

## I.

### A BEAKER FROM A SHORT CIST IN A LONG CAIRN AT KILMARIE, SKYE. BY J. GRAHAM CALLANDER, F.S.A. SCOT., DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES.

About 100 yards north of Kilmarie Lodge, which is situated near the western shore of Loch Slapin, in the parish of Strath, Skye, is a fine example of a long cairn known as Cnocan nan Gobhar (goats' knowe). It stands on the left bank of the Abhuinn Cille Mhaire (Kilmarie Water), at a height of about 20 feet above the bed of the burn, and about 50 feet above sea-level (Inverness-shire, Isle of Skye, O.S. 6-inch map, Sheet L). The cairn measures 72 feet in length, 58 feet in breadth, and 15 feet in height, its longer axis lying  $137^{\circ}$  east of north magnetic, or about north-west and south-east. When I saw it in 1914, it was one of the most perfect cairns in Skye, and showed no signs of having been disturbed by the hands of man. Only at two places were there slight breaks in the surface of the monument, and these had been partly caused by the stream undermining the bank on which it was erected. In the disturbed places it was seen that the cairn consisted of clean stones without any soil amongst them. Although from its shape and size the cairn was presumed to be of the chambered type, no large stones indicating the portal of an entrance passage were to be seen. Whether such a feature existed could only be determined by stripping off the mantle of peat, about 1 foot thick, which has crept up the sides and right over the stony mound, the moist climate of Skye being conducive to a vigorous growth of this material.

Towards the end of December last year (1926), I received a communication from Mr G. M. Fraser, Portree, one of our Fellows, in which he stated that a cist containing a broken urn and human bones had

been discovered in this cairn, and that he would send further details after he had an opportunity of visiting the site. These have since been supplied by Mr Fraser, and from them I have been enabled to furnish the following description of the find.

Owing to the encroachment of the stream on its banks in the vicinity of the cairn, it had been decided to protect them by building a retaining wall of stone. The men engaged on this work, in their search for large boulders, removed some of the stones from the side of the cairn nearest the burn. Fortunately before much damage had been done, near the top of the cairn, a slab, which turned out to be the south-west end of a short cist, came away, exposing the grave and



Fig. 1. Short Cist in long Cairn at Kilmarie, Skye.

revealing a broken urn and some fragments of bone lying on the floor (fig. 1). These objects were removed, and the matter was reported to Mr Fraser, who, as Factor for the estate, gave instructions that no further disturbance of the cist or the cairn was to be permitted until he had visited the site; at the same time he intimated the discovery to the proprietor, Mr W. L. Johnson of Strathaird, and suggested that the urn and bones might be presented to the National Museum. Mr Johnson very kindly agreed to this, and ordered that no further disturbance of the grave should take place, also that the end slab should be put back into its original position, the cist covered up, and the stones which had been removed from the cairn replaced. This work of restoration was carried out shortly afterwards.

The cist, which as we have seen lay near the top of the cairn, was covered with little more than a single layer of stones with a coating of peat above. This is clearly shown in the illustration, fig. 1, which has been made from a photograph taken by Mr Fraser. The sides and ends

of the cist were each formed by a single slab of stone set on edge, while another formed the cover; the bottom was paved with two slabs, or perhaps by one which had cracked across the centre. The grave measured internally 3 feet 3 inches in length, 1 foot  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches in breadth, and 1 foot  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches in depth; its longer axis lay about north-east and south-west. On the floor was a thin layer of dark mould or soil, and above this a coating of shore gravel. The urn and the few bones which were recovered lay on the gravel, near the south-west end of the cist. As it was the desire of the proprietor that the grave should be as little disturbed as possible, the material on the floor of the cist was examined as it lay, but no further relics were recovered.



1 0 1 2 Inches.

Fig. 2. Beaker from Kilmorie, Skye.

The urn (fig. 2), which is of the beaker type, is formed of a yellowish-brown paste containing a fair admixture of small crushed stones. It measures from 8 to  $8\frac{1}{4}$  inches in height,  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches in external diameter at the mouth, 6 inches at the neck,  $6\frac{1}{8}$  inches at the widest part, and  $3\frac{7}{8}$  inches across the bottom, the wall being  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch thick. The top of the rim is very slightly rounded. Encircling the vessel are two broad bands of ornamentation, all incised with a blunt-pointed tool.

