Illus 1 Site location.
The excavation of a disturbed Bronze Age cemetery at Ethiebeaton, Angus

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The site

The site was situated to the N of the A92, c3km NW of Monifieth, Angus, on the former Ethiebeaton estate (NGR NO 4872 3373). It was at c 50m OD on a low S facing ridge which sloped down to a small burn, and was overlooked by the steep slope of higher ground to the N.

The background to the excavation

In 2002 Ennstone Thistle Limited applied for planning permission to build a new office development on a green field site adjacent to their quarry at Ethiebeaton, Monifieth, Angus. As there were 19th-century references (discussed below) to probable Bronze Age burials on part of the site, an archaeological condition was placed on the planning application.

A series of evaluation trenches was excavated in March 2002 (Illus 1: Trenches 1–5). These produced no archaeological evidence and demonstrated that the ground had been considerably levelled during the 19th century. The depth of topsoil and subsoil ranged from a scant 170–230mm of cultivated topsoil and no surviving subsoil over the natural gravels in Trenches 2 and 4 to 600mm of topsoil over 350–400mm of stratified subsoil above the gravel at the S end of Trench 1. Overall the impression was of a considerable movement of topsoil from the area of Trenches 2 and 4 towards the NW, presumably to level up ground before cultivation. After the evaluation was complete it was deemed that there was no evidence of archaeological survival and topsoil stripping began for the development. In the course of this topsoil strip, a capstone was dragged off a cist (Grave 1).

Murray Archaeological Services were informed and then excavated the cist (Grave 1) and cleared the surrounding area to the top of natural. In the process, a cluster of other features were discovered cut into the natural gravels. These appeared to form an isolated pocket of survival of part of a cemetery of Bronze Age date in the area between the evaluation Trenches 2 and 4. The evidence of the evaluation trenches suggest that they may originally have been covered by a mound that was removed in the 19th century. All the features had been badly denuded by the levelling and subsequent cultivation. No other features were observed in the rest of the field.

The results of the excavation

The surviving features consisted of two cist burials (Graves 1 and 2), two cremations in urns (Graves 3 and 4) and one cremation without an urn (Grave 5). They were clustered in an area c10m N–S by c14m E–W (Illus 1, 2). Directly to the S and E of the cluster, there was a considerable Victorian midden. This was not excavated due to time constraints but was clearly dug into the natural and extended for at least 20m NE–SW and up to 5m N–S; it did not appear in evaluation Trench 4. This midden pit would have destroyed any prehistoric activity in that area. Context numbers in brackets are included throughout the following descriptions of the excavated features.

Grave 1: cist inhumation (Illus 2)

Grave 1 was a cist inhumation orientated NNE/SSW. It was discovered when the capstone was broken and moved during machine levelling of the building site. In the process some loose earth had fallen into the cist which was removed before further excavation. The cist was 1.06m x 630mm at the base, and 490mm deep to the base of Trench 1. Overall the impression was of a considerable movement of topsoil from the area of Trenches 2 and 4 towards the NW, presumably to level up ground before cultivation. After the evaluation was complete it was deemed that there was no evidence of archaeological survival and topsoil stripping began for the development. In the course of this topsoil strip, a capstone was dragged off a cist (Grave 1).

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The base of the cist was on the natural pebbly gravel (5). The skeleton was almost totally disintegrated but skull fragments were found at the NE end of the cist with a group of teeth lying to the W of the rest of the skull. Part of a long bone and the dust-line of a second, much eroded longbone lay to the S. This would suggest that the body was lying flexed on its right side with its head at the NE end, facing W/NW. A Food Vessel (SF 5,
Illus 2 (above) Relationship of the graves, (below) plan of Grave 1 cist.

Illus 3 Plans of Graves 2, 3 and 4.
The excavation of a disturbed Bronze Age cemetery at Ethiebeaton, Angus

Illus 4) lay in front of the position of the stomach and an awl fragment (SF 6, Illus 4) was found beside the thighs. Two flints (SF 1 and 2) lay in the S corner behind the feet and another flint (SF11) was found when sieving the soil beside the jaw for teeth.

The bone and grave goods lay on the base of the cist, partially covered by a layer of fine silt (4). At some point the pot had fallen, lying on its side on c10mm of this silt, even though the basal edge of the pot was on the cist floor. It is possible that the pot may have been resting against the body and fell as the body decayed.

Subsequently a layer of fine gravel (2) had built up in the cist, possibly falling in around the edges of the capstone.

The bone evidence shows that the burial was of an adult aged between 17 and 25 years at death but the sex could not be determined.

Grave 1a (Illus 2)

Two fragments of Beaker (SF 4, Illus 4) were found on the surface of the natural gravel 0.25m from the outer edge of the E slab of the cist Grave 1 and just beside the edge of its outer pit. This pottery could not be directly related to Grave 1 and is likely to have derived from another burial disturbed during the 19th-century destruction of the site. No bone was found in association with this pottery. The findspot of the Beaker fragments is shown on Illus 2 but this does not indicate the position of the hypothesised grave.

Grave 2: cist inhumation (Illus 3)

Grave 2, a cist inhumation, lay 5m to the NE of Grave 1. Only the very base of the cist survived as a shallow cut, 100mm maximum depth, and c1.10m long and 0.70m wide, lying WNW/ESE. Part of the stub of the S side slab (12) survived to a height of 50–80mm. It was the same type of flat stone which was used in Grave 1 and which is the natural local stone; this fractures easily and the stone is likely to have broken off when the upper part was removed. No stone survived on the N side but part of the slot for the N slab remained to a depth of 50mm below the level of the cist floor. A slot c30mm deep survived from the W end slab but the E end was too badly destroyed for any traces of a slab slot to survive. A well laid paving (11) of flat pieces of stone average c100mm long, survived in the W half of the cist. A few fragments of bone and teeth and four small sherds of a Beaker (SF 7, Illus 4) were found between the stones on this paving. These were sealed by a patchy dark humic layer up to 50mm deep. The bone evidence shows that this was an adult but was too fragmentary for further identification.

