An Archaeological Study of Neolithic Orkney:

Architecture, Order and Social Classification

by

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Summary

Orkney has always been renowned for the high quality of its Neolithic monuments. The use of local sandstone in their construction has ensured a degree of survival unknown elsewhere in Britain. More importantly, these buildings include houses and villages, perhaps the best known being Skara Brae. Curiously, this aspect of the archaeological resource has tended to be ignored in any analytical sense, and the domestic structures assume a merely descriptive role in discussions of social organisation and its change through time.

Here a more positive stance is taken towards all forms of Neolithic buildings with particular emphasis placed on attempting to understand the cosmologically derived principles of classification and order inherent within their architecture. Thus, much of this thesis is involved with a detailed examination of architecture and its spatial representation. However, to understand the more subtle aspects of spatial organisation a more subjective approach is advanced in which the movement and activities of people (including myself), at particular places and times, is of central importance.

Since social practices determine spatial meaning, other aspects of material culture, it manufacture, use and deposition, are also examined. This investigation is undertaken within a framework which assumes that different forms of classification and order will always determine how something is made and used. This aspect of the enquiry is mainly concerned with ceramics, in particular Grooved ware.

Field survey in the form of field-walking is also a component of this research. A selected area of Mainland, Orkney, was examined from 1984-6, in order to re-evaluate the settlement evidence. During this work a number of sites were discovered including the late Neolithic settlement of Barnhouse, which has subsequently been excavated. The discovery and excavation of this site has provided a wealth of information which is continually drawn on throughout this thesis. However, whatever aspect of the evidence under examination, the themes of order and classification underpin the analysis.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

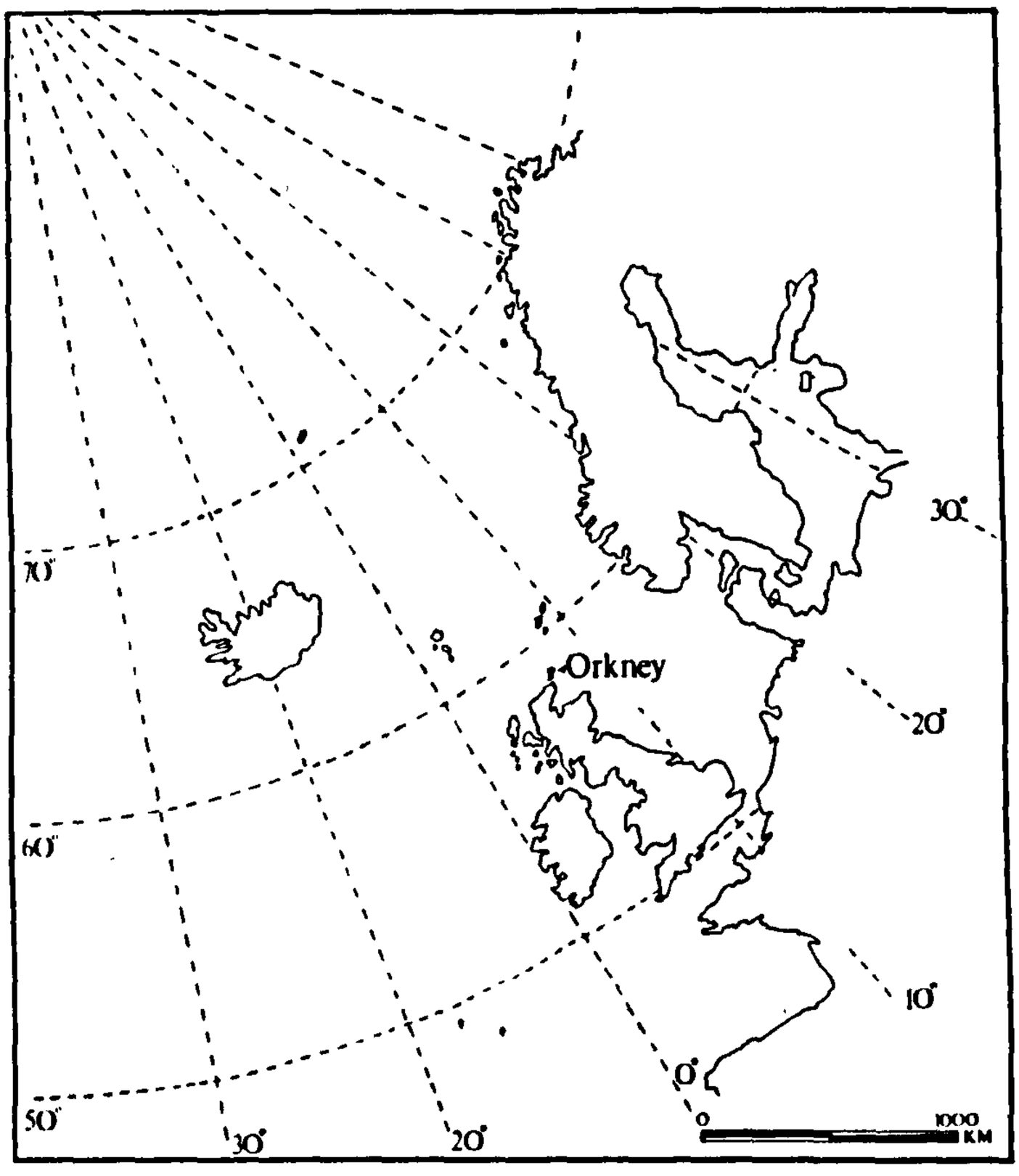
The Neolithic period of British prehistory has always held a fascination for me which is difficult to explain. One discernible element within this obsession is the difference or `otherness' of Neolithic people and their view of the world as revealed, for example, in the construction of huge henge monuments such as Durrington Walls or Avebury which testify to powerful beliefs and a clear sense of purpose. In certain respects the practices of these societies appear totally alien to a twentieth century view of commomsense and rationality. Recently, Thomas (1991, 1) has ventured the view that it is this sense of the irrational even `the mysterious' which is so alluring to prehistorians. Yet, he continues, through its investigation a necessary imposition of order and rational occur which creates an unavoidable paradox. Whilst this suggestion is to some extents valid there must remain the possibility that we can know the supposedly irrational, can conceptualise that which lies beyond our limited experience. Surely to study the past, to pursue history, is a recognition of wanting to know something different about others and ourselves. In taking this view it is easy to recognise the attraction of the past, particularly prehistory which is both linked to and separate from our everyday existence.

The Neolithic period in Britain is characterised by a variety of striking monuments which are, even at a crude functional level, difficult to understand. In studying this period the researcher is continually confronted with evidence of practices which appear

to make little sense and there is always the temptation to implicitly assume `primitivism' as an explanation. In fact it is in the growing awareness that the British Neolithic is not as straightforward as has previously been considered which makes it so attractive and generates an enthusiasm and excitement for a span of time which existed over five thousand years ago. I believe the past is not unknowable, despite its recreation through ourselves. Neolithic people knew exactly what they were doing when they acted in their world, and in their architecture and other forms of material culture we glimpse part of an undoubtedly sophisticated symbolic system of knowledge. It is this potential, this possibility of gaining insight into another culture which influences our decision to indulge in hermeneutic somersaults in an attempt to know more about the past.

It is this wanting to know which both lured me into archaeology and produced the incentive to pursue the various areas of research documented within this volume. As with all research it can never lie completely outside the self and is therefore a personal view of the past. The subject area is essentially Neolithic Orkney (Fig 1:1), although, as seen in Chapter 2, occasional illumination and understanding comes from a critical examination of the people involved in past research who have influenced the nature and trajectory of current enquiry.

My research into Neolithic Orkney in many ways mirrors the trajectory of knowledge gained by the ethnographer when confronted by another culture (although obviously a dialogue with Neolithic people is impossible), enlightenment and understanding come in spasmodic leaps and bounds through contact with the materiality of the past. Similarly the researcher is continually aware of their position as interpreter, of never possessing all the evidence or nuances of a situation or context. Getting to know other people is frequently a difficult affair, especially when occasionally they appear to act in quite an incomprehensible manner. This, I feel, is like Neolithic studies. Understanding other people is also dependent on frames of reference and devices for interpretation because sometimes our impressions are wrong or misplaced. Hence, we have to be clear about what we wish to know and how we may assess this knowledge. Archaeological understanding has shifted quite dramatically over the last decade with the result that now a range of different lines of



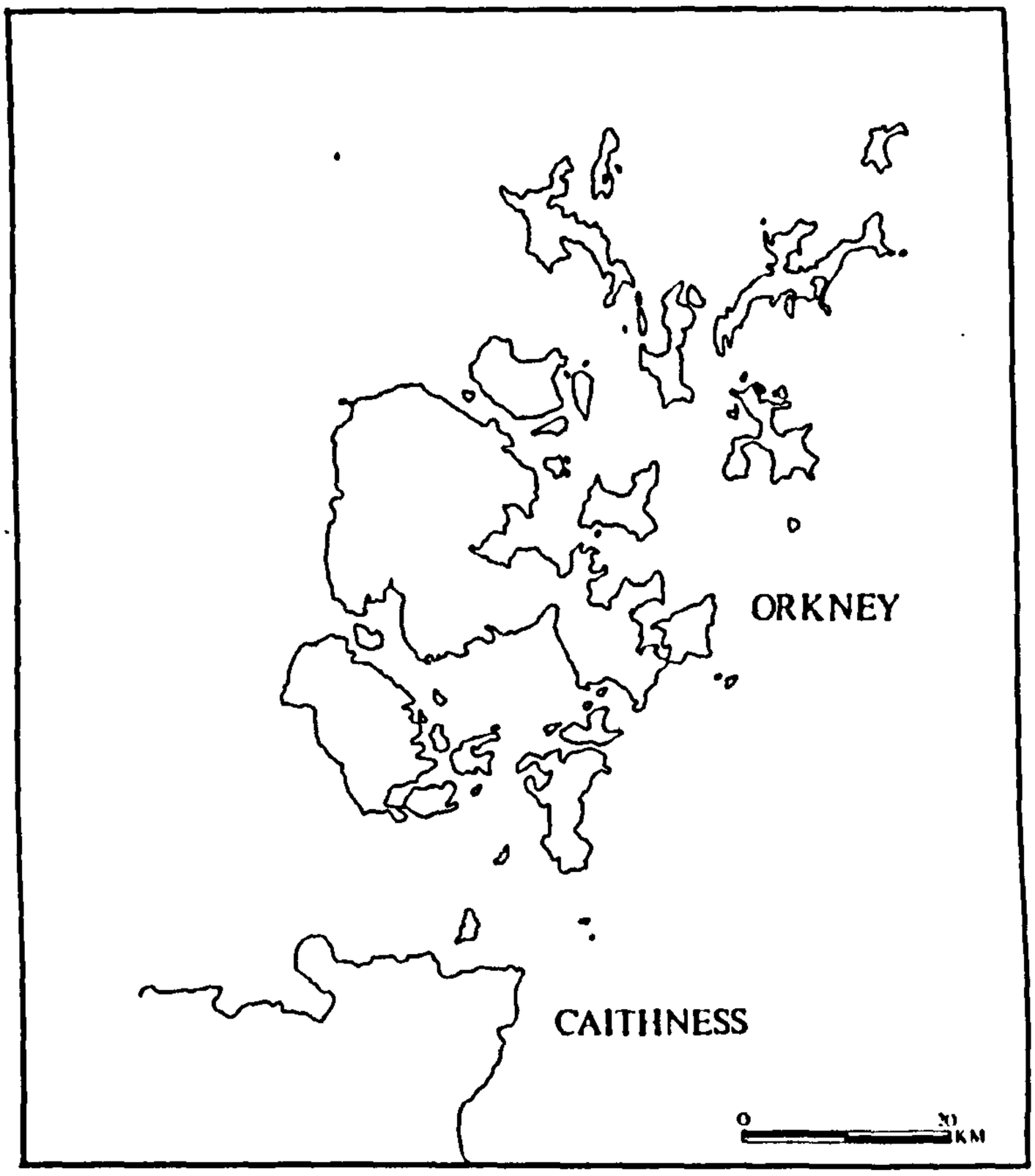


Figure 1:1. Location map of Orkney.

enquiry are subsumed within a `post-processual' archaeology. This study undoubtedly falls within such a post-processual framework, however, the nature of enquiry, as will be seen, is solely guided by the wish to know about Neolithic people and their knowledge of the world and the conditions under which this knowledge was formed and reproduced. I am simply interested in the people who lived and died in Orkney some five thousand years ago.

The reasons for selecting Orkney as an area for research are quite straightforward. As a geographical area it is clearly defined, although as a historical reality this definition may become blurred. However, from the available archaeological and historical evidence, Orkney appears to consistently embody a separate entity which merely fluctuates in its relationship to mainland Scotland. For the Neolithic period, Orkney not only provides a wealth of information, but this data comes from many different archaeological contexts. These include different types of fairly common monuments, for instance, megalithic chambered tombs, henge monuments, stone circles, standing stones. Other monuments such as the stone constructed settlements are less common, being restricted, at present, to the Northern Isles. In each case the quality of evidence is enhanced by virtue of the dry stone construction of buildings which has led to their almost perfect physical survival as standing remains. The importance of this occurrence cannot be overstressed and will hopefully be evident in the following text.

A further reason behind the selection of Orkney as a study area is that it maintains a continuous history of antiquarian and archaeological enquiry. Such a process undoubtedly contains a self perpetuating mechanism since the observations of one study will fuel the fires of another, each adds more and more evidence to the slowly growing body of data and this will entice further work. Such a history of archaeological enquiry should be applauded as opposed to the denunciation often heard from scholars who think too much is given to such a small area. Again it is hoped that this study will help to quieten these voices.

This thesis is structured towards a detailed examination of late Neolithic Orkney which represents the second section of the text. The first half is concerned with `setting the scene'. In this respect the former chapters are self contained and present

different aspects of archaeological enquiry. The second chapter considers the work of V.G. Childe in Orkney which perhaps constitutes the most influential area of study to contemporary researchers. The third chapter introduces evidence obtained from fieldwork undertaken as part of this research in order to compensate for the biases inherent in the previous database. This chapter provides new material which strongly contributes to the general enquiries undertaken in the second section. Chapters 4 and 5 provide a fresh insight into the architecture and depositional practices evident in the early Neolithic period, with particular emphasis being placed on the Orkney-Cromarty chambered cairns. These chapters serve to provide a `historical' prologue to the second section.

The chapters of the second section examine different aspects of the evidence in late Neolithic Orkney. This is not a total or complete picture but represents the fragmentary nature of our knowledge and in this respect is little more than a contribution towards a broader project of understanding. The final chapter attempts a more traditional approach in providing an alternative view of social evolution throughout the late Neolithic period.

The notable absentee in this thesis is the almost obligatory chapter on theory. It has always been my intention to provide a prehistory which is accessible and readable. To achieve this goal I feel the `theory' must to some degree be implicit in the text. It should be clear to the reader where my sympathies lie and, when required, theoretical discussion is included in the appropriate section. The most important aspect of archaeological theory lies in the realm of self criticism and awareness that an informed archaeology should possess. For me, it is the problematic of interpretation which is so fascinating; the dialectical relationship between myself and the materiality of another culture. Like Tilley (1989), I see no distinction between different areas of archaeological enquiry whether they involve fieldwork, excavation or analysis. Each is a personal exercise in interpretation and the presence of physical material from another culture prevents the excesses of complete relativism. Should we therefore attempt the construction of a methodology of interpretation? I think not, since it is felt that such an enterprise represents a contradiction of practice. For me research is simply an exploration of the past, I have no clear idea of the limits of understanding and suggest

that research is itself based on pursuing possibilities. I suspect that such limits are self imposed and the moment a line of stones or pot sherd is exposed an interpretive exercise is embarked upon which continues until a supposed limit is reached. In this light such `limits' are arbitrary; a situation discussed by Geertz (1993, 3-32), in terms of a `thickness of description'. This is not to say that objective knowledge is not possible, no-one would dispute the recognition of a series of stone slabs as precisely that, however, it is only when they become a wall or a house that a thickness of description or interpretation occurs. In this respect I leave the reader of this text to decide what is acceptable and what is not.

Through the nature of archaeological evidence, I see the past being presented as a fragmented image. At times one feels close to an ethnographic situation, at other times the people simply disappear from view. While frustrating, it seems important to concentrate on the strengths of the evidence and therefore different aspects of the data are examined in self-contained chapters. The most exciting feature of the evidence for Neolithic Orkney is the presence of standing buildings: houses, burial monuments and henge monuments. As I will repeat throughout this volume, it seems incomprehensible that so little attention has been given to the possibilities of interpretation presented by these standing structures. Where else can people walk into Neolithic houses and move around their internal furniture? Yet, archaeologists continue to `see' the data two dimensionally. Thus, within the discipline there remains a tendency to view cases of exceptional structural preservation, whether in stone or wood, as merely a fortunate elaboration of the evidence; an accident of survival. Whilst this may be true, it also opens a new dimension, so to speak, of archaeological enquiry; the analysis of socially constructed space. Perhaps one of the main factors behind the past reluctance to enter this area of research lies in the subjective nature of architectural analysis, which necessarily focuses attention on the social arena. No longer is architectural variation seen merely as the subject of typological sequences, nor as a practical response to the physical environment, even in the extreme conditions of Orkney. Instead, for any meaningful discussion of architectural form, cosmology, classification and social practices must occupy a central position (cf. Guidoni 1979). Of course, such an undertaking is problematic since we are discussing the symbolic and practical qualities

embodied in Neolithic architecture. Hence, we have to direct our subjective understandings to those readings of spatial representation induced by human agency in the past.

In this respect, it is an examination of Neolithic architecture which predominates in this study with particular attention being given to ideas of cosmology, classification and order. Even when architecture is not the prime concern (chapter 8), the theme of classification and order is continued in the material analysis. Much of the analysis is based on my experience of Neolithic spatial representations, and the impressions gained from that encounter. While this is highly subjective, I hope to show that through my understanding of the principles which were employed in the creation of this architecture, much light is shed on many other aspects of Neolithic life. If nothing more, it is hoped that this study will go some way to revealing the vast potential which has remained unacknowledged by archaeologists (see however Hodder 1982), studying the Orcadian Neolithic period.

This study represents a period of research in which I have come into close contact with another culture, at times both alien and familiar. This enterprise has been extremely exciting as I never expected to gain so close an encounter with a past society. This contact has operated at a number of levels, for instance, from a physical confrontation with archaeological material through the discovery and excavation of Barnhouse, to the act of crawling through the passages and houses of Skara Brae. At each point, a new perspective or insight is gained. However, regardless of the familiarity of the acquaintance, the lure and excitement of the past is still overwhelming.

I should state that parts of this thesis have already been published in various forms. Chapter 4 appears in an earlier form in a volume dedicated to Audrey Henshall entitled *Vessels for the Ancestors* (Richards 1992). Parts of chapters 5 and 8 were included in a general article in *The archaeology of context in the Neolithic and Bronze Age: Recent trends* (Richards 1988). The section on the architecture of the late Neolithic house in chapter 6 was a contribution to the volume *The Social Archaeology of Houses* (Richards 1990). Finally, part of the discussion of Skara Brae in chapter 10 was published in *Scottish Archaeology: New perspectives* (Richards 1991).

Chapter 2

The Childean Legacy

Introduction

It is an obvious truism to claim that our perceptions of Neolithic Orkney are coloured by the ideas of those prehistorians whom have come before. However, an assessment of the origins of our ideas is often neglected and the assumptions which form the basis of these views are frequently accepted without any critical evaluation. Our interpretations are not formed in a vacuum but are produced through knowledge. Such knowledge is created by reference to the past, that is, through our personal experiences of the world. Within the context of this volume we may venture the question, from where are the accepted and traditional ideas of the Neolithic period in Orkney derived and who has been most influential in their construction? I think that the person who has exerted the greatest influence over the way scholars have viewed Orcadian prehistory is Vere Gordon Childe.

Childe operated at both a practical and intellectual level and consequently his beliefs and ideas communicated through the medium of archaeology had a broader appeal and circulation. Moving to the level of practical archaeology, in Orkney the inter-war years saw a major burst of archaeological activity which included fieldwork and excavation. This was mainly attributable to the collaboration of Walter Grant, the whisky magnate of `Grants Whisky' with V.G. Childe and Graham Callander. It was,

however, Childe's interpretations of archaeological data coupled with his political beliefs which gave rise to an authoritative account of the Neolithic cultures of Orkney.

In chapter 10, this legacy is identified clearly in the recent discussions and interpretations of the settlement at Skara Brae. Moreover, the egalitarianism of Renfrew's early Neolithic Orkney concords with Childe's equalitarian society discussed in the Rhind lectures (Childe 1946). Indeed, Renfrew (1979, 216) draws on Childe's paper of 1942 to argue the case for territoriality on the island of Rousay.

I would argue that to fully understand many of the implicit assumptions which underpin much current work it is necessary to trace the development of Childe's ideas in the context of Neolithic Orkney. This has the dual purpose of exposing both the origins of particular ideas which are prominent in the archaeological literature and revealing the flaws in the framework adhered to by Childe. That we are not objective independent observers is all to clearly revealed in the development of Childe's views. Nevertheless, the impact of these ideas on Orcadian prehistory is immense. Furthermore, these ideas must be viewed within their historical context, only then can we assess the legacy of V.G. Childe.

Childe in Orkney

In 1927 Vere Gordon Childe became the first Abercromby professor of Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh, a position he was to hold for almost twenty years. In accepting this post he assumed an obligation to undertake fieldwork and excavation on a regular basis, a duty which it appears he often disliked and occasionally loathed (cf. Green 1981, 64). Although he possessed a broader European awareness, certain aspects of Scottish prehistory did draw his attention. For instance, the problem of the vitrification of Iron Age hillforts in southern Scotland remained a consistent topic of interest (e.g. Childe 1935b). Likewise, digging in the Northern Isles seems to have appealed to him and there can be little doubt that over the years he found the Orkney excursions most enjoyable. In turn many Orcadians, still alive today, remember him with affection and great respect. Certainly, of all his forays into field archaeology, it is the work in Orkney which is still best remembered, particularly

the earlier excavations at Skara Brae.

In tracing Childe's Orcadian work we are able to critically assess the many facets of his remarkable abilities as a prehistorian. Interestingly, this field of enquiry offers specific examples of his view and treatment of the data ranging from intimate contact with archaeological material and its recovery from the ground through to the ideas embodied within its classification and interpretation. Hence, it provides insight into his methodology in action, embracing chronological, cultural and evolutionary perspectives.

Figure 2:1. Photograph of Childe at Skara Brae.

In 1927, the Ministry of Works began operations at Skara Brae, a conglomerate of small, circular, stone-built houses nestling in the sand dunes at the Bay of Skaill, Mainland, Orkney. This work was primarily to conserve the ancient monument involving the construction of a sea wall to protect it from north-westerly storms. It soon became clear, however, that someone possessing archaeological abilities was required to oversee the project. Thus, the following year, Childe was approached and consequently agreed to assume this role. The 1928 season of excavations marked the

first of a remarkable three year period of investigations (Fig 2:1).

Unfortunately, the methods of excavation were of a low standard and Childe frequently refers to the `clearing out' of particular structures and passageways. It should not be forgotten, however, that complete excavation was continually hampered by the aims of the work, primarily the conservation of the monument for public display. This undoubtedly restricted Childe's enquiries (Clarke 1976, 233). Nevertheless, the following three years saw a large proportion of the upper deposits excavated revealing an amazing prehistoric settlement complex with not only the house walls surviving to a height of over two metres but also, the internal furniture fossilized in stone.

In the introduction to the excavation report, published promptly in 1931, Childe, fully acknowledged its importance, he said:

> "Of prehistoric man's habitations only exiguous and insignificant traces usually survive north of the Alps. The dwellings of his dead are indeed often impressive and always instructive; circles of stone provoke speculations of his religious ideas; and elaborate defensive works remind us forcibly of the constant perils of that age and its continuous feuds. But of everyday dwelling-places the foundations alone have come down to us, and these are generally poorly furnished. Owing mainly to this defect in the archaeological record a reconstruction of commonplace scenes of prehistoric life is for the most part a work of pure imagination assisted by none too reliable analogies from among modern barbarians or savages. Skara Brae in Orkney fills a unique role in supplementing this defect. Here a gigantic sand dune has embalmed a whole complex of huts and lanes, preserving even their walls to a height of eight or nine feet; lack of timber had obliged their builders to translate into stone, and thus perpetuate, articles of furniture usually constructed of perishable wood; finally the inhabitants, deserting the dwellings in precipitate haste, have left them exactly as they were during their occupation with implements, ornaments and vessels all in place" (1931, 1).

Besides expounding the unique nature of the settlement it is the latter observations which are of significance. Particularly, the idea of the desertion of Skara Brae by the occupants in great haste; an assumption which was totally derived from his initial experiences of the site in 1928. During the first season of excavation Childe uncovered and excavated his first intact house, Hut 7 (Fig 2:2), described as "the most perfect dwelling in the whole village" (1931, 37). On reaching the floor levels of this building it was found to have what appeared to be all of its contents still in position, thus creating a `Marie Celeste' appearance. Childe observes that "hut 7 was discovered

exactly as it had been left when its occupants beat a hasty retreat" (ibid, 40). This single observation from the first house encountered, combined with the presence of an overlying layer of sterile sand, gave Childe the everlasting impression that he was dealing with a prehistoric `Pompeii'. Moreover, this assumption was to have a profound effect on the interpretation of the site as a whole and of its original inhabitants.

Figure 2:2. Hut 7 at Skara Brae.

In fact, Hut 7 is quite unlike the other dwellings (see chapter 10). For instance, it is approached through a long narrow passage in which the path of movement is continually demarcated by threshold slabs in conjunction with areas of incised decoration. Hence, it is clearly divided from the other houses which are reached from a wider main passage running straight through the settlement. Internally, Hut 7 is the only house to contain human burials in the form of two older females interred in a cist situated beneath the right hand bed. This area of the interior is also heavily adorned with incised geometric designs. Furthermore, the door bar is controlled from the

outside, as opposed to the other houses which all have internal control over equivalent door bars. Thus Hut 7 could only be sealed or locked from the outside, keeping someone or something shut in. Taken together all the evidence points to this structure being of a special nature, perhaps of ritual significance, and yet for Childe it was a typical dwelling representative of the whole settlement.

The impression of sudden abandonment prompted Childe to seek a single explanation. In the final report he asked:

> "what was this catastrophe? Its effect was to leave the huts exposed to the infiltration of sand, but otherwise the fixtures of the interior were undisturbed. There is no trace of hostile violence. The huts had not been pillaged nor the valuables hidden in them carried off... It is, therefore, more reasonable to think of a natural agency, namely a hurricane from the northwest, perhaps coinciding with a high tide... At the same time the sand dunes might be set in motion, and people, so poorly equipped as our villagers, could only find refuge from this foe on the higher ground" (Childe 1931, 64).

In the official guide book written by Childe in 1933, a more vivid account was provided:

> "It (Skara Brae) was eventually overwhelmed by a sudden catastrophe. The inhabitants of the huts were forced to flee from their homes, abandoning in the store rooms and on the floor many treasured possessions, fashioned with great labour and ingenuity. One woman in her haste to squeeze through the narrow door of her home (No 7) broke her necklace and left a stream of beads behind as she scampered up the passage" (Childe 1933,).

The portrayal of such a precise picture of the final abandonment of Skara Brae effectively dictated the interpretation of the material recovered from within all the houses and consequently of the people themselves. Superficially, the overall interpretation was supported by the artefacts, upon which, of course, it was based. However, not all the evidence was consistent with such an interpretation for the destruction and abandonment of Skara Brae; this became increasingly difficult to accommodate within such a scheme. For Hut 7, which as we have seen contains many elements which make it atypical, Childe stated:

> "the observations made during its excavation accordingly afford a graphic and reliable picture of a "stone age" interior. The first impression produced was one of indescribable filth and disorder. Scraps of bone and shells were lying scattered promiscuously all over the floor, sometimes masked by broken slates laid down like

> stepping stones over the morass. Even the beds were no cleaner; the complete skull of a calf lay in the left hand bed and the green matter usually associated with drains was observed on its floor. The disposition of actual relics was less haphazard." (Childe 1931, 40).

This arrangement, particularly the calf skull, does not appear compatible with the sudden abandonment thesis which depends upon the house being a fossilized record of daily activity. Indeed in maintaining this view Childe was forced into making deprecatory judgements on their living standards and thus their social condition. This view was clearly expressed in the interpretation that:

> "the inhabitants seem to have taken bones to bed with them to gnaw for supper, and the broken remains of such repasts and even a greenish substance, believed to be excreta, are found on the beds' floors" (Childe 1931, 15).

Such degradation becomes even more problematic when Childe examined the role of the small side cells, built into the house walls. He said:

> "Such an arrangement suggests that the cells in question were used as privies by the families immured in the huts, a sign of hygienic progress and modesty not easily reconcilable with the filth surrounding the huts and covering their floors" (Childe 1931, 18).

The view of Hut 7 as a typical dwelling also effectively eliminated any suggestion of functional variation between houses. The discovery of a potential `workshop', Hut 8, in 1929 (Fig 2:3), did little to alter the picture and specialisation was firmly rejected in favour of communality. This line of reasoning accounts for the later insistence upon uniformity since although there were differences in house size there was, as Childe remarked:

> "no difference in plans or the kind of furniture. In other words, there are no positive indications of differences in rank, nothing like a chiefs' palace. The organisation of co-operative activity by a leader seems unlikely; the communities appear equalitarian" (Childe 1946, 32).

Thus, the inhabitants of Skara Brae conformed to Childe's view of Stone age society being essentially self sufficient and lacking any social organisation other than kinship ties.

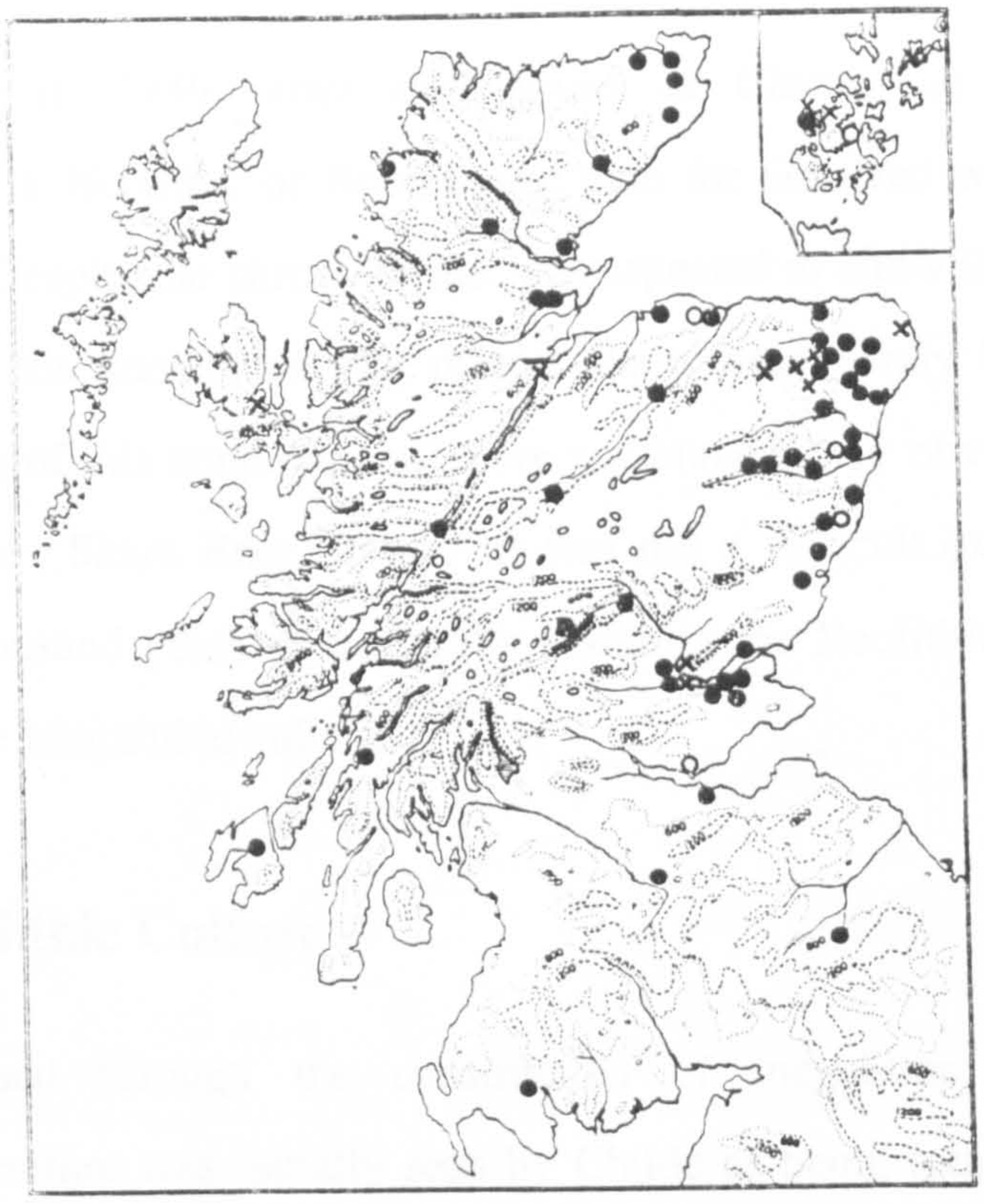
Figure 2:3. Hut 8 at Skara Brae.

An absolute date for Skara Brae was extremely difficult to establish with the methods at Childe's disposal. A lengthy discussion of chronology in the final report did little to resolve the situation. He noted:

> "the culture thus revealed, whatever its absolute date, is extremely archaic, indeed literally a Neolithic culture. And so Skara Brae unfolds a picture of Stone Age life in the British Isles that can be matched nowhere else"(1931, 1).

Nevertheless, a Pictish date in the early centuries A.D. was finally postulated on the basis of a correlation in the distribution of stone balls and Pictish symbol stones (Fig 2:4). This wayward chronology, creating a "glaring shortcoming" in the words of Trigger (1980, 80), may have been influenced by Childe's own experiences of a highly parochial and marginal Scotland. Certainly the attribution of a Pictish date suggests an archaic isolated survival of an inward looking culture (Childe 1931, 155). A striking prejudice of the Skara Brae culture as an evolutionary throw-back, in teleological terms, is revealed in a discussion of the inferiority of sixth century A.D. building modifications:

> "such unintelligent reconstructions in masonry that often recalls Skara Brae .. rather than the true castles, look like the work of barbarian descendants of "Bronze Age" stocks." (Childe 1935, 204).



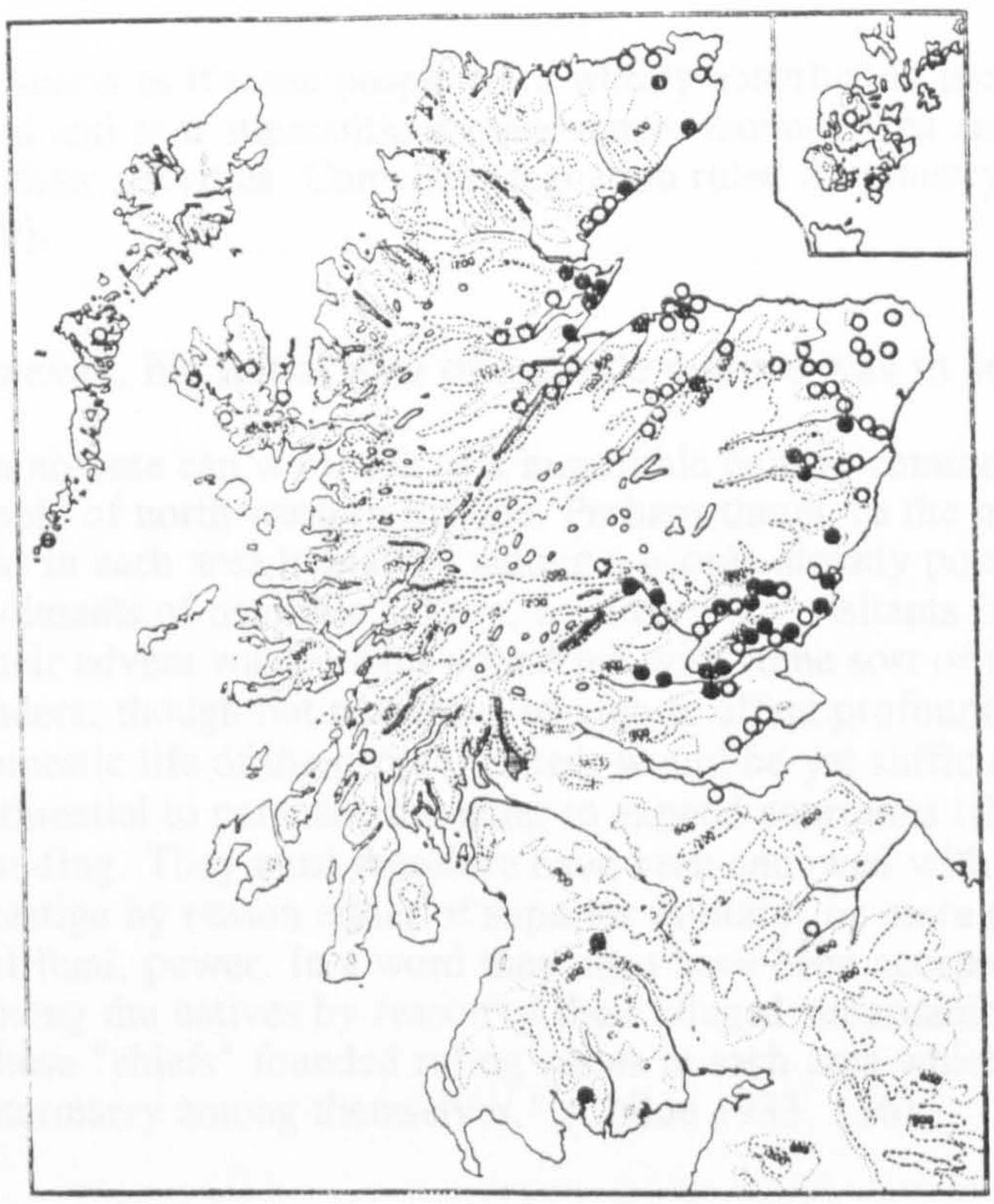


Figure 2:4. The distribution of carved stone balls (top) and Pictish symbol stones (bottom), in Scotland (after Childe 1931).

However in 1936, after excavations at Clacton in Essex, Stuart Piggott demonstrated a Neolithic or Bronze Age date for Grooved ware pottery, as found at Skara Brae. Despite the chronological lag suspected to allow for pottery styles to move northwards, this knowledge still placed Skara Brae firmly back in prehistory. The repercussions of this temporal shift were not immediately obvious. As insularity was a feature of the `Skara Brae Culture' it was not a difficult exercise to merely push it back two thousand years to eventually reside in the Neolithic period, sitting uneasily alongside the Megalithic culture.

The Megalithic Culture

Recognised through the construction of megalithic chambered tombs, the Megalithic culture was initially seen by Childe as being totally obsessed by death He stated that:

> "it seems as if these people were wholly absorbed in the cult of the dead and as if superstitious observances monopolised and paralysed all their activities. Complete stagnation ruled in industry." (1926, 210).

Later, however, his initial idea of a single culture was in some doubt; he said:

> "in no case can we speak of a megalithic culture common to the whole of north-western Europe. Perhaps therefore the megalithic idea was in each area implanted among a people already possessed of the rudiments of neolithic culture, by a very few visitants from overseas. Their advent was perhaps connected with some sort of trade, but the traders, though not numerous enough to affect profoundly the domestic life of the people visited, would be yet sufficiently influential to persuade the latter to expend enormous labour on tomb building. They must therefore have been endowed with peculiar prestige by reason either of superior military, or more probably spiritual, power. In a word they must have been accepted as chiefs among the natives by reason of their alleged supernatural gifts... These "chiefs" founded ruling castes in each area which might intermarry among themselves." (Childe 1933, 136).

In the same paper an alternative cultural diffusionist perspective was proposed in which entire groups of colonists spread along the Atlantic seaboard into France, Ireland, and Scotland (ibid, 137). The presence of the Megalithic culture in one form or another was strongly attested in Orkney where a large number of megalithic tombs

Figure 2:5. Excavations at Rinyo.

were recognised, particularly on the island of Rousay.

Over the winter of 1937-8 a second settlement of similar nature to Skara Brae was discovered by James Yorston and Walter Grant at Rinyo, Rousay. Childe and Grant began excavations in the summer of 1938 and soon discovered the remains of identically shaped houses to those at Skara Brae, and characteristic grooved ware pottery. This evidence established beyond doubt the presence of the `Skara Brae culture'. The importance of Rinyo to British prehistory was considered by Childe to be nothing less than revolutionary, being comparable to the central European Neolithic site of Koln-Lindenthal. Operations at Rinyo were halted after a single season by the outbreak of the second world war. The results of the excavation were, nevertheless, promptly published in 1939. In the report the authors remark on the total absence of artefacts normally associated with the `Megalithic culture', thus sustaining the implicit belief in discrete cultural identities. Nevertheless, the noted location of several megalithic chambered tombs in close proximity to Rinyo was judged curious.

Childe gave the Rhind lectures to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1944, subsequently published under the title of `*Scotland before the Scots*' (1946). Even the title can be seen as containing an element of antagonism and as Trigger (1980, 152) notes, this was an extremely controversial series of lectures, perhaps intended to shock, but more importantly seen as an expression of Childe's evolutionary ideas within an overtly Marxist framework. Of the six identified stages of cultural evolution, the Neolithic period (phase two), was discussed mainly using the Orcadian evidence. Although admitting temporal uncertainty, Childe outlined and contrasted the Skara Brae culture with the Megalithic culture. Regardless of the low opinion he held of the "stagnant" qualities of the Megalithic culture (Childe 1926, 210), it still compared favourably when set against the archaic Skara Brae culture. He noted that:

> "the Megalith builders, judging by the tools surviving and their products, were no better equipped technologically than the inhabitants of Skara Brae and Rinyo. But their economy appears more progressive" (Childe 1946, 35).

Within the confines of its evolutionary position, the Skara Brae culture was portrayed as self sufficient and ingenious in its exploitation of its immediate environment. However cultural impoverishment was always an element in the equation. For instance, in *Progress and Archaeology*, published the same year as the Rhind lectures, Childe qualified his remarks on self sufficiency and ingenuity by stating:

> "Of course this attractive picture has another side. The floor of one house, found exactly as it had been left by it occupants on their last precipitate exit, was littered all over with rubbish, gnawed bones, and broken shells; remnants of choice joints were found even in its beds. The atmosphere of stench and squalor in which the Neolithic Orcadians habitually lived could be disgustingly revived owing to exceptionally favourable circumstances" (Childe 1944, 46).

Childe further stated in the Rhind lectures that there was little evidence at Skara Brae for a division of labour between the households. Indeed, much effort was expended in arguing that Hut 8 was more likely to be a communal workshop than the dwelling of an artisan family. Similarly, the idea of egalitarianism was furthered by recourse to the uniformity of house architecture and its supposed function. With regard to social relations, the inhabitants were deemed to be a clan and:

> "consequently within the whole group tasks were apportioned and their performance ensured by the same unformulated rules and sanctions as hold within a modern family"(Childe 1946, 33).

These assumptions led directly to the recognition of a state of `primitive communism' since there appeared to be no ruling or exploited classes and there was no private property apart from personal items. He continued:

> "Of the ideological lubricants that kept this social mechanism running smoothly there is curiously little evidence" (Childe 1946, 33).

The uniformity attributed to Hut 7 allowed Childe to make his most interesting comment that:

> "the absence of any room or structure suggestive of a shrine or temple may be significant. Magic powers and ghosts would have been recognised, but gods no more than chiefs" (Childe 1946, 33).

By invoking primitive communism Childe effectively removed any internal mechanism for change, dooming the insular, archaic, Skara Brae culture to an unchanging, self-perpetuating future. In these ideas we are seeing not only the hand of Marx, but also the corollary of Childe's initial impressions of Skara Brae. Alternatively, the Megalithic culture, whilst described in similar terms with the chambered tomb being a symbol of clan unity, is oddly held as being a more dynamic entity. Paradoxically, it was seen to contain the potential for change, though the means by which such transformation would occur is never clearly expressed.

Rinyo and Quoyness: the breakdown of cultures.

Childe and Grant returned to Rinyo in the summer of 1946. The area of excavation was expanded and more houses were located (Fig 2:5). Beneath the floor of house G, in a build up of midden deposits, the Grooved ware ceramics of the Skara Brae culture were found in association with the Unstan ware ceramics of the Megalithic culture (1947, 36-7). In *Scotland before the Scots* Childe had once again clearly defined the idea of archaeological cultures, stating that:

> "Prehistorians can distinguish two or more assemblages of relics and monuments that have divergent distributions in space but belong to

> the same stage or period. Technically, such contemporary or systadial assemblages are termed cultures. Prehistorians assume that each culture represents a distinct people or society; the peculiarities of its domestic architecture, burial ritual, ceramic decoration or fashions of ornament reflect the divergencies of the traditions that constitute the spiritual unity of each group" (Childe 1946, 2).

Given this definition it is surprising that Childe should make no comment on the association observed at Rinyo, and the repercussions it had for his earlier ideas.

The rather disturbing results obtained at Rinyo were to be emphatically reproduced in 1951 when Childe, now director of the Institute of Archaeology, London, undertook further excavations at the megalithic tomb of Quoyness, Sanday. This monument sits overlooking a small bay on the south coast of the island. The excavations, or rather re-excavations, were in advance of conservation work to be undertaken by the Ministry of Works. Childe, supervised the `cleaning out' of the chamber and passage within the tomb, and investigated a surrounding open platform. Both areas, inside and out, produced Grooved ware and other artefacts belonging to the Skara Brae culture, together with a few items of Megalithic character. In the report he freely acknowledged that:

> "while pottery connects our monument firmly with the Rinyo (Skara Brae) - Neolithic C culture, the discs, as much as its architecture, connect the tomb no less firmly with the "Megalithic culture" of Atlantic Europe." (Childe 1952, 136).

The location and presence of Grooved ware within a Megalithic tomb must have severely shaken Childe's confidence in the cultural definition he had consistently placed on associated material `culture'.

The inevitable conclusion in the Quoyness report is no less extraordinary, when he remarked:

> "Incidentally we now thus obtain some hint of how the inhabitants of Skara Brae and Rinyo disposed of their dead kinsman or chiefs" (ibid, 137).

In this sentence we see far more than a reversal of previous statements, but an admission that the two cultural groups in Orkney were one and the same.

In view of the unexpected results from the excavations at Rinyo and Quoyness in the late forties and early fifties, we gain an insight into McNairn's observation that at

precisely this time, Childe began to display a different attitude towards the definition of culture (1980, 59). In her words, he began to question the usefulness of the term in describing an assemblage of associated traits. This dissatisfaction is clearly discernible in 1949 when in the Hobhouse memorial lecture, Childe stated:

> "in any given archaeological period we find, often juxtaposed in a small area, different assemblages of tools, weapons, ornaments ... Such recurrent assemblages we term - rather unhappily - cultures"(Childe 1949, 3-4).

McNairn (1980, 59) notes, that although he made no explicit statements of the reasons for his change of mind they may be easily inferred. These are suggested to be the wider adoption and critical appraisal of the concept of culture in the other social sciences, particularly American anthropology. Here, we may link this changing attitude towards the usefulness of cultural definition to his own observations in the field. In practice, the integrity of discrete assemblages of archaeological material, which he had consistently interpreted as representing distinct cultural groups, was lost. His ideas were undermined, so to speak, before his very eyes.

Significantly in 1954 Childe returned to Orkney to supervise excavations at the megalithic chambered tomb of Maeshowe (Fig 2:6). Renowned as one of the finest chambered tombs in Western Europe, it is clear that Childe felt some pride in being invited to undertake this work; "the author had the honour of supervising operations [at Maeshowe] by the Ministry of Works" (Childe 1956, 155).

This makes all the more curious, and perhaps revealing, the omission in the published report of the excavations at Maeshowe of any cultural identification or indeed of any discussion whatsoever. To excavate such an important monument and to make no comment on the cultural context is totally inconsistent with Childe's other Orcadian excavations. This may be interpreted as further indication of an increasing hesitancy, on his part, to forward cultural explanations.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at Childe's fieldwork in Orkney and his interpretation of Skara Brae and the Orcadian Neolithic. Two elements dominate this

Figure 2:6. Childe supervising excavations at Maeshowe.

work, first, a social interpretation of the data which is inevitably linked strongly to his political beliefs; hence we see the Neolithic portrayed as egalitarian (or equalitarian). Second, a cultural interpretation of the data which although being linked to his political ideas, has a strong archaeological emphasis in its composition; it is primarily concerned at the material level with the identification, classification, and dating of material assemblages; material cultures.

At another level an attempt has been made in this chapter to demonstrate that Childe's field archaeology should not be marginalised or ignored, as some researchers have tended to do. Indeed, it is suggested that the work in the Orkney Isles greatly influenced his ideas of cultural and social evolution. If teleology is recognisable in his evolutionary schemes, some aspects at least can confidently be attributed to his own personal experiences in the field. Furthermore, this study provides an interesting example of the way initial experiences and expectations can heavily influence interpretation and understanding. From the initial discovery of Hut 7 at Skara Brae in 1928, to the Rhind lectures in 1944, it is possible to trace his unwavering misconception of the social organisation and culture of the inhabitants of Skara Brae and Rinyo. Significantly, this has nothing to do with Marxist theory, although it was translated into those terms through a basic misunderstanding of the archaeological material. Neither was this necessarily a product of his being a bad excavator, as several commentators have suggested. Contemporary archaeology has finally reached a point where it can begin to accept that excavation is an act of interpretation and is therefore theoretical in nature. The objectivity claimed by Childe's greatest critics proves to be as false a god as they considered Marxism was to him.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this investigation is the way in which the archaeological material itself, under Childe's criteria, challenged his cultural schemes for Neolithic Orkney. However, his redemption comes in the flexibility of thinking which allowed the remarkable statement in the Quoyness excavation report and his revision of the concept of archaeological cultures. Moreover, the recent discovery of notebooks detailing the majority of his Scottish excavations, reveal his excavations not to be the poor affairs which others have hinted.

Thus, we have followed a sequence of events spanning 25 years of Childe's

archaeological enquiries. From his initial encounter with the material remains in Hut 7 at Skara Brae, coupled with the impressions they conveyed, through to the cultural interpretations and their Marxist correlates, we have seen the power and conviction of his ideas and assumptions. Had he excavated a different house during his first season, things would perhaps have been different. The eventual collapse of his cultural definitions was, ironically, by his own hand, reinforced by his own strict criteria of cultural definition.

However, the cultural problems of Neolithic Orkney with which Childe wrestled remain unresolved, since the material assemblages from recently discovered settlements such as Barnhouse (Richards 1990), conform to the discrete situation of Grooved ware. Unbeknown to Childe, megalithic tombs can now be seen to fall into two categories of architecture; one, including Quoyness megalithic tomb, was undoubtedly constructed and used by the same people who inhabited Skara Brae and Rinyo; the `Skara Brae culture'. The second remains distinct in terms of house and tomb architecture and material culture. The latter was his `Megalithic culture'. The Childean legacy is now revealed in the way we view Neolithic Orkney and the origin of concepts and problems regarding social organisation and cultural definition is clearly visible.

Chapter 3

Neolithic Landscapes in Orkney

Introduction

An objective of this study is the reconstruction of particular contexts of Neolithic life. These may range from the landscape to the house or even a place where people met and conversed. Of course, there are numerous activities and events in which people are engaged which do not directly involve the use of materials, let alone their discard or deposition. This constitutes a particular dilemma for archaeologists since the corollary is that the quantity of material remains cannot be used as an index for determining the levels of social significance for any given place or activity. An archaeologically constructed image is therefore a partial view of human agency in the Neolithic period of Orkney, However, we know people moved across landscapes, sometimes physically manipulating their appearance and definition through enclosure and monumentality (see chapter 11), embracing natural features within conceptual frameworks of order. Hence, archaeological interpretation should not be solely governed by and restricted to, the presence of material deposition, but be informed by a level of interpretation which incorporates contexts of Neolithic life where there are material traces and where there are not.

This is not to call for or suggest an uninformed or uncritical archaeology. For instance, it was only a mere fifteen years ago that Mackie (1977) was able to suggest

that the form of settlement typified by Skara Brae, Mainland, and Rinyo, Rousay, represented special settlements of `astronomer priests' which were restricted to a density of one per island. In all fairness, the archaeological evidence available at that time did provide such a picture. However, a critical evaluation of site discovery reveals that the Neolithic settlements of Knap of Howar, Skara Brae, Links of Noltland, Bay of Stove and Pool were all revealed as a consequence of natural agencies. Only Rinyo was discovered through any form of archaeological work resembling fieldsurvey (Fig 3:1).

Beyond basic site recognition, all archaeological excavation in Orkney has tended to be on prominent upstanding sites, mainly chambered tombs. This line of research tends to maintain an archaeological record which is completely biased towards accidental survival and discovery with no obvious strategy for providing a more balanced image of the Neolithic landscape.

In order to combat this deficiency it requires an acknowledgement that the range of Neolithic activities occurring within an organised and structured landscape will vary considerably in content. Some may have a strong material component, others none at all. The type of material culture being used within particular contexts may also differ, e.g. flint, wood, leather, etc. Finally, the mode of deposition will alter according to circumstance, for instance, the contrast between objects which are traditionally curated and those which are broken and discarded at a single place.

Linked to this question of archaeological visibility is the further problem of post depositional disturbance. We have already noted the role natural agencies had on preserving and revealing Skara Brae and Links of Noltland, however, generally such forces serve to totally destroy archaeological deposits. The main source of such destruction in Orkney is coastal erosion. Both the above sites together with Knap of Howar, an early Neolithic settlement on Papa Westray, and Pool, Sanday, have been excavated because of the imminent danger of destruction through coastal erosion. Recently, another site, Bay of Stove, Sanday, has been identified as a late Neolithic settlement suffering serious damage from the sea. As a consequence of this examination a further large late Neolithic settlement was accidentally identified, approximately 90 metres to the east (Bond *et al* forthcoming).

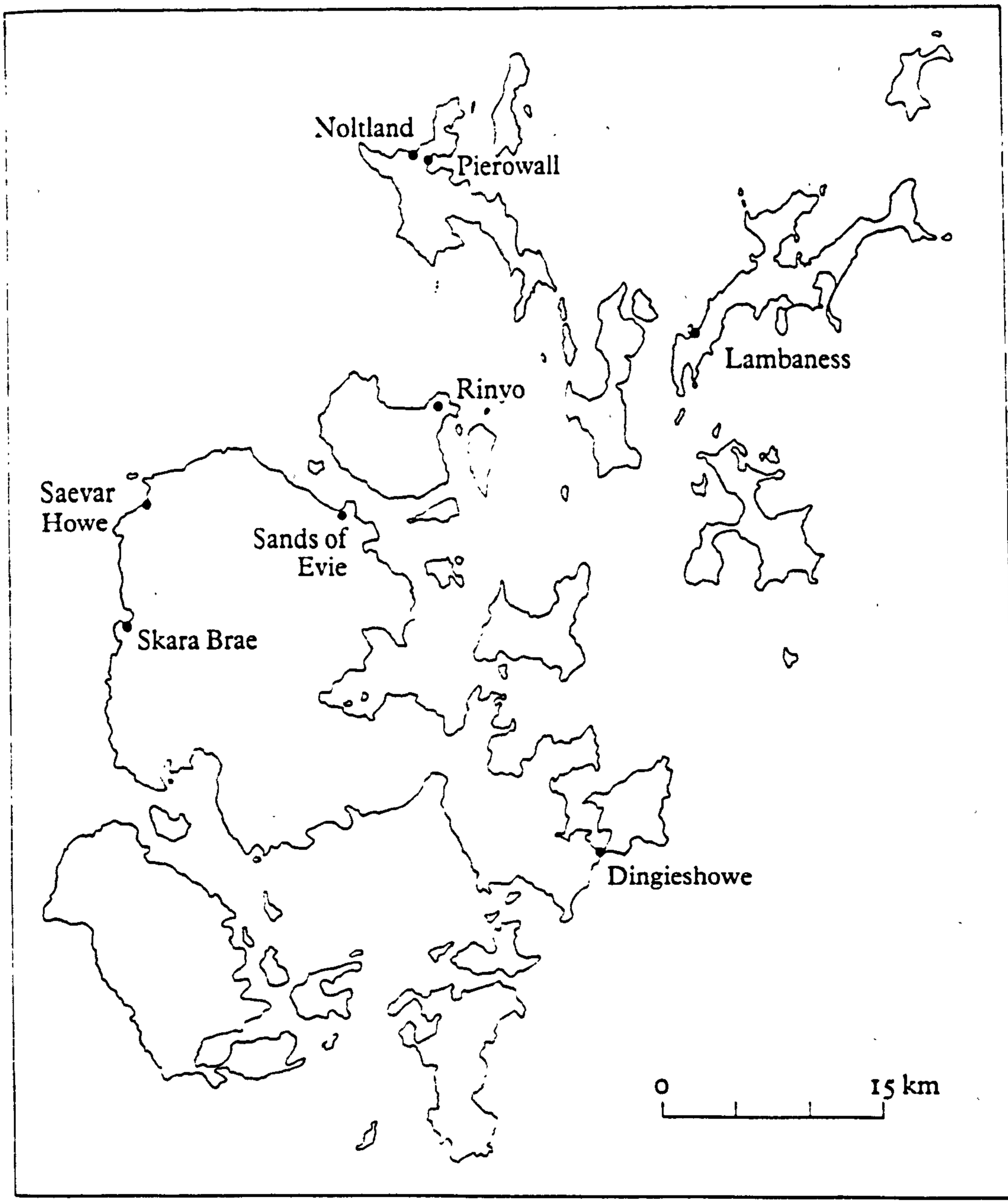


Figure 3:1. Map of Orkney showing previously known late Neolithic settlements (after Clarke & Sharples 1985).

A further factor to consider is the effect of humans in altering the landscape and destroying or removing what was there before. Thousands of years of construction and reconstruction of houses and shifts in settlement pattern have, through a combination of stone robbing and purposeful destruction, obscured traces of Neolithic habitation. A long history of agricultural practices has perhaps constituted the most effective

medium of archaeological destruction. Strategies of land clearance and a history of cultivation combine to level and slowly erode archaeological structures and deposits. Unfortunately this process of destruction is accelerating at a frightening pace and with the introduction of more powerful machinery and intensive farming methods, sites which have incurred a slow rate of truncation now face imminent destruction.

It is clear that for a variety of reasons, including its own constitution, the material record can only ever be a partial record of Neolithic life. With this realisation comes the responsibility of gathering a systematically derived database from which broader statements can be made with some confidence. Through the various factors described above, a sense of urgency should accompany this objective. We will always be operating under a severe handicap because of the nature of archaeological material but it seems ridiculous that we should be further hindered by our own inabilities of data collection.

Landscape is a palimpsest of activities and ideas, however, these constantly change according to the position of the observer; both physically and socially. Often these two elements are inextricably linked. Nevertheless, people tend to perceive the outside world from their place of origin. We can be sure that the same was true in Neolithic Orkney, where like now, perspective is formed with reference to the home, village, or Island. Similarly, a strong component of understanding landscape involves an awareness of others; either where they live or what rights they have over areas of land. An understanding of landscape, therefore, depends on the presence of people, both conceiving of it and/or living within in it. Hence, any archaeological project of landscape must situate people, centrally, in the equation. We must posses knowledge of where people lived and where they performed the tasks of everyday life, since it is this definition which constitutes landscape.

Fieldsurvey

The use of fieldwalking as a method of archaeological survey and data collection has a long and relatively successful pedigree in southern Britain (see Holgate 1988, 71-120). Indeed, it also represented a common pastime in Orkney during the earlier

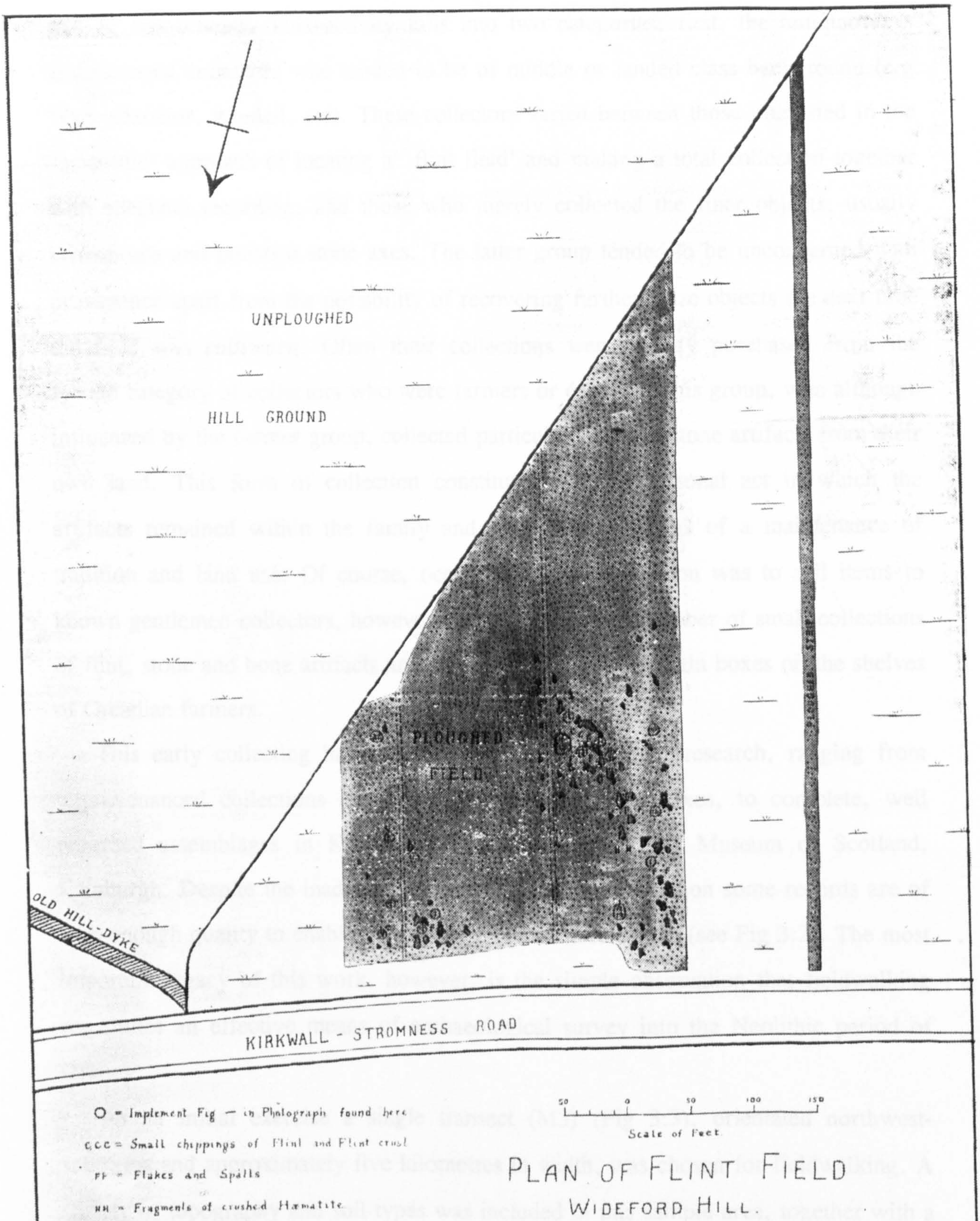


Figure 3:2. Wideford Hill flint `field' (after Rendall 1931).

part of this century. This activity falls into two categories; first, the antiquarian - archaeologist collectors who tended to be of middle or landed class background (e.g Watt, Cursitor, Rendall, etc). These collectors varied between those interested in the `scientific' approach of locating a `flint field' and making a total collection together with adequate recording, and those who merely collected the finer objects, usually arrowheads and polished stone axes. The latter group tended to be unconcerned with provenance apart from the possibility of recovering further prize objects the next time the field was cultivated. Often their collections were mainly purchased from the second category of collectors who were farmers or crofters. This group, who although influenced by the former group, collected particular flint and stone artifacts from their own land. This form of collection constituted a more personal act in which the artifacts remained within the family and were seen in terms of a maintenance of tradition and land use. Of course, occasionally the motivation was to sell items to known gentlemen collectors, however, a remarkably high number of small collections of flint, stone and bone artifacts are still to be found in small tin boxes on the shelves of Orcadian farmers.

This early collecting has left variable data for current research, ranging from unprovenanced collections of flint arrowheads and stone axes, to complete, well recorded assemblages in Kirkwall Museum and the Royal Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. Despite the inadequacies of this history of collection some records are of high enough quality to enable the `flint fields' to be relocated (see Fig 3:2). The most important legacy of this work, however, is the simple observation that fieldwalking constitutes an effective means of archaeological survey into the Neolithic period of Orkney.

As an initial exercise a single transect (M3) (Fig 3:3), orientated northwest-southeast and approximately five kilometres in width, was chosen for fieldwalking. A variety of topography and soil types was included in this sample area, together with a selection of known Neolithic sites. On the western coast is the settlement of Skara Brae and in a central position within the transect lies the stone circles of Stenness and Brodgar, also the more nebulous site of Ring of Bookan. The chambered tombs of Bookan and Unstan are also positioned centrally within the study area (Fig 3:4). The

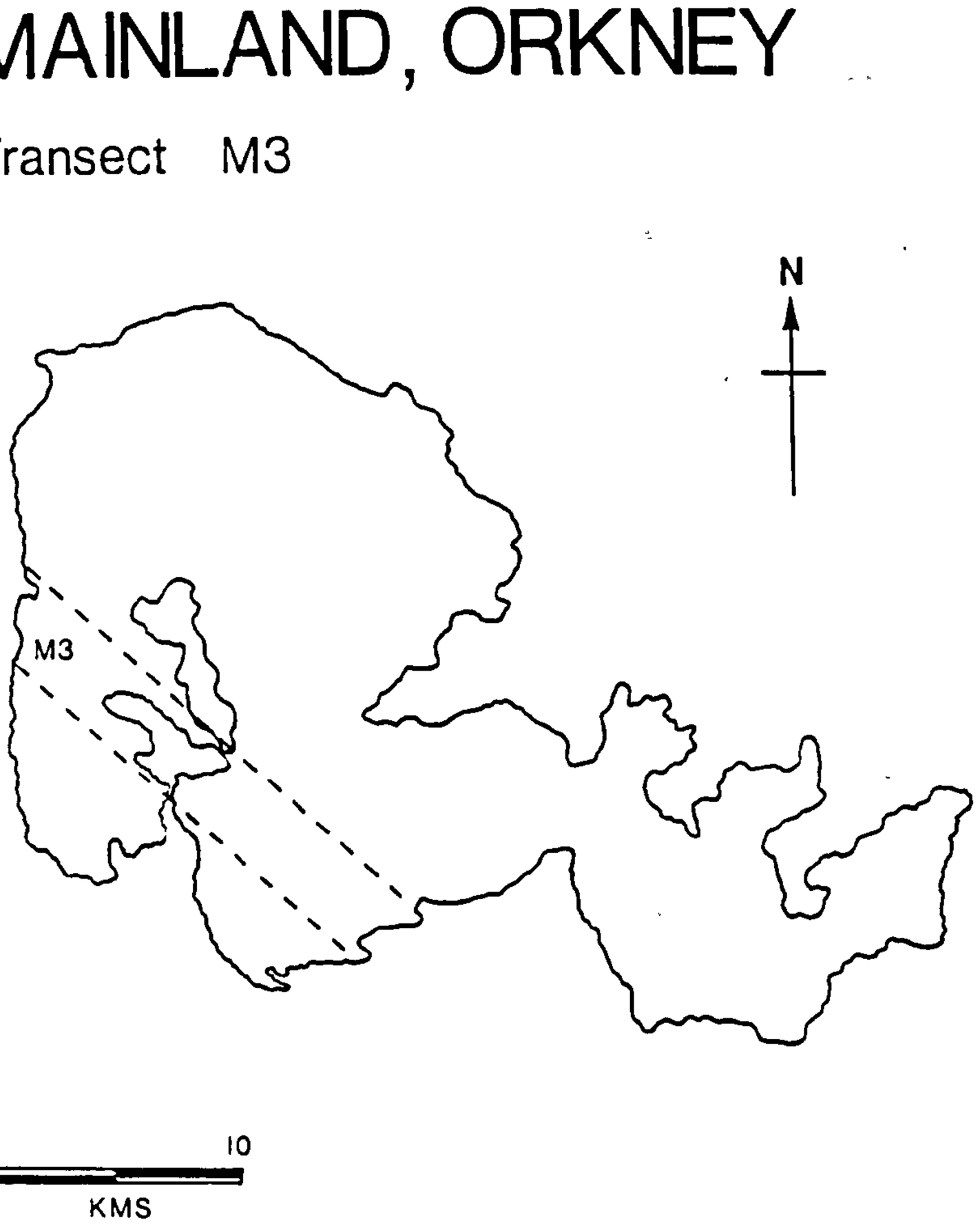


Figure 3:3. Location of Transect M3 on Mainland, Orkney.

overall quantity of land available for examination was, however, restricted through limited areas of arable cultivation. As the emphasis of current Orcadian agricultural production is livestock, the majority of fields are under grass. Nevertheless, in the long term this does not prohibit field survey since in Orkney, pasture tends to be ploughed and re-sown on a ten year cycle, thereby allowing access for fieldwalking.

Methodology

The field methodology of this survey was selected in order to achieve two goals. Primarily, it was deemed necessary to initially balance an adequate overall coverage of fields with a realistic time scale of survey. Second, it was considered important that the method of survey was compatible with other surveys undertaken in different parts of the country. Furthermore, with regard to coverage, it was important to decide a

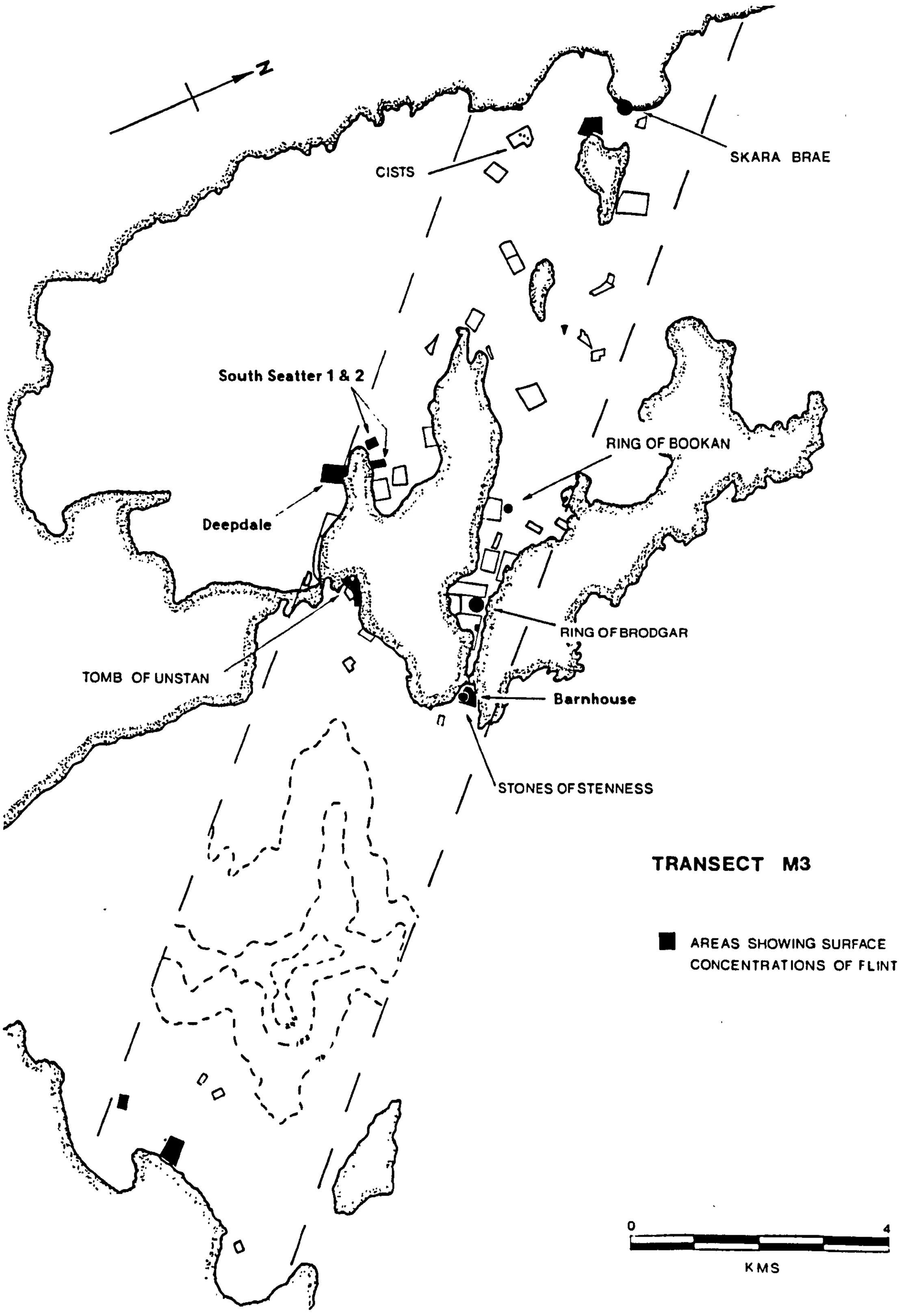


Figure 3:4. Detailed map of Transect M3 showing fields walked.

strategy which allowed different scales of prehistoric settlement and activities to be recognised. In accordance with all these objectives a system of fieldwalking was implemented in which each field examined was divided into parallel runs, 25 metres apart, with each run being broken into 50 metre collection units. In this framework a sample area of almost 10% may be examined in a manner susceptible to the various expected scales of prehistoric material surface scatters.

Once areas had been systematically walked a secondary phase of investigation could be implemented. This entailed complete surface collection of recognised surface scatters on a 5 metre collection grid. Accompanying the surface collection selected geo-physical surveys of magnetic susceptibility, resistivity, and proton magnetometer, as appropriate, could be undertaken on the same grid.

A third phase of investigation in the form of trial excavation was considered important in order to evaluate the results of the earlier surveys. This aspect of the work, while being the most expensive, is of the upmost importance in assessing the current state of preservation of identified sites.

Results

As had been indicated by the `fieldwork' undertaken earlier this century, worked flint and stone implements were present on the surface of some fields under cultivation. A notable fall off in the amount of stray finds handed into the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland clearly coincides with changes in agricultural practices, namely the introduction of tractors, as opposed to a lack of material being brought to the surface.

During the first phase of survey, fields constituting approximately 200 hectares were walked. Surface finds, mainly flint, were detected in fields. Of these, four constituted large discrete scatters and two were small discrete scatters. Each of the larger scatters included surface finds of flint, stone, and burnt bone revealing the presence of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Early Bronze Age settlement and activity areas. Here I will concentrate on the four larger scatters: Barnhouse, South Seatter 1 and 2, and Deepdale, and a smaller example; Barnhouse Odin (Figs 3:4 & 9:27).

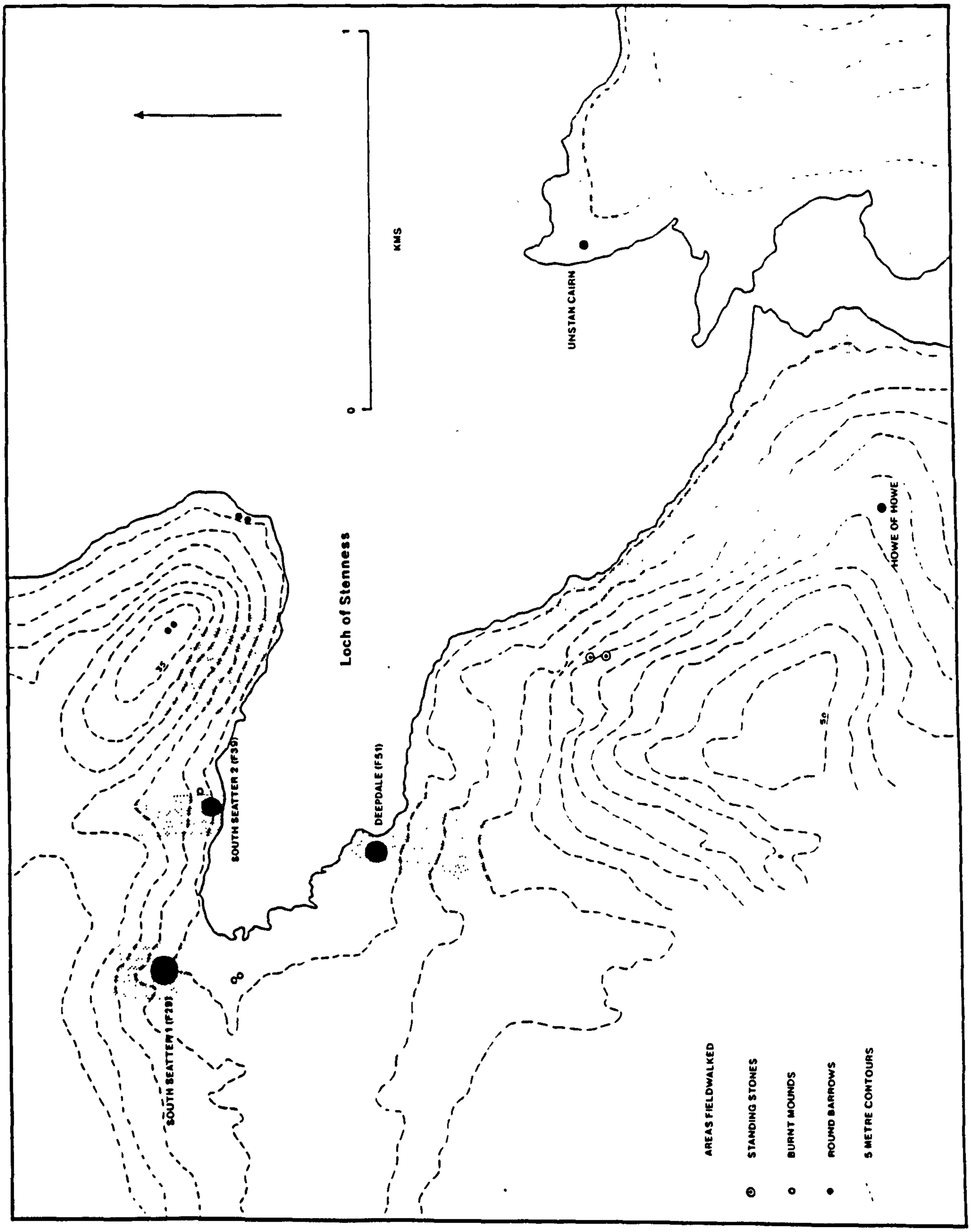


Figure 3:5. Map of Deepdale bay showing locations of flint scatters.

South Seatter 1 & 2

During the three year period of field survey, three high density surface scatters, South Seatter 1 and 2, and Deepdale, were located in three cultivated fields around a small bay of the south-westerly reaches of the loch of Stenness (Fig 3:5). The first surface scatter was across a slopping field running down to a marshy area to the west of the loch. Although this study is primarily confined to the Neolithic it is interesting that included in the South Seatter 1 assemblage was a small mesolithic component of backed-bladelets (Fig 3:6). These finds were particularly significant since it was previously considered that the Mesolithic occupation of Orkney was unlikely: "on present evidence, then, it would seem that Orkney presented a virtually empty landscape to neolithic man" (A. Ritchie 1985, 37).

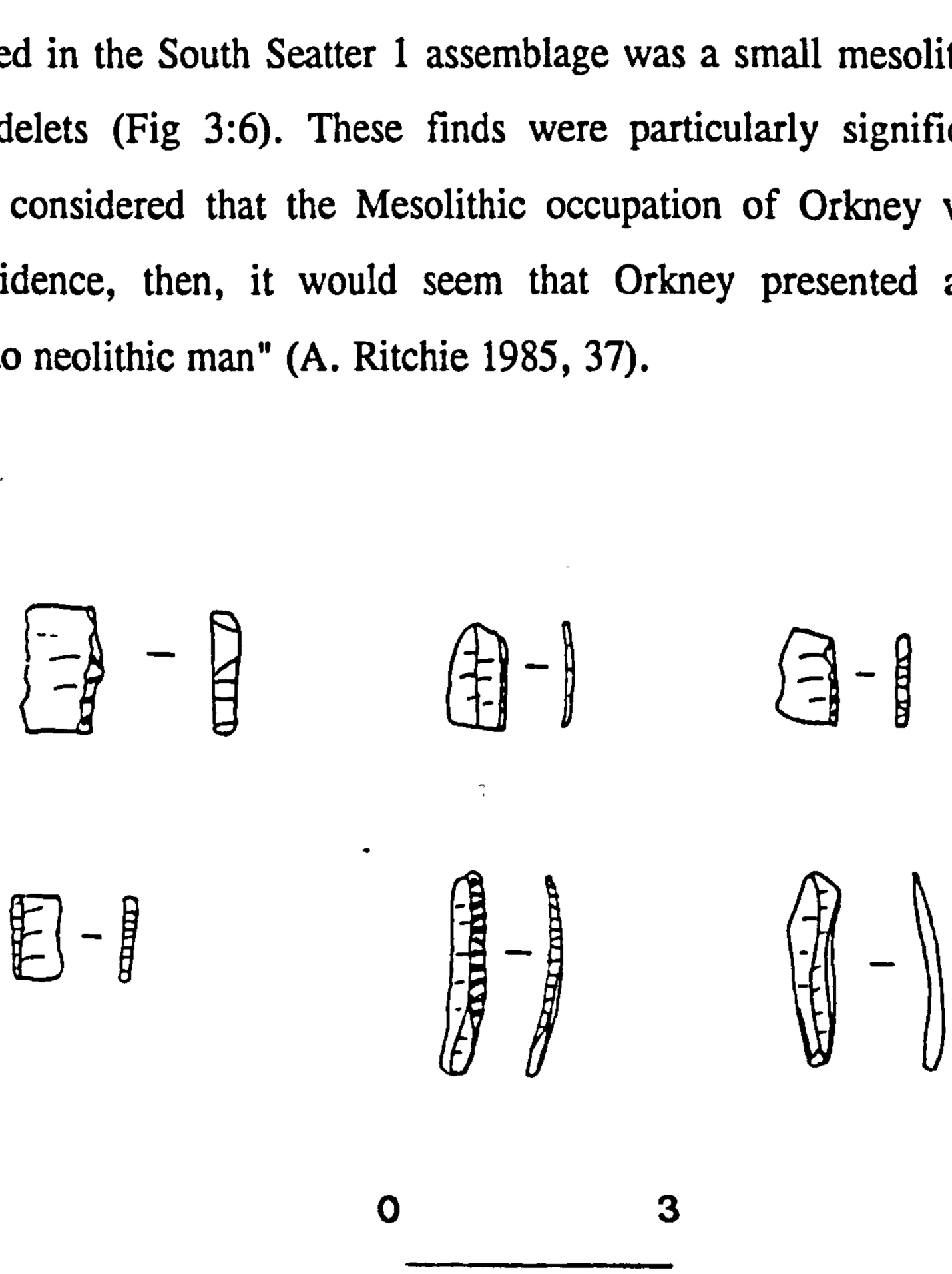


Figure 3:6. Mesolithic backed-bladelets from South Seatter 1.

Overall, the distribution of surface material at the South Seatter 1 site was fairly widespread (Fig 3:7), and consisted of a mixture of flint, stone and burnt bone. In content the worked flints included a range of tools and waste flakes (Fig 3:8), as may

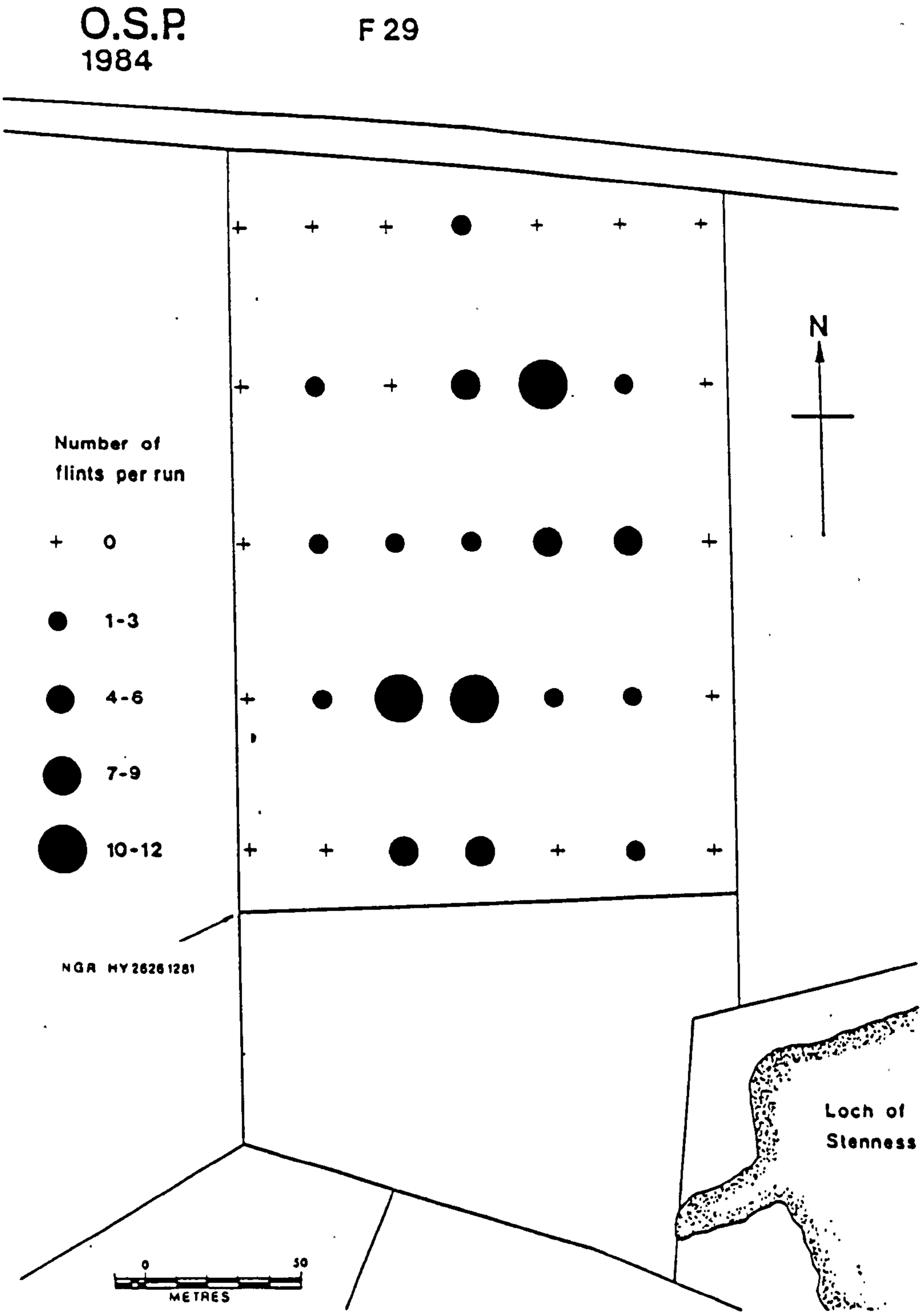


Figure 3:7. Flint distribution at South Seatter 1.

be expected in a domestic assemblage. Two stones with pecked hollows were also recovered which are likely to have acted as small containers or mortars. In the absence of further work this site remains difficult to interpret; suffice is to note that apart from the small Mesolithic component, the remaining flintwork could easily be assigned to a late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age assemblage (C. Wickham-Jones pers comm).

Furthermore, given the general lack of a `background noise' of flint in the fields examined, it is particularly curious that flintwork indicative of at least two different periods should occur in the same place. The presence of burnt bone in the surface assemblage strongly indicates the likelihood that this material is representative of occupation.

South Seatter 2 surface scatter, lies 600 metres to the east of South Seatter 1, and is situated on a south facing slope, directly adjacent to the loch edge. The former differs from the latter in being extremely discrete; occupying an observable area of approximately 50 metres x 50 metres (although it is likely to run into the adjacent field to the east, which is currently under grass). The complete surface collection produced a mixed assemblage of flint, stone and burnt bone, including included a stone axe (Fig 3:9). The flint component is technologically characteristic of a late Neolithic assemblage incorporating a combination of tools and waste material (Fig 3:8). Although the surface scatter covers an area of 50 x 50 metres, the results of a proton-magnetometer survey, undertaken on a two metre grid, indicate the actual area of sub-surface occupation deposits to be more restricted, lying 25 -33 metres north of the loch edge.

Both the surface collection and proton-magnetometer survey suggest the presence of a single area of habitation not inconsistent with an individual house structure. Unfortunately, no further fieldwork was possible at this site due to the change in land use from crop cultivation to pasture. This site is of particular interest because if its assignment to the late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age is correct then it represents a previously unrecognised form of settlement. The presence of `village' type settlements is considered to be characteristic of the later Neolithic period in Orkney, however, in South Seatter 2 we may be seeing a missing component of the late Neolithic settlement

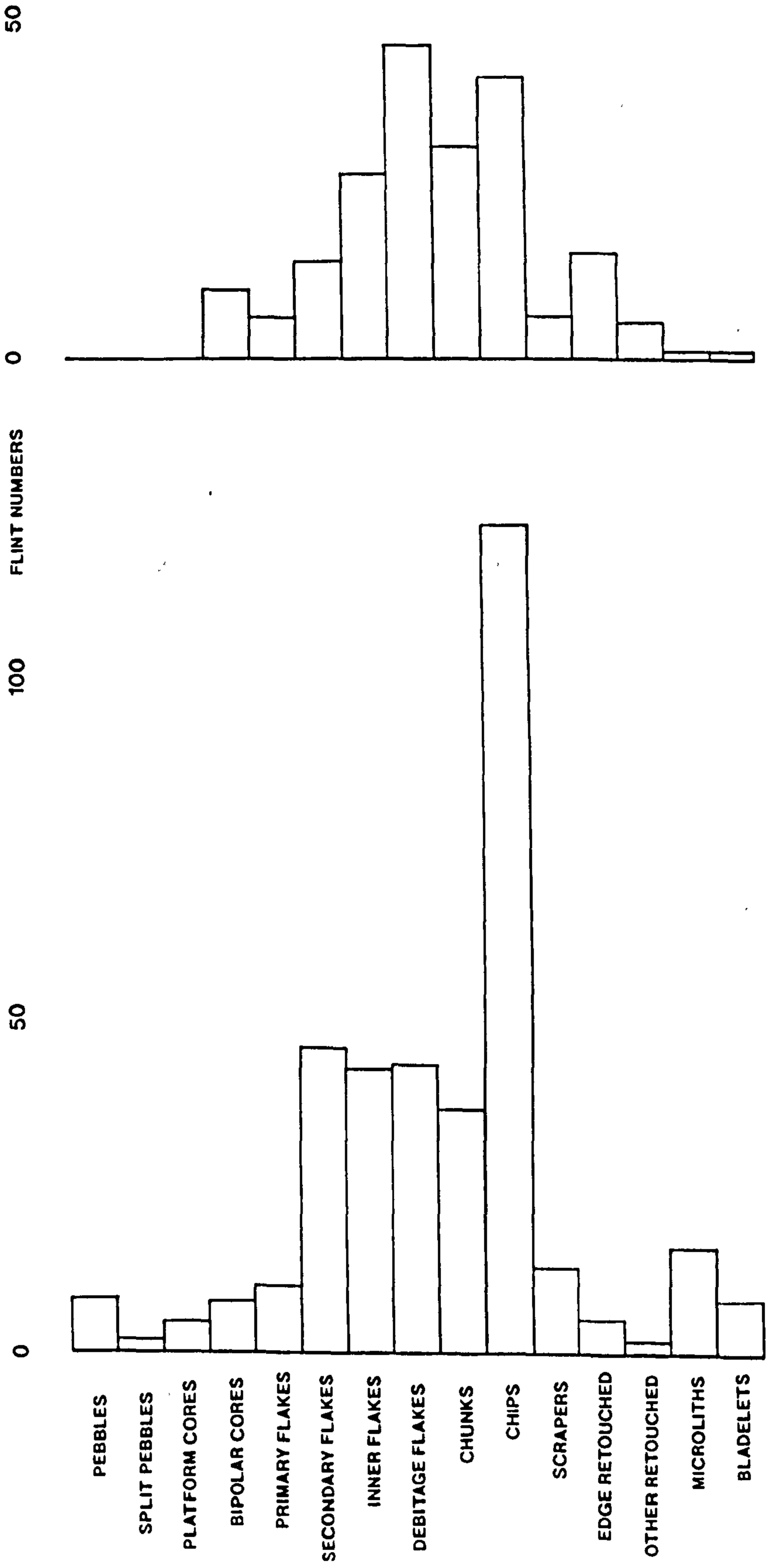


Figure 3:8. Comparison of flint types from South Seatter 1 & 2.

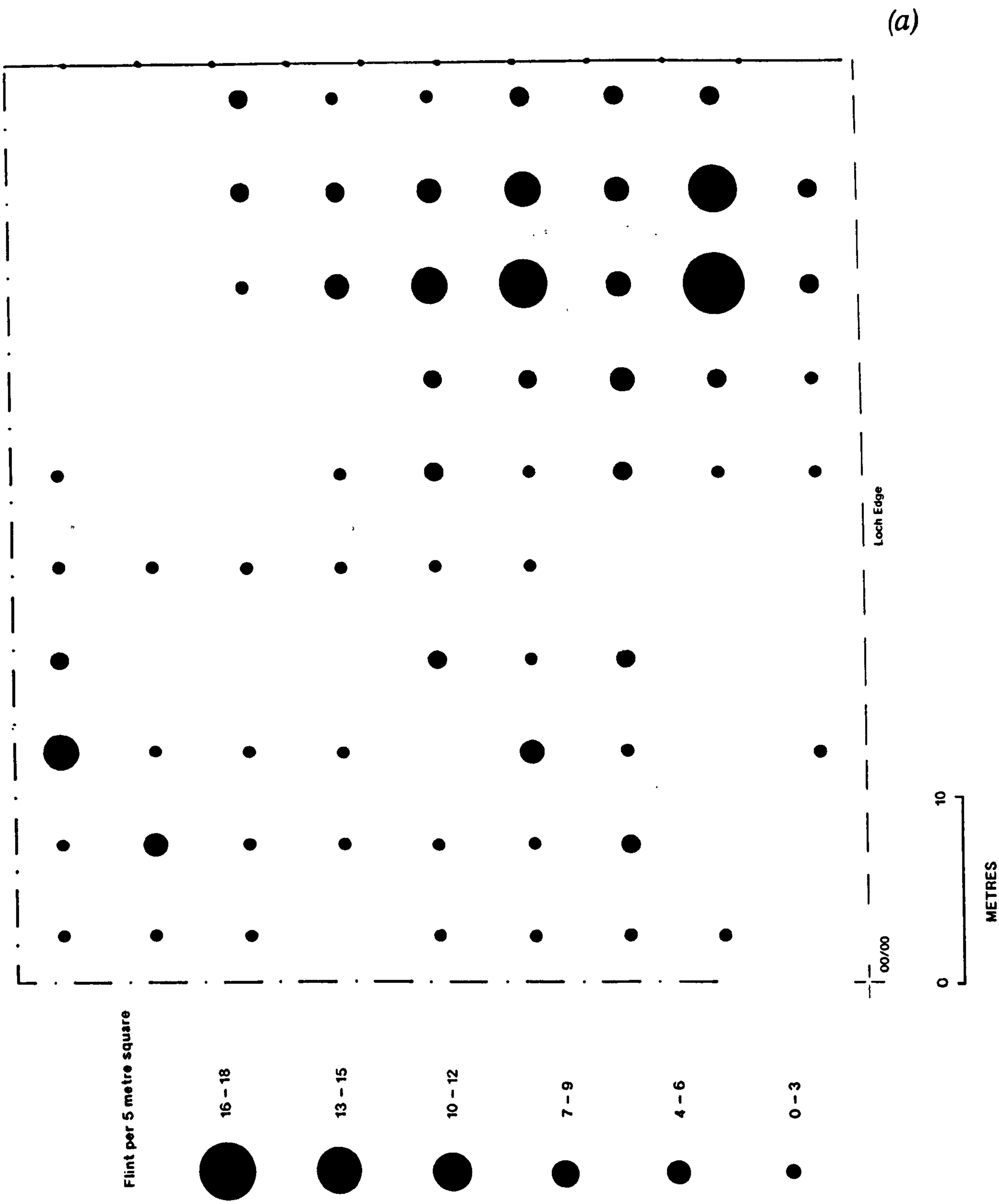


Figure 3:9. Flint (a) and burnt bone (b) distribution, and the results of a proton magnetometer survey (c), at South Seatter 2 (d).

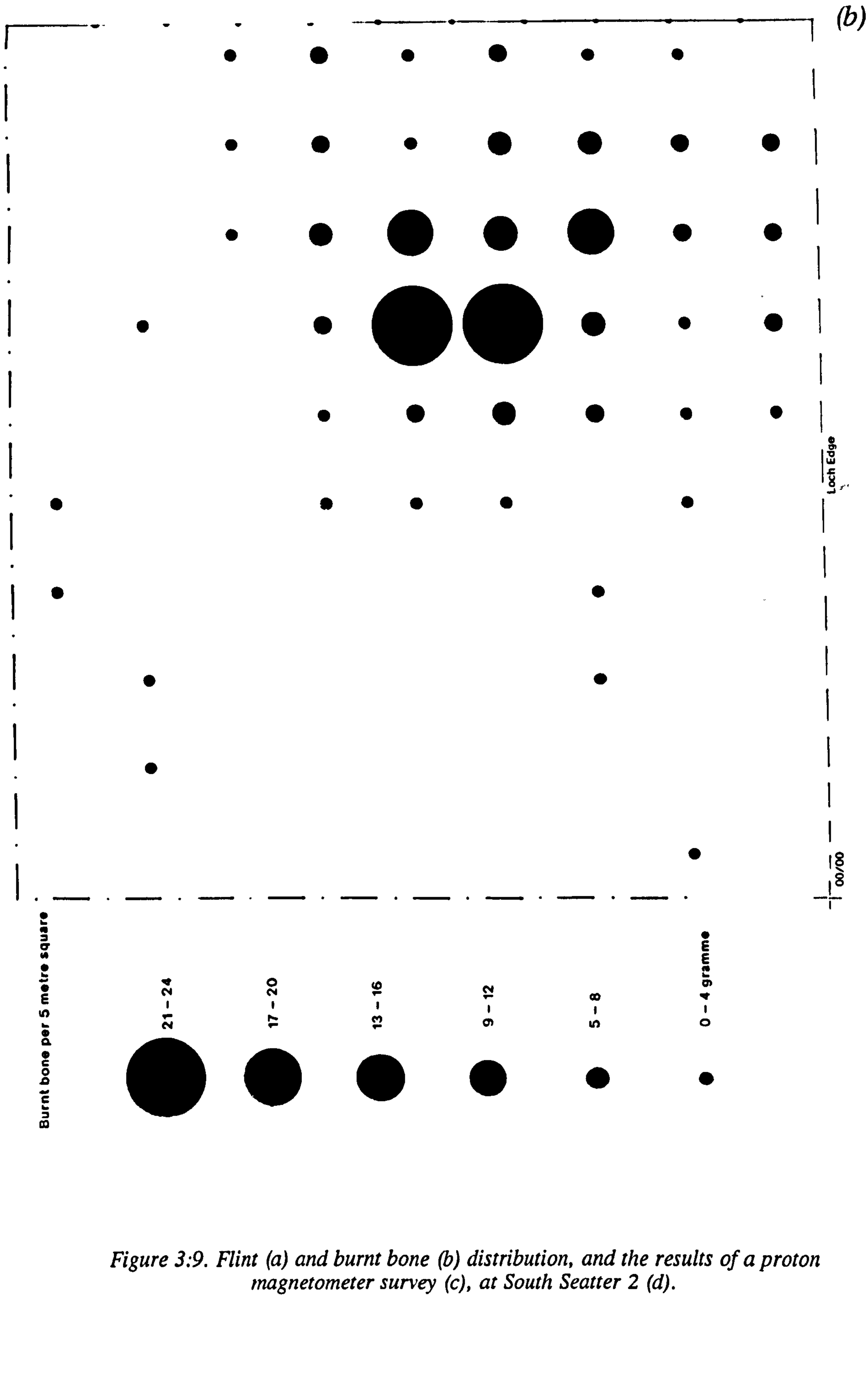


Figure 3:9. Flint (a) and burnt bone (b) distribution, and the results of a proton magnetometer survey (c), at South Seatter 2 (d).

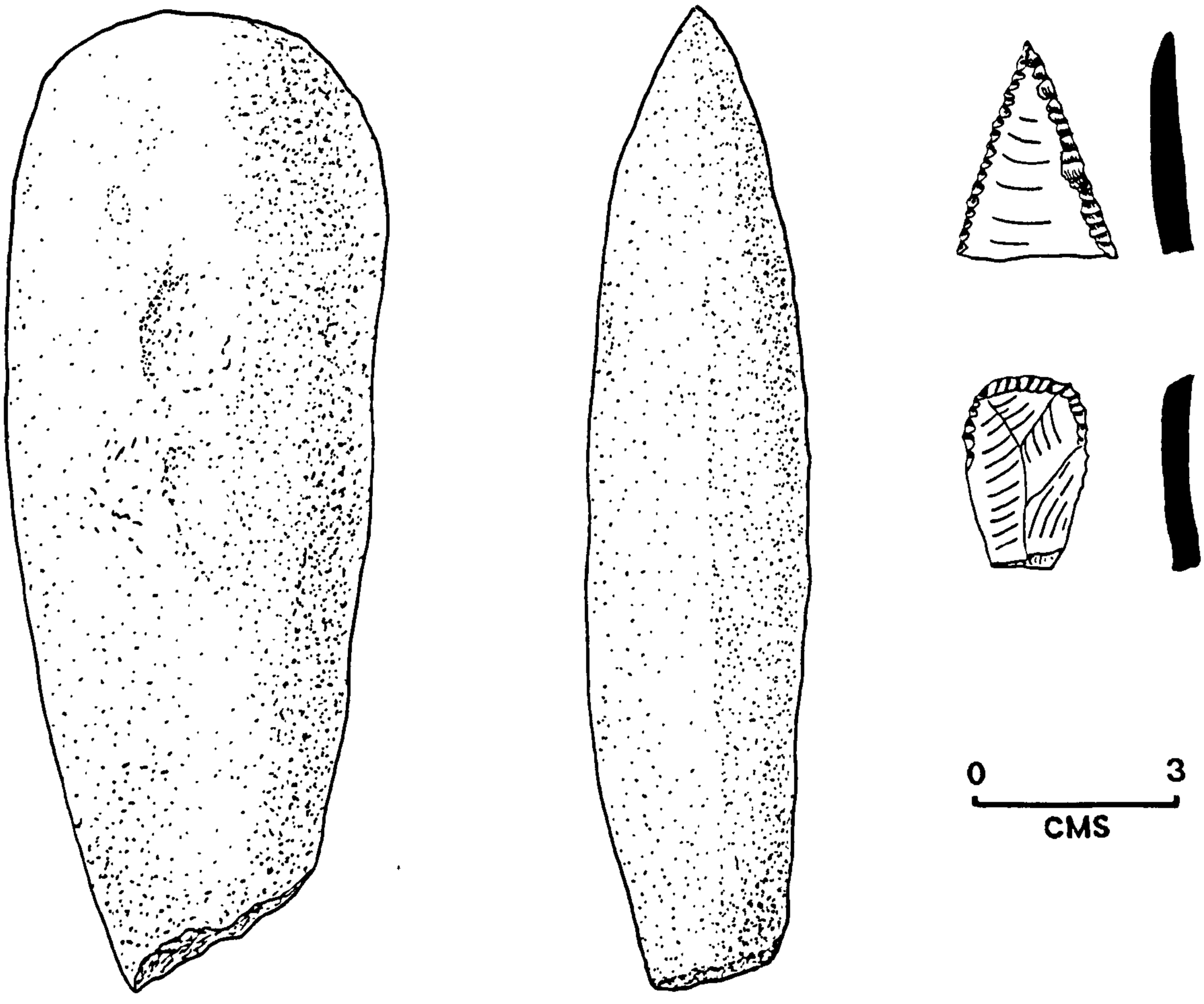


Figure 3:9. Flint (a) and burnt bone (b) distribution, and artefacts (c), at South Seatter 2 (d).

(d)

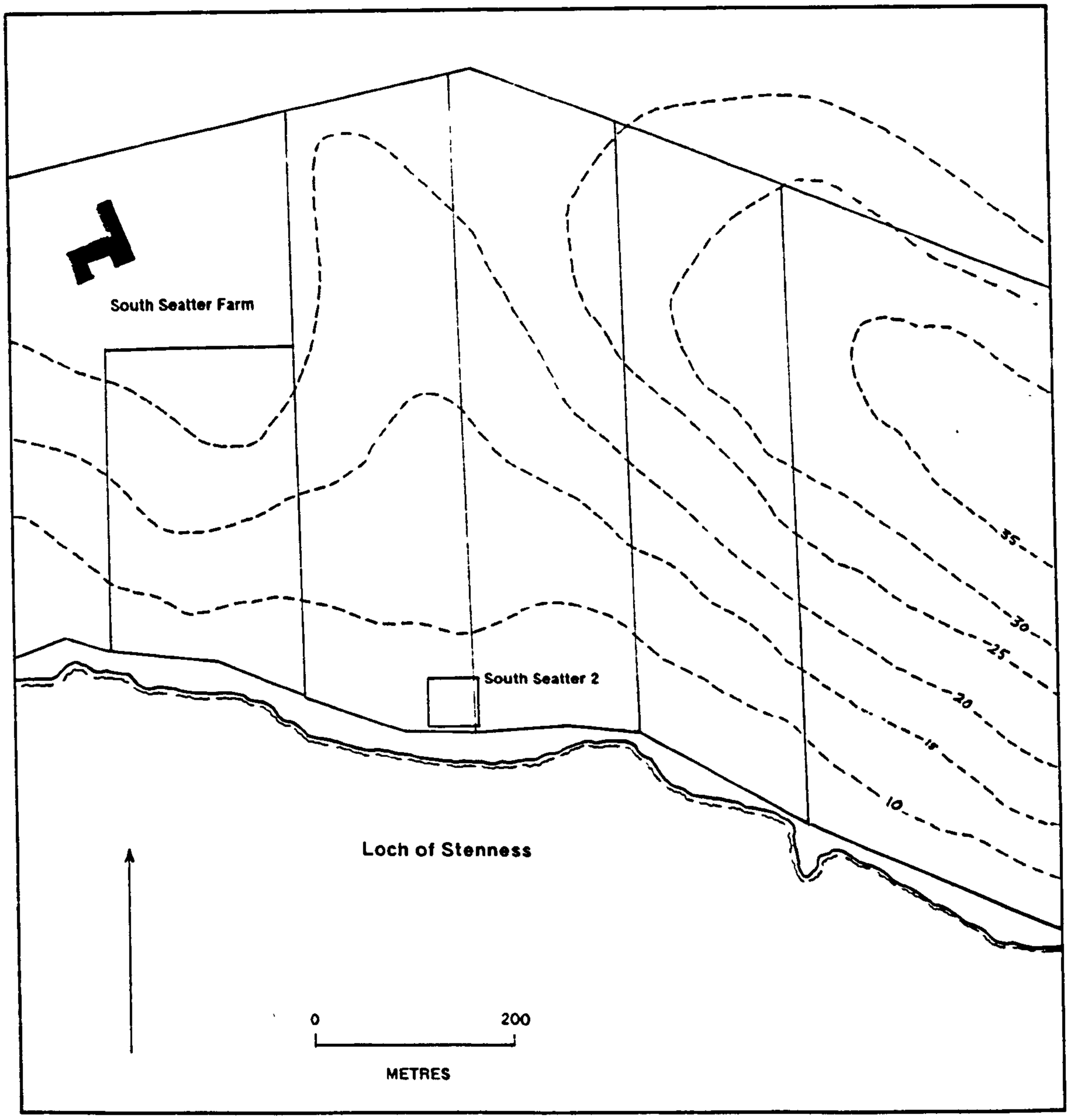


Figure 3:9. Flint (a) and burnt bone (b) distribution, and the results of a proton magnetometer survey (c), at South Seatter 2 (d).

pattern. Alternatively, this site may represent the form of habitation which occurs after the abandonment or breakdown of the `village' organisation of settlement. Either way this site reveals the presence of smaller units of settlement during the late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age periods.

Deepdale

The remaining site of the group is situated on fairly level ground directly across the bay from South Seatter 2. Here, initial fieldwalking located the presence of a substantial flint scatter. Complete surface collection revealed a main concentration lying approximately 90 meters south of the loch-edge. A small concentration of flints was also observed at the edge of the field, adjacent to the loch (Fig 3:10). Magnetic susceptibility tests were taken at one metre intervals across the surface scatter which revealed three areas of enhancement; one main concentration coinciding with the heart of the main scatter and two smaller concentrations in positions adjacent to the loch-edge (Fig 3:11).

