XI.

REPORT ON THE EXCAVATION OF A NEOLITHIC TEMPLE AT STANYDALE IN THE PARISH OF SANDSTING, SHETLAND.

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Read October 9, 1950.

In the course of a survey of antiquities in Shetland for the *Inventory*[1] published by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, my attention was attracted to the remains at Stanydale of a structure of uncommon design. The disconnected outlines of inner faces of walls that were then discernible in the rickle of stones and the growth of vegetation at the site suggested such a perplexing departure from the normal that closer investigation of the phenomena seemed to be desirable. The opportunity to solve the riddle, however, did not occur until the summer of 1949, when I was privileged to carry out excavations on behalf of our Society. Permission to dig was kindly given by Mr James M. S. Tait, factor to the Marquis of Zetland, and to him and to the Society, which generously financed the operations, I would here express my grateful thanks. I am indebted also to Mr R. B. K. Stevenson, Keeper of the National Museum of Scotland, to Mr M. Y. Orr of the Royal Botanic Garden, and to Mr R. Eckford of the Geological Survey of Great Britain, for their respective reports on the pottery, the timber and the stones.

In the *Inventory*, the monument to which I refer has been described from surface indications as of "Indeterminate Character" on account of the meagreness of detail at the time of visit and for lack of any known comparable example for guidance as to its class. A textual qualification states that it "possesses features that mark it off clearly from any sepulchral monument observed elsewhere in the Islands," and that it "finds its closest analogy in certain of the early domestic sites."[2]

That these statements are not substantiated in fact is revealed in the material now exposed by spadework, and indeed a converse view better meets the case. Some of the principal features at Stanydale distinctly connect the structure with sepulchral monuments, but no analogous domestic buildings have ever been recorded. On full exposure, the plan of the remains developed into a form without parallel in the British Isles, but it became clearly evident that the work bore an unmistakable likeness in some respects to a group of local megalithic tombs (figs. 1 and 9). These tombs are a recent discovery of the Royal Commission, and one of the distinguishing marks of a typical specimen is a concave façade, together with a rounded

[1] *Inventory of Shetland*, Twelfth Report, vol. iii.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 102, Art. no. 1401.

back forming an outline to which the term "heel-shaped" has been applied from its resemblance to the heel of a boot.

The geographical situation of the remains at Stanydale falls within the area of distribution of this group of cairns (fig. 2), and in having a common "heel-shaped" outline and a similar building technique a close association of the two types becomes manifest. This relationship points to an agreement of ideas from which it may be deduced that both kinds of monument were erected by people of the same culture, and for the cairns at least the period has been ascribed to a Late Neolithic date.[1] A notable difference in the lay-out of their respective chambers, however, presupposes that each type fulfilled a totally different function. The one at Stanydale displays a unique internal arrangement, as may be gathered from the following descriptive report on the results of the excavation.

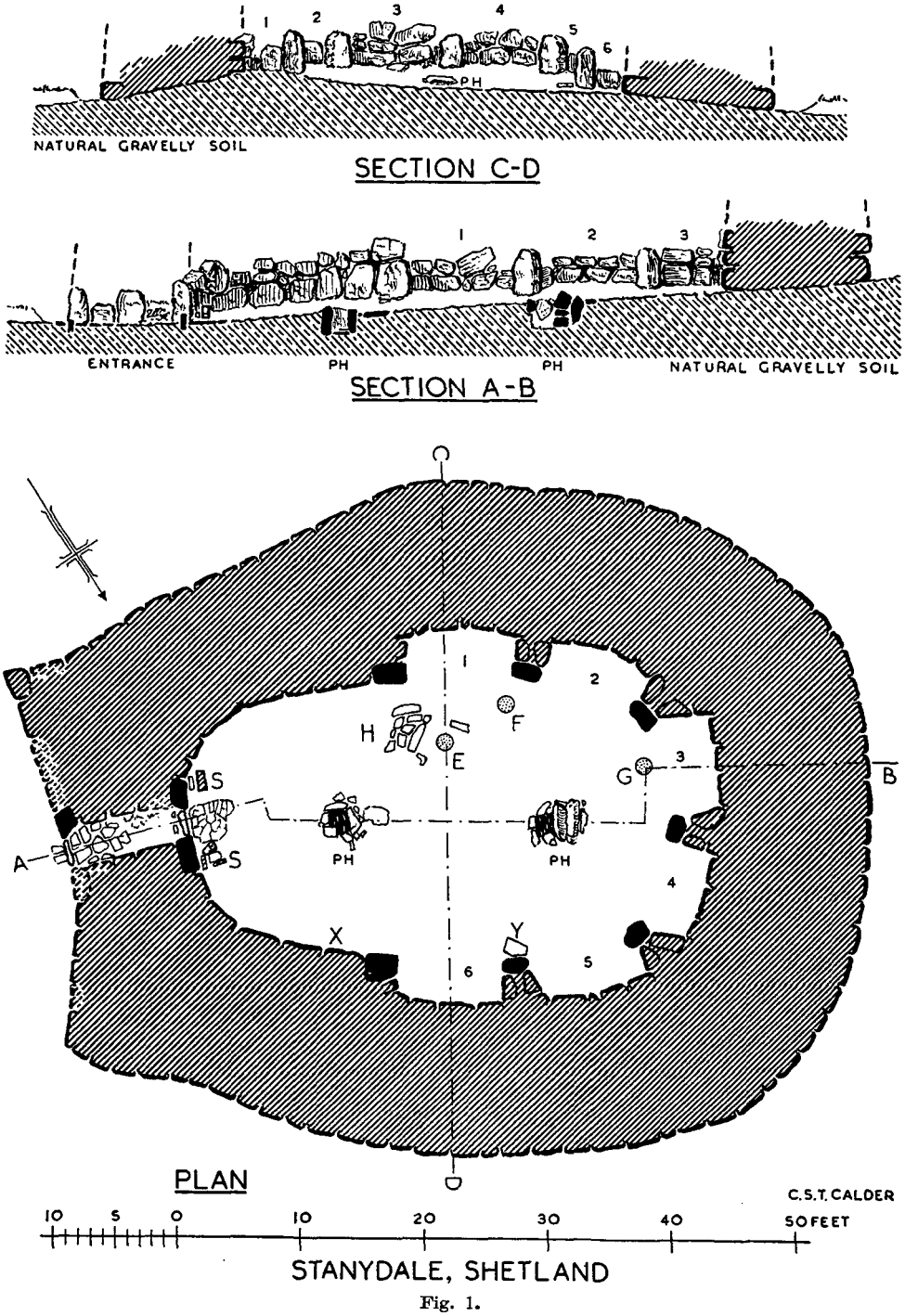
On property belonging to the Marquis of Zetland, the site at Stanydale lies on the lower ground of the scattald between the township of that name and the high rocky ridge to the south known as the Hamars (fig. 3). It is marked as a "Cuml" on the 6-inch Ordnance Survey map of Zetland, Sheet No. XLVII, and is situated 650 yards west-north-west of the bridge over the Burn of Scutta Voe on the road from Roadside to Gruting. The surrounding area is studded with a goodly number of antiquities, but the three nearest cumls to the south noted as sites on the map have disappeared, and the precise character of three to the north cannot be determined in their ruinous and overgrown condition.

The monument itself was grass-covered over the outer face and over the eastern half of the interior, which had been cleared of loose stones for use as a sheepfold, the debris being piled up in the western half. No attempt had been made to level the area before laying the foundation of walling, which rested on the natural surface and followed the configuration of the ground on a gentle downward slope from south-west to north-east.

Walling.—The walling averaged 12½ feet in thickness at the base, and had probably thinned somewhat in its rise to the wall-head by a batter on the outer face. It was built of rough massive blocks of stone[2] set indiscriminately on edge or bed, and steadied by large pinnings where the seating was uneven or the stones irregular in shape. The wall enclosed a single chamber, and the largest and best stones had been selected for the interior face. Some of the stones were estimated to weigh 7 or 8 cwt., and the tallest rose to a height of 3 feet 10 inches above the floor. In places around the inside face two or three courses of masonry existed, but the wall generally had been reduced to its lowest member (Pls. XVI, *a*, XVII, *a* and *b*). "Heel-shaped" on plan externally, the building is set with the concave

[1] *Inventory of Orkney and Shetland*, Intro., vol. i. pp. 6 and 21.

[2] "Calcareous and micaceous sandstone of Old Red Sandstone Age, altered and hardened by movement and heat," from report by Mr R. Eckford.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C.S.T. CALDER
10 5 0 10 20 30 40 50 FEET
STANYDALE, SHETLAND

Fig. 1.

