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The Lands of Ancient Lothian

Interpreting the Archaeology of the A1

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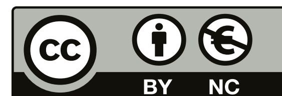

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Chapter 11

Lothian lives in the long term

OLIVIA LELONG

The preceding three chapters have explored how the character of the archaeological evidence for life in prehistoric Lothian varies dramatically over the roughly 8,000 years it spans, from the late ninth millennium BC to the early first millennium AD. Variations in the character of the evidence correspond to broad and significant changes in the social groups that people formed, their subsistence strategies, the kinds of objects they made and structures they built, the ways they treated the dead and the beliefs they held about the social and spiritual worlds they inhabited. In spite of these changes, the long view through time that we glimpse through the A1 and other sites shows that there were also common concerns or themes through the millennia, shared by disparate generations and woven like threads into varying patterns in the tapestries of their lives. This chapter explores both the broad changes and some of these common themes.

The changing character of Lothian life

From the evidence reviewed in the preceding chapters, the texture of life at different periods in the Lothians emerges. The early post-Holocene landscape was probably home to small, fairly mobile communities, who knew how to find foods in its varied environment – from fish, shellfish and seabirds on the coastal flats along the Firth of Forth to hoofed game, nuts and fruits on the forested uplands, where early birch woodlands gradually filled out with hazel, oak and elm (Tipping 1994; 1997a). The stone tools they made and used and the places in which we find them point both to varied gathering practices and to this mobility (see Chapter 8). Overall, the evidence for this long period suggests there were small communities that existed within a loose social structure; they were skilled in finding food in its natural state and probably exploited a wide range of locales and environments in their efforts to thrive.

Over time, different groups may have established rights to certain territories, resources or routes across the land. They may have respected or fought over social territories, which were marked by natural boundaries, oral traditions or associations, or perhaps their movements were utterly fluid. The discovery of buildings like the one at East Barns (Gooder 2003) suggests that some formed commitments to certain places that lasted for generations, while light structures like those that left traces at Cramond (Lawson and Saville forthcoming) would have housed people at seasonal camps (see Chapter 8). As groups moved about, certain places – favourite hunting grounds, for example, or hilltops where people met for social or religious purposes – accrued more importance. The early meanings attached to some of these places, such as Blackshouse Burn in Lanarkshire (Lelong and Pollard 1998a), may have germinated the seeds of ceremonial monuments in following millennia.

With the advent of the fourth millennium BC, the character of life changed considerably. There was a significant burst in innovation, with the introduction of animal and plant husbandry, knowledge of pottery production and new kinds of stone tools. The advent of agriculture meant that communities were intervening with their physical surroundings in unprecedented ways: digging into the earth to coax food out of it, and managing animals for food and raw materials rather than hunting them in their natural environment. While these changes are likely to have occurred piecemeal over a long period of time, they still marked a dramatic shift in how communities lived. Around the same time, strong evidence emerges for changes in social structure and the expression of belief.

A standardised architectural vocabulary, evident at many sites through the remains of massive timber halls, mortuary structures and mortuary enclosures like those at Pencraig Hill and Eweford West (see Chapter 2), hints at a new degree of social conformity and cohesion. There is also evidence for high respect for convention in other contemporary practices, such as the deposition of pottery, pitchstone and stone tools in pits and the construction of large ceremonial structures such as cursus monuments

and long cairns (see Chapter 8). The adoption of more explicit (or at least more archaeologically visible) methods of disposing of the dead suggest a rising concern with ancestors or the spirit world. This, along with the new ways in which people were expressing the significance of certain places by building monuments, may have arisen through greater involvement with particular places through farming and greater concern over the long-term success of farming projects. In a period of such radical, albeit probably piecemeal change in lifestyle and subsistence strategies, people may have felt the need to cling to conventional beliefs and communal efforts that would ensure survival.

