

An enlarged food vessel urn burial and associated artefacts from Kiltry Knock, Alvah, Banff and Buchan

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INTRODUCTION

This burial was revealed during ploughing on 27 January 1977 by Mr Samuel Smart, Burngrains, Alvah. We are grateful to him and to Police Constable Taylor of Aberchirder Police Station who visited the site, removed the urn and pendant and showed the site to the Grampian Regional Archaeologist (I A G S) the following day.

THE SITE

The urn had stood inverted in a small hole on the crest of a slight rise at *c* 135 m OD on the SW flanks of Kiltry Knock (NGR NJ 66535652) overlooking the Rosy Burn. Kiltry Knock, which gives its name to the farm three fields to the W of the burial, is one of several small hills rising to between 150 m and 200 m which lie within 3 km of the left bank of the River Deveron (fig 1). The site is in the parish of Alvah, *c* 6 km NE of Aberchirder and *c* 7.5 km SSW of Banff in the district of Banff and Buchan.

As the removal of the urn had involved digging an annular trench around the deposit, no trace of the containing pit could be found; there was no indication in the surrounding ploughsoil of any packing stones, cist-like features, cairn material or additional burials. The frozen nature of the surrounding earth prevented detailed examination of the surroundings of the burial. The remaining pile of cremated bone and modern soil, all of which was removed for sieving, lay on a small pavement of three rough flattish stones *c* 0.45 m square. The presence of a few fragments of cremated bone beneath some smaller flat stones lying on this pavement suggested that the urn, after being inverted on to the pavement, had been stabilised by these chocking stones. This raises the possibility that the bones had been placed on the pavement and the urn inverted over them rather than that the urn had been inserted with the bones already sealed inside; that the urn was inverted is demonstrated by the destruction of its base. The pavement was lifted and found to lie directly on the top of the natural subsoil of light gravelly till; there was no cremated bone or other feature beneath the pavement. Some indication of the position of the grave goods in the urn can be gauged from the fact that the pendant was picked off the top of the pile of cremated bone (i.e. originally at the bottom of the pot), while the unburnt flint knife was found just above the pavement (i.e. at the top of the pot).

