IV.—ROMANO-BRITISH BURIALS AT BEADNELL, NORTHUMBERLAND

J. Tait and G. Jobey

Introduction

John Tait died suddenly but, in a workaday sense, most tidily. So far as his archaeological field activities were concerned there was little left on record that had not been reported in full. That there remain one or two items in need of amplification is due entirely to his earnest endeavour, in spite of failing health, to make sure that all that could be rescued in advance of possible destruction was recorded. The following item is of this nature and, as his intention was to publish a report in *Archaeologia Aeliana*, one can only hope that it is as he would have wished it to be. *Curri mi clach er do cuirn.*

The descriptive part of the report consists of a conflation of information obtained from a typescript note by himself and Mr. L. Rutherford[1] and from a few photographs and annotated plans amongst his possessions. Unfortunately, after a lapse of time, it has not been possible to recover all of the skeletal remains but gratitude must be expressed to Professor C. H. Tonge and Miss J. Weyman for information on such material as now exists. Their detailed report will appear in the next volume of these Tracts.

The Site (NU: 230299)

In March 1970, a field on the west side of the coastal

[1] *Archaeological Newsbulletin for Northumberland, Cumberland & Westmorland*, no. 9 (Sept. 1970), 1*ff*.

road (B1340) between Beadnell and Seahouses was being developed as a caravan park. Following upon a timely report by Sgt. Johnson of Seahouses Police Station that, in the process of trenching by a mechanical excavator, workmen had already cut through one mound and revealed human bones, the site was visited with commendable speed by Mr. Rutherford and then also by Mr. Tait.

The first mound lay some three hundred and fifteen yards to the south of Linkhouse Cottage on Beadnell Links, opposite to an inlet on the shore-line known as Collith Hole and a few yards to the west of the road, at an altitude of less than fifty feet. Some twenty-five yards to the north a second mound was seen to be on the line of the trench about to be cut by the machine.[2] As it would have been impracticable to stop the work at this stage in order to excavate the second feature manually, arrangements were made with the machine operator to proceed slowly and to stop at given signals so that the trench could be cleaned down by hand.

Cairn 1

Such extensive damage had already been done to the remains of this cairn and its contents that no excavation was attempted. From the trench cut by the machine it appeared to have been a mound some twelve feet in diameter and two feet high, composed of sea-rolled cobbles which were retained by a definite kerb of larger stones. Subsequent to its construction it had been covered by about one foot of wind-blown sand on top of which six inches of turf and humus had formed. Some large sandstone slabs had been removed by the machine, the largest remaining fragments measuring some two by three feet. The machine operator stated that at least one of the slabs had been set on edge. A cursory

[2] I am indebted to Mr. L. Rutherford for pointing out the exact sites of the cairns, since now no traces remain. However, there are one or two small mounds containing some stones in the uneven field immediately to the west of the road which may merit excavation at some future date (G.J.).

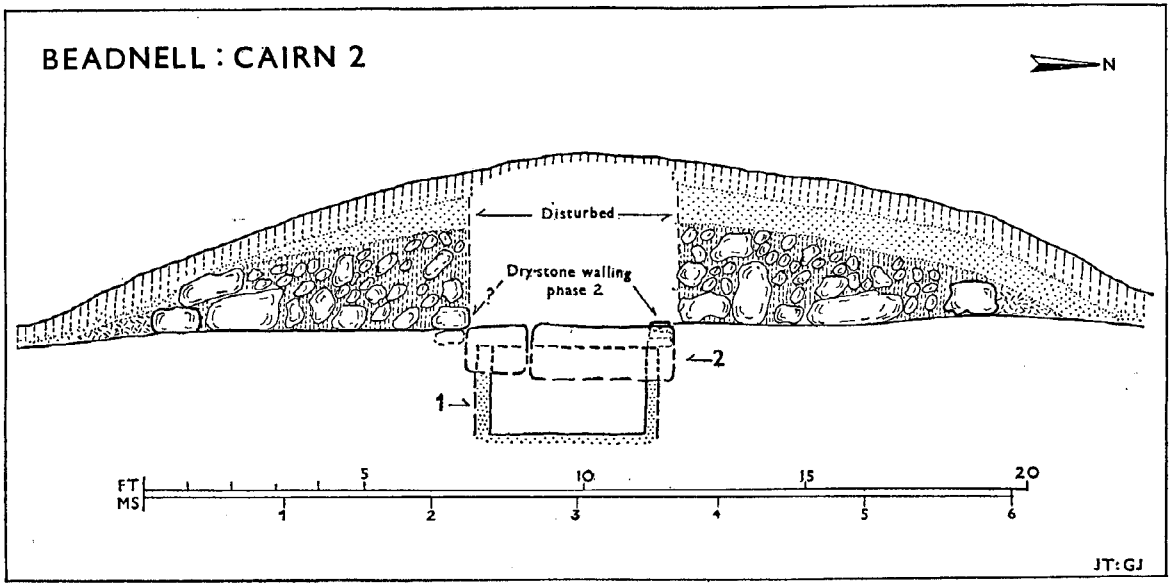
BEADNELL : CAIRN 2
N
Disturbed
Dry-stone walling
phase 2
2
1
FT
MS
5
10
15
20
1
2
3
4
5
6
JT:GJ

