

# A beaker cist from Chapelden, Tore of Troup, Aberdour, Banff and Buchan District, with a note on the orientation of beaker burials in north-east Scotland

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## ABSTRACT

*The burial of an adult male accompanied by a complete N4/Step 4 beaker within the cist and sherds of an indeterminate beaker on the capstone is described. A review of the evidence suggests that the same beaker burial pattern existed in north-east Scotland as has been observed in east Yorkshire.*

## INTRODUCTION

On 11 August 1967, a cist was discovered near Chapelden, Tore of Troup in the parish of Aberdour (then in Aberdeenshire, now in Banff and Buchan District) by a farm worker while extracting gravel from a mound. He reported the find to the farmer, the late Watt Taylor, who in turn contacted the team of archaeologists who were excavating nearby at Cullykhan, Castle Point, Troup.

The cist was situated just below the 105 m contour (NGR NJ 8406 6381) on the south-facing slope of Litterty Hill on whose summit sits the remains of a large round cairn. The hill is a glacial mound covered in bracken which lies in the steep-sided valley of the Tore of Troup, a major melt-water channel (illus 1).

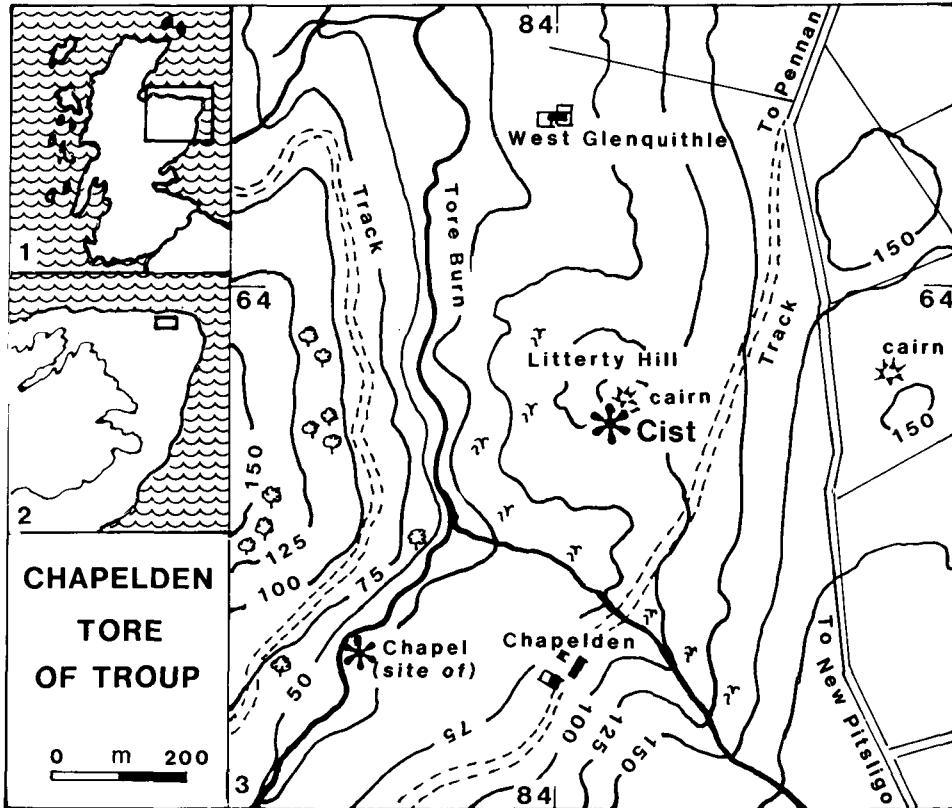
## THE CIST

Owing to earlier quarrying the sandstone capstone, measuring approximately 1.83 m by 1.22 m by 10 cm, had collapsed and fallen into the cist. This allowed gravel and sand to fill the interior which in antiquity had been a void. The sides of the cist had also been disturbed and part of the east end stone (0.48 m by 0.50 m by 5 cm) had shattered, leaving only the south side (0.95 m by 0.60 m by 12 cm) of the cist in its original position with its packing stones still *in situ*. The north slab (0.97 m by 0.46 m by 10 cm) had proved too short for the cist and an extra length of sandstone (0.55 m by 0.30 m by 5 cm) provided the north-west corner. In the west corners the slabs had been carefully worked to provide neat jointing. The west slab measured 0.65 m by 0.38 m by 8 cm. The long axis of the cist was orientated north-east/south-west.

