

Two beaker cists at Keabog, Pitdrichie, near Drumlithie, Kincardine and Deeside

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ABSTRACT

Two late beaker short cist burials are described, each of whose skeletons presents unusual pathology.

CIST 1

INTRODUCTION

A short cist was discovered on 9 November 1977 at Keabog Quarry near Pitdrichie Farm, Drumlithie, in the parish of Glenbervie, Kincardine and Deeside District. It was reported to the police at Stonehaven who established that the cist had first been exposed at the top of the quarry face during the extraction of gravel by machine, but that the cist collapsed very quickly on to the quarry floor, 9 m below.

The cist had lain c 1.20 m from the surface of the south face of a gravel hill which overlies a knoll of red sandstone at 115 m OD (NGR NO 7987 8195; illus 1). Prior to calling in the Grampian Regional Archaeologist (IAGS) the police recovered the remains of a skeleton and part of a Late Northern (step 5) beaker by raking through the debris of the collapsed cist.

THE CIST

Nothing remained of the cist *in situ*, but the collapsed slabs were recovered and from them it can be estimated that the cist measured approximately 1 m by 0.60 m and 0.50 m deep. Its alignment is uncertain. All the slabs were of the local red sandstone; none bore any traces of decoration.

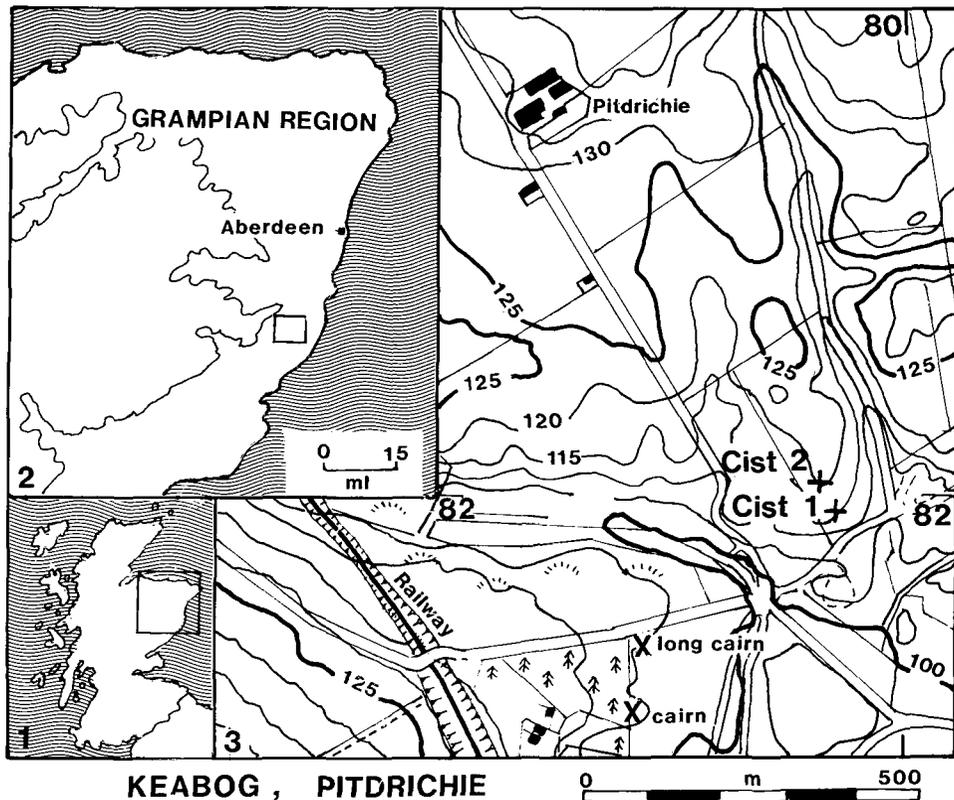
The capstone was a massive irregular slab, 1.6 m by 1.10 m and 0.30 m thick. The side slabs were 1.20 m by 0.70 m by 0.15 m and 0.95 by 0.65 m by 0.10 m. There would appear to have been two slabs at either end. They measured 0.90 by 0.70 m by 5 cm; 0.6 by 0.35 m by 4 cm; 0.55 by 0.45 m by 6 cm and 0.6 by 0.4 m by 7 cm. Another two slabs and a possible pinning stone were also recovered.