The very fragmentary nature of this burial suggests that this may have been one of the cists opened and then levelled in the 19th century with part of the floor surviving below cultivation levels.

Grave 3: urn cremation (Illus 3)

Grave 3 lay c6m to the SE of Graves 1 and 2 and c3.5m from Burials 4 and 5. It consisted of a cremation set in an inverted urn of Collared/Cordoned type (SF 8 Illus 4). The base of the urn, which was uppermost, had been destroyed by ploughing and there was some spread of bone and pottery fragments in the topsoil (20). The urn had been set in a small ovoid pit (22) c500–630mm in diameter and with a surviving depth of 250mm. The base and sides of the pit had been partly lined with two large stones and some smaller stones. The largest of the stones was c350x200mm and lay at an angle up the side of the pit. The rim of the urn lay directly on these stones in such a way that the pot would not have been absolutely level when it was inserted and may even have broken at the time of burial. After the urn had been buried the pit was backfilled with a soft dark loam containing some charcoal (21).

The urn was wrapped and lifted with the cremation intact and excavated in Marischal Museum, Aberdeen, during conservation. Two pieces of flint and a flake of quartz (SF 13–15) were found in the cremation near the rim of the urn; all were heavily vitrified (Ballin, below).

The bones were of a single individual, either an adult female or a young adult male. There was copper or copper-alloy staining on the bones of the right arm.

Grave 4: urn cremation (Illus 3)

Grave 4 lay respectively c9m and 7m SE of Graves 1 and 2 and 3.5m to the ENE of Grave 3. It had been buried directly over Grave 5. It consisted of a cremation set in an inverted Collared Urn (SF 9: Illus 4). The base of the urn, which was uppermost, had been destroyed by ploughing and there was a considerable spread of bone and pottery fragments in the topsoil (15). The urn had been set in a small round pit (16) c500mm in diameter and with a surviving depth of 200mm. The base of this had been carefully lined with small stones (17). The rim of the pot lay directly on the stones. A very small amount of the cremation was found directly on the base stones, suggesting that there had been an organic covering of the top of the urn. The pit had been backfilled with loam which contained a few fragments of cremated bone (19); a softer darker fill (18) was mixed with the cremated bone in the urn.

The contents and surrounding soil was sieved but no associated grave goods were found. The bones were of a single adult individual, of indeterminate sex.

Grave 5: cremation without urn (Illus 2)

Grave 5 was directly below Grave 4. It is possible that the stones (17) lining the base of the Grave 4 pit may have been a deliberate covering of the underlying cremation. A few pieces of broken pot, subsequently identified as part of the urn from Grave 4, were mixed
in the top of the fill of Grave 5. The cremated bone of Grave 5 was in larger fragments than those from Grave 4 and mixed in a looser, much browner soil (23) which was clearly distinct from the Grave 4 fill. Grave 5 was contained in a small pit 250 x 230mm in diameter and 150mm deep. Around the sides of this pit there was a fine silt (24) with only a few fragments of cremated bone and a flint (SF 12) in it. The flint does not appear to have been burnt. It would appear possible that the cremation had originally been in a bag made of organic material and that this silt was backfilled around it. As there were traces of a copper or copper-alloy object visible in the top of the cremation, the cremated bone was lifted as a block. The object, which proved to be a fragment of a razor (SF 10: Illus 4) was subsequently x-rayed, removed and stabilized by Margot Wright in Marischal Museum, Aberdeen. The cremation was of a single adult of unidentifiable sex.

The artefacts

The pottery (Illus 4)
Alison Sheridan

The small assemblage from the Ethiebeaton cemetery comprises one complete pot and fragments of four further Early Bronze Age vessels, as follows:

1. fragments of a Beaker (SF 7) from the truncated remains of the Grave 2 cist;
2. fragments of a Beaker (SF 4) from disturbed topsoil near Grave 1, but not deriving from that grave;
3. a complete Food Vessel (SF 5) from the Grave 1 cist;
4. fragments of a large Collared Urn (SF 9) from Grave 4; and
5. fragments of a smaller, bipartite Urn of Collared/ Cordon type (SF 8) from Grave 3.

Catalogue

Beaker fragments SF 4, from disturbed topsoil near Grave 1 (Illus 4). Two conjoining sherds from the rim and neck of a thin-walled, fine-textured Beaker with incised and impressed decoration; less than one-twentieth of the pot is present, and the overall size of the sherds is only c 40mm x 25mm. The fracture surfaces are fresh, and the sherds probably derive from a wholly-destroyed grave; they will not have come from the grave 1 cist. The estimated rim diameter – expressed with caution, given the small size of the sherds – is c 160–170mm; wall thickness is 7mm at the neck, 5.7mm immediately below the rim. The rim is rounded on its interior and gently peaked at its outer edge, and the neck is upright (or very slightly tilted, in towards the belly) and may well have swelled slightly, like the Beaker from Grave 2. It also resembles that Beaker in its surface finish, colour and fineness of texture; but on the inside, just below the rim, instead of a faceted hollow there is a gentle depression where a thumb may have been pulled around the top of the pot. Decoration is again zoned and covers the exterior, with the zones framed by horizontal incised lines. Immediately below the rim there is a row of faint criss-cross impressions, made with a narrow-ended tool; the next zone down comprises slanting impressions, made with the same or a similar tool; and the next zone may represent an attempt at a narrow herringbone design, again made with the same tool. The zones are narrow, each no wider than c 5.5mm. Lithic inclusions are small (maximum 3mm x 3mm) and sparse (3–5%), and comprise angular fragments of a creamy mineral and gold-coloured mica platelets.

The closest parallels for this kind of Beaker fall within Clarke’s ‘Northern’ series (Clarke 1970), namely his ‘N1/D’, ‘N2’ and ‘N3’ variants; examples from Angus include Lunanhead (ibid, fig. 456) and Priest-town (ibid, fig. 453). According to Ian Shepherd’s developmental scheme for Beakers in Buchan (1986; extrapolating from that used by Lanting and Van der Waals 1972), it could be classed within steps 4, 5 or 6. According to the most recent Beaker typology, developed by Stuart Needham (2005), it is a short-necked (SN) Beaker. Its likely date is discussed below.

