

HIGHLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL



FIELD MONUMENTS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

1 SITE CODE									
H	N	D	2	7	S	W	0	0	1
2 NGR		3 8		1 7		3 8		5 CR	
3 QUAL									
6 SITE NAME									
H A M *									
10 GENERIC TYPE									
MOUND (ALLEGED BURIAL MOUND)									
+ SOUTERRAINS									
14 PERIOD/DATE					15 DATING METHOD				
BA = IA					TYP				
18 SHAPE									
CIRCULAR									
19 THREAT AND DATE									

4 DISTRICT		5 PARISH	
CAITHNESS		DUNNET	
7 AREA STATUS		9 REGIONAL STATUS	
8 SITE STATUS		13 DIMENSIONS	
SCHEDULED		MOUND 21.0m DIAM.	
11 CONCORDANCE		12 FORM	
OS ND 27 SW 1		STANDING STRUCTURE	
NMR		SOUTERRAINS 28.0m DIAM	
16 RELATIONSHIP OF ELEMENTS		17 CONDITION	
POSSIBLE BURIAL MOUND, CHAMBERED,		MUTILATED AND ROBBED	
REUSED AS DWELLINGS OR			
SOUTERRAINS			

20 LAND USE		21 GEOLOGY	
BACKSHORE			
22 SOILS		23 VEGETATION	
24 HYDROLOGY/DRAINAGE		25 RELIEF	
		CLIFF TOP	
		26 ASPECT	
		E = SE = S	
		27 ALTITUDE	
		10 = 15m OD	

28 EXCAVATION (EXCAVATOR: DATE: EXTENT: QUALITY)	
1. EDWARDS: 1924: COMPLETE: SCIENTIFIC	
29 BIBLIOGRAPHY (AUTHOR: DATE: TITLE: JOURNAL OR PUBLISHER: VOLUME: DETAIL)	
1. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1976: 1/10 000 MAP	
2. HENSHALL, A.S.: 1963: CHAMBERED TOMBS OF SCOTLAND: EDIN. U.P.: Vol. 1: p273	
3. RCAHMS: 1911: CAITHNESS INVENTORY: HMSO: pp22-4: No. 65	
4. EDWARDS, A.J.H.: 1924-5: PROC. SOC. ANT. SCOT: Vol. 59: pp85-9	
5. : 1794: OLD STATISTICAL ACCOUNT OF SCOTLAND: 11: 257	
6. POCOCKE, R.: 1887: TOURS IN SCOTLAND 1747-60: p156	
7. ORDNANCE SURVEY: 1873: OBJECT NAME BOOK: 3: p54 /cont. PTO...	
30 GROUND PLAN NO.	31 GROUND PHOTO NO.
32 SLIDES NO.	33 HR. AP. NO.
34 NMR. AP. NO.	35 OTHER AP. NO.: SOURCE
36 ARCHIVE AND LOCATION	
37 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY	
38 SAMPLES	
39 PALYNOLOGY	
40 NUMERICAL DATES: RANGE: LAB NO.	
41 SMALL FINDS	
42 MUSEUM/LOCATION	
43 OTHER	

44 NAME & ADDRESS OF OWNER		45 ATTITUDE OF OWNER	
46 NAME & ADDRESS OF TENANT		47 ATTITUDE OF TENANT	
48 ACCESS & RESTRICTIONS			

49 NAME & ADDRESS OF FINDER/RECORDER: DATE		50 RECORDER: DATE		51 CHECK: DATE	
		ALM: 3.4.1986		PB 16.4.1986	

52 TEXT					
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"See continuation cards for text and plans".

"Ham, chambered cairn 180m NW of Brough ND 238738" (10)

6. "** Also known in the district as 'The Pict's House'."

