annotating the precognition, Sheriff Thoms wrote: 'an example must be made'.

It wasn't the first time that Mackay had been accused of taking stones from the broch: see *Shetland Times*, 11 June 1881, and the *Antiquary*, 4, 1881, 78. He replied indignantly on that occasion 'that if any parties are interested in preserving the ruins of the castle, they will find ample opportunity of using their *remonstrances* on Sunday and other days among the young people who are regularly in the habit of spending their spare time in demolishing, as far as lies in their power, said ruins. I may state that I am as anxious as any one to preserve the antiquities of the neighbourhood in their entirety' (*Shetland Times*, 18 June 1881). He was still indignant in 1888: 'I can assure you', he wrote to Lady Nicolson's agent on 3 February, 'that I am as anxious as anyone to preserve everything of antiquity that is about the burgh' (SA, AD22/2/23/17/2/2).

38 At random, *Belfast News-letter*, 15 Mar. 1888; *Daily Chronicle*, 6 Apr. 1888; *Lancaster Gazette* and *General Advertiser for Lancashire, Westmorland, and Yorkshire*, 11 Apr. 1888; *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 15 Apr. 1888.

39 *Shetland News*, 7 Apr. 1888.

40 Memoranda in NRS, MW1/913.

41 Shetland Museum and Archives photograph collection, NE08704.

Figure 3. George Washington Wilson's photograph of Clickhimin, c.1890. ***Photograph: Shetland Museum and Archives***

into a mere heap of stones'.[42] The Member of Parliament raised the matter in the House of Commons.[43]

It was a happy coincidence that the Office of Works was preparing to build a new post office in Lerwick. The clerk of works, Henry Macleod, was instructed to repair the broch at the same time, and for three years he and his squad laboured at the site. As we shall see, Hamilton's proposition that they merely carried out 'a certain amount of structural consolidation' could not be further from the mark. In 1910, when the work was finished, a local councillor said that 'during the past two years the monument has been destroyed. It is a modern structure now; it is not an ancient monument'.[44]

So much for Hamilton's view that Clickhimin had 'remained virtually untouched' from antiquity until 1953. Now we must examine at length his own work on the site, and his and others' theories about what it meant.

42 NRS, MW1/432, Report by A.R.M. (Albert R. Myers). The year before a contributor to the *Boy's Own Paper* had thought that 'the annihilation of the tower of Clekamennin [*sic*] seems to be only a matter of a few years' (Smith 1905, 772).

43 *Hansard*, Commons, 153, 5 March 1906, column 74. J. Cathcart Wason, the Member, followed up the matter by writing on several occasions to the Office of Works about it: NRS, MW1/432.

44 *Shetland News*, 7 May 1910.

3

For most of the past 2,000 years Clickhimin broch was on an island in a loch: the 'Peaches' or Picts Loch,[45] as it was called until a pub called Cleikhimin was established nearby, probably around 1740.[46] When Dryden paid his second visit there, in 1866, he drew the 170 foot-long causeway that connected it with the mainland.[47] **(Figure 4.)** It wasn't until 1874 that the first drainage of the land around the loch occurred;[48] the butcher Mackay drained more of it in the eighties, side-by-side with his stone-pilfering activities,[49] and eventually causeway and broch were left high and dry, as they are today. I'll come back to the causeway at the end.

Hamilton said, without an atom of proof, that in the Bronze Age and the early Iron Age the site was a peninsula.[50] We shall see later why he said so. As we have seen, Hamilton had moved on from Jarlshof, where there are settlements from diverse eras, to look for an identical situation at Clickhimin. He announced that a Bronze Age farmer had wandered on to the site about 700 B.C., and set up a farm there. He thought that a building with side-chambers at the north end of the site was that farmer's dwelling.[51]

The Bronze Age is the first of Hamilton's settlement periods. We may ask: how did he decide that the house dated from that era? The area outside the broch is full of later structures, and it might have been logical to assume that the house was post-broch in date. For Hamilton it was a matter of building style: the house looked like similar houses at Jarlshof, he said, and a few pieces of pottery that he found on the edge of the loch looked like Bronze Age material found elsewhere in Shetland.[52]

45 SA, D24/box 24/8/1, Disposition by Thomas Leslie of Ustanes to William Murray, 3 August 1689; NRS, RS47/1, folio 26, Instrument of sasine in favour of Magnus Irvine in Uppersound, 16 April 1746.

46 Cleikhimin (with variant spellings) is a common pub-name in Scotland and the north of England. The first reference to ours is in 1743, when an illegitimate son of William Nicolson, the proprietor, was born there, with the publican and his wife as godparents: Goudie and Grant 1891, 9-10. 100 years later a seller of property referred to the place as Cleikum Inn (*John O'Groat Journal*, 17 July 1846: I am grateful to Gordon Johnston for this reference).

47 RCAHMS, SHD 8/15; Dryden 1874, plate XVII. When the novelist George Borrow visited the broch in winter 1858 he had to take off his shoes, socks and trousers to wade round it (Shorter 1913, 339).

48 *John O'Groat Journal*, 2 July 1874.

49 Years afterwards Mackay's son gave evidence to the Land Court about his father's drainage projects: *Shetland Times*, 14 June 1913.

