11

DISCUSSION AND APPRAISAL

11.1 HOWE – A REVIEW OF THE SEQUENCE • ALEXANDRA SHEPHERD

'. . . the strength of the archaeological record is its ability to lay bare long sequences of change . . .' (Bradley & Gardiner 1984, 2)

INTRODUCTION

Throughout a period that stretched from somewhere in the 4th millennium BC until that point in 1982 when excavation ended, the site of Howe represented a focal point in the landscape, a distinct outline on the horizon of the neighbourhood of Stromness and beyond. Its mound provided a navigational aid to ships well into this century (2.2: Discussion above) and the prominence of its location must have been fundamental in the first choice of the site and in its continuing utilisation. The gradual build-up of the debris from this occupation produced the *tell* of Howe, the embodiment of its four millennia as a focus of activity.

In the twelve years since excavation ceased, a number of interim publications by the excavators (*inter alia* Carter *et al* 1984; Neil 1985; Smith 1990) have presented the main structural and chronological aspects of the site; they have thereby placed much of the material in preliminary contexts from which inferences have already been drawn. This monograph has finally brought together the mass of data from the excavations which provided the basis for those initial statements.

Presenting fresh perceptions of a site, a large proportion of whose data has already become embedded in the archaeological literature, is no easy task. The restricted excavation of the earliest phases combined with the predominant survival of the later phases, 7 and 8, have biased previous discussion of the site towards the later, Iron Age, themes, particularly those relating to broch development and interpretation (most recently Armit 1990; 1991; Foster 1989a; 1989b; 1990; Hedges 1990; Hingley 1992).

Whilst highlighting, therefore, the contribution which individual stages of the site have already made to a number of debates, this discussion will seek to stress the overriding importance of the ***sequence*** and what this can reveal of the more general pattern of Orcadian society at particular moments in its prehistory.

The assessment will present the sequence in the traditional three age chronological pattern which has been followed throughout the volume, whilst attempting to identify significant changes in the inhabitants, represented by facets of architecture and material culture, technology and exploitation of land and resources. It will attempt to identify the nature of these changes and reflect on the existence of similar sequences elsewhere.

At this point a note is required on the terminology employed in this discussion. It has been stated in the Introduction (1.3 above) that the terms used for the three phases of substantial round structures in the volume would continue to be those established early in the excavation and post-excavation work – Roundhouse (Ph 5), Broch 1 (Ph 6) and Broch 2 (Ph 7). It is recognised that there is a clear need to divest the term *broch* of the 'clutter of prejudice and unfounded assumption' (Armit 1991, 204) which has built up around it, in particular that part relating to chronology and dimension: 'not all brochs are Mousa' (Fojut 1981). However the substitution of the term *roundhouse* (Armit 1991, 182–3), whilst representing an understandable attempt to establish and confirm a continuum and to release the terminology from the any inference of exotic introduction, needs to be continually and scrupulously qualified – *simple* or *complex*, with or without facets of *broch architecture* – if is it not to produce as many ambiguities and provoke comparable false expectations. Consequently the sections of this review which deal with the Iron Age sequence of the site

Illus 159
Relationship on the Neolithic mound of the Phase 6 broch (Broch 1) outer wall (upper scale), to that of the Phase 5 roundhouse (middle scale), and the Early Phase 7 broch tower (Broch 2) (lower scale); scale – 2m; from S.

will adhere to the original terminology but, to aid future reference and clarity, will be followed by equivalent terms (after Armit 1991) in parentheses. The term *broch tower*, sanctioned by Armit (*ibid*, 183) for use only with those structures displaying palpable evidence of multi-storey construction, is used to distinguish the broch *tower* from the surrounding settlement, Hedges' (1987c, 13) distinction of *keep* and *village*.

A note is also necessary on the use of the radiocarbon determinations. In the body of the report, they have been expressed (10: The radiocarbon dates above) at the 1σ, 68%, level of confidence; a recent reassessment of their interpretation (Armit 1991) also employed this level. A number of the dates, particularly those from the earlier phases 3–5/6, have standard deviations well in excess of 50 years; at the 2σ, 95%, level of confidence, therefore, a very wide bracket for the calibrations of in excess of 300 or more years is produced. Consequently the dates provide a framework in spans of 200–300 years, or Case's (1991) quarters of a millennium, indicating a rough currency for phases of the site: they do not offer the precision that some examples of their use might suggest. In this respect they differ little from suites of radiocarbon dates from many other comparable sites. They are most effective in confirming the general time frame for a particular phase, suggested by other comparative material, rather than in attempting to support a definitive chronology. The derivations of chronological brackets from the excavators and subsequent work (Armit 1991) will be quoted in the following discussion with the proviso that the use of 2σ, 95%, level of confidence can stretch the possible span of some periods of activity over a further 50–100 years.

THE SEQUENCE

The excavation of the *howe* of Howe uncovered a range of occupational episodes indicating the changing uses of the mound over time (illus 159): it spans two periods at least of Neolithic building, some incidence of Beaker activity, a hiatus or lack of apparent activity over much of the Bronze Age (or more accurately the 2nd millennium), the first enclosure of the site at a time heralding the Early Iron Age, the re-emergence of large-

scale building with a fully demonstrable development from roundhouse to complex roundhouse to full broch tower, all with accompanying settlements, and finally a multi-stage post-broch settlement lasting into the Late Iron Age/Pictish period.

From at least one period as a major Neolithic funerary monument, it became a focus for Iron Age settlement, culminating in the highly organised village centred on Broch 2 (the *broch tower*).

NEOLITHIC BUILDING AND REBUILDING

The restricted nature of the excavation of the Neolithic levels at Howe has meant that definitive statements about the essence of the first use of the site are difficult to substantiate. Nonetheless, on the basis of the evidence presented, it has been strenuously argued (2.2: Discussion above) that the earliest activity at Howe is represented by the construction, somewhere in the 4th millennium BC, of a mortuary structure, subsequently modified to act as the forecourt for a stalled tomb of Orkney-Cromarty type, together with the erection of at least one standing stone. The ensuing construction of a Maeshowe-type tomb is not in doubt, but the interpretation of the earliest evidence as a funerary rather than domestic structure has been questioned (Davidson & Henshall 1989, 52).

The structural design – two building compartments, each with their own 'hearth' – has prompted comparison with the domestic structures at Knap of Howar (Ritchie, A 1983) rather than Orkney-Cromarty stalled cairns. Architectural similarities with existing house types need not rule out funerary interpretation for the structures: it might rather suggest their identity as houses of the dead, their form developing from the design of structures for the living (Hodder 1984).

A ritual funerary role rather than a domestic use for the hearths is suggested by the evidence for the use of fire as part of the pre-completion ritual within Orkney chambers such as Knowe of Ramsay, Knowe of Yarso, Unstan and Calf of Eday Long (Davidson & Henshall 1989, 57), although none of these included a hearth arrangement as such. A non-domestic, hearth-like structure, the enigmatic central feature at the henge monument of Stenness (Ritchie, JNG 1976, 12–13) provides a possible comparison but in a ceremonial rather than funerary setting. In this connection, the inferred presence of at least one standing stone in this phase at Howe (2.1.1: Phase 1 above) adds weight to a ritual interpretation for at least some of the early activities.

The lack of any *in situ* human bone within the structure has been noted; yet even well-preserved tombs have sometimes yielded only small amounts of bone (Clarke *et al* 1985, 23). Some of the later scattered finds (9: The human remains above) could represent redeposition from successive periods of cleaning out and building works. Against the lack of skeletal remains can be set the two polished axes from the clay layer which suggest deposition as part of a funerary rite such as represented by the two from the innermost chamber at Calf of Eday (Davidson & Henshall 1989, fig 21, 30, 31; 107).

A comparative sequence of a domestic structure overlain by a Maeshowe-type, cellular, funerary monument has not so far been demonstrated on Orkney. However, evidence for sequential funerary monuments does exist. At Knowe of Lairo the long mound with Orkney-Cromarty tripartite chamber was structurally altered into a cellular type (Richards 1988, 54). At Calf of Eday Long (Davidson & Henshall 1989, 107–8) and Bigland Long (*ibid*, 101) the stratigraphic sequence is horizontal rather than vertical with a large stalled chamber succeeding a smaller Bookan-type at the former (*ibid*, 87) and a smaller stalled chamber succeeding a larger at the latter (*ibid* 88). What has been identified as a stalled cairn at Tres Ness, Sanday (*ibid*, 163–4) has further, unquantifiable, structures superimposed.

At Maeshowe itself, there were traces of a possible earlier structure (Richards 1991) and, as at Howe, evidence for at least one standing stone. That other similar sequences may exist beneath standing monuments, whose excavation is precluded by the need to preserve their present entities, serves to underline the value of the Howe sequence.

Whichever interpretation – domestic structure of Knap of Howar type or funerary monument of Orkney-Cromarty type – is to be accepted for the earliest structure at Howe, it is of note that both structural types are associated with an Unstan cultural identity. For either type of monument to be succeeded by a cellular,

Maeshowe-type tomb, with the Grooved Ware associations which that carries, implies an Unstan>Grooved Ware progression. Howe consequently presents a stratified architectural sequence of the two traditions, whether house to tomb or tomb to tomb, a sequence more recently demonstrated by the ceramic assemblages from the settlement at Pool, Sanday (MacSween 1992, 259–71).

It is interesting to speculate on the nature of the transition: does the clay sealing of the earlier structure by the builders of the later indicate a 'respectful' laying to rest of the recent past, a vengeful act of slighting or an attempt to achieve a level surface for an impressive new monument over the decrepit remnants of long past generations? Each has a chronological implication, with the last possibly the least acceptable as it demands a hiatus between the two traditions rather than the considerable overlap, if not contemporaneity, which has been argued for elsewhere (Clarke DV, 1983) and which finds support in the range of radiocarbon dates (*ibid*; Davidson & Henshall 1989, 90–2). The proximity of Howe to both type-sites of Unstan and Maeshowe (illus 9) poses questions of territorial integrity. It would certainly seem that, in this corner of western Mainland at least, there is a progression from one cultural identity to the other; however, change may have been more rapid on Mainland Orkney (MacSween 1992, 268) while the old traditions survived longer in the peripheral regions, allowing for greater overlap. The implications of this change will be returned to below.

Whatever the impetus for its construction, the Maeshowe-type tomb at Howe would have presented a stunning stepped appearance, reinforcing the sense of commitment of massive communal resources to facilitate its construction. The impressive qualities of this tomb should be borne in mind when construction of the substantial structures on the site of two millennia later are discussed.

The whereabouts of the dwellings of the community who constructed the tomb can only be surmised. The identification through fieldwalking of the hitherto unknown, yet extensive, Grooved Ware site at Barnhouse (Richards 1986) provides hope that the recovery of similar material from the area might yet indicate the whereabouts of such a settlement for Howe.

THE ADVENT OF THE BRONZE AGE – BEAKER TRACES

The problem of discerning the nature of the transition between phases – whether it is one of destruction, abandonment, renovation or continuum – becomes more acute when the limited evidence for the immediate post-Neolithic years is examined.

At Howe, there is no structural evidence for the period that follows the use of the Phase 2 tomb. The Beaker sherds (illus 10, 139), found in the area in front of the tomb, represent the only evidence for the presence of the cultural change which elsewhere marks the centuries approaching the turn of the 2nd millennium BC for much of mainland Britain. In this, Howe reflects the sparse evidence from Orkney where Beakers have not been found in the same concentrated single-grave funerary context displayed on the British mainland, but sherds and related material, in particular barbed and tanged arrowheads, have been found deposited within the fill of Neolithic tombs (Knowe of Yarso, Calf of Eday, Unstan; Davidson & Henshall 1989, 78–9) and some in later levels of settlement sites (Childe & Grant 1939, 26). Howe and the other Orkney examples consequently form part of the phenomenon of the association of Beaker material with the filling-up and abandonment of chambered tombs, as well as what appear to be last acts of ritual associated with other burial mounds and stone circles, from as far apart as Wiltshire and the Western Isles (Shepherd, IAG 1986, 9): it is of note that one of these episodes, at Clettraval, N Uist, produced a sherd offering the closest parallel to one of the Howe pieces (8.9: Pottery above).

