

II.

EXCAVATIONS IN A CHAMBERED CAIRN AT KINDROCHAT, NEAR COMRIE, PERTSHIRE. BY PROFESSOR V. G. CHILDE, B.LITT., F.S.A.Scot.

The Long Cairn on the farm of Kindrochat is mentioned by Mr Coles in the *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, 1910-11, p. 47, who speaks of cists at the site. In his time the area occupied by the cairn was planted with larch and oaks, but these trees were cut down during the War and only a few beeches remain standing on the site.

The true significance of the ruins was apparently first recognised by Professor H. Breuil when staying at the farm with Miss M. E. Boyle. At his instigation Mr Callander visited the spot and diagnosed the visible remains as those of a Long Cairn. He mentions it as such in *Archæologia*.

Two cists are exposed. The coverstone of one was removed by Mr J. M'Intyre, brother of the present tenant of Kindrochat. He dug down until the pillar-stones threatened to fall in, and removed portions of a human skeleton which he retained until he left the district three years ago when the remains were thrown away. Later on, but still before 1914, Capt. H. Boyle with his two brothers removed one of the lintels from an outer chamber of the same cist and dug down a short distance. It was from this compartment that the leaf-shaped arrow-head was recovered this year.

At present the area is occupied by a very low, stony mound from which project several large, upright stones including the pillar-stones

of the cists as well as several tree stumps. It is bounded on the north by a modern dyke whose top is flush with the surface of the mound. The southern side and eastern end is likewise bounded by a low wall, very much grass-grown and dilapidated and nowhere standing to-day more than 18 inches above the level of the northern field. Excavation, however, showed that this wall had once stood higher and had simply become buried by the gradual silting up of the field. The latter slopes up southward and has been exposed to inundation from a torrent. A trench dug at the south-eastern corner outside the wall reached what seemed to be the bottom course of the wall 3 feet below the present surface of the ground. This gives some idea of the relatively high antiquity of the south wall. It was already considerably silted up when Mr M'Intyre first knew the farm seventy years ago. I had at first regarded this wall as the original kerb of the cairn. But at many points where the wall is reasonably preserved one notices a shallow depression between it and the mass of the stones enclosed. (Still in every case the level of the turf inside the wall is above that of the field to the south.)

Moreover, the trench at the south-east showed that the wall had no organic connection with the original cairn. On the inner side it was only at a depth of 2 feet $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches below the wall top that any mass of stones comparable to the body of a cairn came to light. Similarly on the outside a mass of large stones, comparable to those forming the mass of the cairn, appeared even below what seem to be the foundations of the wall, 5 feet 8 inches below its top. It would therefore seem that this old wall was built over the edges of the cairn or its spread at a time when the latter was already being covered up by silt from the torrent. A trench dug due south of Cist II. suggested a similar conclusion.

The southern wall can therefore no more be regarded as an original boundary of the cairn than the patently modern dyke on the north. The whole area enclosed between these barriers is, however, covered with stones and might be regarded as roughly co-extensive with the cairn. But many of the stones are modern depositions. Mr M'Intyre remembers that stones from the fields have been dumped here for the last seventy years at least. At certain points it was observed that the "feld stanes" are embedded in and superimposed upon a layer of black earth or mould. Only below a layer of such soil, 4 inches to 6 inches deep and comparatively free from stones, do large boulders begin to appear. These and these alone presumably belong to the cairn proper. The visible surface indications are not therefore an accurate guide to the extent of the prehistoric cairn. That could only

be determined by an excavation on a larger scale than the time and labour available allowed us.

Nor is the existing height any indication of the original elevation of the cairn. Serious denudation, presumably for dyke-building, is implied by the exposure of much of the uprights of the two cists which were presumably once completely hidden. The actual height of the cairn is to-day inconsiderable, not exceeding 4 feet above the level of the southern field near the centre of the cairn. Moreover, the summits



Fig. 1. Chambered Cairn, Kindrochat, Perthshire. Cist No. I. looking west.

lie in a suspicious way from 10 feet to 40 feet north of the main Cist II., which itself lies near the southern boundary of the enclosed area. But normally the cist should lie near the highest portion of the cairn. Now to the north-east of the enclosure a ridge of rock running E.N.E. by W.S.W. is clearly visible projecting for some 40 feet beyond the enclosure and rising as much as 18 inches above the adjacent portions of the north field. This suggests that the present apparent summits of the cairn may be due rather to the elevation of the subsoil than to a deeper accumulation of stones. The actual summit of the cairn can accordingly only be determined by farther excavation.

