

Walter Gordon Grant: an archaeological appreciation

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Between 1930 and his death in 1947, Mr Walter Grant, owner of the Trumland estate on Rousay, Orkney, undertook a remarkable series of excavations. Some of the plans which were prepared at the time were preserved in Trumland House, and Mr and Mrs E Harrison have kindly presented them to the Orkney Archive.

Walter Gordon Grant was born in Elgin in 1886, the eldest son of Mr and Mrs James Grant of Highland Park, Kirkwall. He was resident in Orkney for most of his life and had business interests in the Highland Park Distillery; in later years he became a director of the Highland Distillers Company Ltd, Glasgow. Grant's involvement in local affairs is illustrated by his work as president of the Orkney Trout Fishing Association, and his assistance with the introduction of the Orkney airmail, the first within the United Kingdom; but it is perhaps his interest in the antiquities of Rousay for which he is best remembered.

Grant's enthusiasm for archaeology was aroused, as it was for so many Orcadians, by Professor V Gordon Childe's excavations at Skara Brae, which began in 1927. The visit of Mr J M Corrie, an investigator from the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, to Rousay in 1928, may also have stimulated Grant's interest in archaeology, and much of the detailed information on the monuments of the island contained in the *Inventory of Orkney* was the result of Grant's work. Although this volume was printed in 1939, final publication was not possible until 1946 and consequently much of Grant's later excavations were unfortunately not included in full.

In July 1929, when Mr James Richardson, of HM Office of Works, visited Rousay, he found that Grant had begun the excavation of a small medieval castle at Westside. Richardson was so impressed by the work, that he suggested that trial excavations be undertaken on the broch of Midhowe, Rousay, and, in the following year, encouraged Grant to have the monument fully excavated, recorded and preserved.

The excavation of this site was undoubtedly Grant's major archaeological project, and, with Dr J Graham Callander, director of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, giving personal supervision during the summer months, work continued from 1930 to 1933. 'The time taken to excavate the broch lasted for five consecutive summers and a few winter months and practically the whole work of cleaning out the structures was done by Mr James K Yorston. It has been computed that he wheeled out from 1500 to 2000 tons of fallen stones and debris' (Callander & Grant 1934b, 513-14).

The excavation aroused a considerable amount of interest and acclaim. In an Office of Works minute, dated 5 November 1933, Richardson wrote 'not only has Yorston cleared the interior of the broch and excavated the labyrinth of secondary buildings between the outer

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ILLUS 1 James Graham Callander (left) and Walter Grant (right). (From an album in the possession of Mrs D Wilson, now in Tankerness House Museum)



