

VI.

LONG 'CIST BURIALS, PARTICULARLY THOSE AT GALSON (LEWIS) AND GAIRLOCH (WESTER ROSS), WITH A SYMBOL STONE AT GAIRLOCH.

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GALSON.

The kitchen-midden at Galson and the structures found in it by excavation were described and planned in 1924 by A. J. H. Edwards.¹ In 1946 and again later Dr R. S. Doig, the M.O.H. at Stornoway, reported the discovery of burials there, and two—"Galson II and V"—were exposed by the writer in September 1948 and 1949 respectively. All the skeletal remains recovered, of females with one probable exception, have been described fully by Dr W. C. Osman Hill, who has raised far-reaching questions on their racial significance.² An additional note by Dr L. H. Wells is printed below (p. 112). Valuable assistance was also received from Mr W. MacArthur, the schoolmaster at Galson, and his family, and from Mr J. S. Grant of the *Stornoway Gazette*.

Four structures were found in 1923 along a sandbank over 20 ft. high that falls NNW. from outside a field wall to the Atlantic shore, the top of the bank stretching in part over 40 ft. from the wall. The largest structure, called C by Edwards, contained five chambers in a row with an adjacent low, narrow lintelled passage, and was sited around 337 ft. from the field wall's WSW. corner. By 1948 it had been completely swept away, so that the top of the bank was there only a yard outside the wall, while even its maximum width had been reduced by more than 10 ft. There had been exposed between B and C, at 298 ft., a new fragment of wall, "X," at right angles to the face of the bank and 35 ft. out from the field wall. A 16-inch layer of midden occurred 16 ins. below the surface with a broad belt of dirty sand underneath, followed by several alternating layers of clean and dirty sand down to the wall some 11 ft. from the surface resting on clean sand, but with a further layer of midden 3 ft. below. The uppermost midden level is that from which Edwards recorded an Anglo-Saxon penny of Edgar (959-75)³ and a ring-headed pin of similar date. His various structures, A, B, C, had their floor-levels more or less on the same horizontal level, though at varying depths in the bank. This suggests, despite the

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, LVIII, 185-203. *R.C.A.M. (Outer Hebrides)*, Nos. 20 and 21.

² *Proc. Roy. Phys. Soc.*, XXIII, 165-82 (Edin. 1950).

³ *B.M. Cat.*, Class I, Fardein.

lintelled passage, that all were built on the surface and only later blown over with further sand, covered ultimately by the topmost midden.

This midden does not seem to have survived farther ENE. where the top of the bank is lower, but the footings of another wall, "Y," appeared in 1949 between 367 and 378. It consisted of a row of stone blocks, curiously eked with pebbles, some 16 ft. out from the field wall and 7 ft. below the surface—though horizontally only a couple of feet higher than X.

A 7-inch thick midden or occupation level with dirty sand above runs along the sandbank at this point, dipping irregularly towards ENE. (Pl. XX, 1). It crossed over Y, which lay 8 ins. below it. And a foot below it at 393, where it was itself a foot lower, there was the top of the E. end slab of a stone-lined grave or long cist. Three out of five small slabs forming the S. side were also *in situ*, the interior of the grave being about 6 ft. long. The skeleton, Galson V, was disturbed and not quite complete. It lay stretched out on its back, the head at the W. end (actually WSW.)—axis of the body 114° E. The bottom of the cist was not paved. A thin black stratum ran a foot below it, and another 10 ins. thick 4 ft. lower still, which in turn was 6 ft. above the pebble beach at the foot of the sandbank.

Six feet along the bank was a further cist, about 4 ft. lower down than the other. The top of its side slabs, of which six miscellaneous stones remained along the S. side, were some 20 ins. below the middle layer of midden, there up to 18 ins. thick. As before, it could not be ascertained if the grave had been dug through the black stratum. The skeleton, Galson II, was nearly complete except for the skull, no doubt recently removed. It lay on its right side, the chest almost downwards (Pl. XX, 2). The head, at the W. end, had rested on the right cheek, as shown by the lower jaw. The right arm was extended, the wrist raised up against a side slab and the hand hanging down. The left arm was bent at the elbow close to the hip, with the hand up towards the chin. The left knee rested against the back of the right.

