

# THE EXCAVATION OF THE ROYSTONE GRANGE ROUND CAIRN (BALLIDON 12), BALLIDON, DERBYSHIRE

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## INTRODUCTION

The Roystone cairn (SK 20365650) occupies a prominent height above the 320m contour, 457m southwest of Roystone Grange farm in the parish of Ballidon. It overlooks open limestone country, and stands above the deep-cut valley linking Pike Hall with the quarry-ravaged village of Ballidon. From the site there are extensive views in all directions except the east, where it is overshadowed by the 350m high eminence of Minning Low, on which stand the two well known cairns, the largest of which forms the subject of a separate paper in this volume. The Roystone cairn is set in an area containing much evidence of prehistoric occupation including field systems (Hodges and Wildgoose 1980, 1981); there are several cairns and occupied caves in the vicinity, whilst recent fieldwork has produced much casual surface material of the same period. The site itself was found by chance during a field survey of the locality, and is surrounded by comparatively recent disturbance, including a lime kiln and the remains of collapsed drystone walls and other debris. Immediately to the north is a scooped declivity and the burial mound sits on a slight eminence above this. Its present height is only 0.61m at the centre, and its diameter averages 7.93m. It was at first thought that the cairn was the one at 'Ryestone' investigated by Thomas Bateman on August 13th, 1849 (Bateman, 1861: 61), but the presence of so many undisturbed burials suggests that the two sites are not in fact the same.

## THE EXCAVATIONS

The mound was excavated by quadrant trenches taken due north, south, east and west, with extensions to the south cutting (Fig. 1). It was found that during its long existence the tumulus had lost much of its upper levels, though it seems doubtful whether it was ever really elevated. Much of the overlying cairn material had been removed perhaps for wall building during the late eighteenth century enclosures. This despoliation had fortunately left the burials intact, though most of them were only thinly covered by the remaining soil and stones, and their preservation was more than a little fortuitous. The mound itself had been raised on a very rocky and uneven surface. In places the limestone rock rises in natural pillars and blocks, particularly on the north and east sides. Here the cairn had been made up by simply filling in and levelling off the intervening depressions with stone. In fact the tumulus was a true cairn, formed entirely of limestone rubble of various shapes and sizes. Some of the basal slabs were of a considerable weight and magnitude. The excavations described here were carried out between 1975 and 1976.

### The burials

The main prehistoric burials consisted of a number of early bronze age interments grouped together east of the presumed cairn centre, and they occupied a space just 2.13m square. The first structure to be located and excavated was a cist in the eastern quadrant, the tips of whose orthostats were clearly visible when the area was deturfed. There were six uprights, though subsequent disturbance in the southern part of the cist was probably responsible for the removal of further stones in this locality. The burial in the cist, presumably a crouched inhumation, had been very badly disturbed during the