The higher band, which extends from about  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch below the lip to the lower part of the neck, consists of a horizontal triple zigzag or chevron design, the angles on the upper side being filled in with horizontal straight lines, and bordered with three similar lines above. The lower band, which covers the space from a short distance below the neck to the base, shows three double or triple horizontal zigzags encircling the wall. The angles of the upper two are so placed as to form a row of transverse lozenges near the centre of the band. These lozenges are left plain, but all the angles of the two higher zigzags and those on the upper side of the lower are occupied with transverse straight lines, and there are also two continuous lines on the upper margin.

The few fragments of bones which were recovered are incinerated and undoubtedly human. The largest piece is possibly part of a femur, and shows clearly the marks of the teeth of a small rodent which had gnawed it.

This discovery is of considerable importance in more than one respect. It is well known that very much fewer beakers have been reported from the west of Scotland than from the east,<sup>1</sup> and consequently any new discovery of this class of pottery in the first locality is worthy of special attention. This is the first beaker, so far as I am aware, that has been recorded from Skye, and when reading this paper I did not know of any which had been found in the Outer Hebrides. However, since then Mr Allan D. Macmillan, Barrhead, has shown me two small fragments of an urn which, from the thickness and character of the ware, and the designs impressed on it with the well-known toothed stamp of the early Bronze Age, must have been of the beaker type. The shards were found during the summer of this year in a short cist, in the parish of Lochs, Lewis, which had been opened two years before. The cist, which had not been covered by a cairn, was formed of short slabs set on edge, and a layer of sand had been placed on the floor. In addition to the urn the unburnt remains of a human skeleton were found in the grave.

The Kilmarie burial, occurring as it does near the summit of the cairn, must be a secondary one, and from the fact that it contained a beaker which we can assign to the early part of the Bronze Age, we are justified in believing that the primary burial over which the cairn has been raised is contained in a chamber of a form that we consider belongs to the late Neolithic Period. The position of the cist, so near the top of the mound, is unusual, as also is the very thin covering of stones which had been placed over it. Still a parallel can be cited and in another Skye cairn. This monument, Carn Liath (grey cairn), situated near the shore of Loch Snizort, at Kensaleyre, in the parish of Snizort, is a fine round cairn of clean stones, measuring 80 feet in diameter, and 18 feet in height. About half-way up its north-east side is a short cist which has been exposed through the removal of its thin covering of stones. The cist was exposed about 1907 by some crofters looking for a large stone. On extracting a slab which turned out to be the cover of the cist, human bones were noticed in the grave, and no further damage was done to the structure. Presumably the cairn is also of the chambered type, although no traces of an entrance passage were to be seen when I visited the site.

<sup>1</sup> It is not generally known, however, that small fragments of many beakers have been found on the Glenluce Sands, and of several on the island of Coll.

Another important feature of this discovery at Kilmarie is the association of a beaker with cremated remains in the same grave. Although such an occurrence is rare in Scotland and also in England, a few Scottish examples can be noted. A beaker is recorded as having been found in a stone cist near Buckie, in Banffshire, with a quantity of charred and burnt bones,<sup>1</sup> and there is a less satisfactory account of another being found with burnt bones near Aberdeen.<sup>2</sup> Four years ago I described to the Society a short cist found in a cairn at Idvies, Angus, which contained an urn and cremated human bones. Although the urn was decorated with unusual designs, and was thicker in the wall than the ordinary beaker, it resembled this class of vessel more than any other variety of Bronze Age pottery.<sup>3</sup> Another beaker was found near the summit of a cairn, the Fairy Knowe, Pendreich, Bridge of Allan, in which the primary burial consisted of a short cist containing cremated bones.<sup>4</sup> A somewhat similar discovery was made in a very large cairn at Collessie, Fife, where a short cist containing a beaker with unburnt human remains was found near the centre of the cairn, on the natural surface of the ground. In the subsoil under the base of the cairn two pits were discovered, one containing another beaker, and the second cremated human remains with the blade of a bronze dagger and the fillet of gold which had decorated the haft.<sup>5</sup>

We know from the hundreds of graves containing beakers which have been discovered in Great Britain, that the people who made this class of pottery usually buried their dead without burning them. But, from the records mentioned above, it would seem that while the general custom was inhumation, sometimes cremation was practised.

<sup>1</sup> *Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist*, New Series, vol. i. p. 229.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. xxxviii. pp. 342 and 364.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. lviii. p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. vii. p. 519.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson, *Scotland in Pagan Times—the Bronze and Stone Ages*, p. 7.