

Shorter Notes

A Long Cist at Logan Cottage, Peeblesshire

by A. MacLaren

In March 1968 a long cist containing an unaccompanied inhumation was discovered immediately SE. of the bridge that carries the Edinburgh–Moffat road (A701) over a small unnamed tributary of the River Tweed at Logan Cottage (NT 108288), 5 km N. of Tweedsmuir. The cist lies in a small plantation of pine trees on a gravel terrace overlooking the River Tweed from a height of 230 m O.D., and some 15 m above it; the centre of the cist is situated 5.64 m SE. of milestone 33, which stands at the S. end of the E. parapet of the bridge. The NE. end of the cist became exposed in the edge of a ragged hole torn out by the roots of one of the trees when it was blown down in a gale the previous January. The initial discovery was made by Mr A. Lorimer, Mossfennan, who owns the land on which the cist is situated, and the information was passed by Mr J. H. Hendrie to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. Mr Lorimer readily granted permission for the cist to be examined, and an excavation was carried out by Dr J. N. G. Ritchie and the writer shortly afterwards.

The cist had been inserted into a shallow pit dug into the natural sand and gravel so that the cover-stones lay about 0.5 m below the present surface of the ground (Pl. 32a). With its long axis aligned on a magnetic bearing of 60°, the cist was formed of thin slabs of Silurian Slates,¹ measuring between 0.38 m and 0.76 m in thickness, two along each of the long sides, a single slab at each end, and four overlapping cover-slabs. The slabs had been carefully laid in position to form a wedge-shaped coffin, measuring internally about 1.5 m in length, the width decreasing uniformly from 0.51 m at the head (SW.) to 0.33 m at the foot (NE.), and the depth similarly from 0.31 m to 0.23 m. The NE. end-slab had been dislodged by the fall of the tree, and all except one of the cover-slabs had been badly smashed by roots and partially had collapsed into the interior. Originally, however, the cover-slabs had projected beyond the sides and NE. end-slab, but had abutted against the SW. end-slab.

The skeleton lay extended in a supine position, head to the SW., on the unpaved sand and gravel floor of the cist (Pl. 32b). Decomposition and the collapse of the cover-slabs had reduced the bones to a very friable condition, and nothing of the skeleton remained below the knees. The writer is much indebted to Mr P. R. Ritchie, B.Sc., F.S.A. SCOT., for the following report on the skeletal remains:

There are the remains of an incomplete skull. The palate is separate and the greater part of the right side is missing. All the sutures are open. The left side of the mandible is preserved. In the maxilla and mandible the second molar teeth have erupted, but not the third molars. Parts of the atlas, axis and various other vertebrae and ribs are present. The first two sacral vertebrae have not united. The medial