Beaker fragments SF 7, Grave 2 (Illus 4). Four conjoining sherds from the rim and neck of a thin-walled, fine-textured Beaker with incised and comb-impressed decoration; less than one-tenth of the pot is present, and the overall size of the sherds is less than 100mm x 50mm. Found in a disturbed position on the floor of the destroyed cist; some of the fracture surfaces are very fresh. Estimated rim diameter c 170mm; wall thickness 9.6mm at neck, 7.9mm immediately below rim. The rim varies in shape from gently squared off to rounded, and the upright neck swells slightly; it would either have been upright, or sloping in very gently towards the belly. The surfaces had been carefully smoothed prior to decoration, and a shallow horizontal facet on the interior just below the rim may indicate that the interior had been scraped. The surfaces had either been wet-smoothed, or coated with a very thin slip. The whole of the exterior from just below the rim is covered with zones (8.5–9.5mm wide) of alternately sloping impressions made by a rectangular-toothed comb c 13mm long, each framed top and bottom by a shallow horizontal incised line; the zones form a herringbone design. Traces of a creamy white material are visible in some of the comb impressions, and this may well represent a deliberate decorative inlay. However, traces of whitish sediment are also present on slightly abraded parts of the fracture surfaces and over parts of the interior, and only compositional analysis could determine whether two distinct materials – one deliberately added, the other a post-depositional natural accretion – are involved. The outer and inner surfaces are a pinkish-buff, and the core is blackish, indicating rapid firing in oxidising conditions. Lithic inclusions, deliberately added as a filler to protect the vessel from thermal shock during firing, are small (no bigger than c 3mm x 2.5mm) and sparse (occupying 5–7% of the fabric), and comprise angular fragments of hard stone, some light grey, some blackish-brown. There are no visible traces of the pot’s former contents, even though it would probably have contained an offering of drink or food for the deceased’s journey into the Afterlife.
Illus 4 Small finds.
This Beaker is of the same type as that from Grave 2; in terms of the cemetery’s use-life, the grave from which it is likely to have come could have been constructed within a generation or two of Grave 2.

**Food Vessel** SF 5, from Grave 1 (Illus 4). Complete tripartite Vase Food Vessel, found on its side and with its upper side crushed in (from the ingress of material during the cist’s discovery), mid-way along the western side of the cist. It would originally have stood in front of the chest/stomach area of the corpse, but had probably fallen on its side in antiquity; its lower side was found resting on c 10mm of sediment. The upper part of the vessel is a slightly oval shape, but whether this was an original feature or a product of post-depositional deformation is unclear. Rim diameter: 160–172mm; maximum diameter (at upper ridge) 175–184mm; base diameter 92mm; height 170mm; wall thickness: 15mm at neck, 23mm at base; width of rim bevel c 16mm. The rim has an internal bevel, flat to slightly dished, and gently sloping inwards, and a narrow (c 3mm), sloping external bevel. Below this the upper half of the vessel is divided into two zones by low moulded ridges, the upper one lying at around three-quarters of the vessel’s height, the lower at its mid-height; the wall between each is gently concave. The upper segment slopes in very gently towards the rim; the lower segment is upright. The belly tapers gently to a broad base, the outside of which is minimally dished and the inside is flat. There is impressed decoration on the rim bevels, over the upper half of the exterior and immediately above the base. The inner rim bevel has a herringbone design featuring narrow impressions, the outer bevel a line of small oval impressions, probably made with a different tool; and elsewhere there are lines of roughly triangular impressions, made with the pointed end of a third, spatulate tool; these had clearly been executed by a right-handed potter. (There are four such lines above the upper ridge; five between the ridges; one immediately below the lower ridge; and two immediately above the base.) The surfaces are fairly smooth and may have been coated with a thin slip, or at least have been wet-smoothed, prior to decoration; slight undulations on the interior probably relate to finger-smoothing. The exterior is mostly a buff-brown colour, pinkish in places, and with small blackish patches on the upper section and over much of the internal rim bevel. The core is black, and the interior is buff-brown over much of its surface, but has a large, irregularly-shaped black stain covering much of one side. This runs from the base to just below the rim, and indeed the black patches on the rim bevel and exterior may represent the same material. Within this stain on the interior are small patches of thin, crazed, organic encrustation; this, and the stain, relates to the vessel’s former contents. However, the side on which these traces occur is the one lying uppermost in the cist. Its position is not consistent with the gradual evaporation of material from a tilting or supine pot, unless the pot had subsequently rolled (or been rolled, for instance through rodent action) at some point prior to the cist’s discovery. Lithic inclusions are small (up to 5mm x 4.5mm), fairly abundant (probably 20–25%), and comprise sub-angular fragments of a hard, dark grey and grey-brown stone. There are also a few minute, shiny mica platelets, which may be natural inclusions in the clay.

In both form and decoration, this vessel falls within the range for Scottish Vase Food Vessels, even though it is uncommon for the decoration not to cover most or all of the exterior. Although not an exact parallel, a tripartite Vase Food Vessel from cist 3, Aberdour Road, Dunfermline, Fife (Close-Brooks et al 1972, illus 3) shares the overall tripartite form and the use of jabbed decoration. Several Vases with closer formal parallels are known from Tayside and Fife (eg near Abernethy: NMS X.EE 141), and many others featuring jabbed decoration could be cited. The vessel’s likely date is discussed below.