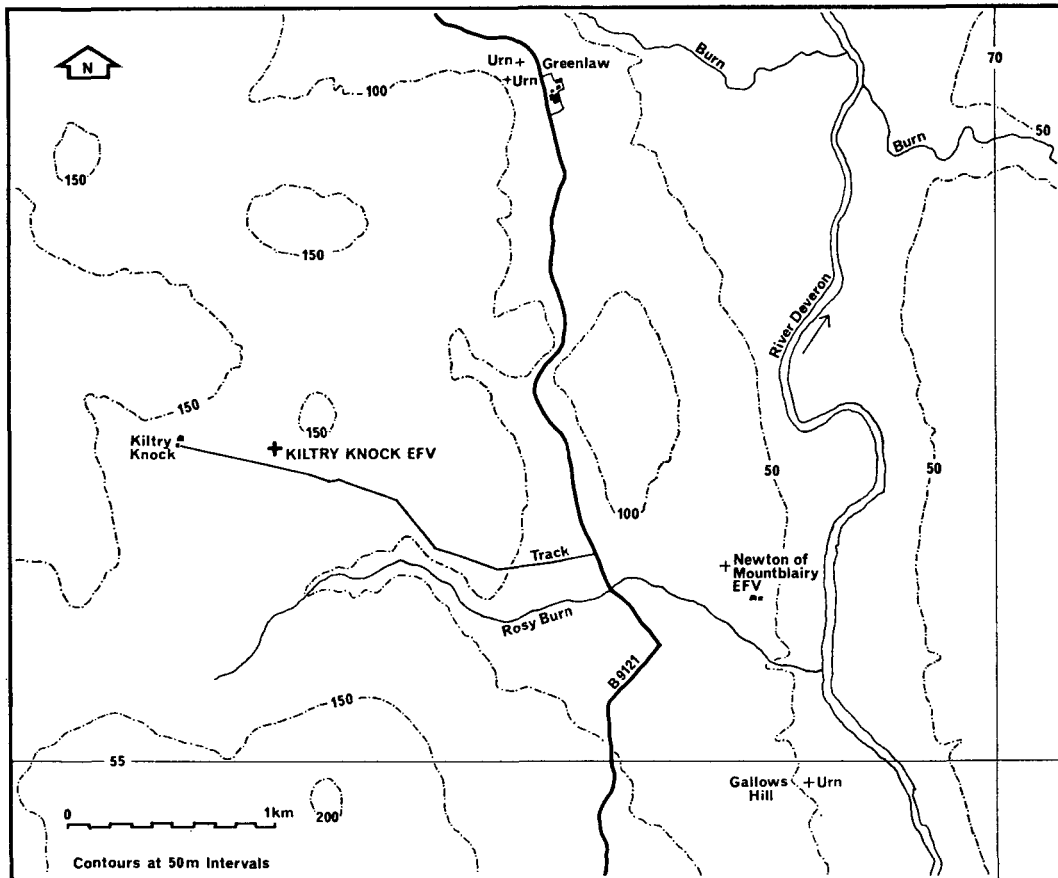


FIG 1 Kiltry Knock: location map (based on OS map; Crown copyright reserved)

CREMATION DEPOSIT

The pile of mixed cremated bone and ploughsoil was dried and washed through basket sieves of 3 mm and 1 mm mesh, thereby recovering the other small finds. Mr Denston (Appendix 1) has identified the remains of three individuals: an adult female, a 6- to 9-year-old child and an infant. This multiple cremation deposit supplements the recently published list of such deposits (Petersen *et al* 1974, 58–60). It should be noted that the sieving process recovered no charcoal, which suggests that the cremated bone fragments had been picked carefully from the remains of the pyre rather than swept up together with the pyre debris.

FINDS

Food vessel urn (fig 2) The urn is in a friable ware with large grits and a mid-brown exterior and interior. As restored the rim diameter of the vessel is *c* 350 mm; the rim is bevelled internally but has only a simple rounded lip. Two raised mouldings serve to define a pair of broad shallow grooves or cavetto zones above the shoulder. Characteristically the lower part of the urn would taper from the shoulder to the now destroyed base: an original height for the vessel of *c* 350–400 mm can be inferred. The decoration of the urn is straightforward but distinctive: on both the

internal bevel and on the rounded external lip of the rim are parallel rows of twisted cord impressions. Columns of horizontal whipped cord maggot impressions are arranged around the remainder of the extant portion of the urn; although the vertical spacing of the impressions is haphazard in places, the overall result has been the formation of a series of reserved areas around the circumference of the urn.

The urn is clearly related to the cinerary urn classes usually described as encrusted urns and enlarged food vessels. As noted recently, these types may be most conveniently grouped under the term food vessel urns (Cowie 1975, 197). The formal features of the Kiltry Knock urn, the rim form, the distinctive cavetto zones above the shoulder, the basically bipartite profile, all find