Just when these sherds were deposited at Howe is uncertain; they do not represent any clearly definable mainstream Beaker phase. The most recent, if still somewhat inconclusive, dating of Beaker associated skeletal material (Kinnes *et al* 1991) presents a currency of 2400 cal BC to 1800 cal BC for their deposition. Unless considerable overlap with Grooved Ware supremacy is envisaged, the latter part of this time span, the first quarter of the 2nd millennium, would seem the more likely timing for activity within tombs such as Howe.

Perhaps too much stress can be laid on the incidence of a few – in the case of Howe, four – Beaker sherds (see Morton 1990 for a detailed study of the incidence of Beaker deposits in Neolithic contexts). Yet even amongst the Neolithic pottery in the tombs, representation of a vessel by only one or two sherds is the norm

(Davidson & Henshall 1989, 57). For Beaker deposition, however, there is a striking contrast between the apparent scattering of a few small sherds within an earlier monument, as at Howe, and the reverent placing of a whole pot close to the body as part of the classic Beaker single burial ritual. Does sherd deposition represent the re-use of past ritual foci (Thorpe & Richards 1984, 79–80) or does the nature of deposition at Howe and elsewhere suggest rather the laying down of markers: registering 'under new management' or the end of the old era? Again, these themes will be returned to below.

Elsewhere in Britain, the advent of Beakers and Beaker-related material heralds the earliest appearance of metalworking (Burgess 1980). The evidence for this development within Orkney is recognised as being slight indeed (Clarke *et al* 1984, 84) and none was revealed in the Howe sequence. Yet Orkney is shown to have varied metal resources (Øvrevik 1985, fig 7.1), a number of these within easy access of Howe; if the advent of Beaker producers was as metalworkers and prospectors, then they seem to have left very little trace.

THE BRONZE AGE HIATUS

At Howe, the fragmentary evidence for Beaker activity in the sequence is followed by none at all for what could be ascribed to the full Bronze Age. In real terms this could mean a hiatus in the habitation of the site of anything up to 1200 years, beginning with cessation of activity post tomb closure, suggested as the first quarter of the 2nd millennium, and its reassertion with the earliest re-enclosure of the site in Phase 3, which could, from radiocarbon determinations, be as early as the 8th, or as late as the 6th, century cal BC.

Given the nature of the Early and Middle Bronze Age evidence from the rest of Orkney (Øvrevik 1985), characterised as it appears to be by smaller scale, scattered settlements, burnt mounds and barrow groups, it would not be surprising if Howe lay unoccupied during much of this time. The massive stepped mound, however altered its associations following a Beaker interlude, may not have presented an attractive building proposition to what was an altogether smaller scale, possibly more mobile society (*ibid*, 131).

Alternative interpretations for the apparent break in the Howe sequence should not be entirely ignored: rather than a total hiatus in occupation it is possible that an impoverished, and consequently insubstantial, 2nd millennium occupation might have taken place, all traces of which were destroyed by subsequent Iron Age activity; or again, activity might have been in areas slightly off the main mound which would therefore not have been within the scope of the excavation. Yet even these interpretations serve to underline the sharp contrast between an Orkney studded with massive tombs and flourishing settlements and a much reduced Bronze Age aftermath.

THE EARLY IRON AGE – ENCLOSURE AND BUILDING DEVELOPMENT

It is probably most accurate to envisage Howe lying dormant for much of the 2nd millennium. The resumption of activity following this interlude marks the beginning of the second major part of the Howe sequence. The chronology of the first two and a half thousand years has been inferred by analogy with other Neolithic and Beaker associations. At this point in the sequence, radiocarbon dates (10 above) become available to help define the chronology. They indicate that at least from the 8th, possibly even the 9th century cal BC, full occupation of the site resumes.

The first enclosures

The resumption of activity is characterised by the construction of a shallow ditch or gully which enclosed an area to the south of the old Neolithic mound. Concrete evidence for structures within the enclosure during this period is limited but the construction of a well *outside* the ditch has been taken as evidence that it served purely as a boundary marker, rather than a physical defensive structure (see below). The radiocarbon determinations (Table 73) give wide brackets of *c* 8th/9th to 5th century cal BC for this phase; it has been termed Early Iron Age but a Late Bronze Age label might be as valid; the distinctions at this stage are somewhat academic.

Evidence for the nature of the settlement within the enclosure, and consequently for the people who constructed it, is fragmentary (illus 11) and cannot provide a coherent picture of the period represented by the dates; but the establishment of this enclosure at Howe initiated a series of structural developments on the mound, and set the boundaries for settlement on the site for almost a thousand years.

After some unquantifiable period of time, the boundaries of the settlement were consolidated by the recutting of the first ditch, the construction of a stone wall on its inner edge, and the taking in of the tomb mound within the enclosure. The timing of these developments, differentiated as Phase 4, is uncertain; the single radiocarbon determination (Table 73) appears to overlap stratigraphically later phases: somewhere around the 5th century cal BC would seem to be the most appropriate placing.

During this phase, there were only three, possibly four, recognisable buildings (illus 13), two of which provided definite evidence of construction against the enclosure wall. From the scant remains, sub-circular structures were suggested, with no discernible indication of hierarchy between them: what seems to have been important was the clustering of structures. From the beginning, the evidence indicates the formation of a nucleated farming settlement complex rather than an isolated single farm unit and points rather to a pattern of recurrence of similar forms from the cellular traditions of the Neolithic (Armit 1990, 195–7).

There is evidence that other similar enclosed settlements were created at this time. Lying respectively 1km to the NNE and 2.6km to the NE on the edge of the Loch of Stenness are two enclosed promontories, the Tang of Onstan and Nether Bigging (Lamb 1980, 78). The presence of ditches, banks and walls plus a sherd of Iron Age pottery suggest activities contemporary with the Early Iron Age enclosed settlements at Howe. However, if these were indeed Early Iron Age communities then, for some reason, unlike Howe, they did not thrive and develop into similar substantial settlements with roundhouses.

The evidence from these more fragmentary and less visible settlements has been somewhat eclipsed by the substantial structures which characterise the later stages of the Iron Age in the area. However, recognition of these (Armit 1990, 198; Hingley 1992, 17) is increasing and again, the importance of the fugitive Phase 3 and 4 structures at Howe lies in helping to elucidate the complexity of the progression towards thriving Iron Age village.

Roundhouse development – simple and complex

The span of calibrated radiocarbon dates (Table 73) suggests that the enclosed settlements of Phases 3 and 4 could have been in existence for anything from 100 to 400 years before a large roundhouse with 4m thick walls, a ditched and walled enclosure and adjoining structures, was built on the site.

Radiocarbon determinations for this first substantial circular structure on the site place the possibility of its occupation sometime between the 8th and 4th centuries cal BC. In the original discussion of the site, the excavators (3.1.3: Phase 5 and 10: The radiocarbon dates above) preferred a span of 4th and 3rd centuries for its occupation. More recently, Armit (1991, 187) has placed the roundhouse within a 500–400 cal BC bracket as part of the *simple roundhouse* development recognised at Bu (Hedges 1987a), Calf of Eday (Calder 1937; 1939), Pierowall (Sharples 1984), Quanterness (Renfrew 1979) and represented by the early 'broch' at Crosskirk (Fairhurst 1984), As a class Armit ascribes them to the period 800–400 cal BC. The Bronze Age horizon for a large thick-walled structure at Tofts Ness (Dockrill 1986, 22–3) suggests that their establishment could have been even earlier.

The emergence of these single isolated farmhouses has been seen as a contrast with the tradition of cellular 'courtyard' houses with their Neolithic ancestry (Foster 1989b, 34). The importance of the appearance of the roundhouse in the sequence at Howe is twofold. Firstly, together with Bu, Quanterness, Pierowall and others, it helps to establish a native pedigree for the later complex roundhouses, the brochs, both in their thick walling and their interior features, and obviates the need to attribute the development of their construction to external influences (cf MacKie's long held and firmly argued views eg 1971; 1983). Secondly, whilst contributing to this picture of established substantial roundhouses, the size of the enclosure together with the accompanying remnant structures suggest that even at this stage it does not represent an isolated single homestead with, possibly agricultural (Foster 1989b, 35), outbuildings but can be seen as an embryonic nucleated settlement.

With its souterrain, derived from the remodelled Neolithic underfloor chamber, the roundhouse also helped to amplify understanding of the relationship of these structures; it helped to demonstrate that many roundhouses, both thin- and thicker-walled, possessed souterrains which were entered from their interiors. This augmented the increasing evidence that souterrains were not isolated occurrences but invariably

ancillary to an above-ground domestic structure such as was identified at Grain (Haigh 1983). It does not, however, aid the interpretation of their use; Orcadian examples are likely to have been extremely damp and their use for storage of grain (Foster 1989b, 35) is considered unlikely.

Evidence of other internal arrangements at Howe had been largely removed by successive restructuring but analogies with Bu suggest that radial partitioning was likely.

This simple roundhouse settlement could have been in existence for as much 200 years before some form of impetus for change led to the building of a more complex form differentiated as Broch 1 (3.1.5: Phase 6 above). There were no radiocarbon determinations for this (Phase 6) structure but its stratigraphical position between dated phases prompted the excavators (10: The radiocarbon dates above) to place it in the 2nd and 1st centuries cal BC. Again, more recent assessment (Armit 1991) ascribes it somewhat earlier date brackets of 400–200 cal BC.

This substantial structure had walls 3.5m in width (illus 20), preserved up to 2m high, together with two intramural staircases and two guard cells (illus 22). Sets of post-holes may indicate roof supports (Carter *et al* 1984, 66) and a possible timber gallery. The interior of this structure was divided by radial partitions similar to those in the Bu roundhouse and Crosskirk broch (*complex roundhouse*). It provides a link in the development from *simple roundhouse* to full *broch tower*, displaying some elements of *broch architecture* – intramural staircases and guard cells – but not the full height and features of the subsequent Phase 7 Broch 2. The broch structure (*complex roundhouse*) at Crosskirk, placed in the 5th century cal BC, is seen as a parallel (Armit 1991, 202). Like Howe, it appears to have been enclosed and may also have had ancillary structures.

The indications are that there is a development in this period from simple thick-walled roundhouses as at Bu and Howe to more complex, ie more recognisably broch-like structures, as exemplified at Crosskirk.

The importance of the Howe sequence at this point is to help demonstrate that, possibly as early as 300 cal BC, there are structures in Atlantic Scotland displaying features of broch architecture which would formerly have placed them in a much later period (Armit 1991, 190). In addition, there is evidence of a nucleated settlement, fully enclosed, based around this complex structure.

MIDDLE IRON AGE – BROCH TOWER AND SETTLEMENT

The first broch (*complex roundhouse*) form appears not to have been architecturally successful and at some point, possibly less than 100 years after its construction, it was replaced by a more substantial structure, designated Broch 2 (the *broch tower*). The construction and occupation of this, the final and best-preserved of the three substantial roundhouse forms on the site, has, together with its accompanying village settlement, been given chronological brackets (10: The radiocarbon dates above) of the 1st to 4th centuries cal AD. The dates, however, all relate to the later part of the phase (Table 73): the major fires, collapse and subsequent partial reconstruction. They do not date the construction or early occupation of the broch tower and settlement; this must lie some time earlier, probably closer to the more recent reassessment (Armit 1991) of 200 cal BC–cal AD 100, which crucially places the broch village construction and *floruit* in a *pre*-Roman context.

The massive dry-stone broch tower construction, with its 5–6m thick walls (illus 24; 25), was built over the remnants of the previous, less stable, version at the same time as a planned settlement of six buildings and yards was laid out. Broch 2 is considered by Armit (1991) to be a *broch tower* in the full sense although its original height and number of storeys are matters of conjecture. The very high percentage wall base (PWB), 84%, well above an estimated average of 72% for the Orkney brochs and far in excess of the 62% for Mousa (Fojut 1981), would argue for an improbable height to the tower; it is more likely (4.2: Discussion above) that the considerable thickness of the walls (illus 160) was aimed at ensuring stability rather than achieving excessive height. The defensive implications of possible height are discussed below.