FIG. 1

examination of the remaining bones suggested that a number of individuals had been inhumed. No other finds were noted.

Cairn 2 (figs. 1 & 2)

The second mound was at a centre to centre distance of only eighty feet from the first. It had been nineteen feet in diameter and four feet high. The base and kerb were of stone blocks with smaller land-stones and sea-rolled cobbles above, the whole again being covered by a foot of windblown sand with turf and humus overlying. The trench cut by the machine was between four and five feet wide and penetrated below the base level of the cairn in its progression from south to north. From subsequent cleaning of the section it became obvious that there had been some intrusion into the cairn material in antiquity. Further cleaning of the west face also revealed the side of a stone-built cist and at this stage the surrounding area was excavated so far as possible in an orthodox manner.

The final result was the uncovering of what may be termed a two phase cist. The first phase was represented by a typical short cist, measuring internally three feet six inches long from north to south by one foot eleven inches broad at the north end reducing to one foot five inches at the south end, and having a depth of two feet. It was constructed from four sandstone slabs set on edge at the sides and ends of a base stone, the form of which thus governed the final shape of the cist. The whole structure had been set into clean sand and the top of the side stones were a few inches below the basal level of the overlying cairn (fig. 2, 1).

In the second phase the cist had been both heightened and lengthened by the insertion of two sandstone slabs placed to the outside of the east side of the original cist. The south end, being thus extended for six inches, was built up in dry-stone walling, whilst the north end was similarly heightened by at least three courses of stones (fig. 2, 2). A