INHUMATION (fiche 1:A5–8)

The skeletal remains are virtually complete and are in an excellent state of preservation. They are those of a muscularly well-developed adult male, about 174 cm (5' 8") tall, aged at least 35–45

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ILLUS 1 Location of short cists at Keabog, Pitdrichie (contours in metres)

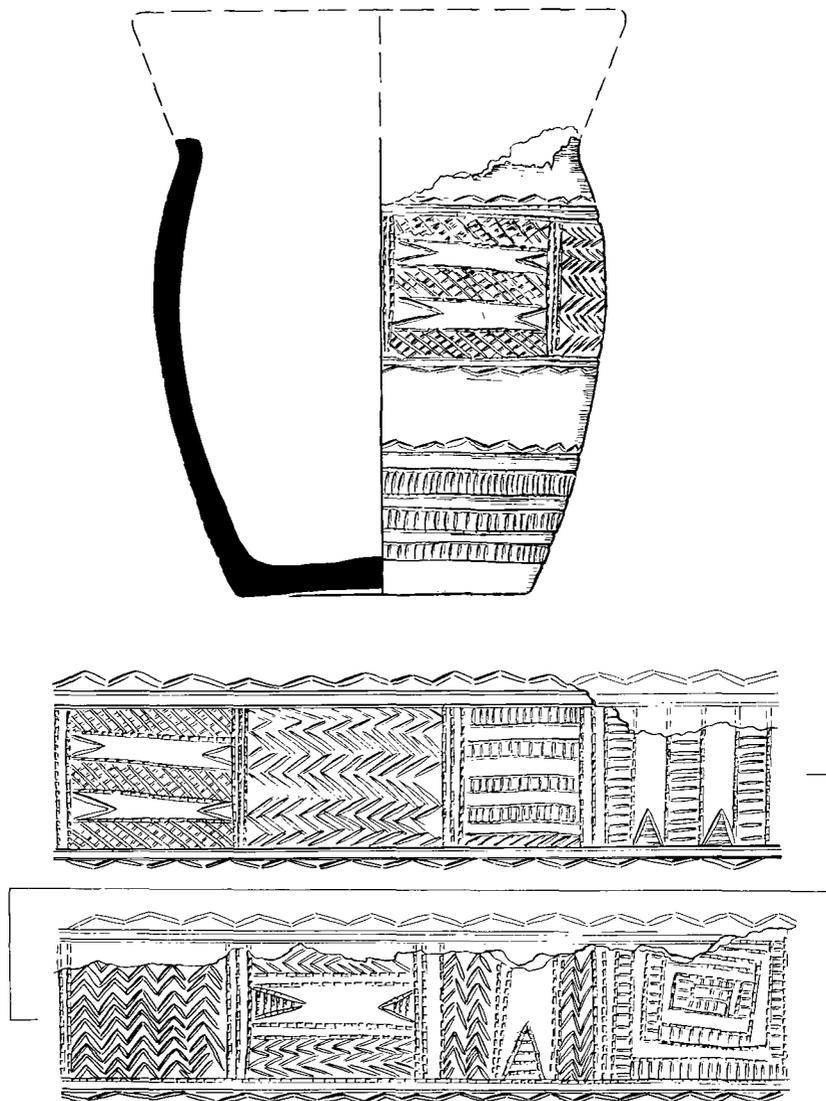
years at death, with considerable vertebral and dental pathology and possibly a skull injury which may have been the cause of death.