50 Hamilton 1968a, 30.

51 Hamilton 1968a, 13, 16, 25-6. Hamilton found the 'Bronze Age' house in 1955: RCAHMS, MS/163/4.

52 Hamilton 1968a, 13, 30, 31-3.

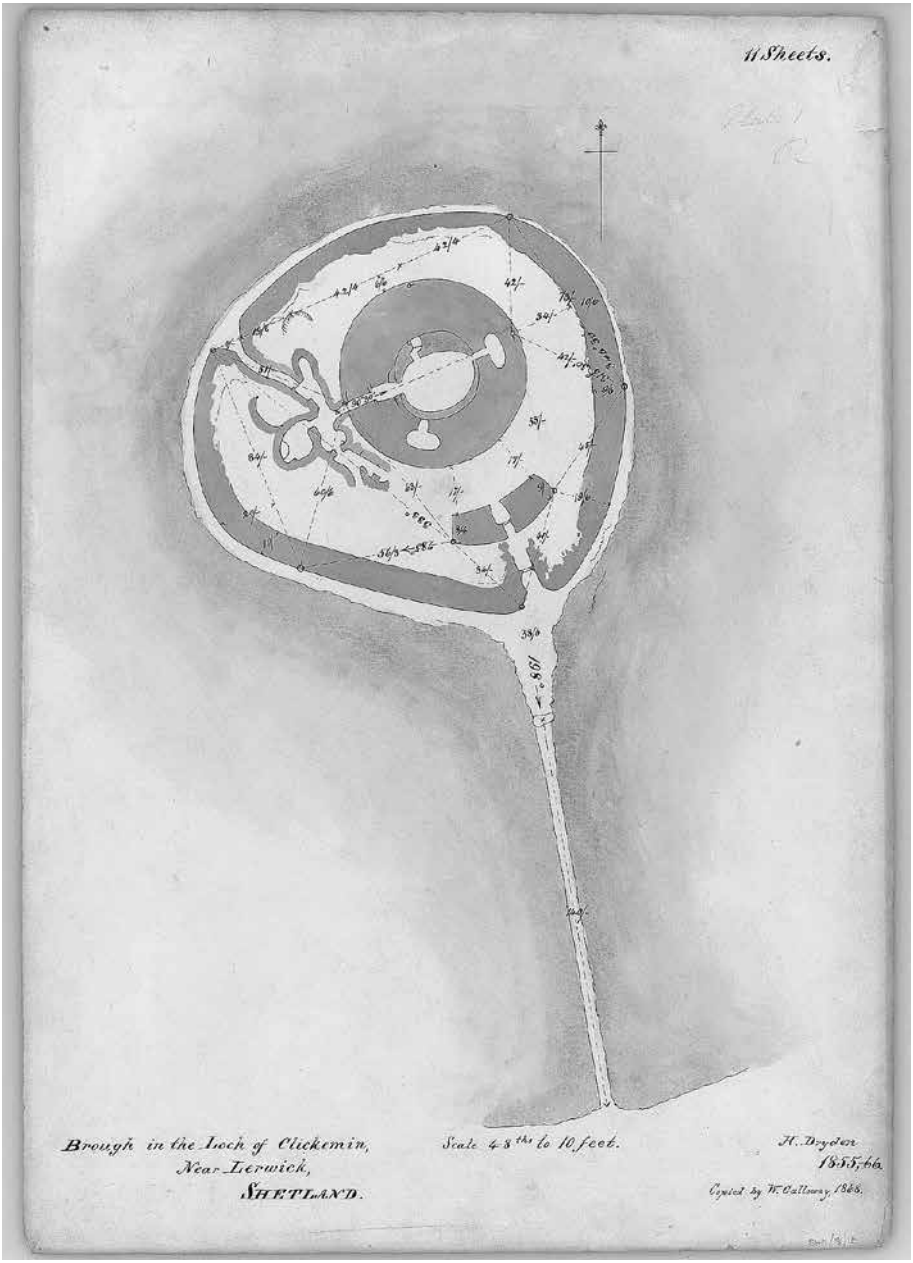

Figure 4. Dryden's plan of the site, 1866. *Photograph: RCAHMS*

It is a flimsy argument. Recently Dennis Harding has joined the debate: he points out that such a house in the Northern Isles might have emerged at any date from the stone age until Pictish times, and he shows that the Clickhimin example closely resembles a Pictish one at Gurness in Orkney. If the Clickhimin house was Bronze Age in date, he says, 'we could only marvel at its survival in such substantial form through a millennium of building activity that included the construction of a broch within a few metres of it'.[53]

It is also worth invoking common sense in this argument. Why would a Bronze Age farmer in Shetland set up house on an island in a loch, or even on a loch-peninsula? There is no example elsewhere in the islands from that period of such a foolhardy escapade. Hamilton himself admits that the putative farmer would have had to travel to the mainland for crops, pasture and fuel, because there is no scope for any of them on the isle.[54] Shetland may have been short of arable land in that era, as Hamilton is at pains to stress, but hardly to that extent. As Harding says, the so-called Bronze Age house is far more likely to have come on the scene in the post-broch period, when there was plenty of stone on the site.

And we can dismiss Hamilton's alleged early Iron Age roundhouse, his second phase of settlement at Clickhimin, even more summarily.[55] He imagined that a new community of 'colonists' had arrived there about 500 BC.[56] His proof for the new immigration is a spur of stone on the north wall of the broch.[57] According to Hamilton it was the fragment of a large house, preserved by the broch-builders hundreds of years later for some reason when they were building their own great structure. The big problem is that the spur is missing from Dryden's meticulous drawings of 1866,[58] and from Macleod's plan of 1908.[59] Since it makes a first appearance on Ragnar Moe's survey plan of 1928,[60] I presume that it was inserted by Macleod's masons in 1909 or 1910, perhaps to shore up that part of the structure during rebuilding. A glance at it shows that it is largely separate from the broch, and not an integral part of it.[61]

53 Harding 2009a, 181-2; see also Harding 2009b, 481-2.
54 Hamilton 1968a, 29-30.
55 Hamilton did not identify the 'early Iron Age roundhouse' until 1956, when he submitted a report to *Discovery and Excavation* (Hamilton 1956b).
56 Hamilton 1968a, 34.
57 Hamilton 1968a, 39.
58 Dryden 1874, plates XVIII-XIX.
59 RCAHMS, SHD 8/107.
60 Brøgger 1929, opposite 46.
61 I am grateful to Robbie Arthur for discussing the spur with me. There is a not entirely dissimilar excrescence on the north-west side of the broch, unmentioned by Hamilton or anyone else.

Hamilton's notion that there was a roundhouse there in the early part of the Iron Age, and that there are further traces of it on the broch floor, is not taken seriously by archaeologists today.[62]

4

From misdated and phantom structures we now proceed to real ones. Hamilton devoted much attention to the ringwall, the forework and the apron next to the broch: more even than he gave to the broch. They are the subject of the longest chapter in his book.[63] He now proposed that a new band of colonisers came to Clickhimin around 2,400 years ago, 'crofters, whalers and prospectors', natives of Gaul,[64] basing themselves once more in a highly inconvenient place for such activities. For good measure he said that they were Picts,[65] an outrageous suggestion, since that people didn't make an appearance until hundreds of years later. Those Picts, according to Hamilton, built the ringwall and forework.

As we saw at the outset, Douglas Simpson thought that those structures were originally conceived as a seamless whole, a pre-broch fortification on the island rather like the little structure in the Loch of Huxter in Whalsay. Hamilton adopted Simpson's idea, without acknowledging it.[66] But he went much further. The alleged fort period, you will recall, was the period missing from Jarlshof. He now went full steam ahead to find it at Clickhimin.

Let's look more closely at Simpson's argument for a conjoined forework and ringwall. Simpson assumed, as Hamilton did, and I do, that they were military structures. But 'a forework or barbican,' he said,[67] 'containing a well-secured entry, yet unconnected with any curtain wall or defensive envelope, but standing free so that anybody can run round it, is a plain absurdity. Clearly this forework must be the remnant of a larger structure, providing an effective barrier against admission to the site.'

