

IV.

NOTICE OF THE DISCOVERY OF A FULL-LENGTH STONE CIST, CONTAINING HUMAN REMAINS AND A PENANNULAR BROOCH, AT CRAIGIE, NEAR DUNDEE. BY ALEXANDER HUTCHESON, F.S.A. SCOT, BROUGHTY-FERRY.

On 16th April (1902) the workmen engaged in making a new road to the north of Stannergate railway station, on the Dundee and Arbroath joint-line, about midway between Dundee and Broughty-Ferry, came upon a full-length burial cist embedded in the gravel, the top of the cist being at a depth of about 14 inches from the surface. The ground here slopes upward with a gentle inclination for a distance of about 200 yards from the bank of the river Tay, but at this point rises somewhat steeply until a height of about 25 feet is attained in a comparatively level plateau of some extent, presumably the 25 feet beach-level known to geologists. The surface soil is of gravel and sand, with a little vegetable soil on the top, but below is a bed of stiff reddish clay, containing many water-rolled and glaciated boulders of gneiss, diorite, and other hard igneous rocks, some of them being from 3 to 4 feet in diameter.

A little to the south of the top of the slope a retaining wall was cut through for the road, but still exists to the east and west of it, and it was at a distance of about 10 yards to the north of this wall, on the eastern side of the excavation for the road, that the cist was located. This had been removed before I heard of the discovery, but Mr George Mackay, contractor, Broughty-Ferry, who had the work, kindly accompanied me to the site and pointed out the spot where the cist was found. I also interviewed Mr William Mackay, station-master at Stannergate, who saw the cist when it was discovered and took charge of the few fragments of bones recovered, and from these gentlemen, as well as from the foreman at the works, the following particulars are derived.

The cist, which contained an unburnt skeleton of a full-grown person, very much decayed, lay east and west. It was about 6 feet in length

and about 2 feet in width. The sides, ends, and cover were formed of thin undressed slabs of stone, set on edge in the gravel, three or four stones to the length of the cist. Two of the largest of the side stones measured respectively 2 feet 3 inches by 2 feet 6 inches, by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick, and 2 feet by 2 feet 10 inches, by 2 inches in thickness. These two stones formed part of the north side of the cist. The workmen had come upon it from the south, and pulled down that side before its true character was recognised; the covers on the top collapsed and got broken, and the overlying earth came down and covered everything up, and it was only when all this was cleared away that some of the bones were discovered, and drew the attention of the workmen to an examination of what remained. Then it was seen that all that was left of the cist were the two slabs noticed above, forming part of the north side.

It is, I am afraid, not now possible to determine at which end the head lay, as the few teeth which have been rescued were picked out of the cart into which the materials of the excavation were at the time being shovelled. It was then also that the brooch was picked up by the workmen. This was shortly afterwards taken possession of by Mr John T. Maclaren, architect, on behalf of Mr D. C. Guthrie of Craigie, proprietor of the ground, and the discovery communicated to that gentleman. On learning that it was of interest as an archæological relic, Mr Guthrie, with praiseworthy public-spiritedness, instructed Mr Maclaren to hand it to the Society of Antiquaries, for the National Museum of Antiquities. It is a penannular brooch (fig. 1), apparently of iron, but so much corroded by rust that the metal cannot be determined. The pin measures 4 inches over all, while the ring or circled part is only about 2 inches over, ending in slightly swelling knobs. Brooches of penannular form, distinguished by expansions of the ring into bulbous knobs, the head of the pin being similarly expanded, and possessing characteristics which link them with the period of the intrusion of the Norwegian element, have been found in the northern and western districts of Scotland. Several of these are of large dimensions, made of silver, and highly ornamented, but the Craigie brooch is in size and appearance more akin

to the plain brooch of silvered bronze found with a heathen burial in the island of Eigg, the only other example of the type that had hitherto occurred in Scotland.¹ The Craigie brooch is therefore an object of much interest.

“The brooch, with a movable acus or pin, served,” says Bloxam,² “to connect one part of the dress with another; by the men it was used to fasten the tunic and mantle on the right or left shoulder, and by the women the vestment in front of the breast.” From fragments of cloth found adherent to the pin of the brooches, and from similar impressions on arms and implements discovered in graves of the period, it would

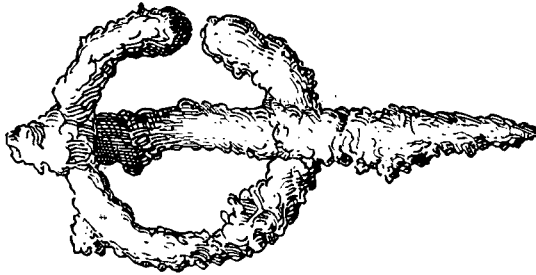


Fig. 1. Penannular Brooch found in a Cist at Craigie, Dundee.

seem that the dead were buried in their customary apparel, together with their weapons and personal decorations.³

Christianity changed all this, but the change was not immediate; on the contrary, it was slow and gradual. Certain grave-goods and ceremonies would, out of deference to the new faith, be omitted; others, from superstitious motives, would be retained.