Any discussion of the likely number of storeys present in the broch tower assumes a multi-storey construction for which there is no definite support in the evidence. The height of the remnant masonry and the presence of a staircase (4.1.1: Early Phase 7 above) does suggest a possible upper storey, varying slightly from Hedges' suggested 1.8m norm for brochs (1987c, 10). However, unlike the earlier Broch 1 (*complex roundhouse*), no

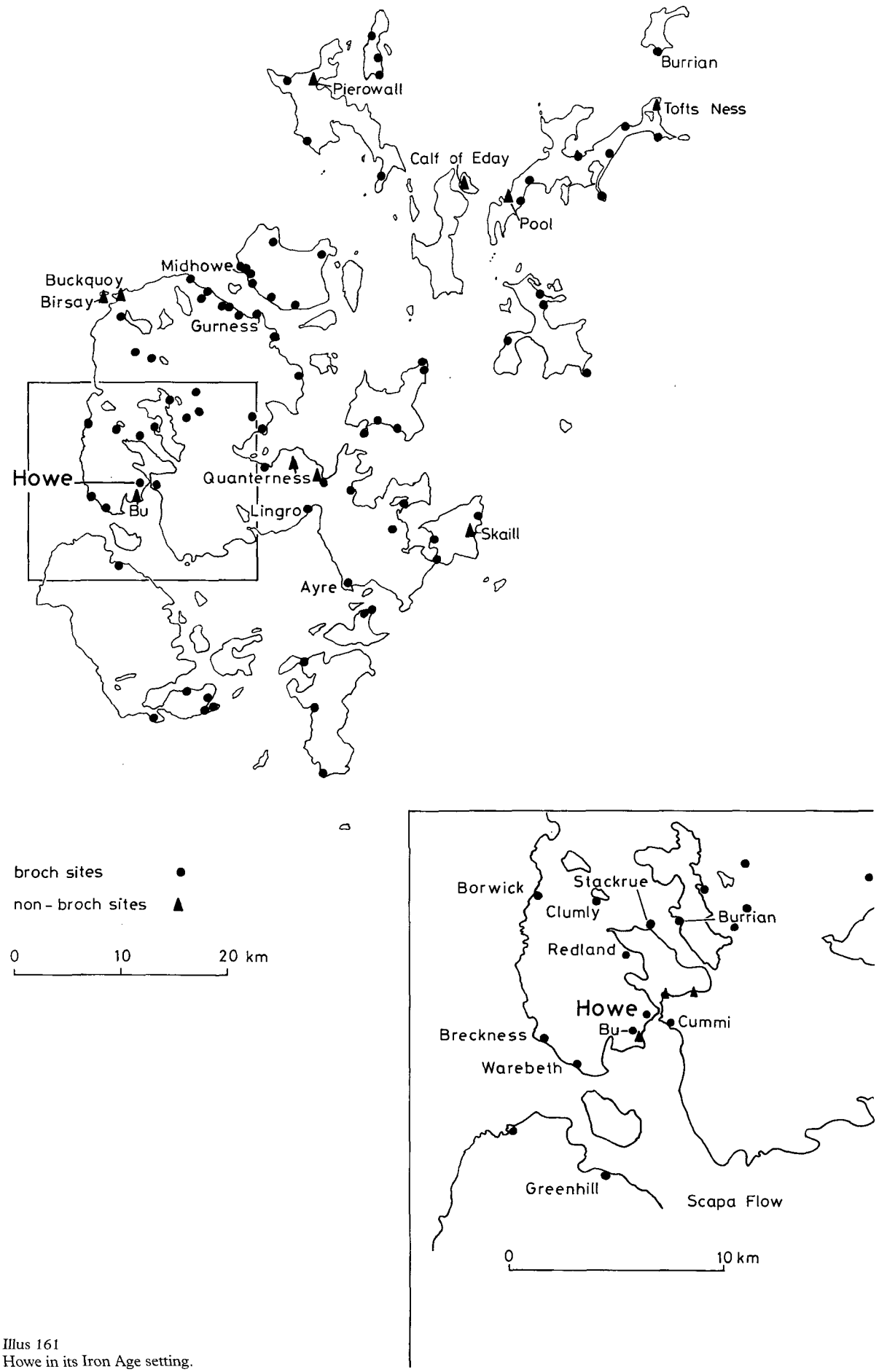
Illus 160
The surviving masonry of the broch tower (Broch 2).

post-holes were revealed which might indicate the presence of an internal timber structure with support for floors. The radial uprights, by their flagstone nature, would not offer firm enough support for flooring in the way that stone piers might; timbers resting on a scarcement would be the most plausible support for a second storey (Harding 1984, 209–10).

Parallels for this stage of broch development at Howe are noted from the earlier stages at Crosskirk (Armit 1991, 190); its interior partition and general plan link it with complex and earlier simple roundhouses. The period of its occupation corresponds to the period of the bulk of the broch tower sites in the west (*ibid*); it seems to be a period of general increase in architectural complexity, with continuous intramural galleries and other features of broch architecture, and in the number of complex roundhouses overall.

The architecture of the Broch 2 tower shows its antecedents and similarities with the complex roundhouses such as Bu and Crosskirk, but the major comparisons for this stage of full broch tower are with a number of other sites which display, in addition to the tower, the same accompanying regulated settlement: in particular Gurness, Midhowe and Lingro (Hedges 1987c). The major contribution of this stage of the Howe sequence is to demonstrate contemporaneity of the Broch 2 (*broch tower*) and the village structures (although opinion on whether contemporaneity is satisfactorily demonstrated elsewhere still varies: Anna Ritchie pers comm).

Although the closest comparisons for similar broch village settlements lie further afield on Orkney, within close proximity to Howe a number of structures identified as brochs (*complex roundhouse/broch tower*) can be seen in the landscape (illus 161). Their incomplete nature does not allow exact comparisons and no radiocarbon dates are available; although ascertaining their exact contemporaneity with stages in the Howe sequence is not consequently possible, their identification as broch structures (Hedges 1987c, fig 3.1) indicates that a considerable number of comparable contemporary sites are likely to have been present in the vicinity of Howe. In a 4km radius there are: Breckness and Warebeth on the W coast of Mainland; Cummi Howe Broch across the Bay of Ireland; the Brochs of Redland and Stackrue bordering the Loch of Stenness; and the Broch of Burrian (Russland) on the W shore of Harray Loch. At a slightly greater distance is the



Illus 161
Howe in its Iron Age setting.

Broch of Clumly and, beyond that, on the W coast the comparable site of Borwick. None now demonstrates a full accompanying settlement but traces, in some cases considerable, at the majority (*ibid*, 83–93) suggest that, as at Howe, Gurness and Midhowe, such settlements, or certainly subsidiary structures, did exist.

Two further sites may add to the picture of the landscape around Howe studded with a number of settlements in these centuries: the cairns of unknown date which lie S of Cummi Howe Broch, on the E coast of the Bay of Ireland, and an extensive site of Iron Age date found close to Bu but on the coast (Lynn & Bell 1987; 1988; Hedges 1987c). This picture of a thickly populated landscape is emphasised by Hedges' estimate (1987c) of 52 definite and 80 probable broch sites within the island group; the Orkney Sites and Monuments Record suggests that 120 definite brochs would be an underestimate (Raymond Lamb pers comm). This latter number does not take into account large mounds of Iron Age date without visible defences.

Recent work on the Grainbank souterrain (Haigh 1984) has demonstrated a possible middle Iron Age date for this monument and revealed related surface structures. If souterrains as a class of structure could be placed in this period, then at least thirty unenclosed non-broch Iron Age settlements should be included. Øvrevik (1985, 149) has, however, put forward a late Bronze Age date for some of these, and at Howe, souterrains were used throughout the Iron Age, a period here of about one thousand years.

Episodes in the sequence during Phase 7 suggest that this picture of a landscape filled with settled communities became disrupted. A major fire in the broch tower and the W of the settlement was followed, possibly very closely, by substantial collapse of the broch tower on the W, on to that half of the settlement, collapse of the door cell and filling in of the ditched defences. The fires have been interpreted as accidental by the excavators (4.2: Discussion above) and the collapses are seen as a continuation of the period of slow decline in the level of upkeep and repair of the settlement. However, the fires and collapse precede a total change in the nature of the settlement: in particular, the broch tower was no longer inhabited in the same way after this point, which is likely to have been towards the end of the 1st century cal AD. The grandeur of the defences and of the broch tower were past. The changes which occurred must be accounted for either in terms of social change within the settlement itself or politically within a wider Orcadian scenario. The nature and implications of these changes will be looked at below. The appearance of Roman material at this point, coinciding with decline of the broch village rather than its construction or *floruit*, is perhaps a pertinent point.

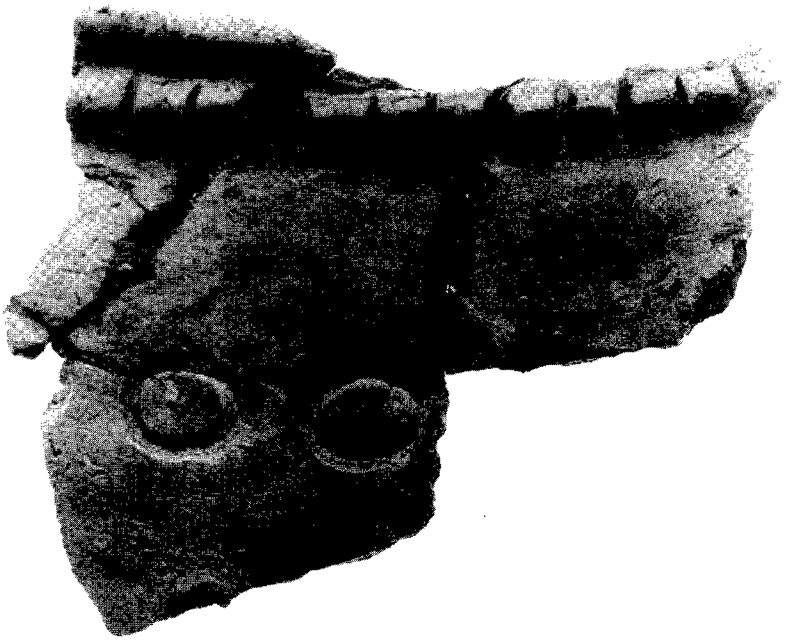
POST-BROCH – THE LATE IRON AGE

After the final abandonment of Broch 2 (the *broch tower*), at some time around the 4th century cal AD, the occupation sequence continues with a 12-stage series of buildings, which varied considerably in shape and function. The radiocarbon dates for this series have calibrations giving very wide brackets of 4th–10th centuries cal AD; original approximations (10: The radiocarbon dates above) suggested that this, Later Iron Age, phase of occupation lasted into the 7th or 8th if not the 9th centuries cal AD. Elements of the material culture, however, incline to support abandonment of the site nearer the earlier of these dates as the diagnostic material 'scarcely trespasses' (Foster 1989b, 38) beyond 600 cal AD.

The settlement over this period appears to have been predominantly a domestic farming complex which reached a peak in Stage 5, somewhere around the 6th century cal AD; from then on the impetus of the settlement declined. The individual buildings, or periods of activity, were short-lived; buildings were repaired frequently, doorways blocked, floors repaved, and structures often levelled after their use was over. The structural degeneration which had begun in Late Phase 7 becomes more noticeable and represents a marked decline of population on the site. From a conservative estimate of seven households comprising the broch village in the first century AD, the number had been reduced to one by the 7th century.

However, it has been stressed (5.2: Discussion above) that it is possible that by no means all Phase 8 structures were excavated, particularly in the early phase; buildings were located predominantly off the mound to the SW of the site, where the slope of the land was not as severe and there were less limitations on construction. It is highly probable that the settlement extended further, both to the SW and E, beyond the limits of excavation.

The Late Iron Age levels at Pool offer close comparisons for this period at Howe, both in the architectural techniques and in the decline of the population and settlement, the latter noticeable from the beginning of the 7th century AD at Pool (Hunter 1990, 184, 189).



Illus 162
Phase 7 sherd decorated with ring-headed pin impressions; scale 1:1.

At the end of the period represented by Phase 8, the early 7th century cal AD, more distinctive buildings and artefacts begin to appear elsewhere on Orkney (Foster 1989b, 38). There appears to be some sort of watershed around cal AD 625 (the horizon between Foster's (1990) LIA I and LIA II) which sees the rapid development, thereafter, of a fully formed Pictish state and church (*ibid*, 156). From the decline of its architecture and the lack of the new material, the implication is that Howe was not part of this new phase in Orcadian life.