In particular, the damage to the skull vault in the region of the right coronal suture may have been pre-mortem, in which case it may have been, or contributed to, the cause of death. There is evidence of a healed nasal fracture; the upper lateral incisors were lost some long time before death; there is very considerable tooth wear, with evidence of caries and of an abscess at the root of the first upper left molar. The vertebral bodies show very extensive lipping in the lower mid-thoracic region, in the only cervical vertebra present and in the fifth lumbar vertebral body. Some degenerative change is also apparent in the superior aspect of the right and left acetabula. The full skeletal report is on fiche 1:A5-8.

A femur submitted for radiocarbon dating gave a result of 1780 ± 60 bc (GU-1122 $\delta^{13}\text{C} = -20.2\%$).

THE BEAKER (illus 2)

(The full description is on fiche 1:A12-13.) This pot is represented by the lower three-quarters of a well-made, evenly fired beaker. The rim and virtually all the neck are missing; the pot survives to a height of 123 mm. The beaker is covered with an even, cream- or buff-coloured slip which in the undecorated zones has been burnished.



ILLUS 2 Beaker from Cist 1 (scale 1:2)

The decoration was in three broad zones around the neck, belly and foot. The belly zone is fringed with shallow triangles which have been deeply impressed with a short comb. Between these fringes are eight panels each of which is different (although there are three pairs which vary only in details such as filling or orientation). The basal zone consists of three bands of vertical comb impressions between horizontal lines.

This beaker belongs in Clarke's Late Northern (N3) group (1970), step 5 in the scheme of Lanting and Van der Waals (1972) and may be compared with such Aberdeenshire beakers as those from Strichen and Old Machar (Clarke 1970, figs 605 and 533).

The use on the Pitdrichie beaker of a band of complex panels and metopes is of considerable interest in view of the links with continental beaker groups that they indicate. Clarke observed that panels and metopes are usually found on the necks of the British beakers, echoing the German usage, whereas the Dutch fashion was to use these motifs as a bridge between the belly and the waist or between the belly and the foot zones (1970, 177). (The different usages are demonstrated in Van der Waals and Glasbergen 1955, 36, fig 15.) Although this distinction may to some extent be overdrawn, the Pitdrichie beaker, with its broad zone of panels and metopes occupying the central area of the pot, is surely a fine example of the kind of 'intergroup contact' that Lanting and Van der Waals thought such motifs represented (1972, 27).

CIST 2

INTRODUCTION

A second cist was found on 24 January 1978 during work at the quarry. The Stonehaven police were called and they recovered part of a skull and three fragments of pottery; they then contacted the Grampian Regional Archaeologist. Prior to his arrival, persons unknown lifted some of the bones and placed them to one side: sufficient remained *in situ*, however, for the orientation and position of the body to be assessed.

The cist lay slightly further up the knoll, 42 m due north of Cist 1, on the 120 m contour on the south-facing slope of the gravel mound (NGR NO 7985 8199; illus 1). The capstone had been lifted by a machine during gravel extraction and as a result some gravel had spilled in.

THE CIST (illus 3)

The cist measured internally 0.90 m east/west by 0.77 m north/south and was 0.60 m deep. It lay within a large sub-oval pit 1.60 m by 1.85 m and approximately 0.70 m deep.

The slabs were of a schist-like stone with a massive capstone 1.85 m long by 1.10 m broad. A levelling bed for the capstone was made up of six small slabs lying against and partly covering the west end slab. A number of large cobbles made up the top of the pit fill against the south side slab, with the rest of the fill being of tightly packed gravel with an occasional large cobble.

