

## III.

## A CHAMBERED MOUND AT WESTNESS, ROUSAY, ORKNEY.

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About the 100-foot contour line, on a slight shelf, on the fairly steep grassy slope between the house of Westness and the public road, some 25 yards distant from the latter and about 250 yards from the Bay of Westness on Eynhallow Sound, stands a grass-covered mound, measuring 40 feet in diameter from north to south and 35 feet from east to west. As the mound had been dug into a good many years ago, it is now reduced to a height of 3 feet, the excavated part having been partially refilled and left with a hollow on the top. On the east side of this hollow the upper edge of a long thin slab appeared, and at the northern end two stones laid on the flat, giving the appearance of steps. There is no record of the former excavation.

On the 3rd of July 1933, Dr Callander, Director of the National Museum of Antiquities, being present, the mound was again opened, in the hope that its character might be revealed.

A trial trench was driven in from the northern edge until structure was met with. This cut showed that the mound was an earthen one, containing a natural admixture of small stones. No traces of cairn-building were seen. When the centre was excavated an irregularly shaped sub-oval chamber was brought to light, the longer axis lying nearly north and south (fig. 1). It measured 8 feet 9 inches in length and 6 feet 11 inches in greatest breadth. The north-east corner of the building had evidently been completely torn out except for a small section which indicated the line of building. The west side of the chamber

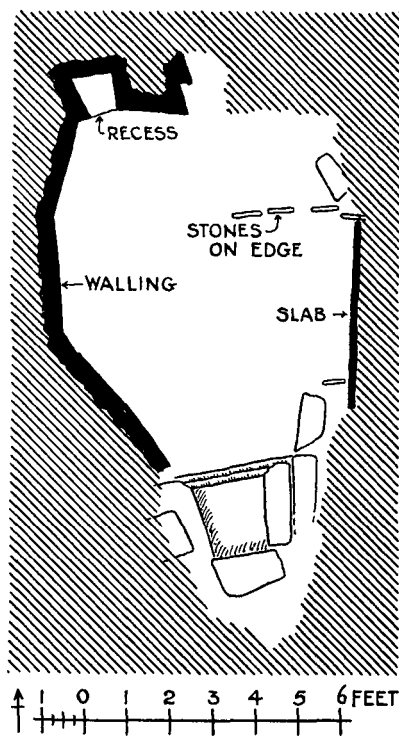


Fig. 1. Plan of Chambered Mound at Westness, Rousay.

and also the western half of its north end consist of a carefully built wall of stones, not set in a regular curve, but in short straight sections. The greater part of its east side is formed by a flagstone set on edge, measuring 4 feet 11 inches in length, 2 feet 1 inch in height, and 2¼ inches in thickness. At its northern end is the fragment of walling already referred to. This consists of three thin stones, now lying at an angle, but no doubt originally laid on the flat. The vacant space in the north-east corner between the end of this flag and the eastern end of the north wall which terminates in a vertical face, may have been filled with another slab on edge, this having been removed during the previous excavation. The south end of the east side beyond the flag is not aligned with it, but projects forward 12 inches and angles inwards. The corresponding building on the opposite side also converges, reducing the width of this end to 3 feet.

Inserted in the floor at the northern end of the upright flag on the east side, and at right angles to it, is a setting of four small flags, 1 inch to 2 inches thick, placed vertically, the three outer ones rising only 2 inches to 4 inches above the level of the floor. Near the opposite end of the flag is another small stone, also placed at right angles, possibly the remaining member of a setting similar to that at the other end. Whether there had been an outside kerb is not known, but the structure is strongly suggestive of a rectangular bed- or hearth-like arrangement, 4 feet long by 2 feet 9 inches broad.

Where the north end angles into the west wall is a small bole or recess, 6 inches from the floor, measuring 8 inches high, 7½ inches broad, and 11½ inches deep. In the east end of the chamber are the lower courses, one on each side and two at the back, of a recess, measuring 23 inches across the mouth, 16 inches across the back, and 19 inches deep.

There is no indication how the chamber was roofed, as the remaining parts of the sides are practically vertical, with no signs of inward corbelling, neither are there any indications of supporting pillars for a roof.

The only relics discovered consisted of a few fragments of burnt bones—evidently human, as small parts of a skull could be identified—and pieces of charcoal scattered here and there. The incinerated bones were mostly picked out of the filling in, but a few pieces were found on the floor, chiefly at the north-west corner, where the lowest floor-level had not been disturbed by the previous excavators.

There is some difficulty in determining the character of the monument. The small bole near the floor and the bed- or hearth-like setting are suggestive of a dwelling more than a tomb, but there are

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no signs of a fire nor of an entrance. Besides, the diameter of the mound is too small to permit of the walls being carried to a height suitable for habitation. It has not to be forgotten, however, that in Orkney there are quite a number of small earth-houses with low roofs, but these are all provided with entrance passages. The presence of cremated human remains and scattered small fragments of charcoal could hardly be expected in a dwelling, and it would seem that the building was sepulchral and of a very unusual type.

Professor Alexander Low, F.S.A.Scot., who examined the bones, reported that they were very thoroughly incinerated, and that fragments of human parietal, occipital, ulna, and thigh-bone were identified.

On sloping ground on the farm of Westness, in a field which has been long under cultivation, about 230 yards north of Westness House and 70 feet west of the farm road, at an elevation of some 80 feet above sea-level, is a circular mound, doubtlessly lowered in height and spread out to a certain extent by agricultural operations, now measuring 56 feet in diameter and 4 feet in height. This, presumably, is another burial site.