

Shorter Notes

Short cists at Buckstone Road, Fairmilehead, Edinburgh

by Joanna Close-Brooks

A short cist was discovered on 3rd June 1972 during earth-moving operations on a new housing estate at Buckstone Road, Edinburgh (NGR NT 248689) (fig 1). A second cist was found and destroyed on 5th or 6th June. The skeletal remains from both cists were removed by the police. Late on 6th June the find was reported to the National Museum, and the remaining cist was investigated by Mr D V Clarke and the writer the following morning. Mr Alexander Cunningham, the Trojan driver who had uncovered both cists, gave helpful information; so did Mr Bain of Miller Homes Northern Ltd and Edinburgh City Police, who kindly provided photographs taken at the time of discovery. I would also like to thank Mr Mitchell of Miller Homes for supplying site plans, Mr J Davidson of the Ordnance Survey for surveying the site, Miss H Jackson for drawing the illustrations, Dr A Young for the skeletal report and Dr D Lunt for the dental report.

The two cists lay at about 167 m OD near one of two knolls on the edge of a flattish area of high ground, from which a slope falls away northwards to the valley below the Braid Hills. The natural knolls once had rounded tops, but at some time in the past they have been artificially levelled and planted with trees. This landscaping is shown on a 6 in OS map surveyed in 1853. The two cists found in 1972 originally lay close to the E knoll, but at the time of discovery the S end

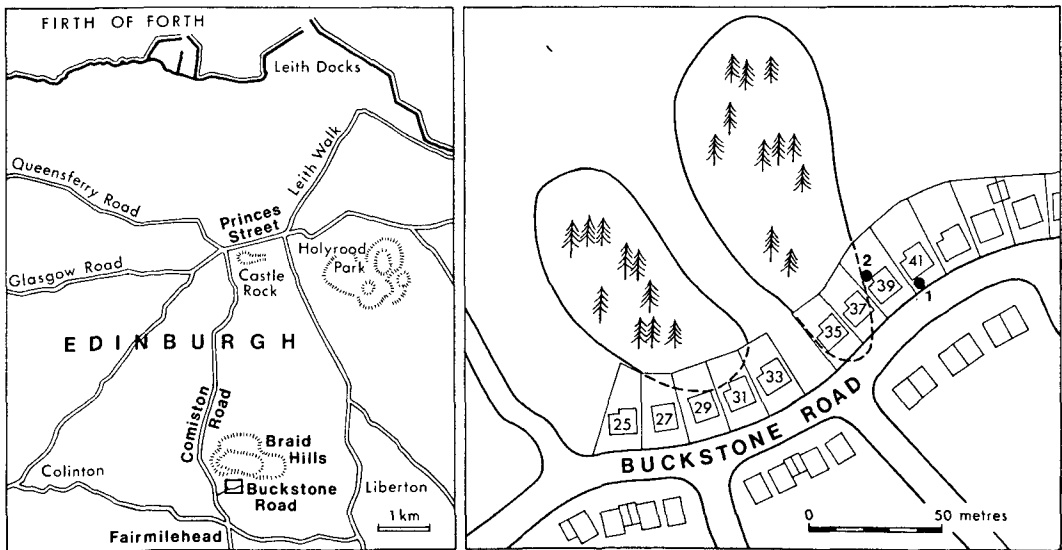


FIG 1 Location map for cists at Buckstone Road, Edinburgh

of both knolls had been quarried away to make space for the new houses, so the exact relationship could not be determined. The site of Cist 1 is now in the front of No 41 Buckstone Road, while Cist 2 was somewhere in the back garden of No 39.

Cist 1 measured 1.05 m by 0.60 m and was 0.45 m deep, with its long axis aligned approximately NE – SW (fig 2 and pl 21a). It has been constructed in a pit dug into the natural subsoil of andesitic basalt, a lava outflow from the Pentlands. This pit appeared to have been approximately 0.50 m larger than the cist, though it was only traced with certainty on the N side. It was filled with angular basalt fragments and some gravelly soil. The stones forming the cist were thin sandstone slabs of the Old Red series, about 0.03 m thick. Each long side was constructed with two slabs. The S side had been badly distorted and the W end slab broken either at the time of discovery or subsequently. On the N side a number of thin slabs overlay the pitfill and were apparently chocking stones for the capstones; a single slab on the S side may have served the same purpose. Photographs taken at the time of discovery show two capstones which have been

