

III.—A BRONZE AGE BURIAL AT KYLOE, NORTHUMBERLAND.

BY PARKER BREWIS, M.A., F.S.A.,
A VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.

[Read on 31st August, 1927.]

On June 9th, 1927, in clearing off the surface soil preparatory to blasting operations at Kyloe whinstone quarry, a burial of the Bronze Age was discovered. On the evening of the discovery Colonel G. F. T. Leather of Middleton Hall took several photographs of the cist; one of these is here reproduced (plate XI, fig. 1). We are also indebted to Colonel Leather for collecting most of the contents of the cist, viz., a piece of charcoal, portions of a broken food-vessel and of a jet necklace.¹

The cist was two feet four inches long, seventeen inches wide and sixteen inches deep, with its major axis lying north and south. It was covered by a whinstone flag weighing about half a ton.

Charcoal has frequently been found scattered throughout British barrows. But this substance also occurs in direct contact with unburnt bodies of the Bronze Age. Indeed, Canon Greenwell believed that, though not always noticed, it was present in all such interments, and thus explained its presence in connection with unburnt bodies: that in the case of cremation the actual extent of burning varied very much, whilst in some cases the whole body

¹ These objects have been presented to the Society of Antiquaries, Newcastle upon Tyne, by the owner of the land, Sir Percy Loraine. They are now in the Black Gate museum.

was reduced to ashes, in others the burning was so trifling as to leave little or no indication of fire in contact with the bones. In the latter case the burning was reduced to a rite, probably one of purification. The charcoal found with unburnt bodies may be the remains of fire through which the corpse had been passed merely as a rite. "If this suggestion is the true solution of the reason why charcoal accompanies the body, then the practice of cremation was universal amongst these people, for every corpse was either burnt actually, or was subjected so far to the influence of fire, that the obligation of burning was supposed to have been fulfilled." ²

The food-vessel (plate XI, fig. 2) was about five inches high, seven inches diameter at the lip, and three inches at the base. About half of it is missing. It was decorated with four zones of jabbed ornament made with a pointed implement.³ Other food-vessels have been found in the vicinity.⁴

The food-vessel and the necklace are sufficient to give the burial its approximate date. It is undesirable to give too definite a date, but it is known that the food-vessel belongs to the early, although not the earliest period of the Bronze Age, which began in Britain about 2000 B.C., merging into the early Iron Age about 400 B.C., and therefore this food-vessel and necklace are at least three thousand years old.

The jet necklace (plate XII) consists of four trapezoidal plates; each of the larger pair is about two inches by three-quarters of an inch, each of the second pair one and five-eighths inches by five-eighths and one-sixteenth inch. There are also two triangular terminal plates, one of which is two and one-quarter inches long, and the other

² *British Barrows*, p. 30. See also Kemble's *Horæ Ferales*, p. 101.

³ A food-vessel with somewhat similar ornamentation was found in making West Hallington reservoir, Northumberland, in 1886. Fragments of it are now in the Black Gate museum. *Proc. Soc. Ant. Newcastle upon Tyne*, 2nd series, Vol. II, p. 337.

⁴ *Hist. Ber. Nat. Club*, Vol. XXV, p. 368.

one and three-quarters inches long. To the former of these was permanently fixed the laces which passed round the neck, and were then tied to the other terminal plate. These laces were probably strung with beads, but, as all the beads have not been recovered, there are not a sufficient number to restore this portion.

From the holes in these plates, and from similar necklaces found elsewhere, it is known that the plates were arranged alternating with rows of beads to form a crescent, and that there were four beads in each of the end sections, five in each of the next, and eight double beads in the centre section. Over fifty beads, or portions of beads, were recovered from this find, but it is believed that there were more. The beads are mostly barrel-shaped, i.e., they taper towards each end, and vary in length from half an inch to nearly one inch. But there were also recovered a pendant triangle, a small cylindrical toggle-shaped piece, and a single bead which is pierced half-way through transversely as well as longitudinally.⁵ Thus the total number of jet fragments found is over sixty.

In the restoration each individual bead may not occupy its original position—there are several alternative ways of arranging beads. It may be that they were graded with the smaller ones to the top, thus giving a greater curve to the crescent. But otherwise its general arrangement is fairly correct. The arrangement of the pendant fringe, however, is conjectural.

It would appear that the toggle-shaped piece, the triangular pendant and the single special bead must have been arranged somewhere on the centre line of the pendant. Mr. Graham Callander, Keeper of the National museum of Scotland, in an important paper on *Scottish prehistoric jet ornaments of the Bronze Age*,⁶ describes a similar necklace, now in the Elgin museum. In this case the restoration is authentic, for the beads, when found,

⁵ A similar bead was found at Tan Hill, Wilts., *Archæologia* XLIII, 509.

⁶ *Pro. Soc. Antiq. Scot.*, 1915-16, Vol. I, p. 205.

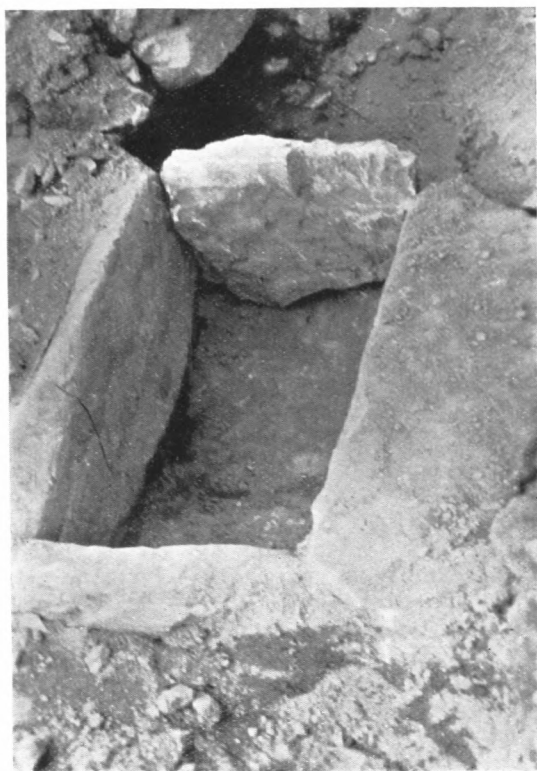


FIG. 1. THE CIST, KYLOE.

