Medieval Shielings in the Isle of Man

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The study of medieval shielings in the Isle of Man (FIG. 63) began unintentionally in 1958 with excavations at the site here called Block Eary, after the nearest farm (SC/400896). It lies at the top of a valley on the north side of Snaefell, the highest mountain in the island, and it is, although this was not realized at the time, about the best example of its kind. It consists of a group of some thirty-seven mounds, spread out on the north side and around the head of the valley, and although they had long been known, they had attracted very little attention, and were assumed, in so far as they were thought of at all, to be a barrow-cemetery. My attention was first drawn to them by Mr. B. R. S. Megaw, then Director of the Manx Museum, who pointed out that the tops of some of the mounds were concave, and strongly resembled small hut-circles. This suggested, at the very least, that some of the supposed barrows had been reused as occupation-sites at a later period (which did not seem unreasonable in view of the wetness of the hill-side); and as the apparently circular huts suggested an iron-age date, and current research in the island was being directed towards iron-age occupation-sites, an excavation was undertaken in August, 1958. Since then smaller excavations have been carried out at Block Eary in March and April, 1959 and 1960, and at a similar site near Injebreck (SC/363856) in April, 1961.¹

THE EXCAVATIONS

I. BLOCK EARY

In the course of the 1958 excavation mounds A—E (FIG. 55) were partially excavated and work on mound A was continued in 1959. The evidence from B, D and E was very incomplete, but all three contributed to an understanding of how the mounds were formed, and B produced important dating evidence.

The excavation of Mound E was confined to a single trench 1 m. broad which was dug across its top and down to its foot on the lower side. It nowhere went deeper than 50 cm., but it revealed that there were more or less horizontal occupation-levels running into the mound on its lower side right down to the natural ground. This was the first clear hint that the mounds were composed of superimposed layers of occupation-material. From one of the highest levels came the most interesting single object from the whole excavation: a small slab of

¹ The work was carried out by students of the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, Birmingham University, assisted by students from the Departments of Geography and Law under my direction. Financial support was provided by Birmingham University, the Trustees of the Manx Museum, and the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society. I wish to thank Dr. C. A. R. Radford for comments and advice given during his visits to the excavations both at Block Eary and at Injebreck.
slate marked out on one side as a board for the game of merels. This has been fully described and illustrated elsewhere.²

Mound D was excavated rather more extensively, and showed beyond any doubt that the build-up consisted entirely of occupation-debris; but no plans of huts, or even any consistent occupation-levels, could be found, because the centre of the mound had been dug out at a later period, and the resulting hollow was lined with vertical slabs to form a small shelter rather like the second stage of the mound shown in FIG. 61. At one point, which was unaffected by the later disturbance, there were clear traces of fallen wattles, which may have served as the base of a turf roof, spread over the rafters.

² A. M. Cubbon, 'The game of merels or mill in the Isle of Man,' J. Manx Museum, vi, no. 76 (1959-60), 66-70.
Mound B covered a larger area than most of the others, and was roughly oval, extending about 10 m. from its upper to its lower edge, and about 16 m. along the hill-side. It was sectioned down to the natural subsoil at several points, but nowhere could traces of walls be discerned in the sides of the trenches, and still less could they be followed in plan. The most characteristic section is shown in FIG. 56. In general, the lower part of the section was composed of collapsed turf, showing as a bluish-grey clay marked with dark brown streaks, while the upper (unshaded) part of the section consisted of mixed turf and soil. At almost every level there were hearths, the highest of which were immediately under the humus.

There was no clear evidence from this mound that the turf had been used for building huts. It could conceivably have been used simply to construct a platform on which were erected very flimsy structures, of which no trace survived; but, since unmistakable turfwalls were found in other mounds, it is more likely that the build-up was caused by the successive levelling of huts which were considered to have deteriorated beyond repair. The material for a new hut was always ready to hand, and each levelling did in fact create a higher platform above the wet hill-side. In the upper levels a larger proportion of soil must have been used for building (cf. p. 164).

An unusual number of large stones were found in this mound. Most of them lay in no intelligible order, but some, as can be seen from the section, were apparently laid to consolidate parts of the turf platform, and all probably served this purpose. The coin of Stephen, which by great good fortune was found in this mound, came from the very top of the solid turf in the lower part of the section; but its exact position probably does not signify much, as it may have been lost somewhere in the vicinity, and built into the mound in a cut sod. It is unlikely, however, that its presence in the area is to be dissociated from the occupation of the shieling, and it constitutes the sole dating evidence which any of the excavations described in this paper has provided. A few tiny pieces of unglazed pottery were found immediately under the humus in this mound, but they were too small to be of value.