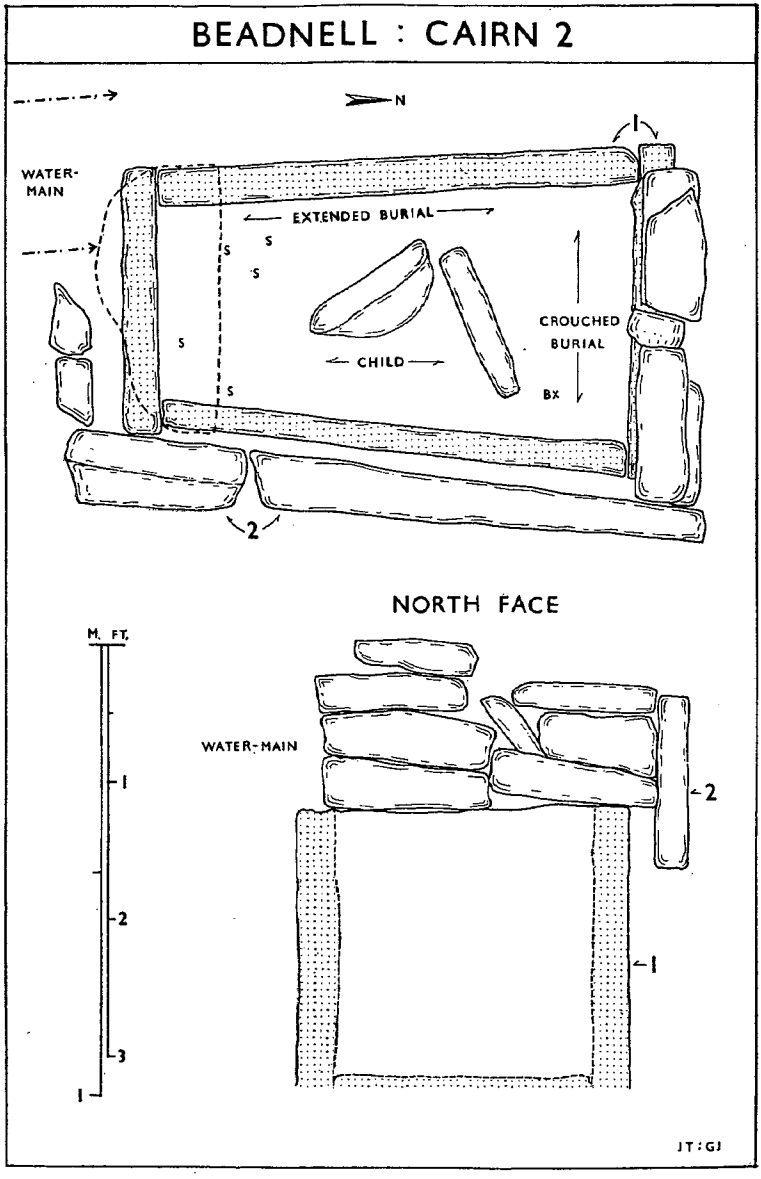

FIG. 2 (S=position of skulls from photographs
B=penannular brooch)

trench for a water-pipe, laid in 1969, ran alongside and over the top of part of the west side of the phase 1 cist, thereby destroying part of the dry-stone walling of the south end of the extended cist and completely destroying its west side. However, it seemed reasonable to assume that this side also had been constructed in a similar manner. The internal measurements of this enlarged cist were four feet in length and at least three feet in width at the widest end, whilst at least one foot had been added to the total depth. There was one flat slab partly placed in the top of the south end of the enlarged cist and another was found amongst the disturbed material filling the 1969 trench.

A large number of skeletons were revealed in excavation. The earliest inhumation was much decayed and represented by only a small number of bones amongst some three inches of very dark compact soil filling the bottom of the phase 1 cist. Above this, occupying the major part of the remainder of the cist, were human skeletal remains in a very disturbed and partly disarticulated condition together with some lighter earth infilling. Amongst these were fifteen complete or fragmentary skulls, all lacking mandibles though a number of these were clearly distributed amongst the rest of the bones. Some of the skulls also appeared to have been pushed towards the south and narrower end of the cist. Above this jumble of remains, at the north end and near to the top of the original cist, was a flexed burial still mainly articulated lying east to west with head to the east. Close to its shoulder was a bronze penannular brooch (description below). Further to the south, and a few inches above this in absolute level, were the remains of an extended burial of a child, lying on its back with its head to the north. This was enclosed in a triangular space formed by two upright stones, set in earth filling, and the side of the extended cist. An additional extended burial of an adult partly overlay the line of the west side of the primary cist with its head to the north, but this skeleton had been much disturbed by the cutting of the trench for the water-pipe. In

all probability however, the body had been interred within the enlarged cist and the skeleton had been articulated before recent disturbance. This amounted to a total of nineteen individuals observed in excavation.

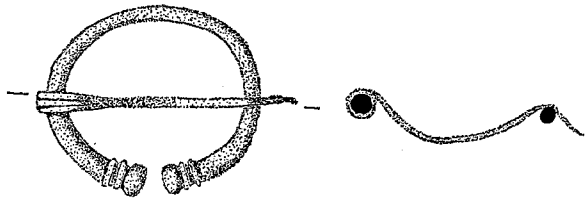

FIG. 3 PENANNULAR BROOCH (÷)

Finds

(1) Penannular Brooch: Cairn 2 (fig. 3)

This is of bronze, the ring measuring 25 mm. by 22 mm. in diameter. The knobbed terminals each have two additional mouldings, whilst the pin has a deep involution to take the fold of cloth and is decorated with two grooves towards the pivot end. It falls into Mrs. Fowler's Type A3 (ii), to which a general context in the I-III century A.D. has been assigned, although there is always a possible survival factor to be considered. Locally, for example, there is an identical brooch found at Corbridge Roman Station in a mid-second century, Early Antonine level,[3] and almost identical specimens come from the Flavian fort ditch and an Antonine pit at Newstead.[4] An iron pin from a penannular brooch, possibly of A2 type, from Ross Links a few miles to the north of Beadnell is the nearest local find of this nature, but is presumably not connected with a burial.[5] Further examples from burials will be found in the Appendix below.