Looking closely at the ringwall on the east side he thought he had had found a kink in it, and other irregularities. 'From the above indications', he went on,[68]

62 Fojut 1998, 28.
63 Hamilton 1968a, 45-96. Hamilton preferred the term 'blockhouse' because of a dangerous 'inferred relationship' between the word 'forework' and broch (Hamilton 1962, 76).
64 Hamilton 1968a, 45.
65 Hamilton 1968a, 52.
66 Hamilton 1968a, 17, 58. He had acknowledged Simpson previously on the subject: Hamilton 1962, 76-77.
67 Simpson 1954, 21.
68 Simpson 1954, 24.

I suspect that the so-called 'forework' is really a vestigial remnant of an earlier phase in the wall of *enceinte* that surrounds the island; a phase when the sweep of this rampart towards the south was less wide than now. Probably a decline in the level of the loch, enlarging the area of the island on the landward front, made it desirable to take in this extra ground. The original southern segment of the circle was therefore taken down and rebuilt farther out.

There are two things to say about Simpson's theory, and Hamilton's adoption of it. First, if they had looked carefully at Dryden's plans of the site,[69]

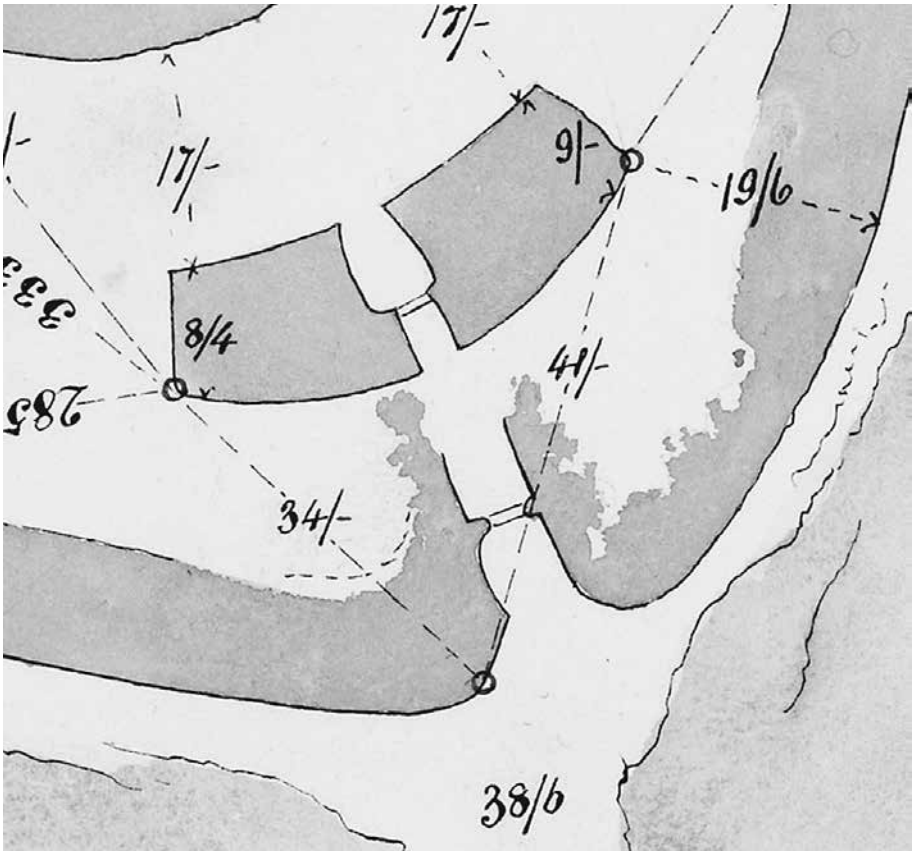

Figure 5. A detail of Dryden's plan, showing how the forework probably joined the ringwall. ***Photograph: RCAHMS***

69 Dryden 1874, plate XIX.

they would have spotted that the forework probably *had* been connected to the ringwall, preventing entry to left or right. **(Figure 5.)** As James Thomas Irvine said, after visiting Clickhimin in January 1863, 'On passing the entrance [to the ringwall] we are … confronted by a guardhouse with … remains of rough walls joining it to the outer wall'.[70] These walls have gone, removed by dereliction and rebuilding in the next fifty years, but they were there 150 years ago.

What misled Simpson, and eventually Hamilton – this is my second point – was that they thought they were looking at Iron Age architecture. What they actually saw, when they studied the forework and the ringwall, were structures almost entirely reconstructed by Macleod's squad in 1908-10. Macleod had had to rebuild them because of the appalling state they had got into in the previous fifty years. Two photographs of the forework survive which show the situation before and after reconstruction: one taken around 1906, on the eve of Macleod's campaign, of a ruin, the other when it had been rebuilt.[71] **(Figures 6-7.)** What we must recall, from now on, is that it is rash to

Figures 6-7. Photographs of the forework, c.1906 and c.1908, showing the dereliction and rebuilding. The figure is probably Henry Macleod (1880-1940), clerk of works. ***Photograph: RCAHMS***

70 Irvine 1866, 370.
71 RCAHMS, SH 806 and A 52635.

assume that any part of the Clickhimin site is original or ancient. Theories about its original form based on the architecture visible today are doomed to failure. As Councillor Sutherland said in 1910, you recall, 'It is a modern structure now; it is not an ancient monument'.

To underline the point, let's look at the ringwall. Simpson diligently inspected it for proof of his theory that the original builders had changed their minds. Perhaps he hadn't seen, or didn't recall, the photograph by Washington Wilson that we considered a moment ago. In it the ringwall is engulfed and obscured by hundreds of tons of stone. As a witness had said at Mackay's trial in 1888, 'The outer wall [at Clickhimin is] scarcely now distinguishable'.[72] Fortunately we have Macleod's clerk of works plan of December 1908, a brilliant piece of work,[73] drawn when the tons of stone had been removed. **(Figure 8.)** Not surprisingly, three-quarters of the original ringwall disappeared in the process, and Macleod's men had to rebuild it from scratch. Simpson's quest for kinks and irregularities in it was beyond the point.

All we know about the ringwall and forework is that they had formerly been structures of that general shape. From Dryden's beautiful plans we