Of the other burials known to Dr Doig, all apparently long cists and within 30 ft. ENE. of that just described, one had cover-slabs and the skeleton lay face downwards with the hands up about the neck: this was Dr Osman Hill's Galson I (skull alone recorded), and from the others came Galson III and IV. One of these graves lay between the two layers of midden and one below them.

Subsequent to the writing of this paper a short visit was paid to the site in October 1953. Erosion had continued and exposed the remains of a wall or foundations, "Z," at 380 ft. from the corner of the field wall and a foot below the 3 ft. thick uppermost layer of midden, or blackened sand, which commenced some 6 ft. below the top of the bank. At 406 ft. and 19 ft. out from the field wall were some stones of a further denuded grave (Galson VI) also about a foot below the midden.

More important was the E. portion of a grave (Galson VII) with only the leg bones remaining, at 426 ft. and 27 ft. out. For it still lay sufficiently within the bank to allow observation for the first time of the trench at the bottom of which a burial had been placed: the side curved up for about 2 ft. to the base of the overlying layer of soil, peat-ash and midden refuse, which at a point between the two graves had split into two strata because of a sand-blow 1 to 2 ft. thick. The grave appeared to have been dug from the ground-level of this midden, and certainly before any of it had been deposited on this part of the site. Mr J. R. C. Hamilton found a number of sherds and a plain bone pin 4.9 ins. long in the stratum that immediately overlay the burial. The grave slabs were 16 ins. high, and 7 ft. below them was exposed the lowest layer of midden, from which no artifacts are recorded.

Conclusions.—It is certain that none of the graves were inserted from the side, for even in 1923 the sandbank extended considerably further seawards. The bottom of the Galson II grave was over 6 ft. below what was there the upper midden level, which seems too great for what we know of ancient burials, so we may conclude that the grave, like the wall at Y, was older than that stratum. On the other hand two graves were subsequent to the dark stratum below, probably again like Y. Galson VI was related to the ground-level of the upper midden and no minor stratum was seen close below there. It would seem, then, that the graves and the structures (originally not souterrains but above ground) were the result of a single prolonged occupation. Unfortunately no markedly characteristic sherds have latterly been found *in situ*, and Edwards did not distinguish those from the latest midden, from the floor of his structures, and from the debris on the sandbank. Though he cautiously dated the structures as earlier than 11th century, his comparisons with broch pottery implied something nearer the conventional broch *floruit* 1st-4th century A.D., a date supported by Sir Lindsay Scott's study of Hebridean pottery and houses.¹ Yet the Galson graves indicate rather the post-Roman centuries, to which the decorated pottery may also rather be ascribed. The graves presumably antedate the ancient graveyard and church 500 yds. along the coast, Teampull nan Cró' Naomh.²

LONG CISTS IN GENERAL.

Scotland.—Often recorded but little discussed,³ such cists form a neglected problem in Scotland. There are few associated finds, of which two ornaments are not closely datable⁴ and two keys are not truly associated, being 18th century or later.⁵ There are, however, possibly early Anglo-Saxon

¹ *P.P.S.* (1948), 46-125.

² R.C.A.M., No. 5.

³ *P.S.A.S.*, XLIII (1908-9), 317-24; *Arch. Ael.*, XXIII (1945), 94-5.

⁴ *P.S.A.S.*, XXXVII, 233, and LIX, 116.