Mound C provided the most evidence about structural details of all those excavated in 1958. It was one of the smaller mounds, and on its top there was a clear outline of a roughly oval hut measuring about 3 by 4 m. (FIG. 57). This shape is deduced entirely from surface indications, for, although the wall was clear enough in section, it proved impossible to follow it accurately in plan once the humus had been removed; and the same applies to the wall of a lower hut, which was also sufficiently clear in section.

The earliest occupation had been on the sloping hill-side, from which the turf had been removed. No walls were discovered at this level, but there had been a large hearth, around which the subsoil bore signs of intense heat. In its centre a cup-shaped depression had been hollowed out, about 25 cm. in diameter and about 40 cm. deep. It was full of charcoal, samples of which were submitted to the late

3 Dr. J. P. C. Kent kindly identified this coin as 'a Type I penny of Stephen, coined, I believe, by the moneyer "Oterche" (sic) of Norwich. Type I appears to date from 1135 to 1141+.'
FIG. 57

BLOCK EARY, ISLE OF MAN

Plan of mound C of shieling (pp. 158, 160)
Professor F. W. Jane, of the Royal Holloway College, Egham, who reported that the wood used for fuel was mainly Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*). The hearth was surrounded, at least on the excavated side, by a double line of wattles, the outer line of which was produced sideways at one point to end against a flat stone. Numerous traces of collapsed wattles were found all around here in this occupation-level. The size of the hut which went with this hearth—if there was one—is unknown, but if it was anything like the same size as the superimposed huts, a very large proportion of its floor must have been taken up by the hearth and its wattle screen. The very existence of a screen suggests something unusual, and if we look for a special function, it may be that the hearth was used for cheesemaking. The wattles may have formed not so much a screen as a complete chimney over the fire. No traces of burnt daub were found, but the exceedingly damp conditions may have caused it to disintegrate. All the stones marked in Fig. 57 belong to the lowest level, with the exception of the two which project from the section.

Above the lowest level there was a platform of turf. The lack of any suggestion of orderly layers in the turf suggested that it had not been deliberately built as a platform, but had been formed by the levelling of the ruined walls of a hut. One occupation-level shows clearly in the section (Fig. 58), beginning with two paving-slabs to the left of the lowest hearth (see Fig. 57, where they project from the section) and continuing with a hearth and two more paving-slabs to the right. It was impossible to decide whether the lower pair of walls in the section belonged to this level. Their clearly recognizable remains began at a higher level, but in such difficult soil-conditions this cannot be regarded as conclusive.

The superimposed hearths continued to be in much the same position, but the last hut of all was built higher up the slope, presumably after further levelling to make a platform. Outside the right-hand wall, and at precisely the level on which it appeared to be built, there was a hearth, presumably an external one like that found at one of the Injebreck sites (Fig. 60). There was no trace of an internal hearth at this level.

A query which remains from the excavation of mound C is the exact construction of the walls which show in the section. Although the evidence in general points to walls having been built of turf, these showed as patches of light-coloured
soil. Possibly they were built with facings of turf inside and out, with soil thrown in to fill up the middle; and perhaps some such method of building accounts for the mixture of turf and soil in the upper part both of this section and of Fig. 56.

**Fig. 59**
Block Eary, Isle of Man
Plan of excavated portion of mound A of shieling (p. 161 f.)

*Mound A* was low and insignificant, with relatively little build-up of turf, but it was worth digging, because it was the first mound to reveal definite plans of huts, in the form of stone footings. The stones belonging to the lowest hut are marked in outline in Fig. 59. They show that the hut was circular, with a paved entrance facing SSW. The circle of stones presumably marks the original outside
edge of the turf walls, so the internal diameter of the hut was probably not much more than 5 m. The line of stones which projects from the north-west side of the hut and ends abruptly, appears to be a barrier to prevent the surface water, which flows copiously down the hill-side on wet days, from running right round the hut to the doorway.

The stones which are marked in broken outline looked like a rough foundation for a turf wall. If so, they would belong to a reconstruction of the original circular hut, carried out when the walls had partly tumbled and spread, concealing the original kerb. It is not likely that they formed part of the original construction, because the stones of the kerb were aligned with each other on the outside, and not on the inside; and if the stones drawn in broken outline had only been a barrier against surface water (as they could be on the north-east side of the hut) they would not have been needed on the west side. The post-holes, except for those at the period-3 entrance, probably all belonged to the earliest hut. There was a diffuse hearth-area in the part where most of the post-holes are clustered, and at least the smaller ones may represent small supports by the fire. None was more than a few inches deep. It may be noted that the only one with packing-stones is roughly in line with the left-hand side of the doorway. The only small find from mound A belonged to this hut: it was a large and very coarse loom-weight, of a kind familiar from stray finds in the Isle of Man.

