

AN EARTHENWARE POT FOUND IN A GRAVE AT DUNBAR. 27

I.

- (1) AN EARTHENWARE POT FOUND IN A GRAVE AT DUNBAR, EAST LOTHIAN, AND (2) THREE SHORT CISTS DISCOVERED ON THE GOLF-COURSE THERE. BY J. GRAHAM CALLANDER, F.S.A.Scot., DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES.

On the 2nd February 1921 there appeared in the *Scotsman* a notice of the discovery of a grave in the kirkyard of Dunbar, from which a vessel of pottery had been recovered. Having communicated with Mr Andrew C. Ramsay, town chamberlain, I learnt that the vessel was in his custody, and that since its discovery two cists had been unearthed on the golf-links to the south of the town. I visited the sites on the 9th February, being met by Mr Ramsay and Mr William Spence, chairman of the Parish Council, who informed me that another cist had been discovered two days before, and that it had been left unopened pending my arrival. I am much indebted to these gentlemen for the trouble they took in the matter, which made it possible for me to obtain these records.

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This grave was discovered quite close to the parish church of Dunbar, which is said to occupy the site of an earlier church, while a new grave was being dug. It lay 4 feet below the surface of the ground, the west end lying 15 feet south-west of the face of the buttress at the south-west corner of the present building. Oriented almost due east and west, it was formed of slabs of the red sandstone which is found on the seashore in the vicinity, the slabs measuring from 2 to 3 inches in thickness. Owing to the stones forming the grave having been broken up and removed as they were encountered, it was impossible to ascertain the number of slabs used or the exact dimensions of the grave, but I was informed by the gravedigger that it was over 5 feet in length and about 18 inches in width, and that each end was closed by a single slab. The body had been placed in an extended position with the head to the west. Most of the bones were much decayed and in a fragmentary condition, but the skull was in a good state of preservation. The vessel found in the grave is formed of thin earthenware, and it was recovered in perfect condition (fig. 1). It has a wide mouth and a short upright brim springing from a slightly constricted neck, below which it widens sharply to the shoulder and then contracts gradually to the base, which is rounded on the exterior. It is of a whitish-yellow colour. The pot is unglazed, and bears on the exterior a series of eight shallow flutings,

covered near Dalmeny, West Lothian, in 1915, which contained a string of glass beads believed to be Anglo-Saxon.¹ After the introduction of Christianity, under the influence of the Church the general practice of burying grave goods ceased, even among the Anglo-Saxon and Viking peoples. Occasionally, however, objects were placed in the tombs of important personages during the Middle Ages, such as insignia of office of royalties and ecclesiastics, and small earthenware pots which contained incense or holy water were very frequently deposited.

Dr Anderson, in discussing the survival of pagan customs in Christian burial, has dealt with the practice of placing urns or vessels of clay in graves.² He has shown that vessels of earthenware were placed in graves

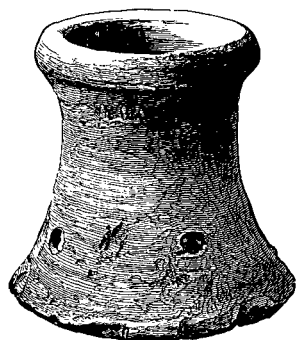


Fig. 2. Urn found near the Castlehill of Rattray, Aberdeenshire.



Fig. 3. Urn found in a Cairn at Memsie, near Rattray, Aberdeenshire.

during historical times in different countries in Western Europe, that in France very many pots of clay have been found in graves dating from the twelfth century to the seventeenth century, and that the custom was not unknown in Scotland. A small pot (fig. 2), 5 inches in height, with concave sides ribbed horizontally, the base wider than the mouth, and pierced with three holes in the side and one in the base, was found with two others under a flat slab at the Castlehill, Rattray, Aberdeenshire, in 1829.³ A flower-pot shaped vessel (fig. 3), ribbed horizontally, 4½ inches in height, with two pierced ears at the lip, a ledge for a lid, and the interior glazed, was found with part of an iron sword in a tumulus at Memsie, Aberdeenshire, in 1827.³ Both these pots are now in the National Collection, and the other two from Rattray are in the Museum at Marischal College, Aberdeen University. In 1834 four small vessels of red earthenware, bearing a strong resemblance to the Dunbar pot, but pierced with a number of holes at the shoulder, were found in a stone

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. xlix. p. 332.