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ILLUS 1 Chapelden: location

The base of the cist consisted of a carefully laid floor of beach pebbles and angular stones on which lay the skeleton of an adult male on its left side, pointing north-east and facing south-east. The skeleton had not been placed centrally in the cist; rather it lay in the eastern half.

Behind the skeleton, between the shoulders and the pelvis, a complete Final Northern/Step ?4 beaker, no 1, lay on its side. Staining on the inside of the pot indicated that it had originally stood upright and had toppled over after burial.

As a final act of ritual, once the capstone had been emplaced, five rimsherds and nine small body sherds of another beaker, no 2, were laid on its upper surface before the remaining backfill was heaped up.

At the end of the excavation the sides of the cist were collapsed in, the base and the sides of the excavation pit were left intact and the trench back-filled.

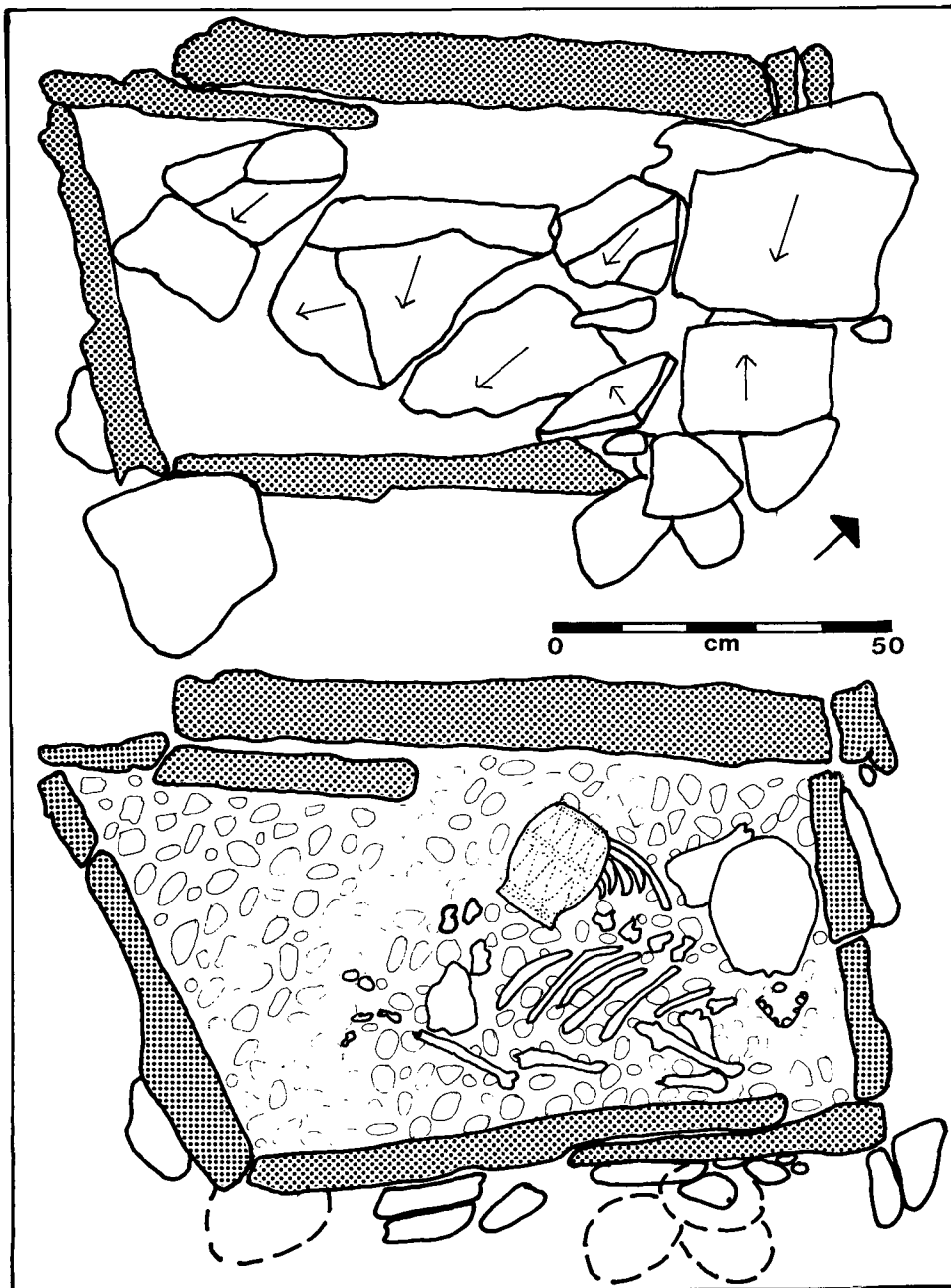