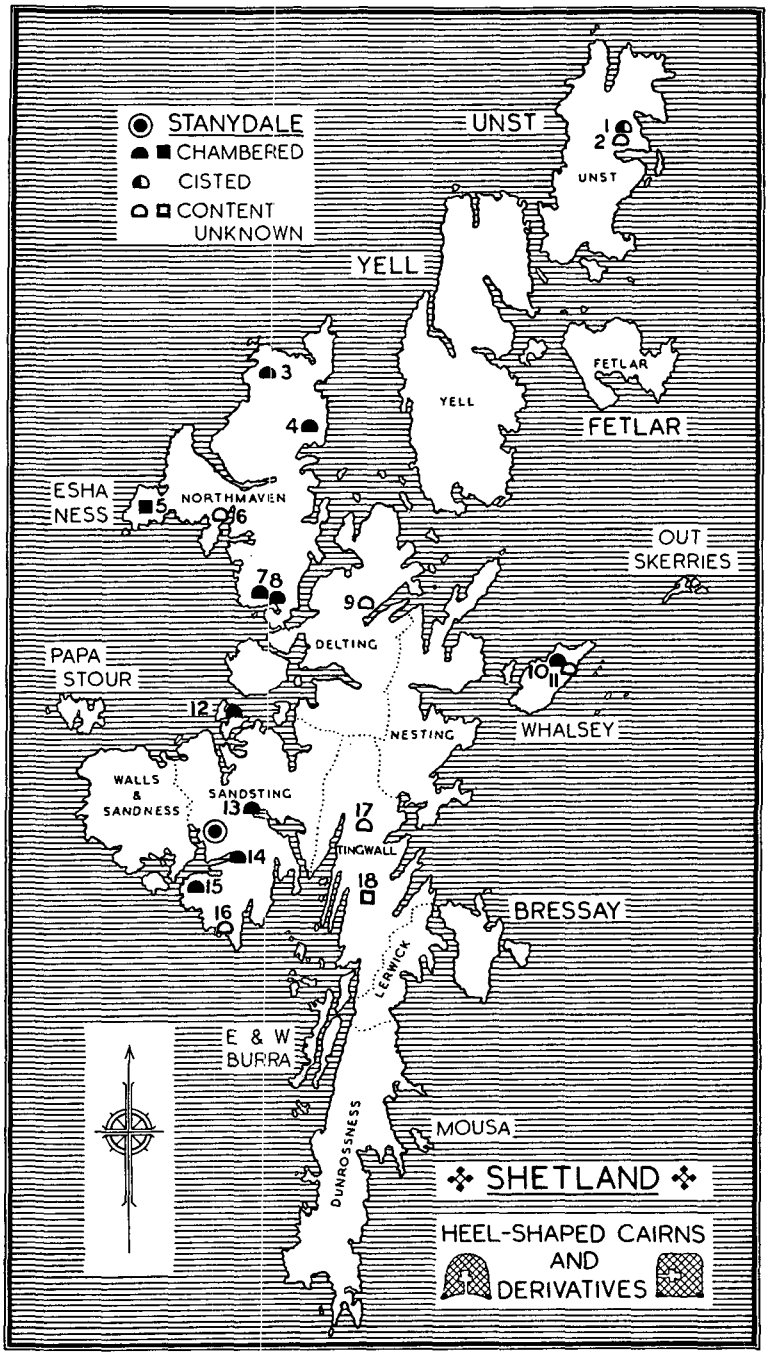


Fig. 2. Distribution Map.

façade on the east, and it measures in extreme axial dimensions 65 feet and 55 feet in length and breadth respectively.

Entrance.—The entrance passage, which pierces the middle of the façade and is now minus its lintels, varies from 2 feet 3 inches to 2 feet 10 inches in width, and is 10½ feet in length. At front and rear respectively a stone kerb has been set, and the floor is partly paved and partly rock. There are no door-checks, but about one foot on either side of the inner end (Pl. XIX, *b*) there is a setting of smallish stones marked S on the plan, having in each an earthfast stone rising at most to 12 inches above the floor of the

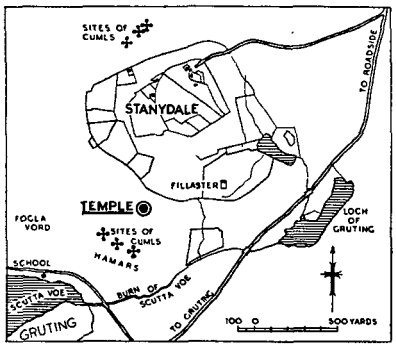


Fig. 3. Map showing site of Temple.

Fig. 4. Shouldered Stone, Hal Tarxien.
Sketch, from photograph by Zammit.

chamber in a position which implies that the settings may have been a device so placed as to engage a bar securing the bottom of the door. Attention is drawn to the south rear jamb of the passage consisting of an orthostat, which is worked for 10 inches down from the top to a shoulder 12 inches wide, no doubt the better to receive a neighbouring course of masonry. This is a feature met elsewhere in megalithic construction, and it is to be seen in an exaggerated form also in the ingoing of an entrance, in the earliest temple of a group at the Hal Tarxien in Malta (fig. 4).[1]

Chamber.—The chamber appears as a well-shaped oval extending to the exceptional dimensions of 39 by 22 feet on the axes. A paving-slab is met with on entering, but elsewhere the floor is simply the trodden-down subsoil. According to local information, the paucity of paving is due to the scarcity of good flagstones in the area. A striking feature of the internal composition is the finish of the western half in a series of six wide and contiguous apsidal recesses, while in the eastern half the wall-face is plain and unbroken (Pls. XX, *a* and *b*, XXI, *a*). The recessed compartments average 8 feet in length by 4 feet in depth and are separated from each other by radial partitions

[1] *Archæologia*, vol. lxx. pp. 180–81, figs. 2 and 3.

terminating in boulder orthostats placed in proper alignment with the curved face of the chamber. This manner of construction is worthy of notice for the reason that it contrasts very strongly with the method seen in the wheel-houses of a later period. In the latter, the recesses are simply incidental to the provision of radial partitions which are projected purposefully inwards from the wall to reduce the space to be roofed; but at Stanydale the fronts of the partitions are flush with the main wall-face, no contraction of the interior being effected, as none was needed for the kind of roof contemplated and ultimately carried out. It is thus the recesses here that have been made for a purpose, the partitions being incidental. In both cases, in

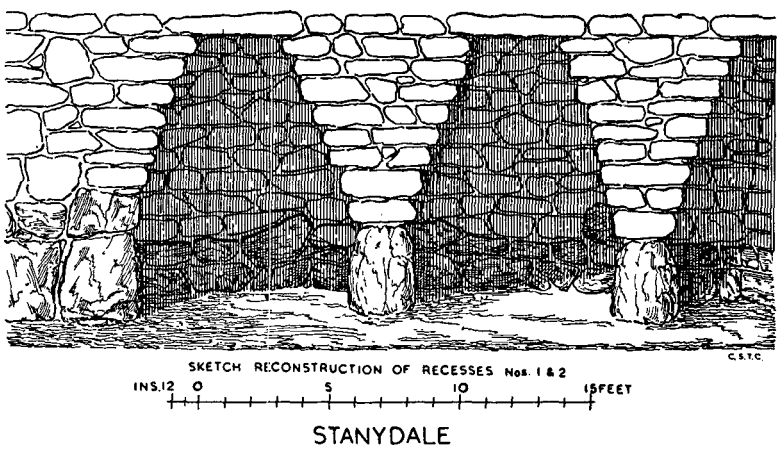


Fig. 5.

order to reduce the size of the roofs over the recesses themselves to areas that might conveniently be spanned by lintels of moderate length, the walls would be built with converging sides in the customary beehive fashion. Following an existing example of complete recesses at Jarlshof, a reconstruction of the recesses at Stanydale has been sketched to scale (fig. 5 and Pl. XXI, *b*). From the drawing which has allowed for what may be considered a maximum overlap of the corbel-stones, the height of the walling of the chamber is estimated to be at least 12 feet.

Post-holes.—Spaced suitably on the alignment of the longitudinal axis, two especially large and heavily constructed post-holes are sunk in the floor to a depth of 2 feet. The bottom of the eastern one (Pl. XIX, *a*) consists of a flagstone, and that of the western one (Pl. XVIII, *b*) is of solid rock. In each, the carbonised stumps of two posts side by side were preserved in a sandy infiltration which had accumulated to a depth of 6 inches in the bottom. On being scraped level, cross-sections of the timber stood out in dark rings, thus clearly defining a diameter of 10 inches for the largest and most complete

specimen. Along with pieces of the others it was carefully collected for botanic examination. As well as silt and sand the post-holes were part-filled with stones which had evidently been used as packing, and in the upper portion of the eastern, peat-ash mixed with quite a lot of vitreous material known as "cramp" had gathered. On the top of the infilling of the western post-hole three small fragments of a beaker vessel together with a rude stone implement were found.

Roofing.—The obvious inference to be drawn from the presence and position of the stumps of the posts is that they are remnants of uprights which had supported the ridge-pole of a wooden roof, the pair in each post-hole being presumably lashed together. The doubling of the posts thus for extra strength and stability would be a natural enough desire in view of the great size of the space to be covered, with consequent increased stresses and strains exerted by strong Shetland winds or by heavy snowfall. Since it was customary to enclose the chambers of contemporary tombs under a stone-built roof of lintels or by beehive corbelling topped by lintelling, the idea of a wooden roof on a "megalithic" monument of the period may appear as a new and unusual invention. But its introduction here need not occasion great surprise on again remembering its large extent, which point and the lack of suitable stones in the neighbourhood combine to make virtually impracticable on such a scale an encorbelled roof on the beehive principle. It is generally assumed that Neolithic houses were capped by wooden roofs, and evidently such construction was employed also on some tombs abroad. Childe records: "In one tomb at S. Andrea Priu [Sardinia] the main chamber was a long rectangular room $6\frac{1}{2}$ by 3 m. square. The walls and roof were carved to imitate the beams and rafters of a wooden hall exactly as in the Etruscan *tombe a camera* which have so often been compared to examples of Anatolian Architecture." [1] An astonishing fact, however, emerged on the examination of the timber by Mr Orr. It was proved to be of spruce, and this material as well as pine was found also in the carbonised fragments gathered at random from the general floor of the chamber.[2] At the time with which we are dealing spruce was not native to these shores. Mr Orr informs me that it was not until 1548 that its introduction to Scotland was first recorded, and as regards Scots pine it does not yet grow in Shetland. The presence of these timbers implies that they reached Shetland from a source of origin in Scandinavia or America or else, for the pine only, from Scotland, either as driftwood or by direct importation. I am inclined to the

[1] *The Dawn of European Civilization* (1925 edition), p. 102.