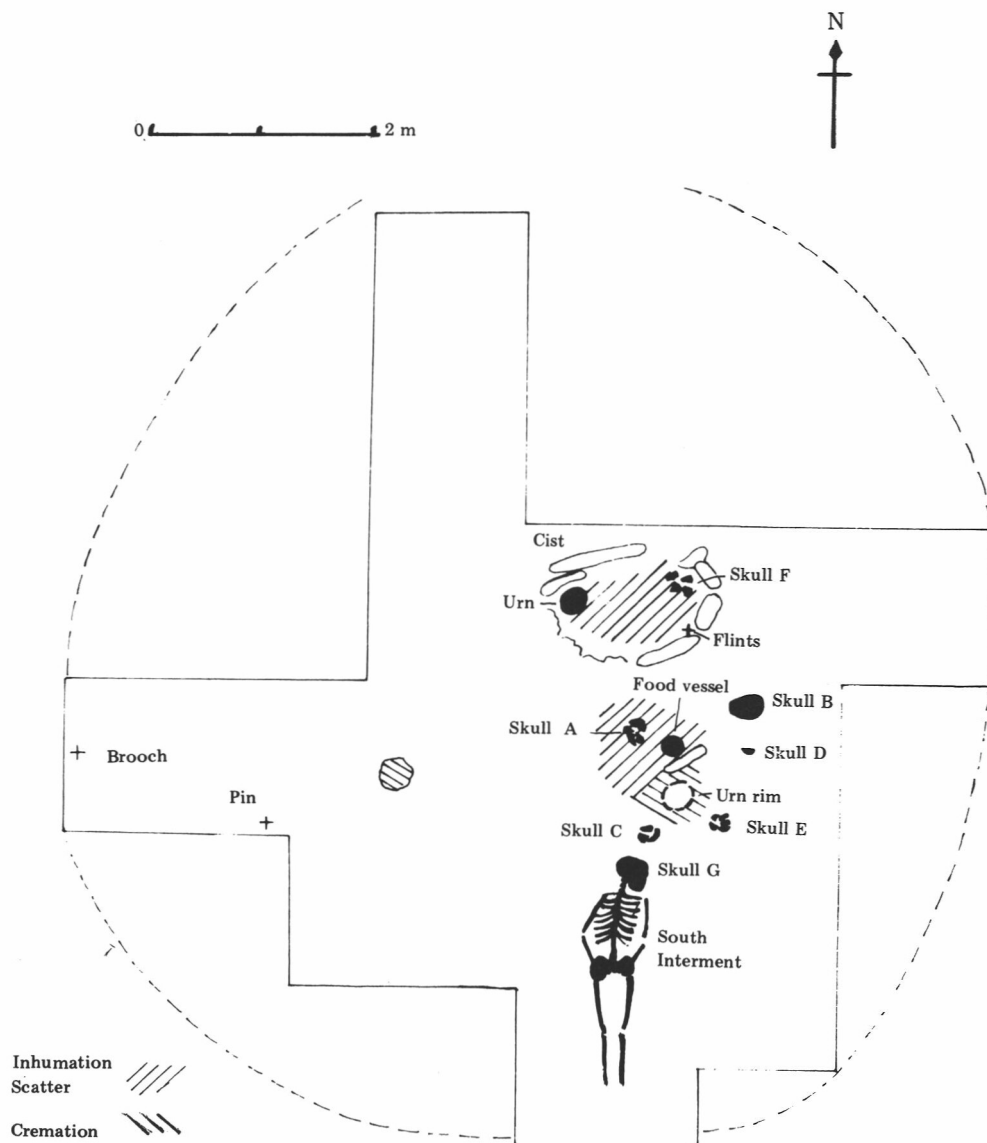


Fig. 1 Roystone Grange round cairn: plan of excavations and major finds.

subsequent re-use of the grave. During this re-use the cist had been partly cleared out and a hole sunk in the northwestern side to receive a cremation housed in a collared urn, placed alongside an additional(?) upright stone. The urn itself (Fig. 2) had its upper part decorated with a circular-ended implement, and was covered by a flat stone. The bones of the skeleton, a young person, had been very much damaged, and showed evidence of ancient breaks, and the urn actually rested on the lower leg bones which alone showed any signs of articulation. Two unburnt vertebrae from the same skeleton were found on top of the cremated remains in the pot. In the southeastern angle of the cist, in a crevice formed by the junction of two uprights, were three white flints (Fig. 3),

