

## 8. NOTES OF ARCHÆOLOGICAL REMAINS FOUND IN ORKNEY.

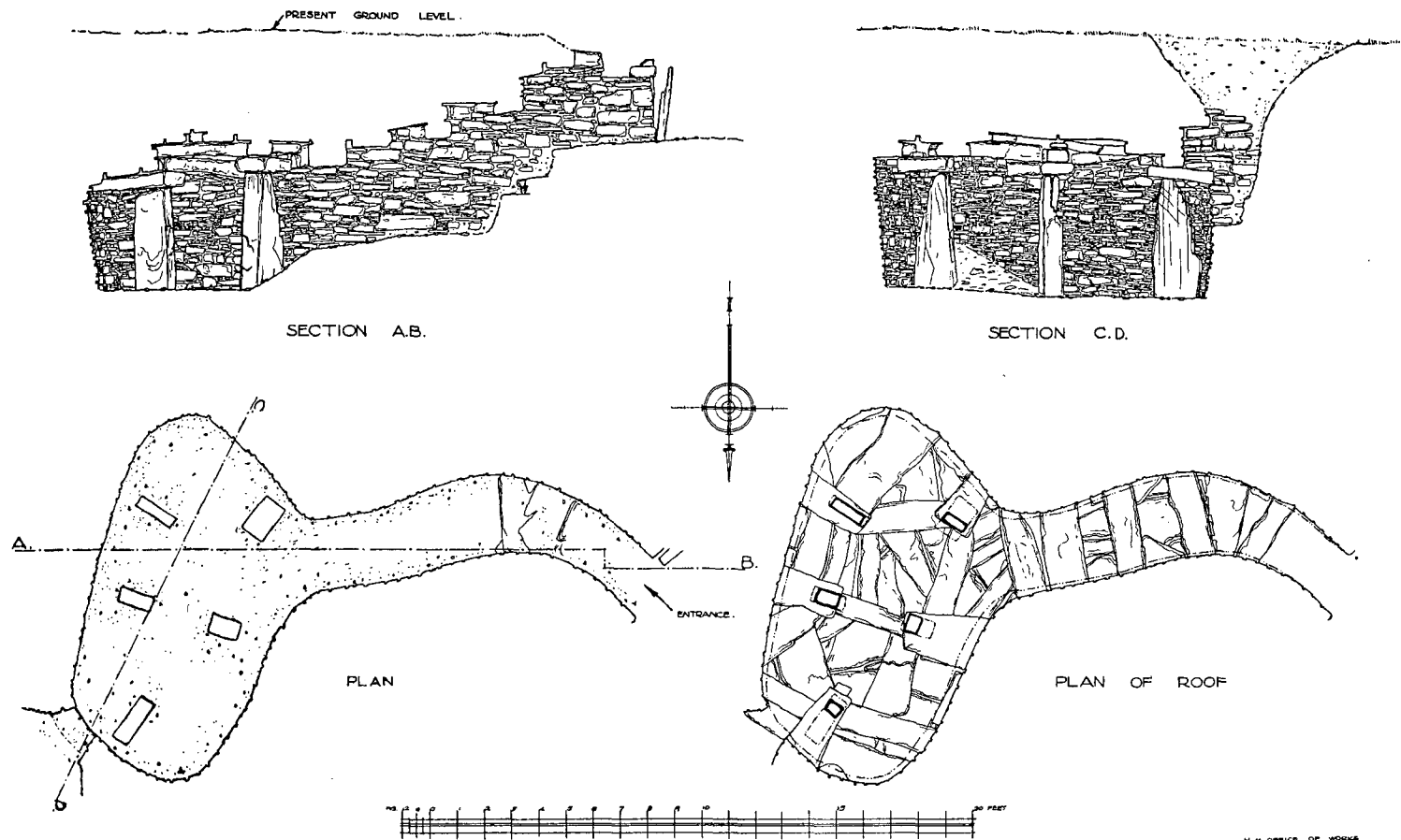
During the recent war years archæological excavation in Orkney as elsewhere was at a standstill, and some prehistoric structures which were accidentally encountered could not be systematically examined and recorded owing to the circumstances of the time. The following may therefore be mentioned briefly here for purposes of record.

In the levelling work on the preparation of aerodromes, three structures at least were encountered and had to be removed completely.