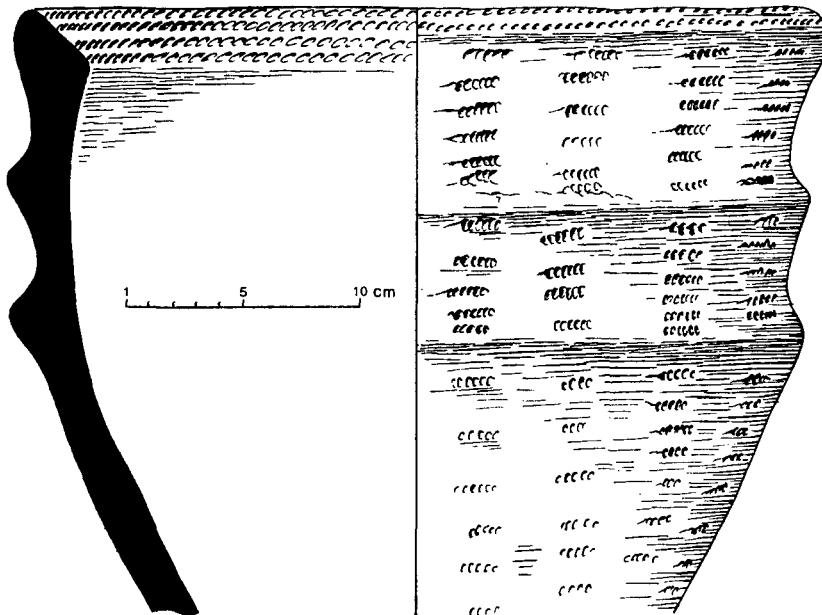


FIG 2 Kiltry Knock: enlarged food vessel urn

close and coherent comparisons only among the food vessel urns. In North England and Scotland at least the affinities of the majority of these pots lie with the Yorkshire Vase series of food vessels. Both the use of twisted cord and whipped cord maggots can be paralleled as individual elements in the decorative schemes of a large variety of vessels, although their occurrence on the same pot is a rarer feature. The very nature of both these decorative elements restricted their range of patterns to, commonly, herringbones and rows of vertical or horizontal impressions. Precise parallels for the arrangement of the decoration are wanting but it is unnecessary to seek them as it is more economical to assume that the potter was drawing on well-known elements in a repertoire of available decorative techniques. Although whipped cord maggots most commonly form a minor element in the decoration of food vessel urns, occurring for example on the internal rim bevels, they represent the principal decorative component on a number of food vessels including urns from Westerlee, Fife (NMA EA 187; *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 59 (1924-5), 72-3); Dunnichen, Angus (Dundee Museum 1971-182; Coutts 1971, no. 110) and Goatscrag, Northumberland (Newcastle; Burgess 1972, 52-5). The presumed all-over decoration of the Kiltry Knock urn is worthy of mention. In marked contrast to other urn types, decoration

frequently extends below the shoulder of food vessel urns, although all-over decoration is uncommon.

Pendant (fig 3.1) shaped from a pebble of phyllite; maximum dimensions 87 mm long, 34 mm wide, 15 mm thick with a slightly eccentrically drilled hourglass perforation, 4 mm in diameter, at the narrower end. Dr N H Trewin of the Department of Geology and Mineralogy of the University of Aberdeen has kindly contributed the following note on the pendant. 'Phyllite, a metamorphic rock produced from a clay-rich siltstone, is a variety of fine grained mica-schist. Similar lithologies are frequent in the Dalradian strata of North-East Scotland and the stone

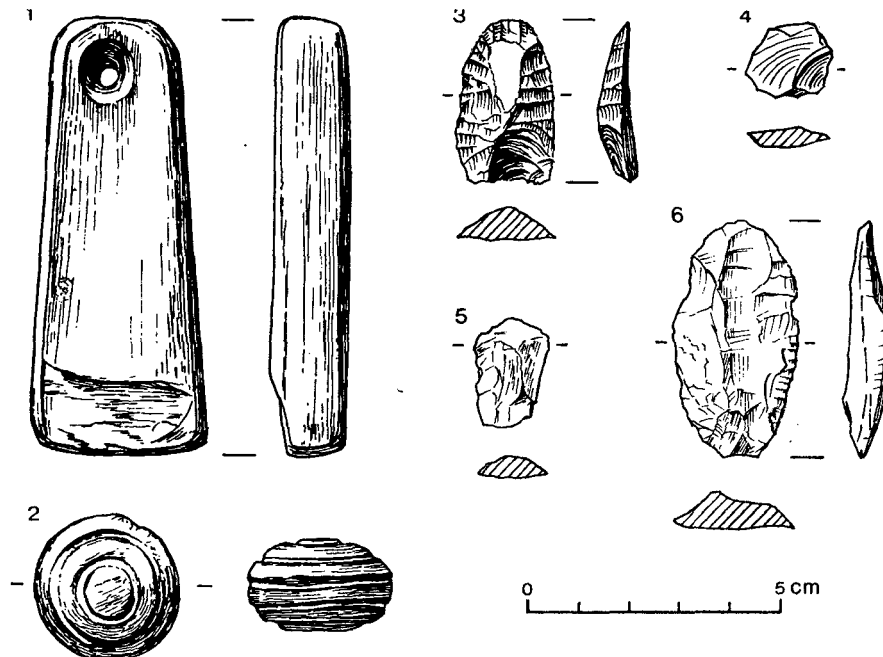


FIG 3 Kiltry Knock: 1. stone pendant, 2. pottery ball, 3. flint knife, 4. and 5. flint flakes, 6. burnt flint knife

could have originated from any one of a number of localities on the coast between Cullen and Gamrie or from an inland source. (Being a common rock type it could have come from further afield.) During the working of the stone most of the original weathered skin of the pebble has been removed. All edges have been shaped but the flat surfaces appear to be natural'.