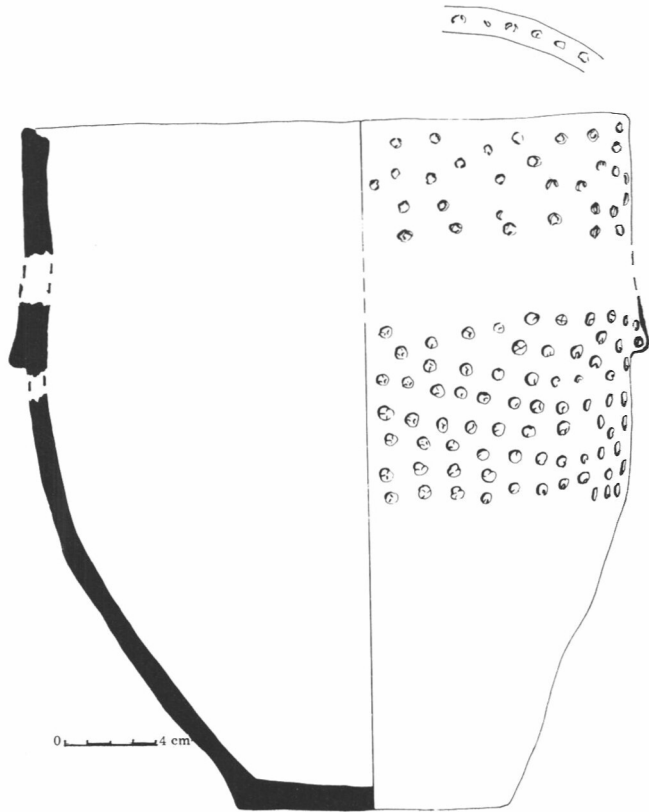


Fig. 2 Roystone Grange round cairn: collared urn from cist (see also Plates 1 and 2).

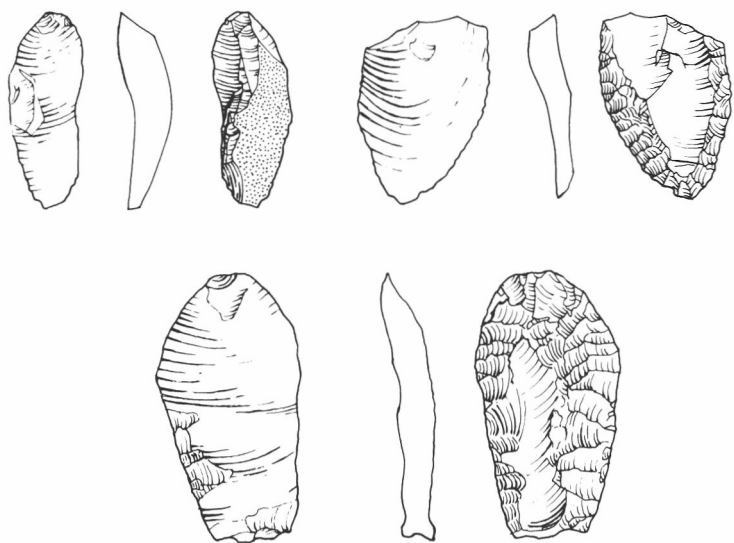


Fig. 3 Roystone Grange round cairn: flint artifacts from cist.

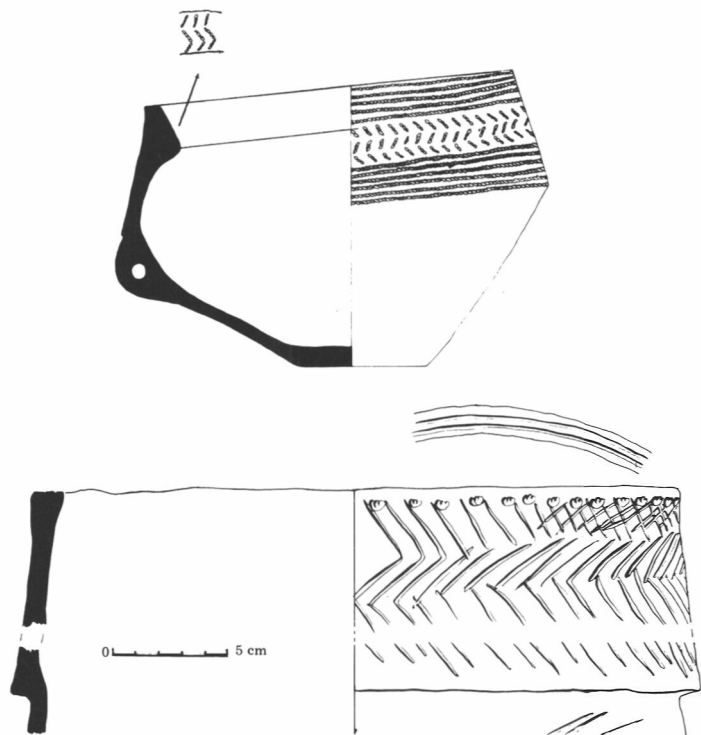


Fig. 4 Roystone Grange round cairn: handled food vessel (above) and rim of collared urn (below).