⁵ *Arch. Scot.*, III, 40, and *P.S.A.S.*, III, 505.

beads from a cist at Dalmeny,¹ and an ogham inscription apparently associated with one of four cists near Kilmartin, Argyll.² A large cemetery near Edinburgh would seem from the adjacent inscribed Catstone to belong to the pre-Columban British Church.³ The apparent distribution of long cists to be gleaned from our *Proceedings* is, however, curious. It avoids the SW. and is almost confined to SE. and E., where most are in the Lothians, round the coast of Fife and in S. Angus. It conforms to no known division of the country. To the more scattered examples may now be added Galson and Gairloch. The idea that such cists continued late for the burial of shipwrecked sailors⁴ has probably no basis other than their frequency in sandy coastal sites, though one would like to know more exactly the nature of the "stone coffins" recorded by Captain Thomas as normal in the 18th century in the cemeteries of Ness, the area N. of Galson.⁵ There may also be mentioned the cemetery at the early monastic site on the Brough of Birsay, Orkney, excavated by the Ministry of Works,⁶ and the two cists in "St Columba's Tomb," at Iona, though such cists with the sides composed of long slabs cannot be assumed to be contemporary with those formed of several short slabs. Various other forms and elaborations of cist, including both Viking and Iron Age burials, need not be considered here.

Britain and Abroad.—The problem of the dating of long cists *sensu stricto* is far from being confined to Scotland. They have been claimed as Early Iron Age in Ireland (*i.e.* before A.D. 500).⁷ In the Celtic Christian cemeteries of the Isle of Man slab-lined graves are invariable,⁸ and in one case recent graves were deliberately covered by a 9th-century Viking boat-burial. They also occur in Wales, without close dating but at least once 6th–7th century or later.⁹ In England some of the graves at Whitby Abbey are of this type, but their context is not clear.¹⁰ In the south some cists are ascribed to the Roman period but the evidence for date is not strong,¹¹ though extended roughly E.–W. graves in regular rows but without cists occur in the Roman part of the Frilford cemetery datable to the 4th and 5th centuries.¹² Long cists, though infrequent, have been found in the Anglo-Saxon cemeteries identified by their grave goods as of 5th–7th centuries; and it is noteworthy that orientation with heads to the W. is common in these *pagan* cemeteries and also in Germany, whence such extended burials and occasional use of stone cists were perhaps derived.¹³

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, XLIX, 332–8.

² *P.S.A.S.*, LXVI, 448.

³ *P.S.A.S.*, VI, 184–94.

⁴ *P.S.A.S.*, XI, 369.

⁵ Stuart, J., *Sculpt. Stones of Scotland*, II, lxi.

⁶ R.C.A.M. (*Orkney*), No. 1, and fig. 52.

⁷ Raftery in *P.R.I.A.*, XLVI (1941), 299–315; but see Tildesley in *Man* (1929), article 78.

⁸ Megaw in *T. Dumf. and Gall. A.S.* (1948–9), 181.

⁹ *Arch. Camb.* (1912), 142; (1926), 22; *Cent. Vol.* (1949), 115–6; (1953), 103–6; also R.C.A.M. (*Wales*), Anglesey, xciii, Pembs. Nos. 140, 559, 976

¹⁰ *Archæologia*, 1943, pl. xxxi.

¹¹ *T. Bristol and Glos. A.S.*, LVI (1934), 131, and VII, 77–9. Some pre-Roman cemeteries cited by Raftery seem to have been of contracted burials.

¹² *Oxoniensia*, 1939.

¹³ Baldwin Brown, G., *Arts in Early England*, III, 146–82; *Archæologia*, XLII (1868), 438–40 (Frilford).

An "enigmatic" cemetery in Finistère may be a Breton counterpart to those in Britain. Though showing that it is not prior to the Iron Age, the excavators do not mention the possibility of an Early Christian dating.¹ The German cemeteries are known as Reihengräber and, like the Anglo-Saxon, contain grave goods. The conversion to Christianity comes in the middle of their period—5th to early 8th century—without effecting any change in the rite then. The E.-W. position had been adopted by some Gothic and provincial Roman cemeteries in the 4th century.² A recent wide-ranging study concludes that similar cemeteries, all however usually without grave goods, found in Italy and Sicily and frequently consisting of long cists like ours though perhaps oftener of coffin-shaped rock-cut graves, are to be ascribed to the 6th and 7th centuries and are due to the influence of the Germanic barbarians.³ The appearance of long cist graves therefore seems part of a wider phenomenon over much of late Roman and sub-Roman Europe—the spread, and adoption by Christianity, of extended and predominantly E.-W. orientated graves, the character of which is perhaps derived from the prehistoric traditions of Central Europe. Many more detailed regional studies are evidently required.⁴

GAIRLOCH.