**Collared Urn** SF 9, from Grave 4 (Illus 4). Fragments representing around a quarter of a large Collared Urn, which had been buried inverted (containing cremated remains) and whose rim may have broken during its insertion into the grave pit, when it was laid onto a layer of stones covering an un-urned deposit of cremated remains. The pieces found in the pit are from the rim, collar and top of the neck; those found in contexts 23 and 24, above grave 5, are from the lower belly and include one sherd from the belly-base junction. These must have been dragged from Grave 4 as (or after) it was truncated. The rim diameter is 305mm; the collar height 110mm; and the wall thickness varies from 10.5mm (at the lower belly) to c 30mm at the bottom of the collar. (At the rim it is 18mm, and at mid-collar and immediately below the collar, 14mm.) The overall height could have been as much as 400mm. The rim is gently squared off and lies flat over parts of the circumference, and minimally inclined elsewhere. The collar would have sloped outwards gently from the rim, its upper part swelling slightly and its lower part sweeping out to a prominent rounded bottom. One detached sherd (illustrated) shows a coil joint line – as an inverted V – at the bottom of the collar. Immediately below the collar the vessel wall thins considerably, where a finger has been run around the neck to smooth the surface and to help accentuate the collar. The vessel wall slopes out gently from below the collar to form a fairly narrow ‘neck’ around 50mm deep; it then curves in, and below this the belly would have tapered to a narrow base. There is no ridge to mark the neck-belly junction, but the overall shape of the urn would have been tripartite (ie collar-neck-belly). The surfaces had been smoothed and coated with a thick slip, which helped to obscure the lithic inclusions. The exterior is a buff to mid-brown, pinkish in places; the core blackish; and the interior buff to mid-brown, but grey-brown towards the base. The rim bevel and collar had been decorated with crude-looking impressions, probably made with the irregularly-shaped end of a narrow stick; they vary in depth and size, with the largest (on the collar) around 9mm across; most are roughly circular or D-shaped. Those on the rim bevel are spaced at irregular intervals; on the collar, there appears to be a roughly horizontal line below the rim, and occasional pendant lines, each comprising two impressions. The fabric
is friable, with a hackly fracture and a tendency, in some areas, to spall. It had been tempered with large (up to 6.5 x 11.5mm), angular fragments of hard black-brown and brown-grey stone, at a density probably of 15–20%.

In terms of existing Collared Urn typological schemes, this would fall within Longworth’s (1984) ‘Secondary Series, North-Western Style’ and within Burgess’ (1986) ‘Late’ category. Some examples of Collared Urns with jab decoration are illustrated in Longworth’s Plates 217–9, with examples widely distributed over Britain and Northern Ireland (including one, no 1783, from Tillicoultry, Clackmannanshire). A further example, similar but not identical in decorative scheme and in details of shape, comes from Gilchorn, Angus, not far from Ethiebeaton to the north-east (Longworth’s no 1993, pl 111).

Fragmentary urn of Collared/Cordoned type SF 8, from Grave 3 (Illus 4). Fragments representing just under half of an urn of apparently bipartite shape, which had been buried inverted and containing the cremated remains of an adult female or young adult male. The surviving portions are from the top half of the vessel (ie those lowest in the pit). The estimated rim diameter is c 240mm; the maximum diameter, at the bottom of the collar, c 270mm, and the wall thickness varies from 12mm (at the upper part of the neck) to 13.5mm (mid-way down the neck). The surviving height is c 185mm (with the diameter at the lowest surviving part of the belly c 220mm), and the overall original height may have been c 360mm; the base is likely to have been proportionally broader than that of the Collared Urn from Grave 4. The rim is upright, narrow and gently pointed at the top, with a narrow and steeply-sloping internal bevel. The collar slopes gently out from the rim and is straight over most of its surface, sweeping out to a fairly prominent, part-rounded, part-pointed bottom. Below this the body seems to curve gently inwards; if the vessel’s profile had been tripartite, rather than bipartite, then this ‘neck’ area would have been relatively deep. The rim bevel and collar are decorated with impressed linear impressions of fairly thick (c 3mm-thick), Z-twisted cord; there are three horizontal lines around the rim bevel, and the collar has a zone of criss-cross impressions, framed at the top by three horizontal lines and at the bottom, by two; immediately below these, at the bottom of the collar, is a running zig-zag line. The surfaces had been smoothed and coated with a thick slip, but numerous grits protrude through these. The exterior is a mid-brown, with blackish patches (and very minor soot-like encrustation) around parts of the collar; the core and interior are blackish, with further small patches of sooting. The latter are likely to derive from the firing of the pot (in an inverted position, and with part of the collar embedded in the fuel) rather than from any use of the vessel. Lithic inclusions are large (up to 11mm x 4mm), abundant (estimated density: c 25%) and comprise fragments of a hard, light grey stone; some of the fragments are speckled.

Whether this urn should be classified as a Collared or a Cordoned Urn is a matter for debate; as argued elsewhere (eg Sheridan 2003; 2007, 162–85), it seems likely that Cordoned Urns emerged as a variation on the Collared Urn in northern and western Britain and in Ireland, and there is a large overlap in terms of decorative schemes and design details, as in currency of use (cf Brindley 2007). The use of the framed lattice design on the collar, for example, is well represented on both Collared and Cordoned Urns. One of the closest formal parallels is a Cordoned Urn from Seggiecrook, Aberdeenshire (Callander 1905, fig 2); two other Cordoned Urns, from Skilmaffily, Aberdeenshire (unpublished), share with the Ethiebeaton urn the framed lattice design but are definitely or probably tripartite in profile.

Discussion

Each of these vessels finds ready parallels among the Early Bronze Age pottery of eastern Scotland, and the cemetery is fairly typical in having both inhumation graves, in which vessels are deposited as containers for offerings, and graves with cremated remains, contained within cinerary urns. Both Food Vessels and Cordoned Urns are particularly abundant in Tayside and Fife (Simpson 1968, fig 48; Waddell 1995, fig 11.3), and Collared Urns are also well represented in north-east Fife, across the Tay from Ethiebeaton (Longworth 1984, fig 42).

Recent and current programmes involving the systematic radiocarbon dating of various kinds of Scottish Early Bronze Age pottery (eg Parker Pearson 2006; Sheridan 2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2007; in press), together with the dating of two important urn cemeteries (Skilmaffily, Aberdeenshire and Lesmurdie Road, Elgin, Moray: Johnson 2004; Suddaby 2004) have been clarifying the chronology of ceramic use. On the basis of this, the likely dates for the different kinds of pottery are as follows: the Beakers, 2300–2100/1200 BC; the Food Vessel, c 2100/2000 – c 1750 BC; the Collared Urn, 2000/1900–1600 BC; and the Collared/Cordoned Urn, c 1850–1500 BC. (The aforementioned Cordoned Urn from Seggiecrook has been dated, from its cremated remains, to 3495±45 BP (GrA-19427), 1880–1740 cal BC at 1σ, 1940–1680 cal BC at 2σ: Sheridan 2003, 220.)