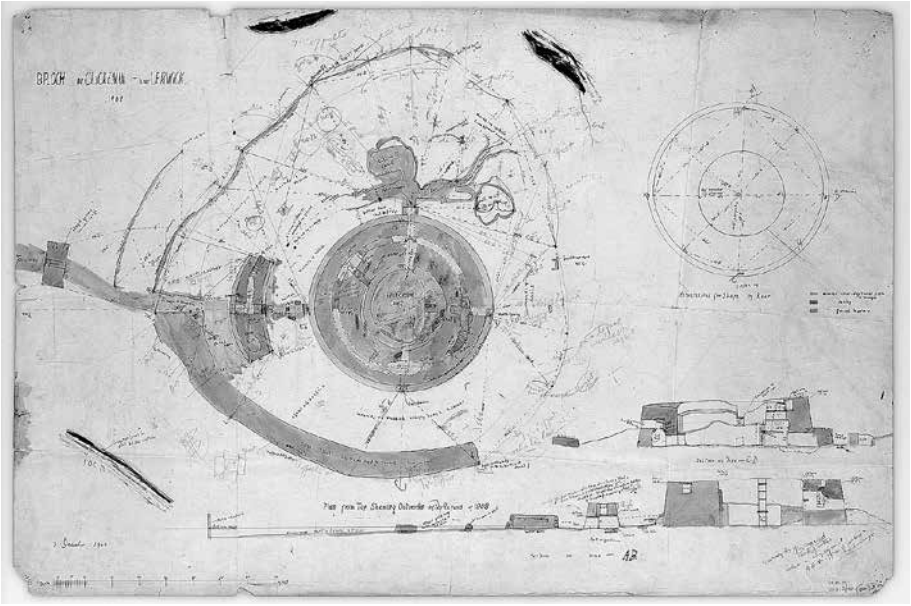

Figure 8. Henry Macleod's plan of Clickhimin, December 1908, showing the depleted ringwall. ***Photograph: RCAHMS***

72 *Shetland News*, 7 Apr. 1888.
73 RCAHMS, SHD 8/107.

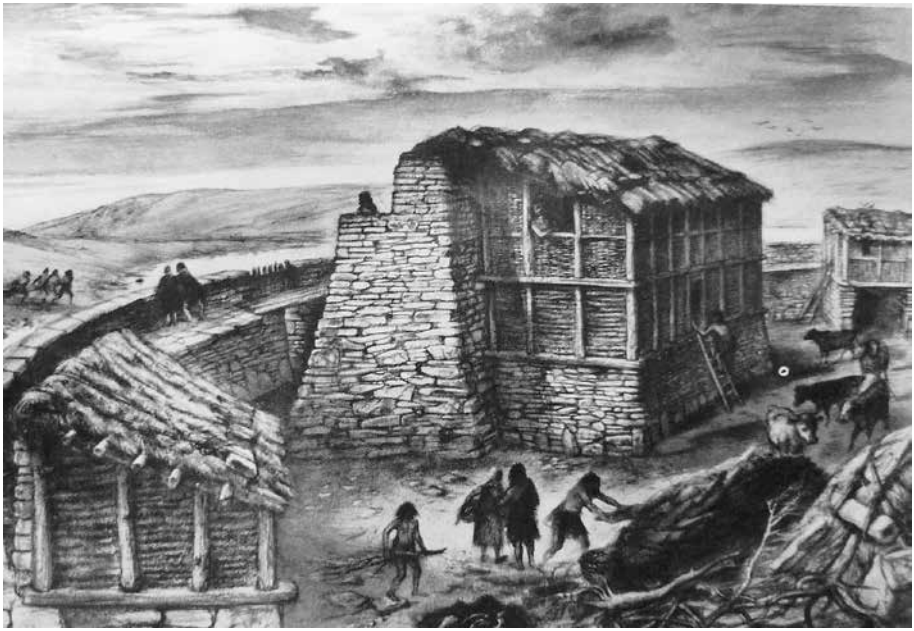

Figure 9. Alan Sorrell's reconstruction drawing of forework, ringwall and 'tenements', 1965. ***Photograph: Historic Scotland***

can view the situation after the excavation of 1861-2 and before the worst vandalism; from them we may hazard a guess that the forework had been attached to the ringwall, contrary to what Simpson imagined. But even then we can't be sure that that had been the situation in antiquity. We must be careful.

Hamilton wasn't careful. Very soon he started to weave a story that the forework and ringwall had been, as he put it, 'the stronghold of a leading family, probably of the chieftain who established the colony on the islet'.[74] He also imagined that he could reconstruct the chieftain's house, and that it had been two or three storeys high, rather than the current one.[75] Alan Sorrell provided a striking drawing of the alleged imposing tenement building.[76] **(Figure 9.)** What is missing from Hamilton's account, however, is any proof that the forework had been a chieftain's house at all, and that it had taken that exotic form. In 1930 Calder had speculated that there might have been some sort of additional structure behind the forework, basing his view on the

74 Hamilton 1968a, 53.
75 Hamilton 1968a, 56-8.
76 Hamilton 1968a, plate IX.

scarcement, the ledge sticking out of the north side of it.[77] Macleod certainly found interesting vestiges of occupation there: a paved court, a hearth and a midden.[78] But there is of course no reason why those features, now gone, should not date from the post-broch period, like the so-called Bronze Age house.

Nothing daunted, Hamilton went on to find more tenements, this time leaning against the ringwall. He located post-holes on the west of it, and traces of manure and peat mould, which led him to believe that grain production, smithing and the stabling of cattle was going on there.[79] Not everyone was convinced by this reconstruction. Horace Fairhurst, reviewing Hamilton's book in 1971, pointed out that 'the excavation evidence [for it] is surprisingly fragmentary in view of the widespread publicity already given to the hypothesis'.[80] Ten years later Noel Fojut concluded that Hamilton's proposal was 'almost entirely hypothetical'.[81]

But that wasn't Hamilton's only theory about the fort. In the 1960s he began to read Irish literature of the dark ages. He believed that he had found descriptions of kings' and chieftains' forts not very different from the alleged set-up at Clickhimin, although they were written a thousand years later.[82] He pointed out that the length of the forework was 27 feet, precisely the length of house to which noblemen were entitled in Irish laws of the Dark Ages – although he admitted that that might be a coincidence. '[I]t seems certain', he concluded,[83] 'that the islet was the seat of a Celtic dynasty of some importance or at least was the stronghold of a noble whose duties at his place of residence included the coronation of the king or chieftain of the central island power.'

'Certain' is not a word that should have been used about such a matter. Hamilton's imagination had run riot.

5

Then catastrophe overtook the antique idyll – or so Hamilton said. Around 100 BC violent gales blew from the south-east, he postulated, and so a narrow spit was formed between the loch and the sea: what we now call the Ayre of Clickhimin. The result was, he said,[84] 'a sudden rise in the level of the

77 RCAHMS, MS 36/118, 46.
78 RCAHMS, SHD 8/107.
79 Hamilton 1968a, 63-5.
80 Fairhurst 1971, 121.
81 Fojut 1998, 29.
82 Hamilton 1966, 120-3; 1968a, 68-75; 1968b.
83 Hamilton 1968a, 75.
84 Hamilton 1968a, 17.

loch, which undermined the fort wall on the west and south sides, flooded the area round the blockhouse, and caused the half-timbered ranges to be abandoned'.

