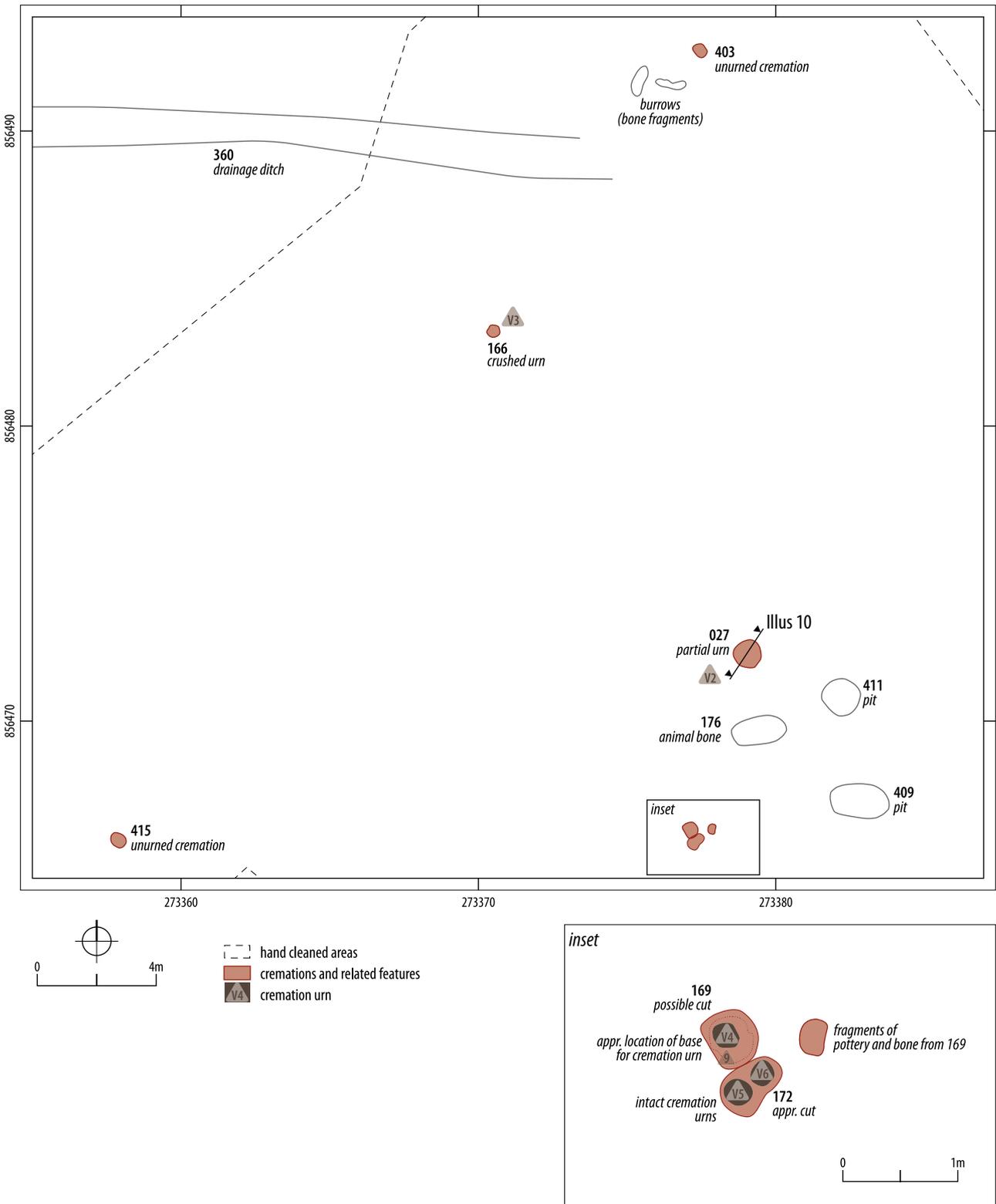


6. MIDDLE BRONZE AGE CREMATION BURIALS



Illus 9 Plan of cremation burials (© Headland Archaeology)