When we reached the site two long cists were exposed distant from one another 44 feet along a line running 70° E. of N. (true).

The main axes of the two cists were nearly at right angles to one another, and the distance mentioned is from the easterly upright of the rear compartment of the westernmost cist to the rear pillar-stone of the easterly cist (No I.).

Cist No I. is orientated 60° W. of magnetic N. and is 9 feet long and $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide at its widest point (figs. 1 and 2). On the southern side four large upright slabs are still standing:—

C, 4 feet 7 inches by 2 feet 8 inches by 9 inches (projecting 2 feet 8 inches above stones outside the cist).

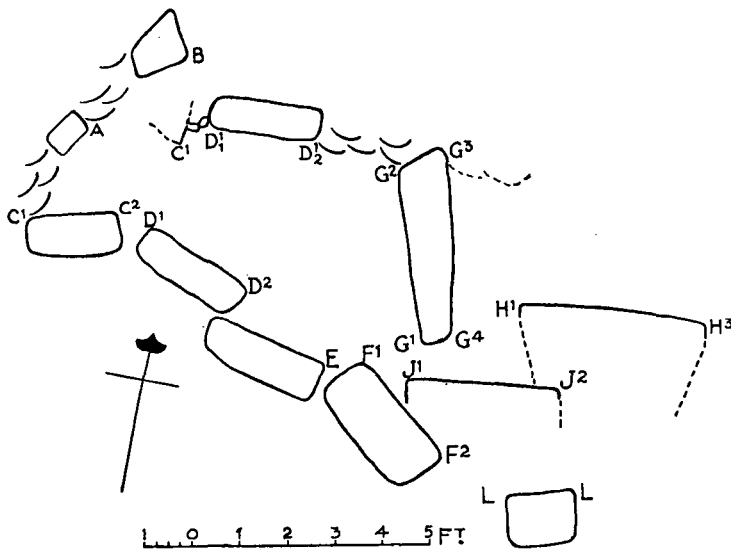


Fig. 2. Chambered Cairn, Kindrochat: plan of Cist No. I. by Miss K. Kennedy and Miss M. E. Crichton Mitchell.

D, 3 feet 3 inches by 2 feet 5 inches by 8 inches.

E, 3 feet 8 inches by 2 feet 9 inches by 9 inches.

F, 4 feet 1 inch by 2 feet 8 inches by 1 foot 3 inches.

Of the north wall only one stone, D', is standing. It measures 3 feet by 2 feet 3 inches by 6 inches, and projects 1 foot 2 inches above the surface of the cairn outside. Farther east a fallen pillar-stone G, 5 feet 6 inches by 2 feet by 1 foot 6 inches, lies diagonally across the cist, having presumably fallen from the north wall. The rear wall apparently consisted of two much-weathered slabs, A and B, whose tops are flush with the present surface of the cairn. It was not possible to dig down to the base of these rear slabs without impairing their stability. The rest of the cist was cleared down to the base of the

pillar-stones 3·40 feet above datum or about 6 inches below the level of the turf immediately outside the wall at its nearest point, but just under 1 foot above the supposed surface of the cairn inside the wall. The whole cist had evidently been disturbed. It contained merely stones and earth. Though this was carefully riddled no trace of bones or artifacts came to light.

A trench was dug in an easterly direction from the prostrate stone G. No easterly boundary slab came to light, but a rough wall about one foot high from the floor line of the cist, as determined by the bases of the uprights, blocked its eastern end. It consisted of thin slabs of considerable size inclined slightly to the south-east. In its structure it recalls exactly the retaining wall of the round cairn near Kilmartin excavated this year by Mr Craw.

Twelve feet from the rear slab A of Cist I. and 10° N. of W. from it a large stone slab projects 3 feet 8 inches above the surface of the cairn. It lies approximately transverse to the long axis of Cist I. and is 2 feet 10 inches broad at the lowest point exposed, and 1 foot 5 inches thick. Its position suggests an original connection with the cist and is a challenge to further exploration in the intermediate space.