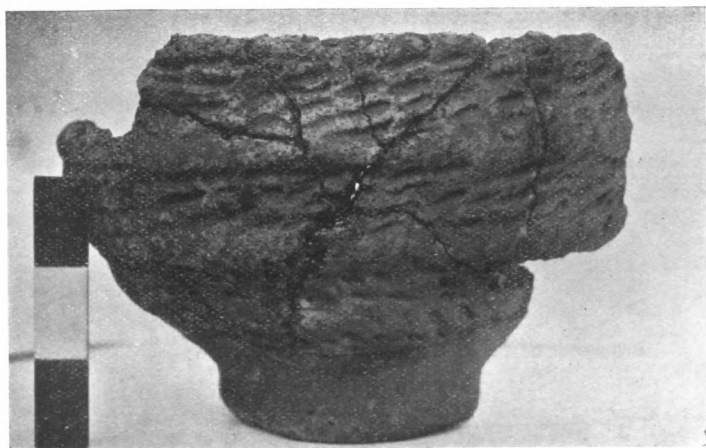
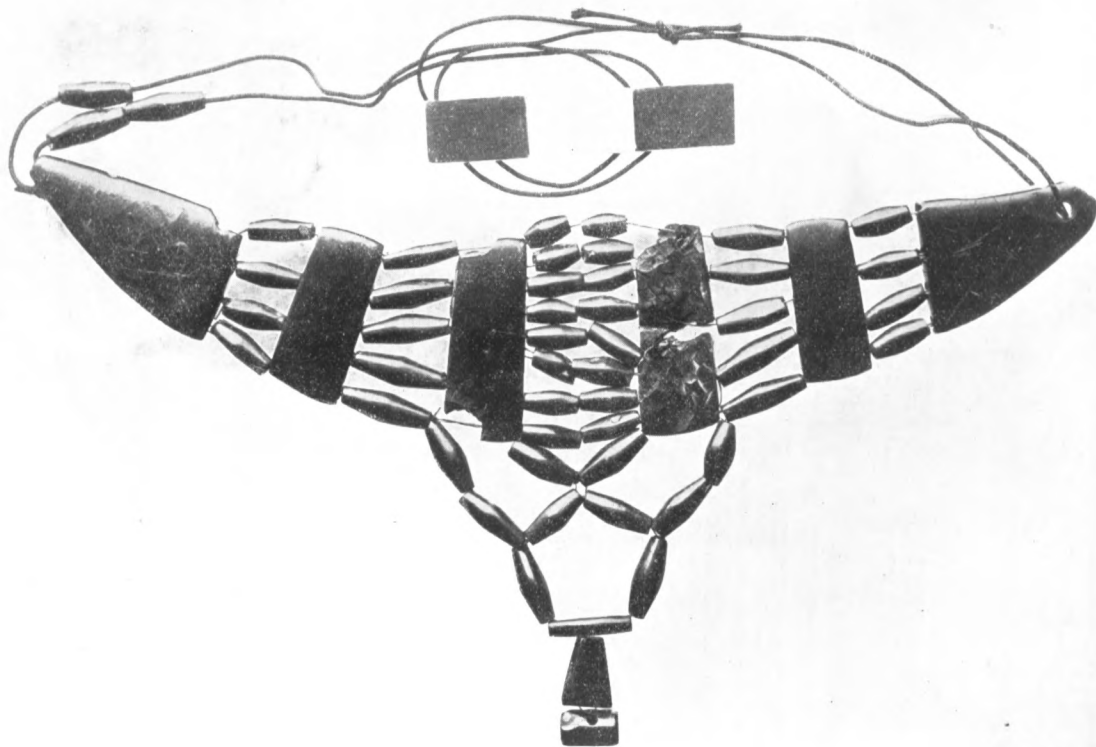


FIG. 2. FOOD VESSEL, KYLOE.



JET NECKLACE, KYLOE.

closely retained their original position, which was noted before their removal from the cist.

Our knowledge of the use of amber and jet in pre-historic times is almost entirely derived from their presence in interments. The amber ornaments are mostly found south of the river Thames, and the jet, north of it. But similar designs are used for amber and jet necklaces; moreover, there is something akin in the materials. Both amber and jet, when rubbed, become electrified, a condition that early man would not be slow to perceive, for one of the processes of manufacture of amber and jet beads was polishing. Doubtless these substances were chosen on account of their reputed medicinal qualities, a tradition surviving down to the Middle Ages. The Venerable Bede⁷ notes that in the eighth century the Northumbrians believed that jet, when heated, drove away serpents.

The late Canon Greenwell and Mr. J. R. Mortimer opened over a thousand burials in Yorkshire; these graves produced but eight jet necklaces, whilst forty have been found in Scotland. Scotland is the land of jet necklaces; nevertheless the best jet was that found at Whitby, Yorkshire, where the trade is still carried on. The modern designs seldom equal, and certainly do not excel, those of three thousand years ago.

⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, Book I, Chap. I.