

Fyrirlestrar

Minningarsjóðs Ásu Guðmundsdóttur Wright

The Ása G. Wright Memorial Lectures

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IV

Alexander Fenton

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE  
IN THE BUILDING TRADITION  
OF NORTHERN SCOTLAND



ÞJÓÐMINJASAFN ÍSLANDS  
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ICELAND

1979

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An interior in Foula, Shetland, with a central peat fire, and fish drying above in the heat and smoke. — Photo: H. B. Curwen, 1902. C 6045

*Minningarsjóður Ásu Guðmundsdóttur Wright var stofnaður árið 1968. Hann er í vörslu Þjóðminjasafns Íslands og skal standa straum af heimsóknum erlendra fræðimanna, er boðir eru samkvæmt settum reglum til að flytja fræðilega fyrirlestra á vegum Þjóðminjasafnsins. Sjóðinn gaf frá Ása til minningar um eftirtalda ættingja og vandamenn sína:*

*Foreldra hennar Arndisi Jónsdóttur háyfirdómara Péturssonar (1857—1936) og Guðmund Guðmundsson lækni (1853—1946).*

*Mann hennar Henry Newcome Wright, LL.D., F.R.G.S., F.L.S., F.R.A.S. (1884—1955).*

*Systkini hennar Sturlu Guðmundsson (1883—1910), Sigfrúði Guðmundsdóttur (1884—1905), og Þóru Guðmundsdóttur Hermannsson (1888—1918).*

*Móðursystur hennar Þóru Jónsdóttur (1858—1947) og Jón Magnússon forsætisráðherra (1859—1926).*

*Móðurbræður hennar Friðrik Jónsson, cand. theol. (1860—1938) og Sturlu Jónsson kaupmann (1861—1947).*

*Stjórn sjóðsins skipa: Dr. Kristján Eldjárn formaður, Þór Magnússon þjóðminjavörður og dr. Sturla Friðriksson.*

Fjórði Minningarfyrirlestur Ásu G. Wright var fluttur í Árnagarði í Reykjavík hinn 7. október 1978. Fyrirlesari var dr. Alexander Fenton, sem nú er þjóðminjavörður Skotlands og forstjóri skoska þjóðminjasafnsins og tók við því embætti hinn 1. júlí 1978. Dr. Fenton á að baki langan feril sem safnmaður og fræðimaður í skoskri menningarsögu og hefur skrifað fjölda ritgerða og bóka um líf og menningu skoskrar alþýðu, ekki síst um daglegt líf og bjargræðisvegi. Síðasta stórvirki hans á þessu sviði er bókin *The Northern Isles: Orkney and Shetland* (Edinburgh 1978), sem er um lífsbaráttu fólks á skosku eyjunum í aldanna rás. Þessi bók ein mundi endast honum til virðulegs sætis í röð þjóðháttfræðinga, þeirra sem nú kveður mest að.

*The fourth Ása G. Wright Memorial Lecture was given in Reykjavík on October 7th 1978, as usual under the auspices of the National Museum of Iceland. The lecturer was Dr Alexander Fenton, Director of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh.*

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OF NORTHERN SCOTLAND



Útgefandi  
Minningarsjóður Ásu Guðmundsdóttur Wright  
Þjóðminjasafn Íslands

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## Continuity and Change in the Building Tradition of Northern Scotland

Scholarship, however conscientious, may be affected by the fashion of thought of a particular period. A Victorian archaeologist would look at his material and ask himself, “what is civilisation?”, seeking for the highlights that have marked the steps of human existence, and looking in allegedly more primitive areas for traces of the past in the present, survivals of earlier ways.<sup>1</sup> The heart-searching that has been going on in the subject of European ethnology has been marked by a move away from a relatively high degree of concentration on the material aspects of culture in its earlier years, to a more sociologically-orientated approach which now seems in turn to be swinging back a little. A Danish ethnologist considered that the older, narrower approach constituted an excess of specialisation, where the main links were with like-minded colleagues at home and abroad in the same or related disciplines. This centrifugality has been the Scylla of the subject: its Charybdis is the social sciences, “deres farlige dragning og deres ensrettende tendens”.<sup>2</sup> Standardisation is no doubt a mark of the present times, but it would be wrong to rest comfortably in an armchair of general ethnological concepts, without relating them to the material actualities of past and present existence. There can be no firmer base for historical studies than this.

Studies in material culture need to combine depth in the area of study, with a wide-ranging comparative approach and continuing source criticism, indeed self-criticism also. It is right that the fashion of textual criticism of the *Landnámabók*, for example, should now be complemented by a critical review of the purpose of the compilation and its relationship to land-ownership and the development of settlement.<sup>3</sup> But this more recent

approach by Benediktsson and by Rafnsson<sup>4</sup> should also be related to an examination of comparable conditions in, for example, the Faroe Islands, Northern Scotland (especially Orkney and Shetland) and Western Norway — all the areas, indeed, over which the Vikings spread, making them their own. And here we immediately come to the heart of the problem. If I may quote my distinguished predecessor as an Ása G. Wright Memorial lecturer, Viggo Nielsen:

“Man må naturligvis ikke forestille sig, at de gamles samfund var statisk — det var det langt fra — men udviklingen gik langsommere og rummedes stadig inden for en økologisk cyklus”.<sup>5</sup>

It is true that change was overall slower in earlier times; but we have also to reckon with the reality of the fact that in each area of Viking settlement — as anywhere else — change, however slow, went on in its own inevitable way, in different ways and at different rates in the different areas. This is a phenomenon that may be characterised as indigenous development, a process of gradual, long-term, usually unrecorded change almost entirely conditioned by local circumstances, and to which changes in the material culture may provide the only key. To appreciate fully the effects of this subtle force, it is necessary to look at a specific area, to correlate the evidence of archaeology, history, language and place-names, and material culture; and then, in the case of the Viking world, to try to compare each area for comparable periods in time. Only thus will we begin to have a base for interpreting the reasons for different courses of development, for understanding what are the common features, and for assessing the effects of the constant coming and going of people and their knowledge and their goods through the Viking world and beyond, effects instanced by facts like the appearance of the name of Gaukr Trandilsson, first settler at Stöng, amongst the twelfth century Runic inscriptions at Maeshowe in Orkney, and the finding of an Ottonian coin of about the year 1000 in the ruins of a mountain croft near Hekla, no doubt established in the first flush of expansion and abandoned early because of natural conditions.<sup>6</sup>

