

#### 4. BRONZE AGE BURIAL SITES AT ASGOG BAY, ARDLAMONT, ARGYLL.

In 1927 a food-vessel (Reg. No. 7-27) was deposited on loan in the Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow, by the proprietors of the Ardlamont Estate, through Mr James Houston, F.R.I.B.A., F.S.A.Scot., the estate architect. Through the kindness of the proprietors it is now possible to supply details of the discovery of the food-vessel, and of other presumably Bronze Age sites in the vicinity.

The food-vessel (fig. 3) was found in a cairn in Asgog Bay, Ardlamont, Argyll. The cairn (A on fig. 2) stands on the floor of the narrow valley opening on to Asgog Bay, on the material of the 25-foot raised beach, only some 250 yards from the present high-water mark (6-inch O.S. map, Argyllshire, Sheet CXCII, S.E., Nat. Grid Ref. 71/944678). Now largely grass-grown, the cairn appears to be almost circular, the diameter at ground-level varying from 56 to 62 feet; from the base the sides slope evenly inwards to a height of approximately 7 feet, at which point the diameter is about 25 feet. The top of the cairn is saucer-shaped, the centre being now only some 5 feet above ground-level. It is quite possible that the cairn has been robbed to some extent to provide bottoming for a nearby track leading to the seashore.

I am indebted to Mr John W. Turnbull, F.S.A.Scot., the estate factor, for details of the excavation of the cairn, which took place in 1927. The body of the cairn was found to be composed of stones all small enough for a man to carry readily, but too large to be removed by spade or shovel. At ground-level a large stone slab, some 5 feet by 3 feet 6 inches in size, was encountered in the centre of the cairn. The slab was raised with considerable difficulty, disclosing a small cist

consisting of four stone slabs, its longer axis lying north and south. Near the south end of the cist stood the food-vessel; no other remains were observed in the cist, which, however, was considered too small to hold an inhumed burial. Outside the cist, but practically lying against the outside edge stones, at ground-level, were found teeth and portions of bones of at least two pigs.<sup>1</sup> After the removal of the food-vessel the cover slab was replaced and the cairn restored as far as possible to its original shape.

The food-vessel is of Childe's Type C 3, and is presumably to be equated with

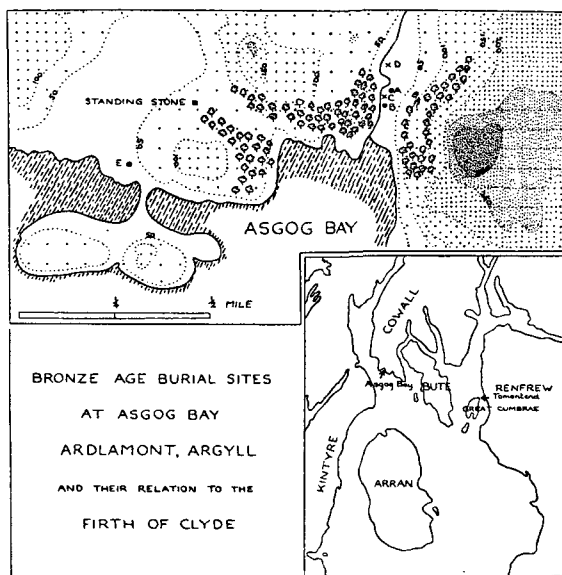


Fig. 2.

either No. 142 or No. 143 in the list of food-vessels given in Childe's *Scotland Before the Scots*.

Somewhat clumsily made, the vessel is of buff-coloured clay, the colour tending to be lighter at the middle and darker towards rim and base. It stands  $4\frac{7}{8}$  inches high; the external diameter of the slightly everted and internally bevelled rim is  $6\frac{1}{8}$  inches. Below the rim three concentric mouldings, with their appropriate intervening hollows, occupy the sides of the vessel; below the third moulding the body tapers in a gentle concave curve to a flat base  $3\frac{3}{8}$  inches in diameter. The maximum diameter, at the centre moulding, is  $6\frac{7}{8}$  inches.