The two Ethiebeaton urns could have been buried over the course of a few generations (or even a single generation).

Comparable dating evidence for the same kinds of pottery in Ireland has been obtained from a large, systematic radiocarbon dating programme undertaken by Anna Brindley and Jan Lanting (Brindley 2007). The results indicate that Vase Food Vessels were in use there between 2020/1980 and 1740 BC; Collared Urns, between 1850/1830 and 1700 BC; and Cordoned Urns, between 1730 and 1500 BC. Wiggle-matching has been used to refine these date ranges, and it may be that a similar treatment of the Scottish dates would narrow their ranges as well.
The copper-alloy metalwork (Illus 4)
Trevor Cowie

Introduction

Two identifiable metal artefacts were recovered during the excavation: firstly, a fragment of a copper awl (SF 6) from the Grave 1 cist, associated with an inhumation, three flints (SF 1, 2 and 11) and a Food Vessel (SF 5, Illus 4), and secondly, a fragment of a bronze razor from cremation Grave 5. This had been sealed by a stone slab and lay directly below cremation Grave 4, which was associated with a Collared Urn (SF 9, Illus 4).

In addition, the possible former presence of a metal artefact is suggested by copper staining on fragments of the bones of the right arm of the individual represented by cremation Grave 3, associated with a fragmentary urn of Collared/Cordoned type (SF 8, Illus 4).

Catalogue

Fragment of copper awl SF 6, from Grave 1 (Illus 4). Slightly tapering fragment; circular section; corroded. Analysis by Katherine Eremin of the Conservation and Analytical Research Department, National Museums Scotland, showed that the metal is composed of impure copper, with traces of iron, arsenic, silver and antimony. Length 6 mm; diameter 1.4 mm. Weight 0.05 gms.

The tapering fragment of copper retrieved from the floor of cist Grave 1 represents the remains of an awl. Bronze Age awls in Britain and Ireland have recently been classified by Thomas (2005, 219–22) while the Scottish evidence has conveniently been summarised by Sheridan (1999), obviating the need for detailed discussion. Essentially, the metal awls fall into two basic types, an earlier and long-lived type (Thomas’s ‘Group 1’), double-ended with a central swelling, and a later type (his ‘Group 2’) characterised by a flattened tang, absence of medial swelling and generally thicker and more robust shaft (see Thomas 2005 for a detailed discussion of sub-types within these Groups, and of an additional ‘Group 3’ type of larger and, in some cases, even later awls.)

The composition of the metal, the slenderness of the surviving portion and the association with a Food Vessel all tend to suggest that the Ethiebeaton fragment would have been of the double-ended type. While its original size cannot be extrapolated, most such awls are in the region of 30–40 mm in length. The association of an awl with a Food Vessel is in keeping with artefactual associations of this pottery type (Simpson 1968); awls have also been found associated with various types of Beaker, with Collared Urns, and with various non-ceramic Early Bronze Age artefacts (Thomas 2005, 220). Most awls – excluding some of Thomas’s ‘Group 3’ specimens – are likely to have been used during the final quarter of the third, and the first quarter of the second millennium BC (cf Brindley 2001, 148 for the dating of an example from the north of Ireland); the Food Vessel association of the Ethiebeaton specimen suggests that it had been in use c 2100/2000 – c 1750 BC (see Sheridan, this publication). It may also be noted that while the human remains from cist Grave 1 were those of a young adult of indeterminate sex, awls tend to be associated with female interments (ibid; Sheridan 1999, 198).

In use, awls would have been hafted in a short handle, making them resemble modern bradawls and engraving tools (Thomas 2005, 222). While Thomas argues that they would have been rather narrow for use in perforating leather, he notes that one example (found, unusually, with a male at Amesbury G51 barrow, Wiltshire) had been accompanied by other tools suggestive of leatherworking. Their use for making fine perforations in leather and other organic materials seems plausible, as is their possible use for decorating leather (and perhaps other substances as well).

Fragment of bronze razor SF10, from Grave 5 (Illus 4). The fragment has broken across the face of the blade and across the upper end of the tang resulting in a roughly rhomboidal shape; original edges survive at both sides and represent the gently curved portion of the razor at the junction of the tang and blade. The blade cross-section is asymmetrical: one face has a clear median ridge but the other is plain, flat or only very slightly convex. Oblique hammer marks have left a series of light ripples on the upper portion of the tang. The surviving portions of the blade bear traces of fine striations, mostly longitudinal with occasional transverse examples indicating that the blade has certainly been polished and possibly also seen use. Although the edges are corroded, the surviving surfaces are sound and the razor appears to be unburnt. Analysis by Katherine Eremin of the Conservation and Analytical Research Department, National Museums Scotland, showed that the blade fragment is of bronze, with traces of iron and arsenic. Surviving dimensions 33mm by 18.5mm; thickness 1.8 to 2.2 mm. Weight 3.89gms.

There is also little doubt that the fragmentary bronze artefact found with cremated remains in Grave 5 represents the surviving portion of a Class Ib tanged razor (following the terminology of Butler and Smith 1956), corresponding to Jockenhövel’s generic ‘double-edged tanged razors with elongated oval blades’ (1980, 37–44). This is a heterogeneous group with considerable variation in the shape and size of the tangs and the blades, in large part due to the heavy whetting and reworking of many of the blades. As a result the original form of the Ethiebeaton fragment cannot be extrapolated with absolute certainty but its outline invites comparison with several examples of razors with slender tapering tang and elongated oval blade from Britain and Ireland (ibid, cat nos 50, Galway; 57, North Riding, Yorkshire; 64, Braddan, Isle of Man and 66, Broughton, Lincoln). As in the Ethiebeaton fragment, a number of razors have asymmetrical blade cross-sections: for example the razor from Laughton’s
The excavation of a disturbed Bronze Age cemetery at Ethiebeaton, Angus

Eight lithic artefacts were recovered from the site—four flints from the surviving cist Grave 1 or its surroundings (SF 1, 2, 3, 11), two flints and a piece of worked quartz from cremation Grave 3 (SF 13–15), and one flint from cremation Grave 5 (SF 12). The purpose of the present report is to characterise and, possibly, date the lithic finds, as well as assess the contexts of the recovered lithic finds.