The assemblage, mainly composed of worked flint, is distinctive in being typically early Neolithic. Apart from the presence of a leaf arrowhead, the flint is generally the product of a blade industry. The significance of this discovery is discussed further in chapter 5, however, it is worth noting the presence of three areas of activity. While the main concentration is almost certainly a focus of habitation there is no reason why each area of enhanced magnetic susceptibility is not indicative of settlement. On the basis of the only excavated early Neolithic house at Knap of Howar, Papa Westray, settlement in the early third millenium BC, is assumed to consist of isolated single farmsteads. This situation need not be typical (see chapter 5), indeed, it is because of this basic assumption that the apparently sudden appearance of villages in the late Neolithic is so problematic. Of course, site function is extremely difficult to ascertain from surface survey, nonetheless, given our lack of knowledge of early Neolithic settlement organisation in Orkney, the discovery of a small settlement complex is extremely valuable.

The discovery of a number of archaeological sites in this small area is particularly

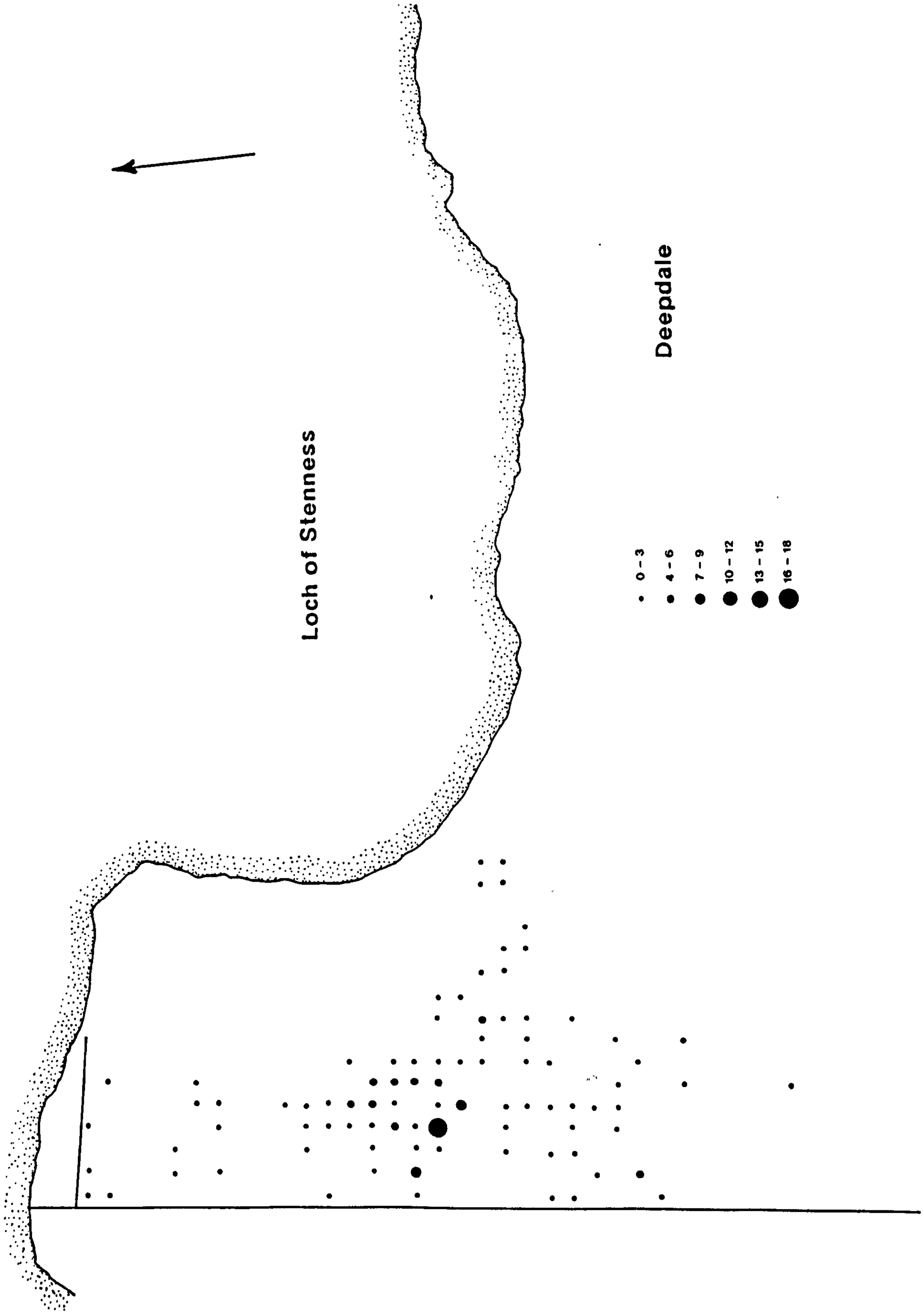


Figure 3:10. Flint distribution at Deepdale.

significant. First, it represents the only such topographic location in which a number of fields were available for walking and therefore, provides an indication of the possible density of Orcadian Neolithic settlement in loch-side environments. Second, the sites are all slightly different in both material culture and surface morphology and, as far as can be discerned from surface evaluation, each displays characteristics which deviate from the accepted norm.

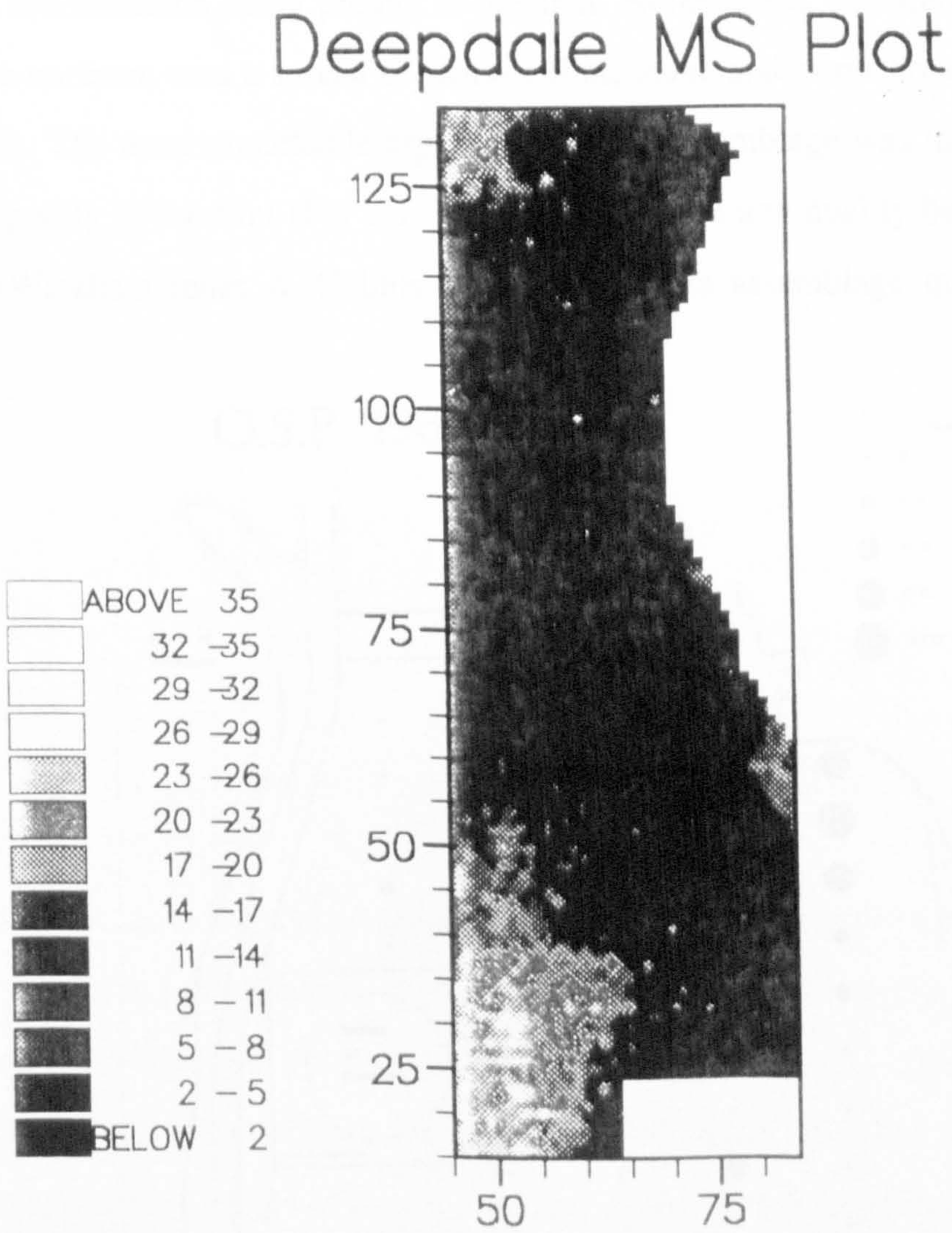


Figure 3:11. Magnetic susceptibility survey at Deepdale.

Barnhouse

Perhaps the most significant discovery of the field walking project was the main surface scatter located on level ground adjacent to the tip of the Stenness promontory. First walked in December 1984, this field was considered an unlikely prospect for Neolithic settlement on the basis that due to its close proximity to the Stones of Stenness, it must be a field which had frequently been walked over in the past. Similarly, while there were a number of objects in both the National Museum, Edinburgh, and Tankerness Museum, Kirkwall, from `Stenness', there was no record of a flint concentration being present in the area. Nonetheless, this field was examined and in the northern area a spread of worked flint, stone and burnt bone was recovered (Fig 3:12). The most remarkable aspect of the flint assemblage was the large physical size and quality of the flint (Fig 3:13), which due to the low quality beach-pebble flint sources (Wickham-Jones & Collins 1978), made this assemblage quite unusual for Orkney.

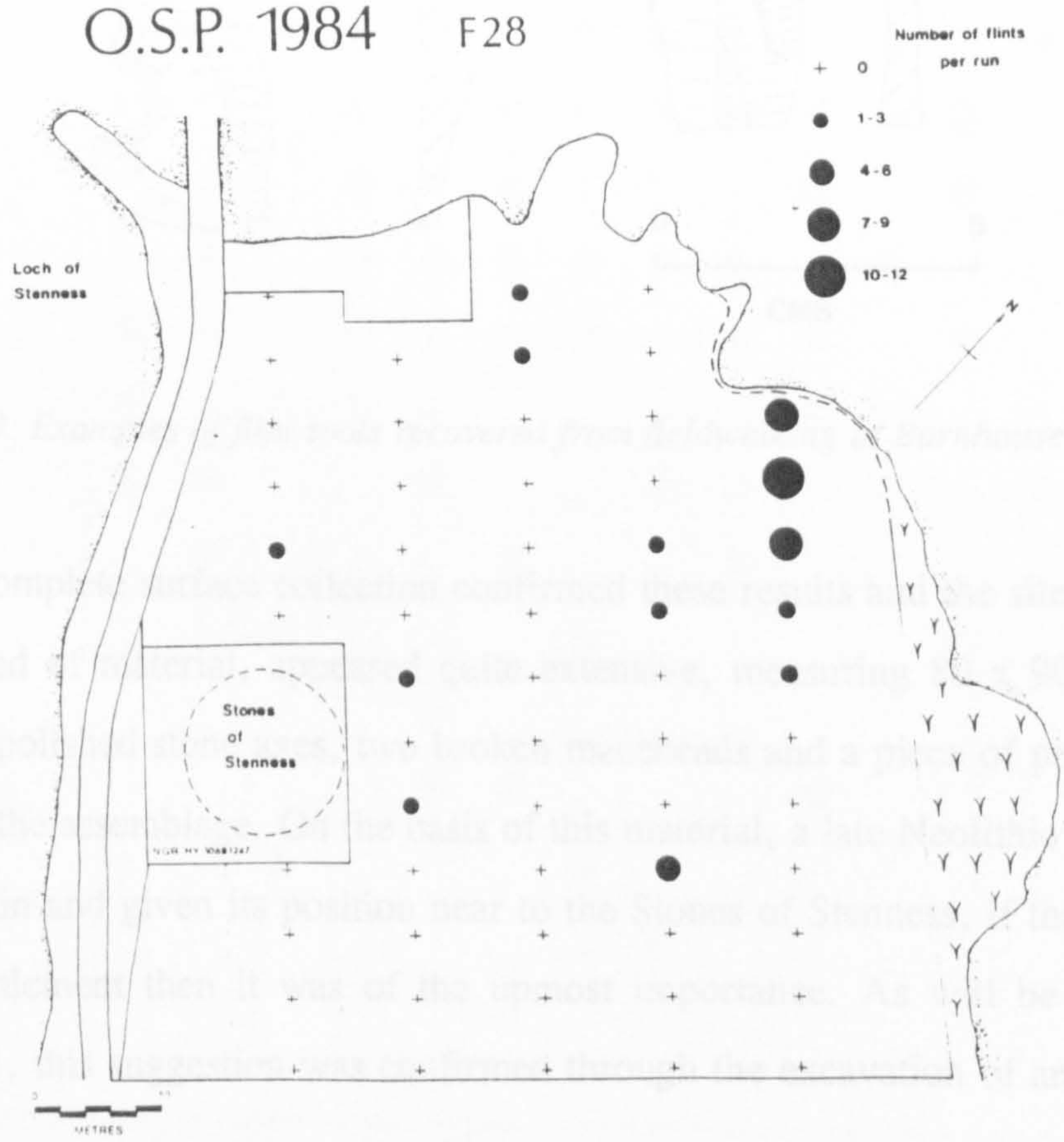


Figure 3:12. Distribution of flint after initial fieldwalking.

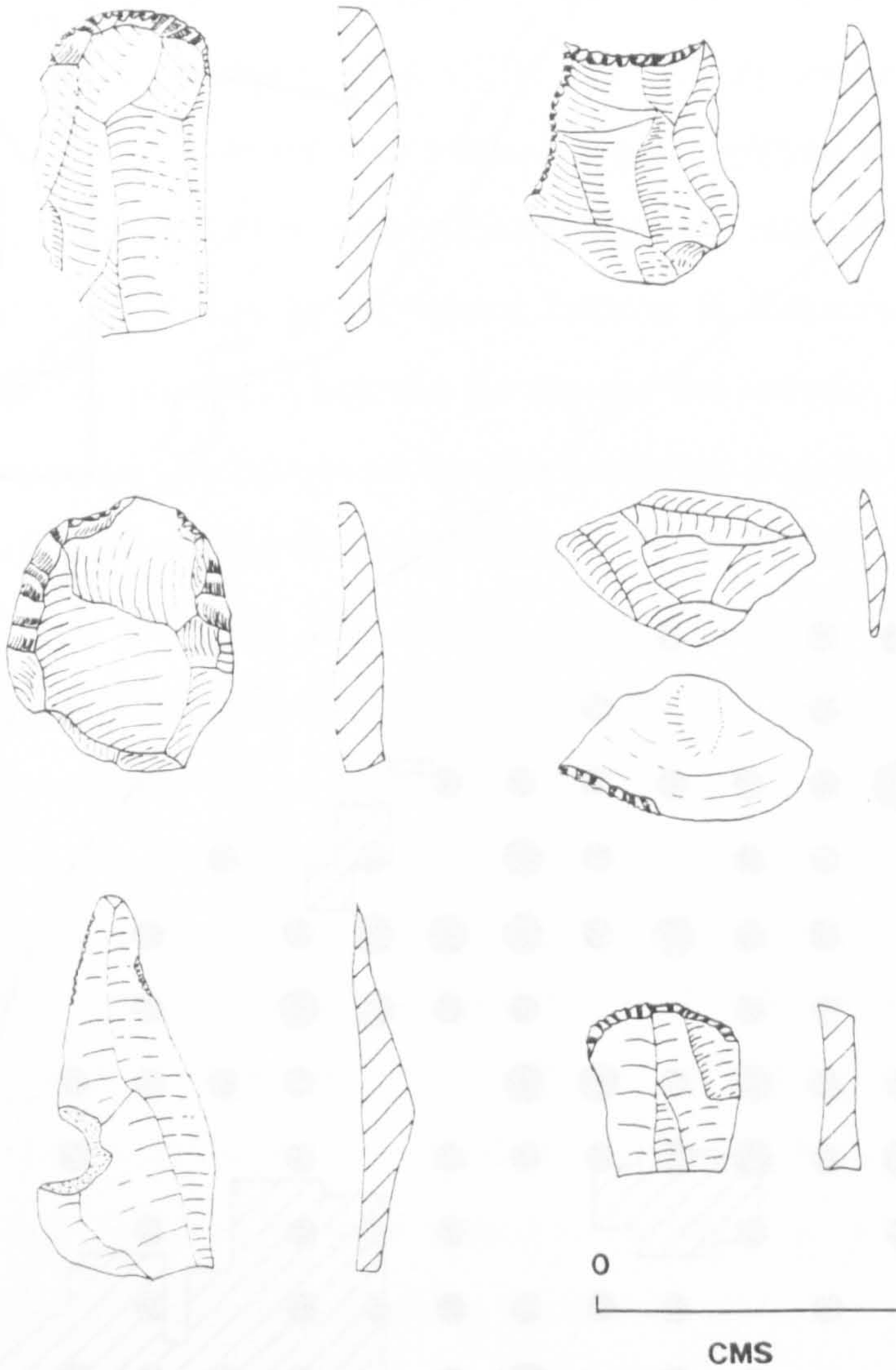


Figure 3:13. Examples of flint tools recovered from fieldwalking at Barnhouse.

Subsequent complete surface collection confirmed these results and the site, on the basis of the spread of material, appeared quite extensive, measuring 80 x 90 metres (Fig 3:14). Two polished stone axes, two broken maceheads and a piece of pitchstone were included in the assemblage. On the basis of this material, a late Neolithic date for the site was certain and given its position near to the Stones of Stenness, if the scatter represented a settlement then it was of the upmost importance. As will be seen in chapters 9 and 11, this suggestion was confirmed through the excavation of an area of the settlement.

As part of a detailed surface survey between the Barnhouse scatter and the Stones

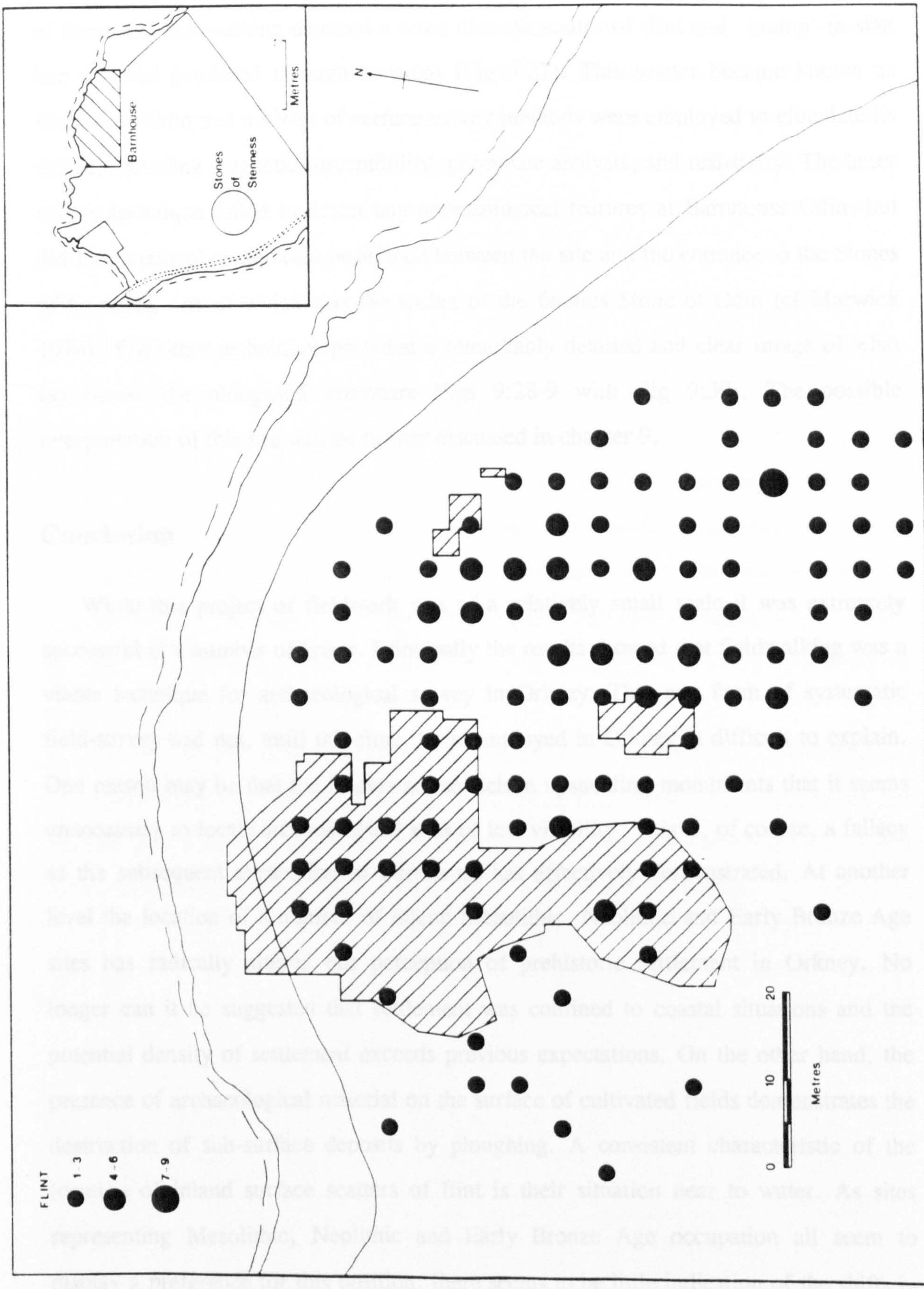


Fig 3:14. Complete surface collection of flint at Barnhouse.

of Stenness, fieldwalking detected a more discrete scatter of flint and `cramp' (a slag like material produced through burning) (Fig 9:27). This scatter became known as Barnhouse Odin and a series of surface survey methods were employed to elucidate its nature, including magnetic susceptibility, phosphate analysis, and resistivity. The latter survey technique failed to detect any archaeological features at Barnhouse Odin, but did find a pair of stone holes positioned between the site and the entrance to the Stones of Stenness, one of which was the socket of the famous Stone of Odin (cf Marwick 1976). The other techniques provided a remarkably detailed and clear image of what lay below the ploughsoil (compare Figs 9:28-9 with Fig 9:30). The possible interpretation of this site will be further discussed in chapter 9.

Conclusion

While this project of fieldwork was of a relatively small scale it was extremely successful at a number of levels. Principally the results showed that fieldwalking was a viable technique for archaeological survey in Orkney. That any form of systematic field-survey had not, until this time, been employed in Orkney is difficult to explain. One reason may be that the islands are so rich in upstanding monuments that it seems unnecessary to locate archaeological sites of low visibility. This is, of course, a fallacy as the subsequent excavation of Barnhouse has effectively demonstrated. At another level the location of a number of inland Mesolithic, Neolithic and Early Bronze Age sites has radically altered our perception of prehistoric settlement in Orkney. No longer can it be suggested that settlement was confined to coastal situations and the potential density of settlement exceeds previous expectations. On the other hand, the presence of archaeological material on the surface of cultivated fields demonstrates the destruction of sub-surface deposits by ploughing. A consistent characteristic of the location of inland surface scatters of flint is their situation near to water. As sites representing Mesolithic, Neolithic and Early Bronze Age occupation all seem to display a preference for this position, there seems to be little indication of the shifts in landscape settlement location detected in lowland Britain (cf Holgate 1988).

At the beginning of this chapter, landscape was described as partly a consequence

of peoples actions and perceptions. To gain insight into Neolithic peoples view of the landscape (which constituted their world) it is vital to possess a detailed knowledge of where they lived and where they undertook different activities. In other words, of how they categorised their landscape and where their reference points were. This process was suggested to incorporate places of material deposition and other places where no such actions occurred. The location of standing stones and other alterations to the natural world constitutes an important aspect of the attempted reconstruction of a Neolithic landscape (see chapter 11). This project of fieldwork has gone some way to achieving this goal, if only for two small areas of Mainland Orkney.

In conclusion, field survey has begun to alter and increase our knowledge of Neolithic landscapes in Orkney. Despite the limitations of time, this small project has provided indications that settlement was far more widespread than previously considered and that settlement patterns and form may vary substantially from the accepted types which come to typify different periods of archaeological time. Indeed, the basis for such stereotypes is often derived from examples which may be themselves atypical, e g Knap of Howar.

Through the excavation of Barnhouse and the detailed investigation of its environs, the consequences of this project have been substantial, however, it represents the beginning of a more detailed and systematic study of the Orkney landscape which will hopefully transform our perception of a Neolithic landscape in Orkney.

Chapter 4

The Orkney-Cromarty tombs of Northern Scotland

Introduction

In order to provide a prelude to the detailed examination of the Orcadian late Neolithic and draw immediate attention to the problems of interpreting meaning from archaeological material, this chapter will examine the earliest `chambered tombs' of north-east Scotland. Due to its geographical situation and the nature of the archaeological evidence, discussed in the last chapter, it is both easy and tempting to continually view Orkney in isolation. The imbalance in archaeological knowledge between Orkney and north-eastern Scotland further facilitates a separation which judging from the evidence of `chambered tombs' is inapropriate, particularly during the early Neolithic period.

The Orkney-Cromarty group of megalithic chambered tombs, as defined by Audrey Henshall (1963), maintains a distribution restricted to northern Scotland and the Orkney Isles. The distribution is, however, extensive, spanning an area of approximately 150 miles and crossing a notorious stretch of ocean; the Pentland Firth (Fig 4:1). This situation is but a single strand in the total `megalithic phenomenon' which serves to highlight generally the problems of understanding the nature or degree of contact between social groups in the early Neolithic period. Our lack of

understanding is on the one hand suggested to be governed by the inadequacy of the empirical data and on the other by the limits of our interpretative abilities. Whichever epistemological stance is assumed, an understanding of the circumstances surrounding the construction of megaliths and the mechanisms responsible for their distribution remain, for archaeologists, an obsessive attraction. These problems cannot be merely pushed aside since the initial response of archaeologists and public alike, when confronted with a `megalithic tomb', is to question what it is and why it was built, with at least a brief thought given to how we can ever know or even answer such questions. With regard to the chambered tombs examined in this chapter Joseph Anderson expressed a similar concern over one hundred years ago in 1868:

> "the archaeologist can have as little knowledge of the design of the cairn builders, with reference to the peculiarities of form and varieties of type exhibited in the construction of cairns of different classes, as they could have had of his special theory on the subject. He can see, however, that they had fixed ideas which they wrought out with great persistency, both in the external configuration and in the internal arrangements of their sepulchral structures" (1868, 481).

Apart from the obvious inconsistency of assumed function, the question remains regarding the ability of archaeologists to obtain any knowledge of the `design' or `special theory' of the cairn builders.

Regardless of statements to the contrary (Renfrew 1976, 204; Chapman 1977, 25; etc) it appears to have been an extremely difficult task to shed the idea of megalithic chambered tombs constituting a unitary phenomenon. However, it should not be forgotten that despite the consistent usage of the term `megalithic chambered tomb', which tends to support the "certain homogeneity" noted by Renfrew (1976, 199), these monuments are continually defined and classified according to architectural variation. Interestingly, at various times these differences are either emphasised or suppressed according to the desired objective, for instance, in discussing the Orcadian megalithic tombs, Renfrew (1979, 211) provides an amended typology based on architectural variation. Later in the discussion, however, this variation is ignored and all types of tomb, irrespective of architectural difference, are suggested to constitute the same role in being equal access communal monuments (ibid, 216-7). Unfortunately, the lack of consideration of architectural differences, apart from typological studies, has been

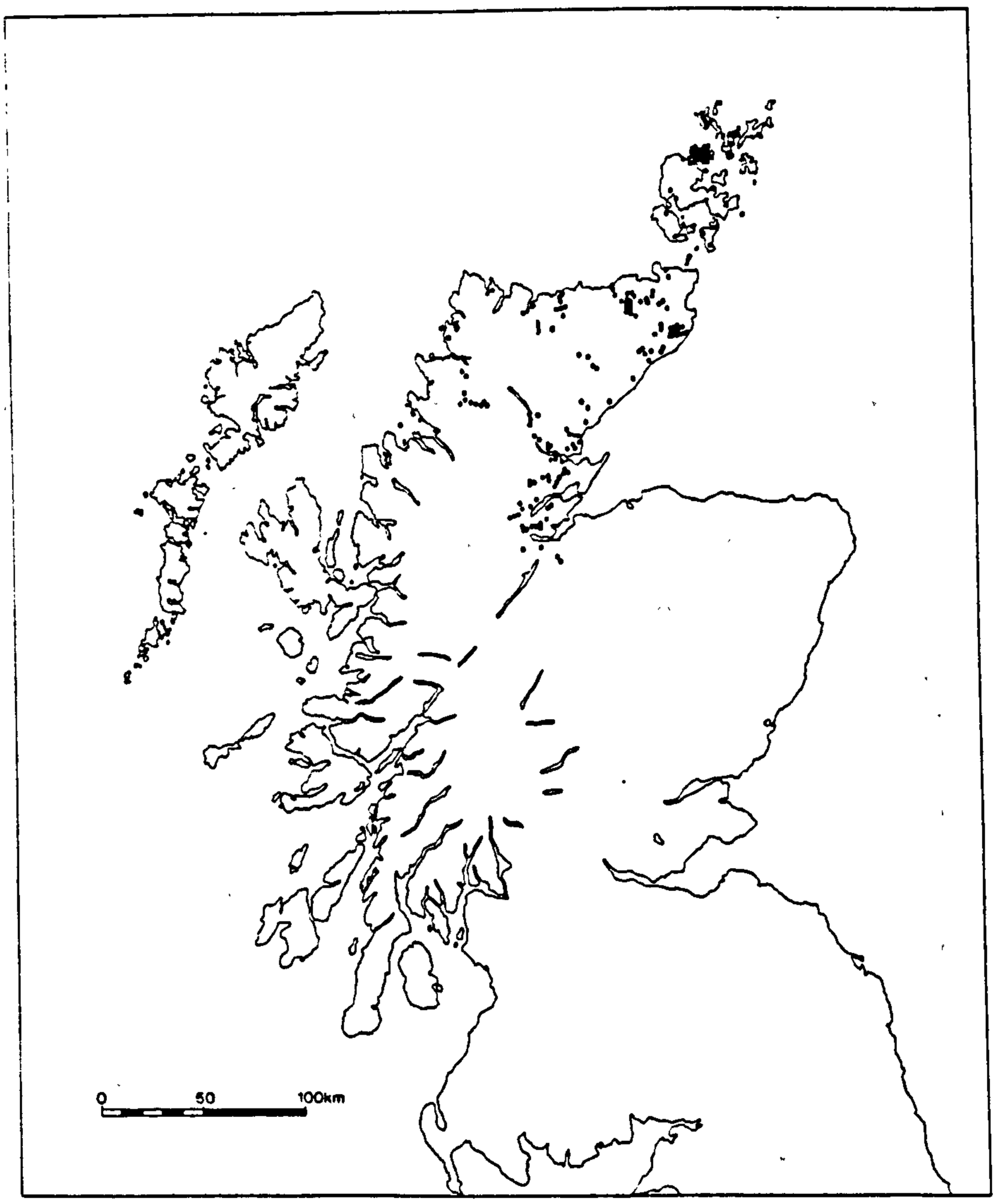


Figure 4:1. Distribution of Orkney-Cromarty cairns (after J. Downes 1992).

inadvertently aided by Kinnes's (1976, Fig 7) scheme of modular chamber construction. Here, by a simple manipulation of modules, some of the most complex forms of architecture become reduced to little more than a shuffling of boxes.

In this chapter I wish to examine a particular tradition of architecture as revealed in the Orkney-Cromarty chambered tombs. Whilst realising that to focus attention on a single group of tombs tends to bypass the wider problems of social interaction as illustrated in the `megalithic phenomena', it is hoped that by examining the architectural significance of these monuments, in terms of spatial experience and

architectural representation, a deeper understanding of the intentions of the builders may be obtained.

The first Megaliths in Northern Scotland

Through the many aspects of debate surrounding megalithic enquiries, two basic assumptions are widely accepted; that chambered tombs are constructed for the containment of the dead, and that they constitute monumental construction. Neither assumption is particularly contentious, hence, their widespread belief. The implication of this acceptance is that the megalithic tomb is assumed to be the first monumental construction (in Northeastern Scotland) to be inserted into the landscape and therefore, the geography of the Neolithic world. It is also represents a fundamental material statement about death and the dead in relation to the living. Thus, the megalithic chambered tomb constitutes an objectification of the past in the present. How different pasts are chosen to be represented is visually charted in the design of the monuments and the many modifications and additions which occur to their basic appearance. It is the concept of the past in the present, of time and temporality fused into `place', which is felt to be of particular relevance in considering the first megaliths.

The assumed relative sedentism of early agricultural societies will undoubtedly have involved far more profound changes than a growing awareness and urge to physically mark a territory (Renfrew 1976), or legitimate claims to particular resources (Chapman 1981). Sedentism, or simply the idea of staying in the same place, provokes an altered perception of the outside world; it also focuses attention on temporality and the apparent ontological contradictions inherent within a `lifetime'.

The life of the hunter-gatherer is one of movement. In Northeast Scotland, little is known of the indigenous later Mesolithic inhabitants. Potential habitation sites at Freswick Bay, Caithness and along the Sutherland coastline between Golspie and the Dornoch firth (Morrison 1980, 164), and Mainland, Orkney (Richards 1985) have yet to be fully investigated or confirmed (Masters 1989, 25). Nevertheless, later Mesolithic inhabitants would quite probably have practised a trans-resource subsistence cycle entailing the movement of people between different topographic zones and plant

and animal species (Ingold 1986, 190). Such movement is locked into the cycle of the seasons. In this way of life, physical movement from place to place defines life and therefore, cosmology. This entails a distinctive ontology, the ancestral past is seen within the process of moving through the world involving a recognition of specific places or locales (Thomas forthcoming). It is, however, the action of moving between such places which defines existence, in this way, Ingold (1986, 153), is able to suggest that for hunter-gatherers "the road or track has a past, described by the people, ancestors and spirits who - in an unbroken succession - have travelled it and left their mark on the countryside". Hence, movement and its spatial and temporal classification embodies both a religious passage and the means of subsistence, in short life itself (ibid).

The mechanism behind the introduction of agriculture to Northeast Scotland is unknown, however, on the basis of pollen assemblages from the Northern Isles (Keatinge and Dickson 1979; Davidson and Jones 1985) it occurred in the early third millenium. Even if this change involved little arable cultivation with the emphasis placed on animal husbandry, the changing nature of subsistence fosters the illusion of staying in a single place for ever, a greater degree of attachment to a single place, inducing a profound effect on the way people saw their own presence in the world. The existence of the farmer is governed by a perceived attachment to a single area radiating from the centre of the world; the house and home. Observation from a primary locale necessarily sees time passing, for Neolithic people, the annual agricultural cycle of birth - growth - maturity - death - rebirth, enforced analogy with the human life cycle and past generations. Thus, existence became fused with place.

It is in this context that megalithic architecture can be seen. Death and monumentality; the physical objectification of the past in the present. Perhaps for the first time a permanent architecture was brought into existence and through the necessary sanction of religion the world becomes transformed.

Doorways as a metaphor

Although having either round, rectangular, or horned long mounds, the Orkney-

Cromarty chambered tombs are currently identified as a separate tradition on the basis of chamber form. Opposed upright stone slabs or orthostats project inwards from the side walling of the chamber and passage, creating a distinctive method of partitioning which is best visualised in its Orcadian variant: the stalled cairn (Fig 4:5). This tradition of chambered tomb architecture has been subdivided by Henshall (1963, 45-121) to include four main types:

1. Rectangular chambers (Fig 4:2).
2. Polygonal chambers (Fig 4:3).
3. Camster chambers (Fig 4:4).
4. Stalled chambers (Fig 4:5).

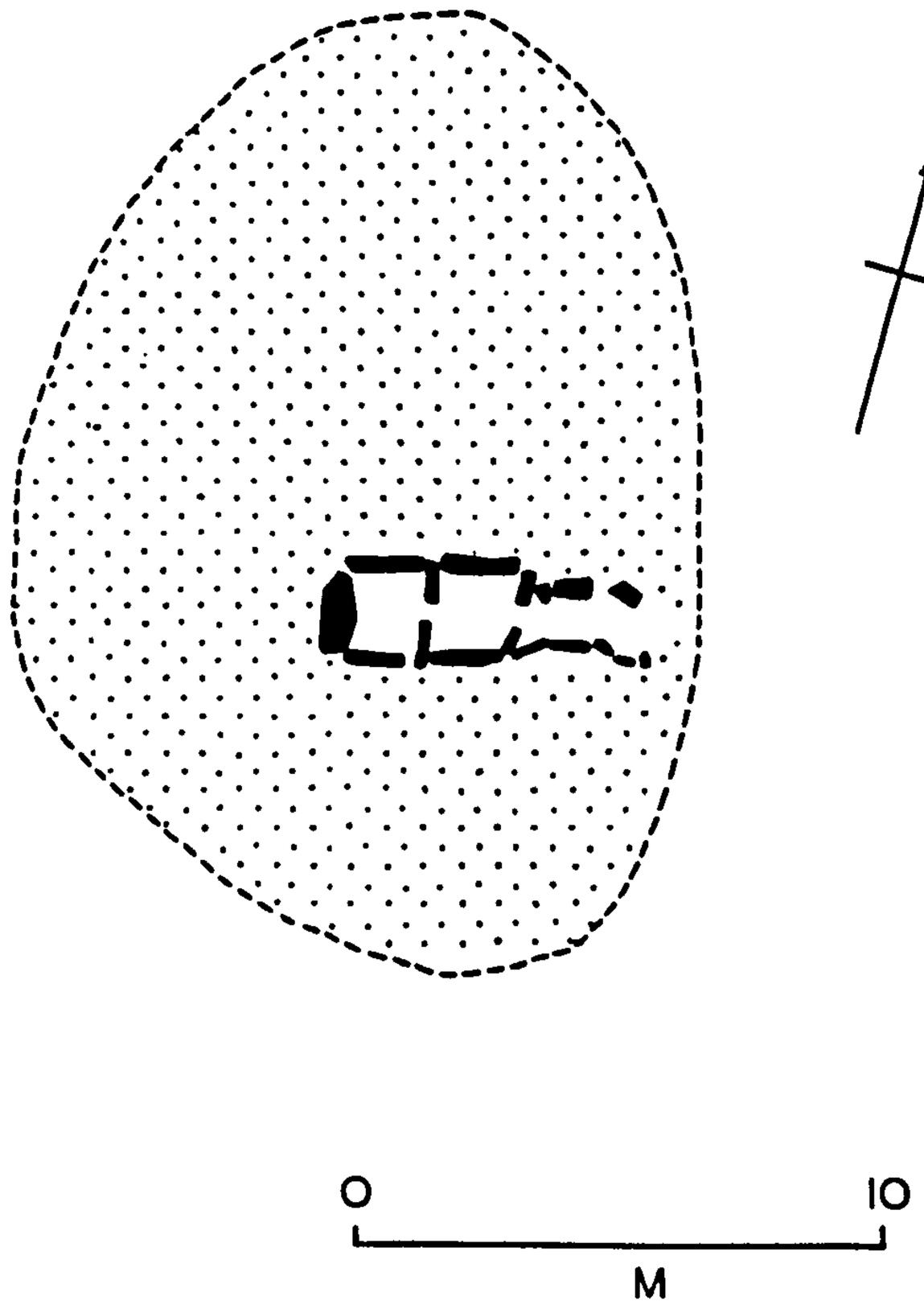


Figure 4:2. Orkney-Cromarty rectangular chambers: Carn Glas, Ross-shire (after Woodham & Woodham 1957).

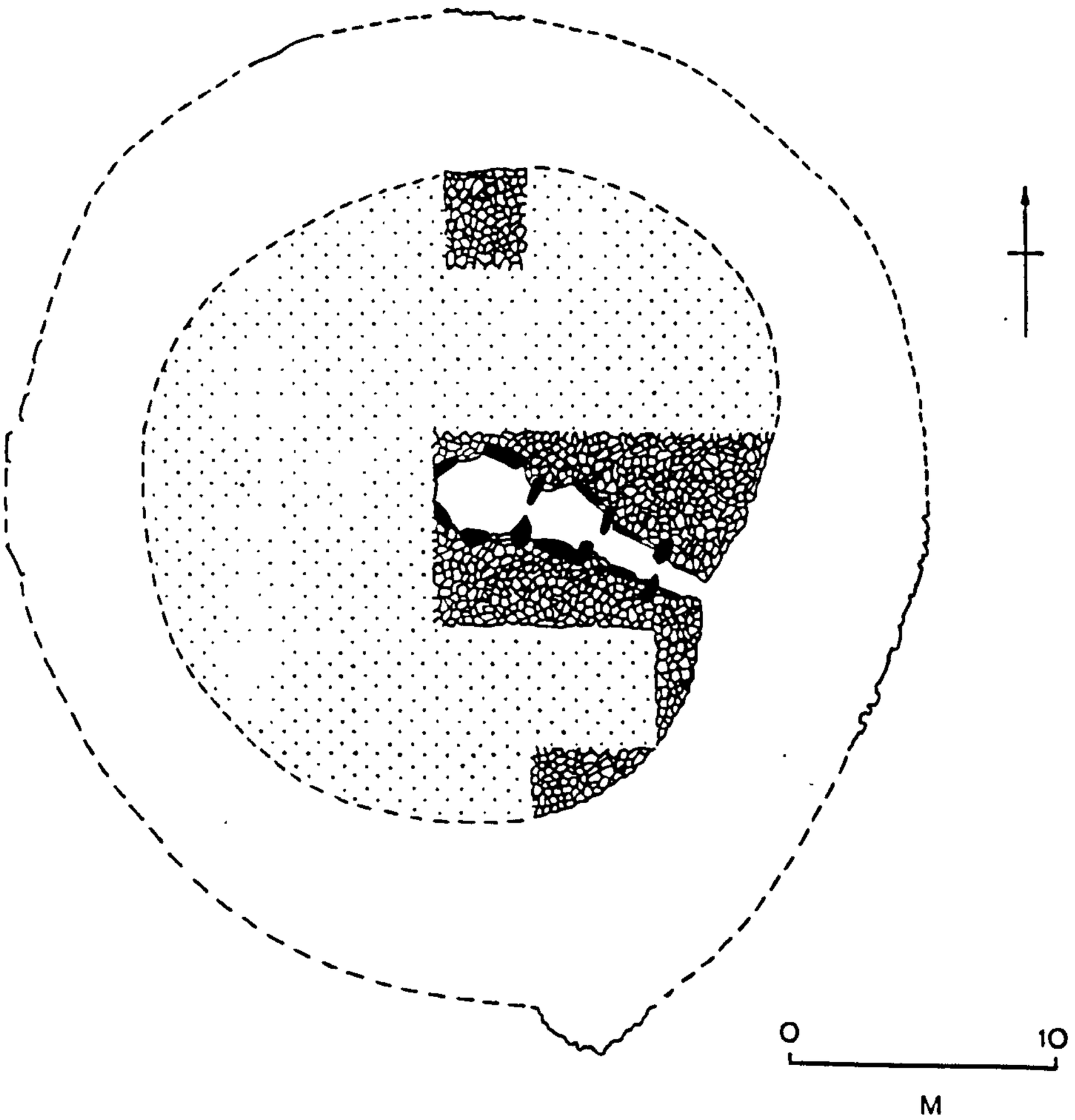


Figure 4:3. Orkney-Cromarty polygonal chambers: Ord North, Sutherland (after Sharples 1981).

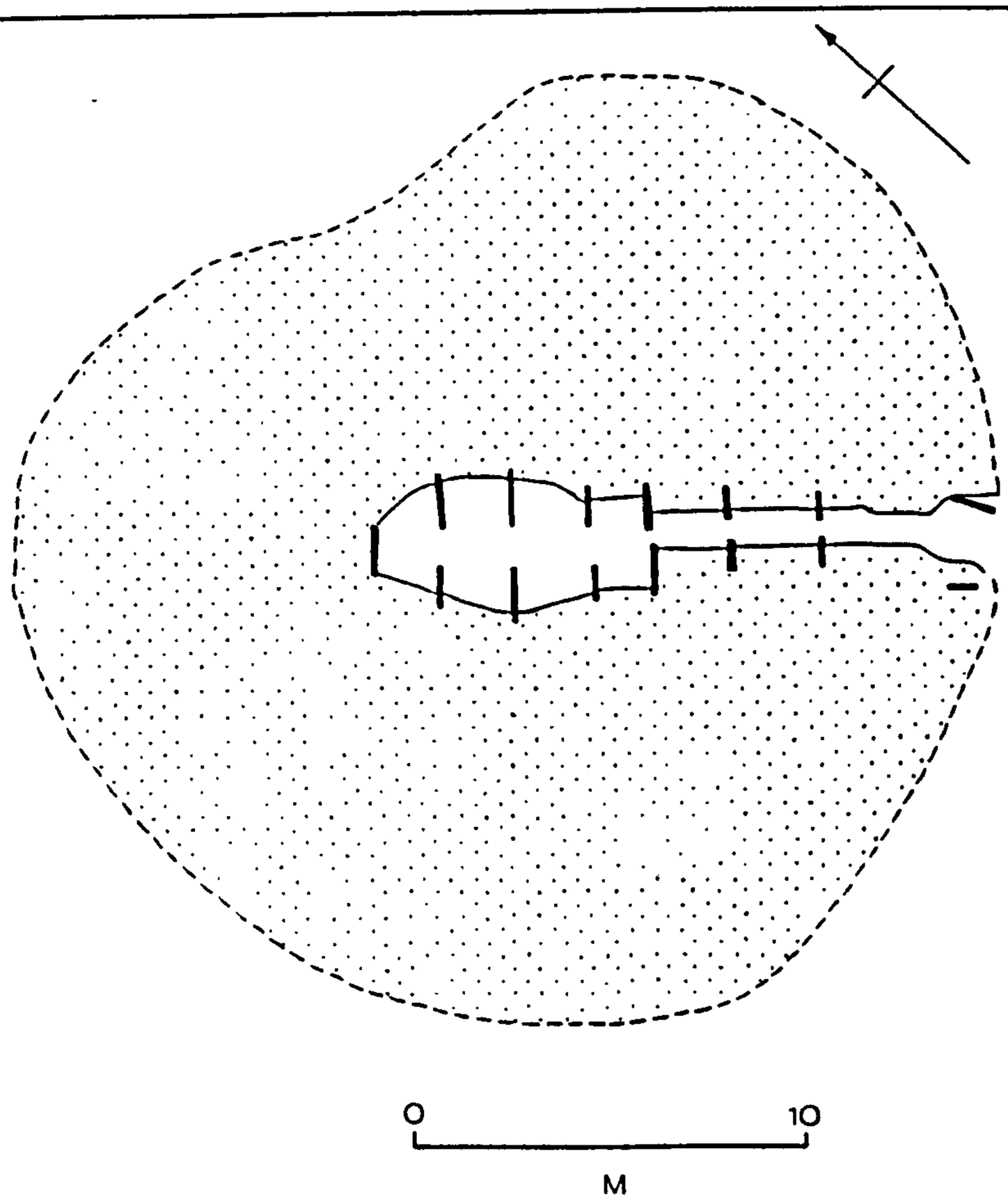


Figure 4:4. Orkney-Cromarty camster chambers: Hill of Shebster, Caithness (after Henshall 1963).

These differences based on shape and method of chamber construction, maintain a certain geographic integrity. Various reasons for this divergence have been presented ranging from chronological progression (Henshall 1963) through to technological limitations (Sharples 1980). Given this variation, however, there remains a consistency of architecture which is followed throughout all the above subdivisions. Of equal relevance is the observation that this architecture is also a feature of a contemporary house, as demonstrated at Knap of Howar, Papa Westray, Orkney (Traill and Kirkness 1937; Ritchie 1983) (Fig 4:6). In this respect it is well to remember when attempting to understand the architecture of the Orkney-Cromarty chambered tombs that they were constructed by people who were engaged in the creation of a spatial representation which embodied and spoke of religious ideas which lay beyond everyday experience. Hence, by definition the architecture of a chambered tomb relied on analogy and metaphor for its understanding and interpretation. This is also suggested to be a possible way for archaeologists to approach the problem of

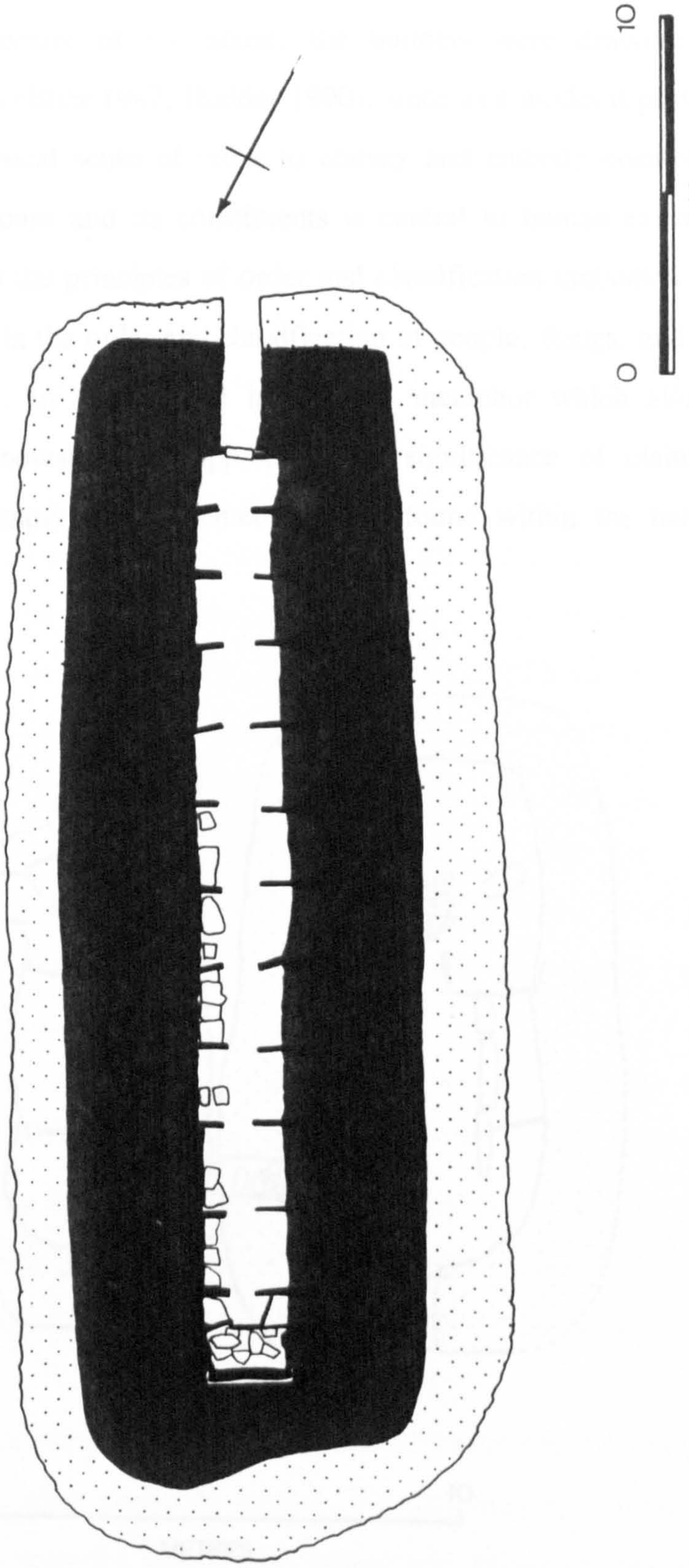


Figure 4:5. Orkney-Cromarty stalled chambers: Midhowe, Rousay (after Callander & Grant 1934).

interpretation and meaning in the past.

In utilizing the architecture of the house, the builders were drawing on a particularly potent metaphor (Blier 1987, Hodder 1990), since as a model it provides a concrete expression; a physical sense of order to convey and embody cosmological themes and beliefs. The house and its constituents is central to human experience, people `live' in houses and the principles of order and classification embodied within its architecture are realised in the order and classification of people, things, and events which constitute daily life. In viewing the house as a metaphor which allows an understanding of the unknowable, we appreciate the significance of claims that religious architecture is simply a development of that found within the habitation (Eliade 1959, 58).

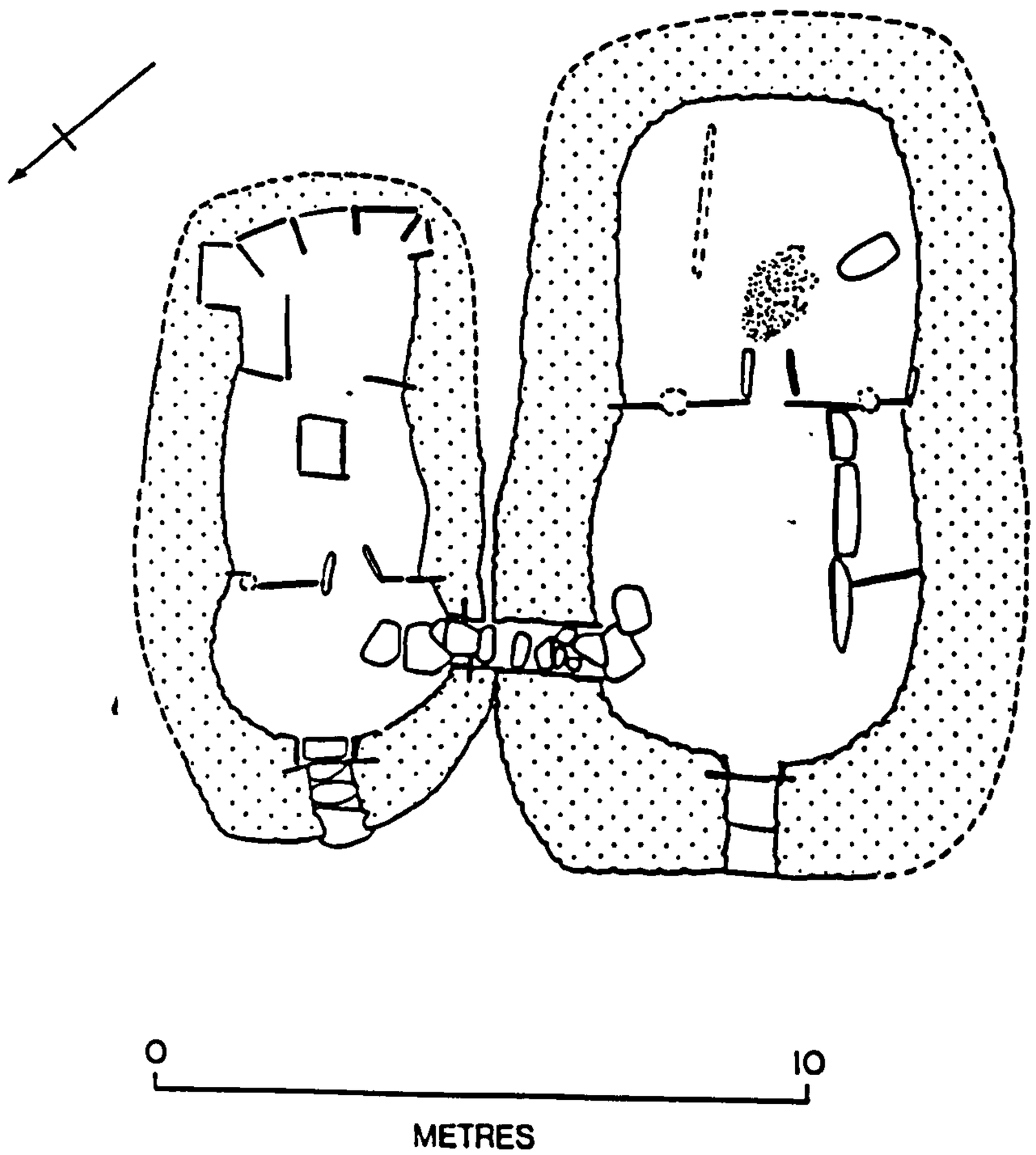


Figure 4:6. The early Neolithic house at Knap of Howar, Papa Westray, Orkney (after A. Ritchie 1983).

However, the Orkney-Cromarty tomb is not a house, although through its imagery complex beliefs are given tangible form. Only by Neolithic people experiencing the architecture of the chambered tomb, either directly through entry or indirectly by description, could such knowledge be imparted.

The chambered tomb contains and constrains the dead. As a place of death it has an appropriate situation in the world. It is simply where it should be, and that will be frequently away from the living. Its visitation, whether for the interment of a corpse, the extraction of ancestral remains, or an alternative experience, will be heavily sanctioned. It will be undertaken at the appropriate time. Hence, for the people going to the tomb the journey will be one of consequence, it will have been planned and prepared perhaps for a substantial preceding period, since it is a passage from the profane to the sacred, from the everyday activities of life to the religious experience of death. For those who will enter the monument and move into the domain of the dead the experience will be magnified, perhaps they will be afraid. However, regardless of the deeds to be undertaken all will possess a clear image of their goal. At this particular time the route and direction of movement is fully part of the ritual process, since it will involve transformation which is defined not only in religious awareness but also in spatial and temporal terms.

The forecourt or external perimeter will represent the end of the journey for some of the participants. They may have entered the chamber before or cautiously viewed the internal proceedings (see Richards 1988, 54), perhaps never to cross the entrance. They rely instead on verbal accounts, myths and revelations. The experience, for them, is imaginary; for those entering the tomb the experience is to be physical, to be real.

Within the enhanced facade of the later tombs, drama was surely enacted (Fleming 1973). Even outside the smaller tombs the focus of attention was to be reflected back onto the watchers. When powerful words were spoken and rituals enacted it was by individual representatives. When facing the onlookers situated in and beyond the forecourt area, these individuals commenced a discourse with the living, drawing on the sanctity of the dead. On turning and entering the chamber a reversal occurred, the individuals were now wholly mortal and for them a rather more dangerous discourse

The view confronting those moving into the tomb was one of gloom and darkness, after negotiating a narrow entrance passage the chamber expands before the subject. Perhaps aided by fire, the chamber sides would still lie in shadow. Ahead, out of the darkness a familiar sight would appear: stone doorways through which a path leads towards the goal in the furthest deepest part of the tomb. This is the image the architecture presents to the subject, one of a series of doorways (Fig 4:7).

Figure 4:7. The view through the `doorways' to the back-slab.

What is normally and unquestioningly (see however, Boast 1987) accepted as being merely stone partitioning positioned to define a series of compartments within a main chamber, is suggested to be a completely different representation. Of course, an

main chamber, is suggested to be a completely different representation. Of course, an open area is required between the doorways, however, here megalithic logic is reversed. No longer do the stone uprights define the compartment but the compartments define the doorways. Occasionally, the doorways have threshold slabs set on edge across the bottom (e.g Camster Long, Knowe of Yarso, Carn Glas, etc). In some cases, as at South Yarrows South (Henshall 1963, 291-2), Warehouse South (ibid, 301), and Allt Nam Ban (ibid, 265), a stone `door' was set between the door jambs blocking the pathway. If the Orkney-Cromarty `chambered' tombs are principally conceived as a series of doorways the question arises; where are they leading and to what goal?

In discussing the rectangular Orkney-Cromarty tombs, Henshall, notes that the end stone is "nearly always taller than the other stones" (1963, 62). In some examples this stone is almost a metre taller than the other orthostats. Moreover, the end stone is generally pointed at the top, a feature which dominates the monuments on the Black Isle, Easter Ross (Woodham 1957, 111), and, interestingly, the majority of single standing stones in Northern Scotland. For the rectangular tombs their can be little doubt that the final goal is the huge monolith placed at the end of the pathway which, it should be noted often exceeds the height of the subject. Indeed, the tomb is in some ways no more than a covered pathway through a series of doorways to the ultimate goal; a symbol of the divine or an impassable gateway to another world?

An end stone is less clearly defined in the polygonal tombs, although, the innermost `compartment' is always of larger area in assuming a more circular shape. However, things are not always as they appear for in describing the end chamber at the Ord North, Sutherland, Sharples, notes that "the largest orthostat, no 9, was built with the dry-stone walling running behind it unlike all the other orthostats where the walling abuts on to the stone" (1981, 28). Here within a different `sub-type' we find the same emphasis placed on the freestanding, tallest monolith, situated directly at the end of the pathway through the tomb. As with the end stones within the rectangular tombs the stones or orthostats composing the end compartment in the polygonal tombs are taller that the other uprights. Henshall (1963, 65) identifies this characteristic; "it seems likely that the small low outer compartment was lintelled (as is typical of most

Camster type chambers) and the inner polygonal chamber was corbelled". The largest stone, however, does not always occupy the rearmost position "the backslab is sometimes the tallest stone in the chamber, but as often as not it is topped by one of the others [in the rear chamber] which can be a very prominent stone as at Ballachnecore or Leachkin" (ibid, 66).

Of further relevance is the condition of the internal floor deposits of the Orkney-Cromarty tombs, particularly the Camster type of Caithness. Consistently, the clay, earth, and ash floors, incorporating small and broken fragments of cremated human bone, are compressed to form a dark greasy deposit described as compacted "and bearing that trodden appearance so characteristic of all the floors of these cairns" (Anderson 1868, 499). In some tombs, such as, South Yarrows North, South Yarrows South and Ormiegill, a layer of paving was laid down to create a new floor surface (Henshall 1963, 90). The thick layer of soil included in the basal deposits of the Orkney and Caithness tombs may also be interpreted as a continual process of covering the burnt remains of the dead and the recreation of a pathway.

The noted wear and compaction of the chamber floor, together with the examples of resurfacing, relates to more than the occasional deposition of the few individuals represented in the tombs by fragmentary skeletal material. It demonstrates that people frequently entered the tomb and moved through its interior on a formidable journey, following the many previous footsteps taken in awe and trepidation towards an ultimate goal.

It has been suggested that the innermost compartment of the Orcadian stalled cairns maintains a distinctive quality in terms of architecture and deposits (Richards 1988, 52-3; Davidson and Henshall 1989, 19). As within the Camster type tombs, with the notable exception of Carriside (Henshall 1963, 267), a tall monolith is absent from the inner area of the Orcadian stalled cairns, however, a massive backslab, the largest orthostat within the chamber, is virtually always present. The special nature of this stone slab is effectively demonstrated in the Orkney stalled cairns of Knowe of Yarso, Unstan, and Midhowe where the massive backslabs were inserted after the walled construction of the tomb chamber (Callander and Grant 1935, 332). This observation is particularly significant when it is remembered that the opposed

orthostats creating the internal doorways or `stalls' would normally be a primary element of tomb construction (Henshall 1963, 80), and the later addition of the backslab would have been a formidable task. Nevertheless, for a certain period of time the line of doorways formed by the orthostats would have been freestanding stones and therefore completely visible.

Regardless of the number of doorways or the length of the path through the tomb, this characteristic use and arrangement of orthostats marks a consistency discernible in the architecture of all the Orkney-Cromarty tombs. A series of doorways which define a path, a path taken to extreme lengths in the stalled tombs of Orkney (Fig 4:5), leading to the inevitable representation; that of the doorway to immortality and another world, the door to which is always closed to humanity.

The weight of ages: reconstructing the tombs

Outward appearances are important, they are meant to be seen, but as we all know they can be deceptive and frequently are in the case of the Orkney-Cromarty tombs. The massive long horned cairns, which have confounded typologies of the past (Childe 1934; Piggott 1954), are now revealed as composite structures which, through their alterations, betray a continued but changing attitude on the part of Neolithic people, to time, tradition and the past. The modifications represent a reconstitution of people's history and also a physical redefiniton of `place'.

At Tulach an't Sionnaich (Corcoran 1966, 5-22), as with many other examples, an extended sequence of tomb reconstruction can be demonstrated. Similarly, at Camster Long (L. Masters pers. comm.), a sequence of incorporation reinforces the view that the earliest Orkney-Cromarty tombs were small circular constructions and the many long mounds of Caithness and Sutherland are merely reconstructions, adding enormous masonry shells to a basic circular cairn form (Henshall 1972, 241; Sharples 1986, 9). In assuming this primary position the smaller circular tombs combine a striking architectural opposition between the inside (linearity), and outside (circularity) (cf. Hodder 1990). This distinction is lost in the later modification and addition which serves to provide the whole monument with directionality and prominent focal points.

The consequences of such action is difficult to realise, however, through time changes occur, both to the external world and necessarily, peoples perceptions of their place within it. On the Scottish mainland the tombs are altered and the treatment of the corpse changes. No longer is the purificatory properties of fire used in the interior of tombs as part of the rituals surrounding interment (Henshall 1963, 88-9). Complete bodies are now inserted and placed inside the monuments in positions which would impede, even prohibit movement through the interior. Coincidentally, the exterior of the monument is transformed, sometimes through a series of stages, from a small circular cairn to a massive linear construction with reaching monumental hornworks situated at either end. These changes are undoubtedly to do with display since their enlargement and reconstruction often involved subtle and deceptive building techniques to achieve monumental grandeur (Barber 1988, 58). Internally, no major architectural changes accompany this process of monumentalisation, indeed, it is as though the interior is forgotten, perhaps relegated to myth, and the entrance passages are frequently blocked by masonry as part of the external modifications.

The linearity of the pathway is now sealed within the tomb, individuals are unable to physically approach the sacred goal or door. Instead, the linearity of the pathway is transformed into the mound itself, however, proximity to the sacred is now limited to the forecourts within the two imposing hornworks situated at either end (fig 4:8). These facades now represent the end of the pathway which may have already existed before monumentalisation occurred. For instance, below the mound at Camster long, a series of postholes ran linearly, directly along the line of the spine of the later cairn, in a Southwesterly direction towards the southern chamber (L Masters pers comm). Accompanying these posts were the remains of large hearths and areas of burning. These posts and activities pre-date the long cairn. Hence, a line of posts had marked out a pathway to the original tombs before the monument was expanded, and along its length, just as with the pathway enclosed within the tomb, fire had played a part in the activities associated with its use. This passage, leading towards the tomb, was subsequently monumentalised and objectified through the construction of the massive long mound. While the tomb was effectively becoming larger and more visible in the

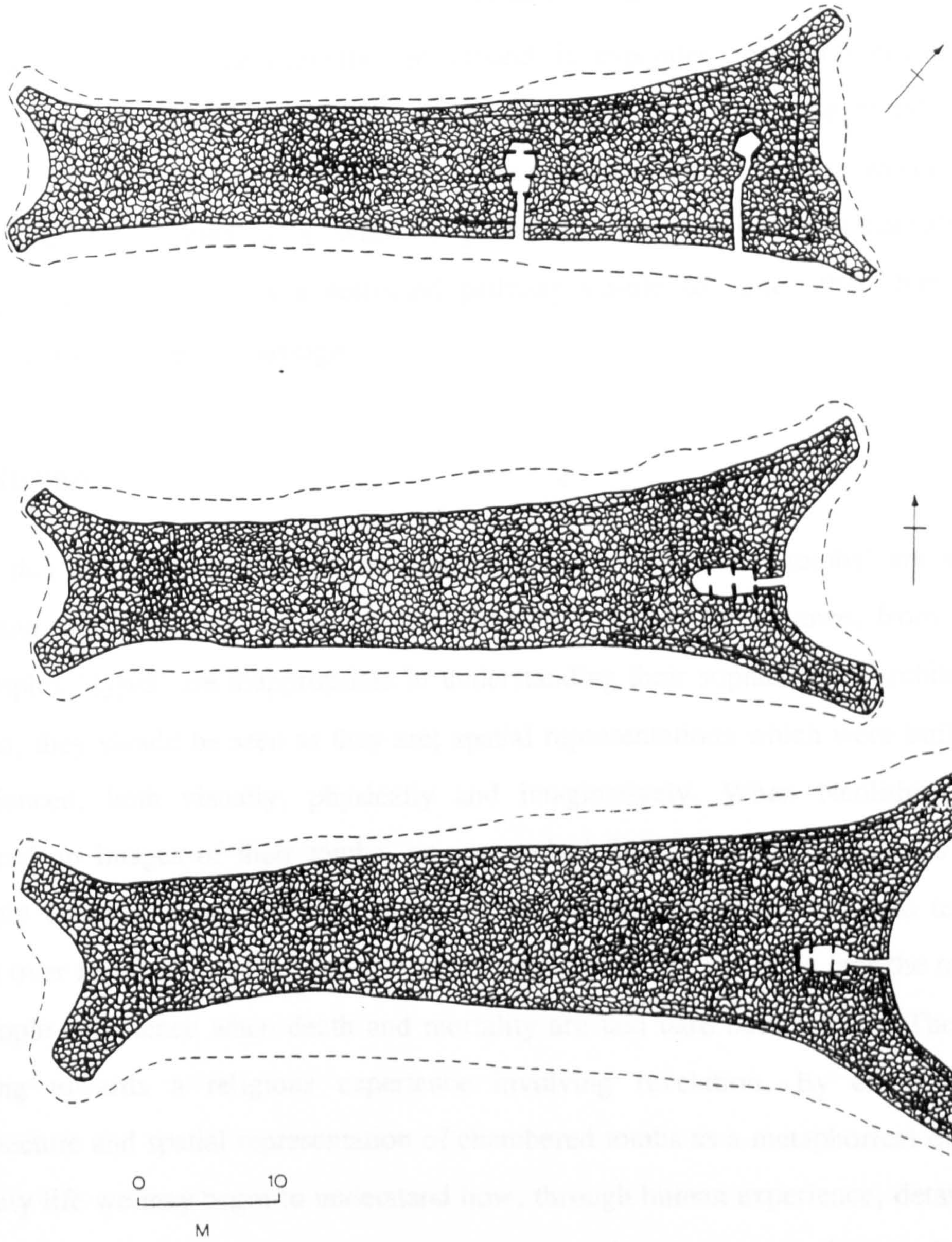


Figure 4:8. The horned cairns of north-east Scotland (top to bottom) Camster Long, North and South Yarrows South (after Henshall 1963).

world, the dead were becoming more restricted; they simply could no longer be approached.

In Orkney, as we will see in the following chapter, something quite different occurs within an apparently similar move towards increased outward visibility through monumentality. Within the architecture of the stalled cairns we see the lengthening of the pathway within the tomb. In contrast to the Caithness and Sutherland tombs, the interior of the tomb becomes emphasised and the passage to a final goal is severely

elongated (Fig 4:5). Consequently the mound is expanded to accommodate this internal development and just as before the final area within the tomb maintains its special significance (Richards 1988, 53-4). The passage from the outside world to the sacred place of communication with the gods and ancestors is now a considerable journey. Significantly, it is a restricted pathway visible to none other than those undertaking its dangerous passage.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to show that all `chambered tombs' are not the same and that broad generalisations of evolutionary nature, for instance, from simple to complex `types' are inappropriate in understanding their sophisticated architecture. Instead, they should be seen as they are; spatial representations which were built to be experienced, both visually, physically and imaginatively. When Neolithic people conjured up images of their tombs, or approached them with the dead, it is highly unlikely that they would have thought of them as territorial markers or in terms of rights over resources. On the contrary, they would have felt the same fear the majority of people experience when death and mortality are laid bare before them. They were moving towards a religious experience involving revelation. By examining the architecture and spatial representation of chambered tombs as a metaphorical extension of daily life we may begin to understand how, through human experience, detailed and complex cosmological beliefs were both understood and contextualised in Neolithic life. In Anderson's terms "the design... and special theory" (1868, 481) of the cairn builders is not necessarily lost to the archaeologist.

Chapter 5

Life and death in early Neolithic Orkney

Introduction

As seen in the previous chapter the weight of evidence for the earlier Neolithic period in Orkney is derived from excavations of Megalithic tombs. Only a single settlement has been excavated at Knap of Howar, Papa Westray. This imbalance effectively limits any ability to provide a rounded view of life and death in the early Neolithic period. Hence, the structure of this chapter reflects this bias and should be seen as providing a prologue to the more detailed examination of particular aspects of later Neolithic Orkney which forms the remainder of this volume. It should be noted however that continued research into this earlier period should, in the near future, help to address this imbalance.

Megalithic burial in the early Neolithic of Orkney

In the last chapter the Orkney-Cromarty tombs were examined as architectural constructs embodying conceptions of death and physically symbolising part of the passage from the world of the living through to that of the dead. It was heavily stressed that functional views, for instance, the megalithic tomb acting as a territorial marker, may have had some bases in motivating monumental constructions, but to take such aspects in an explanatory framework are obviously extremely reductionist and

therefore inadequate in understanding the richness and diversity of the megalithic burial record. Extensive critiques of functionalist or processual attitudes to mortuary practices have been forwarded elsewhere (Pearson 1982; Shanks & Tilley 1982; Barrett 1988; Richards 1988; Thomas 1991) and it is hardly necessary to repeat these views here.

Here I wish to examine the attitude of the living towards the dead as witnessed in both tomb architecture and the treatment of the corpse. By drawing on the ideas forwarded in the last chapter I hope to provide an insight into the complex forms of mortuary practices which occur during the early Neolithic period, which it will be suggested, are vital in understanding the broader patterns of social change occurring in the later Neolithic period of Orkney (see also chapter 8).

From the outset it seems clear that research into Neolithic Orkney has been burdened by two approaches to the study of megalithic tombs which dominates the archaeological literature. First, regional studies of a functionalist nature which are encumbered by pre-formulated theoretical models imposed onto the available evidence (e.g. Childe 1946; Renfrew 1979) and second, particularistic studies in which chambered tombs are treated as independent physical entities, seemingly maintaining a life of their own. This perspective is typical of classificatory and typological studies mentioned in the earlier chapter and, for me, the worst aspect of these investigations is that the examination of the data takes place within a framework possessing no coherent theoretical structure linking the megaliths to human goals and interests (e.g. Fraser 1983, Henshall 1985).

Apart from these basic criticisms perhaps the strongest condemnation of these studies is the same as that noted for the megaliths of northern Scotland; the common failing of having once identified distinct and marked difference and variation in the burial record, to then ignore it completely in the final analysis. Indeed, presupposed uniformity of purpose is an essential ingredient of the type of general models which have been forwarded in the past for Neolithic Orkney (Renfrew 1979; Hedges 1983).

For analytical purposes chronological integrity and adequately recorded excavations are obviously essential. Unfortunately, it is the lack of these qualities which generally serve to characterise chambered tombs, and Orkney is no exception to

this rule. These problems stem from one of the defining features of chambered megalithic tombs; that of accessibility. Indeed, analysis and interpretation of the internal deposits of these monuments has been largely neglected on the grounds that a lengthy period of access will permit the disturbance, destruction, or removal of deposits. As a result the discussion of tomb contents became a purely descriptive exercise (e.g. Darvill 1982; Fraser 1983). However, these deposits are transforms of human activities which embody a history of the tombs, therefore, a more positive yet critical stance is necessary. Surely, as was heavily emphasised in the last chapter, the provision of access on the part of the builders points to the importance attached to the facility of both insertion and extraction (cf. Kinnes 1981, 84).

Of the 80 recognised Orcadian cairns (Figs 5:1 & 7:2), 33 have been excavated over the last 150 years. Out of these examples two distinctly different `types' of architecture have been recognised, referred to here as the tripartite/stalled cairns (chapter 4) and the Orkney passage graves (chapter 7). The former, as discussed earlier, fall within the Orkney-Cromarty group recognised by Henshall (1963, 57-8); the latter includes Henshall's Maeshowe type (*ibid*, 121-34) and Renfrew's Quanterness/Quoyness group (1979, 201-3). The tripartite/stalled cairns are, as we have seen, defined by a long rectangular chamber lineally sub-divided by paired orthostats projecting internally at right angles from the inner wall face.

The chronology of these cairns is far from sound or secure, although as was suggested in the last chapter, the bi/tripatite forms of stalled cairns would appear to constitute the earliest constructions, being similar to certain Scottish mainland examples which, on the basis of radiocarbon determinations, can be placed early in the third millennium BC (cf. Sharples 1986, 4). The larger stalled cairns are clearly an elaboration of this basic theme and could be tentatively placed at a slightly later date. The relatively later position of the passage graves is clearly demonstrated at Howe of Howe, Stromness, Mainland, where a passage grave overlays a supposed stalled cairn (it is possible that the underlying structure is a house, either way the earlier structure adheres to a linear architectural form (cf.Carter *et al* 1984; B. Smith & D. Haigh pers. comm.).

We may posit, therefore, a very general chronological ordering of chambered

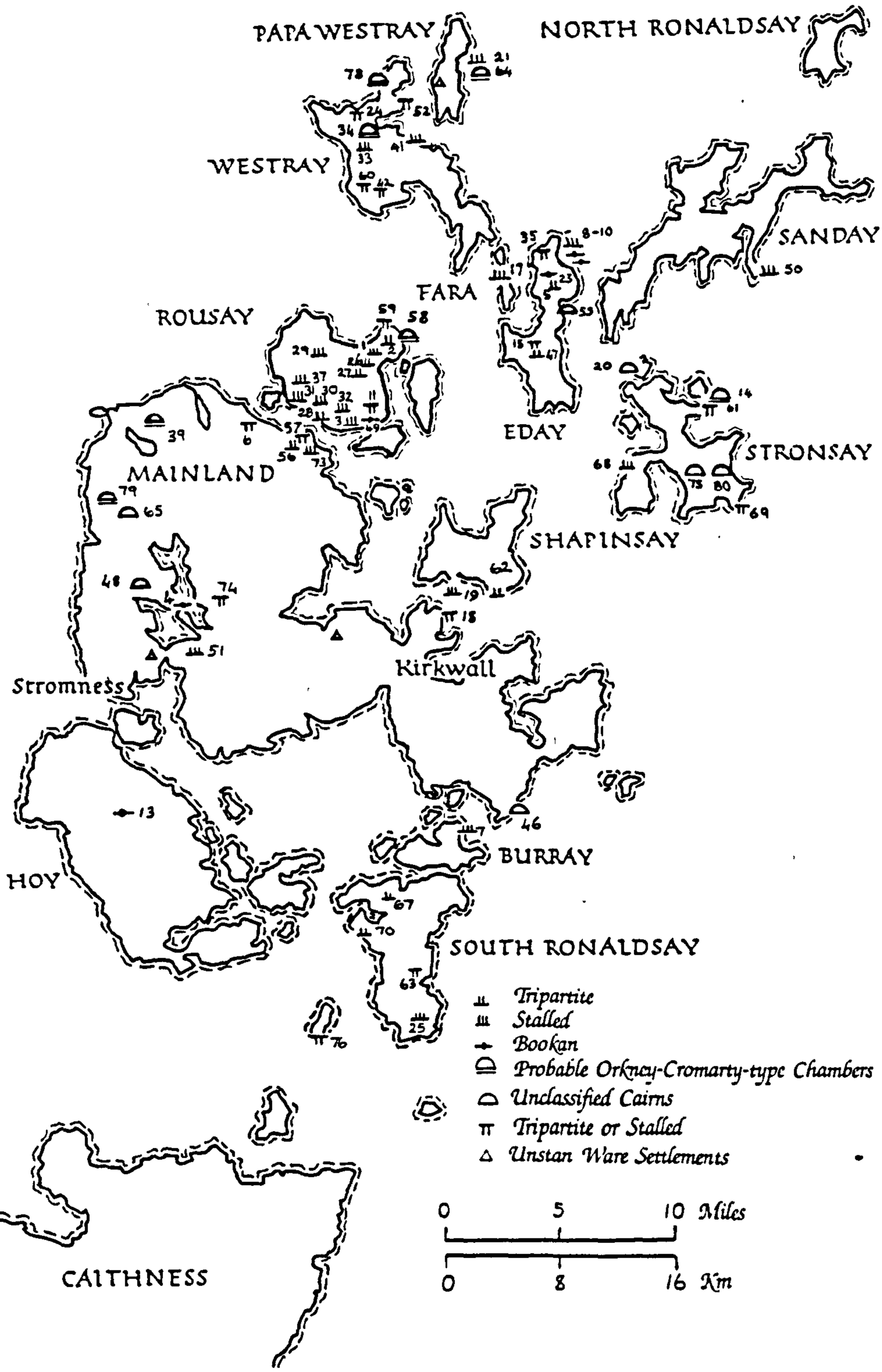


Figure 5:1. Distribution of Orkney-Cromarty cairns in Orkney (after Davidson & Henshall 1989).

cairn construction, however, this is not to say that one design superseded the other or that such a trend of changing architecture embraced all of Orkney. In fact, even if the initial construction of the different cairns maintains a chronological distinction, the radiocarbon determinations obtained for three stalled cairns on Rousay demonstrate continued use concurrent with the later passage graves. Similarly, the late radiocarbon determinations from Isbister, South Ronaldsay, suggest that a form of stalled architecture, albeit combing elements of passage grave design, may have continued in some peripheral areas well into the late third millenium. It would appear that only under exceptional circumstances, for instance Howe of Howe (see also the structure below Maeshowe discussed in Chapter 7), was it deemed necessary to supersede one form by another.

It will be noted that little reference has been made to support this chronological scheme with the currently available radiocarbon determinations. The reason for this lies in the uncertain relationship between tomb construction and contents. Strong reservations are held about the viability of using human bone to date all the deposits within a particular context and even less the construction of the tomb itself. As will be argued below, the apparent discrepancy and incoherence of the radiocarbon determinations relates to the removal and redeposition of human bones, both within and between sites.

The bones of the ancestors

Taking an overall view of the early Neolithic Orcadian burial record at our disposal, of the excavated sites only 19 have been recorded in a manner which facilitates further analysis. Human remains have been recovered from 14 of these sites. Unfortunately, the quality of excavation reports is extremely variable and a large amount of skeletal material has been lost or mislaid (however some unknown skeletal material from Knowe of Rowiegar and Knowe of Yarso has recently been discovered in the Aberdeen anthropological museum). In some cases, however, where explicit information is absent, it is still possible to produce a rough estimate of the number of individuals present (Fig 5:2). The significant aspect of this evidence is the obvious

variability in the numbers of individuals deposited in different cairns. This is most strikingly illustrated by the extraordinary difference in numbers noted at Isbister as compared with the other Orkney-Cromarty cairns, an observation which exceeds any taphonomic processes which will have effected different conditions of survival (*contra* Barber 1988).

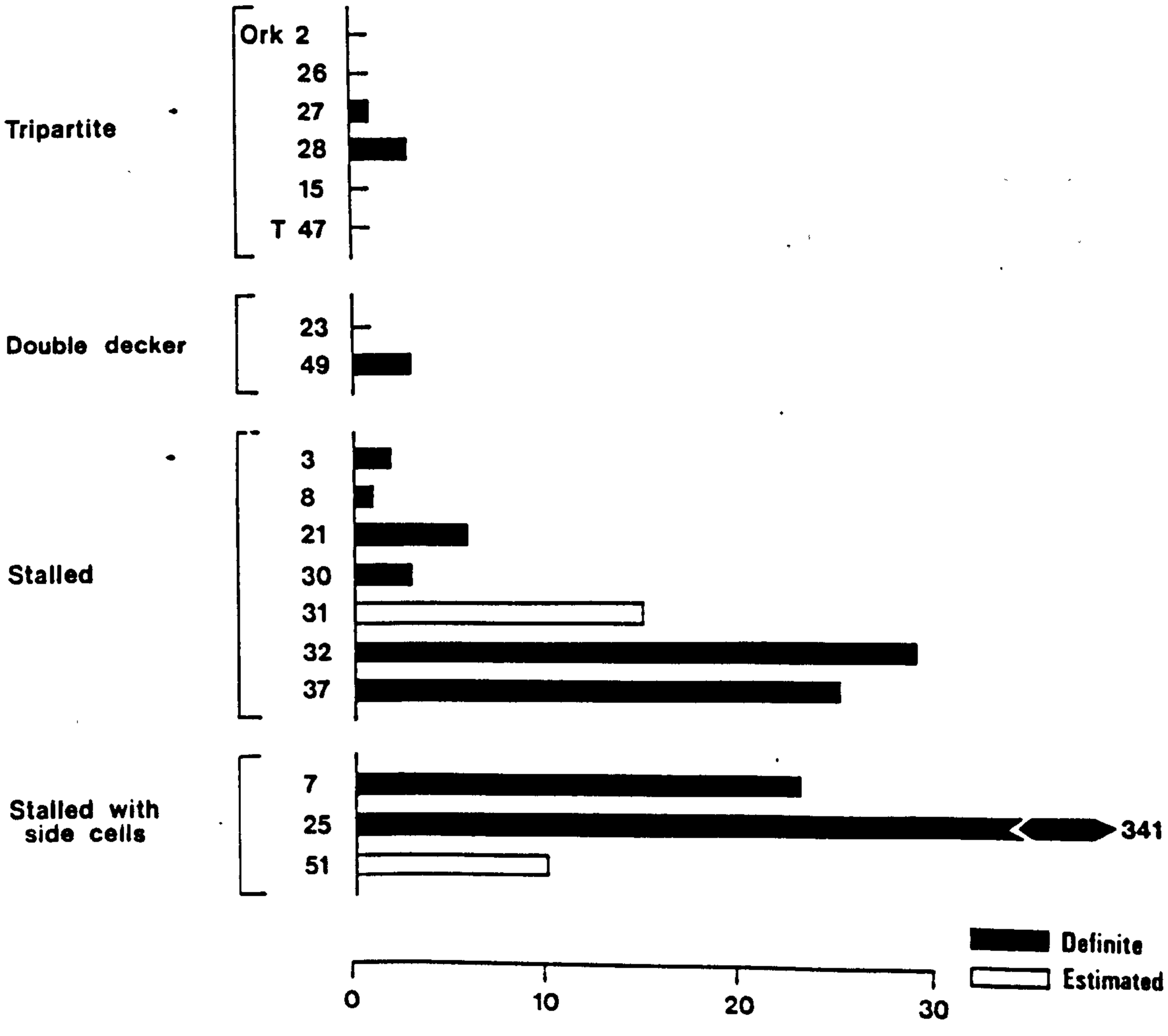


Figure 5:2. Numbers of individuals represented in the Orcadian Orkney-Cromarty cairns (vertical numbers refer to Henshall's scheme and horizontal numbers to individuals represented).

A general examination of the condition and arrangement of the skeletal deposits from the excavated tombs reveals strong evidence to support an Orcadian tradition of the initial interment of *complete* bodies (cf. Henshall 1963, 93; Davidson & Henshall

1989, 52-5). Almost half the tombs examined include both articulated *and* disarticulated skeletal remains. Logically, the presence of articulation effectively demonstrates that bodies were interred in complete (articulated) form, hence, the noted disarticulation is due to the purposeful and selective movement and/or removal of human bones subsequent to interment. As noted in the last chapter, movement in and out of the tomb may well have been a frequent occurrence and the mixed skeletal remains the result of continuous visits and activities.

Nevertheless, the evidence for the interment of complete bodies conflicts with the suggestion of Chesterman (1979;1983), uncritically adopted by others (Renfrew 1979; Hedges 1983; Fraser 1983), that the predominant form of mortuary practices involved excarnation outside the cairn and that this was consistently employed throughout the Orcadian Neolithic period.

Burial Rites

Earlier it was suggested that the architecture of the Orkney-Cromarty cairns adhered to a spatial representation not solely concerned with the deposition of the dead, e.g. the traditional view of a chambered tomb. The design of these monuments emphasised the passage towards a goal; an end point which represented the deepest, most sacred, area within the building. This is not to deny that the dead were deposited within the structures nor that the buildings were not considered as houses for the dead. Indeed, through the necessary metaphorical link between what is known and understood and that which requires physical translation, it is argued that through the concept of doorways dividing space within the house so doorways were employed as the active metaphor within the tomb. The important aspect of this interpretation is that it is the moving in and out, through structured and weighted space, which is considered to be of prime importance.

With reference to these ideas it is possible to review the evidence from the tripartite/stalled cairns to provide greater insight into the way these burial structures were used and conceived. By examining the burial deposits located within particular cairns it will be possible to assess the mode of burial and the nature of deposition and

use. Earlier it was suggested that the initial burial rite involved the interment of

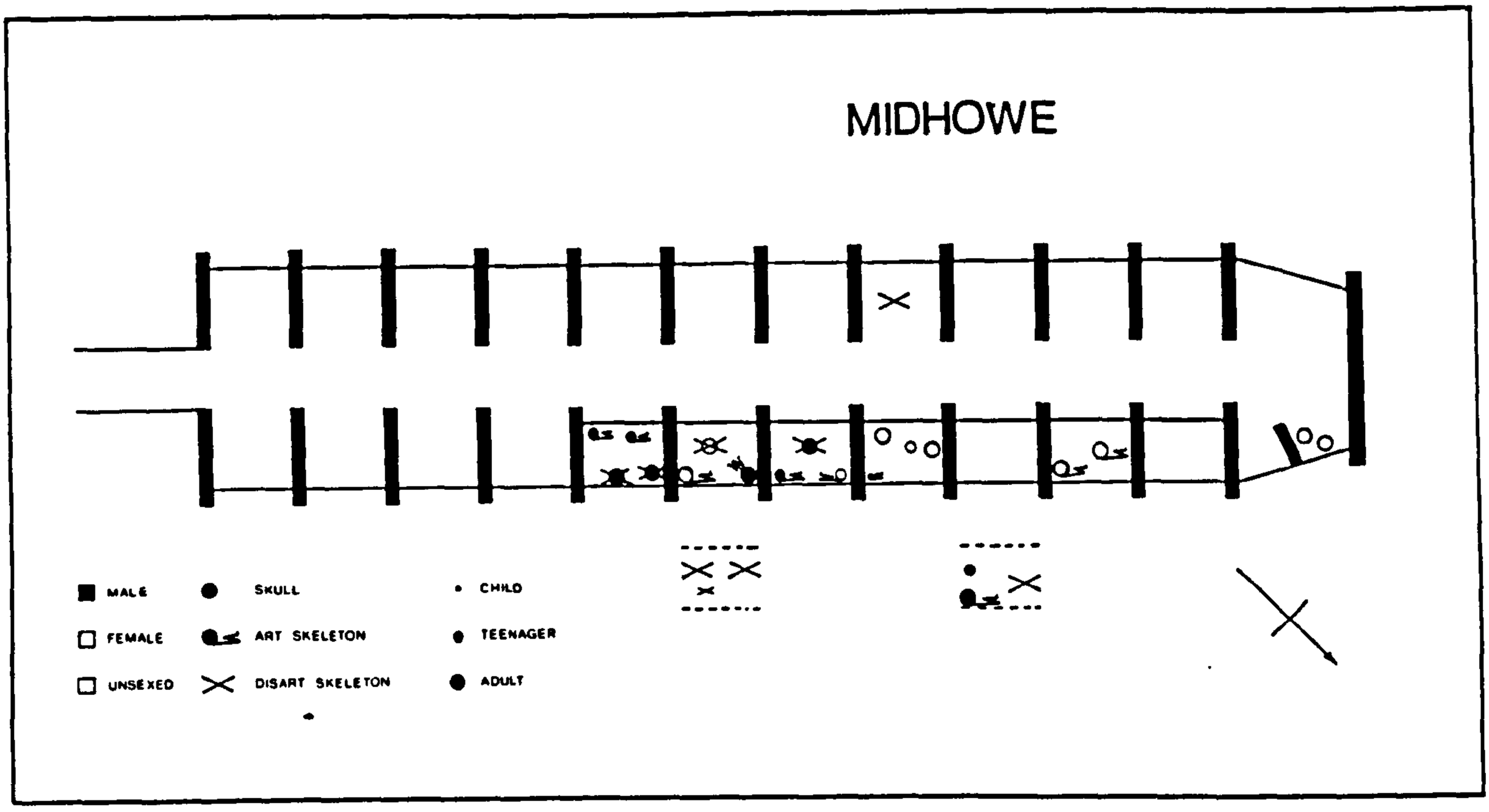


Figure 5:3. Midhowe, Rousay, showing the positions and types of human skeletal remains.

complete bodies. The evidence for this proposal came from the identification of articulated burials within certain tombs. The clearest example of this practice comes from the tomb of Midhowe, Rousay; a long stalled cairn having 12 internal paired stone stalls or doorways (Callander & Grant 1934). Within the cairn, nine individuals out of a total of twenty five represented were crouched or `sitting' inhumations. These remains were positioned on stone shelves, situated at a low level along the right, or north-eastern, side of the chamber (Fig 5:3). Earlier deposits of human remains, presumably also articulated when interred, had either been removed or pushed to the rear of the stone shelves in order to create space for the new occupants of the tomb. During this process the remains had become disarticulated and jumbled, however, in particular cases the bones were heaped together and the skull placed on top. Further individuals were represented by a smaller amount of skeletal material, for instance, beneath the stone shelf in compartment 6 lay a small group of bones representing the remains of two adults and a child. The consistent element of these `burials' is that the remains are generally incomplete, thus maintaining an occurrence consistently noted

within all of the Orkney-Cromarty cairns.

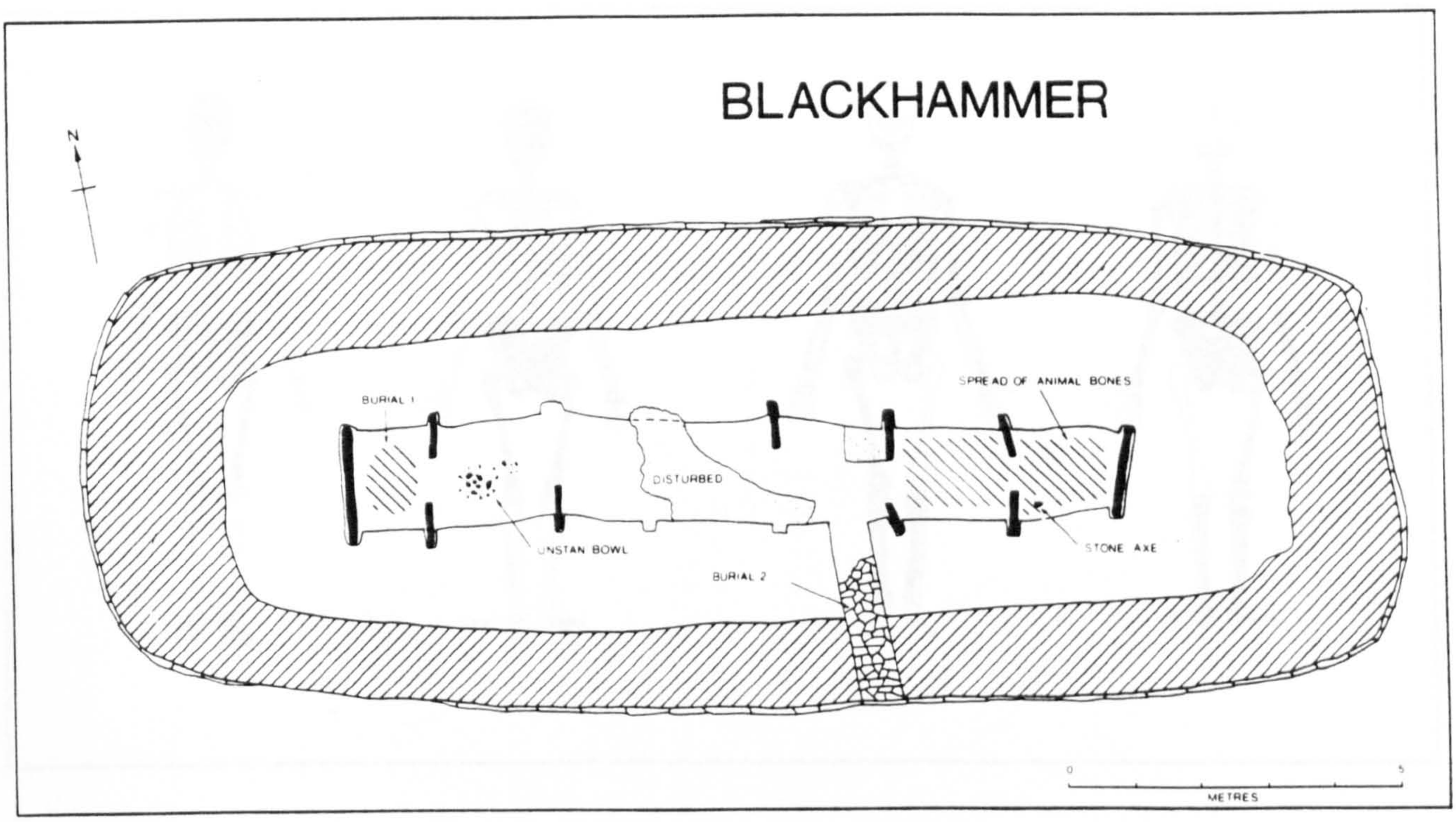


Figure 5:4. The position of burials and artefacts within Blackhammer, Rousay.

Apart from the virtual absence of human remains in the tripartite cairns (Fig 5:2), when a closer look is taken at the burials in two other large stalled cairns, both situated on Rousay, an interesting pattern emerges. At Blackhammer (Callander & Grant 1937) (Fig 5:4), two burials were recorded: one in the western end compartment, the other in the entrance passage. We can only assume the burial in the entrance to be associated with the closure of the tomb and the passage blocking ceremonies. However, in examining both burial deposits it is found that neither individual is fully represented (Fig 5:5). Blackhammer, like Unstan, Mainland, is unusual in having a side entrance. In this marked variation we see the creation of opposition since on gaining access to the main chamber the subject is presented with a choice to move either left or right. Both directions present the same series of `doorways' and, as is shown at Unstan (Fig 5:6), each end has a clearly defined rear

compartment and back-slab. Here we can assume that specific meanings were attached

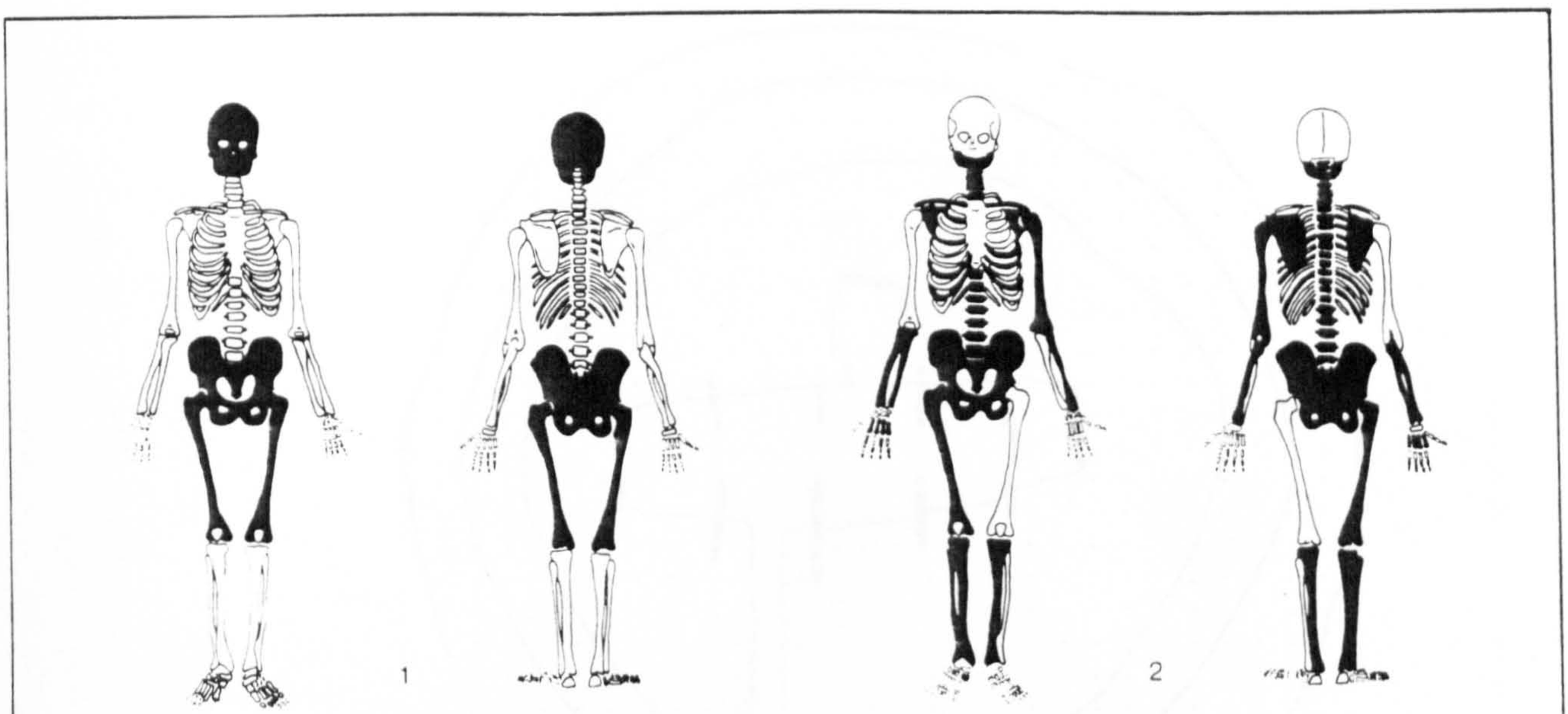


Figure 5:5. Human skeletal parts representing the two burials at Blackhammer.

to each route. In this context it is worth noting that at Blackhammer, differential deposits were recovered from the two opposed sections (Fig 5:4).

Again at Knowe of Ramsay (Callander & Grant 1936), where three burial deposits were discovered, the skeletal parts are incomplete (Fig 5:7). In assessing these remains we have to seriously consider taphonomic processes (cf. Barber 1988), however, the obvious selectivity of the majority of these burial deposits (e.g. Knowe of Yarso) defies a purely taphonomic explanation.

The burial deposits within Knowe of Yarso (Callander & Grant 1935), a smaller stalled cairn, situated on high ground to the south of Rousay, again reveal a dispropor-

tion in human body parts. In this tomb there is a marked bias towards the deposition of

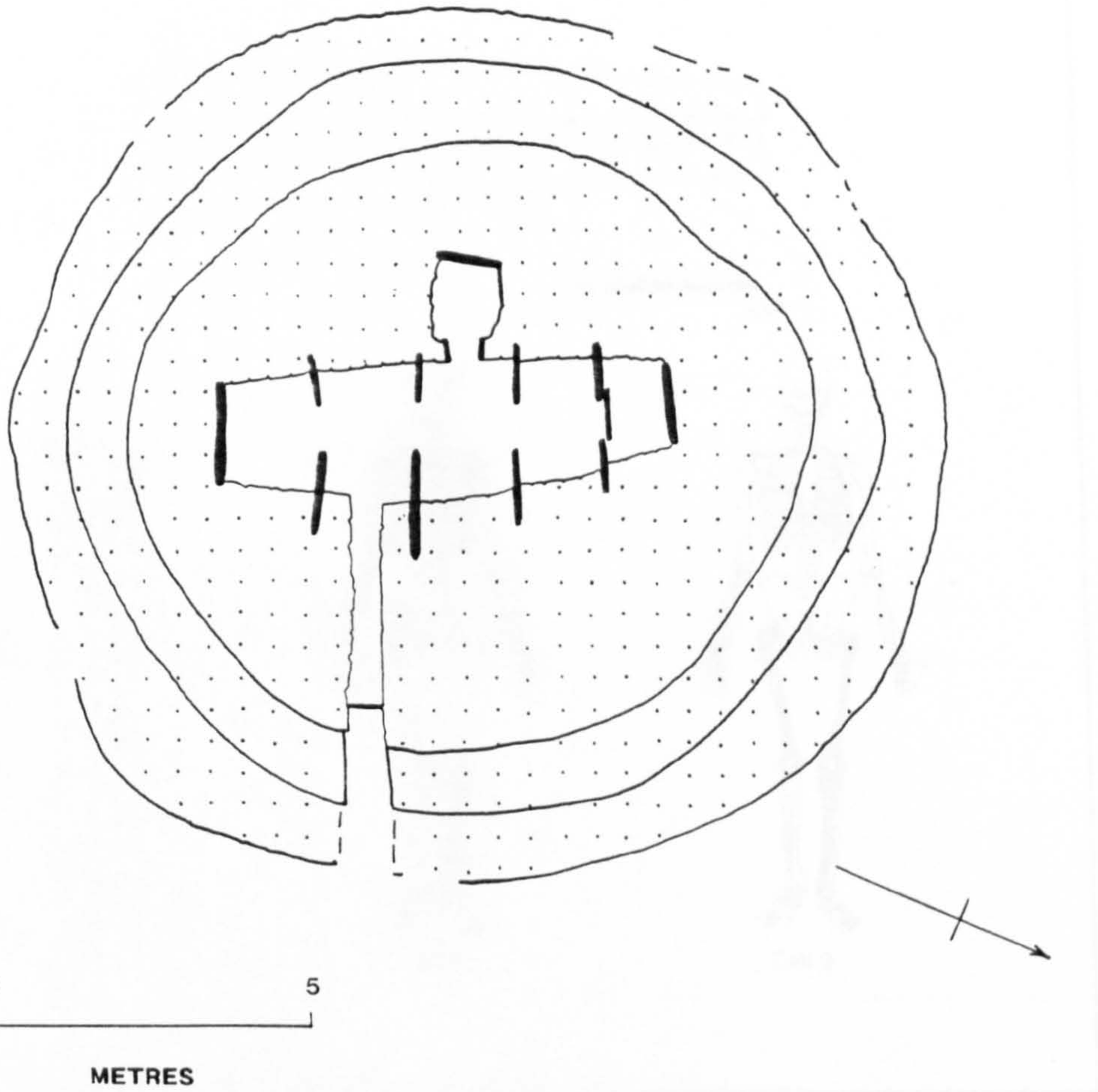


Figure 5:6. Plan of Unstan, Mainland.

skulls. This differentiation is apparent not only in the presence/absence of body parts but also in their spatial distribution (Fig 5:8). The predominance of skulls must surely relate to the discrepancy noted in skeletal remains for other Orkney cairns. A more detailed examination of the burial deposits within Knowe of Yarso shows a complete absence of human mandibles, furthermore the skulls themselves were noticed to be in variable condition and preservation; one notable example having been exposed to fire (Callander & Grant 1935, 333-9). Clearly these deposits either originated from different contexts or else were subjected to removal and differential treatment at

another place before they were finally deposited and arranged within this cairn.

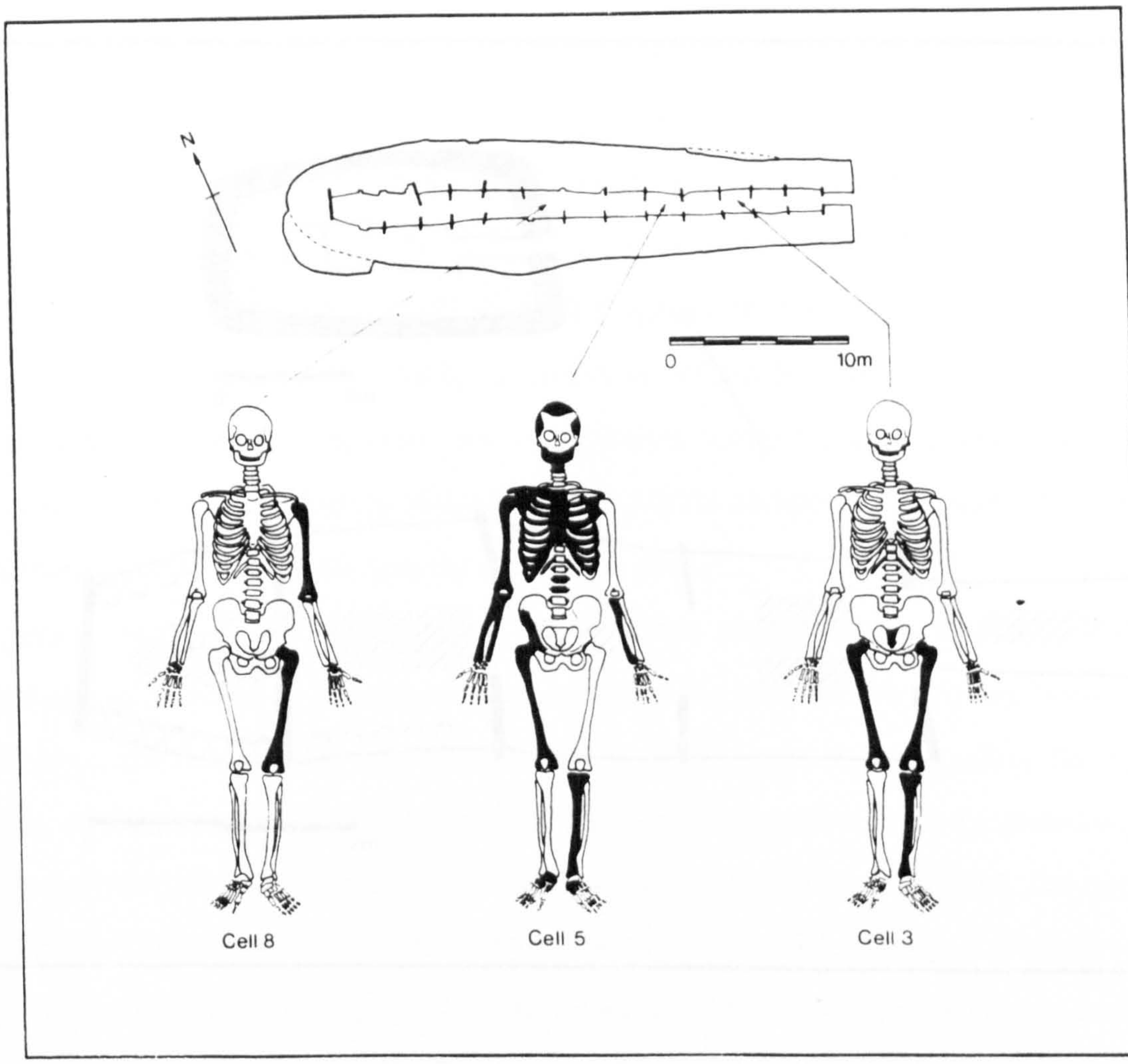


Figure 5:7. Knowe of Ramsay, Rousay, showing locations and skeletal remains of the burials.