A valuable addition for the Scottish distribution map, and perhaps an indication for dating, is provided by a typical oriented cist found on the west coast of Ross-shire at Gairloch in October 1949. It is here described from full notes made by Mr W. G. Bannerman, County Road Surveyor. There were four slabs plus eke-stones along each side and one at either end. The cist measured $5\frac{3}{4}$ ft. long inside, and in width 14 and 16 ins. respectively at E. and W. ends. It was not paved. The well-preserved skeleton was stretched out on its back, the head at the W. end. It has important affinities with those from Galson and is discussed on p. 112 by Dr Wells.

The site, being developed for houses, lies on the shore of Strath Bay on low sandy ground 25 yds. W. of Achadh a' Chàirn burn, and 250 yds. SE. of Gairloch Manse (Nat. Grid ref. 18/800771). Mr Bannerman reports that human bones are known to have been found there over seventy years ago, and also a hitherto unrecorded symbol stone. Three further burials were found in a similar situation 200 yds. to the SE. when the F.P. Church foundations were being prepared.

The symbol stone, of Torridonian sandstone, now measures 36 by 20-24 by 5 ins., and served as the step of an outhouse at Flowerdale House, till

¹ *Gallia*, ix (1951), 1-19.

² Werner, J., "Zur Entstehung der Reihengräbercivilization," *Arch. Geographica*, i (1950), 22-32.

³ Eleonora Bracco in *Notizie degli Scavi* (1950), 140-81.

⁴ I am indebted to various friends for references to publications.

recently placed in the Parish Church. As shown in Pl. XXI, for which we are indebted to the Rev Donald Macdonald, two creatures are incised on one face, the lower a fish¹ and the upper an eagle that is equally characteristic though reduced by breakage to claws, legs and tail with a small part of the wing.² A 7th to 8th-century date is probable. This is the most northerly of the Pictish carvings so far recorded on the W. coast. Its presence in the cemetery gives slight support to the view that the skeletal peculiarities are not due to the Norse invasions, but are older. It could however, perhaps even so, have been re-used as part of a cist: a number of symbol stones are known to have been incorporated in graves of various forms.³

APPENDIX.

Even when known, long cists have often gone unrecorded unless in newspapers. The following instances may therefore be recorded here:—

MIDLOTHIAN. *Dryden Mains, Roslin*, 1949. Four or five cists echeloned parallel to one another, about 4 ft. between each, on a natural hillock 10 yds. S. of the railway bridge (Nat. Grid ref. 36/278637). One examined though disturbed had cover-slabs but no floor slabs, head at W. end. Other graves are said to have been found further SE. in the same field and in the next.

EAST LOTHIAN. *East Fortune Sanatorium*, 1948, two cists. One had three slabs at either side, single end slabs, and three bottom slabs of which that at the W. end tilted to raise the head and shoulders; covers were missing since only 16 ins. from surface; internal depth 5–9 ins., length 5½ ft.; axis 78° E. The other cist, 3 ft. away, capstones 2 ft. below surface, was not uncovered (ref. 36/550793). Four other cists side by side were found 40 yds. further S. about 1940.

Prestonpans. In 1951 one cist was found in a courtyard close to the sea (ref. 36/385745). In 1953 a cist, probably long, was found 50 yds. W. of Mary Murray's Institute (ref. 36/391741).

Longniddry: to be published later.

FIFE. *Kingswood, Burntisland*, from about 1948. Considerable numbers of long cists close to the sea have been destroyed in a sandpit without examination (ref. 36/250865).

Newburgh, Mare's Craig Quarry (ref. 37/247[8]178). The quarry-master has stated that in the late 1920's cist burials were associated with what he took to be the site of a chapel. This is the site where a small iron Celtic bell was found, now in Perth Museum.⁴

¹ This stone was by accident referred to as at Loch Broom in *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXIV, 206 n.

