

Shorter Notes

A short cist at Darnaway, Forres

by L M Maclagan Wedderburn

A short cist was discovered during ploughing in November 1973 and was reported to Inverness Museum by Mr J Chapman, Estate Factor, to whom thanks are due for all his assistance and interest. The site (NGR NH 994555) lies at the edge of a fluvio-glacial terrace 850 m N of Darnaway Castle at an altitude of 50 m OD and had been revealed by progressive backwearing of the terrace during ploughing.

The capstones had been dislodged and consisted of two blackish sandstone slabs one of which, measuring 80 cm by 42 cm by 15 cm thick, had been removed; the second, measuring 80 cm by 70 cm by 20 cm thick, was *in situ*. The cist (fig 1) had been constructed of four rectangular sandstone slabs, two of the same material as the capstones and two of yellowish sandstone. These

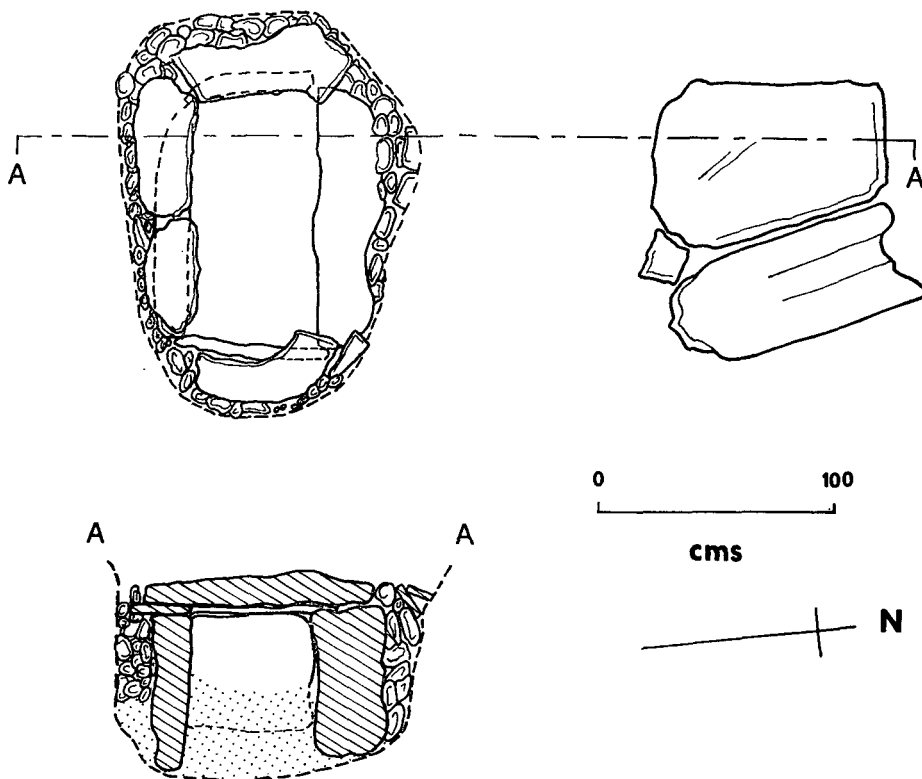


FIG 1 Plan and section of short cist at Darnaway

had been carefully levelled by the addition of a number of 2 cm-thick sandstone slabs, particularly on top of the S side-stone which was some 4 cm shorter than the others. In addition, slabs had been laid on top of the E and W side-stones so that the capstone lay directly only on the 30 cm-wide edge of the N side-stone. The four sides fitted extremely neatly and no additional packing had been necessary. There was no evidence that the stones had been dressed in any way. The interior of the cist measured 109 cm long, 55 cm wide and 32 cm deep, and the base consisted of the natural gravel.

The cist had been built in an oval pit measuring 140 cm by 125 cm. The space between the cist and the sides of the pit had been packed with water-worn boulders on average 15 cm in diameter and jammed in places at the upper levels with angled 3 cm-thick sandstone slabs. A quantity of gravel and leaves had entered the cist when the capstone was removed, otherwise it was free of fill. When this material was cleared, it was found that the bones of an inhumation lay in a disordered and much decayed state except for the skull and lower jaw, which were apparently *in situ*. Other than this the cist was empty, although a beaker had been present and was removed when the cist was first disturbed.

The vessel

This was removed before the cist was examined but is intact. It is of a hard, smooth ware with numerous micaceous grits, light brown to pink in colour with a firm surface crumbling slightly in two areas 3-5 cm in diameter. It is irregular in shape, leaning somewhat to one side and the rim is slightly oval. The profile is gently curved from the slightly everted rim to a belly about half way down, coming in to a basal flange. Its maximum height is 16 cm, outside rim diameter 13.7 cm, outside belly diameter 14.4 cm and base diameter 8.4 cm. The decoration (fig 2) is by comb impressions. The comb appeared to have been 1.5 cm long and to have had eight teeth. In places the decoration had been smeared, presumably by handling before firing.

