

Shorter Notes

A short cist from the Hero's Cairn, Lanarkshire

by J B Stevenson

During fieldwork undertaken by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland in the preparation of the *Inventory* of the prehistoric and Roman monuments of Lanarkshire, the opportunity was taken to excavate a short cist exposed in the Hero's Cairn, Lanarkshire (NGR NS 958405). This cairn, situated some 7 km SE of the town of Lanark in the Lanark District of Strathclyde, is the largest and most southerly of a group of twenty-six barrows and cairns (RCAMS 1978, no. 106) strung along the summit of Swaites Hill, the name given to the ridge of high ground (c 300 m OD) that rises from the left bank of the River Clyde between the villages of Pettinain and Thankerton. The centre of the cairn (fig 1) has been almost completely removed and only a turf-covered peripheral fringe of stones now survives, standing to a height of 1.3 m; a few large boulders, apparently dislodged, may originally have formed part of a kerb. Until recently the partially exposed cist was covered by a massive capstone (A), but this had been removed prior to the excavation.

Constructed with the long axis aligned NE and SW, the cist measures 1.2 m by about 0.7 m and at least 0.4 m in depth. The two end-slabs and the NW side-slab are still *in situ*, but the other side-slab has fallen inwards, while the capstone, a massive block measuring 2.3 m by 1.85 m and 0.45 m in greatest thickness, has been removed and is lying near by. The pit in which the cist had been set was so shallow that the top of the capstone would have projected above the old ground-surface, and between the sides of the pit and the cist there were a number of packing-stones. All the slabs used in the construction of the cist were of local Old Red Sandstone, the S end-slab belonging to a rather thinner bedded facies than the others. The interior of the cist had been disturbed at some time in the past, and the only finds were fragments of a food vessel (fig 2) and some small pieces of cremated bone, all of which came from a depression in the gravel floor.

THE FINDS

Food vessel (fig 2)

Diameter of rim c 130 mm, buff/light-brown ware, fairly hard fabric tempered with coarse grit, outer surface smoothed. Lower fragments show signs of secondary oxidation. The body is bowl-shaped with an everted rim, bevelled internally and externally. Decoration consists of whipped cord impressions (maggots) arranged vertically in horizontal bands or chevrons. (NMAS cat no. EE 168)

Cremation

A small amount, c 15 gm, of heavily calcined bone was found close to the food vessel fragments. The bones were finely comminuted, averaging 10 mm in length. (NMAS cat no. EE 169)

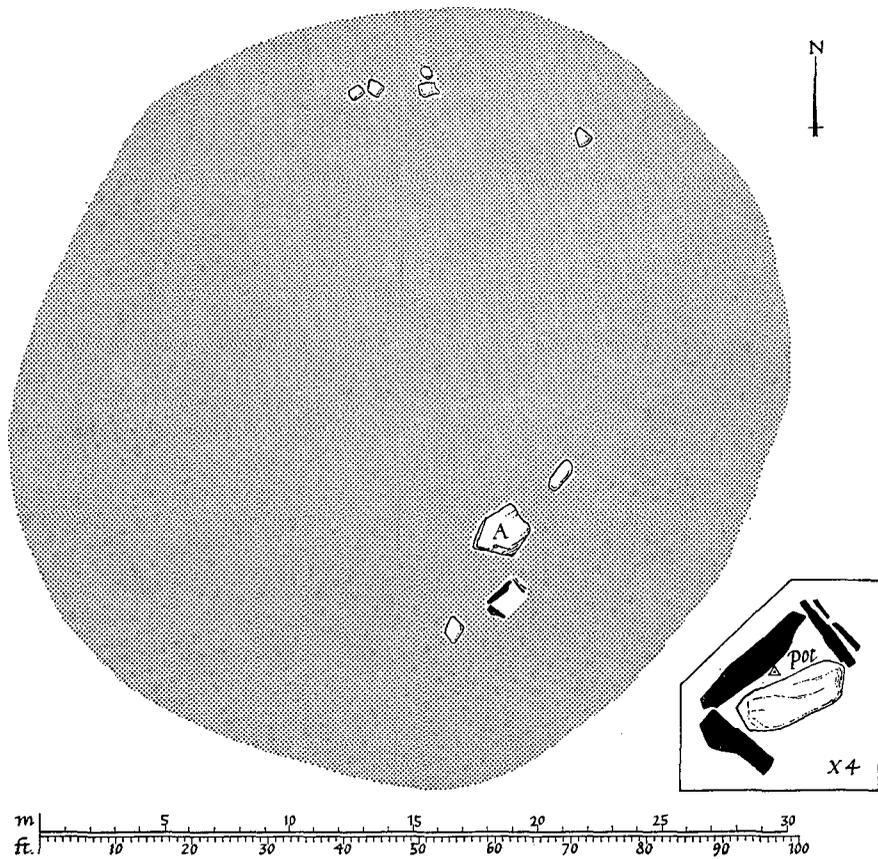


FIG 1 The Hero's Cairn: plan

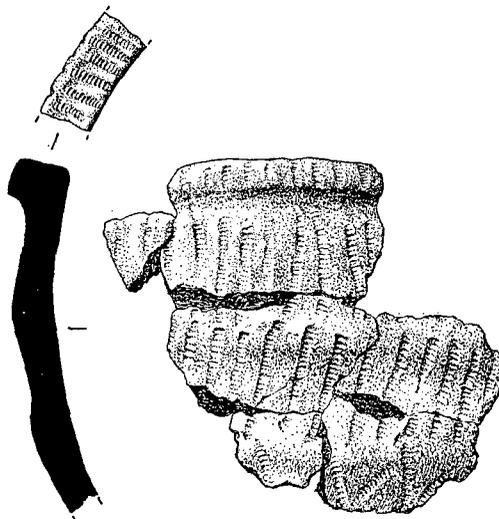


FIG 2 The Hero's Cairn: food vessel (scale 1 : 3)

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REFERENCE

RCAMS 1978 Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Lanarkshire: An Inventory of the Prehistoric and Roman Monuments*. Edinburgh.

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