

## A food vessel urn from Mawmill, Kinross

by Trevor Cowie

Through the good offices of the Rev J N Purves, Manse of Cleish, fragments of a cinerary urn discovered during gravel digging at Mawmill, Cleish, Kinross-shire (approximate NGR NT 082990), were presented to the National Museum in 1969 (NMAS cat no. EA 246). Unfortunately, no other details of the context of the vessel are available. Now considerably restored, the urn has a buff to reddish-brown exterior and a brown to grey-black internal surface (fig 4). The ware is quite hard and well-fired with few visible grits. The urn has an overall squat, slack profile though two slight, raised mouldings serve to define a pair of broad shallow 'grooves', or cavetto zones, above the shoulder. The rim, though slightly everted, is not very pronounced and

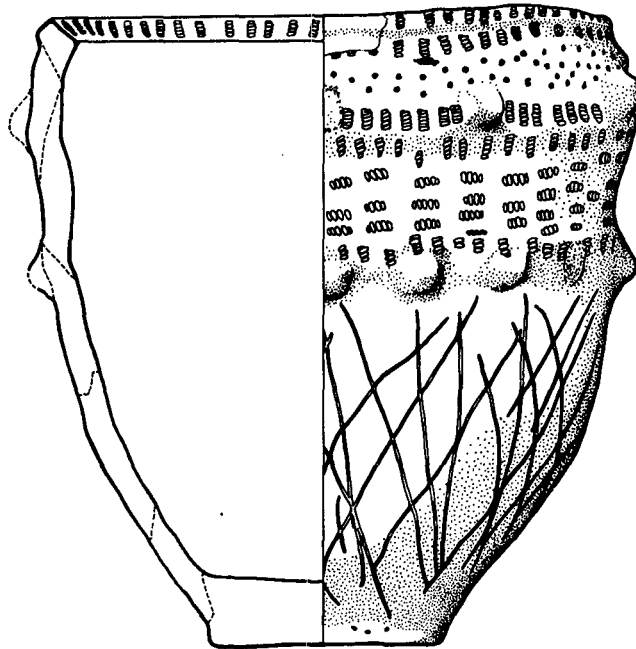


FIG 4 Food vessel urn from Mawmill, Kinross (1:4)

was probably formed by pressing down the clay to create a small concave internal bevel. As restored, the vessel has a height of *c* 34 cm and approximate rim and base diameters of 39 and 10.5 cm respectively. The urn is profusely decorated. On both the internal and external bevels of the rim and on the neck there are vertical whipped cord maggots which also fill the intervening spaces between applied knobs set at intervals around the lower part of the upper groove. Above the knobs the decoration consists of one to four rows of small but deep circular depressions. The lower groove is filled with one row of vertical maggots and three or four rows of horizontal maggots more lightly executed than those above, while a further series of knobs and maggots is arranged just below the weak shoulder. A coarse chevron or lattice pattern of tooled grooves extends over the body to just above a presumptive substantial base, above which there is a row of light triangular jabs.

Features of the form and decoration of the vessel appear to justify relating it to the cinerary urn classes usually described as encrusted urns and enlarged food vessels. Both types may now be conveniently grouped under the term food vessel urns since there is a growing realisation that encrusted urns do not form a distinct type while the new term emphasises the close relationships of these urns to food vessels. With the latter they correspond in most features apart from their relatively greater size, and these shared elements suggest that both groups emerged from similar domestic assemblages (ApSimon 1969, 66, fn 8; 1972, 141; Cowie 1975, *passim*). Particular features which relate the Mawmill vessel to food vessel urns are its rim form, the distinctive cavetto zones above the shoulder and the presence of decorative devices in the form of applied knobs around the upper part of the urn. Although the squat baggy profile is unusual, these formal features find close comparisons only in such urns. In N England and Scotland, the affinities of the majority of food vessel urns clearly lie with the Yorkshire vase series of food vessels. The urns are characterised by a basically bipartite form with a high well-marked shoulder dividing the pot into two unequal parts, and commonly the upper part is divided into two (as with the Mawmill vessel) or more rarely three cavetto zones. The rims of food vessel urns are remarkably consistent and most show the characteristic moulded features and thickening of the Yorkshire food vessels. In some cases the internal bevel may be concave but this feature, present on the Mawmill urn, is common on food vessels.

The proportions of the Mawmill vessel do, however, set it apart from the majority of food vessel urns, at least in N England and Scotland, where analysis has shown that the larger vessels consistently tend towards a more 'vase-like' shape – that is, height increases significantly in relation to rim diameter and overall width (ApSimon 1972, 148; Cowie 1975, 35). This may perhaps be due to the requirements of the pot structure. However, the higher frequency of wide-brimmed urns in Ireland (see Kavanagh 1973 for examples), where strong bowl food vessel influences can be invoked, suggests that technological factors did not provide the only control. The Mawmill urn does not bear any obvious features suggestive of a link with bowl food vessels and at present it is impossible to do more than draw attention to its atypical shape and proportions.

