

A beaker child burial from Catterline, Kincardine and Deeside

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ABSTRACT

The cist-burial of a child of about six or seven, accompanied by a Late Northern/Step 5 beaker, is described.

THE CIST (illus 1 and 2)

Alan Small

A short stone cist was discovered by Mr William Adam of Brigstanes Cottage, Roadside of Catterline, Kincardineshire (NGR NO 8579 7886) during gardening operations in February 1970 (*Discovery Excav Scot* 1970, 27) (illus 1). The capstone lay at a depth of 1.09 m in a mound of fluvio-glacial sands at 75 m OD. On pulling out the capstone, which was obstructing the work, and inserting his spade Mr Adam noticed human bones. To his great credit, he did not disturb the find any further.

On excavation by the writer, the cist proved to be a simple construction of six slabs forming a small stone box, originally measuring some 0.66 by 0.43 m by 0.30 m, although precise dimensions were difficult to assess as the end slabs had collapsed inwards during the primary infilling of the grave. The cist (illus 2) was orientated east–west and built of undressed local old red sandstone slabs.

The base flag was extremely irregular, with maximum dimensions of 0.50 by 0.45 m by 30 mm, and did not fully cover the bottom of the cist. The side slabs measured 0.66 by 0.30 m by 38 mm, 0.813 by 0.31 m by 0.64 m, 0.431 by 0.33 m by 0.31 m and 0.412 by 0.317 m by 30 mm. Each corner had been packed with a single beach pebble in an attempt to give the structure some rigidity. The capstone measured 1.194 by 0.635 m by 0.51 m.

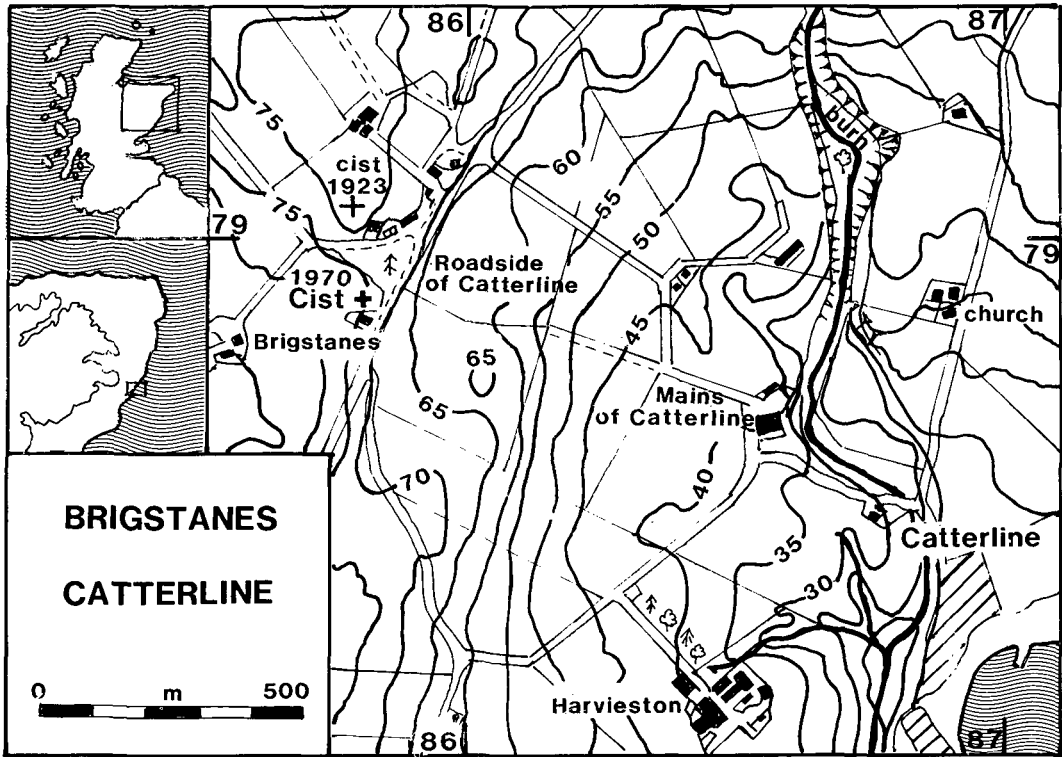
The cist contained the skeleton of a child of about six to seven years at death. The skull had been fragmented on the initial discovery of the grave and many of the smaller bones had completely decomposed. After reconstruction of the skull, Mr H G Galloway, Medical Artist in the University of Aberdeen, attempted a facial reconstruction (*Times*, 9 May 1970, 10). A beaker, partially filled, lay on its side at the opposite end of the cist from the skull. That it had not been tampered with was confirmed by the underlying imprint of the decoration in the soil being clear, exact and undisturbed (illus 2).