[2] From Mr Orr's report on the timber:

East post-hole: spruce (*Picea abies* Karsten = *P. Excelsa* Link.).
West post-hole: " " " " "
Floor of chamber: " " " " "
and Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris* Linn.).
Peat Mixture: (*Calluna vulgaris* Hill).

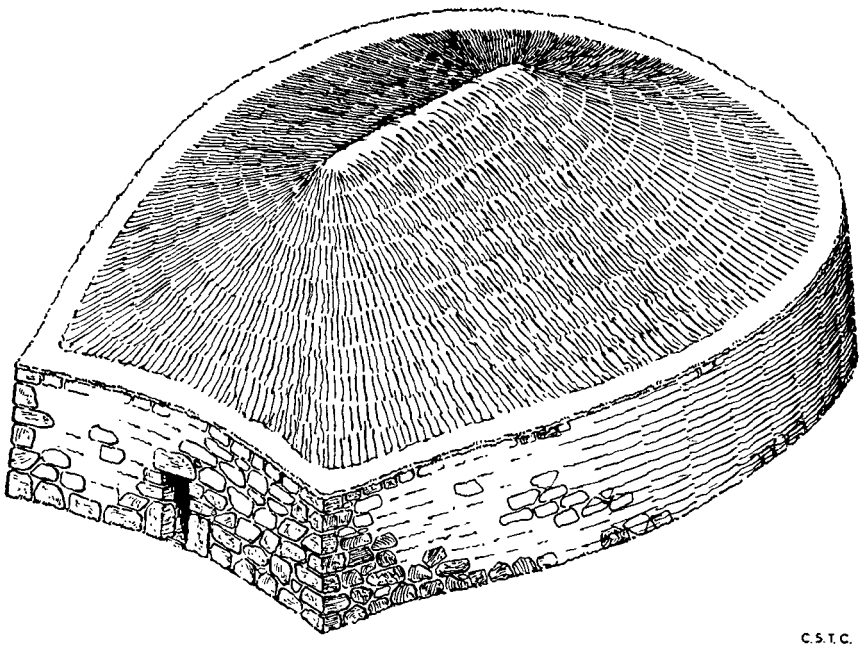
opinion that direct importation is the more probable course. The whole conception of the monument is a work of orderly arrangement, advanced design and careful execution, for which the builders must be credited with a high degree of skill, technical knowledge and craftsmanship. It is not too much to assume that they had the ability to foresee the sources of their materials before commencing the project, and in the case of timber for the particular job at Stanydale special selection would have to be made for long lengths and suitability. From a calculation based on the conjectural reconstructions in figs. 5 and 6 it is reckoned that, for uprights and rafters, the minimum finished lengths required would be 26 and about 20 feet respectively. With purlins to complete the framework, and the whole timbering spaced at reasonable intervals to carry the weight of a thatch of straw, brushwood, heather or sods, or whatever covering material was employed, an estimated quantity approaching 2300 lineal feet of finished timber would be necessary. It is difficult to believe that this large amount would have been procured piecemeal by chance dependence on driftwood, and, it may be added, the natural current of drift flows in a direction away from Shetland towards Scandinavia,[1] while no driftwood of spruce from America is known.

Direct importation is perhaps not such a far-fetched notion as would at first sight appear for the Stone Age tomb-builders were, according to Childe, a race of mariners of no mean ability.[2] Also it is already well established that megalithic cultural connexions extended between Scandinavia and Britain, and that these bonds of intercourse leave no doubt in the mind of Shetelig that "the Stone Age people could make voyages straight across the North Sea." [3] Again, though some eminent authorities do not agree with the following view, G. E. Daniel, in a paper published in 1941,[4] mentions that Forde, Childe, Fox, Peake and Fleure favour a megalithic colonisation of Scandinavia from the south and west by way of the Pentland Firth. On this hypothesis a maritime trade connexion between Shetland and Scandinavia might well have been possible, but it must be borne in mind that, according to the distribution of the monuments, the term Scandinavia may refer only to South Sweden and Denmark and not to Norway, where no evident connexion exists.

Miscellaneous.—Near No. 1 recess an indeterminate setting of small stones (H) with a slight western extension which doubtfully represented the kerb of a hearth was presumed to be secondary, since two quarters of a broken saddle-quern had been placed upside down as part of the setting at its southern edge.

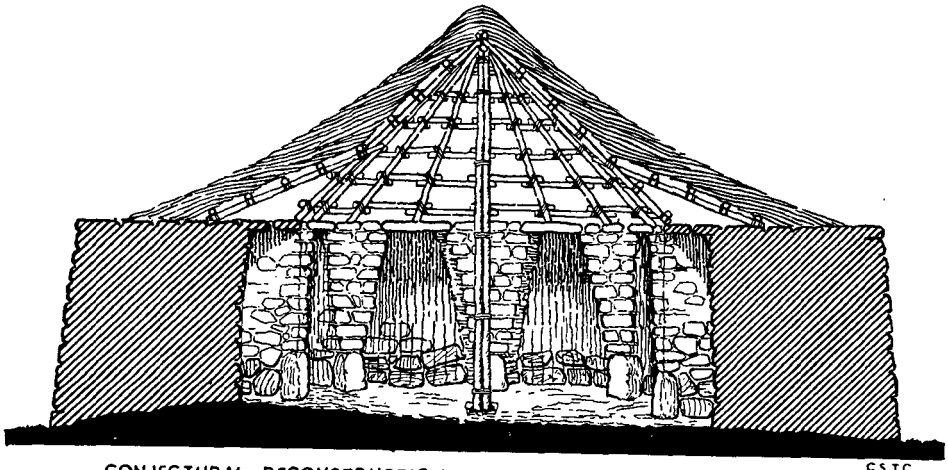
Here and there in patches, peat-ash was present in layers from 2 to 6 inches thick. The greatest quantity lay in front of No. 1 recess and spread

[1] See *Antiquity*, vol. xxv. (1951), pp. 151–3, on the subject of Drift.
[2] *Scotland before the Scots*, p. 36. [3] *Scandinavian Archæology* (Professor Shetelig, 1937), p. 58.
[4] *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* (New Series, vol. vii), p. 23.



C.S.T.C.

CONJECTURAL RECONSTRUCTION ON ISOMETRIC PROJECTION



C.S.T.C.

CONJECTURAL RECONSTRUCTION OF CROSS-SECTION ON LINE C-D

10 5 0 10 20 30 FEET

STANYDALE, SHETLAND

Fig. 6.

thickly towards No. 2 from two shallow saucer-shaped depressions (E and F) in the floor, which seemed to be hearths self-formed by continual use. One was situated within the above-mentioned kerbing and the other a short distance in front of the mutual radial partition; each measured about 15 inches in diameter. A slightly larger scoop (G) was noticed in the front of No. 3 recess, and two or three small flattish stones sloping from a short part of the edge of it faintly suggested that it may once have been lined. No peat-ash was found in No. 4, but a thin layer occurred in No. 5, and again in No. 6, to a depth of about 5 inches. Much if not all of the ash must be regarded as secondary, as the spread from the first two scoops overlay broken pottery vessels which rested on the original floor, and at a point marked X on the plan close to the inner wall-face on the north a compact heap of cremated sheep-bones was gathered from a spread of the peat-ash mixed with the cramp which has already been noticed as overrunning into the eastern post-hole. Also a further quantity of ash lay on and around the paving-slab behind the doorway. Mr Orr has reported that the ash was the residue of ling or heather (*Calluna vulgaris* Hill).

Pottery.—The pottery significant for dating the structure will be considered first.

Three small somewhat gritty red sherds from the west post-hole have already been mentioned. One is a simple rim decorated outside with horizontal cord impressions, and they may be ascribed to the "B" group of beakers. This is the third instance of a beaker in Shetland, the other two coming from a cairn at Fraga in Dunrossness and an unknown locality.[1]

Resting on the original floor-level in and near the recesses Nos. 1 and 2 were the remains of three or four vessels of extremely coarse and friable pottery. In front of recess No. 2, particularly, they were squashed together in a solid mass too soft and crumbling to lift satisfactorily. The largest had weighed well over 40 lb., and appears to have had a diameter of 18 inches at the top and $6\frac{3}{4}$ at the flat base, but the wall is incomplete and the height indeterminate.[2] The wall is over an inch thick, its outer surface well smoothed, and red or encrusted, with a black deposit notably on the upper part. The rim is flattened but slopes inward slightly, while on the outside it has a broad raised moulding whose ridge is only $\frac{3}{4}$ inch below the lip (fig. 7, A). Another vessel, with closely similar rim but its wall under $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick, is represented by a single sherd. Two thinner sherds have a more rounded rim and only a slight cordon, which is $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches below the lip, while other sherds, perhaps of the same pot, show at least three cordons about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches apart (fig. 7, B and B_1). This pottery is unlike the cinerary urns of the latter part of the Bronze Age, and Mr Stevenson tenta-

[1] *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxvii. p. 35.