#### THE INHUMATION

The upper part of the body was still in a reasonable state of preservation, but both the pelvic region and legs were badly decomposed. The skeleton was that of a male aged between 35 and 45 years (pers comm Dr Ian Smart, Department of Anatomy, Dundee University). The skeleton was removed to the Department of Anatomy, Dundee University for further study. Unfortunately no further report is available as the skeleton has since been lost.

## THE BEAKERS

## Beaker 1

(The full description and discussion of both pots are on fiche 1:B3-6.) This is a rather squat pot with a globular body and a very short, sharply everted neck. It is 168 mm tall, 152 mm in diameter at the belly and 148 mm in diameter at the rather squared-off rim; the greatest diameter is slightly above



ILLUS 2 Plans of cist

half-way up the pot. The mid brown fabric has a hard, black interior with medium-sized stone grits; the surface has been wet-hand finished.

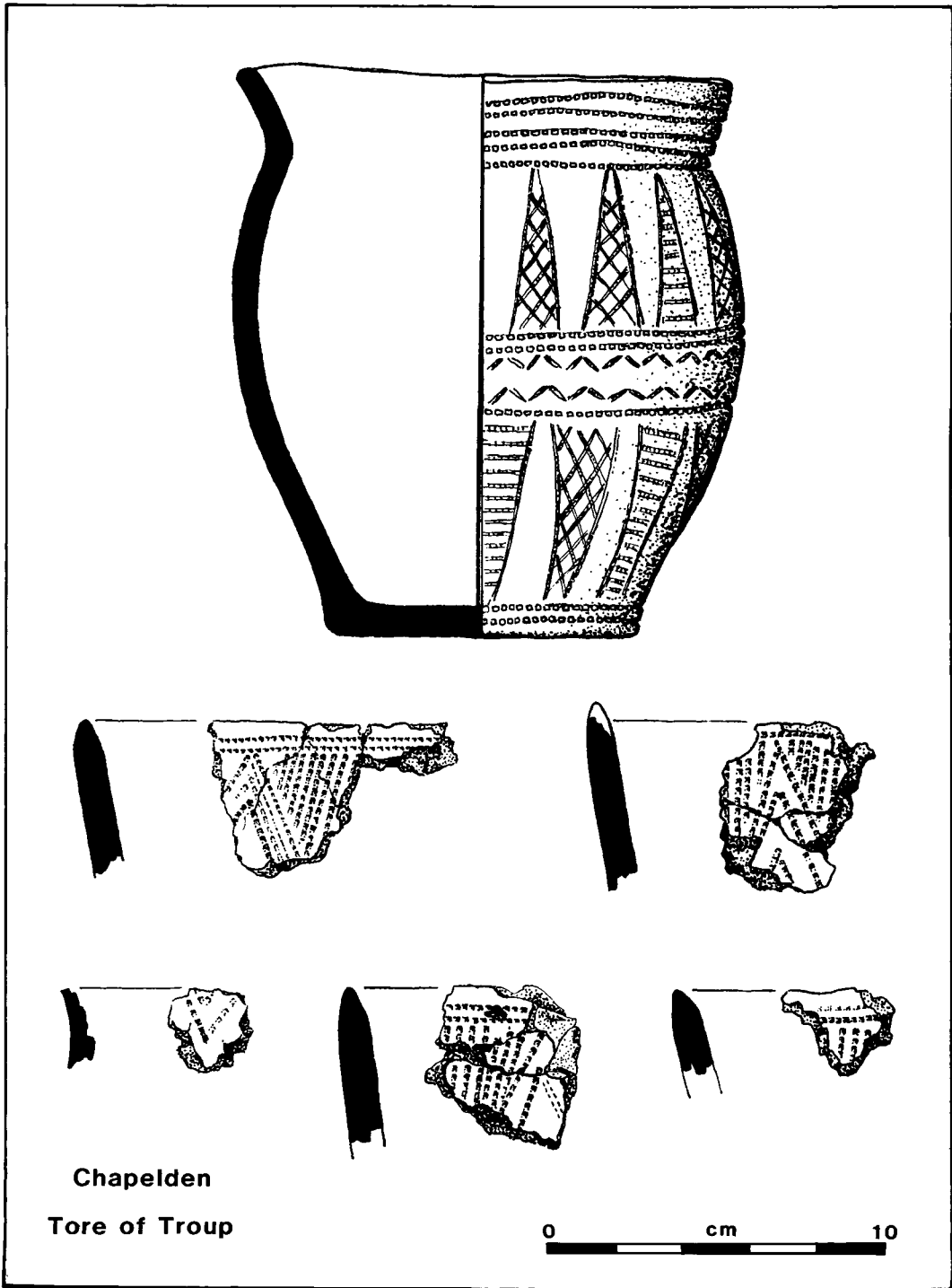
The decoration has been mostly applied very carefully and generally with a comb c 9 mm long with regular square teeth. The decoration is in five zones of very unequal size. The most striking aspect of the decoration is the large triangles filled with criss-cross or ladder motifs on the upper and lower bellies.