Side-scraper on broad tertiary hard-hammer flake SF 1. Fine- to medium-grained cream-coloured flint (19mm x 32mm x 6mm). (An end scraper is defined (Ballin 1996, 55) by having a working edge approximately perpendicular to the longer of the two dimensions L and W (L being the dimension proximal end to distal end), whereas a side-scraper has its edge on the longer of the two dimensions. If L > W (elongated blank) the working-edge of the end-scraper will be distal (sometimes proximal) and the edge of the side-scraper will be lateral. If W > L (broad blank) the working-edge of the end-scraper will be lateral and the edge of the side-scraper will be either proximal or distal. Or in short: the edge of an end-scraper is not necessarily at the distal or proximal end, and the edge of a side-scraper is not necessarily at one of the two lateral sides). A long, straight, relatively acute scraper-edge was manufactured on a broad distal edge. The right lateral side has been fully blunted by inverse retouch. Though the flat retouch of the left lateral side has some similarity to platform-edge trimming, it is most likely that its function was to blunt this edge, and that this modification was carried out after detachment of the flake, rather than before. Cist Grave 1, in cist on Layer 5, sealed by Layer 4.

Proximal fragment of a secondary bipolar flake SF 2, with use-wear, fine- to medium-grained light olive-green flint (24 x 25 x 5mm). The piece has had minute flakes detached along its right lateral side, which may be sporadic blunting or use-wear. Fine damage to the distal break facet may be post-depositional, but is most likely use-wear from scraping or shaving. Possibly an expedient tool (ie an informal implement for ad hoc tasks; cf Binford 1979). Cist Grave 1, in cist on Layer 5, sealed by Layer 4.

Thin medial fragment of tertiary flake SF 3 with retouch or use-wear, fine-grained cream-coloured flint (22 x 14 x 2mm). This piece has had not only its two ends broken off, but also parts of its left lateral side. It has, along its right lateral side near the proximal break, a flat edge-modification, which may be either use-wear from cutting activities or the surviving remains of a scale-flaked edge. The latter would define the piece as the fragment of a scale-flaked knife (definition according to Healy 1996, 76). By cist Grave 1, in disturbed topsoil.

Side-scraper on broad primary bipolar flake SF 11, fine-grained orange flint (22 x 24 x 8mm). The working-edge is convex and steep, and overhanging parts suggest that the scraper-edge has been used. Grave 1. Cist Layer 4, sieved soil in vicinity of jaw.

Medial-distal fragment of indeterminate primary flake SF 12, fine-grained light-brown flint (21 x 14 x 4mm). Grave 5. Layer 24, sieved soil, surrounding cremation.

Primary indeterminate piece, superficially vitrified flint of unknown type SF 13 (25 x 16 x 12mm). A fine grained, almost dusty deposit has been encapsulated into the superficial ‘glaze’ of the piece. A similar deposit on SF 14.

Knowe, Holm, Orkney, has one flat face and one face with traces of a midrib (Piggott 1948).

Although the sex of the individual in Grave 5 could not be determined, it may well have been male, since razors appear to be a male-associated grave good (Brindley, 2001; Kavanagh, 1991). The function of razors has traditionally been assumed to be for removing body hair, and the discovery of shaved facial hair in an urn burial at Winterslow, in Wiltshire (formerly claimed to be from eyebrows) appears to support this view, while also suggesting that shaving was part of funerary rituals (Kavanagh 1991). That shaving had probably been an everyday practice—rather than something carried out exclusively as part of funerary rites— is suggested by the worn condition of many razors, as noted above.

Razors of this type have most commonly been associated with Cordoned Urns, and in Ireland, comparable examples have been radiocarbon dated (from associated cremated bone or charcoal of short-lived species) to between c 1700 and c 1500 BC (Brindley 2001, 149–50; Brindley 2007, 291). No Scottish example has yet been directly dated, but the currency of Cordoned Urns in Scotland has recently been established as falling within the period c 1850–1500 BC (see Sheridan, this publication). In this regard it is noteworthy that the cremation deposit associated with the Ethiebeaton razor had been sealed (by a stone slab) directly below cremation Grave 4, which was associated with a Collared Urn (SF 9). Razors are rarely found in association with Collared Urns, raising questions about the possible social and/or chronological inter-relationships of these two burial deposits.

To summarise, the Ethiebeaton razor fragment invites comparison with a type of bronze blade usually found in burials in Britain and Ireland. A date for its deposition towards the end of the Early Bronze Age, probably between 1700 and 1500 BC by analogy with dated Irish examples, seems likely. The practice of burying old and worn razors finds an echo in earlier Bronze Age funerary practices, as recently demonstrated by Woodward et al (2005).

Another metal object

Issues of presence and absence also have a bearing on the green staining present on the cremated remains associated with the Collared/Cordoned Urn in Grave 3 (SF 8). This indication of the probable former presence of a small copper or copper alloy artefact provides a salutary reminder of the vagaries of survival of small personal artefacts—and the potential for loss of such evidence, not just as a result of factors contemporary with the burial process but also due to recovery and recording biases following discovery.

The lithics

Torben Bjarke Ballin

Eight lithic artefacts were recovered from the site—four flints from the surviving cist Grave 1 or its surroundings
reacted to hydrochloric acid, suggesting that the substance may be a mixture of bone-ash and soil. The piece has almost certainly been deposited with a deceased person, after having been exposed to high temperatures on the funeral pyre (cf Ballin forthcoming). Grave 3. Excavated with cremation from urn SF8 in the laboratory.