The late fourth millennium BC onward seems to have seen the dissolution of this trend toward conformity. Large communal buildings gave way to much smaller, lighter, more temporary ones, suggesting that people were congregating in smaller groups and spending shorter periods in particular places. This could be partly related to changes in subsistence, as communities shifted more of their dependence onto herds, which regularly required fresh pasture. The occurrence of rock art on the uplands, and as portable pieces on the lowlands, further hints at increasing mobility. The continued construction of large ceremonial monuments like the pit alignments at Eweford East (Chapter 3) or enclosures centred on water, like those at Meldon Bridge (Speak and Burgess 1998) and Blackshouse Burn (Lelong and Pollard 1998a), may have been closely linked to the seasonal gathering and movement of animals; such events would have been important social occasions as well as economic ones. The diverse ways in which the dead were treated, ranging from crouched inhumation in cists to cremation deposits, show a wide range of attitudes toward the individual body and hint at the variety of social purposes these treatments served (see Chapter 9). By the second millennium BC, there is evidence for more permanent settlement, certainly on the uplands (this apparent bias could be due to better survival there), combining arable and pastoral agriculture.

By the late second millennium BC, it is clear that certain places in southern Scotland, such as Traprain Law, were considered especially important places, although not necessarily for settlement. They may have loomed large in the symbolic landscape to numerous small communities living around them, who came together under some sense of shared identity or common beliefs on these hilltops (see Chapter 10).

The mid first millennium BC saw another dramatic shift in how communities lived in the Lothians, as they began building enclosures around their settlements. These ranged in scale from the small homestead at Biel Water to the substantial ditched enclosure at Eweford Cottages (see Chapter 6) to the massive, multi-ditched village at Broxmouth (Hill 1982b). This coincided broadly with other phenomena that carried implications for social change: large-scale woodland clearance from 300–400 BC (Tipping 1994; see text box 1.1), possibly coupled with more intensive and large-scale farming, evident through pit alignments, and the appearance of new forms of material culture such as rotary querns and highly ornamental metalwork (Armit and Ralston 1997, 169). The evidence points to a new surge in social cohesion, perhaps as groups came together for security, to shore up shared identities and to stake claim to larger tracts of agricultural land.

In the closing years of the first millennium BC, Lothian society began to change again. In many cases its members neglected or actively erased the boundaries around their settlements, and during subsequent centuries they abandoned many settlements altogether. The erasing of enclosure may have prefigured the dissolution of notions of community that had been sustained over hundreds of years (see Chapter 10). The most concentrated evidence for local settlement during the early centuries AD is on Traprain Law. It may be that, as individual communities abandoned their villages and farmsteads, they coalesced in much larger settlements, choosing to subsume their various identities under larger ones like the Law. Pressure to coallesce socially in this fashion may have come from an increasing awareness of an even larger social group, the Roman imperial army. Increasingly complex social organisation may have grown in tandem with awareness of this other, much more powerful group. This may have permitted the rise of leaders who would draw together many smaller communities under a larger sense of identity, the group recorded by the Romans as the 'Votadini'. With the arrival, more than five centuries later, of Anglian settlers in Lothian and its absorption into the Northumbrian kingdom in the seventh century AD, society's make-up and organisation may have changed again (Maddicott 2000), although that lies beyond the chronological scope of this volume (but see text box 11.3).

Threads through time

While the character of everyday practice, social organisation and settlement pattern in Lothian's communities changed considerably over 9,000 years of prehistory, there are also certain themes that appear again and again in the evidence for those millennia. These themes were worked like threads into the varying patterns of different periods, carrying society forward, linking distant generations through common concerns. From the A1 sites, in particular, there is evidence that certain practices and kinds of material worked as vehicles for

social memory.

Social or collective memory is literally the way that societies remember and pass on cultural knowledge from one generation to another (Connerton 1989). The texture of that memory informs a society's views of itself and the world it inhabits. It stems from and sustains practical knowledge about the appropriate way of doing things (for example, how and where to grind grain or make pottery; the right way to butcher meat, and who is allowed to consume what joints). These aspects of practical knowledge may be wrapped up in certain cultural values and beliefs (for example, grain is ground in a particular hut that faces south towards the summer sun that ripens the crop; the shoulder joints of pigs are given to the elders as a mark of respect). The explanations for this practical knowledge can appear self-evident and remain unquestioned as they are passed from one generation to another, as can the values and beliefs underpinning them. At other times, they might be challenged due to altered circumstances, catastrophic conditions or new ideas.