Cist No. II. is much better preserved (fig. 3). Miss Simpson describes it as follows:—

The cist occupied a fairly central position south of the apparent ridge running the length of the cairn area. Two compartments were already exposed when operations commenced. They are separated by a septal stone measuring 3 feet 5½ inches in length and varying in thickness from 2 inches to 9½ inches. The walls of the cist are megalithic slabs of schistose rock that splits easily along the bedding planes like a shale. The septal stone and one of the uprights from the outer compartment seem different, less angular, and more completely metamorphosed. The rear upright and those on the eastern side are well preserved, those on the west have suffered from the weight of the material behind them and are much broken up. The slabs of both walls are inclined inwards out of the perpendicular.

Three main blocks make up the walls on either side, but the portal (southern) end has a wall of angular laminæ and water-worn stones. The headstone is a massive block standing some 3 feet high at either side and rising to 4 feet at the centre. It is just on 2 feet broad and its maximum thickness is 11 inches.

Abutting on this on the east side is another large and well-preserved slab, 4 feet 9 inches long, 8 inches thick, and standing 4 feet high. Adjoining and slightly overlapping this and met by the septal stone is a similar though thinner slab, 5 feet long but less than 3 feet high.

Almost half the height of the third stone on the east has been broken away so that it now stands there only 1 foot 6 inches, tapering to the left to less than 1 foot.

The stones of the western wall are too dislocated to allow of such exact description. The northernmost must have been originally 6 feet long, but owing to its inclined position and instability it is not possible to ascertain its height exactly (the measurable height is 2 feet). The length of the adjoining slab which overlaps with the foregoing must have



Fig. 3. Chambered Cairn, Kindrochat. Cist No. II. looking north.

been fully 4 feet, but it is no longer intact, while the southern slab is even more broken.

A coverstone was removed from the inner compartment some forty years ago, but remains lying beside the cist. It is of rock similar to that of the walls, and measures 5 feet 8 inches by 3 feet 8½ inches at its greatest breadth. A lintel, probably removed from the outer compartment, also lies beside the cist and is more regular in shape. It measures 4 feet long, 1 foot to 1 foot 4 inches wide, and from 6 inches to 8 inches thick. This block, may, however, represent only a portion of the original lintel.

The large lateral slabs normally overlap some 9 inches or 10 inches, but in one case on the west side as much as 1 foot 6 inches. Thus the inner compartment measures 5 feet while the outer is about 4 inches longer.

The cist varies in width from 2 feet 3 inches to 3 feet 3 inches. The septal stone, whose western end abuts against the end of the north slab of the west wall, is 3 feet 6 inches long. It is 1 foot 6 inches

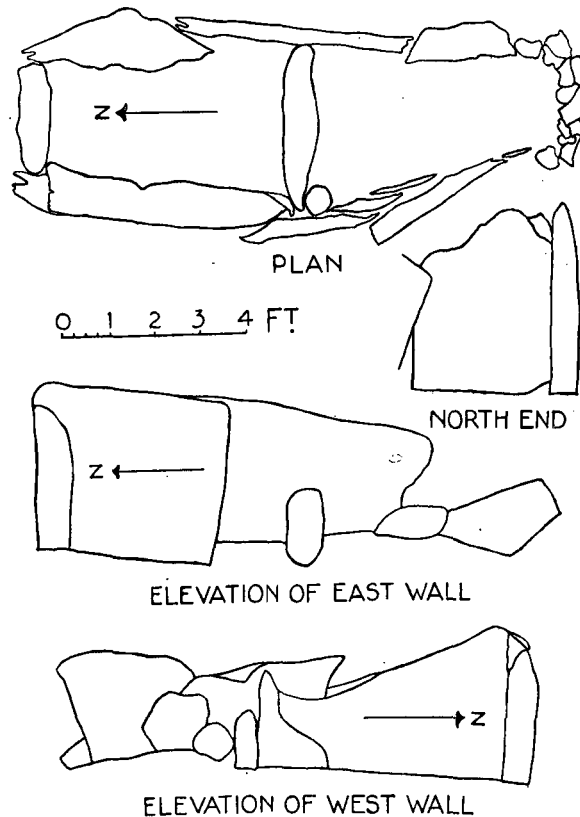


Fig. 4. Chambered Cairn, Kindrochat: plan and elevations of Cist No. II. by Miss M. E. Simpson.

high, so that its top lies 1 foot below the top of the adjacent slab on the west and 1 foot 7 inches below that of the central slab on the east.

