

# KILMAGADWOOD:

## The Story of an Early Bronze Age Cemetery



Ray Cathart excavation an urn, January 2013 © Derek Hall

- In 2017 and 2018 more archaeological fieldwork was carried out at Kilmagadwood to see whether there were any more graves. A geophysical survey was carried out by Oliver O'Grady as part of the *Our Portmoak Project* and this suggested that there might indeed be graves, and possibly one or two prehistoric round houses nearby.
- A group of local volunteers, led by AOC Archaeology's Rob Engl, carried out fieldwalking over the survey area and dug several test pits. No more Early Bronze Age graves were found, however, but a range of objects dating from the Neolithic to the recent past were discovered.
- The Kilmagadwood cemetery is one of the largest Early Bronze Age cemeteries found in Scotland, making it very important. The urns, the cremated remains and the objects still have a lot to tell us about the people that lived by Loch Leven in the Early Bronze Age. Perhaps with more research and analysis, more of their fascinating story can be revealed.

This leaflet was written by Alison Sheridan, Derek Hall and Aida Romera and produced with grant assistance from Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust.



## INITIAL DISCOVERY: HORSE FINDS URN!

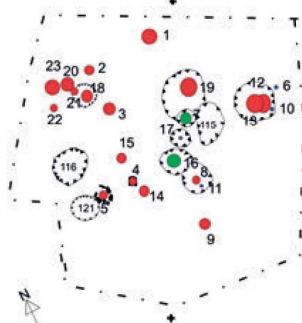
In 1946, a horse ploughing a field near the Scotlandwell to Kinnesswood road sank its hoof into a hollow and through the base of an upturned urn containing cremated human remains. Little did people know then that the urn was part of a large, 4000 year old Early Bronze Age cemetery.



Urn found in 1946  
© National Museums  
Scotland

## 2012/13: MORE SURPRISES

66 years later, archaeologist Derek Hall was working in the south eastern part of the field in response to a planning proposal to build two new houses. Digging in wintry conditions, Derek was astonished to find 23 more cinerary urns plus three bone deposits that may have been buried in bags. There was also a charcoal-rich area where a pyre for cremating a body might have been built. All of this in an area just 20 metres square!



Cemetery plan. Green dots: upright urns. Red dots: upside-down urns. © Derek Hall

## A COMMUNITY'S CEMETERY

The discoveries suggest that this was a cemetery for an Early Bronze Age community, used over several generations. Radiocarbon dating of one of the last urns to be buried (No. 18) tells us that the cemetery was in use until around 1,650 BC while the urn discovered by the horse in 1946 was much older, dating to 1,950 BC.

The urns were made specially for burial. Once the cremated remains had been gathered up and placed in them, a piece of animal skin was fixed over the open mouth, to prevent the contents from spilling out.

Most of the urns were buried upside-down. The pits dug to receive them were at varying depths. The urns nearest the surface had been damaged by ploughing. Some had lost their bases, while three were almost completely destroyed, surviving just as a few sherds.



Left: Urn 15, lacking its base. Right: Urn 16, buried upright.  
© Derek Hall





Urn 4



Urn 5



Urn 8



Urn 3



Urn 12



Urn 20



Urn 7



Urn 7 in the lab.



Urn 9



Urn being wrapped for lifting.



Urn 7 in the lab.

Images © Derek Hall

- Burnt objects that had been on or with the body when it was cremated were found in seven of the urns. Research into these objects by Alison Sheridan has shown that some of them would have been rare and precious status symbols in the Early Bronze Age.

Burnt faience bead  
© Alison Sheridan

- Fragments of one or two tubular beads made of sheet bronze were found with a young adult, possibly a woman, and are a very rare find. They could have been worn as part of a necklace or sewn onto clothing, echoing Continental fashions.

Burnt bronze bead  
© Alison SheridanBurnt bronze razor, Urn 15,  
© Alison Sheridan

- Bronze razors found in two urns suggest that men took pride in their clean-shaven appearance. But why bury a razor? Perhaps the corpse was shaved in preparation for the cremation.

- Other, more modest, objects were also found such as this bone toggle that would have fastened the shroud or clothes of a child aged 3-6 years old.

Burnt bone toggle, Urn 7,  
© Alison Sheridan

## BONE DETECTIVE WORK

- During the excavation, the urns were carefully lifted with the cremated remains still inside, and stored until money could be found to study who and what was inside. The contents were finally excavated by a team of osteology students from Edinburgh University in 2016 at the National Museums Collection Centre in Granton.

- The human remains were studied and documented by osteologist Aida Romera.

Urn 3 during excavation.  
© Kathleen McSweeneyOsteologist Aida Romera.  
© Aida RomeraEdinburgh University osteology students excavating the urns in 2016.  
© Alison Sheridan

## THE PEOPLE IN THE CEMETERY

- In all, the remains of 29 people were found, of both sexes and all ages. These included an unborn baby with a woman aged around 25 who had probably died in childbirth.

- Most urns contained the remains of just one person but three (plus one of the possible 'bag' deposits) contained more than one. The woman with the foetus was also accompanied by a child aged 7-10 years old.

Large Urn 23, 340 mm tall,  
containing a woman, a foetus  
and a child aged 7-10.  
© Derek Hall

- The amount of bone found varied, with one urn holding just a few scraps and a lump of clayey soil that made up the weight...Curious!

Signs of malnutrition on adult bone, Urn 19.  
© Aida Romera

- Signs of illness were found in the bones, including evidence of malnutrition (affecting both children and adults) and arthritis (in older people).

Unburnt human hair, Urn 14.  
© Alison Sheridan

- The bones were thoroughly burnt but in one urn, a tiny bit of hair had survived, unburnt!

Small Urn 22, 150 mm tall,  
containing infant 6 months old,  
buried beside Urn 23.  
© Derek Hall

- Aida's work has revealed that the size of the urn related to the age of the dead person inside it: the smaller urns contained children's remains.