² Cf. *E.C.M.*, III, p. 59, Strathpeffer, Ross-shire.

³ *E.C.M.*, III, pp. 42, 99, 124; *P.S.A.S.*, II, 60, and LXXVII, 28; Inchyra, unpublished. Cf. "Welsh Early Christian Inscriptions," *Arch. Camb.*, Cent. Vol. (1949), 115–6.

⁴ *T. Perth. N.S.S.*, 1928–9, 149, with mention of one skull; not in *R.C.A.M. (Fife)*.

A NOTE ON THE HUMAN REMAINS FROM THE GAIRLOCH
AND GALSON CIST BURIALS.By L. H. WELLS, Senior Lecturer in Physical Anthropology,
University of Edinburgh.

The remains from the Galson burials have already been described in detail by Dr W. C. Osman Hill (1952); the Gairloch skeleton is referred to in his report, but has not been individually described. Although many long cist burials have previously been recorded, we still know surprisingly little as to the people who were interred in them. In view of the evidence marshalled by Mr Stevenson regarding the age and significance of such burials, it seems desirable to give some further account of the Gairloch skeleton and at the same time to review Dr Osman Hill's observations on those from Galson.

The Gairloch Skeleton.

This specimen comprises corroded remains including almost all parts of the skeleton. The pelvic fragments show it to be unquestionably female, while the state of the cranial sutures indicates an age above thirty years and probably near or over forty.

The limb bones are slenderly constructed; the maximum length of the right femur is 408 mm., that of the left approximately 406 mm., while both tibiæ measure approximately 339 mm. Calculation by the formulæ devised by Dupertuis and Hadden (1951) gives stature estimates ranging from 1559 to 1584 mm., *i.e.* between 5 ft. 1 in. and 5 ft. 3 ins. The skeleton thus belonged to a short and slender but, from the muscular impressions on the bones, clearly active woman, showing no signs of deformity or disease.

Very few useful measurements can be taken on the skull, since the base of the braincase is lacking and the facial bones are fragmentary. The maximum cranial length is 179 mm. and the breadth 130 mm., giving a cranial index of 72.6, *i.e.* moderately dolichocephalic; the minimum frontal breadth is 92 mm. The teeth are small and moderately worn but not decayed, although there are signs of inflammation along the alveolar margins and around the roots of the right upper second molar. There is a large paramolar tubercle on the external aspect of this tooth; the right upper third molar appears never to have erupted. In the lower jaw a series of tubercles along the inner alveolar margin represent in an incipient state the mandibular torus which is a conspicuous feature of the Galson specimens.

In its length and minimum frontal breadth the Gairloch skull is almost identical with the average of a large series of modern skulls from Glasgow (Young, 1931), but it is considerably narrower, albeit still within the range of the Glasgow series in both breadth and cranial index. These Glasgow skulls represent a type which is shown by specimens assembled by Sir William Turner (1903) to be distributed over a large area of Scotland. This has been termed the Lowland Scottish type, although Turner's material includes examples from the Highlands and Hebrides. It is closely comparable with pre-Roman and Romano-British crania from the north of England (*cf.* Wells, 1953, Table I), and is regarded on

somewhat limited evidence as the type of the Early Iron Age population also in southern Scotland. This type has been supposed (Morant, 1926) to have established itself in Britain at the beginning of the Iron Age; the extent to which it displaced earlier types of man, especially in northern Britain, has been disputed (Howells, 1938). In being more dolichocranial than the average of the Lowland Scottish and Iron Age series, the Gairloch skull might be thought comparable with the Neolithic type (Morant, 1926), but the latter is on the average both longer and wider. On the evidence available, the Gairloch skull probably belongs to the type of the Iron Age and modern Lowland series, although a strain persisting from the Neolithic may perhaps be included in this woman's ancestry.

The Galson Remains.

The remains of the five individuals from the Galson burials are listed by Dr Osman Hill as follows:—

- Galson I, middle-aged female—cranium and mandible only.
- Galson II, adult female—skeleton with mandible but lacking skull.
- Galson III, adult male (?)—right humerus and left femur only.
- Galson IV, young adult female—fragments of skull and skeleton.
- Galson V, middle-aged female—skeleton with skull and mandible.

