II

TWO EARLY BRONZE AGE CIST BURIALS IN NORTHUMBERLAND

T. G. Newman

I. HOLLYBUSH FIELD, SHORT MOOR FARM, GUNNERTON, WARK (894 746)

ON THE evening of 9 October 1975, Hollybush Field was being chisel-ploughed, and the implement, cutting deeper than an ordinary plough, hit the cover-stone of a cist, breaking it and leaving a hole through which the interior of the cist could be seen. A skull being immediately visible, the cover-stone was removed and the police informed. They in turn contacted the Museum of Antiquities the next day, enabling the cist to be examined.

The cist (fig. 1) measured 1·15 m × 0·70 m and was 0·55 m deep with 0·3 m of ploughsoil above. It was built of soft sandstone, and to a height of 0·35 m it was composed of slabs set on edge: a single slab at each end, and the sides composed in each case of a larger slab with a smaller slab beside it to the north-east. The smaller slab on the north side (illustrated) had broken across at some time in the past, and slipped a little. The floor of the cist consisted simply of the clay subsoil, but above the slabs were two layers of smaller blocks laid horizontally to form a dry-stone revetment. The cover-stone had been a large irregular slab, some 0·15 m thick, and measuring 1·2 m × 1·3 m.

The cist contained only the decayed remains of a crouched burial. The body had lain on its left side, facing south-east, on the sticky clay sub-soil. The parts of the skeleton lying on the clay had suffered much the worst disintegration, and it may be assumed that this was due to excessive waterlogging of the bottom of a cist dug in such an impervious sub-soil. What remained was, however, sufficient to suggest a man in the prime of life, well-built, but with a limp, the result of a broken leg (see below, p. 45).

The body was partially covered by a layer of fine, clean, sand, thickest at the south-west end of the cist and thence diminishing to nothing at the skull, which had been visible, and which had been removed from the cist before examination was possible. The sand was presumably brought from the North Tyne, one third of a mile to the south.

The burial may be tentatively assigned to the latter part of the Early Bronze Age, possibly *c.* 1500 B.C.; that is, to a time when the traditions of crouched inhumation and cist-burials were still strong, but the deposition of grave goods had gone out of fashion. The district is one which has produced a number of Early Bronze Age burials, as indicated by Jobey, Smith and Tait in their account of the Reaverhill Farm

burial.[1] The situation of the Short Moor Farm burial is not a prominent one, being close to, but not at, the edge of a plateau above the North Tyne. The views from it are attractive but not extensive and it may be significant that the only feature of note is the mound of that same Reaverhill burial, a mile away to the south-east.

Thanks are due to the Northumbria Police for their co-operation, to Lt.-Col. R. Taylor, the land-owner, for presenting the skeletal remains to the Museum of Antiquities (Accn. no. 1975–18), and to Mr. J. D. Gledson, the farmer for bringing the cist to notice.

