

EXCAVATIONS IN WHALSAY, SHETLAND, 1954-5

by CHARLES S. T. CALDER, A.R.I.A.S., F.S.A.SCOT.

In the *Inventory of the Ancient Monuments of Shetland* are noted three monuments¹ on the east side of the island of Whalsay and about three-quarters of a mile NNE. of the township of Isbister (fig. 1). The site is in an area called Pettigarths Field, about

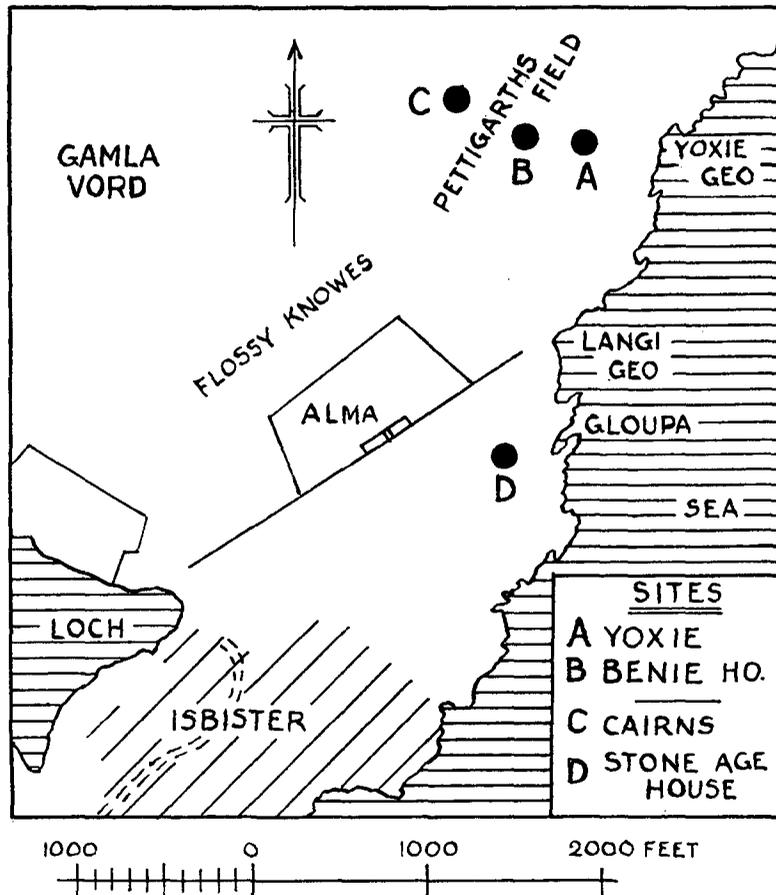


FIG. 1. Map of sites on Pettigarths Field, Whalsay, Shetland

100 ft. above sea-level on the lower slopes of Gamla Vord (Nat. Grid reference HU(N41) 586652). No. 1319 lies 150 yds. from the steep cliffs of Yoxie Geo, and the others at short distances from it inland. All three are classified as cairns, but excavation revealed that Nos. 1319 and 1320, respectively the 'Standing Stones of

¹ Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Inventory of Orkney and Shetland*, iii, Nos. 1319-21.

Yoxie' and the 'Benie Hoose', did not belong to that category and were in my opinion probably a temple and a house, while No. 1321 comprised two cairns of different type set close together. All were heavily ruined.

The Yoxie monument (Pl. V) was found to have been a chambered structure with the upright stones, that gave it its local name, set in its drystone walls. The plan, as recovered, is shown in fig. 2, the vanished portion of the outer face and core being

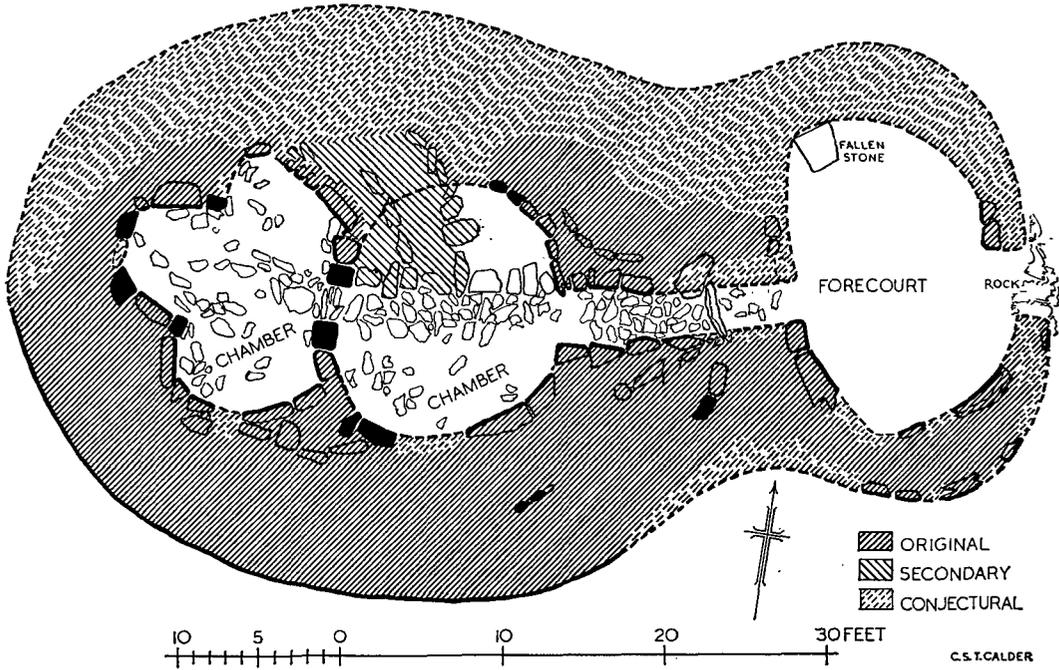


FIG. 2. 'The Standing Stones of Yoxie', Whalsay, Shetland

supplied with confidence. As will be seen, it resembles a figure of eight and measures 61 ft. 6 in. by about 36 ft. over all¹; it comprises a larger heel-shaped main block on the W. with a smaller, sub-oval, horned forecourt projecting east from a concave façade. The main block contained a passage entering in the centre of the façade, and two chambers. The passage was lined with boulders, was paved, and showed a sill-stone on edge, but no door-checks were found, this part of the side walls having been destroyed. The first chamber is circular on plan and is mainly lined with slabs which, no doubt, originally carried rubble-faced walling above. A scatter of paving-stones rests on the floor of the south half of the chamber but a more densely-laid pathway of paving, roughly in continuation of that of the passage, stretches across the middle of the floor up to and beyond the door of the second chamber and in a sense divides the first chamber into two opposed recesses. The west half of the north recess has later been filled up with boulders, steadied by pinnings, which confine a core of earth and stones. This line of boulders extends

¹ Detailed dimensions are generally omitted here and elsewhere as they can readily be scaled off the plan.