In what follows, I shall keep this broad and somewhat complex pattern of local change and wide interrelationship in mind, whilst concentrating on

northern Scotland, and in particular Orkney and Shetland. Though looking at a limited number of themes, I should nevertheless like to make a general point now. An enormous amount of writing on the Vikings is appearing in English at the present time, for learned, semi-learned and popular consumption, but the emphases are on literature, and on the impact of aspects of Viking society, administration and culture (usually comprising ships, weapons, art and ornament) on the British Isles. This is no criticism; but there is much else that needs close attention. This includes more detailed studies of the material culture content of the sagas and also of other kinds of Old Norse written sources, such as the seventeenth century surveys and valuations (*úttektir*) of which Hörður Ágústsson is making such good use in his examination of wood-framed buildings in Iceland.<sup>7</sup> There is also the question of the impact of the Viking settlement of Shetland and Orkney on Scotland and other parts of Britain. Orkney was a place of such importance that one of the most northerly counties in Britain, Sutherland, is named from its geographical viewpoint, and the Hebrides were the *Suðureyjar*, a name preserved in the title of the Bishop of Sodor and Man.<sup>8</sup>

The function of the areas of Viking settlement in northern Britain as staging-posts for people who were simply passing or who passed on after staying for a while is of importance too. Place-name scholars have begun to take notice of the fact that some Icelandic and Faroese names have their counterparts in the Hebrides. One group of names in a small area of Lewis recurs in another small area near Reykjavík, stated in the *Landnámabók* to have been settled by people who came at least in part from the Hebrides. The Faroe Islands have a rather less firmly localised but nevertheless extensive range of parallels, even allowing for possible mutual influence from Norway.<sup>9</sup> Besides this, the *Landnámabók* names 50 settlers from the British Isles, usually the Hebrides or Ireland, and 130 Norwegians, many of whom probably reached Iceland by way of northern Britain. These Vikings must have brought Celts with them, for there is a small number of loan words and personal and place-names, such as *Bekansstaðir* and *Brjánsloekr*, commemorating the Irish personal names Beccan and Brian.<sup>10</sup> We are told that the cranium indices of Viking Age Icelanders agree closely with bone finds from Ireland and Scotland, and that the distribution of blood-groups in the population of modern Iceland is closer to that of the Irish and Scots than of

modern Scandinavians. There are some references to Irish and Scottish slaves, but these are so few as to scarcely justify an old insinuation that the Icelanders derived from slaves and bandits.<sup>11</sup> In this general context it is worth remembering that at least a proportion of the Celts came from Orkney and Shetland as well as from the Hebrides, and that some may have been of quite reasonable status, capable of organising the work of a distant farm on an estate, and not necessarily all starting off in this function as freed slaves, *leysingjar*.

All this is scene-setting. Let me turn now, ignoring fashions in scholarship, to the material culture.

When Hörður Ágústsson lectured in May 1978 at a meeting in Utstein, Norway, he spoke of the *borghús*, built in the shape of a dome, of turf or flat stones or both. The circular courses overlapped each other in succession to give the shape of a dome. The walls could be either single, or double, in which case there was an infill of earth between the outer and inner skins. Such buildings were also to be found in Scotland, and several examples may still be seen in the Outer Hebrides, particularly Lewis, where the tradition of going with the animals to the summer shielings in the hills survived longer than in any other part of the British Isles. The huts in which the women and young folk lived whilst tending the stock are called in Gaelic *sgithiol*, *bothan àiridhe* or *taigh àiridhe*, that is the hut or house on the *àiridh* or shieling. Such huts generally occurred in groups, which were linked with the houses in the lower lying main village. The shieling huts were often found in pairs, a larger one to live in, and a smaller one to serve as milkhouse, or sometimes as a shelter for a new-born calf, the smaller one usually backed against the bigger one, and sometimes entered from it. One built entirely of turf was a *both(an) cheap*, and one of stone a *both(an) cloiche*. The older types were beehive shaped, with an open top that could be closed with a turf or flagstone. The door, made of wicker work, wattles, heather or bent grass, had no hinges and in fact was rarely used. Such doors were formerly used in various parts of Scotland and were numerous in Ireland.<sup>12</sup>

The walls of the huts had recesses in the walls, *butbailt*, which held the necessary utensils for milk processing. These were rectangular in shape, and could be quite numerous. For this reason alone I think that huts built entirely of turf were rare or only for very temporary use. Recesses made in

turf are not especially durable, and therefore an inner lining of stone was more serviceable. It does, in fact, appear from a mid-nineteenth century source that huts with turf exterior walls frequently had an inner lining of stone.<sup>13</sup>

Examples of beehive huts examined in Lewis had double walls up to 1.8 m thick and standing 0.9 m high, with single walls rising above this to a height of 2.4 to 2.7 m. The internal diameter was 2.1 to 2.4 m, with a height to the apex of 1.8 to 2.1 m. An example recorded in Harris in 1856 had one door 0.9 m high by 0.6 m wide, with four wall recesses; but quite often, even in the smallest examples, there were two doors. The wind-direction determined which door was to be used.

Though beehive huts can still survive in Lewis in a reasonable state of preservation, they were also formerly common over a wider area in Scotland. The beehive form is very old, and widespread. Corbelled stone huts at monastic settlements, animal houses, corn-drying kilns, sweat-houses and turf shelters were found in Ireland;<sup>14</sup> corbelled pigsties can be found in Wales.<sup>15</sup> In Scandinavia they appear in West Sweden in store-houses, animal-houses and dwelling houses, and the *fjårborgir* found especially in the south and the Reykjanes Peninsula in Iceland are of comparable form.<sup>16</sup> The Mediterranean area has numerous examples,<sup>17</sup> as also has Portugal.<sup>18</sup> All this is to say that Scotland has no special rights in the matter of beehive huts. They are part of a wide heritage, which may have reached Iceland from the Scandinavian peninsula or from Britain.

