

THE DORNOCH NURSERY CIST

SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q What is it?

A It is a stone coffin, in which was put a crouched skeleton and things it used in everyday life and things suitable to accompany it in the afterlife.

Q How old is it?

A It is probably about 4500 years old

Q Who were the people who made the burial?

A Archaeologists call them the Beaker people, because of the fine pottery beakers found with their skeletons in cists. They seem to have come from the Netherlands and to have mixed with the stone age inhabitants of Scotland. Beaker people are found all over Europe, and in every European country they had their own particular customs and traditions. In Iberia they built forts and were metalworkers. Scotland is not so rich in evidence of their ways. Archaeologists have found a few settlements, mostly on coastal sites, and a few simple oval houses. But they are known mostly from their burials.

Q Is this burial unusual?

A Yes. It is, judging by the shape and decoration of the beaker, very early for such a rich burial. Most rich burials are later.

Q Who was buried?

A The person buried was an archer. He was small, and study of his bones may show he was young, for Beaker people were in general not much smaller than we are today. Presumably he came from a rich family.

Q How did he die?

A We do not know. His bones were poorly preserved, but it is just possible we may be able to tell how he died when they are studied.

Q Are there other burials nearby?

A It is quite likely. We know of a few small cemeteries of Beaker people in Scotland. But we also know of a lot of isolated burials.

Q Where could we expect to find settlements near Dornoch?

A The best chance is in eroding sand dunes, where scraps of pottery like those in the photograph but smaller may be found in sand scrapes.

Q Who should be told if another burial or evidence of a settlement is found?

A You can tell the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments at 17 Atholl Crescent, Edinburgh. They arrange excavations and try to preserve archaeological sites. Or you can tell Inverness Museum, at Castle Wynd, Inverness. They are the nearest Museum with full time staff who can help preserve the objects. You could get in touch with the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland at Queen Street, Edinburgh.

P J ASHMORE
INSPECTORATE OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS
17 ATHOLL CRESCENT
EDINBURGH (031) 229 9321