1. On Hatston aerodrome, near Kirkwall, there appeared to have been an earth-house of a small type. It was in a very dilapidated state, but a plan of the structure has kindly been supplied by H.M. Ministry of Works (fig. 5). The finds made at the time of the discovery of the earth-house are more numerous than usually recorded from such structures. The most interesting is an anthropomorphic object rather like that from Dale, Harray, illustrated in vol. lxii. p. 159. The head of that from Hatston is about 5 inches in diameter, the width of the body, which is rectangular, 6 inches, and the total length, perhaps broken at the foot, 15 inches. It is chipped out of a block of grey flagstone. There were also sherds of hand-made pottery of various qualities such as are found in brochs. The majority of the sherds are from a single vessel, of which the base had a diameter of about 10 inches; the walls rose steeply for more than  $11\frac{1}{2}$  inches, at which point the diameter was about 14 inches. On parts of the exterior there were scored straight parallel lines in groups of five or six running vertically and obliquely. They also occur inside, though rarely, and may represent notches in a bone smoother rather than decoration. One fragment only remains to suggest that the rim was very slightly everted.

2. On Skaebrae aerodrome, in the West Mainland, an extensive ridge of ground had to be cleared away with the aid of mechanical excavators, and in the process foundations of some large indeterminate structure were encountered,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxiii. pp. 233-9.



EARTH HOUSE, HATSTON AERODROME, KIRKWALL, ORKNEY.

Fig. 5.

(Crown Copyright Reserved—Reproduced by permission of the Ministry of Works.)

H. M. OFFICE OF WORKS  
 P. M. DEPARTMENT,  
 122, GEORGE STREET  
 EDINBURGH AUG/24.

which seemed to suggest that it must have been an old broch site. It was situated not far from the old houses of Hammercleat.

3. On Skaebrae aerodrome also another building was cleared away entirely by excavations, but though time did not allow for full examination it was possible to determine that it was a rather fine example of an earth-house similar in type to the well-known examples at Rennibister and Grain, and that recorded by Thomas at Saverock (R.C.A.M. *Inventory*, Nos. 325, 409, 408). The chamber was larger than any I have seen, and its roofing had involved slabs resting on the cantilever principle on top of nine pillars. The plan reproduced in fig. 8 was kindly provided by Mr W. H. Kirby.

4. In the course of agricultural work on the farm of Naversdale, in Orphir, still another earth-house was discovered, but from the farmer's report it was of a very primitive type, similar to those recorded from Dale in Harray and at Mid-

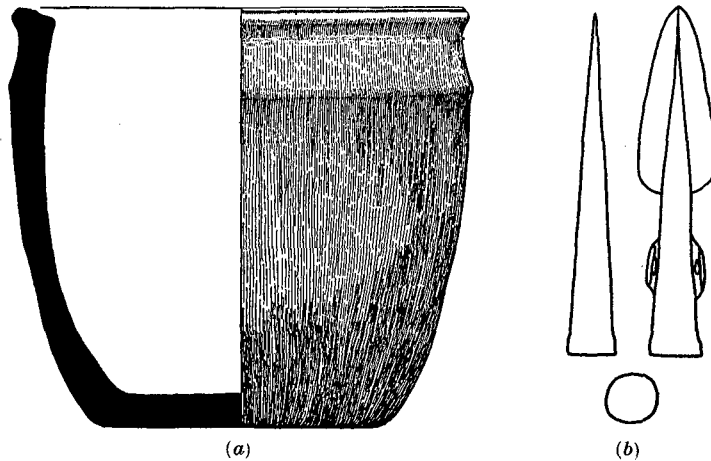


Fig. 6. (a) Steatite Urn from Lyking, Sandwick. (c) (b) Spearhead from Nether House, Firth. (c)

house in Costa (R.C.A.M. *Inventory*, Nos. 290 and 291). It was covered over and left *in situ*. A brief note was printed in the *Proceedings*, vol. lxxx. p. 143.

5. In farm-work 600 yards north-west of the farm buildings of Lyking, in Sandwick, a cist was discovered in which was a steatite urn. Mr G. N. Robertson, writing about eight years later, describes it as follows: "The cist was found on the top of a natural mound or hillock (Nat. Grid Ref. N:30/269155) and is still intact though filled with earth. It consists of flagstones set on one edge, being as far as I can remember about 4 feet long by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  wide and 3 feet deep, covered by one single stone on top. I rather think the bottom was also flagged. There were bones and fragments of bones. We were of opinion that the body had been placed in the cist in a sitting position."

The vessel was broken, but from the fragments collected it was possible to effect a satisfactory reconstruction (fig. 6, a). It stands about  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches high, and measures 7 inches across the rim and 5 inches across the flat base. The walls are evenly shaped, varying in thickness from under  $\frac{1}{2}$  to over  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch. The outside is blackened, and in the lower part of the interior is a carbonaceous deposit. The rim is slightly bevelled towards the inside, and has a broad groove

on the bevel and a narrow one on the outer edge of the lip, below which there is a concave neck an inch high. Recently, Mr A. H. Robertson has most kindly presented the urn to the National Museum.