In terms of structure, however, it should be noted that circular shieling huts made of more flimsy materials were also to be found. When Pennant visited Jura in 1778, he saw huts that were wigwam-shaped, and "so low that entrance is forbidden, without creeping through the little opening, which has no other door than a faggot of birch twigs, placed there occasionally; they are constructed of branches of trees, covered with sods; the furniture a bed of heath, placed on a bank of sod". Pennant's illustration of such wattle huts, with an exterior cover of turf hung on so that the turves overlapped like the scales of a fish, places them in front of the hills known as the Paps of Jura, and one cannot help thinking that there is some artistic licence in the way in which hills and shieling huts match in shape.<sup>19</sup> Such relatively flimsy structures, which would leave little trace on the archaeological record, may

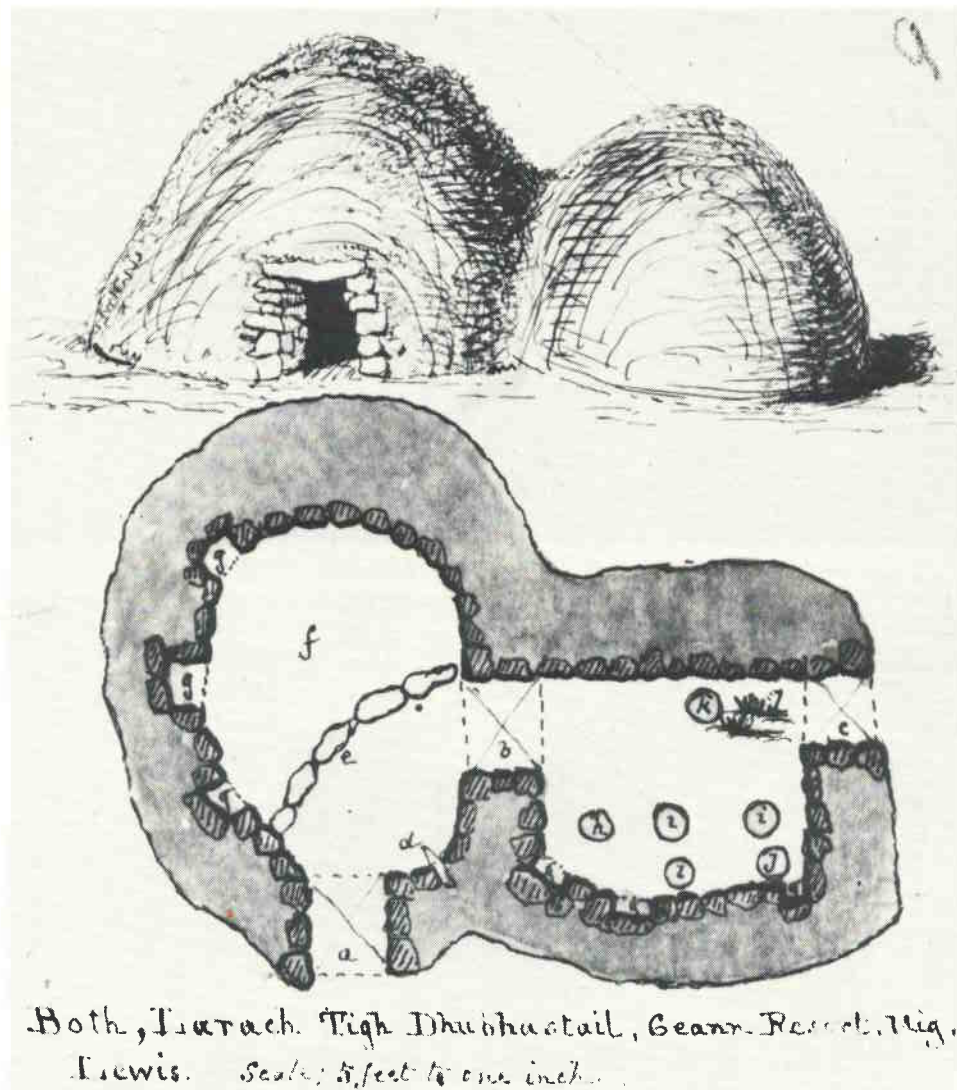
not have been uncommon, for the technique of building with wattle and turf (even if not in conical forms) has been recorded in several Scottish counties. The Jura huts should be regarded as a parallel form to the more solid beehive huts of stone and turf.

In Scotland, a sequence of development can be observed. Surveys made in Perthshire and Sutherland, for example, show that in many cases the old beehive huts went out of use as dwellings when slightly bigger four-sided huts were erected, but they remained as store-houses. This change appears to start from about the late eighteenth century. Beehive huts continued to be used in Lewis, however, but also came to be replaced by small, rectangular huts.

Whether beehive shaped or rectangular, the walls were formed of an inner and outer skin with a core of turf or earth, except for the more recently-built rectangular huts, which had single-skin walls. In the case of beehive huts, the walls were built double up to a height of about a metre, after which they became single walls.

The double-skin wall, found in such shieling huts, is also the feature that characterises the so-called blackhouses of North and West Scotland. Here, the rafters rest on top of the inner face, and the thatch comes down as far as the central core, leaving the top of the outer face as a ledge on which men and sheep could walk easily. This made thatching easy. Numerous examples of such blackhouses remain to be seen, mostly preserved as outhouses rather than dwelling houses, but it appears from investigation that such survivors are rarely more than a century old, in spite of their extremely archaic appearance. It is clear from the comments of the officers of the Ordnance Survey who were mapping Lewis in 1849—52, that most blackhouse walls were then built of a combination of sods and stones, usually consisting of an inner face of stone and an outer wall of turf.<sup>20</sup> What can be surveyed in the field at the present day, therefore, are rather sophisticated blackhouses, and the earlier prevalence of stone inner and turf outer skins raises the question of how old the use of central core may be.

The answer can be sought in the evidence of archaeology. Norse settlements have been excavated at Birsay, Buckquoy, Skaill and Westness in Orkney, Jarlshof and Underhoull in Shetland, the Udal in North Uist, Drimore in South Uist, and Freswick in Caithness.<sup>21</sup> At all of these places the



A shieling-hut at Uig, Lewis, surveyed by Captain Thomas in the 1860s. From *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* VII. C711



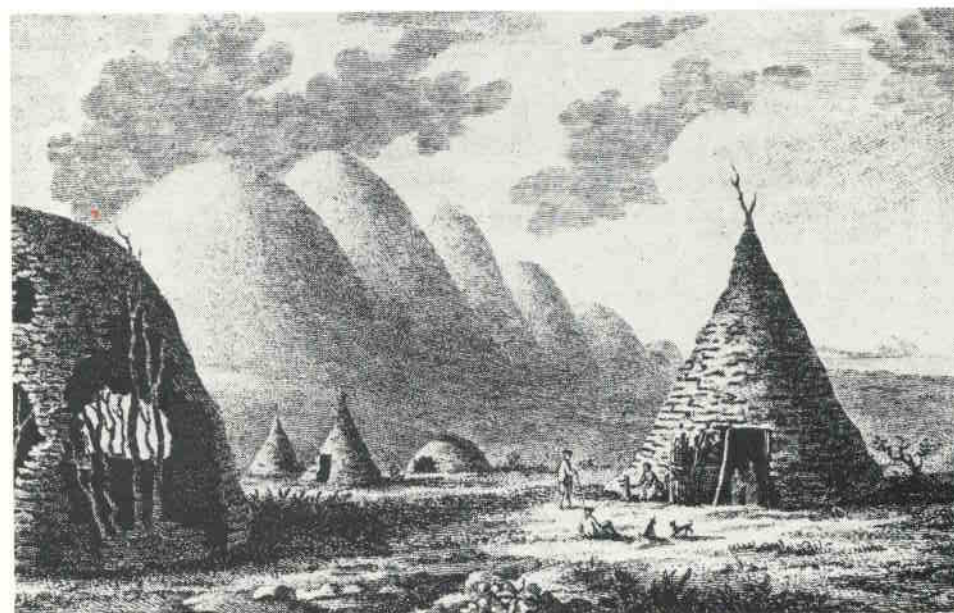
A beehive shieling-hut at Uishal, Lewis, in the 1970s. xxxviii, 35.9.