Social memory and cultural knowledge can be passed on through 'incorporating practices' (Connerton 1989), such as bodily actions, particular rules of etiquette, ceremonies and rituals in which people physically perform the information they are transmitting. In non-literate societies, this is the main means of sustaining social memory. It can take place through the developmental cycles of individuals and households, and through the rites of passage that mark their turning. It can also take place as societies continue certain practices that reproduce and sustain the beliefs and values that define them; acts repeated over a long period of time can leave archaeological residues of social memory (Lucas 2005, 77–83).

For successive generations in the Lothians, social memory functioned as the stitches in history's tapestry, connecting people to the past and shaping the world that they inherited, and their own vehicles for social memory performed the same role for the generations that came after. Social memory was vital for the continuity and ongoing regeneration of society, because it carried with it communities' histories and identities. It also was key to how people managed transitions, bringing elements of the past into the changing present and future.

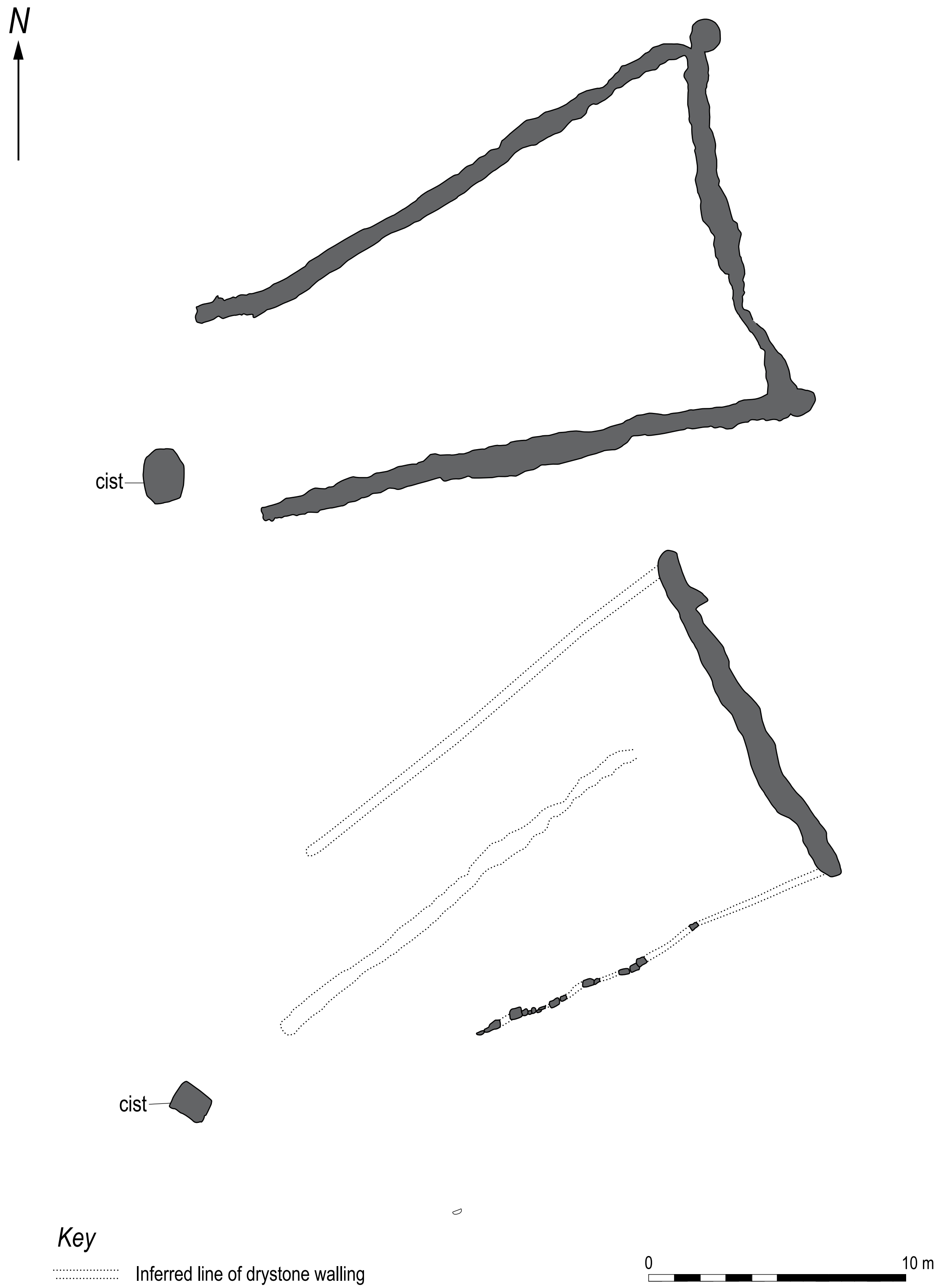
Sites of remembrance

Certain acts and places strongly evoke the role of social memory over hundreds of Lothian generations. Excavated sites along the A1 and elsewhere in the region show how long the memory of certain places endured, even if their specific meanings changed. Communities built settlements on top of earlier burial sites at Dryburn Bridge (Triscott 1982), Broxmouth (Hill 1982b), St Germains (Alexander and Watkins 1998) and Standingstone (Haselgrove *et al* in prep). Traprain Law drew some to leave significant objects on it over millennia, to modify its fabric through rampart construction and finally to live there (Jobey 1976; Armit *et al* 2002). This distinctive landform also acted as a focal point for ceremonial activity on the slopes overlooking it, from the fourth millennium BC mortuary enclosure at Pencraig Hill, to two episodes of activity in the late fourth to third millennia at Overhailes, to the cremation deposits in the third and second millennia at Pencraig Wood (see Chapters 2 and 5).