The most local parallel from a similar context is the claystone pendant in a cordoned urn cremation burial at Drumdurno, Chapel of Garioch, Aberdeenshire (Marischal College 240/18; *DES* (1960), 2). This is trapezoidal with rounded corners and a perforation at the broader end, and it parallels closely the example from the primary cremation burial at Loanhead of Daviot (Kilbride-Jones 1936, 300, fig 10A). None of these objects appears likely to have served as whetstones, and they certainly bear little resemblance to the more slender and rectangular Wessex examples (e.g. Annable and Simpson 1964, nos 267-8, 345, 362, 377).

Pottery ball (fig 3.2) 29 mm diam by 18 mm thick, of a flattened biconical shape, it has been evenly fired to a light brown colour and weighs 10 g. Its surface has been decorated with six incised concentric grooves *c* 2 mm wide, two on one surface, one around the circumference and three on the marginally larger opposite surface. That this object is difficult to parallel is not sur-

prising given the history of inadequate recording of inurned cremation burials and the scope for the unique afforded by such rituals. However, the small conical baked clay object found with six cylindrical clay pieces in a cordoned urn at Seggiecrook, Kennethmont, Aberdeenshire, is the nearest parallel to the Kiltry Knock object (Callander 1908, 214-5, fig 2 top centre). Less exact parallels exist with objects not of clay but with certain affinities with the Kiltry Knock example: finds such as the ammonite in the miniature vessel from Hill of Keir, Skene, Aberdeenshire (Reid 1924, 50); the encrinite and miniature vessel from Brackmont Mill, Fife (Mears 1937, 252-78); the half bivalve shell in the Hill of Montblairry cremation burial (3 km SSE of Kiltry Knock; Coles 1906, 311-12); and the association of quartz pebbles with a variety of urns, e.g. with a bucket urn at Ardeer Sands, Stevenston, Ayrshire (Mann 1906, 378-96); and with a cordoned urn, at Bankfield, Glenluce, Wigtownshire (Wilson 1887, 186-7, fig 5). However, the presence of two children in the Kiltry Knock cremation may suggest that this biconical pottery ball is simply a child's toy.

Plano-convex knife (fig 3.3) 32 mm long by 20 mm wide and 7 mm thick, of honey-coloured flint, unburnt, with fine even retouch over most of the dorsal surface. Miss R M Hope, who kindly conducted a low magnification edge-damage examination of this piece, has submitted the following report. 'Damage is very slight all over: the left side has sustained more wear, and, as both lateral edges exhibit similar wear marks, the left side was probably used longer than the right. There is no clear evidence of hafting: the distal area has some damage but the proximal end has almost none. The location of the damage very near the edge on the dorsal and ventral surfaces indicate the tool was used for cutting and slicing, which correlates with the low edge angle of the piece. As the flake scars are predominantly scalar, with a few more irregular ones, it is likely that the material on which the tool was used was soft. In summary, the tool was probably not hafted and was used to cut or slice soft material for a short time.'

Secondary flint flake (fig 3.4) 15 mm by 18 mm and 4 mm thick, unburnt and dark red in colour.

Flint flake (fig 3.5) 22 mm long by 15 mm wide and 5 mm thick, slightly keeled, burnt white to grey in colour.

Flint flake knife (fig 3.6) 47 mm long by 25 mm wide and 8 mm thick, burnt, grey brown in colour with some shallow retouch on one edge.

Four burnt flint flakes ranging from 13 mm to 2.7 mm in length. Irregular in shape and white in colour: not illustrated.

Two quartz fragments 15 mm and 27 mm long: not illustrated.

Both individually and collectively the flint artefacts associated with the urn are difficult to parallel precisely among the large range of cinerary urns as a whole, far less among the particular class of food vessel urns.