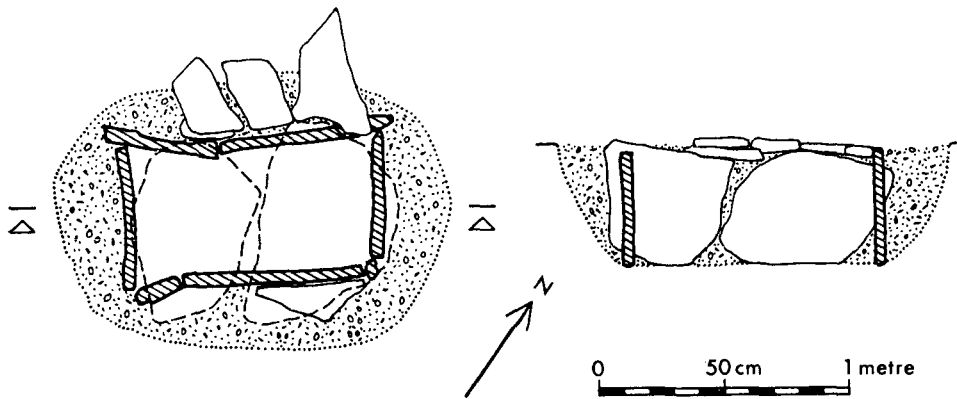


FIG 2 Plan and section of Cist 1

sketched on to the plan. The surviving capstone measured 1.28 m by 0.47 m by 0.09 m. Smaller slabs must have sealed the gaps. Photographs also show the skeletal remains lay in complete disorder at the W end of the cist, probably disturbed by heavy earth-moving machinery. The bones, which were removed by the police, represent parts of two individuals (see Appendix 1). The cist was partly filled with a loose mass of earth and basalt fragments that had fallen in when the capstones were lifted. This cist was cleared and plotted some four days after its discovery, and re-excitation to the natural sandstone floor revealed no finds.

Cist 2 had been destroyed before our visit, but its approximate position was indicated by Mr Cunningham. It is said to have been aligned in the same direction as Cist 1. Photographs of the W end taken by Mr Bain suggest it was of similar construction to Cist 1, but broken pieces of capstone still in position across the corners obscure many points of detail. The photographs do show that the S side was built with two vertical slabs, while extra slabs overlay the N side to support the capstone. The skeletal remains, again of two individuals, lay in disorder at the W end; a mass of earth and broken basalt fragments half-filled the rest of the cist.

Comment. Little can be said about the cists in the absence of finds. It seems certain that the Buckstone cists never contained pots, which the discoverers could hardly have missed, but there is a possibility that small objects such as flint knives were not noticed. An early Bronze-Age date is most probable. While short cists of both Iron- and Dark-Age date have been found in the Lothians, they are very rare indeed. Fluorine and nitrogen analysis of the bones undertaken by

Mr J C McCawley of the Museum's Research Laboratory as part of a long-term programme cannot yet give conclusive results, but he reports that the analyses indicate a Bronze-Age date as most probable. Short cists without grave goods are surprisingly common in SE Scotland. Coutts (1971, 14 map 2) plotted them for Tayside and the numbers can be judged from his map. There seems at present no way to date these more closely. Cists in the Edinburgh area have been mapped by J N G and A Ritchie (1972, fig 44). The Buckstone cists lie between the Braid Hills and the food vessel cist at Fairmilehead shown on their map.

Each cist contained parts of two individuals, one more or less complete, the second represented only by limb bones. There is no evidence to show if these were introduced together, or are the results of separate depositions. Both practices have been noted in beaker cists in East Lothian (Stevenson 1939 and 1940) though in each case the second skeleton was more complete than at Buckstone Road.

APPENDIX 1

The skeletal remains from Buckstone Road, Edinburgh

by A Young, MA, MB, ChB, FRCS(G), Dept of Anatomy, University of Glasgow

CIST 1

The bones are relatively few and include a number of fragments. However, *parts of two individuals at least* are present. The only *Skull* is broken and lacks facial and jaw elements; the cranial portion is large and rounded.