Decoration consists of "false-relief," carried out with a triangular stamp or stamps, and of "whipped-cord" impressions. Execution is careless throughout, though not without originality. Cord impressions set obliquely decorate the internal bevel of the rim. On the exterior the first hollow, below the lip, contains a double row of cord impressions, succeeded by a row of stamps, points upwards. The first moulding has false-relief rendered by a double row of stamps, points inwards. The second hollow has two rows of cord impressions, succeeded by a doubly impressed row of stamps, points upwards. The central moulding has

<sup>1</sup> For a report on the animal remains see Appendix.

false-relief, like the first. The third hollow has a single row of cord impressions, below which is a row of double swags of cord impressions; short lengths of cord

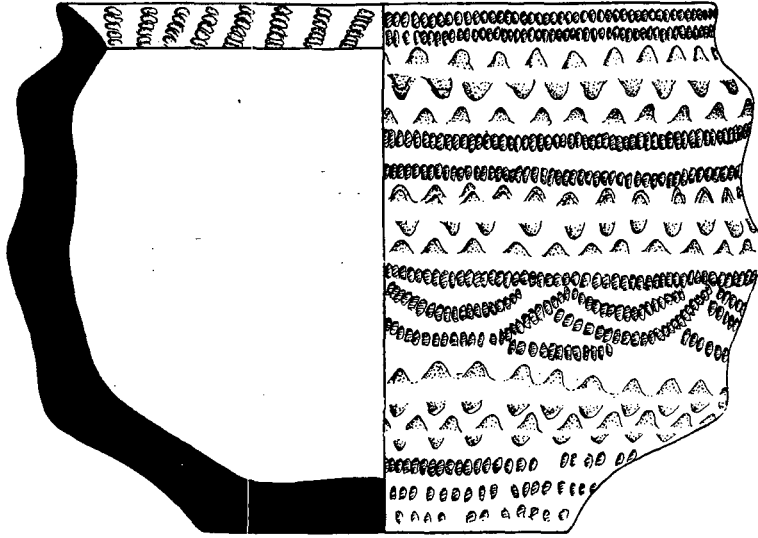


Fig. 3. Food-vessel from Asgog Bay ( $4\frac{7}{8}$  inches high).

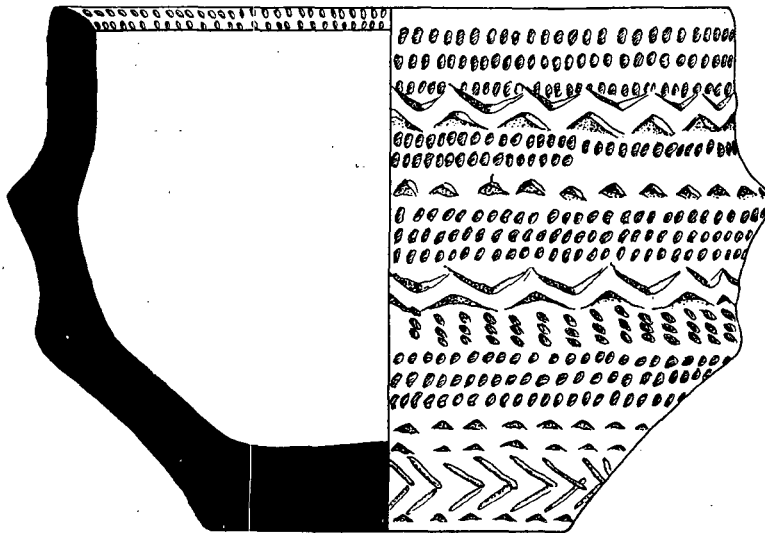


Fig. 4. Food-vessel from Tomontend, Great Cumbrae (same scale).

impression fill the spaces between the swag loops. Below this cord decoration is the usual row of stamps, points upwards. The final moulding has false-relief, like the first two. The concave curve between this moulding and the base is

occupied by a row of stamps, points downwards, succeeded by three rows of cord impressions, though the execution of these latter rows is so careless that at times they degenerate into mere scattered clumps of impressions. The base is undecorated.

It is interesting to compare this vessel with one (fig. 4) discovered in Cairn No. 2 at Tomontend, Great Cumbrae, and now in Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum (Reg. No. 78-177a). The Tomontend vessel was found in a stone-lined cist containing cremated bones, under a cairn made up of water-worn stones to a height of 12 feet and a circumference of 60 feet, only 20 yards away from the seashore.<sup>1</sup>

Both vessels make use of false-relief ornament, but in the Ardlamont vessel this ornament is closely associated with the mouldings. In the Tomontend vessel the two most prominent bands of false-relief ornament occur one above each moulding, though the top moulding has a series of triangular stamp markings reminiscent of false-relief. To a wood-carving technique, such as we may imagine was employed in decorating the wooden bowls from which food-vessels seem derived, false-relief is especially appropriate, yet it can with ease be applied only to a raised surface, such as a moulding; it would not normally be used on a concave surface, where it appears on the Tomontend vessel. If this line of reasoning be accepted, it follows that the Ardlamont vessel is nearer to the wooden prototype, and so presumably earlier, than the Tomontend vessel. Furthermore, it suggests the possibility that Type C food-vessels with false-relief ornament may be placed in a series showing progressive degeneration, in which series, for instance, the food-vessel from Circle 2 on Mauchrie Moor, Arran,<sup>2</sup> would appear late. It is possible, of course, that a punch could be used on the concave surface of a wooden bowl just as a stamp on a clay vessel, yet the primary and appropriate connection of false-relief ornament with raised mouldings seems difficult to deny.