[2] A cinerary urn $13\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the top, 5 inches at base and 10 inches high, from Cairnpapple, weighed 26 lb.

tively compares it to some from the Isle of Man. The Ronaldsway Culture there, somehow related to the Skara Brae Culture of Orkney, has vessels that are usually round-bottomed but include flat bases. Rims commonly have raised mouldings, but without a flattened inner lip and

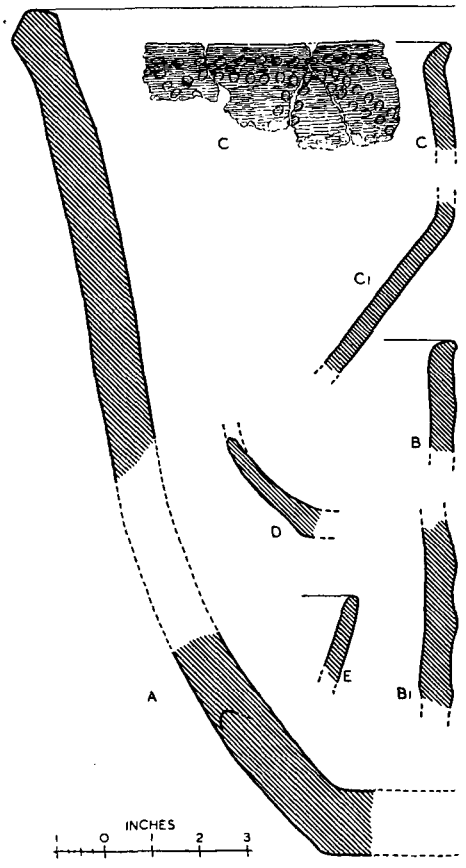


Fig. 7. Sections of fragments of pottery vessels from the Temple.

usually decorated, and cordons also occur.[1] This comparison indicates the very latest Neolithic overlapping with the Bronze Age. Except for a Neolithic fragment from Whalsay,[2] this coarse pottery is the only ceramic record of that Age from Shetland.

Other sherds from Stanydale suggest a prolongation of the building's use.

[1] *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, vol. xiii. (1947), pp. 152–6.

[2] *Inventory*, vol. iii. p. 85, No. 1320, footnote. Mr Stevenson regards the Neolithic assignation as doubtful.

The remains of a vessel from within the peat-ash that covered the floor in recesses Nos. 1 and 2 contrast strongly with the foregoing. The fabric is comparatively thin-walled and hard, red outside though brown at the neck and rim. This had an estimated diameter of 12 inches and was bevelled internally and slightly everted. Below the lip and above the shoulder are oval impressions made with some hollow-ended object, in two rows forming horizontal lines with outline triangles between them (fig. 7, C and C_1). The pattern and form relate the vessel to the Middle and Late Bronze Age cinerary urns.

From the peat-ash in recess No. 6 come soft, indeterminate sherds nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick, of mud-coloured pottery which had been much tempered with grass.

From the same stratum there are sherds of the lower part of a rather globular flat-bottomed pot of blackened reddish-buff fabric, for which an Early Iron Age (broch) date is suggested (fig. 7, D). An upright, very slightly flattened rim of similar fabric occurred at floor-level in the south-western corner of recess No. 1 (fig. 7, E).

Relics.—Of the other relics, the earlier and more important were two broken knives, made from porphyritic stone and polished, from No. 2 recess (Pl. XXII, *a*, 2 and 3). One was the half of an oval-shaped blade of a Shetland type called a "flenser," which was smoothed on each side to a cutting edge, and measured along the broken axis 3·85 inches, the perpendicular size being 2·6 inches. The other was thick-backed and ground in a taper to a cutting edge, which was chipped on one side only, and it measured 2·95 inches long by 1·85 inches broad. There was also a middle portion of a smooth stone axe or adze which was of a pointed oval cross-section measuring 3·1 by 1·25 inches. A whetstone of red-brown micaceous sandstone came from the peat-ash layer in No. 5 recess (Pl. XXII, *a*, 5). It was pierced at one end with a biconical perforation, and measured 4·6 inches long, 1·35 inches broad, and ·6 of an inch thick. Beside a purposefully set flat stone (Y) in front of the radial partition between Nos. 5 and 6 recesses two pieces of pumice-stone were found. One of these, with its faces rubbed to a concavo-convex shape and also with a biconical hole at one end, formed an adze-shaped pendant measuring 2·4 inches long, 1·3 inches wide, and ·95 of an inch thick (Pl. XXII, *a*, 4). The pendant is in keeping with one found in the chambered tomb of Unival, North Uist, by Sir Lindsay Scott, who traces their distribution from the Central Mediterranean.[1] A pocket of plastic yellow clay about the size of a football occurred in the south-western corner of No. 3 recess, and from the chamber floor generally a few quartz cores and chips turned up, as well as a nodule of a grey-blue porphyritic stone 2·2 by 1·5 by 1·3 inches, from which flakes had been struck, a small piece of haematite, 1·5 by 1·4 by 1·0 inches, with

[1] *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxxii. pp. 29–30, and Pl. IX, fig. 4.

one of its angles smooth and glossy by rubbing, and a ball of pinkish granite, $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter, which had probably been used as a grinder.

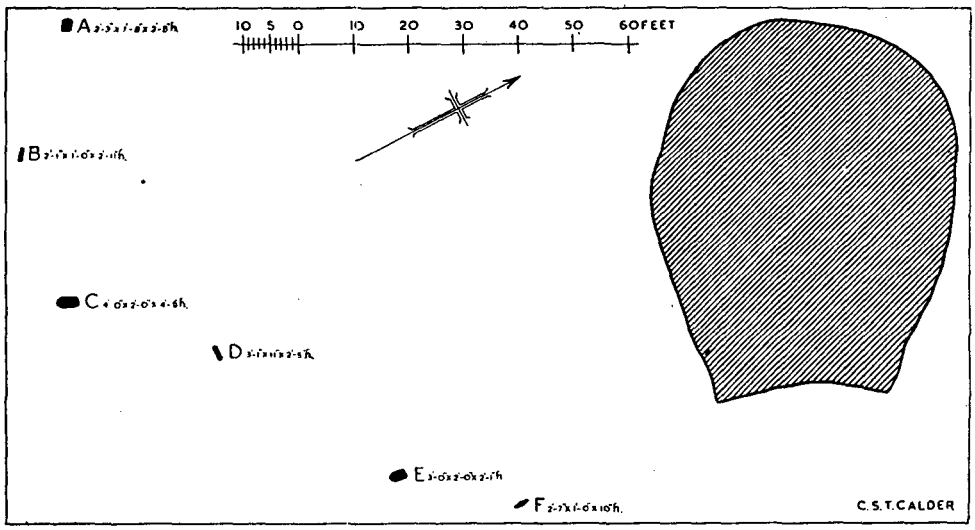
The accumulation of later material above the original floor varied in depth from 9 to 14 inches and it yielded only rude stone implements of which two-thirds of the numbers were broken. Of the total of one hundred and twenty-two, ninety-nine were found inside the building and the remainder were obtained from the soil and debris which was cleared away from the outer face of the walling. Such implements are extremely common in Shetland, and their manufacture may have extended from the earliest times till well into the Iron Age. Only some of the more complete specimens were thought worthwhile collecting as museum exhibits, and all are typified in the corresponding relics recovered from Wiltrow (Pl. XXII, *b*, XXIII, *a*, *b*).[1]

A brief descriptive list is noted below.

Implements.	Whole.	Broken.
Basin, fragment, bowl $3\frac{1}{4}''$ deep	..	1
Hammer-stones, one of granite, worked both ends	1	2
,, rounded beach-stones, worked on edges, average size $3\frac{1}{4}''$ diam., $1\frac{1}{4}''$ thick	4	..
Implements, most abundant, flattish, rectangular, made by chipping, average size $6\frac{1}{2}'' \times 2\frac{1}{8}''$ and $1\frac{3}{8}''$ thick (Pl. XXII, *a*, 1)	27	10
,, ,, large-sized, $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 3'' \times 1\frac{1}{4}''$	1	..
,, ,, small-sized, $4\frac{1}{4}'' \times 1\frac{5}{16}''$ and $\frac{5}{8}''$ thick	1	..
,, axe-edged, oval section, chipped, largest $13'' \times 5\frac{1}{2}''$ and $3''$ thick	1	3
Implements, axe-edged, flat faces, chipped along edges, largest $9'' \times 6'' \times 2\frac{1}{4}''$ (Pl. XXII, *a*, 6, and as Pl. XXIII, *a*)	..	6
Implements, pick-pointed, rough worked all round, largest $18'' \times 7''$ and $4\frac{1}{2}''$ thick	1	6
Implements, pick-pointed, smooth, oval section, fragments of pointed ends (as Pl. XXIII, *b*)	..	9
Implements, pick-pointed, percussed, oval section, fragments of pointed ends	..	4
Implements, various fragments, some pointed (as Pl. XXII, *b*)	..	36
Pestle	1	..
Pivot-stone, $9\frac{1}{2}'' \times 9\frac{1}{2}''$, cup $4''$ diam., $1''$ deep	1	..
Pot-lid, $3\frac{1}{2}''$ diam., $\frac{3}{8}''$ thick	1	..
Quern, saddle, half only, $21\frac{1}{2}''$ wide, $5\frac{1}{2}''$ thick, oval dishing $14''$ wide	..	1
Quern, saddle, part of another, dishing $7\frac{1}{2}''$ wide	..	1
Quern rubbers, circular, average $6''$ diam. $2\frac{1}{2}''$ thick	..	3
Rubbing-stone, made from beach-stone, $3\frac{1}{4}''$ diam. $1\frac{1}{4}''$ thick, rubbed on small part of one edge	1	..
	40	82

[1] *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxx. pp. 159–61, figs. 7, 8 and 9.

