

## 5. THE BURIAL

The ploughsoil that sealed the cist and its environs consisted of friable, dark grey-brown gritty sandy and stony silt that varied from 0.1m to 0.23m thick.

### 5.1 Contents of the cist

The sub-rectangular interior of the cist was defined by four side slabs (Context 006) that pitched slightly together towards the top, so that it measured 0.88m east/west by 0.4m at the top but 1.10m east/west by 0.77m at the base. The base was formed of the natural sandy gravel subsoil (Context 012) (Illus 4 & 5).

A thin, irregular spread of compacted, dark grey-brown, gritty sandy silt (Context 011) lay about a centimetre thick across the base, beneath and around the human remains (Illus 4 & 5). It may have derived from the decay of organic materials, including the body. Similar, amorphous stains have been identified in other Early Bronze Age cist burials, for example at Doons Law in Berwickshire (Clarke & Hamilton 1999) and at Mains of Scotstown, Sandhole Quarry and Tavelty Farm, all in Aberdeenshire (Ralston 1996).

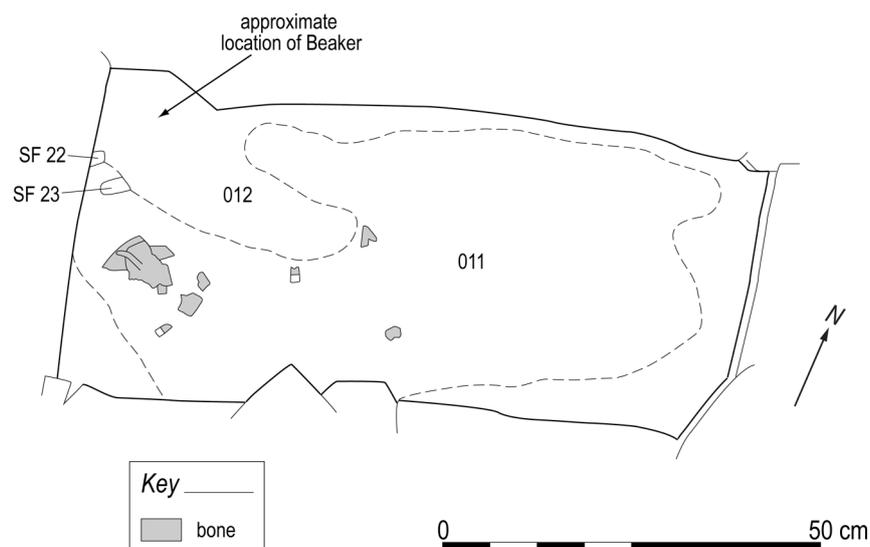
At the western end lay a concentration of skull fragments, including part of a temporal bone found directly on top of a mandible. Several other cranial fragments and teeth lay in the same area

and across the western half of the cist. Two worked flints (SF022 and SF023) lay to the north-west. Two conjoining fragments of a copper awl (SF025) were also recovered from a bulk sample taken from the basal deposit (Context 011) in the north-west corner. Taken together, the evidence suggests that a body was laid in the cist with the head to the west and the artefacts were placed behind the head. This would be in keeping with Beaker burial practice (Tuckwell 1975: 109; Shepherd 2012, and see 10 'Discussion' below).

Above was loose ploughsoil (Context 009) that had fallen in when the capping slab was dragged out of place by the plough. Human bone and teeth and pieces of worked flint, none apparently in situ, lay in it. A triangular slab (Context 014, not illustrated) sat in the north-west corner of the cist with the Beaker sherds lying on it, where the farmer had placed them. When he first observed the Beaker, it lay already broken in this corner of the cist (Ian Menzies, pers comm).

