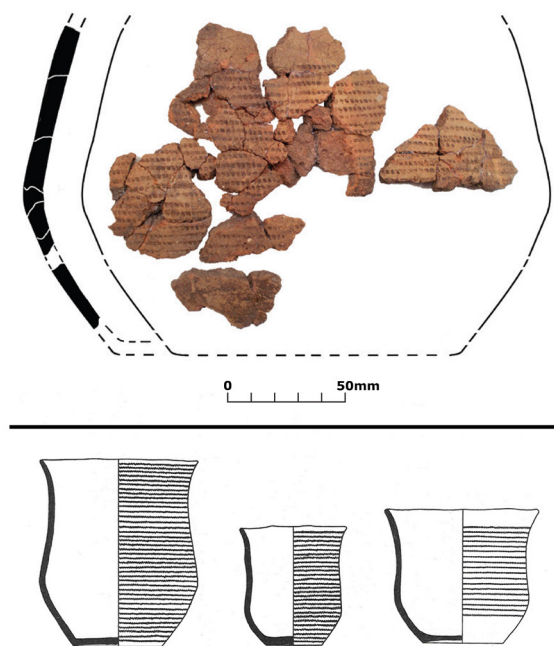


18. APPENDIX 4: THE BEAKER POT

Alison Sheridan

Total reconstruction of the large piece of the pot was not possible owing to the friable, laminar nature of the sherds, their structure having been compromised in several cases by rootlet penetration. The pattern of fragmentation did, however, reveal details of the manufacture of this very fine pot, with several sherds having broken along coil joints; clearly it had been built up using flattened coils of varying height. In one case it was clear that the ends of the coil had been joined in a diagonal seam.

The pot had been made with great skill and care. It has remarkably narrow walls, with wall thickness ranging from as little as 5.5mm at the lower belly to 8.1mm just above the carination. In shape, it is low-carinated, with a rounded carination that will have been located around a quarter of the way up the



Illus 17 The Beaker from Carmahome (above) and a range of formal comparanda (below, from L to R: Grassington, North Yorkshire; Drumelzier, Scottish Borders; Antofts Windypit, North Yorkshire). Note: even though these have impressions made using twisted cord rather than a comb, they are likely to be broadly contemporary with the Carmahome Beaker (after Clarke 1970). (image: Forestry and Land Scotland)

pot. The diameter at the carination will have been *c* 200mm. Below that, the body curved in towards what will have been a flat base, whose estimated diameter is just under 130mm. Further up, at the highest surviving part of the pot, the estimated diameter is *c* 170mm. Above the carination, the wall sloped in gently in a straight line (Illus 17). It is hard to be certain about how much of the upper part of the pot is missing, since the formal *comparanda* (Illus 17) – all Beakers that are likely to be roughly contemporary – show a range of possibilities. The straightness of the wall above the carination is comparable to that on the Drumelzier Beaker, Scottish Borders, although the Carmahome wall slopes inwards slightly, rather than rising vertically. The decorative scheme, with a band of horizontal lines fringed by undecorated zones, is comparable to that on the Antofts Windypits Beaker found in North Yorkshire, although one cannot rule out the possibility that this had been a taller Beaker like another Yorkshire Beaker, the Grassington example, with a further band of decoration on the neck above an undecorated zone (for which a parallel can be cited from Ashberry Windypit, also North Yorkshire: Clarke 1970: 284, no.31). There is no hint of the concavity of the wall above the carination as seen in the Antofts Windypit example. Given the proportions of the surviving part of the Carmahome Beaker, it seems most likely that it had been a tall vessel, like the Grassington example, and is therefore missing around a third of its height (as well as missing its base); its original overall height could therefore have been around 210mm.

