



Galloway Glens 'Can You Dig It' Community

Archaeology project – Technical notes.

#3: Park of Tongland Bronze Age cremation cemetery – A complex prehistoric site with unusual pottery...

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Located west of the A711 and northwest of Tongland Park, Tongland Cemetery and standing stones occupies a small terrace overlooking the River Dee. The site's location can be characterised as an undulating plateau which features a number of linear, north-south running rocky outcrops. The land is currently used as pasture.

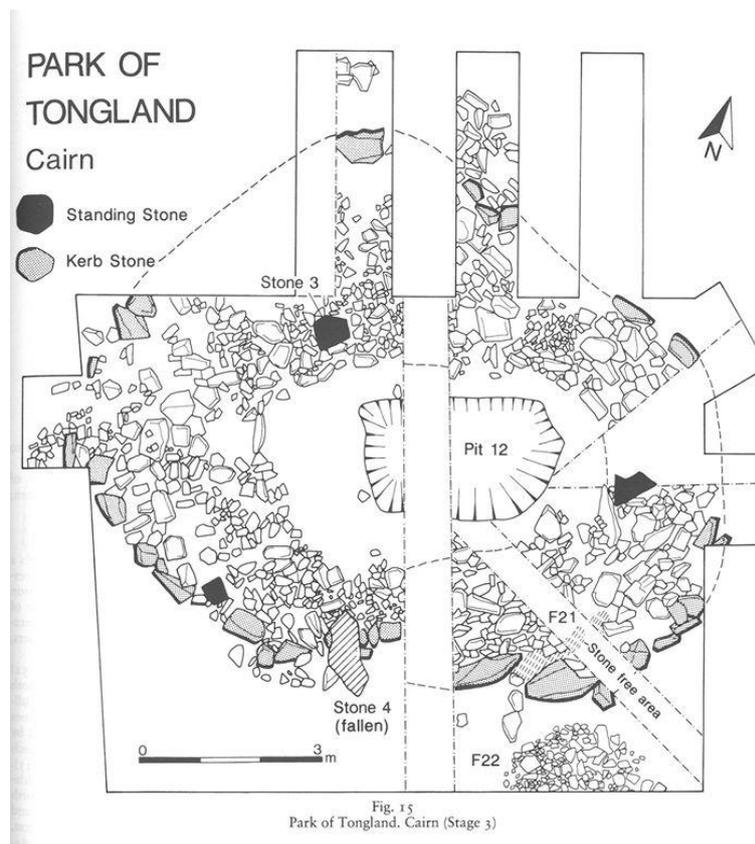
Its History

The site was first interpreted as a stone circle by [Coles](#) in 1895, who noted on his plan a potential for the existence of an outer circle made up of much smaller stones. The outer circle was later dismissed by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland in 1914, on the basis

that the smaller stones could not be absolutely associated with the standing stones. It was not until 1971 that Aubrey Burl classified the site as a 'four poster' stone circle.

The Excavation

The excavation by McCullagh of [Tongland](#) cemetery took place in 1987. The excavation area incorporated all three of the standing stones which made up the possible outer ring of stones first noted by Coles. It was deemed necessary at the time to undertake a full excavation, as there had already been considerable disturbance to the site.



Plan from McCullagh excavations

The excavation indicated that there were four sequential phases of activity. The first two phases were the most distinct, with the first phase consisting of the excavation of a series of burial pits and the erection of two standing stones. One of the standing stones had fallen before the second phase, which involved

the construction of a cairn and the erection of two further standing stones. It should be noted that at no point were there more than three stones standing upright at any one time at Tongland.

Radiocarbon dates recovered from the site supported the argument that the site was sequential, as opposed to multi-phase, as the dates were very close together. The burial rite exclusively involved cremation, with the large quantities of charcoal suggesting that these cremations would have taken place within the immediate surroundings of the site. The incomplete nature of the funerary deposits suggests that only a token deposit of bone from the cremated body was necessary to complete the funerary rite.

The Finds

The 1987 excavation unearthed a significant addition to the known Bronze Age pottery corpus from the south west of Scotland with the discovery of two collared urns and an accessory vessel. The materials used to manufacture them came from the local area, and it was suggested that their poor quality and mediocre character meant they may have been made by the same individual.

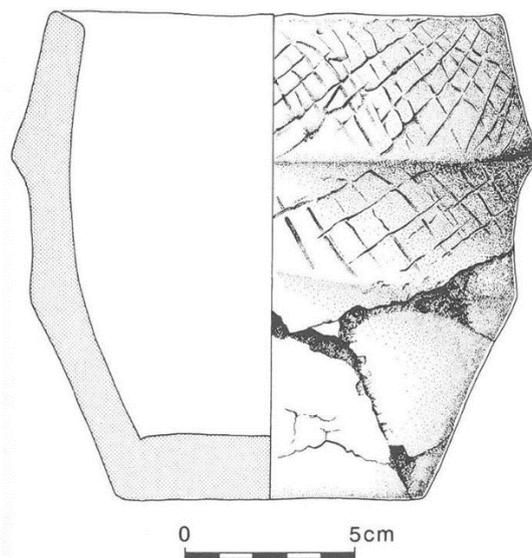


Fig. 17
Park of Tongland. Decorated Collared Urn

The lattice decorated collared urn

One of the funerary urns exhibited a repeated lattice pattern which had been incised into the surface of the clay before firing. This was unusual; while the pattern itself is not rare, it tends to be made by pressing a twisted cord into the clay rather than cutting into it.

The morphology and decorative pattern of the two collared urns meant that they were interpreted as later in the sequence: an estimated date age range of c.1450 – 1250 BC was attributed to these objects on typological grounds, but unfortunately no radiocarbon dates were recovered which could support this.

Its Current Status

The excavations at Tongland Cemetery provided us with a rare excavated example of a Bronze Age cremation cemetery, giving us a glimpse into the funerary rites and traditions in the southwest of Scotland at this time. The work involved during the excavation and post-excavation phases, and the site's subsequent publication, was part funded by Historic Scotland.



The access route to the stones is signposted

Three of the four standing stones can still be seen at the site today. It is still accessible through the farm via a route signposted on a barn as you approach. The site can be accessed using gate which respects the existing field boundary. No climbing is required.

This archaeological site is protected as a [Scheduled Monument](#) and must not be disturbed.

Further Reading

Burl, A. (1976) *The stone circles of the British Isles*. London and New Haven

Coles, F R. (1895) 'The stone circles of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquarians of Scotland*, vol. 29

McCullagh, R. P. J. (1992). The Excavation of the Bronze Age Cemetery and Standing Stones at Park of Tongland, Kirkcudbright Dumfries and Galloway, *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, vol 58

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