PHASE 9 – ABANDONMENT

The final phase of the Howe sequence has evidence only for periodic use and abandonment of the massive rubble mound. It was not used to provide a basis for a subsequent Norse settlement although some possible Norse presence has been implied from the glass linen smoother (illus 155), ascribed to that period (Marwick 1927, 121) and latterly believed to have been associated with a concentration of human bones on the eroded broch tower wall-head, disturbed in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Parts of nine other late structures, which cannot be assigned to specific phases, were present on the site. It is recorded (*ibid*) that the site was 'excavated' in the 1860s and the area ploughed close up to the mound (illus 77). It must be left to the imagination to speculate on the extent of settlement beyond the defences which was lost to the plough.

THE MATERIAL CULTURE – DISCERNIBLE CHANGES

A sizeable assemblage is not available for the early part of the Howe sequence to augment the evidence of structural change but, from around the 7th century cal BC onwards, a full range of material does exist. What this assemblage reveals is a strong measure of continuity, punctuated by new introductions.

At Howe, pottery (illus 162) is by far the largest component of the material culture (Table 67), responsible, in numerical terms, for 92% of the small find assemblage; of this, the major part comes from Iron Age levels, and the Broch 2 (*broch tower*) village in particular. The publication of the pottery assemblage has been eagerly awaited (Armit 1991, 199; MacKie 1983, 121) in the expectation that it might answer many of the

questions of the development and chronology of the Iron Age pottery sequence. The report in this volume (8.9: Pottery above) presents a detailed review of the ceramic collection, but the analysis can only show broad trends since the bulk of the sherds were derived from redeposited rubble contexts, making clear attribution to specific contexts difficult; the number of joins across contexts bears witness to this. Yet within these broad trends a number of factors are observable.

The phases display a range of forms, fabrics and design, indicative of a common basic repertoire which appears to have a long-lived existence from the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age well into the later Iron Age. Fabric, form (illus 142; 152) and rim shape (illus 141mf) continue with little change throughout the broch tower and village occupation into the succeeding farmhouse complex. The vessel range includes globular jars of various sizes, straight-walled bucket-shaped vessels, shouldered jars, with both wide- and narrow-mouthed vessels; all have parallels with the assemblages identified at other Orkney roundhouse and *complex roundhouse*/broch sites, as well as in Caithness and Shetland and to some extent the Western Isles (Hamilton 1956; 1968; Renfrew 1979; Hedges 1987c).

This common repertoire of shapes appears to have fulfilled the needs of households over a considerable time; the requirements would seem to have changed little from the Late Bronze Age to the early stages of the Late Iron Age. Techniques of manufacture remain largely unchanged throughout the major part of the Early and Middle Iron Age: the major demonstrable change is apparent only after the decay of the broch tower and village; this change is indicated by the appearance of wheel-finished vessels, followed by a marked decline in the production of decorated pottery. From Phase 8 there is evidence of wheel-made and some painted pottery although pot quantities generally are reduced at this point. On their own, these changes do not appear dramatic; they have been perceived (8.9: Pottery discussion above) as being due to a gradual development, under the impetus of local influence, rather than a deliberate change in style. However, the distinction in a pottery assemblage at this point which otherwise alters very little throughout the Iron Age life of the site, underlines the sense of change which the destruction of the architecture of the Broch 2 (*broch tower*) village presents.

Except for one piece of Roman Samian pottery, no other sherd has been positively identified as being an import. It has been assumed that all the pottery was made at the site, although the supporting evidence for the Phase 8 wheel-thrown vessels is lacking and they may well have been manufactured elsewhere in Orkney and brought to the site.

Given the continuation of the range of pot forms during much of the Iron Age history of the site, it is only within the repertoire of decoration that the clearest changes and trends are likely to be observable. A rigorous analysis of the decorative element, of the kind undertaken by Miller (1985) for a modern Indian pottery assemblage, might enable the isolation of significant trends; but the paucity of decorated sherds, <200 out of 17,000, suggests that the fine distinctions discernible in a fully controlled modern assemblage would be impossible to detect. Most of the range of motifs can be paralleled by other examples extending across the range of Iron Age sites within the Atlantic province (8.9: Pottery above) giving a picture of a shared vocabulary of design built up over time.

The comparatively small percentage of decorated pottery begs the question: which media were used as the main outlets for the expression of design? The mass of surviving Iron Age stonework bears no ornament, unlike that visible on Neolithic structures and at Howe on the reused cup-marked stone. It is possible that stonework was painted, in the manner of Pictish pebbles, of which there is an example (SF 2200, illus 106) from the site, but, if so, some trace might have been expected to survive. Clearly, wider outlets must have lain in the metalwork of which we have some evidence, or in textiles or other fugitive materials which have not survived.

What does survive in other material at Howe presents an array of items of personal ornament, in particular pins of bone and metal and personal hair combs (8.2: Bone artefacts, 8.6: Metal artefacts above), which are contingent with the picture of an Iron Age community identified elsewhere on Orkney and the wider sphere of the Atlantic Province and beyond (Foster 1990); examples of the range of pins and combs in particular offer comparisons with the assemblage from Broch of Burrian, North Ronaldsay. The artefacts indicate that in addition to bone ornament produced in the settlement, from as early as the 3rd century BC until some time in the 7th century AD or just possibly later still, the inhabitants of Howe came into possession of pieces

of precious metalwork, fashionable jewellery in current circulation. These pieces entered Orkney from the west, from Ireland and the east and south from Scotland (and England), presumably along coastal routes (8.6: Metal artefacts above). The iron drum-headed pin was, however, probably made in Orkney, but not at Howe. During Phase 8, when the apparent wealth of the settlement was in decline, the movement of jewellery into the site was maintained from the same areas.

These objects both amplify the wider picture and aid clarification of the chronology, although, as with the radiocarbon dates, the precision of the dating brackets offered by metalwork types is limited to one century at best, and usually two to three. Within the range of metal artefacts there is little to differentiate phases 7 and 8. The lengthy currency of some types, as with the pottery forms, restricts their chronological usefulness (Armit 1991, 200). However, even the wide brackets available can serve to extend the known currency of some types, such as group 5 double-sided combs (Foster 1990, 162), where the Howe examples represent the earliest finds of the type. More generally, the appearance of some types in the later Iron Age levels serves to underline the somewhat paradoxical post-broch picture of a less regimented architecture with a less tightly organised village but an apparent maintenance of the range and quality of personal goods.

Evidence for imported copper-alloy and other luxury items is counterbalanced by the picture of home production of a range of workaday iron tools, including blades fine enough to carve bone combs and pieces solid enough for agricultural implements. By comparison with the small numbers of metal objects, particularly in the early stages, there is considerable evidence of the metalworking process itself. A stone toolkit suitable for metal working (8.3: Stone artefacts above) can be identified and location of large quantities of residues (8.7: Slag above) enabled identification of metalworking locations within the settlement. This was limited to certain sheds in the broch tower period indicating specialised workers, although not on an industrial scale. After the decline of the broch tower, the ***NE*** building was exclusively used as a smithy; the smithy in the ***W*** building was the only manufacturing place identified for Phase 8. Clearly this was enough to satisfy local demand.

As indicated above, the introduction of Beaker elements heralds early metalworking in mainland Britain but apparently not in Orkney – or has left little trace. For Howe there is no evidence for a developmental metalworking phase in the 2nd millennium; either the evidence for this is lost or the expertise must have arrived ready formed in the Early Iron Age, accompanying the re-occupation of the site. Øvrevik (1985, 140) describes the lack of mining evidence for Bronze Age Orkney, while indicating useful sources of material within the isles. It is of note that metal sources cluster in the area of concentrated roundhouse/broch occupancy between the knuckle of land to W and NW of Stromness (area of inset illus 161; Øvrevik 1985, fig 7.1) Iron sources lie on Hoy in the area of Green Hill broch (*ibid*) coincidentally the tallest recorded (Hedges 1987c, 2–3, fig 3.1); a further metal source on Hoy, Lead Geo, was identified (8.7: Slag above) for the Howe residues. It is interesting to ponder on the similar correspondence of metal resources on the W of Rousay and the concentration of known brochs lining either side of Eynhallow Sound. Just how noteworthy these and other apparent congruences are is perhaps a matter for further discussion.

Other more basic resources were clearly offered by the Howe location through the life of the settlement. Clay for the pottery was obtained from a local source (8.9: Pottery above), as was the bulk of the stone used in the range of tools (8.3: Stone artefacts above); bone for tools and ornament (8.2: Bone artefacts above) derived from the basic resources of animal husbandry which would have been established in the Neolithic and survived the Bronze Age recess. One major resource, red deer, does alter during the period of the site. The discrepancy between the apparent reduction of red deer as a resource, and the continuance of antler artefacts on the site, has led (8.2: Bone artefacts above) to suggestions of imported substitutes. The possibility has been advanced that reindeer antler was already being traded by the 7th century cal AD. This could be taken as an indication of greater contact between Scandinavia and the Northern Isles, prior to the Norse invasions, than has previously been considered (Myhre 1992). Emerging centres of power, which would be identified latterly as Pictish, could have acted as distribution centres for traded wares. However, it is unlikely that the dispersed farms of the Later Iron Age at Howe were sizeable enough to have been part of this development.

A further intrusive element, Roman material, has been noted as first appearing during Later Phase 7 in the Broch 2 (*broch tower*) and continuing in post-broch Phase 8 contexts. The glass, metalwork and Samian sherd from Howe provide another example of the presence of Roman material in Iron Age settlements of the early centuries AD (Armit 1991). Previously, Roman material within broch stratigraphy was used to date

initial broch occupation, placing it well into the first centuries AD; its presence is now recognised (*ibid*, 196–8) as dating some period of broch use which clearly post-dates construction. The implications of this revised dating and the significance of the material are examined below.

The need for examination of gender and age grouping within Iron Age settlement has been expressed (Hingley 1992, 40) but attempts to address this within the Howe evidence come up against restrictions of the limited data even on this well-documented site; Howe displays the general lack of Iron Age (*ibid*, 16) burial evidence, a dearth which makes difficult the identification of gender specific pottery categories (such as is beginning to emerge for Beakers – Shepherd, AN 1989) or provide other items of the Iron Age assemblage with gender specific contexts. Little can be discerned within the material from other activities which might be categorised by gender, such as spinning and weaving, other than to say that these are fairly constant throughout the Iron Age settlement. There are no elements within the internal roundhouse layout which lend themselves to possible gender differentiation as do the beds at Skara Brae (Childe 1931,15; Piggott 1954, 326) although status, which has implications of gender and age ranking, is looked at below.

THE ECONOMIC BASE

A review of the influences and changes observable in the material culture leads on to a look at the evidence for the economic base which sustained the settlement throughout its changing lifetime. Like the material culture, this also presents the appearance, from the Early Iron Age onwards, of the preservation of a basic norm, a mixed farming core (7.1: Introduction to environmental section above), with some periodic adaptions and introductions. This is maintained by a settlement which over time sustained a level of tool-making and artefact production in a range of materials, most obtained locally but some traded, which ensured a viable community for some considerable time.

Within the agricultural base, the main transition appears to be around the 5th century AD with the introduction of hulled six-row barley. Unlike other Iron Age sites, such as Gurness (Armit 1991, 192–4) where saddle querns occur in the earliest layers and rotary in the upper levels, at Howe this distinction is not discernible as the rotary quern appears in contexts from the earliest Iron Age onwards. Grinders/mortars do not appear in the farmstead of Phase 8, underlining the sense that these were for non-agricultural purposes. Saddle querns have been shown to be used for very specific tasks in the stages of pot production, grinding material for gritting, slip and paint production (Miller 1985, 226), an indication of their continuing importance after the rotary quern would have been expected to have made them redundant.

It is likely that the inhabitants were experiencing economic stress in face of a deteriorating climate in the 1st millennium BC. Other changes in agricultural practice at this time are likely to have been the suggested replacement of stone ards with iron (Hedges 1987a, 93) and the use of the horse, indicated by the recovery of bones of a smallish Shetland pony type (7.3: Animal bone above) suggesting the presence of small domestic horse herds like those at Crosskirk (Macartney 1984, 133–47). These would have been useful as a working animal, and possibly as a food source too. The fact that the early Christian church in Celtic Britain frowned upon the eating of horseflesh as a 'practice fitting only for thieves' (McCormick 1979, 315) indicates that it was normal custom, at least before conversion. Horses are likely to have been used as gifts and dowries (as noted by Tacitus for the Germani (trans Mattingly 1980, 114, 116)), acting as conspicuous indicators of wealth and status. Their use in warfare is a further possibility.