This beaker can be best accommodated within Clarke's scheme as a Final Northern (N4) pot, in view of the high, rounded belly and zone-straddling motifs: these constitute Clarke's style e – 'balancing the upper and lower registers about the belly axis' (1970, 191). The pot is very similar to its near neighbour from Afforsk, Gardenstown (less than 5 km to the west of Chapelden: Clarke 1970, no 1572, fig 728) and, even more, to the beaker from Mill Farm, Rathen (c 16 km to the east: *ibid*, no 1476, fig 726). Looking south, the beaker from Mains of Scotston, Bridge of Don, Aberdeen is also a close parallel (*Discovery Excav Scot* 1975, 5).

However, some difficulties are encountered when attempting to place this Chapelden beaker and its fellows in the scheme of Lanting and Van der Waals (1972). The sharp division between the short neck and the high belly, both through a tight bend and the neck decoration could point to a Step 4 placing, as might the graceful S-profile and zonation on the upper part of the Afforsk pot. The existence of a strand of such globular beakers with short everted necks, running parallel to the



ILLUS 3 Cist from south-west (scale in feet)



ILLUS 4 Beakers 1 and 2 (scale 1:2)

development of conventional beakers in north-east Scotland, has been argued elsewhere (Shepherd 1986, 26–28). Admittedly, Clarke felt that many of these pots could be confined within his Final Northern group, in which he defined two series, necked and biconical (1970, 192). Perhaps such problems help to explain why Lanting and Van der Waals found the Final Northern group to be one of the least satisfactory of Clarke's groupings (1972, 29).

#### Beaker 2

This pot is represented by five rimsherds and nine small body sherds in a rather flaky fabric with small stone grits. The exterior bears a mid brown to buff slip. Very little can be said about the shape of this vessel, although it is clear that it did have a pointed rim; the sherds are c 8 mm thick.

It should be noted that the fractures on the sherds are fresh and unabraded, indicating that they are unlikely to represent accidental inclusion of residual material; rather the emplacement of these sherds on the capstone would seem to have been a deliberate act.

The decorative scheme on the neck seems to have consisted of tall chevrons flanked by vertical filling. All the decoration has been executed with a comb with very fine, square teeth; it is not possible to estimate its length, but it was probably different from the one used on beaker no 1.