### 5.2 Construction of the cist

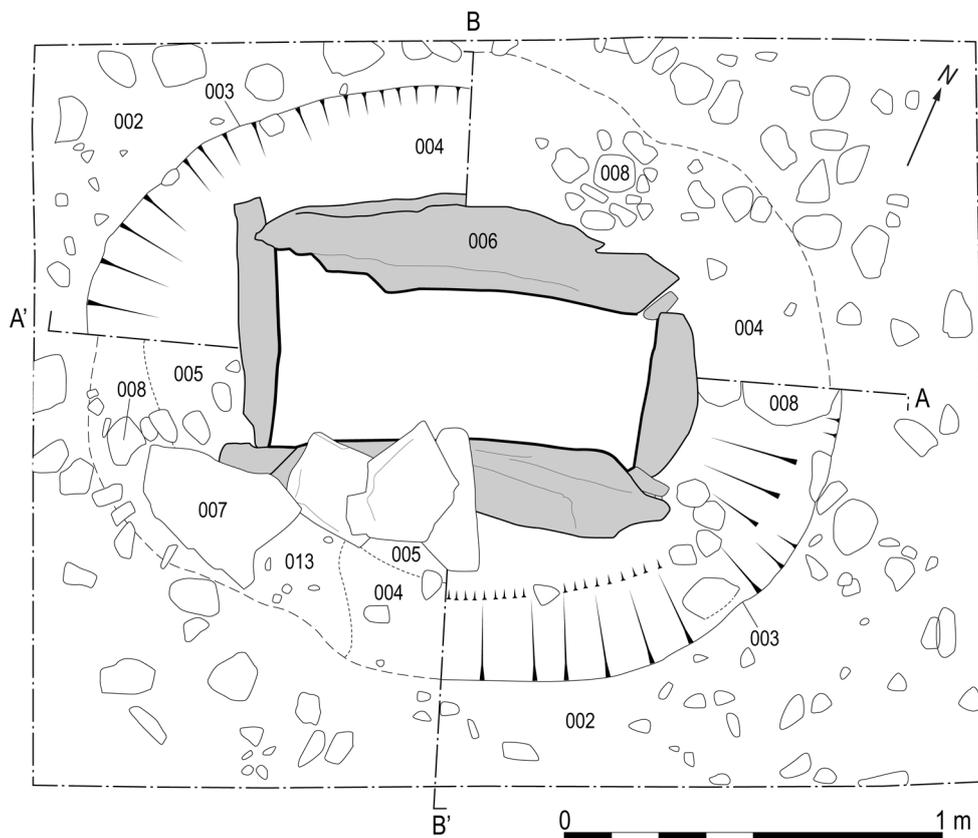
The cist had been constructed by first digging a large, sub-oval pit (Context 003) to contain the structure; it had been cut, 1.94m east/west by 1.7m and about 0.55m deep, into the yellow-orange coarse sand, pea grit and firmly set stones of the subsoil (Illus



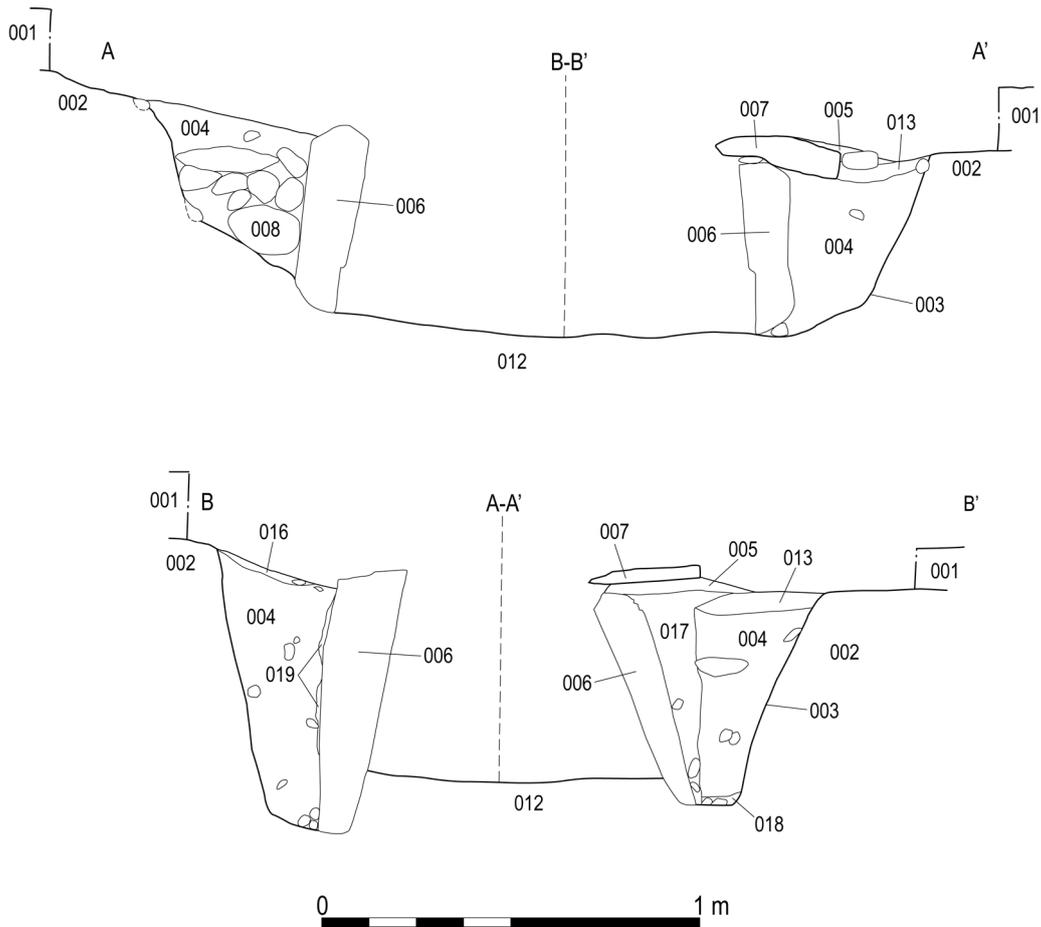
Illus 4 Plan of deposits inside the cist. © Northlight Heritage