- 29./ 8. FEACHEM, R.W: 1963: PREHISTORIC SCOTLAND: pp42-3
9. MERCER, R.J: 1980-81: ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SURVEY IN N. SCOTLAND: EDIN. U.P: Vol. 2: p66:
No. 648
10. HBM(SDD): 1985: LIST OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

(ND 2381 7385) Chambered Mound (NR)

(1)

Name: Reputedly a chambered cairn (4, 8) but not accepted as such by Miss Henshall, this site is recorded as an earth-house by the R C A H M, but even after excavation by Edwards in 1924 its nature is uncertain.

It consists of a circular mound of stones and boulders, thinly covered with soil and turf, in which is a narrow chamber approached from the S by a passage. The perimeter of the mound is not definable but the diameter has been about 100 ft and the height is 8 to 9 ft.

The unpaved passage, destroyed at its outer end but still partially covered with lintels, is curved and measures 2 ft in width, from 1 ft 6 ins to 3 ft 10 ins in height and about 20 ft in length. 1,2,3,4,5,6,&7

The chamber is 14 ft 9 ins long by 3 ft 6 ins to 4 ft 10 ins in width with oversailing drystone walls roofed by flags at a height of 6 ft 6 ins. Near the end of the W wall, 3 ft above floor level is a small recess averaging 1 ft 3 ins in height, width and depth. Limpet shells and fish bones were found in this recess and also on the floor of the chamber where 'quern stones' and animal bones have also been found. (7)

On excavation an oval depression in front of the entrance proved to be flanked by opposing walls, 19 ft apart, running E-W and both faced only on the S side. The N wall was straight, 26 ft long and almost 4 ft high. A right angled corner was formed by a possibly secondary stretch of walling, 4 ft long, at its W end. This was faced only on its E side and its termination was rough and irregular giving the impression of having continued. The S wall was slightly curved, 23 ft long and 3 ft high. Both long walls were topped by regularly laid slabs about 2 ft 6 ins in breadth. Behind this structure was the mass of stones and boulders which formed the body of the mound, of which the wall appeared to be an integral part.

This is probably the monument referred to by Bishop Pococke in the mid-18th century and by the O S A in the late 18th century as having two chambers with separate entrances.

This site now consists of a turf-covered stony mound, 21 m in diameter and 3 m high, covering a paved and corbelled chamber, 4.7 m long by 1.7 m broad and 1.8 m high, with a hole in the roof of massive stone lintels. The passage is 0.8 m wide and 1.1 m maximum height. The structure on the S has been so greatly mutilated and robbed that it is now visible only as a slight, turf-covered hollow, in which there are traces of inside walling now surviving to a height of 0.4 m. Resurveyed at 1:2500.

OSPI:RD:26.2.1965

The chamber and passage are reminiscent of the subterranean structures on Orkney which the R C A H M describe as 'earth-houses', though few, if any, of these occur beneath stone mounds, and most have orthostats to support a lintelled chamber-roof. Those at Rennibister (HY 31 SE 3) and Saverock (HY 41 SW 5), however, have a combination of corbelling and orthostats in the chamber.

The dimensions of the passage at this site agree with their Orkney counterparts, but although the length of the chamber is acceptable, the width is less than the generality of Orkney sites, but that at Gripps (HY 42 NE 27) is comparable, as is that of the passageless structure at South Keiglar (ND 50 NE 9).

Souterrains in mound 28 m in diameter by 4.5 m high; two passages. a: Chamber 5 by 3 m - as previously described. b: Passage 8 by 1.5 m. Collapsed. NW-SE. (See plan.)

(9)

The remains are generally as described and planned by Mercer. The lintelled passage and chamber are still accessible but rough vegetation obscures details of the structures to the S of the mound. There is no positive evidence of a second cell as noted by Pococke and the O S A, but a depression in the summit immediately N of the chamber and the line of the old excavation trench (marked A on Edwards' plan) may indicate its collapsed presence.