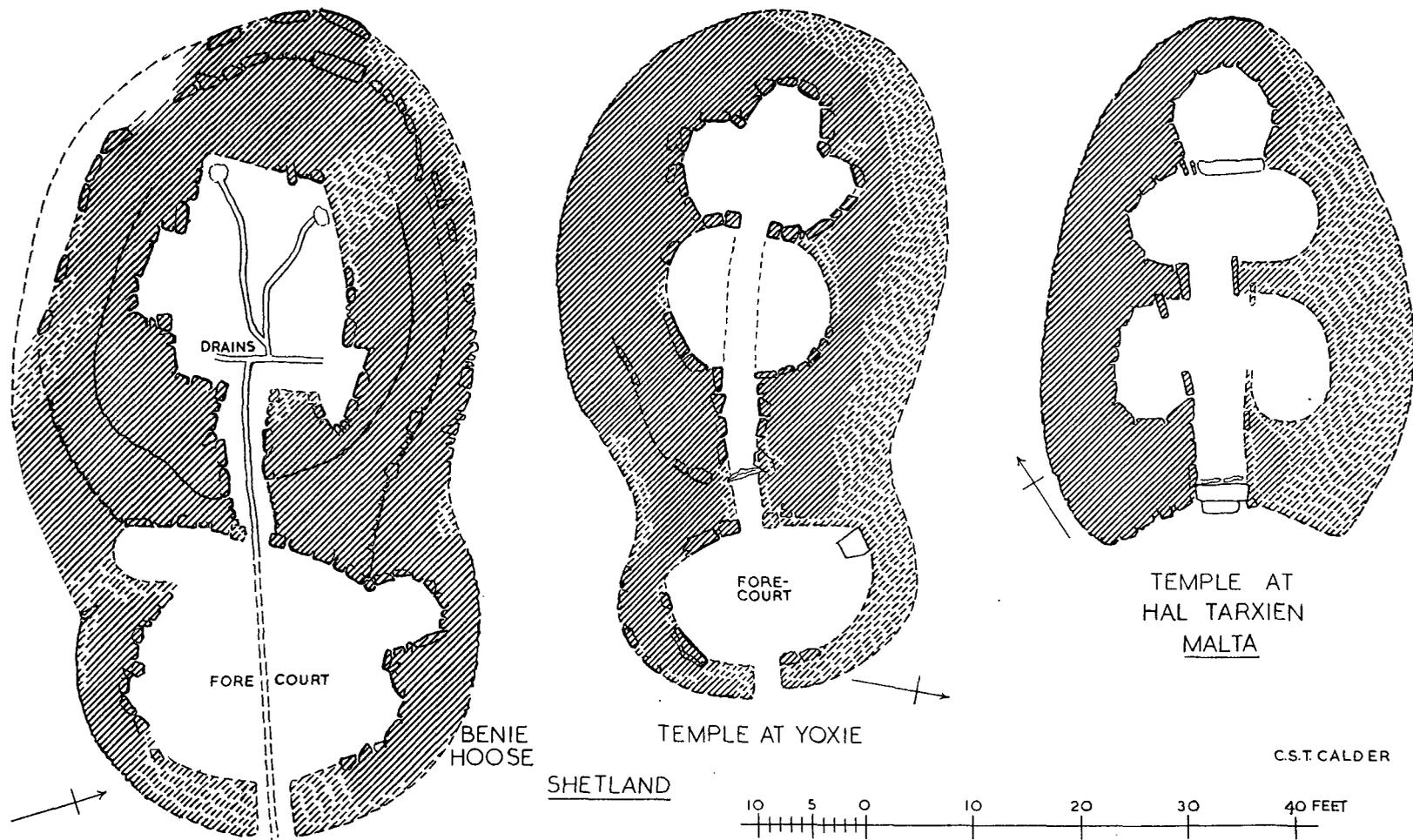


FIG. 3. Plans of the Priests' House, locally called 'The Bunyie Hoose' and the temple at 'The Standing Stones of Yoxie', Whalsay, Shetland, for comparison with the Maltese temples of Hal Tarxien (Plan of Hal Tarxien after J. B. Ward Perkins)

through the broken-down original wall-face here and the extension is backed by a more solid core of rubble but the purpose of the alterations is not known. The east half is stepped up 9 in. from the original floor by a later kerbing of four slabs on bed, behind which the raised portion consists solely of earth on which lay a quantity of peat-ash where once a fire had burned. The inner chamber, Pl. V: 1 and fig. 2, is trilobate on plan and is entered from the outer one through a doorway flanked on each side by a large upright portal-stone the taller of which is still 4 ft. 6 in. high. Two boulders similarly mark the intersections of the lateral and terminal lobes; the back of the terminal lobe originally consisted of three others, of which the middle one, found fallen, has been re-set. The wall varies in thickness from 8 to 10 ft. and two short settings of boulders found in the middle of the core on the south suggest that it was built in two operations, first an inner thickness and then an outer casing. In its heart, however, there was a very considerable bed of pure peat-ash which seemed to have been put in purposely as part of the infilling of the core.

Of the horns that enclosed the forecourt only the south one was preserved, but when the north one was in place there would have been a gap for entrance between them opposite the opening of the passage.

Peat-ash, spread here and there, covered parts of all the floor areas but could not with any degree of certainty be distinguished as original or later. Indeed, from around the mouth of the entrance to the sill-stone of the passage, a dispersion of peat-ash would, at least, seem to have been due to fires from a secondary occupation after the building had become ruinous and the passage no longer required for its original purpose.

The excavation yielded between 120 and 130 rude stone implements including hammer and anvil stones, two rubbing stones, a socket stone and many of usual but indefinite shape but none of any precise datable value. Some of the implements may date from the earliest stage but many may be assigned to a time of later use of the building in the Iron Age as fragments of a vessel and other undecorated sherds of pottery of that period were found.

The monument just described shows a type of plan that puts it in a class by itself not only in Shetland but in the whole of the British Isles. That it is related to the heel-shaped tombs is obvious in the display of a concave front, a rounded back, a trilobated chamber as well as by the adoption of the same building technique. None of the Shetland cairns is provided with a forecourt¹ and though forecourts are, of course, features of other classes of cairns there would seem to be no question but that the Yoxie monument, in having an internal lay-out so different from that of cairns, or houses, was designed for some other purpose than that of burial or domesticity. Maltese and other Mediterranean analogies and their possible implications have been discussed elsewhere,² but in furtherance of the theory earlier expressed that Yoxie is a temple it will be informative to study its plan with that of the temple at Hal Tarzien and note the obvious points of resemblance, fig. 3.

The Benie³ Hoose lies higher up the slope about 100 yds. W. of the Yoxie monu-

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXIV (1949-50), 199, fig. 9.

² *ibid.*, 198 ff.

³ The form also in local use 'Bunye' is probably a corruption of this. Benie Hoose appears to be derived

ment (A in Pl. V: 2). Before excavation most of the remains were covered with peat, 3 ft. deep on the outside, and they had been partly encroached upon by a substantial 'plantie-crub',¹ built of stones robbed from the ancient structure (figs 4 and 5) which greatly impeded the excavator's work. Many broken trough-querns and rude