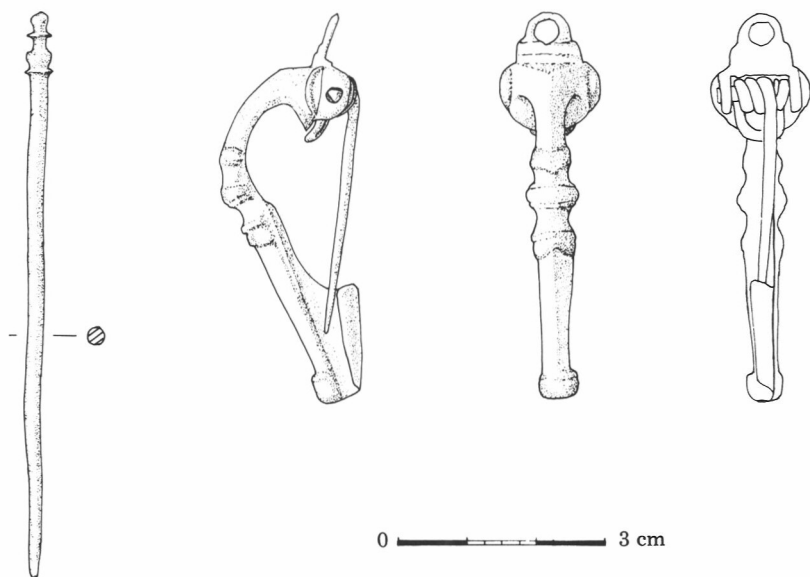


Fig. 5 Roystone Grange round cairn: bronze disc head pin (left) and bronze trumpet brooch (right).

two of them superb plano-convex knives, forming the tool kit deposited with the original burial. All the surviving bones of this interment show weathering, possibly as a result of the exposure of the body before its final covering. The bones were only 0.30m below the present surface of the mound, and the rim of the later urn was 0.46m down.

South of the cist, an area 1.22m square contained an interesting succession of burials. At a general depth of 0.23m was a series of scattered and broken bones comprising two individuals, one of whom retained a mandible and twelve skull fragments. Immediately below this confused deposit, and associated with a left humerus, was a fine handled food vessel, found in pieces (Fig. 4). It had been disturbed, but was fortunately more or less complete. The vessel was biconical in shape and was finely decorated with twisted cord motifs. It provides the only Derbyshire example of this very rare ceramic type. At the same level, but 0.30m further south and separated by an upright stone, was a circular ring of pottery sherds comprising the complete rim of an inverted collared urn (Fig. 4). Above and around it were the remains of the cremation it originally contained, together with 68 body sherds. Like the nearby burials the urn had obviously suffered partial uncovering, and had been shattered during stone removal or ploughing in some bygone era.

The area defined also contained examples of three individual skull-burials, proof of a custom only rarely mentioned by previous investigators of Peak District tumuli. On the southern periphery of the area were the distorted remnants of two youthful crania; one subject was little more than an infant. Both rested on the old ground surface 0.30m deep. On the east was the weathered skull of an adult 0.35m down, on the same bedrock. The skull was upright and the face pointed due west. The mandible was in position, as were the atlas and axis vertebrae. There was no evidence that these neck bones had been cut or hacked; presumably the cranium had been detached when the body was in a state of decomposition. 0.30m south of this skull was a single large fragment of a further skull, 0.42m deep and just above the bedrock. To the south of this well used necropolis was an extended skeleton laid on the limestone rock and orientated north-south. The bones, being only some 0.30m below the cairn surface, were in a very poor state of preservation. The burial, whose date could fall in either the iron age, Romano-British or Anglian periods, had no accompanying artifacts.

