

## **Reg's Diary 1969 - the second epistle, by Reg (Gerald N.) Whitehead**

(plans at end – not to scale)

6/8/69 The flooring slabs to the seaward side of floor (A) were lifted, and excavations commenced by Sam and Roger Berry. They discovered, cleaned and lifted ELEVEN infant and juvenile burials from that area today. Audrey has found a further skeleton beneath her previous one and is clearing it (B). David Laughton has unearthed and is cleaning a skeleton he has found to the seaward side of Audrey's. Kate and Gus have removed and cleaned the skeletons they were working on, one of them a baby. Rachel has been drawing the main flooring slabs at (C) for most of today.

The two skulls in the tunnel mentioned at the end of the first epistle have turned out to be associated with two entire articulated skeletons layed lengthways in the tunnel. As the roof was intact over these skeletons, and the section of tunnel in which they lay had been sealed by roof fall debris, it must be assumed that these skeletons were buried or even died in the tunnel. How long they have been interred in the tunnel it is impossible to say. All the skeletons except the lower legs and feet were removed from the tunnel. About 3 ft. of material was dug from the tunnel today.

Sam Berry and David Laughton (the latter a lecturer in the Chemistry Dept. R.F.H.S.M. [Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine]) arrived today. The weather was windy at first with some cloud in the morning, but clear sunny and warm in the afternoon.

7/8/69 Sam and Roger are working like beavers and have removed a dozen + small skeletons from the same area as yesterday. This area is now firmly christened "Kiddies Corner". One or two other bodies have been coming up from areas (D) and (E).

The remaining portions of the two skeletons (in the tunnel) were removed and washed in the evening. They appear to be the skeletons of women. Further clearing was done in the tunnel today and a vertical slab descending from the roof to about half way to the floor has been encountered. A third skull was found a third of the way up from the floor and 3 ft. in front of the slab. If this skull is part of an entire skeleton the tunnel must extend beyond the vertical slab by at least another 3 ft. The total length of the tunnel is now 31 ft. 3 ins.

The weather was overcast and windy all day. The Boyces, friends of Don who are visiting Orkney to try and get some dental fieldwork done, were helping on the site today.

8/8/69 The floor (C) was lifted from the eastern end as far as the line (F). An interesting dark soil layer with some large rocks in it was exposed. Six more bodies were raised from "Kiddies Corner" today.

Owing to some injuries ([footnote:] now happily healed) sustained from an accidental encounter with some barbed wire I did not work on the tunnel today.

The weather was clear and windy. Roger Berry leaves midday tomorrow.

9/8/69 Sam has dug up two or three more skeletons in "K.C.", and Gus and Heather have found one more skeleton each.

The vertical slab in the tunnel was removed and deduced to be a broken roof slab so there is probably an extensive roof fall beyond it. Part of the third tunnel skeleton was removed today. The tunnel length is now about 35' i.e. 20' under the wall (H)..

The weather was wet and windy all day and for this reason I think everybody's rate of work was reduced. Some of us went into Kirkwall for an evening meal and a wander round because Kathy (the cook) had an evening off to go to the dance in Kirkwall in honour of the County Show which was on this afternoon.

10/8/69 Gus and Mary McMinn (a new arrival from R.F.H.S.M.) have found and are cleaning skeletons of an adult and two children in area (G). I am losing count of how many skeletons we find each day but we have found a total of 87 up to tonight.

The weather was wet and windy all today and we had very heavy rain in the night; for this reason the tunnel was unworkable because I was getting stuck to the softened clay floor of the tunnel. During the first part of the morning most people were employed mopping up and laying duckboards round the site. Between the showers David and I started to sink a shaft (I) to strike one side of the tunnel and so buckets could be more easily emptied from the tunnel and some light let in. I went down to the site at 6.30 intending to swim, but the mist had come down and the wind freshened so I decided it was too cold.

11/8/69 A total of ten more skeletons were found today. One of them, which I finished off digging out because Kate developed a migraine, had a piece of iron adherent to its atlas vertebra on one side. Don and I could not decide whether the iron had been forced into the bone during life (a sword-point perhaps?) or had adhered to the bone because of corrosion in the ground. Don thinks that an x-ray may resolve the question. The floor (C) has been trowelled down to basal clay but displays several features shown in one of the accompanying sketches.

