

## 8. TWO CISTS AT GOLSPIE, SUTHERLAND.

During the removal of sand from a quarry approximately 100 yds. due W. (mag.) from Golspie school in September 1956, a cist of unusual construction was exposed containing a contracted skeleton. After examination by Professor R. D. Lockhart, quarrying was restarted only to halt with the discovery of a second cist approximately 6 ft. from the first. This cist was somewhat more orthodox in form, and the contents were removed by Dr I. D. Pennie of Golspie. Subsequently the writer visited the site and examined the surrounding area for further burials without success. Quarrying has continued since then but nothing more has been discovered.

The two cists were located in a bed of shingle averaging 6 ft. in thickness, the upper surfaces of the cover slabs being approximately 1 ft. below the modern surface. This bed forms the top of a steep-sided platform of sand which runs parallel to Golspie main street, and between the latter and the railway line. The burials were at the east end of the ridge (Nat. Grid ref. NH/833903). The ridge is planted from end to end with trees and rises from the flat plateau forming the 15-ft. raised beach upon which most of Golspie stands. It was on this lower level, at a spot 500 ft. almost due S. of the new finds, that a small empty cist covered by a symbol stone was found in 1942 (Nat. Grid ref. NH/833901). This find was subsequently described to the Society by Mr J. M. Davidson.<sup>4</sup>

The first of the new cists to come to light was unusual in that it was built of five or six courses of small flat stones and covered with a single large slab. Roughly pear-shaped, it measured  $4 \times 2\frac{1}{2}$  ft. and contained a contracted skeleton. No artifacts were found in this cist, and after the bones had been drawn *in situ* by Mr Simpson they were removed by Professor Lockhart and the cist dismantled to allow sand quarrying to continue. Shortly afterwards the cover slabs of the second cist were located by a quarry worker with a steel probe. It was therefore opened from the top and the contents were removed by Dr Pennie. This cist was constructed in a more usual manner by the use of flat slabs set on edge, but as these were little more than a foot high they were supplemented with two courses of small flat stones interposed between the upper edges of the upright slabs and the cover slabs. Two slabs were used to cover the cist which, like the first, measured  $4 \times 2\frac{1}{2}$  ft. The contents of this cist comprised, in addition to an unburnt contracted skeleton, a deposit, in one corner, of charcoal mixed with burnt bone, some of which at least is of animal origin, and, in the centre of the cist, a pumice pendant with some fragments of clay moulds. Two pieces of unburnt

<sup>1</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, xvii, 452, N.M.A. EQ 67.

<sup>2</sup> *Arch. Camb.*, 1923, 279 ff.; also R. E. M. Wheeler, *Prehistoric and Roman Wales*, 136.

<sup>3</sup> W. F. Grimes, *Nat. Mus. Wales Guide*, 1939, fig. 55, 5.

<sup>4</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LXXVII (1942-3), 26.