It is a striking indication of the harsh life of these Dark Age islanders that out of four incomplete skeletons two, both female, show evidence of crippling bony injuries. In Galson IV the left clavicle has been fractured and has healed with considerable shortening, while Galson V displays an ununited fracture of the neck of the right femur which must have been of very long standing.

Galson II was a robust woman of moderate stature; the Dupertuis-Hadden formulæ place her between 1627 mm. (5 ft. 4 ins.) and 1673 mm. (5 ft. 6 ins.). She was thus appreciably taller and also more powerfully built than the Gairloch woman. In contrast, Galson IV and V both fall between 1499 mm. (4 ft. 11 ins.) and 1554 mm. (5 ft. 1 in.), being thus shorter than the Gairloch woman but possibly more stocky in build. The stature of Galson III is estimated as between 1650 mm. (5 ft. 5 ins.) and 1675 mm. (5 ft. 6 ins.) if male, or between 1610 mm. (5 ft. 0.5 in.) and 1643 mm. (5 ft. 5 ins.) if female.

As Dr Osman Hill has emphasised, a mandibular torus is indicated in all four lower jaws in this group, but it is much more conspicuously developed in Galson I and V, older women with heavily worn teeth, than in Galson II and IV. This supports the view enunciated by Sir Arthur Keith (1929) that the mandibular torus is not a racial characteristic but a physiological response to stresses placed upon the jaws and teeth by masticatory habits associated with a primitive dietary and particularly with dependence on sea-food.

It is to the skulls of Galson I and V, supplemented by the cranial fragments of Galson IV, that we must chiefly look for evidence of the physical type of these islanders. In contrast to the Gairloch skull, Galson V, while its length is equal to the average of Lowland Scottish crania, is considerably above the average of this group in breadth; it is thus a mesaticranial, almost brachycranial skull. It is even more sharply distinguished from the average Lowland Scottish skull by its great height. The facial breadth is also well above the average; the face must have been long, but cannot be accurately measured since the upper teeth had been shed during life. From the form of the surviving portions of

Galson IV, it seems that in height and breadth of braincase this skull must have been similar to Galson V, but its face was possibly somewhat narrower.

The characters of these specimens suggest a blending of the Lowland Scottish type with one possessing a broader and higher skull and probably a wider face. Such a type was widely dispersed over Scotland in the Early Bronze Age, many centuries before the time of the Galson burials. These Bronze Age broad-heads are regarded as new arrivals from the Continent, but some broad skulls found in Neolithic chamber tombs in Orkney may perhaps be descended from an older British broad-headed stock represented by late Palæolithic skulls from Kent's Cavern and Aveline's Hole in southern England. Survivors of either of these types may well have lingered on into the Christian era in Lewis, although the possibility of a later influx of broad-heads from the Continent cannot be excluded.

Re-examination of Galson I shows it to have a braincase somewhat wider (133 mm.) than was estimated by Dr Osman Hill, bringing it into the lower part of the mesaticranial range (cranial index 76.0). While the braincase agrees well with the Lowland Scottish type, the face, which is even wider than that of Galson V, contrasts sharply with the characteristically narrow Lowland Scottish face. This feature could be due to an admixture of a broad-headed and broad-faced type, as in Galson V, but which in Galson I has affected the cranial form hardly at all. Alternatively we may look, as Dr Osman Hill suggests, for an ancestral type combining a broad face with a braincase of medium width. Dr Hill has rightly pointed out that such a combination is found in Arctic (Eskimoid) skulls, but equally in a group of Upper Palæolithic and Mesolithic skulls from Western Europe, of which the Chancelade skull is the best known example. It is also found in certain recent Norwegian and Icelandic skulls which probably reveal a surviving Palæolithic strain. In Scotland this broad-faced Palæolithic type appears in the skulls from the MacArthur Cave at Oban. It may well have survived in the Isles to a much later period, only gradually becoming leavened by the intrusion of the Bronze Age and Iron Age types. Consequently Galson I need not necessarily be supposed to be of either Scandinavian or Arctic ancestry.