The only other interment represented in the Roystone cairn was a simple cremation 1.22m southwest of the mound centre and 0.30m deep. There were no associated objects and the finely comminuted nature of the bones, by comparison with those from the urn cremations, suggests perhaps a Roman date for this deposit. Further evidence of Roman occupation in the vicinity was provided by the finding, on the west side of the site, of two well preserved bronzes, a trumpet brooch and a disc-headed pin (Fig. 5).

A number of flints occurred in the mound material, but they were mainly waste flakes. The only pottery fragments discovered, apart from the ones mentioned, were of Roman date and included one sherd of Derbyshire ware and fragments of a coarse reddish type of pot. Animal remains were scarce, but included fragments of horse, cow, sheep/goat and red deer. Although present, the bones of the water vole were not particularly prominent in any part of the cairn structure.

These finds are fully described below, followed by the concluding discussion.

## THE HUMAN BONES

### Crania

1. SKULL A. In probable association with handled food vessel. It comprises 12 fragments of cranial bone and mandible. The sutures of the skull are open, and the 7 teeth present are relatively unworn. Tooth wear suggests an age around 20. Sex: male.
2. SKULL B. Detached on old ground surface. Rather weathered (from exposure?) and possessing a frontal suture. The mandible has one worn tooth in situ, and the maxilla 2. There are 6 further loose teeth. Tooth wear suggests an age of 45+. Sex: male.
3. SKULL C. Detached on old ground surface. It consists of 38 fragments of a very incomplete cranium. The sutures are open and there is no mandible, but 8 loose unworn teeth. Sex: possibly male.

4. SKULL D. This is represented by a single large, weathered and eroded piece of the frontal bone of an adult cranium. Sex: indeterminate.

5. SKULL E. Detached on old ground surface. It consists of 24 fragments of a partly-reconstructed and very thin, fragile infant cranium. There is also part of a maxilla with 3 teeth, and 2 further loose molars. Sex: indeterminate.

6. SKULL F. Found in the cist, and represented by 15 weathered cranial fragments. These include a broken maxilla with 6 teeth, and a complete mandible with 3 teeth, plus 7 further loose teeth. Tooth wear suggests an age of 17-25. Sex: male.

7. SKULL G. From the extended burial in the south. It consists of a reconstructed cranium and mandible. The sutures are obliterated; the mandible contains 9 heavily worn and hollowed teeth, and a marked amount of alveolar resorption due to periodontal disease. Tooth wear suggests an age around 45+. Sex: male.

### Uncremated bone

Inhumed bones at Roystone were found in three specific areas: in the cist; in a disturbed locality south of the cist; and comprising the extended skeleton still further south.

*Cist.* The bones of this young person, doubtless originally laid in a crouched posture, with the body lying with the head pointing east and the face looking north, had been badly disturbed and disarranged when the cist was opened to admit an urned cremation. The inhumation had by this time become skeletonized, and the bones suffered widespread cracking and breakage. The only parts of the body in any articulation were the lower bones of the leg, which lay under part of the base of the urn. The flints accompanying the original burial were placed behind the shoulders.

*Southeast of the cist.* This area contained a quantity of very disturbed and damaged bones relating to two subjects. Most of the remains seem to belong to the owner of Skull A; they were much decayed and only a left humerus, alongside the food vessel, was found intact.

*Southern burial.* This interment, laid without protection on the sloping bedrock only 0.30m beneath the present surface of the mound, and subjected to water percolation and other destructive agencies, was not surprisingly very badly decayed, and many of the smaller bones had disappeared. Only the skull (G) at the highest level of the body was reasonably intact; most of the other bones had disintegrated.

### Cremations

*In the cist.* This cremation, in an upright urn, was mixed with soil, a little charcoal, and a number of small animal bones (all apparently of the water vole). When removed from the urn the deposit weighed 790gms. The burnt bones seem to represent one person, and recognisable fragments included teeth, long bones, skull, vertebrae and toe and finger bones.

*With the inverted urn.* This deposit was very scattered. When collected, it weighed 538gms and again appears to represent one person.