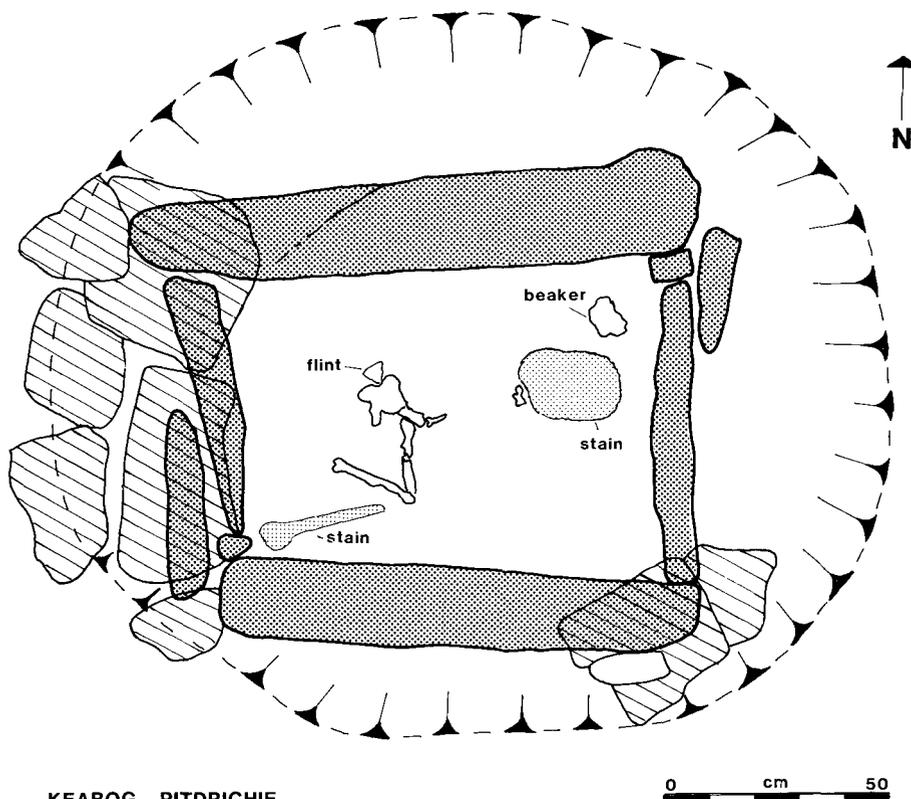
The south slab, 1.11 m by 0.67 m by 0.18 m, had been erected first, hard against the pit sides, then the north slab, 1.23 m by 0.63 m by 0.20 m, was inserted, followed by the two end slabs which must have been put in at an angle then slewed round to wedge up the side slabs. The east slab measured 0.69 m by 0.59 m by 9 cm and the west slab 0.53 m by 0.51 m by 9 cm. Two smaller slabs were placed behind the gaps in the north-east and south-west end stones.

The fill of the cist, which had been seen on the removal of the capstone, was loose gravel. This gravel gave way to a fine red silt in which lay the body.

INHUMATION (fiche 1:A9-11)

The body lay in a crouched position on the cist floor. The lower part of the skeleton which lay in the silt had decayed away while the upper part which had been in gravel was less decayed. The skeleton was lying on its left side with the skull pointing east and facing south. Behind the skull lay a black pebble and the neck and rim portions of an N3(L) (step 6) beaker (illus 4), the remainder having decayed in the silt (illus 3). The toes lay in the south-west corner beside a red pebble. Near the hips was a triangular flint flake knife.

The skeleton, which was incomplete and in a poor state of preservation, was that of a young male adult of approximately 169 cm (5' 6") in height, who had suffered a skull fracture and possibly a fracture of the thoracic spine some time before his death.



KEABOG, PITDRICHIE

ILLUS 3 Plan of Cist 2

Other features of the skeleton include a depressed nasal root, porous bone texture over the brow ridges, shallow pituitary fossa, shallow slope of clivus, pronounced bilateral prominences on the chin, and pits on the endocranial aspect of the frontal bosses. Evidence of a healed skull fracture, some 5 cm in extent, lies behind the right parietal eminence. The asymmetry of the lowest thoracic vertebral bodies and the presence of lipping suggest a possible crush fracture in this region. Both clavicles show lesions at the site of attachment of the costo-clavicular ligaments, possibly the result of habitual stress at the sterno-clavicular articulation. The full skeletal report is on fiche 1:A9-11.