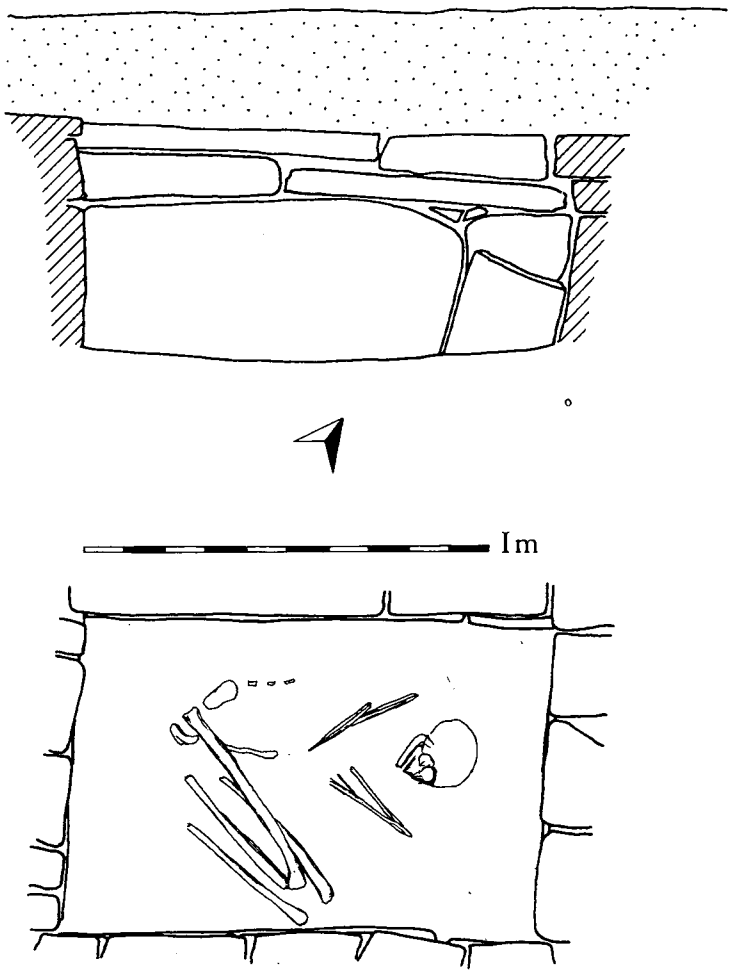

Fig. 1. Cist on Short Moor Farm: Section and plan.

[1] G. Jobey, D. J. Smith and J. Tait, *AA*[4] XLIII (1965), 65–76.

II. BROOMHILL, HIGH MICKLEY, PRUDHOE (NZ 076606)

The cist at Broomhill, like that at Short Moor Farm, was discovered as a result of the land being ploughed. The farmer had long been aware of a large stone in the field, which was struck by the plough every year: on the 30 October 1975, however, the plough shifted the stone to such an extent that the tractor partially slipped back into the space thus revealed, and had to be pulled out by a second tractor.

The hole in the ground was investigated, and when pieces of pottery began to appear, it was decided that the Museum of Antiquities should be notified. Con-

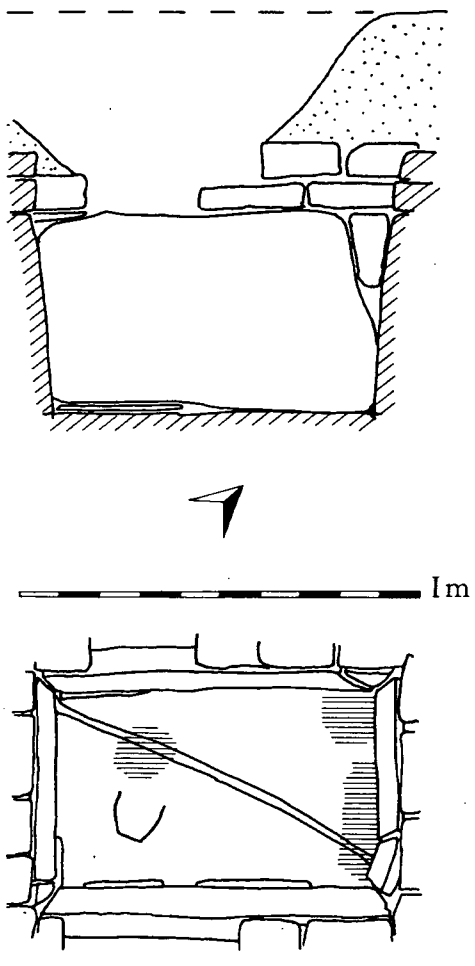

Fig. 2. Cist at Broomhill, High Mickley; Section and plan showing position of food vessel, and shading indicating main areas of cremated bone.

sequently the site was examined on the following day, and proved to be an Early Bronze Age cist containing a food vessel and a quantity of cremated bone.

The cist (fig. 1) was constructed of sandstone blocks and slabs, but the sandstone was harder, and the construction much poorer, than at Short Moor Farm. It measured 0·9 × 0·6 m at the top and was 0·65 m deep, with 0·3 m of plough-soil above it. The bottom of the cist was formed of a large slab which had split diagonally into two: the sides were largely formed of four slabs, all of which sloped inwards so that the bottom of the cist measured only 0·8 m × 0·5 m. These slabs were filled out where necessary by smaller pieces of stone, and above them there had been two layers of dry-stone walling, much damaged by the accident with the tractor. The cover had evidently consisted of four pieces of stone; one larger slab (1·1 m × 0·8 m × 0·3 m) covering the south-west end of the cist, and three smaller ones (0·4 m × 0·3 m × 0·1 m, 0·4 m × 0·2 m × 0·1 m, 0·4 × 0·2 m × 0·1 m) presumably so arranged as to cover the other half of the cist. The cover-stones had evidently been out of position for some time, as the cist was about three-quarters full of ploughsoil and a broken plough-share was found inside—evidently the result of an earlier ploughing mishap.