(OSFI:NKB:21.5.1982)

The mode of construction, size and shape of the passage and chamber is typical of a souterrain, though the passage is narrower than is usual. Edwards established by excavation that the mound is man-made, yet it is too large to have been built merely to accommodate a souterrain. The relationship of the walling immediately S of the mound (see Edwards' plan) to the mound and souterrain is not now ascertainable. Published survey (1:2500) correct.

flags. The greatest height in the centre from what appears to be the original floor level is 6' 6". In the end of the W. wall, where the curve of the back commences, about 3' above the present floor level, is a small recess or ambry measuring 1' in height, 1' 3" in breadth, and 1' 6" in depth. The floor, which is said to be paved, is covered with a deposit, nearly a foot in depth, of soil and food refuse which has not been examined. There is a hole some 2' to 3' square in the centre of the roof where the slabs have apparently fallen in. The top of the roof in the interior is some 1' 6" to 2' below the summit of the mound. At the extreme outer end of the entrance passage is an oval depression, measuring 27' x 14', which has not been excavated.

This monument may possibly be the "Pict's House" noted in 1760 by Bishop Pococke, who gives the following account of it:—
 "I found two cells, three yards apart, and the mouth about a yard wide. The passage to one is destroyed, and, as I apprehended, two yards of the other. It is three yards into a bend, and then two yards more. The cell within is two yards wide and five yards long in a sort of an oval, and at the entrance is a sett in of three-quarters of a yard, and on the other side it forms the narrow end of the oval, the sides are straight for a yard high, and set in for another yard to three-quarters of a yard in width at top, which is covered with flags. There are two or three small holes as convenient recesses. The other cell is only a yard and a half high. At the end is a hole, half a yard above the floor, about two feet six inches high, three feet long, and three feet broad, lessening by a set-in of three-quarters of a yard, and this was probably a chimney, as there seemed to have been an opening to the top. Both the cells and passages have without doubt been in some degree filled with earth, for it is with difficulty any one can get in by the passages, which are about a yard high."

If the places are identical, only one "cell" is now apparent.

In the *Statistical Account* relating to the parish of Dunnet there is a description evidently of the same construction. Its external appearance is described as a "beautiful green mount about 8 or 9 feet above the level of the adjacent field." Two entrances to the "cells" about 8' asunder are said to have led from two outer intercommunicating circular apartments of about 17' or 18' diameter.

See Pococke's *Tours*, p. 156; *Stat. Acct.*, xi. p. 257.

O.S.M., CAITH., i. ("Brough"). Visited, 18th August 1919.

INVENTORY OF MONUMENTS, ETC., IN COUNTY OF CAITHNESS.

EARTH-HOUSE.

65. *Earth-house, Ham.*—On the E. side of a small geo about $\frac{1}{2}$ m. NW. of Ham harbour is an earth-house or chambered mound (fig. 7). A grassy mound some 62' in diameter and 6' in elevation is situated at the edge of the cliffs. At several places small excavations have been made in it disclosing its artificial character. Entering from S. by W. is the passage which has been opened out, leading to a chamber in the centre. The outer portion of the passage as originally exposed on excavation extended for a distance of some 14' beyond the present entrance, passing directly inwards for over 9' or 10', thereafter making a sharp turn to the left. Where now exposed it is built on each side and roofed with flags. In height it measures 3' and in