Taken together, the evidence indicates that a complex sequence of events occurred within the context of the tripartite/stalled cairns over an extended period of time. Following Henshall (1963, 93), we can suggest that inhumation, often in a crouched position, represented the primary method of burial, this practice being exemplified at Midhowe. The radiocarbon determinations obtained for several of the Rousay stalled cairns (Renfrew 1979, 72), albeit on unstratified material, demonstrates continued activity into the later part of the third millenium rendering them contemporary with the construction and use of the Maeshowe passage graves. These activities apparently involved regular entry and the movement of deposits within *and* between cairns, and

to other external contexts.

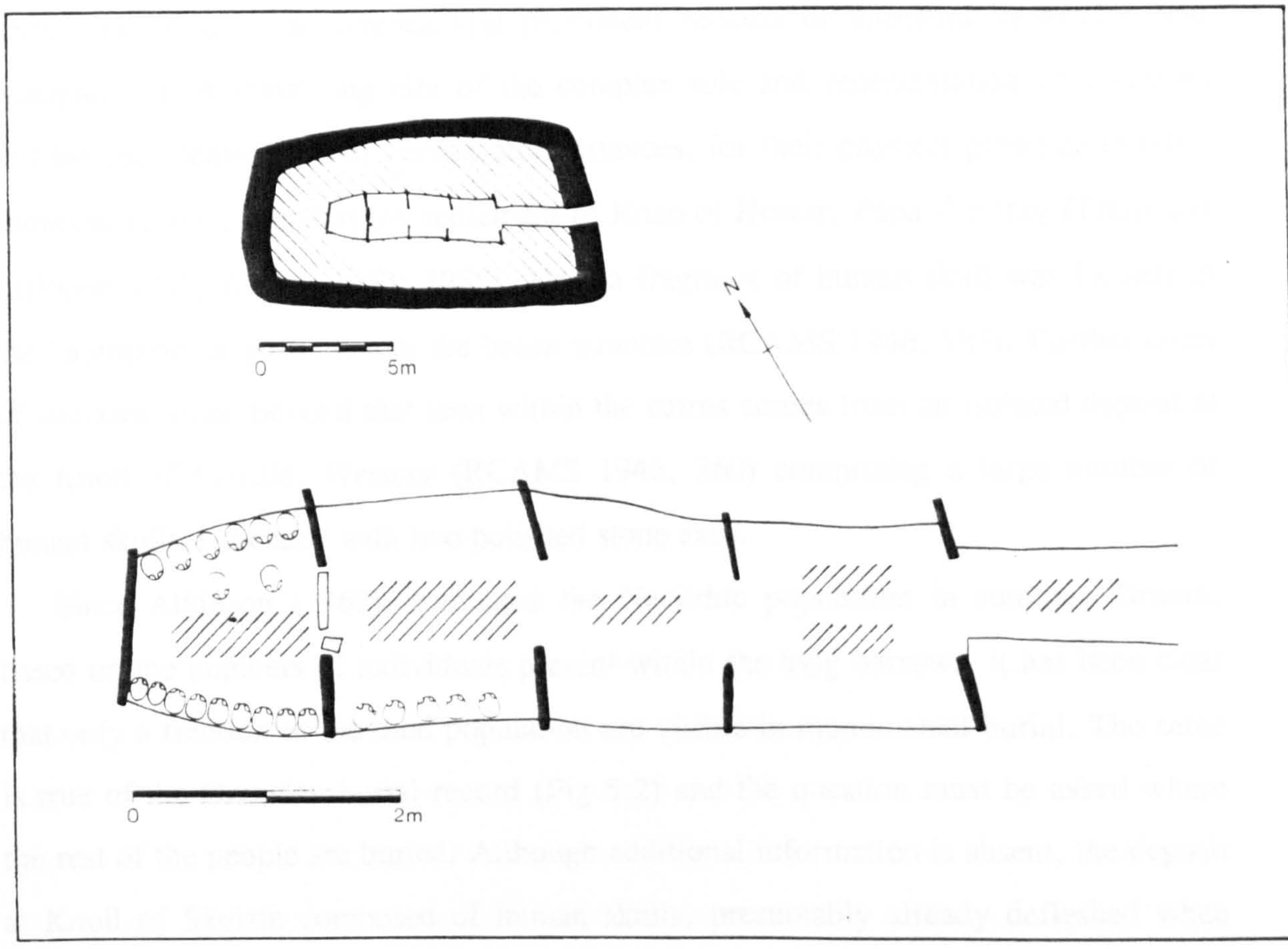


Figure 5:8. Knowe of Yarso, Rousay, showing a diagramatic representation of the human skeletal remains.

In rejecting the widely held belief that excarnation was an integral part of mortuary practice in Neolithic Orkney it is no longer justifiable to invoke chance loss during the excarnation process to account for the partial nature of human remains within the cairns. Neither does an appeal to taphonomic processes as a selective mechanism. Instead it is suggested that at certain times after initial deposition of the corpse, the cairn was purposefully re-entered and the bones of the deceased were disturbed, involving the rearrangement and removal of selected body parts.

Thus the human bones would appear, in some cases, to have been transported between different tombs and redeposited; however, this may form only one aspect of what appears to be a complex and prominent process of ancestral veneration and manipulation. A tantalising hint of the complex role and representation of ancestors and the requirement, under certain circumstances, for their physical presence in other contexts, is to be found at the settlement of Knap of Howar, Papa Westray (Traill and Kirkness 1937, Ritchie 1983; 1985). Here a fragment of human skull was located in the `domestic' deposits within the house structure (RCAMS 1946, 183). Further clues of ancestral ritual beyond that seen within the cairns comes from an isolated deposit at the Knoll of Skulzie, Westray (RCAMS 1946, 360) comprising a large number of human skulls associated with two polished stone axes.

Since Atkinson (1968), estimated the Neolithic population in southern Britain, based on the numbers of individuals present within the long barrows, it has been clear that only a fraction of the total population are visible in monumental burial. The same is true of the Orcadian burial record (Fig 5:2) and the question must be asked where the rest of the people are buried. Although additional information is absent, the deposit at Knoll of Skulzie composed of human skulls, presumably already defleshed when deposited, testifies to this being a secondary burial. Two basic possibilities to account for these factors may be suggested. Either the cairns were the context for *all* the population and the majority of skeletal material was subsequently removed after the flesh had rotted. Here, the deposition of the individual in a house of the dead would have formed only part of the rites of passage which began in the settlement and ended at another location. Alternatively, only a few individuals gained admission into the house of the dead, the majority would have been buried elsewhere or disposed of in another manner.

At this point it is worth clarifying the main forms of rituals which are envisaged to involve the disturbance and rearrangement of deposits within the tomb. First, there is the initial interment sequence, which occurs after the death of an individual deemed appropriate for burial within the tomb. This event will probably be drawn out over a period of time involving some form of rites of passage necessary to sanction the transformation from life to death. As was suggested in the last chapter, this will

involve a spatial and temporal structure beginning with rites within the house or settlement and a subsequent journey from the place of the living; the house, to that of the dead; the cairn. Given the prominence of the dead and their abode in the landscape and consequently, the lives of the Neolithic people, it is quite likely that this process was a highly ritualised and elaborate affair.

Second, are the rituals which may occur at the tomb or elsewhere but which necessarily require the presence of the ancestors. This, for example, may include calendrical rituals involving fertility or the rites of passage of an individual. Communication with the ancestors requires their presence and this may be achieved through the withdrawal and movement of particular ancestral emblems from the tomb, either skulls or other significant skeletal parts (cf. Kinnes 1975, 17). We can be fairly certain that both forms of activity occurred within the tripartite/stalled cairns.

Returning to specific Orcadian contexts, the contents of tripartite/stalled cairns reveal a complex sequence of events which includes the removal and transportation of human remains between tombs and other contexts. This surely relates to the importance attached to ancestors *and* their physical and metaphysical accessibility. Under these circumstances the incorporation and presence of ancestral bones within new contexts of deposition (e.g. a newly constructed tomb) may have been an essential part of the ritual process of bringing a building `to life'. Here it is worth recalling the two skulls situated within the deepest, end compartment at Midhowe (Callander & Grant 1934, 334). These were so fragmentary and decayed that no sex or age determination was possible.

It is suggested that the anomalous skeletal deposits at Isbister, South Ronaldsay, become comprehensible when examined in terms of the movement of human remains between different contexts. Like the passage grave of Quanterness, Isbister, holds the remains of a vastly greater number of individuals than any other stalled cairn (Richards 1988, fig 4:2). A minimum number of 341 individuals were identified from their skeletal remains, although it was considered to be a low estimate (Chesterman 1983, 76-7). As with other stalled cairns, individuals were only partially represented by particular skeletal parts (*ibid*, 73-4), and in no case was any form of articulation present (Hedges 1983, 215). The bones were selectively deposited with groups of long

bones and skulls being placed in different areas of the cairn (Fig 5:9). Following the interpretation offered for the large amount of human remains within Quanterness (Renfrew 1979), Isbister, was suggested by Hedges (1983, 225), to have served as a communal chambered tomb for over a period of about 160 years. The weathered and variable condition of the disarticulated skeletal remains was taken as clear evidence for excarnation, possibly occurring in close proximity to the cairn (*ibid*, 216-7).

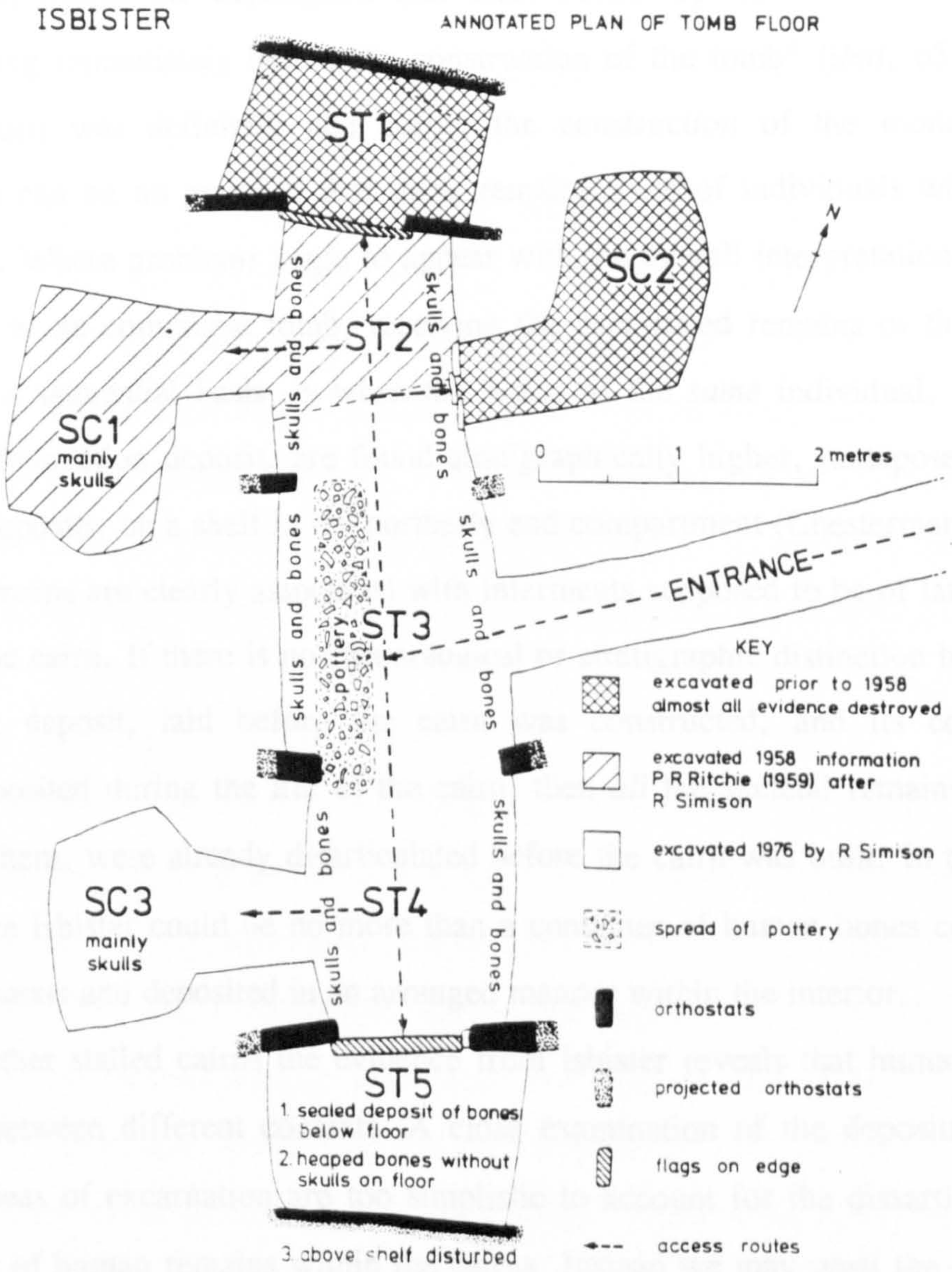


Figure 5:9. Plan of Isbister, South Ronaldsay, showing differential deposits of human bone

If this evidence is re-examined, the deposits reveal a more complex process of deposition. The supposed duration of 160 years for the use of the cairn is taken from the eleven radiocarbon determinations taken, in all but one sample, from human bone. If this material was collected from other contexts, the `life' of Isbister could have been much shorter. The skeletal remains were clearly disarticulated before insertion and a vital clue to the circumstances of their deposition comes from the foundation deposit. Hedges, makes the assumption that these bones represent the remains of "individuals dying immediately before the construction of the tomb" (*ibid*, 65). The foundation deposit was definitely laid before the construction of the monument, therefore, there can be no question that these remains were of individuals who had died previously. Where problems begin to appear with the overall interpretation of the role of Isbister as an communal tomb, receiving the excarnated remains of the dead generations on a sequential basis, is when the bones of the *same* individual, as was present in the foundation deposit, are found stratigraphically higher, juxtaposed with other skeletal deposits, on a shelf in the northerly end compartment (Chesterman 1983, 129). These remains are clearly associated with interments supposed to be of later date in the life of the cairn. If there is no chronological or stratigraphic distinction between the foundation deposit, laid before the cairn was constructed, and its contents, supposedly deposited during the life of the cairn, then *all* the skeletal remains, or at least some of them, were already disarticulated before the cairn was built. In the face of this evidence Isbister could be no more than a container of human bones collected from other contexts and deposited in an arranged manner within the interior.

Like the other stalled cairns the evidence from Isbister reveals that human bones were moved between different contexts. A close examination of the deposits shows that current ideas of excarnation are too simplistic to account for the dissarticulation and patterning of human remains within the cairns. Instead we may posit the removal and localised circulation of human remains between contexts, and the anomalous contents of cairns such as Isbister simply represent the final deposition of selected remains at a later date.

Architecture as the end

In the last chapter it was argued that the architecture of the Orkney-Cromarty tombs employs a lineal spatial representation which necessarily emphasises the deepest space: the innermost compartment. In this light the inner compartment in the tripartite/stalled cairns takes on greater significance since if it does represent a goal; the furthest point humanity can get towards the ancestral world, then it is also a point to which every action has to relate. As I will show, the inner area is distinct in many of the Orcadian tombs.

Stone shelves feature in only three of the tripartite tombs: Sandyhill Smithy (Calder 1937, 115-54); Bigland Round (Henshall 1963, 183-4); and Knowe of Craie (Henshall 1963, 208). In each case the shelf is exclusive to the inner area. Similarly, Knowe of Yarso has a scarcement to hold a shelf and a stone `door' sill delineating the inner area within the end compartment. A sill stone defining the final compartment - is also present at Holm of Papa Westray North (Ritchie 1983). At Midhowe the inner area is paved and the space broken by a curious stone arrangement which may be shelf supports. Stone cists or boxes occupy the inner compartment at both Point of Cott, Westray (Barber pers comm) and Calf of Eday Long (Calder 1937, 115-29).

In addition to the architectural embellishment and definition of the inner compartment in many of the tripartite/stalled cairns, there is the further intriguing evidence from Holm of Papa Westray North and Calf of Eday Long, that both these constructions were added onto, and incorporated, earlier funerary structures. A smaller two chambered tomb lies encased directly beyond the rear wall of Calf of Eday Long. A smaller structure lies encased behind the rear wall at Holm of Papa Westray North. In both examples, the linear interior of the later `stalled' cairn, effectively provides a passage, a line of approach towards the enclosed structure hidden behind the rear wall. Just as we saw with some of the Orkney-Cromarty tombs on the Scottish mainland, the `stalled' architecture acts as doorways through which people pass on their journey to something specific which lies beyond the rear wall. In these two examples the goal

was an earlier, and presumably venerated, funerary monument.

The material deposits are also structured in a manner which emphasises the deepest space within the cairn. At Knowe of Yarso (Fig 5:8), the inner compartment was subdivided into two areas. In the outer section, five skulls were positioned against the wall and in the inner section, seventeen skulls were placed in juxtaposition in a similar position, cranium upwards facing the centre of the compartment (Callander & Grant 1935, 332-3). At Midhowe, as previously mentioned, two skulls were located in the inner chamber. The single skull from the tripartite cairn at Knowe of Craie, Rousay, being the only skeletal material represented in any of the tripartite cairns, was positioned in the inner compartment (RCAMS 1946, 206). The only human skeletal material at Calf of Eday Long (Calder 1937, 115-29), was a single adult situated in the innermost compartment below a shelf upon which two polished stone axes were placed (there were no recognisable deposits in the earlier structure encased behind the rear chamber). However, within the smaller encased structure at the rear of Holm of Papa Westray North, a deposit of both human and animal skulls, together with deer tines, were discovered (Ritchie 1983).

In this, and the last chapter, I have attempted to draw out the specific and special nature of the Orkney-Cromarty megalithic cairns. Although classified as megalithic tombs, their architecture is distinct and recognisably different from other burial monuments, this it is argued, is intentional and should not be merely seen as some form of deviation from a single model or template of a `chambered tomb'. Architectural form relates to their use and perception by Neolithic people. I have also attempted to explain why their contents are so variable. We recognise the entrance to a megalithic tomb is important, and yet, still do not acknowledge that this feature (and its frequent embellishment) is the most important aspect of their architecture; people went in and out, probably on a fairly regular basis. Yes, they did contain the dead, but not in the communal or collective form we tend to envisage. Here we are dealing with symbolism and display, and a specialized use and deposition of selected members of a community. The events surrounding the use of the tomb may have been highly selective and one element of certainty was that the deposition of a corpse within a stalled cairn almost certainly ensured later interference and rearrangement, if not

extraction.

The living Community

Despite the presence of Knap of Howar, the only standing early Neolithic house structure in Britain (Fig 4:6), our knowledge of the everyday lives of these people remains extremely limited. An initial problem is encountered when it is considered whether Knap of Howar is truly representative of all earlier Neolithic habitations. On one hand, Knap of Howar would seem to be consistent with the generally accepted framework of early Neolithic settlement in Britain comprising small isolated farm-steads (e.g. Holgate 1988). On the other, potentially conflicting evidence comes from excavation and field-survey on Mainland, Orkney. For example, the evidence from fieldwork at Deepdale, Stromness, (see chapter 3), suggests the presence of possibly three house structures (Figs 3:13-14). Moreover, if the structures located beneath and. around the passage grave at Howe of Howe (Carter *et al*, 1984) (Fig 7:1), are habitations, then the possibility of larger residential units occurring in this period becomes greater. Stratigraphically, the Howe of Howe structures are earlier than the passage grave which will have been constructed *circa* 4600 - 4300bp. Contrary to the interpretation offered by the excavators of the underlying structure being a stalled cairn (*ibid*), the presence of a hearth, strongly suggests this to have been a house. Certainly the structure is of similar dimensions to Knap of Howar and the orthostatic divisions are clearly not restricted to stalled cairns but also form part of house construction. Interestingly, the associated `houses' at Howe of Howe, which do not exhibit orthostatic construction, are also suggested to be earlier than the passage grave (*ibid*).

A further tentative example of an early Neolithic `village' incorporating many structures is located in cultivated land directly beneath Wideford Hill (Rendall 1931, see also chapter 3). As yet unexcavated, the "ground as a whole is decidedly peaty, but is interspersed with considerable patches of yellow clay, particularly in the lower half of the field, and it is from those clayey patches that most of the flints were

recovered" (*ibid*, 21). Given the similar observations at Barnhouse directly after ploughing, the clay spreads and patches may relate to clay house foundations. On the basis of the scale of the clay spreads, together with the large area of the flint scatter at Wideford Hill, it seems likely that this surface material represents an extensive settlement complex. The date of the settlement is more problematic, however, the flint assemblage includes leaf arrowheads (ibid, 23), and the ceramics recovered have been identified, by Audrey Henshall, as including Unstan ware (pers. comm.).

Taken together, the Orcadian evidence for the organisation of early Neolithic settlement is confusing. Whether the single farmstead, as represented by Knap of Howar or the larger settlement, as represented by Deepdale, Howe of Howe and Wideford Hill, were contemporary remains to be seen. Nevertheless, a picture of early Neolithic settlement comprising single isolated farmsteads is suggested to be untenable in the face of the evidence. Of similar doubt is the idea that house structures such as Knap of Howar were the result of a fully fledged agricultural community and were constructed only after an initial `pioneering' phase had been accomplished (*contra* A. Ritchie 1985, 39).

Site	*Assemblage*	
	total	*Mesolithic component*
Slap o' Valdigar, Tankerness.	36	1 blade 1 microlith
Wideford Hill, Firth.	535	15 blades 2 microliths
South Ettit, Rendall.	1486	16 blades 9 microliths
Hill of Heddle, Firth.	2	1 blade
Barnhouse Odin, Stenness.	133	2 blades 4 microliths
South Seatter 1 Stromness.	365	8 blades 16 microliths
Stenness*	85	8 blades 1 microlith

* - unprovenanced.

Fig 5:10 Table of mesolithic flints located in Orkney (information C. Wickham-Jones).

The Mesolithic occupation of Orkney was until recently considered unlikely (ibid, 37). However, recent work by Caroline Wickham-Jones (pers. comm.), and fieldwork under taken alongside this research has revealed a number of flint assemblages which incorporate microliths and backed bladeletts (e.g. Fig 3:7). The occurrence of Mesolithic flint types in Orkney (Fig 5:10) demonstrates clearly that the islands were at least visited during this earlier period. While the possibility exists that structural evidence for Mesolithic occupation will be discovered, it is sufficient to note that Orkney was inhabited prior to the Neolithic and that this occupation may have been of a more permanent nature.

The Architecture of Life

At present we have to rely greatly on the structural evidence from Knap of Howar for an insight into the use of space in an early Neolithic house. In chapter 4, it was suggested that the architecture of the Orkney-Cromarty cairns drew heavily on that of the house as a metaphor for expressing abstract religious beliefs. Here I wish to examine the architecture of the early Neolithic house.

Like the majority of stalled cairns, the entrance to Knap of Howar continues the linear composition of the overall form (Fig 5:11). On passing through the doorway two main impressions are formed. First, the interior is large and spacious, second, the space is graduated away from the subject to the rear of the building. The graduation of space is expressed through the division of the interior by small orthostats projecting from the inner wall-face. Since Knap of Howar has a second building attached to the northern wall (Fig 4:6), it is possible to compare the spatial structure of both houses. In each case the same method of demarcation breaks the interior space into a series of linearly ordered compartments. In house 1 a bipartite division of internal space exists while in house 2 a tripartite division is present.

The position of the entrance along the main axis reinforces the idea of lineal progression and in this aspect we can identify the existence of `weighted' space through the house interior. Thus, the subject moves from the outside world through different categories of space to reach the innermost area of the house; the end

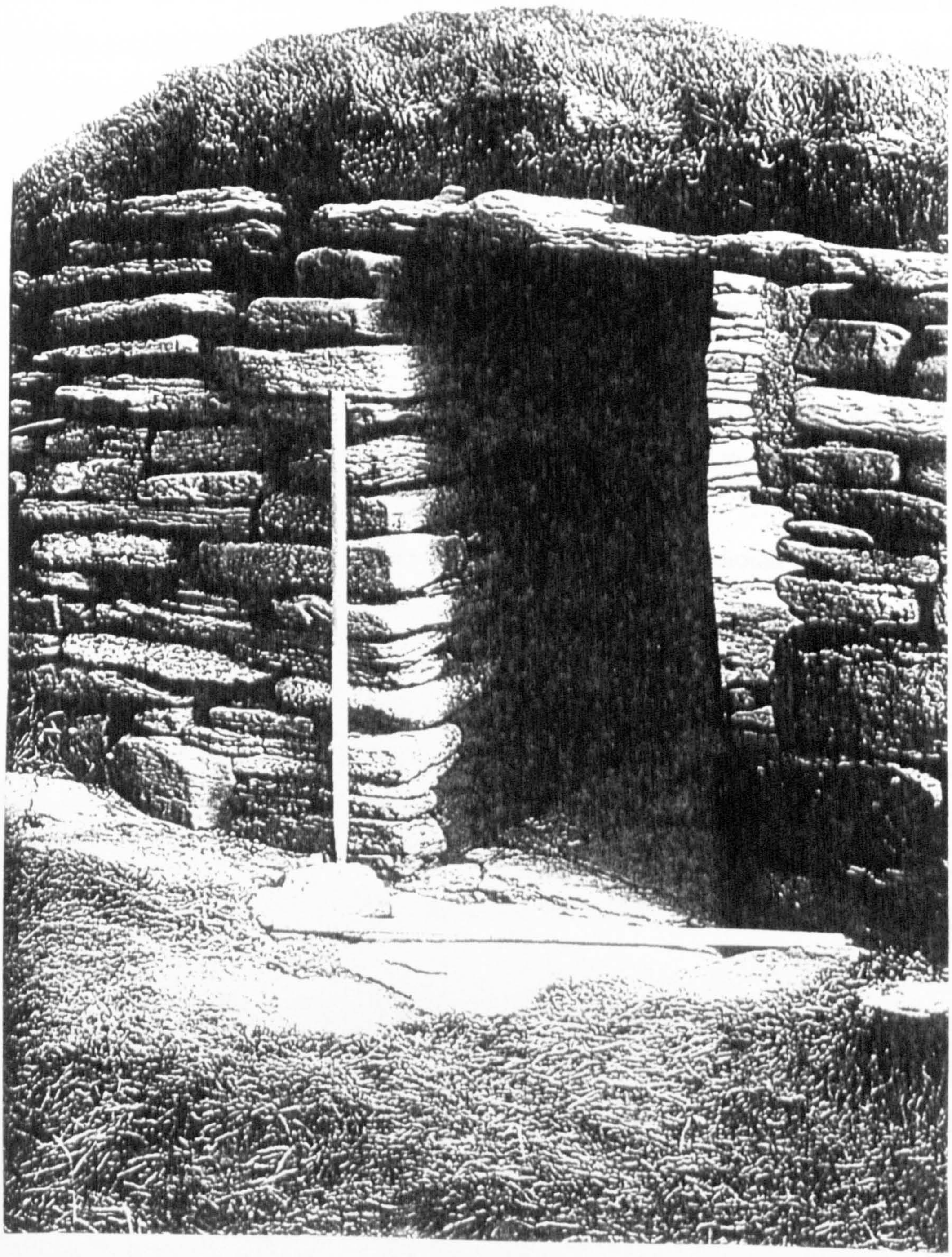


Figure 5:11. The entrance to House 1 at Knap of Howar, Papa Westray.

compartment. While the divisional stone uprights or doorways which serve to delineate the interior are less substantial than the stalled cairns, a second upright in conjunction with a post-hole continues the partition inwards leaving a narrow doorway between the different internal areas within the house. Also the massive back-slab (or door), which is a prominent feature of the stalled cairns, is absent from the house.

Adding support to the suggestion that space is physically and symbolically `graded' from the outside world to the rear of the house, it is interesting to note that the communicating doorway between the two houses is situated in the first compartment of each thereby ensuring the path of access between the two buildings never contravenes the linear spatial organisation (Fig 5:12). Just how this space was conceived is impossible to know, however, degrees of sanctity may have been but one conception of this ordering, suffice is to note the consistency of this architectural form in virtually all the earlier Neolithic constructions.

Further insight into the significance of this spatial structure should be gained by an examination of the activities undertaken in the different areas of the house. Unfortunately, Knap of Howar suffers from earlier exploration this century and the recent excavations recovered only partial material evidence.

House 1 shows a strong bipartite organisation of space with the division created by two pairs of orthostats projecting from each side wall (Fig 5:12). A post hole was positioned centrally between the paired upright partitioning on either side. Two smaller stone uprights set at right angles to the inner orthostats created a token passageway into the rear area.

The outer chamber is clearly defined through the floor being paved. A stone bench or shelf, reminiscent of the shelving within the stalled cairns, is situated on the right side (south), and a narrow passage leading to house 2 is situated in the left wall of the outer chamber. No artefacts indicating activities were recovered from this area. In contrast, the floor of the inner compartment was unpaved and had a `greasy' occupation deposit spread overlying a clay floor. A large quern was situated on the right side, although this may not represent its original position (A. Ritchie 1985, 43). This appears to have been associated with two rubbing stones (RCAMS 1946, 183).

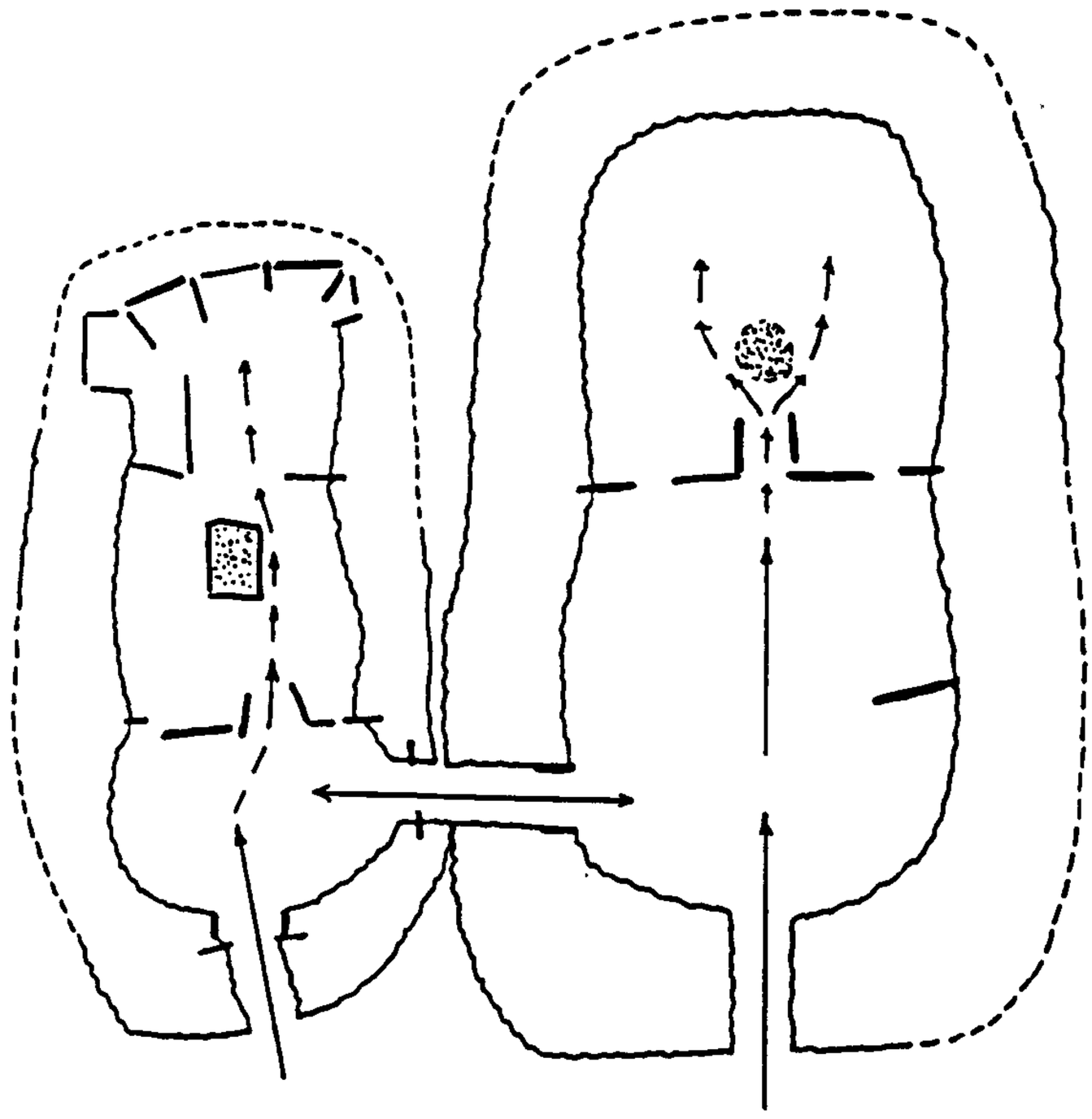


Figure 5:12. Paths of movement necessary to gain access into Knap of Howar.

A shallow scooped hearth was centrally positioned directly inside the two low stone uprights, directly behind the hearth a stone lined pit was interpreted as a post-hole (A. Ritchie 1983, 46). On the left hand side (north) a pit contained a complete pinched up pot which was covered by a larger broken sherd. Other shallow hollows were discovered running around the rear of the end compartment, which may have served to hold round based vessels. Grooves encountered in the clay floor to the left and right provided evidence for some kind of wooden furniture.

Although noted to be sequentially later, house 2, appears to have been built in conjunction with house 1. The interior of house 2 maintains a tripartite structure through two sets of opposed projecting stone uprights. The uprights dividing the middle and inner compartment are of interest in that the inner stones of each pair are actually higher than the outer uprights set partially into the inner wall face. This would serve to create an image of greater separation and exclusion of the inner compartment from the rest of the interior. Post holes were noted between each pair of orthostats

dividing the middle and outer chambers.

The outer compartment, like that of house 1 has a main entrance from the outside aligned on the house axis, and a second entrance passage linking the two houses in the right hand wall. However, unlike house 1, this compartment was not paved although the paving from the passageway linking the two houses ran someway into the interior. A number of sherds of a plain vessel with a rim diameter of 220mm with recovered from this area, together with a grinding stone.

In the central compartment two phases of floor deposit were discovered. A stone `bench' 1 metre wide and 2.4 metres in length ran along the north wall. This feature apparently replaced an earlier wooden version, the slots of which were cut into the primary clay floor. A central square stone hearth was associated with the primary activity and an ashy spread ran across the clay floor. To the left (northeast) of the hearth were positioned four hollows which could have held round based pots. Two flint scrapers and a broken awl were found in this area.

The second phase of activity within the central compartment appears to be consistent with the first; a large hollow (similar to the `hearth' in house 1) acted as a hearth. Undoubtedly this central area acted as a food preparation and cooking place; a focal point for household activities.

The inner compartment displays the most complete set of stone furniture. Here a series of projecting stones divide five `cupboards' set at ground level into the rear wall. In the right wall (south) three further recesses are situated approximately half a metre above the floor. These recesses have been interpreted as storage facilities (*ibid*, 51), however, while they may have performed such a role, a degree of consideration should be given to their positioning in the inner chamber. This area constitutes the deepest space within the house and may have had religious significance. A pit covered by a stone slab containing a number of animal bones and a hammerstone, was discovered in the inner compartment during the earlier excavations (Traill & Kirkness 1937, 312). This would appear to be a `special' deposit, unfortunately, the bones are now lost but it is not beyond the realms of possibility that human bone formed part of this deposit.

The evidence is poor for any discussion of activities within the houses. As may be

expected the rear compartments appear different in terms of furniture and pit deposits and there can be little doubt that an element of significance was imbued to this area of the house. The presence of a hearth and quern in the inner compartment of house 1, tends to point to a straightforward interpretation of a food processing area, however, we are dealing with a period early in the development of cereal agriculture. In this respect the handling and transformation of domesticated (and different) foods may have required special sanctions. The recesses in the inner compartment of house 2 may not simply be for `domestic' storage, since on the basis of the lack of evidence they could just as easily have contained ancestral remains. Certainly, similar recesses containing human and animal bones, occur at the nearby stalled cairns of Holm of Papa Westray North and Point of Cott, Westray.

The lives of the inhabitants appear to revolve around animal husbandry. Equal numbers of cattle and sheep were represented at Knap of Howar by the faunal remains in the surrounding middens (A. Ritchie 1985, 48), and only a few grains of domesticated barley were recovered. This tends to confirm the small scale and perhaps special significance of cereal production which may have been restricted to small `garden' areas inland from the settlement. Thus, we can envisage daily routines of perhaps the men tending the animals, although given the small size of Papa Westray the animals could have roamed freely for long periods of time. From the faunal assemblage, deer were also present at this time. Obviously introduced to the island, the provision of a `wild' species allows greater scope for hunting which may have been an exclusively male pursuit. Certainly the relative abundance of leaf arrowheads across Orkney can be best interpreted as evidence of hunting as opposed to warfare for which there is no indication. Food preparation and craft activities appear to have been carried out in and around the house. Pottery production can also be included in the yearly cycle at Knap of Howar, since petrological analysis has shown that local clays were exploited (Williams 1983, 90).

What is Unstan Ware?

The presence of an early Neolithic ceramic assemblage from a domestic context is of particular significance since it highlights basic problems surrounding the term Unstan ware. Initially, identified as a `type' from the ceramic assemblage at the stalled cairn of Unstan, Mainland (Clouston 1885), the term has since tended to embrace all early Neolithic Orcadian round based pottery. This description has led to much confusion about definition and cultural affiliation (e.g. Clarke 1983). It is now clear that the decorated carinated bowls (Fig 5:13), maintain a wide distribution beyond Orkney which includes both the north-east of mainland Scotland (Davidson & Henshall 1991, 74-5) and the Western Isles (Armitt 1987). In each case, however, they tend to be associated with other forms of round based ceramic.

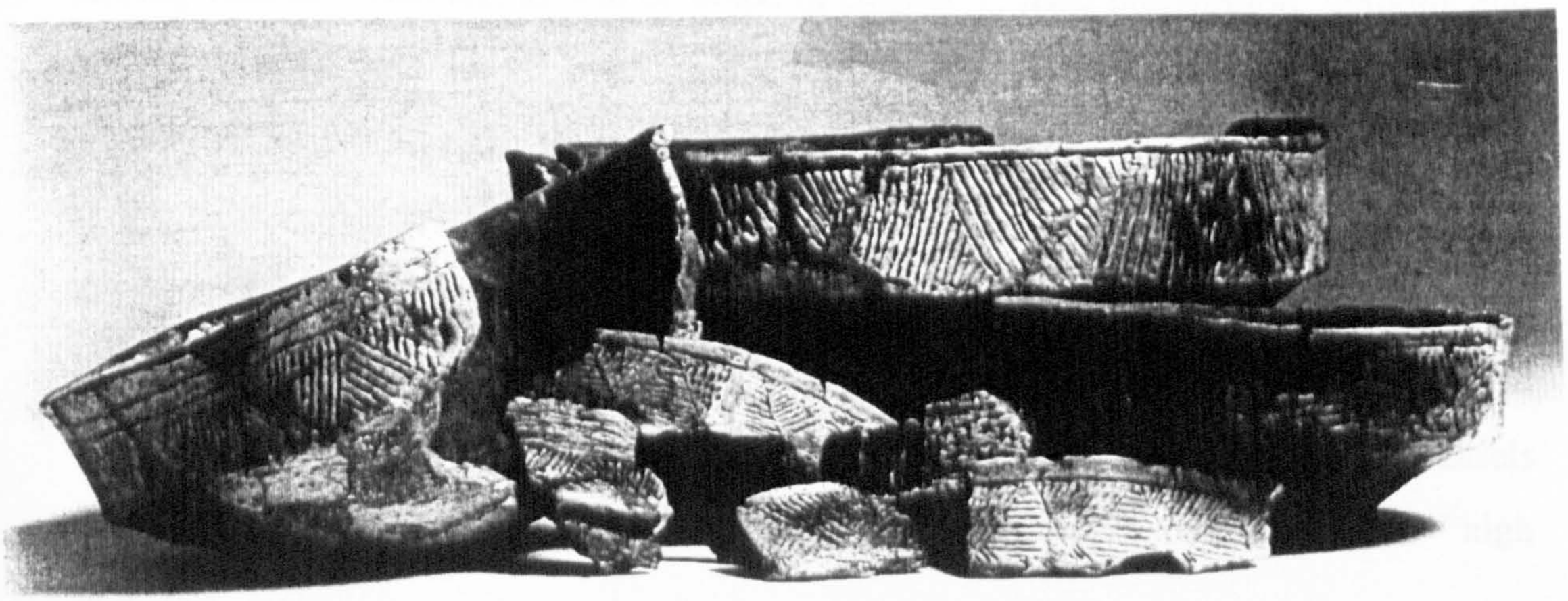


Figure 5:13. Unstan bowls (from Davidson & Henshall 1989).

The decorated carinated shallow bowls which occur in many stalled cairns on Orkney conform to the original definition, however, as is clearly demonstrated at Knap of Howar this form of pottery constitutes only a single element in a much broader based ceramic assemblage and as may be expected different sized vessels, performing different functions, display a variety of forms. Although the decorated carinated vessels have been found associated with plain bowls in the stalled cairns, for instance, in a subterranean chamber at Taversoe Tuick, Rousay, (Callander 1931),

overall they are over-represented in mortuary contexts in comparison to settlement use (if the Knap of Howar assemblage is representative of a domestic context):

Context:	Plain	Carinated
Tripartite/stalled cairns	64	71
Knap of Howar	41	13

Fig 5:14 A comparison of the numbers of vessels from tripartite/stalled cairns and Knap of Howar.

Ritchie describes the carinated vessels as "drinking bowls" (1985, 49). This would seem to be a restrictive interpretation and they may be better described as general food serving vessels. However, as will be noted in chapter 7, food preparation, cooking and serving vessels tend to be over-represented in ceramic assemblages due to high breakage rates. At Knap of Howar the carinated bowls are not in the majority, indeed, as Fig 5:14 demonstrates, the opposite is true. Admittedly a representative sample of the Knap of Howar ceramic assemblage is not possible without a larger excavation since structured depositional practices may assume a spatial element to rubbish disposal. However, on the basis of the evidence as it stands the carinated vessels appear to have a specialist function which does not involve daily use in a `high breakage' situation.

Henshall (1983, 70), notes that the carinated bowls from Knap of Howar are small and thin walled in comparison to the generally heavier vessels within the stalled cairns. Similar bowls have only been discovered in Midhowe, Calf of Eday Long and Unstan. Yet, the distinctive carinated form dominates the mortuary assemblage. In her discussion of the Knap of Howar excavation, Ritchie states that "prior to the recent excavations at Knap of Howar, it remained possible that Unstan ware was purely a funerary ware, but it is clear now that there was a complementary domestic range of Unstan bowls." (1983, 54). Given the small number of carinated bowls at Knap of Howar and the variety or sizes noted within the stalled cairns, I suggest that there may still remain a case for the specialised or ritual use of this ceramic. In support of this interpretation it is worth noting the similarity between the designs incised into the

`collar' of the carinated bowls and those created by masonry on the outer walls of some stalled cairns, for example, Blackhammer, Knowe of Yarso, Midhowe, Unstan and Head of Work (Fig 5:15). Davidson and Henshall observe that "at Blackhammer the long sides had slanting sides laid in groups giving the appearance of hatched triangles, a motif much favoured on Unstan pottery" (1989, 31). No such designs of masonry occur at Knap of Howar.

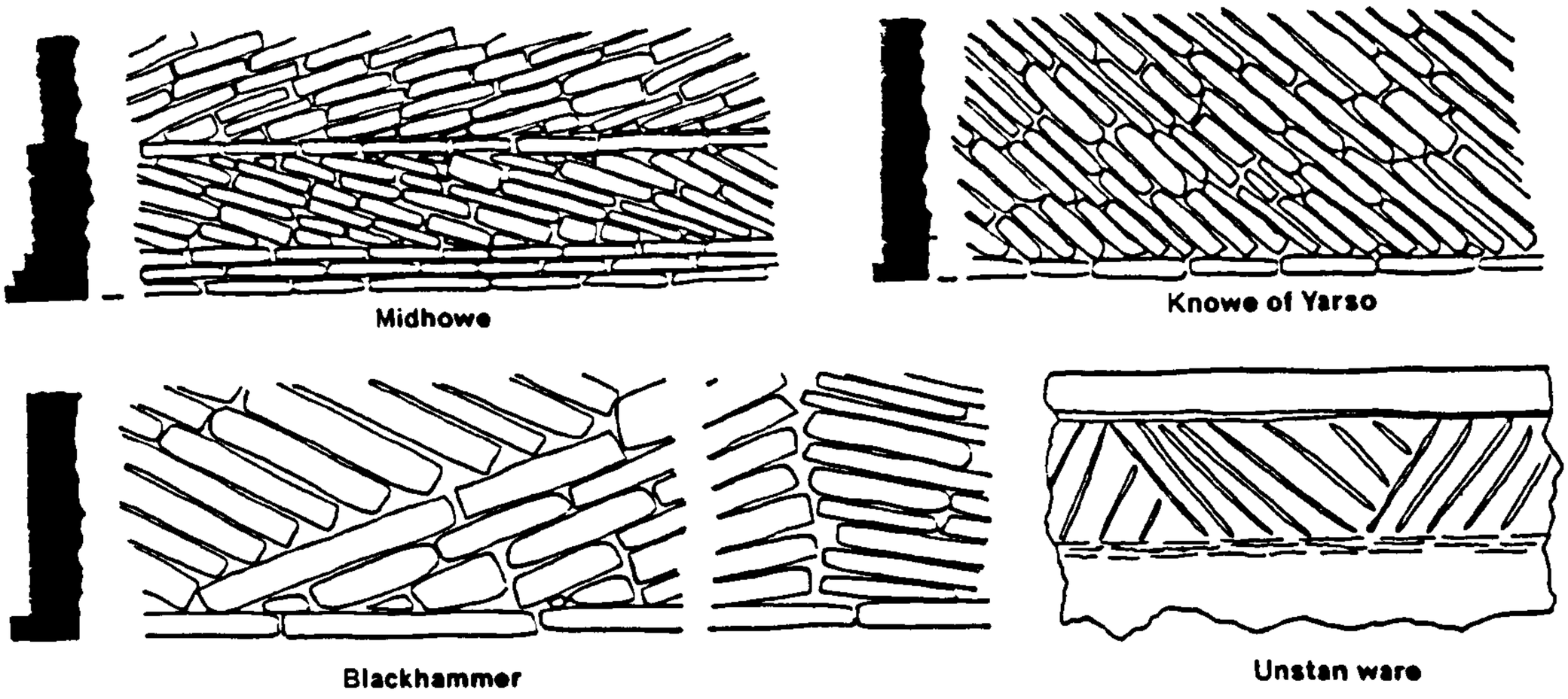


Figure 5:15. The similarity between designs in masonry on the exterior walls of Orkney-Cromarty cairns and Unstan ware decoration (after Callander & Grant 1937).

The carinated bowls are different from the other round based vessels in both form and decoration and if employed only on ritual occasions, perhaps involving the ancestors, we may expect comparatively infrequent use and therefore low breakage rates within domestic contexts. In this light, the few examples of broken carinated vessels represented at Knap of Howar in comparison to the thirty represented at Unstan (Cloustan 1885, 345), takes on particular significance . The variation in size noted in the ceramic deposits within stalled cairns may indicate that larger vessels were manufactured, perhaps solely for specialised ritual activities and were destroyed at the place of use.

Apart from revealing the diversity of early Neolithic Orcadian domestic pottery,

the Knap of Howar assemblage throws light on round based ceramic manufacture. Early petrological analysis of `Unstan ware' from the stalled cairns revealed that in each case the pottery contained inclusions which were available locally (Phemister 1942). The same is true at Knap of Howar where three fabric groups based on shell, mudstone and quartz were identified (Williams 1983, 89-90). These fabric groups appear to cross-cut all forms and size of pottery.

All three types of inclusions were available locally and production was likely to be at the local or household level. Hence, the carinated vessels were locally produced and not composed of special or exclusive clay or filler.

To conclude this section, it would seem that the decorated carinated shallow bowls are but a small part of the total ceramic assemblage of any early Neolithic social unit. If the term `Unstan ware' is to have any validity it should be to describe this form of vessel alone. Perhaps a more useful approach would be to attempt an interpretation of the uses of the different vessel forms present in the Knap of Howar assemblage. Of particular interest is the over representation of carinated bowls of all sizes in funerary contexts which contrasts with their relatively restricted distribution at Knap of Howar. In conclusion it seems likely that this vessel form was made and used for various ritual occasions.

Conclusion

To summarise this chapter, through the large number of excavations of mortuary contexts which provide fairly limited and restricted amounts of information, a deceptive situation exists where it seems that a large amount of knowledge of the early Neolithic period is possessed. In fact, a very biased and fragmentary array of information is available which has been reflected in the organisation and imbalance of this chapter. Even an examination of the rituals surrounding death and ancestry will always be partial if the settlement contexts remain unexamined. Neither can we be sure that Knap of Howar is representative of domestic architecture or settlement organisation. Indeed, given the evidence from recent field survey and excavation this may not be the case.

The architectural evidence of the Orkney-Cromarty cairns demonstrates external contact between the inhabitants of Orkney and mainland Scotland. A similarity of ceramics between Orkney, Caithness and the Western Isles, during the early Neolithic, provides further evidence of contact and exchange, despite the supposed local production of Orcadian ceramics. Other material items such as the polished flint axe from Folsetter Farm, Mainland, belong to a small group of similarly finely polished axes distributed along the North Sea coast of eastern Britain (Sheridan 1992). Social contact and influence through exchange would have been an integral way of life to Neolithic Orcadians and the extremely peripheral location of Knap of Howar should be remembered when judging such contact through the material culture of this site.

Our knowledge of the early Neolithic period may be scant and biased but it does provide a prologue for the wealth of information for the later Neolithic period which until recently has been similarly biased towards the excavation of chambered tombs. However, apart from the tentative evidence from Rinyo, Rousay, and Pool, Sanday, where earlier Neolithic pottery appears stratigraphically to underlie Grooved ware, we posses little indication of how or why the profound changes in material culture and architecture, which define the late Neolithic, occurred. Only through far more extensive research into this earlier period will the apparently momentous changes which occur *circa* 4600bp, become better understood.

Chapter 6

The Late Neolithic Period of Orkney

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I have reviewed the evidence for occupation in the early Neolithic period of north-eastern Scotland and Orkney respectively. Both chapters drew heavily on the evidence from excavated burial sites with additional information mainly derived from a single house structure: Knap of Howar. As was discussed in chapter 1, this shows quite clearly the biases prevalent in the available archaeological evidence. For example, the evidence for the early Neolithic period is particularly weak and if a more complete picture of social life is required, a far more comprehensive archaeological research programme is required. Hence, our present view of the period is a fragmented image derived from an extremely partial and selective archaeological database.

Through this distortion, however, I was able to follow a general theme of cultural conceptions of order and classification, primarily recognisable through architectural analysis, which in turn guided the examination of other forms of material culture. Central to this analysis was an appreciation of the importance of the movement and presence of Neolithic people who constructed, inhabited and undertook a range of activities within this architecture. These interpretations were guided by my own impressions of Neolithic architecture, and its representation.

This view of the past as a series of fragmented images, obtained from an equally biased and disjointed archaeological record (as we have constituted it), is not frequently acknowledged in archaeological studies. Instead, more complete presentations are often offered which gloss over the `gaps' in the data in order to provide broad social commentaries of the past.

With regard to the later Neolithic period of Orkney, my research has attempted to address certain inadaquacies in the archaeological evidence. For instance, in chapter 3 it was noted how the majority of Neolithic settlements were accidents of discovery, with no strategy of site location guiding fieldwork. Field-survey and excavation have begun to redress this imbalance, and in this respect, research into Neolithic Orkney is just beginning. It is in this vein that the rest of this volume is structured. In the remaining chapters I aim to pursue certain themes concerning conceptions of the classification and ordering of the world by late Neolithic people, whilst at the same time revealing the partial nature of the evidence and therefore our partial knowledge of these people. Hence, the different chapters tend to be particularistic and to some degree disjointed. Only chapters 7 and 12 extend beyond single aspects of the data. In some ways I feel this particularism to be a valid perspective to adopt. For instance, the more I come to know about the late Neolithic period of Orkney, the more it seems that despite the apparent similarities between the material culture of different island communites, there remain distinct differences between them. Such variation should not be confused with defiencies or biases in the data, many of which may still be remedied. However, at present I feel it is defensible to adopt a more detailed perspective on aspects of the evidence which are stronger and more complete.

A period of change: the third Millenium BC

The centuries 2700 - 2500 bc appear to represent a period of profound change in Orkney. Indeed, judging from our still fairly crude chronology for the British Neolithic, this relatively small period of time seems to be a general time of flux throughout Britain and Ireland. This is particularly noticeable for the inhabitants of areas along the Atlantic seaboard, for in Orkney, as in Ireland, we see the building of

a different monument; the passage grave. This monument embodies the changes which also embrace ceramics and other forms of material culture. The building of passage graves is certainly not the simple addition of a new or different monumental form to an already existing repotoire of `monuments'. Since the introduction of new forms of architecture must represent fundamental changes in social practices. Even if such changes in ceremony remained negligable in particular societies which adopted or copied the passage grave, it is important to consider the historical and social consequences of such actions.

So far I have stressed the passage grave as representing an important signifier of change. This is because architecturally it effects various discourses including those embodying control and authority. Moreover, it represents a common index for many areas of Britain where little or no other evidence is available e.g. Anglesey. If the evidence for changes in Orkney, around 2600bc, concurs with that from elsewhere, then a far greater and more profound phenomenom has to be acknowledged (see Bradley and Chapman 1986). Just what such changes represent in social terms is difficult to envisage, hence past recourse to megalithic missionaries, etc.

In certain areas, such as Orkney, where the archaeological evidence is more comprehensive we see the construction of passage graves to be part of much wider patterns of change. Indeed, it will be argued that the passage grave is just one aspect of a `cultural' repertoire which includes a range of material culture including architecture, ceramics, flint technology, etc. Because the level and range of evidence is so much richer in Orkney this advent appears more sweeping and severe. However, in chapter 5, the impoverished nature of our knowledge of early Neolithic settlement was discussed. Because of this deficiency the identifiable changes in material culture may appear more sudden than they actually were. Hence any discussion of the mechanism of change is drastically curtailed and will inevitably be ill informed. Instead, I wish to examine in detail the late Neolithic period in Orkney as it appears in a range of different forms of material culture.

Without doubt the most outstanding archaeological evidence which characterises the late Neolithic period of Orkney is the presence of a number of well constructed stone buildings and monuments. These include houses; clustered in `villages', passage

graves, and henge monuments enclosing large stone circles. Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect to these constructions is the use of the local, easily laminated, sandstone slabs to create extremely sophisticated masonry and internal furniture and partitioning within the structures. Hence, the almost perfect survival of the most famous Neolithic settlement in Britain: Skara Brae. In the following section this architecture is examined in terms of its reference to cosmology. The act of constructing a house and ordering social space effectively draws on cosmological ideas of classification and order. In this way, the symbolism of the house, in all its ambiguity, remains an architectural expression embodying both ontological and metaphorical knowledge of the world (cf Blier 1987).

The cosmological principles of classification and order identifiable in the architectural representation of the house provide a framework which will underpin much of my investigation into late Neolithic Orkney. As different aspects of the material evidence are examined these themes of meaning will be developed in different ways. Hence my goal is not to provide a comprehensive, all embracing model of social organisation and its change throughout the late Neolithic period (see however chapter 12). Instead, I merely wish to examine the way in which these ideas of classification are manifest in different aspects of the archaeological evidence.

Architecture, cosmology and the house

In Orkney, the dwellings of Skara Brae, Barnhouse and Rinyo constitute the most remarkable archaeological evidence of habitation, especially as evidence of late Neolithic houses is virtually unknown in other areas of Britain. The Orcadian examples display a remarkable consistency of design which is maintained over several hundred years. The internal organisation of stone furniture within the house comprises a central square stone built hearth, a rear shelving arrangement, known as a dresser, and two rectangular stone boxes, interpreted as box-beds, situated on either side of the hearth. The single entrance is positioned opposite the dresser thereby forming a cruciform aspect to the spatial organisation of the house interior (fig 6:1). These structural elements, in various guises, are present within all houses to create an overall

homogeneity of late Neolithic house architecture. In each case the internal organisation of space defined by the cruciform arrangement of dresser - doorway / right box - left box, is referenced to the central hearth.

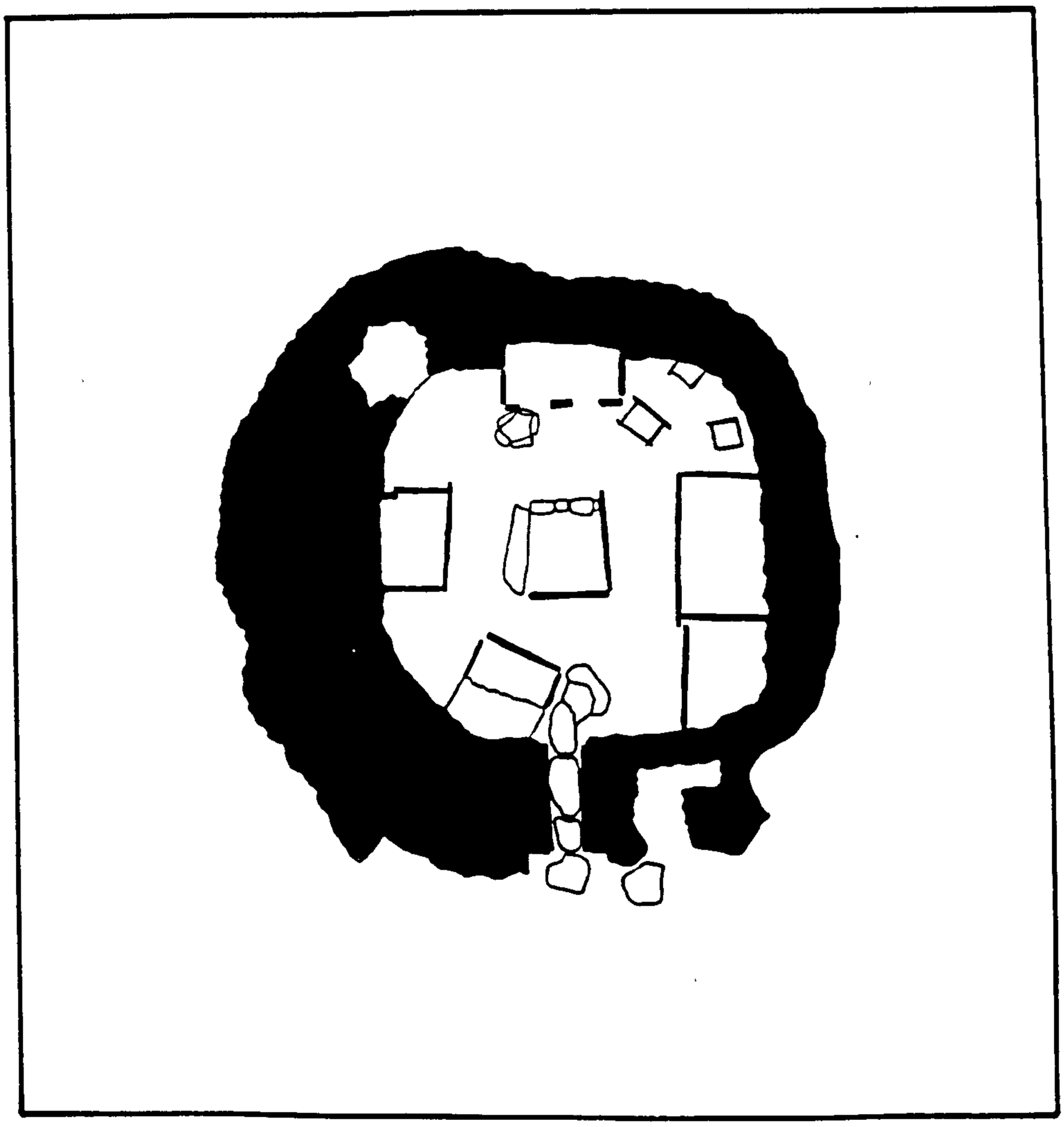


Figure 6:1. The late Neolithic house.

The central positioning of the hearth establishes a particularly striking focal point. Within the inhospitable northern climate the fire, and by extension the fireplace, is central to the maintenance of life itself. Indeed, until the recent past, one of the gravest acts of neglect within the home was to allow the fire to go out. To underline this point, within the Northern Isles many fires had reputedly been kept alight for over forty years. Almost certainly such attitudes would have been as pervasive in the Neolithic period as they were until recently.

Fire, as a medium of transformation, is not restricted to producing heat and light, it also facilitates cultural transformation. In this light it is easy to understand the consistent association of fire with supernatural and mythological qualities (e.g. Levi-Straus 1986). Hence in many societies there is always an element of danger attached to fire and thus numerous sanctions surround its use. This extends to both ignition (e.g. Ingold 1986, 268-71) and the collection and disposal of ash (e.g. Moore 1986, 102-6). In attempting to assess the significance of the hearth in the Neolithic dwelling it may be suggested that its centrality transcended functional necessity, and the fireplace embodied many disparate meanings as may be expected in such a dominant symbol. Indeed, I intend to argue throughout this study that centrality, as symbolised by the hearth represents a fundamental structural principle of classifying and organising the late Neolithic world.

Despite an apparent symetry in the house interior the entrance is frequently offset to the right (Hodder 1982, 222). A closer examination of the stone furniture within the houses reveals the right `box-bed' is consistently larger than the left. This distinction is further mirrored in the size of the aumbrey or keeping place positioned above each bed. How are these differences best undertood?

One clue lies in the off-centre position of the entrance, which would appear to facilitate entry into the right side of the house. This interpretation is supported by the direction of a series of entrance slabs leading into the right side of Hut 7 at Skara Brae (Fig 10:4), and the provision of the entrance leading into the right side of House 2 at the Barnhouse settlement (Fig 9:5). Indeed, in both the above examples strong architectural measures are introduced to ensure that on admittance the subject may not directly enter the left side. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the internal organisation of House 2 at Barnhouse where the path of movement is strictly controlled by walling and partitioning (Fig 6:2). Here access to the left area is only gained once the subject has been directed to the far side of the house and forced to turn to their left. Only at this point does the interior organisation of House 2 become comprehensible since the view now presented is one of re-entry into an inner area of the familiar cruciform architectural representation (see chapter 11).

The consistent reproduction of right hand entry may be related to wider social

categories. For instance, on crossing the threshold into the late Neolithic house the internal spatial arrangement would become visible, however, it would be the right hand side, in the earlier free-standing houses, which would tend to be illuminated by light coming through the doorway. The left side would remain in semi-darkness. Thus, by default the varying quality of light available to the interior reiterates the movement of people entering the house. As will be shown later these differences are part of a much broader symbolic systems of classification.

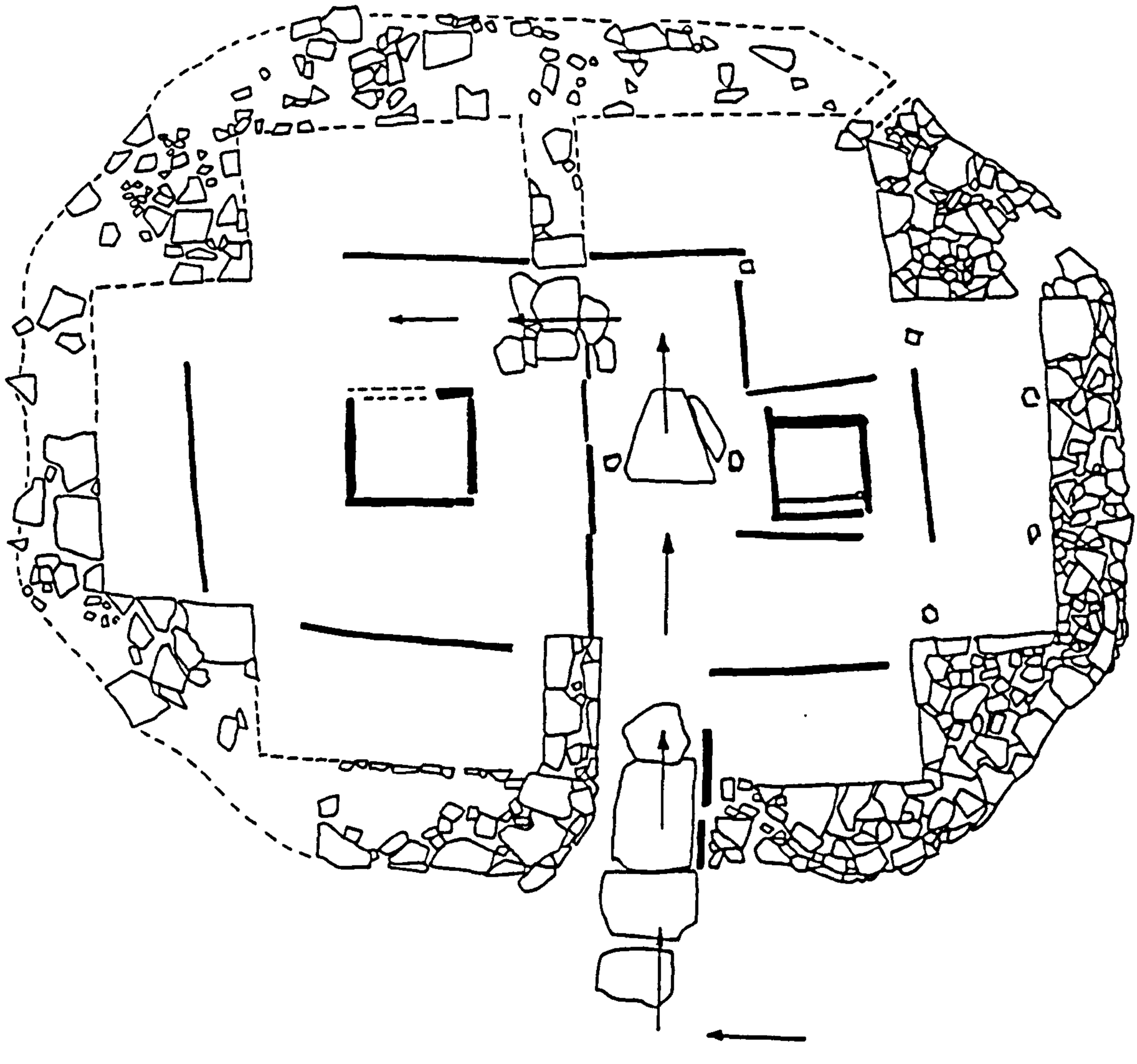


Figure 6:2. Plan of House 2 at Barnhouse, showing the path of movement into the western (left) area. Note that the route forces the subject to walk over the cist cover.

How may we relate the nuances of entry with the difference in size of the stone furniture within the house? It will be noticed that the spatial balance of the house interior alters when someone enters into the right-hand area. Access, therefore, produces a spatial shift whereby the `back' area of the house occupied and `fixed' by the dresser, no longer constitutes the deepest space. By virtue of the appropriate path of movement, the deepest space, can become the left area of the house. Through this simple observation it is clear that the apparently static nature of the architectural components which should be recognised more as a microcosm; an ideal structure of order based on cosmological themes. However, through human actions in everyday situations this `fixidity' breaks down and is constantly re-defined. Alternatively, in certain, more formal social circumstances, different aspects of this ideal symbolic structure may be drawn on, thereby providing ontological status to everyday actions. For instance, the discrepancy in sizes between the stone box `beds' may relate to distinctions of function, age, or gender within a left/right division of the house which comes into play in specific social situations.

Analysis of the late Neolithic settlement of Barnhouse (see chapter 9), reveals differences between houses. However, the hearth appears to have been frequently tended and cleaned out from the left, as revealed by spreads of charcoal and burnt material trodden into the floor. High levels of phosphates in close proximity to the hearth on the left-hand side are recognisable in some houses (Z. Sannigar pers comm). Taken together this evidence could be interpreted as suggesting areas of food preperation. Historically, in Orkney, it was the womens duty to tend the fire and prepare food on a daily basis, and regardless if we accept Childe`s view of the disparity in box-bed size being attributable to gender, it seems likely that the front left area was at times the domain of women.

For certain family members, particularly women, everyday life in the house would have been partially constituted through a sequence of different activites occurring either in the same place or different places within the house interior. Each of these tasks were undertaken in the `correct' place and through their employment spatial meaning was re-created. Hence, within a single temporal cycle such as a day, domestic space and its symbolic meaning would have been constantly re-negotiated.

A good example of such redifinition within a house of similar spatial organisation is the Blackhouse of the Scottish Western Isles. Indeed, it was to the Blackhouse that Childe (1946, 32), turned for ethnographic parallels of the Orcadian late Neolithic houses. When the family was together in the Blackhouse, a frequent occasion during the long dark nights of the northern Scottish winter, the left side of the house was the woman's area and it was here that food was prepared and other tasks undertaken. The right hand side was considered to be the domain of the man. However, this left/right distinction fell away in other social occasions. For instance, when a guest was invited into the house a back/front division came into play with the status of the guest being defined by the position offered around the central fireplace. This was established with reference to the most distinguished position being that directly behind the hearth facing the entrance (Clarke & Sharples 1985, 70).

Having stressed the importance of the spatial organisation of the house as a microcosm of the socially constructed world and the necessary links with wider spatial and temporal cycles, a broader undertsanding must be sought in terms of symbolic classifications. At this point orientation and directionality may be introduced. It is suggested that the cruciform arrangement of the house relates to four Neolithic cardinal directions centred on the hearth. An examination of the entrance orientation of houses at the villages of Barnhouse, Skara Brae and Rinyo reveal that 80% lie on a north-west/south-east axis. This characteristic is also identifiable in the entrance orientation of Orcadian `Maeshowe' passage graves (Fig 7:8). Returning to the house, a larger sample number is obtained if the alignment of individual hearths is examined since frequently the hearth remains *in-situ* when the rest of the house is demolished or destroyed. Because of their square shape, the orientations of the hearth will always relate to the four elements of the house interior (Fig 6:3). It is clear that the hearth maintains a uniformity of orientation, however, the significance of these directions becomes more apparent when the midwinter and midsummer sunrise and sunset is considered. Each element in the cruciform organisation is a spatial referent to the key points in the annual cycles which govern both agricultural and social practices. In these constructions we recognise a fusion of space and time embodied within late Neolithic architecture.

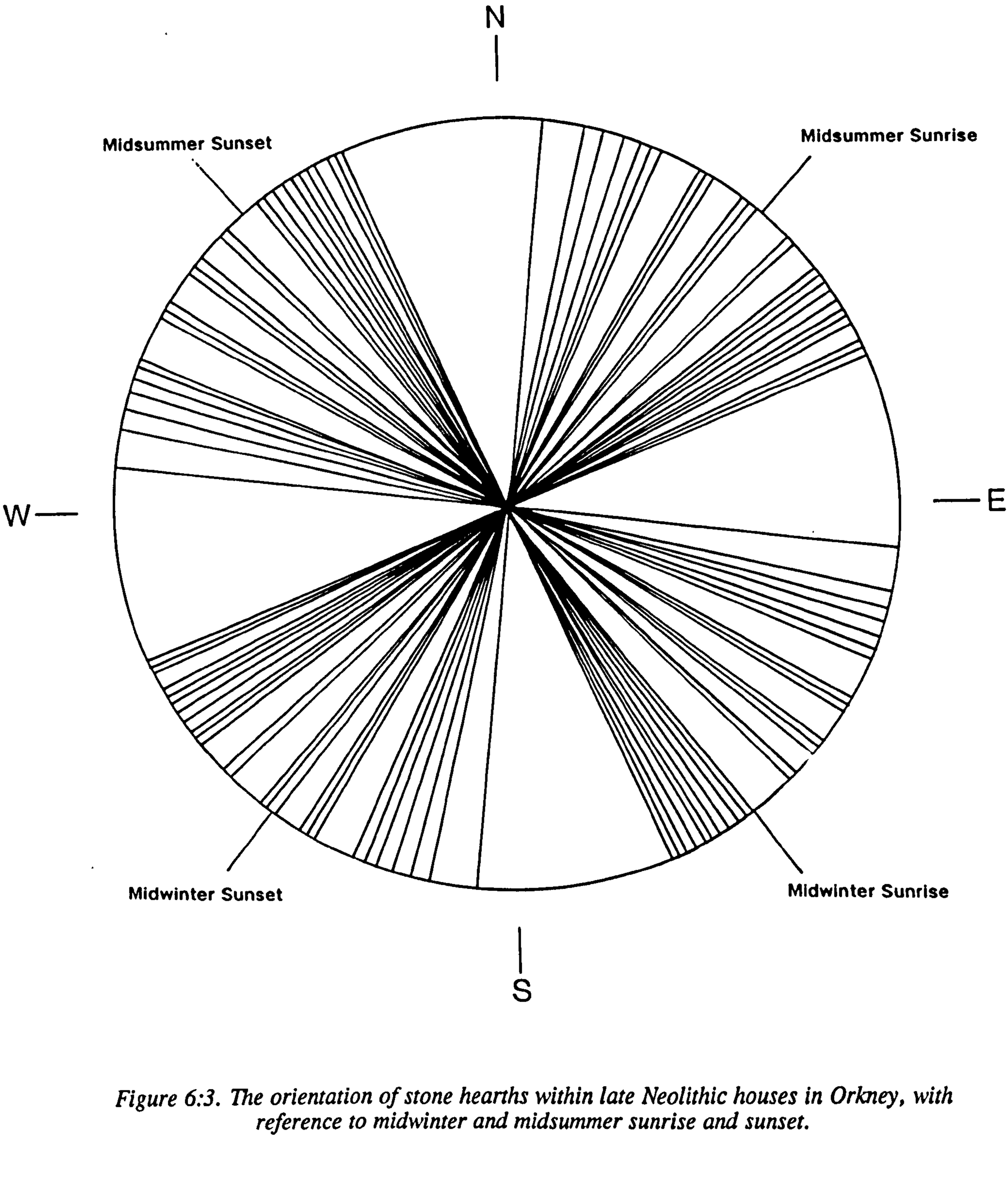


Figure 6:3. The orientation of stone hearths within late Neolithic houses in Orkney, with reference to midwinter and midsummer sunrise and sunset.

The links between principles of order, as shown in architecture, and broader classifications, is clearly demonstrated within the passage grave of Maeshowe (Fig 11:1). Here a monument of the dead is orientated south-west, towards the setting midwinter sun, marking the height of winter and the darkest day of the year. In the northern lattitudes of Orkney there exists a marked contrast between the eighteen hours

of sunshine at midsummer and eighteen hours of darkness at midwinter (Fig 11:4). An association between death and a westerly direction may appear unsurprising, however, in the architecture of the passage grave of Maeshowe we see the selection and emphasis of certain categories pertaining to the `house' of the dead; south-west, midwinter, left, darkness, cold and death. Just like human action, classifications are not static but only take on concrete expression in certain places at certain times.

The categories of order inherent within the architecture of the late Neolithic house in Orkney formed part of wider symbolic classifications embracing many spheres of meaning. Such meanings could only be mobilized through social practices. The undertaking of different activities at particular places within the house not only draws on this symbolism, but the religious or cosmological principles of order which underlie its organisation provide an ontological status to such actions which inevitably involve authority and dominance. Here we recognise the reflexive nature and power of architecture.

Cosmological principles of classification embrace many disparate processes of categorization. Some may appear permenant and fixed, others totally context dependant and therefore arbitrary. Yet in different guises they underpin and inform on a constructed knowledge of the world. This was as true for Neolithic people as it is for us today. If we can begin to understand some of these basic principles we provide the possibility for a level of archaeological understanding unknown for other areas of Neolithic Britain.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced two main elements which effectivly provide the basis and linkage for the remainding chapters of this study. First, that archaeological evidence is by default fragmentary in nature and that when we view the past through these data a fractured and incomplete image of late Neolithic society is presented. Rather than gloss over these discontinuities I intend to draw out the areas of the evidence which are felt to be strong. In particular, the presence of standing stone built structures, including houses, which allow us to directly experience the architecture and

socially constructed spaces, even down to the arrangement of furniture within the house, of late Neolithic people. For me, the greatest irony of previous studies of the Orcadian Neolithic, with the notable exception of Ian Hodder (1982), is the total neglect of this amazing body of evidence. This approach seems to offer so much potential for understanding the past that it seems almost incomprehensible why it has been overlooked in the past (although see Hodder 1982, 218-20).

Secondly, in order to gain a greater degree of understanding I have introduced my interpretation of the principles of classification and order as are identifiable in the spatial organisation of the house. A recognition of these principles is regarded as a vital prerequisite to examining other forms of material culture, its context, and its patterning and associations. Of course, the ability to recognise these principles is yet another consequence of having standing remains. Having established this scheme, I intend to extend it in various ways through a detailed examination of specific contexts of human action. In this way analysis is both guided and informed by my reading of late Neolithic cosmology.

I begin with a chapter (7) on late Neolithic passage graves and mortuary practices. This extremely broad category of evidence will neccesarily be examined from a number of different `directions' and the idea and theme of cosmology will be developed and a structuring principle of architecture and social practices. The investigation continues in chapter 8, with a neccessary examination of Grooved ware which enables a more detailed contextual analysis of the settlement of Barnhouse (chapter 9). Complimenting this study is an examination of Skara Brae (chapter 10), where the artifactual evidence is weaker but the architecture remains unparalleled. From an architectural study of a single settlement we move to the monumental constructions of an entire landscape on the Stenness promontory (chapter 11). Finally, in chapter 12 these different data are assessed in terms of the model of social evolution suggested by Renfrew (1979).

Chapter 7

A Place for the dead: the Maeshowe passage graves

Introduction

As in life, the death and burial of people in the late Neolithic period of Orkney accords with a series of complex cosmological beliefs. In particular, attitudes towards the realm of death as seen in the treatment and deposition of the corpse and a continued interest in the bones of the deceased as part of an ancestral body relate to both the regeneration of the spirit or soul and the overlapping relationship between the world of the dead and the world of the living. In this chapter I will examine the `place' of the dead, as represented by the position of the tomb or passage grave in the physical landscape, and the `place' of the dead as a late Neolithic religious conception. As the place of the dead assumes the material form of an architectural entity, both physical bounded and visibly prominent, I would suggest that a clearly defined relationship existed in the late Neolithic in which the presence and involvement of the dead was acknowledged as being part of life. In this respect the passage graves cannot be viewed in isolation and their examination must continually be referenced back to the world of the living.

Clearly the introduction of a different architectural representation to `house' their remains after death marks a change in the attitude of late neolithic Orcadians towards

death. New architecture belies new practices and different forms of discourse which strongly suggest that for whatever reason, in the period after *circa* 2600 bc, an alternative view of the dead and their place in the world and cosmos had come into existence. An understanding of the domain or `place' of the dead transcends some form of locational analysis, it requires the situation of the tomb as a representation of the dead and the physical remains of the dead to be firmly presenced in different cycles of late Neolithic social practices. In this way I hope to continue the overall narrative of social life in Orkney during the later period of the third millenium BC.

The construction of the Maeshowe passage graves gives rise to an architecture which represents a complete departure in spatial organisation from that of the stalled cairns. Indeed, in the numerous classifications (*cf.* Davidson & Henshall 1989, Fraser 1983, etc) of the Orcadian megalithic tombs, the Maeshowe `type' always stand apart. This should be of no surprise to anyone who has actually visited the monuments since they are simply quite different constructions.

With regard to passage grave chronology, although the date of *circa* 2600bc obtained from the primary layer at Quanterness (Renfrew 1979) has been treated as an acceptable beginning for the appearance of the Maeshowe `type' of passage graves (Sharples 1985), their relative chronological position with the stalled cairns remains problematic. If the sequence of dates for Isbister, South Ronaldsay (Renfrew *et al* 1983, 62), is correct (see Appendix 1), and there seems no reason to doubt their integrity, then the distinctive style of stalled construction continues well into the late third millenium (it should be noted, however, that Isbister displays both the architecture of the stalled cairn and the Maeshowe passage grave). Similarly, although the contexts of the animal bones from the Rousay stalled cairns, dated by Renfrew (1979), is unknown and is therefore of little use in dating cairn construction, these dates effectively demonstrate the continued use of this form of monument well after 2600bc.

Commentators have noted the confused nature of the Orkney tomb chronology (e.g. Sharples 1986). However, it is not the chronology which is at fault but rather our utilization of it. There are many elements to this problem which exceed the basic point that a date obtained from the tomb contents does not date the monument. The first is

simply one of interpretation and difference of form. Both Maeshowe passage graves and stalled cairns are ingrained in the literature as chambered tombs, however, if a comparison is drawn between the two, they are clearly revealed as constituting completely different buildings both in construction technique and spatial organisation (compare Figs 4:5 & 7:6). Hence they would have embodied quite different interpretations and meanings (see chapter 4). Consequently, in use, the different forms of monument necessarily involved different social practices. In this respect they represent exclusive entities.

A second problem is identifiable in the desire to see sequential development both within and between the different megalithic tombs. This merely betrays the traditional urge of the archaeologist to identify evolution in monuments, social types, and all aspects of material culture. Third, the chronology is based, in the majority of cases, upon radiocarbon determinations obtained from deposits of human bone; a procedure noted to be unreliable in dating the tombs (see chapters 4 & 5). If the chronology for the Orcadian tombs is examined from an alternative point of view it merely reveals less confusion and greater complexity in the construction and use of these monuments.

For many reasons archaeologists find it difficult to abandon a belief in the assumed continuity and unity of purpose of different megalithic tombs. One of these resides in terminology and thus how we tend to think of these monuments in the past. For instance, the Maeshowe passage graves and the stalled cairns are both labelled as chambered tombs. As was noted in chapter 4, their architectural form varies considerably and sometimes these differences are emphasised and at others they are suppressed. The relevant point is that they are both described and discussed in the same way; as chambered tombs, and it is particularly difficult to conceive of these monuments in any different way because of the restrictions of archaeological terminology. In short, Neolithic monuments tend to be put into a very limited number of categories, for example: houses, henges, stone circles, or chambered tombs; we simply have no other choices. Here resides a far bigger hurdle to overcome than a confusion over chronology.

Having argued that these different forms of architecture are not necessarily typologically sequential or of unitary function, we have to address the evidence from

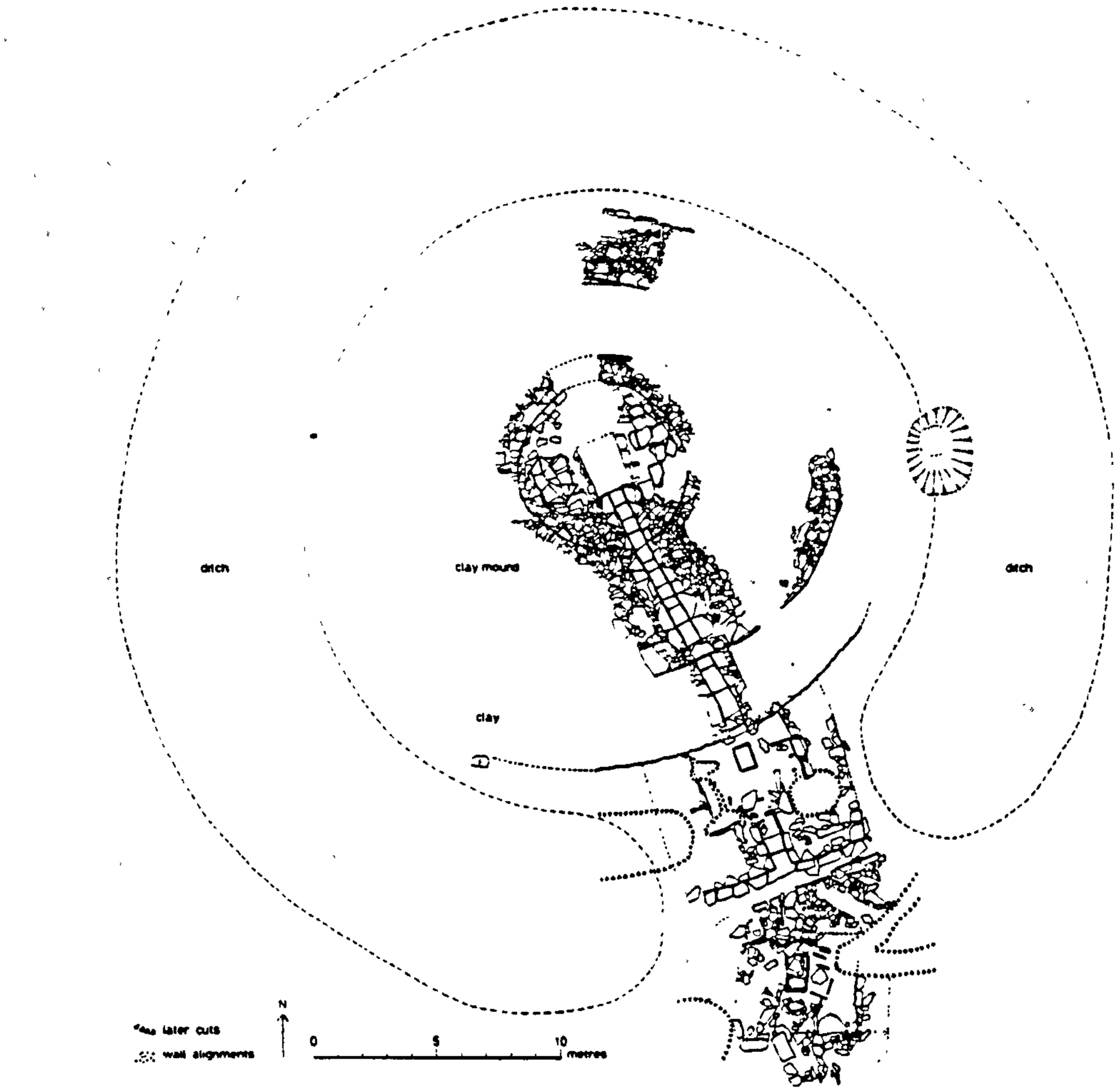


Figure 7:1. Plan of the structure underlaying the passage grave at Howe of Howe, Stromness (after Carter et al 1984).

Maeshowe and Howe of Howe, Mainland. Here recent excavations (Richards in prep, Carter *et al* 1984) have shown that beneath each passage grave lies an earlier building. At Maeshowe only an entrance pathway covering the drain of an earlier building was discovered, however, at Howe of Howe, Stromness, a rectangular building interpreted by the excavators as a stalled cairn was located directly below the passage grave (Carter *et al* 1984, 61). This evidence has tended to support the idea that one type of chambered tomb merely replaced another. Actually the interpretation of the earlier structure at Howe of Howe being a stalled cairn is open to serious doubt (see Davidson & Henshall 1989, 62), particularly in light of the small area excavated and the presence of a fireplace located centrally within the interior (Fig 7:1). No other stalled cairn contains such a feature and it is suggested that the hearth is the one item of

furniture which may be expected to be excluded from a funerary context. In reconsideration, this building would be far easier interpreted as an early house of similar architecture and dimensions as Knap of Howar, Papa Westray (Fig 4:6).

In summary, it is suggested that it is not simply a question of whether the Maeshowe passage graves are `chambered tombs'. Indeed, a mortuary interpretation is not disputed. Rather it is the assumed similarity between the different types of monument, both in meaning and use which is challenged. Also the obsessive urge to chronologically order the monuments on the basis of type has tended to dominate any interpretation of the available radiocarbon dates and stifle more productive avenues of enquiry. I wish to consider what the major difference in architecture signified and why such a change in tradition and social practices occurred in the late Neolithic period.

Placing the dead in the landscape

An examination of the overall distribution of Maeshowe passage graves in Orkney reveals little evidence for any consistency in either overall spread throughout Orkney or individual topographic situation in the landscape (Fig 7:2). The spatial distribution of Maeshowe passage graves reveals an obvious imbalance towards Mainland. A combination of differential survival patterns and the difficulties of recognition is often cited as mitigating against the emergence of any clear picture (e.g. Davidson & Henshall 1989, 14). Indeed, Hedges states that these monuments are "probably grossly under-represented" in the archaeological record (1983, 294). This endeavour to create distribution maps, however, begs the question of contemporaneity an any variation in social practices. Similarly, it appears to be implicitly assumed that there should be an uniform spread of passage graves across Orkney which unfortunately has been somehow lost through the biases of the archaeological evidence. This assumption is derived from the `one tomb - one people' idea originally discussed by Childe (1942) to account for the distribution of chambered tombs on the Island of Rousay. This idea and example was drawn on and extended by Renfrew (1973, 1979) in his discussion of the function of chambered tombs as territorial markers within a network of egalitarian societies. Apart from being simplistic and reductionist in demanding uniformity of

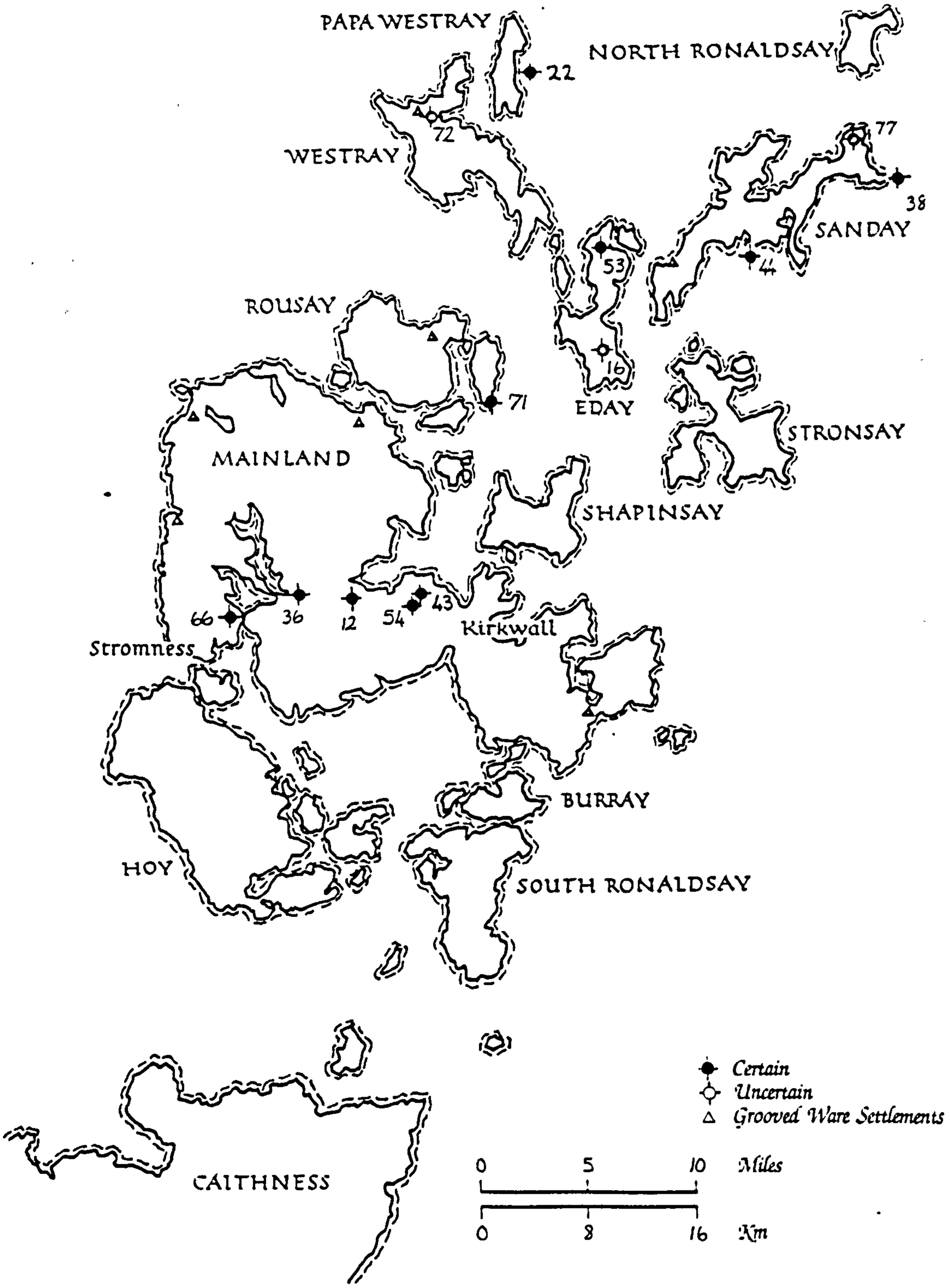


Figure 7:2. The distribution of `Maeshowe' passage graves in Orkney (after Davidson & Henshall 1989).

behaviour, these assumptions are now commonly realised to be extremely questionable on many counts, including the validity of social typology (Barrett 1988, Thomas 1991, etc). If we abandon the expectation of uniformity in distribution and critically except the disproportionate spread of Maeshowe passage graves throughout Orkney as constituting a phenomenon in the past then we are in a much stronger position to interpret the late Neolithic period in Orkney. The broader issues of this evidence will be reviewed in Chapter 12 , however, here we can note the potential divergence in social strategies of different groups of people on Orkney in the latter part of the third millenium B.C. For instance, it should not be assumed that there was an all embracing requirement which insisted that all family or lineage groups should build their own passage grave. Similarly, if the Maeshowe passage graves were introduced as a new form of architecture can we expect all to reject tradition, alter mortuary practices and build new monuments? It seems far more likely that different groups differed in their historical development; some would adhere to tradition, others may engage to varying degrees in emulation, and others would fully embrace new ideas and practices (see chapter 12).

As with distribution, where locational analysis has been undertaken (e.g. Fraser 1983) the landscape position of the passage graves is found to be extremely variable, if not puzzling (Davidson & Henshall 1989, 88). For instance, Quoyness, Sanday, is situated adjacent to the seashore only a matter of 60 metres from a possible second passage grave, Egmondshowe (Lamb 1980, 11). Vinquoy Hill passage grave is positioned on the summit of a high ridge running across north Eday, maintaining a highly conspicuous position, as opposed to Cuween Hill and Wideford Hill passage graves which sit two thirds of the way up their respective hills on Mainland. Quanterness, on the other hand, lies at the base of Wideford Hill while Maeshowe, is situated on open ground to the east of the loch of Stenness, Mainland. Alternatively, Howe of Howe, Mainland, and Pierowall Quarry, Westray, were built on sloping ground overlooking the open sea. Finally, Holm of Papa Westray South and Onziebist, Egilsay, are both on small islands off Papa Westray and Rousay respectively.

Although such a bewildering series of locations may defeat an overall statement of

locational consistency, when individual passage graves are examined within their immediate context, there does seem to be a range of different purposes and concerns behind individual placement which cannot be discovered through large scale analysis. Initially, we have to consider how the different monuments related to settlement and the daily lives of the living, moreover, can we expect any obvious uniformity when dealing with different communities inhabiting different islands? Furthermore, to what extent does a late Neolithic conception of the correct place for the dead influence their situation given the topographic variation between islands and monuments of possibly different purpose? I think these questions reveal the complexity of situation and identify the variety of concerns which are manifest in the landscape position of different passage graves which were constructed, used, and sealed over a period of several hundred years.

The confusion acknowledged in interpreting the position of passage graves in the landscape obviously relates to the lack of address given to above questions. Of course, because of the limited nature of archaeological evidence combined with our restricted interpretive abilities, complete understanding is always elusive. However, by examining the monuments within their social and landscape context certain strands in the available data may be drawn out and identified.

Placing the dead: a genealogy of the landscape

In the construction of a megalithic passage grave we see the creation of an identifiable `place' in the landscape. The commitment of architecture to the world orders space within and without the confines of its masonry. From the point of construction the world is both physical and conceptually altered. When attempting to understand why a particular site is chosen one factor to consider involves the possible maintenance, albeit in a new form, of a site or `place' already strongly associated with special qualities. This is different from advocating continuity as expressed in typological evolution. It is simply the acknowledgement that certain places may have already been associated with particular memories and myths which transcended everyday experience before the passage grave was built. (Kinnes 1981, Barrett 1988).

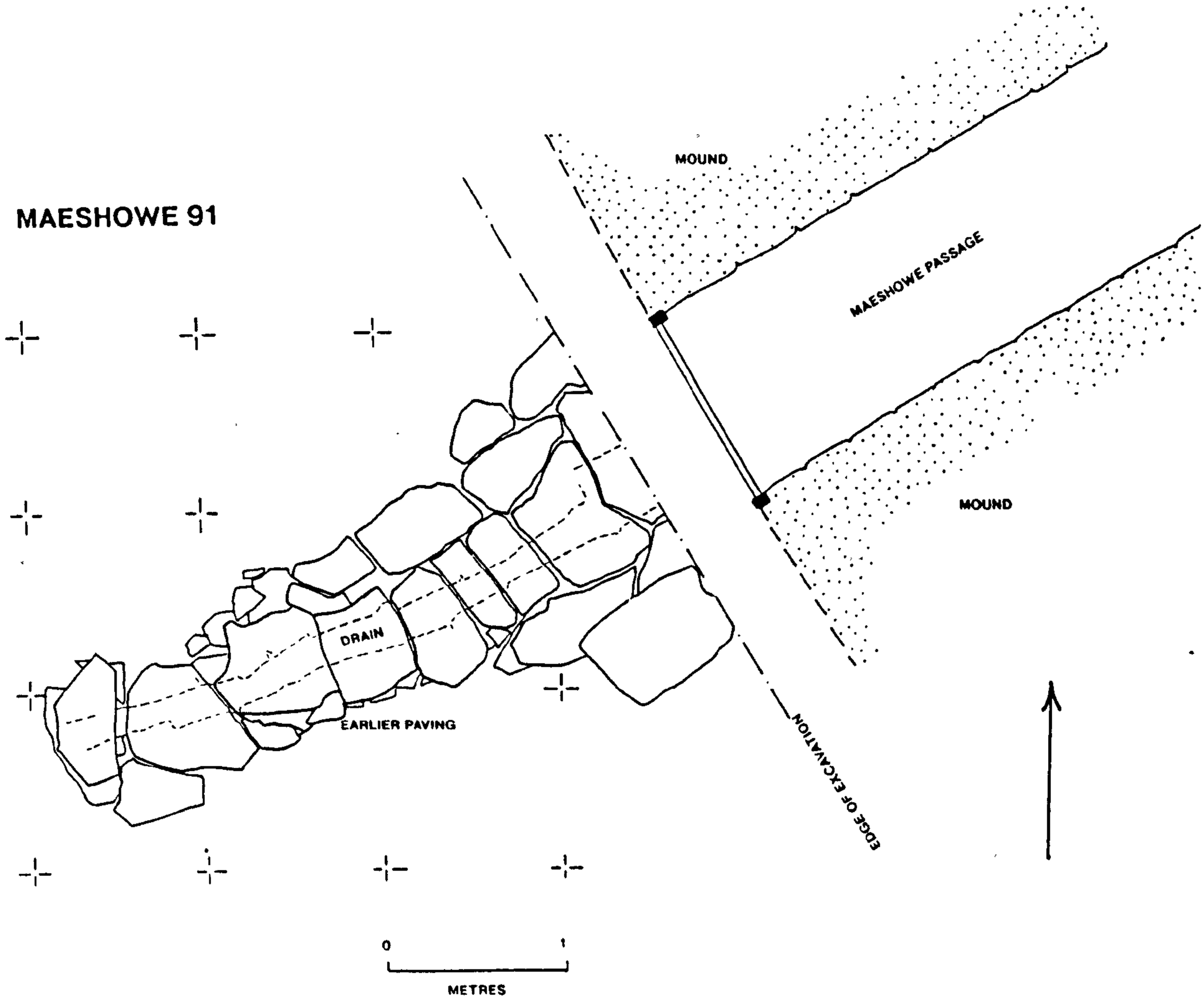


Figure 7:3. Plan of the entrance to an earlier building beneath Maeshowe.

Where we have positive evidence that the selection of a place for a new construction was influenced by earlier sites, for instance, where old, possibly ruined, burial monuments once stood, we have to consider the role ancestor veneration played in supporting traditional authority. In traditional societies, claims by people to maintained links between past generations and founding deities is a common strategy of justifying power and authority.

A similar interpretation could be proposed when the earlier structure was not a burial monument but another building, for instance a house. Under these circumstances a very specific link is being made between the living and the dead. This occurrence could either take the form of commemoration or continuity or indeed both. Either way, by appropriating the past and transforming it in the present, new ideas are introduced and naturalised in a single project.

Such an occurrence is witnessed at Howe of Howe, Stromness, Mainland, where the passage grave was found to overlie an earlier building (Fig 7:1). As suggested earlier, the underlying structure has been identified as a stalled cairn (Carter, *et al* 1984, 61-73), but some doubt may be expressed over this interpretation. Indeed, the idea that the earlier structure may have been some form of house is strengthened by the presence of an adjacent building measuring 4 x 4.5 metres, which was considered to pre-date the supposed `stalled cairn'. Internally, a rectangular stone construction, interpreted as a cist, was located centrally; the normal place for the hearth. Whether the earliest building was a house or not is debatable, however, it is clear from the partial evidence at Howe of Howe that at least two buildings were present on the site selected for the construction of the passage grave and that they were purposefully demolished and sealed with clay to facilitate construction of the passage grave.

One important aspect of this activity is the maintenance of passage orientation between the entrance to the earlier building and the passage grave. This led the excavators to suggest that the modifications occurred "before the position and function of the earlier remains had been forgotten" (*ibid*, 61). Although this statement assumes a continuation of a supposed mortuary role for the two buildings, it is clear that this particular site was selected for the new passage grave on the basis of its `past' and the importance in which this was regarded. Furthermore, the accuracy of alignment noted between the two structures suggests the earlier buildings were demolished to facilitate the new construction. Certainly the presence of at least two earlier buildings may indicate the presence of some type of dwellings. If so these were commemorated through the monumentality of the passage grave; a building incorporating the skill and sophistication of architecture as seen only at Maeshowe and House 2 at Barnhouse. This course of action, as we will see in chapter 9, is mirrored at Barnhouse.

Significantly, a similar sequence of construction can now be demonstrated at Maeshowe (Richards in prep). Recent excavations conducted in 1991 directly outside the entrance passage discovered the presence of an earlier building below the passage grave. Beneath a constructed clay platform, an earlier stone pathway covering a small drain led under the later passage grave (Fig 7:3). Given the presence of the drain we can postulate the presence of an earlier building, the nature of which remains indeterminable. As at Howe of Howe, the earlier and later buildings shared the same entrance passage alignment. The former structure had presumably been demolished to facilitate the laying of a substantial clay platform which provided a level surface for the building of the massive Maeshowe passage grave.

A possible third example of passage grave superimposition is Tres Ness, Sanday. Partially destroyed by coastal erosion, this monument is composed of a 9 metre long chamber the southern end of which is completely destroyed. Davidson and Henshall (1989, 163-4) interpret the lower structure as a stalled cairn with a later circular structure being placed on top. Whether this later structure is a Maeshowe passage grave remains to be seen, although Lamb (1980, 11), identifies the site as a probable Maeshowe type cairn.

At Howe of Howe, Maeshowe, and possibly Tres Ness, we see the selection of a site for passage grave construction being influenced by a maintenance of `place'. Although in each case we cannot be sure of the significance of the earlier buildings, we may, however, note that at Maeshowe and Howe of Howe the earlier structures were demolished to ground level and both passage graves respected the earlier entrance alignment. This surely suggests a certain knowledge and respect, if not reverence, for the earlier buildings.

Whilst the intimacy of association manifest in the continuity of place accounts for the situation of at least two passage graves there is little evidence to suggest this to be a general trend. A less clear relationship between a passage grave and earlier stalled cairns may be postulated at Holm of Papa Westray South which is positioned on a very small island off the east coast of Papa Westray (Fig 7:13). The passage grave is positioned centrally towards the south of the island. Also present on the island are two Orkney-Cromarty stalled cairns: Holm of Papa Westray North (see chapter 4) and

Holm of Papa Westray Centre (Davidson and Henshall 1989, 175). Although no physical relationship between the three monuments exists and as already discussed the chronological position of the two `types' remains problematic, it can be suggested that the construction of the stalled cairns pre-dated the passage grave. The significance of this situation is that it would appear that the small island may have traditionally been conceived of as a `place of the dead' and that the construction of the passage grave drew on this historical association. Importantly, as with Howe of Howe and Maeshowe, the building of a new passage grave introduced a new architecture and generated an alternative form of discourse, however, in this case the older structures were not displaced, although purposeful destruction or blocking coinciding with the new construction cannot be discounted. Certainly at Holm of Papa Westray North, the stalled cairn is blocked with earth and stones and conjoining walling is added to the southern end of the cairn. This reconstruction phase is associated with Grooved ware (A. Ritchie pers. comm.) and could conceivably be contemporary with the construction of the passage grave.

The significance of `place' is clear and certainly we can see that in some cases an earlier place in the landscape with all its multiplicity of meanings directly influenced the chosen site of a passage grave. We cannot, however, assume perfect knowledge on the part of the builders, the original building may have been constructed hundreds of years earlier and given the contingent nature of meaning it seems likely that original symbolism and intentions would have been manipulated and recreated over the ages. The builders may even have been uncertain as to the purpose of the original building, let alone understand the principles of its form and situation. As a place of significance and history it may have been revered but as a newly constructed standing building, the passage grave, can have been nothing other than a misrepresentation of that which came before. Under these circumstances the new stands on the old and the present and past merge. In this light any suggestion of uniform rules governing preferred locations in the natural topography, as sites for all passage graves, fall away under the weight of cultural understandings and myths. People do things because they are necessary, their reasons and intentions are often expedient and vary from place to place and time to time, paradoxically, change is rarely emphasised and the adherence to tradition an

unquestioned assumption.

Another important factor to examine when considering the position of the passage graves in the physical and socially constructed landscape is the variation in their visibility. In constituting monumental architecture they were obviously intended to be seen at a distance and to impress at close quarters. The question of visibility of passage grave location has been examined in detail by Fraser (1983, 298-303) and Davidson & Henshall (1989, 16-7). In examining the 360 degree view from each of the Orkney cairns, Fraser, divided the distance of visibility into three categories, distant visibility (greater than 5km), intermediate visibility (up to 5km), and restricted visibility (less than 1km). In this analysis a preference for cairns to be positioned with broad views of intermediate visibility was recognised. Again I question the merits of amalgamating all the cairns in a single analysis and suggest that many subtle intentions and motivations may be obscured and lost in the generalised picture produced.

When the Maeshowe passage graves are examined in context we find they are extremely variably positioned. Seldom does complete visibility, either from the monument or to the monument, appear to be the overriding factor. Only Vinquoy Hill, Eday, enjoys the prominence offered by the summit of a high hill. Instead a more selective or restrictive view is sought in the chosen location. It should also be remembered that the passage grave itself is frequently of monumental proportions in respect to other constructions such as houses. One aspect of such constructions is the desire for enhanced visibility, however, the question is for whom and from where. At another level we have to understand that the passage grave adheres to, and participates in, the cultural ordering of the perceived landscape. In this role its situation will necessarily involve particular social rules of classification and symbolic order not simply in terms of landscape position but also in respect to cosmological principles governing practices and movement.

Having discussed the position of passage graves in regard to older places of significance, I now wish to consider passage grave location in relation to the physical landscape and the way in which the natural world was ordered. Clearly this involves an understanding of a late Neolithic social landscape and the way in which Neolithic people symbolically constructed their world. In an attempt to address this issue

attention will be turned towards two different areas: the Island of Sanday and the Wideford - Cuween area of northern Mainland.

Island of Sanday

As one of the Northern Isles, Sanday is distinctive in having a fairly low rolling topography. Only the south-western peninsula has a more rugged terrain composed of rough hill land. Three areas of late Neolithic settlement are known on the island and in each case occupy a coastal setting. With little fieldwork having been carried out in the interior it is difficult to know if this represents a `real' distribution.