For this reason it is difficult to assign a chronological sequence to burial phenomena. Broadly speaking, and treating of a special form of brooch differing entirely from the Craigie example (the applying principle being, however, the same), Dr Anderson says, “the effect of pagan-

¹ *Scotland in Pagan Times: The Iron Age*, p. 101.

² *Fragmenta Sepulchralia*, p. 51.

³ *Scotland in Pagan Times: The Iron Age*, p. 42.

ism was that those who had brooches were buried with them. The effect of Christianity was that brooches ceased to be buried with them."¹

The application of this to the period of the Craigie brooch will be considered after the cist has been further dealt with, to which I now proceed.

Numerous discoveries of long and short cists have from time to time been made in the same neighbourhood, and are recorded in various publications. One of the earliest notices, although without details, occurs in Rev. Dr Small's Statistical Account of Dundee in 1792. Referring to the discovery here of several stone coffins with bones, he remarks, "though the most of these are of the common form, some, without any difference in the size of the bones, are only 3 feet square." Apparently here the majority of the coffins had been of the full-length variety, but associated with short cists, where either cremation had taken place or the bodies had been interred in a doubled-up position.

Writing in 1879 regarding a more recent discovery in the same locality, Mr Allan Mathewson, Cor. Mem. S.A. Scot., says, "All the cists that I saw were long ones, and in one instance as many as five were got together." Here, again, we have to lament the entire absence of details. Mr Mathewson merely remarks the presence of a layer of white pebbles over them, but does not state whether the cists were tapered, or at what height above the cists this layer of white pebbles was placed. It is, however, remarked that between the cists and a kitchen midden which lay below them there was a stratum of earth of 8 feet in thickness.² The coffins were probably, therefore, of the tapered variety; and if these referred to by Dr Small as being of the "common form" were also of the same type, shaped like a modern coffin, swelling in the middle and tapered to both ends, it would indicate they were comparatively modern, and clearly belonging to Christian burial. Of this class many were found at Perth a few years ago, in an extension of the general railway station there, and were supposed to have belonged to the burial-ground of a nunnery which once occupied a site in that neighbourhood.

In 1887 I had the opportunity of examining two stone coffins of this

¹ *Scotland in Pagan Times: The Iron Age*, p. 47, note.

² *Proc.*, xiii. 303.

type found on the property of Capt. G. D. Clayhills Henderson, of Invergowrie. These were shaped like the modern wooden coffin, broadest in the middle and tapered to both ends, narrowest at the foot. They were very neatly made and fairly regular in outline, although the stones had not been dressed in any way. The ends were each formed of one stone, but several stones set end to end composed the sides. They had bottoms and covers composed of thin slabs, the covering slabs overlapping the sides, and they lay east and west, with their heads to the west. Both contained human remains, but no other relics.¹

Similar to these were a number of coffins which I examined about fifteen years ago in a sandy hillock at Carlungie, Forfarshire, but here, again, no relics other than bones were met with. Here the covering slabs were of larger dimensions. Indeed, I was informed by a man in the neighbourhood that a great many coffins of the same class had been got in the same sandy hillock ; and that when any of the neighbouring farmers wanted a hearthstone for a cottage or a like purpose, he simply sent a man to search the hillock, being certain that in one or other of the stone coffins, which he was sure to come upon, he would find a stone or stones to suit his purpose.

The writer has previously noticed the discovery, at 6 feet under the surface, in Coupar-Angus churchyard, of a long stone cist or coffin formed of slabs set on edge, with paved bottom, but no cover, which doubtless, however, had been removed in some earlier operations.²

Dr Stuart describes fourteen such graves at Hartlaw. They were formed of small stone slabs, with which they were also paved in the bottom and covered above ; and other two, similar in other respects to the last, but differed in not being paved in the bottom. They lay east and west, with the head to the west. All appeared to be full-length graves, their average length being about 6 feet, but no other dimensions are given, nor is it mentioned whether they were tapered or parallel-sided. They contained no burnt bones and no relics. He supposed them to have been early Christians' graves, placed in groups not yet

Proc., xxii. pp. 167-8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 147.

attached to any church,¹ and mentions that some long stone cists had been discovered in and about the ruined chapel of the Kirkheugh, St Andrews, which was the site of an early Culdee settlement.²

Other references might be given,³ but sufficient has been said to indicate this variety of the long cist.