**Illus 5** The interior of the cist with skull fragments and basal deposit 011, from the north and above.  
© Northlight Heritage



**Illus 6** Post-excavation plan of the cist. © Northlight Heritage



**Illus 7** Sections across the cist structure. © Northlight Heritage

6 & 7). The upright slabs (Context 006) on the north and south were taller than the others and, to accommodate them, the builders had excavated near-vertical sides on the north and south, cutting away the lower subsoil in steps and setting the slabs hard against the edges of the cut. They dug the east and west sides to descend steeply to a gently sloping base in order to give the slabs on these sides greater height.

The eastern slab was of coarse-grained granite with an irregular surface. A small, pecked hollow measuring 2cm in diameter was observed in the centre of its inner face, about 0.33m from the base (Illus 8). The other slabs were of finer-grained, sedimentary rock and no markings were observed on their accessible faces.

The builders packed cobbles and small slabs (Context 008) behind the eastern slab and at the south-west and north-east corners, but relatively little packing material was observed elsewhere

(Illus 7). Gaps at the lower corners were chocked with cobbles except on the south-east, and the north-east corner was also pinned with long, angular stones.

After the cist was constructed, light yellow gravelly sandy subsoil (Context 017) had been packed behind the base of the more steeply leaning southern slab. Then the rest of the pit outside the structure was backfilled with the coarse, dark orange-brown sand (Context 004) which had been dug out to make it. Roots had penetrated along the north face of the northern slab, leaving pockets of more humic, gritty loam (Context 019). On the north and south, the pit fill was sealed by a thin layer of light orange-brown sandy silt (Contexts 016 and 013), a remnant topsoil.

The builders set several slabs (Context 007) over the edge of the cist on the west and south to support the capping slab, which had an irregular underside. Over the western side they also set a large



**Illus 8** The pecked hollow on the interior face of the eastern slab, from the west. © Northlight Heritage



**Illus 9** The slab with a straight, serrated edge, set over west edge of the cist, from the east. © Northlight Heritage

slab with a serrated edge, which appeared to have been chipped to straighten it (Illus 2 & 9). Fine, pale yellow sand (Context 005) had been packed beneath the southern levelling slabs and partly over the western one before the capping slab was put in place (Illus 2 & 7).

The capping slab (Context 015, not illustrated) was an irregular triangle in plan, measuring 1.38m

long by up to 0.68m wide and up to 0.10m thick. The surfaces were extremely irregular and weathered, and no artificial marks were observed on either face. When the capping slab was replaced, it became clear that a smaller slab (Context 020), found pitched at the cist's south-east corner, had been set to fill a gap created by its irregular shape (Illus 2 & 3).