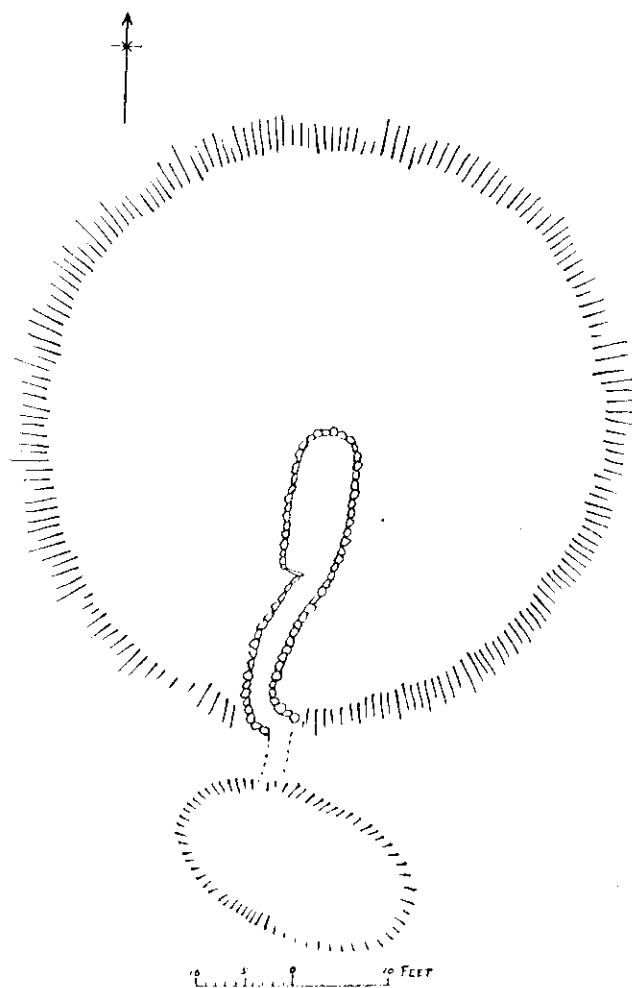


FIG. 7. — Earth-house, Ham (No. 65); Ground-plan.

width 2', and appears to pass along the original ground level. Curving slightly to the right it extends inwards for a distance of 13', increasing in height to 3' 10". In its course there are neither door checks nor bar holes. The chamber, into the end of which the passage opens, is oblong on plan and rounded at the back. It measures 14' 9" in length, 4' 10" in width at the entrance of the passage, and 5' 11" at its greatest width in the centre. The walls, which are dry-built, slightly converge upwards and are roofed with

EXCAVATION OF CHAMBERED CAIRN AT HAM, CAITHNESS

CHAMBERED CAIRN AT HAM.

In the county of Caithness only three earth-houses have hitherto been recorded—two in the parish of Latheron and one in the parish of Dunnet. The latter, which is situated near Ham at the edge of a cliff on the eastern side of a small geo, about 233 yards north of the farmhouse of Ham, is not an earth-house in the accepted sense of the word, but a chambered cairn rising from the natural surface of the ground to some 8 or 9 feet above the level of the adjacent field. The mound can be distinctly seen from the roadside, its presence being made still more prominent by reason of a modern cairn of stone which has been built on the top. The exact diameter cannot be ascertained, as there is no definite margin, but at one time it has probably measured somewhere about 100 feet.

The monument has long been known in the district as the Piets House, and in Pococke's *Tours*, p. 156, and the old *Statistical Account*, vol. xi. p. 257, reference is made to it under this name; but in both of these descriptions mention is made of the existence of two "cells" with separate entrances. If this is the same construction, only one "cell" or chamber is now extant, entrance to which is obtained through a covered passage. In the *Statistical Account* the entrances to the cells are also described as seemingly to have led from two outer circular compartments of about 17 or 18 feet in diameter. But, before the present excavation, the only indication of what might have corresponded to one of these compartments, was an oval grass-grown depression some little distance south of the extreme outer end of the entrance passage, whose broken and incomplete walls extended, before excavation, for a distance of 4 feet outwards from the point where the lintels begin and the covered passage leads from the face of the slope into the chamber in the heart of the mound. Taking a lead from the description given in the *Statistical Account*, an attempt to discover the existence of a second "cell" or chamber was made by an excavation which commenced at a point 8 feet west of the opening of the covered passage, and extended for about 15 feet in a northerly direction (A on fig. 1). At the northern extremity

(4)