The introduction to the environment of the site (7.1 above) discussed the changes in resources which became apparent in early Phase 8. These changes imply not only loss of control over natural resources but also of territory. Included here is the decrease in numbers of red deer, the change-over to the use of heathy turves as fuel and the significant decrease in the use of wood on the site. Farming at the settlement was certainly affected and there was a gradual change to more sheep and pigs and new crops. Taking into consideration the reduced site population which is seen during Phase 8, it seems quite likely that the territory held by the settlement was broken up and redistributed prior to AD 300, and was later modified in subsequent centuries.

The organisation of the landscape during the late Iron Age period may have formed the basis for land-holding during the Norse period (Smith 1990, 38) and also for Norse administration (Barrett & Foster 1991, 53). The events during later Phase 7 may have been more far-reaching than can be interpreted solely from the archaeological record.

RITUAL AND BELIEF

Assessing indications of ritual behaviour at Howe is biased by the overshadowing massive architecture. Indeed the broch tower itself can be interpreted as an 'artefact' whose sheer scale would have made it an extremely powerful symbol (Armit 1991, 204); but Hingley (1992, 14) has warned against the categorising of all substantial sites as necessarily symbolic or special. That so imposing a structure must have been central to the enforcement of the formalised nature of much of day to day existence cannot be denied, but this is not to rule out its initial construction for more practical considerations of domestic or defence requirements.

Beyond what can be inferred from other Neolithic ritual and funerary monuments, there is little concrete evidence for ritual, belief and deposition at Howe. In the funerary context, there is the possible use of fire, if the 'hearths' are accepted as part of the ritual; the deposition of the two stone axes already mentioned; and the sealing of grey clay over the first structures which may have been of ceremonial significance or may have had a purely constructional rationale. At a later stage, the deposition of Beaker sherds has been interpreted as ritual expression of changeover.

One aspect of the formal layout of the Howe tomb(s) is indicated by the orientation of the entrance to the ESE, a line preserved by the subsequent Iron Age roundhouse/broch settlements. This orientation towards the SE quadrant is shared by the bulk of tombs (Davidson & Henshall 1989, 85–6) although notably not Maeshowe, for which close parallels have been drawn with the Howe Phase 2 tomb. The significance of orientation to the S and E is not difficult to interpret. In utilising this line for the entrance to their roundhouse/broch settlements, the Iron Age builders were able to follow a direction that was acceptable for broch entrances, the preponderance of which are to the E and SE (Hedges 1987c), with the notable exception of Midhowe to the W. Although architectural convenience is likely to have dictated the reuse of the tomb entrance, the positioning of broch entrances generally is likely to have been prescribed by a number of practical considerations, not the least of which would have been the maintenance of defence, in addition to their ceremonial requirements.

The 'cup-marked stone' (SF 7309) was suggested as having come from the Maeshowe-type tomb facade (8.3: Stone artefacts above). This is a possible primary use but its context, in the area of the Phase 5 roundhouse souterrain entrance, also suggests that it could have been reused, either as part of the roundhouse masonry, paralleling the two stones from Midhowe (Callander & Grant 1934, 484–5) or as part of the phenomenon of reuse of cup-marked stones within souterrain masonry in southern and eastern Scotland (Hingley 1992, 29). The symbolic nature of their use and re-use in mortuary contexts has been examined recently (*ibid*; Bradley 1993, 63–5), in particular the sense in which they can be used to bring an external landscape into an internal setting has been stressed. They could have also represented a past landscape, adding status and an air of antiquity – past versions of the diamond-leaded panes and carriage lamps of the present.

Of possible ritual depositions, Howe presents little. The deer bones within the well (7.3: Animal bone above) possibly exist within the same general hunting-related and ritual context as deposition of deer on a number of wheelhouse sites (Hingley 1992, 24). Hunting was clearly a substantial part of the economy and associated rituals are possible. These suggest a continuity from the Neolithic where sites such as Links of Noltland (Clarke & Sharples 1985, 75–7) display apparent ritual deposition of deer.

More easily identifiable areas of ritual lie within the sphere of burial practice. However, as for the Iron Age as a whole (Hingley 1992, 16), very little burial evidence exists at Howe and what there is appears haphazard and ad hoc. Following the decline of the old nucleated settlement, prior to the W collapse of the broch, four bodies were placed in the rubble in the levelled remains of the ***NW*** building. The positions of the bodies are not suggestive of formal burial, nor do they lend themselves to any definite ritual interpretation. In addition, it is uncertain whether the subsequent buildings were erected in the knowledge that corpses lay in the rubble beneath. It is suggested (4.2: Discussion above) that the burials indicate a breakdown in social organisation and highlight the significant physical and hierarchical changes which the settlement experienced during the early centuries AD. Their existence clearly displays some rupture of the existing pattern and contributes to the discussion (below) of how far these shifts were the result of peaceful change or violent disruption.

ASSESSING THE CHANGES

The foregoing review of the Howe sequence has looked at the major structural and material aspects of the site and how these have altered over the lifetime of the settlement. At this point it is necessary to try and analyse what these changes represent in real terms for the people who produced and experienced them, to try and

further identify the nature of the influences and impacts that moved the site from some form of early Neolithic monument, through periods of expansion and contraction over four millennia, to final abandonment in the Late Iron Age.

It is no longer possible at Howe, as it is at some sites, to 'walk through doors and up stairs, lie down in bed-neuks, and collect water from the wells' (Foster 1989a, 44); but it is possible to sustain these images and to amplify them through interpretation of the evidence from the site. It is possible, for instance, to give the houses roofs of willow timbers, to place in them pottery and iron tools and baskets of barley waiting to be ground, to fill the yards with milch-fed calves lowing gently, and to add the smoke and noise of iron-working to the sounds of herds of cattle and small ponies grazing outside the settlement. These and many other images are sustainable for much of the life of the settlement. But, as has been shown, the background against which they are seen alters greatly and the details of many aspects change through time.

The problem of assessing the nature of these changes within the artefactual and structural types has always lain with the paucity of the evidence. It is seldom enough to demonstrate unequivocally whether these changes were evolutionary, peacefully achieved under the impetus of new influences and ideas, or whether they were revolutionary, brought about by malignant forces from elsewhere, characterised by conflict, colonisation and force. Interpretations have varied, dictated by the archaeologist's own 'ideas and histories' (Sharples 1991, 80).

Disentangling change from continuum has relied on alterations in design, visible in architecture and material culture; these are the best indicators of shifts in the guiding principles, either of individuals or of communities and a wider society. It is clear that much of the material culture for the period under discussion shared a common ancestry, and consequently much of its basic repertoire, with a wider Atlantic Scottish society (Harding 1990). Only a very marked intrusive impact will consequently show unequivocally in the record. High status material, which allows greater opportunity to express individuality, can help to demonstrate the qualities which set an intrusive culture apart. Yet it is still difficult to assert with any confidence that the visible changes resulted from invasion or influence, whether they were aimed at maintaining defence or merely for conspicuous display, the by-products of friction or fashion.

Sharples (1991, 79) has commented on the reluctance on the part of modern archaeologists to discuss the role of warfare. Its dismissal has been part of the reaction against invasion hypotheses which has engendered a reluctance to place any responsibility for cultural change on the movement of peoples and all on the movement of goods and ideas. A total reliance on one or the other approach is unhelpful. Given the successive invasions into Britain in the first millennium or so AD, it seems unlikely that within the last millennia BC any substantial change was brought about entirely without some degree of forceful incursion and violence. The developments at Howe are unlikely to have escaped such forces.

The first demonstrable changes occur during the two phases of Neolithic construction; these have been discussed above and it has been argued that they indicate an Unstan to Grooved Ware cultural sequence. This stratigraphical progression is seen against the overlap, if not contemporaneity, which has been argued for the two cultural entities (Clarke 1983; Davidson & Henshall 1989, 90–2). The situation elsewhere within the islands is clearly a complex one, but the Howe evidence indicates that in one area at least the two traditions, exemplified in architecture, have a sequential rather than parallel relationship.

Whether in the case of Howe this sequential relationship also represents a change in the type of use, from domestic to funerary, has also been touched on above. If indeed a great tomb was superimposed over a domestic structure, this implies either a change in attitude, with the land becoming sanctified in a different way, or a change in the population itself so that the former use held either no meaning or presented no taboos. Such a change argues for a much greater break with the past than the replacement of a tomb with a newer, more modern, burial construction. The re-use of the Howe mound for a succession of tombs, its continuation as a focus for burial and delineation as sacred land, would represent the maintenance over time of some sort of enduring spiritual identity. It is a matter of personal choice as to which of these interpretations appears the more plausible – whether the change is merely to something new, in the case of the tombs simply bigger and better, or whether it is inimical, flouting and destroying the past, and the previous occupants in the process.

What is clear is that at some point the population underwent some form of transformation, either economic, philosophical or cultural, enough to provide the catalyst for the production of an entirely new massive structure over the remnants of what had gone before. If no more than the equivalent of the shift from Romanesque to Gothic, it indicates some form of development within the principles guiding the society.

Massive building is seen in some cases to coincide with periods of change (Clarke *et al* 1985, 38): monumentality is important when societies are forming and expanding and also when they are collapsing. The construction of the early tripartite Orkney-Cromarty tombs would be seen as part of such a period of expansion by immigrants from the northern mainland (Davidson & Henshall 1989, 87) and the early Howe tomb, if such it was, could have been constructed as part of this movement. Elements of the succeeding cellular tomb – its platform, massive ditch, great clay capping and impressive monumental stonework, reminiscent of Maeshowe itself – have been interpreted as the expression of a consequent shift in hierarchical control (Kinnes 1985, 43). Such a shift, with its stress on monumentality may have held within it the seeds of its own downfall, a requirement of effort that was ultimately too much for the community to sustain.

It is perhaps within such a climate of decline that the abandonment of the Maeshowe-type tomb at Howe took place. Alternatively, the dramatic disruption of the continuous sequence suggests that the explanation for abandonment may lie, not with internal social stresses, but with external pressures. Sharples has suggested (1991, 80) that warfare is likely to have been endemic since the introduction of agriculture; the communal nature of the Neolithic may well have been overstressed. Alternatively, in the face of the evidence for intrusive Beaker material at this point at Howe and the other sites noted above, it is tempting to see this as the instrument which brings about the change.

Models for Beaker introduction have varied widely in recent years (summarised by Thorpe & Richards 1984, 67); reluctance to accept Clarke's (1970) waves of invasion produced a resistance to acceptance of any form of population movement and a concomitant rationalisation of Beaker dissemination as the product of a trade in prestige items, a cult package (Burgess & Shennan 1976). The uniformity of Beaker skeletal orientation and formal positioning over much of northern Britain (Shepherd, AN 1989) suggests that population movement must be considered an important element within a combination of a number of facets of Beaker influence, still inexplicable (Kinnes 1985, 44) in its entirety. How this impacted on Orkney, what was the nature of the Beaker presence within the closing phases of the Grooved Ware hegemony, are still difficult to identify. The picture, of which the Howe sherds and the similar sherd from Rinyo (Childe & Grant 1939, 26, fig 7) form a part, appears to be one of rich Grooved Ware activity followed by scant Beaker material: this pattern contrasts with areas where Grooved Ware was either non-existent or had no strong hold, such as the North East of Scotland and Yorkshire (Thorpe & Richards 1984, 73) where the Beaker influence appears to have been considerably greater. For Howe, as for elsewhere on Orkney, all that can be said is that at some point Beaker users were clearly present; they almost certainly entered the tomb but there is little evidence for them doing anything further. Their presence at Howe is followed by the cessation of monumental architecture rather than the superimposition of a new tradition. The absence of anything other than a scatter of sherds suggests that if those depositing the Beakers made any impact on the site then their effect was to eradicate activity, and thereby population, from its vicinity. The site becomes deserted and since the period of this depopulation would seem to precede major climatic decline the sense that their demise was not the result of a gentle waning persists. There remains a major interruption to the Howe sequence for which there can be no definitive explanation.