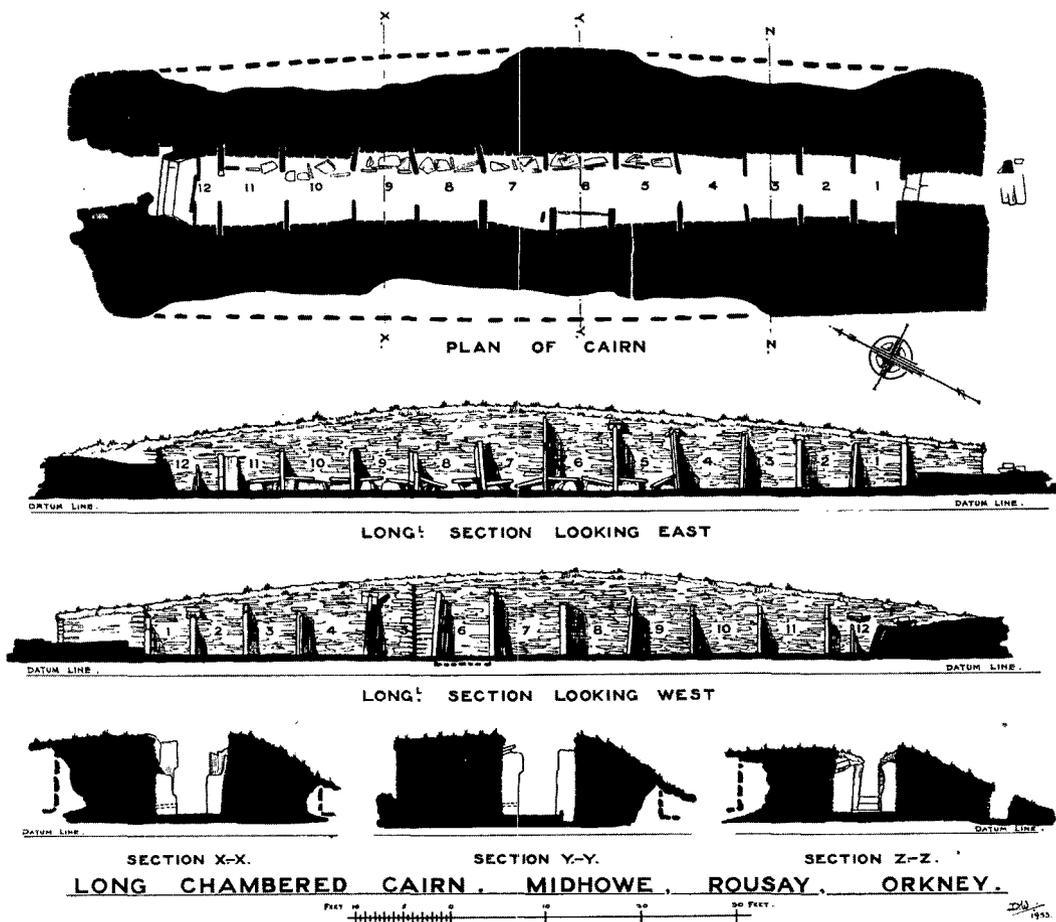
ILLUS 2 Midhowe Broch, with the cover-house over Midhowe Chambered Cairn in the distance. (Crown copyright: SDD HBM)

rampart and the main tower, but he has also consolidated part of the structure in a sympathetic manner quite equal to the best of our own work. Mr Grant has spent a very considerable sum on the undertaking and he has also borne the expense of having the monument carefully surveyed.' (Scottish Record Office MW/1/733). Callander, writing in *The Scotsman*, 13 April 1933, stated:

'It is many years since an excavation on such a large scale as this has been attempted of a prehistoric site in Scotland by a private individual and so Mr Grant has earned the cordial thanks of all interested in Scottish archaeology. He and his assistant Mr J Yorston are to be heartily congratulated on the patience and skill displayed in their work . . .'

Grant was elected a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1930, and in the ensuing years carried out excavations on many of the monuments on Rousay. It was his vision as an organizer and his generosity as a patron which made these operations possible at a time of financial stringency. Even during the years of debate between HM Office of Works and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland over who should be responsible for financing and organizing excavations, he managed to attract some of the best people and the best services to Rousay.

Grant enlisted the help of Callander for a number of excavations, in addition to that at Midhowe broch, notably the chambered cairns at Midhowe, Knowe of Yarso, Knowe of Ramsay



ILLUS 4 Midhowe Chambered Cairn; Plan drawn by David Wilson. (Original in Kirkwall Library)

and Blackhammer. J Hewat Craw, who was working at the Broch of Gurness, Aikerness, on the opposite side of Eynhallow Sound between 1930 and 1933, was invited across to excavate at Midhowe chambered cairn. An excellent draughtsman, David Wilson, was employed by Grant, and invaluable assistance was given by Mr J K Yorston and his son from the Trumland estate. This strong archaeological team, organized by Grant, variously excavated and published 11 sites between 1930 and 1937. Grant continued his archaeological work after Callander's death in 1937 and directed the excavations of the chambered cairns at Taversoe Tuick, Knowe of Rowiegar, Bigland, Kierfea Hill and the Knowe of Craie.

Although not all of these are published, the detailed drawings made by Wilson have been preserved.

In 1938, Childe supervised the excavation of the Neolithic settlement at the Braes of Rinyo with Grant, but further collaboration was interrupted by the war years and work on this site was not recommenced until 1946, the year before Grant's death.

