

Beakers from Easter Gollachy, near Buckie, Banffshire

by I. C. Walker

Subsequent to compiling the corpus of Bronze Age pottery for the counties of Nairnshire, Moray, and Banffshire published in *PSAS*, xcvi (1964-6), 99-125 the writer came across an article, entitled 'The Enzie and its Antiquities' by George Thomson, in the *Transactions of the Northern Association of Literary and Scientific Societies* II, pt. III (1896) 60-7 which gives additional information on the Beaker cemetery - for such it must have been - at Easter Gollachy on the S. shore of the Moray Firth between Portgordon and Buckie.

Thomson, either the tenant or (more likely) the owner of Mains of Gollachy farm, was one of many enthusiastic amateur archaeologists who, in the last quarter of last century and in the early years of this century, added greatly to local prehistory by publishing, often at a surprisingly high standard for the time, in the now largely-forgotten publications of local antiquarian societies. Thomson's observation that he had 'in his time opened and overhauled many, perhaps more, Celtic graves than any other individual in this north quarter of Scotland . . .' lacks something in modesty and archaeological accuracy, but it should not be allowed to obscure the fact that his descriptions of finds are quite accurate and detailed.

The cist with the Beaker from Old Mill of Gollachy, Auchintea (spelt Auchintae on the 7th series O.S. maps), No. 30 in the corpus referred to above, was found on 20th April 1881 several feet down in a knoll a few yards W. of the old meal mill of Gollachy (pp. 60-1). The cist was 2 ft. 10 in. long by 2 ft. 2 in. wide, and 2 ft. 6 in. deep. The 'very pretty carved urn' was carefully embedded in sand in the NW. corner of the cist. When Thomson was writing the urn was in the possession of a Mr Simpson of Auchintea. (This Simpson may be the Dr Simpson referred to later by Thomson who had some of the Stroup Brae Cinerary Urns - if so, he must have been the eccentric noted in *PSAS*, xcvi (1964-6), 123.)

Another cist, with several human bones in a layer of black mould but with no urn, was

¹ *D. & E.*, 1967, 29.

² *op. cit.*, 117-21.

³ *ibid.*, 118, fig. 19.

⁴ *PSAS*, LXVIII (1933-4), 202-4.

found within 20 yds. of the previous cist in April 1881 (p. 61). On 4th April 1884 a similar cist, full of white sand, with a few flint implements and a small quantity of bluish mould, was found in a sandy knoll at the mouth of the Gollachy burn on Mains of Gollachy farm. The knoll commanded a fine view to the N. shore of the Moray Firth (pp. 61-2).

Beaker 31 in the corpus was found, according to Thomson (p. 61), on 25th February 1882. He noted that the cist contained white sand, and the Beaker a little mould. The Beaker, which was found by Alex. Gordon jr., son of the tenant of Easter Gollachy, was in a cist c. 200 yds. NE. of the farm steading. The cist measured 3 ft. long by 1 ft. 10½ in. wide and 1 ft. 3 in. deep. At the time of writing the 'beautiful' urn 'of the tall thin-lipped kind . . . barrel-shaped' was in the 'Royal Institution, Edinburgh'. The Royal Institution building is that now occupied by the Royal Scottish Academy at the foot of the Mound, and the building was known throughout last century as the Royal Institution long after that body had ceased to exist. In 1882, when the urn was found, what is now the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland occupied that building, and while the Museum had left by 1896, the time of Thomson's writing, it seems likely that Thomson meant the Beaker had gone to what is now the National Museum. However, there is no record either in the Antiquaries' *Proceedings* or in the 1892 Catalogue (the earliest) of its loan or donation. (I am grateful to Mr R. B. K. Stevenson for help on this point.)

Under the particulars for Beaker 32 in the corpus there was noted an entry in the Elgin Museum catalogue of an urn and bones from a grave given to that museum in 1889 by Messrs Gordon and Thomson. It is tempting to identify this urn with one found on that farm in March 1889 together with 'a bracer, a barbed arrowhead, and some human remains' (pp. 62-3). The arrowhead is described as being soft and calcined. However, the urn - which must have been a Beaker - was stated by Thomson to be in his own collection, while the bracer and arrowhead were at the Catholic Institute, Buckie. In view of the fact that the Beaker cannot now be found at Elgin it is possible that Thomson took the urn back from the museum.

From Thomson's description, Beaker 34 in the corpus, then in Hugh W. Young's collection, is to be identified with one found in the spring of 1895 at Easter Gollachy. According to Thomson, the bones found included a large femur, a fragment of a jaw, and the enamel of teeth.

Yet another Beaker from Easter Gollachy not hitherto mentioned is noted by Thomson (p. 62). It was found on 22nd March 1884 in a cist comprising five sandstone slabs. The cist was 3 ft. 4 in. long by 1 ft. 6 in. wide at the E. end and 1 ft. 10 in. at the W. end, by 1 ft. 10 in. deep. The urn was 'barrel-shaped' and 'carved in a way different from any other of the kind got in this quarter of the country. Commencing about an inch below the mouth, some five or six indented lines encircle the vessel. Below these circles is a plain unornamented space of three-quarters of an inch and under this plain unornamented space are again punctured circles, while round the bulge run a series of diamond shaped ornaments beautifully lined and symmetrical.' This urn was apparently made of the local red clay.

At first sight the description of this Beaker reads like a description of Beaker 34 in the corpus, already noted (but not described) by Thomson, but this is unlikely, as the latter vessel has a rather unusual yellowish colour. It is therefore possible that it was a similar one that was found at Easter Gollachy, and Thomson never mentioned its resemblance to Beaker 34 because that particular Beaker went to Hugh Young's collection, and it is probable that Thomson never saw it. With the Beaker was a 'very much wasted' skeleton of a fully-grown individual, a round polished pebble of white quartz by the urn, and a fragment of flint. The grave was filled with white sand but round the body was a thin layer of rich loam which Thomson suggested was the *remains of a vegetable lining or bedding*. At the time of writing this Beaker was in the Catholic Institute, Buckie.

In referring to the Stroup Brae Cinerary Urns (p. 64), Thomson notes that one was in the Masonic Institute, Buckie, the others being with a Dr Simpson.

From the above it appears that at least one Beaker – from Easter Gollachy, found in 1884 – and possibly another (that from Easter Gollachy found in 1889) can be added to the above-mentioned corpus; and Beaker No. 34 can now also be located at Easter Gollachy. Thus at least six Beaker burials (including that at Old Mill of Gollachy) and two urnless cists can be placed in the same immediate area, clearly suggesting a cemetery and probably indicating a settlement site nearby. The cists appear to have consistently been found filled with white sand, but it is not clear whether this is merely the local sandy soil or a deliberate infilling with pure sand.

The recent tracing of at least the remains of another late nineteenth-century private collection of antiquities from the Enzie – that of Canon John James Kyles of Preshome and known as the Preshome Collection – to St. Mary's College at Blairs, near Aberdeen (*Discovery and Excavation Scotland 1962*, 23-4) suggests that material such as Thomson's and Simpson's and that in the Masonic and Catholic Institutes in Buckie may not be wholly lost but may be lying forgotten in family attics or institute cupboards. If Fellows in the Banffshire area could endeavour to find what happened to these collections they would be making a most useful contribution to local prehistory.