

## III.

AN EARTH-HOUSE AT GRIPPS, FROTOFT, ROUSAY,  
ORKNEY. BY WALTER G. GRANT, F.S.A.Scot.

Early in April 1937, while Mr George Reid, farmer, Tratland, was harrowing a field of oats on the adjoining farm of Gripps, one of the harrow tines so displaced a thin-edged stone that it would have interfered with future farm work. Mr Reid, on trying to pull it out of the ground, found it to be quite loose but could not extract it. When he let go his hold the stone fell into a cavity which, on a little investigation, proved to be an earth-house. A lintel stone that was broken across was removed, and access to the chamber, which had not been filled up by the infiltration of soil, was obtained. After the mouth of the entrance passage had been cleared of accumulated soil, the broken lintel, which had first drawn the attention of the farmer and was subsequently removed, was replaced by a similar slab from the beach nearby and the surface of the field was levelled up.

The building is situated about 40 feet above high-water mark, some 120 yards north-north-east of the shore of Eynhallow Sound and 150 yards west-south-west of the farm steading of Tratland. Before its discovery there was not the slightest surface indication of the presence of any building.

In constructing the earth-house a trench had been dug into the clayey subsoil towards the rising hillside, running in a north-east direction for  $12\frac{1}{2}$  feet, where it turned to the north into the widened chamber (fig. 1).

The trench and inner enlarged part were then roofed over with slabs set from 6 inches to 27 inches apart; these in turn carried generally lighter slabs laid lengthwise with the passage and chamber. The clay walls of the trench and chamber were left unfaced by building, but additional support to the cross-lintels in the chamber was given by five slabs set on end against its natural clay walls and by one pillar formed of built masonry.

Entrance to the passage is obtained by two steps down, the first cut into the clay and the second having a laid stone tread. The passage therefrom measures some 10 feet long with an average width of 2 feet 6 inches, a height of 2 feet 8 inches at its outer end, and, the floor rising some 4 inches, a height of 2 feet 4 inches at the inner end.

The inner chamber running south to north measures approximately 8 feet in length and 3 feet in greatest width; its maximum height in the centre is 2 feet 11 inches.