The weather was windy in the morning and clear and sunny all day.

97 skeletons were found by knocking off time today, and two more found in the evening as I will explain below.

The shaft (I) was completed and the tunnel digging was recommenced, after the last visible roofing slab, which was cracked, had been shored. About two further feet of tunnel were dug out before it became too unsafe to work, because to go any further would bring my head beneath an unshored earth roof, and expose me to the danger of concussion or suffocation if the roof collapsed. To tunnel any further demanded substantial box shoring made from heavy timber and planking which we do not have. The tunnel walls are continuing into the roof fall so the tunnel must go on. The skeleton in the tunnel has been removed as far as his knees, and it is evident that he is a burial from above which has caused the roof to fall, because the remains of the broken roof slabs lay beneath him.

After doing some packing in the evening preparatory to my departure tomorrow I returned to the site with Don and Gus.

Don, Sam and Tony Boyce decided to dig a trench over the tunnel end (J) in a last ditch attempt to solve its mystery. They had not dug down to the level of the tunnel roof when we left that evening. What is interesting is that they unearthed an adult skeleton in (J) at the same depth as the burials on the main part of the site. I had also found a child's skeleton of about 12 years of age in the shaft (I) earlier in the day. This shows that the burial ground extends well beyond the limits of the main site.

Thus Don found skeleton 98, and Gus who was taking up a skeleton from (G) found another skeleton (99) beneath the one she was removing.

12/8/69 Sam gave Gus, Kate and I a lift to Kirkwall, from whence we took the bus to Stromness and embarked on the St Ola for Scrabster. There our respective paths parted, Gus and Kate setting off valiantly to hitch to London and I climbing on my luxury coach to London where despite my previous protestations my father insisted on meeting me.

ROUGH PLAN OF SITE REFERRED TO IN TEXT

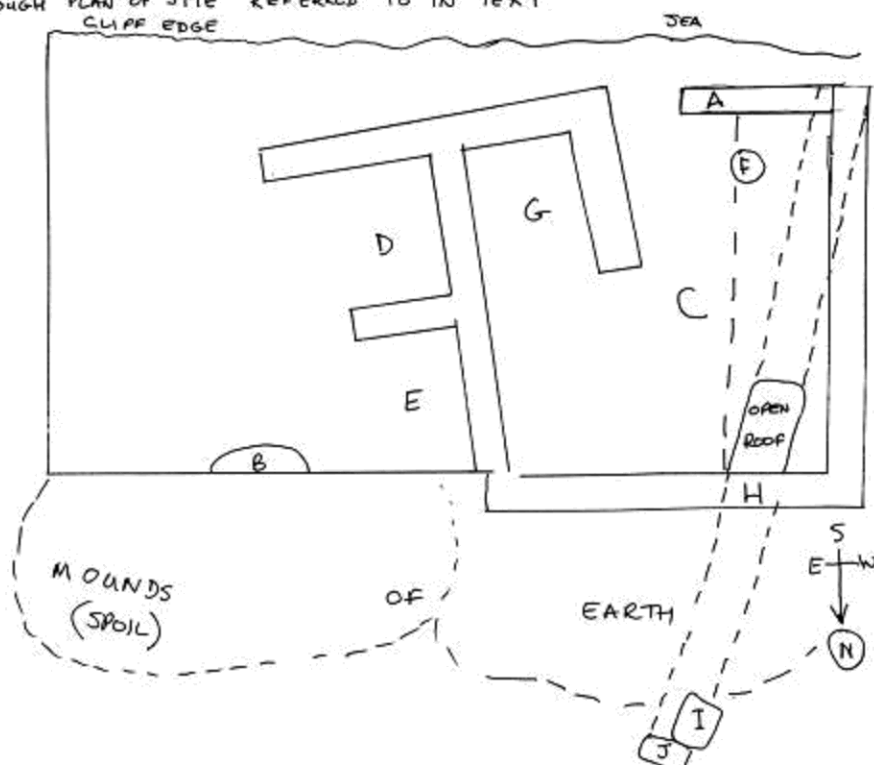


DIAGRAM OF FLOOR AREA C) AFTER CLEANING