Wall-recesses in a shieling-hut in Glen Mor Bravas, Lewis, in the 1970s. xviii, 31.16.



Early morning milking at a Lewis shieling, ante 1928. The stone walls of the hut are covered with turf. C 1228



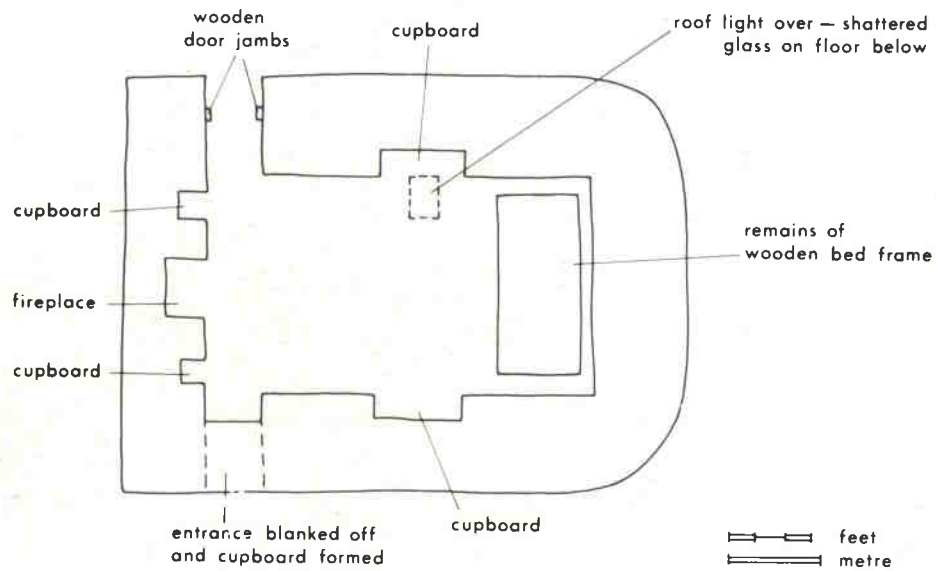
Shieling-huts built of wattle and turf in Jura, in the 1770s. From Pennant. C 1103



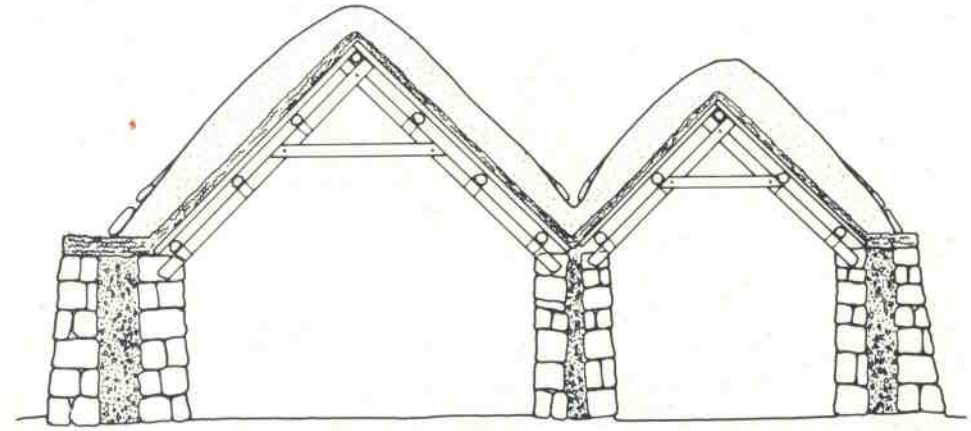


A shieling-hut of more recent, rectangular form, with a gable chimney, at Uishal, Lewis, in the 1970s. xviii. 32 21.

### REMAINS OF A SHIELING AT UISHAL, LEWIS



Plan of the shieling-hut at Uishal, Lewis. C 3335



Section through house and barn in the blackhouse at 42 Arnol, Lewis. The infilling between the two skins of the walls is indicated. C 3335