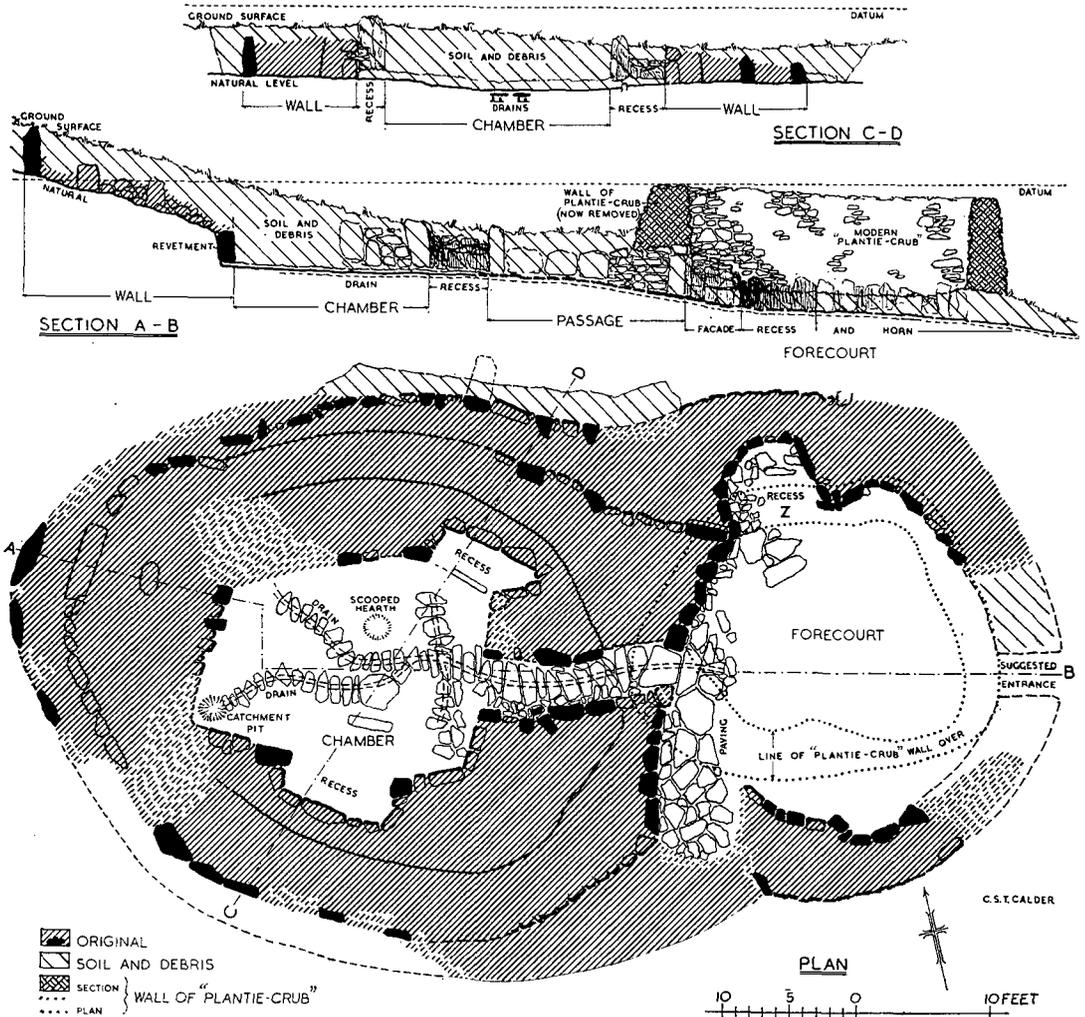


FIG. 4. The 'Benie Hoose', Pettigarths Field, Whalsay, Shetland: late neolithic

stone implements were found to have been re-used in its walls when the crub was demolished. The Benie Hoose resembles the Yoxie monument in its figure-of-eight plan, curved façade and horn enclosed courtyard, fig. 4, and is more elaborate than

from O.N. *Boenus*, 'house of prayer', or chapel, not 'bone house' or graveyard as locally believed. See Jacobson, *Old Highland Dialect and Place Names of Shetland*, 1897, pp. 25-26 and *The Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland*, Vol. 1 (1928), p. 92.

¹ A small stone-built enclosure in which vegetable seedlings are grown, protected from wind and animals.

any known habitations belonging to this phase of Shetland culture, as none of the ordinary houses, about 70 in number, that have been recorded or noted, is either heel-shaped or provided with a forecourt.¹ From the closer positional and architectural affinity between the Benie Hoose and Yoxie it may be inferred as highly probable that the former building was occupied as a dwelling by a body of priests who officiated in the temple of the latter.

Main block and forecourt annexe together measure about 80 ft. in length over all and are 42 ft. and 38 ft. wide respectively. The main block being set end on to the hillside, the inner (western) end of the interior has been scooped out to a depth of 3 ft. or so to make the floor more nearly level; the vertical inner face of the scoop has been revetted with masonry and boulders which also formed part of the inner face of the wall proper above. The walling is of drystone, with numerous large boulders on end or edge incorporated in the lower courses, which are all that now exist, of the facework and is best preserved in the frontal arc where it stands up to nearly 4 ft. to the broken-down wall-head (Pl. VI: 1). It consists of three concentric rings successively constructed from the inside outwards, each ring being finished with a face of rubble masonry behind which is a core of stones mixed with earth and, in places, considerable quantities of peat-ash intentionally introduced. The whole thus forms a single solid wall from 12 to 16 ft. thick. The butt joints between the rings were clearly traceable in much of the circuit, but were lost at the west end, where the wall was least well-preserved, and the inner one seemed to have been disturbed, as indicated on fig. 5, by the insertion of recesses in the chamber (*infra*). The horns joined the main block at the extremities of its curved façade, which was formed of large boulders, and west of their junction coalesced with the outermost ring of the wall of the main block; this appears most clearly on the north side, only a mass of core material and debris being visible on the south. To the east of the junction the north horn runs in a curved projection for a distance of some 20 ft. before it fades out in a later mound of soil and debris which contained such a large number of rude stone implements that the gathering appeared as if it had been purposely flung down in a heap. Except for a short length of a foundation course the outer face of this part of the horn is totally destroyed but the inner is well-defined by a lining of boulders, up to about 3 ft. in height and set edge to edge. Towards its root the horn measures 10 ft. in thickness and in this portion a recess, at Z on fig. 4, with a paved floor has been formed and in a later phase has been turned into a cell by the partial closing of the mouth with boulders, leaving a gap for entrance (fig. 5). The south horn is less well-preserved and is now separated from the main block by a break, fully 6 ft. wide, which originally may have been a recess corresponding to the one in the N. horn; paving which is laid along the front of the façade, like a pathway, extends into the break. The south horn, as in the north one, has been lined with boulders on the inside and the outer face shows only a single foundation-course of masonry; between the faces there is a rubble core and on the south side of the main block it is only this core that remains of the continuation

¹ P.S.A.S., LXXXIX (1955-6), 340 ff. One of these houses, D on fig. 1, is situated about 600 yds. S. of the Benie Hoose.

of the west part of the horn that formed the outermost ring of the walling. The forecourt, more or less circular on plan with a diameter of about 24 ft. 6 in. was, no doubt, entered through a gap left between the ends of the horns.

The entrance to the chamber was gained by a passage (Pl. VII: 1) which opens in the centre of the façade; the south jamb of the opening, shown by a dotted line, was missing and the passage had been intentionally blocked by stonework built, probably, during the latest occupation of the forecourt (fig. 5). The sides of the passage are faced with rubble masonry as far as the outside of the innermost wall-ring and thence inwards are formed of large boulders (Pl. VII: 2). The passage is slightly curved and increases slightly in width behind door-checks about 5 ft. from the inner end; in the angle of the south check there is a posthole which had evidently held the framework of a door. The lintels were missing but the floor was well-paved with slabs which also served as the cover-stones for a main drain coming from the interior. The chamber is roughly trapezoidal in shape and its greatest dimensions from E. to W. and N. to S. were 20 ft. 6 in. and 16 ft. 6 in. respectively. The floor of the chamber appeared to be of earth overlying, at least at the inner end, a bed of clay which, it is understood from local information, is to be found in natural patches in the area. From a catchment-pit in each of the two west corners of the chamber a branch drain curves to join the main drain as do also two short lengths from the corresponding east corners. All are covered with slabs and meet the main drain a short distance to the rear of the entrance-passage through which it flows in good order before its course has been interrupted and destroyed by later alterations. No doubt the drainage would have continued in a run through the forecourt and the gap between the horns to debouch on the surface of the lower ground beyond.