*In the west sector.* A simple cremation deposit weighing 680gms of very finely comminuted burnt bone.

### POTTERY

*Handled Biconical Food Vessel* (Fig. 4). With the disturbed burial south of the cist. When found it was in pieces, and has been reconstructed. The pot is rather lopsided, and is highest on the side opposite the handle. The height varies between 110mm and 125mm; it is 160mm in diameter at the rim, 185mm at the shoulder, and 570mm at the base. The vessel has a flat undecorated rim 6mm across, and the inside rim, 20mm deep, bears a continuous decoration of angular 'S' shaped motifs formed of three separate

short lengths of cord maggots. The top and bottom maggots are 5mm long, the central ones 7mm. The outer surface of the vase is decorated as far down as the shoulder. At the top are five continuous horizontal lines of twisted cord, beginning just under the rim, beneath which is a horizontal decoration of reversed 'S' motifs, paralleling those on the inside rim. The motifs again consist of maggots, each 5mm long. Beneath this are six further horizontal lines of continuous twisted cord decoration, ending at the shoulder. The lower part of the pot is undecorated. The handle is 25mm across at the centre, and has a single perforation. The outside of the handle is decorated with two sets of triple outcurving lines, three each side, which start and finish on the body of the pot itself, and all impressed with twisted cord. The fabric of the food vessel is thick and dark brown in colour.

*Collared Urn* (Fig. 2). In a depression on the west side of cist. When reconstructed, the present height of the urn was 230mm, though the top of the vessel had largely disintegrated, and only a single rim sherd remained *in situ* (Plate 1). Its original height was probably some 300mm. The present width across the rim, with some distortion, is 240 x 280mm, and the reconstructed base width is 1150 x 1270mm. The vessel is decorated with a series of impressed circles averaging 5mm across and which appear to have been executed with some type of animal or bird bone. The top of the rim is impressed with a continuous row of similar circles. The fabric of the urn is of a reddish brown colour.

*Collared Urn* (Fig. 4). Due south of the last. Altogether this pot is represented by 68 fragments. The body of the urn has been shattered by ploughing or stone-robbing, and

Plate 1 Roystone Grange round cairn: looking west across cist, with collared urn *in situ* at western end. Scale: one metre.