In the light of the laboratory reports on the contents of the beaker (appendix) its position in the grave is of some importance. Beakers from other sites have been shown to contain porridge-like

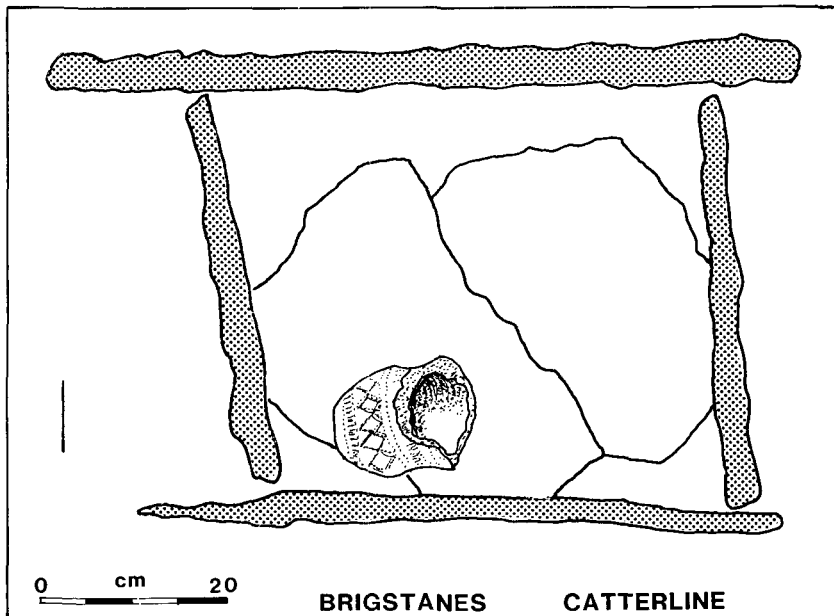
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ILLUS 1 Location maps



ILLUS 2 Plan of cist

substances and it would seem reasonable to assume that when the body was interred the beaker was placed in an upright position. This would probably apply whether the beaker had contents or not, even though in many beaker excavations the vessel is found in a horizontal position.

Excavations seldom explain how the beaker could have toppled over and as it was of some importance in this case when dealing with a disturbed site, some sample experiments were conducted with a reconstruction of the cist and the original beaker. The capstone was of sufficient dimensions to cover the cist entirely; therefore on refilling the grave, material could only penetrate at the ill-fitting corners or at the gap between the top of the end stone and the capstone. The experiments showed that a number of variables were involved including the nature of the base of the cist, the area of the bottom of the beaker, the skewness of the beaker, the type of soil used, the degree of moisture in the soil, the rate of infilling and the distance the beaker was placed away from the side of the cist. In this case, to replicate the position of the beaker in the cist, using damp sand, the vessel would have been over 60% full before toppling over, and any artefacts recovered from the base of the beaker are almost certainly from the primary infilling of the grave as the cist itself would continue to fill after the beaker toppled.

THE INHUMATION

Margaret F Bruce

(The full skeletal report is on fiche 2:E3–4.) The remains, which are moderately well preserved, are those of a single child of indeterminate sex aged about six or seven years at death.

The posterior half of the left side of the mandible was present. The first permanent molars and the deciduous first and second molars were *in situ* on both sides in the upper jaw and in the surviving portion of the lower jaw. Radiographs revealed the presence of the crowns of the second permanent molars and permanent premolars in both upper and lower jaws and of the permanent canines and central and lateral incisors in the maxilla, the latter being clearly visible at the margins of the alveolar process. The deciduous incisors had probably been recently shed.

The metopic suture had fused, the foramen of Huschke had closed, but the basi-occiput had not fused at the occipital condyles.

