

Cists from Sunlaws, Roxburghshire

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In December 1977 the discovery of a cist at Sunlaws, Roxburghshire, in the Roxburgh district of Borders Region, was reported to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. The cist (fig 1), situated about 580 m SE of Sunlaws (NGR NT 708291), was aligned E-W, and measured 1.1 m in length, 0.6 m in breadth and 0.5 m in average depth. The capstone, a substantial block of red sandstone (1.25 m long, 0.75 m broad and 0.15 m thick), rested on a seating of flat slabs round the edge of the cist in order to keep it level. An unusual feature of its construction was the use of three slabs for the N side, one small slab making up the eastern 0.25 m with two further supporting slabs behind; on excavation the cist was found to be empty.

In January 1873 three cists were uncovered in a field to the N of Sunlaws Home Farm and thus about 600 m to the WNW of the cist reported above (Douglas 1875). All three were constructed of sandstone slabs; the first contained the remains of an inhumation burial, the second was empty, and the third contained a fragmentary inhumation and 'the lower portion of an urn' (Douglas 1875, 106). In fact it is the rim and upper part of a food vessel that still survives; a small number of bones, apparently from the first cist, are listed in the Appendix.

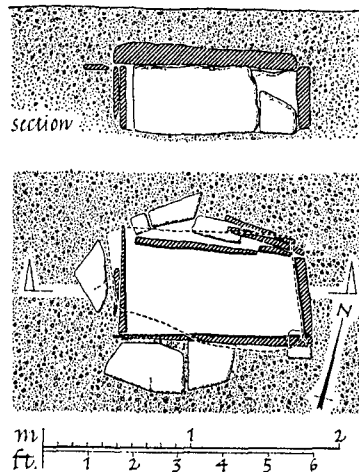


FIG 1 Sunlaws, Roxburghshire: cist found in 1977

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The food vessel (fig 2) originally formed part of the Tweedside Physical and Antiquarian Society collection in Kelso Museum and Library but, since the dispersion of this collection in 1933 (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 68 (1933-4), 8), the vessel has been on loan to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS no L. 1933.2119). It has a rim diameter of 150 mm and survives to a height of some 90 mm; it is of brown heavily gritted ware, with a wall thickness of 7 mm to 8 mm, and with random impressed decoration. Although Anderson and Black, in their report on local museums in Scotland, described the pot as being without ornament (1888, 390), this may be explained by the fact that it was covered with shellac until cleaning in 1969.

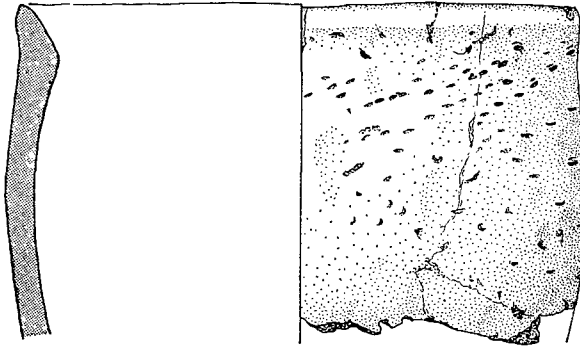


FIG 2 Sunlaws, Roxburghshire: vessel found in 1873

APPENDIX

Skeletal remains from Sunlaws, Roxburghshire

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Four pieces of bone survive, all from the skull: the major part of the occipital, part of the right side of the frontal, part of one parietal, and the right half of the mandible with all the teeth present at death, though only three remain, the first premolar and the second and third molars. There is evidence of severe periodontal disease, and a deep periodontal pocket has formed between the first and second molars. The second and third molars have lost much of their bony support, and marked horizontal resorption of bone has affected the other teeth. The relatively slight degree of attrition of the second and third molars would suggest an age at death in the mid 20s, but age estimation is complicated by the presence of advanced periodontal disease, and an age of c 25-30 would probably be more realistic. There is no evidence of dental caries. The remains are those of an adult of unknown sex. The bones are now preserved in the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Copyright Fig 1 Crown Copyright, Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments, Scotland; fig 2 Miss A S Henshall.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, J & Black, G F 1888 'Reports on Local Museums in Scotland, obtained through Dr R H Gunning's Jubilee Gift to the Society', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 22 (1887-8), 331-422.
Douglas, F 1875 'Note of Cists at Sunlaws', *Hist Berwickshire Natur Club*, 7 (1873-5), 104-7.

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