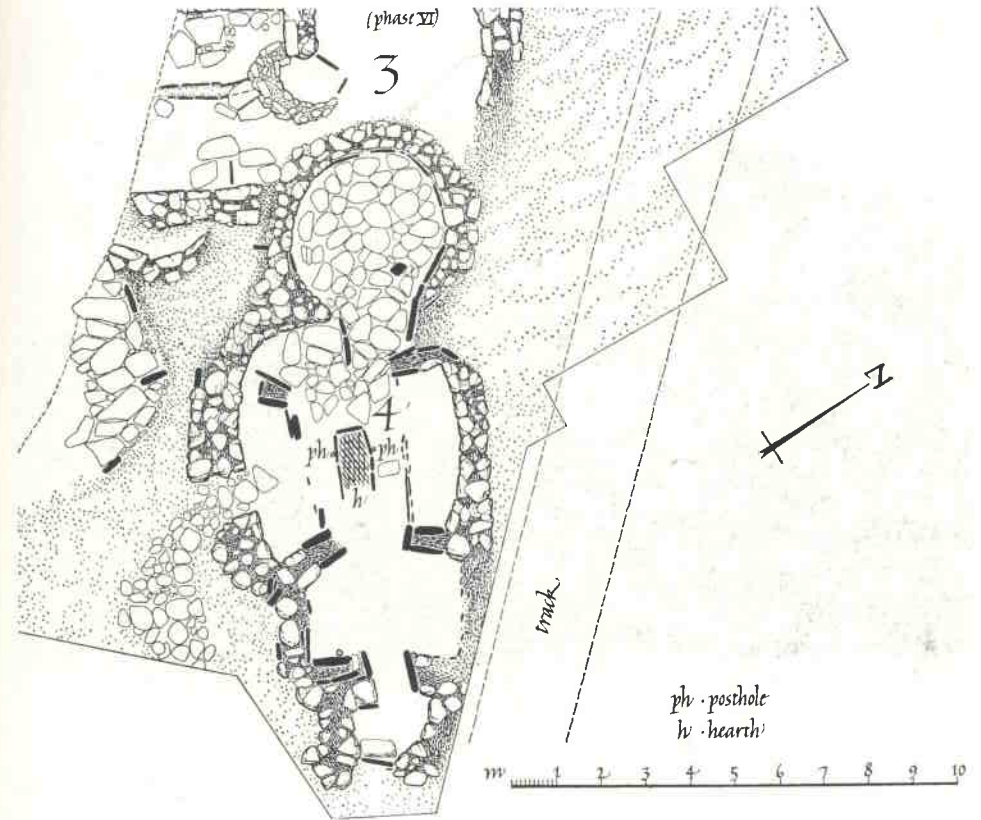




A croft at Bragar, Lewis, showing the hip-ended thatched roof, and the ledge or *tobht* around it, in the 1970s. xiv. 4.5.



A blackhouse at Callernish, Lewis, with a stone chimney on the right, and a wooden chimney in the middle. The thatch of the byre at the left is lower than the thatch of the house. The wall ledge, *tobht*, can be clearly



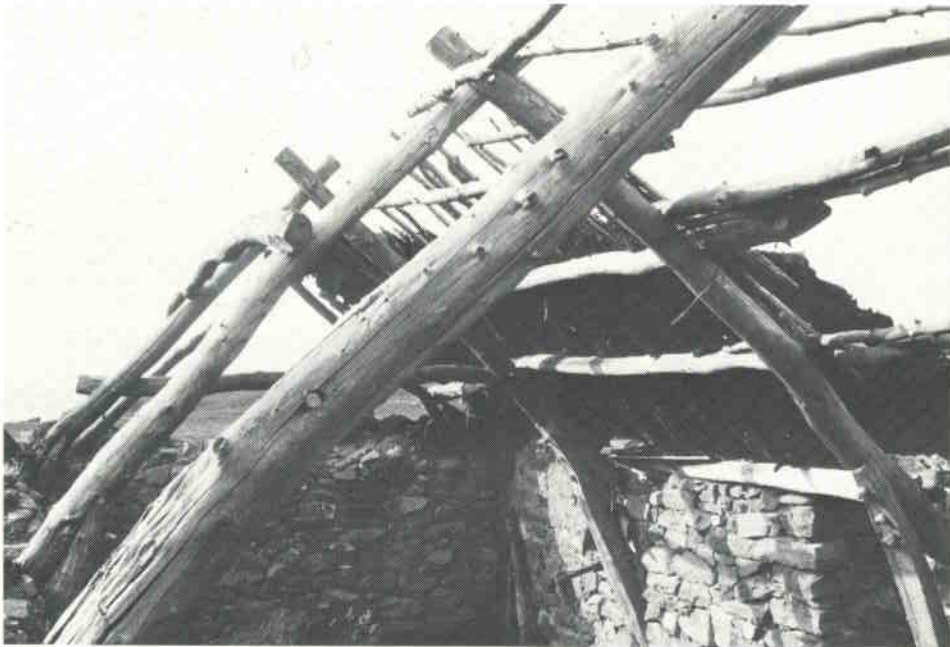
A late Pictish farmhouse at Buckquoy, Orkney. By courtesy of Dr Anna Ritchie.



A house built of solid turf at Loch Eynort, South Uist, Inverness-shire.



A-frame couples at the farm of Quina, Orkney, in the 1960s.