The remains of a second cairn (B on fig. 2) are to be seen 72 yards away from Cairn A on a bearing of 214° from true north. Cairn B also stands on the floor of the valley, on the material of the 25-foot raised beach, about 180 yards from the present high-water mark; its western edge lies within about 10 feet of the bank of the stream which runs through the valley into Asgog Bay. This cairn is almost circular, the diameter at ground-level varying from 73 feet to 78 feet; its height is now only about 6 feet, and its form somewhat irregular, as it has obviously been extensively robbed to provide bottoming for the nearby track leading to the seashore, a great scoop some 4 feet deep and 26 feet wide having been made for a distance of 35 feet into the body of the cairn in its eastern side.

Cairn B, like A, seems to be composed of stones of a size which a man could readily carry, though there are indications of a revetment of larger stones on the western side which have successfully prevented any tendency for that part of the cairn to subside into the stream. Though the cairn has never been properly investigated, and Mr Turnbull does not know of any relics from it, there appears every likelihood that it is contemporary with Cairn A.

Mr Turnbull reports two burial cists without cairns in the same field as Cairn A, but I was unable to examine them on my visit in June 1951, as the field was under crop. The first cist (C on fig. 2), which contained cremated bones, was 56 yards away from Cairn A, on a bearing of 241° from true north. The second cist (D on

<sup>1</sup> *Transactions of the Glasgow Archaeological Society*, vol. ii. pp. 117-118. This vessel is presumably to be equated with No. 165 (B 1a) or No. 166 (A) of Childe's list in *Scotland Before the Scots*, but appears to be Type C2.

<sup>2</sup> *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. iv. p. 506.

fig. 2), probably damaged and with a large coverstone, lay 115 yards away from Cairn A, on a bearing of  $354^\circ$  from true north.

Mention may here be made of a third cairn (E on fig. 2) to be found occupying, in the adjoining valley to the westward, a position near the shore very similar to that of Cairns A and B. The cairn, which is marked on the 6-inch O.S. map, Argyllshire, Sheet CXCII, N.E. (Nat. Grid Ref. 71/923675), is circular, with a diameter of about 70 feet. It is similar in construction to Cairns A and B, but has been much disturbed in the centre; the result, as I am informed by Mr Turnbull, of the misguided efforts of a yachting party not a great many years ago.

The whole complex of sites illustrates the continuation into the Early and Middle Bronze Age, if not later, of that exploitation of raised-beach platforms and alluvial gravels, adjacent to convenient landing-places, pointed out by Childe in 1934<sup>1</sup> as typical of Neolithic settlement in the west of Scotland. It is significant, however, that whereas Neolithic cairns are usually sited well away from the fertile strips, these Bronze Age cairns occupy some of the best ground, no doubt to the annoyance of the present-day farmer! The change may have an economic as well as a religious purport.

An ancient track leading inland from the vicinity of Cairn C may be marked by a standing-stone (fig. 2). Yet the connection of the cairns with and by means of the sea is plain, and it would seem that we have in them an offshoot of that food-vessel culture common to both Northern Ireland and South-western Scotland in the Early and Middle Bronze Age.

This note is published with the permission of the proprietors of the Ardlamont Estate, and I should like to express my thanks to them for their courtesy. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Mr Turnbull, who gave me every possible help and provided the plan on which fig. 1 is based: without his aid and the information which he so generously supplied this note could not have been written. To my wife I am indebted for the drawings of the food-vessels and for the plan. Miss Margery I. Platt, M.Sc., of the Royal Scottish Museum, has kindly contributed the report on the animal remains which is embodied in the Appendix.

J. G. SCOTT.

#### APPENDIX.

##### *Report on the Animal Remains.*

By MARGERY I. PLATT, M.Sc., Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh.

At least two sizes of pig are represented, both immature. One was fairly big, almost full grown, and the other a mere suckling. In addition there is a terminal claw of very slender dimensions, suggesting that of a fox rather than of a dog.

*Pig.*—Molar tooth.

*Young Pig.*—Milk molar tooth; milk tooth and part of maxilla; part of maxilla, with alveoli; parts of skull; fragments of milk teeth and broken bone—all suggesting that they are from the same pig's skull.

*Fox.*—Terminal claw.

<sup>1</sup> V. G. Childe, "Neolithic Settlement in the West of Scotland," in *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, vol. 1, pp. 18-25.