The Food Vessel (fig. 3) was lying on its side near the south-western end of the cist, as indicated in fig. 4. Though little more than half now survives, it was probably complete at the time of deposition; the side which was lying uppermost inevitably suffered at the time of discovery, and the fabric of the pot is such that it disintegrates

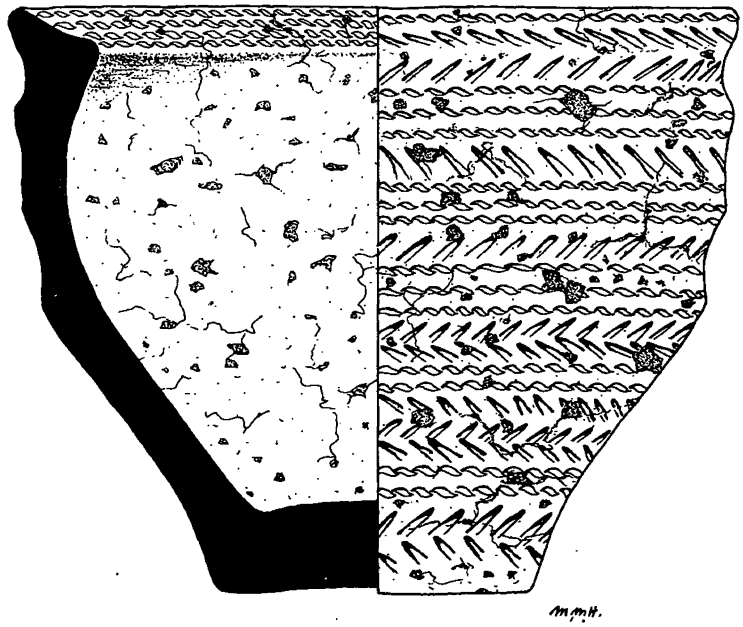

Fig. 3. Food vessel from High Mickley ($\frac{1}{2}$)

into gravel and grit, rather than breaking into small recoverable pieces. The lower side of the pot was complete, but cracked in several directions, and was retrieved only with difficulty. It has now been consolidated by Mr. V. Horie.

The fabric of the vessel is of a dark, black gravelly nature, with little to bond it together, and the surface is a fairly smooth pinkish buff, though somewhat lighter and rougher on the inside than on the outside. It is of developed Irish Bowl form, the triple ridges below the rim being common enough in Ireland, much less so in Scotland and England. The decoration, of herring-bone stab-marks alternating with horizontal twisted cord, is more common throughout Ireland and North Britain, but this particular combination of form and decoration seems unusual, the best parallel vessel coming from Birkhill, Stirlingshire (now incorporated in Central Scotland).[2] In Northumberland, the form is matched only at Kyloe,[3] in a vessel much inferior in quality and decoration, but which was associated with a crescentic jet necklace.

The cremated bone was scattered over the floor of the cist, shading into two areas of somewhat greater concentration (indicated by shading on the plan, fig. 2), one at the mouth of the Food Vessel, and one at the north-east end of the cist. It is doubtful whether this indicates a multiple burial. Examination of the bones (below, p. 45) indicates that they include remains of a child of 7–8 years, with the possibility that a younger child may also be represented.

There was an almost total absence of charcoal with the cremated bone, only two minute fragments being recovered, and there was no trace of ash. This is a circumstance which has been frequently noted before with Early Bronze Age cremations, and poses the question of how it was achieved. There seems no question of the body being placed on a mesh, or griddle, which would keep the body above and separate from the fuel of the pyre: the body would be laid straight on the top of the pyre, and the calcined bone would have to be picked out from the ash and then washed clean. It is known that the bones of Roman cremations were, sometimes at least, picked out with shovels and pincers.[4] This might also have been done in the British Early Bronze Age, and the bone tweezers which are sometimes found with cremations in Wiltshire and Dorset[5] may perhaps be an indication of the process—though other uses for the tweezers such as the plucking of eyebrows,[6] are equally possible, and not mutually exclusive. The task would be considerably eased if the body was already skeletal before cremation, as the pyre could be smaller, and the bone could be concentrated into a smaller area.

The Food Vessel and the cremated remains, once deposited in the cist, had been covered with a thin layer of clean, sandy gravel, of a kind which forms the local sub-soil.

[2] J. Abercromby, *The Bronze Age Pottery of Great Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 1912), corpus no. 418.

[3] P. Brewis, *AA*[4] V (1928), 26–29.

[4] L. P. Wenham, *The Romano-British Cemetery at Trentholme Drive, York* (London 1968), 31, and footnote 1.

