

A collared urn from East Plean, Stirlingshire

by J K Thomson

While laying drains and constructing a manhole on Gallamuir Housing site, East Plean, on 17th December 1969, Stirling County Council Direct Works Department disturbed and partly destroyed a cinerary urn with cremated bones. Through Mr P Sneddon, Architect's Department, Stirling County Council, the Smith Art Gallery and Museum was informed of the find and the remains presented to it.

The site lies near the top of a slope of sand on gravel 126 to 130 ft OD (NS 838872). A burn, originating about one mile away at West Plean and now partly piped, flows at the bottom of the slope in a small valley, one of several formed in the 100 ft contour in this area. The find spot is 230 ft (70 m) from a fence on the N side of the burn, forming the enclosure of a sewage works and 80 ft (24 m) from a hedge lying to the E.

Although the vessel had been displaced, its original position was preserved by the impression made by one side of it in the surrounding sand. From this, it was seen that the urn had been inverted over cremated bone fragments, with the base some 14 in (35.5 cm) below the modern surface. The urn is of the collared type (fig 1) and represented by a little over half the vessel. Its dimensions (supplemented by measurements of sand impressions) are: height (surviving) – $14\frac{1}{2}$ in (36.7 cm); diameter at the edge of the collar – 13 in (33.2 cm); and diameter of the base – $3\frac{3}{8}$ in (9.2 cm). On average, the wall of the vessel is $\frac{1}{2}$ in (1.2 cm) thick. The rim is missing. The collar, the bottom edge of which makes a slight projection on the exterior of the urn, bears a zone of decoration consisting of a series of diagonal lines of twisted cord impressions bounded by a single line of the same kind above the collar edge. The neck is slightly concave while the shoulder is moderately marked. The urn fragments are a reddish brown colour on the exterior surface which is fairly smooth; internally the fabric is dark brown with a good deal of small grit. The inner surface shows traces of carbonisation. A few small pieces of bone were recovered from the sand surface on which the urn had been placed as a cover. The fragments were examined by Dr A Young, who identified a piece of a left temporal bone from a skull, pieces of rib and fragments of larger long bones.

The urn has the characteristics of the collared urn form. Though easily recognised by type, close parallels are few. The form resembles in some respects an urn from Cumnock, Ayrshire, and to a lesser extent one from Victoria Park, Glasgow (Morrison 1968, 107, fig 6 no. 37; 92, fig 16 no. 130). Unfortunately, both these examples are incomplete like that from East Plean itself.

Decoration in all three instances is by twisted cord impressions applied externally to the collar. The rim of the East Plean vessel is missing, otherwise a closer comparison might have

been possible with the other two since both show rim decoration. The pattern is similar to the Glasgow urn; but whereas there the space between the top and bottom horizontal lines is filled with vertical parallel lines, the present urn has diagonal lines (sloping from top right to bottom left) in the corresponding space.

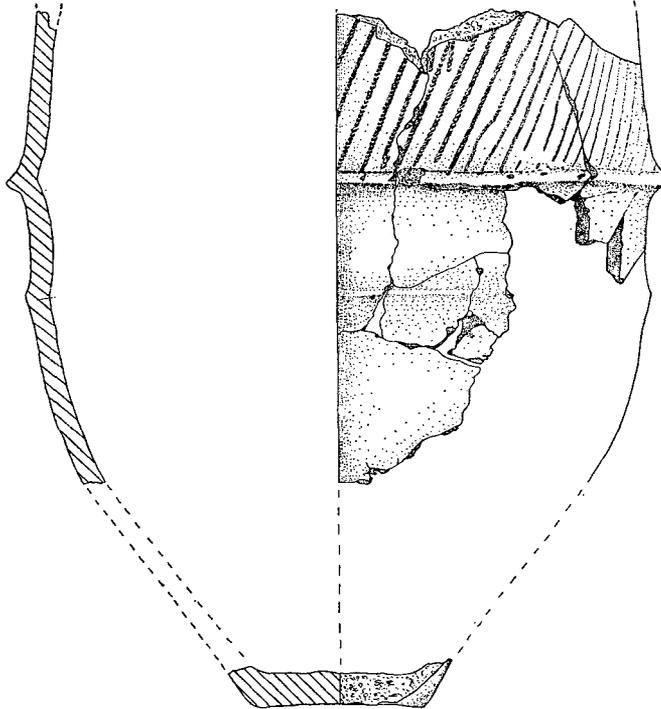


FIG 1 Urn from Gallamuir, East Plean (1:4)

Since 1968, indications of prehistoric activity in the East Plean area have emerged. Previously the Tappoch Broch at Torwood about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles SSW of East Plean and the Homestead distant about $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles WNW at Common Hill, West Plean, were the principal sites recorded (RCAMS 1963, 85-7, no. 100; 88-91, no. 104). In March and November 1968 two flint scrapers were found at Muirmailing Farm about $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles SW of East Plean (*DES (1968)*, 44; (*1969*), 47). In December 1971 a stone net sinker with hour-glass perforation was picked up just above the 100 ft contour between Sauchinford burn and Gallamuir road half a mile NNW of the urn site.

A point of interest is the relation of the find spots of the urn and net sinker to the line of the 100 ft contour as it describes a series of spurs projecting into the lower lying area to the SE. The well-drained sand and gravel subsoil of this higher ground conforms to the type of early settlement areas of the Forth and Teith valleys further to the W.

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