

THE "QUEEN OF THE INCH"

By DOROTHY N. MARSHALL, F.S.A., F.S.A. SCOT.

The large cap stone of a Bronze Age cist was uncovered, while ploughing, by Mr. Dan Boag, farmer of North Park, Inchmarnock (OS 019611) and, with his help the site was examined in April 1960. Miss Anne Brocklebank and Mr. John Ferrier were also there to help and I am grateful for their assistance.

A group of three cists was found; they lie roughly in line but not equidistant. The smaller ones were built nearly N - S, the largest one NNW - SSE. The cists lie on the 50 foot raised beach, 150 yards from the sea. From the site there is a wide and lovely view sweeping from the Kyles of Bute in the North to Kilmory on the west of Bute where in 1933 another group of three cists was found. Judging from the number¹ of cists in Bute the Bronze Age population on the Island must have been considerable. A cairn lies on the shore 200 yards to the north. There is no record of any excavation of this cairn.

There is now no trace of the cap stones of the two smaller cists. In the most southerly of the group, one end stone had fallen in, in the central one the western side stone had collapsed and the end stone had disappeared. Cist 1, the most southerly, was carefully made with a packing of stones to square up the ends where needed, the slabs were well chosen and regularly shaped. The west side stone projected 9" beyond the end slab. The fill was earth, shingle and pebbles. Part of a spacer bead of lignite was found in the fill. It has no decoration and is more square than most spacers. The two holes on the narrower side branch to four in the broader side. The farmer reported that, some years

1. T.B.N.H.S. Vol. XIV, pge. 60.
PSAS, 1903.

ago, a flint knife had been ploughed up near the cists but that it had since been lost. The fill of cist 2 was the same earth, shingle and pebble; nothing was found in it. It was in a ruined condition; the stones which remained were not so regular in shape as in the other cists.

The cap stone of the third cist was a massive one, 5' by 5' and of a fairly consistent thickness of 6". It must weigh about 6 cwt. When the cap stone was raised the cist was seen to be large and very carefully made. No soil had filtered in since the burial and the skeleton of a woman lay on a bed of clean shore shingle with a flint knife at her hand and a lignite¹ collar at her neck. The stone slabs had been chipped and straightened to make a regularly shaped box; the joints were packed with clay and the corners worked so that they fitted closely. As in cist 1, one side slab projected beyond the end stone. The S.E. corner had been built up with stones so that the cap stone lay snugly on the top. It is by far the largest and finest cist I have seen in the County of Bute. She must have been a personage of some importance.

Dr. A. D. Lacaille reported on the flint knife "This is a very fine blade struck from a well-flaked core of flint of such fine quality as to suggest a north-eastern Irish provenance. (Nevertheless having scrutinised the exposed drifts and shores of Kintyre and especially of south Ayrshire and Galloway and there, having seen the vast quantities of flint nodules I wonder if we have not been taken in with the notion that all good flint was imported from the North of Ireland). The specimen does not, by itself, typify the culture, though it certainly was produced in a well-developed industry such as one finds at Bronze Age sites in Scotland. The left hand margin bears some signs of retouch and also of wear from use as a knife or saw, while the opposite edge has not been injured to the same extent it yet shows the

1. This material is usually incorrectly called lignite. True lignite is only found in Scotland in a small deposit at Brora. The stone used here is a canneloid shale, which is shale containing fossilised algal colonies, brown humus material and macerated plant debris. It is not found on Bute. When lignite is referred to in this paper, the material is actually canneloid shale.

faintest trace of glaze testifying to cutting. It can be said that this implement was probably a favourite in life of the person with whose remains it was buried. We do not know enough so far to suggest that the piece was placed as a symbol in the grave. It is preferable to think of it as a personal relic, the deposition of which proclaims the common affection which existed between the deceased and those who had disposed of her body."