Above the lowest level there was a thick layer of stones of various sizes lying in indescribable disorder. From them the features ascribed to periods 2 and 3 (FIG. 59) have been disentangled, but it is probable that this is an over-simplification of minor but numerous alterations and reconstructions.

All that could be ascribed to period 2 was a crude attempt to provide a more level surface by means of a stone platform with a roughly-built, but recognizable, lower edge some 50-55 cm. high. It is probable that the building which was first erected on it has disappeared, or at least was unrecognizable, for the oval structure, the stones of which are drawn in solid black, and which is assigned to period 3, seemed to belong to a stage when the edge of the platform was already obscured. It is likely that more of it survived than appears on the plan, but it was at best a rather irregular feature, difficult to distinguish from the general mass of stones, and only those parts which could be identified with some certainty are shown. The doorway faced up the hill this time, and there had been a door-post on either side of it. Although this is a much smaller building than the earlier circular hut, it is still appreciably larger than either the hut shown by surface indications on mound C or the one excavated at Injebreck shieling (p. 163).

Above the period-3 building there were traces of small turf huts. Occupation-levels were marked by hearths and trodden surfaces in the turf, but it was extremely difficult to identify individual plans. The shape and size of one later hut is roughly indicated by stippling.

2. INJEBRECK

One of the outstanding requirements which remained after these excavations at Block Eary was the recovery of an accurate plan of a hut built, as most of them
seem to have been, without a stone foundation. This was difficult, because the body of the mounds consisted mainly of turf, either completely levelled out, or to a greater or less degree fallen from its original position.

When excavations were carried out in April 1961 at Injebreck shieling, a site (see Fig. 63) at the head of a valley, very like Block Eary, by good fortune a mound was chosen in which the turf walls at one level were sufficiently intact to be followed in plan. Although the ground was badly waterlogged, and the work
was interrupted by snow, the plan (FIG. 60) is not open to much doubt. As usual, traces of occupation began immediately under the humus, but apart from these the mound seemed at first to be made up of indeterminate turf-debris, represented by the unshaded parts of the section (FIG. 60). As the levels were gradually taken down, however, the shape of the walls began to show as a faintly reticulate pattern formed by the outline of the individual turves, which were small, often not more than 20 cm. square. The walls showed up very clearly in section. They had been built directly on the natural subsoil on the south and east sides of the hut, but on the west side there seemed to be some incoherent turf-material under them, as if the remains of an earlier hut had not been completely cleared away.

The plan which emerged may perhaps be described as oblong, with internal dimensions of about 3 m. by 2 m. It seemed that the irregularities in the walls were original, and not due to collapse or slumping, but it was impossible to be certain. The definition of the walls was least satisfactory at the north end, which faced up the hill-side. As their virtual disappearance both in plan and section coincided with two shallow post-holes which might mark the position of a door-frame, and as the walls seemed elsewhere to be continuous, it is very likely that the doorway was at the north end of the hut. Immediately inside it there were a few irregular paving-slabs, but the floor of the inner part of the hut was unpaved, and largely taken up by a hearth. Later hearths were in very much the same position, and it seems that the same walls went on being used, presumably with some reconstruction, even after a considerable quantity of debris had accumulated over the original floor. Two of the stones which appear on the plan—one going through the baulk on the east side of the hut, the other close beside it—belong to one of the later phases, and suggest that the original wall still marked the limit of the living-space at this point.

All the other stones shown on FIG. 60 are contemporary with the earliest stage of the hut. On the lower side they formed a rough footing for the wall; elsewhere such a support must have been considered unnecessary. Outside the southern wall, and built against it, there was an open-air hearth surrounded by a rough frame of stones. This was presumably used for cooking, when weather permitted, and can, as Dr. L. Reinton tells me, be paralleled on Norwegian shielings.

The only small find from this site was a flint which had been used as a strike-a-light, and this does not help in dating the structure. At Block Eary it seemed at two sites that there had been a change from solid turf walls to walls made of turf and earth in roughly equal proportions, and if this is more than accidental, this Injebreck hut might be ascribed to an earlier rather than a later date in the history of the shielings.

