

12. A BRONZE AGE BURIAL CIST AT BALBIE FARM, BURNTISLAND.

In late November 1948 a ploughman on the property of Mr J. Spence, Balbie Farm, Burntisland, encountered and raised a flat stone slab just beneath the surface of the field, on the eastern side of an artificial-looking knoll some 90 feet across, at about 30 feet from the centre. The site is 350 yards south-west of the farmhouse on the summit of an isolated spur (Tournament Hill), over 550 feet

<sup>1</sup> *Statistical Account for Scotland*, 1795.

<sup>2</sup> Anderson, *P.S.A.S.*, vol. xviii.

above sea-level between two higher ridges (Nat. Grid ref. 36/228884). The Ordnance Survey 6-inch map marks "site of cairn" in the next field 200 yards to N.N.E., and "stone cist found" on the other side of Basperd Hill, 500 yards southwards. The existence of the slab had been known for some years, and about six years ago a broken portion of one corner had been lifted and shown to cover a cavity, regarded as a "well." The removal of the entire slab in 1948 revealed a short cist containing burials (fig. 3).

As a result of the earlier investigations, a certain amount of earth had fallen into the cist and covered the floor in the northern and eastern corners, but otherwise the cist was empty of soil. The capstone of sandstone<sup>1</sup> was closely covered

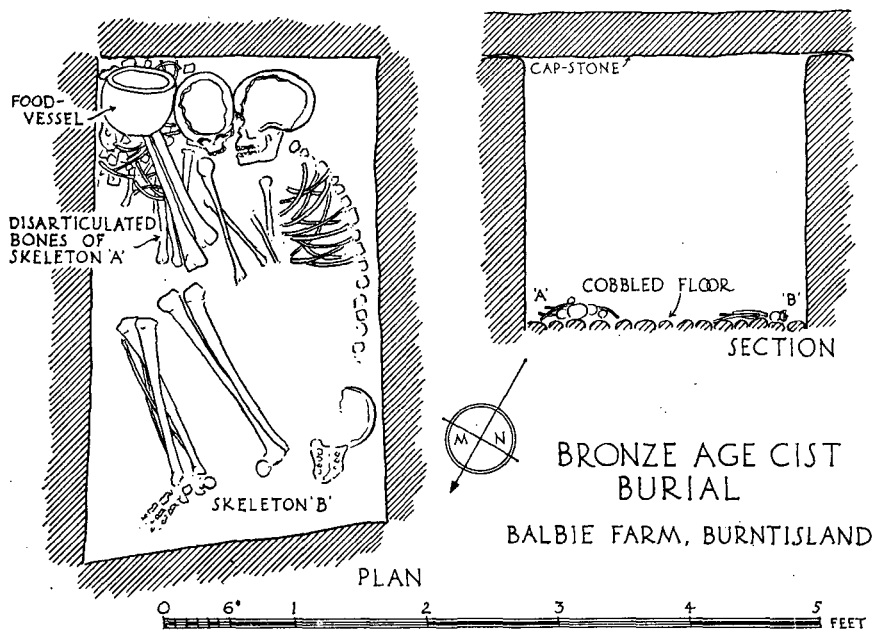


Fig. 3.

with natural cup-marks of various sizes, which had no doubt led to the slab being selected. The sandstone side-slabs were very well fitted at the corners, and the joints here and along the junction with the capstone had been carefully puddled with grey clay. The floor was cobbled with round or oval limestone beach pebbles set in clay: the pebbles were carefully chosen for uniformity of size, averaging about 1 by 2 inches, and presumably had been collected on the shore of the Forth some  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles away.

The burials had been slightly disturbed by the farm workers before the site was examined on 26th November, but the bones covered by earth were unmoved. It was found that the cist contained two skeletons, one articulated and in a crouched position (Skeleton B), and the other obviously removed to make room for this burial, and the disarticulated bones piled in a heap in the eastern corner of

<sup>1</sup> Kindly identified by Mr W. Eckford as Old Red Sandstone, presumably from some miles further north than the volcanic hills on which Balbie lies. The "cup-marks" had originally been filled with marly concretions.

the cist (Skeleton A). On top of this heap of bones was an intact food-vessel, probably originally upright but at the time of discovery leaning over to the south-east.

Although some care had clearly been taken with the redeposition of Skeleton A at the time of the second burial in the cist, certain bones were missing, notably the lower jaw. The skull was resting on its base, and the upper part of the cranial vault had decayed away. Similarly, the skull of Skeleton B, lying on its side, had lost its upper (left) half, and the lower jaw was similarly half eroded away.

The use of a food-vessel cist for more than one burial, with the earlier occupant unceremoniously bundled into a corner, is of some interest. Precisely similar circumstances were observed by Mr R. B. K. Stevenson in a beaker cist at West Pinkerton, near Dunbar,<sup>1</sup> and it seems likely that more careful observation in several more earlier discoveries would have revealed the same state of affairs. It is in accordance with other Early Bronze Age instances of the re-use of an earlier grave recorded from barrow-burials in England, as for instance the A beaker burial inserted into the grave-pit of a B beaker interment at Cassington, Oxon,<sup>2</sup> or the food-vessel burial similarly inserted in an inhumation grave-pit on Rockbourne Down, Hants.<sup>3</sup> In the Yorkshire Wolds, more than one similar double burial has been recorded, involving both beaker and food-vessel interments.<sup>4</sup> In the Burntisland cist it is impossible to tell which burial was made with the food-vessel, which might have been associated with either Skeleton A or Skeleton B. But a broad date for both burials within the early part of the Middle Bronze Age is certain enough, with a long enough interval between the two funeral ceremonies for the first occupant of the cist to have decayed to a completely skeletal condition before the insertion of the later corpse.

The food-vessel (Pl. LIV, 6) is of very gritty fabric, having a buff surface tinged with grey in parts of the exterior. The dimensions are: height 5·7 inches, rim diameter 5·8 inches, maximum diameter 6·4 inches, diameter of the base, which has disintegrated superficially, 3·4 inches. The vessel has a rounded curvation about 2 inches below the lip, and the upper part of the profile is concave, while the lower is convex. The decoration consists of close-set rows of shallow but carefully executed whipped-cord impressions; these lie radially on the bevelled rim and obliquely on the edge of the lip, and cover horizontally all the exterior of the wall, except for five narrow lines of "false-relief" spaced out three above the curvation and two below it.

The food-vessel has generously been added to the National Collection by Mr John Spence.

#### *The Skeletons.*

Professor W. C. Osman Hill, of the University of Edinburgh, has kindly examined the skeletons and reports as follows:—

The remains comprise the skeletons of two adults, a male (B) and a female (A), both dying, as judged by tooth-wear, in early middle life. Both are markedly brachycephalic. The stature of the man was 1760 mm. (5 feet 9 inches) and the female about the same. The male was very robust and with rugged features. Both show marked muscularity of the lower limbs, with deep gluteal fossæ on the ilium, strongly platymeric and pilastered thighs and platygenic tibie.

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<sup>1</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, vol. lxxiii (1938-39), p. 231, with note on other Scottish examples; see also *P.S.A.S.*, vol. lxxiv., p. 139, and vol. lxxix. p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> *Owoniensia*, vol. xi-xii (1946-47), p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> *Proc. Hants. Field Club*, vol. xvi. (1946), p. 156.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Arch. Journ.*, vol. xciv. (1938), p. 50, with refs.