[5] e.g. F. K. Annable and D. D. A. Simpson, *Guide Catalogue of the Neolithic and Bronze Age Collections in Devizes Museum* (Devizes, 1946), nos. 161, 221, 327, 330.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

There are no other known Early Bronze Age burials in the immediate vicinity of High Mickley, and this comparative isolation of the Broomhill cist may be reflected in the prominent position chosen for it, at the western end of a gravel ridge, spot height 625 ft., above the valley of the Tyne. At the eastern end of the same ridge, six miles away, is Summerhill, Blaydon, where a concentration of burials of comparable age has come to light in the course of sand and gravel digging.[7]

REPORT ON THE SKELETAL MATERIAL FROM A CIST AT SHORT MOOR FARM

Dr. J. Weyman

The bones examined were all human. They showed some decay but no evidence of burning.

Skeleton

The remains consisted of a skull; a pair of femurs, one complete and one with upper end missing; major portions of a pair of tibiae, left fibula and humerus; lesser fragments and bones representing all parts of a body, with no duplication.

The skull was in fair condition though the left temporal and parietal area was missing and the maxilla was detached. The cephalic index was 72 (dolichocephalic) and the skull thickness average. The mandibular fragment did not include the angle, but the brow ridges were pronounced and the general build of the long bones heavy. The overall appearance strongly suggests that the individual was male.

Of the pair of femurs, one was complete in its length, which was 51·5 cm (20·2″). This gives the height of the individual as 184 cm (6′ 0″) using Trotter and Gleser's table[8] as applied to a male.

No sutural bones, metopic sutures or torus palatinus were present.

Pathology[9]

The left tibia and fibula, both with decayed lower ends, had each sustained an oblique fracture which had healed with residual ossified callus in a reasonably good position, though there was some shortening due to the over-riding of the fractured ends.

The fracture of the fibula was at the level of the junction of the upper two-thirds and lower one-third, that of the tibia at a lower level. The cavity present in the ossified callus of the tibia suggested that the wounds may have become infected with a discharging sinus but with complete healing subsequently. The state of the injury indicated that it probably occurred after puberty but at least a year before death.

[7] W. Bulmer, *AA*[4] XV (1938), 218–21, *AA*[4] XVI (1939), 260–3.

[8] *Amer.J.Phys.Anthro.* (1952), 10: 496.

[9] I am indebted to Professor I. Rannie of the Pathology Department, Dental School. University of Newcastle for his opinion in this section.

Dental Condition

In the maxilla the teeth present were $\frac{6543\ /\ 4\ \ 7}{/}$ and sockets for $\frac{7\ \ 21/123\ \ 56\ \ 8}{/}$

There were three noteworthy features. Firstly the right third molar (wisdom tooth) was absent. Secondly /6 was represented by a shallow socket for the disto-buccal root only instead of three such sockets. There is no evidence of dental decay in the remaining teeth but there is a moderate degree of bone resorption due to periodontal disease (pyorrhea), so the loss of /6 may perhaps be related to the latter. Thirdly, the crowding of the maxillary dental arch with 4/ crowded inwards and partly overlapped by 3/.

Only part of the right ramus and body of the mandible was present and carried $\overline{654\ /}$ with a socket for $\overline{8/}$. There had been antemortem loss of $\overline{7/}$ and complete healing of the socket.

The attrition of the teeth suggested an age in the range 35–45 years.[10]

Conclusion

The bones represent the skeletal remains of one individual, probably a man of 35–45 years who was 184 cm (6′ 0″) tall and long headed. He had broken his left leg as an adult and most probably walked with a slight limp.

REPORT ON THE SKELETAL REMAINS FROM A CIST AT HIGH MICKLEY

Dr. J. Weyman

The bony remains were all cremated and in a very broken condition. There were only four pieces more than 40 mm in any dimension, most being less than 20 mm. Fragments of skull bones, long bones, vertebrae and ribs were recognized but it was not possible to judge if there was any duplication indicating more than one individual, nor was it possible to say whether there were any bones present which were not human. All the identifiable areas were immature and none suggested the presence of an adult. The only accurate information was an age of 7–8 years provided by a pair of permanent second mandibular molar crowns whose roots had not started to develop, but whether this was the only child present was doubtful as some of the fragments could have indicated a younger individual. It is not possible to be more precise as cremation distorts bone as well as fragmenting it. The molar crowns survived presumably because they were in a more protected situation, well back in the mouth and unerupted.

[10] A. E. W. Miles, in *Dental Anthropology* (1963), Pergamon Press, Ed. D. R. Brothwell, pp. 191–209.