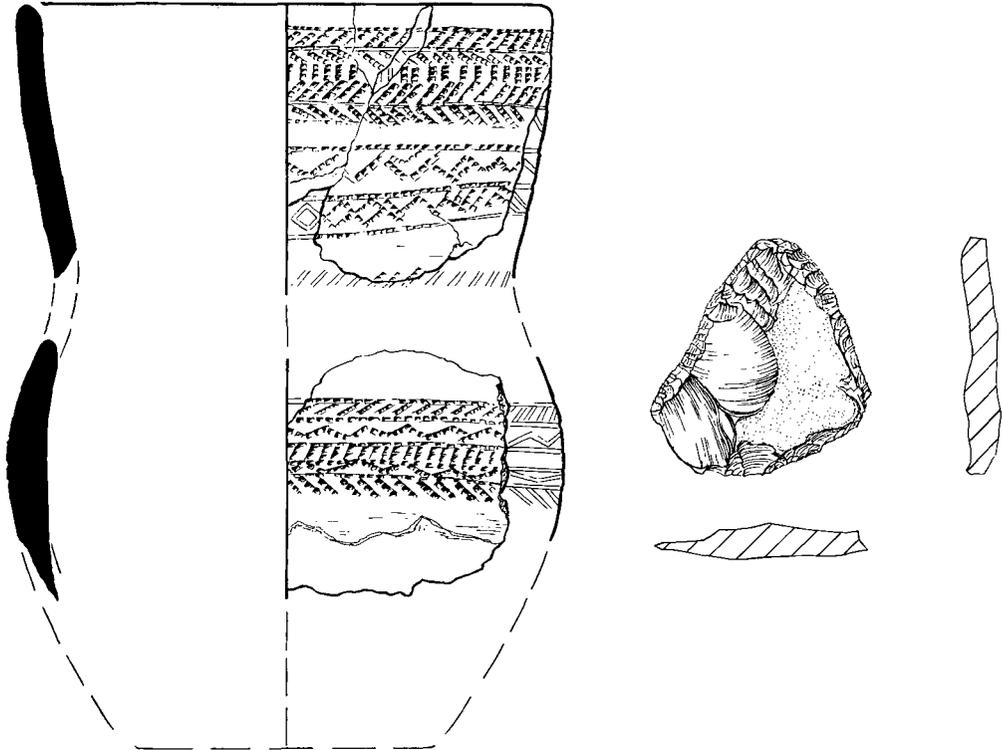
A tibia submitted for radiocarbon dating gave a result of 1745 ± 95 bc (GU-1123 $\delta^{13}\text{C} = -21.3\%$).

THE FINDS (illus 4)

The beaker

(The full description is on fiche 1:B1-2.) This beaker is represented by two large fragments of a tall, long-necked pot, estimated height 195 mm. The fabric differs from that of the beaker from Cist 1 in being more reddy brown in colour, unslipped and with substantial inclusions of mica.

The neck is long and slightly cup-shaped while the belly is high and full. The rim bears a slight internal bevel. All the decoration has been executed in thick, square comb impressions. The care with which the decoration has been applied varies, the upper zone on the neck being considerably more regular than the one below.



ILLUS 4 Beaker and worked flint flake from Cist 2 (scale 1:2)

This beaker is a long-necked variant of Clarke's Late Northern group (N3(L)) (1970) and would belong in step 6 of the scheme of Lanting and Van der Waals (1972). It may be compared with the N3/step 6 beakers from Gullane, East Lothian (Clarke 1970, fig 706), Parkhill, Aberdeenshire (*ibid*, fig 485) and Cookston, Airlie, Angus (Coutts 1971, 48). Certain similarities in some motifs with vessels in Clarke's Southern group should also be noted, principally Garton Slack 75, Yorkshire (1970, fig 763) and Harrowden, Bedfordshire (*ibid*, figs 781, 782 and 785).