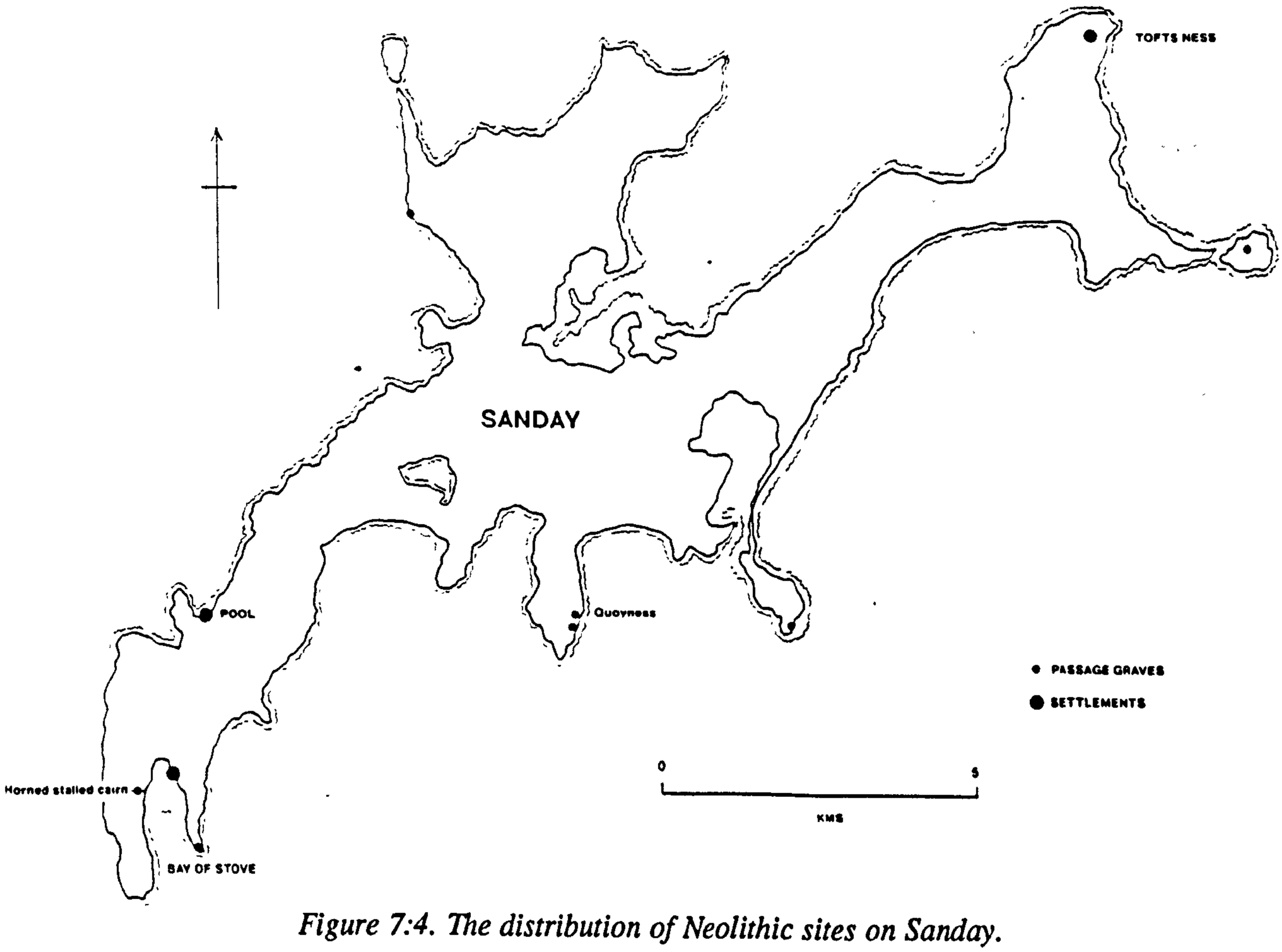


Figure 7:4. The distribution of Neolithic sites on Sanday.

On the east side of the Bay of Stove a large late Neolithic settlement is revealed in section through prolonged coastal erosion. Although unexcavated the recovery of a complete Orkney pestle macehead (Simpson and Ransom 1992, 239) suggests a date in the latter half of the third millenium BC. Recent excavations at Pool, on the northern

shore, have uncovered an area of settlement which appears to run throughout the late Neolithic period (MacSween 1992). Finally, excavations at Tofts Ness, a small peninsula forming the north-eastern corner of Sanday, revealed a late Neolithic house structure (Dockrill 1987). Given this coastal distribution of settlement, it is significant to note that all the recognised `chambered tombs' on Sanday also maintain a coastal situation (Fig 7:4).

In the absence of recognised passage graves situated inland it is interesting to observe their extremely peripheral and exposed topographic positions. Of the five sites identified by Lamb (1980, 11), Mount Maesry is on the small tidal island of Stark Point, Egmondshowe, Rethie Taing, and Tres Ness, are set in such close proximity to the shore line that each monument is suffering serious erosion from the sea. Finally, Quoyness sits on a small cliff adjacent to the seashore. A further mound at Hacksness, on the eastern tip of Bay of Stove may be tentatively included, since through field observations it demonstrates many features of a passage grave. In contrast to the settlements which although coastal assume relatively sheltered aspects within protective bays, all the passage graves lie in exposed positions at the extremities of isolated projections of land or small islands. This point is well illustrated when comparing the sheltered situation of the settlements at Bay of Stove and the exposed nearby passage grave (Fig 7:4). The appropriate place for the dead on Sanday, during the late Neolithic period, seems to embody extreme positioning in conjunction with naturally isolated and wild situations, adjacent to the sea. As if to reinforce this division of the living from the dead, in every example where the passage orientation is discernible, for example, Quoyness, Rethie Taing, and Tres Ness, it is found to be aligned away from the land towards the ocean.

A very consistent attitude towards the placement of the dead is revealed in the landscape situation of the Sanday passage graves. The houses of the dead could not be physically further away from the domain of the living, as represented by the land, and still remain visible. We can be sure that such a position adhered to a classification of the natural world which necessarily embodied a wide range of associated meanings. Included within such a scheme would be the ocean since it would have played an important element in the maintenance of life, both as a source of food and as a means

of communication. In this respect the situation of the dead lay in an ambiguous central position between the land and sea. Moreover, we recognise the context of liminality as applied to the ambiguous position of the dead.

This brief examination of passage grave location reveals a hint of how the late Neolithic inhabitants of Sanday saw and categorized their world. It also expresses their multiple attitudes towards the dead which, as would be expected, varies according to time and place. In assuming a pivotal position between land and sea, we recognise the role of the dead in an ordered landscape as providing a metaphor for abstract ontological conceptions of this world and the other, the natural and the supernatural. A corollary of occupying a position which could be construed as liminal; betwixt and between, is that people themselves enter into a state of liminality by merely travelling to the passage grave.

Wideford and Cuween Hills

Wideford Hill and Cuween Hill define a wide fertile valley running in from the northern coast of Mainland (Fig 7:5). Two Neolithic settlements have been identified within this area. The first lies at the base of Wideford Hill and is known through the discovery of a surface scatter of flints and pottery (Rendall 1931). Given the extent of the surface scatter, this site constitutes a major settlement. Although of Neolithic date, the exact period of occupation is less definite especially as the flint types betray few diagnostic features. An earlier date in the Neolithic period is suggested by at least one sherd of Unstan ware having been recovered from the surface (A. Henshall pers comm).

The second settlement is situated slightly to the south of Cuween Hill and again is known from recent surface finds taken into Tankerness museum for identification in 1990. As there was no systematic surface collection it is difficult to estimate the size or area of habitation; however, a series of small rises in the area of surface scatter may be indicative of a number of house structures. Fortunately, one of the artefacts recovered is a Thames pestle macehead (Simpson & Ransom 1992, 241), which places the date of the site firmly in the later Neolithic period.

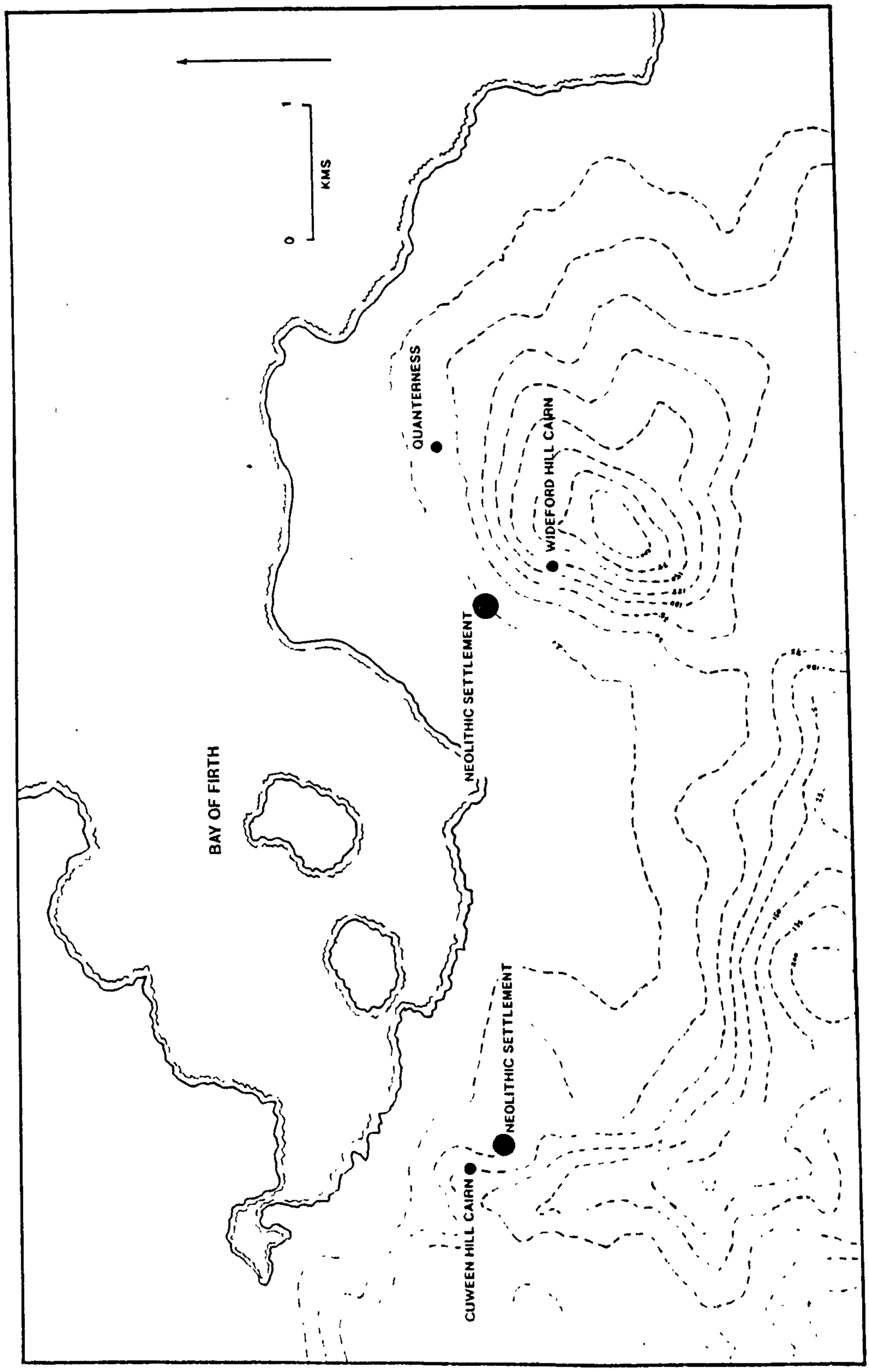


Figure 7:5. The distribution of Neolithic sites in the Wideford Hill - Cuween Hill area of Mainland, Orkney.

The passage grave of Quanterness lies approximately 700 metres to the east of the Wideford Hill settlement at the base of the hill. Situated two thirds of the way up Wideford and Cuween Hills are two further well known Maeshowe passage graves. Both are fairly similar in design and internal spatial organisation, particularly in having the entrance passage leading into the left hand end of the central chamber (Fig 7:6). They are both of similar construction with `onion skin' walling and in having natural flagstone forming their floors where a level surface has been created by cutting back into the hillside. In a general survey of the passage orientation of Maeshowe passage graves (Fig 7:7), the entrance orientation of the Wideford Hill cairn appears anomalous in facing due west. When considered in the context of this particular landscape, however, this orientation becomes more comprehensible when it is realised that the passages in both Cuween Hill and Wideford Hill passage graves are aligned on each other. Hence, one monument may be seen from within the other.

In terms of visibility neither passage grave appears particularly prominent from the valley floor because of their position on the upper slopes, rather than the summits, of the opposed hills. Indeed, an alternative position on the summit of each hill would have guaranteed far greater visibility. This selection of place must be identified as a purposeful choice on the part of the builders, but why chose a less conspicuous location? One answer may lie in the restriction of view imposed from a hillside position since from this aspect they solely overlook the valley floor as opposed to a 360 degree view of the entire landscape. Further insight into their location becomes apparent when each passage grave is viewed from the adjacent settlement. From this perspective both monuments become clearly visible and appear silhouetted against the skyline. In assuming such positions in the landscape they lie above the habitat of the living and throughout the day and night the dead symbolically overlook the activities and labour of the community and overshadow social life. In particular the monuments are always clearly visible from the settlement and the house. Similarly they conform to a cosmological view of the world which they in turn substantiate; everything is where it should be and that is clearly understood.

Although always present and normally visible, the passage graves and the connotations of death they embody maintain both a conceptual and physical distance

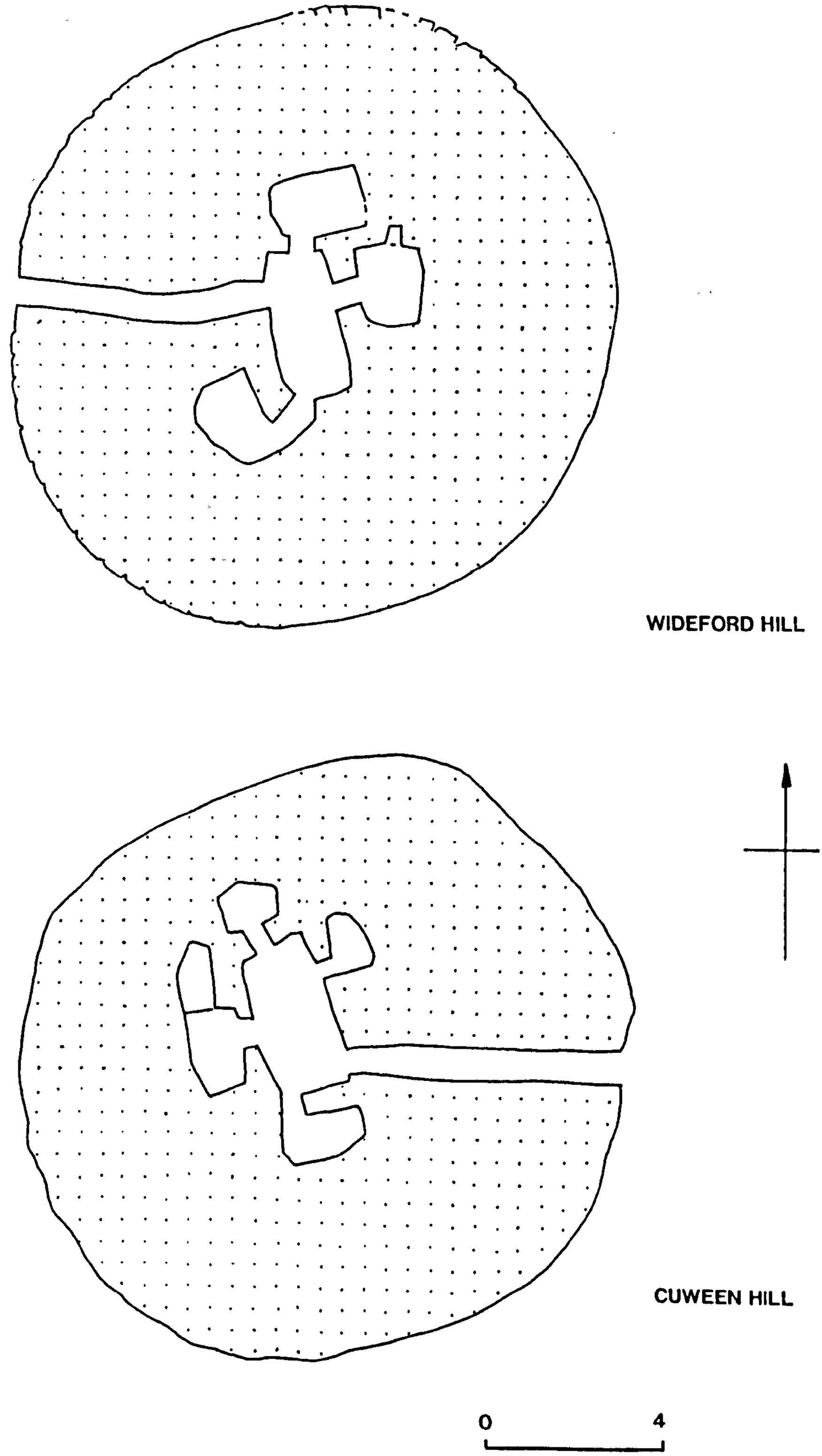


Figure 7:6. Plans of Wideford Hill and Cuween Hill passage graves (after Hensall 1963).

from the living, albeit of less severity than witnessed on Sanday. It is probable that the monuments were only directly encountered at close quarters, by the majority, when ceremonial was taking place. In this aspect we begin to comprehend the significance of their situation, above the domain of everyday life, however, Quanterness in assuming a lower and more intimate position in the landscape fulfils none of the qualities. Should we see Quanterness as being the same as Wideford Hill and Cuween Hill ? Architecturally, it conforms to the design of a Maeshowe passage grave. Although certain differences in internal spatial organisation are identifiable in comparison with the two nearby passage graves. Yet it is positioned on lower ground and, as we will see, contains quite different deposits resulting from different social practices.

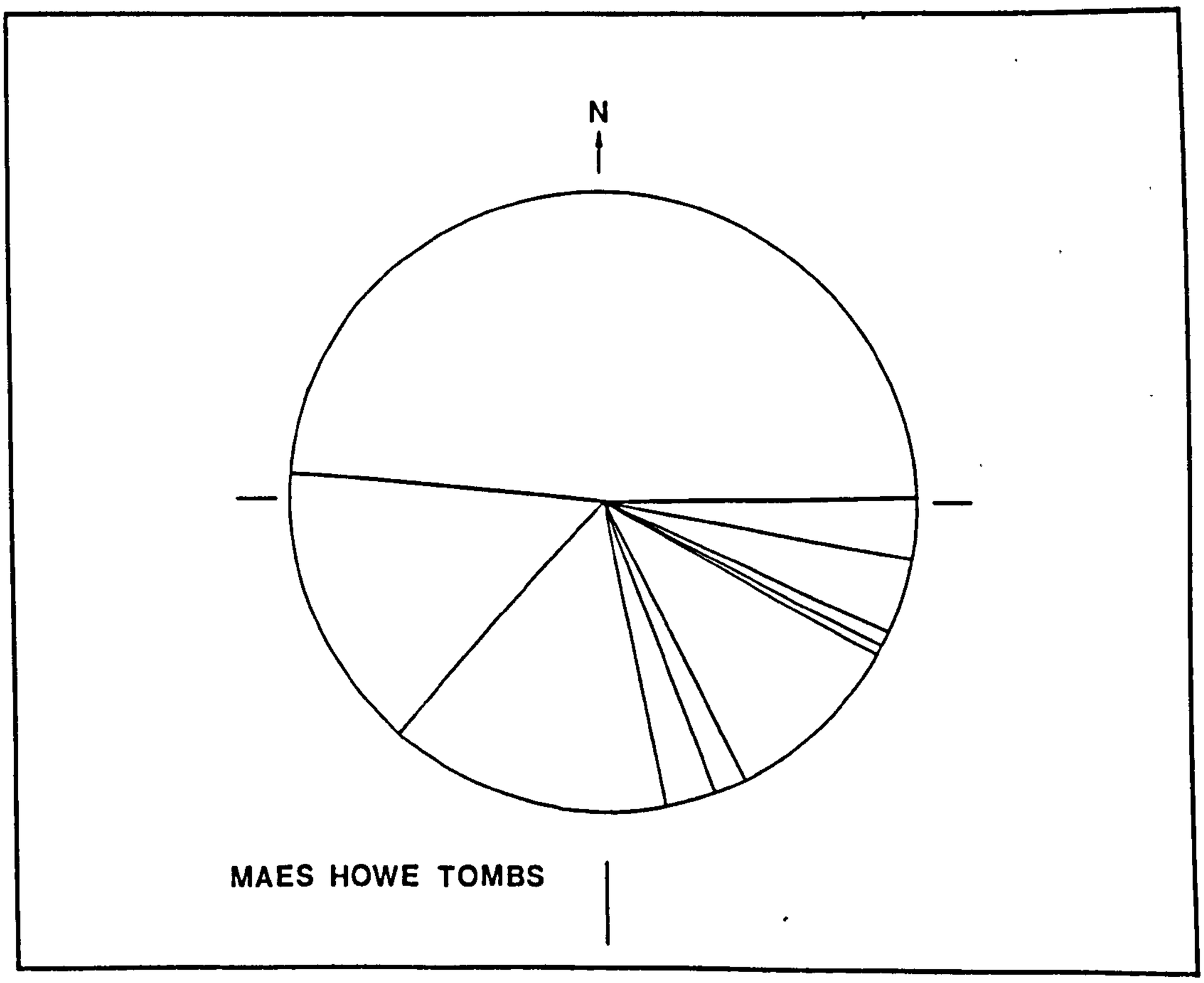


Figure 7:7. Orientaion of Maeshowe passage graves.

Quanterness is a larger construction than either Wideford Hill or Cuween Hill passage graves. As if to emphasise separation it has a longer passage which, as Sharples (1985, 71) has noted, may be a consequence of its presence in the area or domain of the living. Certainly, such a difference in location must include a difference

in perception of both the physical monument and perhaps the dead which it accommodates. Whereas the two hillside passage graves are away beyond the everyday activity areas of the living, Quanterness is firmly situated within that sphere and while the hill-side monuments may be visible from the settlements, fields and gardens, they embody an element of removal and separation; of being somewhere else. Quanterness, on the other hand, must have been confronted in all its monumental splendour on a daily basis as Neolithic people went about their tasks. Its close proximity induces a totally different discourse from that of the other passage graves. In constructing such a monument in close proximity to the living a more powerful, forceful dialogue is set in motion. Quanterness intervenes at all times and for everybody in the community, it does not require a special journey before it is seen in its stark proportions, in this aspect it is almost coercive in its intrusion.

In this area of Mainland we see the passage graves occupying different places within the landscape. The monuments on Cuween and Wideford Hill assume a removed aspect, albeit of greater dominance, than that seen on Sanday. We can suggest a similar notion of liminality is at work, although the use of height offers an alternative reading of the landscape. What is noticeably different is the position of Quanterness which does not utilize topographic variation as a feature of definition. As we will see this variation is not restricted to situation but is also identifiable in its internal deposits and use.

From these two case studies it is clearly seen that considerable variation exists in the position deemed suitable to place the dead. Different islands provide varied landscapes which will be conceived and categorized in different ways. This observation tends to counter the process of inclusive passage grave locational analysis (e.g. Fraser 1983, 263-324). Rather it enforces the need to contextualize monuments in the immediate landscape *and* the way in which that landscape was perceived and ordered.

Placing the dead: a question of direction

Whether influenced by the genealogy of a place of (pre) historical significance or

merely correctly positioned in the landscape, the situation of a passage grave as a house of the dead will conform to established categories of order. Although passage graves represent a new form of architecture they are introduced into a fully categorized world where the relative position of the living and the dead is defined in space and time through practice. The construction of an organised and demarcated space to house the dead, both recreates and reaffirms cosmological principles. These principles are clearly understood and are recognisable in the organisation of space within the house and settlement. This organisation may be discussed in terms of directions of movement and the situation of activities in specific loci. We now have to extend this view in order to examine and understand the wider landscape. In chapters 6, 9 and 10, attention is drawn to the observable patterns of movement and directionality within the settlements of Barnhouse and Skara Brae. It is demonstrated how through the organisation of space within the settlements the two `special' houses; Hut 7 at Skara Brae and House 2 at Barnhouse, were positioned in such a way as to allow their entry, if approached from the main area of occupation, to be gained solely through turning to the right (see Fig 9:2). Similarly, I now wish to examine the direction of movement between the settlement and passage grave.

There are three settlements which have associated passage graves situated in close proximity: Cuween Bottom, Wideford Hill, and Barnhouse. When the relative position of settlement and passage grave is scrutinised in terms of compass direction little consistency is found; Maeshowe lies to the southeast of Barnhouse, Cuween Hill lies to the north of Cuween Bottom, Wideford Hill passage grave is to the south of Wideford Hill settlement while Quanterness is positioned directly to the east. However, discounting compass direction, when a direct path is plotted between the settlement and passage grave it becomes quite apparent that in each case entry into the passage grave requires a turn to the left (Fig 7:8). Here it is suggested we are seeing the cosmologically based principles of classification which include qualities attached to direction, already recognised within the architecture of the house, operating at another level within the wider landscape to govern movement and recreate a host of associated symbolic meanings. It must be remembered that the significance of having symbolic weighting attached to a particular direction, be it right and left, or specific compass

directions, is that when people move into a constructed space they have to effect a reversal when leaving. Hence different or opposite meanings can be induced through the simple act of entry and exit.

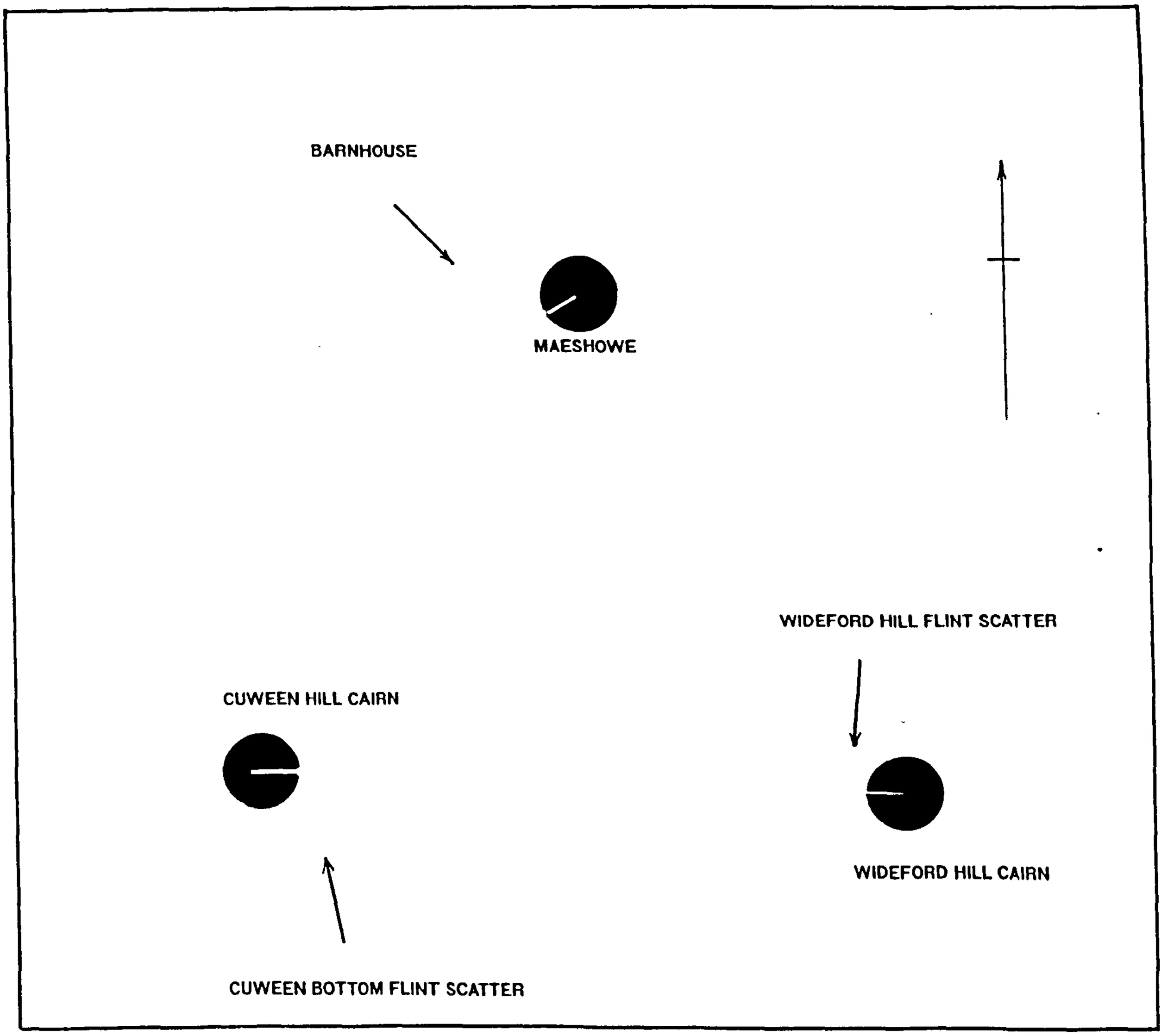


Figure 7:8. The situation and possible paths of movement between Neolithic settlements and passage graves.

What of other passage graves, is there any indication that similar rules may have applied elsewhere? As mentioned earlier, Holm of Papa Westray South is situated on a small island off Papa Westray. The island has an elongated form with the long axis running north-south. The passage grave is located towards the south of the island, assuming a central position, and in comparison to other Maeshowe passage graves it is unusual in being of an elongated form giving the outward appearance of a longmound. Its long axis runs east-west and thus at right angles to the longest axis of the island. This position has the effect of making the mound less visible from Papa Westray since it appears end on. The significance of this alignment is realised when the south easterly orientation of the entrance passage is taken into account. This positioning means that when the monument is approached in a direct route from Papa Westray entry is gained by turning left into the mouth of the passage (Fig 7:13).

As we have seen, the passage graves on Sanday are not only situated adjacent to the seashore but the entrance passages, where known, are orientated towards the open sea. This positioning prohibits a frontal approach. Therefore, to gain entry into the interior, the monument must be approached from the side. As yet no clearly associated late Neolithic settlement has been discovered in close proximity to the Sanday passage graves where entrance orientation is known. Thus we possess no indication of which side was deemed appropriate to approach the entrance. What is apparent, however, is that in assuming this orientation, the architecture of the passage grave forces people to turn either left or right to gain access. These examples provide further indication that prescribed rules of movement operated beyond the controlled internal architecture of the monument. As will be seen in the next section this left-right distinction, as part of an overall cosmological scheme, plays a major role in structuring the internal architecture of the passage graves.

In this section, movement to and from the passage grave has been discussed in relation to pathways of the living but we can be sure that such control extended to human concerns over the possible ambivalence of the dead. Such beliefs are apparently beyond the bounds of archaeological evaluation, nevertheless, to the inhabitants of Neolithic Orkney, control over the dead, particularly sanctions against wandering ghosts, may have been of crucial importance in the selection of a site for a passage

grave.

So far I have drawn out different factors which may have influenced the position of the Maeshowe passage graves in the landscape. It has continually been stressed that the natural landscape is organised through a process of categorisation and this ordering embodies physical alterations through projects of monument building and the social practices of Neolithic people. This is a view of landscape as being a cultural construct, embodying principles of order and a biography of meaning. I will now turn away from the architecture of landscape and examine the architecture of the passage grave itself.

Placing the dead: a physical entity

In pursuing the complex relationship between cosmology, architecture and the symbolic classifications which were continually drawn on and transformed in the various contexts of late Neolithic life it is necessary to examine passage grave architecture in some detail. In this respect it is important to recognise the relationship between house and tomb since, as will be seen, both are understandable within the same conception of architecture and order. Hence, they should be seen as merely constituting different places which provide the contexts for transitional stages in the transformation from life to death.

Some of the Orcadian late Neolithic passage graves constitute massive monumental constructions. For instance Renfrew (1979, 212-4) has calculated that Maeshowe represented an investment of 100,000 man/woman hours to build while Quanterness needed less labour in requiring 10,000 man/woman hours. In design the Maeshowe passage graves differ significantly from the Orkney-Cromarty stalled cairns examined in chapters 4 and 5, being characterised by high corbelled roofs, rectangular or square central chambers and radiating side cells set at ground level (Maeshowe and Howe of Howe have side cells with entrances set above ground level), thus, they constitute a completely different spatial arrangement. Significantly, the main chamber is always centrally positioned within the mound and access is gained through a long and particularly low and narrow passage. The substantial difference between the height of the passage and the height of the main chamber creates a startling contrast to those

entering a passage grave. There can be little doubt that this technique of accentuating the importance of an area by varying roof height was deliberately manipulated within the context of these monuments to enhance the focal point which was now situated in the centre of the tomb (Richards 1988).

Constructing a passage grave

The act of constructing a monument has tended to be seen in purely functional terms by archaeologists. Emphasis is placed either on the amount of human effort required to build a monument or the availability and nature of the raw materials (e.g. Renfrew 1973; 1979; Startin & Bradley 1981). As seen earlier in the discussion of house construction the act of defining a socially constructed space involves many sanctions beyond the physical actions of building. The definition of space is not without consequence and nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the construction of buildings of a religious nature since they have to be clearly demarcated in this world and yet separated from it. Such a place has to be sacred and its definition will necessarily involve some form of consecration. Hence, the marking out of a perimeter is of extreme importance, however, in some cases the traces of such rites of consecration may be archaeologically invisible.

Unfortunately, no passage grave has been completely dismantled in Orkney so any discussion of construction is severely curtailed. This restriction obviously poses problems in any attempt to locate evidence for pre-constructional ritual activity and any accompanying acts of deposition. Nevertheless, we can be certain that such actions occurred and an investigation of construction sequence may bring certain aspects of these activities to light.

Furthermore, it is important to understand the sequence of construction since the passage grave represents an extremely sophisticated building project. The building of Maeshowe will now be viewed in detail in order to understand both the complexities of construction and the sequence of events which led to its completion. An examination of Maeshowe is of particular importance since as a monument it is a composite of different elements which lack any clear chronology. Moreover, an

understanding of the architecture of this monument is crucial to further discussions of both the role of Maeshowe in the evolution of the Stenness landscape (chapter 11) and the more general social changes which occur throughout the late Neolithic period (chapter 12).

Maeshowe

The significance of a continuity of `place' as suggested by the construction of Maeshowe on the site of an earlier structure has been discussed above. However, this decision led to practical problems which had to be overcome. The first building appears to have been situated on the side of a natural knoll and may have been cut into it in a similar manner to that seen at Cuween Hill and Wideford Hill. As Maeshowe was to assume a dominant landscape position, the summit of the knoll was chosen as the site for the new passage grave. Initially, the original building had to be demolished and since Maeshowe was to be of much greater size a substantial area had to be prepared for its foundation. The top of the natural knoll was levelled and large amounts of yellow silty clay was imported, probably from the nearby loch of Harray (French forthcoming), and laid on the southern and western side of the knoll to create a raised oval platform measuring approximately 80 metres across its longest axis. A thin layer of blue clay was then laid over the natural irregularities of the central area, where the passage grave was to be erected, in order to ensure a perfectly level surface for building (Childe 1956, 161).

At this point we have to consider the relationship between the different elements which make up the monument: the passage grave, the platform, the ditch and outer wall. This relationship is extremely important in understanding many aspects of Maeshowe. As Sharples (1985, 61), correctly states, this problem of chronology was never confronted by Renfrew (1979, 37-8), when using the radiocarbon determinations, obtained from the primary ditch silts, to date the passage grave.

We now have clear evidence that the platform is formed from a combination of

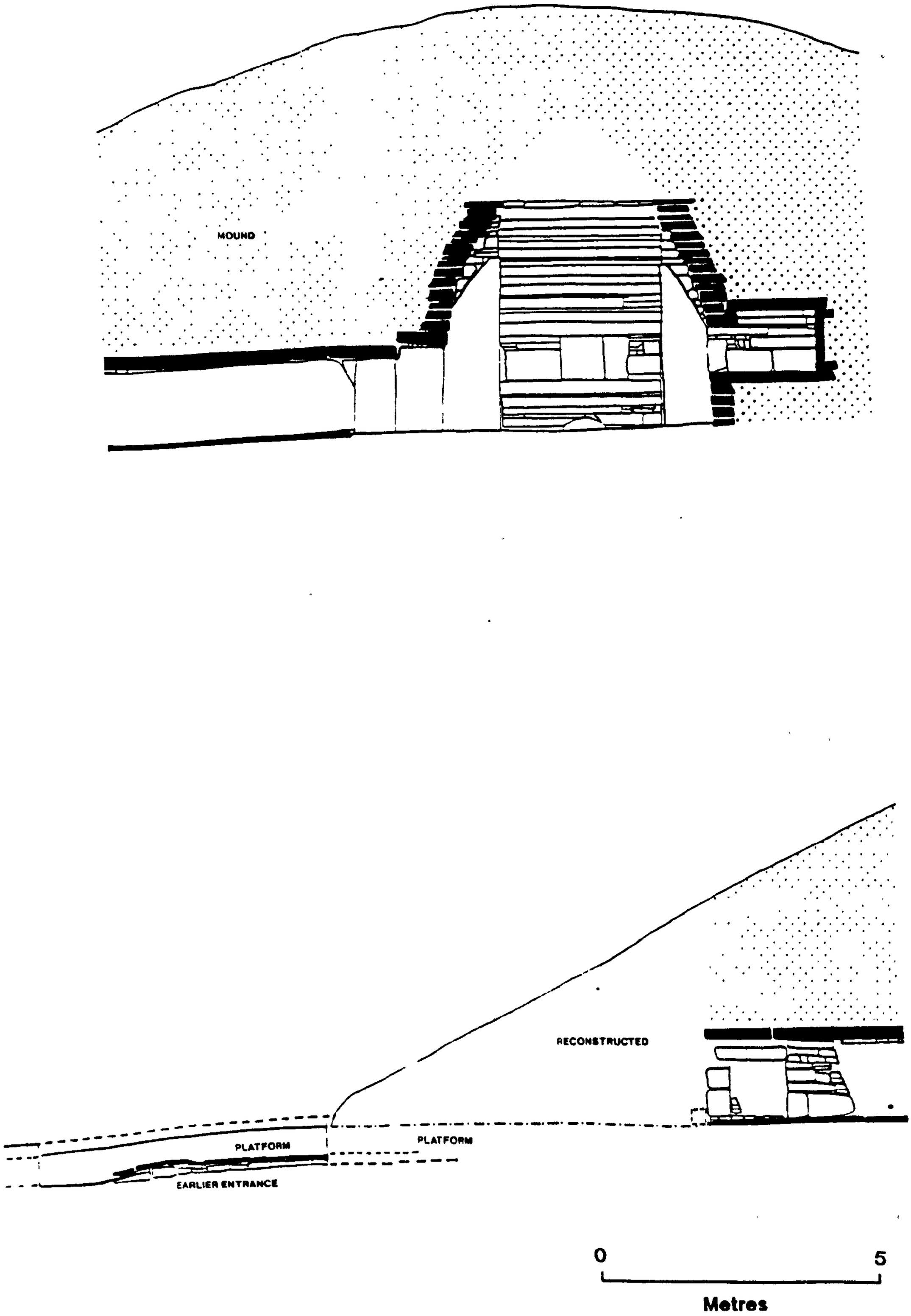


Figure 7:9. Section through Maeshowe showing earlier entrance and covering platform.

sculpted natural till and imported silty clay. From the results of different excavations it is possible to demonstrate that the north-eastern and eastern perimeters of the platform are formed from purely natural glacial till (Richards in prep). In the south-east a thin layer of silty clay is laid over the natural till (see Childe 1956, 159), which gradually falls away to the south-west. Thus, as the platform runs around into its western sector so the level of silty clay increases to compensate for the natural decline and maintain a level surface. The silty clay reaches a depth of 90 cms directly outside the passage grave entrance, where it covers the remains of the entrance path into the earlier building (Figs 7:3 & 9). According to Childe's account of a trench excavated across the southern area of the platform and into the body of the mound (1956, 159-61), the silty clay artificial platform make-up gave way to a layer of white clay or marl; 1 - 3 inches thick. This material ran under the mound where it was interrupted "by an accumulation of bright blue clay, identical with that on the floor of the ditch and presumably scraped up thence" (*ibid*, 161). The blue clay continued and formed a bank within the mound (see *ibid*,fig 2).

The presence of blue clay beneath the mound is of obvious significance in attempting to relate the surrounding ditch and wall to the central passage grave. The only identifiable source for this clay is, as Childe stated, from the ditch. In each of the five excavated trenches into the ditch deposits (Childe 1956, 157-9; Renfrew 1979, 32-4; Richards in prep) each has noted that the ditch is cut through a glacial matrix of grey-blue clay and sandstone slabs. While this distinctive grey-blue till continues eastwards under the wall and its external collapse, the internal natural sandstone till which forms part of the platform, is the more frequently encountered hard yellow clay with sandstone fragments. Renfrew suggests this colour and textual difference is possibly due to glaying within the ditch and the low lying area to the northeast (1979, 32). In discussing the same phenomena in a trench through the ditch in its southern area, Renfrew remarks, "where the clays are damper they become grey in colour and much stickier" (*ibid*, 34).

Given this evidence it seems quite likely that the blue clay encountered by Childe beneath the mound came, as he suggests, from the surrounding ditch. If this proposition is accepted then the platform and ditch are contemporary and they were

Figure 7:10. Contour survey of Maeshowe (Historic Scotland).

laid and excavated respectively prior to the construction of the passage grave (*contra* Sharples 1985, 61-73).

A further factor to consider, in attempting to relate the ditch to the internal platform and passage grave, is that the ditch is not actually a consistent feature. Renfrew (1979, 36), notes that in part of the northern perimeter, the ditch is actually formed by the slope of the platform, which is, in this sector, the sculpted natural knoll, rather than an excavated feature. The illusion of a ditch is increased by the outer bank or originally an outer wall. From this evidence it can be strongly argued that the ditch accompanies the platform to enhance the overall appearence of the monument; it constitutes an exercise in cosmetics, as opposed to a later added division or boundary of a symbolic nature (*contra* Sharples 1985). If, in the context of the latter suggestion, the digging of the ditch is considered to be primarily concerned with the creation of a physical and symbolic boundary, it is both curious and inconsistent that it should not assume a complete circuit of the monument (with the exception of formal entrances if desired). The `ditch' is now revealed as a variable feature, the purpose of which is simply to create an image and in particular emphasise the platform and interior as a regular and separate entity. In this way the ditch may be firmly linked to the episode of platform construction (Fig 7:10).

Returning to the act of construction, after the digging of the outer ditch and the laying of the platform, the next stage in the process would have been the physical marking out on the ground, the perimeter of the passage grave. This demarcation would have probably been accompanied by a series of rituals of definition, since these lines and markers were soon to become an architectural entity creating both internal order and dividing the internal sacred space of the dead from the outer world of the living.

A further event which would probably have been of high ritual significance was the excavation of the stone sockets and erection of the four great monoliths, each of which was to face the internal buttresses. Two smaller uprights were also erected at this time to support the inner passage lintel. Although the four massive uprights, standing over two metres above ground level, were destined to be incarcerated within the dark interior, at this point in time they would have towered above the builders

heads and been visible for all to see.

Next began the construction proper. A large stone monolith was laid at ground level along the line of the passage, forming its floor. Around the four central monoliths large blocks of masonry were positioned outlining the plan of the main chamber. A drain may have been constructed at this time, although evidence for its existence is tentative. Renfrew (1979, 33 & plate 4c) encountered a covered drain running from the direction of the passage grave off the platform into the ditch in his north-western trench. Certainly drainage formed a common problem for Neolithic builders since stability of structure was vital to corbelled construction (Barber 1992, 21). Moreover, the earlier building on this site had a drain running out below its entrance slabs (Fig 7:3).

From this point on, the inner and outer wall faces would have risen together, course by course, to form the core cairn. As Barber (1992, 21) correctly points out, the core cairn effectively constitutes the corbelling itself. The outer casing wall, however, is not a single vertical construction but takes the form of a series of stepped walls (Childe 1956,fig 6). These steps appear to sit on a five feet thick stone built plinth which projects out four feet from the first of the stepped wall segments (*ibid*, 164-6). Childe notes that "the masonry of the plinth and first two steps, though not quite so finished, is really reminiscent of that superbly displayed in the chamber's inner walls - the same selected inner edges, the same trick of intercalating a square block at intervals to replace two courses of thinner slabs" (*ibid*, 166). The quality of this masonry seems to have deteriorated in the higher steps of walling. It seems likely that the lower four courses of masonry formed a circular platform "wide enough to contain both the chamber and the cells that extend back six feet into its walls. On it would be superimposed further steps to support the heavy stones serving as counterpoises to the lintels" (*ibid*, 167) (see also Barber 1992, 21).

Childe considered that the outer casing wall was never intended to be seen, nor could it have stood unsupported, and that the clay mound make-up was piled against each stage as it was built. This counters the claim by Sharples (1985, 65), that all Maeshowe passage graves originally stood as stone towers of up to four metres in height. Beyond the outer casing wall the clay mound make-up appears to have been

revetted by two encircling walls neither of which was very substantial or built upon the platform. Instead they sat precariously perched in a slightly raised position on and supported by the clay make-up.

Two further massive monolith shaped slabs were positioned on their long edge to form the passage walls and another was placed on top to form the passage roof. This would have been done in tandem with the rising tower of the main chamber where the side cells had now been incorporated in its structure. Higher and higher, the main chamber rose until the four monoliths were completely concealed within its confines.

Maeshowe now stood complete, and again we can recognise this time as being of particular ritual significance. Inside the monument, unlike Quanterness (see below), no sign of burning or cist burials have been discovered. However, it should be noted that the interior excavation was undertaken in the last century and no satisfactory account was published. Nevertheless, some form of inauguration rituals almost certainly must have occurred to initiate the use of the most spectacular of the Orkney passage graves.

Art and Architecture

As a new architectural form, the adoption of the passage grave in Orkney is clearly significant in breaking with a tradition which had been in place for several hundred years, this change necessarily depicting an altered relationship between the living and the dead (Sharples 1985, 71). Apart from the cosmological principles embodied in its spatial organisation an important aspect to be stressed here is that within this architecture lie also the ingredients of restriction, separation, and monopoly. The long passage conjoining the outside world to the inner chamber acts to link and separate two worlds: one of the living the other of the dead. Regardless of how these worlds were seen to intervene and overlap, when they did, such occasions were dangerous and inevitably would be heavily sanctioned and controlled. One element of this requirement for spatial definition between the two domains is realised within the passage grave, for here the long passage while allowing access acts as a symbolic barrier. Although no similar evidence has been recovered from elsewhere, the large stone door slab at Maeshowe reveals that the entrance may have been blocked

when the tomb was not being entered.

At the same time the small dimensions of the passage act to physically restrict bodily movement into and out of the central chamber making it an extremely difficult and, under certain circumstances, an undignified event. Indeed, in many of the passage graves people are forced to enter on their hands and knees. The presence of such a small and long passage is restrictive in effectively removing any visual access into the interior of the monument and the proceedings occurring within. People standing outside unable to enter the passage would loose sight of those entering almost immediately they ventured across the threshold. On the assumption that very few people were physically able, or were entitled to witness or partake in the sacred activities occurring within the central chamber, the only medium through which people situated outside the passage grave would have known of what was occurring inside would have been through sound. The large expanse of the central chamber tends to dampen sound inside the tomb, however, the passage tend to amplify and project noise outwards. This has the effect of enhancing the sound of voices of people in the interior to those positioned outside.

Despite the enhanced acoustic properties of passage grave architecture we can see clearly its restrictive properties. The monopoly and separation of ritual practices from the public domain are inevitably linked to a control over ritual knowledge as a source of authority within society.

For those people who actually entered the passage grave what would their perception and recognition of the internal organisation of space have been? Here it is argued that it would have been a recognisable representation which was presented to the Neolithic subject. Exactly the same principles of order were manifest in the passage grave architecture as were present within the home. A passage grave is, however, not a house and thus the form of architecture and its construction were purposefully different. It was simply that the underlying organisational principles of order were the same and again this purposeful selection maintained metaphorical links between the house and tomb. Furthermore, in this linkage we gain an understanding of the use of space which cuts across traditional problems of typology and archaeological classification.

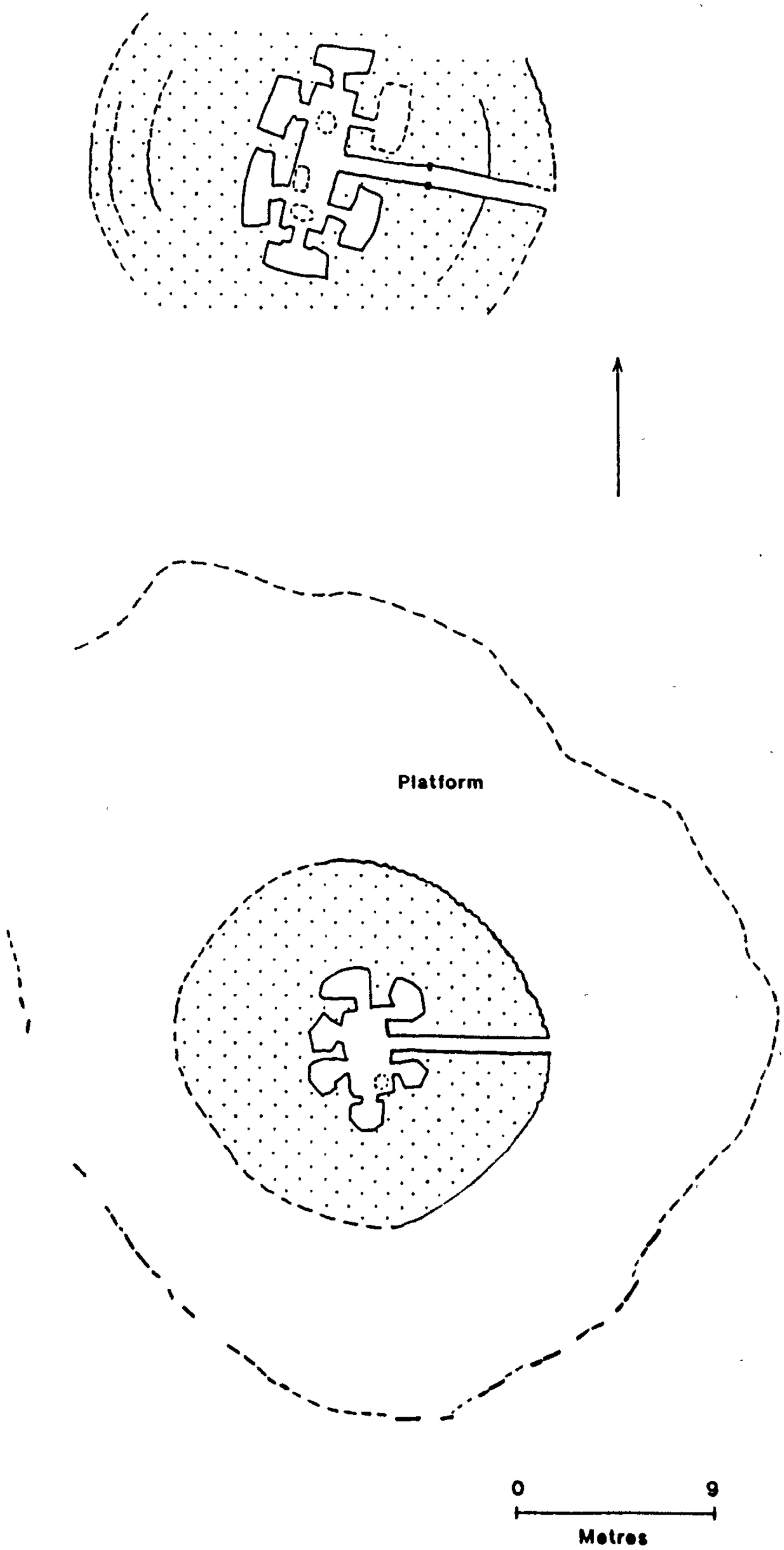


Figure 7:11. Plans of the passage graves of Quanterness (top) and Quoyness (bottom) (after Davidson & Henshall 1989).

Let us initially return to Maeshowe and its internal organisation. On entering the central chamber (a full account of this procedure is given in chapter 11) a cruciform arrangement of space is seen in both the four recesses and the three cells in combination with the entrance passage. Thus, we see an architectural transformation of the principles employed in the spatial organisation of the house. Sophistication of construction does not enter the discussion at this point, all we are interested in here is the basic division of space.

But what of other Orcadian passage graves, how does their apparently diverse architectural forms fit into this scheme? The evidence from recent excavations at Howe of Howe, Stromness, Mainland (Carter *et al* 1984), where a passage grave was discovered below a Bronze Age earthhouse, suggests that this example was of similar layout to Maeshowe (Fig 7:1). Three cells and the entrance passage combine to create a cruciform organisation of space.

Quanterness, Mainland, and Quoyness, Sanday, will be examined in the next section, here it is worth mentioning their similarity of architecture and orientation (Fig 7:11). Each has a long passage leading into a rectangular main chamber with six regularly spaced side cells. The differences between the Quanterness/Quoyness passage graves and Maeshowe were considered to be of such magnitude as to justify Renfrew (1979), to place them in different typological categories. This distinction was solely based on construction technique and ground plan. If these monuments are given a cursory examination based solely on ground plan it is clear that the cruciform aspect of Maeshowe and Howe of Howe is absent. However, let us consider for a moment the view of someone entering either Quanterness or Quoyness. After travelling along the passage the main chamber is entered. At this point the subject is confronted by a large open space, directly ahead is the rear wall of the main chamber and forward motion is denied. In order to continue into the interior a choice is made to turn either left or right (Fig 7:12). It is at this point that the cruciform spatial arrangement becomes apparent because whichever way the subject moves they move into an identical representation. This architecture is not solely a passage grave phenomenon, it is also present in House 2 at Barnhouse where exactly the same layout creates identical choices and spatial re-orientation.

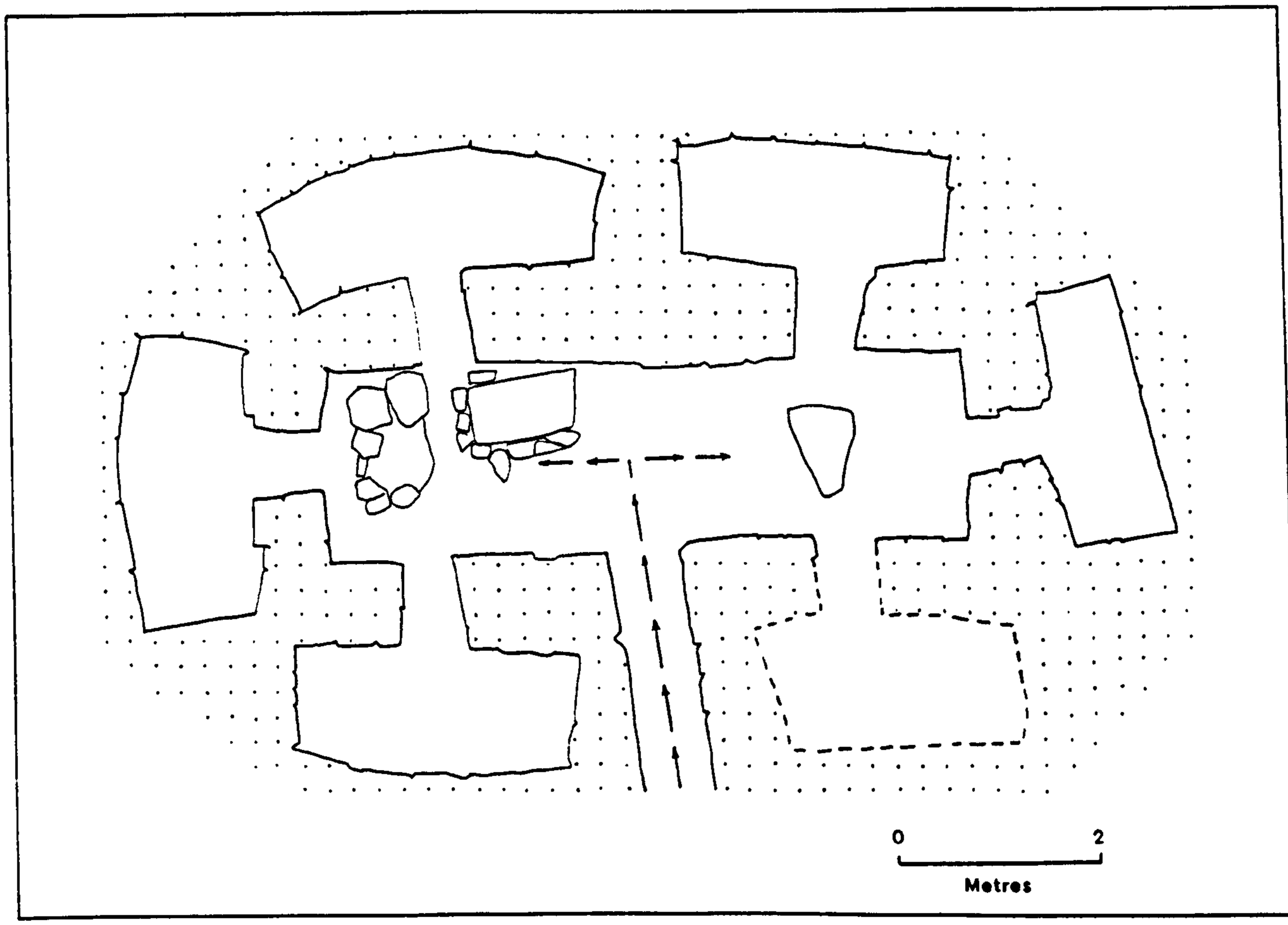


Figure 7:12. Path of entry into Quanterness.

One passage grave which does emphasise such principles in a clear and possibly exaggerated manner is Holm of Papa Westray South, located on a small island off the east coast of Papa Westray (Fig 7:13). A second passage grave of similar form may have been Eday Manse, Eday, which before its destruction in the nineteenth century appears to have also had a long main chamber with numerous side cells (Davidson & Henshall 1989, 37). Interestingly, because it takes an unusual elongated form, Holm of Papa Westray South, tends to be treated as an anomaly by archaeologists merely because it deviates from the definitional norm, in this example an expected circular form or plan (e.g. Kilbride-Jones 1973). Thus despite the notable presence of passage

grave art (Eday Manse also displayed remarkable passage grave art) this monument tends to be marginalised in discussions of `Maeshowe type' cairns. With regard to the art at Holm of Papa Westray South, Davidson and Henshall (1989, 82), acknowledge its presence but in contrasting its execution with other passage graves note that it contains a random element of motifs and their situation is so haphazard as to suggest that they may well represent the "casual use of stones already decorated".

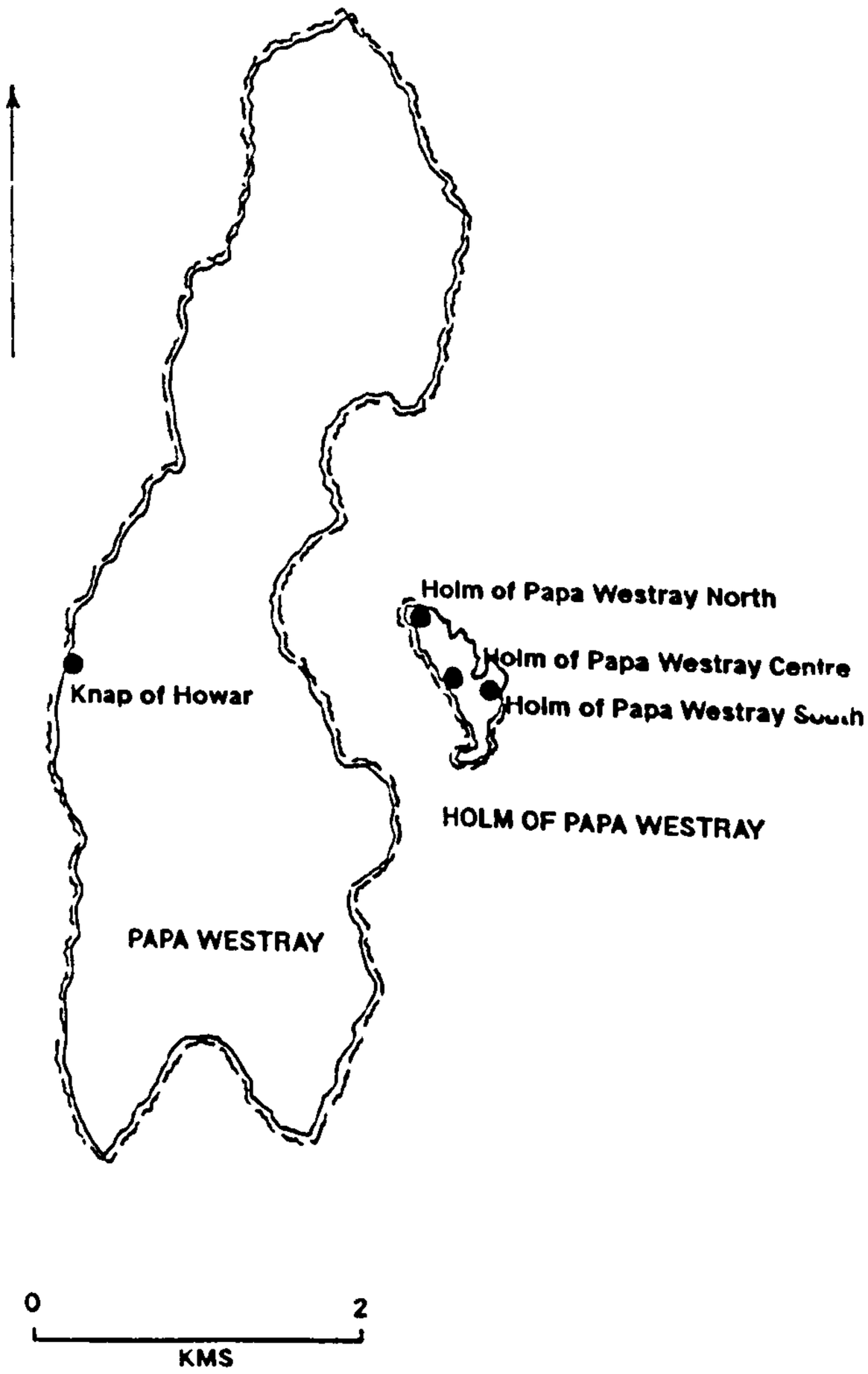


Figure 7:13. Map of Neolithic sites on Papa Westray and Holm of Papa Westray.

By tracing the direction of movement which is necessary for people to gain entry into the different areas within Holm of Papa Westray South, it is possible to begin to understand the many features of its complex architecture (Fig 7:14). The entrance

passage is consistent with other passage graves in being difficult to traverse; it measures 0.8 - 0.6 metres in height, 0.5 metres in width and 9 metres long (as it stands today the passage has been partially reconstructed, however, we know with some certainty that its original length exceeded 5.5 metres). As discussed earlier the passage represents a restrictive medium of communication and the act of moving into the monument is at once both difficult and undignified since it involves crawling on hands and knees. If those entering were encumbered with material items then these difficulties would be intensified.

Emerging from the passage into the inner chamber with its high vaulted ceiling only two options are available for those who wish to continue. The narrow form of the main chamber forces a turn to either the left or right and this basic distinction was obviously considered an important and appropriate choice to be made at this stage of entry into the monument. Although the specific meanings attached to this decision within the context of a journey into a passage grave is difficult to understand it clearly relates back to the classification of direction and the control of space noted within the house. Clearly this decision is neither neutral or without consequence because as we will be shown despite the lack of any artifactual material within the structure, the selection and positioning of passage grave art creates subtle differences which serve to distinguish the opposed end compartments of the main chamber.

If a turn to the right is desired a north-easterly path is taken and moving along the main chamber two sets of opposed side cells are passed. Finally, a barrier wall partially blocking off the end of the chamber is confronted. No form of decoration has yet been passed. Again as within the architecture of the house (see chapter 6), entry into the end compartment is through an offset doorway positioned right of centre. Passing through the doorway access is gained into the right hand side of the end chamber and a familiar spatial organisation is observed; a cruciform arrangement is created by small cells running in from the right, left, and rear walls. The only absentee is the central reference: the fireplace. Apart from the position of the doorway the only feature to break the internal symmetry of the chamber is the presence of eight pecked circles and dots situated within the *left* hand cell (Twohig 1981, fig 258d). No other distinction is observable in the architecture of this end compartment.

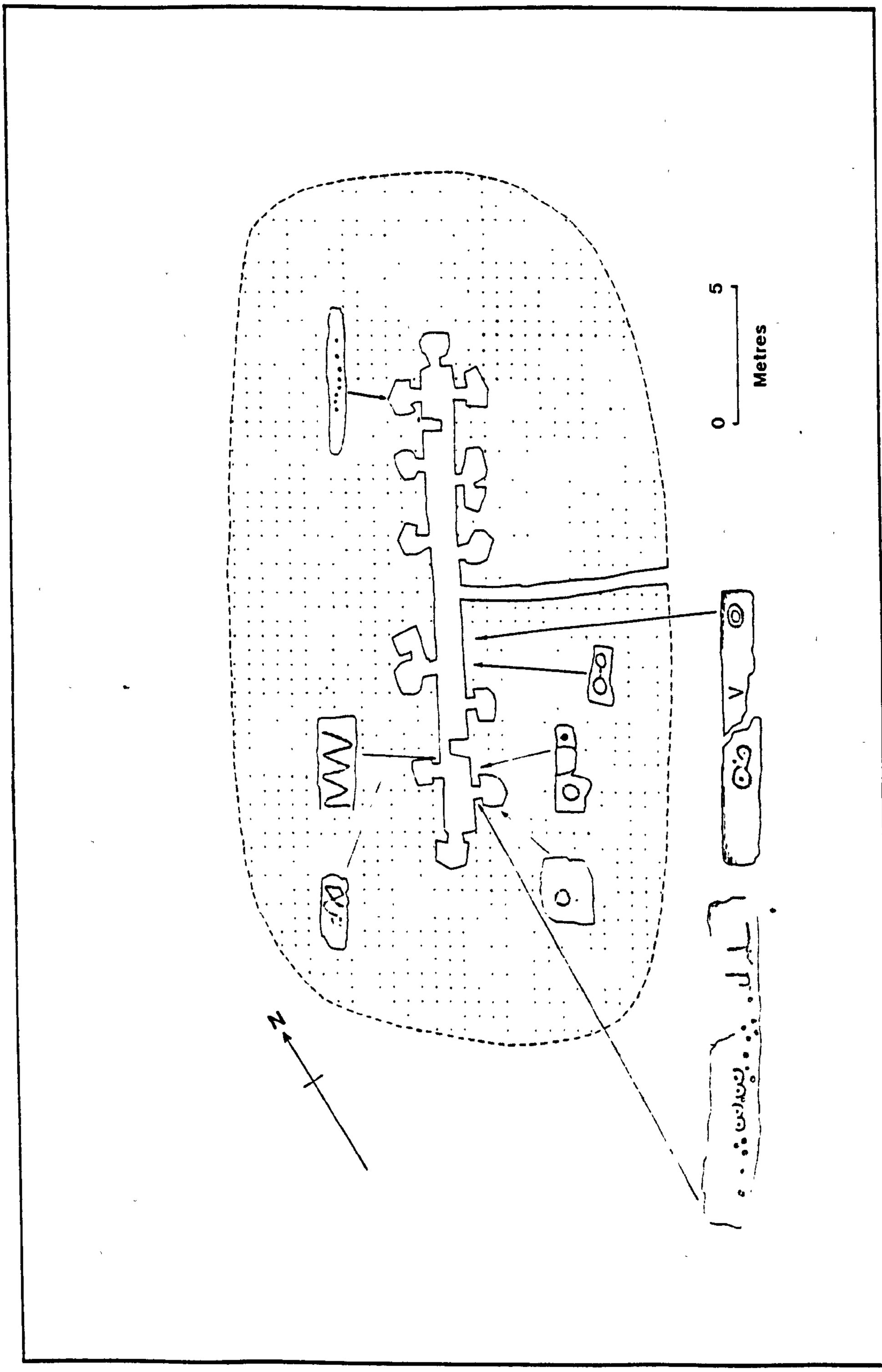


Figure 7:14. Plan of Holm of Papa Westray South showing the position of decoration.

As opposed to the apparently random position of decoration within the passage grave suggested by Davidson & Henshall (1989, 82), the use of art to highlight areas and create distinctions in space is a major aspect of the spatial representation of this monument. While the right end of the chamber displays minimal decoration, art becomes a significant feature of the journey into the Holm of Papa Westray South if a turn to the left is taken after the negotiation of the passage. Not only is this movement to the left but as the passage grave maintains the same orientation as the majority of late Neolithic houses it is also movement in a south-westerly direction.

When either a turn to the left or right is undertaken a re-orientation of the subject is effected which alters spatial perception, especially within the enclosed confines of a darkened monument. Just as was discussed earlier, in relation to Quanterness, and as occurred with the right turn, a turn to the left re-aligns the south-west end compartment which now lies directly ahead. Even aided by torchlight the wall defining this compartment lies in gloom at the far end of the main chamber and the right of centre doorway is little more than a dark shadow. What is revealed in this partially lit chamber as the end compartment is approached are two opposed side cells and two areas of decoration, both employing dots and concentric circles, positioned on the left hand wall. Finally arriving at the door to the end compartment and proceeding through its short low passage the now familiar cruciform spatial arrangement becomes visible. In contrast to the other end compartment, however, this area is heavily decorated by pecked and incised/grooved decoration. Circular motifs and dots adorn the wall around the entrance to the left side cell constituting the most profusely decorated part of the passage grave. In contrast, the right hand wall, whilst bearing two areas of decoration, displays linear art; a long zigzag pattern and a series of joined lozenges. Hence, concentric or circular designs are restricted to the left, linear art to the right.

In the conjunction of architecture and art at Holm of Papa Westray South we see a clear structuring of space within the passage grave. An important aspect of this structure is the representation which confronts the individual when entering the monument. Through a continuous process of re-alignment created by the movement of the subject it is the left hand areas which are consistently emphasised by the positioning of curvilinear decoration. However, the sole example of linear art in Holm

of Papa Westray South is confined to the right hand side of the south-west end compartment. This concurrence of linear art positioned to the right is, I suggest, not an accident but a careful coincidence of symbols acting within a wider classification of space and meaning.

Placing the dead: mortuary practices and deposition

By examining the situation of the passage graves within the landscape and their architecture we are seeing the transformation of ideas about the correct place for the dead into a physical form as expressed through monumentality. In this section I intend to examine the deposits within the passage graves.

The sequence of rituals surrounding the death of an individual in late Neolithic Orkney would have been complex and involved many activities occurring at different places and times. This ritual process will be traced later; here an examination of the final stages of the rites of passage from this world to the next will be examined as revealed in the deposits within the passage grave.

A cursory examination of the available evidence clearly reveals these deposits do not simply relate to successive acts of interment and it is quite clear that other actions beyond the burial of a corpse occurred within a passage grave. Indeed, the monument may have been entered on many occasions either to extract particular skeletal remains or to undertake ceremonies which demanded the participation of the ancestors (cf. Barrett 1988). We cannot even be sure that the burial of the dead was deemed the prime role for these buildings. Certainly it seems clear that very few passage graves contained the amount of skeletal material that would be expected to accumulate if their primary function was one of a container for all the dead of late Neolithic Orkney. However, there can be little doubt that the passage grave was considered to be a place of the dead and that some corpses and human skeletal material was deposited within their confines. These acts constitute the final rituals (if it assumed that the passage grave represented the final resting place) in a lengthy process which surrounds the death of an individual. This final stage, if we follow Van Gennup (1960) and Turner (1969), represents the completion of a transformation of state, in the case of death,

one of incorporation with other dead, the ancestors, within the abode of the dead; the passage grave.

Like the stalled cairns examined in chapter 5, the deposits within the Maeshowe passage graves display considerable variation. A critical examination of mortuary practices within the tombs is hindered by the fact that only Quanterness (Renfrew 1979), Howe of Howe (Carter *et al* 1984), and Pierowall Quarry (Sharples 1984) have been excavated to modern standards, and that only the former produced any archaeological material from within its internal chambers. A number of other passage graves have been examined in the past but a combination of different qualities of excavation and recording has prohibited any clear interpretations of these data. Even at Quanterness where large amounts of human skeletal remains and artefacts were recovered, subsequent disturbance has limited the ability for detailed interpretation (Sharples 1985; Barber 1988). In the discussion of tomb architecture it was noted that only through the presence of people could the symbolic dimension of architecture be realised. Thus, to gain an understanding of how the passage grave was used depends on the identification of different practices which occurred within its confines. Here we are totally reliant on a combination of architectural analysis and internal deposits. The architecture remains, but determining the use of the passage grave through the deposits is problematic. First, even if the prime purpose of the monument was as a receptacle of the dead, may we realistically assume a consistency of use and meaning, especially in the face of the suggestion of a multitude of ritual practices occurring in and around the monument? Second, as has been pointed out on numerous occasions, the provision of an entrance passage allows people to enter the monument time and time again. It has even been suggested that animals may have strayed into the protective inner chambers (Barber 1988), although it must be stated that such eventualities occurring during the active life of the tomb seems wholly unlikely. Finally, where clear stratigraphy is missing the deposits which remain may well relate to the final use of the monument which may deviate significantly from a history of passage grave use.

In order to address the general issues surrounding mortuary practices and the use of passage graves in the late Neolithic period of Orkney, an examination will be undertaken of the various deposits within the familiar passage graves around the

Wideford - Cuween area of Mainland; Cuween Hill, Quanterness, and Wideford Hill. Before ensuing with this enquiry it is prudent to note that no chronology has been established between the three passage graves and thus we have no indication whether their construction and use was synchronous, sequential or more likely overlapping. However, accepting natural agencies will have distorted the evidence to some degree, we remain in a position to examine how different tombs within a small area were used and sealed during the late Neolithic period.

Excavations at Wideford Hill passage grave (Henshall 1963, 170) revealed that the monument had been filled and blocked with soil and rubble deposited through the top of the corbelled roof of the main chamber. The importance of this action cannot be stated strongly enough because the intentional blocking of a monument effectively seals the internal deposits and ends the possibility of further rituals occurring within. On or near the floor of the main chamber a quantity of animal bones, including cattle, sheep, pig, horse, and deer, were discovered in 1849 (Davidson & Henshall 1989). These had apparently been positioned at the entrances to the side cells. No human bones were recognised, although it should be noted that this excavation, or rather clearance, was not systematic in its procedure. Since this activity of filling the main chamber with stone and soil through the roof constituted an intentional event it is suggested that it was undertaken while the tomb was still recognisable and clearly understood. Sharples (1984;1985), identifies this action as part of a wider trend towards passage grave blocking and destruction occurring towards the end of the third millenium BC. In support of this assumption it is proposed that if the intention was at a later date merely to block access into an unsafe and unstable structure, this could have been easily accomplished by blocking up the entrance passage with masonry. Clearly the act of infilling the interior went beyond a desire to obstruct access and constituted more of a need to bury and cover the contents, either real or imaginary.

The inclusion of animal bones at the base of the infill suggests that either they were already *in-situ* or else they formed part of the primary dumped material. If they were already present within the tomb they either represent the final deposits or the remnants of deposits, the remainder of which had already been extracted. The inclusion of horse bones does cast some doubt on a Neolithic date for these deposits

and thus the infilling, alternatively the presence of deer reinforces such a date. In the absence of systematic excavation and recording there seems no resolution to this conflict and no way of assessing the integrity of the identifications.

To recap, the blocking of Wideford Hill passage grave occurred at an indeterminate date, however, the tomb was consciously infilled. Whether the animal bone deposits at the base of the infill were incorporated or pre-existing deposits is difficult to establish, although the latter interpretation is considered to be more likely. The absence of human bone is of interest since according to conventional views regarding the function of chambered tombs this is exactly what would be expected to be found, in considerable quantities, within the passage grave.

Like Wideford Hill, the passage grave on Cuween Hill was infilled and blocked with soil and stone rubble. In this case the roof of the main chamber was no longer in place and rubble filled the interior, passage, and outer entrance trench (Davidson & Henshall 1989, 113). The ruined condition of the monument prohibited detailed information regarding the method of infilling, however, a similar procedure to that seen at Wideford Hill is likely. Numerous animal bones, including many teeth of dog, were encountered within the blocking material; mixed in with the stone rubble. The lower twelve inches of infill had a "fatty unctuous appearance and contained two dozen skulls of the dog, several human long bones and five human skulls" (Charleson 1902, 733). Interestingly, one of the skulls was set in clay near the ceiling of the passage (*ibid*, 734). This clearly demonstrates that particular human body parts were incorporated in the sealing material, as opposed to their being the contents sealed *in-situ* within the passage grave. Given this information it is difficult to know if all the human skeletal material was derived from within the tomb or introduced from elsewhere. The presence of human long bones, showing signs of burning, in the outer passage reveals that selected body parts were deemed suitable to remain deposited within the blocked tomb.

As a representation of the dead body, the skull is perhaps the most potent of emblems. Whether the five skulls were introduced to Cuween Hill or represent original deposits, their inclusion in the sealing deposits provides a clear statement of confining the dead to a particular place forever. The deposition of 24 dogs skulls,

however, is a different matter. We may assume that the numerous teeth of dog encountered higher in the infill relate to the dogs skulls in the lower 12 inches. Apart from attempting to account for the separation of skulls and teeth it must questioned why so many skulls of dog were present in the passage grave. Totomism has been invoked to account for animal deposits in the Orkney tombs (Fraser 1983; Hedges 1983), but the basis of this argument; particular species of animal bones predominating in certain tombs, has been disputed as arising from intentional depositional practices by Barber (1988). Instead, it is suggested that in the case of Cuween Hill we may be seeing some form of symbolic substitution, where dogs being associated with people, provide a representation. In this respect we must face the possibility that each passage grave was conceived differently, perhaps involving various dieties or ancestral bodies.

For both humans and dogs, significant amounts of skeletal remains are missing from Cuween Hill. The presence of skulls and long bones, even allowing for natural decay, betrays a form of selection which could only have been achieved by the movement of bones either into or away from the passage grave. Finally, as with Wideford Hill, the active life of Cuween Hill is effectively halted by infilling and closure.

It has been stated that rather than elucidating late Neolithic Orcadian mortuary practices, the recent excavations at Quanterness have simply compounded the problems of interpretation (Sharples 1985, 68). This conclusion is drawn on the basis of the lack of *expected* stratigraphy within the internal deposits, particularly the mass of disarticulated human bone spread in some disarray throughout the tomb. However, the expected order of deposits depends on an unstated assumption concerning the use of the passage grave. Only if the tomb was used over a substantial period of time with consistent, clearly defined, depositional events would an unproblematic stratigraphic sequence be present. The expected presence of such stratigraphy relates back to the original interpretation of Quanterness acting as an equal access tomb receiving the dead of a community over a period of several hundred years (Renfrew 1979, 214-17). Given the absence of stratigraphic evidence the idea of Quanterness constituting a place for burial of a single group over a prolonged period of time appears to be

derived solely from the presence of a large amount of human skeletal material which represents a substantial number of individuals. The minimum number of 157 individuals identified by Chesterman (1979, 97-111) is, however, represented by partial skeletal remains, not complete skeletons. This causes further problems to the view expressed by Renfrew, although the practice of excarnation is invoked by Chesterman to account for this discrepancy in the evidence.

Is this interpretation consistent with the evidence from Quanterness? I suggest it is not, rather it expresses a preconceived view of the role of chambered tombs already adhered to by Renfrew (1976). In extending this model to all Orcadian chambered cairns an even wider disparity is apparent between the evidence and the interpretation. Let us review the evidence from Quanterness in conjunction with the general observations on architecture and practice, together with the evidence recovered from the nearby passage graves of Cuween Hill and Wideford Hill.

In describing the observed internal stratigraphy at Quanterness, Renfrew (1979, 58-61), relates an interpretive history of tomb use. Once the building was erected the first archaeologically visible activities involved the lighting of fires in different areas within the main chamber. This episode of burning has been likened by Hodder (1982, 224), to the burning in the central hearths of the house, in an attempt to recognise an homology between the `houses' of the living and dead. However, there are no constructed hearths within the passage graves, and in this example fire is possibly being used as part of a primary purificatory ritual involved with the transformatory nature of the passage grave interior. Here the corpse will rot and decay and a change in state will occur. It is worth recalling the use of fire at the threshold of Hut 7 at Skara Brae, Structure 8 at Barnhouse, and the inner area of the Stones of Stenness. In each case fire would appear to have at one time defined the threshold and marked a position of transformation (see chapters 9 & 11).

At Quanterness the fires are confined to the inner passage and main chamber, no traces of burning were discernible within the side cells (Renfrew 1979, 63). Two aspects of this primary activity may be drawn out, first, the monument itself acts as a container for the burning in the absence of a stone hearth; a symbol of the living community and not appropriate within a place for the dead. As mentioned above the

interior itself becomes a place of transformation if the idea of excarnation is rejected. Second, the burning is only present on the floor of the passage and central chamber and therefore restricted to areas where people would tread when entering and undertaking activities within the monument. Rather than seeing the use of fire within Quanterness as a simple homology, as Hodder suggests, it is the complex transformatory properties of fire which appear to be relevant, especially when considered as being part of initial rituals of purification and altering the status of the interior space of the monument.

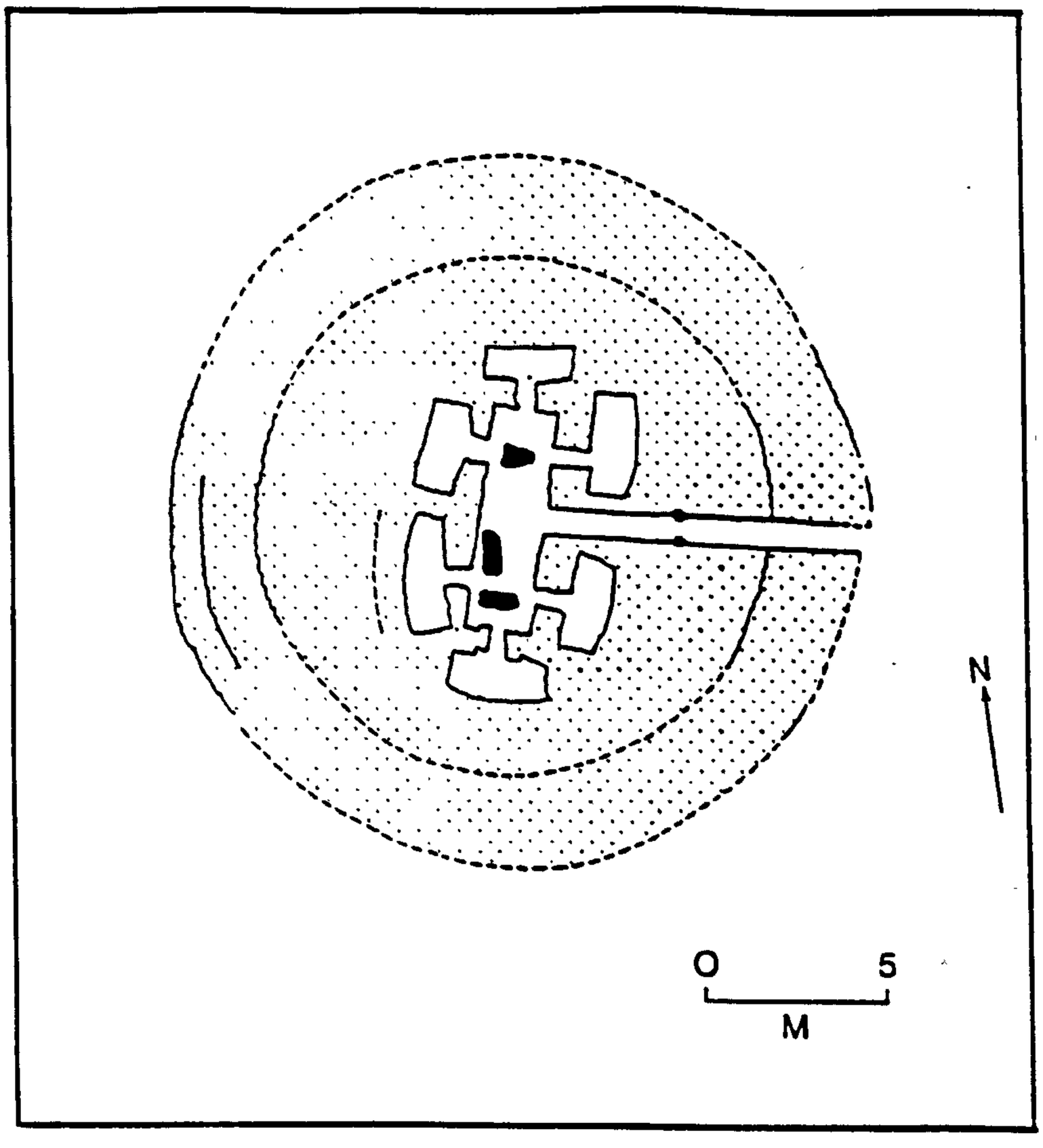


Figure 7:15. Plan of Quanterness showing position of burial cists.

The act of lighting fires in the main chamber did not constitute a single event since within a depth of 10cm of deposits noted in the southern end "four thin black charcoal-rich layers [were] separated by three paler, thin, charcoal-free layers of soil" (*ibid*,

61). This initial set of activities appears to have consisted of a sequence of rituals involving the use of fire over a prelonged period. After each session of burning the ashes were covered over and a new floor surface created. This period of use culminated in the deposition of a layer of clay, presumably re-flooring, which was itself scorched by fire sometime after being laid down.

After the episodes of burning, dated to 2640+75bc (Q-1294), the first burials were interred in the passage grave. Three articulated inhumations were buried in cists dug into the floor of the main chamber (Fig 7:15). One cist (pit D) was not excavated (*ibid*, fig 20), and the human remains within the second cist (pit B) had dissolved *in situ* so that only a stain and fragments of bone remained to show the position of the corpse. This burial was an adult of indeterminable sex lying crouched on its left side with its head positioned to the north-northwest. A third burial was located in better condition in pit A. Here an adult male was buried also in a crouched position on its left side with the head orientated to the northwest.

The significance of these initial burials is often neglected in the face of the later deposits of large quantities of human bone. There is no indication whether the initial periods of burning and the three burials constituted a relatively rapid sequence of events, perhaps related if the burials are considered to be `foundation' deposits, or were quite separate acts undertaken over a hundred years or more. Certainly the three radiocarbon determinations for the burial in pit A; 2410+50bc (SRR-754), 2350+60bc (Pta-1626), 2220+75bc (Q-1479), could be construed either way. The different form of cist construction between pits A, D, and B, may reveal a temporal lag but this line of reasoning is inconclusive.

One important aspect of this form of burial is that the interments were subterranean and covered by a large flagstone. Under these circumstances the internal space of the passage grave was physically unaltered and despite the burials, internal movement remained uninhibited. This is particularly interesting if entry and movement inside the monument was considered to be necessary and important. At a later date the cover of one of the cists (pit A) was removed and the skull and long bones of a female teenager and part of the vertebra of an infant were inserted. The cover was then replaced.

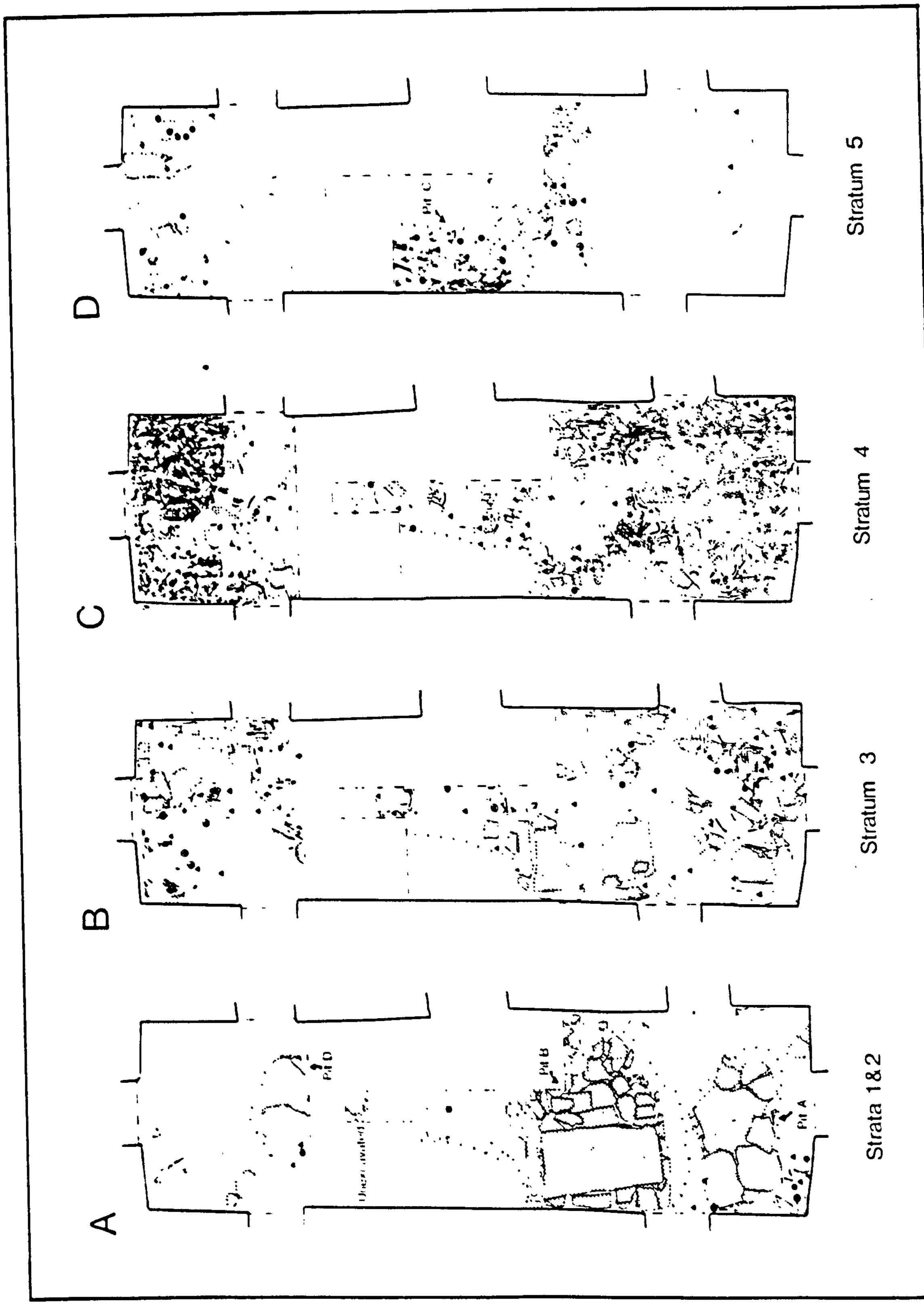


Figure 7:16. Excavated deposits at Quanterness showing primary cists (A & B), main bone spread (C) and final individual inhumation (D) (after Renfrew 1979).

Up to this point the activities at Quanterness follow a similar sequence to those considered to have occurred within the passage grave at Quoyness, Sanday. Initial excavations in 1867 (Farrer 1868), were poorly documented, however, Davidson and Henshall (1989, 58), note that the presence of a black (burnt) layer existed within the chamber. Moreover, a circular stone lined cist containing mainly human long-bones, was dug into the floor in the southwest area of the main chamber. The cist was covered by a large capstone.

The presence of cists, some containing articulated inhumations, at a primary level within two passage graves raises many interesting questions. First, when the presence of cists in Quanterness and Quoyness is seen in conjunction with the examples from Hut 7, Skara Brae and House 2, Barnhouse, it is reasonable to ask whether cist burial was an infrequently practiced form of interment or if it constituted a major form of burial in late Neolithic Orkney. Large numbers of undated burials in cists have been discovered throughout Orkney and assumed to date to the second millenium bc. Moreover, a large cist cemetery, with small perforated stone beads accompanying at least one burial, was located 300 metres northeast of Skara Brae (Thomas 1852). An unusual double cist construction was excavated in Orphir which contained just skulls and long bones, apparently sorted and arranged (D. D. A. Simpson pers. comm.). If cist burial was, in fact, a relatively common method of burial in the late Neolithic then the understood role of the monumental passage grave requires considerable reconsideration. However, for the time being we will return to Quanterness and continue to follow the sequence of deposition.

The next phase of activity inside Quanterness involved the deposition of large amounts of disarticulated human bones together with soil and stone slabs. Disarticulated deer and bird bones appear to have accompanied the human bones as they were found in association within the undisturbed side cell excavated by Renfrew. This mass of skeletal material forming strata 3, 4, and 5, was described as representing "the most intensive use of the tomb" (Renfrew 1979, 170). Examination of the human bone by Chesterman (*ibid*, 97-111), revealed the remains to contain a disproportionate amount of skeletal parts from an estimated 157 individuals of, as far as could be discerned, equal sex, ranging in age from 8 months - 50 years. As the

passage grave was not completely excavated a hypothetical figure of 394 was offered as a reasonable estimate of the total numbers present (*ibid*, 165).

However, attention should be drawn to several important features of the bone spread. Chesterman found the bone to be in extremely variable condition: "the condition of the material is amazingly variable from a few vertebrae and small bones in mint condition through to others so weathered and broken as to be almost indistinguishable" (*ibid*, 97). There was also discrepancies in the body parts present, for example, there were relatively few skulls present. The identified strata 3, 4, and 5, lacked any clear distinction and integrity of definition. Instead, the deposits represented little more than a jumble of material with parts of the same body being scattered horizontally and vertically within the chambers. Although it was noted that skeletal parts from a single body occurred within the same compartments, this observation remains unsupported because of the lack of complete excavation. It is now clear that some disturbance occurred in later periods (see Barber 1988). however, the partially complete inhumation in pit C (see below) testifies to the fact that the passage grave was not completely ransacked as would be necessary to produce fragmentary state of the human remains. Finally, two radiocarbon determinations were obtained from the bone spread: 2590+110bc (Q-1363), and 2160+100bc (Q-1451).

Finally, at least two extended articulated inhumations were inserted into the top of this deposit. One was located by Barry (1805) in a side chamber where "an entire human skeleton in a prone attitude" was discovered. A second, an adult male of approximately 25 years, was excavated by Renfrew (1979, 600). This was situated in a pit (C) cut into the lower bone spread and although the skeleton was disturbed it was clear that it had been interred complete. Three radiocarbon determinations were obtained from bone of this burial: 1920+55bc (SRR-755), 1955+70bc (Q-1480), and 2180+60bc (Pta-1606).

It is clear that the deposits within Quanterness reveal a complex history of mortuary activity, but do they represent a prolonged period of interment as Renfrew suggests and is excarnation the only possible interpretation which accounts for the condition of the deposits?

Undoubtedly, it is the main bone spread with its large number of represented

individuals which forms the basis of both assumptions. Other evidence such as the early cist burials or the later extended inhumations seems to contradict the idea of excarnation and collective burial. These data are largely ignored in the final interpretation, as is the atypical nature of the deposits. As Davidson and Henshall note, "it is the later phases of intensive use at Quanterness that burial practices are attested which appear to differ from any others recorded in Orkney" (1989, 58). Renfrew ignored this difference in order to posit that these practices were, in fact, a norm participated in by egalitarian social groups in the early part of the late Neolithic (1979, 214-223).

Elsewhere, I have suggested that this evidence should be re-assessed (Richards 1988). The differential nature of the condition of the bone spread testifies to their being exposed to different treatment and contexts of deposition. This exceeds the post depositional transformation process proposed by Barber (1988). A strong possibility is that they were derived from other contexts, collected up and re-deposited in Quanterness. Their insertion would have effectively inhibited movement within the interior of the monument and drastically altered its use. In this respect I feel we are witnessing the end of its intended use and a consequent change in its conception. The reasons for assembling many ancestral remains in a single `tomb' will be discussed further in chapter 12, here it is suffice to note that such an event would have removed the immediate contact of people to their ancestors and by default restricted accessability to a few. This occurrence may also be relevant in understanding the noted absence of bodies and body parts in other passage graves, including the stalled cairns (see chapter 5).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined passage graves from a number of different aspects, each of which would have assumed importance in the lives of Neolithic Orcadians at different times and occassions. Indeed, any journey from the house to the passage grave either for interment of a corpse, collection of bones or some other ritual, would have involved a conflation of all these considerations as the participants pased on thier

journey through the landscape (see chapter 4). The differing qualities of the passage grave would have been sequentially experienced and then reversed on the journey home. It cannot be emphasised enough that the practices surrounding death involve the transference of the corpse through a series of states, and thus contexts spatially and temporally defined, from the place of the living to the place of the dead.

A further point to strike home is that different passage graves may have been perceived in different ways. We are only able to discerne these monuments as mortuary contexts through similarities of architecture and internal deposits. Where human skeletal material is absent, architectural similarities are taken as the prime index of interpretation. What if the discrepancy in passage grave contents was intentional and not an accident of survival? The possibility that different passage graves had a variety of subtle meanings relating to supernatural beliefs should not be discounted. Our analysis is always coarse grained and the variation in internal deposits may be worth a second glance. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the passage graves of Wideford Hill, Cuween Hill and Qunaterness, indeed it is particularly difficult to recognise a unity of function.

In this lengthy account of the Orcadian passage graves I have attempted to address individual detail which is so often lost in more general analysis of `types' or social change. As has been so often stated these monuments were built and used by the living and regardless of their role as a house or place for the dead, any meaning and understanding was totally contingent on social practices: the lives of the living. Hence, while I have been at pains to continually introduce `people' and experience into this study, by default it existence as a separate chapter introduces a false division.

Chapter 8

The problem of Grooved Ware

Introduction

Moving from one category of material evidence: passage graves, which define the later Neolithic of Orkney, to another: Grooved ware, I will follow the theme of classification in an attempt to move beyond discussions of ceramic traditions and cultural sequences. My main objective in this chapter is to obtain an understanding of how Grooved ware was used and classified in the late Neolithic. This will involve the identification of differences in manufacture, use and discard, as recognised by Neolithic people. In chapter 10 this investigation will be continued as we look at Barnhouse in detail.

Is there really a problem of Grooved ware? Of course, every generation of archaeologists creates its own areas of enquiry, its own key questions, and its own insurmountable problems. In this way, almost by default, certainly by tradition, we attribute different qualities and meanings to different categories of data. This procedure appears to operate at different levels; a situation which could be described as constituting a hierarchy of meaning. For instance, Neolithic monuments are no longer seen primarily as `cultural' manifestations, instead, purpose and function of architecture is the foremost current problem to resolve. Furthermore, particularly in Neolithic studies over the last decade, a basic question as to whether a monument

performs a domestic or ritual function has dominated research and discourse. In this discourse cultural affiliation appears no longer relevant and tends to be ignored. In contrast, within studies of ceramics, purpose and function are still essentially low priorities of study tending to be relegated to technological studies. Here we still primarily associate pots with people and seek evolutionary sequences, origins, and cultures in the guise of ceramic types. Certainly in Britain, with notable exceptions (e.g. Howard 1981; Cleal 1992, etc), ceramic studies have remained curiously static and maintain the cultural tradition. Despite the possibilities revealed to British archaeologists through ethnoarchaeological studies (e.g. Braithwaite 1982, David, Sterner & Gavua 1988) research into Neolithic ceramics has tended to be one dimensional, (e.g. Richards & Thomas 1984; Tilley 1984; Hearne 1988, etc). Here either decorative or morphological analysis is undertaken independently of the other aspects of ceramics as a container, or a cultural transformation of a natural material, or a product of a particular person or family group.

While it is not my intention to review ceramic studies in British prehistory, it is important to note that the advent of a `post-processual' archaeology has, in the realms of archaeological pottery studies been of negative impact with almost total emphasis being directed towards design analysis and style. Much of the innovative work, involving archaeological and ethnoarchaeological projects, has been generated in North America. Such studies have been evident since the early 1970s (e.g. Hill 1970; Longacre 1970). Certainly, some aspects of these studies, particularly those which sought direct correlates between specific forms of interaction and different levels of variability in ceramic design may be criticised at a number of levels (cf. Rice 1987, 254-7). However, although marginalised (and ignored by the majority of British archaeologists), for employing principles of uniformitarianism and "defining an arbitrary category "from the outside" and searching for the cross cultural correlates of that category" (Hodder 1991, 71-2), a `post-processual' dissatisfaction with methodology has led to a marked absence of informed critical studies involving a comprehensive approach to ceramics.

In this chapter a detailed examination of Grooved ware will be undertaken and as suggested earlier there is indeed a problem with Grooved ware. The problem,

however, is that extensive time and effort has been given to `cultural' studies involving Grooved ware with little concern of the wider potential of the ceramic as an everyday container and material category. The pottery from the settlement of Barnhouse constitutes the most complete and spatially representative assemblage yet recovered from any British Neolithic settlement. In short, this is what an everyday Neolithic Grooved ware assemblage `looks like'. Thus, I intend to examine it from a number of different angles in order to identify what categories are being employed in its production, use and deposition, and whether these are consistently adhered to. In this respect, this chapter is a prelude to chapter 9.

A Grooved Ware Culture in Orkney

The appearance of grooved ware ceramics tends to be seen as defining the late Neolithic period of Orkney as it apparently coincides, and is associated, with a range of other changes in different forms of material culture. It should be noted however, that a detailed chronology is absent for the crucial 4800bp - 4600bp period. Hence it is difficult to be certain of the total transformation of architecture, material culture, residence patterns, etc, over this short period of time. It will also be noted that here lies the main legacy of Childe as discussed in chapter 2; the linking of ceramic styles with cultures or peoples. If it is assumed that different ceramic styles equate with different cultural groups then when contrasting styles are recognised, such as Unstan - Grooved ware, archaeologists need to define them in terms of their relationship. Within this framework of thinking the relationship will be either temporally or spatially defined.

It is within this context that the majority of studies of Orcadian Grooved ware are situated. As seen in chapter 2, Childe, initially saw a cultural distinction between the Megalithic culture (Unstan ware) and the Skara Brae culture (Grooved ware). These were seen as being spatially discreet and part of different phenomena; the Megalithic culture part of a wider movement within the Atlantic seaboard and the Grooved ware culture as an indigenous insular society restricted to the Northern Isles. Although this scheme broke down towards the end of his researches in the north, Childe never

deemed to re-interpret the evidence. Neither did Piggot attempt to question Childe's basic assumptions in `Neolithic Cultures' (1954); he simply maintained a strong material orientated culture historical approach, however, a clear chronological distinction was now introduced to define the two cultures. This view has influenced all further studies whether they are concerned with the ceramics alone or other aspects of material culture, e.g. chambered tombs, since by default they will either belong to the Unstan ware culture or the Grooved ware culture.

Through a desire to posit a social evolutionary model for the Neolithic of Orkney, Renfrew (1979, 205-8), in considering the Unstan - Grooved ware relationship, suggested that there were two alternative explanations:

> "Either there is a chronological priority of Unstan ware over Orcadian Grooved ware, so that the latter superseded the former (and might have developed from it), or we might envisage two different groups of people, perhaps of different origins, simultaneously using Unstan ware on the one hand and Grooved ware on the other. In this case the `Unstan Ware People' would be responsible for the stalled cairns, and the `Grooved Ware People' for the Quanterness-Quoyness group." (*ibid*, 206).

Here again the discussion of Grooved ware is in terms of the division between temporal or spatial definition of cultures or peoples. As may be expected, Renfrew continues to suggest that the former hypothesis represented the more acceptable possibility (*ibid*, 207).

As a reaction against the evolutionary model of Unstan ware - Grooved ware - Beaker, Clarke (1983, 45-56), rightly questioned Renfrew's diagrammatic representation of the chronological relationship between the three ceramic types (Renfrew 1979,fig 54). However, a futile argument was then posited where Childe was criticised as a bad excavator (see chapter 2), in order to cast doubt on the stratigraphic sequence at Rinyo (Clarke 1983, 46). Furthermore it was argued that the round-based pottery at Rinyo could be defined as Grooved ware in order to discredit the suggested Unstan - Grooved ware sequence. Fortunately this curious suggestion has been countered by the clarity of the Pool sequence where Unstan ware clearly predates Grooved ware (MacSween 1992).

Orcadian Grooved Ware: Fabric, Morphology and Decoration

The current chronological position of Grooved ware is provided by radiocarbon determinations from deposits inside the central chamber at Quanterness passage grave, ash spreads in House 2 at Barnhouse, and early midden layers at Skara Brae. Each context independently provides dates in the range of approx 2600bc - 2500bc (3300 - 3000BC) for the inception of Orcadian Grooved ware. As such, it represents the earliest flat based ceramic to be produced in the British Isles.

In regard to the above discussion of traditional questions asked of Grooved ware in a chronologically defined culture historical approach, recent work undertaken by MacSween (1992, 259-71), has provided interesting insights. As we have seen the chronological position of Unstan ware and Grooved ware has provided a focus of attention for a number of scholars. I feel there was never a time when the earlier position of Unstan ware was in doubt, rather the hub of the problem was how the two styles of pottery were related. At Pool, Sanday, MacSween, notes a stratified sequence of clearly defined ceramic types with `Unstan' types including round based bowls with plain and flattened rim forms graduating into a Grooved ware assemblage. Clear fabric differences are discernible throughout the sequence with changes occurring not only between the Unstan ware - Grooved ware transformation but within the Grooved ware sequence itself. Of the early phase pottery (Unstan ware) almost half is untempered and the remainder equally divided between shell and gravel filler. The second phase ceramics are defined by a change to shell temper and the characteristic `bucket' shaped, flat based Grooved ware. Incised and grooved decoration is mainly confined to this phase. The later phase of occupation at Pool, is coupled with a change in both temper; from shell to sandstone, and in decoration; from grooving to applied clay. As MacSween notes, when grooving is present on the later ceramics it seems to "have been used as much to make the intervening area stand out as to incise a pattern into the walls" (ibid, 262).

In this sequence we appear to have three phases of settlement clearly demarcated, not only through stratigraphy but also the two latter by Grooved ware of different fabric types and decorative technique. Interestingly, the sequence at Rinyo, Rousay,

seems to conform to the three tier phasing of Pool and the assemblage from Links of Noltland (*ibid*, 266-7), appears extremely similar, both in fabric and decoration, to the latest phase at Pool. Moreover, recent fieldwork at Bay of Stove, Sanday (Bond *et al, forthcoming*), has located a shifting settlement pattern where the two different episodes of settlement concur with the variation in Grooved ware noted in the second and third phases at Pool.

Morphologically, the Grooved ware vessels tend to be `tub' or `bucket' shaped, although more cylindrical forms are known from Skara Brae, Mainland (Childe 1931, 128), and Links of Noltland, Westray (A. Sheridan pers. comm.). A slightly `baggy' shape to the `bucket' form is noted by MacSween (1992, 261), to occur in the lower Grooved ware layers at Pool, Sanday. A similar shaped vessel is illustrated by Childe and Grant (1939, fig 4), situated within dwelling `D' at Rinyo, Rousay. The Barnhouse assemblage of Grooved ware is dominated throughout its history by fairly straight sided vessels with angled walls, although, like the Rinyo example, in some of the larger vessels a curvature of the walls is noticeable. The size range varies from extremely small pinched up vessels to what must have been vast containers of over 15,000 cc capacity.

In discussing the differences in Grooved ware of the Pool sequence, MacSween (1992) demonstrated that decorative technique appeared to be a major component of change. Similarly, temporality seemed to determine differences in the type of Grooved ware decoration at Skara Brae. Childe (1931, 130-1) recognised three major classes of decoration.

Class A. Relief decoration (A1 - Simple applied strip/cordon decoration - common to all periods of occupation). (A2 - As A1 but applied with slip - restricted to period 2).

Class B. Relief decoration (Single class of applied strip/cordon decoration with incision or grooving occurring on cordons - this form of decoration occurs no later than period 2).

Class C. Grooved decoration on slipped surface (this decoration is restricted to periods 1 & 2).

While there appears to be changes through time in decorative techniques, the distinctive, almost exclusive employment of decorative types recognised at Pool does not appear so clearly defined at Skara Brae. Grooving does appear to be restricted to the earlier periods of habitation (*circa* 4500bp - 4300bp), however, applied decoration is present throughout the period of settlement. Indeed, Childe's Class B: decorated cordons, also appears to be an early phenomenon. The later form of applied decoration moves beyond the simple cordons of the earlier period, with more elaborate designs involving trellis patterns, hatched bands, parallel lines, etc (Fig 8:1).

To recap, at Pool clear differences in the temper used in Grooved ware ceramics are observable through time. These changes are accompanied by changes in the technique of decoration. Very little overlap appears to occur between phases of settlement which define the ceramic variation. This distinction appears to be spatially defined at a second Grooved ware settlement complex at Bay of Stove, Sanday (Bond *et al* forthcoming).