The other bones present and recognisable are:—*Femora*: R lacks upper quarter; L almost complete, approximate length 45.5 cm. *Fibula*: middle half of one shaft. *Tibiae*: R lacks upper quarter, L virtually complete, 35.6 cm; no lower squatting facet on either. *Innominate Bone*: part of L ilium only. *Humerus*: lower half of shaft of R. ? *Ulna*: part of upper shaft in 2 pieces. *Metacarpal*: shaft of ? R 2nd. 3 other smaller fragments of bone.

While the above might all belong to one individual, the metacarpal and the humerus and ulna (?) fragments are possibly too small for the skull and leg bones. In addition there are 3 other recognisable pieces which could only come from a 2nd or even a 3rd individual. These extra pieces are: the upper half of shaft of a L femur, much smaller than that listed above; part of mid shaft of a tibia, also smaller than those above; part of condyles of lower end of a femur.

The larger individual was possibly male and approximately 170–173 cm tall; if female the height would be about 5 cm less.

CIST 2

There are more bones available than from Cist 1, but even so much is missing and quite a few of those present are damaged. Certain points may be made at the outset.

There is evidence of at least two individuals. Most of the remains may be attributed to a large male of middle age or more, perhaps 180 cm in height, suffering from a degree of arthritis of the spine and some scoliosis, but a few bones belong to a much more slightly built individual (age and sex uncertain but certainly adult and possibly female). Dr Lunt has noted the heavy build of the mandible with a big chin and I would draw attention to the large rounded form of the cranial vault.

Both the lower ends of the smaller individual's tibiae and the L talus show the so-called 'Squatting facets' said to be associated with frequent squatting and/or life in hilly country. In the case of the larger individual, the talus (again L) and the upper ends of both tibiae show similar articular surface modifications but the lower ends of the tibiae are damaged and cannot be clearly assessed.

The following bones are recognisable in whole or in part:—*Skull*: most of base and face is missing; the cranial portion is capacious and rounded, probably male. *Vertebrae*: 2 lumbar and 11 thoracic (most of which (but not all) are probably of the same set in showing signs of arthritis and scoliosis) and 4 cervical vertebrae are present in varying degrees of completeness. *Sacrum*: the upper 2 segments only, damaged. *Ribs*: fragments of at least 7 R and 5 L are present. *Innominate bones*: parts of both R and L are present; they are of heavy build and not quite symmetrical. *Femora*: R head and great trochanter are damaged;

length 47.5 cm, making allowance for the missing parts of the head. L great trochanter and neck are missing, part of head was identified separately. The upper third of the shaft of both is very wide and appears flattened mainly due to exaggeration of the gluteus maximus insertion area; the lesser trochanters are also very well developed. *Tibiae*: both are almost complete (for length); R 37.6 cm. *Fibula*: L only, upper end missing. *Calcanea*: both present. *Talus*: L only. *Metatarsal*: portion of ? 2nd R. *Scapulae*: the lateral parts with glenoid facets of R and L of a large individual. *Clavicles*: R and L both present but damaged. *Humeri*: R complete, 34.8 cm; L some damage to both ends. *Radii*: L almost complete, 26.5 cm; R incomplete and in 3 pieces. *Ulna*: R middle half and head only. *Metacarpal*: 1st L.

From the smaller individual only the following were identified:—*Tibiae*: R lower third; L lower fifth. *Talus*: L only.

From Dupertuis's and Hadden's formulae I estimate the height of the larger individual as follows:—From R femur: 177.56 cm; from R tibia: 184.67 cm; from L radius: 180.793 cm.

APPENDIX 2

The dentitions from Cist 2, Buckstone Road, Edinburgh

by Dorothy A Lunt, MDS, PhD, HDD.

The mandible has survived largely intact with only one tooth missing from the permanent dentition, and part of the left maxilla is also present. The mandible is large and well built, with a deep chin and everted angles with pronounced ridges for muscle attachments. These features suggest a male subject.

The amount of wear of the right mandibular molars corresponds to an age of *c* 36-40 on the scale constructed by Miles (1963) from a series of Anglo-Saxon skulls. The left mandibular molars show a slightly different wear pattern, but there is some evidence to suggest that occlusion on the left side was not normal.

No carious cavities are present, but two very small incipient carious lesions appear at the necks of the second premolar and first molar on the right side. There has, however, been quite severe periodontal disease, with inflammation and resorption of alveolar bone and the formation of periodontal pockets between the teeth. The left third molar (lost *post mortem*) was lying at an angle in a grossly infected socket.