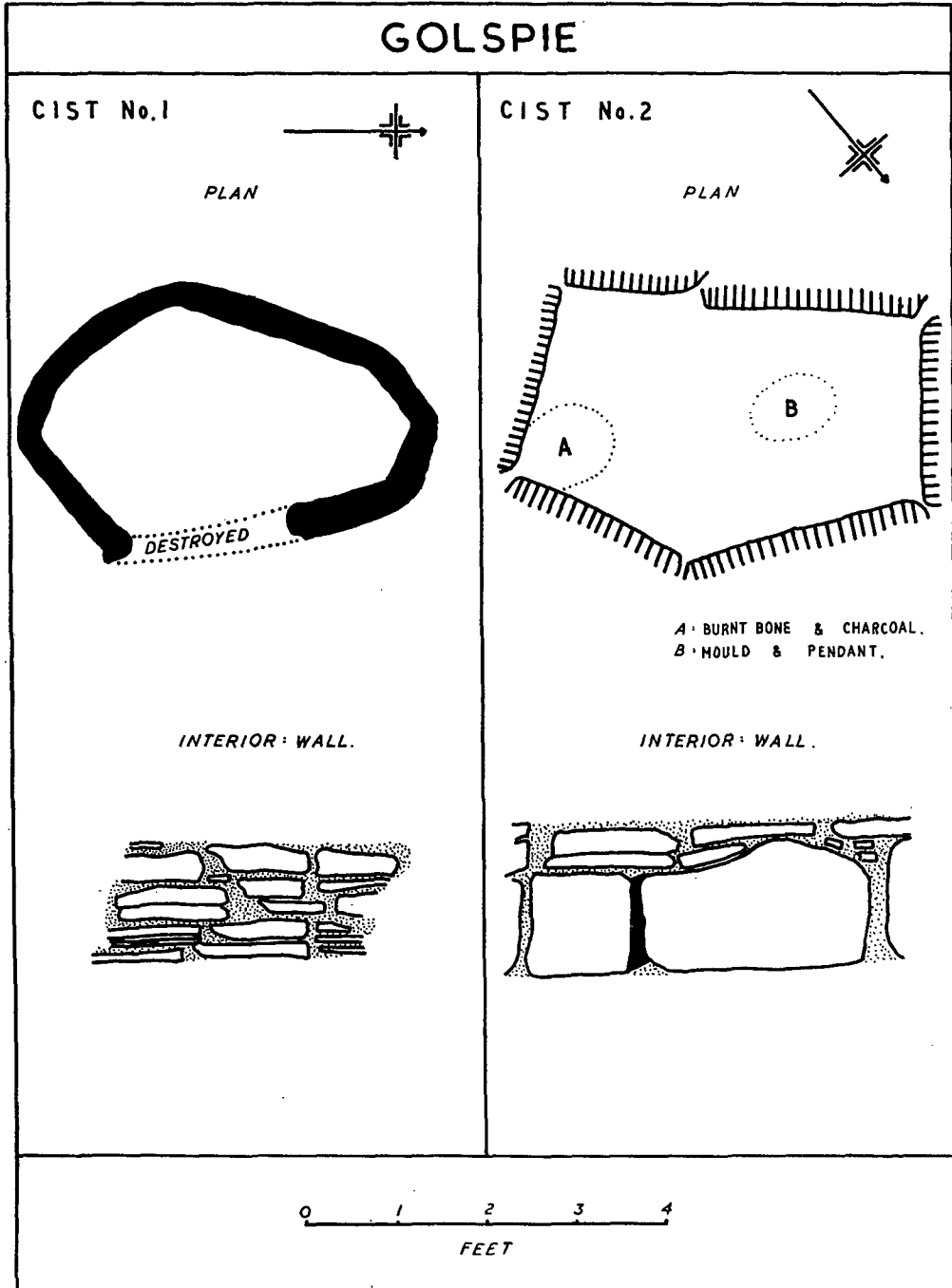


Fig. 10.

animal bone, one showing two distinct cuts, were also found. No markings were observed on any of the constructional slabs.

The date of the two burials is not as clearly defined as the distinctive nature of the objects found in the second cist might lead one to expect. A pendant accompanying a contracted burial in a short cist would be consistent with an Early Bronze Age dating, but the presence of the mould for an object of somewhat advanced design coupled with the unorthodox mode of construction of the cists themselves suggests a much later period.

Mr R. B. K. Stevenson has drawn my attention to a bronze object found at Dunadd and termed a "coupling" by J. H. Craw.<sup>1</sup> This has obvious points of similarity to the impression of the Golspie mould. Less elaborate, doubly perforated plates of similar size and made of bone are known from Bronze Age urn

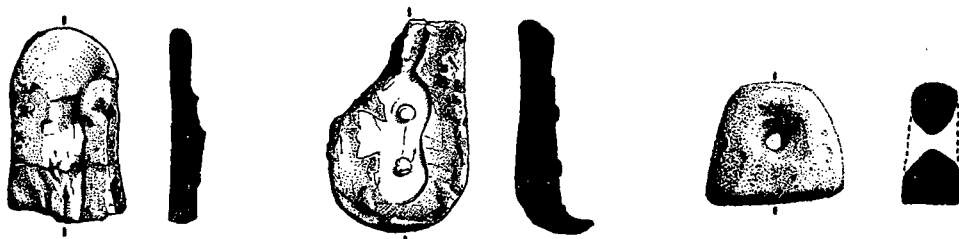


Fig. 11. Clay moulds.

burials in Argyll and Perthshire, and a bronze one accompanied the Glentrool hoard associated with a flanged axe.<sup>2</sup>

Pendants of stone are found in Bronze Age contexts, and we may instance the sandstone pendant found with the earliest burial at the Late Bronze Age cemetery at Loanhead of Daviot, Aberdeenshire.<sup>3</sup> A second came from an adjacent cairn associated with Iron Age pottery, and some have been found in brochs, *e.g.* Dun Beag.<sup>4</sup> The only previously reported specimen made of pumice was found in the chambered cairn of Taiverso Tuack, Rousay, in the entrance passage to the upper chamber, and associated with thirty-five stone disc beads.<sup>5</sup> The circumstances here were such, however, as not to exclude the possibility of introduction via a secondary interment.