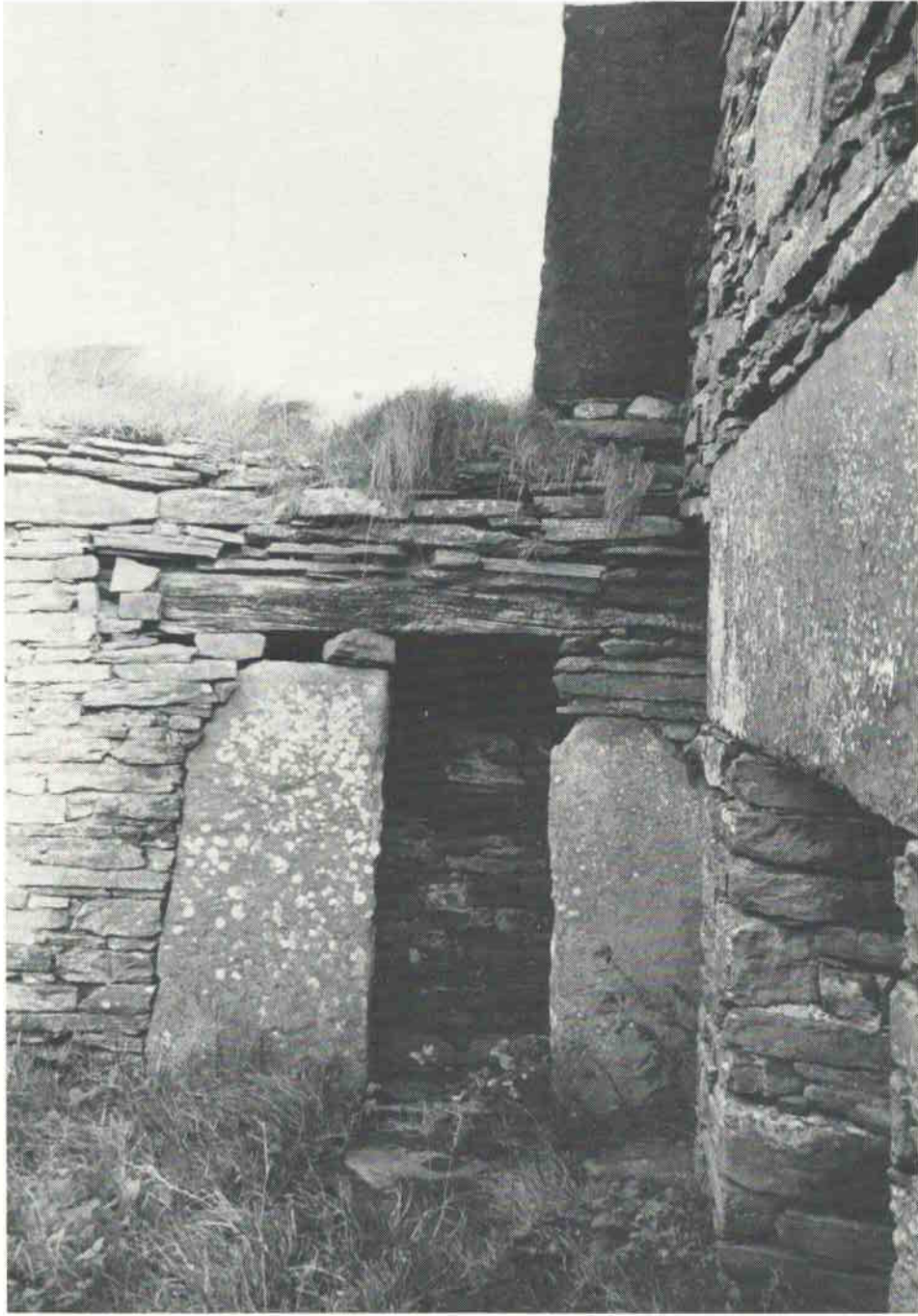


Cruck-frames ("Highland couples") at Cusig, Applecross, Ross-shire, 1971, viii. 27.13.

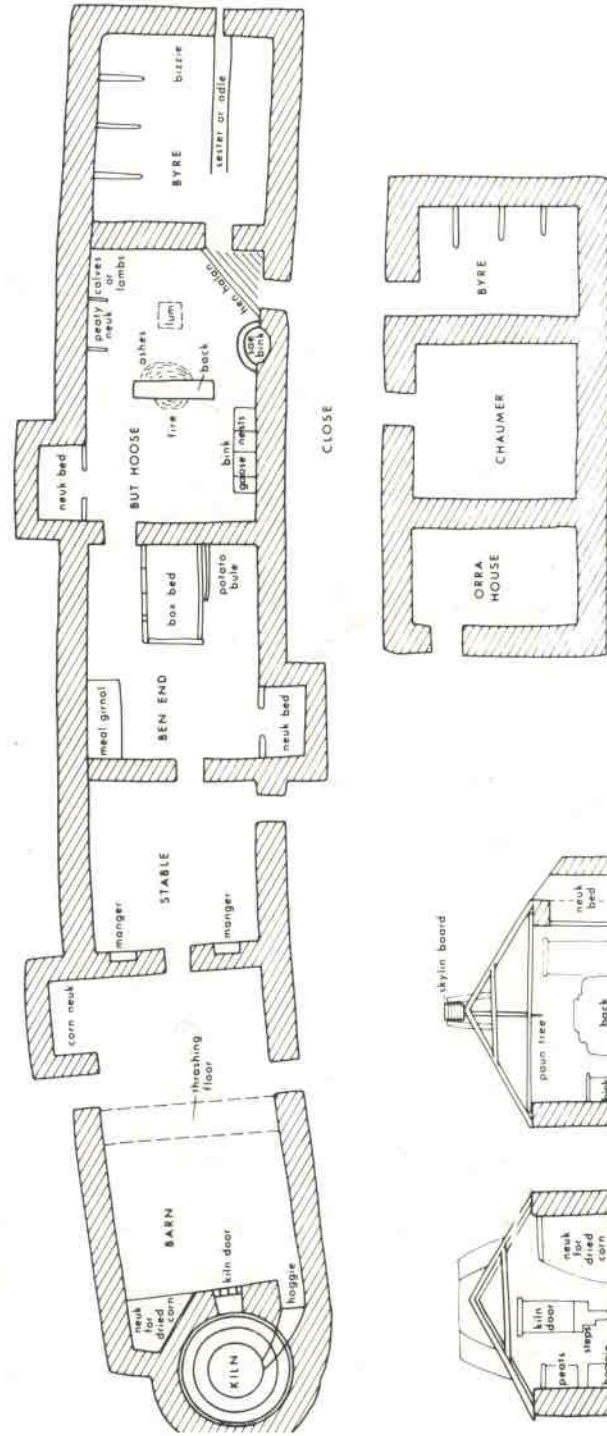


The stonebuilt freestanding back of the central hearth at Kirbister, Orkney. C 2223



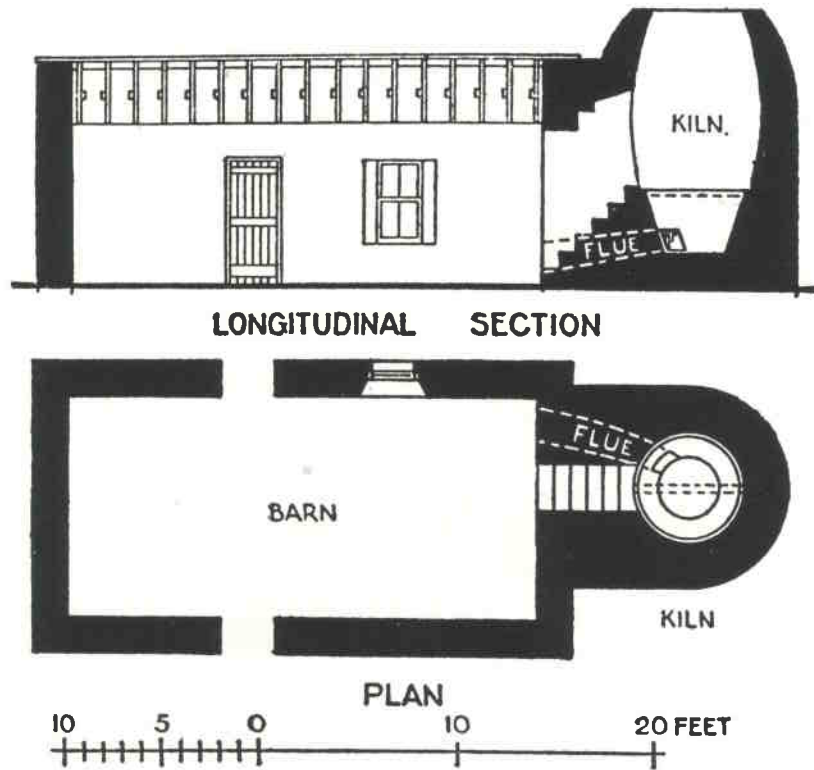


The neuk-bed (corner bed) at Langalour, Orkney, with two large flagstones flanking it. iv. 9.8.