6. About 1942 a well-preserved bronze spearhead was found by Mr T. Aitken, Nether House, Firth, while cutting peats. The site is about 450 yards east of his house (Nat. Grid. Ref. N.30/374184). The spearhead is just under  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches

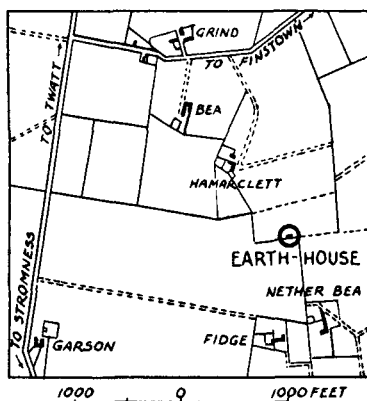


Fig. 7. Skaebrae Earth-house: map of site.

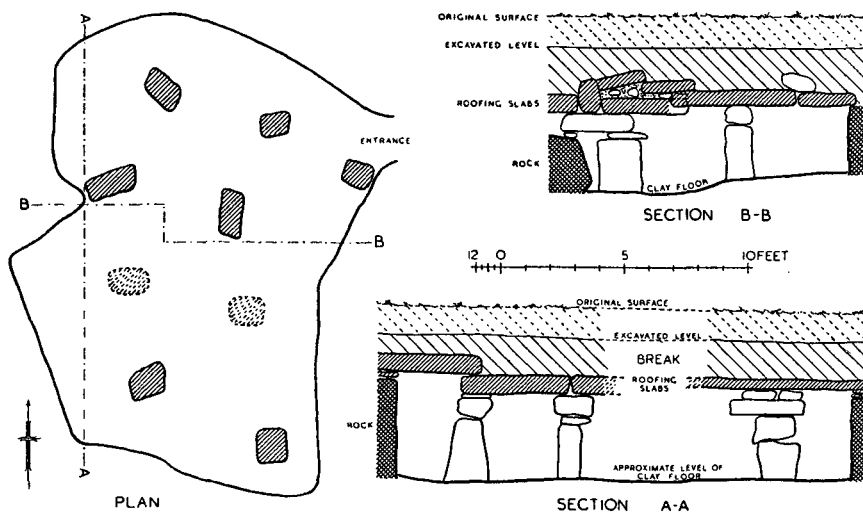


Fig. 8. Skaebrae Earth-house: plan and sections.

long and of Late Bronze Age type—leaf-shaped, with loops on either side of the socket for attachment to the shaft (sketch, fig. 6, b). It was found lying at a depth of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet at the bottom of the peat, in clay. The number of bronze objects hitherto found in Orkney has been small.

7. On 1/4/1946 I received information that Mr Archibald, farmer, of Newhouse (Mittens), Birsay, a few days previously had, while ploughing, come upon a burial cist which was empty save for a small urn standing near one end. The urn was

unbroken, and being uncertain what to do with it, for the time being he decided to replace the coverstone and leave the cist undisturbed. Unfortunately, however, some neighbours had observed Mr Archibald, and came out of curiosity to see what had happened. These were less careful than the discoverer, and in their handling the urn was broken into several pieces. At my suggestion Mr Archibald very kindly agreed to present them to the National Museum for reconstruction and subsequent preservation.

The site of this cist-burial (Nat. Grid Ref. N.30/296282) is the top of a ridge 150 yards north-east of the farm buildings of Newhouse, and about 40 yards east of a rather prominent mound, which is very obviously another ancient burial mound (R.C.A.M. *Inventory*, No. 47). This has no name, but on the 6-inch O.S. map "Tumuli" is entered at the spot, and a note to the effect that a "stone cist" was found there in 1877. Only one mound is visible now, but the adjacent field has been ploughed out, and smaller mounds may thus have been levelled down. It is not improbable, indeed, that a small tumulus may have covered the present cist. Mr Archibald had no knowledge of any earlier excavation or discoveries here, but there is a depression in the top of the large mound which suggests that it may have been dug into at some past date.

The cist itself presented no new feature. It was approximately 44 inches in length by 25 inches in width and about the same in depth. A single flagstone formed each end, but to complete each side three flagstones, each approximately 15 inches wide, had been placed on end edge to edge. On top of these enclosing slabs two or three courses of stones had been built so as to level the top of the cist walls all round and at the same time make it rather deeper. The main cover flagstone was approximately 36 inches by 30 inches, and the bottom of the cist had been roughly stone-paved.

The urn (Pl. XXXVII, 2) is of unusual character, and is described by the Keeper of the Museum as a Late Beaker. As such it is of considerable interest, since only two Beakers have hitherto been found in Orkney. It is of coarse reddish fabric, in places fired brown or black. The profile is a much flattened S-shape; height 5.5 inches, rim diameter also 5.5 inches. Nine or ten chevrons have been scored with the end of a stick, and repeated seven times to cover most of the exterior.

HUGH MARWICK.