The necklace had 135 beads; some have retained much of their original hardness and gloss while others, found at the same level, have flaked badly. Mr. Ian Cameron of the Geological Survey, says that the difference in the amount of flaking of the beads could be accounted for by the inherent differences in the quality of the shale. Beads made from material taken from parts of the same bed of shale, even of only 18" apart could flake to a greater or less degree. This variation of condition was also found by Miss Henshall in a necklace from a cist at Masterton.¹

The woman was buried in the usual crouched position with her head turned to the right. When the string—animal sinew may well have been used — threading the necklace rotted, the beads fell in a heap at her side. The beads which showed on the surface were plotted in a grid 6" x 12" and were lifted by these sections. In one of these areas were 98 beads. In all there were 135 beads of roughly three sizes. The largest on an average were 1.05" long and of these there were 16. The 65 medium sized beads were mostly .75" long and there were 54 small ones about .6" long. There were variations of length and diameter and shape within each group. The best made are beautifully shaped, carefully finished and polished, some are assymetrical and roughly finished. The jumble in which they lay gave no clue to the original stringing so that Plate 5 gives only a conjectural arrangement. However the boring in the spacers gives an indication of the pattern of the upper part of the necklace (Fig. 1. The "fringe" of 10 beads at the bases of the lower pair seemed to follow into five strands more naturally than

1. Discovery and Excavation 1961 32.

into the star design of the Poltalloch necklace,² so we have reconstructed it that way.

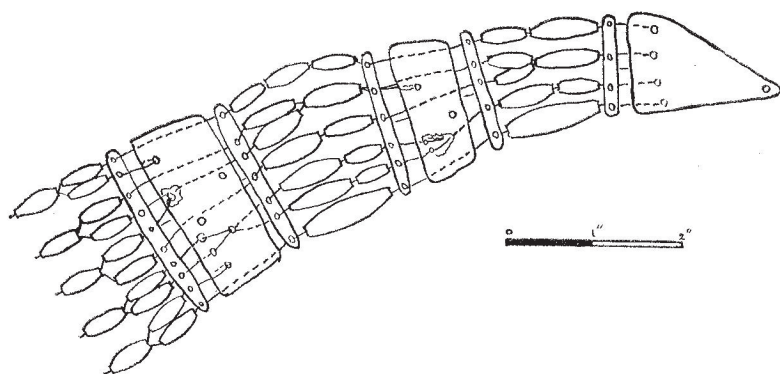


Fig. 1

The spacers are intricately bored. In the triangular pieces beside the fastener 4 holes are bored. The next pair are trapezoidal and have 5 holes at one edge changing to 6 at the broader edge. The third pair change from 7 above to 10 below. Ten is an unusually large number, most necklaces have 8 holes in this position. Ingenious and intricate as this boring is, it is not nearly as precisely done as on many of the other spacers in necklaces from various parts of the country which can be seen in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh. Also the maker of the Inchmarnock necklace used a left hand (as worn) spacer for the right hand lower one. He or she bored the holes so that the narrower side must lie on the outer edge of the collar. This means that the right half of the necklace does not lie so well as the left one. There is no decoration on the spacers. In many of the necklaces the spacers are decorated with fine lines of dots set in geometrical patterns. Another one with plain spacers, which came from the Campbeltown area can be seen in the Inveraray Castle Museum. While the Inchmarnock necklace used a left hand (as worn) spacer for plete so far found, it cannot have been made by the best of the Bronze Age craftsmen.

The shale for making these necklaces occurs in seams in Ayrshire and many other parts of Scotland. As the seams

2. P.S.A.S. LXIII 154.

dip and rise the same seam appearing in different and widely separated areas it is unlikely that spore analysis would be able to tie up one necklace with one specific area. Despite this seeming impasse we have kept a few of the beads untreated, thinking that a future generation will find an answer to the problem. Mr. J. G. Scott, of the Kelvingrove Museum, very kindly treated the other beads with the water-miscible wax method recommended by the British Museum Laboratory for the treatment of wooden objects.

These lignite necklaces are peculiar to Scotland. Childe says¹ "the crescentic jet necklace is an essentially Scottish contribution to the Bronze Age culture of Great Britain." The idea probably came from the amber necklaces of Denmark and the shape from the gold collars of Ireland. But the use of lignite to make them is Scottish in character; Those found in England were either carried there or traded, not made. They were one of Scotland's early exports. Over fifty examples have been found. A very fine one was found in 1887 at Mount Stuart.² The woman in that cist had been buried with a food vessel and a bronze implement. A lignite bead was found in a well made cist which Professor Bryce uncovered in the cairn beside the road at Scalpsie Bay. It is intriguing to speculate on the making of these necklaces; were they made at one centre and carried from there? or did a travelling craftsman make them to order where there was suitable material? Nothing so far has been found to answer these questions. The use of the necklaces dates to the Middle Bronze Age about 1500 B.C.³; their popularity might have lasted 50 to 80 years.