² *Ibid.*, vol. xi. p. 372.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. viii. p. 182.

but while it resembles the others in shape, it bears green glaze on the upper part, and is rather smaller in size; it measures $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height and $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches in breadth at the shoulder. When found it contained two silver brooches, which are also in the Museum, and 150 pennies of Alexander III., John Baliol, and the first Edwards.¹ The fourth example (fig. 5) was found with many fragments of wheel-turned pottery during the excavation of a mound at Kidsneuk, Bogside, Irvine.² As fragments of more than half of this pot were recovered, it has been possible to restore it. Though much blackened in consequence of having been used as a cooking-pot, it has been of greyish-white ware, and it differs from the others only in being rather steeper and longer between the shoulder and the lip. It measures 5 inches in height and $5\frac{3}{16}$ inches in diameter at the shoulder. The date of the pottery from this site was considered to be about the thirteenth century. Considering the general scarcity of mediæval ware in Scotland, the discovery of vessels of this type in districts so widely scattered as Montrose, Dunbar, Ayr, Irvine, and Wigtownshire indicates that they were probably in common use throughout a large part of the country at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the date of the coins found in the pot at Ayr. This is the period to which the Dunbar and Montrose interments may be assigned, which happens to approximate to the period of the manuscript containing the illustration of the incense pots to which reference has been made.

In addition to the two perforated mediæval pots, mention may be made of a small jug of dirty-white earthenware preserved in the Museum which also has holes bored in the wall (fig. 6). It was found filled with coins of Alexander III. and Edward I. and II. at Eastfield, Penicuik, Midlothian, in 1792.³ It measures 4 inches in height, 3 inches across the mouth, $2\frac{5}{16}$ inches at the neck, $4\frac{3}{16}$ inches at the shoulder, and $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches at the base which, like the pots described, is slightly convex on the outside. Owing to this convexity, when placed upright the jug stands tilted to one side. The handle is broad in relation to



Fig. 5. Cooking-pot from Kidsneuk, Ayrshire. (Height, 5 inches.)

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. xxvi. p. 60.

² *Ibid.*, vol. lii. p. 66, fig. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. xxviii. p. 239.

by a single rough slab of the local sandstone about 3 to 4 inches thick; the bottom was unpaved. The main axis lay due north-west and south-east, and while the slab forming the north-east side overlapped the end stones, that on the south-west side was inserted between them. It measured internally only 2 feet 2 inches in length, 14 inches and 16 inches across the north-western and south-eastern ends, and 9 inches in depth. Whether the cist had ever contained an urn is not known, but as the type of vessel usually found with cremated remains of Bronze Age date in Scotland is the cinerary urn, and this as a rule is too big for a grave of the size of the one under review, it seems probable that there had never been an urn, and there was no necessity to make a larger burial-chamber.

A few days previous to the discovery of this grave two slabs, which evidently had formed the southern corner of another grave that had been destroyed at a former date, were encountered in the bottom of the bunker some 4 feet to the north-east. About 8 feet east-north-east of the latter burial a complete cist was laid bare, which contained the remains of an unburnt human skeleton much decayed. As both of these graves had been removed at the time

of their discovery, I could only obtain approximate measurements of them. The complete grave had been a typical short cist formed of slabs, its length being about 3 feet, and breadth from 1 foot 6 inches to 2 feet, while the main axis was about north-east and south-west. Probably the three cists belonged to the Bronze Age.

At the time of discovery the three graves lay very near the surface, but doubtless they had originally been covered with a greater depth of sandy soil which had been removed by aerial denudation. They lay on the northern slope leading up to the shelf on which the ninth hole of the golf-course is located, and which is overlooked on the south by a more extensive plateau that rises about 9 feet above it. The smallest cist lay about 2 feet higher than the two in the bunker, and the general elevation above sea-level is above the 25-foot contour line.

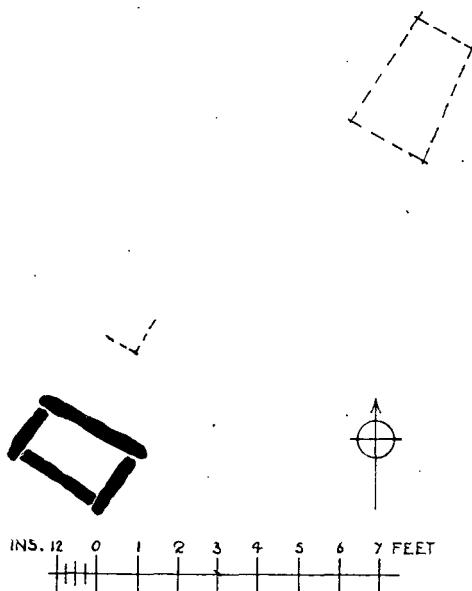


Fig. 7. Plan of Short Cists on Dunbar Golf-course.