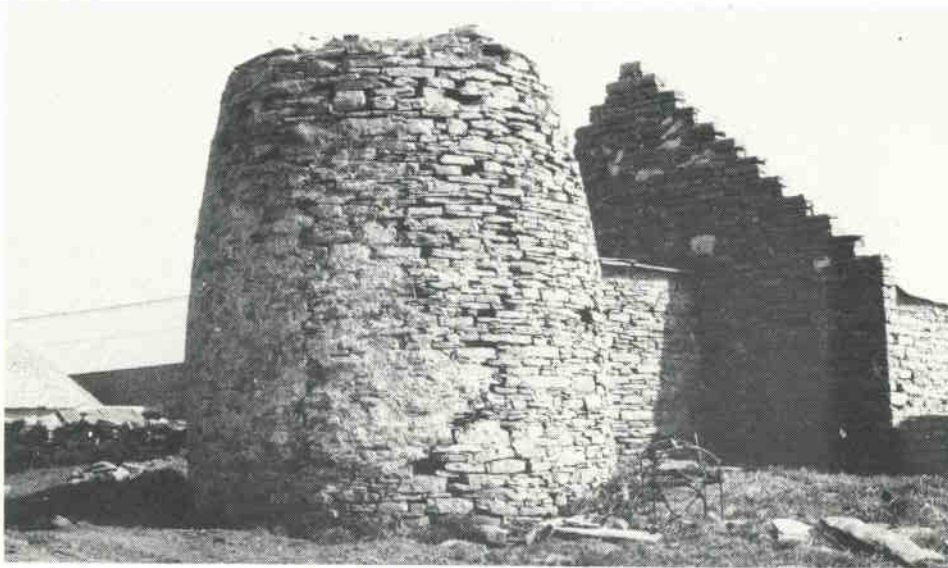


A longhouse in Orkney, with byre, living room, best room, stable, barn and kiln in a long line. After Ormond c 1912 and Firth 1920 C 4077





The kiln and kiln-barn at Exnaboe, Shetland. Reproduced by permission from the Inventory of Monuments in Orkney and Shetland, crown copyright reserved. C 5754.



The stonework of a corn-drying kiln at Holland, Papa Westray, Orkney.  
Photo: Morven Wright. xviii. 28,30.

double skin wall with a central core is a characteristic walling technique, as was also the case in the Faroe Islands,<sup>22</sup> and in Iceland, for example at Lundur, probably dating from the later Middle Ages,<sup>23</sup> and in farm houses of more recent date.<sup>24</sup> The technique is actually pre-Viking, for it is found at the recently excavated late Pictish farm at the Point of Buckquoy in Orkney.

Other walling techniques are also known. At Birsay in Orkney, for example, there were Viking buildings with walls of turf faced with dry-built local sandstone on the inside. Externally, the facing was of alternating courses of turf and flagstone.<sup>25</sup> Though it has been suggested by the excavator of the Point of Buckquoy that the use of such alternating courses, found also in the Viking buildings at Jarlshof and at Underhoull in Shetland, may be Norse, nevertheless this is not easy to accept, even though it is found in Iceland too. The fact is that it was widespread in Scotland, well outside areas of Viking influence, until recent times,<sup>26</sup> — indeed examples can still be found — and so, though the earliest evidence is from 9th—10th century Viking houses, we cannot with any confidence suggest a Viking origin.

A reflection of the technique of building in alternating courses may be the building of courses of turf in herring-bone fashion. This is common in Iceland and has been observed in recent times in North-East and Northern Scotland, especially in the turf gablets of thatched houses. It can scarcely be suggested, however, that this technique was transferred from Scotland to Iceland. Rather it is part of a very old and very widespread tradition, for already in the Stone Age it can be seen translated into stone in the burial chambers at Blackhammer, Laird and Midhowe on Rousay in Orkney. Here, however, there could be cultural influence from afar, for mud-bricks were being laid in herring-bone fashion in Mesopotamia about 2700—2400 BC, and herring-bone masonry was popular around the Aegean in the third millennium.<sup>27</sup>

It is probably no more easy to postulate a source for the double skin form of walling. In south-west Norway, a treeless area, stone and turf were the main building materials and the people who came from there were perfectly familiar with the relevant building techniques. But so were the people in Northern Scotland. Norwegian houses of the Viking period had sometimes no more than stone footings to the walls, with turf only above.<sup>28</sup> The double skin technique was certainly used later in Jæren and Dalane, where,

according to Martha Hoffmann, “de gamle fjøsene som står, er bygget i en slags skallmur med større stein i ytterflatene og fylt med mindre stein, sand og torv i midten”,<sup>29</sup> but nowhere in Norway or in Scotland does it appear that the techniques of turf walling reached the degree of sophistication that has characterised turf-walled buildings in Iceland.<sup>30</sup> Thus, whatever knowledge was brought in, from Norway or Scotland, was adapted to the local conditions and developed further to a quite considerable extent. There is here a good example of the phenomenon of indigenous development.

The excavations of Viking houses show that the roofs were supported by posts, some placed laterally along the side walls, and set a little way in from them, and others placed centrally. Although in Iceland the use of roofing posts continued and developed in a variety of forms and combinations,<sup>31</sup> it is quite remarkable that this did not happen in Northern Scotland. Functional roofing posts are quite absent. Neither in Shetland, Orkney nor the Outer Hebrides are there any existing old buildings with roofing posts. The roofs whether of straw thatch alone, turf and straw, flagstones, or flagstones and turf divots are supported by A-frame couples. In Orkney examples can be found of the so-called “Highland couples”, which are simply untrimmed branches of birch, the ends of which may rest in the wall a little below the wall-head, but these are in no way like the cruck-couples that formerly characterised the roof-construction of farm-buildings throughout the other areas of Scotland, including Caithness. There must be some explanation — or several — for this. Shortage of wood cannot really be held as an excuse. It did not hinder roofing-post constructions in Iceland, and “Timber for their houses, ready framed, and Dale boards and Tar”<sup>32</sup> was being imported from Norway to Shetland in 1633. The term “ready framed” probably suggests A-frame couples ready for erection. There is no implication of roofing posts. Timber was also available in the form of drift-wood, some of it from Newfoundland, and wreck timber.<sup>33</sup> There is, therefore, no immediately obvious reason why the roofing-post construction should have been discontinued. It may well have gone on long enough to inhibit any adoption of the Mainland Scottish cruck-framed roof, but if so, historical sources are silent. The fact is, however, that more or less all the old buildings that survive in Shetland, Orkney and the Outer Hebrides have been subjected to same degree of modernisation, for no building ever remains static from the

moment of its erection. Re-organisation of settlement patterns from the late eighteenth century onwards in all three areas led to much change in buildings, and even the archaic-looking blackhouse of the Hebrides, as it survives, is not much over a century old. In other words, the ubiquitous A-frame couple of modern times has probably swept away all evidence of other possible roofing techniques in these areas.