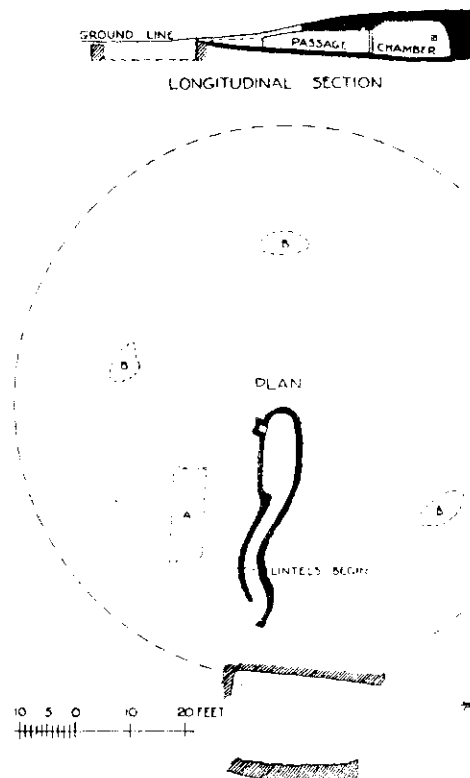


Fig. 1. Plan and Section of Chambered Cairn at Ham, Caithness.

of the excavation the depth from the surface of the mound to the bottom, which was considerably below the level of the roof of the present chamber, was about 5 feet. In so far as finding a second chamber the result was negative, and the second cell mentioned in the *Statistical Account*, and which Bishop Pococke described when he visited the site in 1760, still remains a matter of obscurity. The excavation was not, however, without its value, for it was ascertained that the body of the mound, although supposed until now to be of earth, was really an agglomeration of boulders and slabs of stone with only a few inches of soil on the top. Without penetrating deeply into the mound, an examination was made at various other places (B on plan), and the evidence obtained showed that the structure was similar to that of a cairn.

The exact nature of the oval depression in front of the entrance to the passage had next to be determined, and on the removal of the turf from its extreme outer edge on the south side, a slightly curved wall was found running from east to west. The wall, which measured 23 feet in length and 3 feet in height, was faced only on its outer or southern side. The top of the wall was flat, and consisted of a series of thin slabs, 2 feet 6 inches in breadth, regularly laid for the whole of its length. The inner side, irregular and without form, gradually sloped down towards the centre of the depression in a mass of irregularly placed stones and pieces of rotten slab. The centre of the depression was also dug out, but no floor was found. At a distance of about 19 feet north from the face of the first wall, another wall was found which also ran east and west. This wall measured 26 feet in length and nearly 4 feet in height, and it also was faced only on its outer or southern side. Above the wall before excavation was a covering of fragments of slabs and stones mixed with soil, but when this was removed it was seen that, as in the first wall, the top was well defined by flat slabs, between 2 and 3 feet in breadth, which covered it from end to end. Behind this building was the mass of stones and boulders that formed the body of the mound, of which the wall appeared to be an integral part.

At the western end of the inner wall and on its southern side another portion of walling, 4 feet in length and faced only on its eastern or inner side, was set at right angles. Its termination was rough and irregular, and gave the impression that it had continued further. From near the angle formed by these two walls a cut was made inwards in nearly a direct line with the present opening of the covered passage, and at a distance of 8 feet from the outer face of the long wall, the eastern wall of the passage leading to the chamber was disclosed. This wall, of which it was evident only part remained, curved slightly to the right for a distance of 4 feet, and gradually increased in height from 1 foot 6 inches to 2 feet. The end of the other wall of the passage was then laid bare, a distance of 2 feet separating one wall from the other. Both walls running parallel, curved slightly to the left, and the height gradually increased to 3 feet at the point where the lintels began (fig. 1, Section). The passage now curved slightly to the right and extended inwards for a distance of 13 feet, the height gradually increasing until at the part where it opened into the chamber it had reached 3 feet 10 inches. The passage was not paved.