Standing-stones.—As well as the actual monument the stumps of six standing-stones remain *in situ* to the south, at distances ranging from 40 feet of the nearest to 115 feet of the farthest off. (Fig. 8 and Pl. XVI, *b*.) They appear to be aligned in two sets of three on separate arcs, and it is probable that each set is all that is left of a complete circle or oval of orthostats which might have surrounded the building. No other stones of the series were visible, and for want of time no intensive search was made to establish the possibility. It is thought they are later erections of the



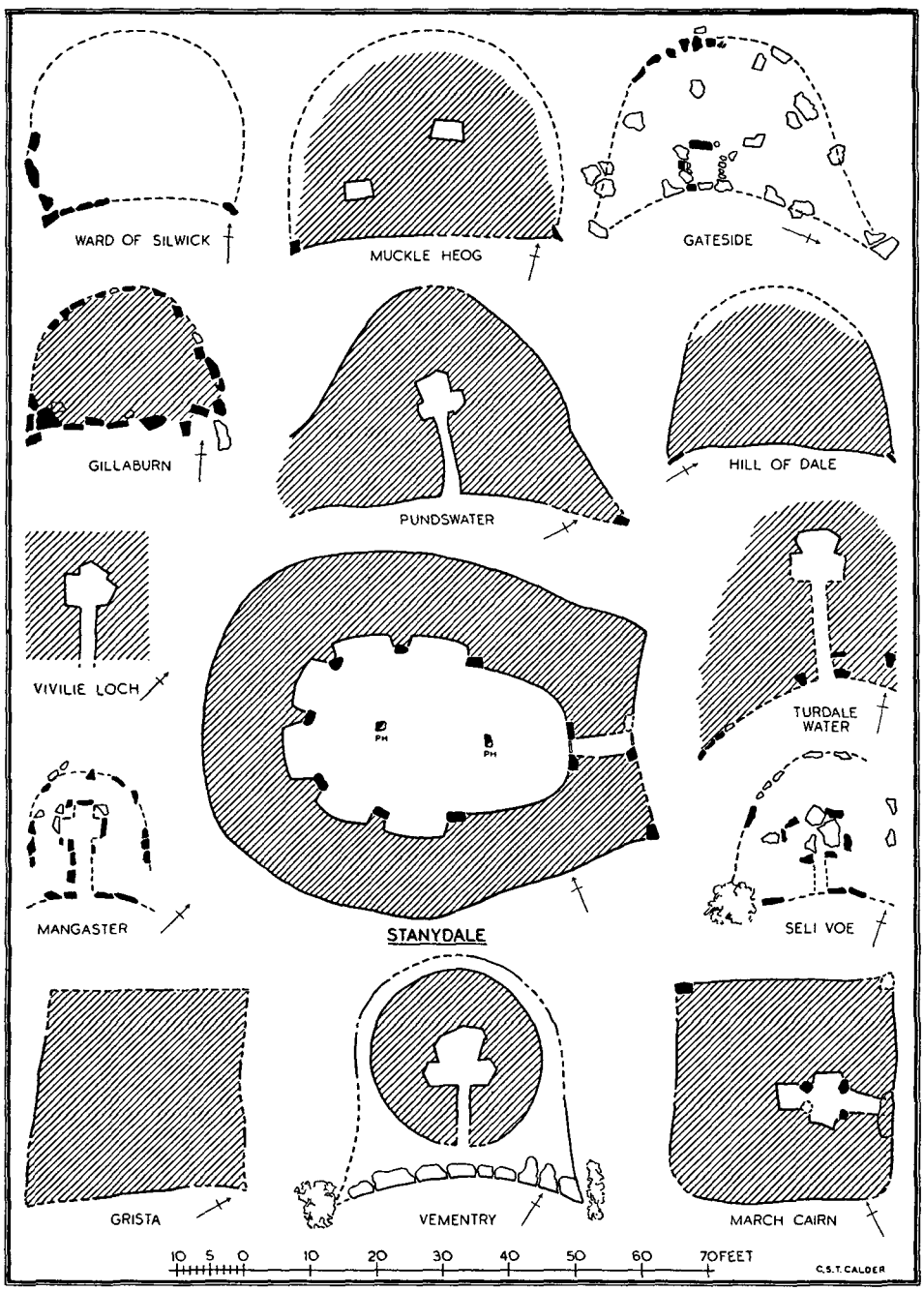
BLOCK PLAN OF STANYDALE IN RELATION TO STANDING STONES

Fig. 8.

Bronze Age with a bearing on the main structure, but in what connexion is open to speculation.

Conclusion.—The foregoing description of structure and relics has been based entirely on the material actually existing as revealed by the excavation, and the questions now arise as to when the monument was built and what purpose it served. Speculation is rendered more difficult by the extreme rarity of a plan which has no precedent in Britain. On the evidence of outward design, building technique, and the finds already enumerated, the period is the less in doubt. The style and detail carries on the megalithic tradition of the latest Neolithic cultural phase, that has been exemplified in the heel-shaped cairns, and the relics clearly indicate a continuity into the Bronze and Iron Age Cultures.

In Shetland, an amicable fusion of the two cultures has been noted and is witnessed in the adaptation of a "heel shaped" cairn to contain the individual cists of the Bronze Age as observed for instance at the Muckle



COMPARATIVE PLANS OF STANYDALE AND THE HEEL-SHAPED CAIRNS OF SHETLAND

Fig. 9.

Heog in Unst (fig. 9). It would not, in my opinion, be far out in the reckoning to assign Stanydale to a date round about 3500 years ago.

Regarding its purpose, a glance at a comparative set of drawings of Stanydale and the "heel-shaped" cairns should convincingly dispel any idea that Stanydale had been built as a tomb, though a close structural relationship cannot be disputed (fig. 9). All the known plans of this isolated group of Shetland monuments are shown in the picture, and the difference in the internal arrangement between Stanydale and the cairns stands out forcibly. It will be observed that the typical chamber of the cairns is cruciform in shape and small in size, and is totally unlike the immense oval chamber under discussion. The monument itself covers twice the area of even the largest of the cairns, and indeed no megalithic cairn is known to exist that embodies a chamber of similar shape and dimensions. No human remains were found in the chamber.

That Stanydale bears even less resemblance to a Neolithic house of British type is also obvious from a study of the site at Haldon in Devon, where excavation has revealed what is considered to be one of the best-preserved remains of the very few homes of the period that are known in England. It may also be taken as representative of others more recently discovered by O'Riordain at Loch Gur in Ireland, though the latter examples have yielded a variety of plan shapes which include oval, circular and rectangular types on post-hole or light stone foundations.[1] The plan of Haldon is roughly rectangular, and is indicated only by rows of widely spaced post-holes in a stone footing. A conjectural restoration by Professor Piggott, who has kindly permitted me to copy his illustration, depicts the house as a flimsy framework of posts and wattle with a roof of thatch (fig. 10). This method of construction shows familiarity with a wooden roof, but it does not inspire one with the belief that such a substantial building as Stanydale could be classed in a Neolithic house group.

That contention too applies equally well in Scotland, where habitations contemporary with Stanydale are those of Skara Brae and Rinyo in Orkney.[2] At each site there is a large stone-built complex of interrelated dwelling-rooms of various sizes, the largest being 21 by 20 feet, which are furnished with stone-built dressers, cupboards, beds, hearths, sunk-boxes, drains, etc. These, as well as a large number of household and personal relics, pottery and heaps of midden refuse, betoken domestic use over a very lengthy occupation. No such evidences suggestive of similar usage have been met with at Stanydale, and anyone familiar with the plans and character of these houses will no doubt readily agree that Stanydale has no features in common with them. In any case, the wide gap in style between the Orkney and Shetland monuments of that early period is suggestive of the work of

[1] *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, vol. xii. (1946), pp. 147–8.

[2] *Inventory*, vol. ii. pp. 254 ff., Art no. 683, and p. 362, App. 4. Childe, *Skara Brae* (1931).