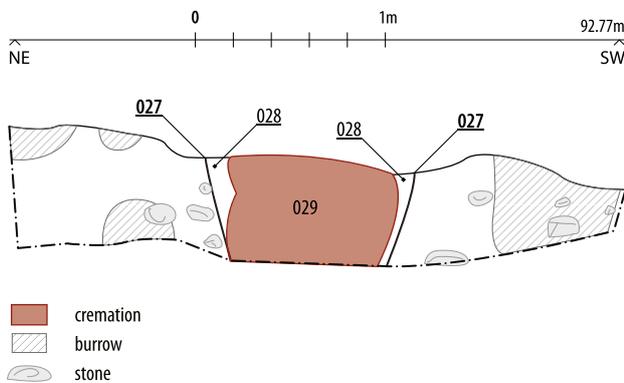
Table 4 Summary of contexts containing burnt bone

Feature	Context	Associated vessel	Weight	Description
Cremation Pit 017	Fill 018	V2	16g	Context (018) denotes cremated bone which had spilled out of V2 through disturbance
Cremation Pit 017	Fill 029 of V2	V2	c 414g	Combined, C018 and C029 equalled c 430g of cremated bone from V2 Three fragments of the orbit from the frontal bone were identified as being probably male
Pit 019	Fill 020	–	< 3g	
Cremation Pit 027	Fill 028	–	< 3g	
Cist 030	Fill 031	–	< 3g	Fill of Cist 030
Cist 030	Fill 032	V1	< 3g	Inner fill of Cist 030
Pit 110	Fill 111	–	< 3g	
Cremation Pit 166	Fill 168 of V3	V3	274g	Contained large fragments of cremated bone of a probable adult
Cremation Pit 169	Fill 171 of V4	V4	471g	Contained large fragments of cremated bone. An additional 28g of cremated bone was identified in the surrounding fill through bioturbation
Cremation Pit 172	Fill 173	V5	8g	Burnt bone and charcoal flecks. Fill surrounding Vessels 5 and 6. Probably derived from V6
Cremation Pit 172	Fill 174 of V5	V5	1,140g	Burnt bone and charcoal; antler present
Cremation Pit 172	Fill 175 of V6	V6	678g	Burnt bone and charcoal; antler present as well as unspecified faunal bone
Pit 224	Fill 225	–	< 3g	
Pit 325	Fill 326	V10	< 3g	Also contained one sherd of Neolithic pottery
Pit 327	Fill 328	V11	< 3g	Also contained a lithic and charred nut shells
Pit 329	Fill 330	–	< 3g	
Cremation Pit 403	Fill 404	–	171g	Abundant burnt bone fill
Cremation Pit 403	Fill 408	–	–	Fill of animal burrow with fragments of burnt bone from Pit 403 from bioturbation. Same as Fill 404
Cremation Pit 415	Fill 416	–	231g	
Cist 417	Fill 418	–	< 3g	Deposit located around the periphery of Cist 417. Same as Fill 419 but deposited outside cist by bioturbation
Cist 417	Fill 419	–	< 3g	Upper fill within Cist 417. Same as Fill 418
Cist 417	Fill 421	–	< 3g	Sandy backfill of Cist 417; below C420 and above C422

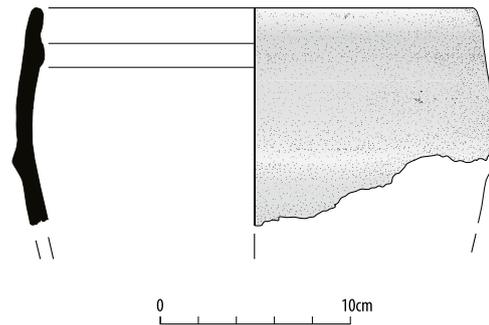
In total five urned cremation burials were discovered at Ness Gap, clustered in the central part of the site (Illus 9). Three of these were upright urns whilst two were inverted. Of the upright urns, two were recovered from a single pit, Pit 172, and were fully intact. The third, from Pit 169, was severely truncated and in a poor condition. The two inverted urns, both of which have also been damaged by truncation, were recovered from Pits 027 and 166. Four of the urns were Cordoned Urns with the fifth being a Cinerary Urn. These all contained variable amounts of burnt human bone (Table 4). The only taxon present in the deposits was oak. The pits and their associated vessels are described individually below.