The chamber, which was of drystone building, measured 14 feet 9 inches in length, 4 feet 10 inches in width where the passage entered, and 3 feet 6 inches in width at the back, where the curve which forms the round commences. The walls converged slightly as they rose upwards, the roof being formed of flags of stone, two of which had fallen in, leaving an open space in the centre about 3 feet square. The total number of flags which had covered both passage and roof was 22 in all. Near the end of the west wall, 3 feet above floor-level, was a small recess, which measured 1 foot in height, 1 foot 3 inches in breadth, and 1 foot 6 inches in depth. In a crevice at the back of the recess, caused by the flat slab which formed its floor not having fitted closely, there were found a quantity of limpet-shells and a few large fish-bones, probably cod. The floor of the chamber was covered with a black earthy deposit, mixed with disintegrated limpet-shells and comminuted fish-bones, the limpet-shell deposit being found in much greater quantity near the entrance than at any other part. The floor was not paved, and a measurement taken from the centre of it to the roof showed that the height was 6 feet 6 inches.

It is matter for regret that even now, after excavation, one cannot say with absolute certainty that this was the monument referred to in the *Statistical Account* and in *Pococke's Tours*. The two faced walls and part of a third, found at the south side of the mound, may have formed one of the circular outer compartments mentioned in the first of these descriptions; but no published plan, however, seems to have been in existence prior to that given in the *Ancient Monuments Commission's Inventory of Monuments and Constructions in Caithness*, p. 23, where this particular part of the structure is described as an oval depression which measured 27 feet by 14 feet. The walls, covered as they were with turf and nettles, would certainly have justified one in the assumption of the previous existence of a circular or oval compartment, and not until the present excavation was made could it have been possible to believe otherwise. The plan (fig. 1) shows that the smaller portion of wall would appear as if it had at one time joined the other long wall at right angles, and although no faced wall was found on the eastern side of the hollow, which would have made of the whole a rectangular enclosure, I am inclined to believe that in any case this portion was of secondary construction. With reference to the main part of the monument, it has until now been supposed that the chamber was contained in an earthen mound; but the composition of the body of the structure undoubtedly resembles that of a sepulchral cairn, and in a region notable for its number of chambered cairns, it is not without the bounds of possibility that one of these early monuments may have been adapted for use as a dwelling-place in later times. The chamber, although it does not now conform to the style of construction usually associated with the earlier type of monument, may have been rebuilt to suit the needs of those who afterwards used it as a habitation.

Ham, Chambered Cairn (ND 235738),
3¼ miles W. by N. of Mey, Sheet 7
(A.836 and by-road). *Caithness.*

This round chambered cairn with a
Camster-type chamber was mistaken for
a souterrain just over 200 years ago by
Bishop Pococke, but the plan and des-
cription published in 1911 reveal the
true identity of the monument while
perpetuating the episcopal error in the
title. The grass-grown mound, 60 ft. in
diameter, and 8 ft. high, stands near the
cliffs a quarter of a mile NW. of Ham.
It has been cut about over the last two
centuries, and the passage, now 13 ft.
long but somewhat truncated, can barely
be perceived to enter the chamber which
is 15 ft. long and up to 6 ft. wide, with a
corbelled roof closed with flags at a
height of 6 ft. 6 in. above the floor. This
is the most northerly chambered cairn
recorded on the mainland of Britain.

(8)

Souterrains. In mound diameter: 28m. Height: 4.50m. Circular grass-covered mound with 2 passages.

Souterrain. Chamber. Dimensions: 5m x 3m. Has a subrectangular chamber at the end of a passage 4m long. Wall 20 courses high and roofed by lintels 1m long. 1 lintel missing. Small niche in NW wall of chamber, 10 courses up. 7m of the west of passage is unroofed. Orientation: NW-SE.

Souterrain. Dimensions of passage: 8m x 1.50m. Passage collapsed for most of its length. Orientation: NW;SE.

Elevation: 100' OD.

ND 238748.