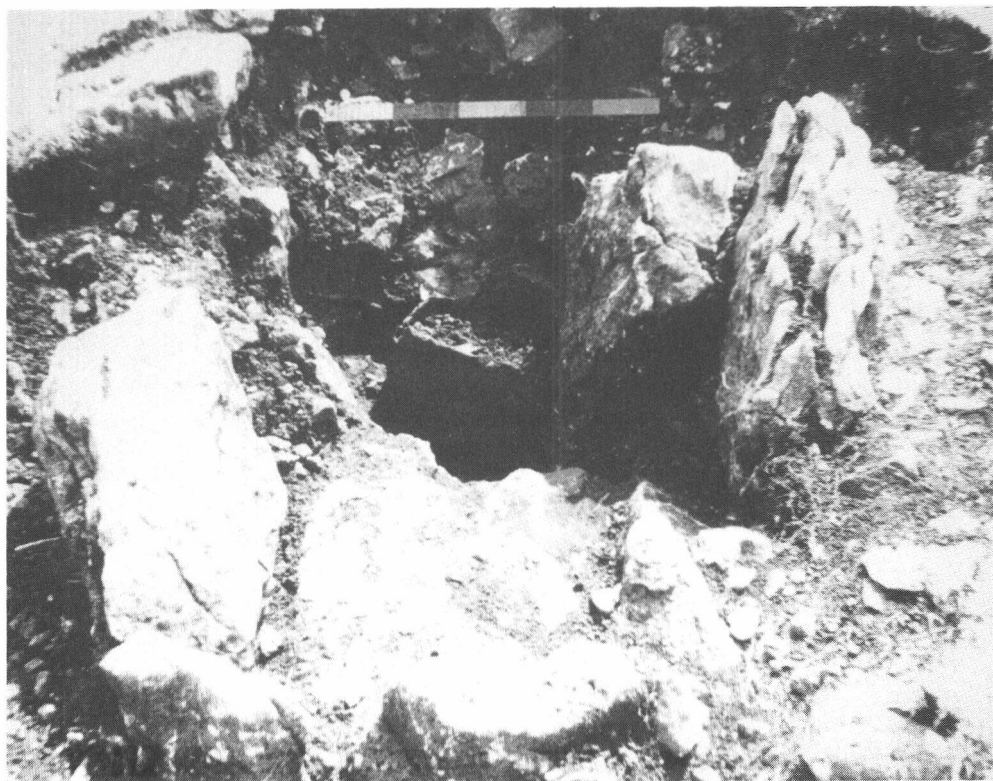






Plate 2 Roystone Grange round cairn: looking down on cist from western end; top of *in situ* collared urn visible in foreground. Scale: one metre.

the only intact part was the inverted rim which still remained *in situ*. The area immediately below the rim of the pot is impressed with a continuous line of horizontal cord maggots with zig zags and cross-hatched slash marks below. The top of the rim is ornamented with a double, and occasionally triple, though discontinuous, grooved line following the contour of the rim. The fabric is hard and dark brown in colour.

*Romano-British sherds.* 32 sherds of thick and coarse reddish ware were found during the excavation. They were mainly small and eroded fragments. There was also a single rim sherd of Derbyshire ware in the south sector.

#### FLINT

There were three flints in the cist, accompanying the inhumation. Two were superb plano-convex knives of white flint (Fig. 3), and the third a waste piece. 19 further flints occurred in the cairn; of these, 17 were flakes or waste fragments. Only two were implements, small flake knives from the western and central areas.

#### BRONZES (Fig. 5)

*Trumpet brooch* of Romano-British type found on the western side. The brooch was in fine preservation, and belongs to Collingwood's group R (Collingwood, 1969: 296). It belongs to a type unknown outside Britain, and was developed in military areas after the conquest. The period of production was the first half of the second century A.D.

*Disc-headed pin.* Found again on the western side, this multiple disc-headed type was again in good condition. It is of Jewry Wall type B (Kenyon, 1948: 262, fig. 89). The object dates to the second/third centuries A.D.



## ANIMAL BONES

Animals represented at Roystone, on tooth evidence, include cattle (*Bos taurus*), 5 teeth; sheep/goat (*Ovis/Capra*), 8 teeth; horse (*Equus caballus*), 1 tooth; red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), one antler tine. A number of water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) skulls and bones was recorded, but the remains of these predators were not very prominent in any part of the cairn.

## DISCUSSION

The Roystone Grange cairn can be confidently assigned to the food vessel/urn period of the Peak Early Bronze Age, containing as it does burial pottery of both types. The burial stratification emphasises the priority of the food vessel element, associated both with the construction of the cairn and its first utilisation for burial purposes. The burial rite was inhumation, whilst that of the succeeding urn users was cremation. This priority of food vessels is well shown in Peak interment contexts, where the urn burials are invariably in mounds already available, though the time lag between the primary and subsequent rituals is not easy to demonstrate, and was perhaps not great (Burgess, 1974: 176). At Roystone the urn cremation seems to have been introduced into the earlier cist after the original inhabitant of this tomb had been reduced to a skeleton. It is interesting to note that most of the burials at Roystone were deposited on the southeast side of the cairn. In view of its position, the cist has claims to represent the primary burial. The body of a young person accompanied by three flint tools was laid in a space delineated by upright slabs of limestone. The peculiar weathered nature of the bones suggests a period of prior exposure; this was also a feature of the detached skull found nearby. Perhaps contemporary, or near contemporary, was the burial of a further skeleton south of the cist equipped with a fine handled food vase, and like its companion in the cist, later considerably disturbed. The cairn is also noteworthy for its three separate skull burials in the southwest sector, a rare feature in British prehistoric cairns.