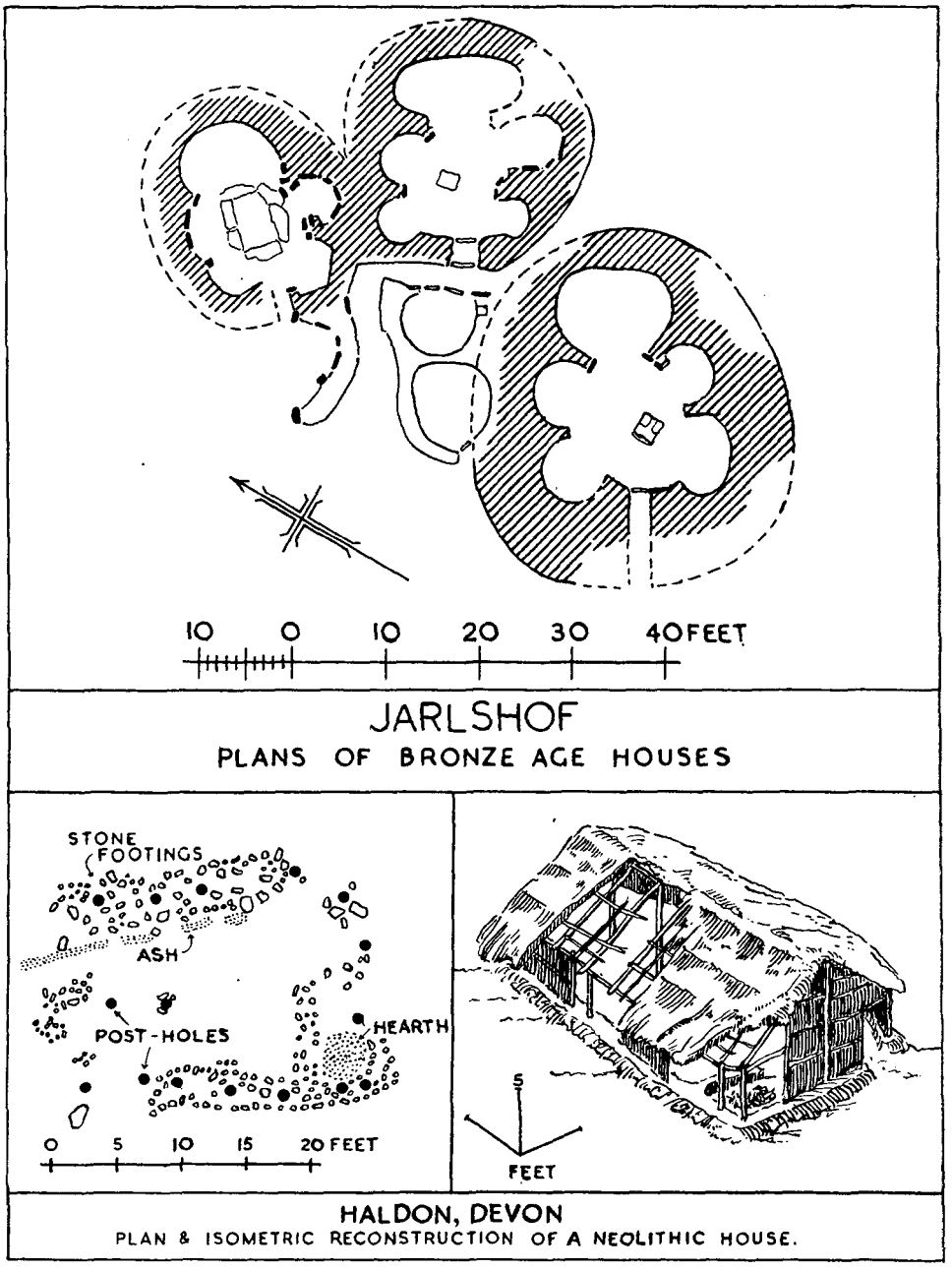

10 0 10 20 30 40 FEET
JARLSHOF
PLANS OF BRONZE AGE HOUSES
STONE FOOTINGS
ASH
POST-HOLES
HEARTH
0 5 10 15 20 FEET
5
FEET
HALDON, DEVON
PLAN & ISOMETRIC RECONSTRUCTION OF A NEOLITHIC HOUSE.

Fig. 10.

two separate peoples following different methods and traditions, and would therefore negative the likelihood of any contact by which common factors would be communicated. Commenting on this same difference, the Royal Commission remarks that "It is thus impossible to infer from the monuments that the population of the two groups was homogeneous in Neolithic times." [1]

Though tombs and houses have to my mind been completely eliminated as a solution to the Stanydale problem, yet the examination of the cairns has provided a promising clue to the answer. Professor Bryce has recorded that the "heel-shaped" cairns have certain structural details which suggest a link between them and the Mediterranean Tradition, and also that the "heel-shaped" cairn "is not simply a degenerate Orkney or Caithness monument but is a variety of tomb developed independently by people with traditions of their own who perhaps reached the islands, not by way of North

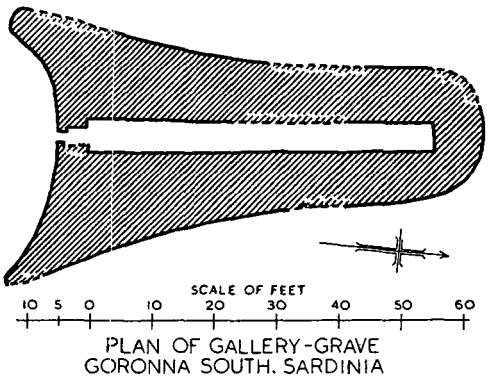


Fig. 11.

Scotland but directly from the south and west." [2] Hitherto very little mention has been made of the Shetland Cairns as a whole by writers on the subject, and Bryce's paper, too, is concerned only with the heel-shaped structures. In our present state of knowledge these do not exceed ten per cent. of the large number listed by the Commission. Until the remainder have been adequately examined and classified no absolute picture can be given to help clarify their places of origin, and evolution for the time being must therefore remain uncertain.

It is true that in tombs of the Boyne Culture a cruciform chamber has been evolved but, as at New Grange, in a round cairn, Daniel and Powell in dealing with the North Scottish Province, in which they include Skye, the Hebrides, Sutherland, Caithness, Orkney and Shetland, state: "It is quite clear then that the Passage-Grave Builders spread up into the North Scottish Province, and almost certainly from their earlier homes on either

[1] *Inventory*, Intro., vol. i. p. 6.

[2] *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxxiv. *p.* 36.

side of the Irish Sea." [1] That supposition may be correct for the North Scottish Province generally, but the divergence of the Shetland "heel-shaped" group from the rest of the region is so great that they seem to belong to a class in isolation from the others. It is not, however, the special object of this treatise to trace the origin and evolution of the structures, but it is a remarkable fact that in by-passing the several varieties of tombs in Britain and Ireland and going direct to the source of traditions in the Mediterranean, as Bryce suggested, the closest parallels to Stanydale and the "heel-shaped" cairns are found.

In the Mediterranean Islands it was the practice to build tombs and other monuments with a concave façade and a rounded back as in the Giant's Graves of Sardinia or in the temples of Malta and Gozo. One of the tombs incorporating these features is the south barrow at Goronna in Sardinia (fig. 11), which Daniel includes in a suggested typology from a simple Gallery Grave of the Loire type to those which have developed a full semicircular forecourt.[2] Another is the simple Gallery Grave at Es Tudons in Minorca, where the almost straight façade, like some of the Shetland examples, may represent the last vestiges of the crescentic form (fig. 12).

Though obvious intermediate links are lacking, Mediterranean influence in Shetland is evident in like manner to the direct influence established for the rock-cut tomb of the Dwarfie Stane in Orkney.[3] It is significant that as in the relation of the Shetland tombs to Stanydale, so also the Mediterranean tombs show an affinity to another class of monument, namely the Temples of Malta and Gozo,[4] the fundamental elements of which are again reflected by Stanydale itself. So pronounced is the resemblance that it is almost impossible not to assume that the Maltese temples are the prototypes from which Stanydale is derived and which solve the question of its purpose. With some confidence, therefore, I put forward the claim that Stanydale is none other than a prehistoric temple, and that the bond between temple and tomb which has persistently intruded itself in this paper is brought about through burial rites and customs, for the ritual of the one cannot be easily dissociated from that of the other.