Tertiary hard-hammer flake, superficially heavily vitrified flint of unknown type SF 14 (15 x 24 x 8 mm). A fine-grained, almost dusty deposit has been encapsulated into the superficial ‘glaze’ of the piece. The deposit reacted to hydrochloric acid, suggesting that the substance may be a mixture of bone-ash and soil. The piece has almost certainly been deposited with a deceased person, after having been exposed to high temperatures on the funeral pyre (cf Ballin forthcoming). Grave 3. Excavated with cremation from urn SF8 in the laboratory.

Primary flake or indeterminate piece SF15, white saccharoidal quartz (85 x 41 x 14mm). The piece has been burnt and is partially discoloured (light yellow-brown). It is not possible to determine whether the piece was originally a relatively thin flake, or whether it is a thin ‘sheet’, detached as a consequence of the exposure to fire. In a number of places the piece has a deposit of the same type as that of SF 13 and 14 indicating that the artefact may have been roasted on a funeral pyre. Grave 3. Excavated with cremation from urn SF8 in the laboratory.

SF 1 and 2 from Grave 1 both have a slight sheen or gloss, most probably from deposition in a sandy matrix (Keely 1980; Donahue and Burroni 2004), whereas the other unburnt flints appear fresh. The two flint artefacts from Grave 3 (SF 13, 14) are both heavily burnt, as is the small collection’s only quartz artefact (SF 15), also from Grave 3. The severe vitrification (superficial melting or ‘glazing’) of the flints from Grave 3 is characteristic of flints from cremations, that is, pieces which followed the deceased onto the funeral pyre (cf Ballin forthcoming), where they were exposed to high temperatures usually not experienced in connection with domestic fire places. The abraded cortex of SF 2, 11, 12, 13 and 15 suggests that probably all the lithic raw material, flint as well as quartz, was procured from pebble sources.

Discussion

The eight lithic artefacts – seven in flint and one in quartz – are all fairly simple and expedient objects. The fact that they were produced in a rather unsystematic fashion, combined with their association with Beaker (Grave 2), Food Vessel (Grave 1), Collared Urn (Grave 4) and Collared/Cordoned urn (Grave 3) pottery suggests an Early Bronze Age date. Their recovery in or near Early Bronze Age burials indicates that they are either resi-dual pieces from earlier Bronze Age activity in the area, or quite ‘poor’ accessories for the after-life.

The relatively simplistic execution of the pieces does not exclude the possibility of their being burial goods, as similar pieces are frequently found in Scottish graves from the Early Bronze Age period. ‘Nice’, more prestigious pieces do occur, such as scale-flaked, plano-convex or foliate knives, or arrowheads (eg Ritchie and Shepherd 1973; Ballin forthcoming), but the fact that plain unmodified lithics were deposited with the dead during the Scottish Early Bronze Age is demonstrated by the heavily vitrified state of many of these pieces (basically, superficial melting, or ‘glazing’).

This clearly demonstrates that simple flakes accompanied the dead onto the funeral pyre, and that the status of these particular artefacts was that of burial goods (eg Skilmalfilly cremation cemetery, Aberdeenshire; Ballin forthcoming). SF 13 and 14 are both vitrified flint artefacts, and some surface points of SF 14 have melted completely, and now exhibit a clear glassy exterior. In addition, SF13–15 have a mixture of bone-ash and soil either adhering to surfaces, or melted into the now glassy exterior. It is suggested, as a standard, to expose similar artefacts to a test by hydrochloric acid, as this will reveal (by weak fizzing) whether the deposits adhering to them is bone-ash, and therefore from a funeral pyre. Experiments with prehistoric cremation at the Archaeological Research Centre at Lejre, Denmark (Henriksen 1991), demonstrated that visible amounts of burnt, pulverised bone blew off the pyre during the cremation. However, the positive acid test carried out on SF 13 and 14 indicates that some bone-ash remained in the resulting mixture of human remains, soil, charcoal, and artefacts, and that it is now adhering to the vitrified pieces.

One way of interpreting these simpler accompanying pieces is as symbols, rather than as objects per se. A scenario is suggested by the well-documented development of burial customs through the Danish Bronze Age. Initially, the deceased was buried with his or her full equipment, which might include a sword, but later the complete weapon was replaced by miniature swords or fragments of swords (cf Broholm 1946; 1949; Brøndsted 1958). It must be assumed that the miniature models or fragments represented complete swords (the Romans would refer to this practice as pars pro toto). In one case (Stensgaard by Svanninge, Funen), actual combs were replaced by virtual combs scratched into the shoulder of an urn (Brøndsted 1958, 198). Following this train of thought, one might imagine that the simpler flint objects in Scottish Early Bronze Age burials replaced better pieces or even full assemblages.

The human remains

Clare Lamb

The human remains from Ethiebeaton consisted of five separate burials, each containing one individual. Graves 1 and 2 were inhumations and Graves 3, 4 and 5 were cremations. Much of the skeletal material present was in poor general condition. The majority of the skeletal elements were fragmentary in nature and very fragile. Dental elements were present but were also in poor condition.
Due to the poor preservation of the skeletal and dental material found it is difficult to assign an age or sex to the individuals present in Graves 2, 4 and 5. However, the dental remains from Grave 1 appear to indicate that this individual was a young adult between 17 and 25 years of age at death. The skeletal remains from Grave 3 indicate that this was a female individual, though it is possible that the remains represent a young lightly-built adult male. No sub-adult or child skeletal elements were present in the samples.

In this report the burials are described as Graves 1 to 5. The full report and skeletal elements sheets for each burial are in the site archive.

Grave 1

Grave 1 was a cist which contained an inhumation that comprised mainly skull fragments and small parts of other skeletal elements. Axial, appendicular and dental fragments were identified.

One individual was present, mostly represented by fragmentary skull and dental remains. It was not possible to assign a sex to the individual but using the dental remains it was possible to estimate the age of the individual to between 17 and 25 years of age at the time of death.

Grave 2

Grave 2 was the remains of a destroyed cist inhumation. Very little skeletal material was recovered. However some axial, appendicular and dental remains were present.

No age or sex determination was possible for this individual, who was mostly represented by small skeletal fragments and damaged dental remains. The skeletal material was from an adult individual.