Only fragments of the atlas and axis vertebrae and of centra and arches of three or four cervical and thoracic vertebrae survived. The first ribs of both sides and the left second rib had survived intact, while fragments of the left clavicle and scapula, a virtually complete right radius and fragmentary left and right ulnae and left radius were all that remained of the upper limbs. The lower limbs were better preserved: the left and right iliac blades, the right pubis and almost intact diaphyses of the femur and tibia of both sides, as well as fragmentary fibulae, were present.

THE BEAKER (illus 3)

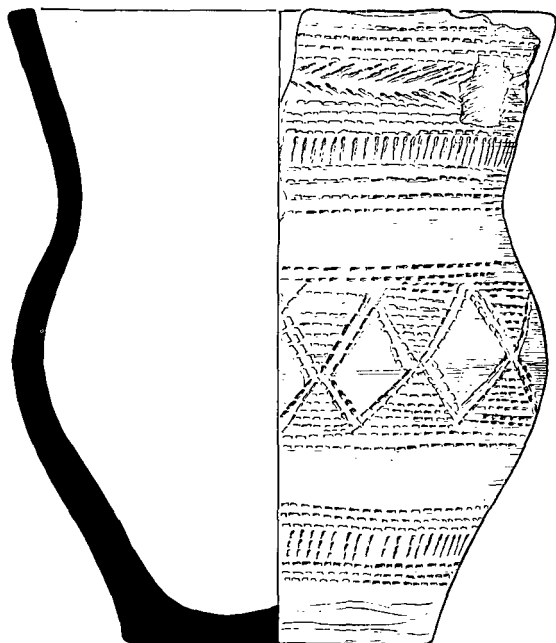
Ian A G Shepherd

(The full description and discussion are on fiche 2:E5–7.) The beaker, which is substantially intact, belongs to Clarke's Late Northern (N3) group (1970, 176–90) and to step 5 in the scheme of Lanting and Van der Waals (1972).

The pot, which has been evenly fired to a foxy red colour, is well made and its surface has been carefully burnished. It is 168 mm in height, 145 mm in diameter at the square rim, 141 mm in diameter at the belly, and 82 mm in diameter at the slightly footed, flat, base. The principal shape characteristics are a short, everted neck well separated from a high, almost angular belly. The decoration, which has been executed chiefly in toothcomb of c 52 mm in length, occupies three broad zones on the neck, belly and foot. The most striking motif is on the belly which is covered by a zone of negative lozenges

(Southern British Motif no 31) which are themselves outlined in double lines of comb. Traces of possible white infilling remain in some of the comb impressions.

It is difficult to parallel all the elements of the Catterline beaker on a single pot. In shape the N2/step 4 pot from Parkhill, Newmachar, Aberdeenshire (Clarke 1970, fig 471, no 1484) has a similar high angular belly and sharp neck bend, as does the N3/step 5 pot from Bruckleseat, Fyvie, Aberdeenshire (*ibid*, fig 598, no 1439). Such piriform bellies were seen by Clarke as the 'most striking new shape element of the Late Northern group' (1970, 187). The vivid negative lozenge motif on the



ILLUS 3 Catterline beaker (scale 1:2)

Catterline beaker, however, finds parallels over a wider area. One of the beakers from Easter Gollachy, Buckie (Shepherd 1986, illus 20) bore a similar design as do certain beakers in Clarke's Southern British series, eg the S3(E)/step 6 pot from Kilmarnie, Skye (Clarke 1970, fig 968, no 1672) or those from Lilburn Steads, Northumberland (*ibid*, fig 816: S2(W)/step 5) and Garrowby Wold, Yorks (*ibid*, fig 817: S2(W)/step 6). Both of the last-named beakers have their lozenges outlined internally in the manner of Catterline.

Rather than suggesting any direct derivation from the Southern British series, such parallels in contrast motifs indicate the sharing of traits between groups, either within Britain (*ibid*, 177, 181), or 'with their continental relatives also at more advanced stages of development' (Lanting & Van der Waals 1972, 26). A good example of this latter process can be seen in early Veluwe-type beakers from the Netherlands with a zone of comb-defined lozenges very similar to Catterline's (eg Van der Waals & Glasbergen 1955, 25, 40, pl XIV).