6.1 Pit 027, Vessel V2

During trenching, a patch containing small sherds of pottery and fragments of burnt bone was discovered on a downhill slope. Upon further investigation, it was discovered to be a cremation urn burial (V2) that had been truncated through ploughing, leaving around a third of its upper portion. An indistinct cut (C027) for the cremation urn was visible as a slight difference in the colour of the sand surrounding the cremation urn edges (Illus 10). Despite the truncation, the cremation urn V2 appeared to be in its original location and had clearly been inverted. The vessel has an interior and exterior cordon positioned 35mm and 95mm from the rim, respectively (Illus 11). The cordons were pinched, with both being rounded and fairly even in height and width (the exterior is around 4mm



Illus 10 Section through Cremation Pit 027 (© Headland Archaeology)



Illus 11 Detail of Cordoned Urn V2 from Pit 027 (© Headland Archaeology)

in thickness and the interior varies between 2mm and 4mm). The rim is rounded and similar to most of the other urns in the assemblage. However, the upper 20mm of the vessel is thicker, giving the effect of a subtly bulging band.

The cremated bone within urn V2 was radiocarbon dated to 1630–1450 cal BC (95.4% probability; SUERC-61662) and was identified as an adult male aged approximately 25–35 years old. No other finds were associated with V2. However, the cremated bone showed copper alloy staining, which suggests objects of this material must have accompanied the deceased into the pyre.

6.2 Pit 166, Vessel V3

A further inverted urned cremation, V3, was excavated 14m NNW uphill of Pit 027 in a small hollow. It was contained within Pit 166, which measured 0.7 × 0.6m and 0.05m deep and had suffered greater plough damage than V2. Around a fifth of the vessel remained in a roughly circular but disturbed position. The urn is unique in the assemblage due to its internal rim bevel, which is very irregular in thickness; at some points it could be termed expanded on the exterior. The wall thickness of the vessel is very thin (5mm in certain areas) despite the rim being up to 15mm thick. Unfortunately, the overall form cannot be confidently judged. There was at least one cordon which was U-sectioned and has either been pinched then folded downwards or applied. There are smoothing marks above the cordon and a fold below, between its join to the body.

The amount of cremated bone in the vessel was the smallest of the urned cremations; this is not surprising, due to its heavy truncation. The bone was radiocarbon dated to 1760–1540 cal BC (95.4% probability; SUERC-64983) and was found to be from an adult, but provided no further osteological information.

6.3 Pit 169, Vessel V4

Pit 169 containing V4 was located immediately to the north of Pit 172 (Illus 9). Only the truncated remains of the base of the pit survive as a shallow hollow measuring 0.6 × 0.5m and 0.05m deep. Urn V4 was the worst preserved, as not only had it been ploughed, it also had extensive root disturbance, causing the sherds to crumble and spall when lifted. The vessel was deposited in the ground upright but what remained had crushed down on itself. Reconstruction was not possible due to its friable condition, but the base sherds indicate a diameter of *c* 110mm. One of the retrieved sherds displays a shallow cordon, although its positioning on the



Illus 12 Fragments of the putative razor from V4 (photo by Alison Sheridan, National Museums Scotland)

vessel could not be identified. A further small cluster of pottery fragments and burnt bone was found in a very shallow natural depression 0.75m to the east. These have been interpreted as having been dragged from Pit 169 by ploughing.

Fragments probably representing three objects, including a possible razor, were recovered from V4. The first artefact is represented by a set of three flat and very thin (0.6–0.8mm) non-joining fragments, which are greenish-brown with a yellowish patch on one side. The overall shape of the fragments suggests they form a tanged object that was broader at its distal end than at the tang. The most likely interpretation is that the fragments are the remains of a very thin, diminutive razor, with a narrow rivet hole for attachment to a handle (Illus 12). A further three fragments are minimally thicker (0.65–1.2mm) and include a piece of deliberately bent copper alloy sheet. The copper alloy sheet is 8mm wide and was bent to leave a gap of 4.25mm between the two ‘arms’. The object has been interpreted as a handle for a thin organic object. The remaining two objects may have formed part of the same artefact, with the larger piece measuring 12.5 × 7.6 × 1.2mm. A kink was identified but, in this case, it appears to be a product of distortion due to burning, not a deliberate feature. The flaky and blistered appearance of most of the fragments suggests that the metal had been through the funeral pyre (Illus 13). Due to the condition of the fragments, no plausible identification of the object can be suggested but it seems unlikely they represent a metal cover for the putative razor.