Grave 3

Grave 3 was a cremation that was removed from site within its original pot. One individual was represented by the skeletal elements.

The cremated remains were from one individual and contained more material than the other cremations from this site. Although the skeletal remains were in a better state of preservation than the other samples in this report the remains were still very fragmentary. Due to the general poor state of preservation of the dental remains it is not possible to differentiate satisfactorily between pre- and post-mortem wear on the occlusal surfaces of the teeth. It is therefore not possible to estimate the age of this individual. However, the mastoid process of the skull was intact and appears to show a more gracile type suggesting the individual is either an adult female or a young adult male.

Also included in this burial was a small sample showing possible copper staining. This comprised of fragments from the right proximal ulna, another small fragment of either the radius or ulna and a small piece of phalange. This suggests that the copper object was placed in contact with the right upper limb of the individual.

Grave 4

Grave 4 was a cremation which contained many small fragments, mostly from the axial skeleton, and some dental remains.

This burial appeared to be one individual whose remains consisted largely of skull fragments and some poorly preserved dental remains. No conclusions as to the age or sex of the individual are possible at this time, except that the individual was an adult at the time of death.

Grave 5

This cremated burial consisted of numerous small fragments of both the axial and appendicular skeleton, though many of the fragments were too small to positively attribute them to any individual bone.

The burial comprises the remains of one adult individual. The poor state of preservation and the very fragmentary nature of the remains make it very difficult to assess the age or the sex of the individual present.

Discussion

This group of graves appears to be the remnant of one of the many Early Bronze Age burial sites in Angus that were partially or totally destroyed in the 19th century (Coutts, 1970, 7–16; Coutts 1963). According to the description of the site in the Ordnance Survey Name Book 1839, ‘Great numbers of stone coffins and human bones have been dug up in a slightly elevated knoll from time to time, all within an area c 1/2 acre.’ (Original Name Books of the Ordnance Survey, No 70, 39). Jervise (1857, 446–7) also records that ‘Stone coffins have been got a some little distance from the site of this old chapel [Chapel Dockie, Ethiebeaton] and the present proprietor says that between 1830–35, a number of ancient coffins, with human bones, were got upon a small hill’. Both of these accounts suggest that there may originally have been more stone lined cists than the two surviving examples. Indeed it would appear that the cist of Grave 2 may have been discovered and almost fully destroyed in the 19th century.

The evaluation trenches had indicated that there had been considerable 19th-century stripping of soil from the area near the graves, with apparent levelling and dumping to the NW. It may be suggested that this effectively was the removal of the knoll referred to in the Ordnance Survey Name Book in 1839. There is no indication as to whether this was a purely natural knoll or a raised mound. The position in the landscape was near the crest of a slope down towards a burn, overlooked by higher ground. A Bronze Age cairn at Cairn Greg, Linlathen, c 2km to the W, was similarly sited on rising ground with wide views. On excavation in 1834
this cairn was found to have a central cist containing a riveted dagger and a Beaker (Stuart 1867; Coutts 1971, 46, no 80, pl 1; Clarke 1970, vol 2, 513, no 1520 and 406, fig 1018); no other burials were recorded in the cairn but there was a reference to many other stone cists having been found in the fields nearby (Stuart 1867, 100).

The evidence of the pottery chronology (Sheridan, above) indicates that the cist with Beaker pottery (Grave 2) and the stray Beaker sherds from a destroyed grave (Grave 1a: SF 4), represent the earliest burials on the site dating to c 2300–2100/2000 BC. The cist with a Food Vessel (Grave 1) was secondary, dating to c 2100/2000 – c 1750 BC and the cremations in urns (Graves 3, 4 and 5) were later additions dating to c 2000–1500 BC, possibly on the periphery of the mound or knoll mentioned in the 19th-century accounts (Illus 2). It is noteworthy that the level of the floor of the secondary cist (Grave 1) was 760mm below the level of the floor of the primary cist (Grave 2), perhaps supporting the argument that it was added in at the lower periphery of a mound. A similar cairn at Gilchorn, Inverkeilor (Coutts 1970), c 10km to the NW, and excavated in the 19th century, is reported to have had a central cist and five urns at the periphery, two containing cremations.

The bones in the secondary cist, Grave 1, have been identified (Lamb, above) as the remains of an adult, aged 17–25, of indeterminate sex. The position of the bone fragments suggests the body had been placed in the usual crouched position on its right side, with the head to the N end of the cist. The position of the jaw fragment to W of the other skull fragments suggests the body had been placed facing W. On analogy with the orientation of some Beaker graves in NE Scotland and N England (Shepherd 1989), this might suggest that the body was that of a young woman. This agrees with Cowie’s suggestion (above) that awls are more common in female graves.

In light of the very disturbed nature of the site it is perhaps not surprising that there was no direct evidence of the cremation graves having been visibly marked. However, Grave 5, the cremation without an urn did appear to be a separate, earlier burial, covered by a layer of small stones before the burial of the Grave 4 urn cremation. If this was the case, it would seem likely that the earlier burial had been marked by a post or stone. Marking of Early Bronze Age graves has been observed on a number of recent sites such as Skilmalfilly, Aberdeenshire (Johnson 2004, Johnson and Cameron forthcoming), Balneaves, Angus (Russell-White 1992) and Holly Road, Leven, Fife (Lewis and Terry 2004, 50).

The site, although significantly disturbed in the 19th century, gives evidence of burial over a considerable period in the Bronze Age and emphasises the apparent density of occupation in the area at the time. It is also perhaps a cautionary reminder of the difficulty of identifying such small disturbed sites during normal pre-development evaluation.

Location of finds

The finds and skeletal material have been allocated, through the Treasure Trove system, to Angus Council Museum Service.

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**Abstract**

*During development work at Ethiebeaton quarry,*

*Monifieth, Angus, a Bronze Age cist was discovered. Subsequent excavation revealed that two cists and three cremations survived from a cemetery that had been largely destroyed in the early 19th century.*

**Keywords**

awl  
beaker  
Bronze Age  
cist  
food Vessel  
razor  
urn

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