O.S. Card ND 27 SW 1

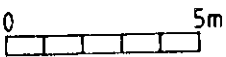
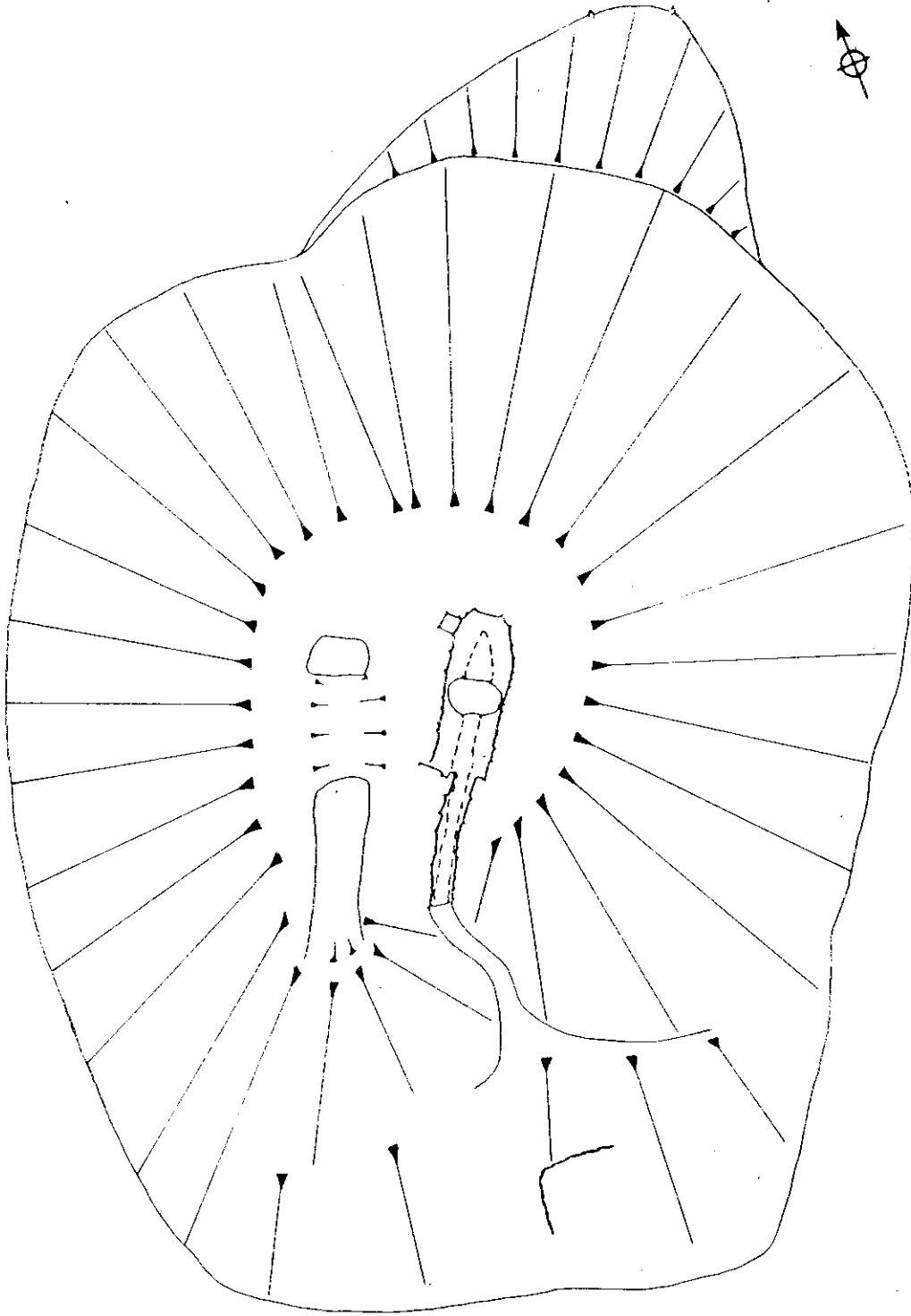
RCAHMS, *Caithness* (1911), p. 25, No. 70. A.S. Henshall, *The Chambered*

Tombs of Scotland, vol. 1 (1963), p. 273. PSAS LIX (1924-25), 85-89.