The small size and careful manufacture of the unburnt flint knife sets it apart from the range of flint objects hitherto found in association with urns in North Britain, but the general practice of depositing unburnt flint artefacts is attested by finds from several sites. A food vessel urn from Callange Ceres, Fife (NMA EA 152; *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 30 (1895-6), 308-9) was associated with an unburnt knife/scrapper made on a primary flake. Single knives or scrapers on flakes were also recovered from each of the food vessel urns from the Northumbrian sites of Ovingham (Greenwell 1877, 438) and Rosebrough, Bamburgh, (*ibid*, 70). Unburnt flint implements have also been recovered from cordoned and collared urns: examples include the heavy but finely serrated flint point (or spear head) from a cordoned urn from the Tarland area, Aberdeenshire (Reid 1927, 517-8, LXII, 5); a flake knife/scrapper from a collared urn from Gilchorn, Angus (Hutcheson 1891, 447); and a retouched flake recovered from a probable collared urn from the

Brackmont Mill urn cemetery near Leuchars, Fife (Mears 1937, 261). More satisfactory parallels for the unburnt plano-convex knife with its quality of finish are to be found in the wider range of inhumations with food vessel associations (e.g. Simpson 1968, 198, fig 45.6), although plano-convex knives have been found occasionally in urns in Ireland (Kavanagh 1973, 517, fig 1a).

The range of associations which include burnt flint artefacts is wider; even so, calcined flint implements have been found in definite association with only two food vessel urns from North Britain. A large urn from Balrownie, Brechin, Angus (NMA EQ 481-4; Stevenson 1941, 209-12) produced two burnt implements broken when found but subsequently reconstructed. One of these is a broad oval knife or scraper and the other a fragment of a stout flint knife. The other possible association is from the Hill of Doune, Banff, where an 18th-century account attests the discovery of a large food vessel urn in association with 13 calcined arrowheads, one or more of which were of the barbed and tanged variety, and a flint knife or scraper which may or may not have been burnt (Pennant 1776, 154-5, pl XXI). This range of burnt flint artefacts from food vessel urns is matched in other urn types. For example, burnt flints, including a possible scraper, were found in a cordoned urn at Seggiecrook, Kennethmont (Callander 1905, 184-9), while two calcined barbed and tanged arrowheads were recovered from one or both collared urns from Kingskettle, Fife (Callander 1921, 37-45, fig 5). Mention should also be made of the ten flints, the majority of which were 'scrapers', from a cordoned urn at Brackmont Farm, not far from the urn cemetery referred to above (Spence 1949, 227-9, figs 3-4). Odd flakes, usually burnt, have been recorded in a few instances but the circumstances of discovery and recovery of the majority of urns almost certainly mean that such minor finds are grossly under-represented. It seems clear from a survey of cinerary urns and their associations that the association of burnt and unburnt flint artefacts in a single urn is rare: apart from the slightly ambiguous Hill of Doune, Banff example, there are no unequivocal cases of first degree associations of burnt and unburnt flints with the same cinerary urn.

DISCUSSION

The Kiltry Knock enlarged food vessel urn burial has several attributes which are common in the urn burial tradition: the inverted position of the urn is so recurrent as to be almost an orthodox feature; the placing of the urn on a pavement can be widely paralleled although a single slab normally sufficed; natural ridges or knolls provided characteristic locations. Several features of the cremation deposit are worthy of further discussion. The lack of any charcoal among the bones has already been noted: this circumstance may reflect the position of the bodies on the pyre or pyres as Wells suggests that the placing of the body beneath the pyre would have facilitated the recovery of the burnt remains (1960, 35). It is worth recalling in this context the primary burial at Loanhead of Daviot cremation cemetery which was that of a body in a shallow trough beneath the remains of a pyre (Kilbride-Jones 1936, 283, 299, fig 3). The identification of three individuals in the Kiltry Knock cremation is of great interest and the opportunity has been taken (Appendix 2) to add to the recently published list of multiple cremation deposits (Petersen *et al* 1974, 58-60). There is a dearth of properly examined cremations in NE Scotland, but the composition of the Kiltry Knock deposit is partially reflected in the burial from Howford Farm, Strichen, Aberdeenshire, which contained a minimum of two individuals, one over 20 years old, the other *c* 2 years of age (Lockhart 1972). Single child cremations have been recorded in NE Scotland at Seggiecrook, burial 4 (Callander 1908, 214) and at Newmill, Strichen (Jervise 1879, 141). Multiple cremation deposits involve many aspects of bronze-age ritual which were fully

discussed by Petersen *et al* (1974, 49-54). It is necessary here only to note one possible inference: it has been suggested that such deposits could represent the final grouping together of the remains of individuals who had died at different times (*ibid*, 50). The unusual association of burnt and unburnt flints and a putative child's toy at Kiltry Knock may represent grave goods appropriate to separate burials which only came to be associated finally in the context of the ultimate communal repository represented by the urn. The possible animal bones noted in this deposit by Mr Denston are paralleled in several other multiple cremations (*ibid*, 55).

