

## Cists from Kilbride, Mid Argyll

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Rising in Gleann Domhainn, the Barbreck River winds through a short but fertile valley between Turnult and Loch Craignish in Mid Argyll. Gravel terraces on either side have clearly formed attractive areas of settlement from early prehistoric times, and in the valley to the S of Turnult there may be found a massive cairn, a smaller mound and a standing stone (Campbell & Sandeman 1962, 18, nos 121 & 121a, 28, no 190). The *List of the Monuments of Argyll* prepared by Argyll County

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Council in 1915 records the tradition that the Danish general Utric was slain and buried here, with the stone marking the spot where natives repelled a Scandinavian attack. On the north side of the river at a point about 280 m to the NW and 700 m SSE of Kilbride, the *List* mentions the finding of a number of 'graves' with 'pottery vessels' while sand was being extracted for the building of Arduaine House, but the proprietor stopped the work on hearing of the discovery of burials. The vessels were probably kept for some time at Arduaine House, but then appear to have been thrown out.

In the course of the survey by Miss Mary Sandeman and the first writer, published in 1962, the pit (NGR NM 838 077) was visited in May 1955 (*Discovery Excav Scot 1956*, 8). A fragmentary cist (at least 1 m by 0.5 m) was seen projecting from the face of the gravel workings; pieces of what were probably femurs were found in the collapsed material below the cist as well as two other slabs, perhaps a side-slab and capstone. Also discovered was what appeared to be the capstone of a further cist (1.7 m by 1.1 m by 0.13 m thick) with one end-slab still visible beneath it, as well as the initial indications of what may have been a third cist. In August 1957 the site was revisited in the company of Mr and Mrs J G Scott and the large capstone mentioned above had by that time been moved aside and lay parallel to the side-slab of the cist, which was partly filled with blown sand. The cist, aligned N and S, was found to measure about 1.06 m by 0.6 m and 0.58 m in depth, with slabs forming parts of the two sides and the east end still in position. A few inhumed bones including parts of femur, pelvis and skull were recovered, but there were no associated small finds (*Discovery Excav Scot 1957*, 7–8).

In 1971, when officers of the Archaeological Division of the Ordnance Survey visited the site, an open cist measuring 1.7 m by 0.9 m and 0.9 m in depth was visible in the gravel quarry; apparently larger than those recorded before or since, this must represent yet another cist, but no details of its contents are known (OS Record Card NM 80 NW 15).

In early April 1982 the site was visited by the second writer in the course of the preparation of the sixth volume of the *Inventory of Argyll*, and the disturbed remains of a cist were discovered. The cist had been aligned NNW–SSE but only the north-north-west end-slab remained in position, the other three slabs and the capstone having slumped into the gravel workings; the cist had measured about 0.8 m by 0.5 m internally and 0.45 m in depth. The capstone measured 1.3 m by 0.85 m and up to 0.23 m in thickness. The slab on the east-north-east side (1.1 m long by 0.44 deep and 0.16 m thick) is of grey schist (probably erratic, but certainly originating from the local country rock, the Craignish Phyllites) and has been decorated with two certain and one possible triangular motifs: one is an

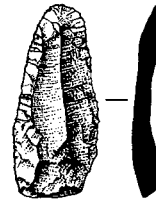


ILLUS 1 Kilbride, Mid Argyll: decorated slab

axe-like marking formed by a pecked outline measuring 70 mm by 60 mm; the other definite mark is a pecked triangular area 140 mm by 100 mm; another area of similar shape (90 mm by 90 mm) is less clearly defined (illus 1). Information about the origin of the rock has kindly been provided by Mr G H Collins, Petrology Unit, British Geological Survey. The cist contained the cremated remains of an adult accompanied by a small flint knife.

The remains have been examined by Miss Mary Harman. The cremation was efficient, the ashes consisting of well-calcined white fragments. A number of pieces were recognizable: these included skull vault fragments showing the sutures open, several tooth roots and part of a premolar crown, parts of vertebral bodies and articular facets from arches, the head of a radius, parts of the distal ends of the humerus and femur and the proximal end of the tibia, a patella, several carpals and tarsals and parts of phalanges. The largest piece is 69 mm in length; the weight of the deposit is 355 g. The bones are those of an adult; there is no sign of extreme age. A smooth supra-orbital area and fairly small bone suggest that the person may have been female.

The flint (illus 2) has been examined by Miss Caroline Wickham-Jones; the layout of the description of the piece follows the format of other reports (for example Ritchie *et al* 1978, 88; Ritchie & Adamson 1981, 196–7). Brown flint; inner flake; wide artificial platform; platform edge trimmed; diffuse bulb; roughly straight sides converge at blunt distal; fine sub-parallel retouch along left edge and distal; irregular scalar retouch along right side; 50 : 23 : 06; l 42°; r 34°; d 67°; p 102°; bilaterally retouched flake. The piece is



ILLUS 2 Kilbride, Mid Argyll: flint flake (scale 1:2)

formed upon an inner flake of fine brown flint. Fine regular retouch runs along the left side and around the distal end. On the right side the retouch is very irregular. It is unlikely that the retouch has altered the shape of the flake much; it has been used mainly to straighten the edges. Along the very edge, on both sides, the arrises of the retouch scars are undamaged, giving a slightly denticulated appearance to the piece. This pristine condition of the edges suggests that the piece may be unused.

The flint belongs to a common type and may, among many other examples, be compared to that from a cist at Ballimenach, Kintyre, associated with a sherd of a food vessel (MacLaren & Scott 1962), cist 6 at Balnabraid, Kintyre, with a beaker and two jet disc-beads (Ritchie 1967, 89), and at Knappers, Dunbartonshire (Ritchie & Adamson 1981, 198). The roughly pecked triangular motifs are too crude a design to be compared usefully with the axe carvings of the Kilmartin valley but the decoration implies a similar intention on the part of the builders of the cist to those of the more elaborately ornamented stones. The number of burials recovered from the area of the workings, however, shows that the cemetery was of some local importance during the Bronze Age.

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