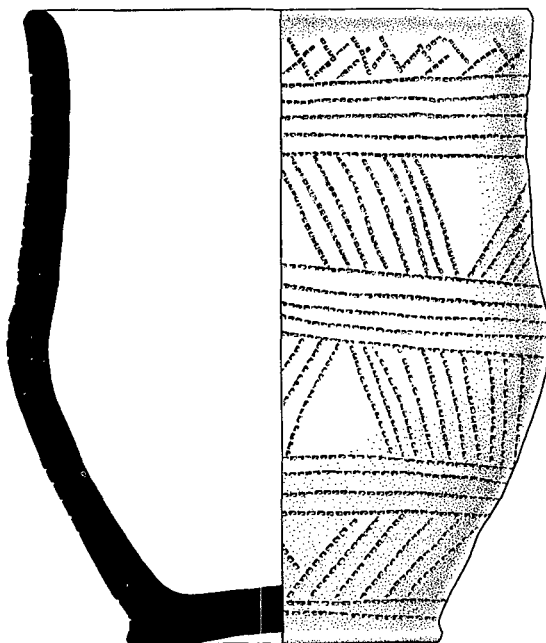


FIG 2 The Darnaway beaker (1:2)

APPENDIX A

The Darnaway beaker

by *Ian A G Shepherd*

The Darnaway beaker has a close parallel in shape and decorative style in the Final Northern (N4) beaker from Auchrynie, Aberdeen (Clarke 1970, fig 722). In the Lanting and van der Waals scheme, its shape is consistent with a step 6 dating, while the preservation of some zoning in its decorative style agrees with the archaism in the development of decoration compared with that of shape noted on other NE beakers (1972, 41).

Although belonging to the end of the beaker series in Scotland, this pot fits into a tradition of tall, largely biconical, slightly footed vessels with concave, rather than sharply everted necks, from NE Scotland. This series can be seen to stretch from the European Bell/Step 2 beaker from Savoch, Aberdeen (Clarke 1970, fig 72), and to include the N2/Step 3 pot from Upper Boyndlie, Aberdeen (*ibid*, fig 493); the N-NR/Step 4 beaker from Lesmurdie, Banff (*ibid*, fig 270), and the curious, tall, thin Whitestone, Aberdeen beaker and its more usual N-NR/Step 4 partner whose decorative scheme provides a good parallel with that on the Darnaway vessel (*ibid*, figs 317–18). The Step 6 Auchrynie beaker mentioned above, and the Portsoy, Banff (*ibid*, fig 727), N4/Step 6 pot are also relevant here. The end of this series is represented by such NE S4/Step 7 sub-beakers as Linlathen, Angus (*ibid*, fig 1018), which was found in a dagger grave typical of this sub-group (*ibid*, 214), and the Fettercairn food vessel (*ibid*, fig 734).

APPENDIX B

The skeletal remains

by *Dr R R Sturrock*, Department of Anatomy, University of Dundee

The material from this cist consisted of a skull, mandible, numerous vertebrae and fragments of various long bones and ribs.

The skull was friable and the right squamous temporal and adjacent parts of frontal and parietal bones were missing, along with the right side of the facial skeleton. On the inside of the parietal bone, just posterior to the fronto-parieto suture, there was a thin wafer of bone, irregular in outline, 4 by 2 cm in size, adherent at its anterior margin to the groove for the left middle meningeal vessels. This is possibly a periosteal reaction. There was also a hollow, 1 cm in diameter, on the inside of the skull, near the bregma, possibly caused by a large arachnoid granulation. All sutures were fused on the inner surface and there was evidence of fusion of parts of the sagittal and lambdoid sutures on the outer surface. There was, however, no evidence of senile changes. From these facts the skeleton would appear to have been over 40 years of age at the time of death. The muscular markings on the skull were not prominent and most of its characteristics were female.

The right ramus and neck of the mandible were missing from the third molar tooth backwards. There was a deep depression at the site of the sockets of the left second and third molars almost certainly due to a root abscess of one or other of these teeth. Protrusion of the chin was not prominent. In the lower jaw all the incisors, the right canine and the left second and third molars were missing. These latter two teeth were probably lost before death. All teeth present, except the right lower third molar, showed extensive wear with flattening of the cusps. No senile changes were evident from the mandible.

The bodies of thirteen vertebrae, half the atlas and the dens of the axis were present. All the vertebrae were extremely friable. Most of the vertebral bodies showed osteophytic lipping.

No complete limb bones were present. Part of the left scapula was present and consisted of the lateral margin, the acromion, cricoid process and the glenoid fossa. Both clavicles were present but the medial ends were missing. The clavicles indicated that the person was slightly built. The shaft and proximal end of the left humerus was present. The epiphyses were fused. This was a light bone with prominent markings, the vertical and transverse diameters of the head were less than the mean female diameters. The lower end of the right humerus was present and showed a defect in the floor of the olecranon fossa. Fragments of the shaft of the right ulna were present. The only parts of the lower limb bones present were the upper shaft, head and neck of the left femur, and a fragment of the midshaft of the right tibia. No

osteophytes were present on the femur. The diameters of the head and neck were less than the mean diameters of female femurs. The platymetric index was 71.5.

This skeleton was human and incomplete. All the bones belonged to one individual, probably female, over 40 years of age. Although no estimate of height was possible, such measurements of the long bones as were possible suggested the owner was slightly built and probably smaller than average. The bony plaque on the inside of the skull and the depression in the mandible were the only evidence of disease.

REFERENCES

- Clarke, D L 1970 *Beaker Pottery of Great Britain and Ireland*. Cambridge.
Lanting, J N and van der Waals, J D 1972 'British beakers as seen from the continent', *Helinium*, 12 (1972), 20-46.