(2) Cup-marked Stone: Cairn 2 (fig. 4)

This slab of sandstone was amongst the cairn material

[3] Found 1970, report forthcoming.
[4] Curle, J., *A Roman Frontier-Post and its People*, 326 & pl. XXXVIII.
[5] Brewis, P., *Arch. Ael.* 4, V (1928), 13*ff*.

removed by the mechanical excavator, so that its precise position in the cairn cannot be determined. It measures 38 cms. by 36 cms. and bears 29 small cup-marks and one slightly sinuous duct leading into what may be part of an earlier and larger cup. It also seems probable that additional

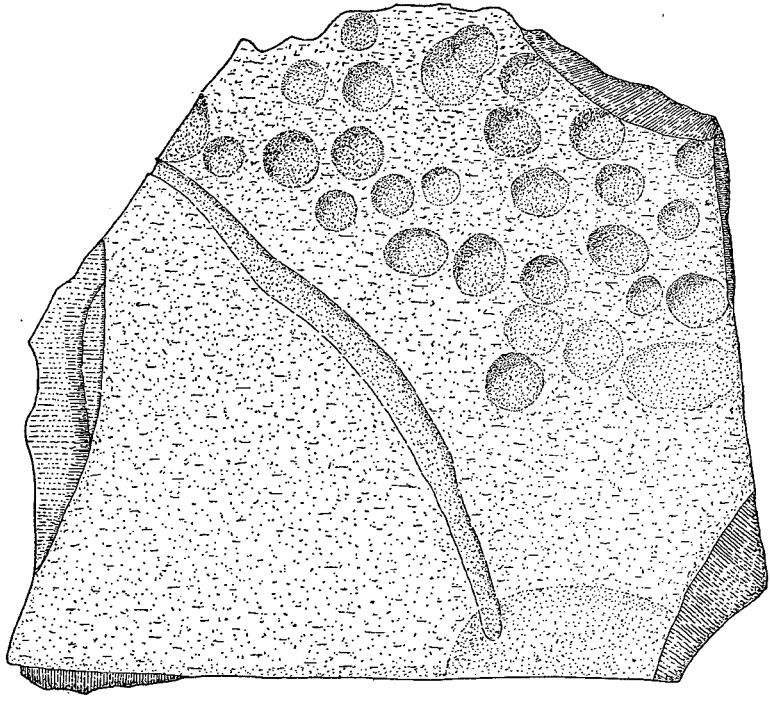

FIG. 4 CUP-MARKED STONE ($\frac{1}{4}$)

cups were added in antiquity, since some are distinctly more shallow than others and, in one instance, two cups impinge upon one another. The stone had been broken in antiquity and may have come from a larger inscribed slab, as is perhaps the case with some other "portable" stones of burials or cairns and other monuments of the second this nature. Inscribed or cup-marked stones associated with

millennium B.C. are not infrequent. Some local occurrences with burials have been listed recently elsewhere.[6]

Discussion

In the circumstances, some aspects of interpretation must remain tentative. Although short cists constructed from large stone slabs are known in an Iron Age or native Romano-British context elsewhere in North Britain (Appendix below), they are not frequent. Moreover, the dual nature of the cist construction at Beadnell allows an interpretation in which the two structural phases can be seen to be widely separated in time. The structure of the cairn itself, with its heavy base stones, is best paralleled locally in a Bronze Age context,[7] whilst the cup-marked stone can almost certainly be taken to confirm an early date. In this event, the short cist of phase 1 could be an early grave containing a single contracted inhumation. The extended cist of phase 2 could then be seen as a later, intrusive feature, constructed to take multiple burials and dated generally to an Iron Age or native Romano-British context by the bronze penannular brooch and some analogous burials from elsewhere in the northern region (Appendix below). Re-use of the cairn in this manner could have led to the discovery of the original short cist and perhaps the removal and breaking of its cover-stone before the incorporation of part of it into the east side of the later cist. Some fragments of this capstone may also have been used as a sectional cover for the newly created and enlarged burial vault. From the available evidence, this solution would seem to have more to commend it than to envisage a two phase cist of Iron Age/Romano-British date or a unitary construction of the same period.