From 2 to 6 inches of silt covered the floor, and the scarcity of relics

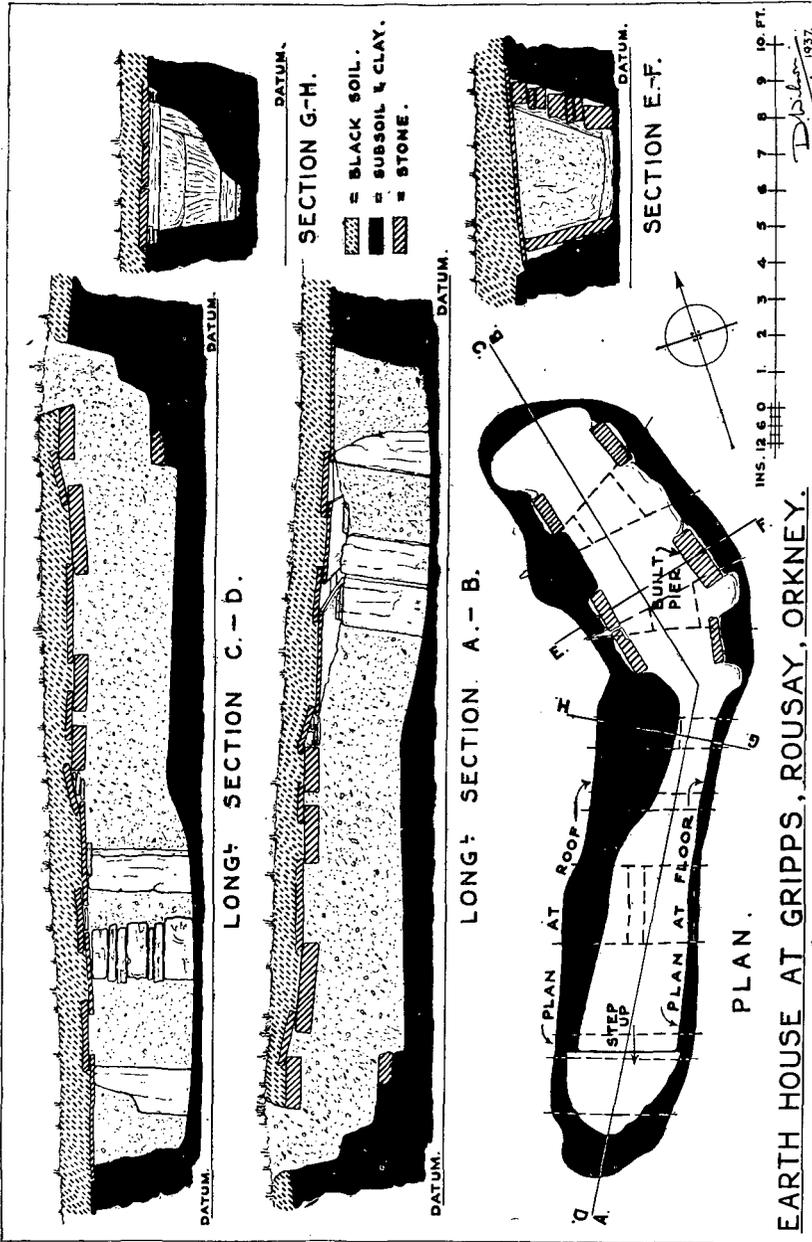
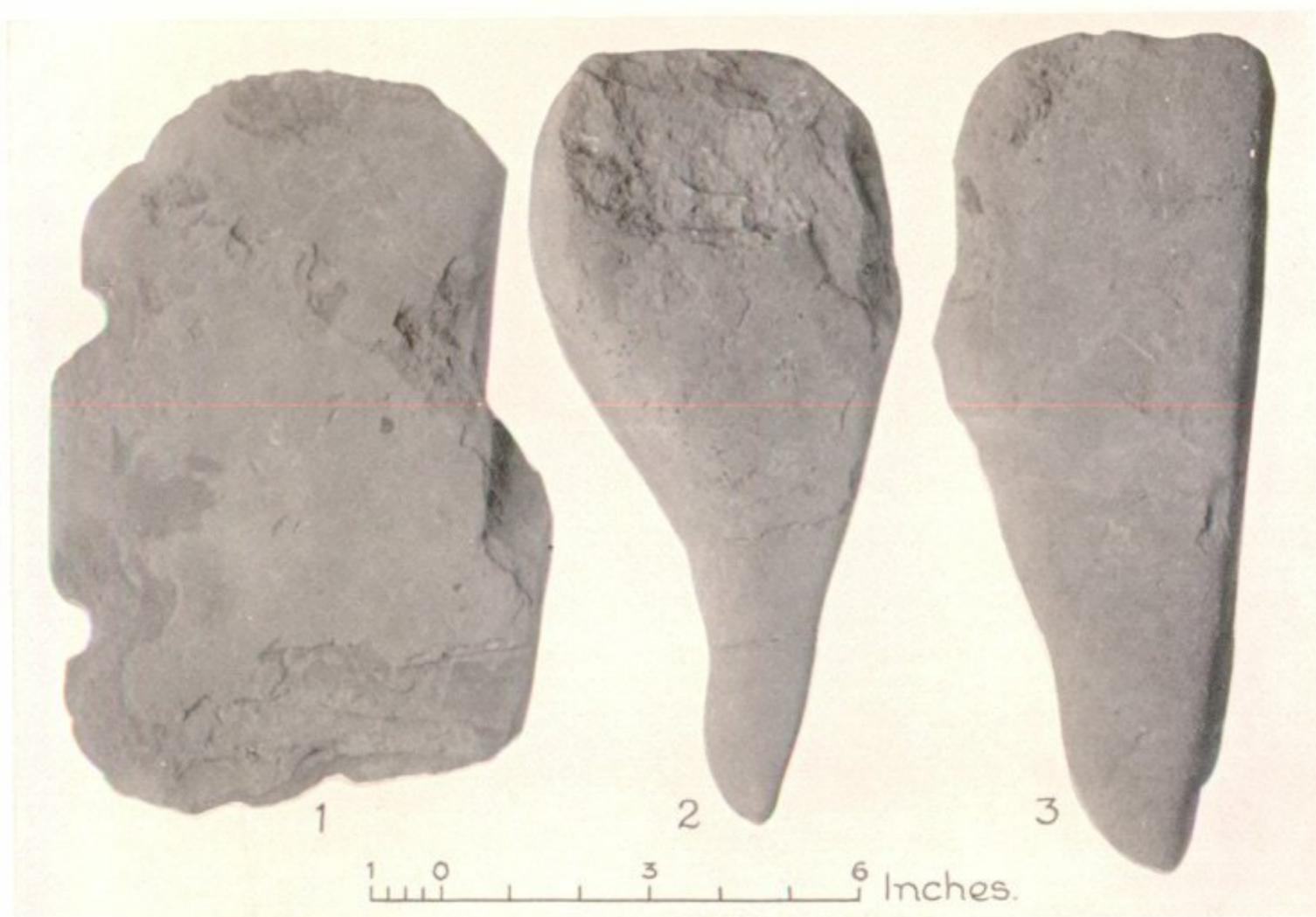


Fig. 1.



Objects of stone from an earth-house at Gripes, Rousay, Orkney.

which it contained was disappointing. Of stone there were an oblong object (Pl. LXXXII, 1) with rounded corners, having two notches on one edge and measuring  $11\frac{1}{4}$  inches by  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $1\frac{1}{8}$  inch; a rude club-like implement (Pl. LXXXII, 2)  $10\frac{7}{8}$  inches in length; a cleaver-like implement (Pl. LXXXII, 3)  $10\frac{7}{8}$  inches in length, and a hammer-stone.

Four pieces of pumice were also found, two being round and another grooved on one side.

The pottery comprised the rim and portion of the wall of a vessel (fig. 2) of dark red ware containing crushed stone. The mouth has been about  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter and the wall is  $\frac{5}{16}$  inch thick. There were also a small rim fragment, flat on top and  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch in thickness, a basal fragment, a few more fragments of other vessels, and two small pieces of what looks like a clay mould.

A human molar, parts of the tooth of an ox or deer, the crown of the milk tooth of a pig, fragments of animal bones (unidentifiable), and a splinter of flint were also recovered.

It is well known that in Orkney there is a class of earth-house of very small size which so far has not been recorded from any other part of Scotland. Such have the lintelled roof supported by pillar stones often brought up to the requisite height by the insertion of small slabs. These pillars are frequently placed some distance from the wall. Sometimes the wall is of the natural clay, but at times this is supplemented by building. In the earth-house described the walls are formed entirely of the natural subsoil, against which the supports of the roof are placed, and it is notable in having a longer entrance passage than any of the other Orkney examples.

Mr Reid has earned the thanks of all Scottish archæologists for the steps he took for the preservation of the building, and I was glad to have the opportunity of discussing the structure with the late Dr Graham Callander, who was able to visit the site a few weeks after its discovery.



Fig. 2. Section of a vessel of dark red clay from an earth-house at Gripps, Rousay, Orkney. ( $\frac{1}{2}$ .)