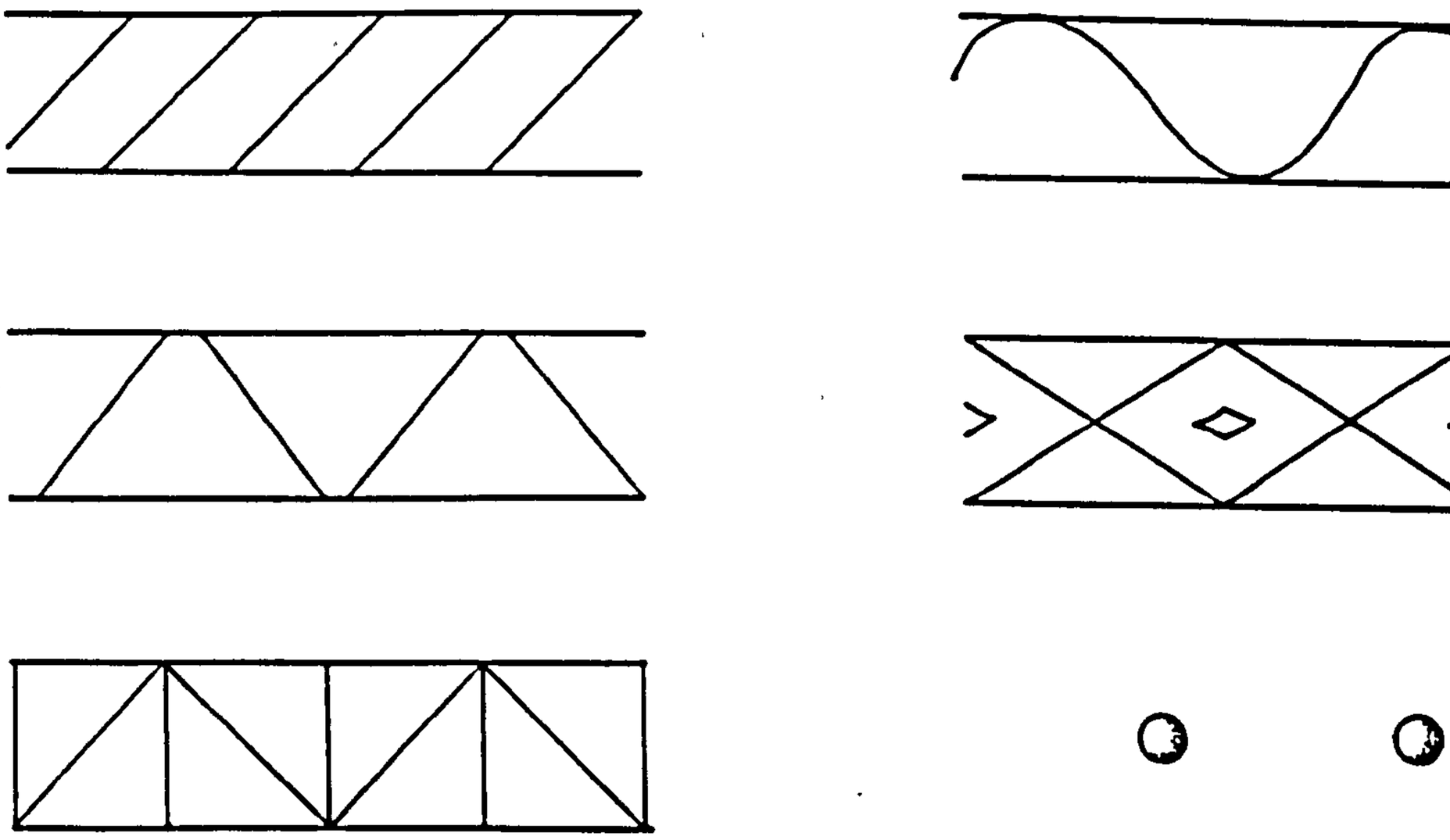


Figure 8:1. Designs on later Grooved ware (after Childe 1931)

A similarity between the two ceramic sequences at Rinyo, Rousay, and Pool, Sanday, is also noticeable and the ceramics associated with the later stages of settlement at these sites concurs with the ceramics recovered from later contexts at another Grooved ware settlement at Links of Noltland, Westray. Thus a pattern emerges which appears to embrace many later Neolithic sites in the northern islands of Orkney.

However, at Barnhouse, Mainland, this sequence is not so clearly defined for either the fabric or decorative technique of Grooved ware. Although fabric identification is not available for the Skara Brae assemblage, changes in decorative technique does occur through time, however, as at Barnhouse, during the earlier period of occupation all of the recognised classes of decoration are in use together. Possible reasons for differences in assemblages and sequences in late Neolithic settlements throughout the Orkney Islands will be discussed in the final chapter, here I wish to draw attention to the variation in fabric types and decorative technique noted in the Grooved ware from the Mainland sites of Barnhouse and Skara Brae. In particular, questions concerning the function and classification of pottery by those who made, used and discarded it, are suggested to be crucial in drawing research (and knowledge) beyond the identification of chronological sequences, artefact types, and dubious cultural entities.

Reconsidering Grooved Ware: towards a methodology of social categories

Before embarking on any form of analysis it is important to consider the questions to be asked. A primary goal is the recognition of different `types' of Grooved ware. It is easy to forget that Neolithic people made and used ceramics for a range of different purposes. These differences formed part of a classification containing spheres of meaning which transcended the individual material container. In some situations different categories of pot may have related to use, e.g. food preparation or cooking. Alternatively, differences in the nature of contents may have been of principle concern. In short, a host of different aspects of use and treatment could dominate any

material classification scheme. A further factor to consider is the simple observation that the way a material item is spoken of, classified and understood relates to its position within different spheres of reality. For instance, is a particular vessel used for cooking, if so, for what types of food? Will the vessel be used by all the family or just particular members? Where and when will it be used, is its use restricted to one area of the house? Is it an heirloom or of `special' purpose such as vessels used in particular ceremonies?

All or only some of these factors may influence the way a pot is classified by those who use it and, of course, here lies the difficulty of attributing meaning since it was always contingent and arbitrary. At first sight the problem seems insurmountable, merely because of the fluidity of meaning, however, certain practical aspects of the archaeological record should be remembered. First, the majority of archaeological material is actually rubbish discarded into pits, dumps or middens. This rubbish is not discarded randomly but conforms to material categories which serve to separate and segregate material even when broken and unwanted. In this situation much of the subtly of meaning is lost and materials may be bulked together because they come from a particular context, e.g. a house floor. In other circumstances a more sophisticated segregation of rubbish may occur based on *use* and *user*. The important point to note, however, is the fixidity of rubbish (and category), both in space and time.

Second, this line of enquiry may be enhanced when undertaken in conjunction with an examination of material from specific contexts such as house floors, activity areas, etc. Often in the form of small and abraded objects, the material culture from such contexts permits a comparison with categories of rubbish and to some extent reveals from where similar material was collected. Slowly a picture of differences may be created through careful and thoughtful enquiry.

Undoubtedly, some classes of vessel are not so ambiguous in meaning. They are manufactured, used and discarded without any other transformation of category. During their `active' lives they stay in a single place and have very clear-cut functions which everyone acknowledges.

An overlap between different categories of the material world is always a further

possibility. This occurrence, however, may be turned to the archaeologists advantage. Take a situation where a pot is used for cooking meat, perhaps a particular species or class of animal. The pot may become associated with this animal and treated accordingly, despite the transformation of cooking itself, perhaps eventually to be discarded with the remains of the butchered animals. There are many different ways of examining this possibility, for example, through differences in decoration or morphology, contexts of deposition, residue analysis, etc. The discovery of different categories of material culture, in this case ceramics, is not beyond archaeological analysis, it simply involves an understanding of the complexities involved and the realisation that direct meanings cannot be discovered since they never existed, they were always totally contingent on practice.

The Barnhouse ceramic assemblage numbers over 6000 sherds, given the nature of the material it is impossible to estimate the exact number of vessels represented, however, a maximum of 2000 (probably almost half that number in reality) can be postulated. Usually ceramic assemblages tend to be viewed as representing a balanced entity and all pots are directly comparable. Under certain circumstances this is acceptable, but when frequency is used as an index of comparison it is important to remember that some pots in the assemblage will be heavily over-represented since they break and are replaced most often. The disproportionate nature of an assemblage may be particularly advantageous to the archaeologist. Arnold (1988, 153), has introduced four `principles' which influence ceramic longevity, first, the relative strength of the vessel through the method of firing. Second, the frequency of use, third, the mode of use and fourth, the presence of domestic animals!

With Grooved ware the differences in vessel strength between thick and thin walled vessels, through the low temperature of bonfire firing, will tend to be countered by an inverse relationship with vessel mobility. The static nature of thick walled, badly fired, large volume vessels prolongs there use life and as Longacre (1981, 64) notes, the larger a pot the longer its life.

In attempting to predict breakage rates, Nelson (1991, 180) suggests the existence of a `regular' inverse relationship occurring between use life and frequency. As may be expected no simple rule or law exists in the ethnographic studies of use-life,

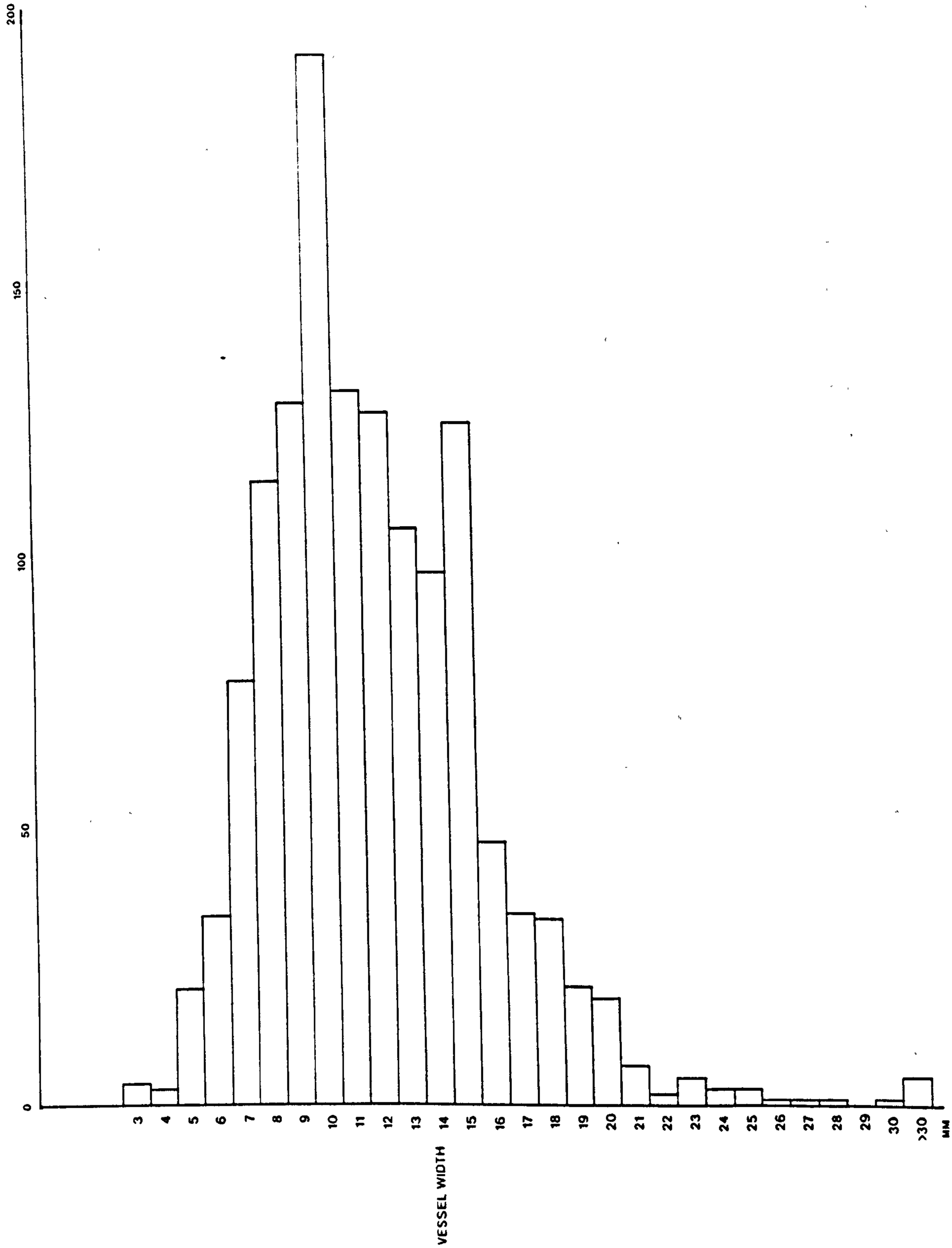


Figure 8:2. Bar chart showing frequency of wall thickness of Grooved ware at Barnhouse.

however, given the diversity of manufacture, aspects such as frequency of use and movement, perpetual heating and cooling of vessel will tend to facilitate breakage. This is the message obtained from the few ethnographic studies (e.g. David 1972; DeBoer & Lathrap 1979; Longacre 1985; etc) which have examined breakage rate. A further important point to draw out of these studies is that vessels involved in food preparation and cooking suffer the highest casualty rate (cf. Howard 1981, table 1:1).

Because of the regularity of Grooved ware form it is not possible to draw out differences based upon morphology. All pots are the same shape and the wall thickness remains fairly consistent from rim to base. It is just the scale, size and volume which varies. Thus, there exists a relatively constant relationship between wall thickness and vessel size, and therefore pot volume, as Rice notes "the thickness of vessel walls is related to the size of the container and its intended use" (1987, 227). Using wall thickness as an indicator of volume it is possible to recognise the breakage rates of different sized pots. Examined in this way, the Barnhouse assemblage reveals clear variation in breakage rates of particular sized vessels (Fig 8:2).

As expected the larger vessels, represented by thick walled sherds, are less numerous than the small - medium sized vessels. Apart from the obvious strength requirements of a larger vessel, thick walls help keep moisture in (or out), they are also disadvantageous for cooking since the transference of heat is slower and a greater degree of thermal shock ensues.

Given the circumstances of breakage noted in ethnographic research the vessels with the highest breakage rates (around 10mm wall thickness) should be those vessels used in food preparation, cooking and serving with perhaps cooking vessels, which are regularly placed on the heat of the fire, being most vulnerable. Following this line of enquiry the vessels displaying exterior sooting through placement on the fire were plotted by volume and frequency (Fig 8:3). Vessels having a wall thickness between 9mm - 15mm are clearly identifiable as those used for cooking. Here, through a combination of breakage rate and exterior sooting, we are able to identify the range of vessels which are used for cooking, food preparation, serving and storage. This is consistent with the practical characteristics of thinner walled vessels which conduct heat far more effectively and minimise the degree of thermal shock.

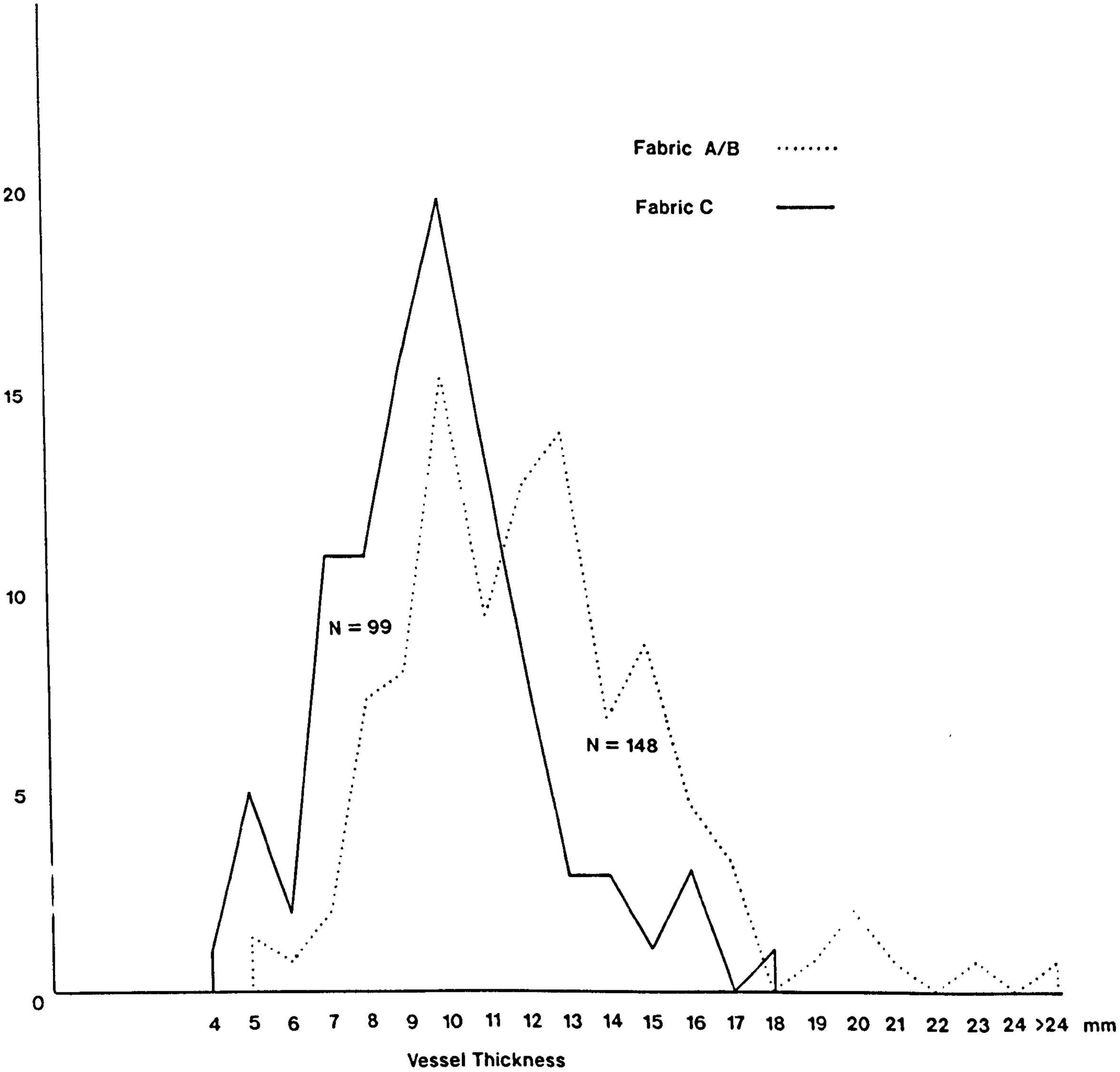
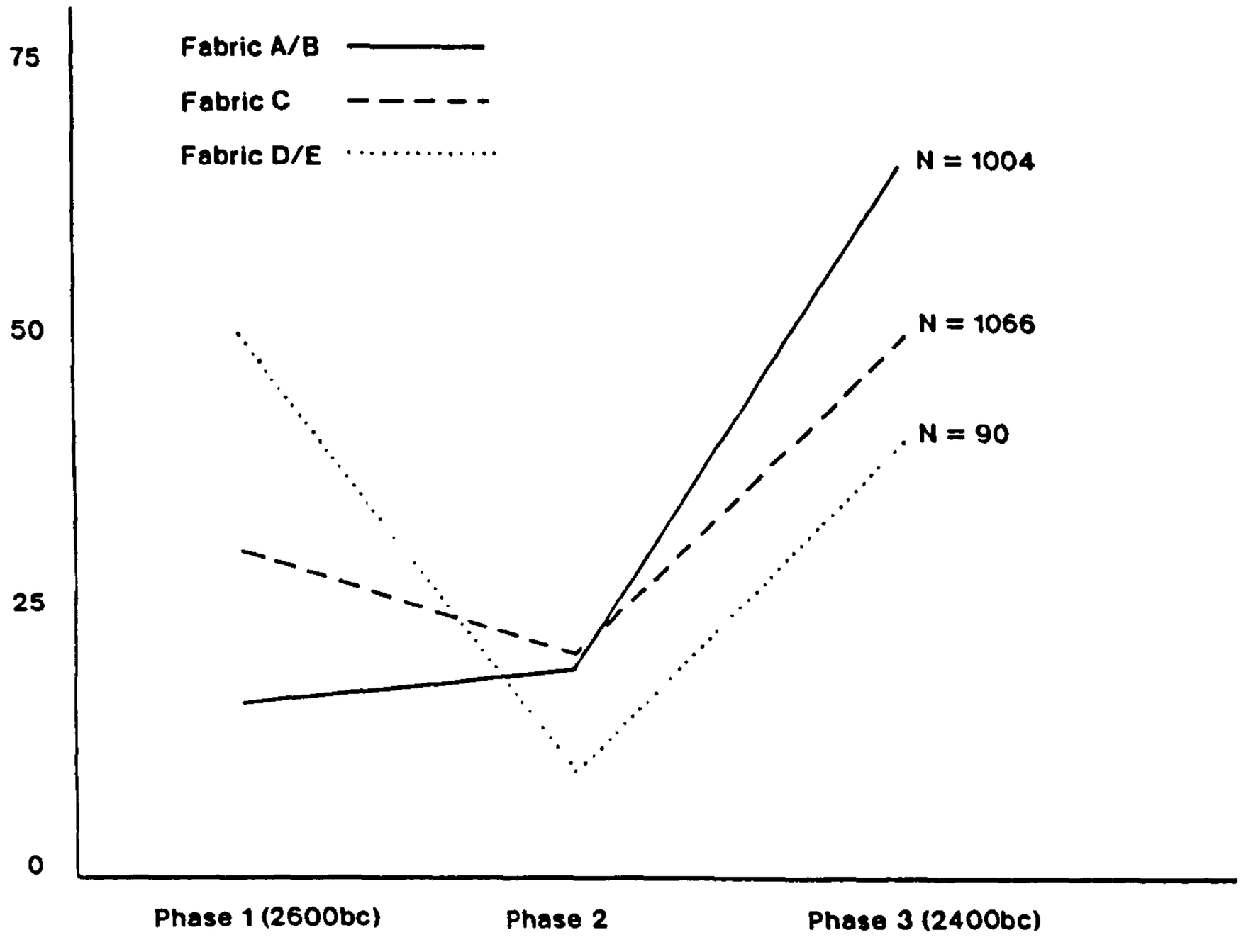


Figure 8:3. Frequency of vessel size and fabric showing exterior sooting at Barnhouse.

A further factor which may relate to vessel function is variation in the technology of production. The selection of filler for inclusion in the clay is dependant on a range of factors. At a basic level it may be essential to add temper in order to curb elasticity or strengthen the clay for ceramic production. Under these circumstances a single, traditional form of temper may be employed by a community or production centre for all of its pottery. Alternatively, different types of inclusion may be added to the clay in order to make vessels of different function; for example, stone filler may be added



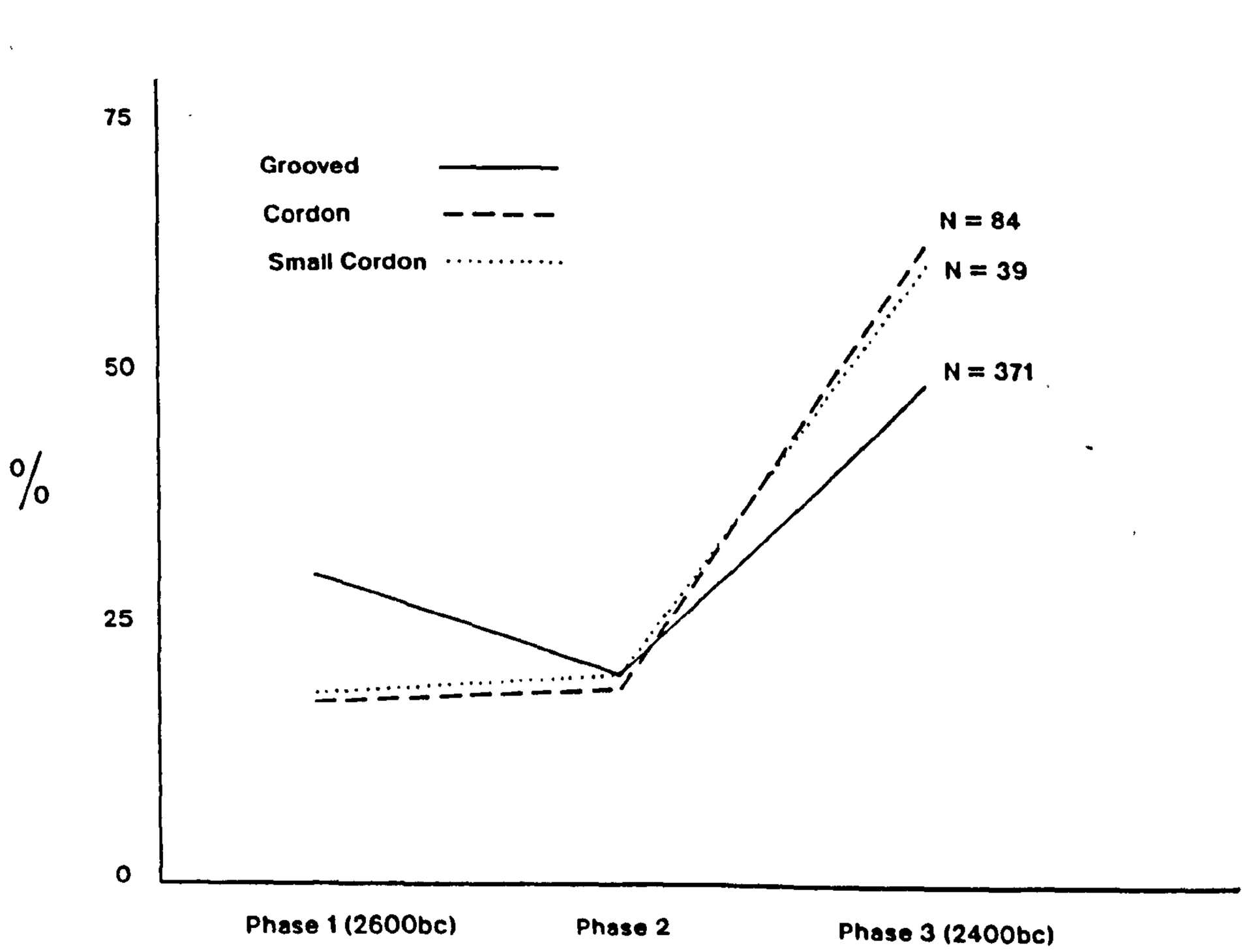


Figure 8:4. Plot of decoration and fabric variation through time at Barnhouse.

to larger storage vessels to increase strength whilst the inclusion of shell is very effective in transferring heat, thus minimalising the effects of thermal shock for pots continuously exposed to heat.

When discussing the changing nature of Grooved ware as represented at Pool, Sanday, and Rinyo, Rousay, it was noted that different types of temper appeared to coincide with different techniques of decoration. These differences concurred with different phases or periods of settlement. At Barnhouse such clarity does not exist. Instead, three different fabric types appear to be in contemporary use:

1. Fabric A/B - Crushed stone, including sandstone and igneous rocks (e.g. Olivine Basalt).

2. Fabric C - Shell.

3. Fabric D/E - No temper.

While techniques of decoration and the predominance of a particular fabric (Fig 8:4) tend to shift marginally through time, the clear concurrence and exclusivity of decorative technique and fabric is not present at Barnhouse.

The presence of different fabric groups could relate to either a division of temper on the basis of function, the result of exchange, or differences in household production, or a combination of these. When plotted against vessel size, the Barnhouse assemblage does reveal a strong tendency for fabric to be related to volume (Fig 8:5) suggesting deliberate selection of filler for vessel function. Fabric D/E is clearly restricted to small vessels possibly for food serving, fabric C peaks at 10mm thickness and mirrors the distribution of exterior sooting, hence food preparation and cooking would appear to be a main role of this range of vessels. Although also peaking in this range, the crushed stone filler, fabric A/B, continues to include the majority of the larger sized vessels, thereby demonstrating its suitability for storage vessels. The overlap between fabric A/B and C in the range of cooking vessels will be discussed later, however, we may now make a series of observations of the Grooved ware assemblage at Barnhouse:

1. By plotting breakage rates it was possible to determine which pots were over-represented and drawing on

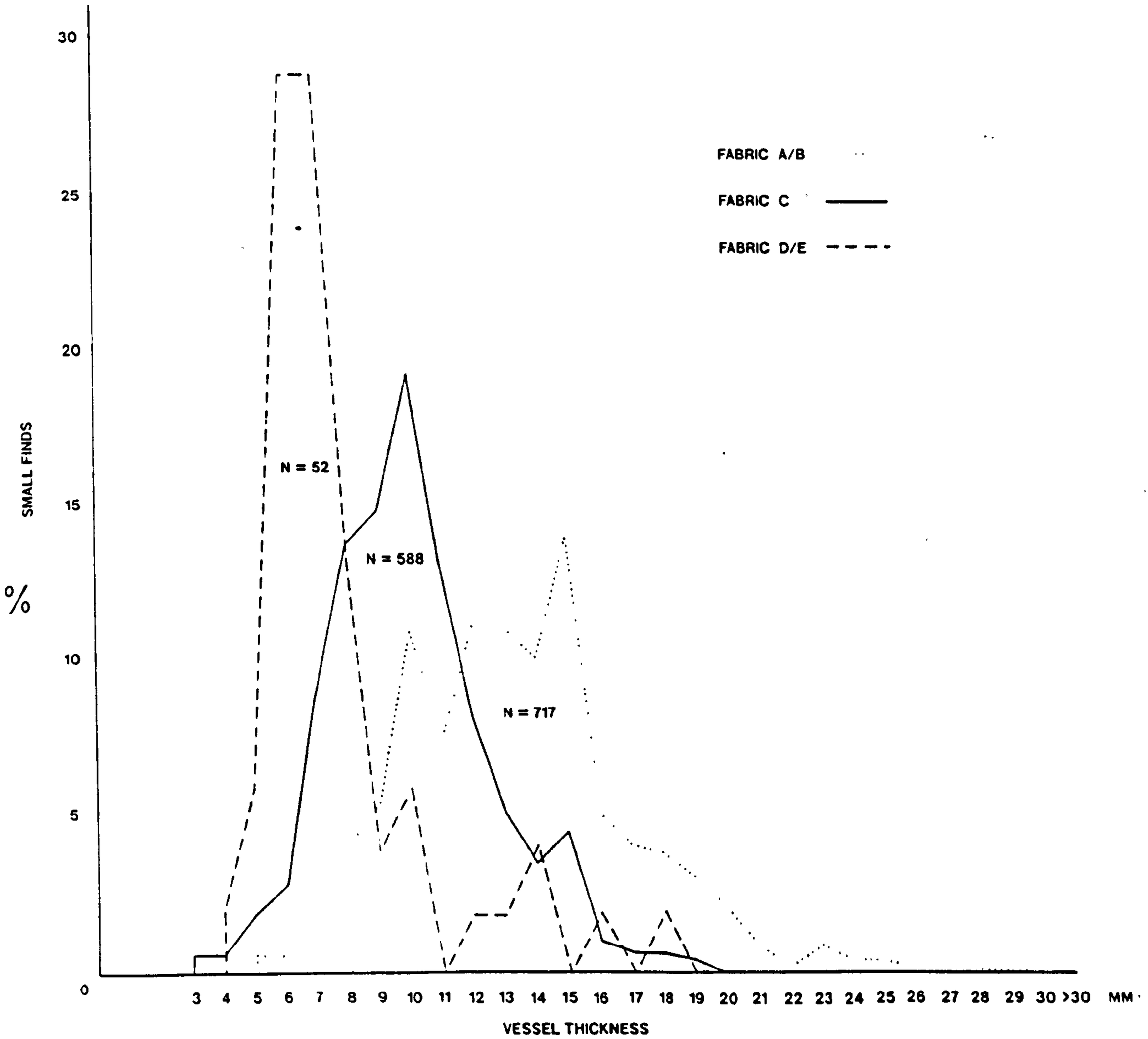


Figure 8:5. Plot of wall thickness and fabric variation at Barnhouse.

ethnographic data it was possible to attribute possible differences in vessel function on the basis of size.

2. The vessels exhibiting exterior sooting due to frequent contact with fire, presumably through their use in cooking, coincided with the greatest magnitude of breakage.

3. Fabric analysis revealed a selectivity of temper in operation which appears to be mainly influenced by vessel size and therefore function.

4. The temporal exclusivity of fabric and decoration noted in other Grooved ware assemblages, at Pool, Sanday, and Rinyo, Rousay, does not occur at Barnhouse, although a slow tendency towards such changes were noticed.

The Art of Decoration

Decoration of ceramics is a further dimension of analysis which has received the wider attention of archaeologists. The very name Grooved ware shows this quite clearly. Although fabric type and vessel morphology selection are not necessarily determined by function, it is ceramic decoration which is deemed more sensitive to social expression. The question of why ceramics are so often decorated tends to be ignored in the quest of different methods of decorative analysis and enquiries of why certain pots are decorated and others not. The `creation' of a vessel through a clearly controlled cultural transformation is perhaps a key issue to consider. As to whether this `creation' or `birth' generally leads to a conceptual anthropomorphism in the term `pots equal people" is difficult to sustain (cf. David, Sterner & Gavua 1988). However, ceramic terminology is rife with terms which relate to the human body and perhaps it is a more general use of the symbolism of the body, in its many different forms, which influences the decoration of a pot and the way in which it is `thought about'. This may be particularly appropriate when pottery is manufactured by women, in this situation the analogue between childebirth/creation and clothing/adornment may well influence the treatment of ceramics in different ways from that suggested by David, Sterner & Gavua (*ibid*).

Further elements should be introduced into the discussion, for instance, the

practical consideration of the usefulness of decoration to enable the picking up and holding of a vessel, undoubtedly such concerns may have influenced the type of decoration e.g. applied decoration (lugs on earlier Neolithic ceramics are often included with morphology and decoration as definitional characteristics). Braithwaite (1982), discussed the possible use of decoration on pottery which displayed ambiguity of gender association or physical and conceptual definition. A more practical element in this situation extends into the wider sphere of observation; a view implicitly expressed in the belief that decoration is only important when it can be seen. Certainly this is an important but not necessarily essential factor of Braithwaite's study. An extension of this assumption has been used to provide a general belief that vessels used for cooking tend to be undecorated because the soot will obscure the decoration (cf. Plog 1980, 83-5). This assumption is quite unsupportable and even among the groups that Plog uses to demonstrate this phenomenon discrepancies occur (*ibid*, 84). The ability to see decoration is certainly an important aspect of its use, since it is primarily considered to be involved in different modes of communication or discourse. However, the act of its creation or merely the knowledge of its existence can, under different circumstances, be just as important.

Before returning to the Grooved ware from Barnhouse a discussion of decoration and its presence in different media is of particular importance. Similarities between different decorative media in late Neolithic Britain and Ireland have been evident for some time (cf Bradley & Chapman 1986; Bradley 1984). Carved decoration occurs as part of architectural definition in passage graves, stone circles and settlements (see chapter 10). It is also present on a range of portable material items including, Grooved ware, stone balls, stone and bone tools, maceheads, etc. The use of the same symbols or motifs on different media have been identified in passage grave art and Grooved ware (Thomas 1991, 97). Here I wish to briefly examine the use and content of decoration in late Neolithic Orkney.

In Orkney, decoration occurs on portable artifacts and the architecture of passage

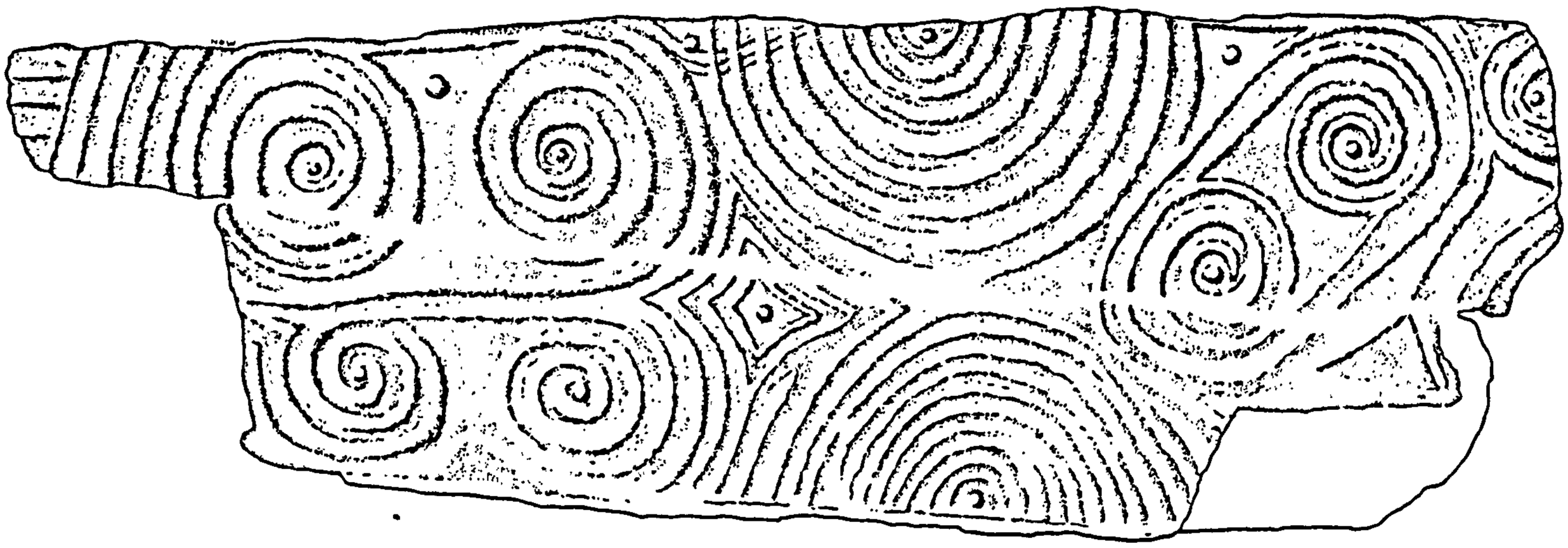


Figure 8:6. The decorated stone from the passage grave at Pierowall Quarry, Westray (after Sharples 1984).

graves and settlements, it also appears on stones used for burial cists. On closer examination, however, the form of decoration on different media varies between contexts. For instance, the decoration employed within the settlements of Skara Brae, Barnhouse and Pool is of particular significance since there is an apparent distinction made between the type of design and the material in which it is inscribed. Within the contemporary `Maeshowe' passage graves of Pierowall Quarry (Fig 8:6), Holm of Papa Westray South (Fig 7:15) and Eday Manse, the decoration takes the form of typical `passage grave' curvilinear style (Shee Twohig 1981, 227-8), with the interesting exception of Maeshowe itself (cf. Ashmore 1986, 57-62). The position of such `art' within the Orcadian passage graves is less certain than the Irish examples, however, it is similarly considered to demarcate and define specific areas in the monument, particularly thresholds and opposed categories of space (see chapter 7).

In direct contrast, within the confines of the settlement, the decoration or `art' present on the walls, door jambs and stone furniture, is restricted to linear patterns, typically, lines, crosses, chevrons and lozenges, and is frequently bounded (Fig 8:7) (see also Shee Twohig 1981, figs 287-90). While decoration seems to fulfil a

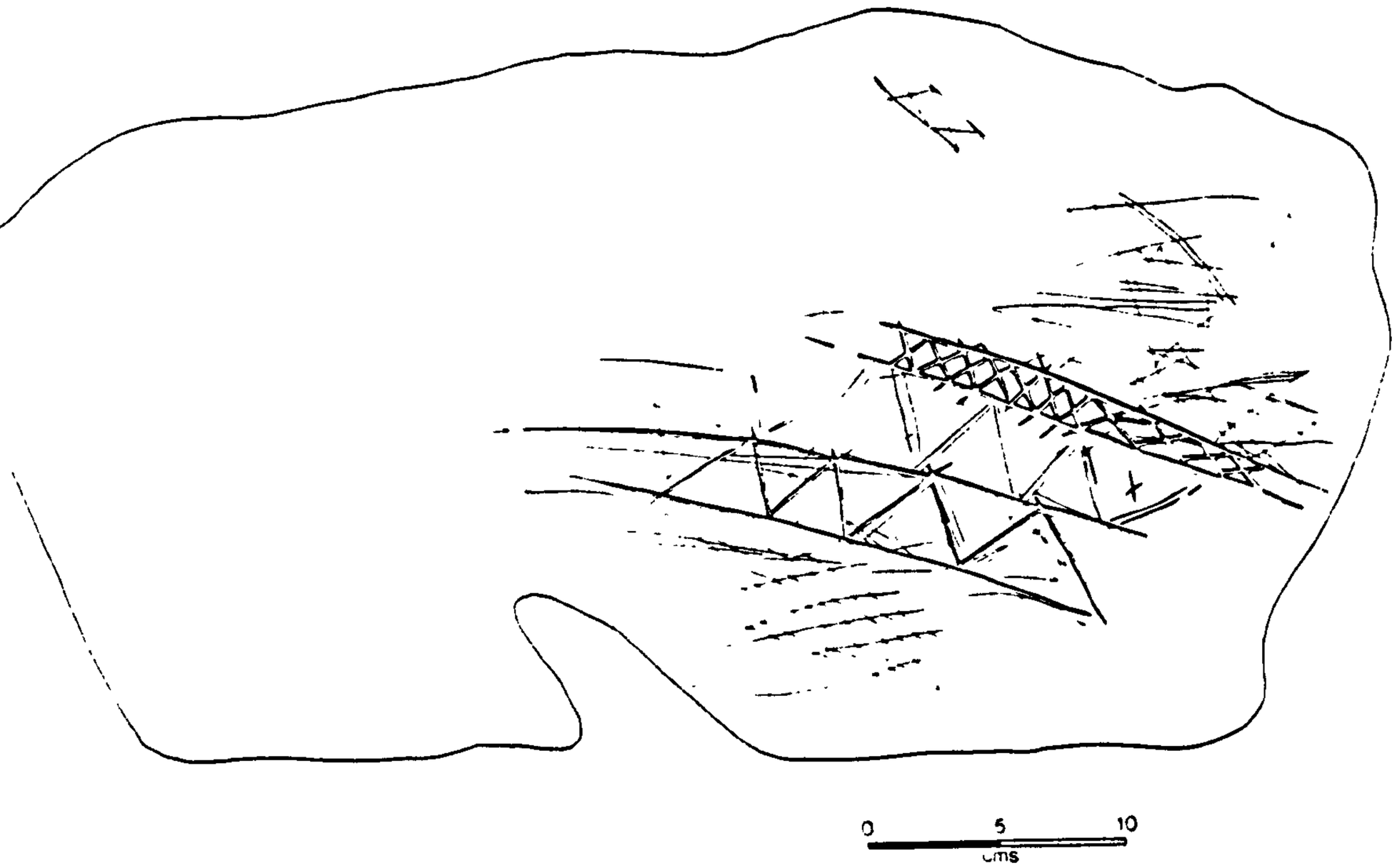


Figure 8:7. Example of the linear decoration at the Barnhouse settlement.

similar definitional role in the settlements (see chapter 10), as in the passage graves, different designs are appropriate to different contexts.

Within the settlements and passage graves, decoration extends beyond architecture to include a range of material culture, namely; stone and bone artefacts, and Grooved ware ceramics. The spheres of decoration would almost certainly have incorporated perishable items which no longer exist, for example, textiles, clothing, wooden objects and perhaps even bodily adornment such as scaring and tattoos. Nevertheless, given this gap in our knowledge, the range of surviving material culture enables an indication of the breadth and selectivity of decorative schemes in late Neolithic Orkney.

Linear forms of decoration adorn settlement walls and furniture, cist slabs, stone Skaill knives, stone objects and bone objects. This decoration is frequently bounded in some way (e.g. Fig 8:8). Occasionally linear decoration is present on Grooved ware, but generally the vessels engraved through the technique of incision or grooving

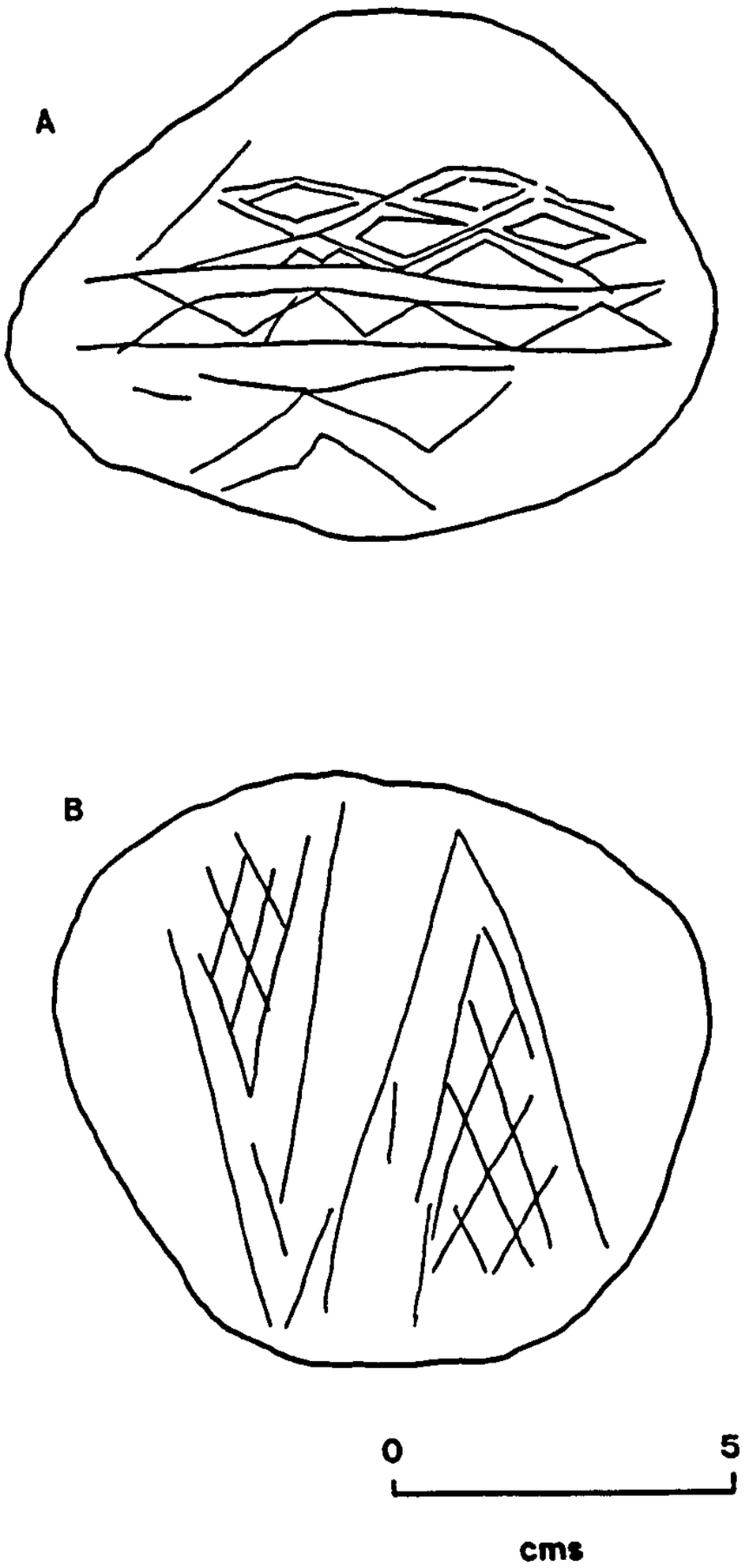


Figure 8:8. Decorated Skaill knives from Skara Brae (after Childe 1931 & A. Clarke pers comm).

exhibit unbounded curvilinear designs. Although sharing this characteristic with passage grave art, only at Skara Brae and Barnhouse (Fig 8:9 & 8:10), are these distinctive motifs directly replicated on pottery. Carved stone balls are also a medium for curvilinear designs, sometimes, accompanied by linear decoration (see Marshall 1977, figs 3:1 & 4:5).

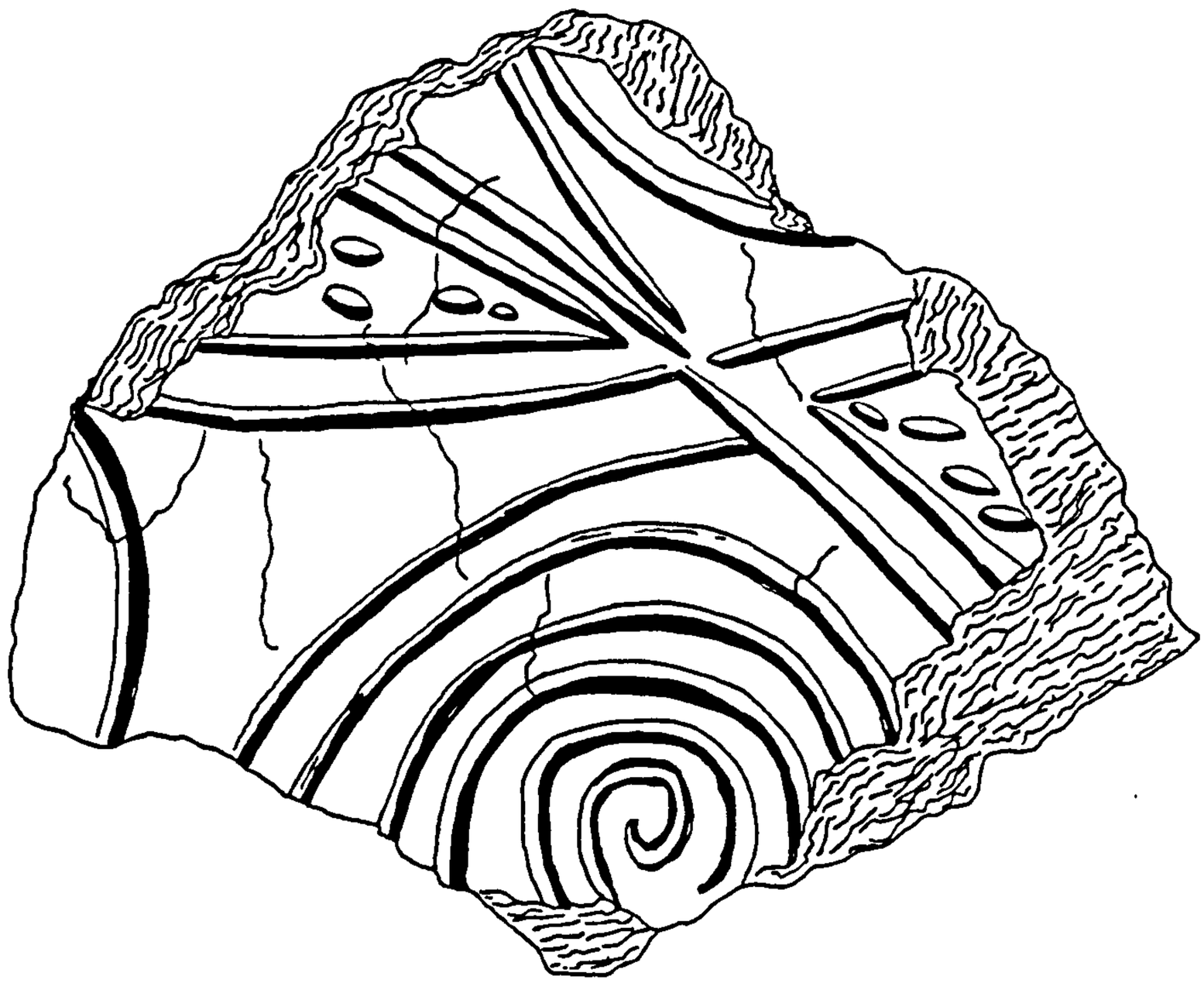


Figure 8:9. Passage grave art on Grooved ware from Skara Brae (after Childe 1931).

The clarity of such partitioning as expressed by the distinction between passage grave and settlement is to some extent present in the artefactual evidence with curvilinear design being restricted to Grooved ware and carved stone balls. All the other decorated bone and stone objects have linear designs. Although it is quite likely that many deeper meanings are embodied in the selection of particular curvilinear or linear motifs, it is this essential difference which is discernible to the archaeologist. A further factor of significance is the use of boundedness in linear decoration. How are we to interpret these distinctions? Apart from pointing to the basic recognition of categorical difference any precise meanings are lost to us, however, it is worth pointing out the infrequency of decoration on all aspects of material culture. At Barnhouse only 508 out of 2167 pottery small finds are decorated. Similarly only two Skaill knives are decorated out of the thousands recovered from different excavations at Skara Brae, Rinyo, Pool and Links of Noltland. Indeed, decorated material culture,

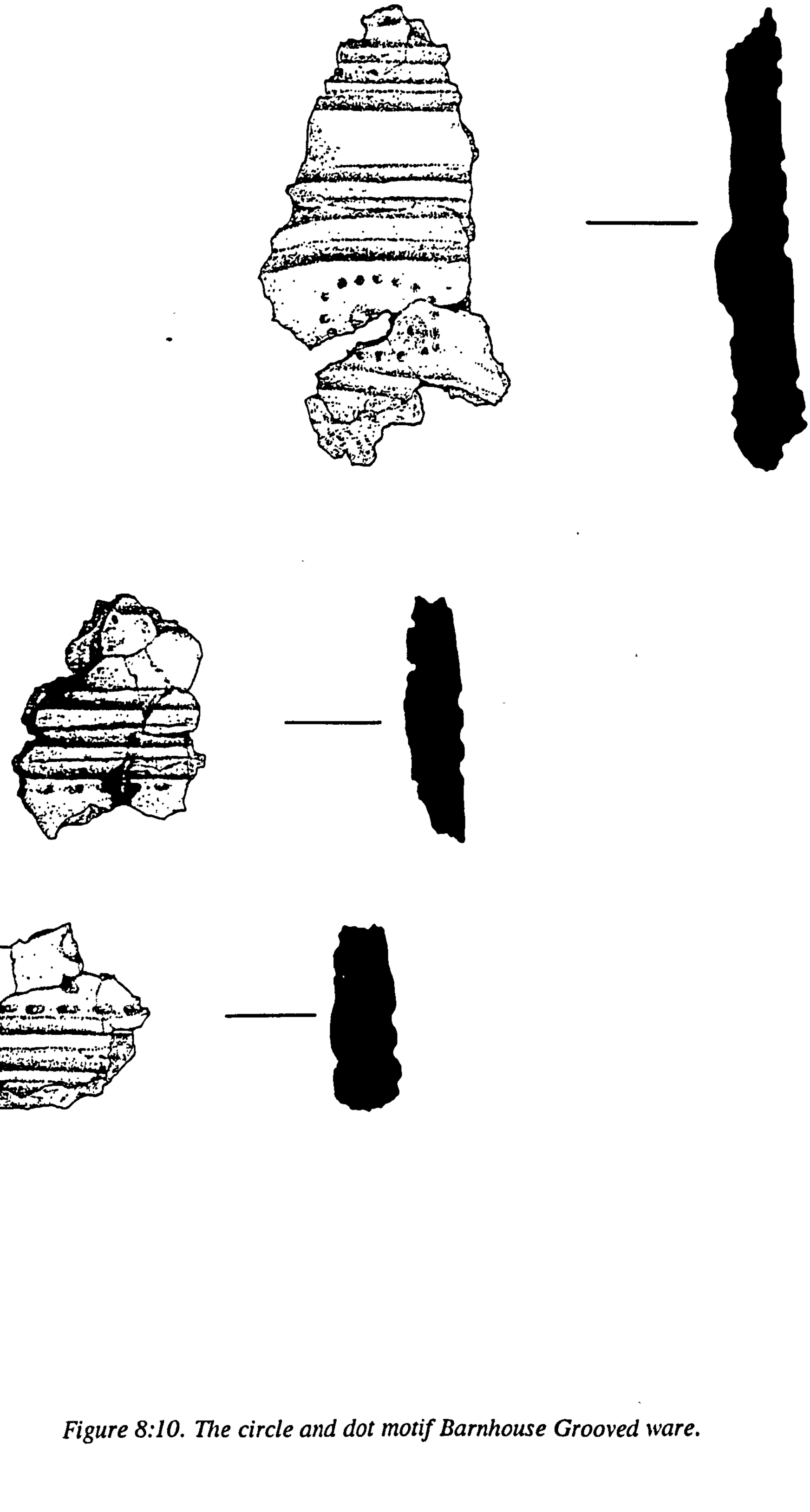


Figure 8:10. The circle and dot motif Barnhouse Grooved ware.

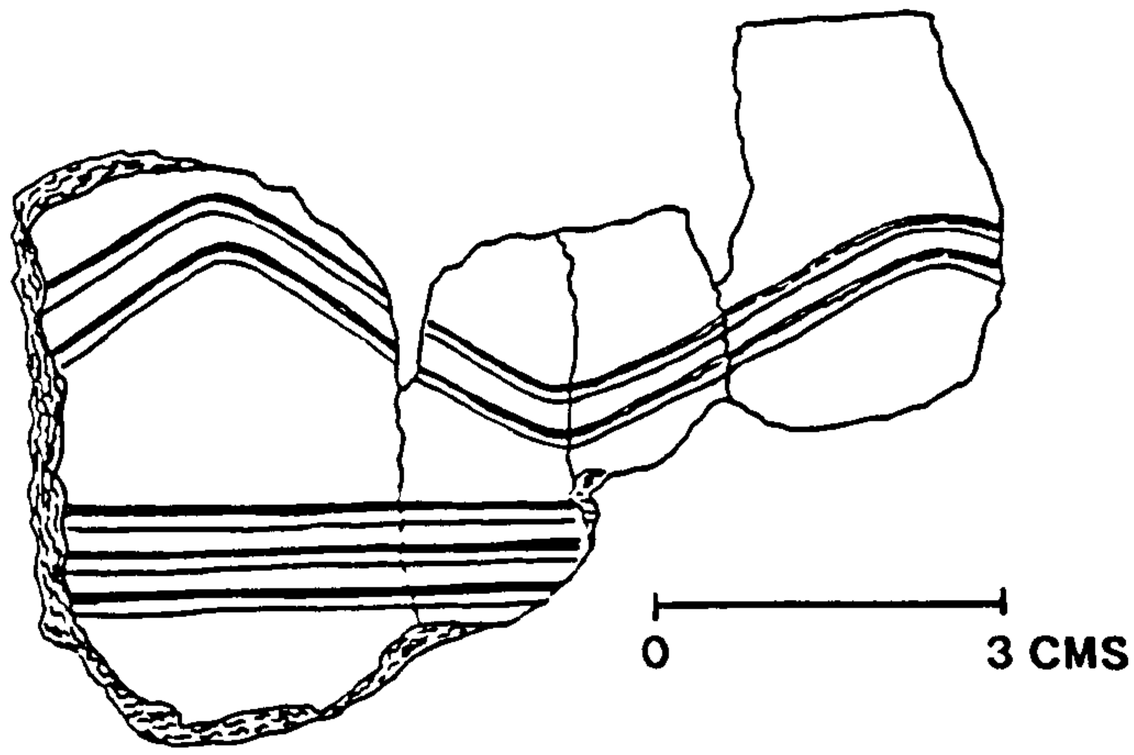


Figure 8:11. The use of the `wavy' design on Grooved ware from Skara Brae (after Childe notebook 1929).

apart from Grooved ware, is the exception rather than the rule. Instantly, we are able to note the special nature of decoration, if not its meanings. Because of its rarity, decorated material culture (with the exception of Grooved ware), has not been recovered in sufficient quantities to enable its attribution to different households, activities, or even contexts of use beyond the site. Suffice is to note that a degree of partitioning does occur between material categories and because of this we are able to detect a degree of change through space and time.

The decorated Grooved ware from Barnhouse and the Stones of Stenness is dominated by curvilinear decoration in the form of `wavy' parallel grooved lines and circular dot patterns. The distribution of passage grave art testifies to an extension of the use of certain curvilinear motifs beyond the confines of the local context, however, to what extent can this be said of ceramic decoration? Certainly, the use of different passage grave motifs appears exclusive to specific settlements with spiral decoration occurring on several vessels at Skara Brae (Fig 8:9) and circles of dots at Barnhouse (Fig 8:10). The Grooved ware from Barnhouse is distinctive in having the same `wavy' grooved pattern replicated on a large number of vessels; a consistency which accounts for 73% of the decorated pottery small finds. Unsurprisingly, this design is present on the Grooved ware from the nearby sites of the Stones of Stenness and

Barnhouse Odin. However, it is not common on the Grooved ware from Skara Brae, Rinyo or Pool. The absence of this design at Skara Brae is perhaps the most notable since it is located only a mere eight miles to the west of Barnhouse. During extensive excavation of contemporary deposits at Skara Brae, Childe, noted the presence of this design only once (see Childe Skara Brae notebook 1929) (Fig 8:11). The other source of a contemporary Grooved ware assemblage is the passage grave of Quanterness where sherds from a similarly decorated vessel were recovered (wrongly reconstructed by Henshall (1979, fig 33:2)). Petrological analysis of this vessel revealed the temper to include Olivine Basalt; an igneous inclusion which is commonly found in the Barnhouse Grooved ware (A. Jones pers. comm.). Significantly this rock is only obtainable from two sources in Orkney; one close to Barnhouse, the other near Finstown (Fig 8:12). While the evidence for an exclusivity of ceramic design to individual settlements is not conclusive, within our present state of knowledge it remains an extremely strong possibility.

Staying briefly with spatial distinctions, it cannot be claimed that all early Grooved ware in use throughout the Orkney Islands displays curvilinear design. For example, MacSween (1992, fig 19:1), illustrates a vessel from Pool which is decorated with bounded linear motifs. It may be suggested that again this points to decoration being used to define categories of function besides differences between local groups or communities.

Where a certain degree of partitioning is present between decorative media, DeBoer (1991, 156-8), suggests that each medium is more susceptible to change. Whether this is accepted, it is interesting to note that through time unbounded curvilinear decoration on pottery and funerary contexts ceases and bounded linear forms predominate. The classification of Grooved ware at Skara Brae by Childe (1931, 130-2) reveals this clearly:

Class C - grooved decoration - linear/curvilinear and unbounded - periods 1 & 2.

Class B - applied decoration - linear/curvilinear and unbounded - periods 1 & 2.

Class A - applied decoration - linear and bounded - periods 1, 2 & 3.

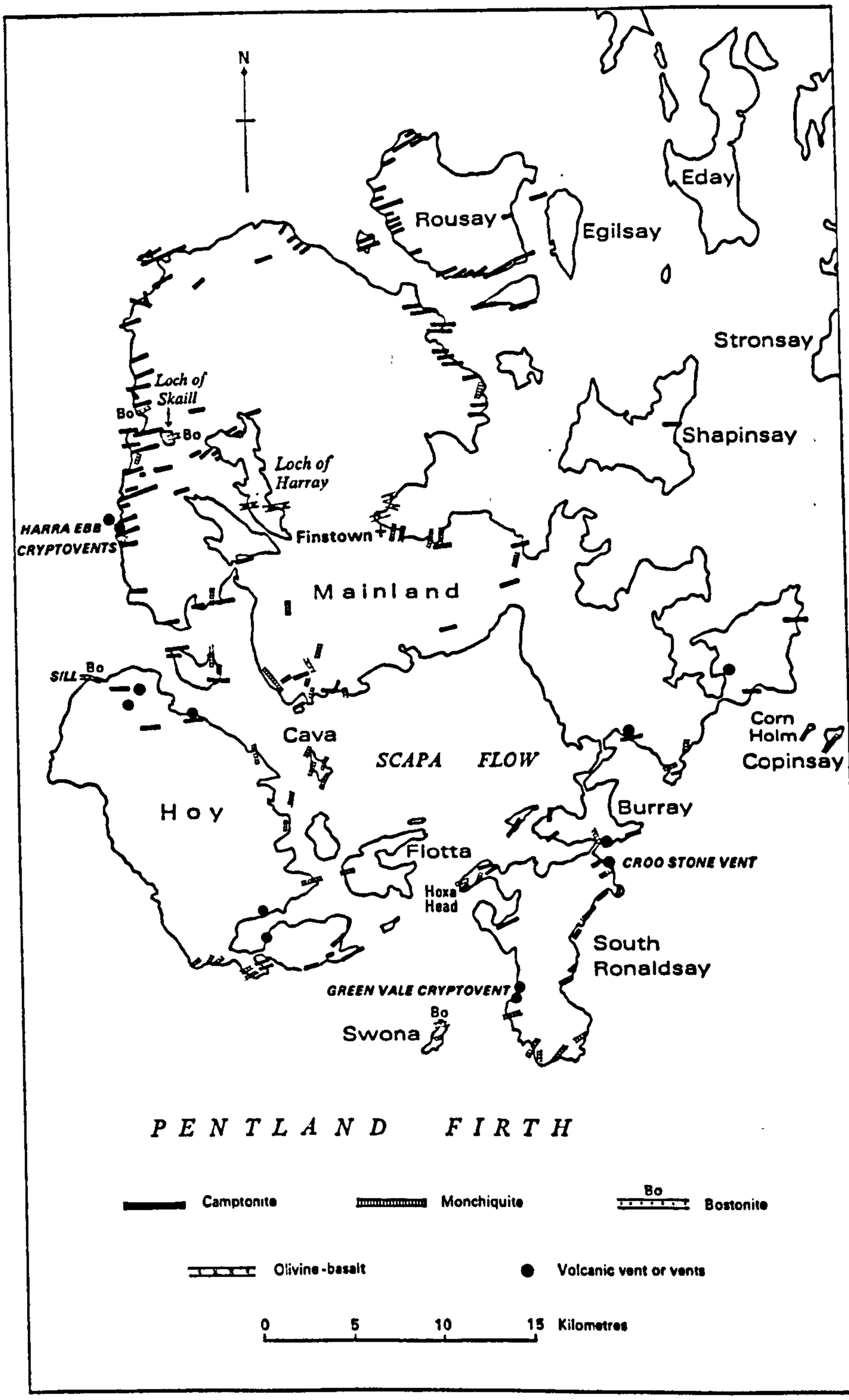


Figure 8:12. Map of Mainland, Orkney, showing sources of Olivine basalt (after Mykura 1976).

By the later phases of Skara Brae, Grooved ware decoration is extremely similar to the bounded linear designs found incised into the settlement walls (Fig 8:1). Similarly, if the cist slab recovered from Brodgar farm (Marwick 1926), is representative, then decoration in the mortuary sphere also undergoes a transformation from curvilinear and unbounded to linear and bounded (Fig 8:13). This may be significant in understanding the presence of linear decoration in Maeshowe (Ashmore 1987).

Grooved ware design at Barnhouse

Returning to the Barnhouse assemblage, I now wish to examine the decoration of Grooved ware in conjunction with the differences in vessel size and fabric discussed earlier. Decorated sherds constitute 23% of the total assemblage. Given the nature of the structure of decoration on a pot it is suspected that an unknown proportion of the undecorated sherds actually come from decorated vessels, unfortunately, this is a problem peculiar to archaeological material. To gauge temporal variation, as suggested by the Skara Brae and Pool Grooved ware, the frequency of different techniques of decoration was charted through time (Fig 8:4). The results show a trend towards the variation identified by Childe (1931, 130-2), and MacSween (1992, 268), with an increase in applied decoration and a decrease in grooved occurring through the life-span of the settlement. However, just as Childe (1931, 130) noted, applied decoration occurs alongside grooved decoration from the earliest phase.

Following the basic difference between decoration which is cut *into* the body of the vessel and that which is applied *onto* its outer surface, a comparison was made between the technique of decoration and vessel size (Fig 8:14). The results of this analysis demonstrate that a selection was made between different methods of decoration for different sizes of vessel. Grooved decoration is restricted to the range of vessels which were earlier attributed to food preparation, cooking and serving. Conversely, applied cordons are present on larger vessels of storage capacity. Indeed,

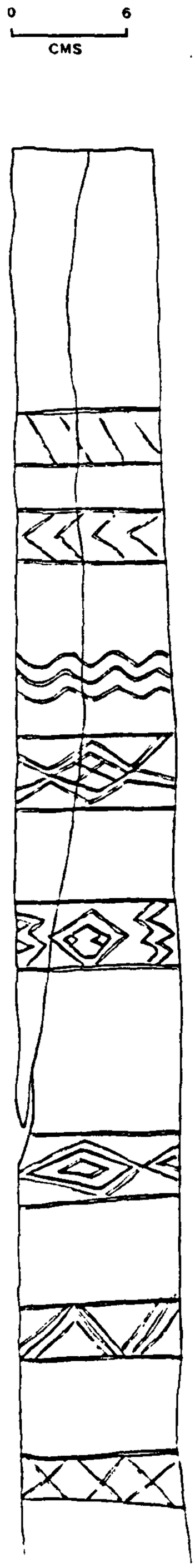


Figure 8:13. Decorated cist slab from Brodgar.

if a distinction is made between small and large cordons, an even clearer relationship between decorative technique and vessel function is demonstrated.

Given this selectivity in decoration for vessels of different function a further comparison was made between decoration and fabric; since fabric was seen earlier to relate to function (Fig 8:5). Initially, a direct comparison was made between the proportion of decorated to undecorated pottery on the basis of fabric (Fig 8:15). Both fabric A/B and C have a fairly similar ratio of decorated to undecorated sherds with the latter dominating each assemblage. However, an examination of the finer fabric D/E, which is confined to smaller capacity vessels, reveals a direct contrast in having a predominance of decorated over undecorated sherds, a characteristic which concurs with the suggestion of the role of this fabric as serving vessels (cf. Howard 1981, table 1:1).

Looking at the general distribution of different techniques of decoration and different fabrics it is noticeable that large applied cordons are virtually restricted to fabric A/B (B being vessels over 14mm wall thickness). With regard to larger vessels (B), designated as storage vessels, it is clear that a conscious decision to coincide a particular type of temper (fabric) and decorative technique (applied cordon) with function was made by the potter. Apart from the larger vessels, grooved decoration occurs on medium and small vessels and on each of the three fabric groups with no apparent discrimination in the method of decoration (Fig 8:16).

Going beyond the basic distinctions of technique of decoration a further level of analysis may now be undertaken through an examination of the way decoration is structured on the surface of a vessel. The method of analysis employed draws on an earlier scheme devised to examine the decoration of Grooved ware at Durrington Walls (Richards & Thomas 1984). The basis of this analysis was the interplay between plain and decorated surfaces, and bounded and unbounded areas of design. The Orcadian Grooved ware, as already seen, does not employ boundaries to sub-divide panels of decoration, rather, a basic or primary design runs across the outer surface of the vessel. Nevertheless, the concepts which underpined the Durrington Walls study may be reformulated to examine the Barnhouse Grooved ware.

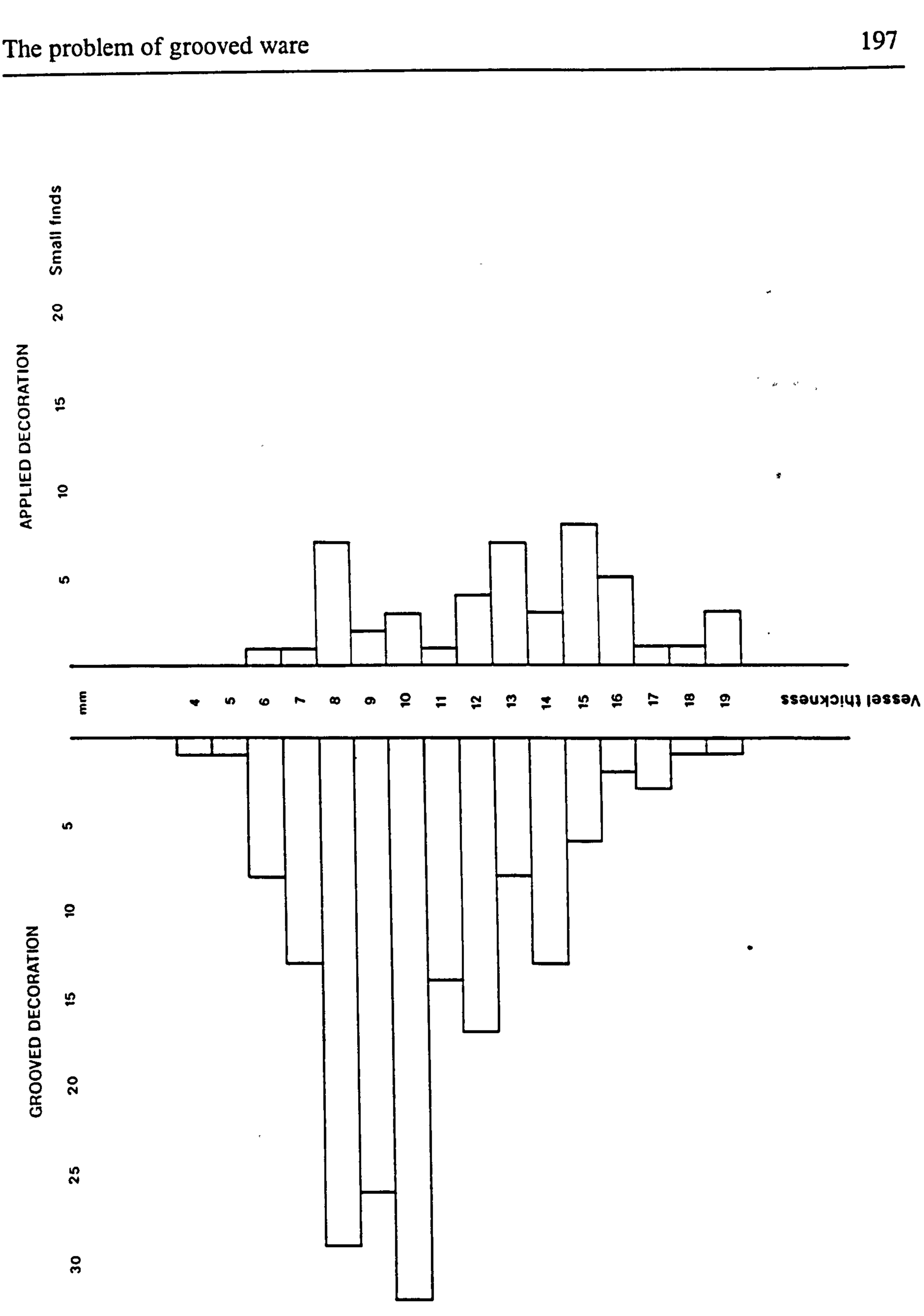


Figure 8:14. A comparison of vessel size and grooved and applied decoration at Barnhouse.

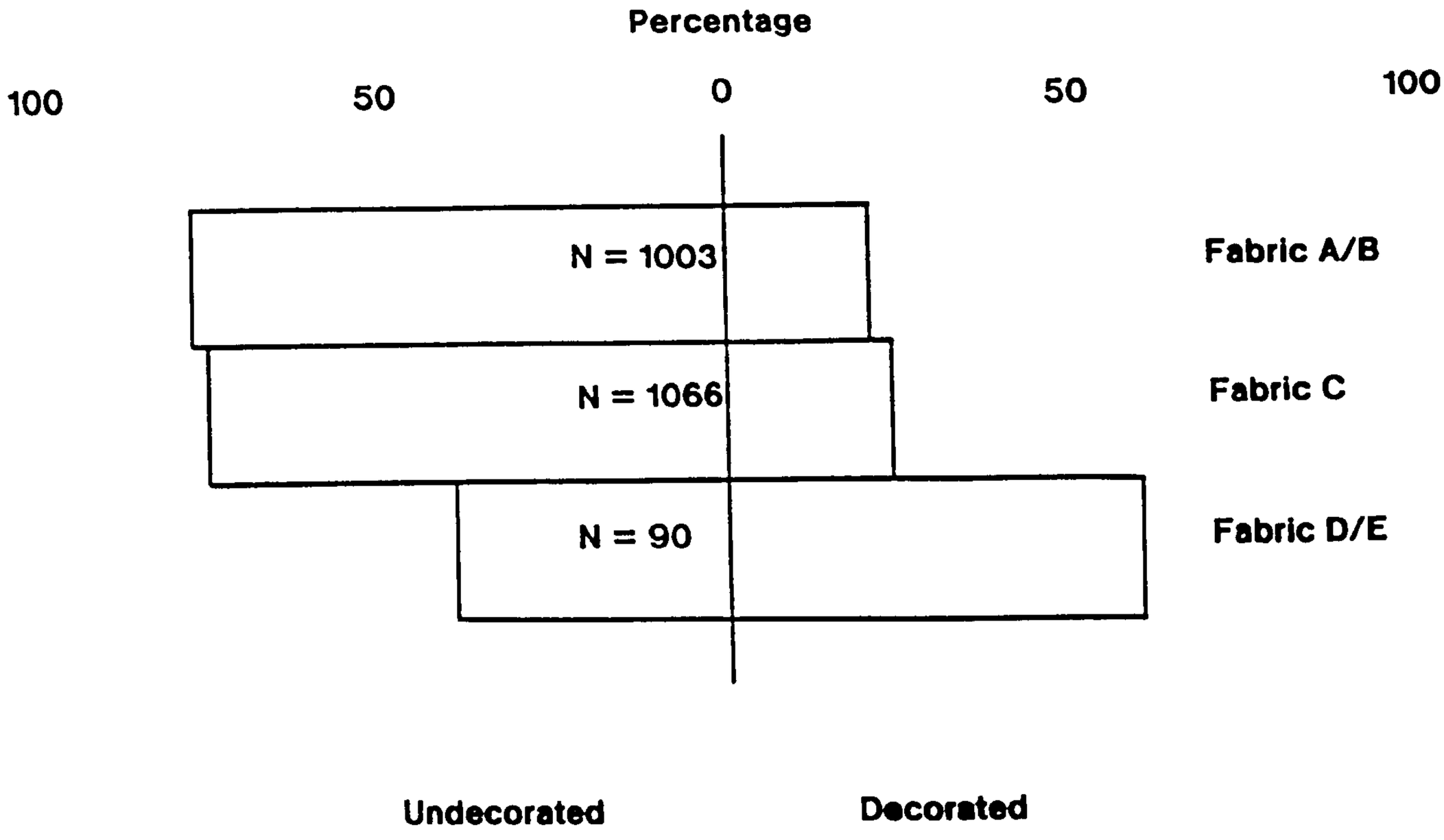


Figure 8:15. Proportions of decoration present within each fabric group at Barnhouse.

One important element in the creation of a `hierarchy of design' is based on the observation by Plog (1980, 47-9), that a classification of decoration should always attempt to relate to the choices open to the potter during the production process. Hence, by tracing the sequence of decoration a classification based upon growing complexity and elaboration of design may be formulated. The advantages of such a form of classification are that it relates to the choices and categories employed by the potter in the creation of a culturally recognisable material object.

In the context of examining the Barnhouse Grooved ware, three levels or stages of design may be identified, however, they are not of a completely hierarchical nature (Fig 8:17). The first stage of decoration is constituted by the application of a primary design; this includes both grooved or applied techniques of decoration. Once this level is reached two further choices are open to the potter. First, the primary decoration may be *modified*, for example, in the common case of a three grooved design, a serpentine effect may be produced by stabbing the raised area between two grooves in

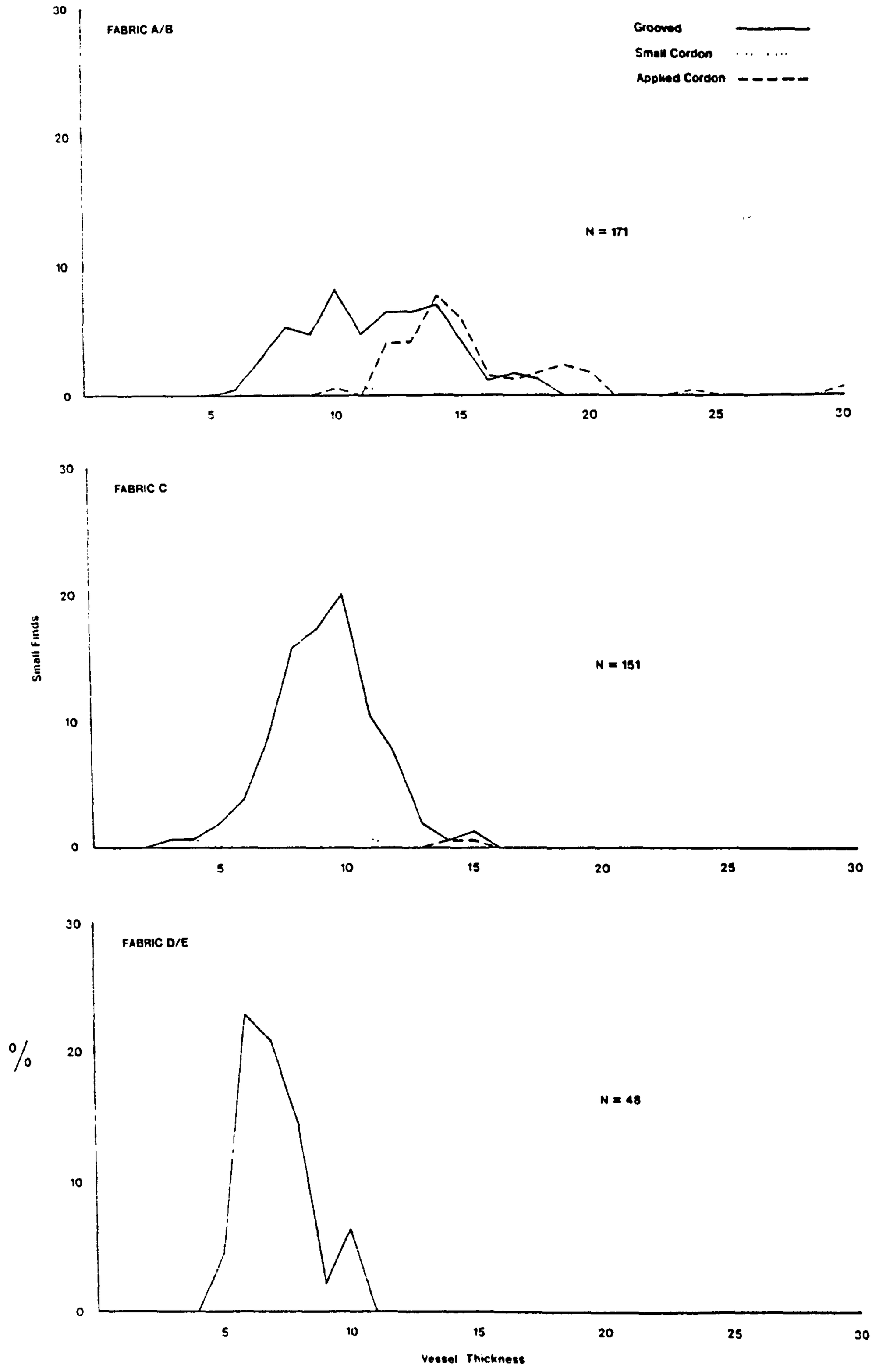


Figure 8:16. A comparison of vessel size, fabric and decoration type at Barnhouse.

a regular fashion. Alternatively, a raised cordon may be stabbed or incised.

A further level of design complexity may be achieved by the *addition* of a new design element or motif which is physically separated from the primary design and any modification. An example of this stage is the use of dots and circles between the primary three grooved decoration. It will be noted that these stages are not necessarily interdependent, for instance, a primary design may remain unmodified but have additional motifs, however, the vessels displaying the greatest degree of decorative complexity will be those which have *primary*, *modified* and *added* stages of design present.

An examination of the levels of decorative complexity in conjunction with fabric, and therefore volume and function is listed below by small find numbers:

Fabric	*Site total*	*House total*
Stage 1 (primary)		
A/B	187	42
C	211	70
D/E	33	9
Stage 2 (modification)		
A/B	21	9
C	13	10
D/E	8	1
Stage 3 (modification & addition)		
A/B	13	1
C	13	6
D/E	8	5

A clear ascendancy through the degrees of complexity is observable in the above table, although it is noticeable that fabrics C and D/E have a similar number of both modified and added levels of decoration. A further discernible trend is the proportional increase of fabric D/E as the decoration becomes more complex. Given the relatively

low numbers of this fabric type it is clear the finer fabric (D/E) pottery, designated as food serving vessels, has a much higher proportion of the more complex stages of design.

Conclusion

In drawing together the different strands of evidence discussed in this chapter, it is clear that many of the `problems' of Grooved ware lie beyond the ceramic itself. Difficulties of chronology and cultural affiliation are simply indicated by changes in material culture; they are not linked in any other way. While both these factors would seem to be apparent in the changes identifiable in ceramic sequence at Pool, Sanday, it should be remembered that this is a single part of a settlement on a relatively small island situated peripheral to Mainland, Orkney.

A major component of this chapter has been an examination of the Grooved ware from Barnhouse. Just as with the fabric sequence derived from analysis of the Grooved ware from the Pool settlement, such site specific analysis casts a certain ambiguity to any wider statements concerning the role of Grooved ware throughout Neolithic Orkney. Nevertheless, a clearer understanding of the process of categorisation and use of Grooved ware within a single settlement is of vital importance in a wider perspective concerning the role of certain forms of material culture and the way it acts to reproduce wider categories of meaning. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the earlier discussion of the partitioning of decoration between media. The wider aspects of decoration as an active element in the arena of transformation will be discussed in chapter 10, suffice is to note the presence of curvilinear decoration, on pottery (itself a clear product of cultural transformation) used for food preparation, cooking and serving, and bounding particular areas of significance in passage graves (a position and context of human transformation).

The Grooved ware from Barnhouse was undoubtedly categorised on the basis of function. Fabric and decoration appear to be structured on the basis of vessel size. Thus, it is the use of these containers which subsumes many of the variables which are often examined independently in archaeological classifications. This view is reinforced

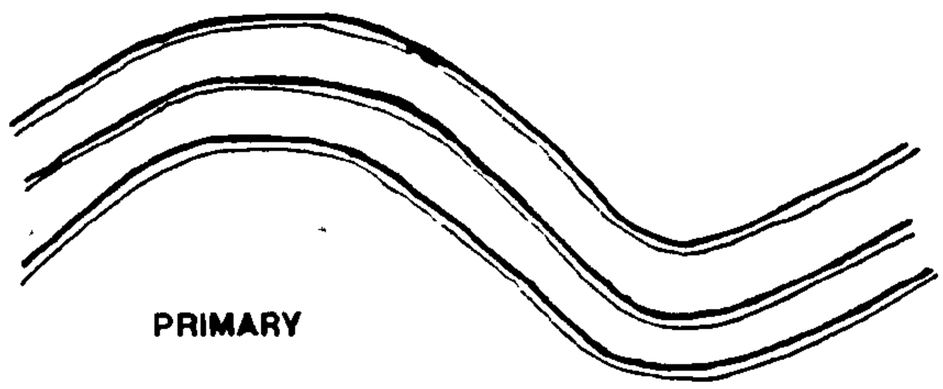


Figure 8:17. Different stages of Grooved ware design.

when patterns of discard at Barnhouse are examined. The larger Grooved ware vessels have already been distinguished on the basis of fabric and decorative technique, if their context of discard is examined it is seen that they are singled out for deposition behind House 3, and in the ditch in area 2, both contexts lying outside the area of habitation (Fig 9:15). This is in direct contrast to the vessels involved in cooking and serving which are deposited with hearth ash adjacent to individual dwellings.

Although we can state that the use of a Grooved ware vessel determines its categorisation, other factors may also influence the choice of fabric and decoration. Vessels of medium size, considered to be used for food preparation, cooking and serving, were noted to vary between shell and stone tempering, but both fabrics consistently employ identical grooved decoration. Furthermore, the use of an outer clay slip on vessels of both fabrics, would have made their outward appearance indistinguishable. How are we to interpret this overlap in fabric when both appear to

have served exactly the same purpose? An examination of discard patterns (Fig 9:15) reveals that a spatial distinction is present between the two fabrics. The shell tempered pottery is concentrated in the central area while the stone tempered is restricted to the outer areas of the settlement. A detailed discussion of the possible interpretations of this pattern will be undertaken in chapter 9, however, suffice is to note that the existence of household traditions of production represents a strong possibility.

To summarise, the introduction of Grooved ware in Orkney marked the earliest flat bottomed pottery in Britain. Despite the sequence attested at Pool, Sanday, the suggested evolution of Unstan ware into Grooved ware may not be a characteristic applicable to all areas of Orkney. The earliest decoration of Grooved ware included curvilinear forms and specific designs may have been peculiar to individual settlements. Interestingly, a distinction between grooved and applied techniques of decoration appears to have been made on the basis of function at both Skara Brae and Barnhouse. However, ceramic decoration cannot be examined in isolation and the wider uses of different decoration on specific media has to be taken into consideration. Within this framework a change from grooved to applied decoration is discernible in the ceramics accompanied by a shift from curvilinear to linear designs on all media.

Clearly, as a category of material culture, Grooved ware does stand apart as something which is culturally transformed and as a medium for curvilinear design. However, within the ceramic category clear differences in fabric and decoration are discernible and to a large degree are based on use. This concurrence is not totally encompassing, as the overlap in cooking vessel fabric testifies. Indeed, if categories of deposition are transferable to usage then it appears that only the larger storage vessels with their distinctive cordon decoration are actually segregated. Other vessels more directly related to food; its preparation, cooking and consumption, seem to be incorporated with regard to deposition. Here the main organisational principle appears to be a linkage with individual residences.

In this chapter it has hopefully been demonstrated that a more complete or comprehensive approach to Grooved ware as a single element within a much wide range of material culture is more productive than approaches which identify it as a cultural signifier. The slow unravelling of the Barnhouse pottery assemblage throws

light on Grooved ware as an everyday item and category of material culture, a container of a specific substance (itself categorised), and medium of decoration, with its own conotations. Also, through these aspects, its relationship to wider spheres of meaning.

Chapter 9

The late Neolithic settlement complex at Barnhouse, Stenness, Orkney.

Introduction

The provision of stone built late Neolithic settlements is perhaps the most important characteristic which separates Orkney from other areas of Britain. A historical tradition of pastoral agriculture with minimal cultivation, in conjunction with the use of sandstone as a building material, has served to provide favourable conditions for the physical survival of prehistoric settlements. However, as was pointed out in chapter 3, this situation is not permanent and will depreciate rapidly with the introduction of more intensive forms of cultivation and modern agricultural machinery. At present the sites remain, thereby providing an unparalleled opportunity for different avenues of research.

In this chapter the results of the excavation of a late Neolithic settlement complex at Barnhouse, Stenness; a product of the programme of fieldwork describe in chapter 3, will be examined. Particular attention will be given to the spatial organisation of settlement and its changes through time, the activities which occur within the area of habitation and depositional practices associated with material production, use and discard. Here it is suggested that these factors are of critical importance in not only understanding the daily lives of late Neolithic people, but also other contexts of human

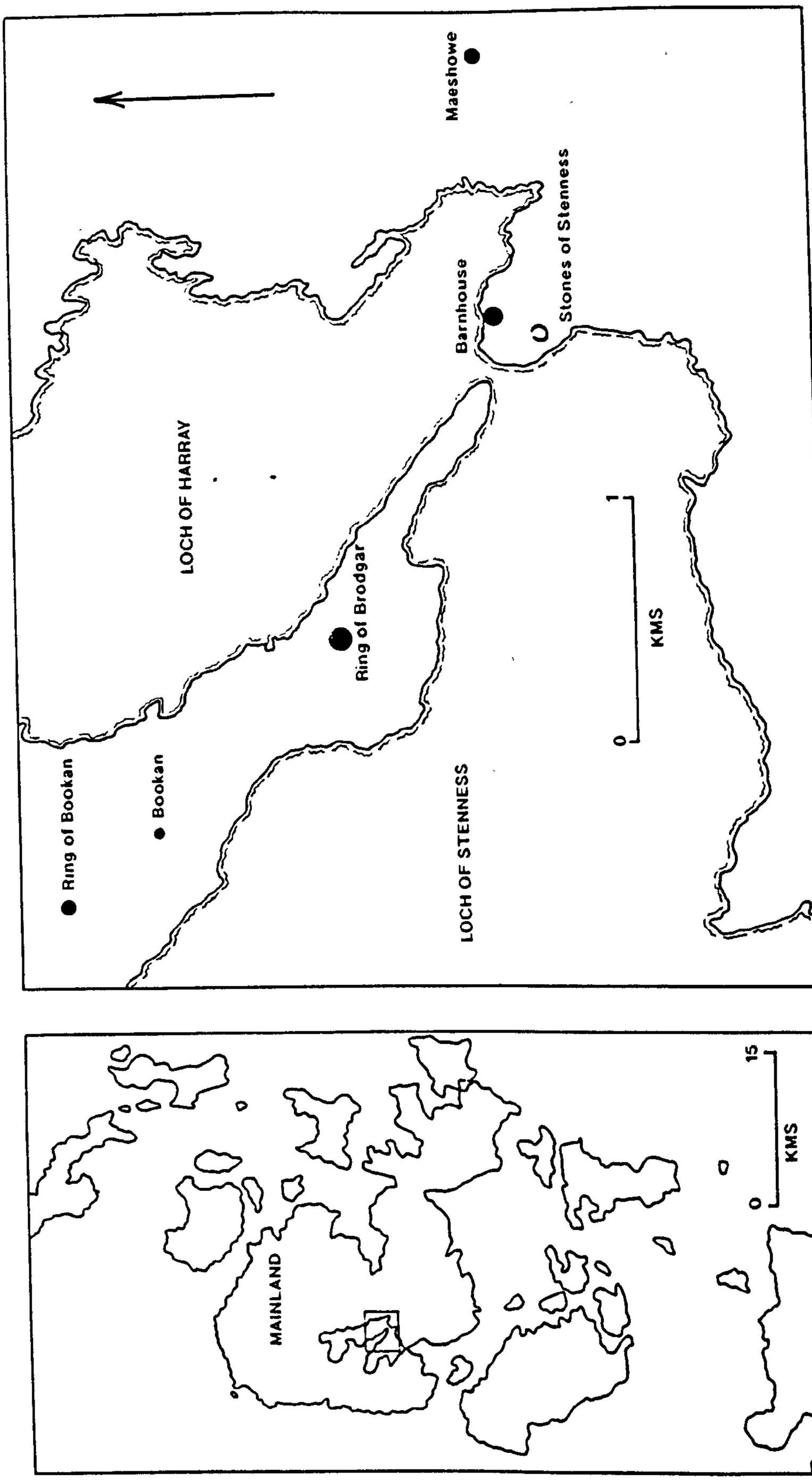


Figure 9:1. Late Neolithic sites in the Stenness - Brodgar area of Mainland.

activity such as passage graves and henge monuments. The same Neolithic people, lived in houses within the settlements, participated in or watched various ceremonies and rites of passage, including funerals. Thus, to divide the evidence in such a way as to divorce these areas of human activity creates false distinctions and categories. Moreover it suppresses the richness of the archaeological record in Orkney, particularly the unique occurrence of standing Neolithic settlements.

The anatomy of a late Neolithic settlement

The most exciting discovery of the programme of fieldwalking, was at Barnhouse, Stenness, where a discrete surface concentration of material, including worked flint, polished stone axes, hammerstones and burnt bone, was located on the tip of the Stenness promontory adjacent to the Loch of Harray. Surprisingly, this scatter lay a mere 150 metres north of the Stones of Stenness henge monument in close proximity to a cluster of monumental constructions which besides the Stones of Stenness, including the passage graves of Maeshowe and Bookan, and the Rings of Brodgar and Bookan (Fig 9:1).

Trial excavations at Barnhouse in 1985, revealed a preserved Neolithic land surface directly below the ploughsoil which was being severely damaged through continual ploughing. Consequently, a five year project of excavation was initiated in 1986 on behalf of Historic Scotland.

The excavations revealed an extraordinary settlement complex comprising a long sequence of occupation and a final phase of monumentality. The material assemblage comprises large quantities of Grooved Ware (see chapter 8), worked flint and stone. Unfortunately, the bone component is absent due to soil conditions, however, substantial amounts of burnt bone were recovered. Although a `Grooved Ware' assemblage, the recovered material, displays marked differences with the Skara Brae and Rinyo assemblages. In contrast to the other known late Neolithic Orcadian settlements whose houses appear architecturally undifferentiated, (an exception being the `grobust' structure at Links of Noltland, Westray), in the size and internal organisation of their houses, Barnhouse displays a marked hierarchical structure of

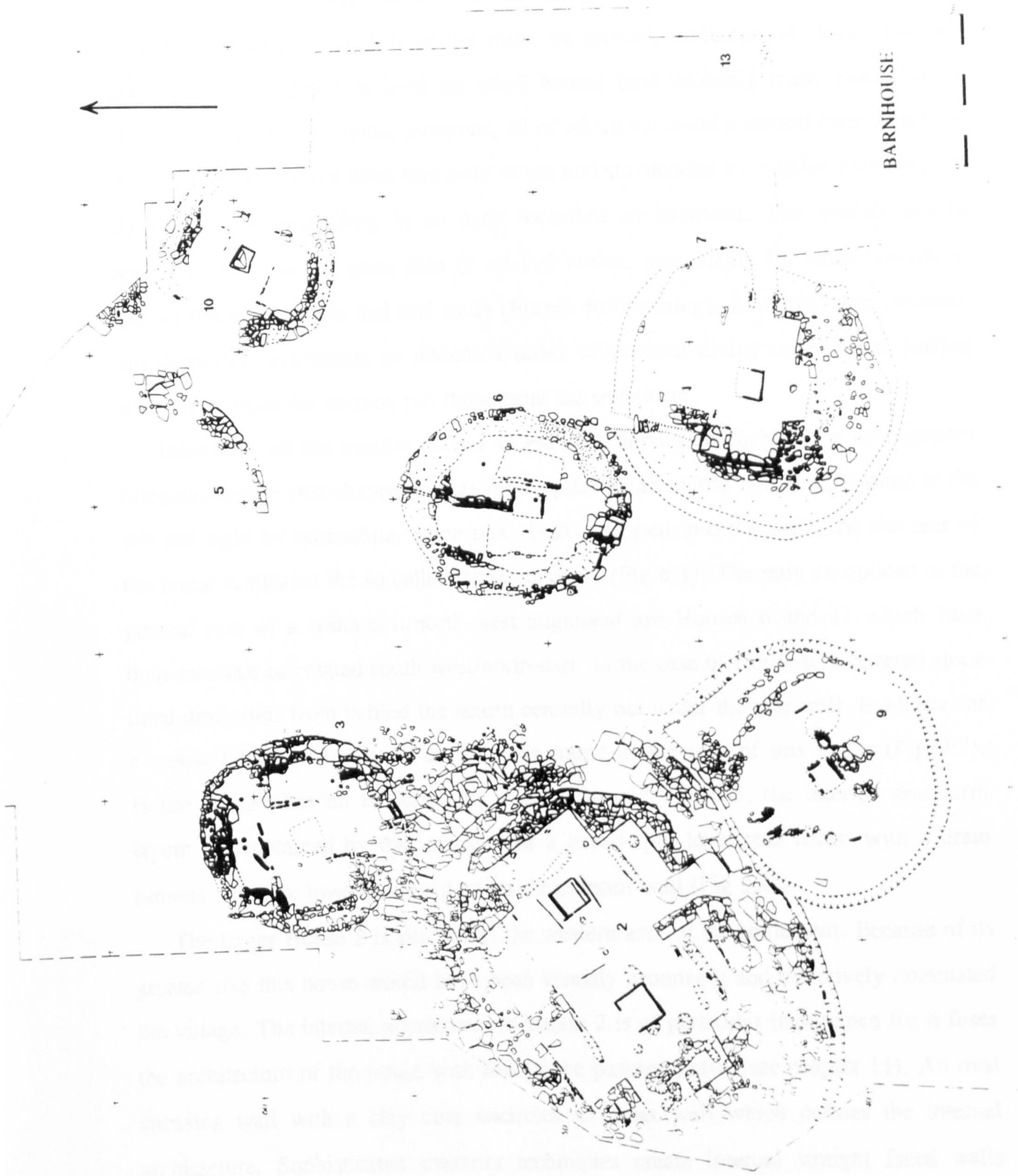


Figure 9:2. The original spatial organisation of Barnhouse.

house architecture.

The initial settlement, which on the basis of radiocarbon determinations was contemporary with, or slightly earlier than, the primary settlement at Skara Brae (see appendix 1), comprises at least six small houses (and probably many more) and a larger, more elaborate, house structure, all of which surround a central open area (Fig 9:2). Rather than being sunk into sand dunes and surrounded by midden material, the dwellings are freestanding in an open loch-side environment. The smaller houses appear to have had an outer skin of stacked turves, presumably for extra insulation, and all houses probably had turf roofs (French forthcoming). Like the other Orcadian late Neolithic settlements an elaborate series of external drains and ditches, linking with drains from the houses, run throughout the settlement.

Internally, all the smaller houses appear to generally conform to the arrangement discussed earlier (see chapter 6), having a square stone central fireplace, flanked to the left and right by rectangular stone box `beds' recessed into the walls. At the rear of the house is situated the so called stone `dresser' (Fig 6:1). The only exceptions to the general rule of a south-east/north-west alignment are Houses 6 and 11 which have their entrance orientated south-west/north-east. In the case of House 6, a covered stone lined drain runs from behind the hearth centrally out under the rear wall. Evidence for a recess rather than a stone dresser was found at the rear of this house (Fig 9:3). House 7, also has no evidence for a rear `dresser'. Instead, the internal cruciform layout is maintained by the inclusion of a paved split level rear recess with a drain running from the lower level out under the exterior wall (Fig 9:4).

The larger House 2 is situated in the western area of the settlement. Because of its greater size this house would have been visually prominent and effectively dominated the village. The internal appearance of House 2 is of particular importance for it fuses the architecture of the house with that of the passage grave (see chapter 11). An oval encasing wall with a clay core encircles an inner wall which defines the internal architecture. Sophisticated masonry techniques create internal straight faced walls which form six recesses through the use of corner buttresses (Fig 9:5). The only other example of this building technique is within the chambered tomb of Maeshowe which lies in full view, 900 metres to the south-east (see chapter 7).

Figure 9:3. House 6.

In having six recesses bounded from the central area by upright divisional slabs a spatial structure is created which is identical to that seen within the passage graves of Quanterness and Quoyness (Fig 7:11). In layout a short passage, orientated to the south-east, provides access into an interior which is effectively divided into two symmetrical halves. Both halves have large and elaborate hearths. The north-eastern example is flanked by two long upright stones. Adjacent to the fireplace, left of centre, is set a visible coverstone of a cist or pit dug into the underlying natural. Very decayed fragments of bone were found within this otherwise empty cavity. Significantly, the triangular shape and size of the cover is similar to one of the cist covers located within the central chamber at Quanterness (Renfrew 1979, Fig 24).

The structure of the settlement is of particular interest in having the larger House 2 set in a peripheral westerly position as opposed to being centrally situated. Indeed, in having an open central area, I would argue that the overall layout of the Barnhouse settlement is an homolgy of the house. The organisational principles of the house, discussed in chapter 6, emphasise the importance of the hearth and its centralised position. In the spatial structure of the settlement this concept of centrality is merely reproduced at a different scale. As will be suggested in the final chapter, this cosmologically derived conception of order, is a major characteristic of the early `Grooved ware' constructions.

Figure 9:4. Plan of Barnhouse showing the sequence of house construction.

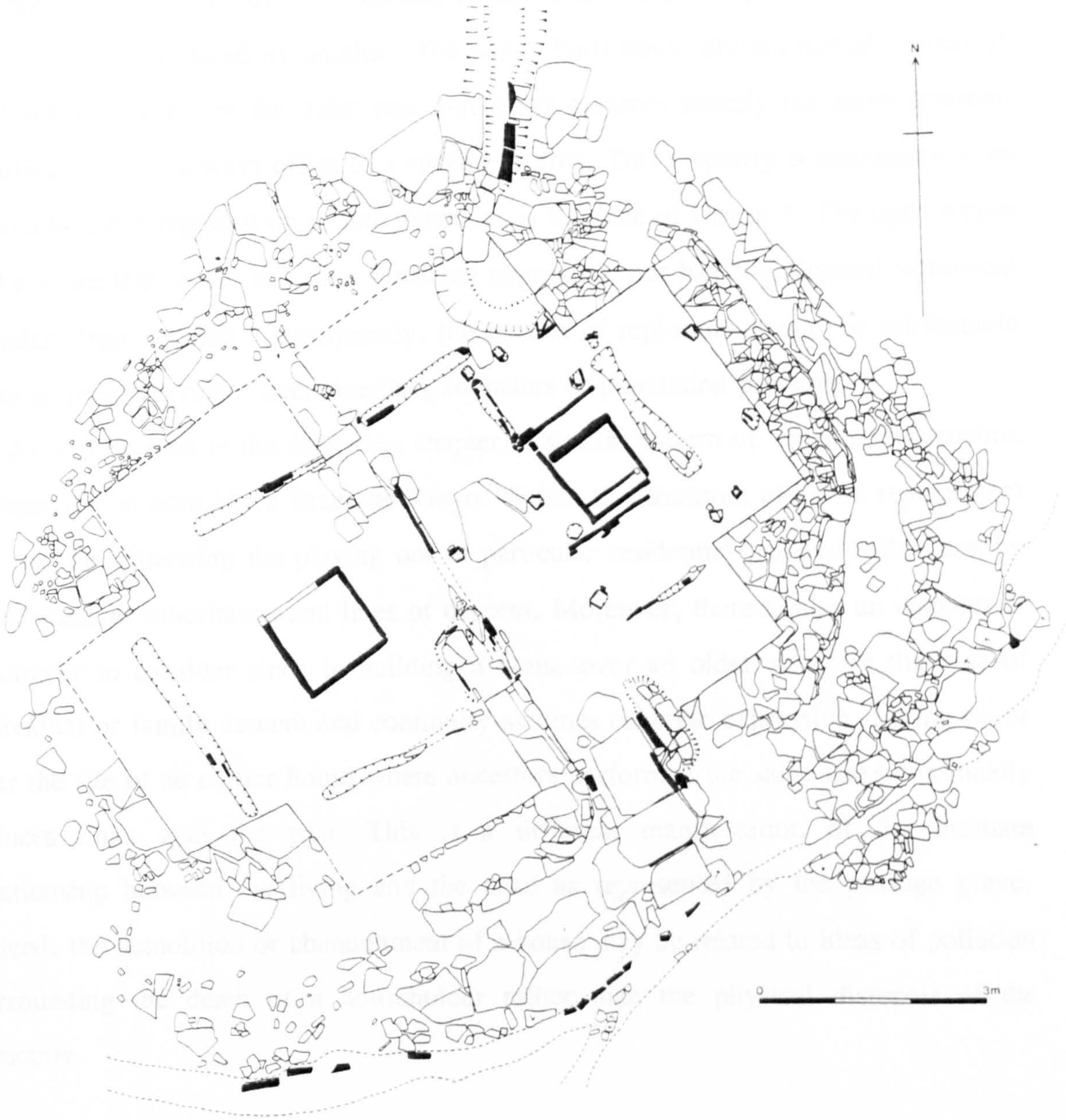


Figure 9:5. House 2.

Chronologically, the settlement appears to have a life span of approximately two hundred years before major changes occur. In terms of historical development, clear phases of settlement are unrecognisable. Instead a situation of flux appears to exist at Barnhouse where individual houses are built, periodically refurbished, and eventually demolished (Fig 9:4). This procedure seems to conform to our own experiences of settlement, however, the rules governing the life span of a Neolithic house in Orkney may have been quite different given the different cultural context. One of the

interesting features of this development is that at different times several houses are demolished and replaced by another. The newly built house always partially overlays the levelled remains of the older one, but never assumes exactly the same position. Significantly, it is always offset to a varying degree. This disparity is maintained even when a house is replaced up to four times, as is the case of House 5. The open nature of the settlement would not have restricted expansion, nor has any physical settlement boundary been located. Consequently, the pattern of replacement may be attributable to social practices rather than external parameters or population pressure.

As will be seen in the following chapter, a similar pattern of house reconstruction is detectable at both Skara Brae and Rinyo. Within this tradition of house replacement we may be witnessing the playing out of particular residential patterns influenced by social rules of inheritance and lines of descent. Moreover, there is also an element of continuity to consider since in building a house over an older structure the idea of individual or family descent and continuity assumes concrete expression. Living on or over the site of an earlier house where ancestors performed the same tasks continually induces links with the past. This is a different manifestation of the intimate relationship between the living and the dead as represented by the passage grave. Indeed, the demolition or abandonment of a house may be related to ideas of pollution surrounding the death of a householder rather than the physical disrepair of the structure.

Living within Barnhouse

A primary problem to determine involves the actual status of the different `houses'. For instance, were they all family dwellings or was there a more functional basis to the settlement organisation? Moreover, how is it possible to determine function given the potential cycles of activities occurring in any given domestic context? In order to evaluate these difficulties a combination of different elements of archaeological enquiry may be drawn upon to provide an insight into the uses of each structure. In this section I will examine different houses and areas of Barnhouse and attempt to provide an account of the settlement and the daily lives and depositional

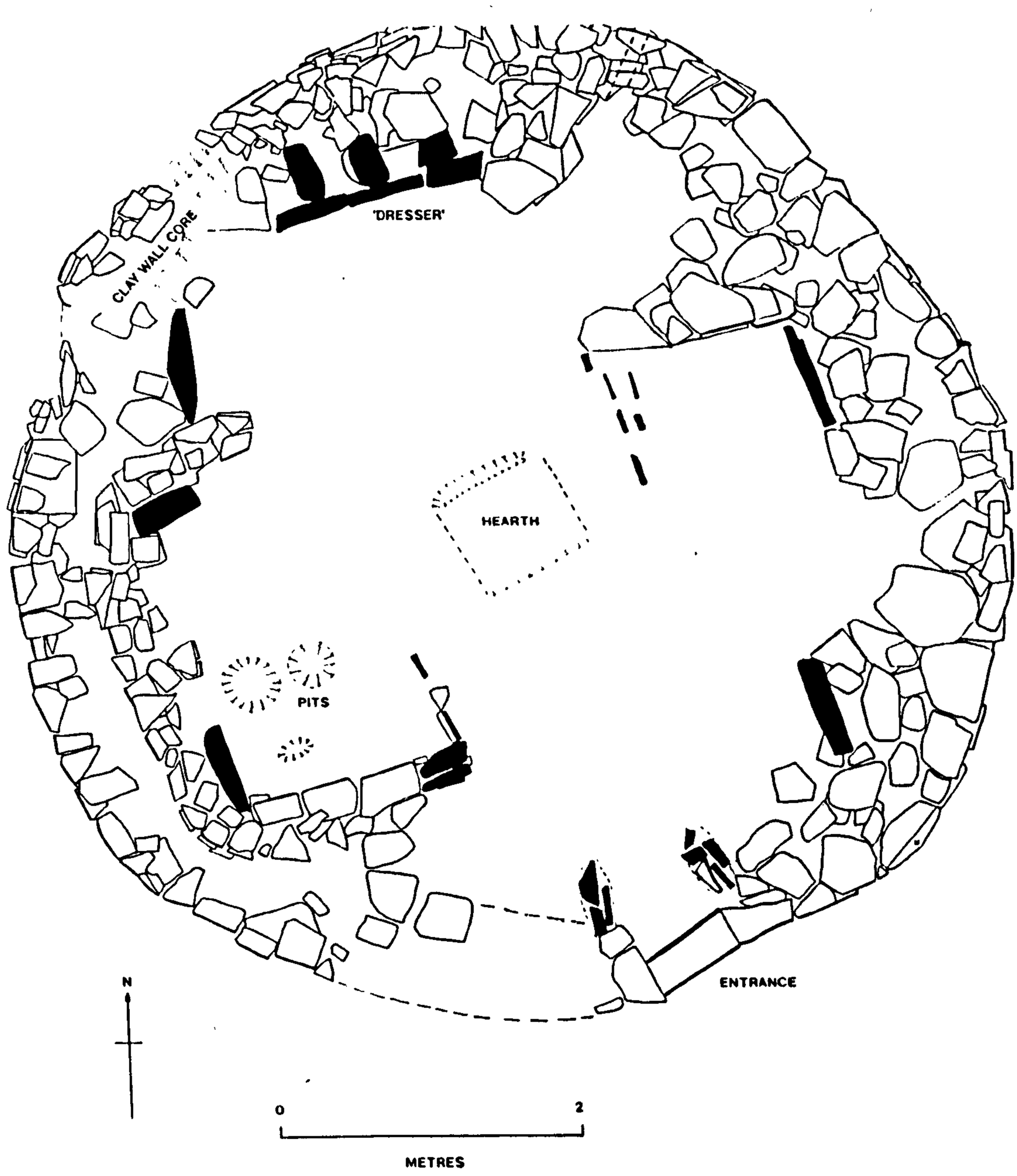


Figure 9:6. House 3.

practices of the inhabitants.