The Eweford area possessed enduring significance over almost 4,000 years. Generations returned to the site of the early fourth-millennium BC mound and mortuary enclosures, to remodel the cairn and leave Beaker pottery, stone tools and huge amounts of burnt cereal in the early third millennium BC. Even later generations continued to treat the site as important, leaving the remains of the cremated dead in the ground there throughout most of the second millennium BC. The building and burning of a complex, post-defined monument at Eweford East in the later third millennium BC and the construction of a large enclosed settlement at Eweford Cottages in the mid first millennium BC further demonstrate the area's persistent magnetism.

Two of the excavated A1 sites produced particularly remarkable evidence for the maintenance and uses of social memory (see Chapters 2 and 6). During the middle of the first millennium BC, a person or group of people came to the eroded cairn at Eweford West that sealed the fourth-millennium BC mortuary enclosure and numerous second-millennium BC cremations. They dug a hole on its flank and set a cist into its surface. They positioned it with reference to the long-vanished mortuary enclosure, placing it in what would have been its open end, and put the burnt remains of two people in it, one of whom had died between 760 and 390 BC (Figure 11.1). At Pencraig Hill several centuries later, a very similar act took place. Here, someone also dug a hole and built a cist, in a very similar position in relation to the earlier monument as at Eweford West, in the open south-western end. It was filled with hearth material and human bone. One of the dead had died between 170 BC–AD 30, up to 800 years after the death of the person whose bone was put in the cist at Eweford West.

The acts at these two places show that contemporary Lothian communities had specific knowledge of the form of these ancient mortuary enclosures. We can try to picture what the mortuary sites looked like in the first millennium BC. Eweford West would have been visible as a distinctive, turf-covered mound, with mossy stone cairns to its south-east and north-west sides, possibly with distinctive stones marking pits that held cremated human remains buried



11.1 Plans of the cists relative to the mortuary enclosures at Pencraig Hill (top) and Eweford West.

between 1500 and 500 years earlier. However, nothing of the burnt mortuary structure would have remained visible. At Pencraig Hill, there may never have been a mound sealing the destroyed mortuary structure, but the tumbled and slumped remains of the destroyed enclosure could still have slightly marked its outline. The obscurity of the ancient remains means that some knowledge of the sites must have been handed down, from generation to generation, over a period of three thousand years. People must also have known broadly what the enclosures had been for – the treatment of human remains – because their acts at both sites were concerned with the same thing.