The cremated bone within V4 dated to 1630–1450 cal BC (95.4% probability; SUERC-61661) and was an adult female. No further osteological information was gained from analysis of these remains.

6.4 Pit 172, Vessels V5 and V6

The most impressive of the urned cremations are vessels V5 and V6, both complete on recovery, which had been buried in a single pit, Pit 172. This pit was not visible on the surface as it was cut into a band of very clean sand and backfilled with the same material (Illus 9). It was only discovered when an area around vessel V4 was being cleaned back and the rim of one of the vessels was revealed. A slight change in compactness upon excavation revealed



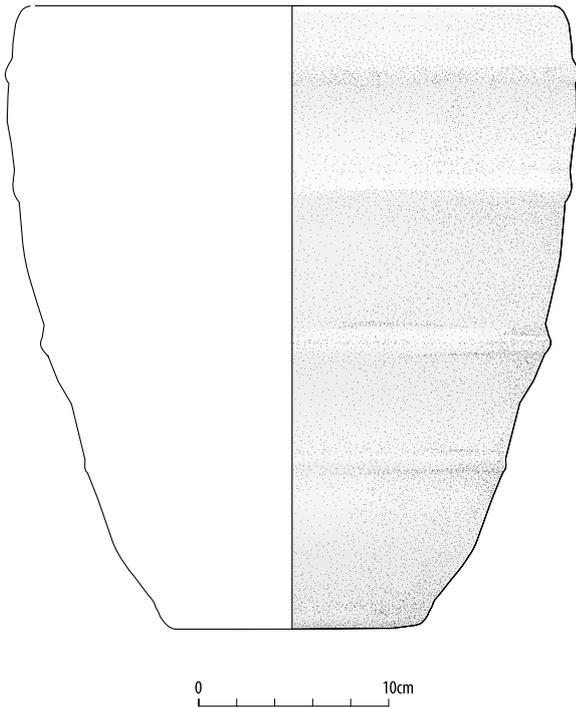
Illus 13 Copper alloy finds from V4 (photo by Alison Sheridan, National Museums Scotland)

the cut to be very tight to the vessels, measuring approximately 0.54×0.29 m and 0.35m deep. The two urns were buried in an upright position at a substantially greater depth than the other vessels and hence survived the plough. The two vessels were gently touching within the pit, indicating they may have been interred at the same time.

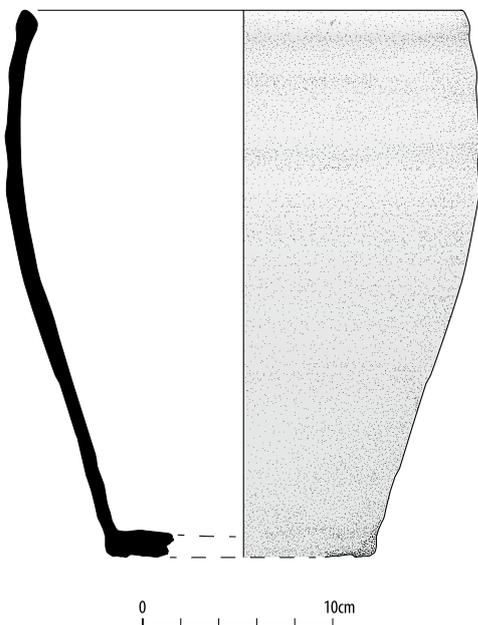
The two urns (and most of the pit) were extracted in one block and excavated under laboratory conditions. Upon excavation, the smaller of the two urns (V6) was discovered to be broken at its base, where it is likely an animal had burrowed into its side. Due to this, a bead and some burnt bone discovered within the pit fill have been attributed to this vessel. Urn V5 (Illus 14) is the larger of the two and has a simple profile which slightly barrels inwards at the rounded rim. This vessel

has four shallow applied cordons spaced at uneven intervals along the vessel. The vessel is very similar to the Cordoned Urn found at the nearby site of Stoneyfield, Inverness (Simpson 1996: 75, illus 18). Urn V6 is also barrel-shaped, with a base around half the size of the rim diameter and walls which kick out at the bottom before curving upwards. The vessel has two very shallow and uneven pinched cordons located 25mm and 95mm from the rounded rim (Illus 15).