Towards the east end of the chamber there are two original recesses, one in each side wall (Pl. VII: 3); these are built of large stones and have upright boulders at their outer corners (one missing). These recesses were fully exposed by Mr John Stewart who had dug into this side on his holidays over a period of many years before the present excavations had begun. He informed me that he had removed from the north recess a kerbed and paved floor which had been laid at a level of from 6 to 9 in. above the underlying clay in the floor of the chamber. Evidently this was a secondary construction as, below the paving, he found a light bed of pebbles with fragments of pottery and a layer of peat-ash 2 to 3 in. in thickness. From this bed of ash he also recovered a fragment of pottery, having finger-nail impressions, besides a rude stone implement and three pot-lids. On top of the paving in the north-east corner of the recess there was a thin spread of peat-ash in which a trough-*quern* lay upside-down. No paving was found by Mr Stewart in the south recess, but rough implements, pumice stones and broken pottery were picked out of the debris down to the floor, level with that of the chamber. In this area there was much phosphate of iron or vivianite which indicated the former presence of bone. In the innermost corners of the chamber by the catchment pits there seem to have been two further recesses (X and Y on fig. 5) though of X hardly more than a bare suggestion survives; it is these recesses that are mentioned above as interrupting the butt-joints between the inner and central wall-rings and the noticeable contrast between the

original recesses (*supra*) and Y (Pl. VII: 4) with its curvilinear outline, smaller stonework and unpaved and unlevelled floor suggests that they were insertions. In the middle of Y there is a small upright earthfast stone, 13 in. high, and in front of it lies a thin flat pavingstone measuring 3 ft. long and 7 in. wide; their purpose is obscure. No built or laid hearth was found in the chamber but 5 ft. inwards from the middle of the north side there was a scooped-out saucer-shaped hollow, fully 2 ft. in diameter, on the original floor, which was covered by a thin spread of peat-ash and was seemingly an original hearth. Above this there were two other thin layers of peat-ash, each separated by a thin stratum of soil, all showing that a hearth here had also been in use on later occasions. In the latest stage of these a rough denuded line of walling, dotted on the plan, fig. 5, stretched obliquely across the middle of the chamber from N. to S. and, towards its north end, which was built clear of the original wall, there was a gap left in the masonry directly above the hearths. The gap, about 2 ft. in height, was bridged by a large flat table-like stone, measuring 2 ft. 9 in. by 2 ft. 1 in. and 5½ in. thick, and in the north jamb which was three courses in height, a large trough-quern was found in re-use as a building-stone.

Alterations and Additions

The plan, fig. 5, shows the sequence of later alterations, insertions and additions to the original building. Exclusive of the plantic-crub, four stages of alterations can be detected in the ruined forecourt but the traces of these, however, are so slight and in such a dilapidated condition that little can be made out of their earlier arrangements. At a low level in front of the inner face of the north horn all that remains of the earliest alteration is a 14 ft. length of a broken-down wall-foundation, marked F on the plan. The next stage G is still less in evidence and is represented only by a facework of three stones in a curved alignment in a wall which has been raised on the line of the above foundation. The third alteration H is seen as an existing angle of walling, one or two courses high, which butts against the facework G and is 2 ft. in thickness. It would appear that this was part of a small chamber which was destroyed during the construction of a new entrance-passage J to the latest chamber of all the building now occupying most of the forecourt. The remains of this period consist of this passage and the large chamber K off which there is a recess V and two cells W and Z (Pl. VI and fig. 5). The walls of the passage which is probably on the line of the original entrance to the forecourt only rise a course or two in height and the floor is paved with small flags which also form the cover-stones of a drain. From the south side of the passage a smaller unpaved one branches to admit into a small circular cell W the back of which is formed by the original boulder lining of the south horn. Beyond the branch the passage is broken down entirely but it would seem to have led directly westwards into the sub-oval chamber K which incorporates the concave façade of the main block as part of its west walling and the recess Z, at this stage converted into a cell, at the north end; the east wall of the chamber is demolished but the inner face is indicated conjecturally on the plan by a large earthfast boulder and a broken line. The south end of the chamber is well-defined by the lower two or three courses of masonry in the inner face of an arc of walling

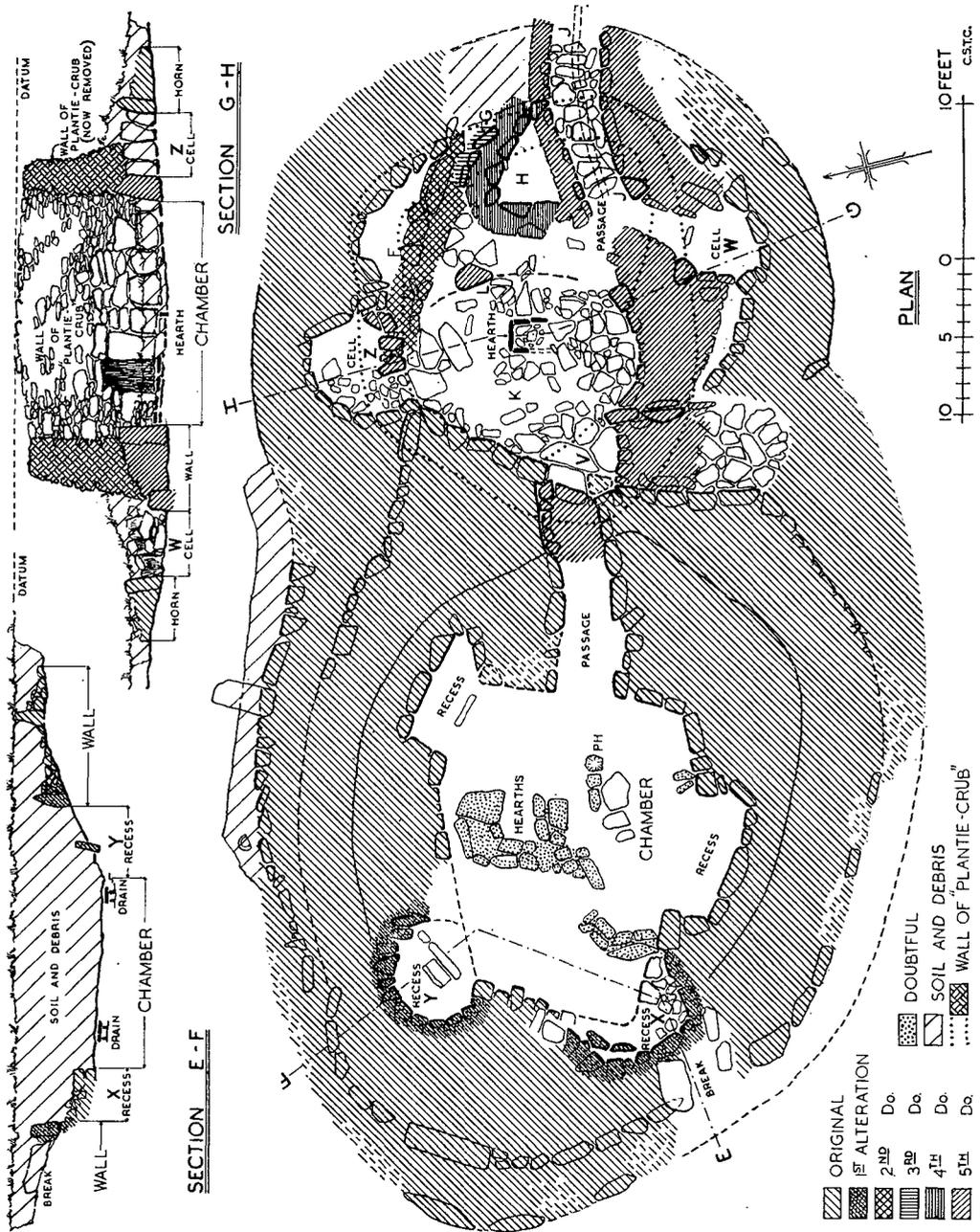


FIG. 5. The 'Benie Hoose', Pettigarths Field, Whalsay, Shetland

which begins, and ends, on a large upright boulder (Pl. VI: 2); this wall is backed by a rubble core, with no real outer face, which finishes short of the south horn, leaving a narrow gap filled only with soil and drifted sand. On the SW. an arc of walling, now removed, together with the set-back blocking of the passage through the original façade formed the recess V and, near the middle of the chamber, a kerbed and paved hearth (Pl. VI: 2) appeared to best belong to the lower of two close levels of paving which still existed in parts of the floor and presumably represented two occupations on the spot.

Relics, etc.