The continuation into the Scottish Iron Age of the practice of contracted burial in short cists is of course known, examples having been found at Moredun, Midlothian,<sup>6</sup> and Dolphinton, Lanarkshire.<sup>7</sup> While these cists are built of single flat slabs in typical Early Bronze Age style, a contemporary long cist at Burnmouth, Berwickshire, was constructed of stones laid in courses.<sup>8</sup> In addition to an unburnt articulated skeleton, this grave contained animal bones, forming an additional link with Golspie.

<sup>1</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LXIV (1929-30), 116.

<sup>2</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LVII (1922-3), 156.

<sup>3</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LXX (1935-6), 300.

<sup>4</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LV (1920-1), 124.

<sup>5</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LXXIII (1938-9), Pl. LXVI.

<sup>6</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, XXXVIII (1903-4), 427.

<sup>7</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LV (1920-1), 45.

<sup>8</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LVIII (1923-4), 143.

The second cist was apparently undisturbed when found, and the possibility of either moulds or pendant having been introduced at a later period than the original burial seems out of the question. The acceptance of their contemporaneity becomes easier in the light of the facts mentioned above and it seems more reasonable to postulate a late date than an early one. The pendant could certainly be as late as, if not later than, the brooch example quoted, and the advanced design of the mould does not encourage a pre-brooch dating. Iron Age or even later then must be the tentative estimate of date for the two Golspie cists on the basis of the evidence at present available.

In conclusion, thanks must be accorded to Mr Thomas Adam, Estates Office, Golspie, and Mr James Sutherland, Contractor, Golspie, for ensuring that these finds were brought to the notice of competent authorities and for delaying quarrying until the necessary examination had been made. Thanks are also due to Mr Michael Simpson and to Dr I. D. Pennie for his active interest in the operations.

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*Skeletal Remains—1.*

Measurements in mm.

<i>Skull :</i>	Minimum frontal breadth . . . . .	95
	Maximum frontal breadth . . . . .	118
	Basibregmatic breadth . . . . .	135
	Auricular height . . . . .	120
	Orbital height (R) . . . . .	31
	Orbital height (L) . . . . .	31
	Orbital breadth (R) . . . . .	39
	Orbital breadth (L) . . . . .	39
	Basialveolar length . . . . .	101 (approx.)
	Basinasal length . . . . .	102
	Nasialveolar height . . . . .	65
	Nasimental height . . . . .	104
	Bizygomatic breadth . . . . .	128 (approx.)
	Alveolar length . . . . .	56
	Alveolar breadth . . . . .	61
	Nasal height . . . . .	49
Nasal breadth . . . . .	25	
<i>Indices :</i>	Total facial . . . . .	81·25
	Upper facial . . . . .	50·78
	Orbital (R & L) . . . . .	79·48
	Nasal . . . . .	51·02
	Alveolar . . . . .	108·9
	Gnathic . . . . .	99·01
<i>Femur (L) :</i>	Upper $\frac{1}{3}$ —Anteroposterior diameter . . . . .	22·5
	Transverse diameter . . . . .	36·0
	Platymeric index . . . . .	62·49

*Skeletal Remains—2.*

## Measurements in mm.

<i>Skull:</i>	Minimum frontal breadth . . . . .	94
	Maximum frontal breadth . . . . .	118
	Maximum bizygomatic breadth . . . . .	127 (approx.)
	Orbital height (R) . . . . .	32
	Orbital height (L) . . . . .	31.5
	Orbital length (R) . . . . .	37
	Orbital length (L) . . . . .	37
	Nasal height . . . . .	49
Nasal breadth . . . . .	23.5	
<i>Indices:</i>	Orbital . . . . .	85.13
	Nasal . . . . .	47.95
<i>Femur (R):</i>	Angle of neck—116°	
	Upper $\frac{1}{3}$ —Anteroposterior diameter . . . . .	21.5
	Transverse diameter . . . . .	33
	Platymeric index . . . . .	65.15

The skeleton appears to be that of a man between forty-five and fifty years of age.

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