The cremated bone in urn V6 dated to 1660–1500 cal BC (95.4% probability; SUERC-61660) and was identified as an adult, most probably female. The bone within urn V5 was radiocarbon dated to 1750–1540 cal BC (95.4% probability; SUERC-61659) and was that of a female of approximately 35–39 years of age. Cremation is much more destructive of the articular



Illus 14 Cremation urn V5 (© Headland Archaeology)



Illus 15 Cremation urn V6 (© Headland Archaeology)

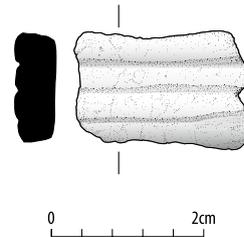
ends of bones than of the shafts of long bones or the skull (McKinley 2000: 405; Harvig 2015: 52). As such, few instances of degenerative changes to joint surfaces were recorded in the cremated bone

assemblage. However, fragments of the bodies of two thoracic vertebrae (from the upper part of the thoracic spine) from urn V5 showed some lipping, a not unusual sign of ageing. The head of the right radius from the same skeleton displayed evidence of osteochondritis dissecans which can be caused by a single trauma (Rogers & Waldron 1995: 28) or micro-trauma from repetitive action (Aufderheide & Rodriguez-Martin 1998: 81). There was also evidence to suggest the female had lost a tooth at least a year before death; whether this was due to caries or gum disease was impossible to determine.

In these two cremations, bones from the tips of the fingers were recovered that were fully calcined (white). It has been suggested that fully cremated extremities imply the body lying flat in the pyre with arms crossed on top of the body (Squires 2015: 161). The remains in the vessels had been particularly carefully gathered. In both cases, some small bones from the extremities of the fingers and toes were identified. These included the sesamoid bone, a bone less than 7mm in size, from urn V5. Many bone fragments had a maximum dimension of around 90mm, indicating that the cremated remains had probably been allowed to cool before

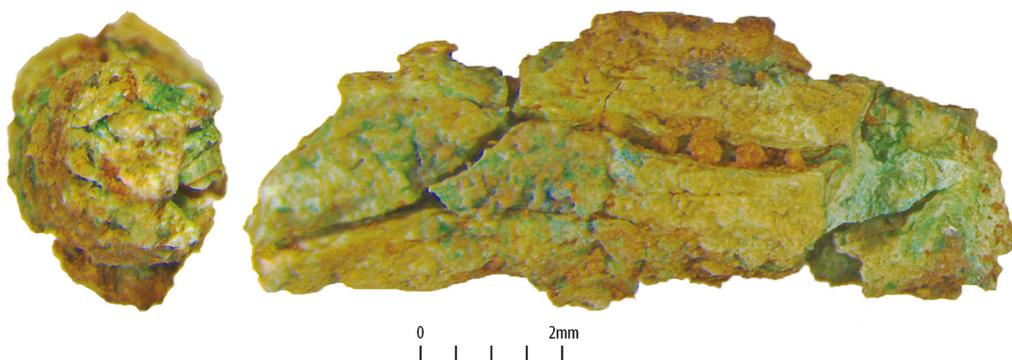
gathering. The minimal disturbance of the material took place between gathering and final interment in the urns as excavated (Harvig 2015). Fragments of all sizes, and from all areas of the skeleton, were recovered from each level of the vessels. This suggests that the remains were not placed in the urns from the pyre in a systematic (for example, head to feet) way. Both the individuals had been accompanied on the pyre by objects of antler. In urn V6, antler was recovered from all levels of the pot, with pieces from the top and bottom of the vessel fitting together. The material was fully calcined throughout and had stains of molten copper alloy. The beam of a red deer antler recovered from this vessel showed evidence of a hand-polished and shaped end with a hollow core indicative of a tool handle with a diameter of 23mm. In addition, the vessel contained a calcined fragment from the proximal articulation of a large mammal (probably cattle or deer). As this is not a particularly meat-rich part of the carcass, it may represent a fragment of another tool-handle or may have been attached to a hide.