It may be inferred with confidence, though from the relics rather than from the plan, that the Benie Hoose had been occupied as a dwelling, though perhaps intermittently, over some hundreds of years up to, finally, the early Iron Age. Typical rude stone implements were found in abundance all over the site and more than eighteen hundred were gathered from the area during the excavations. These included different kinds of hammer-stones and pounders, rude stone axes, leaf-shaped stones pointed at both ends, stone discs rubbed all round the edges on both sides in planes leaving a carination at their intersections, picks smooth or pecked and tapered, spade-like tools, pot-lids, pumice and steatite sherds, a flat steatite whorl, the handle of a sandstone vessel, hammers and cores and rounded balls of quartz, flakes of sandstones, trough-querns and molars and fragments of pottery, but the majority were of a nondescript character. In the collection there were as many as thirty-three trough-querns, some of which, broken as wasters, had been re-used as building stones in the stages of the later alterations. This astonishing and unusually large number of tools and querns point indisputably to the domestic character of the Benie Hoose. At Yoxie, on the other hand, no querns were found and this fact is significant in suggesting the Yoxie building may have possessed a cultural rather than a domestic function as in the case of the somewhat analogous structure at Stanydale.¹ The use of querns implies the grinding of grain harvested from crops grown in the vicinity and it has therefore to be noted that behind the cliffs to the ENE. of the Benie Hoose there are traceable remains of a dyke enclosing a large field or field-system in which cereals could have been raised by the local community. Such fields are a common feature close by or adjoining contemporary houses in Shetland.² Near the cairns higher up the slopes of the hillside there is also a broken-down alignment of very heavy stones on edge which may be the remains of the boundary dyke of a large enclosure. By themselves boundary foundations can hardly be dated but found in association with other constructions as they are here all would appear to have belonged to the same period. That they are, at least, pre-Norse may be inferred from the name, Pettigarth's Field, which has been given to the area in which they lie. The term is derived from a combination of three old Norse words *Pettr* – a pict, *garthr* – an enclosure and *fell* or *fjall* – a hill. Interpreted, this simply means the Pictish enclosure on the hill and expresses in the language of the Norse invaders

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXIV (1949-50), 185 ff.

² *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXIX (1955-6), 340 ff.

what they took or knew to have been the case that this parcel of land had been possessed and worked formerly by the Picts.

The Cairns

The cairns (fig. 6) are situated on a slight terrace at a higher level than the other monuments and some 140 yds. NW. of the Benie Hoose (B in Pl. V: 2). As has been said, the ruinous remains were identified in 1936 and 1938 as those of a single cairn with a trefoil-shaped chamber,¹ but partial excavation by Mr John Stewart showed that the mass of tumbled stones lying on the north side of the cairn was partly made up of material fallen from a second cairn which lay in juxtaposition north of the first. The two are now revealed, respectively, as a square cairn with a chamber and a passage, and a round cairn containing a cist, each being a typical example of a type of tomb erected in the overlap of the Late Stone and Early Bronze Ages.

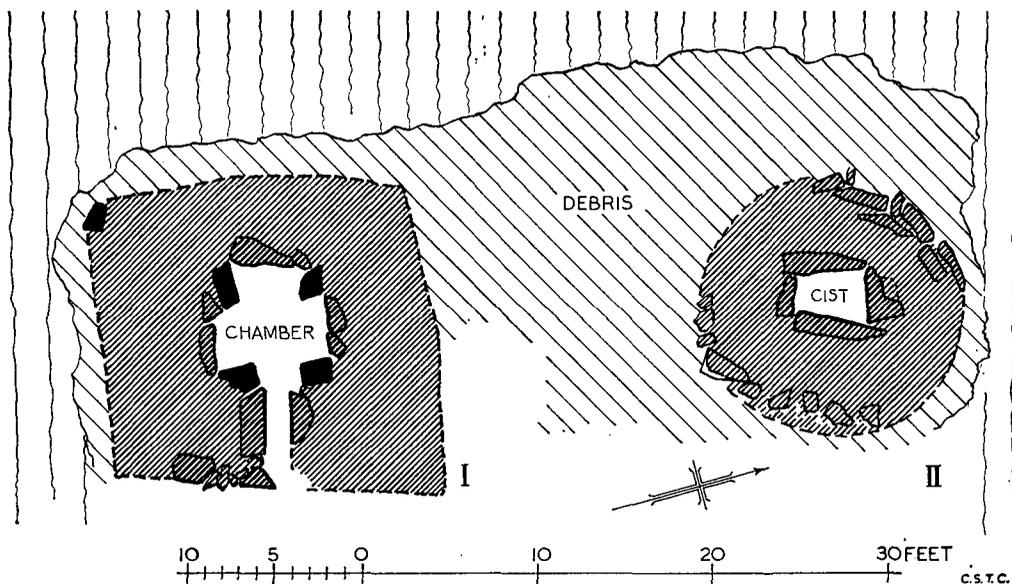


FIG. 6. Cairns, Pettigarths Field, Whalsay, Shetland

The chambered cairn (I on fig. 6) measures 19 ft. by 18 ft. over all. Its squarish shape is indicated by a straight length of facework which runs along the east side southwards from the mouth of the entrance-passage and by slight changes in the ground-level which indicate the straight alignments of the other sides; also there is an earthfast stone marking the SW. angle. The passage broadens towards the interior and enters the chamber between two boulders standing as jambs. These and two corresponding stones at the inner end of the chamber form the jambs of the terminal and lateral recesses of the trefoil. The Royal Commission recorded² that the

¹ Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Inventory of Orkney and Shetland*, iii, No. 1321.

² loc. cit.

chamber and passage were paved and that some fragments of pottery were found but were too much broken for identification. The chamber is very small and although the plan is reminiscent of the heel-shaped cairns the squareness of the structure indicates a deviation from the true type comparable with three other examples known in Shetland.¹

The round cairn (II on fig. 6) was reduced to its foundations but contained a trapezoidal slab-built cist, 4 ft. in length, with a paved bottom; its heavy cover-slab, perhaps displaced by grave-robbers, had slipped into the cavity. The lining of the cist was backed by a rubble core faced with a ring of boulders but this survived only in the NW. and SE. arcs. The large size and rough setting of the boulders combined with the comparatively small diameter of the ring (15 ft.) suggests that this was not the proper outer face and that the whole was originally further enclosed by a second ring of walling with a better external finish.

Acknowledgments

I should like to express my gratitude to Miss Audrey Henshall, M.A., F.S.A.SCOT., for her reports on the pottery and implements in the Appendix and for information regarding the cairn on the Holm of Melby. My thanks are also due to Mr John Stewart, M.A., F.S.A.SCOT., in appreciation of his assistance during the two seasons of excavation and for information on the results of the earlier digging operations on his own. Further, I am indebted to Mr Thomas J. Arthur for permission to demolish his plantie-crub. Finally I wish to acknowledge, with thanks, my obligations to Mr Angus Graham, M.A., F.S.A.SCOT., for undertaking the task of editing this paper; to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland for a grant to defray expenses and to the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments of Scotland for allowing time off to carry out the work.

¹ March Cairn, Esha Ness (*P.S.A.S.*, LXXXIV (1949-50), fig. 9, p. 99); Grista, Tingwall (*ibid.*); Home of Melby, Walls and Sandness (information from Miss A. Henshall). The last may be the same described by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland as a round cairn 40 ft. in diameter (*op. cit.*, No. 1680, presumably the second of the three reported).

APPENDIX

The Finds

by A. S. HENSHALL

The Benie Hoose

The pottery sequence from Shetland, and its affinities, is still imperfectly understood, and the following notes on the pottery from the Benie Hoose and the Standing Stones of Yoxie are as brief and objective as possible pending a thorough survey of the prehistoric pottery from the islands. But one curious feature which is immediately apparent is the contrast of the pottery from such sites as Stanydale, Gruting, Wiltrow, or early Jarlshof with these Whalsay sites, all of them being closely linked by their house-types and stone implements. The registration numbers of the National Museum of Antiquities are quoted.