We now see why Hamilton wanted the site to be a peninsula in the Bronze Age and early Iron Age. It was because he invented a flood and rise in water-level during the next period to engulf it. We can dispose of the flood quickly by examining Hamilton's account of it.[85]

It wasn't an ingress of water that undermined the ringwall at Clickhimin on its west and south sides, and indeed on all its sides: as we have seen already, it was the attrition of ages and vandals. Hamilton now discovered a breakwater against the wall at its south side,[86] supposed to have been created by the inhabitants following the emergency: a long pile of massive stones, leaning against the foundations. But those stones weren't there in December 1908. Henry Macleod, engaged in rebuilding the wall that year, had used large stones as buttresses, as he called them, but at that point he had placed them at strategic points on each side of the main entrance.[87] A couple of years later, the job done, he seems to have moved them to their present position, presumably for neatness sake. The breakwater idea is attractive, but it is wrong.

Macleod made an interesting discovery in that vicinity. When he removed the tons of rubble from the front of the structure he began to find what he called 'traces of built work'. At first he thought it was yet another wall.[88] But what he had found was what the Royal Commission eventually called a 'landing stage':[89] a long low platform between broch and loch. Hamilton grasped at it as yet another example of the response to flooding. From now on, he said, there was only one way to get to the islet: by boat. It was necessary to build a platform to accommodate visiting craft.[90] I won't say more about the landing stage just now, other than to stress that there might be more than one explanation for such a structure.

Hamilton proceeded with his story. 'For a time', he says, 'many of the occupants, possibly the women and children, were sent to a neighbouring settlement until temporary quarters had been built'.[91] I wonder what on earth the archaeological evidence for that evacuation could have been! Meanwhile, the men left at home conceived a bold new project. They decided (Hamilton

85 Kevin Edwards and his colleagues discuss the flood – 'if it ever occurred' - in Edwards et al. 2005, 1749.
86 Hamilton 1968a, 17, 19, 76.
87 RCAHMS, SHD 8/107.
88 RCAHMS, SHD 8/107.
89 Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland 1946, 65.
90 Hamilton 1968a, 75.
91 Hamilton 1968a, 76.

said) to abandon the peripheral areas of the isle 'as too damp for habitation owing to seepage, and to construct a new work, an inner ringwall, round the crest of the islet'.[92] Hamilton thought that the large apron on the south and west sides of the broch was the foundations of this new effort, but that it was suddenly abandoned soon afterwards when visitors from Orkney arrived with a new plan: to build a broch.[93]

Hamilton's inner ringwall looks like a lot of effort to enclose a yard and a couple of piles of wood. It must be the most substantial yard dyke in history. Then in 2002 Euan MacKie came up with his own explanation for it. At first he thought that Hamilton's second ringwall looked more like a 'mound of rubble piled against the base of the broch'. He said 'that it looks nothing like a wall'.[94] But a few pages later he speculated that it was a new 'ring-fort', something even more complex than Hamilton had proposed. He returned to Simpson's idea that the forework was attached to the outer ring-wall, but now suggested that it was attached to his inner ring-fort instead.[95] Inevitably, he suggested that that spur of 1909 or 1910 was part of it. The ring-fort, he said, was a combination of the Hebridean semi-broch tradition and Shetland's own species of gatehouse-fort.[96]

And just as Hamilton had told a story about kings and chieftains at Clickhimin, MacKie now told another about the date of their alleged ringfort. Citing pottery, he pushed the date of ringwall and forework back even further than Hamilton. He said that it was the stronghold of people with pots who had come to Shetland from north-west France in the sixth century BC at the latest.[97] But Hamilton's and MacKie's views about the Clickhimin pottery are not shared by archaeologists today. MacKie's pots could just as well be

92 Hamilton 1968a, 19 and 76. Hamilton started to consider the apron at a relatively late date. Writing to Norman Robertson, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, on 30 September 1955, he says that '[i]t was a great surprise to find that half the broch was built on an artificial mound containing quern stones' (NRS, DD27/1184). In his manuscript of c.1958 (see footnote 13, *supra*) he only proposed five eras for Clickhimin – minus the 'early Iron Age house' and 'second ringwall' - rather than the seven he dealt with eventually.

93 Hamilton 1968a, 78.

94 MacKie 2002, 92.

95 MacKie 2002, 102, 204. MacKie has become certain about this interpretation: he now says flatly that 'the remains of [the forework's] ring-wall underlie the broch entrance passage' (MacKie 2008, 271).

96 MacKie 2002, 203.

97 MacKie 2008, 270-1. This was a big change of direction for MacKie. 25 years previously he had announced that '[t]he date of the earliest fort at Clickhimin should not be before 56 BC', and that '[t]he "blockhouse" at Clickhimin is not a free-standing structure but part of a once complete gallery-walled ring-fort, built at about 50-40 BC' (MacKie 1983, 124). His new dates are less convincing than his old ones.

post-broch in date. '[I]n terms of absolute chronology,' Dennis Harding said in 2009, 'the Clickhimin sequence remains entirely speculative'.[98]

6

It should be clear by now that I don't believe in Hamilton's schema, or MacKie's refinements of it. There was no Bronze Age farmer and no early Iron Age roundhouse at Clickhimin; the forework and ringwall weren't conjoined and then separated to make a chieftain's fortress; there was no flood and breakwater; no second ringwall or second fort. It is ridiculous, in my view, to suggest that the forework is hundreds of years older than the broch, since it has many features in common with it. As Robert Stevenson said with a hint of irony, reviewing Hamilton's book,[99] '[t]he four-centuries priority of the blockhouse's broch-like structural techniques over the actual building of the broch, and the great conservatism of the often-ornate pottery, are unexpected conclusions that run counter to the ingenuity and vigour shown by the invention and proliferation of broch towers.' The archaeologists who believed Hamilton's story were gullible.

I think that the island in Clickhimin Loch was an island until the 1870s, because there is no evidence to the contrary, and that it was probably uninhabited until the broch era, 2,000 years or so ago. In other words, I believe, like Watson, that 'broch, bulwark and enclosing wall [on the isle] are of one time'.

Such a location could only have been used for a very unusual purpose. It was a massive undertaking that required the arrival onsite of vast amounts of stone.[100] I suspect that that was the purpose of the landing stage: it may have been a platform for that stone, created as part of the broch project.

There is not much mystery about the ringwall. It is of course a wall which encircles the broch. Nor is the forework a great puzzle: 'to guard this exposed point' (the entrance to the ringwall), as Samuel Hibbert said in 1822, 'a mural out-work, of a crescentic form, shelters this part of the fortress'.[101] A guard on the forework could see clearly who was approaching the broch via the causeway. Hamilton's multiple periods and explanations were simply an attempt to replicate Jarlshof at Clickhimin.