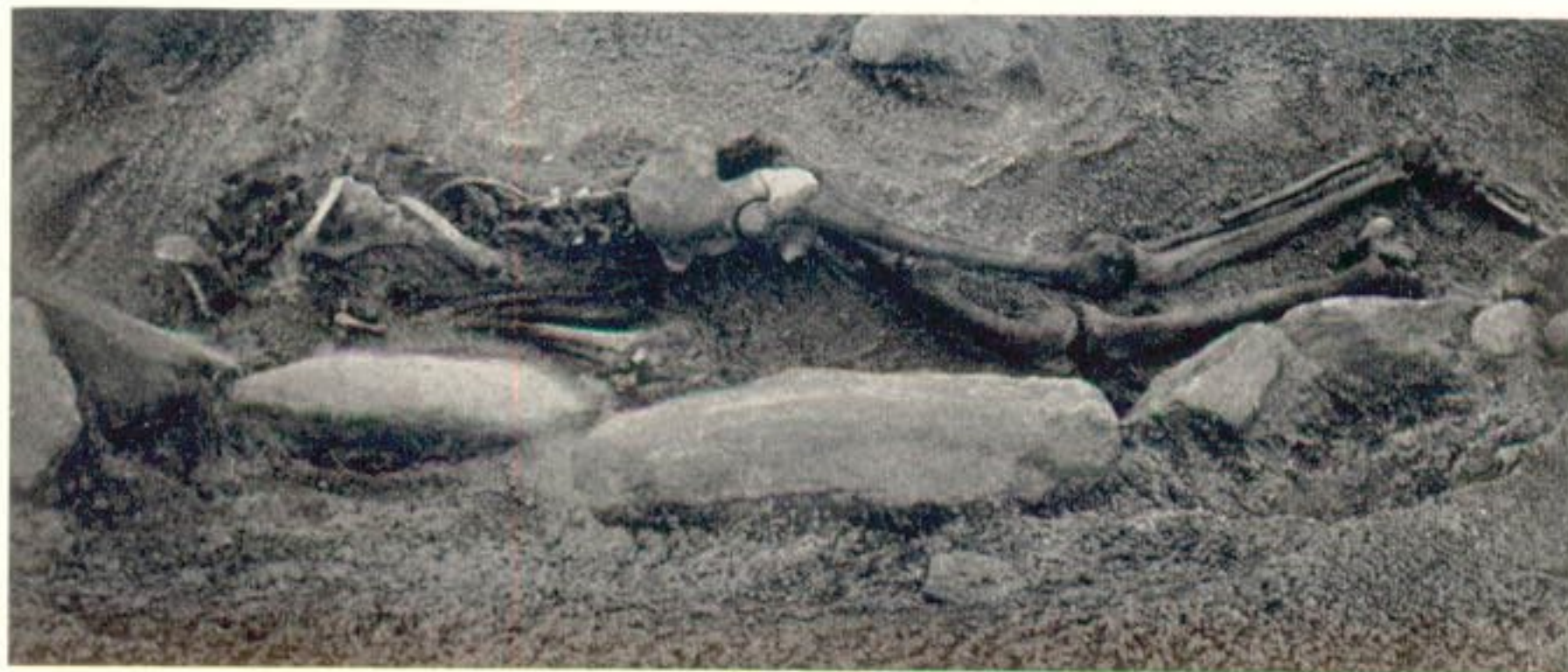
All these interpretations must remain tentative so long as they are based only upon isolated specimens. Not until large numbers of skulls from long cist burials in different parts of Scotland have been studied will a clear picture of Dark Age physical types emerge. Meanwhile we can only be grateful for every addition to our store of knowledge.

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1. Sandbank at Galson with bands of midden; on the right, wall "Y";
on the left, long cist burial V.



2. Long cist burial "Galson II."



Symbol stone at Flowerdale House, Gairloch.

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