This pot cannot be classified precisely, although the tall triangles on the neck suggest that it should be placed late in the sequence of Scottish beakers. The N4 pot from Rathen clearly has some similarities in decoration (Clarke 1970, fig 726, no 1476), as does the N3 beaker from Inveramsay, Aberdeenshire (*ibid*, fig 682, no 1457). In fact there are several Late Northern beakers with similar bold triangles or chevrons (eg *ibid*, figs 670, 689, 692). Finally, beyond the Northern tradition, one may note the use of multiple chevrons on two S3 (E) beakers from the west: Kilmarie, Skye (*ibid*, fig 968, no 1672) and Glenforsa, Mull (*ibid*, fig 671, no 1532).

#### DISCUSSION

The placing of a few fresh sherds of a beaker on the capstone at Chapelden is a reminder of other similar final acts of burial ritual which are often not recognized or recorded owing to the circumstances of discovery. The circumstances at Chapelden were replicated to some extent at Dryburn Bridge, East Lothian where two short cists were found, each with a disarticulated individual as well as a crouched burial; on the capstone of one of the cists lay a beaker (Pollock & Triscott 1980, 369). Other symbols or actions may have served a similar purpose; for example the signs of burning found on the capstones of two of the cists in the Borrowstone cist cemetery, Kingswells, Aberdeen (Shepherd 1986, 13). The recently-broken jet pendants in cists 2 and 5 at Barns Farm, Dalgety, Fife have been interpreted as final acts of mourning (Shepherd in Watkins 1982, 131). The Chapelden and Dryburn Bridge practices may also be related to the occurrence of 'accessory beakers' in N4 contexts, most convincingly at Keir Belhelvie in east Aberdeenshire, where a long-necked (N3 (L)) beaker accompanied two 'necked' N4 pots (Clarke 1970, 194–5).

The complete beaker from Chapelden joins a group of remarkably similar beakers stretching along the north coast of Grampian from Portsoy through Gardenstown and Pennan to Tyrie and Rathen (Clarke 1970, nos 1589, 1572, 1504, 1476). This group forms part of one of the heaviest concentrations of beaker burials in Britain. This extreme north-east corner is also the only area to demonstrate the full range of beaker types in Grampian, which may indicate early and enthusiastic adoption of beaker traits in the area (Shepherd 1986, 25, illus 11). In all events, the Chapelden cist burial must be seen as belonging to a mature phase of this process. Given the details of orientation and position recovered, the opportunity has been taken to review the related evidence within the region.

## A NOTE ON THE ORIENTATION OF BEAKER BURIALS IN NORTH-EAST SCOTLAND

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### INTRODUCTION

The Chapelden skeleton, a male, was extant enough to offer details of the orientation of the burial. Although there had been some displacement of the skull and not all the long bones survived, it was apparent that the body was lying on its left, orientated approximately north-east with an original line of sight of the skull to the south-east.

It consequently represents an example of the pattern of positioning for male burials with beakers first identified in East Yorkshire (Tuckwell 1975). The pattern is that of males placed on their left (L), orientated either directly east (E) or within the eastern quadrant, with a line of sight to the south or southern quadrant (the LESM pattern) and females lying on their right (R), orientated west (W) or in the western quadrant with a line of sight also to the south (S) (RWSF).

Chapelden is part of the high concentration of beaker burial evidence in the north-east of Scotland. In spite of the numbers of recorded burials, there is pitifully little definite evidence of orientation. However, a review of such evidence as does exist for an area covering primarily Grampian, but stretching as far as the Lunan valley to the south and Inverness in the north-west, indicates the existence of the same beaker burial pattern for north-east Scotland as was observed in East Yorkshire.

