

A cist from Kelloe Mains, Berwickshire

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In 1964 an unusual cist (fig 1), discovered in the course of ploughing about 1.4 km W of Kelloe Mains farmhouse, Berwickshire (NGR NT 822536), was excavated by Professor Stuart Piggott and students of the Department of Archaeology, University of Edinburgh. The cist contained a poorly preserved crouched inhumation without associated grave-goods. Professor Piggott kindly made available the plan during the preparation of the list of *The Archaeological Sites and Monuments of Berwickshire District, Borders Region* by the field surveyors of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and has allowed its publication (RCAMS 1980, 21, no 156); the plan has been prepared for publication by Mr J N Stevenson and Mr I G Scott of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland and is Crown copyright.

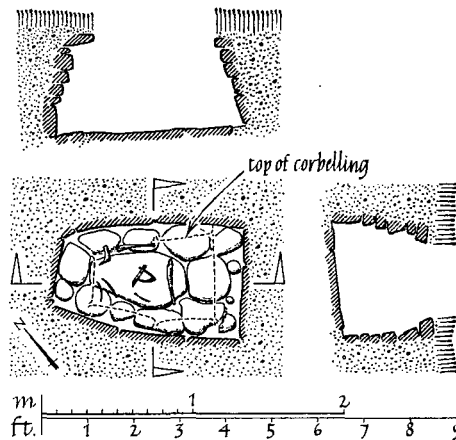


FIG 1 Kelloe Mains, Berwickshire: cist

Covered by a single capstone measuring 1.05 m by 0.45 m and 0.08 m in thickness, the cist, which was aligned NW and SE, was made up, not of large upright slabs, but of small stones built in a corbelled fashion. The cist measured 1.2 m by 0.7 m at floor level, but narrowed to 0.8 m by 0.5 m at the top at a height of about 0.6 m; the floor was paved with a series of flat slabs, the largest set at the centre. The crouched inhumation, the head at the NW end facing NE, lay with its back along the SW side of the cist and the feet in the SW corner.

The use of coursed masonry in cist construction occurs on at least six, and possibly as many as eight, sites in Berwickshire District while masonry-lined pits have also been found on three other sites. In East Lothian two comparable cists, and possibly a third, are known. These sites are listed with appropriate references in the Appendix.

The corbelling of the Kelloe Mains cist is, however, unique to the area, although the structure found near Seacliffe House may have been of similar construction; it was 'a square chamber, formed of stones, vaulted like a "Picts House", and containing seven or eight skeletons' (Stuart 1867, lxxxvii, footnote). Multiple burials were also found in the masonry cist at Lochend; it was considerably larger than that from Kelloe Mains and contained the remains of at least twenty-one

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individuals associated with two iron penannular brooches and an enamelled iron stud which probably date from the early centuries AD. Other instances of multiple burials dated to this period occur at Beadnell, Northumberland (Tait & Jobey 1971) and Black Rocks, Gullane (Ewart & Curle 1908), while undated examples include a second site in sand-dunes at Gullane, where a small cairn covered the remains of four individuals and a masonry cist containing three others.

The single crouched inhumation at Kelloe Mains, together with those from the Hops Sand-pit and Middlefield, is more closely akin to the slightly flexed burial found with a pair of bronze spoons of the second half of the 1st century AD, an iron knife, several fragments of coal and the bones of a young pig, in the Catch-a-penny cist at Burnmouth.

Not all the associations of coursed masonry in funerary contexts are of later periods. Below a cairn at Hoprig, a slab-built cist containing two beakers was found in a pit whose sides were lined with coursed masonry. Two other cists of possible early Bronze Age date are those from Billiemire, which contained inhumations and vessels 'composed of common red clay, about the height of a human span, and have, on their outside, some downward strokes of coarse moulding'; the cists were 'about 6 feet in length, and their breadth nearly equal to that of an ordinary grave. Their sides, rudely constructed of stones, with mortar of lime, had a few unshaped flags extended over them' (*Stat Acct*, xiv (1795), 30–1). The distinction drawn by the author between the stones of the sides and the covering flags possibly indicates that these were masonry cists of comparable size and construction to that at the Hops Sand-pit (the lime mortar may have been a waterborne calcareous deposit although the sides of the Woodend cist were pointed with clay).

Despite its ambiguities, the Billiemire report serves as a reminder that coursed masonry in itself is unlikely to be a chronologically determining factor and that cist burials of apparently similar funerary traditions, but unassociated with distinctive artifacts, may be of very diverse dates.

APPENDIX

Cists with coursed masonry in Berwickshire District

Catch-a-penny, Burnmouth (NT 958 602); Craw 1924; MacGregor 1976, 145–6, catalogue nos 281 & 282.

Coldingham Loch (NT 899 687); Smith 1979.

The Hops Sand-pit, Cockburnspath (NT 772 705); Stevenson 1966.

Middlefield (NT c 774 522); Forrest 1953.

Woodend (NT 795 705); Hardy 1886, 159–60.

Possible examples

Billiemire (NT c 86 59); *Stat Acct*, xiv (1795), 30–1.

Hog's Law, Old Cambus Townhead (NT 800 701); Hardy 1872, 410–11.

Masonry-lined pits

Masonry-lined pits occur on the sites of both the long cist cemetery (NT 638 490) and the palisaded homestead (NT 638 489) at Hartlaw, Westruther Mains (Stuart 1866; RCAMS 1980, 19, no 127; 30, no 239) and also below a cairn at Hoprig (Hardy 1889; RCAMS 1980, 12, no 54).

Comparable sites in East Lothian

Gullane (NT c 492 855); Richardson & Richardson 1902. Lochend, Dunbar (NT 681 776); Longworth *et al* 1966. Seacliffe House (NT c 609 843); Stuart 1867, lxxxvii, footnote.

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