The constructional sequence of the house is of interest since it tends to support the proposed importance of cosmology (see chapter 6), in creating the ordered space within the dwelling. In all the houses excavated at Barnhouse a similar sequence is discernible. The initial act was the laying out and construction of the central hearth. A square cut was dug and the hearth stones wedged in place. The significance of the

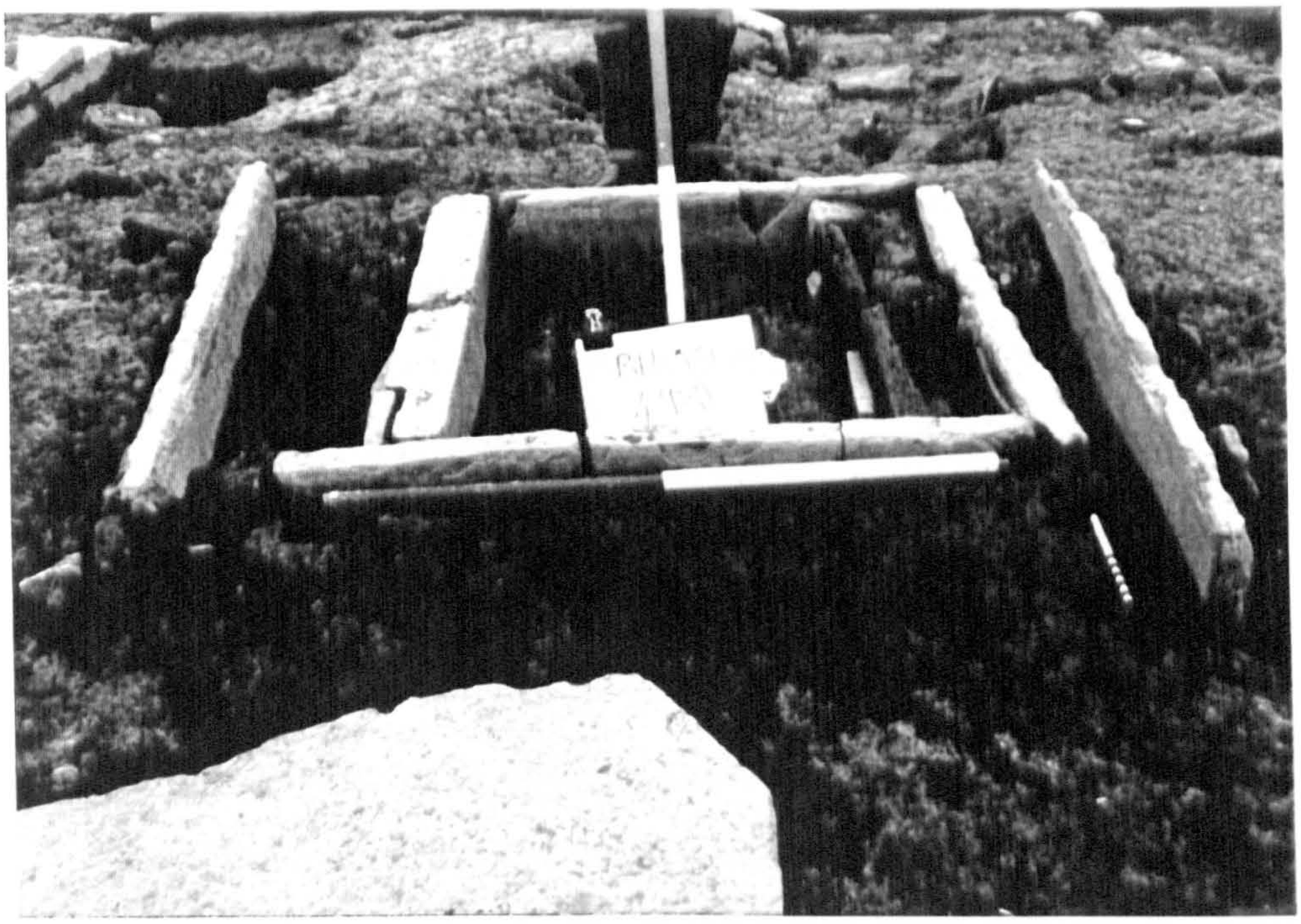


Figure 9:7. The eastern hearth in house 2.

hearth orientation was discussed in chapter 6, and it is at precisely this point in the construction sequence that this alignment is decided. Once built, the hearth then acts as a reference point for the entire house, since each side stone will correspond to an integral part of the interior architecture. The threshold slab is also laid down in a cut at this time determining the entrance orientation of the dwelling. An area of clay is then laid which acts as a foundation surface for the walls, this clay is laid up to the outer edge of the hearth slabs, sealing them in position. The walls of the house are then built up using a clay bank as a base cavity fill to prevent water entering the interior. The inner wall skin creates the interior architecture with the `dresser' or a recess at the rear, two stone boxes, partially set into the side walls, either side of the fireplace and a short entrance passage around the threshold upright. This process is most clearly demonstrated in House 3 (Fig 9:6). In view of this sequence, the hearth can be seen to be central to the constructional sequence in determining orientation, just as it will subsequently become central to the maintenance of life for the inhabitants.

In shifting attention to the overall organisation of the settlement, House 2, clearly

stands out as being different from the other houses and I wish to examine this building in some detail. Despite the apparent symmetry of interior architecture, the two halves of this building are quite different due to the internal division of space and the routes of movement within it. An account of the latter is provided in chapter 11, suffice is to note that on entry a series of upright stone divisional slabs, approximately 1.2 meters in height, restrict and control movement through the eastern half into the western area of the house. Thus, to gain access into the `deeper' area of House 2, a path is taken which forces the subject, after passing through the short entrance passage, to move directly forward past the western side of the hearth, between two upright posts which flank the stone cist cover, which has to be stepped on or over (Fig 6:2). Passing beyond the hearth another series of uprights guide the subject into the right hand side of the western half; an occurrence which conforms to the `correct' path of entry into all houses, as discussed in chapter 6. By creating this route through the house it is clear that different categories of significance are attached to what at first sight appears to be a symmetrical or equal division of space.

The hearth in the eastern half of House 2 may be approached from the entrance without any obstacle. The stone furniture associated with the square stone hearth suggest its primary function was for cooking. It is larger than the normal fireplaces in other houses and within its confines is the unique presence of a series of stone uprights running parallel to the southern end slab provide a shelf-like area on which food could have been cooked slowly or kept warm. The hearth is flanked by two long stone uprights, approximately one metre in length, which project 25cm above the clay floor. These would have been suitable to support a spit arrangement above the open fire (Fig 9:7).

The extensive use of this hearth is attested through the consistent re-flooring of the surrounding area by layers of yellow clay which seal thin lenses of ashy material. A series of small pits were dug adjacent to the hearth on its western side. High levels of phosphate recorded in the eastern half of House 2 (Z. Sannigar pers comm), reveal the presence of decayed organic matter, a situation also consistent with food preparation and cooking.

In the northern recess a large pit, cut into the natural clay till, has a drain running

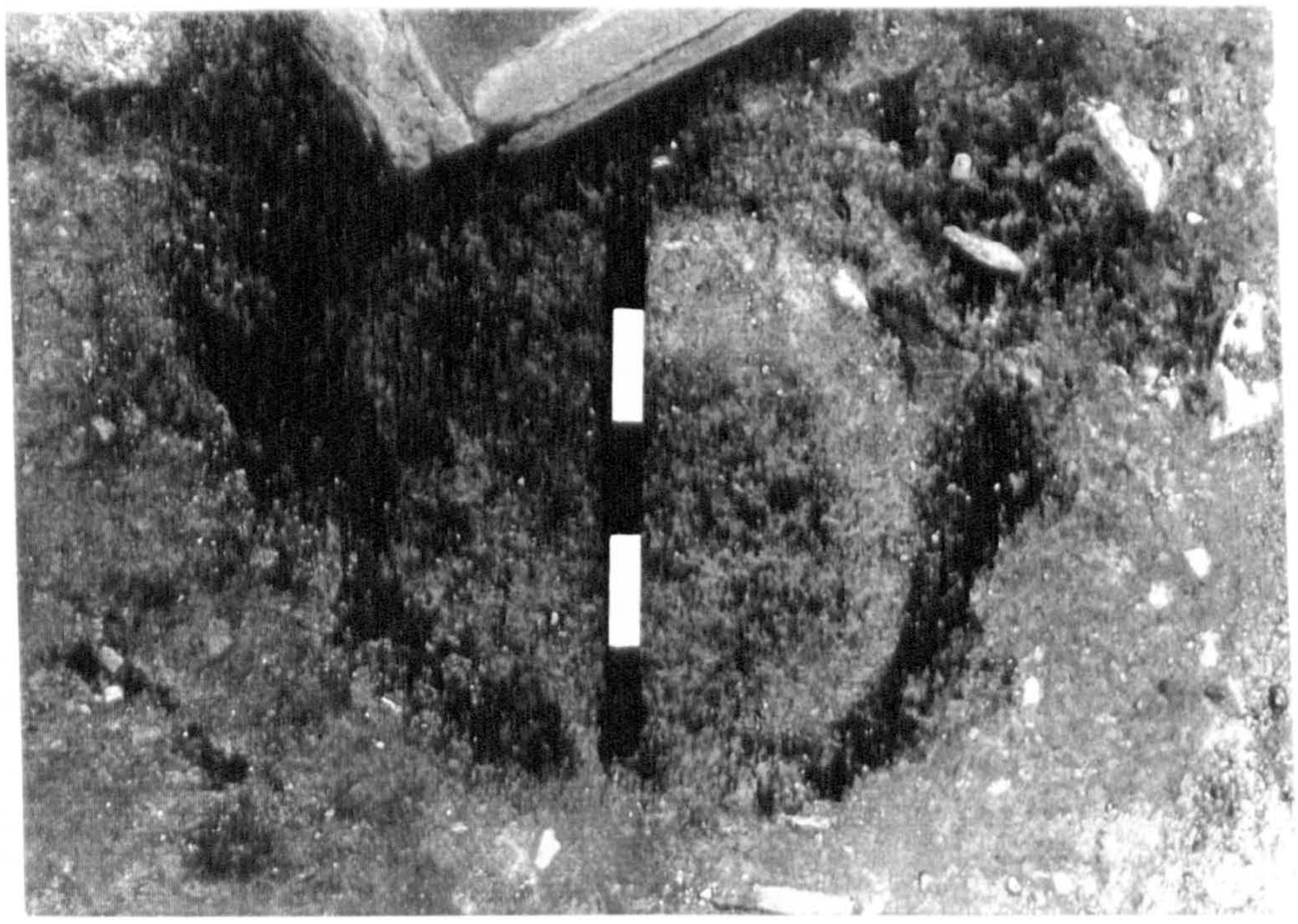


Figure 9:8. The oven or burning hollow adjacent to the western hearth in house 2.

from its upper lip out through the northern wall. Without further evidence it is difficult to determine what liquid filled this feature, however, the provision of a drain to carry the surplus out of the house, in order to avoid overflow onto the house floor, tends to suggest that materials were periodically immersed, causing the liquid level to rise. Also found within this recess were a number of sherds of two large Grooved ware vessels, presumably used for liquid containment or storage purposes. Other finds in the eastern half of the house included several retouched flints and a cluster of sherds from food preparation and cooking vessels situated to the south and east of the hearth.

The provision of a potential burial cist with its stone cover constituting part of the floor is of particular interest since it lay, in full view, on the pathway into the western half of House 2. Together with its flanking wooden posts it may have constituted a symbolic threshold into the inner area. The upper surface of the stone slab appeared smooth from wear. Certainly, after having stepped on or over this slab, between the two timber posts, the subject is confronted with a continuous series of stone partitioning to the left and right which from this point onwards only allows passage

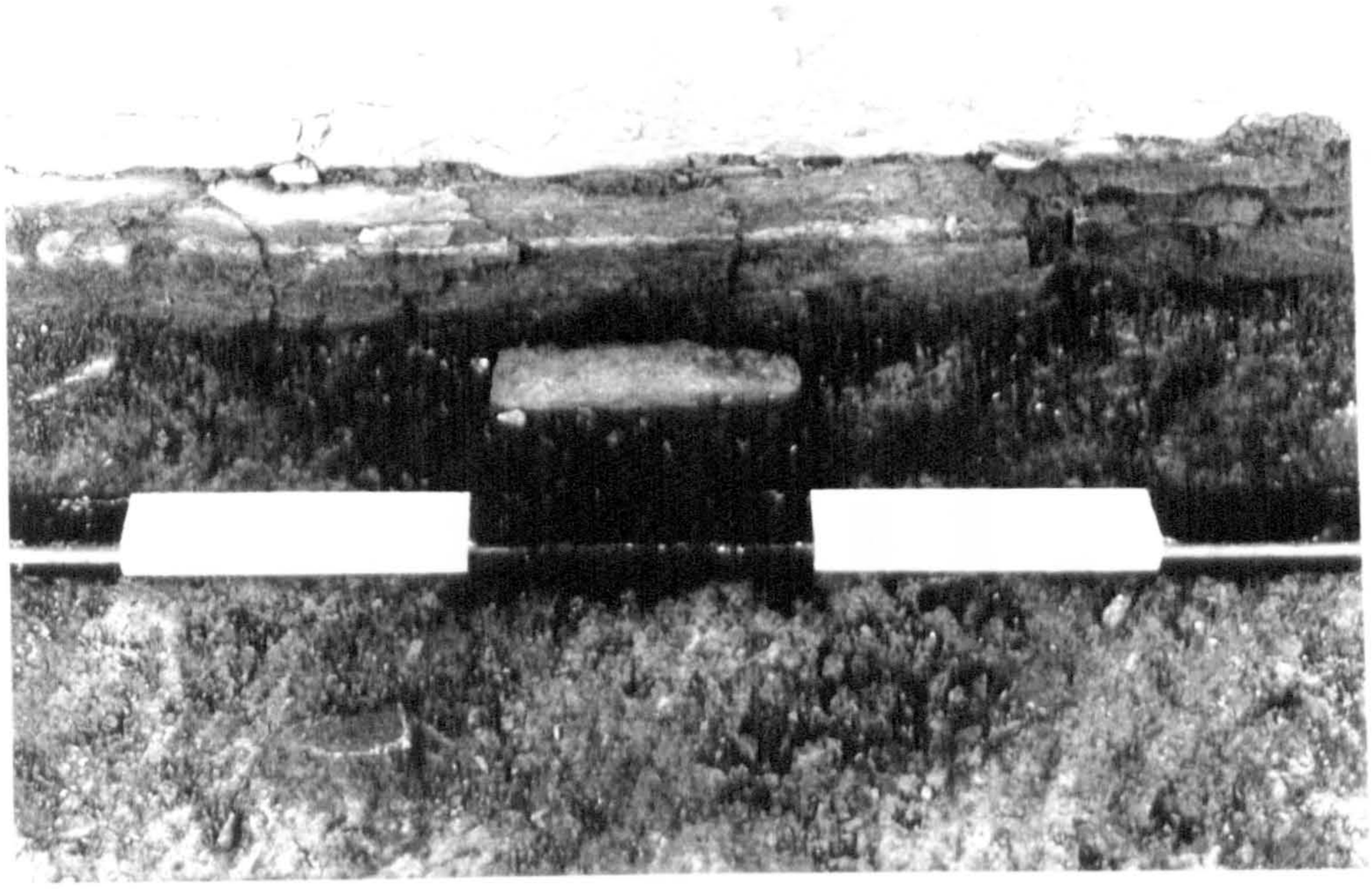


Figure 9:9. The polished chisel deposited adjacent to the eastern wall of house 2.

into the western half. As to the contents of the cist, on excavation a void was discovered beneath the cover-slab, which when lifted, a few minute fragments of decayed bone were detected at the base of the pit. Unfortunately these were too fragmentary to be recovered. However, I would suggest that due to the small size of the pit, if the contents were human remains, then either a small child or selected skeletal parts were present. All the evidence from the eastern area is consistent with its role being as a place for storage and cooking activities.

Like the eastern area, the western half of House 2 has a large central hearth, but here the similarity ends. None of the additional stone furniture is present and the hearth is of superior construction in having larger stone uprights creating a square shape and a large stone basal slab. A deep pit to the west may have contained a vessel and a more shallow charcoal lined hollow to the east may have acted as some form of oven, although this feature had subsequently been filled with clay to level the floor (Fig 9:8). Each recess was bounded by a stone upright and two were discovered in the southern recess. In the western recess, which would have constituted the rear to

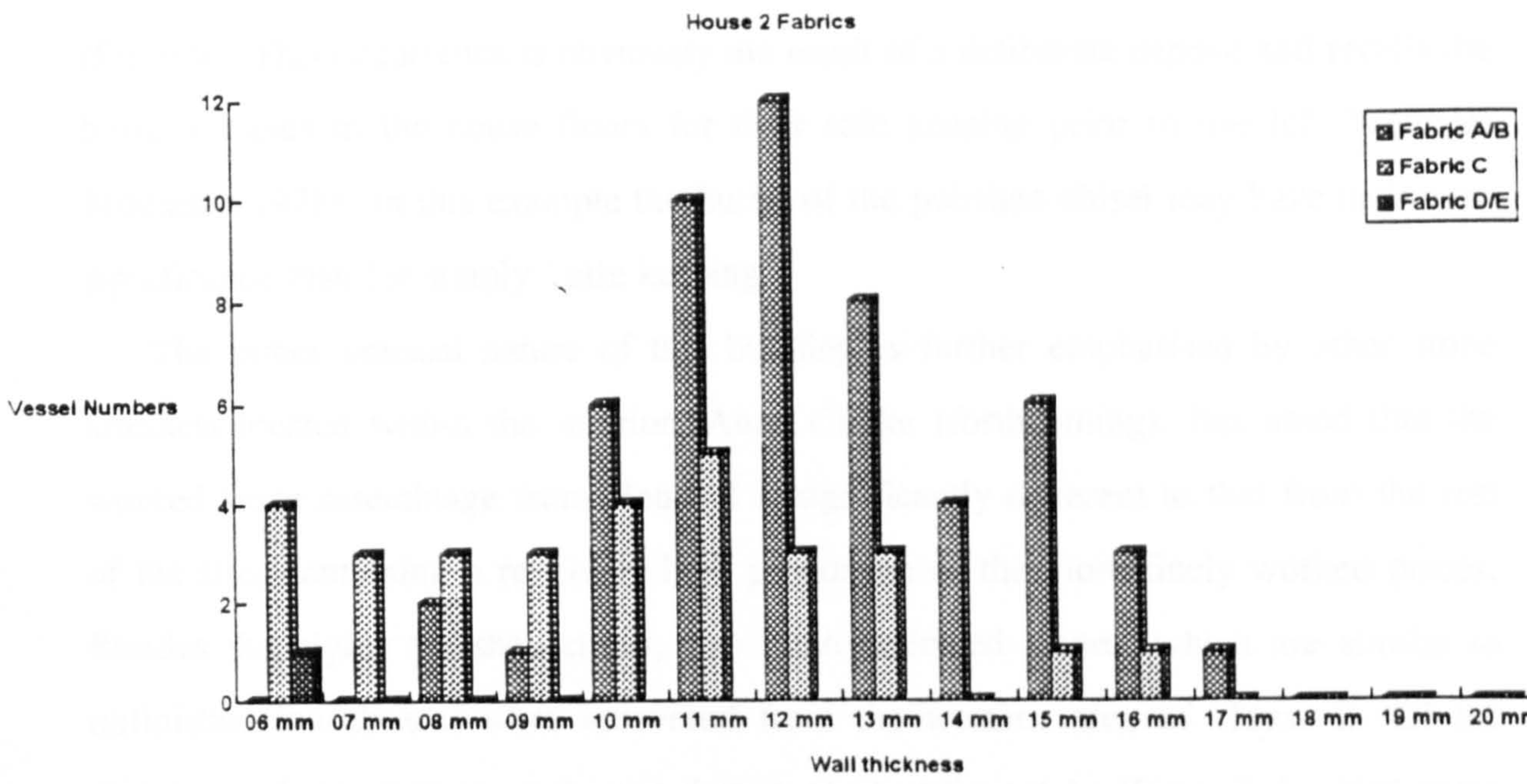


Figure 9:10. The range of size and fabric of Grooved ware from house 2.

anyone entering from the eastern half, a number of pits were dug. Some of these cuts may have acted as slots for a stone `dresser', however, others were certainly for depositional purposes.

Through a spread of burnt material, including charcoal and burnt bone, and higher magnetic susceptibility readings to the south and east of the central hearth (A. Challands pers comm), it is clear that ash was raked out from this side of the house. The majority of pottery was also recovered from this area with sherds from thinner walled serving vessels predominating in and around the hearth. Peripheral to this deposit, against the wall and the cut for the recess uprights, sherds from larger cooking vessels were located. Whilst some cooking does appear to have taken place within the western area of House 2, it seems likely that the majority of cooking took place in the eastern area and was subsequently brought into the western area for consumption.

Small scale feasting was not the only activity to take place within House 2. A number of stone artefacts were recovered from the interior. A complete polished stone

chisel was buried in the eastern recess of the eastern half, adjacent to the inner wall (Fig 9:9). This occurrence is obviously the result of a deliberate deposit and recalls the burial of axes in the house floors for their safe keeping prior to use (cf. White & Modjeska 1978). In this example the burial of the polished chisel may have had more significance than for simply `safe keeping'.

The rather unusual nature of this building is further emphasised by other stone artefacts located within the interior. Anne Clarke (forthcoming), has noted that the worked stone assemblage from House 2 is significantly different to that from the rest of the site, containing a relatively high proportion of the more finely worked pieces. Besides the highly polished chisel, two multi-hollowed stones, which are similar to unfinished maceheads, were recovered from the western area of House 2. Of the remaining three, two were deposited in contexts adjacent to House 2 (a third came from ploughsoil above Structure 8). Adding to the suspicion that `exotic' objects such as maceheads and carved stone balls were being manufactured within the western half of House 2, is the occurrence of a lump of red/black banded mudstone, deposited in the western recess, which as Clarke notes, is extremely similar to a broken macehead of the same material which was found in an ash heap between Houses 6 and 10 (*ibid*).

From the sophistication of masonry, similarities with passage grave architecture, and the elaborate arrangement of partitioning controlling movement, it is clear that House 2 is something other than an ordinary `dwelling'. Rather it appears to be a `special' place for gathering, small scale feasting and other specialised activities such as the manufacture of `exotic' objects. Architecturally, it is restrictive (see chapter 11), and may well have provided a context for certain ceremonial occasions, perhaps rites of passage for the living community. In this vein, the westerly situation of House 2, may be of pertinence given the proposed symbolic association between west:death and the final laying out and dressing of the corpse may have been undertaken within its confines. Again, the presence of a burial cist between two wooden uprights, in the position of a symbolic threshold, where it is directly observable and has to be passed over to gain access into the western area, testifies to the significance attached to this aspect the building. Moreover, for just one hour on midwinter morning, a beam of direct sunlight enters the doorway and illuminates the cist cover (Fig 11:7).

The range of size and fabric of the Grooved ware from House 2 demonstrates a fairly even spread of vessel function with no obvious specialization apparent (Fig 9:10). However, the presence of small sherds from large storage vessels, in the north-east recess is useful in determining the position such vessels assumed. The building appears to have remained fully operational for the entire two hundred year settlement span which, like Hut 7 at Skara Brae, effectively demonstrates its important nature.

The outer doorway of House 2 did not always open out into an open area, however, but for an unspecified period faced, across a narrow paved area, the north-westerly orientated doorway of House 9. The entrance to House 9 was, therefore, directly opposite that of House 2 and it may be suggested that through such intimate association, the two houses were related in some manner. Unfortunately, House 9 was very ruinous with only a small sector of its outer wall remaining (Fig 9:2). A drainage ditch marked its perimeter. The interior was of similar size and layout to the smaller dwellings and this house may have served the same role. Little remained of the internal furniture, with only the central square stone hearth present. An ash spread lay to the left of the hearth and sherds of highly decorated thin-walled, food serving vessels were recovered from the hearth and the ash spread. Two large pits, which on excavation proved to be empty, were located either side of the hearth, towards the rear of the house. Clearly the two buildings are associated in some manner, however, whether the occupants of House 9, due to their close proximity to House 2, were of a different social position is difficult to determine.

Although maintaining slight differences in construction, the other houses at Barnhouse tend to be fairly uniform in size and layout. Particular differences may relate to a variation in building practices by different family groups. Almost certainly, with the exception of House 2, each house represents a dwelling. Whether entire families occupied each house is impossible to determine since during the cycles of family life the occupants and their social standing will continually alter. An estimate of resident numbers is similarly problematic since it revolves around precarious calculations of social space and the definite assignment of the left and right stone boxes, within each house, as beds. For example, these would be equally effective as storage boxes and would maintain a fairly low and stable temperature (J. Hill pers.

comm.). This also assumes a consistency of function which is a proposition difficult to maintain in the face of the evidence. Even if it was possible to designate each stone box as a `bed', there remains differing accounts of the sleeping capacity of a box-beds of similar scale. Historical reports of entire families numbering up to seven individuals, sleeping in a single box-bed are not uncommon. Alternatively, when Childe interpreted the Skara Brae houses (1931, 183), he drew on information from the Hebredean Blackhouses to suggest their occupation by individuals of different gender. Even an estimate based upon the number of ceramic vessels required by a family group is fraught with danger since there is variation in the ethnographically derived data, a problem of determining the period of occupation and a likely inconsistency in patterns of discard between households. In short, it is extremely difficult to present a figure of household size, it is obvious that the maximum number of individuals living within a house is around 7-8, however, there could easily have been less, and almost certainly would have been under differing family circumstances.

It is clear that the key to interpreting many aspect of the Barnhouse settlement and the lives of its inhabitants depends on a critical understanding of depositional practices. As items of human creation, `things' have lives of useful existence before being finally discarded. Obviously, these vary considerably between objects, however, any consistency is determined by culturally determined principles of classification.

Depositional practices are extremely complex and even excluding the natural processes which move, sort, change and destroy evidence (Schiffer 1976), archaeologists have to accept that people do not always conform to normative cultural rules. This fact should be apparent to anyone who has excavated on an archaeological site, and is obvious to those who have undertaken any form of ethnoarchaeology. However, while conceding that a certain blurring will be present in the spatial distribution of material remains across a settlement, consistent practices of deposition should be discernible. A further point to make is that our conception of waste or rubbish is not necessarily translatable into the past. In fact we spatially differentiate between different forms of rubbish, and in other cultures `waste' material is not necessarily conceived in uniform terms, for instance, Moore (1986, 102), notes the distinction made between different categories of rubbish and how they are exclusively

deposited in a settlement context. A different example from Bali shows that when certain material is exposed to impurity, for instance the ceramics used in a cremation ceremony, it must be destroyed and deposited within the cremation area, since it is now considered to be polluted and in some sense ritually `charged'.

At Barnhouse different categories of rubbish are discernible, however, to delve below the mere patterning of material residues, I suggest we have to incorporate the cosmologically derived schemes of classification and order discussed, in relation to architectural representation, in chapter 6. I would also like to introduce the notion of material objects having some form of `life'. As with human life, cultural artefacts are created, used and discarded. This could be conceived as birth, life and death. Just as the residues of birth, in the form of the placenta, are in many societies buried in close proximity to the place of birth, so material objects are created and their place of manufacture spatially marked through waste material. The useful `life-span' of an object becomes synonymous with the social practices in which it is used and on its breakage it is deposited or `buried' according to prescribed rules of social classification.

I have continually stressed the significance of the central hearth within the house. Opposition and balance about this central point is suggested to form the basis of an elaborate late Neolithic cosmological scheme of order. The important aspect of centrality in regard to material depositional strategies is the association with transformation and thus, creation. In the house the hearth occupies this important position, and as a place of fire, with all its transformational properties, represents a physical and symbolic sustainer of life. Through the homologous spatial structure of the settlement, transformation also occurs within the centre.

In the central area of Barnhouse a number of different activities are recognisable due to their material residues. These activities all involve the creation of cultural artefacts from natural materials. After the abandonment of House 7, the southern portion of the central area is devoted to ceramic production; a clay pit is associated with an area of burning, piles of ash, burnt clay and broken pottery (Fig 9:11). Large amounts of a slag-like substance known as `cramp', considered to be the residue of high temperature burning, were also recovered from this vicinity of the central area.

Figure 9:11. The central area of Barnhouse showing site of pottery manufacture.

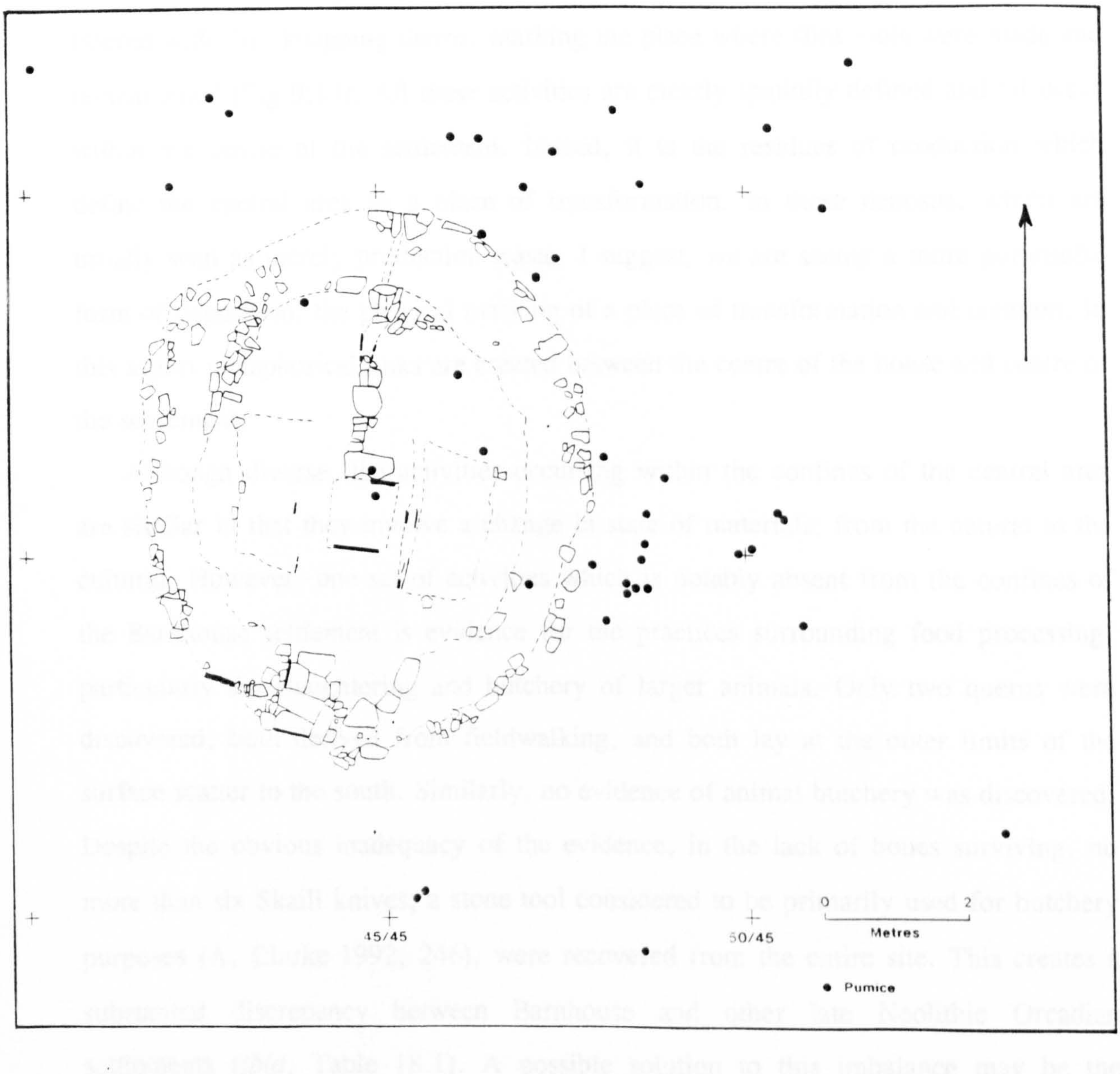


Figure 9:12. The spatial distribution of worked pumice in house 6 and the central area.

Extremely high magnetic susceptibility readings show the centre of burning to have been above a small platform of stone slabs (A. Challands pers comm), presumably laid down as a base on which to place ceramic vessels for firing. Further north, a spread of smoothed and grooved pumice, associated with House 6, marks an area devoted to bone and hide working (Fig 9:12). To the north-east, another clearly defined area is littered with flint knapping debris, marking the place where flint tools were made and re-sharpened (Fig 9:13). All these activities are clearly spatially defined and all occur within the centre of the settlement. Indeed, it is the residues of production which define the central area as a place of transformation. In these deposits, which are usually seen as merely production waste, I suggest, we are seeing a more purposeful form of deposition; the physical marking of a place of transformation and creation. In this aspect metaphorical links are created between the centre of the house and centre of the settlement.

Although diverse, the activities occurring within the confines of the central area are similar in that they involve a change in state of materials; from the natural to the cultural. However, one set of activities which is notably absent from the confines of the Barnhouse settlement is evidence for the practices surrounding food processing, particularly the slaughtering and butchery of larger animals. Only two querns were discovered, both derived from fieldwalking, and both lay at the outer limits of the surface scatter to the south. Similarly, no evidence of animal butchery was discovered. Despite the obvious inadequacy of the evidence, in the lack of bones surviving, no more than six Skaill knives; a stone tool considered to be primarily used for butchery purposes (A. Clarke 1992, 246), were recovered from the entire site. This creates a substantial discrepancy between Barnhouse and other late Neolithic Orcadian settlements (*ibid*, Table 18.1). A possible solution to this imbalance may be the presence of butchery sites outside the limits of settlement. This situation is effectively demonstrated at Skara Brae where a recently discovered butchery site in Skaill Bay lies approximately 90 metres south of the main area of habitation (Fig 9:14). Again the waste material, including substantial numbers of Skaill knives, is left *in-situ* to physically mark the `place'.

In this segregation of activities we see the spatial definition of different categories

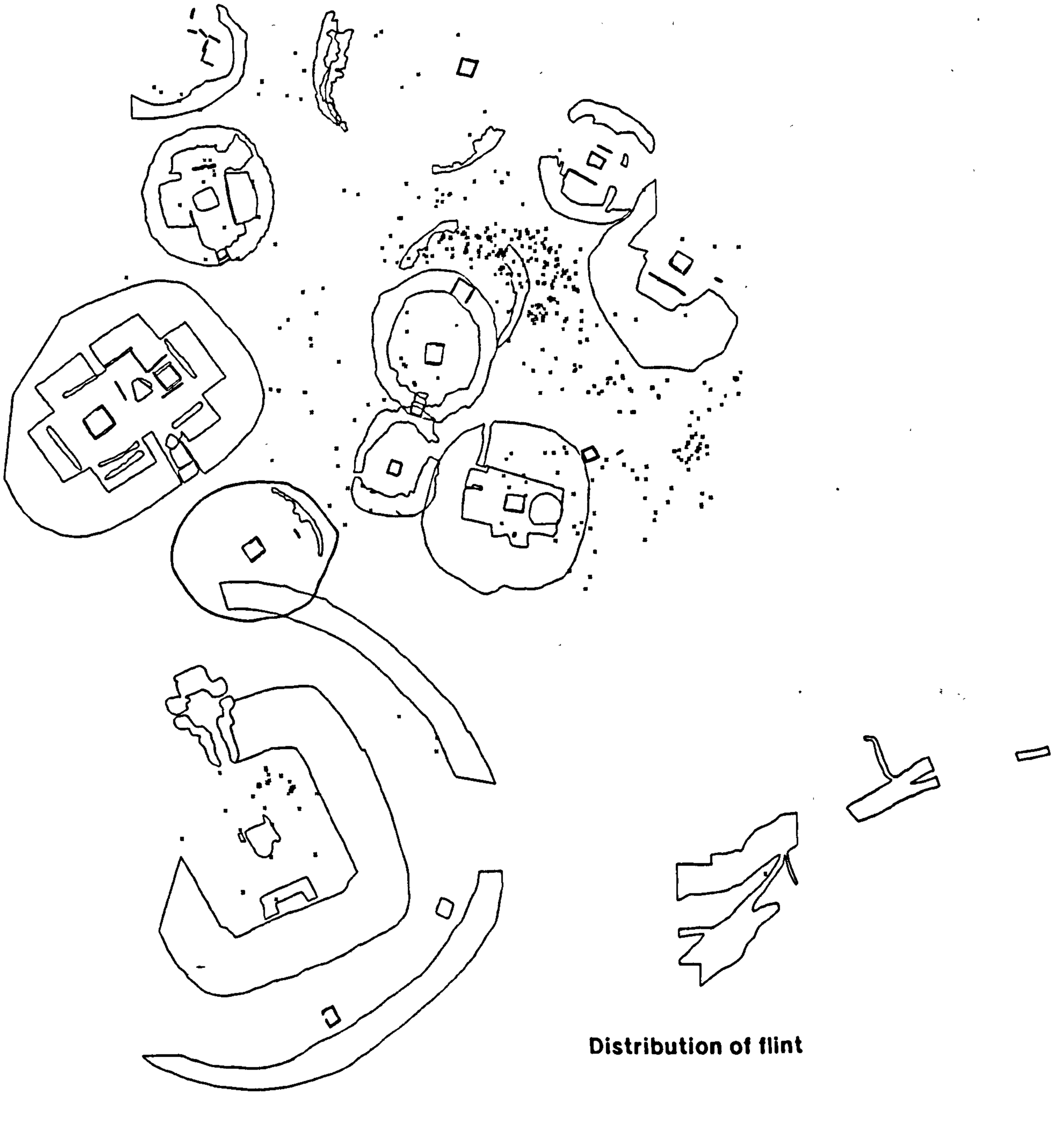


Figure 9:13. The spatial distribution of flint at Barnhouse (early period).

of things. The inhabitants of Barnhouse appear to make a spatial and conceptual distinction between the activities involving the transformation (and death) of living things, undertaken away from the area of habitation, and the transformation of inert

material, undertaken in the central area.

The active `lives' of different materials are within the contexts of daily social practices and the material residues of these activities are extremely limited. They do, however, sustain the lives of the Neolithic inhabitants. Within several of the houses at Barnhouse the presence of ash deposits and high magnetic susceptibility readings provides evidence of ash being raked out from the left-hand side. This portion of the house interior is suggested to be the place of food preparation and cooking activities. It could also be the area devoted to activities performed by women. Judging from the supposed cosmological scheme in operation in late Neolithic Orkney, it also carries connotations of impurity, particularly those associated with death. This view is consistent with the left side being the `kitchen' area where blood is spilled from animals; an occurrence generating a degree of impurity to the family dwelling. In view of this particular spatial organisation within the house, it is interesting to note that in the central area of the settlement, if south-east is associated with beginnings, entry, etc, all the activities mentioned above are also restricted to the left hand side.

Because all the world is classified to some degree, as materials are altered through cultural transforms, so their categorisation changes also. These classifications, however, are neither simple nor unitary. For instance, all ceramics are formed of clay, thus for Neolithic people (and archaeologists) they fall within in single class of material. This basic scheme may, and quite probably was, overlain by classification according to use. In the light of this complexity, there are two processes of material deposition which I wish to introduce. The first concerns when the breakage or end of use of material culture provokes a fundamentally altered image of that material (this may be more pronounced when it involves a change of state, for instance, the change in fuel from wood to ash). Secondly, if the material, although in a broken or different condition, remains securely classified according to its prior use. The reason these possible different attitudes to redundant material has been raised is that they may well result in different depositional practices and associations. Of course, these are two extremes or ideals of what may have occurred in the past and neither is necessarily exclusive. Looking at the forms of deposition occurring at Barnhouse, however, it is suggested that both practices were in operation.

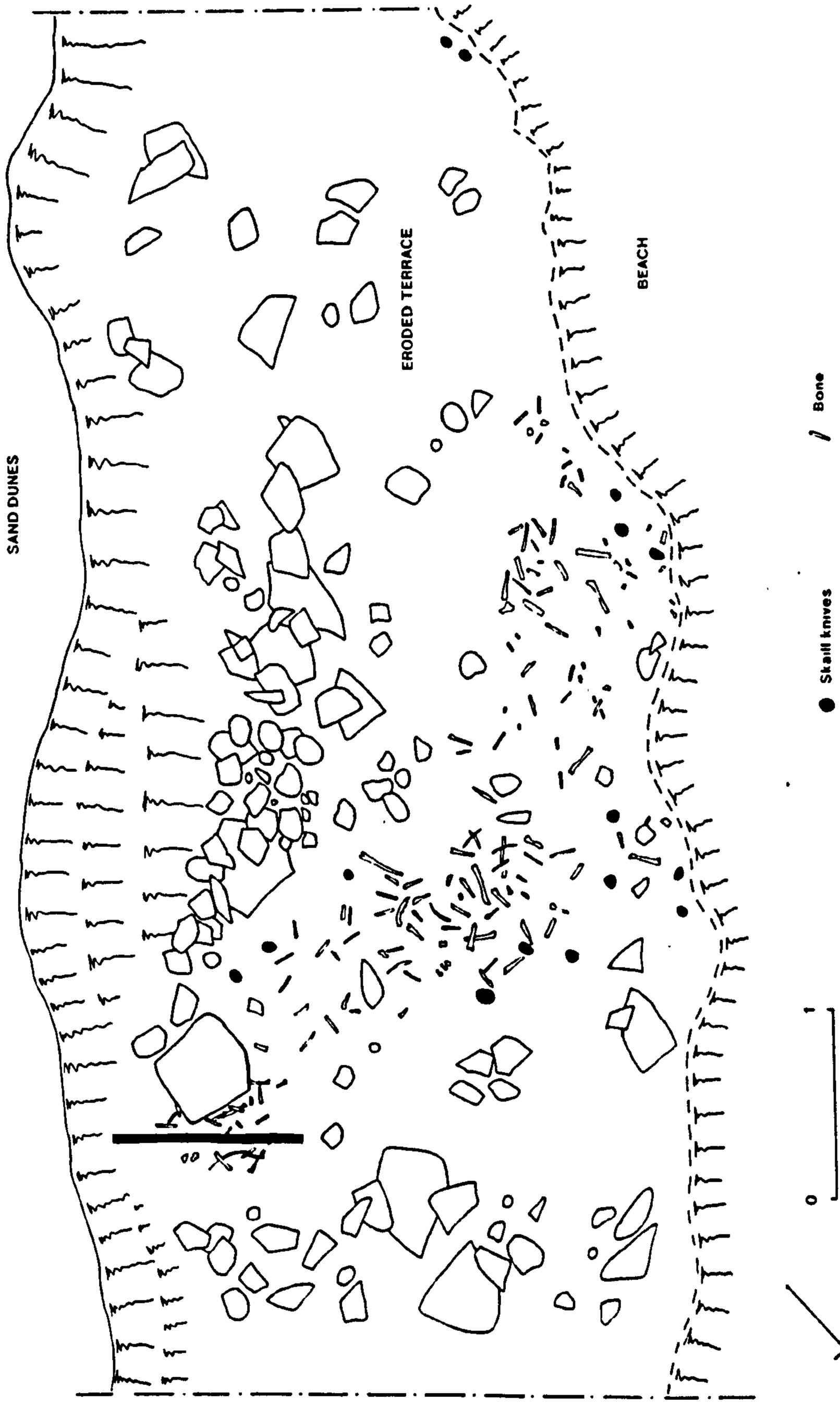


Figure 9:14. Plan of the butchery site at Skaill Bay (note the Skaill knives littered about the working area).

The absence of faunal remains creates a severe limitation on the understanding of depositional rules. However, the ceramic evidence, drawing on the differentiation of vessel function posited in the previous chapter, does provide a basis for examining certain areas of structured deposition within the settlement.

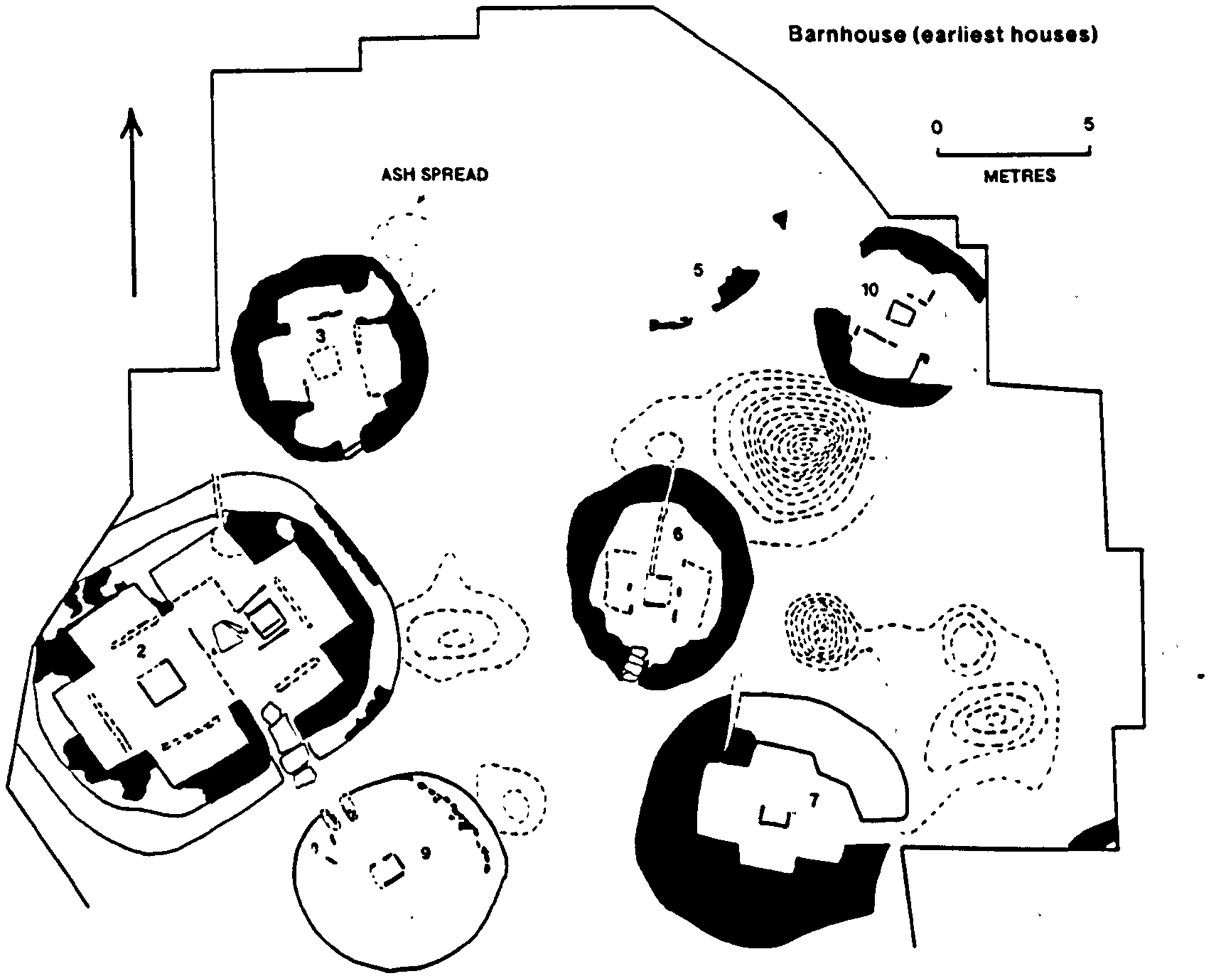


Figure 9:15. Ash deposits at Barnhouse located by contouring burnt bone weight (contours at 4 gramme intervals).

Through a combination of contextual analysis and contouring the amount of burnt bone per metre square, it is possible to identify the position of ash heaps within the settlement (Fig 9:15). Although these vary throughout the duration of settlement, they are all either banked up against the outside wall of individual houses or in close proximity. Hence, each house had its own ash heap with a tendency for it to be dumped against the eastern wall of the dwelling. The two major ash heaps in the

centre of the settlement, although associated with Houses 6 and 10, are also of significance since these are much larger than those of other houses and there must remain the possibility that ash and the debris from cooking was, on particular occasions, purposefully deposited in this central location. Included with the ash was Grooved ware pottery. A detailed examination of the pottery reveals the range of fabrics concur with those attributed to food preparation, cooking and food serving vessels (see chapter 8) (Fig 9:19). Thus, it appears that no differentiation was made between these vessels for depositional purposes. Indeed, the waste material from activities surrounding cooking seems to have been categorized together; this includes the ash periodically raked out of the fire.

The notable ceramic absentee from the ash heaps is the larger liquid/storage containers (fabric b). These were certainly present within the houses as the small sherds from House's 2 and 3 clearly demonstrate. When sherds from these vessels are plotted out we find the focal points of discard are behind the rear wall of House 3 and an outer ditch located in Area 2 (Fig 9:17). A second ditch found in an extension trench to the west of the settlement also solely contained sherds of this class. Hence, after breakage, large vessels are selectively deposited at the perimeter of the settlement.

Interestingly, not only are the larger vessels segregated, but they are positioned beyond the limits of habitation, since at this time, House 3, marked the northern periphery of settlement, and the western and southern ditches defined the area of settlement in their respective directions. Hence, the larger pots are deposited out-side the settlement confines. This final place of deposition marks and completes an interesting journey beginning with their manufacture (birth) in the central area. Their active use (life) is within the house, in the intermediate area of habitation. On breakage (death), the sherds are collected up and deposited at the periphery of the settlement; outside the area of habitation. In following this spatial route which charts the `life' of these pots it is striking how similar it is to the spatial/temporal passage of the life and death of a late Neolithic person.

Preliminary residue analysis of these vessels reveals the presence of wax or blubber (A. Jones pers. comm.).

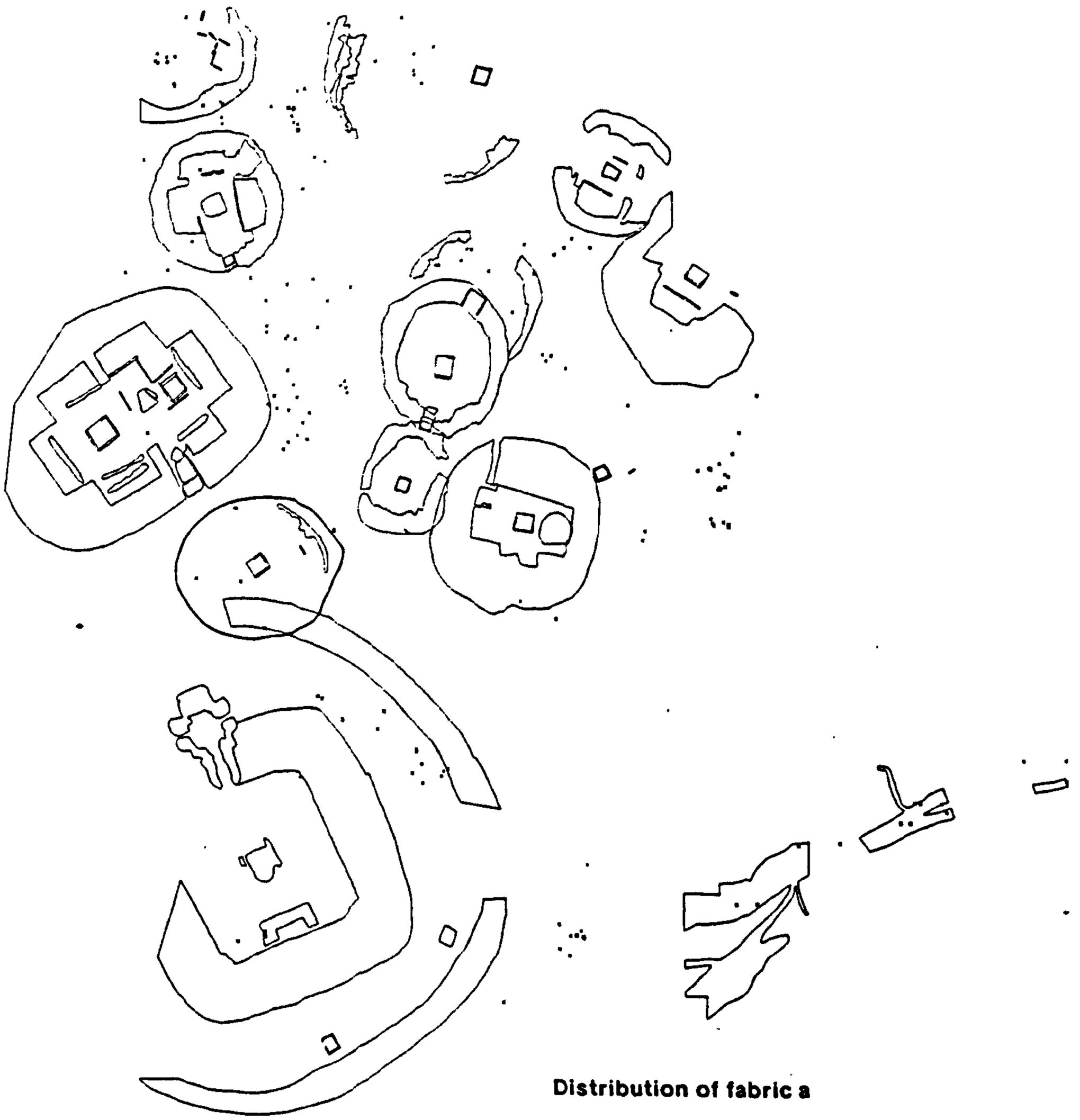


Figure 9:16. Plot of distribution of Grooved ware fabric a (food prearation/cooking vessels).

These results suggest that fats were stored within larger vessels or more likely, these substances were for internally sealing the pots for liquid containment. Whichever, interpretation is accepted, these pots appear to be discriminated in terms of the context of deposition and that certain vessels were classified differently according to their previous use; probably on the basis of the substance they contained.

In these depositional practices we see certain classifications in action, but of slightly different nature; the associated deposition of smaller vessels with ash (Figs 9:15, 16, 18), representing the remains of cooking and other household tasks, are

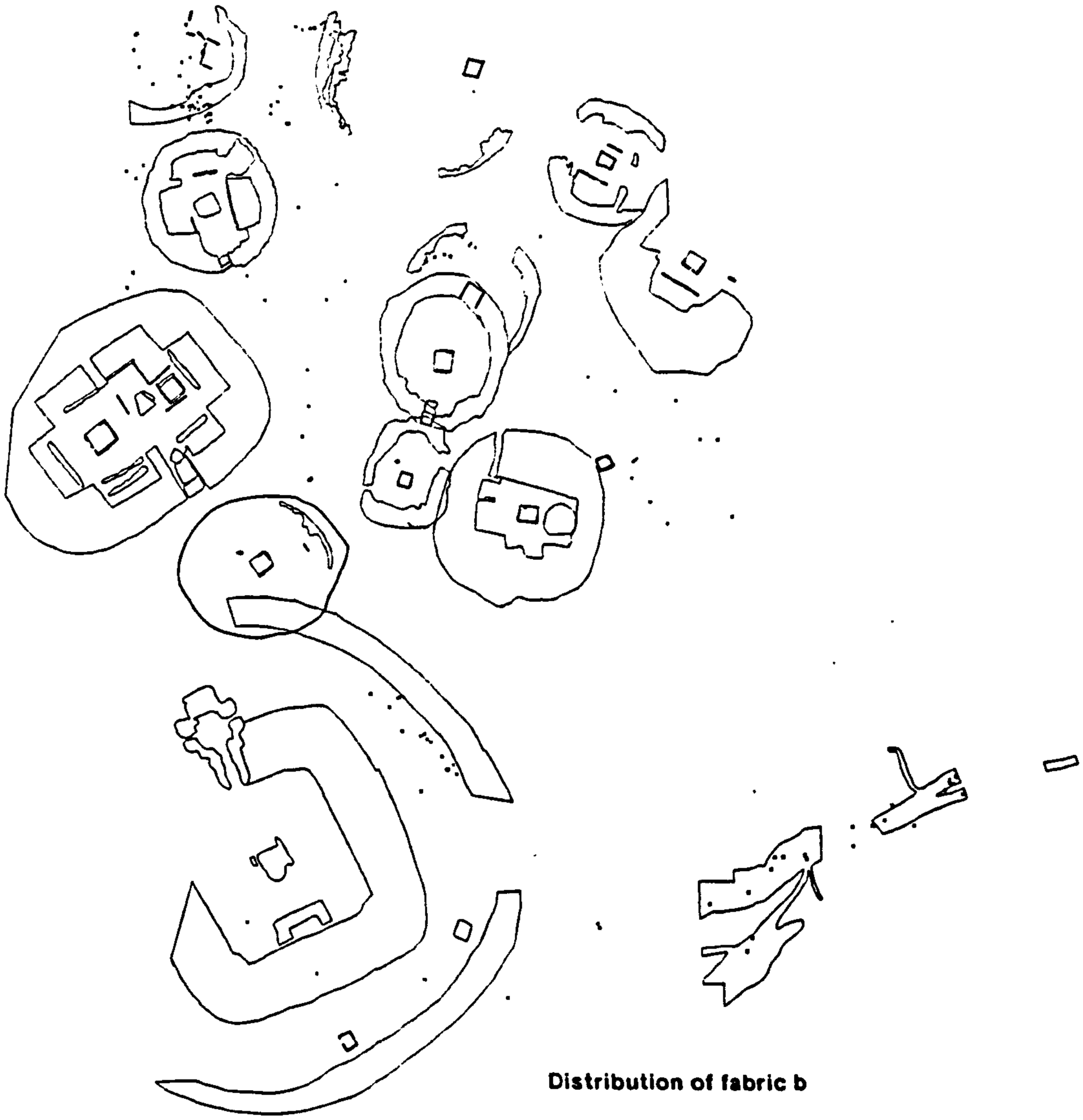


Figure 9:17. Distribution of Grooved ware fabric b (storage vessels).

`dumped' *against* the outer wall of individual houses or in the northern portion of the central area. This effectively links certain domestic refuse with family units in a fairly intimate manner, however, certain classes of material, such as large vessels, were deemed appropriate to be placed away from their context of use (Fig 9:17). Given this opposition between centre and periphery, we may posit the contents and use of these vessels may have been the determining factor.

I now wish to develop the idea of the household and its self definition, as suggested by the discrete dumping of ash and pottery. In the previous chapter,

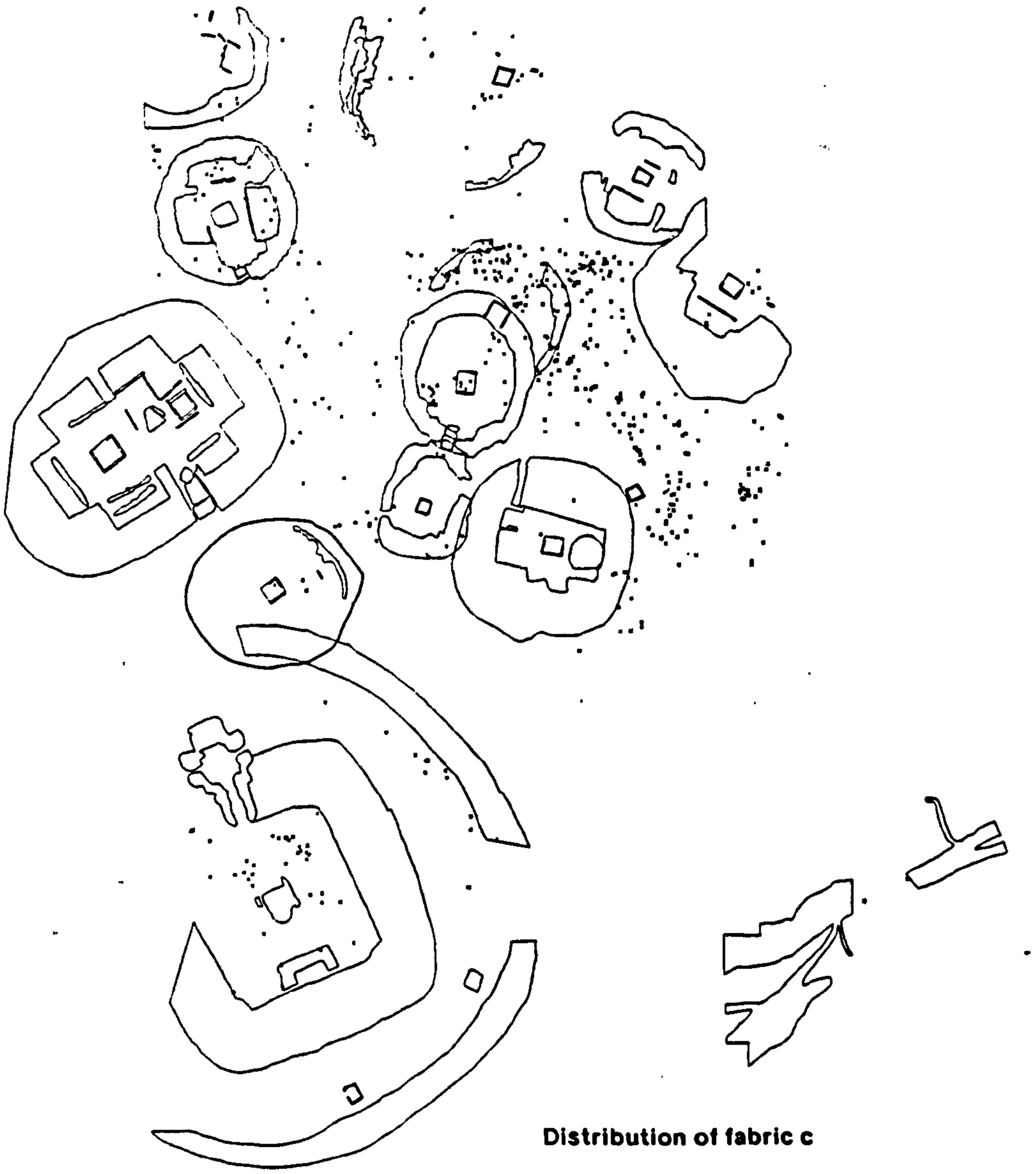


Figure 9:18. Distribution of Grooved ware fabric c (food preparation/cooking vessels).

different fabric types were identified which tended to conform to different sizes of vessel. However, in the range of vessels considered to be used for food preparation and cooking an overlap was noted between shell and stone temper, hence both fabrics appear to have been used for the same purpose. If these fabrics are plotted out across the site, a spatial distinction in their distribution becomes apparent. Certainly in the earlier period of Barnhouse, the shell tempered fabric `C' predominates in the central area of the settlement (Figs 9:18 & 19), while the stone tempered fabric `A' (Fig 9:16), and `B' (Fig 9:17), becomes more common towards the periphery. Given that

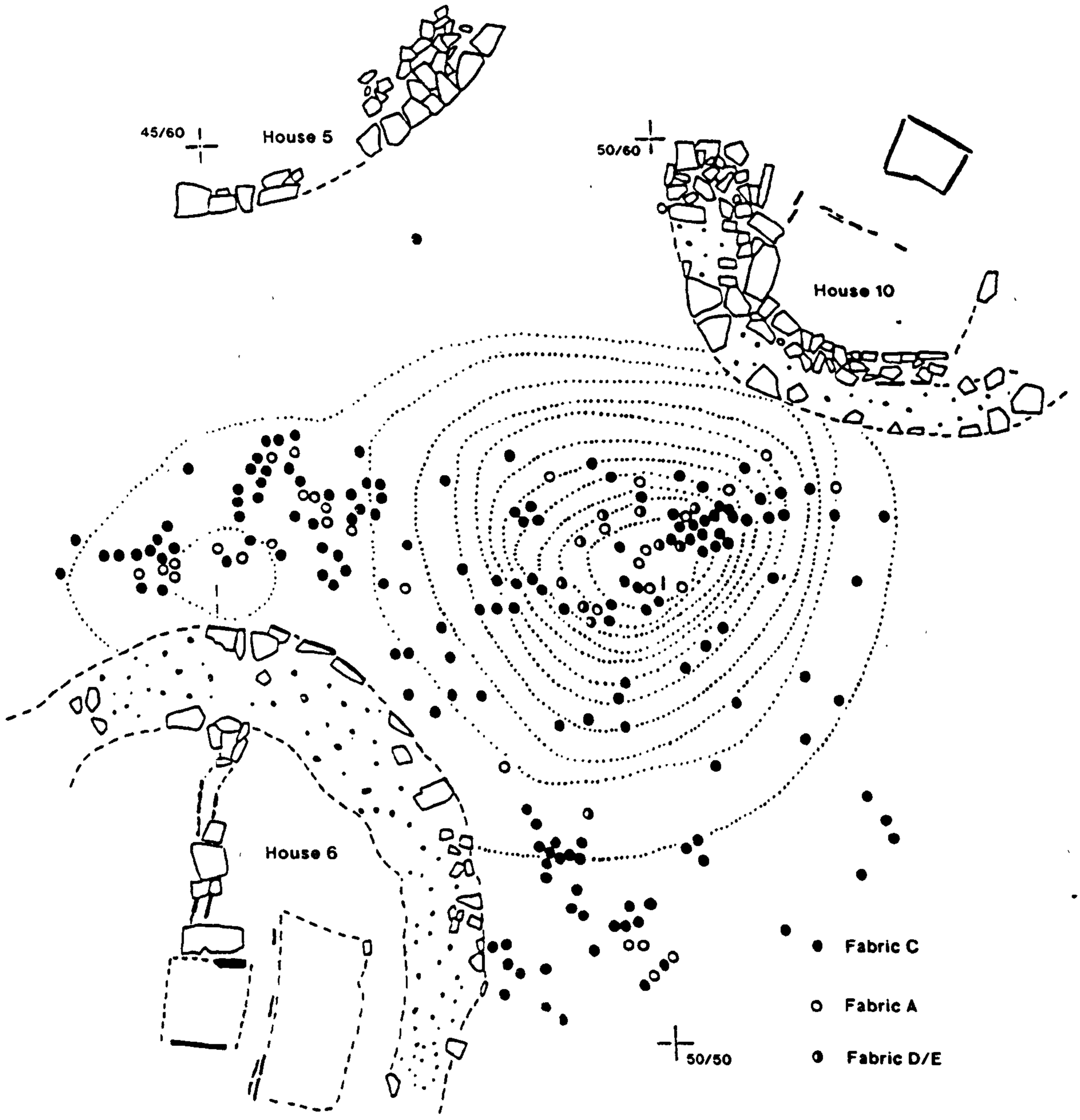


Figure 9:19. Range of Grooved ware fabrics associated with ash heaps in the central area.

the majority of pottery comes from the ash heaps associated with individual houses, it would seem as if different households are using identical looking pots, both in size, function and decoration, but employ different methods of production.

This difference in clay preparation may be interpreted as representing the variation in traditional pottery making between family units or simply exchange between family groups with a production source beyond Barnhouse. Either way, it does demonstrate the unity of the household and kin affiliation. This may explain the distinction between family groups, however, it does not address the notable distinction between centre and

periphery within the settlement. As the whole site has not been excavated we have to accept the incomplete picture of the evidence, nevertheless, if this patterning is representative then some form of concentric spatial organisation of residence seems extremely likely. Such spatial organisation of a village is not uncommon in the anthropological literature (e.g. Levi-Strauss 1977, 132-53), and is a manifestation of a number of different forms of social organisation. In the context of Barnhouse, it is certainly consistent with the overall cosmological scheme of an emphasis on centrality and concentricity.

A further aspect of material culture to be examined involves the wider exchange and contacts between the inhabitants of Barnhouse and other groups. As was noted in chapter 8, the presence of passage grave art, both within passage graves and on other forms of material culture, demonstrates contacts beyond Orkney. However, the material assemblages from the excavated settlements of Skara Brae, Rinyo and Pool, include no materials derived from beyond the local context. This is not the case at Barnhouse where a number of pieces of Arran pitchstone were recovered, mainly from the earlier period of occupation. This material is likely to have been exchanged between groups residing along the western seaboard, which is also consistent with the suspected links with Ireland. Since the settlement at Barnhouse is destined to become surrounded by a number of monumental constructions, it is tempting to see this material as evidence for the inhabitants maintaining and controlling exchange networks with groups beyond Orkney. Bradley (1984, 57-67), has suggested that a series of exchange systems networks were in operation at this time and that Orkney represented one of several `core' areas. While broader exchange networks may have been in operation, it appears that in Orkney, access to such `exotic' material was strictly controlled, and the occupants of Barnhouse represent one group who were locked into such an external exchange network. As will be discussed in chapter 12, this control over material resources appears to become increasingly important through time.

Local exchange networks would have also been central to the social relations between kin groups. The different ceramic types have already been discussed in these terms, however, a number of other materials would also have been in general circulation. The pumice at Barnhouse is only obtainable from the beaches, as was the

majority of flint (cf Wickham-Jones & Collins 1978). Indeed, different materials were only available at certain locations along the coastline. The igneous rock used for polished stone axes and maceheads also has a fairly restricted distribution in the form of dykes running across the islands. Although the materials in use at Barnhouse were mainly local to Orkney, it is clear that through controlled access to their procurement, rights and obligations were established between communities.

I have described certain aspects of the evidence from Barnhouse in order to build up a picture of everyday life within the settlement. Clearly, strong kinship ties were in operation within a highly structured organisation of residence. Similarly, the noted restriction of decorative motifs on the Grooved ware to individual settlements, in conjunction with the exclusive presence of pitchstone at Barnhouse, suggests the local community to have been an important element of social life. The size of the villages prohibits endogamy and we can posit the existence of kinship networks and exchange systems linking and ranking communities throughout the different Islands.

The faunal evidence derived from burnt bone at Barnhouse concurs with other assemblages from Skara Brae (Watson 1931) and Links of Noltland (M. Armour-Chelu pers comm), in showing sheep to be predominant over cattle. Cereal cultivation does not appear to have been an important element in the subsistence economy, as only two grinding stones were recovered from Barnhouse and the quantity of charred barley grains recovered was minimal, numbering less than forty. Pollen evidence from the nearby Stones of Stenness (Caseldine & Whittington 1976), does include some evidence for cultivation, but this is best interpreted as the presence of a small infield system surrounding the Barnhouse settlement. Such a situation is directly observable at the late Neolithic settlement at Bay of Stove, Sanday. Here, exposed in the cliff section, a buried soil horizon stretching 50 metres beyond the settlement, represents a cultivated soil which is enhanced by burned material (presumably ash from the settlement). Infield cultivation is a practice also noted at both the late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age settlements at Tofts Ness, Sanday (S. Dockrill pers. comm.).

Thus we can envisage daily routines of taking the animals out each day and craft activities occurring within the house and in the central area of settlement. Gender specific activities almost certainly occurred and if women tended to perform the

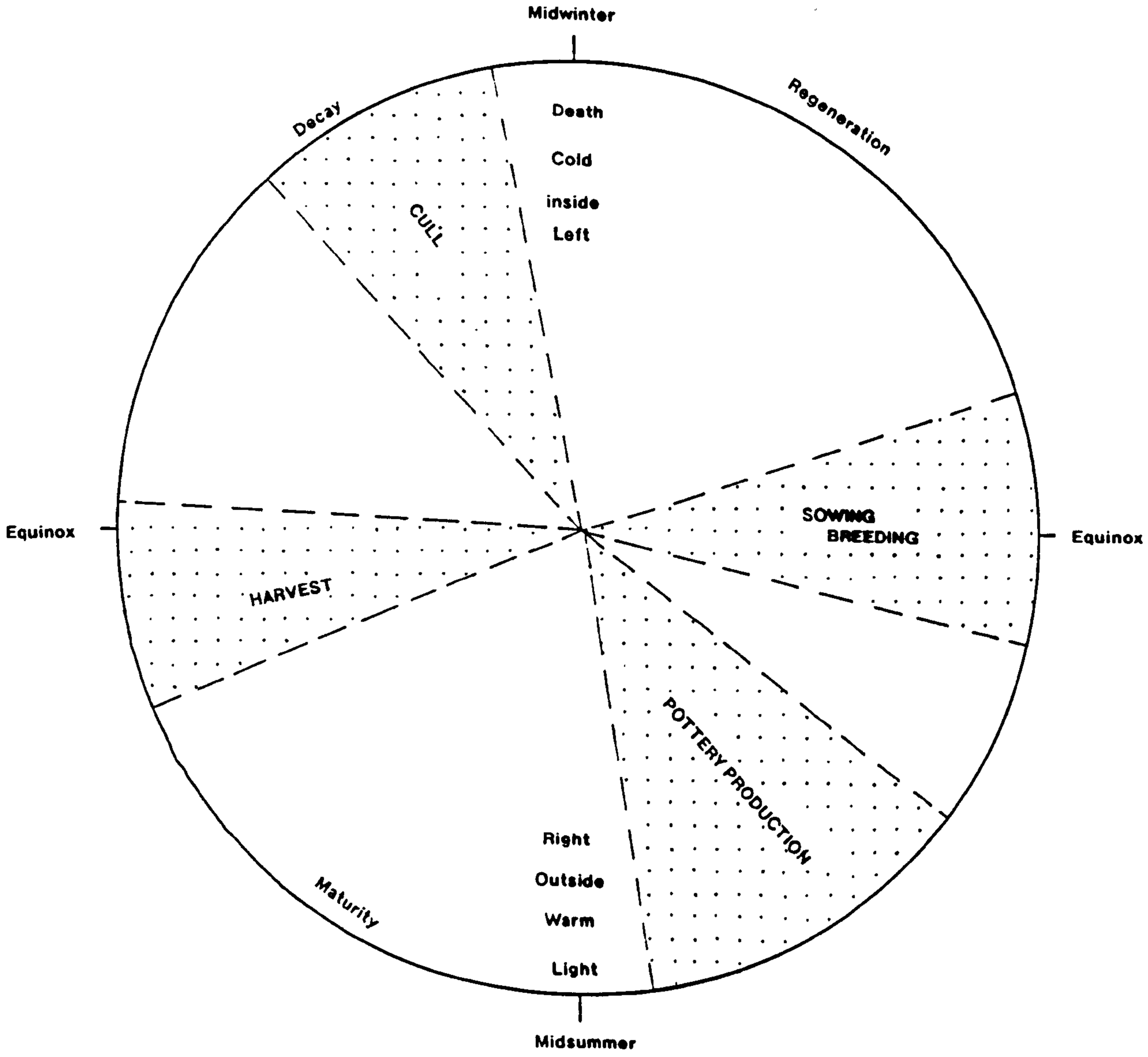


Figure 9:20. Annual cycle of events.

majority of tasks within the settlement there seems no reason they should not have undertaken flint knapping and sharpening within the central area since the cutting edges of flint tools blunt after short periods of work. If we plot the annual cycle of events a more interesting picture emerges of possible practices and activities undertaken by the inhabitants of Barnhouse (Fig 9:20). The sowing and reaping of cereals may be temporally defined with some accuracy, as may the birth of animals. Of particular interest is the culling of animals at an age of around 8 months (M. Armour-Chelu pers. comm.; Watson 1931). Rather than being an autumn cull this

may be interpreted as the slaughter of young animals for feasting around the mid-winter period. Such a celebration of the turning point of the annual cycle; the beginning of regeneration, concurs with the apparent importance given to this time of year and expressed so markedly in the orientation of Maeshowe. Other practices, such as the manufacture of pottery are of more dubious precision. Arnold (1988, 66-70), makes the point that the manufacture of pottery will always tend to be at the dryest time of the year, thus will regulate the time of construction and firing. The drying process is effected by the size of vessel (and the inclusions in the clay), and of course, the weather. Cold and damp conditions will substantially increase the time necessary to complete the manufacture of a pot. This is particularly important for larger vessels, such as pottery of fabric b, because it is necessary to construct the lower part first, and let it harden, before the rest can be built up. This procedure could last up to several weeks for the larger pots in use at Barnhouse (ibid). Certainly the weather is more favourable in Orkney, for this activity, between the months of May and July.

Thus the occupation of Barnhouse continued for some two hundred years. Until, at approximately 4400bp, drastic changes occurred both in the organisation of the settlement and its scale construction.

Monumentality

The continuity and consistency of settlement revealed in the succession of individual houses at Barnhouse is overshadowed by the erection of Structure 8 (Fig 9:21), a building of `monumental' proportions. Of particular importance, is the relationship between monumental Structure 8 and the group of lavish monuments, such as Maeshowe and the Stones of Stenness, which are constructed in the immediate vicinity (see chapter 11).

Although only the lowest courses of masonry remain intact it is possible to partially reconstruct Structure 8. Essentially, a large square building with rounded corners, based on the architecture of the house, is centrally positioned within a surrounding circular yellow clay platform which is enclosed by a substantial stone wall of over a metre in thickness. In spatial organisation, the monument is similar to

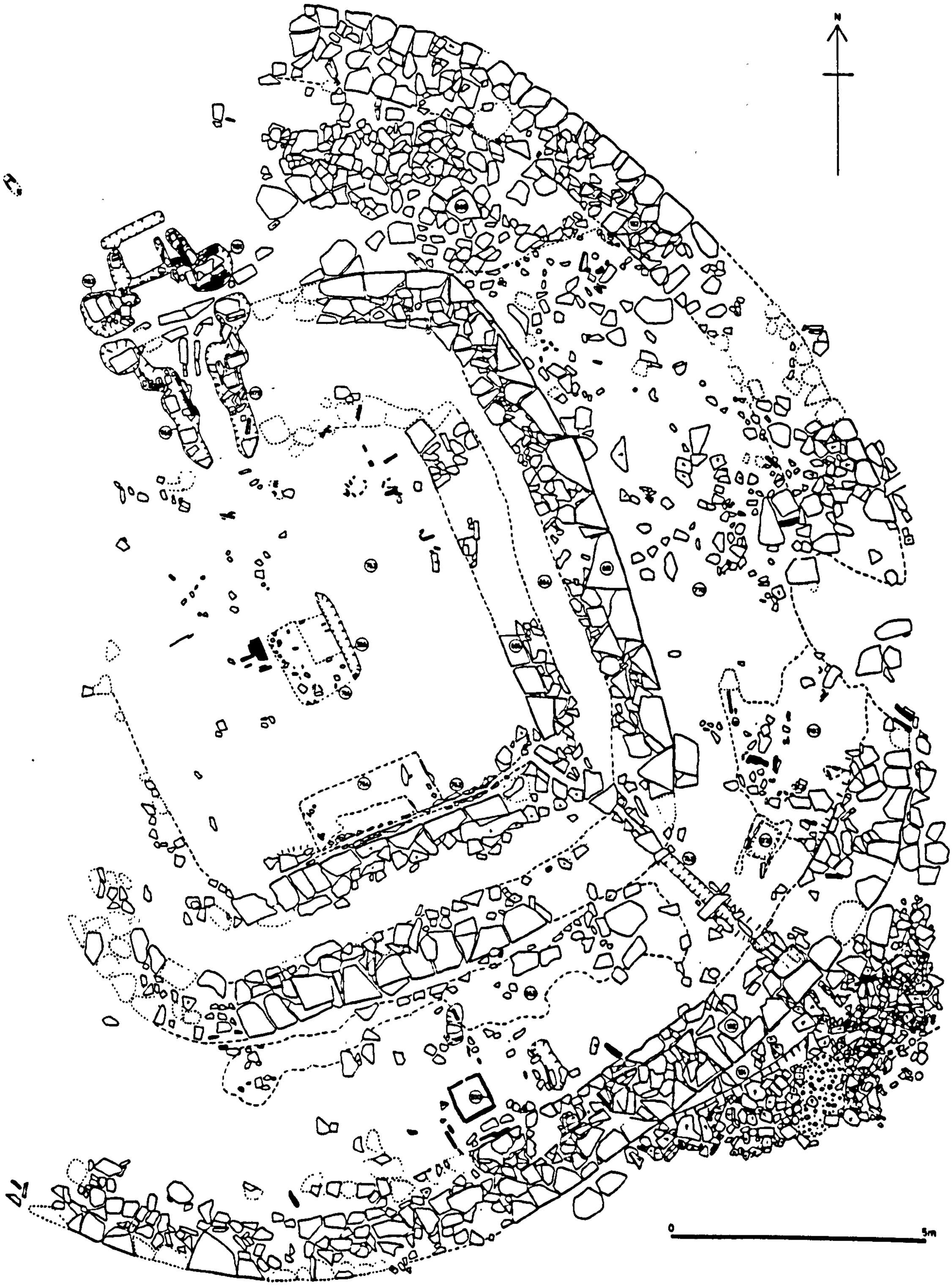


Figure 9:21. Plan of Structure 8.

Maeshowe where the main passage grave is surrounded by a clay platform and enclosed by a ditch. However, Maeshowe is a place of the dead and is situated away from the settlement. Its entrance passage is orientated towards the winter solstice, the darkest time of the year, making a place of cold and darkness. Structure 8 lies within the confines of the settlement and the living and has an entrance orientated towards the north-west, marking the summer solstice, the lightest period of the year.

The surviving stone slots of the passage into the inner building show this to have been a substantial and elaborate entranceway. It has a length of 5 metres and employs a series of orthostats to create a form of anti-chamber (Fig 9:22). Marking the threshold of the entrance was a hearth. A similar arrangement of a hearth lying between two monoliths was discovered within the Stones of Stenness (see J.N.G Ritchie 1976, Fig 4 & chapter 11). Although likely to have been covered by paving slabs it is significant that a fireplace should lie at the beginning of the route into the interior. Whether the remnant of an opening or constructional ceremony, or a recognisable and active element within the entering procedure, the presence of a hearth and the action of stepping over fire on a threshold is a potent form of symbolism embodying purity and transition. A small hearth was noted marking the threshold in the entrance to Hut 7 at Skara Brae (Childe notebook 1928, 20), which may be significant given the nature of all three constructions.

The long passage gave access into the interior where a hearth, which had been remodelled at least on two occasions, was situated in the centre of a room, seven metres square. A complete Grooved Ware vessel was set into the clay floor adjacent to the eastern wall (left side on entry). The vessel was undecorated except for two horizontal grooves directly below the rim. Interestingly, the decorated portion was the only visible area of the pot projecting above the floor surface.

Behind the fireplace, adjacent to the rear wall a semi- rectangular slot was cut through the floor. Initially three large stones supported a rear `dresser' arrangement, but this was subsequently replaced by a substantial stone box or cist-like structure projecting from the rear wall (Fig 9:23). Two further stone boxes projected from the side wall, reminiscent of the `beds' within the house. The presence of a single `dresser' in monumental Structure 8 tends to suggest it had greater significance than

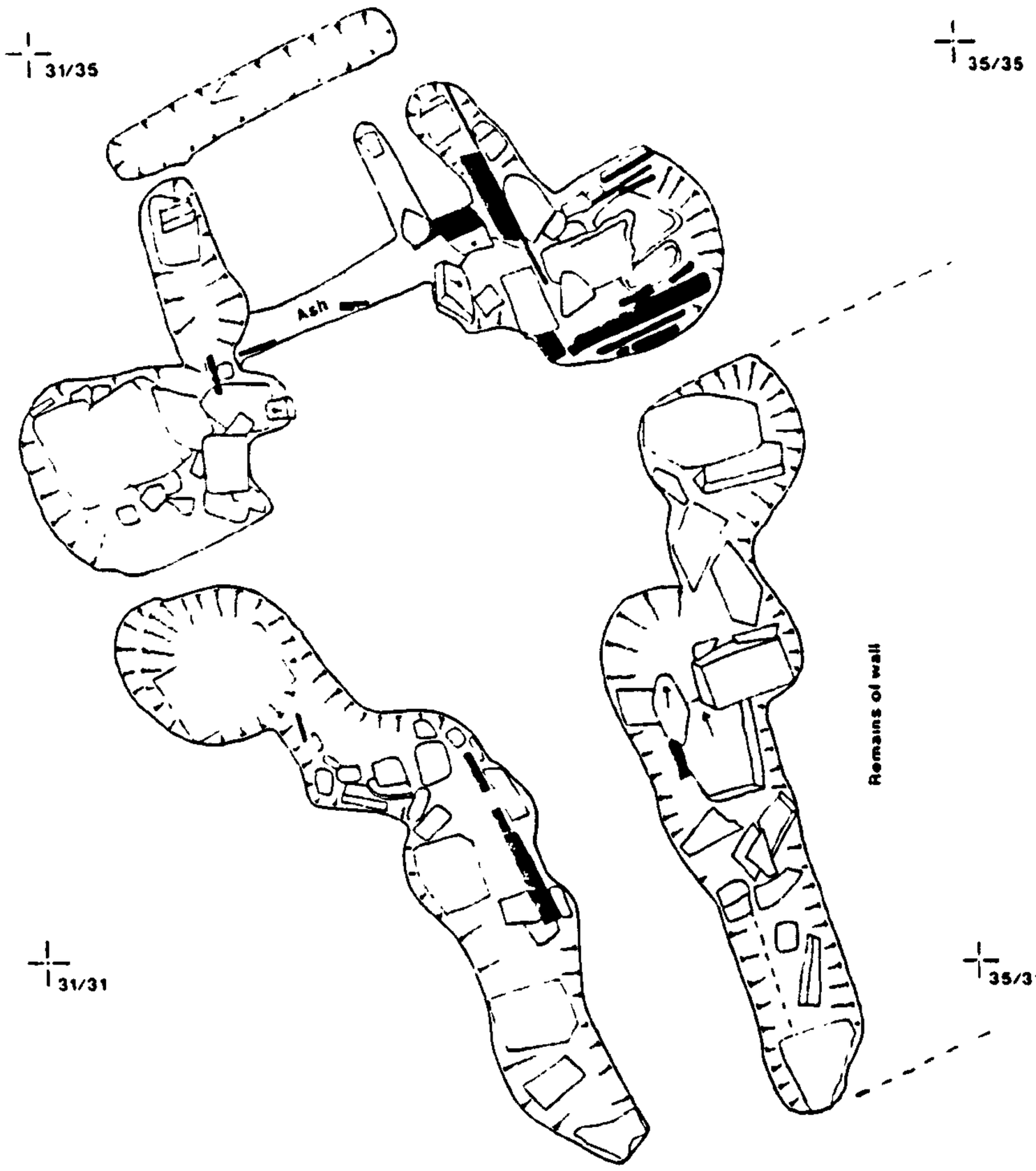


Figure 9:22. Detailed plan of the entrance features of Structure 8 (grid numbers in metres).

merely acting as a furniture arrangement for displaying objects denoting status (*contra* Clarke and Sharples 1985, 70). In being positioned at the rear of the house it marks the deepest internal space and therefore, a special, if not sacred, area of the house, frequently associated with ancestral spirits and the dead (e.g. Collet 1987).

A series of pits and hollows were dug into the floor on the left side (north-east). One of these contained a hoard of 14 prepared large flint nodules which, on the evidence from Skara Brae where flint seems to become a scarce material at this time, may have been a precious or scarce resource. There does seem to be evidence to

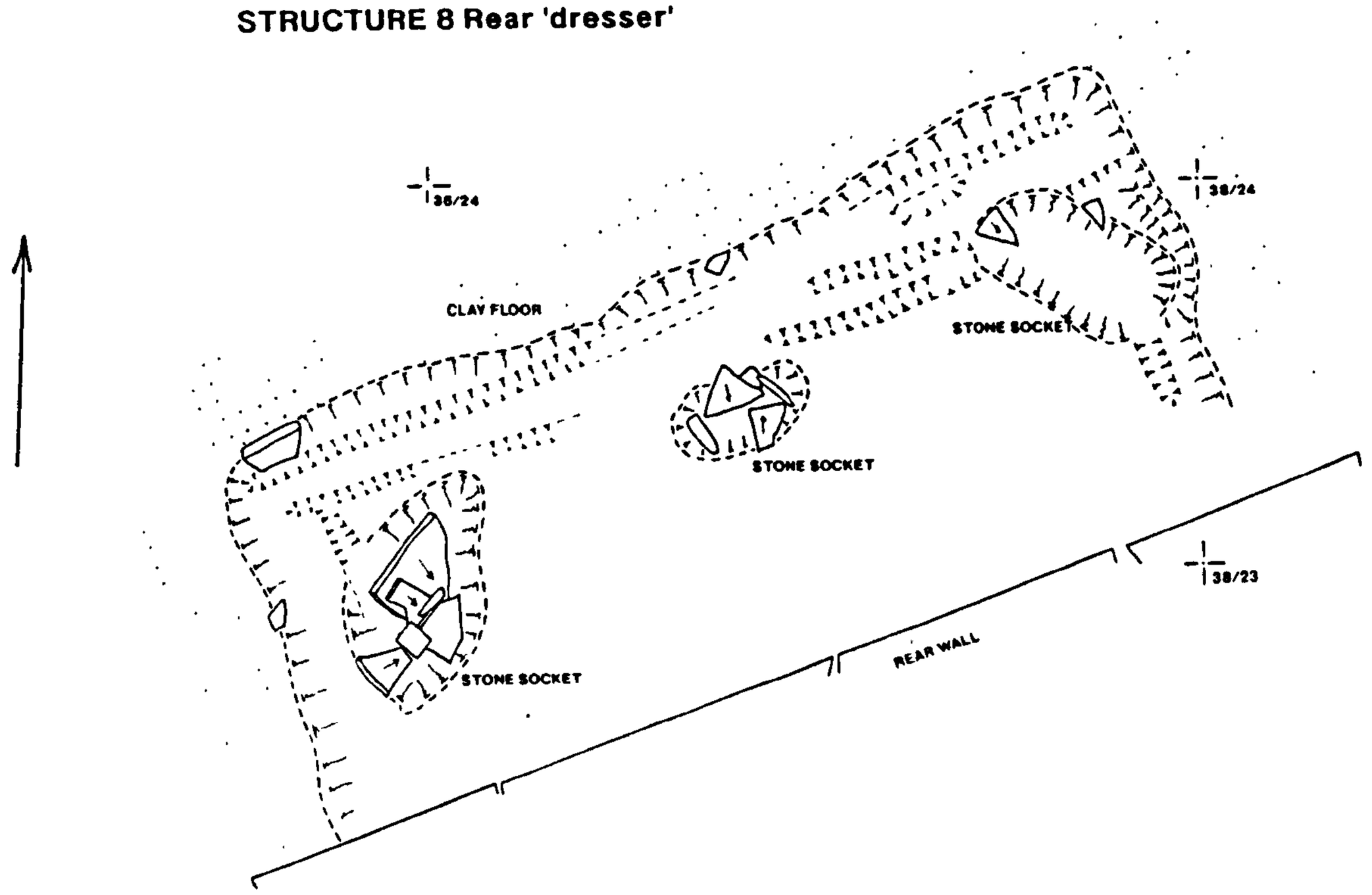


Figure 9:23. Detailed plan of the rear `dresser' in Structure 8 (grid numbers in metres).

suggest that these nodules were imported from outside Orkney (R. Middleton pers. comm.). However, even if locally procured, flint at this time appears to be a controlled item and this hoard; buried and left in place, testifies to the significance of this building.

Several elaborate hearths, pits and remains of stone boxes were present on the enclosed clay platform outside the large inner building. A quantity of pottery, flint, and stone tools associated with these features was also present. These features are adjacent to the small single entrance into the outer platform and the substantial stone wall bounding Structure 8 would have prohibited these activities from external scrutiny.

The pottery recovered from the platform area is of particular interest in the dominance of large vessels of fabric A/B (Fig 9:24). This contrasts strongly with the pottery from the interior (Fig 9:25), which is restricted to smaller vessels of fabric C.

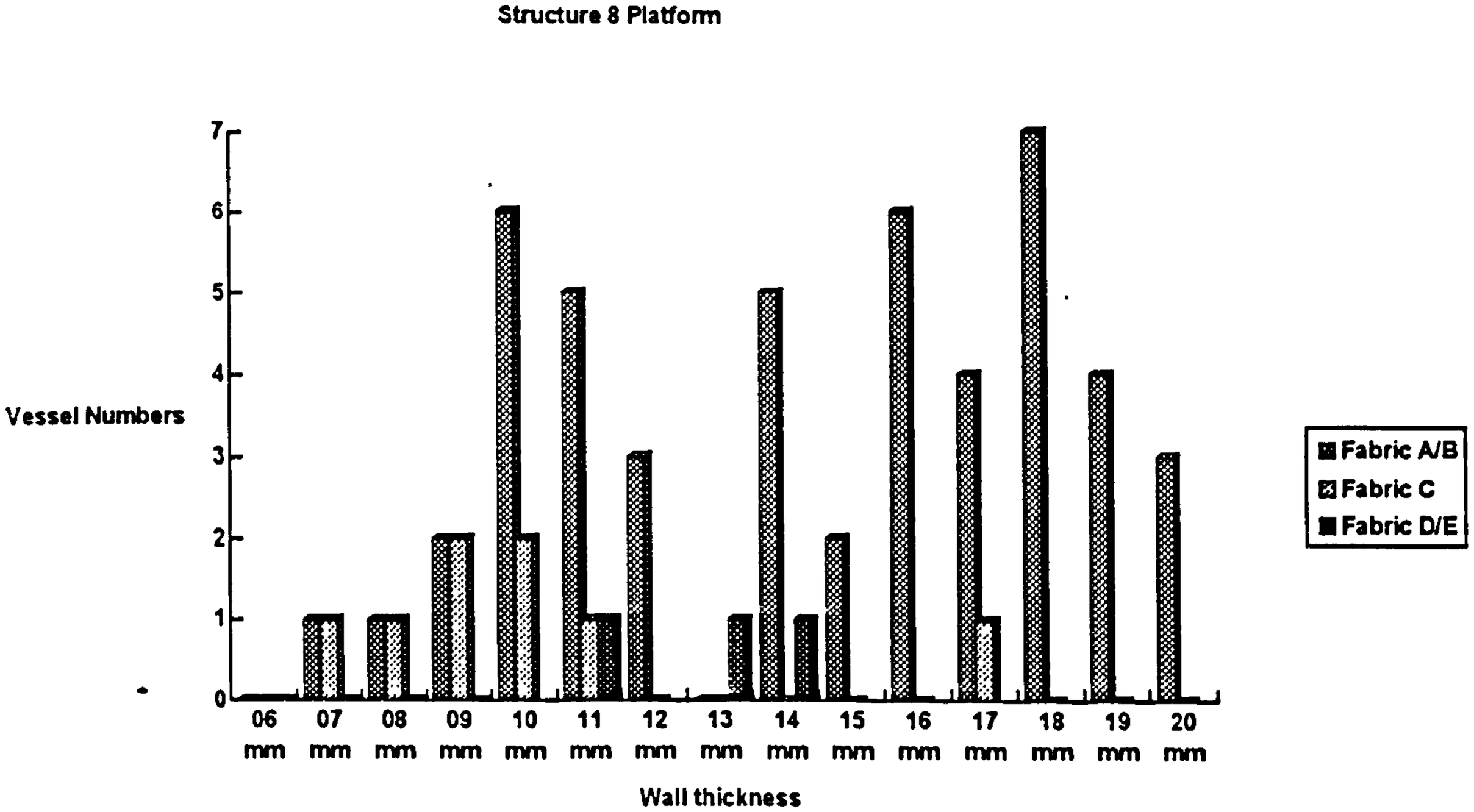


Figure 9:24. Graph of the fabric range and size of Grooved ware vessels on Structure 8 platform.

Unlike the ceramics from the main settlement which show the smaller vessels to have been used as cooking pots, some of the larger vessels on the platform display sooting, therefore providing evidence for having been placed on a fire. This raises the possibility of cooking on a larger scale for feasting with the food being consumed inside the main building.

The overall impression of Structure 8 is that of a large building drawing on certain elements of the house and transforming them into monumental proportions (Fig 9:26). This recalls Eliade's statement that "religious architecture simply took over and developed the cosmological symbolism already present in the structure of primitive habitations" (1959, 58). At present it is difficult to be sure if Structure 8 was in use during the later period of habitation at Barnhouse or if it marked the end of permanent settlement. Nevertheless, in architectural form it continues a general movement

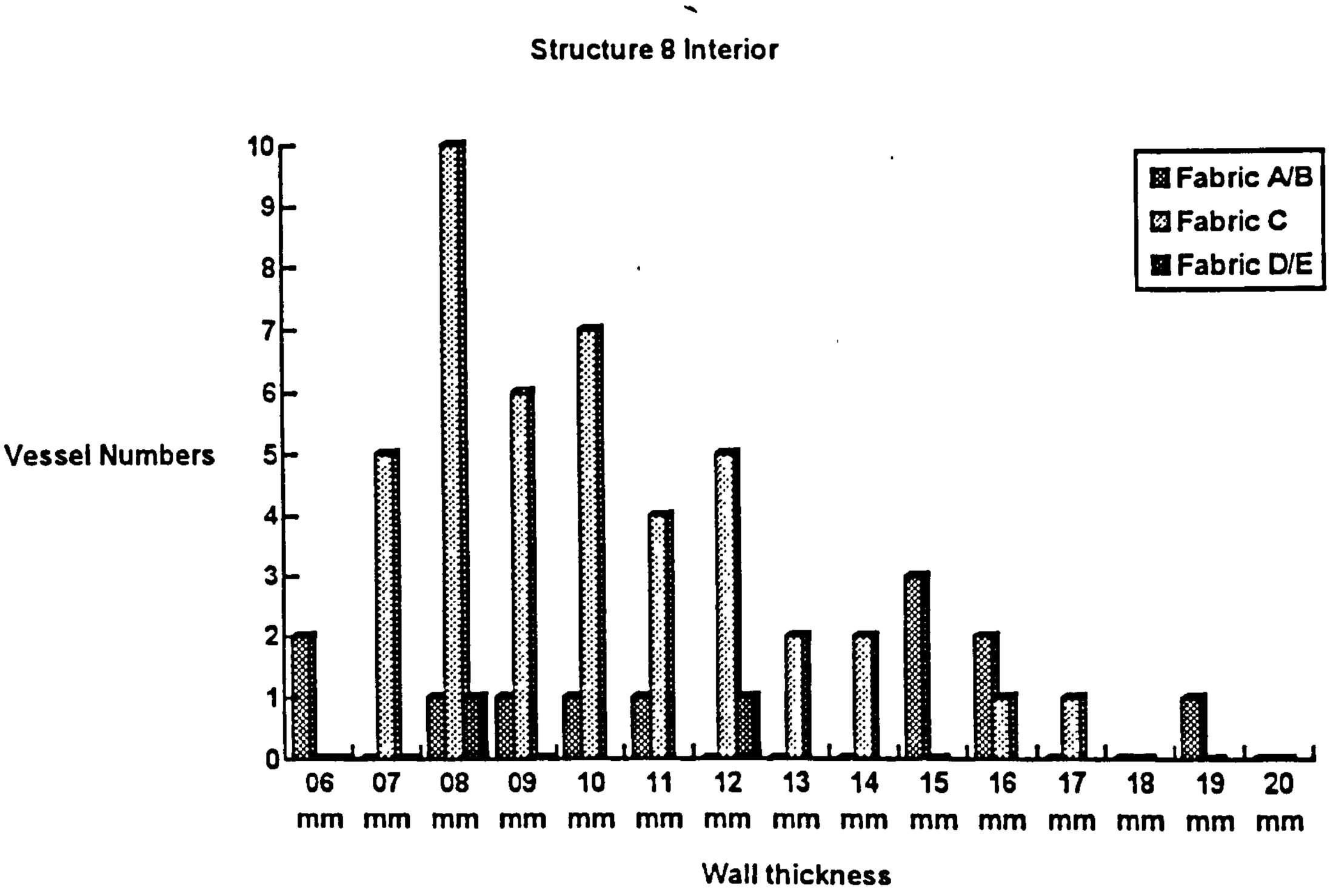


Figure 9:25. Graph of the fabric range and size of Grooved ware vessels within Structure 8 inner building.

towards restriction and greater control over the movement of people through space in the later Neolithic. This concurs with the removal of ritual activities away from the public domain as seen more generally within Orcadian passage grave design.

Barnhouse Odin

Approximately 150 metres to the south-west of the Barnhouse settlement a second surface scatter of flint was discovered in 1988. This site, known as Barnhouse Odin, was situated on a slight rise which ran across the field towards the entrance of the Stones of Stenness (Fig 9:27). Because of its exposed position and the possibility of extensive plough damage to sub-surface deposits, a number of surface survey techniques were employed to gain as much information of the nature of the site as possible. Total surface collection of artefacts revealed a spread of worked flint and

Figure 9:26. Structure 8 platform under excavation.

large quantities of `cramp'. The presence of this material in substantial quantities is of particular interest since it results from large scale burning such as the pottery firing area at Barnhouse. Interestingly, burnt bone was not a significant component of the surface material, an occurrence which is atypical for Neolithic flint scatters and in particular contexts where fires and burning have been present.

The distribution of the `cramp' disclosed two main concentrations, situated fairly close together (Fig 9:28a). Magnetic susceptibility survey (A. Challands pers. comm.), showed one concentration of `cramp' to be associated with burnt soil while the second had little burnt soil present (Fig 9:28b). These results indicated the site to be the location of a substantial fireplace with ash deposits being heaped to the east (a similar placement to the ash heaps at Barnhouse). The broader distribution of flint tended to concentrate on the western side of the suspected hearth (Fig 9:28c), and phosphate analysis (Z. Sannigar pers. comm.), showed a similar general distribution (Fig 9:29).

Excavation undertaken in 1988 and 1991, confirmed the assumption of severe damage to the archaeological deposits being incurred through ploughing. However, some deposits survived and sherds of Grooved ware, flint, and a broken mace-head were recovered. Directly below the position identified by surface detection techniques

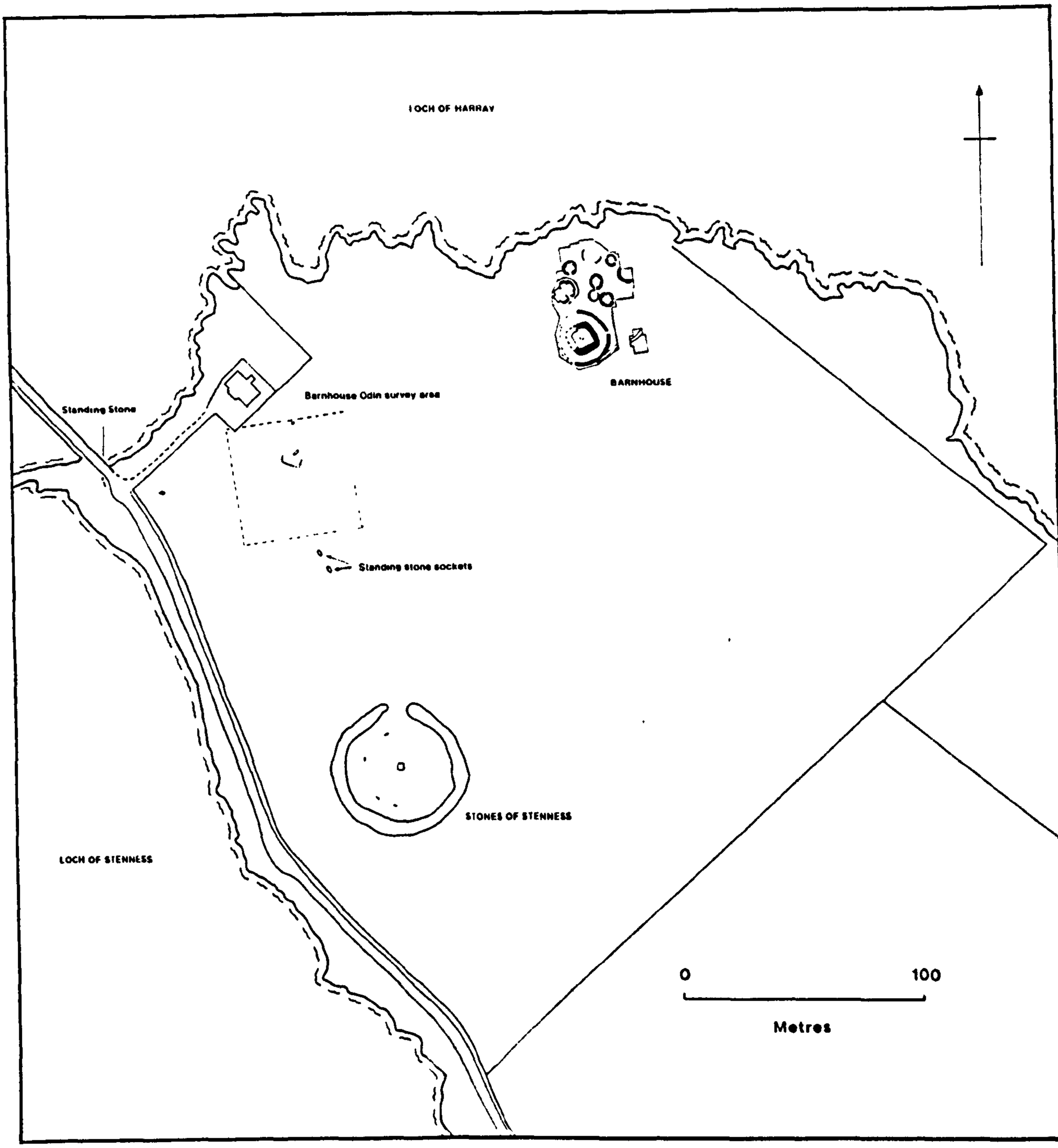


Figure 9:27. Location map of Barnhouse Odin.

as a hearth, a large circular fireplace was discovered (Figs 9:30 & 9:31).

That Barnhouse Odin was the site of activities directly related to the large fireplace is clear, however, what these constituted is difficult to discern. The lack of burnt bone

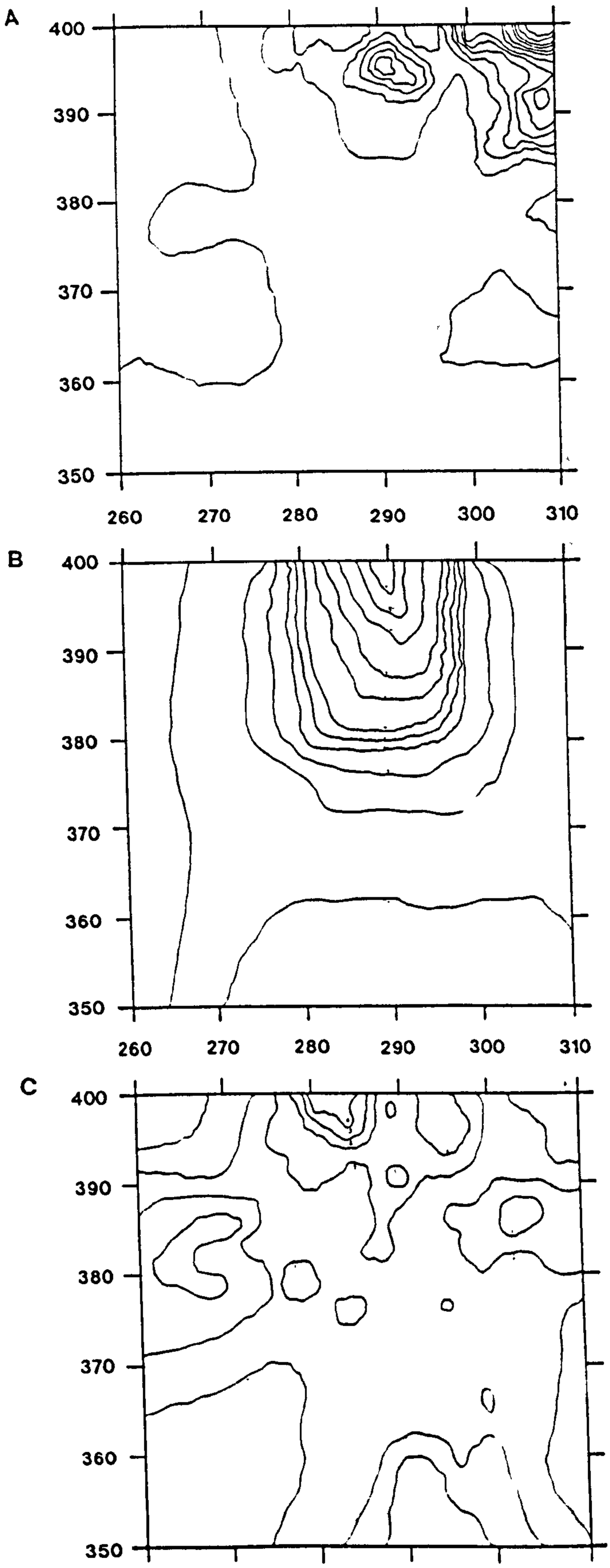


Figure 9:28. Surface distribution of cramp (a), magnetic susceptibility (b) and flint (c), at Barnhouse Odin.