Flint

A large secondary flake of grey flint, sub-triangular in form and with a patch of cortication on its dorsal surface. It is 65 mm long, 60 mm wide and 9 mm thick and is skilfully retouched on the left and right edges (see also fiche 1:B3). It is unusually large in a Scottish beaker context, although the triangular flint knife found in the rich N4/step 5 beaker cist at Newlands, Oyne, Aberdeenshire (Low 1936, 330; Clarke 1970, fig 721) provides a good parallel. It may also be compared with one of the flints from the N2/step 4 'archer's burial' from Cruden, Aberdeenshire (Clarke 1970, figs 551-2; Shepherd 1986, illus 13).

DISCUSSION

Comment on the occurrence of two male burials exhibiting similar injuries might be limited to noting that male burials throughout history regularly present with more injuries than an equivalent

proportion of female burials. However, in this case rather more may be made of the evidence, given that the injuries could have been sustained in hand-to-hand fighting and that the C14 dates obtained from the skeletons are statistically indistinguishable (although one of the pottery typologies would separate them marginally).

Similar evidence of violent injury was found on the male skeleton in Cist 1 at Lunanhead, Forfar, a probable beaker burial in view of the sherds noted in it and the fine beaker from a neighbouring cist. This man, who had sustained a deep wound on the left side of the forehead some time before death, actually died from 'a deep wound on the front of the left thigh, inflicted by a sharp, heavy weapon which had cut deeply into the femur and had soon proved fatal' (Waterston 1942, 129). Whether other Bronze-Age skeletons exhibiting trauma, such as the young man from Court Hill, Tickenham, Somerset (severed left humerus: Westley *in Green* 1973, 38) or that from the beaker burial at Hatton Mill Farm, Friockheim, Angus (healed fracture of right ulna: Smart *in Wedderburn* 1970, 85) do indicate combat must remain an open question.

The adult male in the double beaker (N3(L)/step 6) burial from Hillhead, Ellon, Aberdeenshire, bore a possible skull fracture (Reid 1924, 37; Bruce 1986, 36), as did that from the N2/step 4 burial at Ord, Auchindoir, Aberdeenshire (Reid 1924, 36; Bruce 1986, 36). The 40-year-old man buried with an N4-FV/step 7 pot at Blackhills, Tyrie, Aberdeenshire (Callander 1909, 89) had even more evidence of trauma. Not only did this individual have his right tibia and fibula fused following trauma, but his vertebral pathology was very similar to the two Pitdrichie skeletons in demonstrating both degenerative change and evidence of crush fracture (Bruce 1986, 36).

In all events, the individuals who suffered from these conditions and injuries were of sufficient importance in their communities to merit careful burial with prestigious grave goods. The orientation and position of the man in Cist 2 are typical for a beaker male (Tuckwell 1975), while the beakers from the two cists belong in the last phase of beaker activity in Britain (Case 1977, 82). They both exhibit similar connections furth of Grampian, namely the panels and metopes of the pot from Cist 1 and the (limited) Southern parallels that can be adduced for the sherds from Cist 2. However, the large flint flake knife from Cist 2 has connections north of the Mounth with high status archers' graves (at Newlands and Cruden) which may indicate that the inhabitants of the Dunnottar/Catterline area, to which these two beakers from Drumlithie represent an important addition, were participating more fully in late beaker traditions than has hitherto been thought (Shepherd 1986, 12).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LOCATION OF ARTEFACTS AND ARCHIVE

The beakers and flint have been lodged with the North-East of Scotland Museums Service who have also reconstructed Cist 2 in the Tolbooth Museum, Stonehaven. The excavation archive is in the Grampian Regional Council Sites and Monuments Record and the skeletal material is held in the Department of Anatomy of the University of Aberdeen.

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