The apron on the south and west of the broch is a bigger problem. It appears on one of Dryden's sketches of 1866, and is thus not a confection of

98 Harding 2009a, 125.
99 Stevenson 1970, 123.
100 2,400 cubic yards of it, according to Irvine (1866, 375).
101 Hibbert 1822, 280.

the Office of Works, although it was no doubt tidied up by them. Hamilton's and MacKie's explanations for it are absurd. I am interested in what Stewart Cruden said on the subject in his guidebook of 1951, which, by the way, must be the most abstruse popular guidebook of all time. Cruden was an architect by training, and he looked at the broch with an architect's eye. '[T]he possibilities', he says,[102]

> of considerable rebuilding during the broch period should not be overlooked when considering this feature. ... It may well be that this broch was settling unevenly on the south-west—the outer wall at present bulges disconcertingly at various places although now safe from further collapse—and that from the unstable base were drawn face stones, so that the existing platform might be inserted to act as a low continuous buttress. ... It is not unusual to find ruined brochs spreading at the base through the outward thrust of the high and massive walling. At the Midhowe broch on Rousay, Orkney, flag-stones on edge retain the bulging wall.

Robert Stevenson had a similar idea: he thought that the apron was a huge buttress added after the broch had partially collapsed.[103]

Douglas Simpson, on the other hand, suggested that the apron was contemporary with, not later than the broch; he says that inserting it underneath, as Cruden suggested, 'would have been alike hazardous and unnecessary'. He saw 'at intervals round its kerb … orthostats obviously devised to discipline the structure. These have failed in their purpose,' he says, 'and for the most part are tilted forward under pressure'.[104] I can't comment on the matter; but I note that none of these commentators thought that the apron originated in an era before the broch-builders arrived on site.

Until mid-twentieth century few doubted that the broch of Clickhimin, and other brochs in Shetland, were military rather than domestic in character. It is clear to me that Clickhimin broch is something very special in the military line: untouchable on its island, a place unthinkable for normal settlement, its keep protected by a strong encircling wall and barbican. It is likely that in its day it was far higher than at present: Sir Walter Scott, visiting it in 1814, said that '[t]he wall is not perpendicular, but the circle lessens gradually towards the top, as an old fashioned pigeon-house'.[105]

102 Cruden 1951, 12.
103 Stevenson 1970, 124.
104 Simpson 1954, 25.
105 Lockhart 1838, 75.

We may now enter the broch, pausing to note the government broad-arrow on the lintel above the entrance, no doubt a signature on Macleod's work of 1908-10.[106] Douglas Simpson pointed out that the entrance is deliberately placed on the west side of the structure so that 'an assailant', as he puts it, 'after penetrating the enclosure, had to make his way round the base of the broch in that direction, exposing always to its defenders his right flank'.[107] Cruden and Fojut have speculated that there might have been a guard-chamber on the right-hand side of the entrance passage, to forestall unwelcome visitors, but that it was built up at some stage;[108] Irvine, visiting the broch in 1863, heard that such a cell had been blocked up on the left during Spence's excavations a year previously, because of a broken lintel.[109]

Spence and his colleagues had concentrated their attention on the broch in 1861-2, rather than the external structures. Their winter dig, as I said before, was arduous and careful. 'The upper portion of the building which had fallen into decay having been removed,' said the *John O'Groat Journal* at the time,[110] 'the plan of the lower or ground floor, with its numerous passages and cells, can now be distinctly seen.' Dryden's plans show that the rebuilding they undertook was small-scale and appropriate.[111]

There was a complication, however. The 'keep' of the broch, as Macleod called it in 1908, was obscured by a later building which had been inserted in it. Visiting the site, shortly after the excavation, Arthur Mitchell wrote in his notebook[112] that '[t]he inside of the brough has been fully cleared out, but instead of being circular it is oval. This appears to arise from a large mass of building against the inner walls, running up to a height of 10 or 12 feet, & converging.'

'*Quaere*', he said: 'was this a gigantic beehive house inside the brough?' It was. In other words, a domestic dwelling had been inserted in the broch tower, probably around AD 200, after the building's original purpose had become obsolete. The same happened at other brochs: at Levenwick, Mousa and Burland at Brindister, elsewhere in Shetland, for instance.[113]

106 There is a second broad-arrow on the wall of the broch opposite the forework, now scarcely visible.
107 Simpson 1954. 26.
108 Cruden 1951, 13; Fojut 1989, 32.
109 NMS, Manuscript 535, Shetland Historical Collections, vol. 2, Plan of 'interior of brough of Clickimin', 1863.
110 2 January 1862.
111 For example, RCAHMS, SAS 170.
112 NRS, GD492/37.
113 Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland 1946, 25, 54, 71-2; Harding 2009b, 478.

This wheelhouse, as it is usually called, obscured the whole interior: as Mitchell says, it 'shuts up the chambers – only 2 of which … have been discovered & both by entering at their roofs.' The excavators had to burst through the wheelhouse wall to open the one on the east side of the keep; they didn't break through to the one on the south side, 'but when you examine it from the inside', Mitchell said, 'you find where the entrance had been, though now shut up by this building against it.' These late alterations were mysterious to the Victorians, especially since their investigations had had to stop prematurely. 'The excavations are still very incomplete,' lamented Mitchell, 'serving only to perplex.'

The key point is that Spence & Co. didn't excavate the floor of the broch; what they found was the floor of the wheelhouse. As I said before, one of their main finds was a hearth, although it was destroyed by vandals a few years later; they also found a pile of corn bruisers and knocking stanes, and a 'bink', a bed.[114] A year later James Thomas Irvine, fumbling in a little cupboard in one of the chambers, fished out a peat. 'It had evidently been cut by a metal instrument,' he said, 'as at present done, only thicker'.

There was a drain too, that ran from the wheelhouse, through the broch entrance passage, and through a gap in the north-west part of the ringwall.[115] During the next fifty years drain and gap disappeared under tons of stone; but the drain was rediscovered during the restoration of 1910.[116] The gap had gone, however, along with the rest of the wall, and Macleod didn't reinstate it. In 1956 Hamilton dismantled that part of the wall again, because it was in a dangerous state, and rebuilt it.[117] All this emphasises my point that the architecture we see on the site today frequently is not that of the Iron Age.

7

Hamilton dug through the base of the wheelhouse in summer 1953, and arrived at the original broch floor.[118] The finds there were paltry. The result of two excavations, and of the reuse of the broch after its heyday, is that we get a picture of domestic rather than military use: hearth, bed, cornbruisers, peats and drains.[119] We need to set that impression aside as we go back through the ringwall, and leave the broch on its island fastness. **(Figure 10.)**

114 Irvine 1866, 372. Irvine marked the find-spot of the peat on his plan of 'Interior of brough of Clickimin', 1863, NMS, Manuscript 535, Shetland Historical Collections, vol. 2.
115 Dryden 1874, 206 and Plate XIX.
116 NRS, MW1/433, Copy letter by W.T. Oldrieve to Joseph Anderson, 29 November 1907.
117 NRS, DD27/1184, Memorandum by Hamilton, 9 October 1956.
118 RCAHMS, MS/163/4.
119 Irvine also thought that he had found 'the state bed-chamber of the Celtic squire of the brough', a wardrobe and a pantry (Irvine 1866, 372, 373).