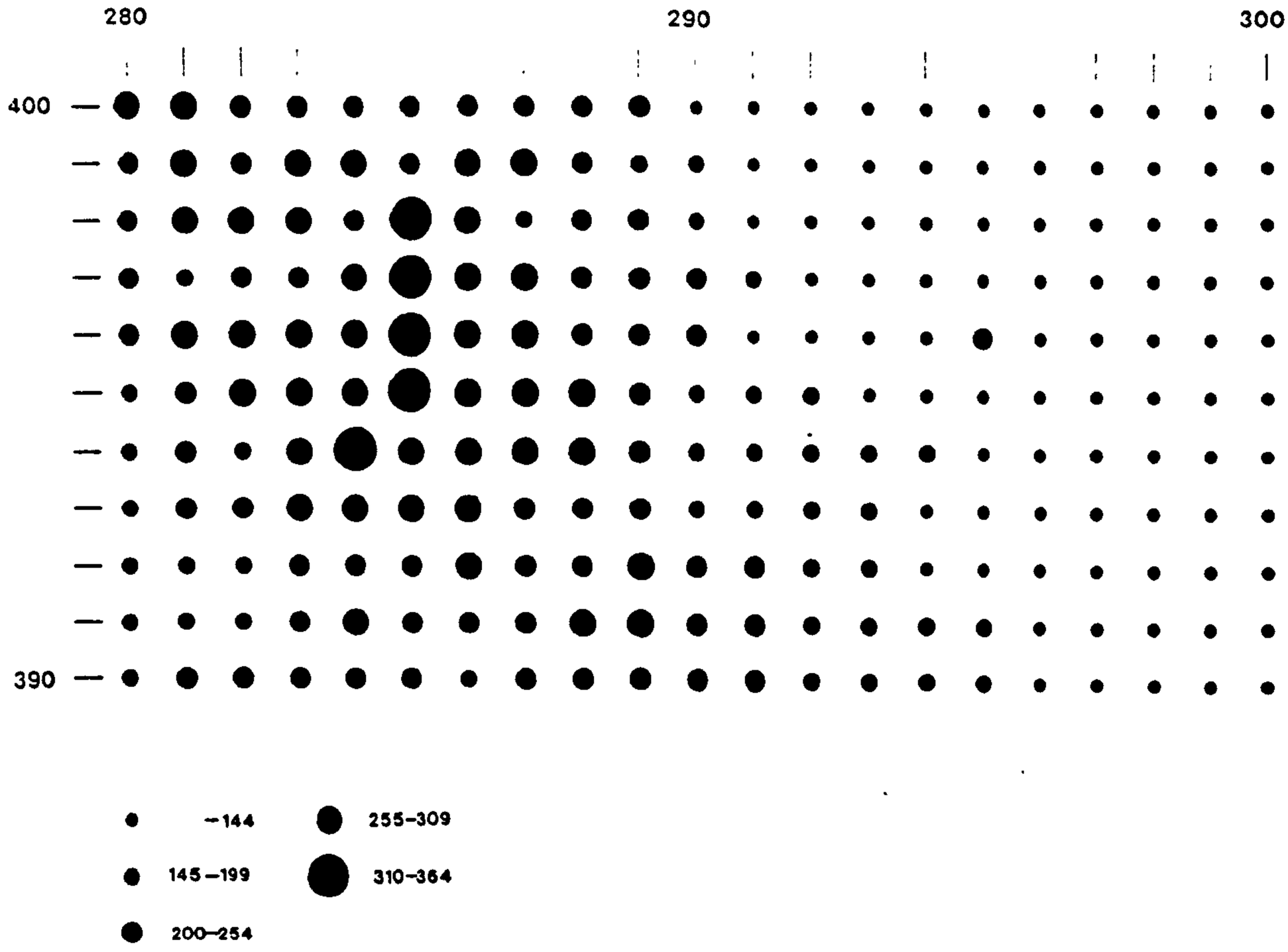


Figure 9:29. Surface concentrations of phosphate at Barnhouse Odin (Z. Sannigar pers comm).

is quite unusual and provides some insight into the nature of the site. At Barnhouse the only comparable area is the site of the fires in the central area for firing Grooved ware. However, this is unlikely to have occurred at Barnhouse Odin since no burnt clay or any other evidence for pottery manufacture was detected. Alternatively, the lack of burnt bone suggests that food was not consumed at this place since the remains tended to be thrown on the fire, thus creating quantities of burnt bone. The presence of substantial amounts of `cramp' attests to the fires employing a particular (and as yet unidentifiable) type of fuel. This fuel was used for pottery production and later, human cremation, thus, we can assume it burns at high temperature. A possible interpretation of the deposits at Barnhouse Odin is that large amounts of food were cooked at this site and taken *elsewhere* for consumption.

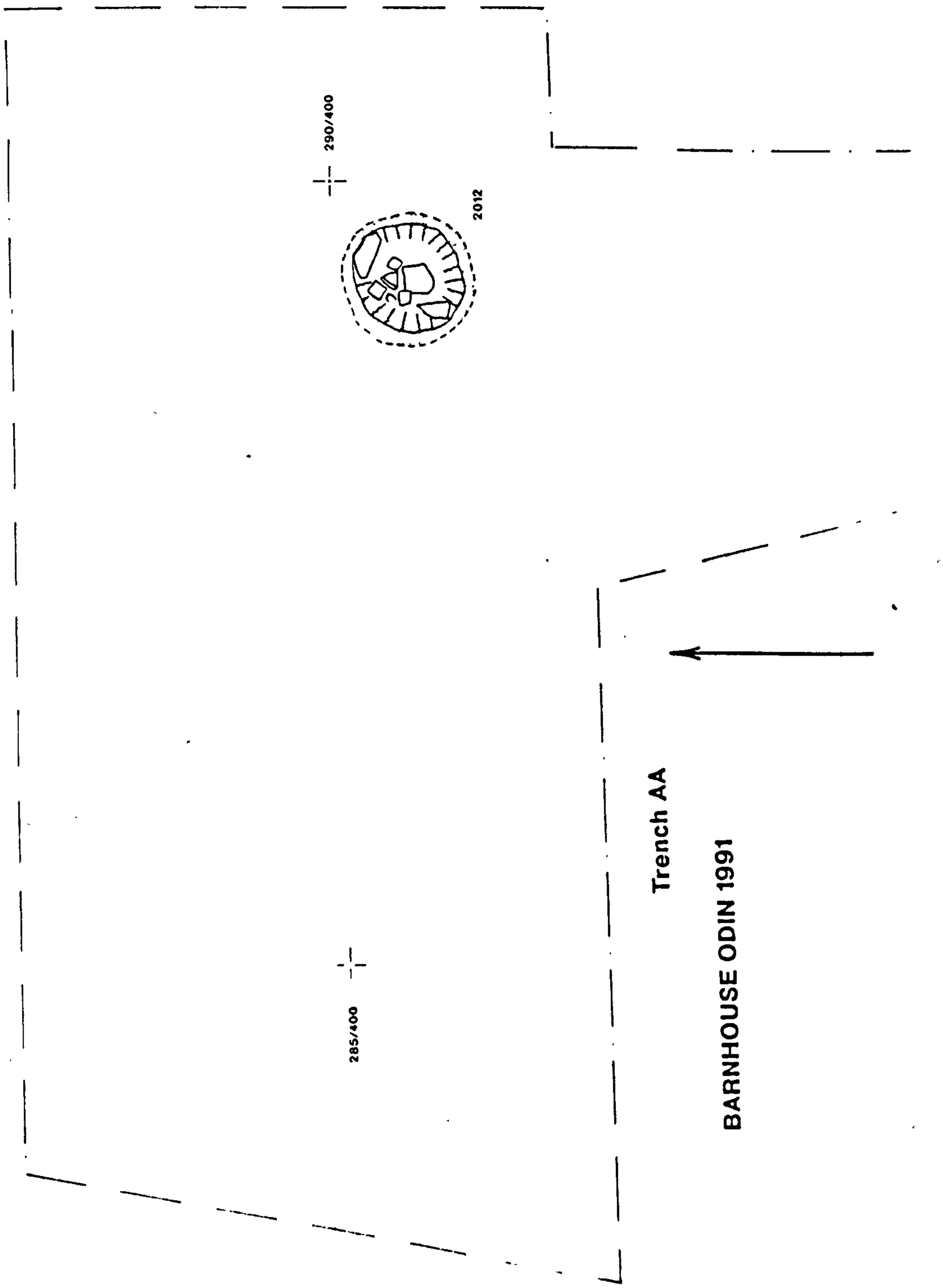


Figure 9:30. Plan of the excavated hearth at Barnhouse Odin (grid points at 5 metre intervals).

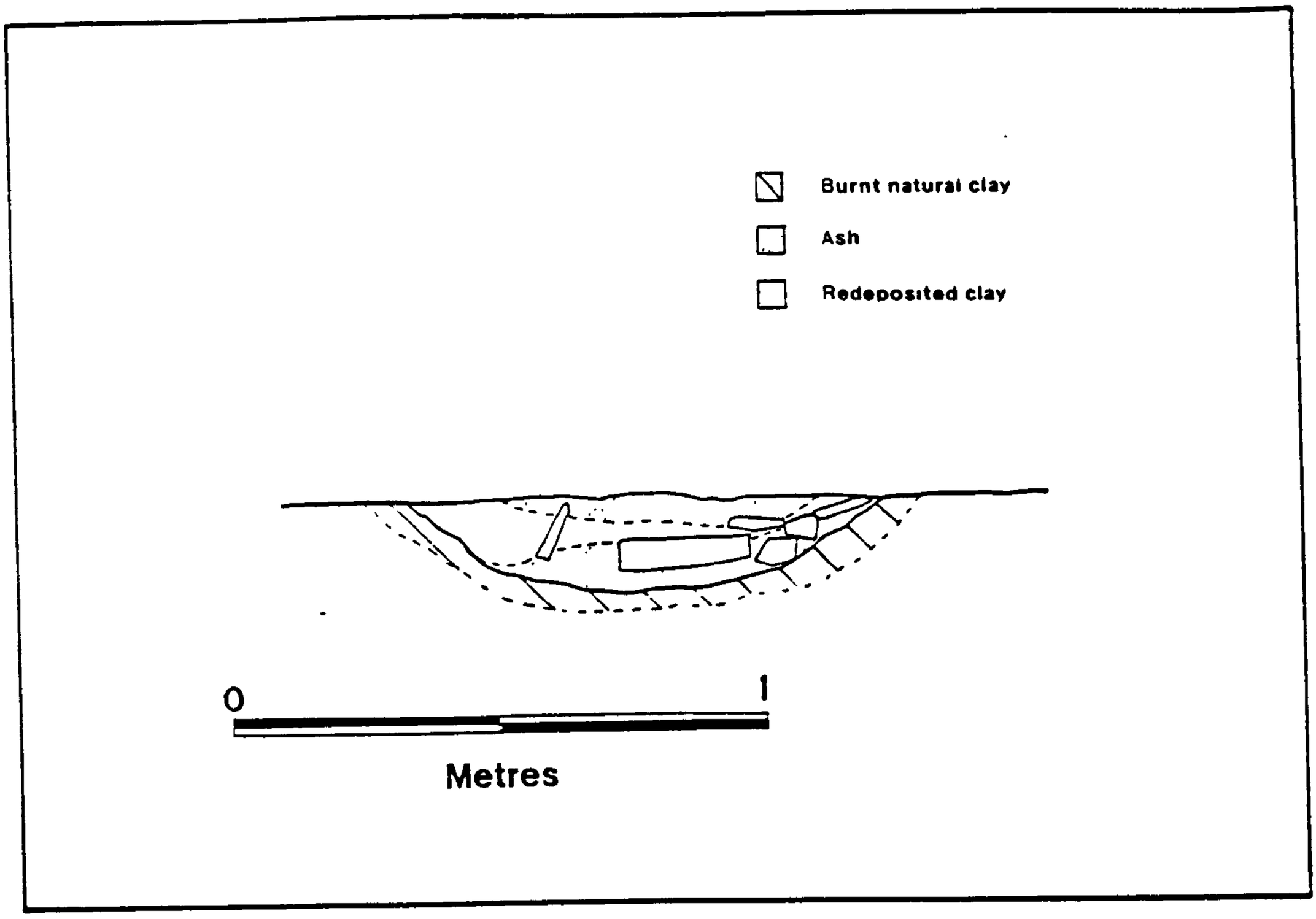


Figure 9:31. Section drawing of hearth at Barnhouse Odin.

The Stones of Stenness

At this point we have to consider the wider landscape context of this site and the close proximity of the Stones of Stenness henge monument. The architectural representation of the Stones of Stenness will be discussed in detail in chapter 11, here I will briefly examine the material evidence for the activities occurring within its confines. Only two contexts produced evidence which relates to the use of the henge; the central hearth and the enclosure ditch (Fig 9:32).

The central hearth was remodelled on several occasions (see chapter 11), therefore, it should be remembered that the excavated deposits relate to its final period of use. Among the ash fill of the hearth sherds of Grooved ware from thin walled serving vessels, associated with burnt animal bone were discovered (J.N.G. Ritchie 1976, 12). Large quantities of `cramp' were also present within the hearth, including some pieces of "fist size" (*ibid, 13*). On the basis of this evidence it is reasonable to

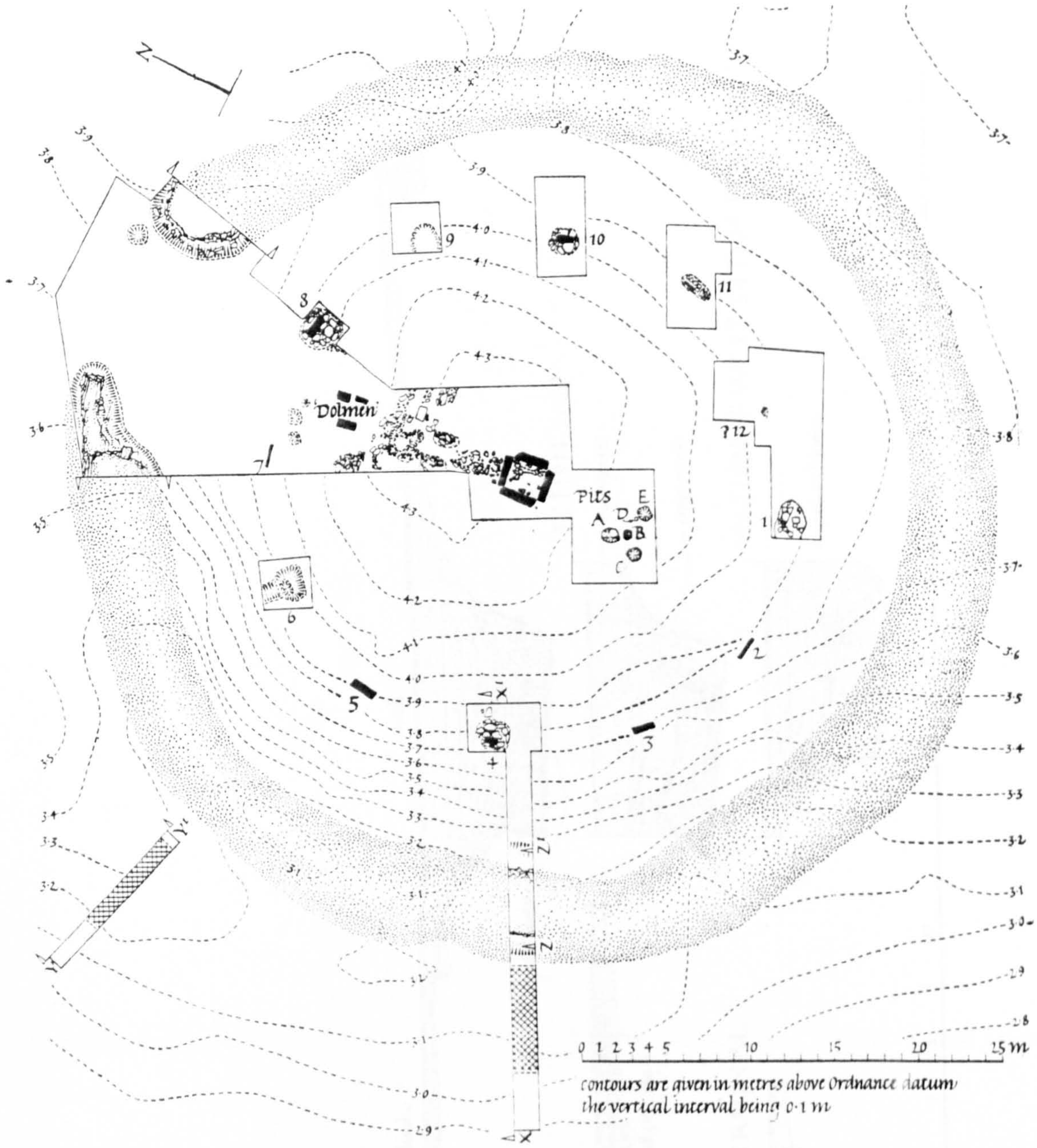


Figure 9:32. Plan of the Stones of Stenness (after Ritchie 1976).

suggest that the consumption of food occurred around the central hearth, which on occasions held a large blazing fire.

Further excavation were undertaken at the ditch terminals and a small section was cut across the ditch in the south-west. The ditch was fairly consistent in being rock cut, generally to a depth of 2.3 metres (Fig 9:33). The primary deposits contained sherds of Grooved ware and animal bones, the latter comprising sheep, domestic ox

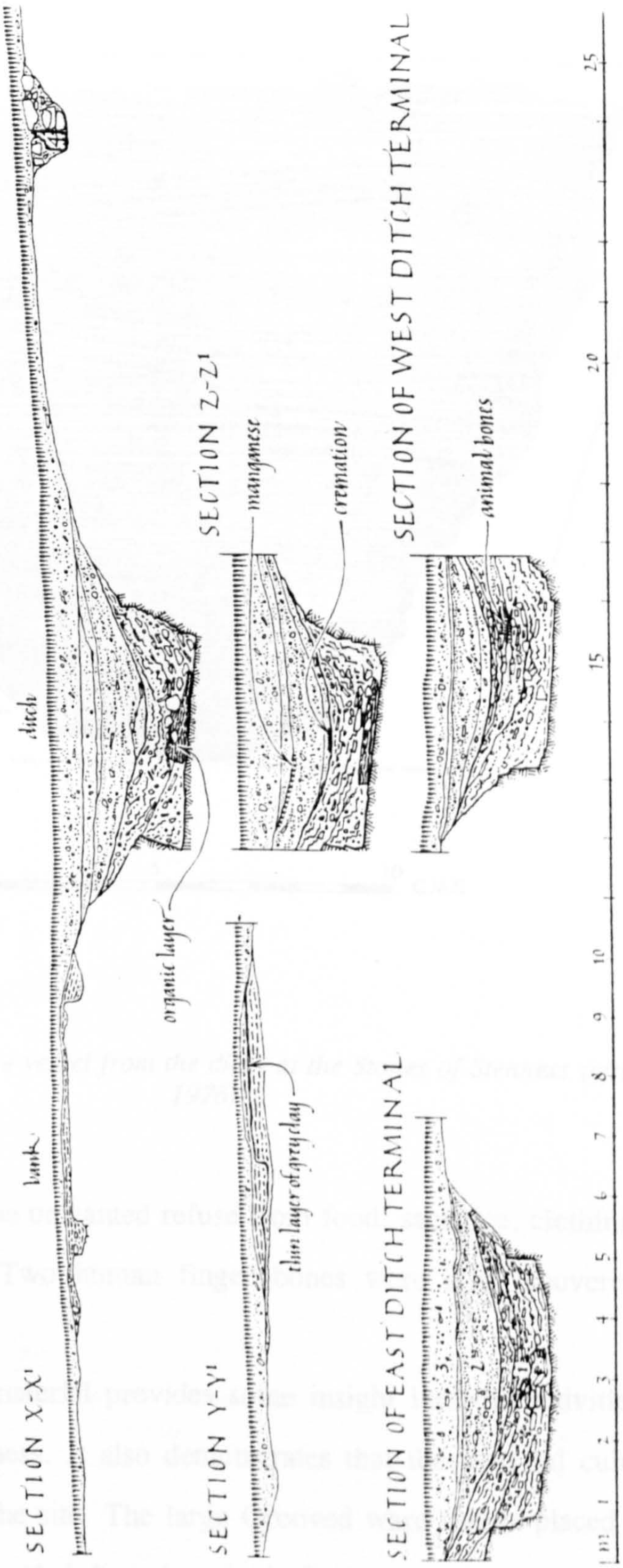


Figure 9:33. Section drawings of the ditch at the Stones of Stenness (after Ritchie 1976).

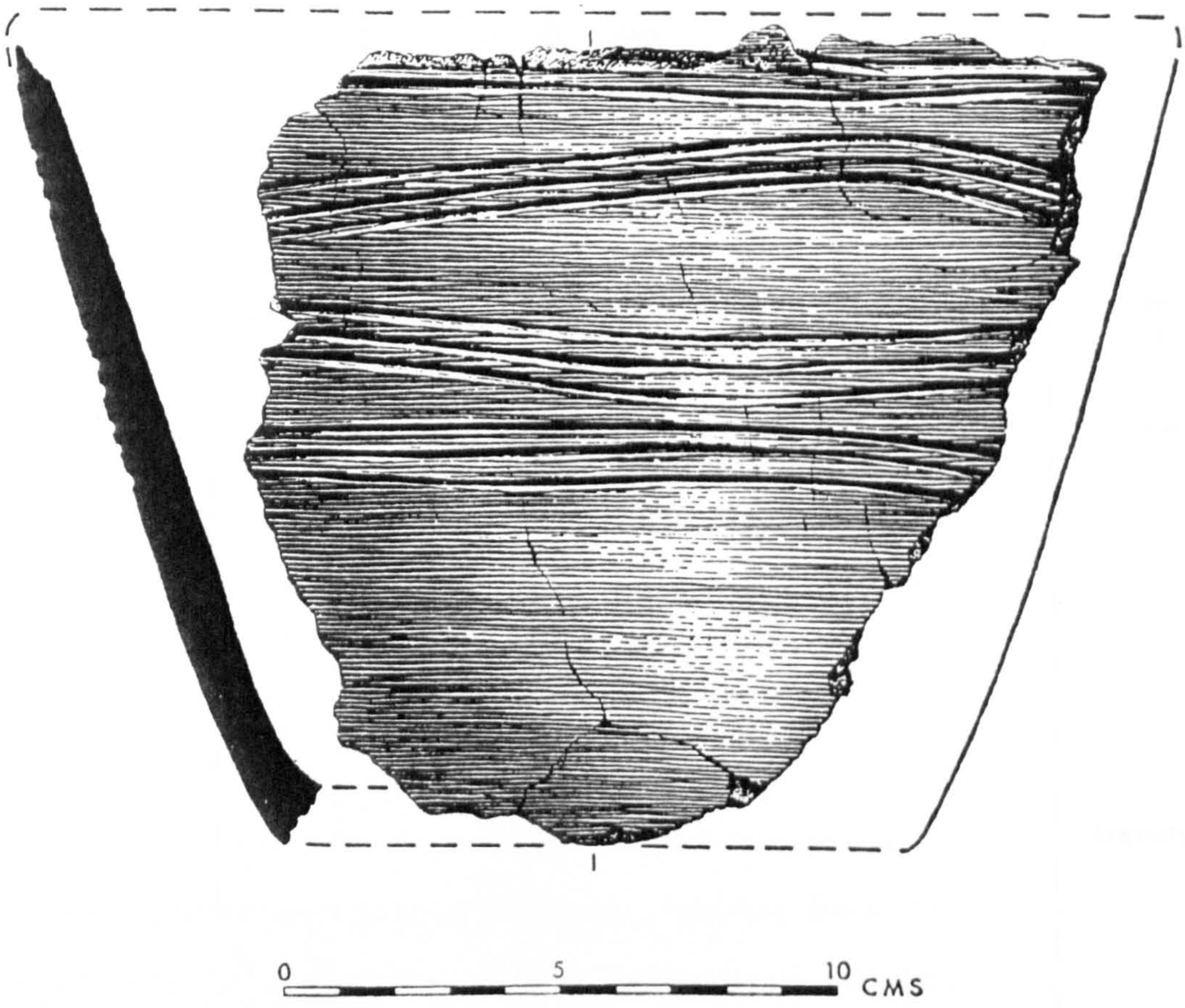


Figure 9:34. A Grooved ware vessel from the ditch at the Stones of Stenness (after Henshall 1976).

and dog "could represent the unwanted refuse from food, sacrifice, clothing or artefact manufacture" (*ibid*, 10). Two human finger bones were also recovered from the primary silts.

The presence of this material provides some insight into the activities occurring within the Stones of Stenness. It also demonstrates that the material culture used in these activities never left the site. The large Grooved ware sherds placed in the ditch were not abraded or trampled but deposited directly after breakage (Fig 9:34). Although feasting, or sacrifice and feasting, constituted a strong element in the proceedings, the presence of human bone testifies to its more ritualistic nature.

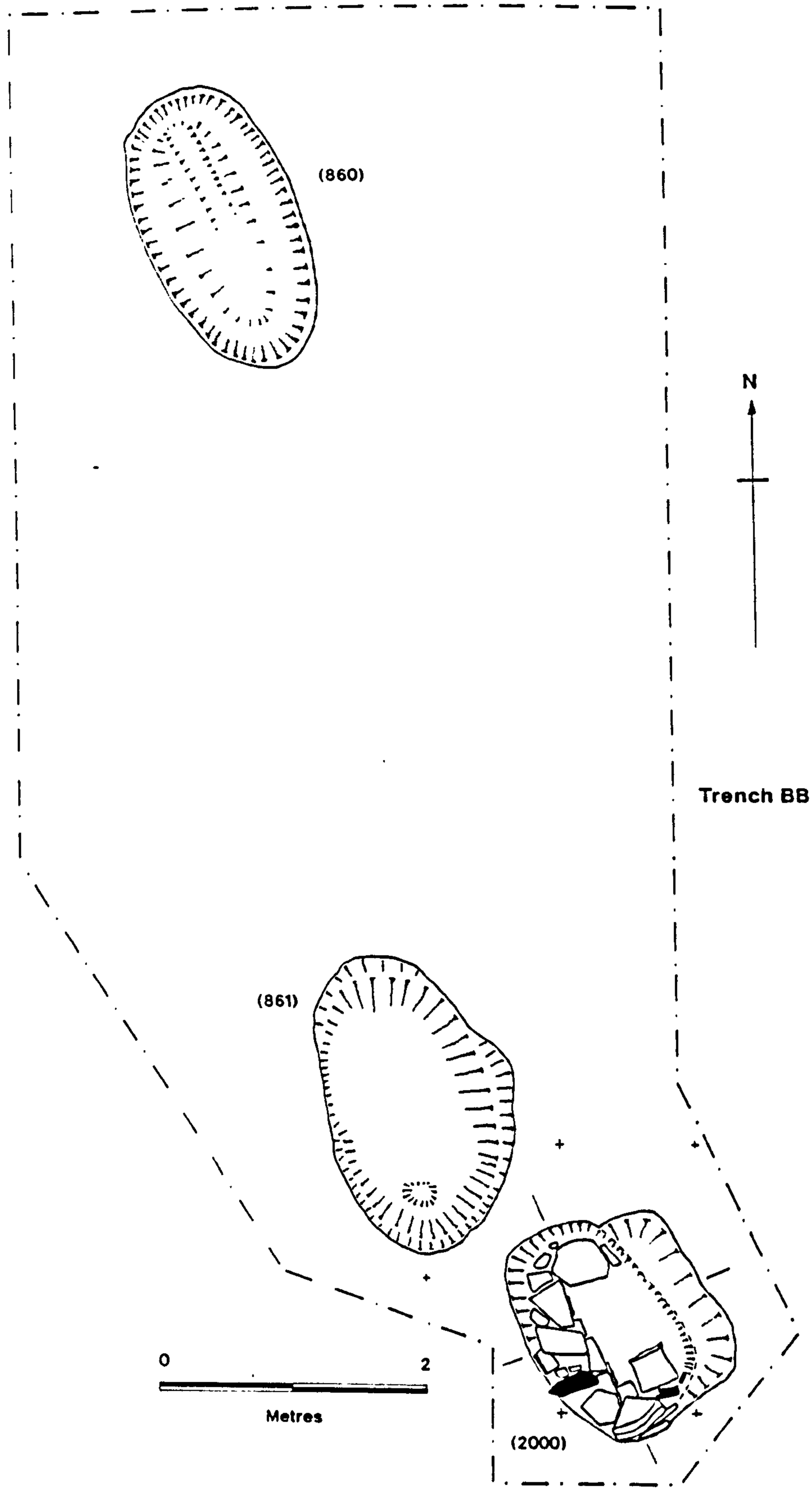


Figure 9:35. Plan of the two stone sockets located between the Stones of Stenness and Barnhouse Odin.

The continual remodelling of the central hearth (Fig 11:7) indicates the Stones of Stenness to have had a long history of use. Although 90 metres to the north of the Stones of Stenness, Barnhouse Odin also occupies a similarly conspicuous position along the same high ridge of ground (Fig 9:27). Although we lack the necessary detailed chronology, in this aspect it seems likely the two sites are linked in some way. I would suggest that given the large hearth and absence of burnt animal bone at Barnhouse Odin, large quantities of food may have been cooked, but significantly, not consumed at this place. Perhaps cooked food was transported from Barnhouse Odin to the Stones of Stenness for consumption and in this light it is interesting that the twin standing stones (Fig 9:35); one being the stone of Odin, lie directly between these two sites (Fig 9:27).

Conclusion

Through the excavation of Barnhouse and Barnhouse Odin it is possible in concluding to make some general statements regarding the settlement and the effect its discovery has on perceptions of the `monumental' landscape on the Stenness Promontory, Mainland, Orkney. The location of a settlement in the centre of what was previously considered a ritual centre or complex, forces a critical evaluation of the ritual - domestic dichotomy which is implicit in much archaeological analysis. This problem is crystallized in assessing monumental Structure 8, since it is neither a house, tomb or henge, and yet, appears to incorporate elements of each. A similar problem of definition and interpretation may be identified with House 2. It is not simply a case of one building being influenced by another but rather in architecture we are seeing transforms of similar cosmological themes of order being manipulated in different contexts.

The organisation of the settlement also displays such order at a higher level. The central area acts as a focal point around which houses are constructed. House 2 lies in the western area of settlement, as does Structure 8, and there can be little doubt of the `special' or different nature of these buildings. This organisation is not accidental but relates to the same conceptions of order which influence and are manifest in the

architecture of the house. Social practices were therefore structured through the organisation of settlement as seen in different modes of deposition.

The history of Barnhouse is of considerable interest in understanding the development of a `monumental' landscape in central Mainland, Orkney. Given the similarities in architecture between Maeshowe and House 2 (see chapter 11), it seems that the two represent contemporary constructions. This provides a picture of a settlement and associated passage grave constituting the initial constructions in the Stenness area. The similarities between the ceramics from the Stones of Stenness, Barnhouse Odin and Barnhouse, suggest that these sites were in use *during* the active life of the settlement. Thus, Barnhouse acted as a focus for the growth of the monuments on the Stenness promontory. The apparent abandonment of Barnhouse may have concurred with the construction of Structure 8. As to why settlement ceased in this area is difficult to determine, however, the possibility that the village gradually assumes special significance during the late Neolithic is virtually confirmed by its final aggrandisement through the construction of Structure 8. The early radiocarbon determinations of *circa* 4600bp for Barnhouse confirm an early date for the settlement and the possibility remains that it may have come to assume the status of an `ancestral' village over a six hundred year time span.

The links between Barnhouse Odin and the Stones of Stenness, while speculative are also of interest. Even if an exact chronological relationship cannot be established between the two sites, the presence of similar decorated Grooved ware strongly suggests contemporary use. Their spatial separation further testifies the need to create `places' for specific activities beyond the confines of the settlement. Nowhere is this more strongly stated than in the enclosure of the Stones of Stenness by a massive rock cut ditch.

Chapter 10

Skara Brae: revisiting a Neolithic village in Orkney

Introduction

In the winter of 1850 a violent storm severely eroded the sand dunes in Skaill Bay, western Mainland, Orkney. Thus was revealed one of the most spectacular archaeological discoveries in Scotland; the Neolithic settlement of Skara Brae. The removal of sand exposed the upper levels of walls and house structures which, due to their construction in the local Caithness flagstone, remained virtually intact with only the roofing lost. Furthermore, the internal furniture of the houses was constructed in the same flagstone, thus, providing a unique record of late Neolithic habitations. Although perhaps not quite of the nature of Pompeii, Skara Brae certainly offers a level of evidence of tremendous potential to a discipline concerned with the daily lives of people in the past. However, this potential has not been fully realised, as noted in earlier chapters, studies concerned with Neolithic social organisation and its transformation have almost entirely focussed attention on chambered tombs and henge monuments (see however, Hodder 1982). Ritchie (1985, 125-6) has warned of the frailty of such schemes, a warning which has been acknowledged but excused on the basis of a lack of records and publications of the late Neolithic settlements, particularly Skara Brae (Sharples 1985, 61).

Once revealed and visible, this extraordinary site invited the curiosity of different and variably competent antiquaries and archaeologists. By 1927-8, when Professor V.G. Childe was asked to assist in the conservation and restoration of the site, Hut 3 had been virtually swept away by the sea, and Huts 1, 2, 4, and 5 had been `excavated' by earlier investigators. Of these, Petrie (1868) alone communicated a detailed account of the partial clearing of Huts 1, 3, and 4. Although Childe (1929, 1930, 1931) left fairly detailed accounts of his work, his excavations were apparently restricted by the main purpose of the exercise which was the conservation and presentation of the site by the Ministry of Works (cf Clarke 1976b, 233-5).

Frequently, references to `clearing out' passages and huts, are used in the series of reports published by Childe on the excavations at Skara Brae. Any remaining hope concerning the possibility of conducting a contextual analysis of the material evidence sustains a further blow when it is realised that very little of the huge quantities of pottery, stone artifacts and animal bone discovered by Childe were kept. For instance, the surviving ceramic collection is extremely small, comprising merely rim, base and decorated wall sherds.

Whilst it is disappointing that such detailed analysis is not feasible there remains an outstanding late Neolithic settlement with all its stone furniture intact. A series of site notebooks written by Childe throughout his excavations and preserved at the Institute of Archaeology, London, enables a more detailed picture to be drawn of the site, including numbered lists and the provenance of selected artifacts within the excavated houses.

The history of the village

As seen today the settlement is essentially a combination of houses of different dates. Earlier houses, such as Huts 9 and 10 (Fig 10:1), are only revealed where they are not overlain by subsequent construction. Consequently they are seen at the periphery of the settlement. Trial pits undertaken by Childe revealed substantial deposits underlying the visible buildings, including structural remains, to a depth of almost two meters in particular areas of the settlement. This demonstrates numerous

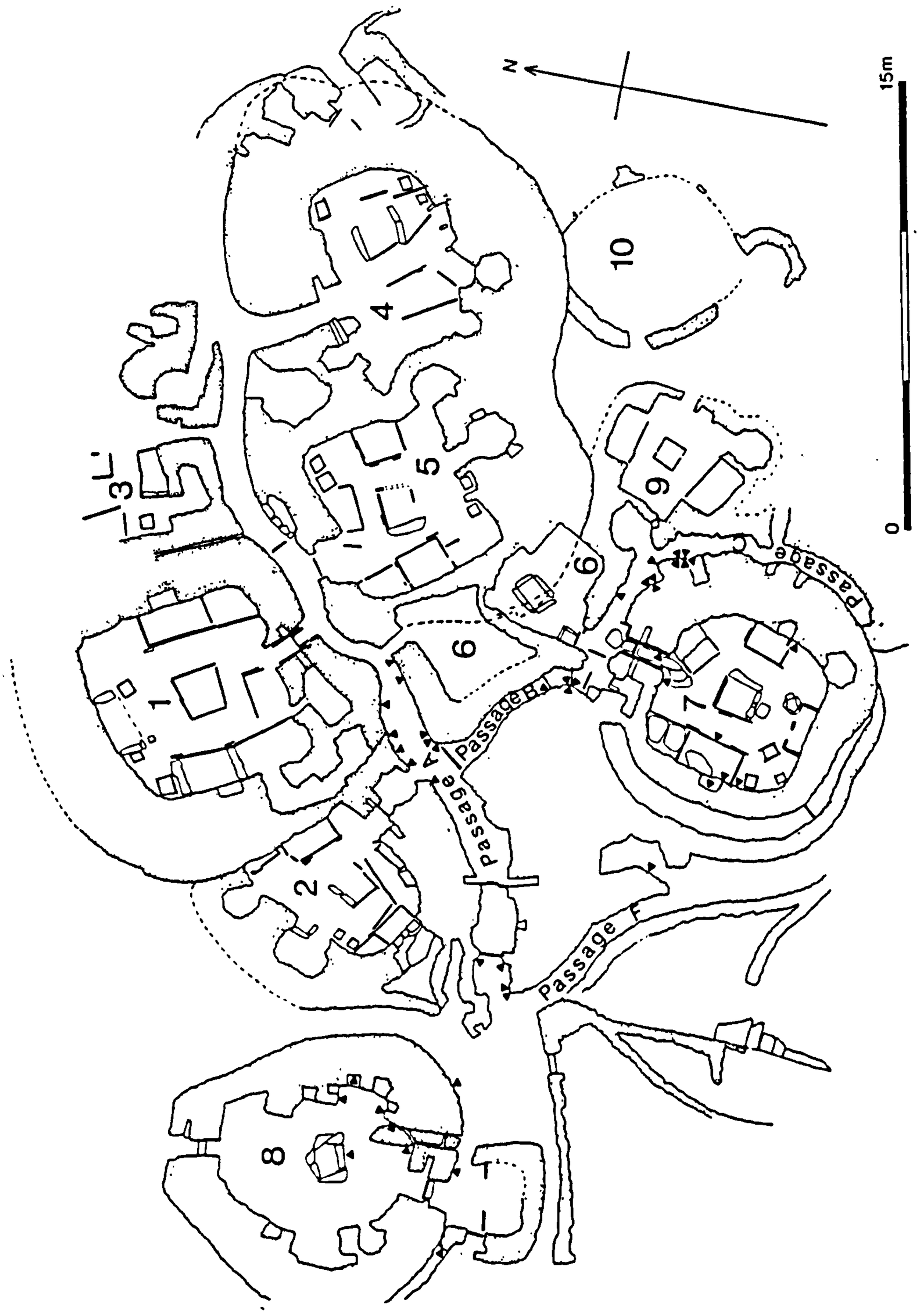


Figure 10:1. Plan of Skara Brae showing the position of decoration in the settlement.

rebuilding episodes and an apparently lengthy history of habitation on the site. Clarke (1976a) located a similar sequence of rebuilding and accumulation of deposits within a small trench located adjacent to passage A and house 7.

Childe identified four main phases of construction at Skara Brae (1931, 61-95), which were subsequently compressed into two by Clarke (1976a, 17). As was noted at Barnhouse, to write in terms of entire phases of rebuilding as representative of the structural history of the settlement is misleading. It is quite improbable that the entire village was simultaneously demolished, levelled, and rebuilt. Indeed, the available evidence for reconstruction at Skara Brae is consistent with that from the nearby Barnhouse settlement, where individual houses are refurbished, demolished and reconstructed. The interesting feature of this process of rebuilding is that a new house is frequently sited on the demolished remains of the earlier house. Childe notes, "the flimsy huts of Skara Brae 2 need not have been inhabited for any great length of time. They would be progressively replaced by larger and solider edifices, beginning perhaps with hut 7. The dwellings of period 2 would accordingly be allowed to fall into disrepair one after another. Eventually the materials from their walls would be appropriated to the more modernized huts, and the sites of the old ones levelled up" (1931, 93). Similarly at the Barnhouse settlement house 5 is rebuilt on at least four occasions. However, the newly built houses are always slightly offset from the foundations of previous habitations.

The combined evidence is consistent with a general pattern of houses being constructed, inhabited and eventually abandoned, following the lives and fortunes of the inhabitants. This may correspond to what is known as the developmental cycle of a domestic group (Moore 1986, 91-7), where domestic space alters in use throughout the life span or cycle of the occupying family. Differing patterns of use will inevitably create the conditions where spatial meaning is constantly altering (see chapter 6) and, depending on the appropriate social rules, dwellings may be demolished and replaced for reasons other than structural failure. That this rebuilding is frequently undertaken on the site of the earlier house, as opposed to an adjacent area of the settlement, is of special interest since it involved demolishing the partially standing walls, levelling the area, and building a new house in a slightly offset position. Whilst the availability of a

desirable plot of land within the settlement may have influenced this practice it is worth considering the important role kinship and inheritance rules play in governing residence patterns.

The practice of replacement also emphasises the notion of continuity. To physically reside on the space formerly occupied by the deceased, even mythical members of a person's family creates a number of links with the past, including those involving seniority and authority. The relationship with the ancestors, as shown in the tendency to isolate chambered tombs in peripheral areas of the landscape (see Sharples 1985), appears to be ambiguous and problematic. It may be this element of danger and concern for the dead which accounts for the construction and re-positioning of new dwellings as opposed to merely refurbishing the older house.

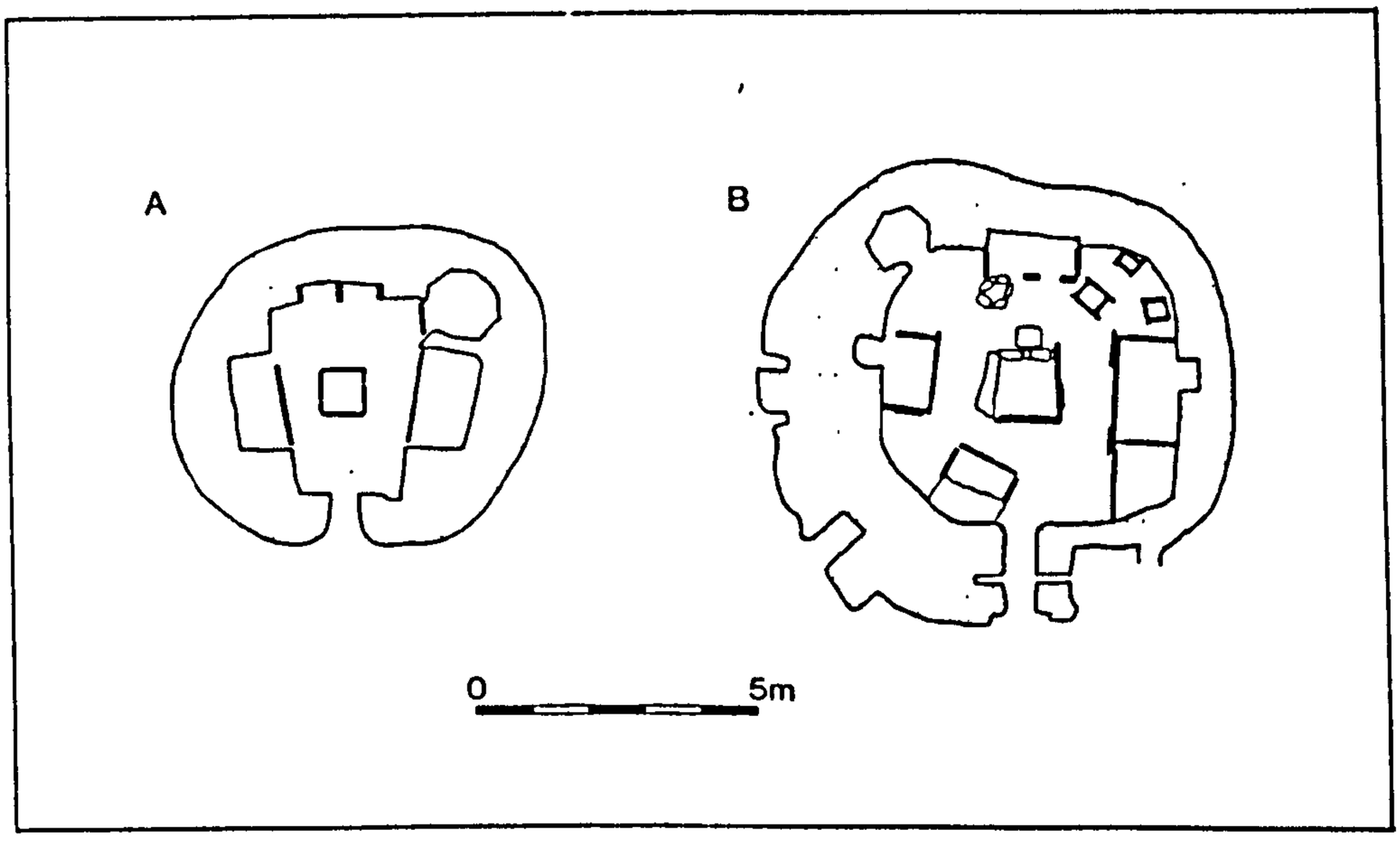


Figure 10:2. Earlier (a) and later (b) forms of house construction in late Neolithic Orkney.

A comparison of earlier with later houses constructed within the period of settlement at Skara Brae shows marked differences in design which have tended to be played down in the archaeological literature. Certainly, the four main components of the house interior; the entrance, left and right `beds', and rear `dresser' situated around the central fireplace maintain their overall layout through time. However, the later houses have almost double the internal floor area of the earlier houses. Paradoxically, when this enlargement occurs the stone box beds and rear dresser are projected from the outside wall, thereby minimalising the available space for

household movement and activities (Fig 10:2). This remodelling of the interior does, however, maintain the same spatial relationship between the four main components of the house.

The clearest example of an early house at Skara Brae is hut 9. Houses of similar design are present at two other late Neolithic settlements: Barnhouse, Mainland and Rinyo, Rousay. Frequently, these houses are orientated on a north-west / south-east alignment with the internal cruciform arrangement of stone furniture corresponding with midsummer sunrise and midwinter sunset (Fig 6:3).

The general image presented of Skara Brae being constructed in a midden filled hollow in the sand dunes is untenable for the original settlement. In examining the earliest period of habitation, Childe (1931b, 78-80) broached the question of whether the `phase 2' houses were freestanding or interconnected by covered passages. The presence of sand accumulation against the outer wall of hut 10 indicated the existence of open areas between the houses, consequently it was later stated that "the village was not originally subterranean; it began in an agglomeration of free standing huts which became embedded by successive steps in heaped up refuse - and that only partially" (*ibid*, 95). The more recent excavations tend to support this conclusion, "since there was very little addition to the midden outside of the house before it was demolished, it must be supposed that it was conceived as an essentially free-standing structure, not buried as the later houses were" (Clarke 1976a, 13).

On the basis of this evidence it is clear that the initial `village' at Skara Brae was quite different in appearance from that seen today. As at Barnhouse, the evidence suggests a number of free-standing houses, perhaps surrounding an open central area (Fig 10:3). Also, as occurs at the contemporary settlement at Barnhouse, a number of the houses may have been roofed with turf and in some cases wrapped in a turf jacket (see French forthcoming). With the demolition and decay of the buildings the turf will collapse and spread creating wide organic loamy deposits which may account for the extensive so called `midden' deposits at Skara Brae.

In examining the spatial organisation of Skara Brae there still remain suggestions of undifferentiated architecture (Clarke and Sharples 1985, 70), echoing Childe's claimed primitive communism (1946, 33). Differential status may not necessarily be

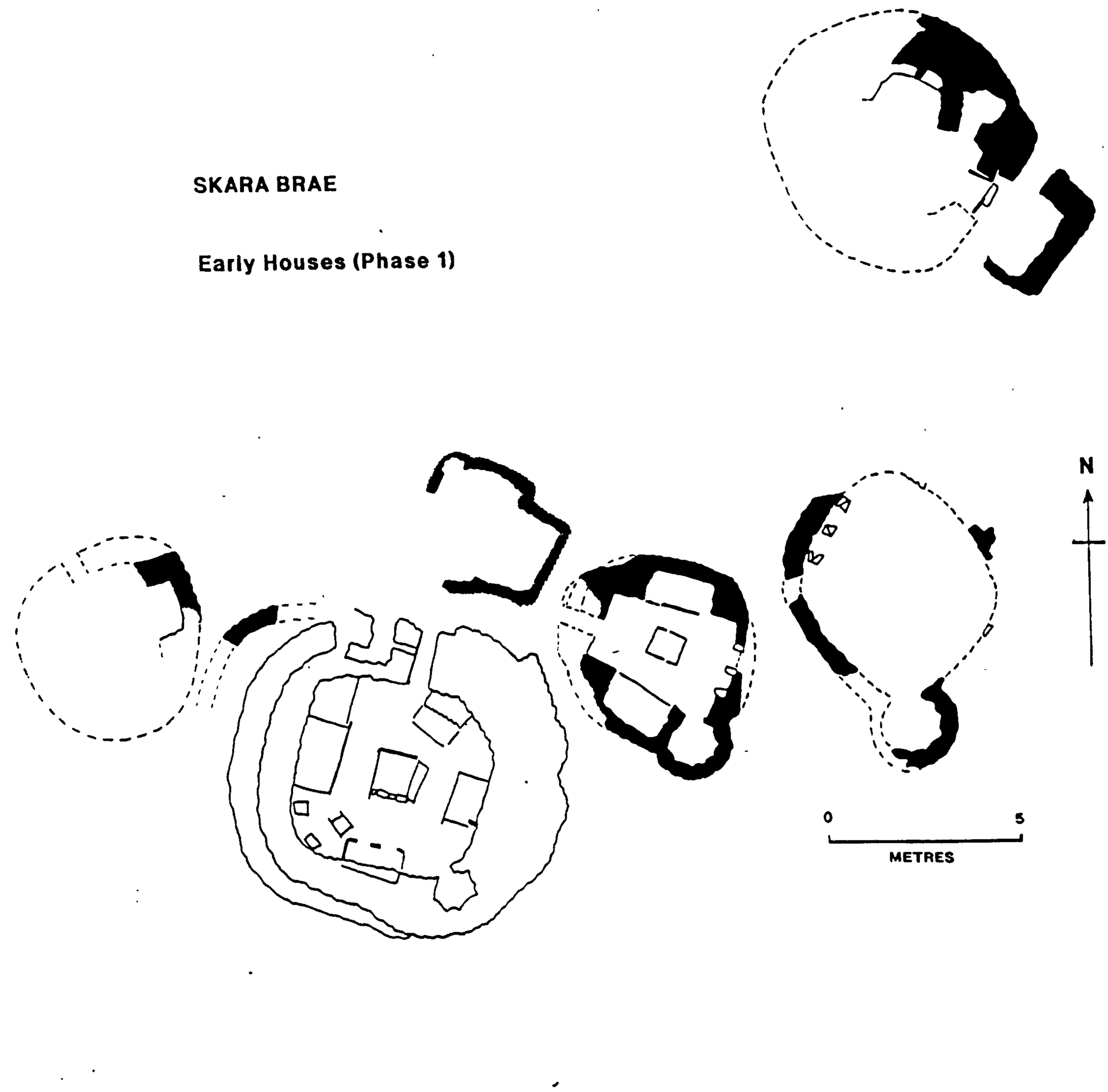


Figure 10:3. Plan of the earlier houses at Skara Brae, showing the open aspect of settlement.

expressed by the size of dwelling (Clarke and Sharples 1985, 33). However, the construction of social space is inevitably linked to cosmology, order, and social control.

Decoration and Division

At Skara Brae a number of different strategies are employed to delineate and differentiate various areas of the settlement. A combination of architecture and decoration effectively orders paths of movement into the area of human habitation, along passages and into the houses.

The decoration employed within the settlement is of particular significance since there is an apparent distinction made between the type of decoration, the context in which decoration is used , and the material in which it is inscribed. In chapters 7 and 8, it was noted that within the contemporary and related Maeshowe type of passage graves the form of decoration employed is of typical `passage grave' curvilinear style (Shee Twohig 1981, 227-8; Sharples 1984, figs 27, 28, 29) with the interesting exception of Maeshowe itself (see Ashmore 1986, 57-62). The position of such art within the Orcadian passage graves, as within the Irish examples, is considered to mark and thus define areas of importance and concern, such as the entrance to the tomb and internal thresholds (Sharples 1984, 116-7).

In direct contrast, within the confines of the settlement the decoration or art present on the walls and stone furniture is restricted to linear patterns, typically incised lines, crosses, chevrons and lozenges (Shee Twohig 1981, figs 287-90; Clarke 1976a, fig 9). That this form of decoration is not peculiar to Skara Brae is demonstrated by the decorated stones recovered from two other late Neolithic Orcadian settlements at Pool, Sanday and Barnhouse, Mainland (Fig 8:7). Hence, although decoration is deployed in a similar manner within both passage graves and settlements, different designs are appropriate to different contexts.

The cosmological significance of spatial representation within the late Neolithic house was discussed in chapter 6, however, it is worth re-emphasising the importance of architecture as both cosmological referent and an instrument of control (Guidino 1975, 9). As cosmological referent, architecture may be mobilised through social practices to give everyday activities ontological status and thus bring legitimacy to particular actions. The creation of a socially or cosmologically derived sense of order to organise a chaotic world will inevitably make architecture an instrument of

manipulation and control. The ability of architecture to cause the subject to move in certain directions, be restricted from some places at particular times, to witness some events and be excluded from others, forms a particularly strong bases of power and authority through the control of knowledge.

A feature of late Neolithic architecture in Orkney is the continual emphasis on boundaries and clearly defined spaces. Within Skara Brae some boundaries may at times take the form of physical barriers to movement, for example, doors complete with holding bars. Alternatively, more subtle devices are employed to convey the impression of moving across boundaries and through delineated space. These take the form of upright threshold slabs, restrictions in passage width by upright stones projecting from the side walls, and wall decoration. In conjunction with such boundaries, differently `weighted' spaces are created by areas of paving, variation in roof height, and inclining or declining floor levels. It is, of course, in this area of analysis, particularly the ability to follow paths of movement throughout the settlement, that the full potential of the standing structures at Skara Brae is fully realised.

As it is the final period of buildings which remain intact, any architectural examination is necessarily restricted to movement within the settlement during its latter period of habitation. Unfortunately, the eastern end of passage A is completely eroded together with most of Hut 3 (Fig 10:1), however, the western end section is intact and it will be assumed that entry into this passage could have been from either direction.

When approaching the settlement from the west an open area of pavement, known as the `market place' (Childe 1931, 22), lies between the isolated hut 8 and the main entrance into passage A. The outer section of this corridor is paved but unroofed, however, on entry a series of decorated stones on the right (south) wall are passed before the primary entrance is reached. An upright sill slab and two buttresses of dry masonry projecting from either side wall (both decorated with incised lines), combine to create a narrowed entrance, 53cm wide and 98cm high. This outer threshold marks the division between the inside and outside of the main area of settlement. Crouching

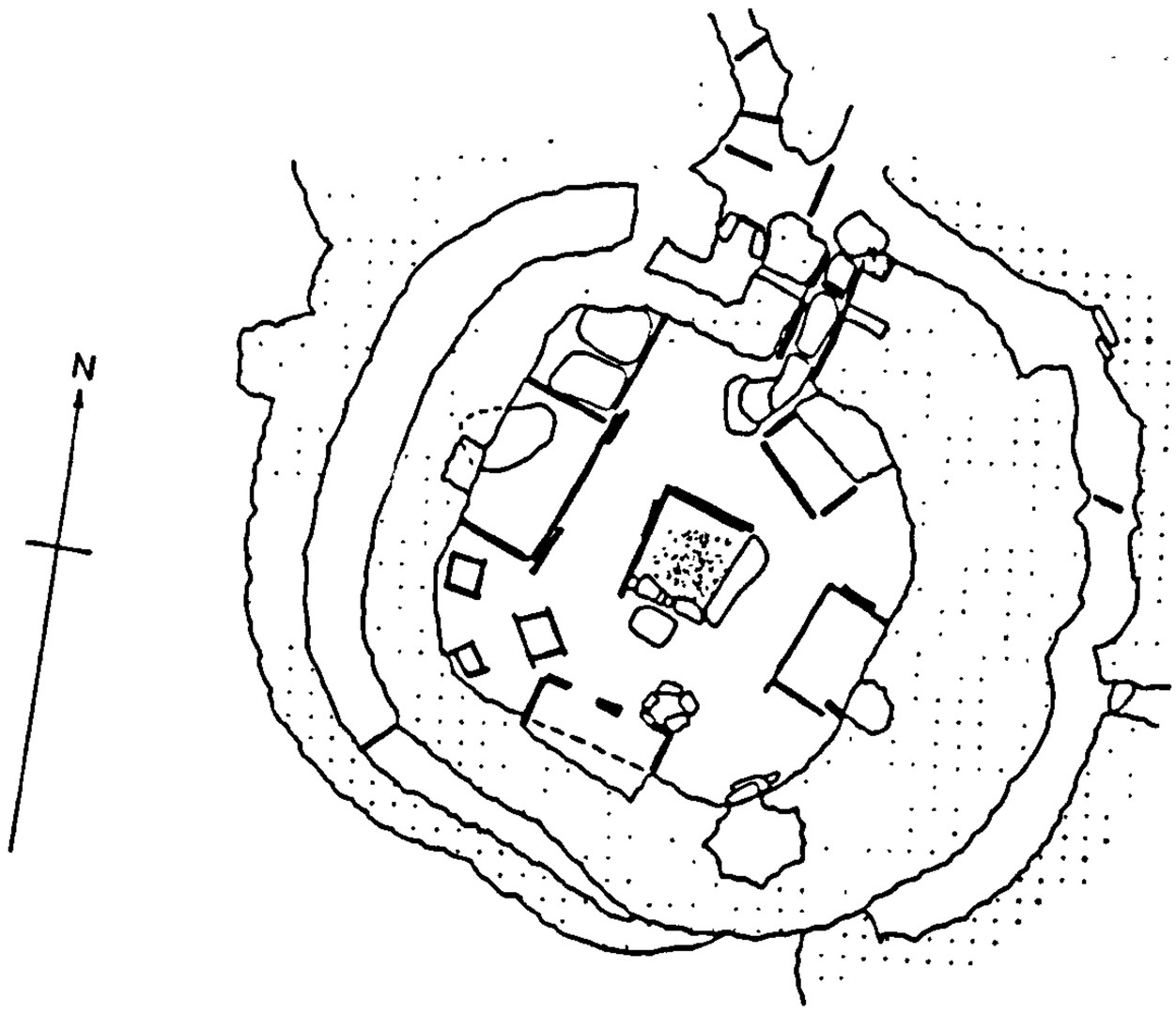


Figure 10:4. Plan of Hut 7, showing routes of access as represented by stone paving and the position of the burial cist slab in the right `bed'.

into the low and narrow passageway, the subject moves forward approximately two metres before being confronted with a substantial doorway. Two orthostats built into the passage walls, resembling door jambs, are set 53cm apart. A slab on edge forms the sill or threshold. Bar holes to secure a door are set into the inner passage.

Passing through this second division, entry into the main passage and settlement area is achieved. Moving in an easterly direction towards the main area of settlement, passage A begins to widen before the narrow passage B is passed leading off to the right. From this intersection both side walls become heavily decorated for a two and half metre length before the passage narrows and turns to the left, continuing its journey to the main area of habitation.

While architecture and decoration combine to create effective spatial definition when moving in an easterly direction, a more dramatic impression is gained when entering this area from the east; the main area of habitation. After turning the corner and passing the entrance to Hut 6 (which is a later addition), the passage way suddenly expands and becomes highly decorated. Where Hut 2 leads into this area of passage A, two features serve to separate it from this apparently important area. First, an elaborate porch-like anti-chamber separates the house doorway from the main passage. Second, both sides of the porch area are decorated. It is clear that this portion of

passage A constitutes a space of special concern even risk, and interestingly, it also marks the beginning of passage B and the journey to Hut 7.

Passage B is entered by stepping over an upright sill slab which also acts as a step down 45cm onto the lower floor level. After moving along, and gradually descending, the narrow passage for approximately four metres it begins to curve around to the right (south). At this point it is traversed by an upright sill slab which forms a further step down,

> "just beyond this step one sees on either side upright slabs set, edgewise into the walls. These slabs, now broken and displaced, seem once to have projected into the passage like jambs. Between them and the sill, already mentioned, the walls seem to have been faced with two slabs on end, now partly shattered. Moreover, two beam-like lintel stones, projecting radially from the west wall, help to support the roof-slabs. The whole construction looks like the remains of a gate" (Childe 1931, 45).

It is exactly at this point that further incised decoration is seen on the wall. Continuing along the passage a second upright sill slab marks another step down which coincides with more elaborate decoration on the right hand wall face. The final step down places the subject in a substantially broader and higher area, known as passage C. Directly ahead is the entrance to a small cell within which the door bar of Hut 7 can be controlled (Fig 10:4).

On entering passage C a further upright sill slab is stepped over and to the right the entrance to Hut 7 becomes visible. A flagstone path now leads directly along the passage and into the entrance passage to Hut 7. Proceeding along this pathway involves a gradual descent and crossing another upright sill slab, before reaching the doorway of Hut 7. This area was also decorated by a carved stone set high up in the passage wall (Childe 1929, 247). In reaching this point from passage A, a descent of almost one and a half metres has been undertaken and no less than five sill slabs and four areas of decoration have been negotiated.

The difficulties and spatial transitions incurred in reaching Hut 7 via passages A and B, are still considerable if access was possible from the south along passage C. The entrance, and original route of this passage are far from clear, however, if the subject was able to gain entry from the eastern side entrance into passage C, a

doorway is encountered approximately two metres inside. A upright sill slab crosses the passage and "a beam like slab spans the passage" (*ibid*), and reduces the ceiling height. This boundary is once again elaborated by six areas of incised art positioned adjacent to the threshold. Passing through the doorway, the subject moves along the passage, experiencing the gradual downward slope of the floor until a second sill stone and narrowing of the walls is reached. This slab faces a step down to a lower level. Stepping down, a decorated slab is passed in the left wall and a side cell lies to the right; the passage curves around slightly to the left and runs towards the entrance to Hut 7 which is now visible. This approach passes three further areas of decoration in the left hand wall.

Clearly whichever route is taken to gain access to Hut 7, involves passing through a number of architectural divisions of space, frequently accompanied and defined by decoration. Far more spatial discontinuity has to be negotiated in reaching Hut 7 than any other house in Skara Brae. Here architecture and art fuse to create greater symbolic and spatial depth. These boundaries, however, do more than order space since they are only encountered through the movement of people within the settlement; therefore, they also embody temporality. In examining the spatial organisation of Skara Brae it is clear that different forms of division and boundary operate to segregate the settlement, mark and identify key areas of importance and create spatial and temporal depth to potential paths of movement.

The `Huts' at Skara Brae

As mentioned earlier, the late Neolithic houses in Orkney all tend to conform to a consistent internal layout. The organisation of space is based on the cruciform arrangement of the entrance, right and left stone box `beds' and the rear `dresser', all positioned around a central fireplace. A distinction was noted earlier between the design of earlier and later houses, with the later examples being larger constructions with increased floor area (Fig 10:2). However, this enlargement is effectively minimalised by virtue of the projecting stone furniture. This regularity in distances between furniture over a substantial period of time suggests the existence of complex

rules of house layout which may have formed part of a sequence of constructional rituals and ceremonies surrounding the successful erection and bringing to life of a house (e.g. Blier 1987, 27-31; Howe 1983, 144-55). In chapter 9 it was suggested that the position and alignment of the hearth stones may have constituted a primary and important part of late Neolithic house construction.

Once built the house provides a place to live and undertake many activities, in this it embodies many symbolic meanings. Architecture and its spatial representation are continually drawn upon in various social situations, as is more portable material culture. Ceramic and stone vessels, woven curtains and many other different materials will participate in the definition of space. There is always a correct place for someone and something at any time of the day or year. Consequently, the numerous activities making up the rhythms of daily life continually alter the spatial definition of the dwelling.

As the main thoroughfare, winding the entire length of the settlement, passage A provides access from the outside world to all the later houses with the exception of isolated Hut 8. Five dwellings are directly situated to the northwest and southeast of passage A, not including hut 6 which is a slightly later construction and difficult to interpret as a house. Apart from the doorways and divisional sill slabs separating the settlement from the outside world, passage A runs unimpeded through the main residential area of huts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, with only a single upright sill slab dividing the corridor to the northeast of the entrances to huts 1 and 5. Each of the huts overlays earlier houses and it is interesting to note that the earlier Hut 4' (Fig 10:3) faced the opposite direction having a typical southeast entrance orientation. A porch arrangement protected the doorway, parallelling the porch in front of the doorway into Hut 8.

Of the houses lying to the south of the passage, Hut 5 pre-dates Hut 4 (Childe 1931, 93-4), while the northerly houses are clearly sequentially constructed beginning with Hut 1. This house has the largest internal area and, other than having its northern wall partially remodelled during the last century (including a window providing pleasant views of the bay), maintains its original construction. A typical internal layout is slightly altered by the presence of two masonry piers forming the ends of the left

hand `bed'. Beneath the rearmost pier a complete Grooved Ware vessel was set into the floor (Petrie 1868, 206). Entry to Hut 1 is gained through a doorway which admits the subject into the right hand area of the house.

This is a consistent feature of house architecture and recalls Hodder's (1982, 221-3), discussion of the apparent symmetry of the house hiding a subtle asymmetry. The right of centre position of the doorway, together with the presence of a stone box enclosure inside the house situated to the left of the doorway, ensure access is into the right hand area of the dwelling. This route is traced in stone paving within Hut 7 (Fig 10:4). By moving into the right side of the house the apparently equal balance of spatial depth between the right and left sides is completely altered. Hence, in some social situations the rear dresser, and the cell immediately behind it, may constitute the deepest space, alternatively, in other situations the left area will assume greater depth. It is worth emphasising that the realisation of these qualities of spatial meaning are totally dependant on people moving through space and undertaking activities at appropriate places.

In examining the rather sparse collection of material culture from Huts 1 and 2 (Fig 10:5) it becomes rather difficult to accept Childe's scheme for the abandonment of Skara Brae which appears to be based primarily on accounting for the contents of Hut 7 (see chapter 2). The tragic end to the settlement came;

> "it was eventually overwhelmed by a sudden catastrophe. The inhabitants of the huts were forced to flee from their homes, abandoning in the store rooms and on the floor many treasured possessions, fashioned with great labour and ingenuity. One woman in her haste to squeeze through the narrow door of her home (hut 7) broke her necklace and left a stream of beads behind as she scampered up the passage (C)"(Childe 1950, 5).

Indeed, the distribution, type and number of artefacts recognised on the floors of Huts 1 and 2, during the excavations of 1865 and 1927 indicates the houses to have been cleared out and the normal contents removed elsewhere. With the exception of the stone cups, bowls and vessels left within the stone box enclosures to the left of the entrance, the remaining artefacts tend to be situated adjacent to internal stone divisions with the rest of the floor area mainly free of finds (Fig 10:5). This concurs with the floors being kept reasonably clean and stray articles becoming lost or trapped against

internal furniture and the outer walls. This pattern contrasts with both the interpretation offered by Childe, and the remains encountered within Hut 7.

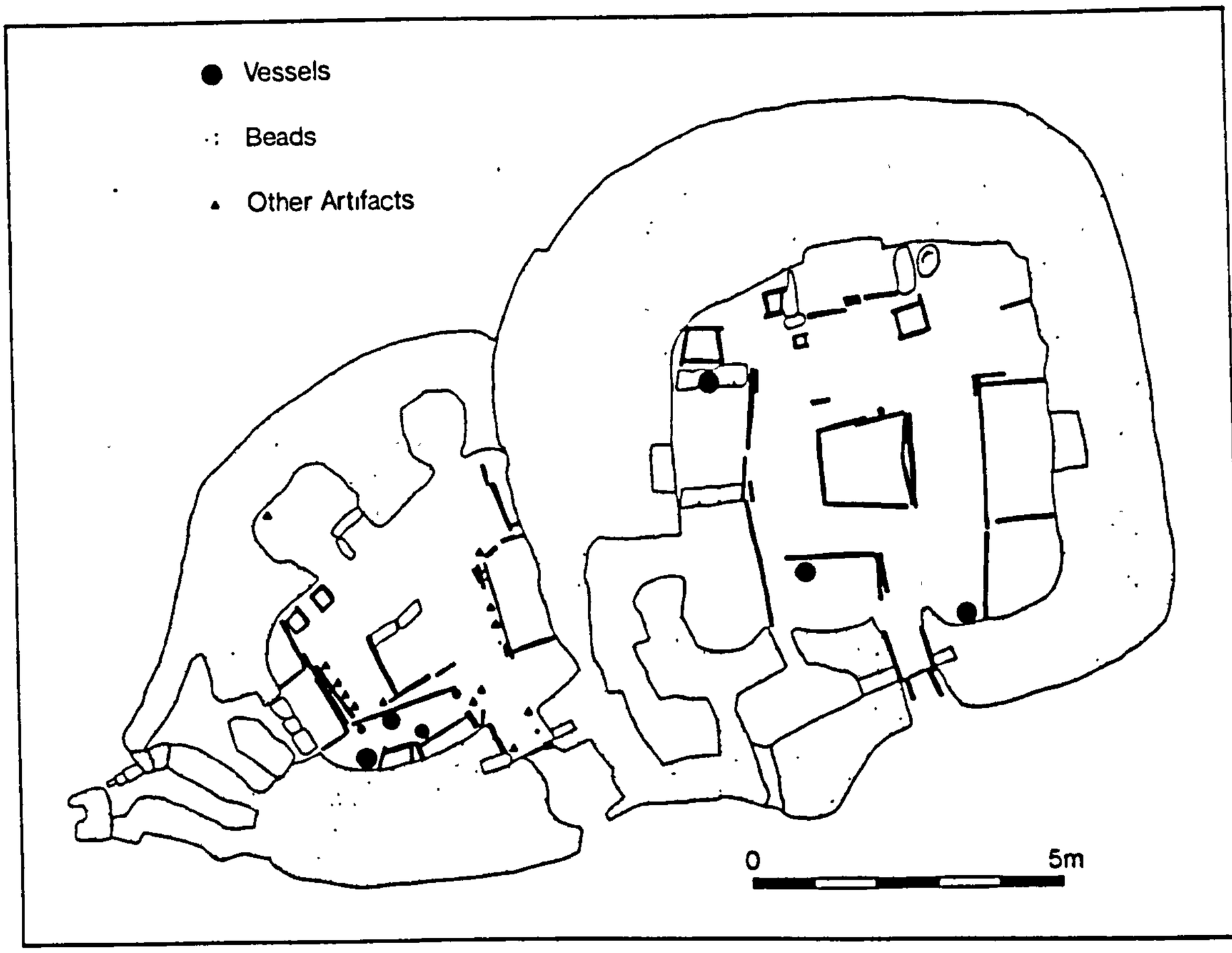


Figure 10:5. Plan of Huts 1 & 2, showing the distribution of artefacts.

Hut 7

During his first season of excavation and conservation in 1928 at Skara Brae, Childe located and `cleared out' Hut 7 (1929, 247). Being virtually intact apart from the roof, this house received extensive attention resulting in a comparatively detailed description of its architecture and deposits (*ibid* 246-60; 1931, 37-41; notebook 1928, 20-4). The house contained the usual internal organisation of stone furniture complete with an elaborately constructed rear `dresser'. The floor area is almost five metres square and the walls survive to the remarkable height of over two metres. This preservation is partially due to the lower level of Hut 7. It stands on natural sand as opposed to the other huts which overlay the levelled remains of previous houses.

Given this primary position, two possibilities were considered: either its foundations were dug through earlier deposits or alternatively, it was contemporary with the earlier houses. Childe, on the basis of the layout of the interior resembling the houses of later design, preferred the former as the more likely proposition. Interestingly, neither of the two interpretations occur elsewhere within the late Neolithic Orcadian settlements. Perhaps another explanation is that Hut 7 was simply remodelled, as Clarke suggested after encountering circular outer walling running around this house, during the 1972 excavations (1976a, 14). This may represent a similar situation as occurs at Barnhouse where Structure 8 may have replaced House 2 (albeit in a different position). Certainly House 2 is a primary construction and is maintained throughout the identifiable duration of settlement at Barnhouse, whereas all the other houses are rebuilt or abandoned. However, at Skara Brae only comprehensive excavation around Hut 7 will provide an answer, suffice to note that this would have been the oldest standing house to remain in use, within the settlement.

As already noted, the path to Hut 7 involves passing numerous boundaries besides being physically quite difficult to negotiate. On eventually arriving at passage C, a line of paving leads into the entrance, suggesting this to have been the intended line of approach. A hearth is positioned in the outer doorway adjacent to the left door jamb (Fig 10:4) (Childe notebook 1928, 20). The presence of a hearth at the threshold to this house is extremely significant since a similar use of fire to demarcate the entrance occurs in both Structure 8 at Barnhouse and at the Stones of Stenness henge monument (see chapters 9 & 11).

The narrow paved entrance passage into Hut 7 leads past the fireplace, over an upright sill slab and through into the interior. The wall of this passage is faced on both sides with thin upright slabs through which bar holes have been cut. Holes and small recesses for door bars are present in all the well preserved houses. In each case the door bar is controlled, as may be expected, from within the house allowing the door to be barred once the occupants are inside. However, the door bar of Hut 7 is controlled from the outside. Thus, the house may be sealed from the exterior, keeping the interior safely closed off and out of view or alternatively preventing anyone from being able to leave. This building is therefore, a structure of separation; a place which

can be shut up and kept apart.

The paved entrance leads into the right side of the building and, when moving into the interior, the subject crosses the threshold and passes decorated stones set either side of the inner entrance. The narrow low passage opens into a wide open expansive interior at least three metres in height. The internal area maintains similar organisation to that within other houses, however, the upper surface of the divisional slab of the right `bed' is heavily decorated with incised lines. Three further areas of decoration are positioned directly above this bed, as opposed to a single decorated slab within the left bed.

The concentration of decoration around the right bed assumes greater significance when it is discovered that a covered burial cist lies directly below it (Fig 10:4). The capstone is, in fact, a visible part of the paved floor of the bed. It also lies partially under the side wall and was stated in the excavation report to a primary element of the house construction (Childe 1929). As such it was discussed in terms of a foundation deposit. However, careful examination of the surrounding internal masonry reveals joins where the wall was *rebuilt* above the cist. This feature was noticed by Marwick, who notes that:

> "the sandy coating on the walls has been gradually washed by rain, and now two pretty clear breaks are apparent - running more or less vertically up and down the wall - one on each side of the burial cist and it is almost certain that Professor Childe will modify his former opinion in light of this new factor." (Marwick 1929, 20).

In fact, Childe did not modify his opinion in the final report. The corollary of this evidence is that the cist is inserted some time after the construction of Hut 7. Contained within the cist were the remains of two mature females interred in a crouched position. Although the exact position of one of the burials is difficult to determine due to the method of excavation, the other burial definitely lay on its left side. This is the only Neolithic cist burial at Skara Brae, and with the exception of the proposed cist in House 2 at Barnhouse, no other cist burials have been located within late Neolithic settlements. Why were these women deemed appropriate to be buried within Hut 7 or alternatively why this building was deemed suitably for burial? At one level the burial of women within a settlement context can be contrasted with the male

cist burials within the passage grave of Quanterness (chapter 7). I have already discussed the spatial and symbolic separation between Hut 7 and the rest of the settlement, such sanctions attest to the `different' nature of this building. A further point to consider is that if the left hand side of the house represented an area of activities undertaken by women, as is suggested by the evidence of ash removal and food preparation in certain houses at Barnhouse (see chapter 9), it is significant that the cist is set beneath the *right hand* bed. The profusion of decoration surrounding the right hand `bed' in Hut 7 may be attributable to the presence of the dead, however, the position of the women constitutes a reversal of normality, and importantly a change in social status. The possible interpretations are endless, moreover, the rebuilding of the wall may represent the cist being re-opened and the second female interred. Nevertheless, it may be significant that it is *women* who are present in Hut 7; a place of restriction which exceeds the sanctions which many societies place on periods of menstruation. Magical powers may have to be confined and in this vein, the building is notable for its other contents.

The material contents of Hut 7 caused Childe some anguish because unlike the other houses, this context appeared as an archaeological `Marie Celeste'. However, the vivid scene created to explain the apparently *in-situ* contents of Hut 7, fitted uneasily with the evidence (see chapter 2). Some objects may have been in their original position, however, other evidence hardly suggested normal occupation; "bits of bone, ashes, fragments of pottery, and, mingled therewith, stray implements and ornaments, were littered about everywhere. The pens D and Y (left and right `beds') were no cleaner than the rest of the floor - a fact which militates against the view that they served as beds" (Childe 1929, 259). The stone paving leading through the entrance was suggested to be "laid down to serve as stepping-stones through the morass of filth that covered the floor, or to mask deposits of bone and refuse that the inhabitants were to lazy to remove" (ibid). However, Childe found it rather more difficult to explain away the presence of the complete skull of a short horned bull, found in the left hand `bed', as a result of the lazy inhabitants taking "bones to bed with them to gnaw for supper" (Childe 1931, 15).

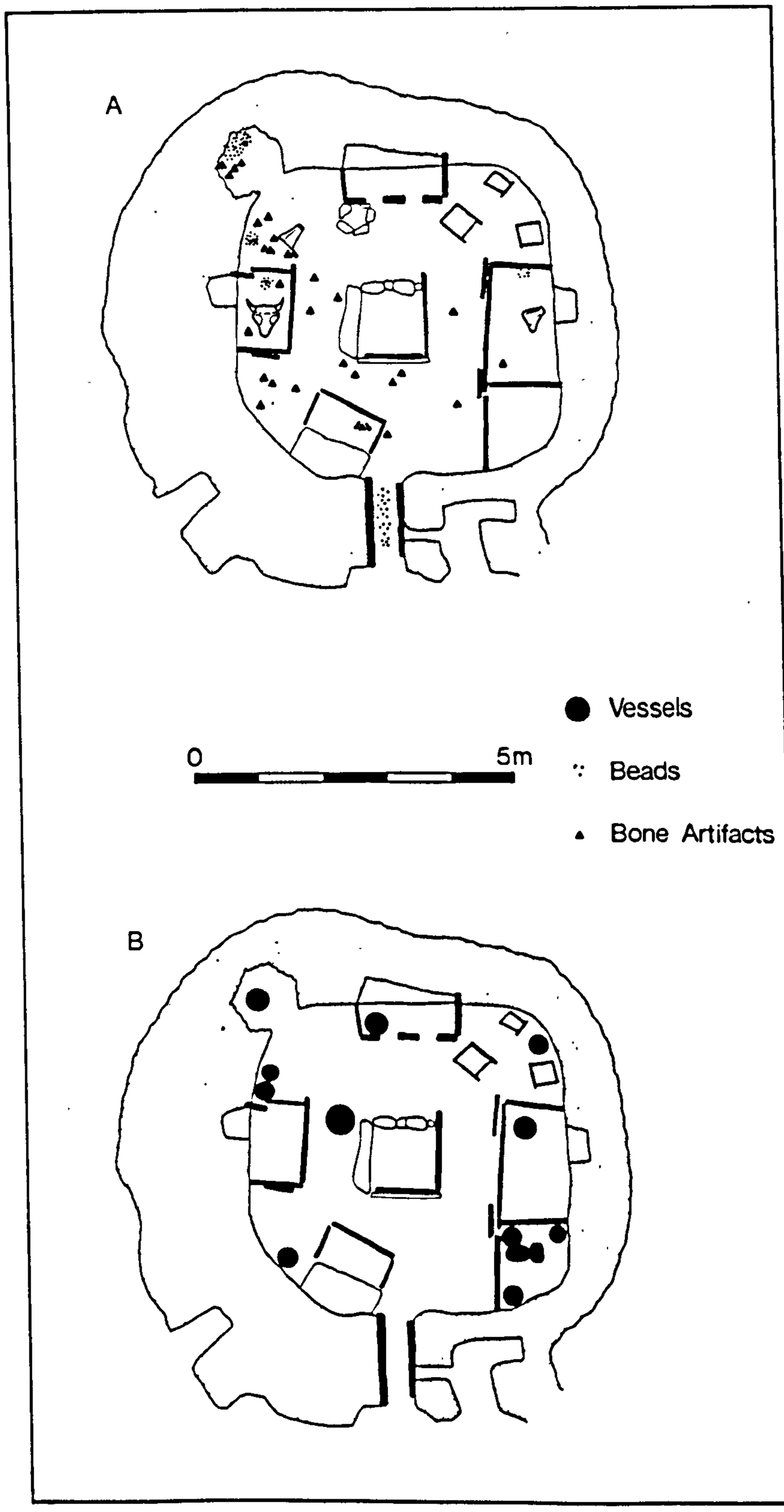


Figure 10:6. Hut 7: the distribution of bone artefacts (a), and stone, bone and ceramic containers.

It is clear, however, that a large number of objects, easily transportable, were left within Hut 7. A number of ceramic, bone, and stone containers were positioned around the interior, particularly in the right stone box enclosure (Fig 10:6). Some appear to have contained bones, which were unfortunately unidentified. A bone dish containing red pigment was set into the floor in the front left corner. Moreover, large numbers of objects of adornment were distributed mainly on the left side including a cache of beads and pendants in the rear cell. While the position of these items is of interest, the principle question remains why they were never removed.

All aspects of Hut 7 are atypical and in some respect represent a reversal of the `norm'. In this light its role as some form of `cult' house is almost certain. Whether it constituted a place of visions or visitations is, of course, beyond the realms of archaeological enquiry, however, it seems to be concerned with women and was deemed necessary to be heavily sanctioned in almost every respect.

Hut 8

The ruinous Hut 8 was discovered by Childe in 1929 (1930, 173). It stands to the west of the main area of settlement separated by the area of paving known as the `market place'. .This paving actually surrounds the outer wall, forming a narrow platform area. This isolation is not a product of collapsed passages nor structural difficulties of incorporation. It constitutes purposeful exclusion from the other houses, even Hut 7. Moreover, hut 8 has a different orientation from the normal northwest-southeast alignment of other houses, maintaining a south-southwest / north-northeast direction.

Direct access into the interior of hut 8 from the open paved area is prevented by a porch structure built around the doorway (Fig 10:7). This construction also serves to restrict visibility into the structure. To gain admission the subject enters the porch from the east, although Childe (1931, 53), states that originally there were two entrances; one each side. It seems unlikely that a door stood at this point, however, a threshold slab marks a small 15cm step up into the porch which is floored with a single large slab. Once within the confines of the porch a recess is seen to the left

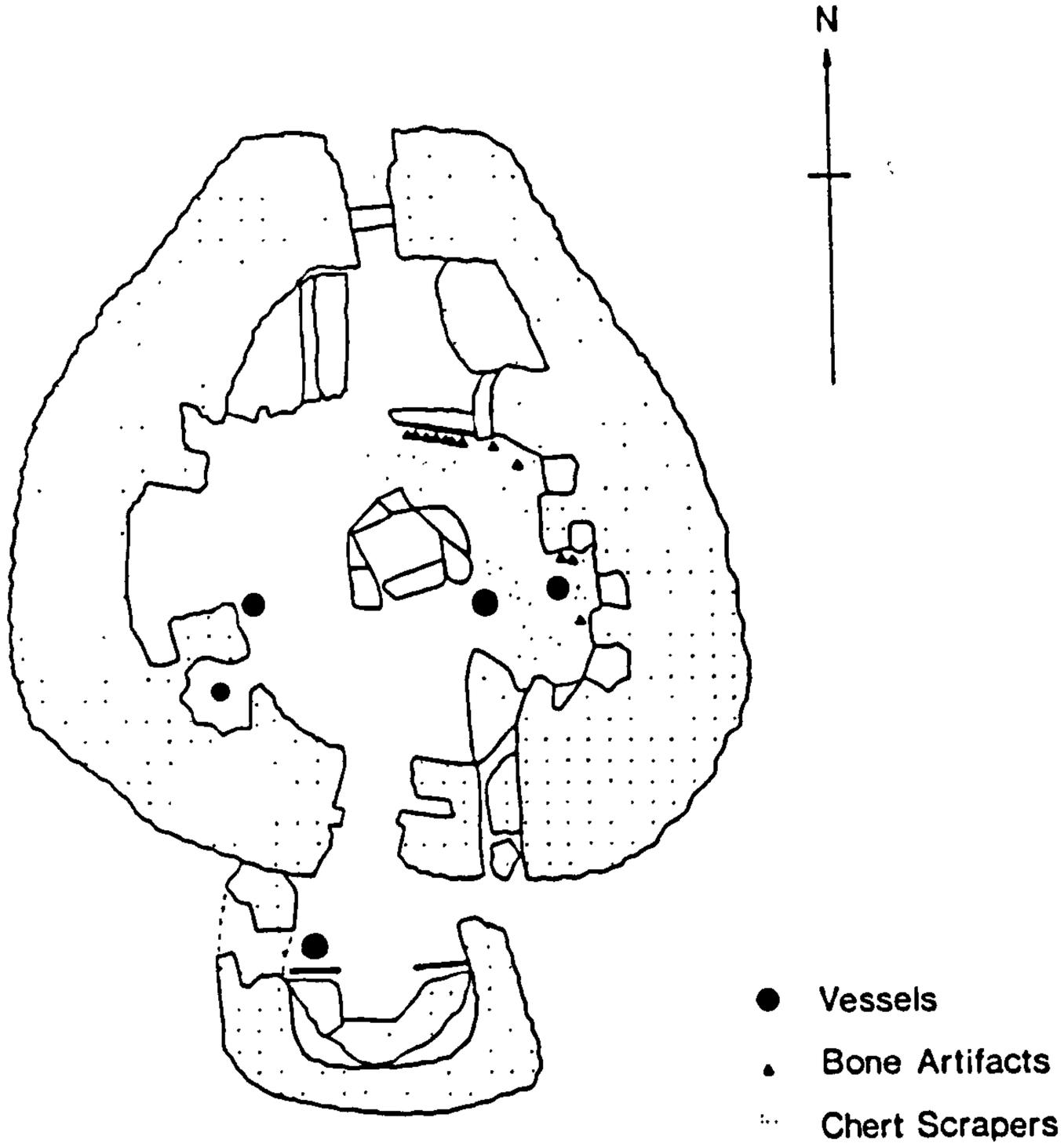


Figure 10:7. Hut 8: the distribution of artefacts.

(south), flanked on either side by two upright slabs resembling door jambs. In this recess stood two large pots (Childe 1930, 174).

The main entrance to Hut 8 is situated to the right and on turning to gain entry, incised decoration becomes visible on the right wall. The doorway is 67cm wide and only 91cm high, making it an extremely small entrance. Passing through into the interior the threshold slab is crossed and "the bar holes come as usual on the inside" (*ibid*, 175). Internally, Hut 8 maintains the same basic spatial organisation seen in the other houses, however, different elements are substituted for the usual furniture. For instance, the projecting `beds' are replaced by recesses. This process of architectural substitution leads Clarke and Sharples (1985, 66-8), to separate hut 8 from the other houses as not conforming in plan or in arrangement of internal fittings.

Of interest is the alignment of the fire place which is offset from the house alignment, bringing it around to the more conventional southeast-northwest

orientation. The western wall and recess was severely damaged, therefore, it is difficult to establish whether the left hand side of the house was as profusely decorated as the right. Nevertheless, the art contained in hut 8 is both superior and more prolific than any other building at Skara Brae (Shee Twohig 1981, 238).

The material contents of Hut 8 serve to emphasise its difference. "The most distinctive traces of human occupation found on the floor of this house were, however, chert and flint scrapers, cores, and chips. No less than 390 pieces were collected on the floor, 57 from the eastern alcove alone" (Childe 1930, 178). At the rear of the hut, in place of the dresser, was a partitioned area which was interpreted as a kiln (*ibid*, 176-7). Whatever occurred within this area "two great slabs paved the areas on either side of the gap between the north wall and the partition to the south. Upon them lay a packing of burnt stones" (*ibid*, 177). Thus, fire seems to have played a major part in the activities undertaken at some time in Hut 8. Whether this activity was primary to the construction is unknown, however, virtually all commentators have followed Childe (1931, 49) in assuming this area to be a workshop and not a dwelling (e.g. Mackie 1977, 191; Clarke and Sharples 1985, 67).

Despite the evidence for chert working, there is no evidence to suggest that Hut 8 was not a dwelling. However, the importance of this structure is that it was deemed necessary to be built away from the main settlement complex and to profusely decorate it. From the materials located within the house we know that some of the activities, such as chert preparation, involved fire treatment. Pottery may also have been decorated and fired in this building. Perhaps an answer to the question of segregation lies in the use of fire since in this context it primarily involves transformation from the natural to the cultural which frequently requires spatial separation and sanction (Leach 1977).

Again we are seeing different activities defined spatially. The exact chronological relationship between Hut 8 and the rest of the settlement was never established with any certainty by Childe. It is definitely not primary, since unlike Hut 7, it lies on earlier deposits. In situation, and having an elaborate porch arrangement, it recalls Structure 8 at Barnhouse and the possibility must remain that it represents a later construction.

Conclusion

Skara Brae is, beyond doubt, the finest and most well preserved late Neolithic settlement in western Europe. This preservation allows the admittance of thousands of visitors every year to crawl along the narrow passages and peer into the dwellings of long dead Neolithic families. Even their furniture is left standing in its original positions. Yet, on the basis of a history of poorly recorded excavations and the unsystematic collection of very few artifacts, the archaeological value of this site appeared to be extremely limited. This is clearly revealed in the notable absence of any form of analysis of Skara Brae in the numerous studies of Neolithic Orkney. This omission may well be a product of the application of inadequate theoretical perspectives (cf Hodder 1982, 218-9), however, there still remains an intangible feeling that Skara Brae is somehow `lost' to any critical archaeological evaluation. Most of the artefactual evidence from the site is indeed lost and no amount of mourning will facilitate its return, nevertheless, Skara Brae is itself an artifact, remaining in virtually perfect condition.

In this re-examination of Skara Brae the emphasis has tended to be placed on architecture and art, and how they combine to create spatial representations as invoked and experienced by people as they moved through the settlement's narrow restrictive passages and into the impressively lofty houses. It is, however, important to stress that space and time are not some independent variables in which people live out their lives, but are intrinsic to human experience and understanding of the world. In this way questions concerning the differences between houses at Skara Brae must necessarily take into account the movement and paths taken to reach the individual structures and the way in which these spaces are delineated and ordered.

The results of the enquiry show that a number of identifiable different methods are employed in the architecture of the passages to break up space, each of which embodies different symbolic meanings and values. For instance, every boundary confronted on the way to Hut 7, symbolises discontinuity along a passage from everyday areas through progressively `weighted' space to a particular goal. The undertaking of such a journey would probably have been restricted to certain times and

specific events, and may have involved people being exposed to the dangers of symbolic impurity and close proximity to the dead.

On closer scrutiny the Skara Brae houses which appear very regular, and in the past have been assumed to be undifferentiated, are found to be extremely different. It was also suggested that the spatial content or symbolic meaning of a particular spatial configuration is contingent on a particular social situation. Hence, houses displaying similar architecture may assume quite different meanings at any given time. Other differences between the houses at Skara Brae involve age and contents.

Hut 7 stands apart, and can no longer be identified as a normal dwelling. It is built in a primary position and despite having been remodelled remains the oldest standing house in the settlement. An identifiable distinction between the contents of this hut and the others is virtually impossible since very few are preserved for examination, however, a difference is noticeable in the treatment of the house contents and the decorative adornment of the interior. Hut 7 apparently has a large proportion of its material contents left *in-situ* after abandonment. This situation contrasts with the contents recorded in Huts 1, 2, and 3, where the floors appear to have been kept moderately clean and most of the contents removed on abandonment; an occurrence consistent with the maintenance of a living area. Thus, although lacking the majority of finds from these contexts and therefore being unable to identify any detailed form of material patterning or conduct spatial analysis, it is possible to make a distinction between Hut 7 and the other houses. A distinction which, when combined with the other evidence, suggests the objects in hut 7 were not available or intended for removal.

Hut 8 poses a different problem for, as with Hut 7, it is separated from the main area of habitation, although in a different manner. From the position and nature of its material contents it appears not to have been regularly cleaned as were Huts 1, 2, and 3, however, as far as may be determined, the majority of contents were removed before abandonment. That particular craft activities occurred within its confines is almost certain, however, this does not prohibit habitation. Of more immediate concern is why this building was spatially separate from the settlement. Like Structure 8 at Barnhouse, Hut 8, may have been a later construction, moreover, the inclusion of

decoration attests to the greater significance of the acts occurring within its confines.

It is to be hoped that this re-examination of Skara Brae has dispelled any remaining belief that it represents a small cluster of undifferentiated houses situated in a scoop in the sand. It is a settlement of great complexity, and, through examining its architecture it is possible to begin to understand the way socially constructed space influenced the relationships between people, families and their houses. In chapter 12, this aspect of the evidence will be drawn out to chart changes occurring throughout the late Neolithic period in Orkney.

Chapter 11

Monumental Choreography: architecture and spatial representation on the Stenness peninsula

For anyone who has visited the late Neolithic henge monuments of Avebury or Durrington Walls, the passage graves of New Grange or Gavrinis, or the stone circles of Callanish or Brodgar, there can be little doubt of the feelings of absolute awe and excitement which these spectacular monuments inspire. To see and move around the monuments invokes a brief encounter with a totally different culture which inevitably generates both intrigue and wonder. On a personal level it is a combination of these experiences which has guided my research into what I regard as the most exciting period of European prehistory. Of course, these impressions are not mine alone nor restricted to other archaeologists but are experienced by the majority of people who visit the monuments. Neither is this a contemporary phenomenon as the numerous historical accounts so vividly demonstrate, and the survival of many late Neolithic monuments for over four thousand years aptly testifies.

Given the lavish scale of architecture encountered within the monuments it is not unreasonable to wonder at their original meanings and enquire into the purpose behind their construction, "what do we know about the role of monuments in their own right? Why were they built in the first place and what roles did they play afterwards ?" asks Bradley (1984, 62). In pursuing these questions some of the monuments appear easier to interpret than others. For instance, there is no controversy or debate in the designation of Knowth or West Kennet as megalithic chambered tombs, built to house

the dead. In contrast, such a direct interpretation of henge monuments or stone circles is apparently fraught with danger and generally avoided with discussion being reduced to problems of definition and classification (e.g. Clare 1986; Harding and Lee 1987). This notable discrepancy in ability to interpret different monuments does not lie within a problem of their `enigmatic nature' but resides in the range and level of our experience and understanding and demonstrates most clearly the frequently unacknowledged degree of subjectivity inherent within all our interpretations of archaeological material.

In this chapter I aim to pursue Bradley's questions concerning monuments, and to offer my interpretation of the group of late Neolithic sites situated on the Stenness promontory, Mainland, Orkney. This account is not intended as a general model for all monuments of similar appearance nor for other groups of similar monuments situated in different regions of Britain, it is simply an interpretation based on my understanding and knowledge of a particular body of archaeological material which is the product of Neolithic people's understanding and knowledge of their own world.

The late Neolithic Monuments of Stenness, Orkney

In western Mainland, Orkney, lies a large natural bowl containing the lochs of Stenness and Harray. These lochs are divided by two promontories; the Ness of Brodgar and the Stenness peninsula. A number of monuments are situated on both the projecting land masses, including henge monuments with internal stone circles, chambered tombs and numerous single standing stones (Fig 9:1). Although separated by a narrow stretch of water the two groups of monuments tend to be viewed as a single unit; either a ritual pairing or clustering (Harding and Lee 1987, 45), complex (Renfrew 1979, 254), or centre (Mackie 1977). As concentrations of Neolithic monuments in other areas of Britain have been discussed in terms of `ritual landscapes'(see papers in Bradley and Gardiner 1984), it has been just a simple step to extend this idea to Orkney.

The recent discovery of the late Neolithic Barnhouse settlement (see chapter 9), on the tip of the Stenness promontory serves to alter the conventional scheme. On the one

hand, the presence of a settlement within an area deemed to be a `ritual landscape' causes certain conceptual and definitional problems; on the other, when Barnhouse is considered in conjunction with a likely second large settlement, closely situated on the Brodgar promontory at Bookan (Callander 1931), the possibility is raised of the two areas constituting discrete groups of monuments. Although today the narrow stretch of water dividing the two promontories is forded by a road bridge it still constitutes a natural boundary between the Stenness and Sandwick parishes. Unfortunately, the monuments of the Brodgar promontory are either ruinous or unexcavated and do not provide the quality of evidence presently available in the Stenness area. Given these limitations this contribution will concentrate on the monuments of the Stenness promontory.

At a brief glance these famous monuments; Maeshowe passage grave, the Stones of Stenness henge monument, and a number of isolated standing stones, and the monumental house 2 and structure 8 at Barnhouse, appear to be of an apparently different nature. Under these circumstances it is quite unnecessary to attempt to explain the formation of this group in a purely evolutionary framework as has been suggested for a similar group of monuments elsewhere (Thorpe and Richards 1984). Instead, questions of composition should be directed towards understanding why the monuments maintain spatial integrity in assuming different locations within a small geographic area as opposed to superimposition or a sequence of remodelling and reconstruction as occurs with many chambered tombs (cf Kinnes 1981).

When each of the buildings is architecturally distinct, as with the Stenness monuments, there is a tendency to divide and classify. For instance, Maeshowe stands at the head of a whole class of passage graves bearing its name (Davidson and Henshall 1989, 37-51), while the Stones of Stenness is a class 1 henge monument (G. Ritchie 1985, 119), being recognised as a classic type (Harding and Lee 1987). Due to their position within the Barnhouse settlement, house 2 and structure 8 would under normal procedure be placed and discussed within a general typology of house designs (e.g. Clarke 1976a, Fig 4). Hence, although physically situated in close proximity to one another each of these monuments remains typologically distant. Interestingly, within the confines of typological classification minute architectural detail is

introduced into arguments concerning the evolutionary position and definition of different sites. Apart from classification, the architectural differences of the Orkney monuments tend to be virtually ignored (see however, Hodder 1982, 218-28), except in the calculation of labour investment in monumental construction (Fraser 1983, 360; Renfrew 1979, 214-8).

Clearly, both monumentality and architecture are important, but it is noticeable that these ideas are highly reductionist, being restricted to the actual phenomenon of construction. Consequently, no concern is given to the intended use of the building, the activities undertaken within it, the paths of people moving through it or the principles of order and ideas of cosmology embodied within its form.

Monumental Architecture

It is all to easy for archaeologists to represent sites and monuments as two dimensional plans. The sites are always drawn as plans and are subsequently analysed as plans, normally in the guise of phases and artefact distributions. Consequently, they are visualised and interpreted as plans. The unfortunate corollary of this traditional procedure is that the people who originally inhabited the sites which the archaeologist excavates become difficult to accommodate and are quickly consumed in the search for interesting two dimensional patterns. Furthermore, better preserved sites which have standing remains tend to be treated in a similar manner to the more frequently encountered plough damaged sites. In either situation a false view of the world is being projected onto the material remains. For instance, how many archaeologists think of their homes or workplaces (apart from excavations) in terms of a two dimensional plan ? Presumably, very few. Like other human beings, archaeologists make sense of the world through interpretive practice. Neolithic people did exactly the same which is why architecture, and its reconstruction, is so vitally important.

Although obvious, the planning and raising of a monumental building, or for that matter any form of construction which delineates space, requires a clear idea of the spatial representation which is to be achieved. This will obviously be dependant on the use for which the building is envisaged. To produce a recognisable and appropriate

form the construction will necessarily draw on established social, and therefore, cosmological principles of order. Monumental architecture may consequently be "defined not only by what is built but also by the interpretations - and therefore the intentions - of those who build and use it" (Guidino 1975, 9). Hence, the organisation of the world as effected through the creation of architecture may only be fully understood in terms of those people who lived and acted within its influence. There is no intrinsic meaning in constructed space (Moore 1986, 107-20), the invocation and interpretation of spatial symbolism is therefore totally contingent on social practices. Thus, the physical presence of people moving through areas, negotiating boundaries, and undertaking particular activities at appropriate places allows spatial meanings to be continually invoked. These actions both draw on and recreate meaning through a reflexive relationship between the material world and the subject. This process allows spatial definition to be frequently altered within various social situations (see chapter 6).

If spatiality and temporality are the essence of human action, and therefore existence, then it follows that the creation of spatial order within the world, through architecture, is also a temporal manifestation. This recalls the belief of Hall (1966, 163), that the way in which a society structures space is dependant on their conception of time. As architecture effects a coincidence of space and time, it must also embody a conjunction of cosmology and social practices. Now we can fully understand the suggestion that within pre-literate societies, time is frequently conceived in terms of particular events and the place at which they occur. Thus, it is the presence of people at specific `places' or `locales' which constitute the routines and cycles of everyday life (Giddens 1981, 40).

Architecture, therefore, fuses space and time in the creation of places which structure the routines of life by representing fixed points in the fluidity of existence. In assuming this role, architecture is obviously a potent medium for controlling people: where they go, and what they see and do. Such a manipulation of social space enables an element of control to exist in the everyday transactions of life since the restriction of people from certain areas allows a partial monopoly over knowledge and emphasises "the historical role of architecture, in all its particulars, as a fundamental

instrument of power" (Guidino 1975, 10).

If architecture creates spatial representations in the form of interpretive practice then it cannot be meaningfully considered independent of social practices. The movement of people through constructed space creates a fluidity which is temporal in nature. Space and time are no longer seen as backdrops to human action but rather an embodiment of it.

In reconsidering the idea of `place', as a fusion of space and time transcending everyday social practices, the monumentality expressed within the construction of Maeshowe, the Barnhouse monuments, Stones of Stenness and the numerous standing stones becomes clearer to understand. In the creation of such highly visible `places' at appropriate positions within the landscape a spatial and temporal order of some magnitude was being committed to the world.

Maeshowe: a place apart

Described as "the most accomplished and sophisticated chambered tomb in the British Isles" (Megaw and Simpson 1979, 136), Maeshowe stands in splendid isolation. Lying within a highly visible position it is set approximately one kilometre to the south east of the Barnhouse settlement and the Stones of Stenness (Fig 11:1). Although recognisable as a passage grave "the beautiful dressing of the stones and the spaciousness of the main chamber" (Renfrew 1979, 203), combine to create an architectural image which is significantly different from any of the other Orcadian passage graves (*ibid*, 201). This variation has been responsible for many ups and downs on the typological ladder; sometimes it is presented as the earliest of its type (e.g Piggott 1954, 234, fig 64), at other times it is the glorious final product (Davidson and Henshall 1989, 90), occasionally it is even excluded from its type altogether (Renfrew 1979, 201). Fraser, after undertaking numerous analyses, concedes that "as happens so frequently, Maeshowe emerges as an exception" (1983, 94), and eventually ends up sitting uncomfortably, with Quanterness, in a separate class (*ibid*, 132). It is these very difficulties of fit which serve to express the ambiguity of Maeshowe and reveal the simple fact that it is different.

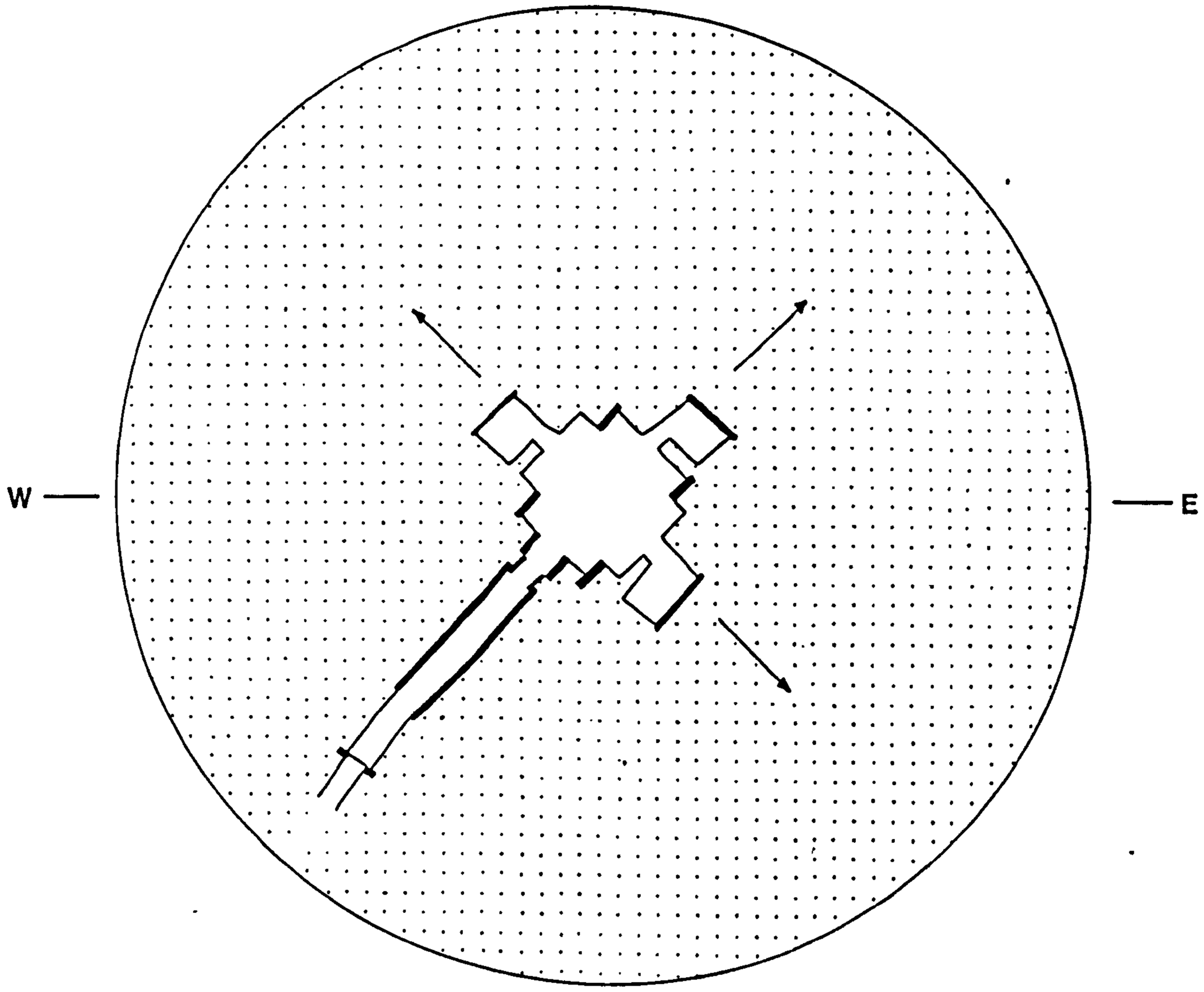


Figure 11:1. Plan of Maeshowe showing the orientation of the entrance passage.

Although different, Maeshowe is inescapably a representation of a passage grave and would consequently have been imbued with all the associations of a place of the dead. In this respect it is important to examine its architecture within a historical context. The adoption of passage grave architecture in Orkney is clearly significant since it depicts an altered conception of the relationship between the living and the dead (Sharples 1985, 71). However, within its spatial organisation lie the ingredients of separation and restriction. The long entrance passage linking the outside world to the high vaulted inner chamber is more than an extended division creating the necessary precautionary partition between the living and dead (see chapter 8). The

Figure 11:2. The view along Maeshowe passage towards the central chamber.

small dimensions of the passage physically restrict bodily movement into and out of the central chamber; it is, in fact, very difficult to move along the passageway except upon hands and knees. The presence of a long passage also effectively removes any visual access to the activities occurring within the central area. Indeed, people observing the proceedings from the outside would loose sight of those entering the chamber after they had travelled no more than a metre or so along the passage. Hence, on the assumption that very few people were physically able, or had the social position, to witness or participate in the ritual events occurring within the central

chamber, the only medium by which people situated externally would have obtained any knowledge of the internal happenings was through sound. It is in respect to these restrictions that the enhanced acoustic properties of the Orcadian passage graves take on greater significance. Loud noise tends to be absorbed and dampened within the size and height of the central chamber, however, the long passage acts as a megaphone projecting sound outwards. This creates the disconcerting effect of increasing the volume as the subject exits back along the passage and provides enhanced clarity of sound outside the entrance.

Passage grave architecture should, therefore, be viewed in relation to secretive and restrictive practices which were inevitably linked to the control of ritual knowledge by certain members of society. It is in this context that Maeshowe should be examined, for despite its magnificence of construction it retains the essential characteristics of a passage grave.

Architecturally, Maeshowe is the same and yet different from other Orcadian passage graves, and it is these features which are crucial in its interpretation . The actual building is situated on a clay platform which is bounded by a circular ditch separating the monument from the outside world. Access into the central chamber involves passing along a passage of approximately 10 metres in length, 90cm in width and 1.36 metres high. The overall scale of the passage is greater than any other Orcadian passage grave, allowing comparatively easier entry and exit whilst maintaining minimal visual access.