(Figs. 36 & 37)

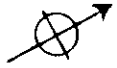
Mon. No. 648 (Figs. 36 & 37). The earth houses or 'souterrains' at Ham remain as one final aspect of constructional development to be considered relating to the period of later prehistory in the area surveyed. While Curle (RCAHMS 1911b, 22-24, No. 65) quotes Bishop Pococke writing in his "Tours in Scotland in 1747, 1750 and 1760" as describing two cells three yards apart and the mouth about a yard wide. "The passage to one is destroyed" and this cell "is only a yard and a half high. At the end is a hole, half a yard above the floor, about two feet six inches high, three feet long and three feet broad, lessening by a set-in of three quarters of a yard, and this was probably a chimney as there seemed to be an opening to the top." Curle was unable to trace this second chamber and it must have totally collapsed at least at its open end since the mid-eighteenth century. It will be noted from the drawing that the position of the second chamber is now readily apparent, doubtless due to the activities of Edwards on the site in the 1920s (Edwards, 1924).

The Old Statistical Account for the parish of Dunnet (1794, 257) indicates that the two 'cells' were "set about 8 feet asunder [and] are said to have led from two outer intercommunicating circular apartments of about 17' or 18' diameter". The outline of one such apartment is visible upon Curle's plan of 1910 and a fragment of that structure is now visible on the site as ploughing of the neighbouring field has encroached right up to the site and presumably has destroyed the greater part of this outer feature. The association of souterrains leading away from the interior of settlement structures is a phenomenon with which we are increasingly familiar and the association of prehistoric subcircular structures and earthhouses has been hinted at as at 'An Rath Chruineach' (Mon. No. 54) in the Farr-Swordly settlement complex

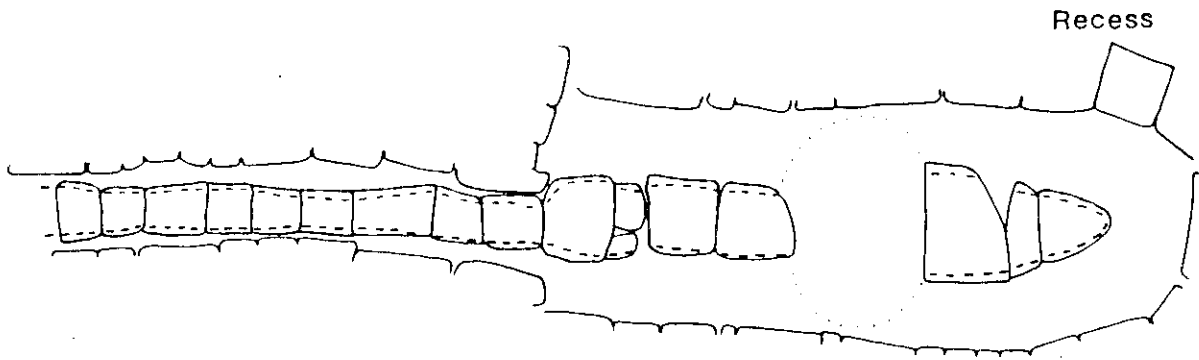


Mon 648

(9)



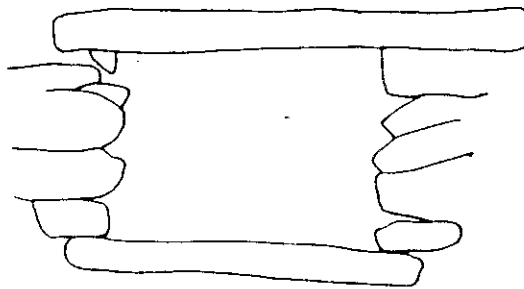
Mon 648



0 5m

Detail of Recess

Mon 648



0 1m