This speaks volumes about the strength and potency of oral tradition in the Lothians across thousands of years of prehistory. Before this, we might have been able to assume and speculate that communities would have passed on ritual knowledge from the ancient past, that they might have had myths and stories to explain the presence of much older ceremonial monuments. The evidence from these two sites allows us to go further, and state quite confidently that oral traditions had passed on not just myths but specific knowledge. It shows that people knew something of the enclosures' original uses and forms, and they had quite particular ideas about what kinds of acts were proper to carry out at them – and those notions about proper ritual behaviour lasted for the hundreds of years that separated the two cists' construction. It seems likely that, down the generations, communities had been gathering at these ancient sites for their own ceremonial purposes, but rarely (in the case of Pencraig Hill) doing anything that left archaeological traces. They may have traced, through dance or procession, the outlines of the earlier monuments, re-affirming social memories of them and repeatedly re-working their meanings.

The creation of these two cists has provided important insights into how people framed their worlds in late prehistoric Lothian. Given the contrast between the rich ceremonial record of earlier prehistory and the rich settlement record of later prehistory, it is easy to conclude that first millennium BC communities were more practical and functionally minded than their predecessors, who invested such effort and time in building large ceremonial structures. The cists show otherwise; clearly people did continue to hold strong beliefs, and they occasionally acted upon them in ways that left traces in the ground. As the scope of communities' agricultural work – woodland clearance, stock raising and crop growing – increased in tandem with the scale of their domestic building projects, the focus of their efforts shifted from creating grand ceremonial monuments. They expressed their beliefs through smaller acts: building cists and burying the dead at ancient mortuary sites on occasion and, at an even smaller scale, placing certain objects (such as querns or human and animal remains) in their settlements, or re-using midden material in particular ways.

If communities had been gathering at ancient sites like these over hundreds of generations without leaving archaeological traces, then it seems probable that unusual conditions prompted two different groups to physically intervene in such dramatic ways, breaking ground and adding their own insertions. These interventions were probably not undertaken lightly, but were expressions of spiritual concern at times of considerable change. The date of the death of the adult at Eweford West (790–390 BC) coincides broadly with when the enclosed settlement was created at Eweford Cottages, a few hundred metres away (see Chapter 6). The community that dug the enclosure ditches was taking on an ambitious task and significantly altering the land at the site. In physically intervening in the earlier monument, perhaps they were making certain statements to themselves, to other communities, or to their ancestors. They might have been reaffirming their ancestral links and rights to the place and its resources (*cf* Hingley 1996) or celebrating their affinities with the mound's perceived spiritual qualities. The act carried out at Pencraig Hill, hundreds of years later, also happened during a period of significant social change, when communities based in the old enclosures were filling in the ditches, fundamentally altering their settlements – and society. Again, an act that drew upon social memory was being used to negotiate an important transition.

Another place in the Lothians may demonstrate use of long-term social memory to manage change. Doon Hill may be the location of a Neolithic timber hall, judging by the close parallels between its ground plan and that of excavated structures such as Balbridie and Claish (see Chapter 8; Ralston 1982); alternatively, it could be the site of a British (pre-Anglian) timber hall (Ralston and Armit 1997, 227). Another timber hall was built there during the Anglian period that very closely followed the footprint of the earlier structure and which stood outside an Iron Age hilltop enclosure (Hope-Taylor 1978). The sockets for the Anglian timber hall had been dug into the soft fills of the large post-pits that had supported the earlier one.

In this case, a social group that was in the process of establishing itself in the Lothians was literally delving into the ground to form a bond, through architecture, with the land's ancient past. This may have been attempt to bolster the newcomers' own rights to a place in the landscape (*cf* Bradley 1987), or it may have expressed the affinities they felt with the landscape and its historical texture. They were taking on ancient mythologies, making them their own, and expressing certain views on their own relationship to the past, views that were acted out elsewhere in the same fashion (for example, at Yeavering (Hope Taylor 1977) and at a recently excavated site near Lockerbie (Tim

Neighbour, pers comm), where juxtaposed Neolithic and Anglian halls were found). Whether they followed the footprint of a British timber hall or a Neolithic one, such close correlation could not have been possible without information from and the cooperation of indigenous communities who held social memories of the earlier timber hall and the society for which it stood – people who were able to impart knowledge of the location, form and above all social significance of the earlier sites, because their forebears had maintained it over several generations, or perhaps even millennia.

In all of these instances, those who dug into the ground were encountering the archaeological remains of long-lost generations. They were recognising those remains and their significance, and adding their own physical interventions to the sites to re-work meaning in their present times.