3. SEARCH FOR CORN-DRYING KILNS

Most shielings include at least one mound which differs from the rest in having much more stonework in its structure. These appear, indeed, less as mounds than as very crude and small huts, too small for human occupation. Often they are situated on small eminences, as if the builders intended them to
FIG. 61
BLOCK EARY, ISLE OF MAN
Plan and section of supposed corn-drying kiln (p. 166 f.)
catch the breeze. The two sites which answer this description in the Block Eary sheltering are marked with the letter K on Fig. 55. The more easterly of the two was excavated in 1960 in the hopes of finding out whether it really was a small corn-kiln, as it appeared to be.

Unfortunately, it turned out that the structure had been drastically remodelled at some time, in a way which obscured its original features. Its interior, in its later phase, was partly lined with upright slabs (shown in black on Fig. 61), and the three paving-stones on the floor also belonged to this period. There was a narrow doorway, with a splayed and partly-paved approach. In this second phase it was virtually a minute hut or pen of the kind also found at Injebreck and illustrated in Fig. 62; but below the partly-paved floor of this phase the building was filled from wall to wall with a deposit of peat-ash about 25 cm. deep, with a layer of clean gravel running through it at one point, as if it had been
used to extinguish the fire on some occasion. On the lower side of the mound, facing down the valley, there were the remains of two short ‘arms’ of turf, with a few associated stones, which might originally have been part of a flue. But no certain trace could be found of a flue having originally gone through the wall, and there was no sign that the deposit of peat-ash ran under the wall. Although the deposit of ash is hard to explain in any other way, it cannot be claimed with certainty that this structure was ever a corn-kiln. The question of cultivation at the shielings, which such a kiln would imply, will be mentioned later (p. 170).

A second attempt to identify a corn-kiln was made during the excavations at Injebreck shieling in April, 1961. Promising as the site looked before excavation, there was no question of this having been a kiln (FIG. 62). Its thick turf wall surrounded a small pen about 1 m. square. A subsequent reconstruction made it even more cramped, and although it originally may have had a thatched or turf roof, it was eventually covered by large slabs laid horizontally across the top of the walls. The only trace of a door belonged to the later phase, and took the form of some iron nails which had presumably been set in wood which had rotted away. It may have been intended for penning geese. A very similar structure seems to be described in the English Dialect Dictionary under hull (Yorkshire, 1840): ‘Felix never failed to run down to what was called “the goose-hull”, a kind of little hut, about four feet square, formed and roofed with coarse peat sods, built on the bank of the beck, and opening on it.’

**DISTRIBUTION AND SIZE**

The positions of all the shielings so far located in the Isle of Man are shown in FIG. 63. About forty-eight groups of mounds have been identified, of which about eight were previously wholly or partly known, without their having been recognized as shielings. As a rule they are not difficult to find. They are usually situated near the 1,000 ft. contour on dry ground close to a stream, and a systematic search in any of the principal valleys has generally been productive. A few small groups of mounds which were situated by very diminutive streams, or by tiny springs which have since almost disappeared through modern drainage, were found more or less by accident; more of these will certainly come to light, but it is unlikely that there are many more large groups to be discovered.

In some valleys cultivation has spread over the areas in which mounds might have been expected. Occasionally it is clear that the plough avoided the mounds, or if it went over them, it did not do so frequently enough to obliterate them entirely; but in some valleys it may be suspected that they have vanished without trace. For instance, there are two areas—one in the northern tip of the parish of Marown, and another in a high valley on the west side of Sulby glen, close to the west boundary of Lezayre—in neither of which there seem to be any mounds, but in both of which there is a pair of farm-names compounded with the element ‘eary’. This word, the Manx equivalent of the Irish airghé, shieling, was borrowed by Norwegian settlers in Ireland who introduced it into northern England, but it is more likely to have come to the Isle of Man from Gaelic, as
Map showing positions of Block Eary, Injebreck and other shielings in the Isle of Man (pp. 167, 169 ff.)

The number of mounds in each shieling is given; those without a dot indicate a rather scattered group.
Place-names containing the element 'eary' are marked by triangles.
part of the Manx language. When it occurs in a farm-name it usually means that there was a shieling in the vicinity, normally a little higher up the stream, as at Block Eary.