The data are summarized in table 1 which lists the burials alphabetically by sex (table 2, giving references for all burials, is in fiche 1:B8). The clear differentiation between the positioning of the skeletons of known sex (only in the case of Mains of Balnagowan does there appear to be a deviation

TABLE 1  
North-east beaker burial data sorted by sex

Site	Side	Orientation	Line of sight	Sex	Beaker step
Borrowstone, Newhills 4	R	W	S	–	5
Borrowstone, Newhills 1	R?	W	S?	F	5
Boysack	R	W	S	F	5
Donside Field, Manar Estate	R	W	S	F?	5
Fallaws Farm	–	E	–	F	5
Kemnay, Paradise Road	R	W	S	F	5
Ladymire, Logie Buchan	R?	W	?	F	5
Mains of Leslie, Premnay	R	W	S	F	4
Nether Criggie, Dunnottar	R	W	S	F	5
Borrowstone, Newhills 2	L	E	S	M	4
Borrowstone, Newhills 3	L	E	S	M	4
Borrowstone, Newhills 5	–	E	–	M	4
Borrowstone, Newhills 6	L	E	S	M	4
Broomend, Crichie 2	L	E	S	M	5
Chapelden, Aberdour	L	NE	SE	M	4?
Hatton Mill, Friockheim	L	NE	SE	M	3?
Keabog, Pitdrichie	L	E	S	M	6
Lesmurdie B	L?	NNE	ESE	M	4
Mains of Balnagowan	R	WSW	SSE	M	4
Mains of Scotston	L	E	S	M	4
Newlands, Oyne 1	L	NE	SE	M	5
Park Quarry 1	L	E	S	M	3
Sandhole, Fetterangus	L	E	S	M	3
Tavelty Farm, Kintore	–	E	–	M	4
Upper Mains of Catterline	L	NE	SE	M	6
Whitehouse, Skene	L	E	S	M	4

from the pattern) suggests it is valid to infer the same sexual differentiation for unsexed skeletons, LES burials representing males and RWS females.

Even where no orientation details survive, further data could be obtained from extant beaker skeletal material where sexing is possible. If from the condition of certain bones the side in contact with the ground and consequently the side on which the burial was placed could be determined, then this, together with the sex of the burial, could help to confirm adherence at least to the sexual differentiation of the burial rite.

#### THE PATTERN AND BEAKER TYPOLOGY

An attempt was made with the Yorkshire burials to determine the correlation between beaker development, as defined by Lanting and Van der Waals, and any changes in the orientation pattern. There was some indication that burials accompanied by beakers of Step 4 adhered exclusively to the 'pure' LESM/RWSF pattern (ie orientation directly east and west); the pattern may have been established with beakers of Step 3. The majority of burials with Step 5 and 6 beakers continued to exhibit the pattern but it was less clearly adhered to and this tendency increased among burials with Step 7 beakers.

The north-east burials are accompanied principally by beakers of Steps 4 and 5. Only two, those from Fetterangus and Park Quarry, can be said to have definite Step 3 beakers. These burials are pure LES(M), an indication, as in Yorkshire, that the pattern was also present with Step 3 beakers. It is interesting to note that in the Scottish sample, beakers identified as Step 5 occur almost solely with female burials or, where the skeleton has not been sexed, with burials of the 'female' RWS pattern (table 1). Although all indications are based on a very small sample the tendency is enough to suggest a reservation against placing too heavy a chronological implication on beaker typology, ie Step 5 need not be later than 4 but indicative of a different style specifically for females. This is one of the areas where the extraction of further evidence from the existing skeletal material could prove worthwhile.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PATTERN

The meaning and origins of the LESM/RWSF pattern have been discussed previously (Tuckwell 1975) and little can be added to provide any definite conclusions. However, the recognition of the pattern in the north-east of Scotland prompts some further speculation on the implications of its distribution. The links between this area and East Yorkshire, already apparent in their similar concentrations of beaker evidence and through Clarke's Northern series (1970, 158-9) are now reinforced by this use of the same burial pattern.

Orientation details from the scanty evidence for the rest of Scotland, such as examples in east Lothian and Berwickshire and up into Caithness, suggest that the pattern may well have extended beyond the north-east. The adherence to rules of ritual positioning by those burying their dead as far apart as the Black Isle and East Yorkshire has significant implications for any discussion of whether the beaker phenomenon represents a widespread dissemination of goods and ideas or a concentrated movement of peoples.

#### LOCATION OF OBJECTS AND ARCHIVE

The beakers are in the care of the Anthropological Museum of the University of Aberdeen (Marischal College) and the site archive is in the Grampian Regional Council Sites and Monuments Record.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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