The Society is grateful to the Most Honourable the Marquess of Bute who gave permission for the excavation

1. Prehistory of Scotland, Pge. 104.

2. It can be seen in National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh.

3. Atkinson, R.J.C.B.A. Conference, London, 1960.

to take place and who has lent the necklace and knife for exhibition in the Bute Museum.

Some of the beads have disintegrated since being taken from the ground; their place has been taken by wax ones, as can easily be seen, in the reconstructed stringing of the necklace.

A Note on the Skeletal Remains.

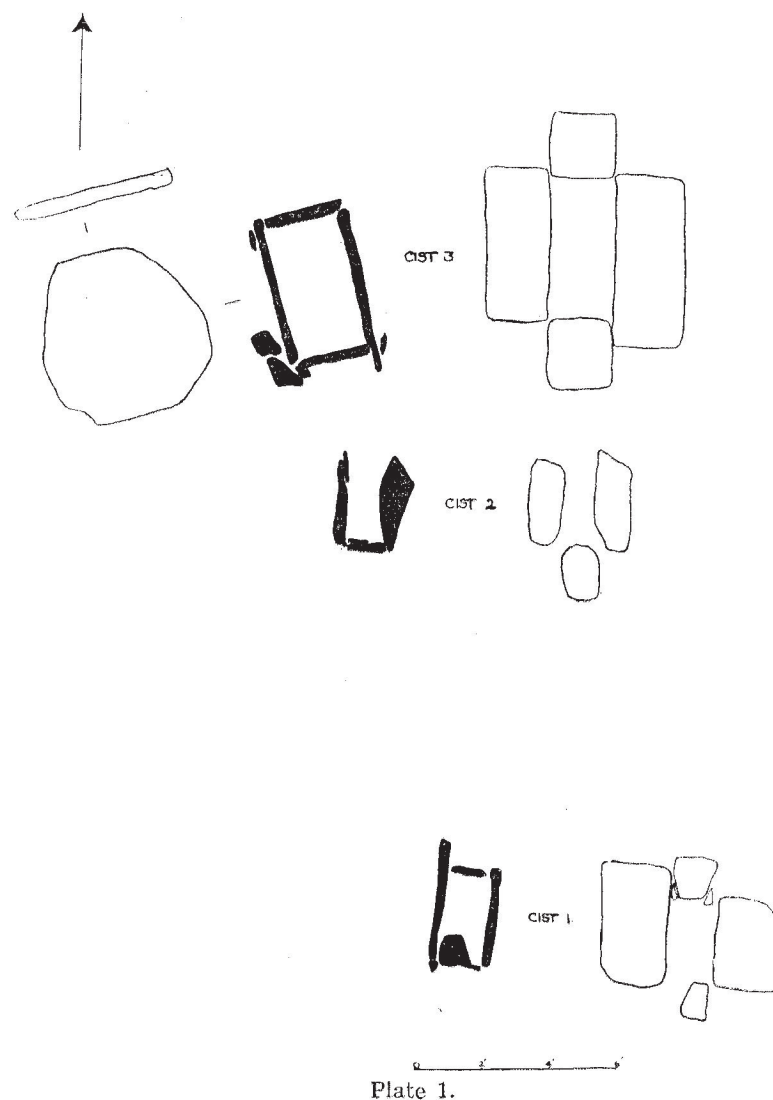
The skeleton lay on its side, with the knees drawn up, in the typical crouched burial position. Those parts in contact with the wet base of the cist were too friable to be fully examined, but the rest of the skeleton was sufficiently well-preserved to allow accurate estimation of the sex, height, and age at death.

Measurements of the pelvis indicated that the remains were those of a female, while examination of the sutures of the skull indicated that the age at death was about 25 years; and the length of the femur, applied to the formula of Dupertuis and Hadden, gave a total skeletal height of between 5'3" and 5'5".

