

FICHE 1: CONTENTS

I A G SHEPHERD & M F BRUCE	Two beaker cists from Keabog, Pitdrichie, near Drumlithie, Kincardine and Deeside	A2-B3
E FURGOL	The Scottish Itinerary of Mary, Queen of Scots, 1542-8 and 1561-8	C1-D6
J N G RITCHIE	A cist at Kentraw, Islay	E1-8

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A CIST FROM KENTRAW, ISLAY

J N GRAHAM RITCHIE

KENTRAW, ISLAY

J N G RITCHIE

CONTENTS

Human remains	MARY HARMAN	E3-E4
The dentition	DOROTHY LUNT	E5-8

Human Remains from Kentraw, Islay

by Mary Harman and Dorothy A Lunt

Human Remains

by Mary Harman

The condition of the bones is very variable; some are reasonably well preserved, while others are very fragile, and some must have decayed altogether. The following bones were recognised: the right half of a skull and mandible in good condition, the left side, apart from the teeth, being entirely absent (Individual A); two clavicles, part of the right scapula, parts of left and right humerus shafts, and the distal ends of two left ulnae, one slightly larger than the other. More than two pairs of legs survived: the distal end and shaft of one left femur and the distal end of another; the distal end, and the shaft, of one left femur; a pair of tibiae almost complete and the proximal ends of a second pair; and the distal end and shaft of a left fibula. There are also ten metatarsals and four foot phalanges, and several fragments of long bone shaft.

The set of teeth accompanying the skull and mandible is almost complete, missing only the upper left central incisor, canine and first molar and the lower left second incisor. There is no sign of caries, or abscesses in the surviving jaw, and wear is light, suggesting an age of

between 20 and 30 years. In addition to this set, there are loose tooth crowns from further sets of teeth (Individuals B - G); they are lightly worn, suggesting ages of between 20 and 25 years.

The presence of the right side of the skull together with the teeth from the left side, shows that the whole was originally present in the cist, the left side having decayed almost entirely. Other bones were too poorly preserved to be recovered (illus 2), or may have disintegrated long before the discovery of the cist. Some of the bones, such as vertebrae, ribs and the pelvis, are less substantial than limb bones and their absence is not remarkable, but the preservation of parts of limb bones and the halving of the skull are probably due to environmental differences within the cist, possibly related to varying levels in the water table. The photograph (illus 2) also shows the disarticulated long bones at the SW end of the cist. All of the bones are mature. Since several people are apparently represented, it is impossible to decide which bones belong together, apart from those which are obviously pairs. The skull is feminine in appearance; a small mastoid process and no pronounced supra-orbital or nuchal ridge; and the limb bones are slight. There are three wormian bones in the right half of the lambdoid suture of the skull. The lengths of the complete tibiae were about 360mm \pm 5mm. The most complete left femur, the complete pair of tibiae and the right humerus were used for a radiocarbon determination.

Detailed Report on the Dentitions

by Dorothy A Lunt

Number of Individuals

One of the major pieces of skeletal material from the cist is the right half of a skull in a fairly good state of preservation. The alveolar process of the right maxilla is present and carries the full complement of erupted permanent teeth and part of the socket for the left central incisor. There is also the right half of a mandible containing all the right mandibular permanent teeth plus the mandibular left central incisor. The mandibular teeth match the maxillary teeth in the half skull for size, colour and degree of attrition, and the half mandible also articulates well with the half skull. These will be referred to as Individual A. There are in addition some 22 loose, incomplete but identifiable permanent teeth, three partially identifiable teeth and some further small fragments, many of which may derive from the incomplete teeth. Of these loose teeth, five upper left teeth and six lower left teeth appear to match those of Individual A; they have similar colour and degree of attrition, and caliper measurements show them to be of very similar size. It is reasonable to assume that they have come from the completely vanished left maxilla and left mandible of Individual A.

The remaining 14 tooth fragments cannot belong to Individual A, must represent a minimum of two further

persons, and could be from as many as five further burials.

They may be grouped as follows:

B. Maxillary left second incisor, canine, first premolar, second premolar and first molar. These all have the same rather dark colour, and are all very large. It is very probable that they derived from the same person.

C. Maxillary right second molar and right third molar. These seem to form a pair: they are of the same very light colour and both show slight morphological peculiarities in that they are compressed mesiodistally. Because of this compression they have large buccolingual dimensions and as a result they might be thought to belong to the massive dentition of B. But their mesiodistal dimensions are in fact quite small and their colour is totally different from that of the teeth in B. They probably represent another person.

D. Maxillary right third molar and left third molar. These obviously form a pair, with virtually identical morphology and similar size. They cannot belong to A or C which already have third molars and are most unlikely to belong to B on grounds of size, but must represent another individual.

E. Maxillary right canine and first premolar.

F. Fragmentary mandibular molars, probably right first and left first. They appear to form a pair.

E and F cannot belong to A and are extremely unlikely to belong to B, since the teeth of the latter are much larger.

They could be associated with each other and/or either C or D. Or each of these groups could be from a different skeleton.

I think that it is certain that A, C and D must represent different people, since each possesses a maxillary right third molar. I also think that it is most likely that B represents a fourth person, as the teeth in this group are quite unlike any of the others. E and F may quite probably be associated with C or D.

G. Another fragment represents a lower molar that is very little worn, but it is insufficiently preserved to be recognisable.

Individual Age of Skeletons

Individual A: the roots of the third molars are complete, but the degree of attrition is very slight, suggesting an age of 20-25. The teeth of B show even less wear, and this individual may have been younger than 20 years. If the third molar had survived with its root intact, a closer estimate could have been made. Both second and third molars of C show early wear facets in the enamel, again suggesting a young adult (possibly in the very early twenties). The pairs of teeth of D and E also exhibit very little wear, indicating young adults. The probable mandibular first molars of F are broken, but again the attrition seems to have been relatively slight, indicating an age of about 20-25.

Dental Pathology

There is no evidence of dental caries in any of the teeth. The alveolar bone of the right maxilla and mandible of A is in excellent condition and there is no sign of periodontal disease. These facts are in accordance with the ages assigned to the individuals, as young adults in the Bronze Age seldom show evidence of dental disease.

There is a small enamel pearl (a developmental anomaly) on the root of the upper left second molar of Individual A.