Much of the exterior is decorated with horizontal lines of impressions made with a rectangular-toothed comb at least 54mm long. These lines stop at the upper part of the surviving wall, and on the lowest part of the belly, to leave the uppermost and lowermost parts of the exterior plain. The surfaces had been very carefully smoothed prior to decoration, probably by wet-smoothing. The exterior is a rich reddish-brown with grey-brown patches; the core varies from light red-brown to medium grey-brown and blackish; and the interior is a light greyish-brown with a slight reddish tinge. There are no visible signs of any organic residues. Inclusions (which were examined both macroscopically and using a binocular microscope at a magnification of *x*10) are mostly very small (<0.5mm) and sparse, and

consist of sand-sized rounded quartz grains and tiny mica flecks (both probably present naturally in the clay); there are also a few slightly larger inclusions (up to 4.3 x 3.3mm in size) of angular clear quartz and feldspar, plus one sub-angular piece of a light grey stone. Overall, the inclusion density is less than 3% (as estimated using the charts published by Matthew et al 1991).

The vessel is immediately identifiable as belonging to the earliest kinds of Beaker found in Britain and Ireland – ones that are closest in style and in their technique and quality of manufacture to their immediate Continental precursors and congeners. According to David Clarke's 1970 classificatory scheme (Clarke 1970: 290–2, eg nos 81, 84, 86, 88, 92–4, 96, 101–5, 558, Map 2), this would count as a 'European'-style Beaker, with close similarities with his 'All Over Cord-impressed' (AOC) Beaker type. According to Stuart Needham's classificatory scheme (2005), it is a Low-Carinated Beaker with All Over Comb decoration (even though the decoration stops short of covering the whole of the exterior); the type does not feature in Neil Curtis and Neil Wilkin's review of Beakers in north-east Scotland (2019). According to the most up-to-date typochronology for British Beakers, this vessel should date to between *c* 2450 cal BC and *c* 2200/2150 cal BC (Parker Pearson et al 2019: 173). A radiocarbon date within this bracket has indeed been obtained at Carmahome, from hazel charcoal found among the lower turf (018) in the mound (2400–2150 cal BC at 95.4% probability, 3814±28 BP, SUERC-122898). Turf, and possibly pyre debris, may have been added to the mound at this time, and this hazel charcoal could conceivably derive from a funeral pyre. Even though no recoverable Chalcolithic or Early Bronze Age cremated bone was found during the excavation, a scatter of minute cremated bone was observed

within the rubble collapse fill within the passage, and this may support the hypothesis of funerary activity at this time; unfortunately, however, this bone was too comminuted to be radiocarbon-dated or identified to any species.

Other Beaker pottery that is likely to be of Chalcolithic date has been found on Arran. At Tormore, in the earliest phase of a 'hut-circle', AOC pottery was found (MacSween 1997: fig. 8D; note that the pottery may well pre-date the erection of that structure); and at Kilpatrick (cairn 16/2) – just 850m from Carmahome – an AOC Beaker (ibid: fig. 22, top left) was found in the earliest phase of a multi-phase funerary monument, possibly a pit-grave or else a cist. Several other Beakers of definite or probable Chalcolithic date have been found in the west of Scotland, many on or near the coast (Clarke 1970: maps 1 and 2). A small AOC Beaker from a simple pit grave at Sorisdale on the island of Coll (Ritchie & Crawford 1978), radiocarbon dated to 2470–2210 cal BC (95.4% probability; 3879±32 BP, OxA-14722; Jay et al 2019: 54), is particularly important because the young woman whose remains produced the radiocarbon date has been found (from her aDNA and isotope values) to be a first-generation immigrant 'Beaker person' from the Continent, probably from central Germany (Olalde et al 2018: fig. 2). Before the DNA analysis was undertaken, the strontium and oxygen isotope analyses of this woman (Montgomery et al 2019: 395; Pellegrini et al 2019: 419) had already revealed that she had been raised far away from western Scotland, thereby leading to the conclusion that she had been a first-generation immigrant. The possibility that the Carmahome Beaker had also been made and/or owned by an immigrant from the Continent should therefore be borne in mind.