

# The Scottish Broch: Enigma From the Iron Age [B2]

Le torri coniche dell'Età del Ferro, enigma del paesaggio scozzese, sono la prova di una misteriosa abilità artigianale. Un progetto che unisce archeologia, artigianato e architettura mira a ricreare la loro costruzione.

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Any visitor to the north of Scotland will be **struck** by the strange ruined towers that **dot** the landscape. Known as 'brochs', these ancient conical structures are unique to Scotland, particularly the county of Caithness. For centuries, archeologists have tried **to put together** the clues that reveal their origins, their use and their significance.

## STRANGE STRUCTURES

Brochs were built by the **Caledonian** tribes during the Iron Age, between 400 **BCE** and 100 **CE**. They are **arresting** because of their size — the tallest remaining broch on the abandoned island of Mousa is 13.3 metres tall, making it the tallest prehistoric building in Britain. The towers were constructed with two concentric **drystone** walls, held together with long stone **slabs**, and probably had roofs of wood or **thatch**. Between the inner and outer walls there were passages, small rooms and stairs leading to higher levels. At ground level there was an **inner courtyard**, often with a stone **fireplace**.

## NORSE WORDS

The name 'broch' comes from the Lowland **Scots** term 'brough', meaning a fort, and is possibly derived from the **Old Norse** word 'borg'. (The more familiar **Old Norse** word 'dun', meaning fort or castle, is more commonly used in other parts of Scotland, where it is incorporated into place names such as Dundee or Dunkeld.) This etymology, together with the small entrance, **lack** of windows and the fact that the external walls can be four to five metres thick, **led** to theories that they must have been defensive

structures. However, as very few weapons have been discovered on the sites, compared to the large amount of agricultural implements and **cooking ware**, the latest thinking among archaeologists is that they were actually just houses, with multiple families living in them. The fragments of **pottery** found at the sites reveal that their owners enjoyed olives and imported wines from the Mediterranean long before the Roman invasion, so it's possible that the brochs housed wealthier tribesmen and their families, and it may have been a status symbol to live in one.

## MAKING A MODEL

Although the work of archaeologists all over the world has helped us understand a great deal about our past, many **puzzles** remain and there are structures and objects whose use and significance we cannot understand through simple examination. One innovative method of trying to find out more about an ancient construction or artefact is to replicate it, using tools and materials of the time. This **hands-on** approach is known as 'experimental architecture' and one of the earliest examples is Butser Ancient Farm in Hampshire in the south of England. What began as an Iron Age research site became an open-air museum. It features archaeological reconstructions of ancient buildings from the Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman Britain and the Anglo-Saxon period. There are also **crops** from pre-history and rare **breeds** of sheep and **goats** are **reared** there.

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# Glossary

- **led** = condurre
- **pottery** = ceramica
- **hands-on** = pratico
- **reared** = allevare
- **dot** = costellare
- **CE** = d. C (acronimo di Common Era)
- **arresting** = suggestivo
- **drystone** = a secco
- **Old Norse** = norreno antico
- **crops** = coltivazioni
- **breeds** = razze
- **goats** = capre
- **struck** = colpito
- **to put together** = mettere insieme
- **slabs** = lastri, placche
- **inner courtyard** = cortile interno
- **Scots** = scozzesi
- **lack** = mancanza, assenza
- **puzzles** = enigmi
- **BCE** = (acronimo di Before the Common Era)
- **thatch** = paglia
- **fireplace.** = camino
- **cooking ware** = utensili da cucina