While usually in groups, as here pointed out by Dr Stuart, they are occasionally found to accompany groups of short cists, as at Barnhill Links, near Broughty-Ferry, where a long stone cist (which, along with an unburnt interment, contained an urn) occupied the centre of a cairn, in and around which were grouped seven short cists.⁴

Sir R. C. Hoare discovered a like association of long and short interments. Lowermost was the primary interment by inhumation with the legs doubled up, the secondary interment by cremation, and on the top a third by inhumation at full length.⁵

Such association of long and short interments may arise either from a change in the fashion of burial by the same race, in which case the long cist may indicate an example of transition assignable to Early Christian times, or by a different and subsequent race, evincing that attachment to ancient burial sites adverted to by the writer in his notice of the discovery of a Bronze Age whetstone in the burying-ground attached to the parish church, Coupar-Angus;⁶ and in other

¹ It is not necessary in such a case to suppose the absence of a church. Early churches constructed of wattle and clay or of turf, when they fell into disrepair, would soon vanish under atmospheric influences.

² *Proc.*, vi. pp. 56, 58 and 61. See also *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, vol. ii. 60, 61, etc.

³ For a notice of full-length cists recently discovered in Uphall parish, with references to other instances, see *Proc.*, xxxv. pp. 325-328.

⁴ *Proc.*, xi. p. 311 and xxi. p. 320; other instances are given by Dr Stuart, *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, ii. 61.

⁵ Bloxam's *Fragmenta Sepulchralia*, p. 17. This last was, however, the body of a child, and there is evidence that even in the Stone Age, when adults were interred in a sitting posture, the bodies of children were usually laid in an extended position. See *Nilssen on the Stone Age*, Lubbock's edition, London, 1868, p. 129.

⁶ *Proc.*, xxii. p. 147. Short stone cists have also been found in the same burying-ground. John Moon, gravedigger there, told me he had taken out at least three such containing human remains.

instances observed by him, particularly the discovery which he made in 1891 of the remains of a burial cairn of the Bronze Age, with underlying urns and cremated remains, in the south-west angle of the parish churchyard of St Madoes, Perthshire, not hitherto recorded.

It is not, however, very certain that full-length burial was practised to any great extent before the beginning of the Christian era.

The long stone burials by inhumation found in Scotland may be taken as exhibiting four types, taking them in their chronological sequence, although the first and second were probably in the time of the latter contemporaneous.

First.—Parallel or roughly parallel-sided cists, composed of several undressed slabs set on edge in the ground, long enough to contain the body in an extended position, and having similar stones for covers, but not always paved in the bottom.

Second.—Enclosure by slabs of stone set on edge in the ground, but with no stone cover or sole.¹

Third.—Similar to the first class, but shallower, widest opposite the shoulders and tapering to both ends, like the modern timber coffin, and having stone covers, and generally paved in the bottom.

Fourth.—The mediæval stone coffin, hollowed out of a single stone, only mentioned here to complete the series.

To take the second class first, the burials are full-length, unburnt and with grave-goods, such as iron weapons of war, implements of labour, and personal ornaments. These Dr Anderson ascribes to the Viking period of the Northmen in Scotland. The first class of roughly parallel-sided cists find example in the Barnhill cist, and now in the Craigie cist. The difference is that the former contained an urn, occupied the centre of a cairn of stones, and was associated with short cist burials, clearly attributable to the Bronze Age. The Craigie cist, on the other hand, has no such association; here there was no cairn nor even mound visible, although, had such existed, it is only fair to say it would probably have been levelled in agricultural operations.

¹ *Scotland in Pagan Times*: The Iron Age, pp. 14, 33, 54, 55.

The presence of the penannular brooch is also a factor in increasing the distinction. It is impossible to maintain any other association between these two examples of the first class than that of form and materials of cist, but it is also impossible to ignore this point of resemblance. The brooch would seem to suggest for the Craigie burial an element of association with the Norwegian influence affecting the second class, but the evidence is too scanty to warrant a definite conclusion.

As Dr Anderson has pointed out, we are as yet entirely without any recorded observations bearing on the burials of the period. Hundreds of such interments may have been shovelled away without any notice being taken of them; and even when noticed, the very details which we desiderate are usually deemed too trivial for recording; and I fear it will continue to be so until we shall be able to employ more careful methods of examining and recording such discoveries.