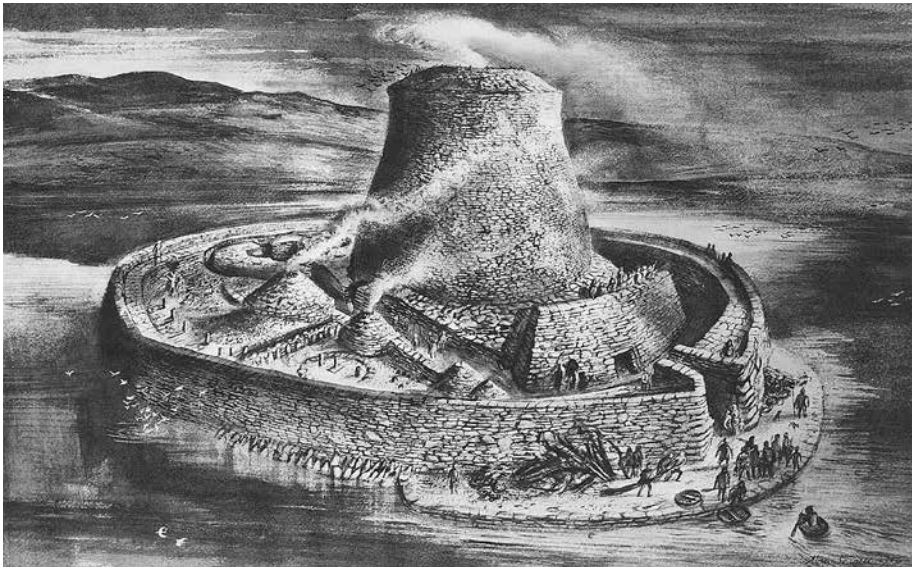

Figure 10. Alan Sorrell's superb reconstruction of the broch on its island, from the *Illustrated London News*, 18 May 1957. It is probably a reasonable portrayal of its subject. Note that there are no 'tenements'! P*hotograph: Mary Evans Picture Library*

Until the 1870s exit from the broch had to be via the massive causeway. Hamilton thought that it came into existence in what he called the late wheelhouse era, probably about AD 600. He said that the loch had begun to silt up, impeding the boats that allegedly used the landing stage:[120] yet another ecological event for which there is no proof at all. According to Hamilton that period was 'one of decline', and noted for 'general poverty':[121] hardly a moment when the community could have constructed a massive causeway. I see no reason to doubt that it was built in the broch period, the means of access to the broch itself, as integral a part of the project as ringwall, forework and landing stage.

At the top of the causeway there is a curious structure, which may be the final defensive feature on the site. It is hardly noticeable today, a remnant a foot or two in height. It seems to have been a gateway to the broch complex. On the threshold of it is a stone with two sculptured footmarks.

The gateway is a puzzle, and commentators have been suspicious of it.[122] On drawings and photographs of the 1860s and 1870s it is a substantial

120 Hamilton 1968a, 23, 150; MacKie toys with the same idea (MacKie 2002, 107).
121 Hamilton 1968a, 150.
122 Simpson (1954, 21n.) thought that the structure was 'obviously modern', 'built to keep cattle out of the island before the existing railing was substituted'.

rectangular building, sometimes with a lintel;[123] on Dryden's sketch of 1855, however, it is a low pile of stones, much as today. Clearly it had been built up or reconstructed after Spence's excavation, and in due course was engulfed by stone during the vandalism.[124]

But without doubt there had been some sort of structure there, and the presence of the footmarked stone is intriguing. Hamilton, convinced that the causeway was late, thought that the stone had been brought there from elsewhere. He said that it was a coronation stone from his fictitious chieftain's fort.[125] But I see no reason to believe that it had ever been anywhere else; I'm prepared to believe either that stone and gateway were part of the broch complex, or (perhaps more likely) that they were inserted on the causeway by the wheelhouse dwellers. The fact that people went on living on the inconvenient site suggests that the broch people's successors were an important and unusual community as well.

What happened to the causeway? Today we can see meagre traces of less than half of it, which stop abruptly at the modern fence. **(Figure 11.)** The southmost half, portrayed on Dryden's plans, has disappeared from the face of the earth. The butcher Mackay had begun to tear it up in 1888,[126] and I have a feeling that Macleod may have completed the work in 1908-10. I wonder if the stones he used for buttresses for the ringwall came from the by then denuded causeway.

I can't resist mentioning one final archaeological theory about the site, this time about the causeway itself. In 2002 Euan MacKie told his readers that '[t]he causeway proceeds straight outwards from the landing stage and at an angle which is slightly to the west of the centre line of the passage through the outer wall.' Then, he sensationally revealed, 'it turns sharply to the east (through an angle of about 45 degrees, estimated by eye) and can be seen, covered in grass, crossing the adjacent field until it disappears near the modern wall.'[127] MacKie thought that he had found an angled causeway, designed to puzzle an attacker who expected a straight line.

123 See the drawings by T S Muir, 1862 (Muir 1885, opposite 132), Arthur Mitchell, 1863 (NRS, GD492/37, 31), J T Reid, 1867 (Reid 1869, opposite 5), and Capt. W St G Burke, July 1875 (RCAHMS, DC 25595); and a photograph by Charles Spence (Shetland Museum and Archives photograph collection, NE00835).

124 Following a request by Joseph Anderson, Office of Works staff took from 1907 until 1910 to find the footmarked stone on the derelict site: NRS, MW1/433, letter by Anderson to W T Oldrieve, November 1907; *Shetland News*, 26 Feb. 1910.

125 Hamilton 1968a, 75.

126 *Shetland News*, 7 Apr. 1888.

127 MacKie says (2002, 91) that '[v]ery similar submerged and angled causeways can be seen at Dun Torcuill in North Uist … and at Dun Barabhat ...' But his own photographs of those structures (MacKie 2007, 1178 and 1281) show causeways far simpler and shorter than that at Clickhimin.