In Derbyshire (Marsden, 1977), Bateman records only one example of the practice, at Hay Top (Little Longstone 1), though headless burials have occurred in the Peak from mounds of the same era. Bateman found examples of these at Rolley Low (Great Longstone 8), Vincent Knoll (Hartington Middle Quarter 10) and Bostern (Newton Grange 10) as did Salt at Thirkell Low (Hartington Upper Quarter 14). Other ritual post-mortem interference with burials is also attested from food vessel contexts in the locality. This generally involves the introduction of inhumation burials as defleshed bone 'stacks' following exposure elsewhere, or, exceptionally as 'part burials' as at Lean Low (Marsden, 1976: 11), where a body was represented by the skull and a few long bones. Disarticulated bone 'stacks' are recorded at Bee Low (Youlgreave 2), Blackstone's Low (Ballidon 6), Fin Cop (Ashford 6), and possibly at Hind Low (Hartington Upper Quarter 4), and Eldon Hill (Peak Forest 6), a rite reminiscent of that practised earlier in the Neolithic. The adult skull at Roystone, complete with mandible, had been detached from its parent body probably after decay, and its weathered state again appears to have resulted from a prior exposure. Further south were two other crania, one an infant, the other a young individual, both distorted and broken, and like two youthful examples found by Bateman at Hay Top, both lacking their mandibles. Between the adult and infant skulls was one large fragment of weathered and eroded frontal bone from another skull. All the cranial burials seem to relate to the same food vessel phase of interment.

At some subsequent time these burials had been supplemented by the burials with urns. The cist had been opened and the enclosed skeleton badly disturbed. A hole had been sunk at the west end of the cist in which had been placed a collared urn containing a cremation, covered by a flat slab. Further southeast a second collared urn had been buried in an inverted position alongside a small vertical slab. Only the rim of this urn remained intact. The body of the vessel and its associated cremation were scattered above and around it, indicating subsequent disturbance at a much more modern period. The extended skeleton on the south, devoid of associations, is not easy to date and

could belong to any of several periods. The only interment not in the eastern sector was a simple cremation southwest of centre, and perhaps Romano-British. Two Roman bronzes in the western locality and contemporary pottery attest the presence of a nearby Roman population, and a native farmstead of the period has recently been excavated near the barn of Roystone Grange (Hodges and Wildgoose, 1980, 1981).

The Roystone cairn fits well into the food vessel/urn period, which in the Peak seems to fall towards the end of the Beaker settlement of the locality, early in the second millennium b.c. In the Peak, later Beakers share some overlap with food vessels, but the two pottery types occur in the same burial mound in only two instances, at Hazlebadge, (Hazlebadge 1) and Hay Top. Otherwise food vessels occupy both primary and satellite contexts in cairns. The urn burials seem to be dated a little later in the Peak and their cremation deposits generally occur in secondary positions in earlier cairns. The growth in population in the later Early Bronze Age in the area at a time of more equable climate than today is well shown by the occupation, primarily by urn-using groups, of what is now marginal territory on the more elevated gritstone moorlands, where clusters of small cairns on Stanton Moor, Eyam Moor, Big Moor and elsewhere affirm widespread settlement.

The Roystone cairn is one of the most diminutive of all food vessel tumuli found in the Peak. Twenty-six food vessel mounds in the district are measurable; of these 21 have diameters between 12 and 21m. Only four, including Roystone, are less than 9m across. The complete pottery vessels from Roystone are both unusual types. Handled biconical food vases are most uncommon; most handled examples appear to be bowl types, with cup or mug-like configurations, with none of the richness of decoration of the one under discussion. This particular discovery shows that, despite the extensive operations of Bateman and others, rare ceramic types are still likely to exist in Derbyshire awaiting future discovery. The two Roman bronzes are useful additions to the relatively few documented examples known in the locality; if the extended burial on the south side was Romano-British, this relatively diminutive burial mound contains a series of deposits spanning some 2500 years, representing at least ten individuals, seven inhumations and three cremations. The Roystone Grange cairn, in short, with its exceptional ceramic types and its rare group of skull burials, has provided a welcome extension of our knowledge of funerary practices in the Early Bronze Age of the Derbyshire Peak.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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