On weighing up the merits of Stanydale, it is at once apparent from the plans here illustrated (fig. 12) that it possesses all the essentials of a temple and compares favourably with the temple of Mnaidra, with which it is almost in complete agreement, including even size. One is so struck with the extraordinary similarity of the details, in size and outline, in shape and

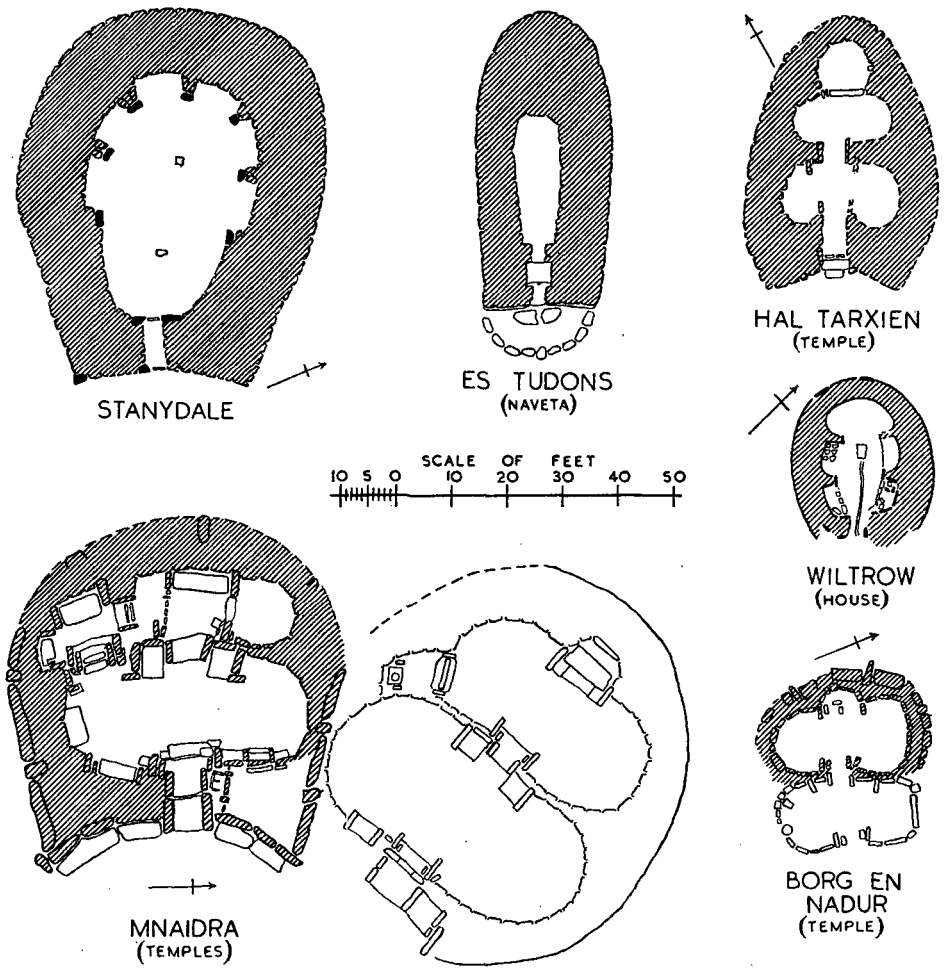
[1] *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* (New Series, vol. xv.), 1949, p. 177.

[2] *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* (New Series, vol. vii), 1941, p. 26.

[3] *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxx. pp. 217 ff. (In *Antiquity*, vol. xi. (1937), p. 348, Hemp later distinguishes two rock-cut tombs in Ireland, namely Kelly's Cave, Cong, and St Kevin's Bed, Glendalough, but these specimens could not be regarded as influential intermediate type-links in a chain to Orkney for such a well-executed example as that of the Dwarfie Stane.)

[4] *Antiquity*, March 1930, pp. 55 ff.; *ibid.*, March 1942, pp. 19 ff.

capacity of the assembly chamber, in the massiveness of the masonry and the use of orthostats, and in the special devotional apsidal-recesses or



COMPARATIVE PLANS OF STANYDALE, MEDITERRANEAN TEMPLES AND TOMB, AND A LATER SHETLAND HOUSE.

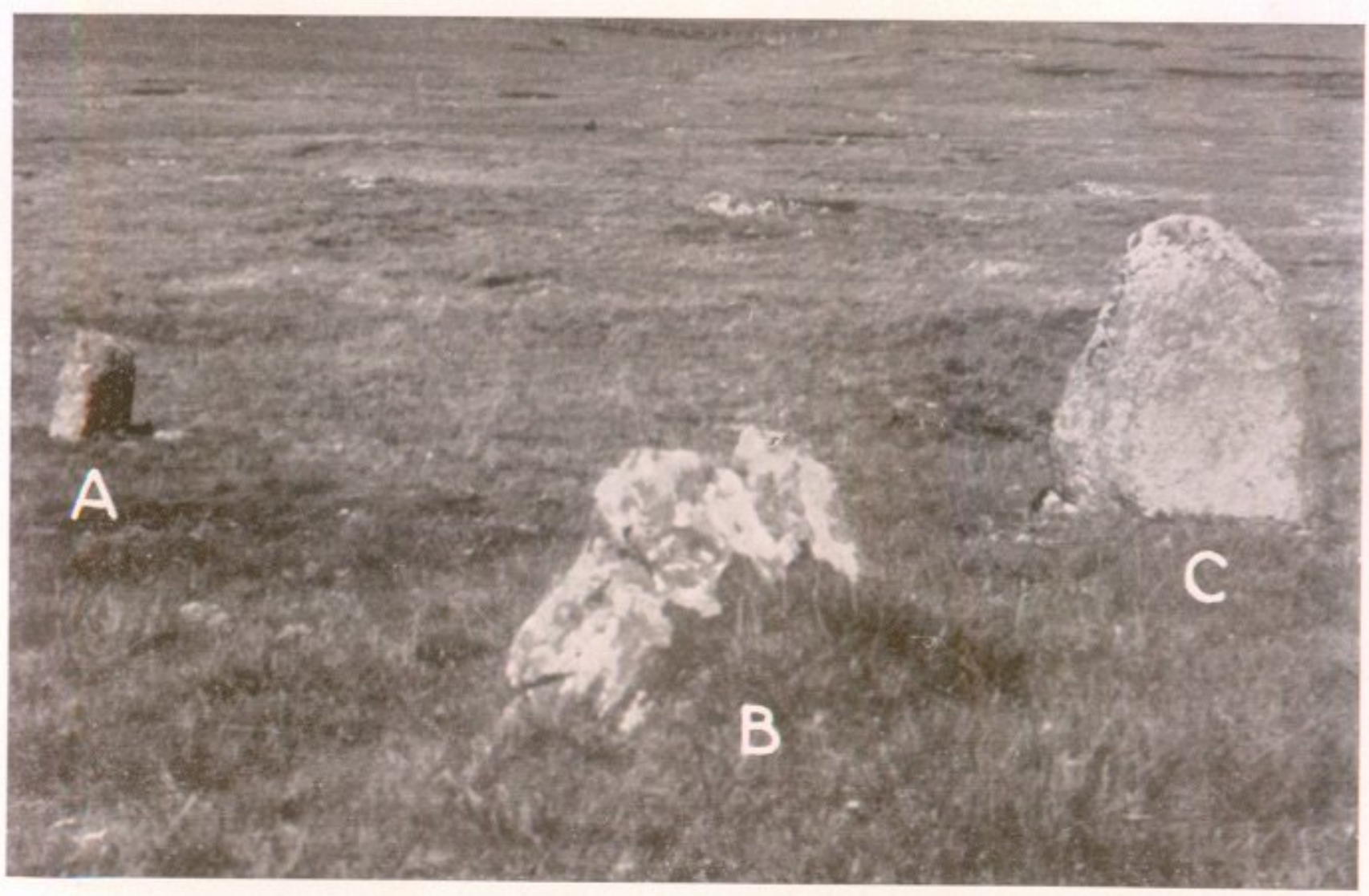
Fig. 12.

shrines, that any other interpretation would seem highly improbable and unsatisfactory.

A distinction of small structural importance in the temples of the Maltese Islands lies in the much larger and heavier stonework, as, for instance, at Jigantea, where most of the orthostats attain a height of 16 feet,[1] but the

[1] *Antiquity*, March, 1930, p. 79.

a. Outer face of wall on south side, and south-east corner.



b. Standing stones to south of Temple Stanydale.

Charles S. T. Calder.

[*To face p.* 204.

a. Interior between Recess No. 1 and entrance.

b. Interior between Recess No. 6 and entrance.

Stanydale.

Charles S. T. Calder.

a. Recess No. 1 with Stone setting (H) and Hearth-scoop (F).

b. Recess No. 2 with Hearth-scoop (G) in Recess No. 3 and West Post-hole in right foreground.

Stanydale.

Charles S. T. Calder.

a. East Post-hole.

b. Rear of entrance.

Stanydale.

Charles S. T. Calder.

a. Recesses Nos. 4 and 5 and flat stone (Y).

b. Recesses Nos. 1 and 2 and Hearth-scoop (E).

Stanydale.