It does not appear likely that the cist in this enlarged form was necessarily intended to take extended burials, since

[6] Jobey, G., *Arch. Ael.* 4, XLVI (1968), 28.
[7] e.g. *ibid.*, 9 & 30.

the remaining space in the short cist was utilised and at least one individual was placed crosswise in a flexed position in the enlarged vault. Concern must have been rather with the entry of individual remains into a prescribed resting place by whatever means. Other considerations apart, the space available within such a vault is also so limited as to deny the possibility of a mass burial at one and the same time of fifteen or eighteen individuals. Moreover, the placing of the uppermost and presumably the latest burials, three in number with the skeletons still articulated, which rested upon the jumbled remains of fifteen individuals some of whose skulls appeared to have been pushed to one side, argues for successive inhumations rather than the transfer and re-interment of skeletal remains from other resting places or an early form of charnel-house in a time of emergency. This interpretation would almost certainly entail some form of vault covering less prohibitive to frequent access than a heavy one-piece capstone. The displaced slab at the narrow end of the enlarged cist, together with the similar slab recorded as being present in the fill of the water-pipe cutting, could have formed part of just such a cover. By the same token, more frequent entry at intervals would explain the marked infiltration of earth amongst the skeletal remains. The penannular brooch accompanying one of the three latest burials will then give a general *terminus ante quem* for the majority of the interments.

Although there is now no means of arriving at an assessment of the precise nature of Cairn 1 at Beadnell the former presence of a slab-built cist is possible from the evidence. A total of at least six inhumations would also suggest the strong possibility of a period of multiple or collective burial, comparable with that of Cairn 2 and perhaps in a generally similar context.

The chief interest of the second period in Cairn 2 at Beadnell lies in the fact that it provides the first almost precise parallel for the massive cist with collective burials at Lochend, Dunbar, already dated to the Iron Age and

reported upon in some detail by Mr. Ian Longworth.[8] Here, a longer but similarly shaped cist, constructed from small orthostats and dry-stone walling, contained in all at least twenty-one individuals. Some form of successive interment was again preferred as an explanation for the collective burials and, despite the length of the cist, the vault did not appear to have been designed specifically for extended burials. Although in this instance the site may have been "marked" by a covering of stones, a cairn of any size was thought not to have existed.

From the little comparative material available to him, Mr. Longworth demonstrated the apparent lack of a common burial rite or method of grave construction amongst the Iron Age and native Romano-British population of Scotland. It was possible, however, to point to a recurrence of cist-burials in various forms. For convenience, some of the relevant and additional evidence from North Britain, approximately north of the Tyne, is summarized below (*Appendix*). From this it will be evident that the Beadnell burial strengthens the case for the practise of cist-burial in some northern parts, particularly in the north-east coastal area, at some time during the Iron Age and early Roman period. At the same time, it may also emphasise the advisability of including in future considerations, at least tentatively, those cists built in dry-stone walling, even though geological factors may be operating on the form of construction and the burials themselves may be unaccompanied by datable grave-goods. On the other hand, even with the addition of Beadnell, collective burial above the order of two interments is found with datable associations in only three certain instances at the moment. As there was only one child interred amongst the twenty-one individuals at Lochend it was suggested that perhaps different treatment was accorded to children. The three child skeletons at Beadnell do not altogether contradict this argument in a significant way but may serve to reduce the possibility in the case of such a

[8] Longworth, I. H., *P.S.A.S.*, XCVIII (1964-6), 173*ff*.

small sample. Whether or not cairns were thought to be necessary to cover or mark the cists remains problematical, although there is certainly evidence to support intrusive burials into pre-existing cairns or, alternatively, the desire to include them in earlier traditional burial areas. It is unfortunate in this respect that a number of early references to secondary long-cist burials found in large cairns in the area are so brief that not even the nature of the cist construction can now be ascertained. All told, the evidence is still too flimsy to allow speculation as to a continuity of earlier tradition or a change of burial rite in this area by comparison with times preceding the general context of the burials listed here. Not the least difficulty is that of recognizing assured burials of a late phase of the Late Bronze Age. As for making comparison with later sub- and post-Roman times, whilst there are the well-known long cist cemeteries of southern Scotland,[9] the general picture north of the Tyne remains similarly obscure. It is however always possible that under a small Anglian aristocracy, native burial rites may have continued for some time unchanged, as indeed has been suggested for some forms of native settlements.[10]