The nature of the intervening years when the Howe tomb lay unused can only be guessed at. The likelihood that reoccupation takes place in a period of upheaval is suggested by the nature of the subsequent settlement. The creation of enclosed defended settlements in the Early Iron Age indicates the need to delineate clearly and defensively, suggestive of response, if not to conflict, then at least to threat and uncertainty. The location of the well *outside* the first enclosure, has been taken as demonstrating a peaceful existence for this settlement (3.1.1: Phase 3 above); however, the well of the subsequent Phase 4 settlement was placed within the boundary and the increased fortification from then until Early Phase 7 suggests growing, rather than diminishing, unease.

It is still only possible to guess at the origins of the inhabitants of the early Iron Age enclosures. Are they the descendants of communities that endured through an impoverished Bronze Age to renew skills and enterprise under the impetus of external cultural influence, or are they indeed invasive land-takers arriving

from outwith Orkney? (Hamilton 1968, 34; Armit 1990, 196–7). There is nothing in the design of the enclosure *per se* that demands it be regarded as an exotic concept; it need not be seen as anything other than a recurrence of the basic design of circular or penannular enclosure first displayed on the site in the creation of the Maeshowe-type tomb ditch. The evidence for the design of structures within the enclosure is fragmentary but could well indicate the continued cellular style of the earlier Neolithic traditions (Foster 1989b, 34). At this stage, however, there is no unequivocal conclusion to be derived from the material culture since it lacks the immediate antecedents to demonstrate change. Such material as does survive from these early phases appears to fit a picture of possible survival combined with new types circulating within an accruing Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age assemblage.

If the major purpose of the enclosure was defensive then the ditch and ramparts would need to be of a size to allow some protection – and certainly the subsequent enclosures of Phase 5 and 6 appear to offer this. Whether these were ever tested in full warfare is uncertain; their major value would have lain in acting as deterrent, to outsiders as well as neighbours in other defended or non-defended settlements. Deterrence is certainly likely to have been the most crucial aspect of defence (Sharples 1991, 88). They could also have had the additional attribute of forming a psychological, or symbolic, as well as a physical barrier between 'us', the elite within, and 'them', the poorer tribal members without. On a more practical note, both Howe and Gurness suggest that the ditches themselves are unlikely to have been used as places of refuge for farm animals because of their narrow V-shaped profiles and their difficulty of access.

Whatever their purpose, purely defence or a more general exclusivity, the rampart and ditch were clearly maintained for Broch 1 (the *complex roundhouse*) with a widened rampart but narrower ditch. It is possible that a redefining of the settlement area took place, or there was a change in the expression of power, which manifested itself in the architecture of the defences. This development may reflect an attempt at the consolidation of power in face of increased local unrest, with tribal leaders or chieftains vying for power, or, conceivably, redoubled threats from sea-borne raiders from beyond the island group representing more intrusions from those areas whence derived earlier Late Bronze/Early Iron Age settlers.

The debate as to whether the origins of change lay with indigenous development or external intrusions goes beyond the defences to the generality of the architecture from the appearance of the first roundhouse onwards. This displays a high degree of planning and forethought, which is continued and refined in the two successive *complex roundhouse*/broch settlements. The preparation of the Neolithic mound, the construction of the souterrain and the drain across the enclosure, as well as the building of both defences and internal structures, demanded organisational skills and an overall view of the project suggestive of innovation. The construction of both the roundhouse and the defences required management and control of a considerable labour input over more than one season. The scale of co-operation and community input which the project required, possibly involving neighbouring settlements, is comparable to that last seen in the construction of the tombs, henges and stone circles of the Neolithic.

The settlements display a mastery of techniques of construction, a control of the resources required and a rigid application of architectural pattern suggesting an embedded framework of refined social control. In the nature of the building works, the depth of the ditch and the impressive style of architecture, the symbolic communication of the assumption of power in the locality by a tribal leader has been discerned (Armit 1990, 198). Although a well-defended settlement was conceived, the scale of the building works was probably as important a factor in the consolidation of the power and territory of the chieftain. How far the internal arrangement of the Howe roundhouse also displayed status is unknown as the floor plan was largely destroyed.

In the subsequent broch/*complex roundhouse* settlements, refinements of this plan, presumably at the instigation of chieftains who were the successors of the originator of the first substantial roundhouse, can be observed.

It is the massive construction and apparent uniformity of design which led to the interpretation of the brochs and their settlements as the product of intrusive forces, with their specialist architect builders, imposing a ready-made structural identity upon the landscape (MacKie 1971; summarised by Hedges 1990, 18–20). Yet the architectural details are not entirely new and need not be exotic; indigenous sources can be found for substantial walls and fine masonry, corbelled cells, partitioning, drainage; even staircases could be developed

out of native architectural elements. Nor did the unitary nature and layout of the village require external impetus for its instigation. The existence of Neolithic nucleated settlements such as are seen at Skara Brae, Rinyo and Barnhouse, provide models whose pattern need not have been entirely lost during the Bronze Age interlude; at these sites, ranking of structures, with apparent supremacy of one, is also apparent (eg House 7, Skara Brae (Childe 1931); Structure 8, Barnhouse (Richards 1989)).

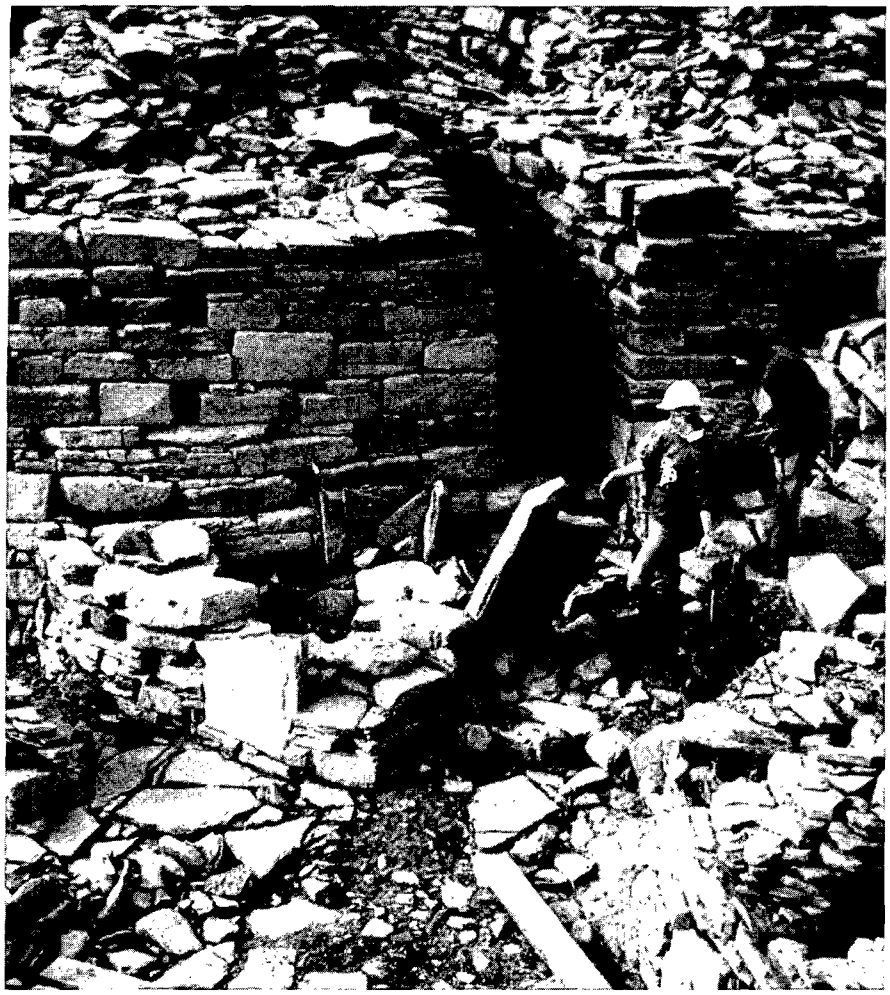
What differentiates the Early and Middle Iron Age roundhouse/broch settlements, then, is not their architectural features *per se* but the re-emergence of these features as an integrated unified whole, apparently designed and executed as one concept. The completeness of the archaeological record in Early Phase 7 provides the strongest evidence yet that the broch tower and village were conceived as a unified design for a nucleated settlement. The sophistication of this design can be seen in the use of space; piecemeal development of buildings within the enclosure appears to have been discouraged. The size of the ultimate broch tower monopolised the available building area within the enclosure and the six contemporary houses were neatly fitted around it. They shared common walls, yet each could operate as a self-sufficient, independent unit. The uniformity of domestic design can be seen in the provision, from the outset, of standard internal features such as ovens and cupboards: additional features or alterations were not noted in the earliest period of the settlement.

Through access analysis of a number of the Orkney broch settlements, including Howe, Foster (1989a) has underlined the hierarchical status of the broch tower within the settlement. In addition to being the most dominant structure, it was also the most segregated area of the settlement; its alignment with the village entrance allowed a processional access along the entrance passage over which it held control. A degree of social inequality is likely to have existed between the inhabitants of the broch tower and those of the village houses; if the broch tower was inhabited by the pre-eminent household or family, a further hierarchy is possibly discernible between the other six households of the village. The houses in closest proximity to the broch tower, display higher status in terms of size and ease of access to the tower; they were the best preserved in terms of interior furnishings and deposits, and both had extremely good, even elegant, masonry in parts. This could merely reflect the overall quality and standard of the architecture of the village and the apparent superior quality in this area could result from differential preservation; notwithstanding, some suggestion of ranking within the settlement is advanced, the sort of ranking of status and rights with regard to housing preserved in the Irish *Crith Gablach* of some few centuries later (Hamilton 1968, 71–5).

An even greater social disparity, however, would have lain between the settlement and what lay beyond the earthworks, which are seen as extending 'the depth between the inside and outside worlds' (Foster 1989a, 48). It can only be surmised where those of even lesser rank may have lived. It would appear that, contemporary with the brochs/*complex roundhouses*, simpler roundhouses and more fragile settlement types, particularly those associated with souterrains, continued to exist (Foster 1989b, 36). Occupation at Skaill suggests that settlement in Orkney was not limited to massive complex roundhouse settlements (Armit 1991, 202). The extent to which the Middle Iron Age population may have existed in such settlements in close proximity to brochs cannot be gauged and the proportion of those sites in close proximity to Howe which represent the simpler or more complex version is hard to assess. Again, how much these more fragile settlements represent survival, not just of earlier architectural elements, but also of an earlier population – cf the Saxon settlements beyond the Norman keeps – is an area for speculation.

The monumentality of the brochs is seen as a means of justifying the power of the tribal aristocracy. Like Foster, Armit (1990) suggests that the symbolic communication expressed in the architecture was all important to the maintenance of a social hierarchy; the broch and settlement are seen as the 'ultimate outcome of the processes of competition and display which operated during the second half of the 1st millennium BC' (*ibid*, 198–200) (illus 163). The extent to which that process contributed to their apparent defensive nature needs to be examined.

The primary internal broch fittings at Crosskirk and Howe have been taken to suggest that the broch had primarily a domestic function (Foster 1989b, 36). Conversely, its implied height, hostile stonework, lack of windows, intramural stairs and provision of guard cells can be seen as arguing for a defensive role (Hingley 1992, 14). For the tower or keep to take up such a proportion of the central area of enclosure argues for a vital use.



Illus 163
Defence or display: the impressive entrance to the broch tower (Broch 2).

The excavators prefer the view (4.1.1: Early Phase 7 above) that the thickness of wall was not intended to achieve height, but rather to ensure stability and maintain status, although the latter would also be a by-product of impressive height. If the direct relationship of the percentage wall base (PWB) to the height of the broch tower is accepted (Fojut 1981, 225) then it would appear that the height of Howe was impressive. Although it is difficult to be certain from their fragmentary nature, it appears that the PWB, and consequently the height, of a number of those brochs in close proximity to Howe (illus 161) was also considerable (Hedges 1987c, fig 3.4). Acceptance of the correspondence between PWB and height would mean it was likely that at least four (Cummi Howe, Redland, Stackrue, Burrian (Russland)) could have been seen directly from Howe; the use of beacons would have increased the visible communication immensely. Howe's position lent it two-way communication: inwards to those settlements around the Loch of Stenness and outwards as a link in a possible chain of coastal brochs, lining the approaches to the Bay of Ireland and Scapa Flow beyond.