Shielings vary greatly in size. The main portion of Block Eary forms the largest compact group, but in Cornaa valley, in Maughold, there are in all at least thirty-two mounds, which probably should be reckoned as belonging to a single shieling; the northernmost shieling in Michael consists of thirty-three mounds, divided into two groups of twenty-one and twelve; and at the very head of the Sulby river, also in Michael, there are two groups close together of twenty-four and seventeen. Injebreck shieling has twenty-three mounds, and Archallagan, near the south-west corner of Marown, has eighteen. Apart from these, the great majority of the shielings consist of less than ten mounds.

The reasons for this variation can only be conjectured, because there appears to be no documentary evidence by which the ownership of shielings might be determined. It might be expected that at least one, and that a large one, would have belonged to the king of Man in the Norse period, but there seems to be no way of identifying it. A large part of the mountainous district of Lezayre once belonged to Rushen abbey, and if, as is possible, the southern boundary of the abbey’s estate ran along the stream which flows westwards from Block Eary into the Sulby river, most of the Block Eary shieling would have belonged to the abbey, and this might have explained its size. It is by no means certain, however, that the abbey’s property came so far south; its bounds are at this point very hard to follow, but it is rather more probable that they ran along a stream immediately to the north of Block Eary, where a small shieling of two mounds is marked. In that case, the size of the Block Eary shieling might simply be due to the fact that many of the landowners in the parish made use of the first convenient valley which was available to them beyond the abbey’s estate.

In Maughold there is a single large valley giving access to mountain pasture, and this alone is sufficient to explain the concentration of mounds in a small area. When a suitable strip of mountain country contains a number of small streams and no single valley which is markedly larger than the others, the groups of mounds tend to be small, as along the streams in German and in the south of Michael. The greatest concentration of mounds (most of them in Michael) is around the head-waters of the Sulby river, where there are some of the best stretches of mountain pasture in the whole island. In Braddan the shielings at the heads of the valleys are small except for Injebreck, to which, as can be seen from the map, an extra strip of land was available in the northernmost tongue

4 Its regularly disyllabic form in Manx place-names distinguishes it from the final element of such North English names as Cleator (Cumberland), Docker (Lancashire, Westmorland), and Torver (Lancashire).

5 Such a shieling would be parallel to the four havotai which according to the Record of Caernarvon of 1352 were included in the property of the prince of Wales in Dolbadarn, in Snowdonia. The two groups of long huts in Cwm Brwynog, which have been identified as one of the prince’s havotai, contain much solider remains of buildings than are known from any of the Manx shielings; but some of them are said to stand on platforms (described as ‘slight’ in every case but one) which conceivably represent the remains of more primitive huts (cf. Roy. Comm. Anc. Mons., Wales, Caernarvonshire, ii (1960), 164 and 170, a reference which I owe to Dr. C. A. R. Radford).

of the parish. In Marown, which contains very little mountain land, shieling-life seems to have been concentrated on the plateau in the south of the parish, where, in addition to four 'eary' names, the modern name 'Intacks' recalls the enclosure of common pasture.

In the absence of any definite information as to what determined the size of the shielings, plausible explanations can usually be found in terms of simple convenience. If a site was proved by experience to be particularly suitable and gave access to a good run of mountain pasture, it was likely to be much frequented, and to have remained in use as long as transhumance was practised at all. It may, in fact, have been length of use, as much as intensity of use at any particular period, which led to the formation of the larger groups. Small groups, in which none of the mounds is very high, were presumably in use for relatively short periods.

USE

There is no means of telling how many huts were occupied at a shieling in any particular year, but the mounds are in places so numerous as to suggest strongly that a considerable number of people resorted to the mountains for at least part of the summer. This implies that they were pasturing milking cattle, which needed daily attention. Cheese-making would be a regular occupation, and it has been suggested (p. 160) that mound C at Block Eary was in its earliest stage particularly devoted to this. There is no direct evidence for other kinds of livestock, except for the possibility that one of the sites excavated at Injebreck was used for penning geese.

A feature of some shielings is a series of banks which played their part in the handling of livestock. At Block Eary, for instance, if animals were driven up along the stream below the main group of mounds, they came between two converging banks which directed them into a small pen. One of the shielings at the head of the Sulby river is surrounded on three sides by streams, while on the fourth side it is bounded by a bank which curves inwards at one point to give a wide V-shaped approach to an entrance. At the northernmost shieling in Michael, which has thirty-three mounds, there is a complex series of small enclosures and connecting banks which has not yet been planned.