The feature which sets Kiltry Knock apart from the main body of food vessel urn deposits is the quality and range of the grave goods. None of the associated artefacts can be closely paralleled either individually or collectively in the corpus of food vessel urns, and it is necessary to look more widely for comparative groups of material among the northern urn types. In this context, however, it is worth recalling the wealth of flint associations with the 'encrusted' food vessel urn and subsidiary vessels on the Hill of Doune, overlooking the Deveron, near Banff (Pennant 1776, 154-5, pl XXI), while no discussion of richly furnished cremation burials would be complete without consideration of the site at Seggiecrook, Kennethmont. The burnt flints from burial No. 1, the cordoned urn which was associated with a decorated slate pendant altogether more elaborate than the Kiltry Knock-Loanhead-Drumduro series noted above (Callander 1905, 185, fig 1), and the fourth burial with its child cremation and seven burnt clay objects and segmented bone toggle are all relevant here (*ibid*, 1908, 214, figs 2 and 3). Walker has drawn attention to the concentration of cinerary urns in the lower Deveron area (1966, 96, cf fig 1), and fig 1 shows the other recorded finds of cinerary urns from the immediate locality of Kiltry Knock. Though lacking in associations and details of context, these include a food vessel urn from Newton of Mountblair (NMA EA 13; Walker 1966, no. 32, pl XVII.1); a cordoned urn from Gallows Hill, near Mountblair House, (NMA EA 14; Walker 1966, no. 33, fig 8e) and two unspecified cinerary urns found between 1837 and 1840 from Greenlaw (*Ordnance Survey Object Name Book 2* (1867), 57).

The sharp contrast between the few rich graves and the majority of poorly furnished cinerary urn burials emphasises the socially selective nature of such evidence. While the Kiltry Knock deposit is 'rich' in burial terms, it is worth recalling the relative wealth of this Marnoch area in the early bronze age as attested by bronze metal work such as the discovery at Colleonard of a hoard of seven flat axes in a cordoned urn (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 3 (1857-60), 245; Coles 1969, 104).

The lack of associations with urns in general and food vessel urns in particular may well be real, but it should be borne in mind that for very many urns the nature of the evidence is very unsatisfactory. In the first place the quality of the material seems to have affected the quality of recovery in the past: coarse, often unattractive and (superficially) unrewarding in the way of rich associations, urns received summary treatment during most early barrow and cairn explorations. Furthermore the circumstances of discovery of so many of the urns during ploughing or gravel digging will have militated against their careful removal and almost certainly resulted in the loss of small objects such as beads which could well be overlooked because of their burnt, misshapen appearance. Apart from the problem of variable recovery which affects the recognition of small artefacts and multiple cremations, inadequate recording has also affected the quality of the surviving evidence. It is salutary to note that out of a minimum of 189 'cinerary urns' recorded in the Grampian Regional Council Sites and Monuments Record, in only 21 cases (11%), now mostly destroyed or lost, were associations noted. Some of the reports are tantalisingly vague in their mention of rich grave goods and in their pottery descriptions. All these circumstances render the Kiltry Knock group a valuable addition to the corpus of cinerary urns as a whole.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We should like to thank Mr Smart and Constable Taylor for reporting the discovery of the urn, Mr C B Denston, Dr N H Trewin and Miss R M Hope for their contributions, Mr A Shaw for drawing fig 1 and Miss A N Tuckwell for drawing figs 2 and 3. We are also grateful to Mr I B M Ralston who kindly loaned the basket sieves; Miss J Croasdale who assisted with the sieving; Ms J E Chamberlain-Mole who consolidated the urn, and Drs D V Clarke, J Dickson and J N G Ritchie. The urn and associated artefacts are now in Banff Museum (North East of Scotland Libraries Service), and the cremation deposit is in the Department of Physical Anthropology, University of Cambridge.