Allied to its height, a further possible defensive feature of broch architecture is the intramural protected staircase. A single continuous staircase would have allowed fast uninterrupted access to any upper storeys and the wallhead (Fojut 1981); the Phase 6 Broch 1 (*complex roundhouse*) had two opposing stairs which would have slowed access to the wallhead – reducing the defensive advantages of height (Fojut 1981, 225). Only the W staircase was retained for Broch 2 (*broch tower*) indicating the development at this point of a single, possibly, continuous stair. But Sharples (pers comm) maintains that on those sites where survival is good, it is often the case that the intramural stair is too narrow to give access to the wallhead; its contribution to a defensive role must therefore remain suspect.

A certain amount of discussion centres around the implication of large defensive complexes: which stage in

the developmental process of the settlement do they represent? Do they indicate a finality, of power having been established, dominance being both exerted and displayed, or do they indicate continuing attempts at gaining and maintaining control against various odds?. The most likely sequence is one of a period of instability in which statements of defence are needed to ensure security and, in the case of towers, to display exactly where the power lay; once established, they can simultaneously embody status and deterrence. The subsequent decay of these substantial structures then can be interpreted either as showing break down in this power struggle or lack of need any longer to display it once its hold is confirmed. The fluctuating periods of growth and embellishment of the enclosure and structures that comprise the Howe settlement suggest such a sequence of challenging settlement, authoritative establishment and ultimate decline.

Yet the wide proliferation of brochs/*complex roundhouses* suggests that not all need represent ownership by powerful households (Hingley 1992, 14). They may well have been the norm – small hamlets spread across the landscape (as in the Western Isles: Armit 1992). However exceptional or otherwise was the family that inhabited the Howe broch tower and held sway over the village and its surroundings, the major fires and building collapses (4.1.2: Later Phase 7 above), which took place probably during the 2nd century cal AD, transformed their settlement and must have produced considerable changes in their circumstances.

The fires and collapse, which resulted in the filling up of the ditch with the debris from the burnt W half of the settlement, have been interpreted as accidental. No suggestion of warfare at this stage is discerned from these levels of conflagration and destruction. Prior to the fire some decline was already apparent in the accumulation of debris and apparent lack of maintenance. Yet after the fire, the rebuilding described above (4.1.2: Later Phase 7) suggests a contrast of form, function and planning with the earlier village: architecturally, and consequently socially, it had become a very different place.

An attempt seems to have been made on the E of the site to rehouse people from the W half of the settlement. Small irregular cellular rooms, were constructed away from the broch and, for the the first time, on and over the rampart; entrances were turned away from the broch and new ones opened over the rampart. In the attempted rebuilding, the pattern and symmetry of the old village, and its nuclear unity, were lost. Once the physical and psychological barrier of the enclosure, which had kept the tightknit unity of the settlement, had gone, so too must have the control of the settlement leader. The rebuilding of the W side of the settlement can be interpreted as an attempt to maintain social organisation and control, as was the buttressing of the broch and the insertion of the internal staircase. The attempts, however, were thwarted and incurred increasing difficulty as the whole pattern of the settlement changed: from focusing in on the broch, it was now reversed, and began to look outwards.

Although the broch tower still retained its position within the settlement, its function as the residence of the village leader may have ended overnight with its fire; it appears never to have been reinstated: the balance of power and leadership had apparently changed. This suggests something other than the purely accidental destruction of the tower.

Although some form of leadership must have still been present within the settlement to organise the clearance of half the village and to set rebuilding in motion, it would seem that, from later Phase 7 on, the skills of stone working and organisation, the skills which enabled the execution of the broch village design, were no longer present. It is possible that the necessary human resources were no longer available for any serious rebuilding attempts at Howe. This implies a rapid decline in, or redistribution of, population. Up to this point, population numbers at the settlement seem not to have altered significantly throughout the occupation of the broch village.

What happened to the former inhabitants can only be guessed at; whether the destruction of the broch tower settlement was deliberate, or accidental as the excavators maintain (4.2: Discussion above), it is likely to have resulted in death for many of the inhabitants, either immediate or through resultant ill-health and disease. The presence of the four skeletons, the young man, foetus, infant and child (9: The human remains above), in the rubble contexts that follow this collapse (illus 156; 157) are perhaps further indicators of some sort of dramatic end to this phase of the settlement.

The appearance of Roman material at a stage after the fires and collapse which herald the decline of the broch settlement link its initial introduction to this time of upheaval. An equivalent shift in emphasis is seen

on North Uist at Sollas at the time of the introduction of Roman material (Campbell 1991, 168–9). Fitzpatrick (1989) has used the evidence of the Gurness amphora to reassess the disputed historical information which places the Orkney Islands under some form of Roman restraint or control, either through submission to Claudius in AD 43 or subjugation by Agricola around AD 83. The details of this argument need not concern us here; more important is that the historical sources indicate that some form of Roman penetration clearly took place and the presence of Roman material within broch settlement stratigraphy supports this; the major difficulty lies in discerning the nature of that penetration and the mechanism by which the material arrived. This has been variously interpreted as looting, trade or gift exchange. Barrett (1981) has argued that Roman material in Atlantic Scotland should not be seen as merely exotic imports but in the context of relationships of marriage and kinship by which external alliances would have been secured. The material could equally support the proposition that Orkney was incorporated into the Roman sphere as client kingdom; it could be placed in a context where the client status was reinforced by a enforced dependency on controlled trading links. The possible contents of the Gurness amphora (Fitzpatrick 1989, 26) suggest the sort of dimension within which the Howe material would have been circulating. The possibility of liqueur wine or olives, deriving from a continental or, more likely, British source, aboard a ship plying the cold grey waters around Mainland Orkney adds a degree of richness to the otherwise fragmentary finds from Howe and the other broch settlements.

Howe's prominent location in the vicinity of Stromness, which then as now would almost certainly be a key route into the isles, would put it in direct line for such contact. The process which brought about its introduction may not have been an altogether happy one and the possible client status which ensured continuing contact may well have been an entirely subservient one, less equal than a network of alliances would suggest.

Whether Roman agency contributed to or merely exploited the decline of the broch settlement, it would seem from the Phase 8 evidence that the mechanisms by which Roman and other traded materials made their way into the settlement were still in place. The picture of the Late Iron Age inhabitants surviving within a once great settlement is not an impoverished one. Armit (1990, 202) has suggested that material culture and not domestic architecture was the important status factor of the later Iron Age and indeed, whatever the circumstances which precipitated the decline of the broch settlement, the quality of material wealth did not alter dramatically with the change in the social and territorial organisation of the settlement, even though actual artefact numbers were smaller. The increasing importance of imported goods during Phase 8 indicates the availability of tradeable wares, the maintenance of personal wealth, and the widespread contact possible through and across the Pentland Firth.

Some of the new styles of buildings (5.1: Phase 8 above) which appear on the site during this time must also represent ideas from outwith the settlement, following current designs which would have been circulating within the Late Iron Age milieu. New structural forms, possibly representing imported ideas, were an ***Oval*** shed and a rectangular building with an apsidal end (illus 61–3), the subsequent ***Stalled*** building (illus 64) which had two rounded gables and the figure-of-eight house, ***U***, (illus 73). The latter is paralleled at the Red Craig, Birsay (Morris 1989) and the ***Stalled*** building possibly by the Late Iron Age wags of Caithness (Curle, AO 1948). These new buildings were accompanied by an indigenous but interconnecting series of small cells and sheds. The predominant building however, that of a farmhouse, was centred on the old ***E*** building of the broch settlement, before being replaced by the ***Stalled*** building at one period and latterly by the figure-of-eight building. It is still not possible to say whether these changes are simply matters of style or of population.

The final major change for the site came with its abandonment; again, it is not possible to do more than speculate on the cause of this. It happens over a period that elsewhere can be termed Pictish; Howe is clearly in no position to take advantage of the developments which elsewhere produced the power centres for this phase of Orkney protohistory. Perhaps abandonment had been precipitated by death or disease amongst the diminished Late Iron Age population or perhaps they had simply moved on, reflecting the wider migrations of that period which characterised much of north-west Europe.

THE HOWE SEQUENCE – ECHOES AND PARALLELS

From the outset, the aim of this section has been to attempt a review of the whole sequence at Howe, thereby demonstrating the major factors which marked the individual stages and arriving at a continuous picture of

the site over time. During this process, individual sites have been cited as comparisons for separate episodes at Howe; what becomes clear is that, where these sites include two or more of the phases discussed, the pattern displayed within their sequence has strong echoes of Howe. Possibly the most important similarity, highlighted by Hunter (1990, 178), is demonstrated by the growing list of Orcadian Neolithic sites which, after apparent long-term abandonment, were restructured in the Iron Age. This restructuring mainly takes the form of roundhouses built on, adjacent to or in close proximity to, Neolithic cairns (Howe, Pierowall (Sharples 1984), Quanterness (Renfrew 1979), Calf of Eday Long (Davidson & Henshall 1989, 107–9) and possibly Pool (Hunter 1990)) and the reuse of Neolithic tomb passages and chambers as souterrains (Howe, Knowe of Rowiegar (Davidson & Henshall 1989, 137), and again possibly Pool (Hunter 1990, 179) and Quanterness (Renfrew 1979, 198)). There are other possible additions to this list where activity cannot be definitely attributed to the Iron Age (Davidson & Henshall 1989, 62). The pattern is also discernible beyond Orkney in the Western Isles at Clettraval (Henshall 1972, 506–11) and Unival (*ibid*, 529–34).

What is of note is that for none of these sites is there any demonstrable intervening Bronze Age occupation. The apparent Bronze Age hiatus and the possible Beaker agency in this have been discussed above. Clearly work is needed to help to discern whether this hiatus is real or illusory.

The other major facets of the Howe sequence – the roundhouse to broch development and the post-broch restructuring – are also replicated on sites where excavation has made identification of multi-phasing possible. The demonstration of a roundhouse to full broch tower sequence on a single site is now well attested, not just on Orkney but in other parts of the Atlantic province (Hingley 1992, 16). In Caithness, the early broch at Crosskirk resembled a roundhouse in many respects and it is becoming increasingly obvious that, as at Howe, the brochs are but a later addition to an underlying palimpsest of earlier settlement (Mercer 1985, 98). On Shetland, a roundhouse at Clickhimin precedes the broch (Hamilton 1968). Howe represents the 'mound upon mound' profile which is seen as being less common in Orkney (Foster 1989b, 35); perhaps its major importance lies in pointing to the likelihood of other such sites being the norm.

After development of the full broch tower, its decline and post-abandonment occupation are also replicated elsewhere. MacGregor (1974) sees the Broch of Burrian, probably built between the 1st century BC and 1st AD, after an initial period as purely a defensive structure, changing to meet more domestic requirements. Other broch sites, such as Gurness and Midhowe, display the same post-occupation phase as at Howe when they ceased to exist as anything other than housing for temporary workshops or sheds; like Howe too, their function had been changing up to this time (Foster 1989b, 38). Three of the above mentioned broch sites in proximity to Howe – Stackrue, Breckness, and Warebeth – have possible or proven evidence of later Iron Age settlement (Hedges 1987c). Without excavation it is difficult to assess how many more broch sites also display the same pattern of later Iron Age (Pictish) activity, as many of the buildings are hard to recognize on the surface. Most of the well-documented excavations such as the brochs of Burrian (MacGregor 1974) and Gurness (Hedges 1987b) have produced artefactual, if not structural evidence of later settlement. Work on non-broch sites such as Skaill, Deerness (Gelling 1985 and forthcoming), Buckquoy (Ritchie, A 1977), Birsay (Morris 1989) and Pool (Hunter 1990), which have until recently been somewhat eclipsed by the more prominent sites, has produced Late Iron Age buildings; this gives a better picture of the existence of scattered farmhouses in the landscape at this stage and helps redress the bias which past concentration on the broch structures has produced.

Recognition of the exact nature of the reuse has been a more recent achievement (Hedges 1987c). The identification of who was responsible for the later activity has depended on the proper distinction of secondary settlement: whether the broch (and settlement) was being altered by original inhabitants or being built into by those who would be considered Picts (Hedges 1983, 117).

What are the factors that govern the reuse of the sites? These are likely to range from the practical, which includes the site's location and quarrying potential, to the strategic, which also involves location together with use as a centre for subjugation and control, to the symbolic, which uses the past to justify the present (Hingley 1992, 42) and from that draw status. At Pool, reuse would have been encouraged by the ease of levelling and availability of material for manuring (Hunter 1990, 178). This would not have been the case for the great clay mound of Howe; here, the major reasons for reuse are more likely to have been as a strategic location or as a source of stone, or status.