1. *Coarse wares.* (a) Stanydale ware. One wall sherd, 1.1 in. thick, with a slight cordon, of very friable dark brown ware with very large angular pale grits (HD 1601); cf. Stanydale.¹

(b) Wall sherds from two vessels, black ware with large white grits, fairly hard, 0.35 in. thick; one from ground level against the façade (HD 1630, 1617); cf. Wiltrow.²

2. *Plain jars.* The rims are flat or with internal bevels, the walls slightly curved, probably generally vertical below the rim, then narrowing to the base. The ware is dark brown, hard, fairly fine, gritty, sometimes with steatite. There is usually a fine slip outside. The ware often splits along the building rings. Several rim sherds were in a position proving that they are primary: HD 1692 from the original floor level, 1694 from the passage paving, 1688 from the wall core of the house (fig. 7: 2, 1, 4). Another sherd came from the core of the secondary building (1689, fig. 7: 5); other sherds are unstratified (fig. 7: 3, 12).

There is no complete profile of one of these vessels, but base sherds of similar ware occur. The vessels vary in size, some bases being quite small; 1611, which is primary, has a diameter of about 3 in. (fig. 7: 27), and 1697-8 are about 7 and 5 in. in diameter (fig. 7: 28-29). On the other hand EO 747, with a tiny piece of rim and no base surviving, has many wall sherds and a maximum diameter of 12 in., and rim sherds seem to vary from 7 to 13 in. in diameter.

Many featureless wall sherds also probably belong to this group, some found in a primary position (HD 1707, 1626), or in the secondary walling (1708).

For this group compare Jarlshof Late Bronze Age pottery,³ but the Benie Hoose pottery lacks the cordons and rolled rims occasionally found in the Jarlshof pottery.

3. *Plain vessels of fine black ware.* The rim pieces suggest vessels of similar shape to (2), but smaller, and made of very high quality ware. This may be steatitic, or may completely lack steatite. Three rim sherds came from a low level in the chamber, but above the floor (HD 1604-6 fig. 7: 19-21); other sherds were unstratified (fig. 7: 22-24). The diameters are 6 to 7½ in. A base sherd which might be included in this group has already been mentioned (fig. 7: 28).

4. *Shouldered and carinated jars.* (a) Small jar with rolled rim and high rounded shoulder, fine non-steatitic ware, mainly black outside but pink at the rim and inside (HD 1602, fig. 7: 25). Found, with wall sherds of another vessel of similar ware (HD 1614), on the pavement against secondary walling.

(b) A clumsy vessel of thick hard steatitic ware, with inturned rim (HD 1603, fig. 7: 26). From above the hearths in the chamber.

(c) Rim sherd, rather similar ware, with a prominent shoulder, and everted lip; perforated below shoulder (EO 744, fig. 7: 18).

(d) Two rim sherds from different vessels (HD 1609, 1690, fig. 7: 16, 14). These are small sherds but may have had a similar form to (c) except that the slope of the shoulder is gentler. The ware is harder, with a black slip, but includes some large grits.

(e) Wall sherd with a shoulder (HD 1700, fig. 7: 13).

The decorated sherd HD 1699 (see below) should be included with this group.

¹ P.S.A.S., LXXXIV (1949-50), 194-5.

² *ibid.*, LXX (1935-6), 166, not mentioned specifically.

³ Hamilton, J. R. C., 1956, 29-31.

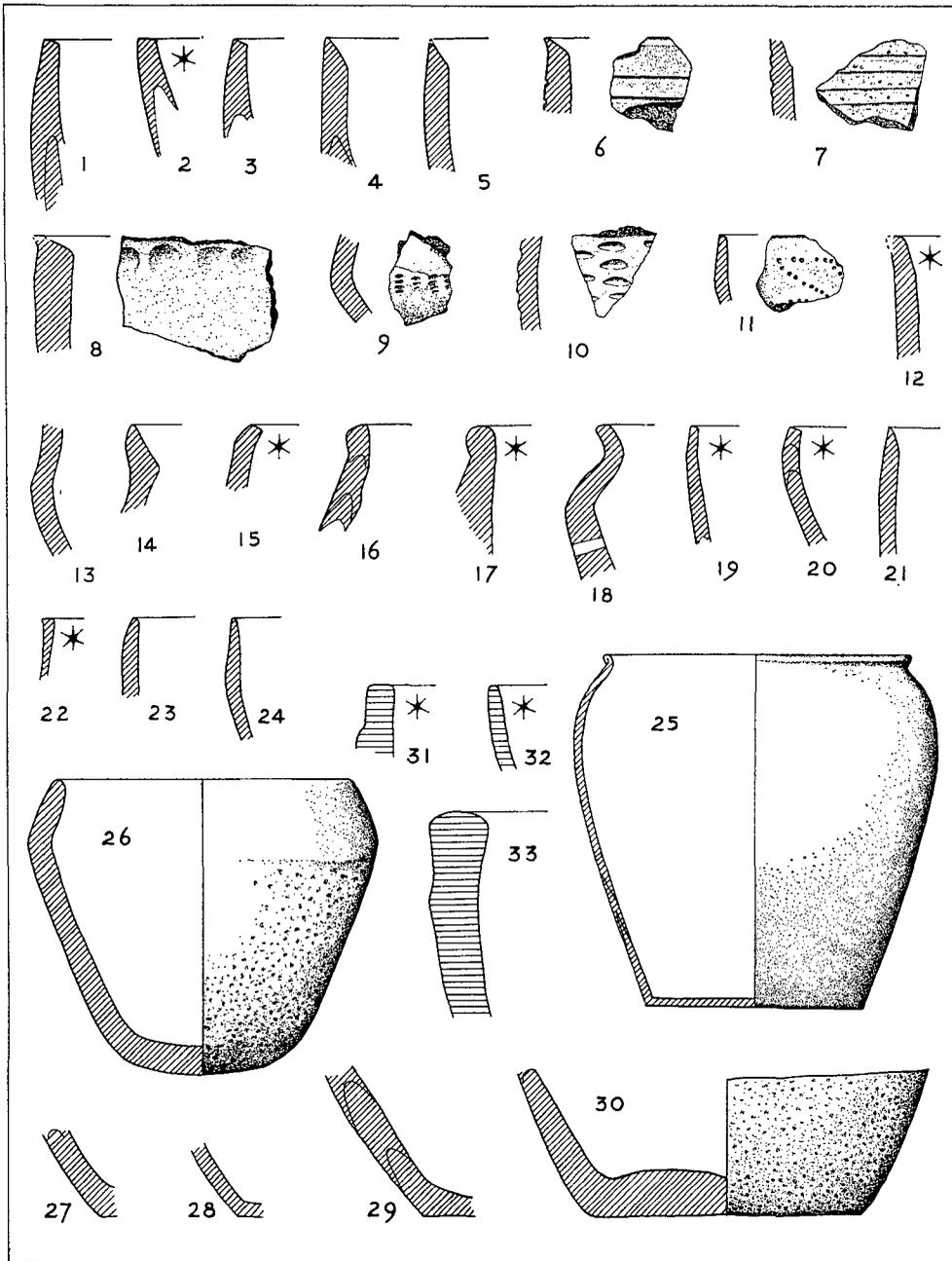


FIG. 7. Pottery and steatite vessels from the Benie Hoose (1/3)
 (Stars indicate sherds where the angle is certain)

5. *Miscellaneous*. (a) Sherd with rounded thickened rim, very steatitic ware (1608, fig. 7: 17).
 (b) Rim sherd from a jar with a restricted mouth, external bevel on lip (HD 546, fig. 7: 15).
 (c) Rim sherd with internal bevel, and a row of thumb impressions below the lip outside, very steatitic (HD 1712, fig. 7: 8).
 (d) Part of base of highly steatitic vessel, from original floor level (HD 1695, fig. 7: 30).
 (e) Sherds of thin hard brown non-steatitic ware, grass tempered (HD 1610). ?Viking, cf. Freswick, Caithness.¹

6. *Decorated Sherds*. These are scarce and small.

(a) Wall sherd, of ware similar to some of group 2, was found in a primary position, in the wall core, and bears a series of horizontal grooves (HD 1615, fig. 7: 7). Another wall sherd and a rim sherd (HD 1687, fig. 7: 6) bear similar grooves, both unstratified.