An abraded sherd of a ‘fineware’ Beaker, measuring 22.5 × 15.5mm with three horizontal lines of decoration, was discovered within urn V5 (Illus 16). The very regular shape and abraded edges could imply it was a small token worn through handling. Alternatively, its regularity may be because it was broken along coil joins. The sherd passed through the pyre, yet it is impossible to discern if it was added deliberately. The accidental inclusion of something lying on the ground may be just as likely if the cremated remains were scooped up in their entirety, with everything indiscriminately collected.



Illus 16 Beaker sherd from V5 (© Headland Archaeology)

Several fragments of metalwork were also recovered from within the vessels. A fragment (plus crumbs) of a round-sectioned rod, presumed to be of copper alloy rather than of copper, measuring 11 × 3.9mm was found among the material from V6 within the pit (Illus 17). In colour, the fragment is a variegated light and dark green and brown with a matt texture. The fragment is heavily corroded and crazed with very little, if any, of the original surface surviving. The corrosion process has involved springing along the deep cracks, which makes the rod’s diameter slightly greater than it would have been. The rod is also very slightly warped; this could be due to the effects of burning during the cremation process. The rod has been interpreted as an awl, rather than a pin shaft, for two reasons. Firstly, a possible fragmentary antler handle was recovered within the calcined remains in V6. This could potentially be interpreted as a handle for an awl. Early Bronze Age awls with organic handles are known from other sites across Britain (e.g. of wood, in a barrow in Wiltshire excavated by Hoare: Annable & Simpson 1964, no. 420). Secondly,



Illus 17 Fragment of a round-sectioned rod from V6 (photo by Alison Sheridan, National Museums Scotland)

metal pins are far rarer than awls in Early Bronze Age Cinerary Urn contexts (Woodward & Hunter 2015).

A fragmentary object, possibly a razor, was also recovered from the fill of urn V5. This comprised three principal fragments (which do not conjoin), together with numerous crumbs of a very thin object (Illus 18). The largest fragment measures 8.9 × 7.5mm and is just 0.8mm thick, with part of an original edge surviving on one side. The surface is matt and variegated green and brown in colour. The largest fragment may come from the broad part of a tang for a razor as the metal seems to be too thin for the object to have been a knife. The fragmentary and poor condition of the object is consistent with its having passed through the funerary pyre.

Along with the metalwork, two beads were associated with cremation urn V6. The faience bead from within the vessel is comprised of a complete segmented bead of six segments, broken into two fragments (Illus 19). The bead is broken along the intersegment hollow, where the wall is thinnest, and probably broke in antiquity within the urn. The overall length of the bead is 20.3mm, with a diameter of 4.1–4.5mm, and a hole diameter of 1.6–1.9mm. The bead is cylindrical with flattish-topped segments, ranging in width between 3.1mm

and 3.9mm, defined by incised grooves of irregular depth. The ends are perpendicular to the long axis of the bead. The longitudinal hole is circular and centrally-located, and there are clear internal corrugations formed as a result of the faience paste having been wrapped around a stalk of straw during the manufacturing process, prior to firing. The bead is matt and most of its original (and probably thin) blue glaze is no longer present. Thus, the dominant colour is that of its weathered core, a brownish-buff, with occasional blackish-red speckles (which are probably of cuprite, produced by the heating of the copper-based glaze colourant in the reducing atmosphere of the funerary pyre). However, over one part of its circumference, extending part-way into the body of the bead, there is a strip of weathered pale blue glaze. The surface is slightly rough and pitted with numerous tiny vesicles formed by the escape of gas during the bead's firing. The quartz grains have fused sufficiently so that only a few incompletely fused grains are visible. Two small spall scars on two of the segments relate to ancient damage, quite possibly due to heating in the funeral pyre. There are no obvious signs of thread-wear or bead-on-bead wear.