Grant donated the finds from all his excavations to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, but the monuments themselves are perhaps his greatest memorial. The best were generously handed over into Guardianship for the nation, and several of the covers which protect them were paid for by Grant himself, thus ensuring their preservation and allowing visitors to the island to share the remarkably rich archaeological heritage of Rousay.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The drawings of Grant's excavations, executed by David Wilson, ARIAS, FSA Scot, are now in the Orkney Archive, Kirkwall Library, Kirkwall, and photographic copies and a catalogue are available in the National Monuments Record of Scotland, 54 Melville Street, Edinburgh. A further collection of plans, bound in a portfolio, came to light as a result of our investigations. These were in the possession of David Wilson's widow who has kindly presented them to Tankerness House Museum, Kirkwall, Orkney.

WALTER GRANT: EXCAVATIONS

1929 The Wirk, Westside	Medieval Castle	HY 373 302	Unpublished; <i>Inv</i> no 550†
1930 Midhowe* With the assistance of Callander	Broch	HY 371 306	Callander and Grant 1934b; <i>Inv</i> no 553.
1931 Midhowe* With the assistance of Callander	Broch	HY 371 306	Callander and Grant 1934b; <i>Inv</i> no 553.

* Monuments now in Guardianship

† Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, 1946, *Inventory of Orkney and Shetland*

1932 Midhowe* With the assistance of Callander	Broch	HY 371 306	Callander and Grant 1934b; <i>Inv</i> no 553.
Midhowe* With the assistance of Craw Geord of Nears With the assistance of Callander	Chambered Cairn Cairn	HY 372 304 HY 423 273	Callander and Grant 1934a; <i>Inv</i> no 583 Grant 1933a; <i>Inv</i> no 572.
1933 Midhowe* With the assistance of Callander	Broch	HY 371 306	Callander and Grant 1934b; <i>Inv</i> no 553.
Midhowe* With the assistance of Craw and Callander	Chambered Cairn	HY 372 304	Callander and Grant 1934a; <i>Inv</i> no 583.
Blows, Deerness	Cist burials	HY 571 060	Grant 1933b; <i>Inv</i> no 636.
Trumland With the assistance of Craw	Cairn and cists	HY 424 274	Craw 1934; <i>Inv</i> no 571.
Westness With the assistance of Callander	Mound	HY 384 289	Grant 1934; <i>Inv</i> no 580.
1934 Knowe of Yarso* With the assistance of Callander	Chambered Cairn	HY 404 279	Callander and Grant 1935; <i>Inv</i> no 575.
1935 Knowe of Ramsay With the assistance of Callander	Chambered Cairn	HY 400 280	Callander and Grant 1936; <i>Inv</i> no 576.
1936 Quandale	Mounds	HY 372 314	Grant 1937; <i>Inv</i> no 560.
Blackhammer* With the assistance of Callander	Chambered Cairn	HY 414 276	Callander and Grant 1937; <i>Inv</i> no 573.
Knowe of Laird With the assistance of Wilson	Chambered Cairn	HY 398 279	Grant and Wilson 1943; <i>Inv</i> no 577.
Ward Hill	Mounds	HY 383 299	Unpublished; <i>Inv</i> no 582.
1937 Taversoe Tuick* On behalf of HM Office of Works Gripps	Chambered Cairn Souterrain	HY 425 276 HY 405 272	Grant 1939a; <i>Inv</i> no 570. Grant 1939b; <i>Inv</i> app no 5.
Knowe of Rowiegar	Chambered Cairn	HY 373 297	Unpublished; <i>Inv</i> no 578.
1938 Rinyo With the assistance of Childe Bigland (Round)	Neolithic Settlement Chambered Cairn	HY 439 322 HY 438 325	Childe and Grant 1939; <i>Inv</i> app no 4. Unpublished; <i>Inv</i> no 565.
1940 Kierfea Hill	Chambered Cairn	HY 424 319	Unpublished
1941 Knowe of Craie	Chambered Cairn	HY 419 315	Unpublished; <i>Inv</i> no 568.
1946 Rinyo With the assistance of Childe	Neolithic Settlement	HY 439 322	Childe and Grant 1947; <i>Inv</i> app no 4.

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