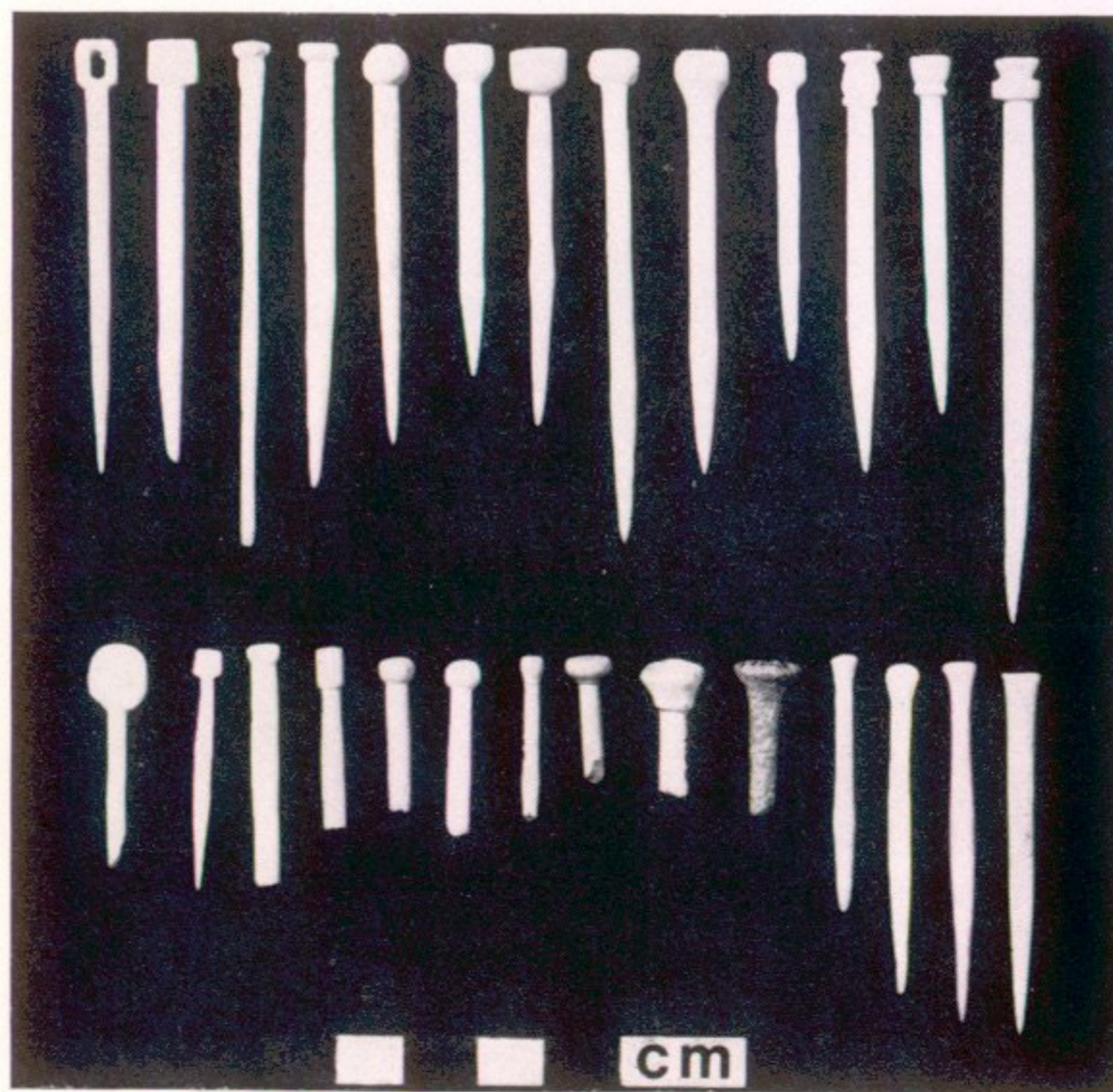
Two abscesses are present in the small fragment of maxilla, though as the teeth involved have been lost *post mortem* it is impossible to be certain of their cause. The state of oral health of this individual was generally poor.

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a Cist 1, Buckstone Road, Edinburgh



b Mackenzie Collection, bone pins (about 2:3)

Mackenzie Collection | Buckstone cist | CLOSE-BROOKS
CLOSE-BROOKS and MAXWELL