(b) Two wall sherds covered with finger-nail nicks, one stratified below secondary paving in the north recess (HD 745, fig. 7: 10).

(c) Rim sherd, possibly from a square vessel as one edge seems to turn in more sharply, decorated with a series of small impressed dots (HD 1684, fig. 7: 11).

(d) Wall sherd with horizontal whip-cord impressions on the shoulder and in a slanting line above, of type 4 above (HD 1699, fig. 7: 9).

(e) A few sherds are perforated (EO 744 (see above), HD 1620, 1622); HD 1623 is only partially perforated after firing.

7. *Pottery disc*, 2.7 × 5 in., of thick hard rather steatitic ware, probably a sherd rubbed down (HD 1711).

Certain vessels from sections 4, 5 and 6 might be compared with the pottery from the first round houses at Jarlshof.² But there are no flanged rims nor really angular shoulders, nor flanged bases at the Benie Hoose which are characteristic of this ware at Jarlshof, and decoration by pin-point impressions and finger-tips is there confined to the rim edges. Many featureless sherds from the Benie Hoose have not been mentioned.

A selection of stone implements from the excavations at the Benie Hoose have been given to the National Museum over a number of years, firstly by Mr J. Stewart and subsequently through Mr C. S. T. Calder.

A certain number of objects are similar to finds at Mr Calder's former excavations of houses at Stanydale and Ness of Gruting, and there is little to add to the comments in the excavation reports.³

1. *Polished axe-adze* of typical Uyea porphyry. It has been much used and some of the flake scars have been partly obliterated by re-grinding; 3.2 in. long (HD 1651). From the core of the wall.

2. *Scrapers*. (a) Of Uyea porphyry, made by chipping a broken flat polished implement, probably a knife; 1.6 in. wide (HD 1724).

(b) Four of white quartz, 1.6-1.1 in. wide (HD 862, 1659, 1660, 1726). Also a worked chip of quartz (HD 1727), and an unworked flake (HD 1661).

(c) Made from a small pebble of yellow-brown flint, 0.8 in. across (EO 746). Also a flint chip (HD 863).

3. *Trough querns and rubbing stones*. None were brought to the museum, but as many as thirty-three were found. Some broken ones had been re-used in later building alterations.

4. *Rough stone implements*. Only a small selection of the great number, about 1,800, found at the site could be brought to the museum. They are similar to those already recorded from the Ness of Gruting and other sites. On one specimen the end has been rubbed smooth at an oblique angle (HD 1644).

There is one specimen of the pointed bar type which it has been suggested may be the share of a plough (HD 1644). This example is unusual in being smoothed by wear on both sides of the tip.

5. *Pumice*. A lump of pumice, 1.8 × 1.8 × 1 in., smoothed and grooved by use (HD 861), and a fragment (HD 1728).

6. *Hammer-stones and grinding-stones*. (a) Four hard pebbles of schist, carinated into roughened

¹ P.S.A.S., LXXIII (1938-9), 104-6.

² Hamilton, J. R. C., 38.

³ P.S.A.S., LXXXIX (1955-6), 391-7.

facets by use as a grinder, and secondarily used as light hammers, diameters 3.3-5 in. (HD 847-8, 863B, 1653).

(b) Four slightly smaller pebbles of white quartz, the surface similarly abraded by use. One specimen is an almost complete ball, diameter 3 in. (HD 1725), the others are only partly used, but the wear produces only the slightest tendency to form facets (HD 1654-6). 1725 from floor level.

Other relics are new to the assemblage from Mr Calder's house and temple sites:

7. *Cleavers*. (a) Part of a flat cleaver of sandstone, retaining the 'nick' between handle and blade characteristic of this tool (HD 1720, fig. 8: 9). Also a fragment of a similar tool (HD 1721). The type is found in the lowest Late Bronze Age levels at Jarlshof, made of slate.¹ It has been suggested that they were used for digging out clay and steatite.

(b) Part of the blade of a large thin slate implement of uncertain form, roughly chipped but worn almost smooth, the edge rounded, not sharp. Possibly used as a spatula for working clay, as was suggested for what seem to be similar tools at Jarlshof (HD 1722).

(c) Handle of some flat cleaver-like tool, of very micaceous schist. (HD 1645).

8. *Handles* of broken implements. (a) Probably from club-shaped implements of schist. The handles have a rather oval flat section, are 3 to 5 in. long, with a marked shoulder where they join the blade (HD 1718, 1719, fig. 8: 7) and a fragment of slate (1652). Various rudely chipped implements have roughly formed handles, including some from Late Bronze Age Jarlshof, but the Benie Hoose specimens are from much more carefully made objects, formed by pecking. There is quite a number of comparable objects from Shetland and Orkney in the museum, but all stray finds. The closest associated parallel is from Wiltrow (HD 525), and a somewhat similar club comes from the earliest sub-neolithic layers of Jarlshof.

(b) Handle tapering to a point, with a groove subsequently cut round 0.75 in. from the tip (BG 362).

9. *Star-shaped object* of micaceous schist, 3.5 × 4.5 (HD 1646). The piece of stone is flat, and five unequal projections have been pecked out. A similar object comes from the Late Bronze Age dwellings at Jarlshof,² and two from Skara Brae.³ It has been suggested that the object is a figurine, a more convincing idea in the case of the Skara Brae relics than the Shetland ones, and a similar object from Taversoe Tuick, Rousay, has only four projections.

10. *Steatite plugs*. Two flattish round pieces of steatite, 2 in. in diameter, and one oval piece 2.7 × 1.9 in., all with a groove cut round the side, perhaps made from sherds of steatite vessels (HD 1647-9, fig. 8: 8, 10). At Quandale, Rousay, Orkney there was a group of cremation burials under small cairns, and with one of these, in a steatite vessel, were some similar plugs.⁴ The burials are further linked with the people of Mr Calder's Shetland houses by a large friable pot, very like the largest pot from the Stanydale temple, by what looks like half an unfinished battle-axe comparable with the miniature battle-axes from Ness of Gruting, and by a rude stone club-like implement of the Orkney and Shetland type. Plugs have also been found in a cist at Trumland, Rousay.⁵

The plugs were probably used for skin floats. There is a modern pig-skin float from Shetland in the museum with wooden plugs of nearly the same size, round plugs in the ends of the legs, and an oval plug in the stomach.

11. *Pieces of steatite vessels*. (a) From the rim of a large vessel, diameter about 12.5 in., with a narrow slightly concave collar (HD 1632, fig. 7: 33). In profile it is similar to, though larger than, the vessel found in a cist at Lyking, Orkney,⁶ probably with an inhumation, and also to unstratified sherds from Taversoe Tuick, Rousay, Orkney.⁷

(b) Sherd, recessed on the outer edge of the rim (HD 1634, fig. 7: 31). From the core of the wall.

(c) Three wall pieces from fairly fine smoothly finished vessels, 0.35 in. thick, and another piece with parts of two perforations (HD 1713, 1715, 1716, 859). The pieces are too small to compare the shape, but they are equally fine as the Bronze Age vessels from a house at Jarlshof.⁸ Also a piece with the outer surface bearing deep chisel marks (1636).

¹ P.S.A.S., LXVIII (1933-4), 307-10, fig. 68.

² *ibid.*, LXV (1930-1), 70-71.

³ *ibid.*, LXXXI (1946-7), 190.

⁷ *ibid.*, LXXXIII (1938-9), 163 (poor illustration).

² *ibid.*, LXVIII (1933-4), 310, fig. 69.

⁴ *ibid.*, LXXI (1936-7), 77-78, 81.

⁶ *ibid.*, LXXXIII (1948-9), 238.

⁸ *ibid.*, LXIX (1934-5), 92-93.