Turning to the decoration, the most distinctive element consists of the applied knobs or bosses which would have caused the vessel to be considered an encrusted urn in the typological schemes of Abercromby (1912) or Fox (1927, 115). Simple applied bosses set around the circumference of the vessel occur on food vessel urns from Lintlaw, Berwickshire (NMAS, EA 203; Craw 1931) and Callange, Fife (NMAS, EA 152; Abercromby 1912, fig 513), but another urn from Berwickshire, discovered on the site of a possible cairn at Hoprig (NMAS, EQ 565; Hardy 1889, 131), is unusual in having both applied bars and knobs set in well-defined upper and lower grooves respectively. A number of food vessel urns possess vertical bars or stops relating them to the classic Yorkshire vase series, and it may be that the knobs set at intervals around the circumference of the urns noted above also relate to the idea of stops. This use of applied bosses should be distinguished from their presence in schemes of relief decoration integrated with chevrons, as, for example, on the well-known vessels from Aberlemno, Angus (NMAS, EA 230; Childe 1943), or Uddingston, Lanark (NMAS, EA 109; Abercromby 1912, fig 528; Morrison 1968, no. 127). Whipped cord maggots, the other major decorative element, occur commonly on food vessel urns, often in a minor role (e.g. on internal rim bevels), but they form the principal decorative component on a number of vessels including urns from Westerlee, Fife (NMAS, EA 187; *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 59 (1924–5), 72–3), and Dunnichen, Angus (Dundee Mus, 1971–182; Coutts 1971, no. 110). Maggots and twisted cord techniques rarely occur together on the same vessel but incised techniques are present with both. By their nature, whipped cord maggots can

only be used to form a restricted range of patterns: herringbones and rows of vertical or horizontal impressions, as on the Mawmill urn, constitute the range in common use.

The other decorative features are also found on food vessel urns, though their representation varies considerably. The circular depressions are noteworthy since this form of decoration is particularly well represented north of the Forth. Similar circular impressions occur occasionally on vessels further south but they are never integrated with relief decoration in the highly distinctive manner of urns such as those from Aberlemno, previously noted, and Kilmagad Farm, the only other food vessel urn known from Kinross-shire (NMAS, EA 232; Stevenson 1946). Apart from their characteristic use on these urns, however, circular impressions occur on a number of vessels in less formal, more random arrangements on the internal bevel or the body of a vessel as in the case of the urn from Westerlee, Fife. Thus, although the use of circular impressions to fill the upper cavetto zone of the Mawmill urn is without precise parallel, it is clear that the potter was drawing upon a well-known element in the repertoire of available decorative techniques. Considerable variation in detail in the form of these circular depressions occurs largely because of differences in the implements used and the method in which they were employed.

Little need be said about the decoration of the body of the urn. The triangular jabs are unusual, though a few food vessel urns are decorated in the region of the base including, for example, the urn from Hoprig, Berwickshire. It must be remembered that the bases of food vessel and other urns are rarely complete and, if not wholly absent, are usually considerably restored. A high proportion of these have been lost because of the practice of depositing urns in an inverted position. Inevitably then, potentially interesting features – such as decoration – are almost certainly under-represented. The use of incised, grooved or channelled lines to decorate the bodies of these urns is uncommon but when the technique is employed the motifs vary from vertical or horizontal lines to simple chevron patterns. A probable food vessel urn from Otterburn, Roxburghshire, now lost (Hardy 1886, 177), appears to have had an incised lattice pattern on its body broadly comparable with the Mawmill vessel. Although decoration very frequently extends below the shoulder of food vessel urns, all-over decoration is not common and, while too much cannot be made of this feature, it would appear to reflect the survival of late neolithic traditions in which profuse decoration is a more marked feature.

Thus, although the Mawmill urn possesses several unusual features, notably its irregular form and proportions, individual elements of both form and decoration link it to the relatively coherent series of food vessel urns in N England and Scotland. While it is unfortunate that fuller details of its context are wanting, the vessel makes a valuable addition to the corpus of bronze-age cinerary urns.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am grateful to Dr D V Clarke for much useful advice and help in the preparation of this note.

#### REFERENCE

- Abercromby, J 1912 *A Study of the Bronze Age Pottery of Great Britain and Ireland and its Associated Grave Goods*. Vol II. Oxford.
- ApSimon, A M 1969 'The earlier Bronze Age in the north of Ireland', *Ulster J Archaeol*, 32 (1969), 28-72.
- ApSimon, A M 1972 'Biconical urns outside Wessex', in Lynch, F and Burgess, C (eds), *Prehistoric Man in Wales and the West*, Bath, 141-59.

- Childe, V G 1943 'An Encrusted Urn from Aberlemno, Angus', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 77 (1942-3), 189-91.
- Coutts, H 1971 *Tayside before History*. Dundee.
- Cowie, T G 1975 *Food Vessel Urns in Northern England and Scotland*. Unpublished MA dissertation presented to the Department of Archaeology, University of Edinburgh.
- Craw, J H 1931 'Two urns found at Lintlaw, Berwickshire', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 65 (1930-1), 359-63.
- Fox, C 1927 'An Encrusted Urn of the Bronze Age from Wales, with notes on the origin and distribution of the type', *Antiq J*, 7 (1927), 115-33.
- Hardy, J 1886 'On an cinerary urn at Otterburn, Morebattle, Roxburghshire', *Hist Berwickshire Natur Club*, 11 (1885-6), 177-9.
- Hardy, J 1889 'On British urns found at Hoprig near Cockburnspath, Berwickshire', *Hist Berwickshire Natur Club*, 12 (1887-9), 131-7.
- Kavanagh, R 1973 'The Encrusted Urn in Ireland', *Proc Roy Irish Acad*, 73C (1973), 507-617.
- Morrison, A 1968 'Cinerary urns and pigmy vessels in south-west Scotland', *Trans Dumfriesshire Galloway Natur Hist Antiq Soc*, 45 (1968), 80-140.
- Stevenson, R B K 1946 'An Encrusted Urn burial at Scotlandwell, Kinross-shire', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 80 (1945-6), 145-6.