

## II.

### ACCOUNT OF CISTS OPENED AT KINTRADWELL, SUTHERLAND.

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Along the east coast of Sutherland links are of frequent occurrence, and these flats are peculiarly rich in prehistoric remains. Brochs, hut-circles, tumuli, and shell-mounds occur on them abundantly. At Kintradwell, about 8 miles east of Golspie, the links seem to contain numerous specimens of a peculiar kind of kist-vaen, which I have not seen elsewhere, nor have I seen it described. Many specimens have been opened by the tenant, William Houston, Esq. (some, I believe, in presence of Dr John Stuart), and they all present the appearance which I shall immediately refer to. The emblem-sculptured stone, figured by Mr Stuart, was found on the links where the kist-vaens are; and, from the examination of it, I agree with the learned Secretary, that it probably has formed part of a cist. I cannot agree with him, however, that the name Kintradwell indicates anything ecclesiastical. The prefix *Kil* is not known to be transformed into *Kim*. Besides, the name Kintradwell is of quite recent date, certainly not more than forty years old; prior to that the name of the farm was Kentruila, which it is yet in Gaelic, and which describes well the position of the spot—"the head of the bay."

Close to where the kist-vaens are found is a ruined broch of very large

size, which has been described by Mr Joass. The interments are of the bent variety, are rarely more than 24 inches under the surface, and there is no external indication of their presence. The method Mr Houston employed for their detection was by boring with an iron wire.

On the 16th of April, I got notice from Mr Houston that he had detected a kist-vaen for me, and I went on the 17th to examine it. I found that, in addition to this one, there were other two in juxtaposition to it. The three were close together, not more than 8 inches apart. Their long measurements lay very nearly in the same direction—north-west and north-east; a line, however, to run through all of them, would run very nearly north and south. These three cists were nearly of the same size—3 feet long, 18 inches wide, and 14 inches deep. They were formed of thin slabs of sandstone, and covered with fragments of the same for lids. They were very rudely built, quite unlike any of the massive tumular cists I had hitherto seen. They were filled with dry sand, amongst which were found shreds of bone, and in the centre cist the shale nodule and the fragment of belemnite. The shreds of bone were not of sufficient size to give any indication of the arrangement of the skeletons; but in cists that had been opened here previously the usual bent burial on the right side seems to have been prevalent. A skull which was found by Mr Joass in one of them presents, according to a photograph I have of it, a well-developed condition of the anterior lobes. It is now in the Edinburgh Phrenological Museum. The sand, being dry, was exceedingly difficult to work in, from its constantly slipping; but this very inconvenience ultimately proved of great consequence, for when we had the middle cist cleared out it collapsed, and one end of it, with a large quantity of sand, slid down into a bank near which we were working, and exposed a slab, which proved to be the covering of another cist immediately under this, the centre one of the three. By careful digging we exposed a series of little slabs of freestone, which formed the covering of a kist-vaen 5 feet 5 inches long. I carefully removed the sand with my hands, and exposed a skeleton extended on its back, with the hands crossed over the pelvis, and the chin bent on the breast, and slightly to the left side. The cist, if I may call it such, had evidently been built round the body, for the small, flat stones of which it was composed were close round the skeleton, so that the shape

of the whole was somewhat like a wooden coffin, only more closely adapted to the shape of the body. From the appearance of everything about it, I should say that a hole had been dug in the sand, in which the body had been laid on its back, the small stones set round it, the cist filled in with sand, and then covered as we found it. For an inch or so round each stone the sand was stained black. It was also quite moist and very salt. The cist lay nearly east and west, with the feet to the east. No weapon or ornament was found. The covering slabs of this extended burial were 4 feet 7 inches from the surface. Between them and the bottom of the centre short cist there were nearly 12 inches of sand, and through this ran a black band about 4 inches thick, and about 3 inches from the covering slabs, which I have no doubt was a layer of old alluvium—an old surface. There was another similar band about 8 inches above the coverings of the contracted cist, and 18 or 19 inches from the present surface. These measurements were carefully taken by Mr Houston and myself. The skull was in fragments, and I have had great trouble in preserving it. The outer table seems much damaged, and the general appearance is very much that presented by the Keiss skulls. I have forwarded it, along with a femur and the remains of the pelvis, to Professor Turner, who will, I hope, favour the Society with an opinion of the remains.

The upper short cists undoubtedly belong to the stone age, judging from the articles which have been found in them. The shale nodule is apparently beach-rolled, and is the ordinary bituminous shale of the south, which is not found in Sutherland. It does not in the least degree resemble the Brora lignite. Rings of this same shale have been found in Sutherland, associated with remains of the stone age. A portion of such a ring was found by Mr Joass in the round tower near Dunrobin, which was examined by the late Duke of Sutherland, and these round towers most undoubtedly belong to the stone age; for while articles and weapons of stone are frequently found in them, no prehistoric article of metal ever has. Indeed, I have not, in my own investigations, found a single article of metal in the county, nor have I heard of any one else having done so, although I have made inquiries everywhere on this point, with the solitary exception of a small piece of gold found in Strath Kildonan, and which the Duke now wears as a

signet-ring. The history of this, however, is not satisfactory. A bone needle was found in one of these short cists at Kintradwell, and I have found rude flints in the neighbourhood. These and the sculptured stone convince me that the short cists belong to the stone period. The superposition of a fresh layer of sand after the grass had grown over the deceased, the burial in this of a later yet perhaps prehistoric race, another green surface and another layer of sand, on which the herbage now grows, give to the extended burial an antiquity which I think must be remote. I do not think that any explanation like that advanced against the Keiss remains likely to have much corroboration.