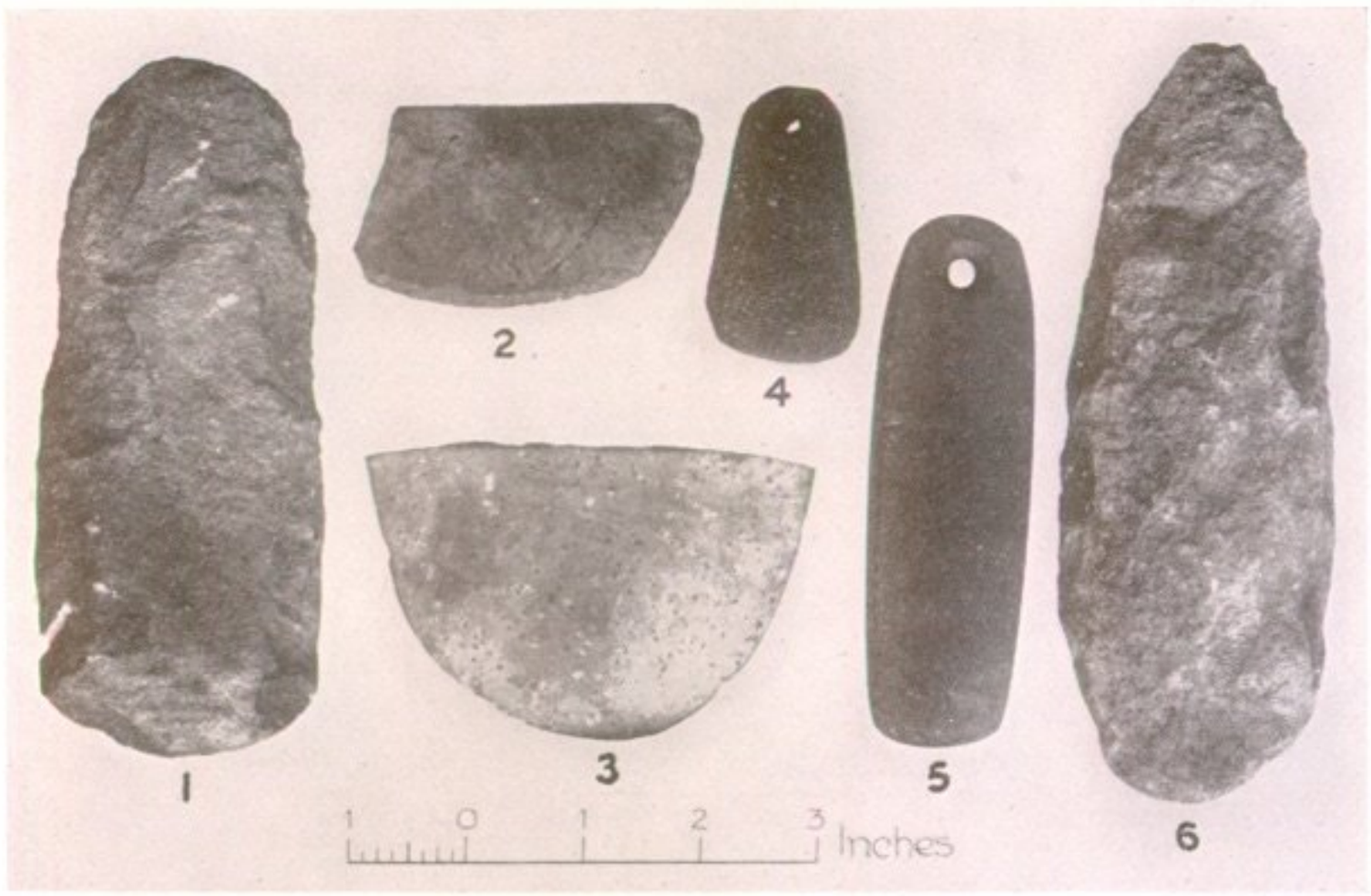
Charles S. T. Calder.

a. Eastern half of interior.
Stanydale.

[*By permission of H.M. Stationery Office.*

b. Recesses in post-broch wheel-house.
Jarlshof.

Charles S. T. Calder.

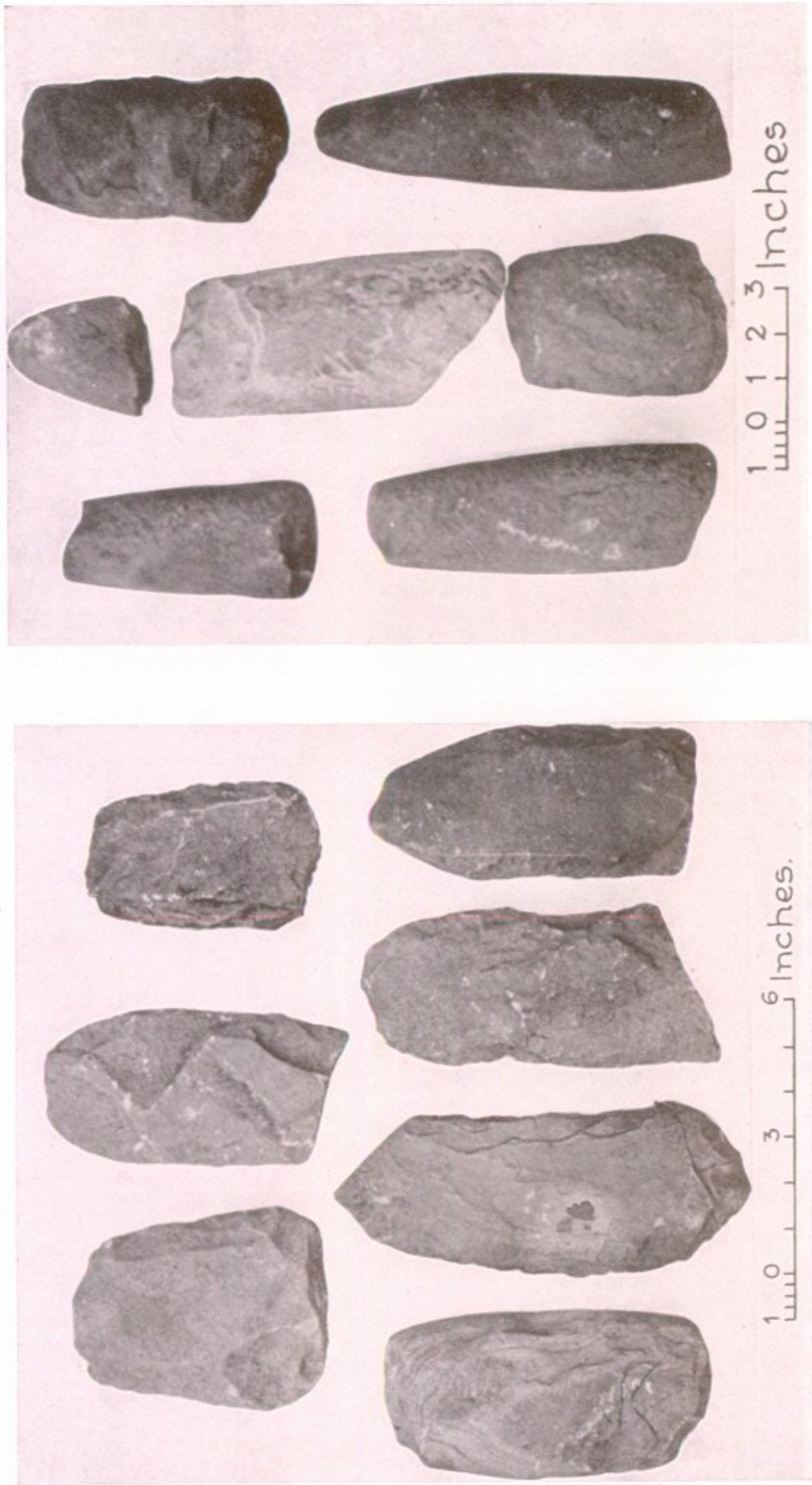


a. Relics from Temple.

Stanydale.

b. Stone implements from dwelling at Wiltrow.

Charles S. T. Calder.



a. *b.*

Stone implements from dwelling at Wiltrow.

Charles S. T. Calder.

difference and character is no doubt dictated by the kind of stone available locally. Also some have been roofed with large lintel-stones instead of wood, as is shown in the model of a unicellular temple found at Mgarr.[1] According to Ward-Perkins, the single-chambered building with an apsidal compartment occupying the centre position of the inner end is the original type, the double-chambered multi-apsed form being a later development.[2] The evolutionary process from the one to the other is observed in the frontal additions at Borg en Nadur, leading up to a unity as in Hal Tarxien, which is the latest temple on the spot and is dated to the Bronze Age (fig. 12). It is interesting to note that the Shetland houses excavated by Dr Curle at Jarlshof and Wiltrow [3] are singularly reminiscent of Hal Tarxien on plan (figs. 10 and 12). The analogy may only be a coincidence, but it might also indicate a continuation of building traditions with a dominating influence from that quarter of the Mediterranean which cannot be overlooked. Oval in shape and thick-walled like the temple, the dwellings each contain two recesses disposed on either side of a central interior space and a larger apsidal compartment at the inner end.

Certain writers have expressed the opinion that these houses belong to the courtyard type of plan where a series of rooms extend around an open court, but surely the term courtyard is misapplied in this instance. It is most unlikely that the central space here was left as an open courtyard, nor by any stretch of imagination could these small recesses, which are open to it and measure at Wiltrow only 6 by 3 feet, be called rooms. In all probability they have been formed as bed recesses, and bed recesses in the walls of houses survived or have survived until recent times in Orkney and the Hebrides. To protect the occupants from the weather, I have no doubt the chamber was properly roofed over, an opinion with which the excavator of Jarlshof and Wiltrow now agrees.

Finally, from the evidence made available in the above material, in which houses, tombs and temples have contributed each their part, the deduction that Stanydale is a temple of Mediterranean lineage is offered as the likeliest and most fitting conclusion.

[1] *Antiquity*, March 1942, pp. 22, 24, and facing p. 24.

[2] *Ibid.*, March 1942, p. 25.

[3] *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vols. lxvi. p. 115, lxvii. p. 83, lxviii. p. 225, lxxix. p. 86, for Jarlshof; vol. lxx. p. 154 for Wiltrow.