It is difficult to know where to start towards a solution of such problems of burial custom, particularly when, as is clear from the record so far, grave-goods may be sparse. However, an answer of sorts may lie in the one direction in more extensive excavation of a genuine sepulchral cairnfield lying in close proximity to a Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age settlement, of which that at Alnham,[11] with its beaker burial, urn cremation and cremation with ring-headed pin, is one of only a number of examples similarly situated in Northumberland alone. To this extent, the recent excavations of the remains of round barrows on Ampleforth

[9] e.g. Henshall, A. S., *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXIX (1955-6), 268*ff*. Thomas, A. C., in *Christianity in Britain* (*ed.* Barley and Hanson, 1968), 107*ff*.

[10] Jobey, G., in *Rural Settlement in Roman Britain* (*ed.* Thomas, C., 1966), 3.

[11] *Arch. Ael.* 4, XLIV (1966), 25*ff*.

Moor,[12] N. Riding, together with the use of radiocarbon assay, may point the way. In the other direction, it might be possible to take a presumed later burial area, which is nevertheless suspected of having earlier beginnings, such as the so-called Pagan Anglian cemetery at Howick,[13] Northumberland, and to subject this to similar more intensive examination in the field.

At Beadnell itself no nearby Romano-British settlement is known, but the potential of the Northumberland coastal plain for early settlements in number is just in process of realization from air-photographs. This burial must clearly take its place as an additional indicator of further possible settlements close by the sea-shores, in positions not only confined to natural bastions as testified at Tynemouth, Dunstanburgh or Bamburgh, but also situated hard by those marginal dunes which at times had attracted much earlier, even if transitory communities.

[12] Wainwright, G. & Longworth, I., *Y.A.J.*, 1970, 283*ff*.

[13] Although the area of the original burials has long since been quarried away, other cairns exist in the immediate vicinity *v. Arch. Ael.* 4, XLVI (1968), 44.

APPENDIX

EXAMPLES OF IRON AGE AND ROMANO-BRITISH NATIVE BURIALS

A. With Cist and Associations

PLACE	CIST AND CONSTRUCTION	CAIRN	BURIALS	ASSOCIATIONS
Beadnell 2 Northumberland	Extended cist of dry-stone walling and slabs	Intrusive in earlier cairn	18 inhumations (1 flexed, 2 extended, 3 children)	1 penannular brooch (A3, bronze)
Burnmouth, Berwickshire *PSAS.*, LVIII, 143*ff.*	Long cist, 5′ 7″ × 2′ 3″, of small boulders. Four slabs as cover-stones	Not known	1 male, flexed	1 knife (iron); 2 spoons (bronze); pig-bones
Torwoodlee, Selkirkshire *PSAS.*, LXXXV, 105*ff.*	Long cist, 5′ × 1′ 9″, of stone slabs	None	1 female, slightly flexed	In stone filling of Broch ditch
Lochend, E. Lothian *PSAS.*, XCVIII, 173*ff.*	Long cist, 6′ 8″ × 3′, of orthostats and dry-stone walling	possibly marked by stones	21 inhumations (2 contracted, 1 child)	2 penannular brooches (iron); 1 ? stud of dress-fastener (iron)
Luffness, E. Lothian *PSAS.*, LV, 45	Stone coffin	Not known	Not known	1 penannular brooch
Moredun, Midlothian *PSAS.*, XXXVIII, 427	Short cist, 4′ × 2′ 3″, of stone slabs	Not known	2 skeletons	1 La Tène fibula (iron); 1 penannular brooch (iron); 1 projecting ring-headed pin (iron)
Granton Pier, Edinburgh Wilson, *Prehistoric Annals,* I, 474	Small stone cist, near sea-shore	Not known	2 skeletons "sitting"	1 spiral finger ring (bronze); 1 penannular brooch (D4 bronze)