The journey to the centre of Maeshowe initially involves negótiating the boundary ditch and crossing the open platform area where the subject remains in full view of observers positioned outside the monument, beyond the ditch. Admission into the building is gained by stepping forward and crouching into the low passage. Entering the monument the subject is presented with a darkened, apparently undifferentiated corridor. This space has no visible demarcation in the form of divisional uprights or threshold slabs, or megalithic art. In fact, the opposite occurs with an impression of uniformity and `stretched' space being enhanced by the use of long single slabs for the walls, floor and ceiling of the badly lit passageway. On moving forwards along this constructed path (Fig 11:2), a feeling of rising towards a goal is experienced by virtue

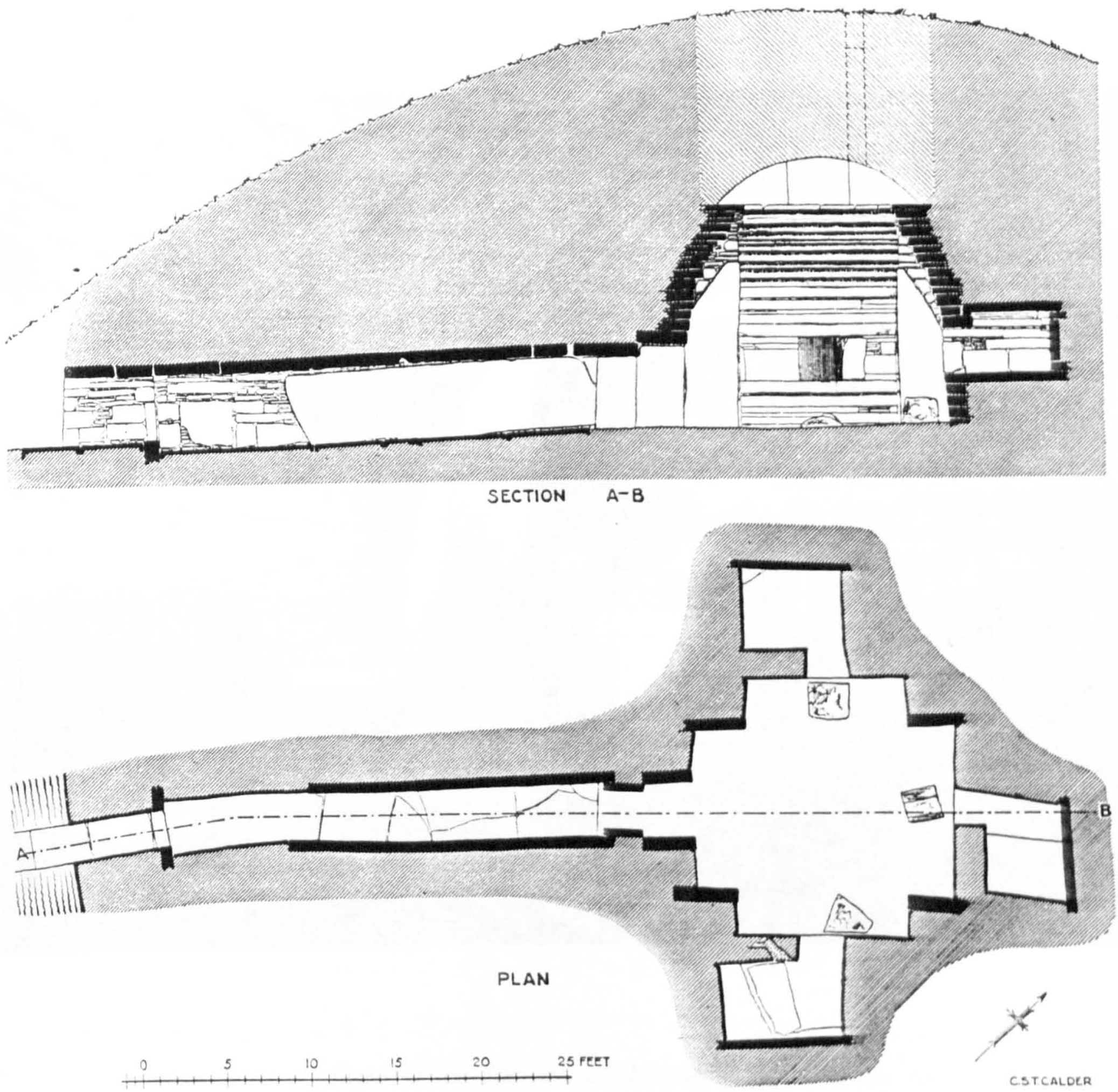


Figure 11:3. Detailed plan and section of Maeshowe (after Calder 1946).

of the almost "imperceptible" incline of the passage towards the central chamber (cf. Henshall 1963, 220). That this was an intentional feature of design is beyond doubt, given the precise and sophisticated method of construction. Thus, in proceeding along a lengthy undifferentiated passage towards the darkness, the subject experiences the ascendant position of their ultimate destination; the central chamber and its contents both physical and metaphysical.

After moving almost ten metres in a crouched position, entry into the central chamber is marked by two slightly taller upright stones "resembling door jambs" (*ibid*), which project in from the passage walls, reducing the width to 70cm (Fig

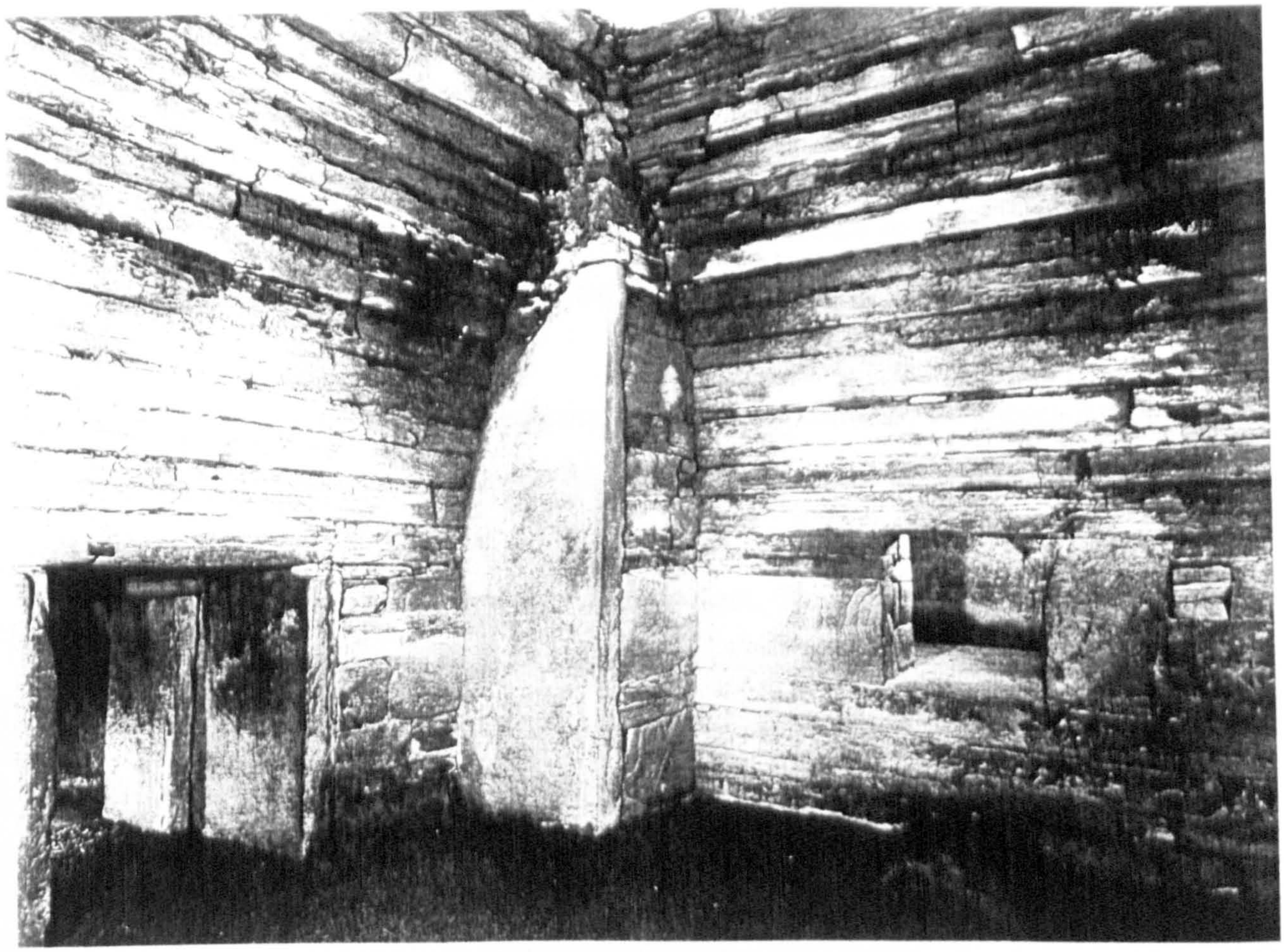


Figure 11:4. The central chamber at Maeshowe.

11:3). On passing between these divisional slabs the transitional stage of the journey is completed, and entry into the central chamber initiated. It is now possible to stand erect and look around. If some form of illumination is available the sophisticated nature of the masonry becomes visible as the roof height begins to rise from this point reaching a spectacular five metres directly ahead at the centre of the chamber. The vaulted ceiling is certainly the highest known example within Neolithic buildings and was quite probably the highest enclosed space ever experienced by Neolithic Orcadians (Fig 11.4).

As the restrictive space of the passage abruptly opened out into the central chamber with its lofty corbelled roof, there could have been little doubt in the mind of

the subject as to the awe and importance of the inner sanctum. Four large monoliths externally facing each corner buttress emphasise the impression of height. The presence of corner buttresses creates four recesses in the central chamber. The entrance passage is centrally placed in the front recess and in each of the remaining, at approximately one metre above the floor, is the entrance to a cell or small chamber. This arrangement recreates that of the house with the notable absence of the central hearth.

Superfluous to structural necessity (J. Hill pers. comm.), the incorporation of four monoliths in the architecture of Maeshowe reproduces a feature present in other monuments of the Stenness promontory. In each case it is their height which consistently dwarfs and overwhelmes the subject. Their inclusion within Maeshowe is of interest since they are enclosed within the chamber and out of sight. However, due to the large dimensions of the stone holes and the required space for manoeuvre, the erection of the stones would have been a primary operation in the construction of Maes Howe (see chapter 8 for constructional sequence), which would almost certainly have been surrounded by a series of rituals involving demarcation and sanctification. Consequently, for a period of time, early in the construction, the four menhirs would have stood proud, in full view of everyone.

In gaining entry to the central chamber the subject has taken a path which through its spatial representation conveys certain impressions which are duly interpreted. The undifferentiated passage which appears as a single space linking the inside and outside is a single prolonged period of liminality which effects an impression of moving upwards, towards a special goal. After passing through the semblance of a doorway the towering inner chamber is reached, the journey is complete and the subject halts. The use of contrasting ceiling heights to convey impressions of neutrality and importance is a simple architectural technique, however, its effects are extremely dramatic in the context of Maeshowe.

On leaving the chamber more than a reversal occurs, since the subject is now heading back towards the light of the living and the outside world and leaving the darkness, damp, and cold of the interior. Maeshowe is a place of the dead and its entry and brief visitation must have involved a high degree of risk and concern on the

part of the subject.

Visibility and therefore illumination is obviously crucial to the interpretation of space. The interior of Maeshowe is dark, there is no life giving hearth to provide heat and light. Hence, when people ventured into the passageway they either stumbled through the darkness or relied on fire or sunlight to illuminate their path. In other Orcadian passage graves there is extensive evidence of internal burning, for instance, the central chamber at Quanterness contained large quantities of burnt and charred material (Renfrew 1979, 52). No such evidence is known from Maeshowe (Davidson and Henshall 1989, 145), although it is unlikely that simple burning torches would leave extensive traces. The choice between fire and sunlight involves far more than the practicality of illumination, since neither light sources are culturally neutral, but are highly potent symbols which may be deemed appropriate to particular places at particular times.

The question of the illumination of the monument by the sun (Bradley 1989a), introduces the most significant aspect of Maeshowe architecture; its orientation. Unlike other passage graves whose passages tend to face south east (Fraser 1983, 371; Davidson and Henshall 1989, 85), the passageway into Maeshowe is built on a southwest - northeast axis facing the setting sun at the winter solstice, thereby allowing the passage and part of the inner chamber, areas normally in perpetual darkness, to be fully illuminated at precisely the height of winter darkness, which in Orkney accounts for up to eighteen hours of the day (Fig 11:5). Whether illumination and a path created by the suns rays were related to the time and path of movement within the the monument is difficult to establish (Rapoport 1969, 75), however, the marking of the end of the shortest day of the year is an annual event of great significance and celebration since it marks the beginning of a new agricultural cycle and a period of regeneration.

What actions occurred within its confines? The earliest excavation of Maeshowe in 1861 (Farrer 1862), was of poor quality and it was considered by Davidson & Henshall (1989, 145), that only a single fragment of human skull together with the bones and teeth of horse were recovered from the cells (cf. Petrie 1861, 356). However, in discussing Farrer's acount of Maeshowe, Marwick (1931, 13), makes an

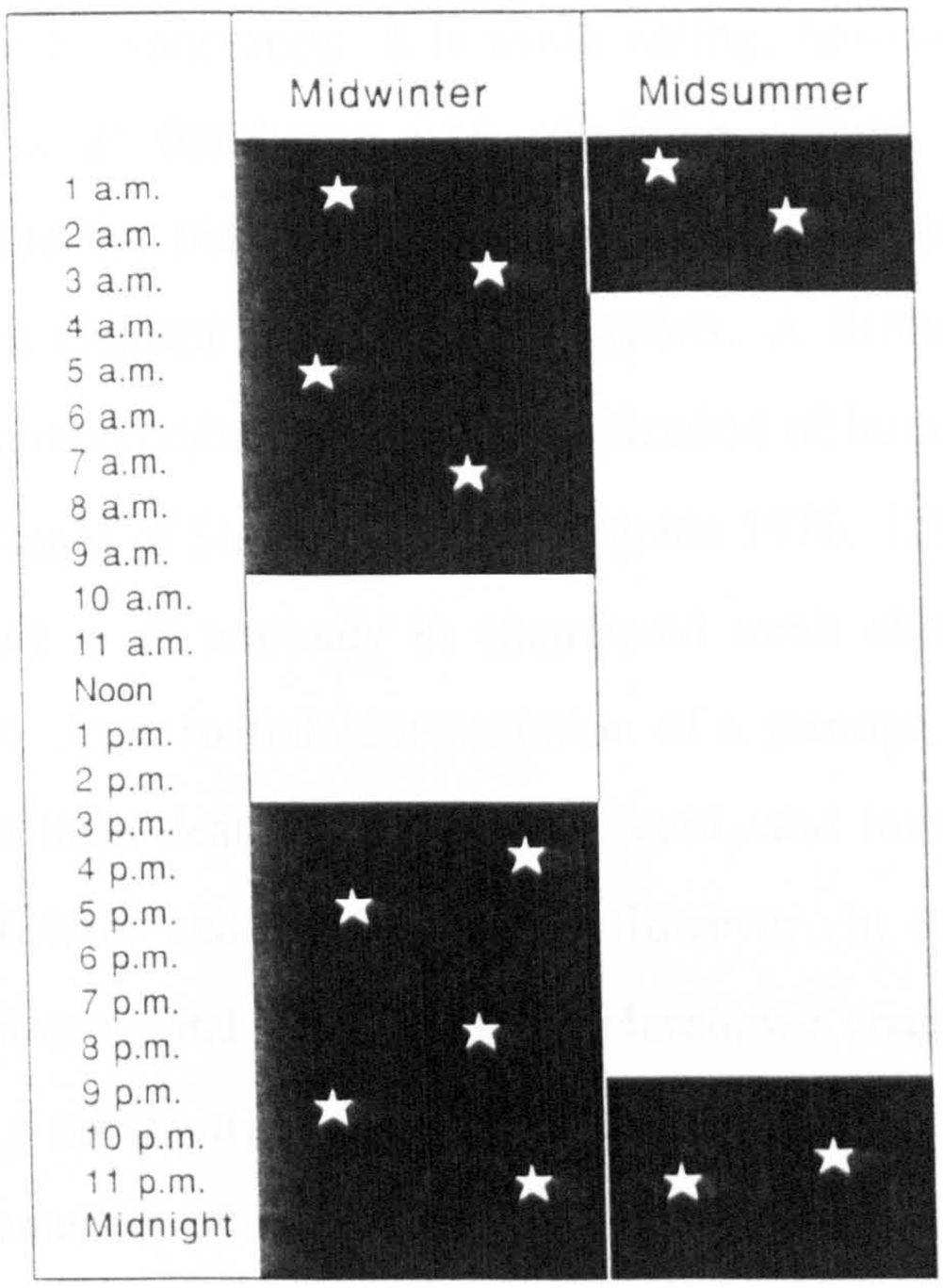


Figure 11:5. Diagram showing the hours of daylight at midsummer and midwinter.

important statement, " he [Farrer] states that no relics were found in Maeshowe on excavation. That is the general opinion, and I am glad to take this opportunity of pointing out that in a paper George Petrie read to the British Association in Edinburgh in 1871, he definitely said that amoung the clay thrown up from the bottom of the central chamber of Maeshowe he noticed several fragments of human skulls". From this account it seems quite plausable that *several* human skulls were present in the central chamber and were subsequently broken and trodden into the clay floor by later disturbance in the 12th century A.D..

The presence of human skulls in the main chamber of Maeshowe is consistent with human skeletal material in other passage graves, however, these deposits should be seen against a background of the changing nature of burial during the late Neolithic period. For instance, was the role of the ancestors of similar nature to that resulting in a similar deposit at Knowe of Yarso (see chapter 5). The answer is probably no, but

even with the high level of evidence at our disposal we are still unable to recognise different forms of ancestor veneration. It is worth noting, however, that the suspected burial cist in House 2 at Barnhouse was not large enough to contain an adult inhumation and perhaps the transport and presence of particular human body parts remained an important element in religious occasions. A further indication of such activities in another context comes from the identification of human finger bones in the ditch deposits at the Stones of Stenness (J.N.G. Ritchie 1976, 12).

Clearly, Maeshowe is an anomaly in chambered tomb classification, but this is because it is different. As a spatial representation of a passage grave; a place of the dead, the architecture links death with darkness, cold, and importantly temporal and spatial qualities: midwinter and the southwest. However, in embodying a fusion of time and space the monumental proportions of Maeshowe create a `place' of special significance which is a constantly visible part of the landscape at all times of the year.

The public presentation of such themes of meaning is nevertheless contrary to passage grave architecture which pertains to exclusion and restriction. In the spatial order of Maeshowe, however, the constructed building within the mound does not constitute the division between the inside of the monument and the outside world, that is affected by the enclosure ditch. By expanding the external boundary, the highly visible clay platform now becomes part of the interior of the monument. This allows greater physical access to events occurring `within' the monument on the platform. It is clear that the spatial arrangement of Maeshowe, whilst maintaining the category of passage grave, successfully reverses the restrictive logic of passage grave architecture. In this respect the symbolism of death, and associated concepts, is brought into the public domain at an appropriate place and time.

Barnhouse: home is where the hearth is

On the northern tip of the Stenness promontory lies the contemporary village of Barnhouse (Fig 9:2). Initially, the focal point of the settlement is the large monumental building House 2 (Fig 11:6). In contrast to Maes Howe, a place of the dead, House 2 lies in a prominent position within the realms of the living. In outward

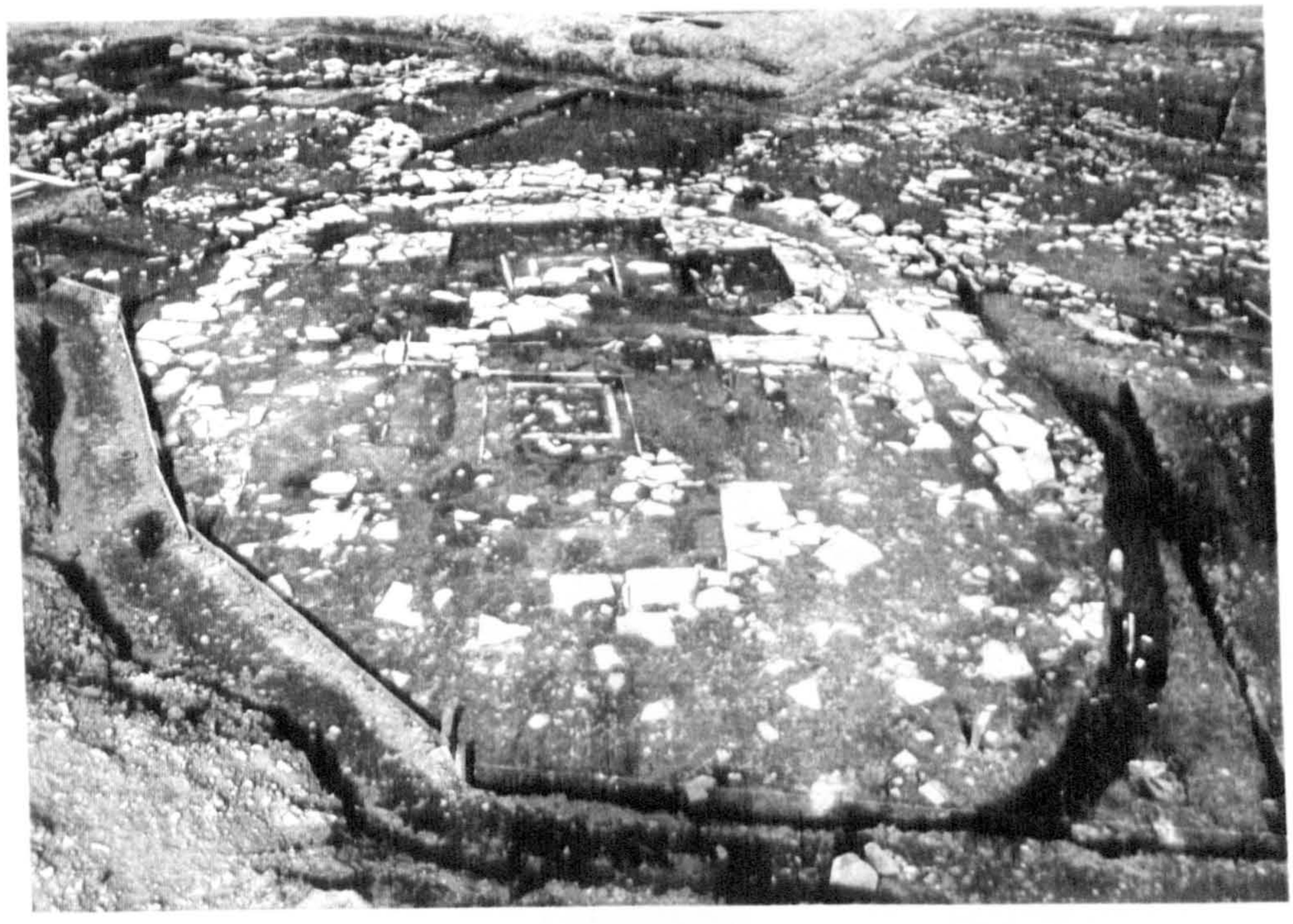


Figure 11:6. House 2 at Barnhouse.

prospect it appears as a large rectangular structure with rounded corners. The entrance is low and narrow being orientated to the southeast. Moreover, this alignment is directed towards the *rising* sun at midwinter which occurs at 9.45 am. For exactly one hour, between 9.45 - 10.45 am, a beam of light shines directly through the entrance passage and illuminates the cist slab (T. Thompson pers comm). After this short period the beam moves completely out of the house (Fig 11:7).

As with Maes Howe, to understand the architecture of this building it is necessary to fall under its influence, therefore, it will be examined as if it is a standing construction.

To gain access involves passing through the entrance and stepping down into an immense interior which rises up before the subject. Since the left half of the building is entirely obscured by a buttress wall projecting inwards to the left of the entrance, and a massive stone upright assumes a similar position to the right, it is only by

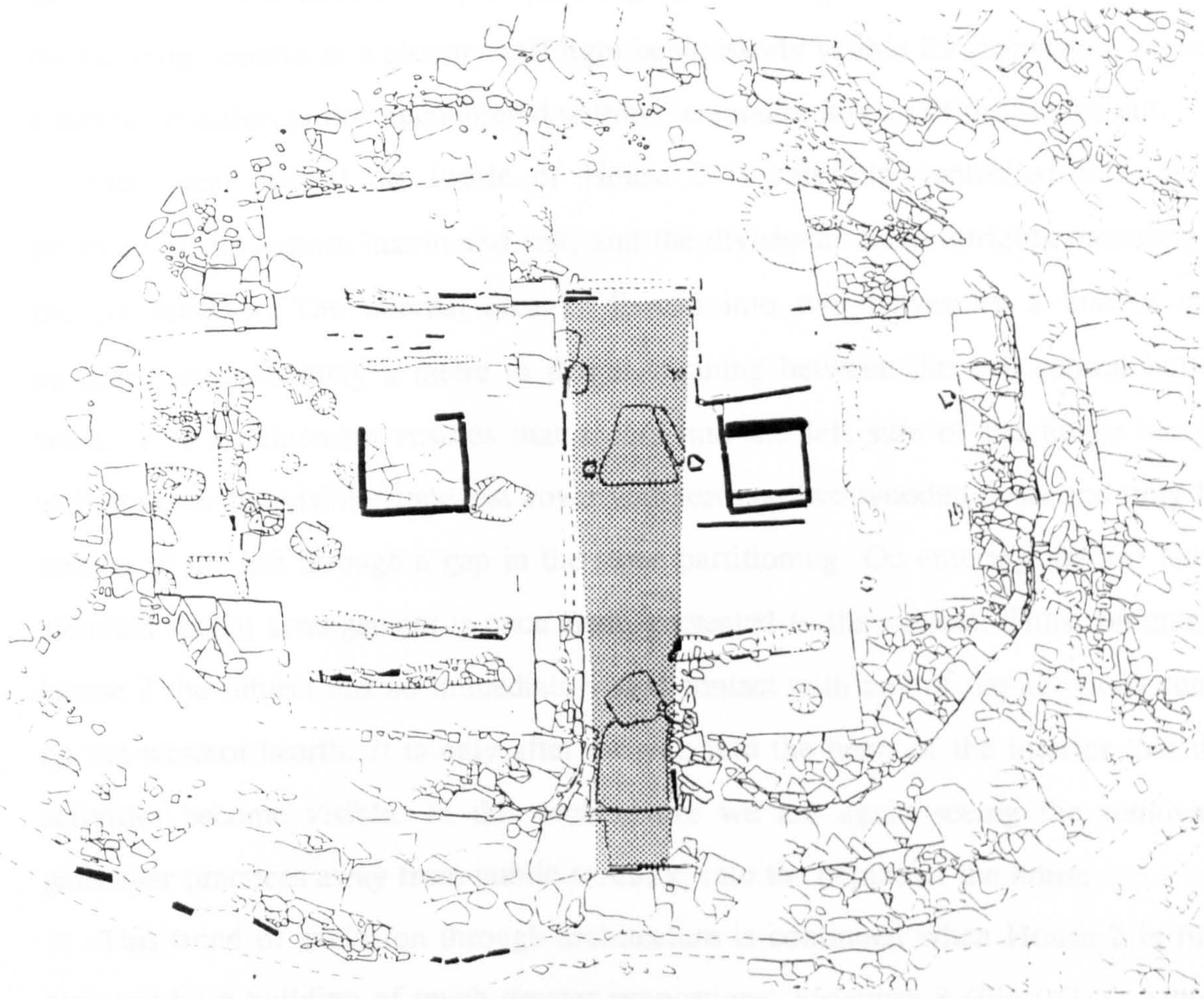


Figure 11:7. Plan of house 2 showing the internal area illuminated at the time of midwinter sunrise.

moving forward into a more central position that the whole of the interior becomes visible.

Directly ahead, set in the floor, lies the large triangular shaped flagstone cover of a cist which contained skeletal material, probably human. This is flanked on either side by two wooden posts. To the right of the cist is a large square stone fireplace with low upright stone slabs positioned to the front and rear. Even within the smoke filled interior there is enough illumination from the doorway and fire to see the sophisticated masonry which is only paralleled within Maeshowe. The flush straight sided walls and

corner buttresses reaching up to the roof creating recesses presents an identical image to that seen within Maeshowe (compare Fig 9:5 with Fig 11:3). The left hand side of the building remains in a gloomy half light being barely visible for inspection, creating a similar situation to that encountered within the smaller houses of the settlement.

Movement around the inside of House 2 is carefully controlled through the presence of the eastern hearth and cist, and the divisional stone uprights bounding off the six recesses. The internal area is divided into two halves by a line of stone uprights, approximately a metre in height, running between the two central buttress walls. This arrangement ensures that access into the left side of the house involves walking over the visible stone cist cover and between two wooden posts and only then turning to the left through a gap in the stone partitioning. On entering the left half an identical spatial arrangement is once again presented to the subject. Thus, on entering House 2 the subject has no immediate visual contact with any of the activities centred on the western hearth. It is only after moving into the heart of the interior that these activities become visible. In this architecture we are again seeing the removal of particular practices away from public scrutiny, into the depths of the house.

This trend of exclusion through architecture is continued when House 2 is finally replaced by a building of much greater proportions; Structure 8 (Fig 9:21). Although the main building is effectively a large `house' it assumes monumental status. It also features a similar spatial organisation to Maeshowe in having a central building being surrounded by a laid clay platform. In this case the platform is enclosed by a substantial wall prohibiting physical or visual access. However, of greatest significance is the orientation of the entrance passage of the main building towards the northwest and the setting sun of the summer solstice.

These striking similarities and contrasts between Maeshowe, House 2 and Structure 8 may be linked to the wider categorical difference of the house and tomb. Although Structure 8 is far larger and more elaborate than the typical late Neolithic house, it retains the essential architecture of the house (see chapter 6), and consequently assumes a certain correspondence.

Whilst only the lowest course of masonry remain intact it is possible to partially reconstruct Structure 8. The central building is a massive and lavishly constructed

`house' of sophisticated design. The entrance passage, much shorter than Maeshowe, but constructed in a similar manner with long single stone slabs facing either wall, leads directly through a three metre thick wall into the interior. Externally, the entrance projects from the house wall in a porch like arrangement and positioned on the threshold is the remains of a hearth.

Inside the house a massive fireplace is centrally positioned, behind which, adjacent to the rear wall, lie the slots for a stone `dresser'. A stone lined drain runs along the inside of the base of the rear wall and out through the rear left corner. Slots for large stone boxes, equivalent to the right and left box beds within the smaller houses, are located either side of the central hearth. Immediately behind the left hand box a grooved ware vessel is set into the clay floor.

Outside the building, on the surrounding clay platform, a number of hearths, stone boxes and pits are located in its southeastern section, to the rear of the central building. Since a quantity of broken pottery and stone and flint tools was recovered from around these features, it appears they saw frequent use. Significantly, this area of activity coincides with the small entrance through the outer wall which is over a metre in thickness and would have acted as an extremely effective barrier to the outside world besides restricting views of any of the activities occurring on the platform.

The path of people entering this monument is of particular importance in understanding the architecture of Structure 8. The outer wall was penetrated by the single entrance passage to the east. Being under a metre in width and probably no more than a metre in height, the doorway would have been no larger than that to a normal dwelling. Squeezing through this small aperture, the subject, steps out into an open platform area, to the left and right are a number of square stone fireplaces and pits holding grooved ware pots. Moving to the right around the perimeter of the platform in between the large outer wall and the towering inner building finally brings the impressive `monumental' porched entrance of the inner building into view. Since the activities being undertaken on the platform are now out of sight, behind the main building, this seems to introduce Goffman's, front - back, distinction of social performance (1959, 114). Moving towards the porched entrance, the subject is finally ready to undertake the journey into the inner building.

This involves entering a wide passage and walking over the fireplace marking the threshold, which may have been covered by paving slabs. Crouching through the outer entrance, past two door jambs, the passage shrinks to a restrictive 90cm width for its three metre length, the subject finally emerges into an interior lit and heated by the central fire, and perhaps other forms of lighting, such as small stone lamps.

This illumination would have revealed an enormous internal area of over seven metres square. Just as the central chamber of Maeshowe may have been the highest enclosed space, Structure 8 would almost certainly have been the largest covered and enclosed space experienced by Neolithic people in Orkney. Also visible behind the fire would be the stone `dresser', the role of which is impossible to determine, nevertheless, in being positioned at the rear of the building, it occupies the `deepest' constructed space which may have been imbued with supernatural properties.

If movement into the interior of this building was by way of the right hand side of the hearth, as appears to be the case within the ordinary dwelling then the left hand side becomes the deepest and most inaccessible space. It is clear that the presence of a central hearth not only introduces the symbolic associations of the dwelling house, but also constitutes a central reference point for all people and all things; an *axis mundi*.

Structure 8 is a representation of a house in just the same way that Maeshowe is a representation of a passage grave although both are built on a scale of magnificance transcending other constructions, this must have been recognised in the Neolithic just as it is today. In this aspect they are tied into wider classifications of the world, involving life and death, decay and regeneration; social and cosmological categories which are expressed through the construction of particular `places' which fuse time and space within their architecture and situation. One is orientated towards the summer solstice and the other to the winter solstice. Maeshowe is a place of the dead and situated away from the habitation of the living, while House 2 and Structure 8 lie within the confines of the Barnhouse settlement. Although Structure 8 and Maeshowe have an identical internal spatial organisation; a lavishly spacious inner building, a surrounding clay platform and an external boundary, there is a substantial difference between them. Activities occurring within Maeshowe, on the platform, are open to view, as opposed to Structure 8 which remains visually inaccessible and restrictive in

nature.

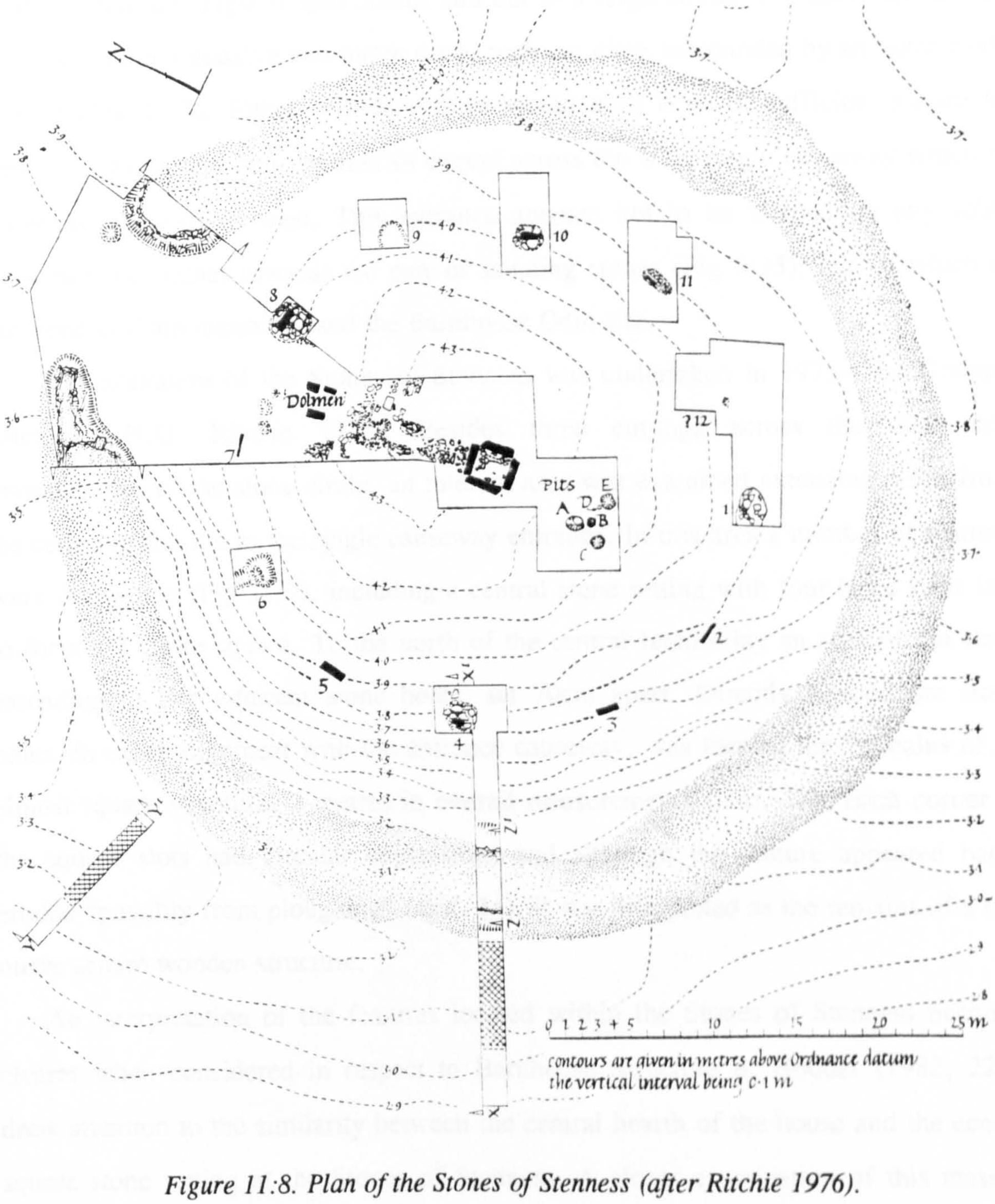


Figure 11:8. Plan of the Stones of Stenness (after Ritchie 1976).

Stones of Stenness: removing the barriers

The Stones of Stenness is situated a mere 150 metres south of the main Barnhouse settlement, and recent excavations at the Barnhouse Odin site has revealed even closer

activities involving large scale burning, situated within 80 metres of the entrance. It is beyond doubt the most immediately striking of the Stenness monuments, originally having twelve tall angle topped stones laid out in a large circle. The stone circle was enclosed within a massive two metre deep, rock cut ditch surrounded by an outer bank or wall (Fig 11:8). Either boundary form would have been of sufficient stature to prevent visual access into the interior except across the wide single causeway which is orientated north-north west. This entrance appears not to be aligned on any solar movement but rather towards the pair of standing stones (Fig 9:35); one of which is the stone of Odin monolith, and the Barnhouse Odin site.

The excavation of the Stones of Stenness was undertaken in 1973-4 by Graham Ritchie (J.N.G. Ritchie 1976). Besides three cuttings across the ditch and investigations of the stone circle, an internal area was examined extending north from the centre of the site to the single causeway entrance. In this area a number of features were discovered (Fig 11:9), including a central stone setting with four large slabs laid to form a 2 metre square. To the north of the central feature lay an area of flat slabs extending to two adjacent stone holes, set 70cm apart. Directly beyond the stone holes, in exact alignment with the entrance causeway, was located the "remains of an almost square structure, 2 metres in overall measurement" (*ibid*, 13). Each corner of the square slots had circular depressions and although the feature appeared badly eroded "possibly from ploughing" (*ibid*, 14), it was interpreted as the remains of a two metre square wooden structure.

An interpretation of the features located within the Stones of Stenness becomes clearer when considered in respect to Barnhouse Structure 8. Hodder (1982, 222), drew attention to the similarity between the central hearth of the house and the central square stone setting at the Stones of Stenness. A closer examination of this massive hearth reveals it to have been reconstructed on at least three occasions. Of particular interest is the similarity between the early construction and reconstruction at both the Stones of Stenness and Barnhouse Structure 8, where the central hearths begin life as identically proportioned `L' shaped slots dug into the natural. Both are modified through time, but, at the Stones of Stenness the hearth undergoes further remodelling (Fig 11:10) and is monumentalised by the laying of four enormous stone slabs (Fig

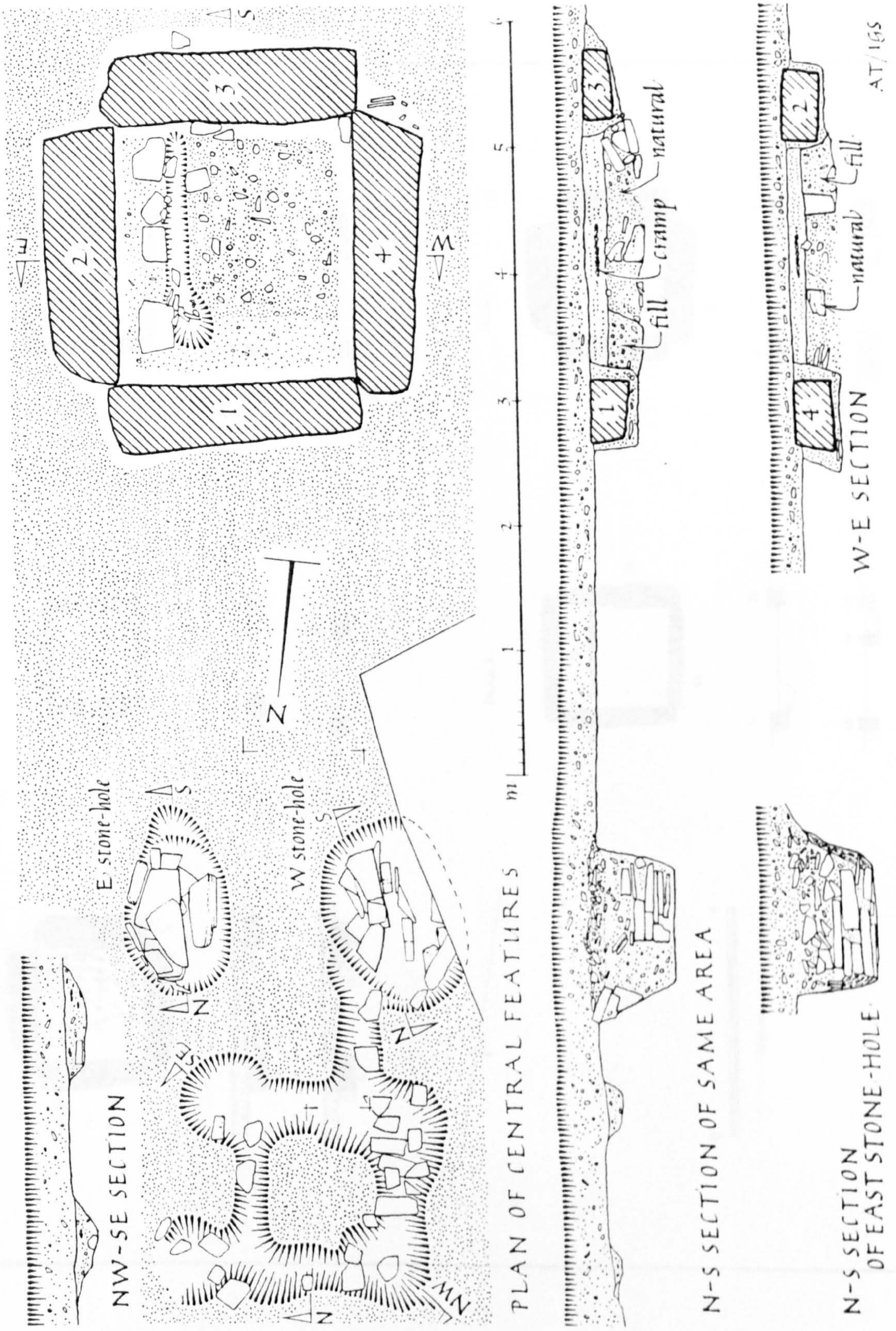


Figure 11:9. Plan of the interior features at the Stones of Stenness (after Ritchie 1976).

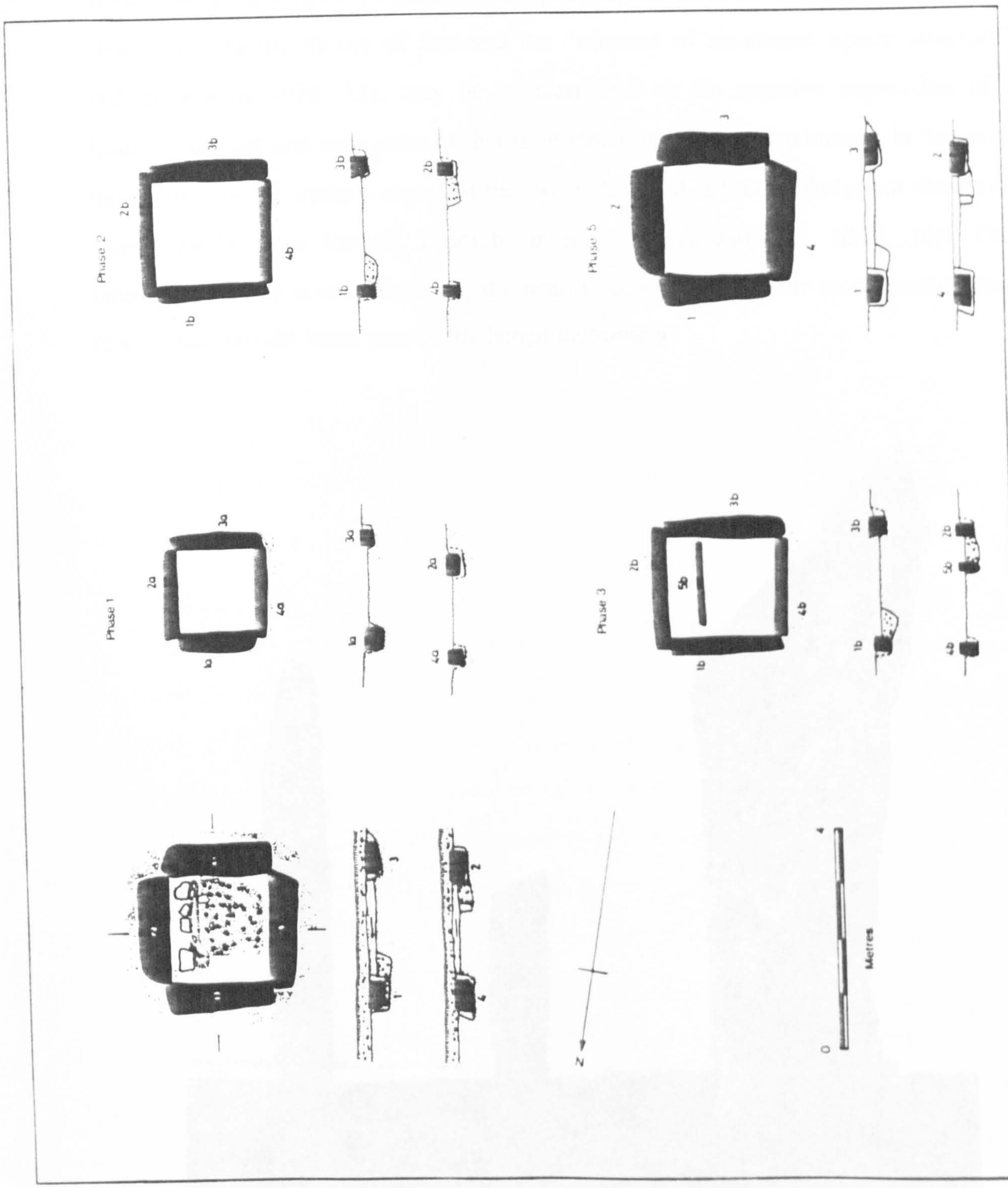


Figure 11:10. The sequence of hearth construction at the Stones of Stenness.

Furthermore, the features situated towards the entrance of the Stones of Stenness are also paralleled on the platform of Barnhouse Structure 8. Entrance to the inner `house' at the latter is defined by a characteristic square hearth set at the threshold of the porch (Fig 9:22). At the Stones of Stenness the "remains of an almost square structure" (J.N.R. Ritchie 1976, 13), may be re-interpreted as the negative impression of a hearth, "the east and west sides of this little structure were approximately in line with the position of the upright stones in the two holes, and it seems likely that these two stones would have formed a porch or monumental entrance" (*ibid*, 14). This interpretation may now be inverted, the hearth becomes part of the monumental porch or entrance into the inner area of the henge monument.

Figure 11:11. The stone circle at the Stones of Stenness (after Ritchie 1985).

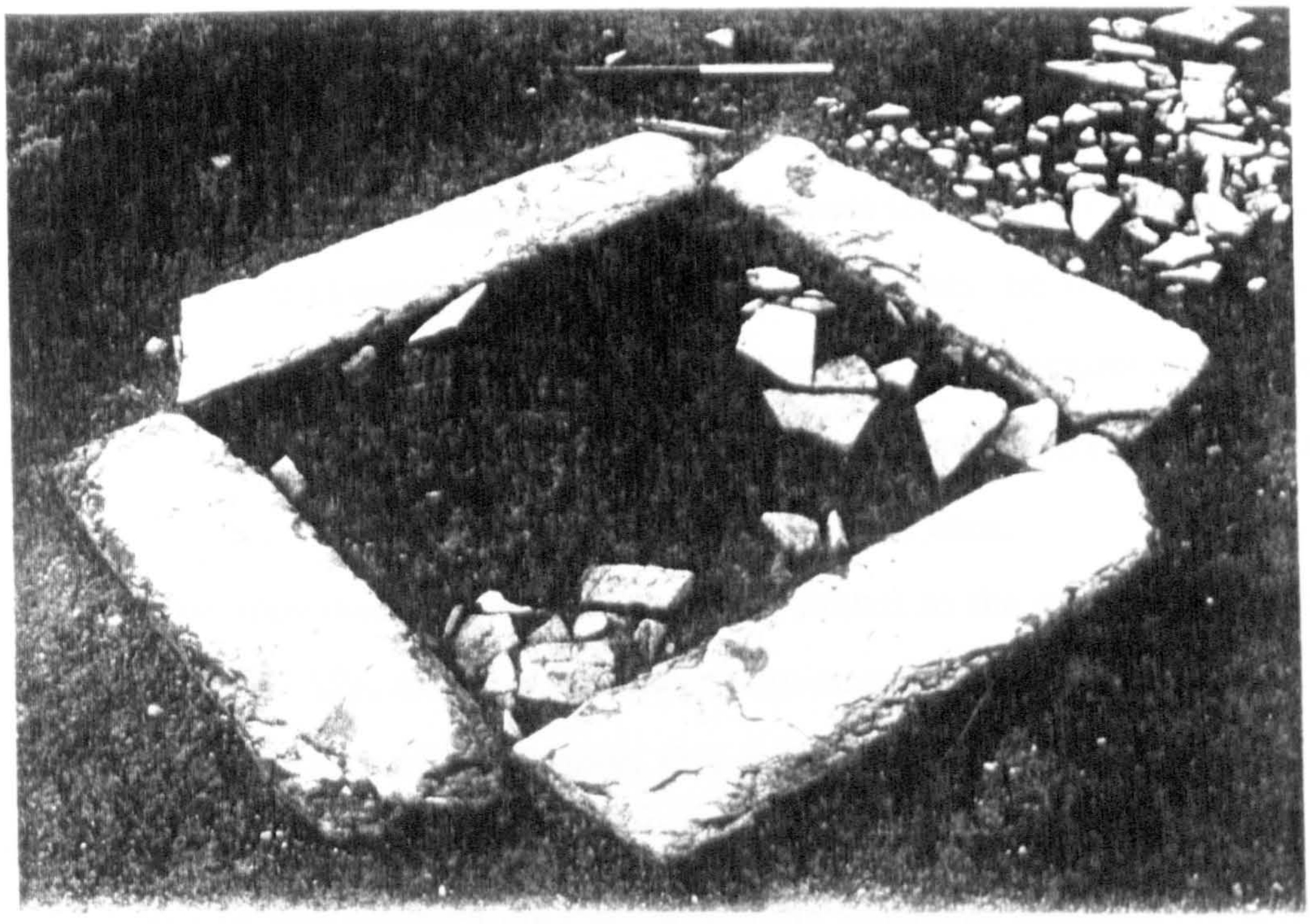


Figure 11:12. The central fireplace at the Stones of Stenness (after Ritchie 1985).

In the absence of any evidence to the contrary it must be assumed that the central precinct of the Stones of Stenness, was open and not, as at Barnhouse Structure 8, enclosed by a building. Nevertheless, as Hodder (1982, 222) recognised, the Stones of Stenness draws once again on the architecture of the house to create a similar spatial structure to that confronted by Neolithic people on a daily basis within the home.

Whether approaching the Stones of Stenness along a prescribed path, perhaps involving a route governed by the surrounding menhirs, or in a less formalised manner, the large bank or wall running around its perimeter would do little to obscure the higher internal ring of pointed monoliths, some of which rise to over five metres in height (Fig 11:11). The break in the outer barrier provides the only means of admittance to the monument and as this entrance is approached so the central stones and hearth, together with those already present, fall into view. Gaining entry to the interior involves passing through and over two successive boundaries; one rising above the ground the other cut into its depths. The subject moves through a breach in the

outer bank or wall and then proceeds over a causeway dividing the substantial rock cut ditch which is over four metres wide and almost three metres deep. At the base of the ditch lie the remains of earlier activities within the monument, including the ash from past fires, and the animal bones and Grooved ware vessels from earlier ceremonies.

On entering the enclosure, its monumental proportions become dramatically apparent with the circle of huge monoliths towering above. This architecture serves to invoke sensations, both of wonder at the achievement, and awe inspired by the height; impressions which tend to embrace the whole of the internal area.

Once inside the monument the eye is inevitably drawn to the central area with its massive hearth (Fig 11:12), and the two monoliths standing five metres away on a direct line with the entrance. Significantly, this is the same distance as that between the monumental porch and the central hearth within Structure 8, and there can be little doubt that the pair of free standing uprights within the Stones of Stenness constituted a symbolic entrance into the central area with its monumental hearth.

The relationship between the two monuments becomes clearer if the Stones of Stenness is considered as simply a larger version of Structure 8. Indeed, if the wall of the inner `house' within Structure 8 is removed and the circular outer wall expanded, then it effectively mirrors the spatial organisation of the Stones of Stenness. Of course, the notable absentee is the surrounding circle of monoliths, however, it would have represented an impossible feat to roof the vast area within the Stones of Stenness, therefore, the inclusion of a towering circle of monoliths symbolises and creates a forcible and overwhelming impression of height. This is the importance of the Stones of Stenness, it is a monument which allows people to see what is occurring inside.

Monumental Choreography

In attempting to understand the monuments of the Stenness promontory it has become clear that they operate upon several planes of meaning. A recognisable cosmologically based sense of order is manifest in the architecture of all the monuments. This facilitates the necessary metaphorical links between everyday contexts of life and the contexts of ritual and religion. The potency of the architecture

and the rituals which took place within the monuments lies in the reconstitution of broader categories of such knowledge which is apparently cosmologically based and derived from elsewhere - beyond the everyday world of the living.

In the use of the monuments certain people will have gone through elaborate routines of ritual performance whilst the majority looked on. However, by virtue of moving into the confines or proximity of the monument the subject becomes involved and presenced within the proceedings. Through interpretive practice different meanings and levels of understanding will be derived from the experience; an experience which transcends daily life, but is inextricably linked through metaphorical association. Hence, it is in the arena of daily living that such metaphorical knowledge comes into play, in the guise of analogy and social classification.

This is what makes the the Stenness monuments so important. Not only do they contain a clarity of statement previously unseen (or unrecognised), through rituals confined to particular times of the year, but they also directly impinge on everyday life, all of the time. If the naturalisation of power resides in the religious experiences and cosmological beliefs of Neolithic people then the monumental architecture of the Stenness promontory is truly an emblem of that power.

Scale of construction and high visibility, however, should not be confused with greater social awareness. Nevertheless, within the architecture of both Maeshowe and the Stones of Stenness, the two larger and more prominent members of the group, an emphasis is apparently placed on greater public access to the events occurring within their confines. In fact, both monuments allow that which was previously enclosed and restricted to be revealed. This facility is, however, only realised by people travelling to the monument at a particular time and participating through their very presence. In this fusion of space and time we see the monuments as representing `places' effecting a conceptual and physical order on the fluidity of existence and the natural world.

In conclusion, by offering an interpretation of a discrete group of late Neolithic monuments in Orkney, it is to be hoped that an alternative line of enquiry to the typological and evolutionary models which still influence prehistoric studies has been provided. For instance, it is no longer necessary to invoke cloaked arguments of social evolution to suggest that henge monuments followed chambered tombs or that the two

need be somehow incompatible (e.g. Sharples 1985). Still worse is to see the monuments as `things' having a life of their own (e.g. Fraser 1983). I would suggest that to do so is to loose sight of the people who intentionally built and used them and perhaps having done so never escaped their influence.

Chapter 12

Centralizing Tendencies: a re-examination of social evolution in late Neolithic Orkney

Throughout this study, I have attempted to follow the themes of classification and order through different aspects of material culture. Whilst each chapter has maintained these themes, each has stood, to a large degree, independantly of the others. By taking this approach, I hope to have exploited the strengths of the archaeological evidence, and by viewing Neolithic Orkney from different aspects, have, almost by default, created an image of life in the later third millenium BC.

By way of a conclusison, however, I intend to examine current views of social change, as applied to Neolithic Orkney. Generally, it has not been my intention to build up to a all embracing scheme of society and its change throughout the Neolithic period. Instead, different areas of the material evidence have been examined in an attempt to draw out their particular detail. Indeed, it is this very detail which is notably absent in the broader schemes of social change offered for Neolithic Orkney.

Given the extraordinary nature and quality of the Orcadian Neolithic settlement record it may seem curious that exactly the same crude model of social evolution is posited for Orkney, as is offered for many other areas of Britain. The main reason for this situation lies in the simple fact that settlement evidence has been largely overlooked in the various interpretations of social change. Indeed, if the settlement evidence of Neolithic Orkney is ignored, then the *assumed* chronological sequence of collective burial monuments leading on to henge monuments, stone circles and

standing stones, appears to follow a similar trajectory to that of many other areas in Britain.

Just as Vere Gordon Childe, effected the way Orcadian neolithic culture was defined materialy (see chapter 2), so, Colin Renfrew, introduced a linear scheme of social evolution which provided an order to that material. In 1979, Renfrew published *Investigations in Orkney*, in which a progressive model of social evolution was posited for Neolithic Orkney. The basis or inspiration for the model was derived from two sources: first, a belief in the existence of social `types' and their ability to graduate into more complex forms (cf Service 1971). Second, an equation between a particular social `type' and the scale of monumentality it could achieve. For the model to even appear to work, or be deemed appropriate, a chronological development in scale of public works requires to be demonstrated. Once this is established, the corresponding social `type' can be matched with the expenditure of labour required to build any given monument. Six years earlier, Renfrew (1973), had offered exactly the same model for Neolithic Wessex, and it was a simple step to transport it to Neolithic Orkney.

For Orkney, the basic premises remained the same, with a particular burden on establishing a chronology of increasing scales of construction. A further dimension of the model included the search for group territories. For Orkney, this had already been suggested by Childe (1942), in his account of the spatial patterning of the Rousay cairns; an article which probably provided the inspiration for Renfrew. Previously developed typologies of Orkney-Cromarty cairns (Henshall 1963; Piggott 1954), provided a basic chronological order and a reversal of the established Maeshowe typology (Fig 12:1), was easy to achieve through recourse to the prevalent view of a simple - complex trajectory of social evolution (Renfrew 1979, 211). Given the association of Unstan ware with the smaller Orkney-Cromarty cairns, a straightforward evolutionary path was visible with Unstan ware giving way to Grooved ware (Fig 12:2). So it was that Renfrew (ibid, 208), presented a comprehensive model of social evolution in Neolithic Orkney, where a territory based, Unstan ware using, segmentary society, developed into a centralised, Grooved ware useing, chiefdom.

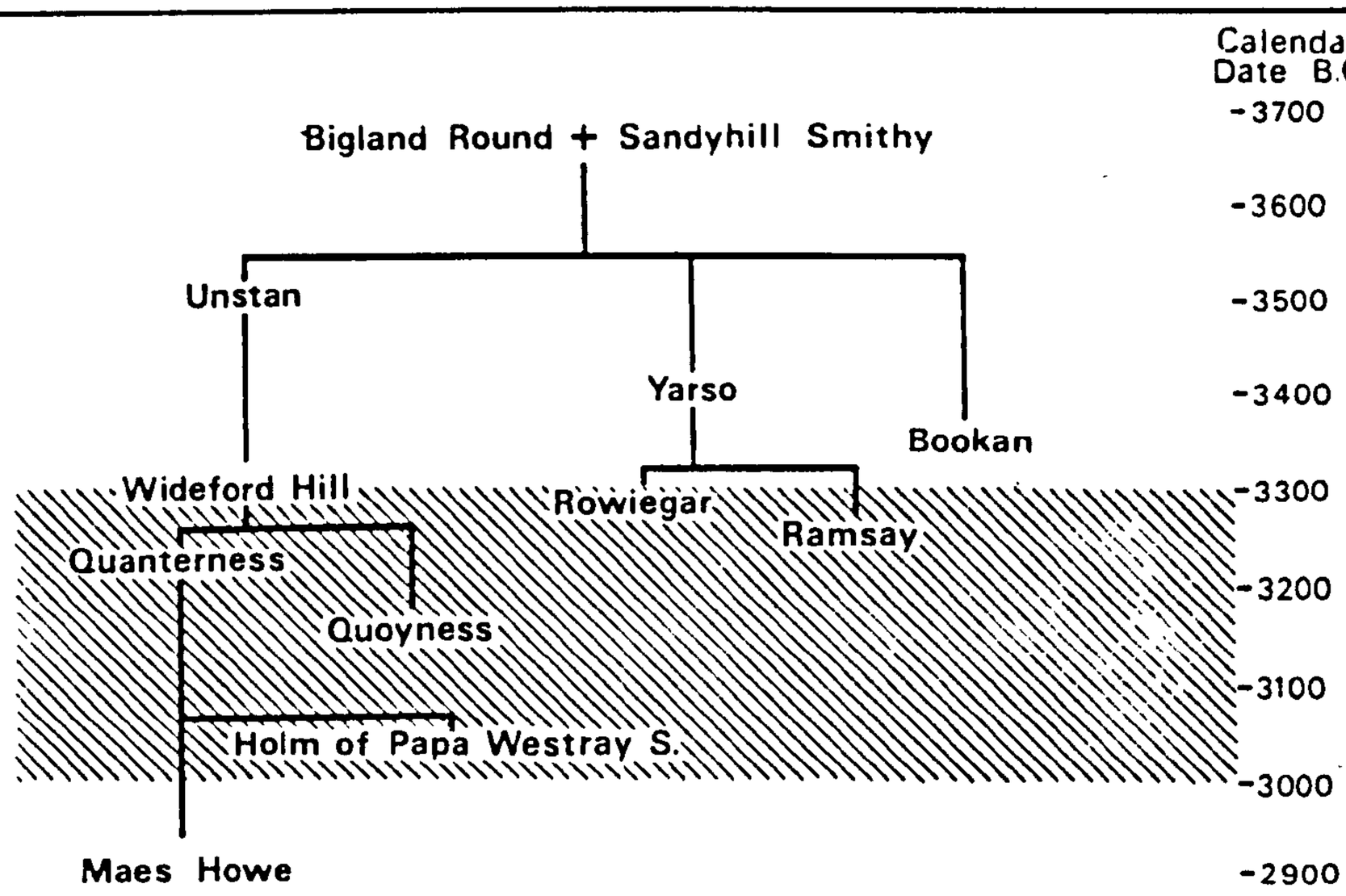
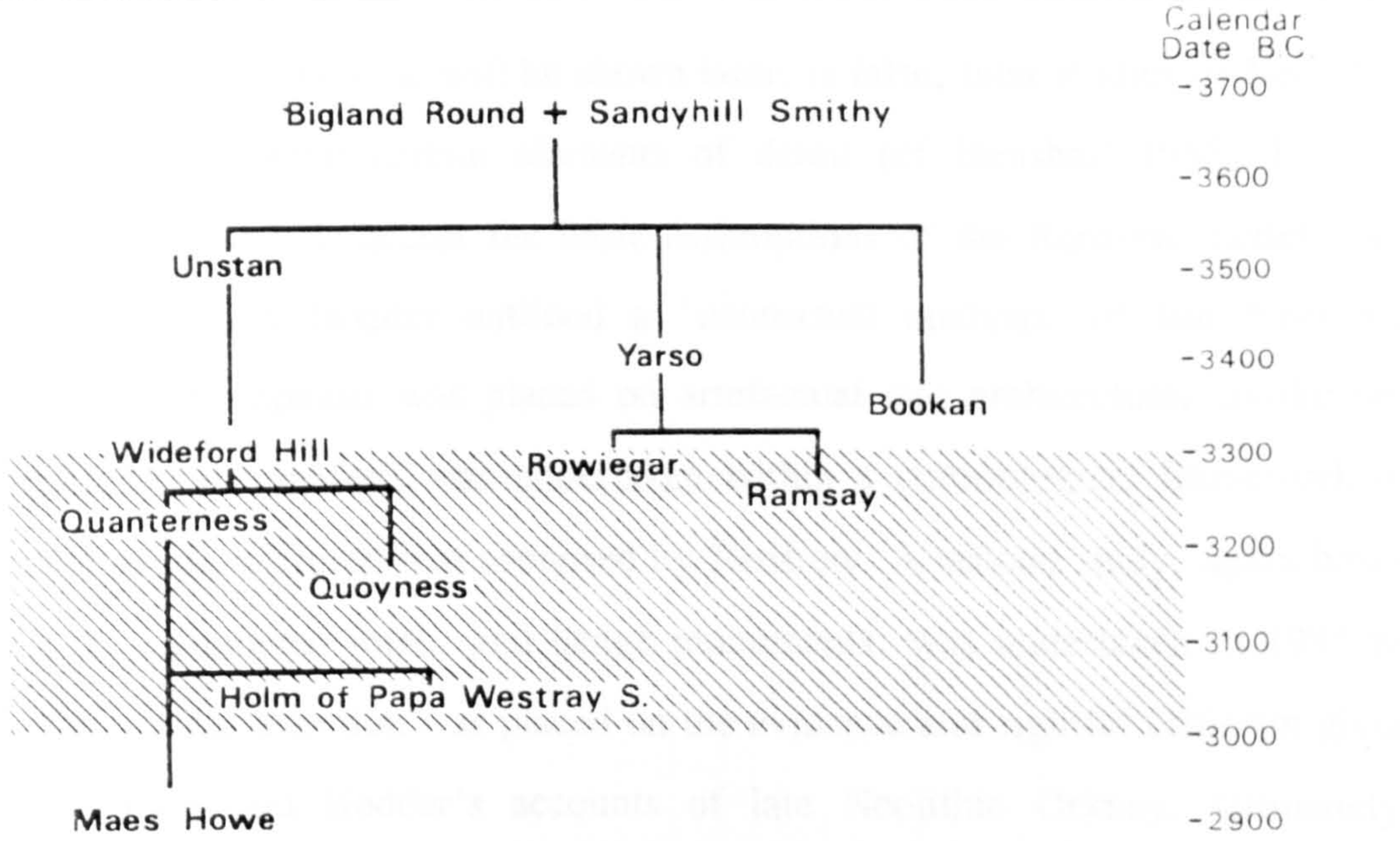


Figure 12:1. The typology of Orcadian chambered tombs proposed by Renfrew (after Renfrew 1979).

In this scheme, no distinction was made between the different architecture of the chambered tombs; all `types' were seen as performing the same function; to house all the dead of a corporate group (Hedges 1983, 296). The relatively low labour requirements for construction, when combined with an unsupported notion of communal burial, gave rise to the recognition of an egalitarian segmentary society.

Towards the end of the third millenium BC a dramatic increase in labour expenditure, as represented in the construction of the henge monuments: Stones of Stenness and the Ring of Brodgar, was seen as representing "the development of a more centralised society" (ibid, 218). Here, social evolution had led to the creation of a "larger social formation, to which the population of all Mainland may have owed allegiance" (ibid). For Renfrew, the increase in monumentality was directly related to the ability to mobilise a larger workforce within a situation of increased social complexity; in other words, a function of the emergence of chiefdoms. Apart from problems surrounding social typologies, this scheme is dependant on two basic premises. First, that an equation exists between social types and a scale of monumental construction. Second, the presence in Orkney of a chronological sequence of increasing monumentality.

Although the first premise has been effectively criticised by Richard Bradley



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Towards the end of the third millenium BC a dramatic increase in labour expenditure, as represented in the construction of the henge monuments: Stones of Stenness and the Ring of Brodgar, was seen as representing "the development of a more centralised society" (ibid, 218). Here, social evolution had led to the creation of a "larger social formation, to which the population of all Mainland may have owed allegiance" (ibid). For Renfrew, the increase in monumentality was directly related to the ability to mobilise a larger workforce within a situation of increased social complexity; in other words, a function of the emergence of chiefdoms. Apart from problems surrounding social typologies, this scheme is dependant on two basic premises. First, that an equation exists between social types and a scale of monumental construction. Second, the presence in Orkney of a chronological sequence of increasing monumentality.

Although the first premise has been effectively criticised by Richard Bradley

(1984, 61-6), and the second, as will be shown later, is false, later studies of Neolithic Orkney, while questioning certain elements of detail (cf Henshall 1985, 110-11; Clarke 1983), continued to accept the basic assumptions of the Renfrew model. For example, in 1982, Ian Hodder outlined a `contextual analysis' of late Neolithic Orkney. While the emphasis was placed on artefactual and architectural similarities between contexts, the analysis was undertaken within a chronological framework of social change which mirrored that proposed by Renfrew. A second study, again based entirely on the chambered tombs and henge monuments, was undertaken in 1985 by Sharples. Here closer attention was placed on the evidence and rightful criticism given to both Renfrew's and Hodder's accounts of late Neolithic Orkney. Ultimately, however, Sharples adheres to the model of social evolution forwarded by Renfrew and takes the "massive investment of organised labour" to "represent the establishment of a central hierarchy within Orkney as a whole" (ibid, 71-2).

All three enquiries appear to have been heavily influenced by studies of social evolution and monument typologies in other parts of Britain, particularly Wessex. Renfrew (1973) had subsequently undertaken a similar analysis of monumental development and social evolution in Neolithic Wessex. In his study, Hodder (1982, 226), claims that the "change from local and equivalent communities to some degree of centralisation is supported by evidence from other parts of Britain". Finally, Sharples (1985, 72) states that "the method by which this hierarchy achieved dominance involved the control and manipulation of increasingly important rituals which structure social interaction during the late Neolithic throughout Britain".

Reviewing these separate studies it is clear that Renfrew's view of social evolution has been influential in their formulation. In each case the evolution of society into a hierarchical structure is unquestioningly assumed (see also Hedges 1983). Thus, in virtually every study of the Orcadian Neolithic the same model provides a temporal framework of social change.

At this point we have to consider the validity of claims that late Neolithic Orkney provided the context for growing social complexity and the development of a centralised authority structure. As we have seen, the basic premises of Renfrew's

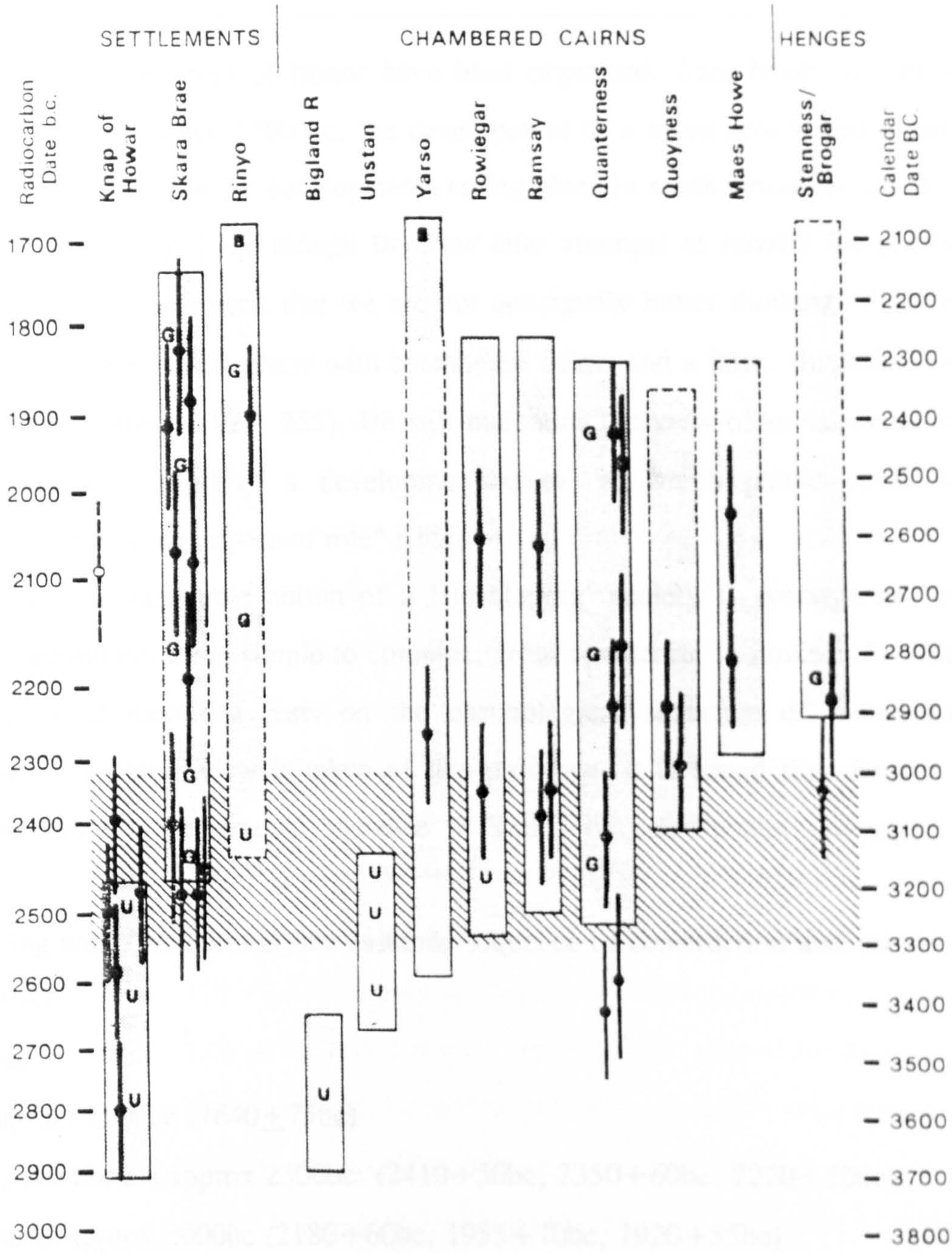

Figure 12:2. The evolutionary sequence of change from Unstan ware to Grooved ware (after Renfrew 1979).

argument are open to question and it should be asked why such a social trajectory of change should occur in Orkney, simply because it is detectable elsewhere in Britain during this period (these models also require closer scrutiny).

The main point of evidence, advanced by Renfrew, to substantiate the view of an emerging centralised authority is the construction of larger public works, requiring greater amounts of labour investment, towards the end of the third millenium BC, "only by the support of the population as a whole, which may have been some 5000

strong, could this investment of labour have been organised. Late Neolithic Orkney thus may have seen, around 2700 bc, the development of a more centralised society, analogous in many ways to the developments taking place in south Britain at about the same time" (1979, 218). Even though Renfrew later attempts to modify his position with the statement, "this means that we are not necessarily better thinking of distinct stages - an earlier egalitarian phase with chambered cairns and a later, chieftain phase with henge monuments" (1985, 255). He still maintains the view of social evolution: "we can conceive instead of a developing society, in which public ritual was increasingly taking on an important role" (*ibid*).

It is clear that the whole notion of a `developing' society is synonymous with linear social evolution; from simple to complex, from egalitarian to ranked. As noted, the foundation of this idea rests on the chronological sequence of monumental construction. If a closer view is taken of this sequence, it is found that there is no evidence to support the gradual increase in scales of construction envisaged by Renfrew.

Beginning with Quanterness, the assumed sequence of construction and use begins circa 2600 bc:

Quanterness

1. Built approx. 2600bc (2640±75bc)
2. Primary cist burials approx 2300bc: (2410+50bc, 2350+60bc, 2220+50bc).
3. Final burial approx 2000bc (2180+60bc, 1955+70bc, 1920+55bc)

The construction and first use of the cairn concurs with the construction and habitation of Barnhouse and Skara Brae (see appendix 1). Consistent with this contemporaneity is the presence of Grooved ware at Quanterness, which includes a vessel which is identical in design and fabric to those in use at Barnhouse. It is the consistency of this method of decorating Grooved ware which partially defines the earlier `Grooved ware period' in the mid third millenium BC (MacSween 1992, 268).

Because henge monuments are clearly a late Neolithic phenomenom in southern Britain, being constructed towards the end of the third millenium BC, such a chronology is assumed to cover all of this type of monument. Of the two definite henge monuments in Orkney: the Ring of Brodgar and the Stones of Stenness, only the

latter has been dated by radiocarbon determinations. A date of 2356+65bc (SRR 350), was obtained from the second layer, and earliest material deposits, in the ditch. A second date of 2238+70bc (SRR 351), came from charcoal in the central hearth, which must relate to the final use of this feature. Remembering that the central hearth had been modified on several occasions (Fig 11:10), this date marks the end of a lengthy history of activity, involving the hearth, at the Stones of Stenness.

The date from the ditch has been seen as representing primary use of the monument, if not its date of construction (e.g. Fraser 1983; Hedges 1983; Sharples 1985; etc). However, we cannot be sure how long the monument had stood before the animal bone, used for radiocarbon samples, was deposited in the ditch. Of greater significance, however, is the Grooved ware recovered from the same ditch deposit (Fig 9:34). Both in method of decoration and surface design it is identical to the majority of decorated Grooved ware from the Barnhouse settlement (see chapters 8 & 9), which, as noted above, is typical of the earlier `late Neolithic period'. Here I suggest that the construction and initial use of the Stones of Stenness is actually contemporary with Barnhouse, where the two hundred year period of occupation is securely dated to circa 2600 - 2400bc. Indeed, there is a notable absence at the Stones of Stenness of the later type of Grooved ware which employs applied decoration (see chapter 8), which is in widespread use at the time of use suggested by the radiocarbon determinations. If we push the construction date of the Stones of Stenness back into the period of habitation at Barnhouse, it is found that not only are the henge monument and Quanterness in contemporary use (cf J. N. G. Ritchie 1985, 129), but there is little to separate their dates of construction. Here then are two monuments, one taking an estimated 40,000 worker hours (Stones of Stenness), the other 6,340 worker hours (Renfrew 1979, 213-4), being constructed within a short time of each other.

Maeshowe is estimated to have taken close to 100,000 worker hours to construct (ibid, 214), which dramatically exceeds the figure for the Stones of Stenness. Throughout this study I have compared the architecture and sophistication of construction between House 2 at Barnhouse and Maeshowe. Because of this similarity, I would argue that in the absence of reliable radiocarbon dates for the construction of

Maeshowe (radiocarbon determinations of 2185+65bc (SRR 505), and 2020+70bc (Q1482) were obtained from basal peat in the ditch fill), that the two buildings were built at approximately the same time. House 2 has radiocarbon determinations of circa 2600bc for its primary use. Thus, Maeshowe is constructed at the same time as House 2 (and the initial houses at Barnhouse), Quanterness and possibly the Stones of Stenness.

There are several points I wish to make: first, Maeshowe and House 2 are contemporary constructions. Second, the Stones of Stenness is built during the life of the Barnhouse settlement and, judging from the `later' Grooved ware with applied decoration located on Structure 8 platform, was in use before Structure 8 was constructed. Finally, in this history of construction, Maeshowe is either earlier or contemparary with the Stones of Stenness, therefore, the gradual increase in monumentality, and labour expenditure, suggested by Renfrew, does not exist.

The corollary of this alternative history of monument construction is of particular significance since it effectively puts all the large constructions into a single, two hundred year, time-span of public building. Rather than being the results of an evolving `Grooved ware' society, it appears to concur with the very appearance of this new `cultural' repertoire. If this flourit of monumentality occurs at the beginning of the late Neolithic period, how can we account for it and what actually happens throughout the duration of the latter half of the third millenium BC?

Turning now to the archaeological evidence for the late Neolithic period in Orkney, we start from a point of disadvantage since, at approximately 2600bc, there appears a new cultural assemblage. This takes the form of a variety of material culture ranging from Grooved ware ceramics through to domestic and public architecture. We also appear to see the establishment of conglomerate settlement, with villages comprising 10 - 20 houses. On Mainland these settlements appear to be founded between 2600bc -2500bc (see appendix 1). It will be noted that this concurs exactly with the earliest date obtained from primary deposits within the `Maeshowe type' passage grave at Quanterness. Thus, at first glance there appears to be a major change occurring in virtually all aspects of the evidence in the mid third millenium BC. This change in material culture may, however, be less of a cleavage than it appears at first

sight. In chapter 5, it was noted that the isolated single farmstead, as represented by Knap of Howar, may, in light of recent fieldsurvey (see chapter 3), may be atypical of early Neolithic settlement patterns. Indeed, if the Wideford Hill and Deepdale sites are more representative, then the differences between early and late Neolithic settlement organisation may be less dramatic than previously considered. Moreover, the presence of earlier settlement below the `Grooved ware' occupation layers at Pool, Sanday, and Rinyo, Rousay, clearly demonstrates some form of continuity of occupation at *particular* places in Orkney.

Perhaps the main reason why the later Neolithic cultural entity stands distinct is the amazing level of homogeneity within all aspects of its material culture. For instance, Orcadian Grooved - ware was divided into three chronological ordered categories of decorative technique, by V.Gordon Childe, during excavations at Skara Brae (see chapter 8). The earliest Grooved-ware was decorated by incision and grooves. This characteristic is not confined to Skara Brae, or even Mainland, but as Anne McSween (1992, 263-5), has recently noted, is common to all known Grooved-ware contexts of this period.

Architecture constitutes another medium of remarkable consistency with houses conforming to a uniformity in spatial organisation (chapter 6). This architectural form also characterises passage grave design, hence the identification by Audrey Henshall (1963), of the Maeshowe group. This consistency and uniformity extends to other areas of material culture such as flint technology. Thus, in the mid third millenium, it can be assumed that there was a common interest in maintaining, through the medium of material culture, a unified self image of society.

In previous chapters I have discussed the architecture of the late Neolithic Orcadian house in terms of cosmological themes and principles of order. The central pivot of continually changing spatial meaning within the house is the hearth, the *axis*

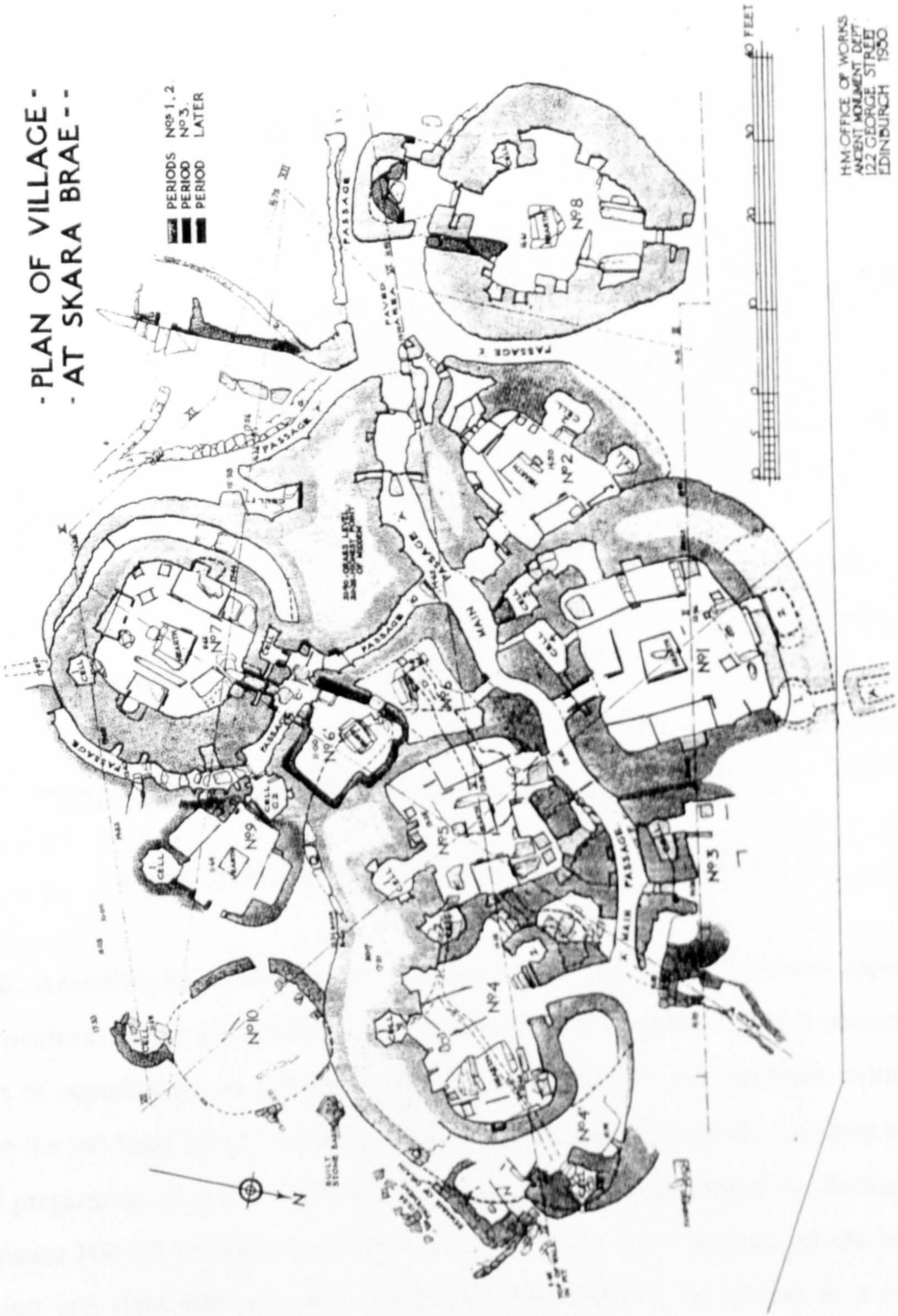

Figure 12:3. Plan of Skara Brae, note the way the houses are built against one another (after Childe 1931).

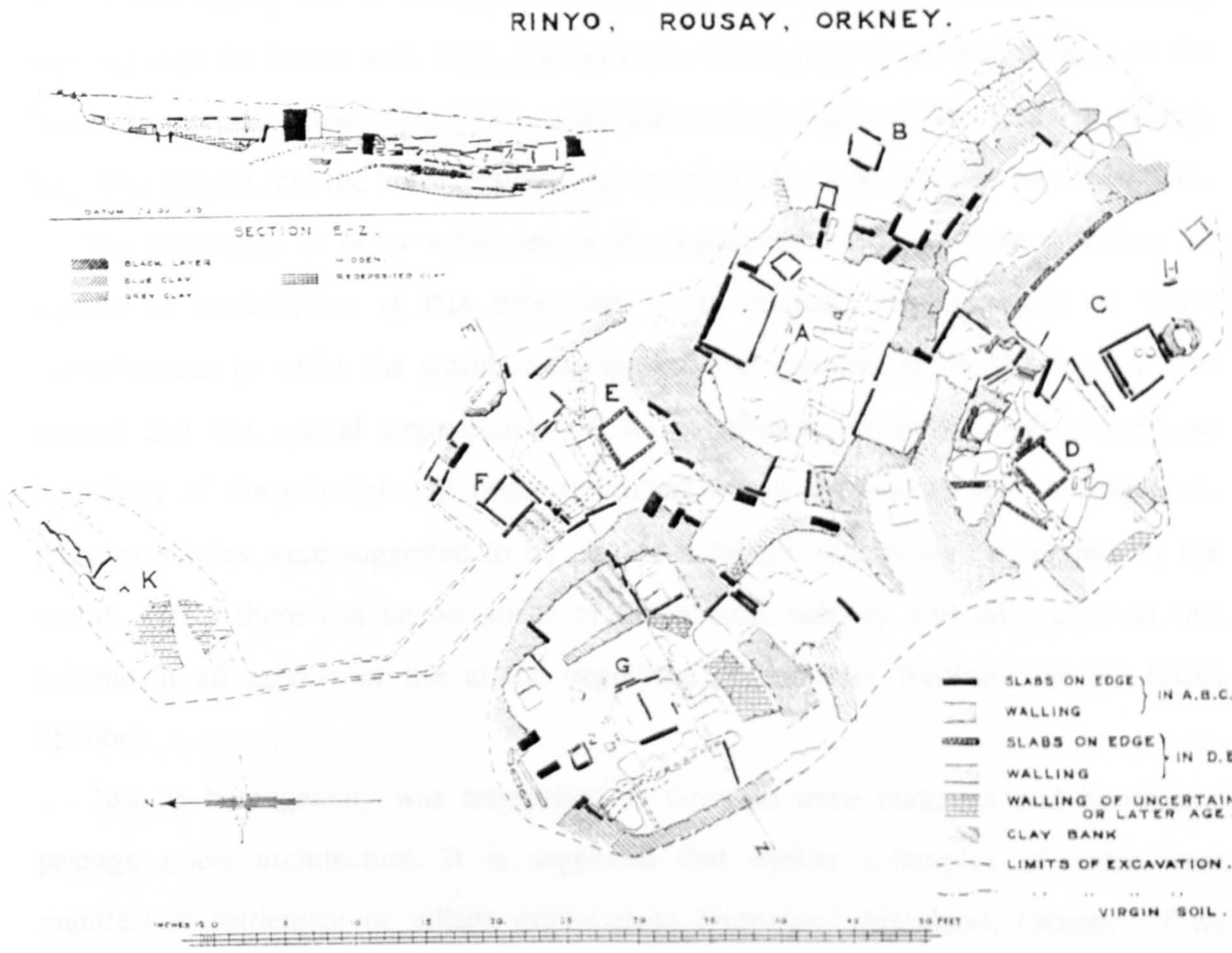

Figure 12:4. Plan of Rinyo (after Childe & Grant 1947).

mundi. According to different social situations within the house, different aspects of the cruciform spatial arrangement, may be brought into operation. This is promoted in terms of oppositions, for example back/front and right/left. For example, within the house the left hand side of the hearth tends to be an area of domestic activities such as food preparation, it is also the side from which ash is raked (chapter 9). Because of a consistent NW-SE orientation of the house, each of the main elements of the interior, the left and right beds and the rear dresser and doorway, is related to a cardinal direction which adheres to the midwinter/midsummer sunrise and sunset. In this classification we see a fusion of space and time.

The four elements radiating from the central hearth: the rear `dresser', left and right box `beds' and the entrance, create the cruciform spatial arrangement which is consistently employed in all houses constructed from circa 2600bc - 2000bc. However,

it is worth noting that in the earlier houses the beds and rear dresser are actually recessed into the house wall, thus, the furniture forms part of the main fabric of the house. In the later houses (Fig 10:2), while the same elements of furniture are present, they now project into the house interior and are no longer embedded in the house wall.

The principles or order witnessed in the organisation of the house dominate all aspects of architecture at this time and, it is argued, they are part of wider classifications in which the world is categorised and understood. In chapter 9 it was argued that the spatial organisation of the Barnhouse settlement was simply an homology of the principles of order embodied within the house, and in chapter 6, these principles were suggested to be part of a broader cosmological scheme of the world. I feel there can be no doubt of the overall potency and adherence to this scheme in all aspects of life at the beginning of the later Neolithic period (circa 2600bc).

Just as homogeneity was recognised in Grooved-ware ceramics and house and passage grave architecture, it is suggested that similar principles of order were manifest in settlement or village organisation throughout Mainland, Orkney. If we examine the first phase of settlement at Skara Brae (Fig 10:3), hints of a similar organisation are present. Because large areas of this early settlement remain unexcavated only partial reconstruction is possible, however, three points may be made:

1. The houses are similar to those at Barnhouse and are free-standing.
2. A large and `different' building stood in the western area of the settlement.
3. The village organisation may have been concentric and referenced to an open central area.

While an exact correspondence in the spatial organisation of settlement may only be inferred between Skara Brae and Barnhouse, in both examples two clear house types are evident; the larger building in the west and the smaller houses which form the rest of the village. This division recalls a discussion of changing forms of domestic architecture by Duncan (1981, 41), who has noted similar spatial characteristics in

societies which maintain collectivistic social relations. This social formation is structured on kin based, age and gender relations, with a fairly stable shared value system and group identity. Individual ambition is discouraged within a situation of fairly low spatial and social mobility. He identifies the inclusion of a single large building, essentially a mens house or cult house, with the more numerous smaller houses which act as shared dwellings by men and women. Women tend to be associated with the house since their work is primarily seen as being based in and around its confines. On the other hand, men spend little time in the house with their work taking them away from the family dwelling. Within such a situation the individual family houses tend not to be embellished and are visually of similar size and appearance.

While not subscribing to ideal types, the description Duncan (ibid), provides of the form of society which tends to employ such spatial organisation of settlement, is very similar to that which I would interpret from the material evidence. It will be noticed that it is also similar to the form of egalitarian segmentary society envisaged by Renfrew (1979, 221). The development of these communities, for Renfrew, and by default others, involves the emergence of centralised authority "a larger social formation to which the population of all Mainland may have owed allegiance" (ibid, 218).

However, these views of social evolution founder when the histories of the settlements are examined. Indeed, Clarke and Sharples note that "while no evidence for the Grooved-ware settlements is fundamentally at variance with the concept of a segmentary society there is as yet nothing from these sites to support the idea of the emergence of a centralising tendency" (1985, 69). Rather than seeing the rise of a central authority and greater social cohesion, I suggest something quite different occurs in late Neolithic Orkney.

It is at this point that the evidence from the `village' settlements may be of value. It has been noted that the earlier villages were similar in spatial organisation, with free standing houses concentrically arranged around a central area. Similarly, inside the early house, stone furniture was actually recessed into the wall; forming part of the fabric of the house (see Figs 9:6 & 10:2).

Through time these characteristics vary in several ways. First, settlement organisation changes from the concentric structure to a more conglomerate form. At both Skara Brae (Fig 12:3), and Rinyo (Fig 12:4), the houses decrease in number and become physically attached. By implementing such changes settlement organisation alters to a form as can be seen today at Skara Brae. Thus, at the level of settlement organisation, the principles of order based on centrality and concentricity break down. Also the architecture of the house changes. The house becomes larger and the interior furniture *projects* from the internal walls, hence, it no longer forms part of the actual core fabric of the dwelling (Fig 10:2). This allows internal modification and addition to the cruciform representation.

In all these changes we see a weakening of the cosmologically based principles of order so strongly adhered to in the earlier phase of the late Neolithic period. At Barnhouse the settlement appears to be abandoned and Structure 8 is built. This new construction, despite its large size, demonstrates this `new' form of architecture. In this altered architecture, it is suggested, we necessarily see changes in both kinship and social practices. The larger interior area of the later house may indicate larger family units and the structural attachment of houses, as seen at Skara Brae, may be a physical manifestation of increased social cohesion, but on an extended family basis. If larger communities fragment into smaller units based on the extended family, then overall we may expect a re-orientation of exchange networks and broader social relations.

It is also at precisely this time that we see the changes in material culture discussed in earlier chapters. For instance, the decoration on Grooved ware becomes confined to applied techniques. Furthermore, decoration itself becomes restricted to linear motifs (see chapter 8). At another level, flint appears to become a limited and restricted resource. This is clearly demonstrated in the later phases of Skara Brae where an inferior chert, which requires heat treatment for its preparation (C. Wickham-Jones pers comm), becomes the dominant flaked stone component. At Barnhouse, a hoard of large prepared flint nodules is buried in a pit in the floor of Structure 8 inner building. Thus, materials which appear to have been accessible in the earlier period now

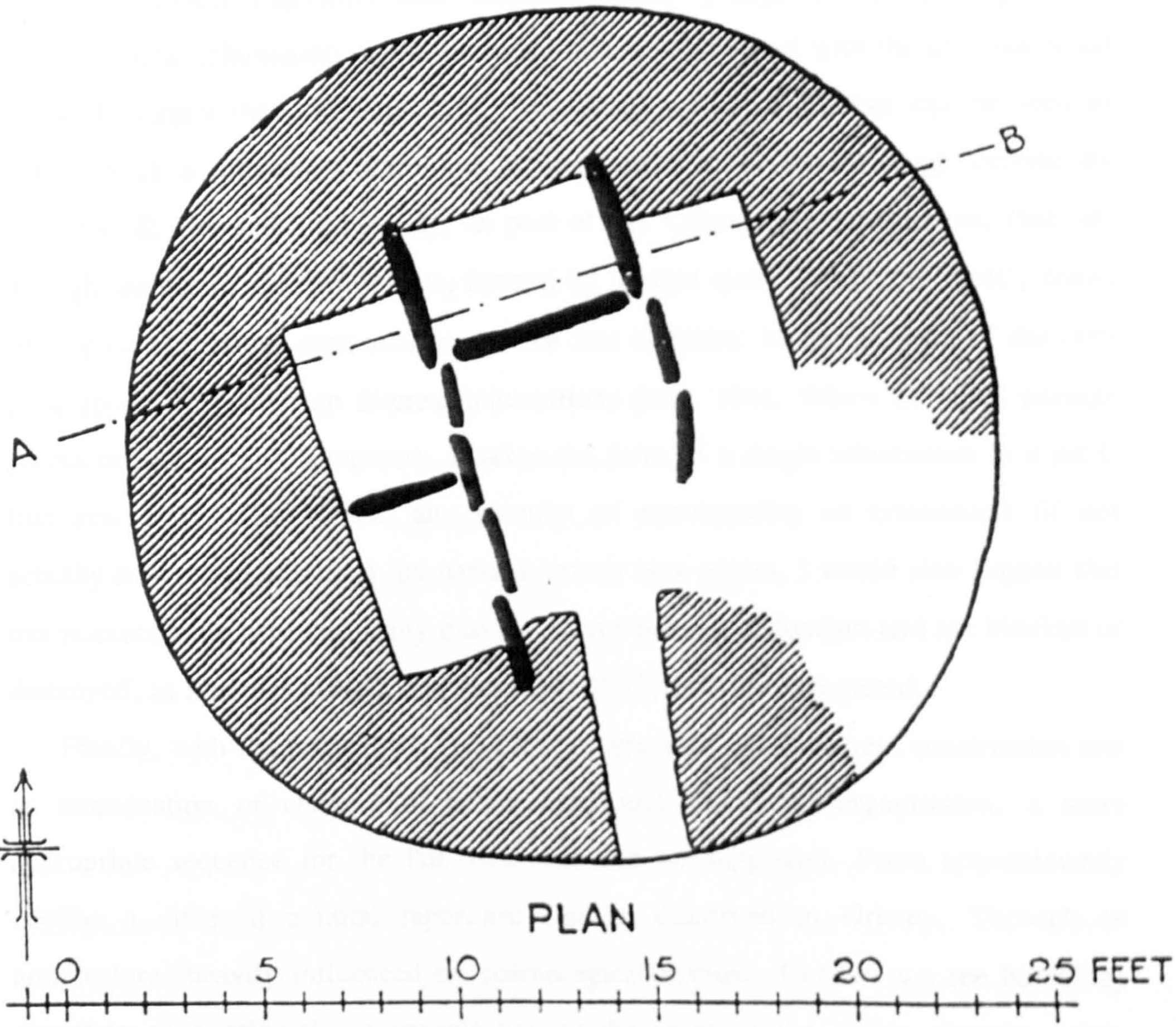

Figure 12:5. The `chambered tomb' of Bookan (after R. C. A. H. M. S. 1946).

become scarce suggesting that not only do family groups come to control particular resources, but spheres of contact become severely curtailed.

For Childe, one of the notable aspects of the material assemblage from Skara Brae was its localised character (1931, 97). Remembering that the majority of his excavations were confined to the later settlement, this provides an indication of the lack of contact beyond Orkney. The two main sources of evidence for such contact in the late Neolithic period comes from the presence of passage grave art on ceramics and inside passage graves, and a number of pieces of Arran pitchstone at Barnhouse. Thus, both types of evidence are confined to the *earlier* phase of the late Neolithic.

As settlement fragments into extended family groups so mortuary practices change. Single inhumation in cists is likely to have concurred with the changes noted above. I suggest that the anomalous `chambered tomb' of Bookan can be seen to capture such a movement within its architecture (Fig 12:5). Although defined by Davidson & Henshall (1989, 26), as part of the Orkney-Cromarty series, Bookan, through the use of a series of cists, formed by upright slabs, similar to `beds', draws heavily on the spatial representation of the late Neolithic house. In each of the cists there appear to have been discrete inhumations (ibid, 104). Where burial in passage graves occurs, as at Quanterness, it takes the form of a single inhumation in a pit C (Renfrew 1979, 55). Hence, any element of communality as symbolised (if not actually adhered to in burial), by passage graves now ceases. I would also suggest that this is exactly the time that many passage graves become redundant and are blocked or destroyed, as Sharples (1985), and Henshall (1985, 107-8), have noted.

Finally, with the breakdown of a clear progression of monument construction and an examination of changes in house form and settlement organisation, a more appropriate sequence for the late Neolithic can be suggested. From approximately 2600bc a different cultural repertoire can be discerned in Orkney. Through an architecture, heavily influenced by cosmological themes of order, we see homology operating as a principle of organisation at the level of the house, passage grave, settlement, and landscape. This is suggested to concur with a view of collective social relations, as discussed by Duncan (1981). Interestingly, it is also a time when contacts are identifiable with other areas of north-western Scotland and Ireland. The construction of the Stones of Stenness and Ring of Brodgar can be seen as the work of a corporate social organisation seeking to capture, in concrete form, the order of the social and natural world. Lying centrally within a huge natural bowl in central Mainland, the Stones - like the hearth - serve as a pivotal point around which social landscape was structured.

Through time this order changes, as settlement is re-organised, becoming smaller and fragmented, house form and internal architecture alters. Smaller numbers of houses become physically linked to form single units. With this dispersal and the suggested changes in kinship towards a family based individualistic formation, links

outwith Orkney appear to cease. This marks the point when passage graves, symbols of the collective, become redundant and individual burial becomes the norm.

It should be noted, however, that this scenario does not encompass all of Orkney. In peripheral areas, such as South Ronaldsay, older traditions continue even to the extent of a maintenance of Unstan ware. This may explain the fairly late radiocarbon determinations (see appendix 1), and Unstan ware ceramics, obtained from Isbister. Captured in the architecture of this cairn is the influences of passage grave design (the side cells and side entrance) and an existing tradition of `stalled' construction, which is far less obvious or intrusive as other monuments displaying this architecture. In this respect it is easy to understand the various descriptions of this cairn as unusual (Davidson & Henshall 1989, 24-5), or hybrid (e.g. Hedges 1983, 203).

To conclude, in the final analysis, Renfrew's scheme of social evolution is difficult to sustain in the face of the archaeological evidence. Instead of an increase in social complexity and the emergence of centralizing tendencies we see a change in social relations away from the collective towards individual family groups, which can be traced into the second millenium BC. The monumentality which marked the emergence of a chieftain, is seen to have occurred early in the late Neolithic period. The major problem of understanding how an apparently `new' cultural assemblage appears in Orkney in the mid third millenium BC remains obscure. Although further fieldwork and a proposed programme of genetic enquiry may slowly shed light on this problem. However, the changes which occur throughout the late Neolithic and Early Bronze age begin a period of isolation which is destined to last for the next 500 years.

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Appendix 1

Radiocarbon dates for Neolithic Orkney

C14 date	*Context*	*Calendar date*
Knap of Howar		
3756+85bc (SRR 347)	House 1 wall fill	4560+110BC
2131+65bc (SRR 452)	re-run of above	2725+110BC
2820+180bc (Birm 816)	Lower midden	3600+190BC
2815+70bc (SRR 348)	Upper midden	3595+110BC
2740+130bc (Birm 814)	House 2 occupation deposit	3520+145BC
2582+70bc (SRR 346)	House 1 occupation	3350+110BC
2501+70bc (SRR 344)	Upper midden	3245+110BC
2472+70bc (SRR 349)	Lower midden	3205+110BC
2398+75bc (SRR 345)	House 1 occupation	3090+110BC
2320+100bc (Birm 813)	House 2 wall fill	2995+115BC
2300+130bc (Birm 815)	Lower midden	2970+145BC
Knowe of Yarso		
2275+60bc (Q1225)	no context	2940+110BC
Knowe of Rowiegar		
2355+60bc (Q 1221)	no context	3035+110BC
2055+60bc (Q 1227)	no context	2600+110BC

Knowe of Ramsay

2390+65bc (Q 1223)	no context	3080+110BC
2350+60bc (Q 1224)	no context	3030+110BC
2060+60bc (Q 1222)	no context	2610+110BC

Isbister

2480+55bc (GU 1179)	Foundation deposit	3215+110BC
2295+100bc (GU 1178)	Foundation deposit	2965+115BC
2530+80bc (GU 1182)	Deposit below shelf	3285+110BC
2425+50bc (Q 3013)	sample as above	3135+110BC
2470+95bc (GU 1185)	Deposit in cell 3	3205+110BC
2410+55bc (Q 3016)	sample as above	3110+110BC
2470+90bc (GU 1180)	Floor deposit stall 4	3205+110BC
2460+130bc (GU 1181)	Floor deposit stall 4	3190+145BC
2415+90bc (GU 1184)	Deposit in cell 3	3120+110BC
2310+55bc (Q 3015)	sample as above	2980+110BC
2335+45bc (Q 3018)	Backfill behind hornwork	3010+110BC
2310+55bc (GU 1190)	sample as above	2980+110BC
1960+80bc (GU 1183)	Deposit under shelf, stall 5	2470+110BC
1880+50bc (Q 3014)	sample as above	2355+110BC
2090+100bc (GU 1186)	Stone infill	2655+115BC
2080+50bc (Q 3017)	sample as above	2640+110BC

Skara Brae

2520+120bc (Birm 795)	Occupation on OLS	3270+135BC
2370+100bc (Birm 480)	Occupation on OLS	3055+115BC
2330+100bc (Birm 794)	Occupation on OLS	3005+115BC

2480+100bc (Birm 637)	Early occupation phase 1	3215+115BC
2480+120bc (Birm 638)	context as above	3215+135BC
2450+100bc (Birm 639)	context as above	3175+115BC
2400+130bc (Birm 636)	context as above	3095+145BC
2420+150bc (Birm 790)	Final occupation phase 1	3125+160BC
2360+120bc (Birm 789)	context as above	3045+135BC
2340+100bc (Birm 791)	context as above	3020+115BC
2340+120bc (Birm 788)	Early occupation phase 2	3020+135BC
2330+120bc (Birm 786)	context as above	3005+135BC
2200+100bc (Birm 787)	context as above	2850+115BC
2090+110bc (Birm 436)	Final occupation phase 2	2655+125BC
2070+110bc (Birm 434)	context as above	2625+125BC
1920+100bc (Birm 435)	context as above	2415+115BC
1880+100bc (Birm 433)	context as above	2355+125BC
2110+130bc (Birm 793)	Base of waterlogged midden	2685+145BC
2000+100bc (Birm 477)	context as above	2520+115BC
1900+140bc (Birm 478)	context as above	2385+150BC
2190+120bc (Birm 438)	Top of waterlogged midden	2830+135BC
1980+110bc (Birm 792)	context as above	2495+125BC
1830+110bc (Birm 437)	context as above	2275+125BC

Rinyo

1900+70bc (Q 1226)	no context	2385+110BC

Links of Noltland

2265+65bc (GU 1429)	Ploughsoil below midden	2930+110BC

2190+65bc (GU 1428)	context as above	2830+110BC
2000+65bc (GU 1431)	Midden associated with deer skeleton	2520+110BC
1910+60bc (GU 1430)	Upper layer of midden	2400+110BC
1890+60bc (GU 1433)	Midden infill of structure	2370+110BC
1772+60bc (GU 1432)	Butchery site	2190+110BC

Barnhouse

2620+75bc (OxA 3498)	Primary occupation House 2	c 3500-3100BC
2640+75bc (OxA 3499)	context as above	c 3600-3110BC
2470+75bc (OxA 3500)	Final occupation House 2	c 3300-2925BC
2500+75bc (OxA 3501)	Central activity area	c 3325-2930BC
2570+70bc (OxA 2734)	Hearth fill House 12	c 3350-3100BC
2510+70bc (OxA 2735)	Hearth fill House 7	c 3330-2940BC
2410+70bc (OxA 2736)	Deposits built up against House 7	c 3095-2915BC
2450+70bc (OxA 2737)	Ash on clay floor House 5	c 3270-2920BC
2410+60bc (OxA 3763)	Occupation Structure 8	c 3090-2910BC
2450+65bc (OxA 3764)	context as above	c 3270-2920BC
2525+70bc (OxA 3765)	context as above	c 3350-2950BC
2470+60bc (OxA 3766)	Pit fill House 9	c 3300-2925BC

Quanterness

2640+75bc (Q 1294)	Base deposits main chamber	

		3420+110BC
2410+50bc (SRR 754)	Burial cist A	3110+110BC
2350+60bc (Pta 1626)	context as above	3030+110BC
2220+75bc (Q 1479)	context as above	2875+110BC
2590+110bc (Q 1363)	Layer 3 main chamber	3360+125BC
2160+100bc (Q 1451)	context as above	2775+115BC
2180+60bc (Pta 1606)	Burial cist C	2810+110BC
1955+70bc (Q 1480)	context as above	2460+110BC
1920+55bc (SRR 755)	context as above	2415+110BC

Quoyness

2315+50bc (SRR 753)	no context	2990+110BC
2240+50bc (SRR 752)	no context	2900+110BC

Pierowall Quarry

2190+60bc (GU 1582)	Construction of structure on ruined tomb	2830+110BC
2190+60bc (GU 1583)	Secondary occupation of structure	2830+110BC
2080+65bc	context as above	2640+110BC

Maeshowe

3145+60bc (SRR 791)	Peat below northern bank	3930+110BC
2185+65bc (SRR 505)	Basal peat in north ditch	2820+110BC
2020+70bc (Q 1482)	context as above	2550+110BC
1815+70bc (Q 1481)	Basal peat in south ditch	2250+110BC
1495+50bc (SRR 524)	context as above	1830+110BC

Stones of Stenness

2356+65bc (SRR 350)	Organic secondary layer in ditch	3040+110BC
2238+70bc (SRR 351)	Central hearth fill	2895+110BC
1730+270bc (SRR 592)	Fill of possible second hearth	2135+275BC