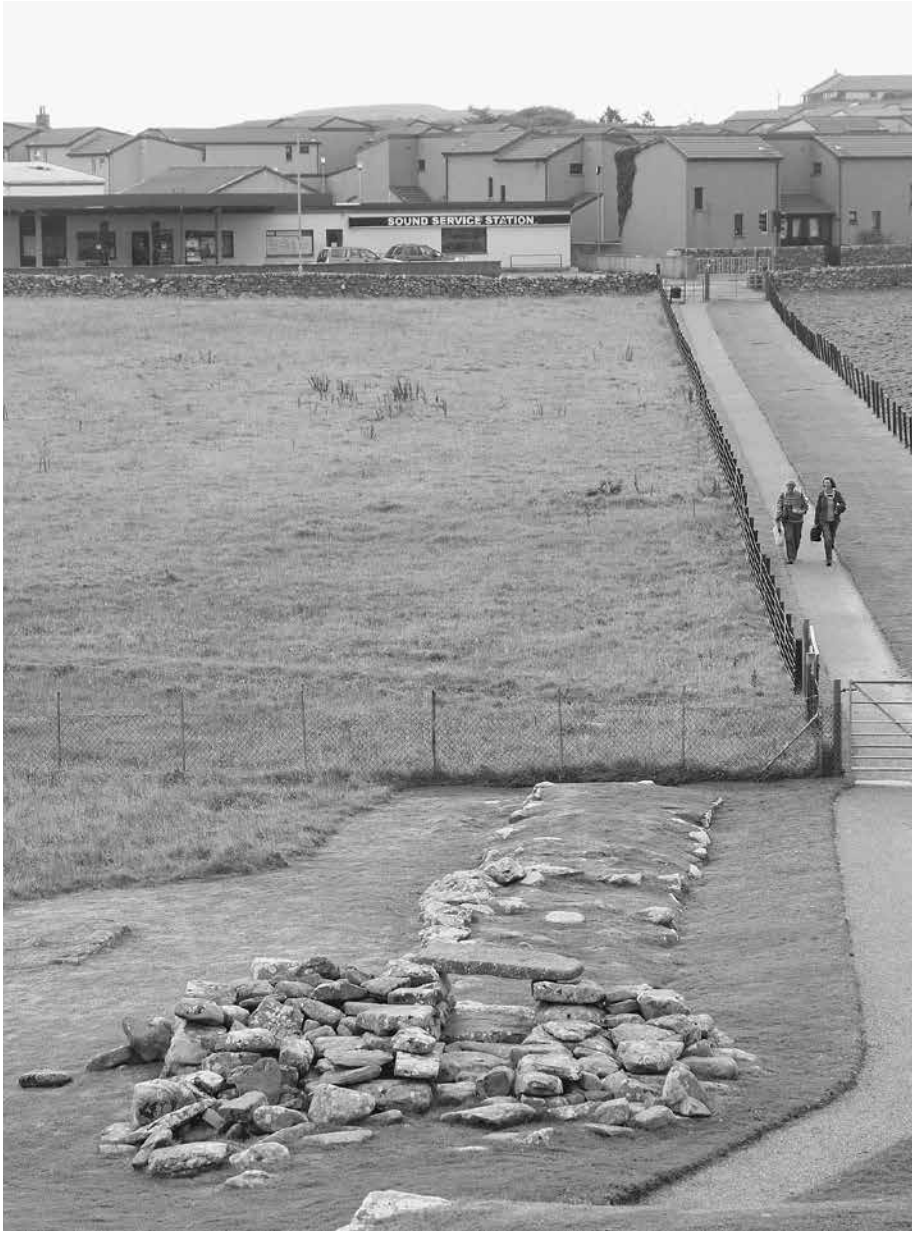

Figure 11. The remnant of the causeway and gateway, and the (just visible) cobbled path, 2013. ***Photograph: Brian Smith***

He should have consulted Dryden's plans of 1866. What MacKie saw was a cobbled path, whose nature is still perfectly clear, built by the Ministry of Works around 1930 to accommodate visitors to the monument.[128] Until 1970 there was no straight road down to the broch; if you wanted to see it you had to come via the butcher Mackay's house – by then, ironically, his son was the broch warden[129] – and finally along the cobbled path. MacKie's misapprehension was not the first, but will hopefully be one of the last about a fascinating ancient - and modern - monument.

8

What are the implications of our fresh look at Clickhimin?

First, there is nothing on the site to support a centuries-long pedigree for broch-settlement before Christ. The broch, its forework and its ring-wall must have come on the scene abruptly, in response to a real or even an imagined threat. The pre-broch forts are fiction. Since the 1970s archaeologists have been proposing a centuries-long genealogy for brochs. There is nothing to support such a view at Clickhimin, or anywhere else in Shetland.

Secondly, a close scrutiny of Clickhimin helps us to keep clear of the doctrine that brochs were always farmhouses in arable fields. Hamilton never took that view: he regarded Clickhimin as a fort, pure and simple. But Joseph Anderson, writing in the 1880s, thought that 'although [brochs] are often placed in situations of natural strength, yet, as a rule, they mark the area of the best land in the districts in which they are situated. … They are therefore the defensive strongholds of a population located upon the arable lands and not in the mountain fastnesses of the country.' [130] It is a view that appeals to most modern archaeologists.

Sir Lindsay Scott, solving (he thought) 'The problem of the brochs' in 1947, was more cautious:[131] he said that there should be '[s]ome qualification of [the agrarian view] … in the case of Shetland, which, except its southern part, is very infertile.' '[I]t is probable', he went on, 'that the broch settlers there relied to a greater extent on pasture and fishing.' But Scott still regarded brochs as defended farmhouses, always with an economic rather than a military function.

Scott nonetheless had an important insight about broch societies. He spotted that there might have been different broch-polities in different places:

128 The path is not on the Ordnance Survey map of 1929, but is marked on a Ministry of Works photograph of August 1938 (NRS, MW1/432), and on the Ordnance Survey map of 1959.
129 NRS, MW1/432, Note by J.S.R. to Mr Paterson, 19 July 1932.
130 Anderson 1883, 205.
131 Scott 1947, 9.

a community of farmhouses in Barra, for instance, something far more grim and defensive in the far north. Clickhimin isn't the only broch in Shetland distant from the arable fields. Most Shetland brochs, and there are swarms of them, are on headlands or on hills, on sites where an ear of corn never grew. They kept a sharp look on the ocean, and many of them are intervisible. Shetland brochs weren't farmhouses, as a visitor to Mousa or Culswick should spot immediately: they were watchtowers, or fortresses, as at Clickhimin.

It was a curious and momentous development in Shetland's history. John Stewart said that it was the result of 'the most extraordinary social system that the islands ever possessed'.[132] It is worth keeping in mind what John Brand's Shetland informants told him about brochs when he visited the islands in 1700:[133] 'They are conveniently situated through the Isles, each one being within sight of another, hence in a few hours, advertisement could be given by Fire, or other signs they might condescend upon, through the whole Countrey, signifying unto them any danger, that being thereby alarmed, they might meet together, or be upon their own defence.' It looks to me as if the strange society and its leaders were defence-mad.

Douglas Simpson and John Hamilton thought that by scrutinising Clickhimin in detail we might solve the problem of the brochs. But their detailed scrutiny of it had fantastic results, as I hope I have shown. Sir Lindsay Scott was right: to understand broch societies we must look at different developments and outcomes in different places. Where Scott failed, and the present generation of broch-scholars fails, is in not confronting the view that brochs were always farmhouses in agrarian regimes.

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132 Stewart 1956, 11.
133 Brand 1701, 99.

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