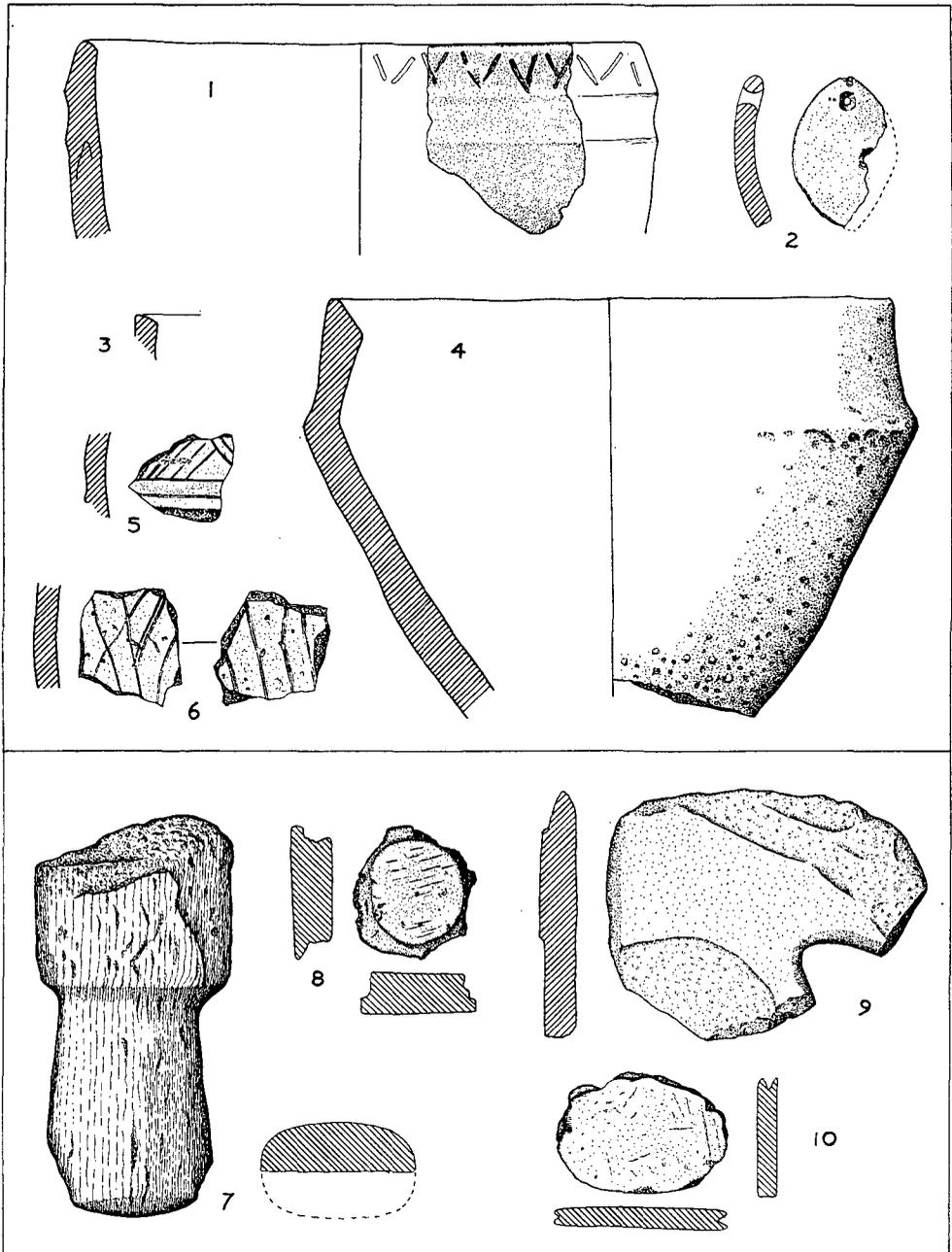


FIG. 8. Finds from The Standing Stones of Yoxie (1-6) and The Benic Hoose (7-10) (1/3)

(d) Fine well-made rim fragment, the lip having an uneven curve; perhaps from a square vessel with rounded corners (HD 845, fig. 7: 32).

(e) A worn piece, apparently from a small open bowl (HD 860).

(f) Piece of a flat base, almost worn through (HD 1635).

(g) Four pieces, including a plain rounded rim probably from an open bowl, are from massive vessels, the walls 0.9 to 1.8 in. thick. Parallels for these are difficult to find, though very large vessels, up to 2 ft. high and wide, were used for cremations on Orkney and Shetland, presumably of Bronze Age or Iron Age date.

12. *Pot lid*, of schist, chipped into a neat oval 8.5 × 7.5 in. (HD 1663). Pot lids were found at Wiltrow and Jarlshof.

13. *Roughly rectangular piece of steatite*, 2.2 × 1.2 in., one face gouged into a hollow (HD 1717).

14. *Pebbles*, possibly used as whetstones (HD 1650, 1658).

15. *Steatite whorl*, diameter 1.6 in., with a roughly incised concentric line on one face (HD 844). This may well be quite modern.

The Standing Stones of Yoxie

The pottery is mainly hard, dark and coarse, with large angular grits of white stone or quartz; generally there is a fine surface slip. Most of the sherds are featureless wall sherds. This ware may be compared with group 1 (b) from the Benie Hoose. It sometimes breaks along the building rings, but this is not so prevalent as with the harder, finer wares of groups 2 and 3 from the Benie Hoose. Only two rims of pots of this ware survive. One is a tiny angular rim sherd with a diameter of about 6 in. (HD 865, fig. 8: 3). Other sherds are from a bucket-shaped vessel with a diameter of about 8.5 in. inside the mouth; it has two slight cordons and a deeply but roughly incised row of chevrons below the rim (HD 864, fig. 8: 1). A small wall sherd of another vessel has light incisions on both faces (HD 867, fig. 8: 6). Two sherds of this group have a corky surface outside due to the pale grits having weathered out (HD 1664-5).

A sherd of finer, non-steatitic, ware with mica in the paste, has a careful lightly incised pattern, and has broken along what seems to have been a small cordon. This sherd is somewhat reminiscent of the beaker-like sherds from the Ness of Gruting.

Other sherds are of a similar ware but with lumps of steatite predominating over the harder grits. One vessel of this ware can be reconstructed: it has a steep internal bevel to the rim, and a definite, though irregular shoulder (HD 1729, fig. 8: 4). The base of another similar vessel survives. The ware and the shape may be compared with 4 (b) from the Benie Hoose.

The stone objects from the Standing Stones of Yoxie brought to the Museum consisted of the following:

1. *Scraper* of white quartz, finely worked, but split down one side, 1.25 × 0.6 in. (HD 1734).

2. *Piece of pumice*, 1.8 × 1.5 × 0.6 in., rubbed into smooth facets (HD 741).

3. *Two pebbles*, 4 × 2 × 0.9 and 2.4 × 1.7 × 0.6 in., artificially smoothed by rubbing (HD 1666-7).

4. *Splinter of stone*, one face smoothed by rubbing (HD 869).

5. *Hammerstones*; large elongated pebbles, 7.3 × 3 × 2.7 and 5.7 × 3.5 × 3 in., the ends flattened by hammering, and numerous irregular hollows in the sides due to use as anvils (HD 870-1).

6. ?*Amulet* of steatite, slightly convex as if made from a piece of a vessel. It is diamond-shaped with slightly convex edges, 2.3 × 1.6 in. originally, but it has been broken down one side. There is an hour-glass perforation in one end and part of another in the broken side (HD 1733, fig. 8: 2). This object is difficult to parallel, but there is a piece of steatite vessel with parts of two perforations from the Benie Hoose.



1. The Standing Stones of Yoxie; the inner chamber from the NE, showing S and W apsidal recesses



2. The Standing Stones of Yoxie; rear of entrance passage, outer circular chamber, and inner chamber beyond



1. The Benie Hoose; chamber in forecourt incorporating façade of main block



2. The Benie Hoose; south end of chamber in forecourt with recess V on right; kerbed hearth showing on lower left



1. The Benie Hoose; entrance to main block



2. The Benie Hoose; rear of entrance



3. The Benie Hoose; angular recess in S wall of chamber



4. The Benie Hoose; circular recess Y in NW corner of chamber