A skeleton had been, as noted, removed from the inner compartment many years ago. Since then the cist had stood open and become choked with ferns and rubbish. It was cleared out, and near the centre, excavation was carried down to a depth of about 1 foot 6 inches below the bottom of the septal slab without bringing to light any relics. Against the foot of the upright there are signs of packing somewhat similar in



Fig. 5. Flint Arrow-head from Chambered Cairn, Kindrochat. (?)

style to the wall at the south end of the cist. The stones in question might have been carried by natural agencies. The outer compartment had been disturbed by tree roots and had stood open since Captain Boyle's operations in 1914. It was cleared out down to the level of the bottom of the septal stone. Among the leaf mould, which filled it, was found one very small but beautifully worked leaf-shaped arrow-head of flint (fig. 5).

INFERENCES.

The similarity of the Kindrochat cists, especially No. II., to the segmented cists of the Clyde area is patent to anyone who has seen the classical examples in Arran. The position of the septal stone at the junction of two uprights and the overlapping of the lateral stones likewise recur there. Moreover, the arrow-head is allied by the sharpness of its point and the curvature of its body peculiarly to the specimens collected by Professor Bryce from chambers of this class—Giant's Graves¹ and Slidery,² in Arran.

On the other hand, the majority of the cists of this class in Arran, Bute, and Argyll are preceded by definite portal stones transverse to the walls and normally standing distinctly higher than the lateral slabs. A sill stone, resembling a septal slab in character, is often found immediately behind the portals. Moreover, in the Clyde area, many of the cists exceed in length the 11 feet of our No. II., and have more than two compartments. Dunan Beag (south),³ Dunan Mor (south),⁴ and Clachaig⁵ in Arran approximate in dimensions to ours. While several Arran cairns covered two chambers, these tended to be on the same axis. At Dunan Mor⁴ in Arran and Glecknabae⁶ in Bute, however, the two cists are differently orientated but not nearly at right angles one to the other as at Kindrochat.

Still closer analogies are to be found on the fringe of the area in Wigtownshire and Kirkcudbright. The cairn at Drannadow⁷ near Minnigaff in the latter county covered five cists each bipartite like ours and approximating to it in dimensions. One opened to the east like our No. I., two to the south like No. II. here. Still, there were generally slabs at either end. Other Galloway cairns, *e.g.* Mid Gleniron,⁸ show a comparable arrangement of chambers within the cairn. But even in this area portal stones occur, *e.g.* Kilhern,⁹ as in Arran.

The Arran cairns rarely exceed 100 feet in length and those in

¹ *Proceedings*, xxxvii. p. 45.

³ *Ibid.*, xliii. p. 342.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xxxvi. p. 86.

⁷ *Ibid.*, lvii. p. 60.

⁹ *Ibid.*, No. 269.

² *Ibid.*, xxxvi. p. 90, fig. 19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xliii. p. 348.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxviii. p. 38.

⁸ *Inventory, Anc. Mon.*, Wigtownshire, p. 94.

Galloway hardly ever reach this figure. This shows that the whole area of our enclosure at Kindrochat can hardly have been occupied by the original cairn; for it measures 180 feet along the axis of Cist I. At the same time the analogy of Drannadow suggests that further chambers may well be found. Wider exploration to determine the limits of the original cairn and to discover, if possible, traces of retaining wall or horns is likewise desirable.¹

In the meantime it may be stated with confidence that here in this remote glen, well east of the watershed, we have an isolated outlier of the Clyde group whose main characters have been so accurately defined by Professor Bryce. From what can be seen of the cairn itself it would seem that the alliance is with the Clyde basin itself, rather than with the westerly outliers in the Crinan region where the cairns seem to have been circular.²