
11 Appendix: salvage recording at Lower Dounreay, Caithness 1956 *by the Ministry of Works*

[Ed.: The account of the work at Lower Dounreay Farm (now part of UKAEA Dounreay) has been mentioned in [Section 10.2](#). Like Lambsdale Leans, the site is not well known, however (e.g. it is absent from the survey of Viking and Late Norse graves, [Batey 1983](#)) and so it is reproduced here – by permission of the Council for Scottish Archaeology – as an appendix, largely unaltered from its 1956 form.]

In the course of excavating a deep trench near Lower Dounreay Farm (NGR NC984 669) with a mechanical digger, human and animal remains were discovered. The Ministry of Works was informed, and in the course of other duties in the district an Inspector of Ancient Monuments carried out a limited exploration of the site.

At least seven skeletons were found; as the first discoveries were dispersed by the digger, it is not possible to determine the number exactly. Excavations on the 29th–30th October exposed four skeletons buried in pits dug in the sand. The interments were 8 to 9 feet (2.4–2.7 m) below present ground level: at least half of this accumulation is later than the interments.

Three of the skeletons were extended, one crouched lying on its right side with arms folded. The left arm of one of the extended skeletons was dismembered at the shoulder. No objects were found in association with the interments. The ganger in charge of the original digging said that the first skeletons found were buried in covered cists, made of

local flagstones, but the cists could not be accurately observed before they were broken up. As no cists were found in the course of the MoW excavations we have little definite knowledge of them. Upright flagstones, which may have belonged to other cists, were visible in the western side of the trench, but it was not possible to explore these.

The opening of the trench also revealed in cross-section the floors of two huts, one containing a clay hearth. As no objects were recovered from these it is not possible to date them absolutely; they may be contemporary with or later than the interments.

At present it can only be suggested that the interments are pre-Christian [Ed.: presumably on the grounds of orientation, though this is not stated]. It is very likely that there are more outside the limits of the 1956 trench: the discovery of three skeletons lying within a 6 ft (1.8 m) square points either to good luck or to a considerable cemetery.

[Ed.: The NMRS notes that ‘several coffins’ were found in the vicinity while part of the stackyard of Lower Dounreay Farm was being levelled in about 1865 and that another burial was recorded in 1966 (NMRS NC96NE3). A Class 3 decorated slab has been found at the foot of the cliffs at Dounreay and is now in the National Museum (National Museums of Scotland X.IB 303) (NMRS NC96NE31). It bears a key pattern in low relief on one face and could be part of a cross-shaft like that found at Reay parish church (National Museums of Scotland: X.IB 267)].