Walling materials could sometimes in part consist of the living earth itself. In the early seventeenth century, a visitor to Orkney noted that the houses of the lower social classes were built underground, with only the heather-covered roof protruding above the ground level. A barrel or frame of wood served as a smoke hole to let the smoke escape from the central fire, around which the people could lie on broad benches,<sup>34</sup> undoubtedly the descendants of the benches that served both as sitting and sleeping places in the Viking houses. The custom of building underground or against hill slopes continued for a long time, for in 1773 houses were still said to be half underground and “like most other farm houses in Orkney, most ordinary huts, where people and cattle all sleep under the same roof, and sometimes the calf has a better apartment than the heir of a family that can boast of twenty-four generations of uninterrupted lineal succession”.<sup>35</sup> Still in the 1880s it was said that the farm-servant or cottar class in the North Isles of Orkney chose sites for their houses on the south sides of rising ground. They dug away the earth to make a perpendicular north wall, against which only a single facing of stones had to be laid.<sup>36</sup>

In this respect it is of interest to note the recent discovery and first positive identification of tenth century underground houses at Hvítárholt in Southern Iceland. Here five such houses came to light, some with ovens and water-channels, suggesting use as bath-houses. The sagas contain several references to the *jarðhús*, from which it is clear that it could serve several purposes, workshop, living-quarters, bath-house, etc.<sup>37</sup> Underground houses, therefore, reflect an old tradition, common to Iceland and to Orkney.

So far I have been concentrating on building materials. Another question is the form of the buildings in relation to function. When Aage Roussel carried out a comparative investigation of buildings in Northern Scotland, he did so “with tense expectation that we should embark upon a study of the buildings handed down to us from so old a peasant culture”.<sup>38</sup> His

expectation cannot be realised with absolute clarity, however. When he visited Orkney, for example, he saw a number of longhouses with men and animals under one roof, and included information on them in his book, though leaning heavily also on the work of the Orkney historian, J. Storer Clouston.<sup>39</sup> Because some of the houses discussed were still occupied, it was not easily possible to look behind box-beds, furniture and wall-paper for straight joints and other structural evidence. As a result only an incomplete picture emerged, and the tendency to norsify the evidence also played its part. In 1968 a more detailed architectural survey was undertaken,<sup>40</sup> as a result of which it may be stated that, whilst the buildings include numerous features — the central hearth, the smoke-hole or *liora* in the roof, goose-nests recessed into the kitchen wall at floor level, quern-binks or shelves in the walls for holding the quern or hand-mill, neuk-beds in the thickness of the walls or built as outshots, etc. — that may be considered old, nevertheless the general layout appears to be mainly of eighteenth century date. This is also true of the surviving Hebridean blackhouses, most of which date from the nineteenth century.

The strongest link with the past appears to be the co-existence of men and animals under one roof, but even here it is not clear that this was an original Viking settlement feature. At Jarlshof in Shetland, for example, the earliest dwelling house stood by itself, with nearby outhouses. Only in the eleventh century was a byre added to the living quarters of the parent dwelling. Houses built in the vicinity in the ninth and tenth centuries do, however, appear to have been longhouses that incorporated byres. The pre-Viking farm at Buckquoy had a combined barn and byre alongside the dwelling-house. At Kvívík, one of the early farms in Streymoy in the Faroe Islands, the conjoint barn and byre is behind and parallel to the hill. The farms at Gjáskógar and Gröf in Iceland, dated to the eleventh and mid-fourteenth centuries, contain dwelling-house units alone. In Iceland this kind of original simplicity seems to have begun to be replaced by tight clusters of dwelling and outhouse units sometime during the fourteenth century. In Greenland the earliest farmhouses, though built on an elongated plan, do not include byres, which also appear only later with the clustered type of house. The splitting of the hall into separate rooms for cooking, living and sleeping seems to date to about the start of the twelfth century,

and the further addition of outhouse units to the nuclear block is later still. In the late tenth to early eleventh century Viking settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, there is no evidence for byres as part of the houses, but such would hardly be expected for what was basically an expeditionary party.<sup>41</sup>

All this is not to say that the longhouse was unknown to the Vikings at certain social levels, but its main development seems to have followed the first period of settlement. Besides, it is a widely known phenomenon. In Scotland alone there is evidence for it as the primary dwelling form throughout the whole country up to the period of the agricultural improvements that began around 1750—70. The north and west of Scotland are areas where the tradition has survived — not necessarily where it has continued as the mark of a cultural tradition different from that of Lowland Scotland. How old the longhouse tradition is, is still a matter for more detailed regional investigation, however. It did exist in Viking times in the Northern Isles; it was found, as documentary sources show, in nearly every county of Scotland in the seventeenth century;<sup>42</sup> Welsh and English literary sources appear to take it back to the early fourteenth century.<sup>43</sup> In Northern Scotland, however, there is a gap of 700 to 800 years between the evidence of archaeology and that of historical documentation — which is a long time to think in terms of continuity for something as subject to change and decay as buildings. The concept of “Norseness” has to be scrutinised very carefully indeed.

All that I have been saying is related, in terms of material culture, to a common stock of knowledge, applied and adapted in different areas in the light of parallel or differing environmental conditions, and as modified by the existence of previous populations and later forms of social organisation. One of the few examples of possibly direct linkage is the type of circular drying-kiln found at Gröf í Örafum in Þjórsárdalur, which closely reflects the Orkney type. Here the terminology is also significant, for the Icelandic term *sofn*, *sofnhús*, equivalent to Faroese *sodnur* and Shetlandic *sonn*, *sinnie*, certainly derives from Gaelic *sòrn*.<sup>44</sup> Here I think the influence of Northern Scotland on the Faroes and Iceland can scarcely be disputed. But in general, though the details of such contact are interesting and indeed form a base on which lost aspects of history may be rebuilt, the primary matter for

exploration is the question of continuity and change within each settlement area, each area being related to its fellows at comparable periods of time. This is not a job for an individual, unless he were exceptionally gifted. It is a job for collaboration, and I particularly welcome this invitation to deliver one of the Ása G. Wright Memorial Lectures, since it gives an opportunity to discuss the possibility of closer collaboration between our two countries, and others, in relation to subjects of common concern, in the years to come.

*Acknowledgement:* I am indebted to Gavin Sprott, County Life Section, National Museum, for help with illustrations.

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