Is there some survival of folk memory through the Bronze Age? There is the sense that a claim of right to the land could be reinforced by the reuse of an ancestral site (Clarke *et al* 31). Perhaps the reuse of cup-marked stones were an expression of this or conversely they may have been re-used with as little thought as Pictish symbol stones become incorporated into modern farm walls. Did the remnant Maeshowe-type tomb represent a monument as enigmatic to Iron Age incomers as it does 5000 years later or did it offer a prime development site with status, the Aberdeenshire tower house renovated to provide the oil executive's mansion?

Whatever the motivation and justification for the reuse, the major incidents of the Howe sequence can be seen reflected across Orkney: two great periods of massive building, Neolithic and Iron Age, with between them some form of Bronze Age recession with its fragmentary Beaker presence.

'. . . it is the process of historical imagination which draws the evidence together into a coherence. Historical science is about criticising and increasing these insights.' (Hodder 1986, 96–7). Howe allows a coherent historical picture to be drawn: it has rich foreground details, a hazier middle ground and a background still subject to criticism; further insights remain for others to extract but the framework now exists for the imagination to work upon.

11.2 POSTSCRIPT • BBS

Howe was the first total excavation of a related series of Iron Age settlements within the Northern Isles to produce a stratified sequence of both buildings and artefacts. For the first time, unequivocal evidence for the complexity of structures on a single site spanning the whole of the Iron Age was revealed. The stratified sequence of events from the development of the roundhouse, through the brochs to the eventual decline of the settlement is a landmark in Iron Age studies in the North of Scotland.

Of vital importance was the radiocarbon dating of the structures, fundamental in the debate on the origins and development of roundhouses, brochs and their settlements. Perhaps more importantly, this has obviated once and for all, what Hedges termed "That tower of Scottish Prehistory" (Hedges and Bell 1980). The idea of the lone stone tower, isolated in the landscape in the Orkney/Caithness region and Shetland, must be altered in preference to the broch tower being one building, but undoubtedly the dominant one, within a nucleated settlement. The combination of the roundhouse or broch with its accompanying settlement and surrounding defences has been well recorded through the excavations at Howe, and the development of them as a nucleated unit has thus been stressed. The results from Howe can be used in a positive fashion for the reinterpretation and reassessment of past excavated sites such as Clickhimin in Shetland and Gurness and Midhowe in Orkney. It is perhaps the only means whereby the problems of interpreting recently consolidated buildings can be overcome. The narrowness of previous broch studies has unfortunately bequeathed to us an inadequately poor data base from which it has been almost impossible, to date, to assess with any validity the role Howe played in its locality, in the region and its relationship with other broch and non-broch sites. In this area, themes can be suggested for future research.

In spite of the positive results from this excavation, there are negative aspects. There was neither time nor money to explore the extent of structures which lay beyond the Iron Age defences. Although poorly preserved and at the mercy of the plough, later Phase 7 buildings existed beyond the settlement entrance. Did earlier buildings lie outwith the settlement? What was their relationship with the nucleated and enclosed village? How many buildings lay away from the mound in Phase 8, and how complete was the settlement on the mound? It is to be hoped that in future excavations of this type, a more comprehensive investigation of structures external to the defences can be made.

Similar problems existed with the Neolithic structures, which were never fully excavated. It is to be regretted that a fuller investigation of the relationship and function of the Phase 1 and 2 structures was not possible due to the limits of the excavation brief and the lack of funding.

From aspects such as this, pointers lead to the future. The emphasis in Iron Age studies has moved away from the broch tower. Future excavations must look beyond the defended nucleated broch settlements to

non-defended broch sites and to both early and later Iron Age non-defended and non-broch sites. Iron Age studies must become more integrated, to look at the whole complexity of Iron Age settlements within an area, and the social organization of surrounding territories. Hedges remarked that "broch towers will only be understood adequately when we have a much clearer picture of the Iron Age landscape as a whole" (1985, 175). Only by this means will the function of the roundhouse – broch in the landscape become clearer. Hypotheses about broch overlordship, territory and land-taking must be tested. Were broch villages surrounded by satellite farms, how was the landscape organized, and what can be learnt about the size and extent of Early and Middle Iron Age territories? The decline of broch settlements is perhaps better understood. Research at Pool in Sanday and at Skaill, Deerness (Hunter & Buteux forthcoming) will help elaborate the pattern of the setting up of single unit farms in the Middle to Late Iron Age period as seen at Howe. Did the Norsemen come to a preexisting dispersed farming landscape where a territorial pattern had been long in existence (Smith 1990, 38)? The answer is difficult to evaluate as it is yet another area into which research is urgently required. The questions and some of the answers that have been generated by Howe could also be applied to other geographical regions such as the Western Isles, Shetland and Caithness, where the relationship of brochs to other forms of Iron Age settlement is lacking, and the study of the interplay of building development and ideas between the regions and Orkney is needed.

At the time of excavation Howe was the most expensive excavation ever to have been undertaken in Scotland. An approach was made by the Inspectorate of the then Ancient Monuments, for the first time, to the government treasury department for permission to go beyond an upper threshold limit of £250,000 for an individual excavation. The excavation ended in 1982, but its expense still has important ramifications for the future. Howe was a total excavation of an average Iron Age broch settlement site in Orkney: a type of excavation suggested by Fairhurst in 1984 (181). Both larger and smaller sites exist, but in the light of the cost, can mound sites be excavated to modern scientific standards in the foreseeable future? The results of the excavation presented here are due to the total excavation of the site and removal of exceptionally well preserved stone buildings. The methods were drastic and nothing is left of the structures apart from remnants of the Neolithic and the Phase 5–6 rampart and ditch. It is a site which cannot be reappraised through further selective analysis of stratigraphy or structures. Archaeologists have long laboured with inadequate data from incomplete excavations, where ideas put forward have often been subject to doubt and uncertainty, and hypotheses have not been provable. It can be argued that the total sacrifice of the occasional complex site is justifiable, to increase not only the complete knowledge of that and like sites, but to test the hypotheses and put forward new ones with unquestionable evidence.

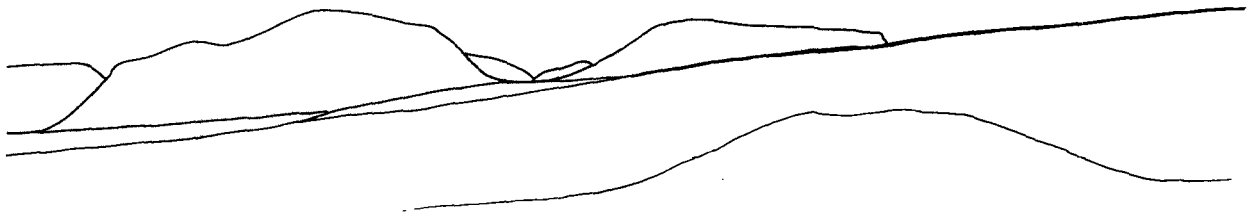
Howe was an exceptional challenge, which has already yielded far reaching results. It is argued that it would have been impossible to have sampled this site to have produced any worthwhile information. Indeed the stoney nature of the site excluded any viable selective sampling of its structures. In order to have achieved a stratified sequence of buildings and artefacts, total excavation of the site was the only feasible means of recovering useable information. With these factors in mind, excavation of similar sites in the future will not be cheap, if the reliability of the data is to be ensured.

In the case of Howe, consolidation was also not feasible. The problems inherent in the Phase 7 broch tower were still present after 2000 years. The stonework of the contemporary village was in poor condition and often reduced to a fragmentary state. The cost of consolidation was insupportable when considering the presence of the two guardianship sites of Gurness and Midhowe. The fact remains, that if Howe had been consolidated at its Phase 7 structures, the information produced would have been little advanced over the 1930's excavations of Gurness and Midhowe. Only by removing that broch and village did the other six phases of the site, spanning another 3000 years of prehistory, come to light. Through this example can the earlier excavated Iron Age sites on Orkney be better understood and explained.

From the excavated evidence produced at Howe, it is possible to learn a little more about our Iron Age ancestors, their social organization, a little of their beliefs, their life styles, wealth, poverty, ritual, death, disease, habits, aesthetic tastes, and their craftsmanship and abilities. Rarely does the archaeologist find the skeletons of the inhabitants of the settlement under excavation. At Howe this was possible and some of the very young and the old were met in exceptional circumstances.

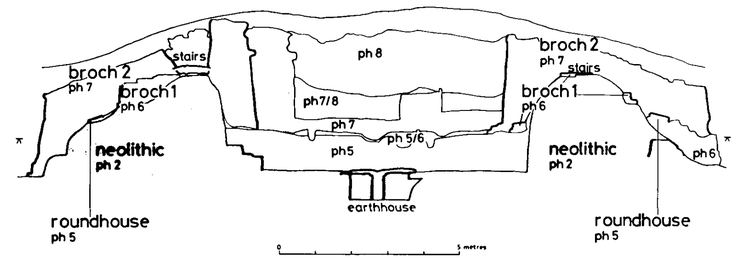
For the present, if a little of the colour and vitality of the life of our Iron Age ancestors is reflected in these pages, then we will have partly succeeded in revealing to the reader the sophisticated achievements of the

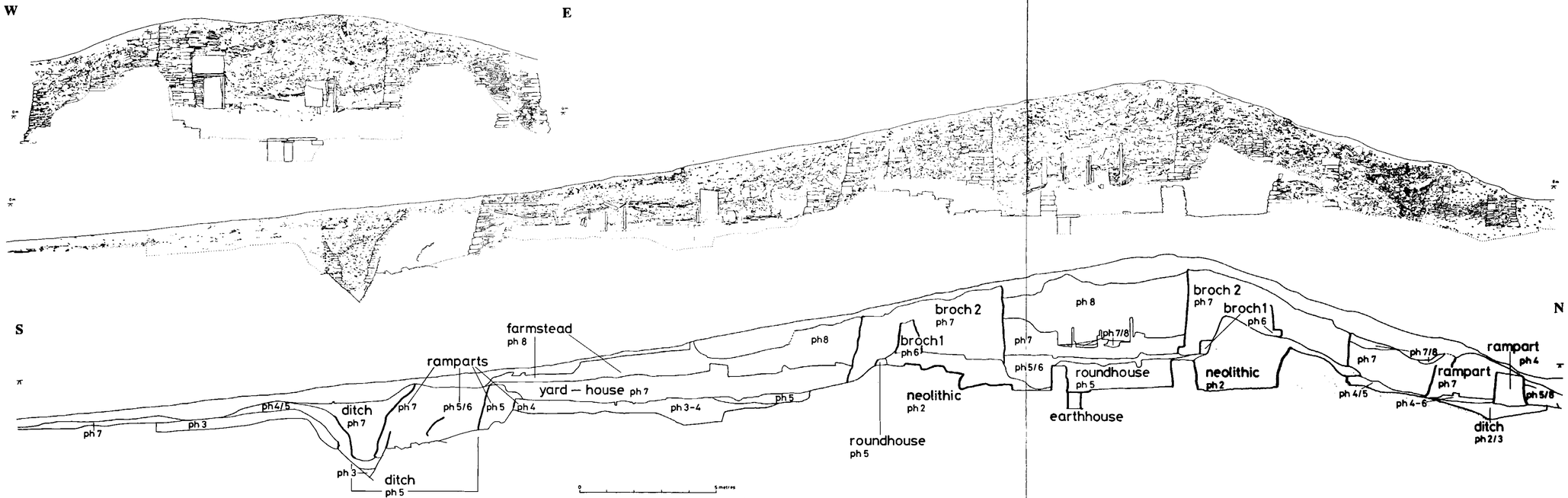
past. These achievements have been long undervalued whilst tucked away in the NE corner of the British Isles. However an attempt to readdress this discrepancy was made by Harding who wrote " what the Atlantic Iron Age emphatically is not is either 'peripheral' or 'marginal'" (1990, 16). The inhabitants of Howe were participants in the long term game of the turning of prehistory into history in the North of Scotland, but their particular placings in the various events still await future assessments.



Illus 164

Detailed and explanatory sections N–S and E–W through the site; key to plans and sections.





Keys to plans and sections