DISCUSSION

Ian A G Shepherd

There is some evidence for the formal burial of children in Neolithic contexts, for example within a pit grave at Duggleby Howe, Yorks (Mortimer 1905, 27–30; Kinnes *et al* 1983), but in the Bronze Age, very few children were apparently given formal burial, so the Catterline child is an important discovery. Although several graves of children have been found beneath certain round barrows in Wessex (Amesbury G71: Christie 1967; West Overton G6b: Smith & Simpson 1966) and Yorkshire (eg Aldro 116 or Acklam Wold 204: Mortimer 1905, 54–6, 86–7, the latter accompanied by an S4/step 7 beaker), they are, multiple cremation deposits apart (Petersen *et al* 1974), generally under-represented in the burial record (Burgess 1980, 162). For example, of 69 Scottish short-cist skeletons reviewed recently only eight (11.6%) were of children (Bruce 1986, 21).

Given the effort required to construct a short cist (McAdam & Watkins 1975) it is perhaps not surprising that most occurrences of children are in conjunction with an adult female, as in the nearby late beaker graves at Nether Criggie, Dunnottar (Kirk & McKenzie 1955, 2–3) and Beatties Hill (Spurryhillock), Fetteresso (*Discovery Excav Scot* 1985, 18; Bruce 1986, 38). Double burials of children are also occasionally found in the north-east, as at Auchlin, Aberdour, Aberdeenshire (Reid 1924, 45; Bruce 1986, 36). Looking further afield, the rare association of an adult male and a child occurred in cist 1 at Boatbridge Quarry, Thankerton, Lanarkshire, which, like Catterline, was furnished with a slab floor (Clarke *et al* 1984).

The best parallel for the Catterline child burial, however, is the beaker cist from Nunraw, Garvald, East Lothian which contained a child of six and a fine N2(L)/step 5 beaker (Childe 1944). The careful treatment of the body indicated by its position and orientation (on its right side, pointing west and facing south, characteristic of beaker females: Tuckwell 1975, 101) extended to a prepared floor of pebbles (Childe 1944, 17) which echoes the paved floor at Catterline.

Such rare examples as Catterline do demonstrate that when in beaker times it was decided to bury children, they were accorded the full range of the available burial rituals.

APPENDIX

THE CONTENTS OF THE BEAKER

Alan Small

The beaker was taken to the laboratory for emptying and the material removed in a step by step system. The lower part of the beaker produced a small piece of wood identified by Mrs Dickson of Cambridge as conifer and on further investigation by Dr Frank Cusick of the Department of Botany, University of Aberdeen as pine. The botanical experts disagree as to whether some tiny fragments of organic material are pieces of roots or stem epidermis but suggest that they are more likely to be of grass rather than grain. Also from the bottom of the beaker, fragments of the pupae of two different types of flies were recorded as well as a tiny fragment of glass measuring 5 mm by 2 mm. Dr Hugh McKerrell, formerly of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland's Research Laboratory, considered that the unetched state of the glass might indicate that it might be modern rather than contemporaneous with the burial. Qualitative arc spectrography and X-ray fluorescence analysis showed that the material was a lead glass containing sodium and potassium. There was no boron present such as would be expected from a borosilicate glass like Pyrex laboratory glass.

Although the circumstances of the find and the method of emptying the beaker were such that the excavator considers modern contamination highly improbable there is no doubt that the considerable quantity of lead is very suggestive that the glass is not ancient. The experiments outlined above, to discover exactly how the beaker was filled and toppled over, argue for the opposite view. The downward movement of a piece of glass through 135 cm of soil followed by horizontal movement over at least 45 cm and fortuitously finding the gaps between the cist slabs is not totally impossible through the natural processes at

work in the soil but certainly highly unlikely. Similarly there was no satisfactory evidence to suggest burrowing animals had been at work. Although the question of the origins of the glass must remain open at present it must be stressed that the case of lead glass would be unique in a Scottish beaker context as soda lime glass was almost universal until historical times.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Mrs Moira K Greig and Mrs Alexandra N Shepherd for preparing illus 1 and 2 and illus 3 respectively.

LOCATION OF FINDS

The beaker is in the care of the Anthropological Museum of the University of Aberdeen (registration number ABDUA 14267) and the skeletal material is lodged with the Department of Anatomy of the University of Aberdeen, both Marischal College.

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