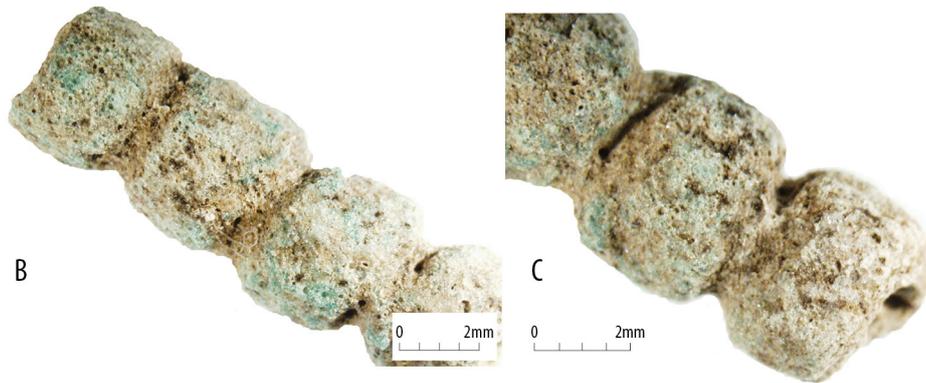
A calcined fusiform bone bead of a compact texture and off-white colour was recovered from within the pit fill (C173) associated with V6 (Illus 20). The bead was likely dislodged from the fill of V6 as a result of the animal-burrowing which broke the base of the vessel. The bead measures 11.1mm in length with a diameter of 7.7–7.8mm. In cross-section, the bead appears as a minimally flattened circle within the body, tapering at the ends. The longitudinal perforation is wide, slightly tapered and centrally positioned with a smooth interior. The diameter of the hole is 3.2mm at one end and *c* 4.3mm at the other, with the wider end displaying a sharper perforation edge. The narrow end of the perforation has been choked, around 2mm down the hole, by a blackish-brown material that is suspected to be manganese precipitated from the groundwater post-depositionally. There is also a small patch of similar-looking material adhering to the exterior surface. The bead is matt, with a small patch of low sheen on the surface which could have resulted from the initial storage of the bead in a plastic bag (which is known to create post-excavation polish). It is unclear if the bead was originally polished, losing



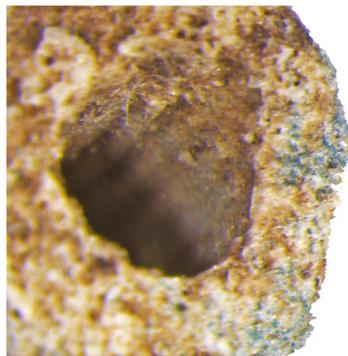
Illus 18 Copper alloy razor from V5 (photo by Alison Sheridan, National Museums Scotland)



A 0 0.5mm



B 0 2mm C 0 2mm



D 0 1mm



E



F

0 2mm

(Above) Illus 19 Faience bead recovered from V6. A: Overall view with the conjoining fragments placed together. B: Details of the four-segment fragment showing the scoring to create the segments and variation in the surface colour. C: The vesicles from gas escaping during the bead's manufacture. D: Corrugation marks along the hole left by the piece of straw around which the faience paste had been wrapped. E: The broken end of the bead. F: The original end of the bead (photo by Alison Sheridan, National Museums Scotland)

(Right) Illus 20 A calcined fusiform bone bead from V6, Pit 172. Images display the overall form, material within the perforation, and shaper perforation edge (photo by Alison Sheridan, National Museums Scotland)



0 2mm

the sheen during the cremation process. There are a couple of hairline cracks extending from the 'sharp' end and almost imperceptible nicking of each end of the hole where the bead ends would have been closest. These may have been caused by thread wear, with the slope of the bead ends being a feature of the original design, as opposed to grinding wear.

6.5 Unurned cremations

Two shallow cuts (C403 and C415) were recorded in the vicinity of the urned cremations, which

contained burnt human bone and small quantities of charcoal. The pits were severely truncated, with Pit 403 further disturbed by burrowing. Cremated bone from within Pit 403 was radiocarbon dated to 1640–1450 cal BC (95.4% probability; SUERC-61663) and identified as an adult but provided no further osteological information. The cremated bone from Pit 415 was dated to 1870–1610 cal BC (95.4% probability; SUERC-61664) and was a probable female adult. In both cases, similarly to the urned cremations, bones from all parts of the skeleton had been gathered for interment.