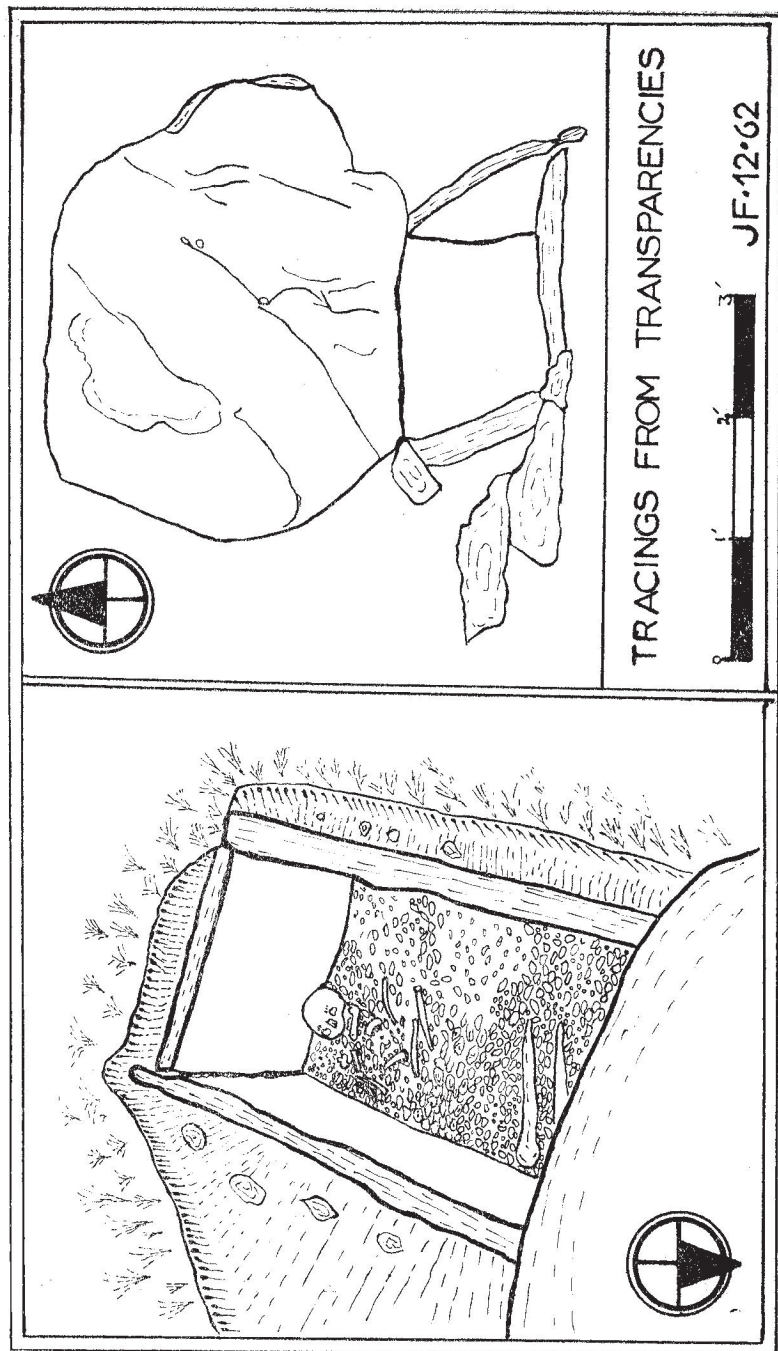
The teeth and jaws were well preserved. The lower incisors were evenly worn down and the enamel worn away exposing the dentine. The left lower fifth tooth was missing and the socket healed: the left upper fourth tooth showed a little caries, otherwise caries was absent: a little tartar was visible.

Both femora showed an exceptionally high angle between shaft and neck — no reason for this was found, nor was there any evidence of disease or injury in any part of the skeleton.

John Ferrier, F.R.C.S., F.S.A., Scot.



Plan of Cists, Inchmarnock, with "Exploded" Plans beside them



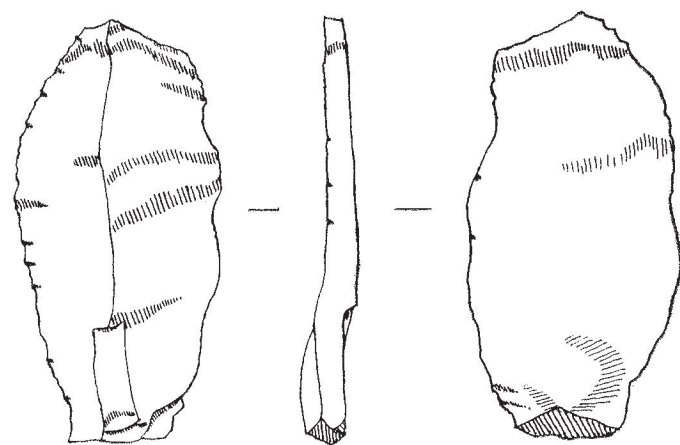


Plate 4

Flint Knife, Inchmarnock



Plate 5

The Inchmarnock Necklace

[Photo: J. Ferrier]