Occasionally, at least, an attempt was made to raise crops. The best evidence for this comes from the group of fourteen mounds in the south of the parish of Patrick, where the cultivation-ridges are extremely clear. At Block Eary there is a suggestion of two small fields on a tongue of land between streams to the east of the main group of mounds. The traces of the banks which define them are too faint for them ever to have been cattle enclosures, and they probably represent little more than the stones picked off the hill-side. At this altitude a cereal crop would hardly ripen, so the presence of a kiln to dry the grain would not be surprising; but, as has been described, the results of the excavation of a supposed kiln near by were not conclusive. At the moment very little is known about cultivation at the shielings. The signs of it were very much harder to see than the

7 For a plan of this shieling see J. Manx. Museum, vi, no. 77 (1960-61), 125.
mounds themselves, and at some sites, which were visited in less than ideal conditions, they may have been missed.

There is some variation in the type of hut that was in use, but generally they seem to have been built with walls of turf, or of turf and soil, without any, or with only partial, stone foundations. There is normally so little stone in the upper parts of the mounds that it would seem that footings were considered unnecessary once a raised platform had been created by the levelling of earlier huts. The roofs were probably made by laying branches horizontally from one wall to the other, filling the gaps with wattles, and covering the whole with sods. The lowest hut in mound A at Block Eary (fig. 59) stands apart from the others in having a regular circular shape and a continuous stone footing for the wall, and in being relatively large. It probably had a low conical roof of some kind, perhaps of thatch rather than turf, in view of its size. Although it was the earliest hut on that particular site, nothing is known about its absolute date, and it would be risky to explain it as an early type of hut which was later superseded by a cruder oblong type. It is very tempting, however, to regard it as an impermanent version of the iron-age circular hut, and to ascribe the oblong type to Norse methods of building. If there were anything in this surmise, this round hut would be the only hint which excavation has provided of a pre-Norse shieling; yet such must surely have existed.

It is possible that the hut-circles which are found in the mountains at much the same altitude as the shielings, and which are believed to belong to the iron age, were connected with transhumance. Their appearance is quite distinct from that of the shieling-mounds, as they generally show signs of solid construction, with little or no indication of mound-formation. None has been properly excavated, and nothing certain is known about the date or purpose of any of them, but it is possible that they were the forerunners of the shielings described in this paper.

DATE

The only dating evidence we have from a shieling is the coin of Stephen from mound B at Block Eary. It indicates a date within the Norse period of the island’s history, even if it were lost as much as a century after its minting. If we were to contrast the large number of shieling-mounds with the relatively small number of mountain hut-circles, and assume that the hut-circles represent pre-Norse shielings, then we could deduce that there was a great increase in transhumance in the Norse period; but there are so many unknown factors that this can be no more than a surmise.

It is equally difficult to say how long the shielings remained in use. W. Blundell, an Englishman who took refuge in the Isle of Man during the Civil War, and wrote a good account of it as he knew it in the middle of the seventeenth century, makes no mention of transhumance, and if the practice had been

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8 The 1957 edition of the 1-in. O.S. map is misleading. Some of the sites marked as hut-circles are in fact shieling-mounds; and some hut-circles are not marked at all.
flourishing, it could hardly have escaped his notice. It is likely that by then it had ceased to be at least a prominent feature in the island's life. It is not clear why it should have ceased, or when. Its cessation can hardly be connected with the provision of proper fences in the cultivated ground of the lowlands, because the lack of such fences was still deplored after Blundell's time. A possible explanation is that transhumance owed its main development in the island to Norse settlers; that it flourished during the Norse period, and declined as Norse traditions died out in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. A custom so well-established as this seems to have been would not cease suddenly, and a few people may have gone to the mountains for the summer until a much later date. There is no living memory of the practice, but even in north Skye, although transhumance persisted there into the nineteenth century, it has 'barely left a trace even in local tradition'. When the Rev. Dr. John Kelly (1750-1809), a native of the parish of Braddan, compiled his Manx dictionary, he apparently had no idea that the word 'eary' had anything to do with transhumance. He defined it as 'an open airy place'.

It must be remembered, however, that all arguments about dating depend on the relevance of a single coin, and the possibility cannot be excluded that transhumance reached its greatest development appreciably later than the Norse period in the Isle of Man.

10 M. D. MacSween in *Scottish Geographical Mag.*, lxxv, no. 2 (1959), 75-87.

11 In the 1957 edition of the 1-in. O.S. map the terms applied to such shielings as are marked vary between 'mounds' (which is appropriate); 'tumuli' (SC/305786 and SC/365836); 'hut-circles' (SC/352900 and SC/217736), a term which would be better reserved for the quite distinct huts of iron-age type); and 'earthworks' (Block Eary).