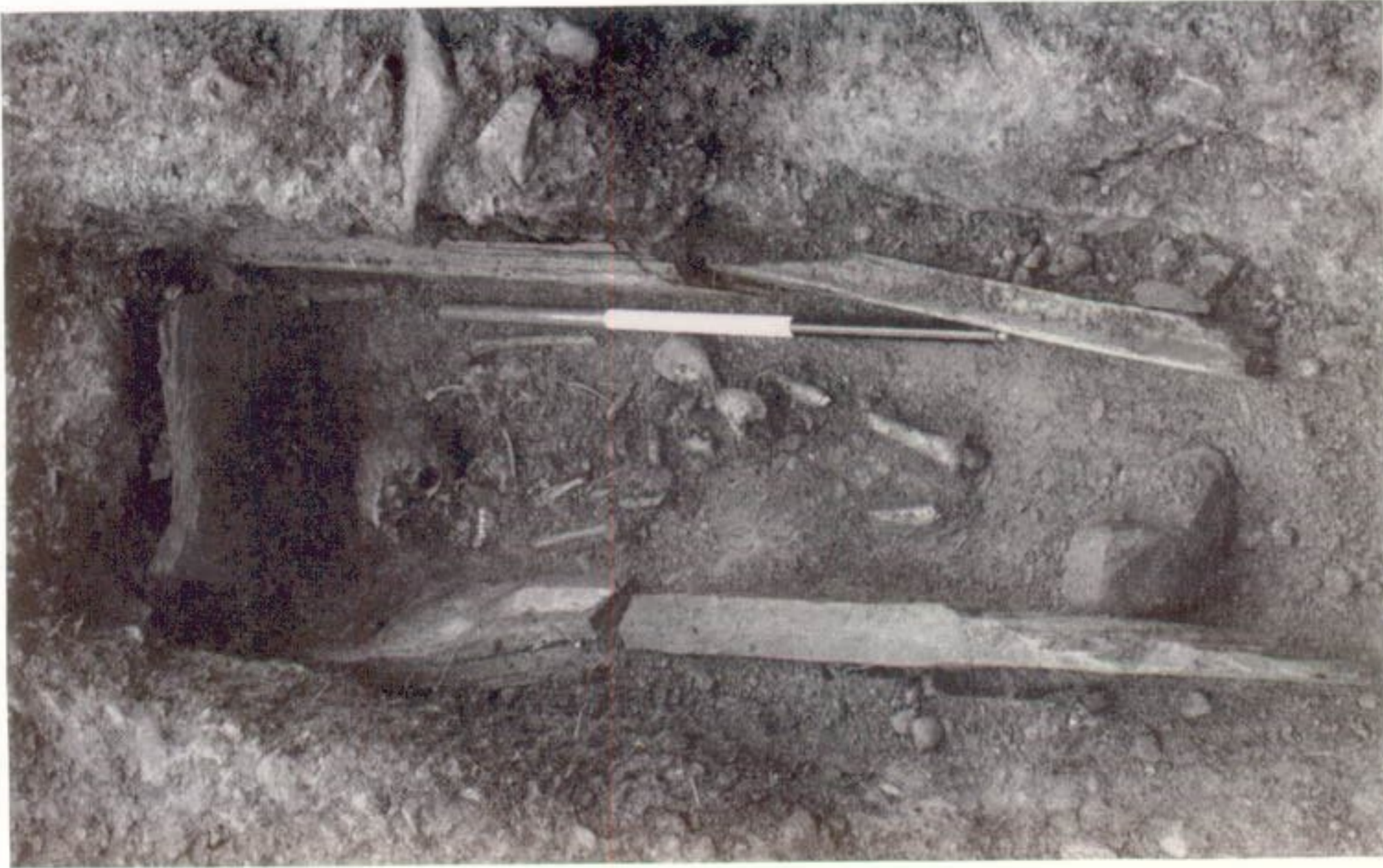
¹ I am much indebted to Mr G. H. Collins, B.Sc.,
Institute of Geological Sciences, for identifying the
stone.

part of the left clavicle survives: the epiphysis has not united and is missing. Similarly there has been no fusion and the epiphyses are missing of the distal end of the left ulna, the olecranon process of the right ulna and the coracoid process of the left scapula. Only the distal half of the left humerus remains with epiphyses not yet united. In the case of the left femur the un-united epiphyses survive. Fusion of the pelvic bones at the acetabulum has not taken place. These features of incomplete growth coupled with the eruption of the second molars suggest this is a child of about 11-13 years.

Sex is difficult to decide since the pelvis is so fragmentary. The left ilium is complete (with the epiphysis of the crest of the ilium missing) and the wide sciatic notch suggests a female. The part of the left pubic bone which survives does not show definite female characteristics.

On balance I suggest that the remains are those of a girl aged about 12 years.

This is the third long cist discovered in this locality within the past 30 years, the two previous examples having been found in 1939 and 1958 respectively at Polmood,¹ a little over 1.5 km to the S. Its construction, orientation, burial rite and the absence of grave goods are typical of the large number of similar long cist burials, whose distribution in Scotland is predominantly south-eastern, and which are exemplified by the cemetery at Parkburn, Midlothian,² for which a date between the sixth and eighth centuries A.D. seems most reasonable.



b Cist, showing skeleton

Scale in feet



a Cist, with cover slabs



Burial and grave-goods in position