

Bronze Age skeleton found wrapped in sheepskin



The Bronze Age cist containing the skeleton of a female.

WHEN a prehistoric burial site was accidentally discovered during the construction of a septic tank at Spinningdale, GUARD Archaeology were called out to investigate and made an extraordinary find – a Bronze Age burial cist containing a skeleton.

The bones, discovered in September 2011, were next to the remains of a sheepskin that may have been wrapped around the body.

Through Historic Scotland's Human Remains Call-Off Contract, the results of this investigation have only now been published by Archaeology Reports Online, a free internet journal.

The team, led by Iraia Arabaolaza, from GUARD Archaeology, were commissioned to excavate and analyse a stone cist, built within a substantial pit, containing the remains of a crouched inhumation of a middle-aged woman (35-50 years) with signs of spinal joint disease. A radiocarbon date of 2051-1911 BC and 2151-2018 BC was obtained from a bone and charcoal fragments respectively, placing the cist in the early Bronze Age period.

A tripartite food vessel urn, of Early Bronze Age date, was placed to the west of her skull, but what made this burial a particularly extraordinary site was the discovery of sheepskin and wool recovered from under the skeletal remains.

"The sheepskin discovered around the left arm of the body is the first sample of this kind in Scotland and is the first known example discovered from a Bronze Age burial in Britain," said Iraia Arabaolaza.

"There have been two other samples of Bronze Age wool found in the British Isles, but no other examples of potential sheepskin are known.

"Findings of hide or fur are few and far between in Britain but are often associated with 'rich burials' of adult inhumations."

The radiocarbon dating of the cist corresponds with the date of the food vessel urn buried with the body.

The vessel found here contained carbonised material of non-botanical origin, unidentified cremated bone and a fragment of a small ring. These were probably placed there to assist the individual's journey into the next world and indicate belief in the afterlife, which appears to have been a concept only adopted in Scotland during the Early Bronze Age.

The full results of this research, ARO5: Spinning the yarn: a cist at Keas Cottage, Spinningdale, is now available to download from the Archaeology Reports Online (ARO) website - www.archaeologyreportsonline.com