PLACE	CIST AND CONSTRUCTION	CAIRN	BURIALS	ASSOCIATIONS
Blackness, W. Lothian *PSAS.*, LIX, 116*ff.*	Short cist of sea-worn stones 3′ long	Not known	1 female	1 armlet of uncertain date (bronze)
Camelon, Stirling *PSAS.*, LVII, 146	Short cist of dry-stone walling	Not known	1 skeleton, probably flexed	1 sword
Craigie, Angus *PSAS.*, XXXVII, 233*ff.*	Long cist, 6′ 2″, of orthostats and thin slabs	Not known other burials in area	1 skeleton, E-W	1 penannular brooch (iron)
Kingoldrum, Angus *PSAS.*, XX, 139	Cist	Not known	Inhumation	1 bronze vessel; small chain of bronze; 1 Roman glass vessel
Airlie, Angus *PSAS.*, XX, 136	Cist, 4′ × 2′, of stone slabs	Not known	? Inhumation	1 Roman glass vessel
Sundaywells, Aberdeen *PSAS.*, LXXX, 149*ff.*	Short cist of stone slabs	To NW of cairn with Beaker	Bones	? L.B.A./I.A. pottery vessel
Golspie II, Sutherland *PSAS.*, LXXVII, 26	Short cist, 4′ × 2′ 6″, of stones on edge and dry-stone walling	Not known	1 male contracted	Charcoal; burnt bones; pumice pendant and clay mould fragments not closely datable
Westray Island *PSAS.*, XX, 139	Cist	Not known	Not known	1 Roman glass vessel

B. Other Burials with Associations but no Cist or Cist doubtful

PLACE	CAIRN	BURIAL	ASSOCIATION
Heaves Fell, Westmorland *CWAS.*, XII, 397*ff.*	Overlying mound, beneath wall of settlement	1 skeleton, crouched	1 penannular brooch; 1 small ring; 1 melon bead
Alnham Northumberland *AA.* 4, XLIV, 25*ff.*	Low cairn in cairnfield (some B.A.)	Cremation *in situ*, encircled by trench	1 ring-headed pin (bronze)
Glenluce, Wigtown *PSAS.*, LXVI, 375	Cairn of boulders	Cremation	Samian ware; spearheads (iron); nails and "iron plating"
Gullane, E. Lothian *PSAS.*, XLII, 332	Small cairn	6 skeletons, contracted	1 spiral ring (bronze); 1 knife/dagger (iron)
Queen Mary's Law, Lanarkshire Ure, *History of Kilbride*, 216	Mound containing cists, and urn burials	Human bones around cist	2 fibulae; 1 shale ring; and 1 fibula and metal comb in an "urn".
Waulkmill, Aberdeen *PSAS.*, XLIX, 204		1 or more interments	1 bronze cup; 1 penannular brooch; 6 quartzite "playing-men"

C. Dry-stone Built Cist and/or Multiple Burials, no Associations

PLACE	CIST CONSTRUCTION	CAIRN	BURIAL
Beadnell I Northumberland	? Cist of stone slabs	Cairn, but could be intrusive burials	6 skeletons
Cockburnspath, Berwick *PSAS.*, XCVIII, 397*ff.*	Cist, 5′ × 3′ 6″, of 5 courses 2 cap-stones	Not known	1 skeleton, crouched
Gullane, E. Lothian *PSAS.*, XXXVI, 654*ff.*	Oval cist of 5 courses with 2 cap-stones	Small cairn, others in vicinity	3 adult skeletons in cist and 4 skulls and bones on top of cist cap-stone
Golspie I, Sutherland *PSAS.*, LXVII, 26*ff.*	Cist, 4′ × 2′ 6″, of 5 courses and cover slabs	Not known	1 skeleton, contracted

D. Doubtful Examples

Gunnar Peak, Northumberland (*AA.* 4, XX, 165); Chatton Sandyford, Northumberland (*A.A.* 4, XLIV, 25*ff*); Worm Law, Northumberland (*B.N.C.* 1856–63, 433); Falla, Roxburghshire (*PSAS.*, LXXXI, 183*ff.*); Midlothian (*Itinerarium Septentrionale*, 117); Batho, Peebleshire (*PSAS.*, XXXII, 44); Broughton, Peebleshire (*PSAS.*, XCIX, 99*ff.*); Dolphinton, Lanarkshire (*PSAS.*, LV, 45); Rutherglen, Lanarkshire (Ure, *History of Rutherglen*, 124); Carriestane, Dumbartonshire (*PSAS.*, V, 127); Monquhitter, Aberdeenshire (*PSAS.*, XXXVI, 675*ff.*; *Antiquity*, XLI, 143*ff.*); Towie, Aberdeenshire (*PSAS.*, V, 341); Cairnapple, West Lothian (*P.S.A.S.*, LXXXII, 68*ff.*).