APPENDIX 1

A cremation deposit from Kiltry Knock

by C B Denston, Department of Physical Anthropology, University of Cambridge

Colour of fragments: light brown; light brown-grey
 Overall length of the fragments: 0-54 mm
 Total weight: 1535.3 g
 Number of individuals: possibly three
 Sex and age at death: adult female; immature; infant

<i>Bone</i>	<i>Weight</i>
Cranium	227.7 g
Mandible	17.5 g
Teeth	11.0 g
Possible long bone (leg)	133.4 g
Possible long bone (arm)	82.8 g
Metacarpals, Carpals, Phalanges	12.0 g
?Metatarsals, Metacarpals, Phalanges	26.8 g
Innominate bone	25.8 g
Scapula	3.5 g
Vertebra	29.1 g
Clavicle	2.9 g
Rib	45.0 g
Patella	6.3 g
Miscellaneous long bone	312.0 g
Miscellaneous cancellous bone	56.7 g
Miscellaneous	522.0 g
Possible infant	11.0 g
Possible animal	9.8 g
Total	1535.3 g

Description of recognizable skull fragments 2 of the frontal process of zygomatic bones, 2 of the ramus of mandible, 1 of the frontal process of a maxilla, 8 of the alveolous of mandible, 40 fragments of teeth, 47 of crania displaying sutures, 4 of occipital bone, 1 of frontal bone displaying the internal crest, 1 of mastoid area of temporal bone, 3 from squamous area of temporal bone, 3 from zygoma area of temporal bone, 2 zygoma portions of temporal bones, 2 of the palate, 1 of foramen magnum, 2 petrous portions of temporal bones.

Long bone A few fragments were identified as of specific long bones, but were so few that possible fragments of the leg are tabulated together, likewise those of the arm.

Conclusions The examination of the fragments suggested that three individuals were represented. The fragments of crania identified varied in thickness: this could be expected of all crania, as the bone is

thicker in some areas than others, but the degree of variation of some of the fragments was too great for them to belong to a single cranium. In fact some were very thin with very small sutures, suggesting that the serrated edges were in the first throes of development in the neonatal period after birth. Portions of ribs, extremities of bones in the process of formation, and a fragment of an orbit pointed to the inclusion of an infant among the remains. Evidence for an adult was indicated by the presence of nine intact phalanges of the hand, displaying consolidation of the epiphyses, and at least one distal extremity of a metatarsal bone also with epiphyseal consolidation. The lack of robustness of these bones and of other fragments of post-cranial bones as well as those of the skull, suggested a female individual rather than a male. Evidence for the immature individual was the presence of two portions of the frontal process of zygomatic bones, R and L, of varying proportions, the smaller compatible in size with a 6-9 year cranium. This hypothesis was confirmed by half of the occlusal crown of a premolar tooth devoid of any attrition, and roots of deciduous molars. The fact that this crown survived the combustion suggests that it was enclosed in the alveolus and was unerupted.

APPENDIX 2

British beaker/bronze-age multiple cremation deposits (an addendum to Petersen *et al* 1974, 58-60)

Abbreviations A, Adult; C, Child; F, Adult female; I, Infant; *PSAS*, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*.

Site	Burials	Associations	References
Howford Farm, Aberdeens	at least 2 (20 yr A+2 yr C+ ?)	Collared urn	<i>PSAS</i> 104, p 289
Kiltry Knock, Banffs	3 (F+6-9 yr C+I)	Food vessel urn, pendant, pottery ball, 2 flint knives, flints	Present paper
Loanhead of Daviot, Aberdeens			
(pit A1)	at least 3 (A+A+A)	nil	<i>PSAS</i> 70, p 305
(pit A2)	at least 3 (2A+C)	nil	<i>PSAS</i> 70, p 305
(pit 5)	2 (A+A)	Cordoned urn	<i>PSAS</i> 70, p 306
(pit H)	2 (C+C)	nil	<i>PSAS</i> 70, p 307
(pit 12)	3 (A+2C)	Collared urn, bone toggle	<i>PSAS</i> 70, p 308-9
Dalineun, Argylls	2 (F+C)	Pig phalanges	<i>PSAS</i> 104, p 60

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