Marking time

When we think of the people that came to Eweford West's old cairn to leave their cremated dead or to Pencraig Hill to dig a cist at an ancient sacred site, we have to ask whether they perceived the remains of the past that they encountered in the same way that we do. The passage of time, and our and others' places in it, are issues that we – as participants in twenty-first century Western culture and even more so archaeologists in that culture – deal with intuitively and effortlessly. The linear progression of time can seem so obvious and natural that we take its universality for granted. We excavate sites with evidence for different phases of use; we date those phases through radiocarbon and artefacts, and we conclude that people remembered them and returned to them over long spans of absolute time. And this was indeed what happened at the sites discussed above.

It does not necessarily follow that the people who came to the monuments of earlier generations, hundreds or thousands of years after they were first used, perceived the time gap as we do. Anthropological studies have shown that there are many different ways of understanding time, all of them linked to how time is used in social life (Lucas 2005, 65). Our own, Western perception of time, which we take so for granted, arises through the use of clocks as scientific instruments to mark time's passing (Tiles 1986). However, science is not culturally neutral. It makes up part of our contemporary social life (Lucas 2005, 66); it is as cultural as religious belief.

Considering other ways in which prehistoric Lothian societies *might* have perceived time, by drawing on anthropological studies, can open up possibilities for interpretation. Its members, like us, experienced the passage of time, but their metaphors for it and how they saw their place within its span might have varied considerably from the inexorable, linear progression that our clocks record (see Gell 1992).

To say that the inhabitants of prehistoric Lothian did not mark the passage of time using clocks is not to say that they did not mark it or observe it at all. Lucas, in his book *The Archaeology of Time* (2005, 68), follows Nilsson (1920) in differentiating two types of time perception. 'Time indication' is fairly ubiquitous, and involves the perception of time based on astronomical phenomena, such as the earth's movement in relation to the sun, moon and stars, and on seasonal phenomena. 'Time reckoning' involves developing observations on these natural phenomena into mathematical systems, such as the calendar.

People living in prehistoric Lothian would have been thoroughly familiar with the cyclical turns of climate, year after year, from winter's dead, difficult months to the fecundity of spring and summer to the life-sustaining rewards of autumn. They would have known when to sow and harvest different crops, and when stock came into season, bred, gave birth and produced milk; they would have known when wild fruits, nuts and certain fish were available. Their existence depended upon such familiarity. They would have been aware of time's passing, but they might have imagined it as cyclical rather than linear.

If they did not reckon time through mathematical observations – and we have no evidence that they did – then people living in the first millennium BC had no means of measuring the hundreds and thousands of years that had piled up between their own present moments and the previous uses of monuments. It follows that they may not have perceived the fourth-millennium remains at Eweford West and Pencraig Hill, for example, as belonging to a past that was separated from them by a great gulf, filled with long-dead generations or an unimaginable number of seasons. There is widespread ethnographic evidence for non-literate societies perceiving time as closely linked to seasonal work, agricultural routines and generational cycles (Lucas 2005, 62).

The inhabitants of prehistoric Lothian may have believed in a direct relationship between the living and their ancestors, no matter how many generations had elapsed between them. They may have considered it important to re-affirm those links through ceremonies at ancient sites or ones involving human remains. They may have seen certain natural or built monuments, such as Traprain Law or Eweford East, as places where they could mediate their relationships with ancestors and collapse time through particular rituals. Their view of the world, past and present, and of their place within it may have arisen through the intimate linking and dependence of their own lives upon the agricultural cycle. Observing the stages of birth, growth, maturity and death in crops and

11.1

Changes in arable farming through time

The earliest cereal grains from the A1 came from several pits at Eweford West (see Chapter 5). Radiocarbon dating of the grains produced a series of dates that clustered around 2000 BC, showing that during this period the main cereal crop being grown in the area was naked six-row barley, although hulled barley was also relatively common. Only small quantities of wheat were recorded, mainly emmer and very scarce grains of possible bread wheat. Naked barley is often found in abundance at Neolithic sites, as are small quantities of emmer wheat (Dickson and Dickson 2000). However, the quantities of wheat recorded are so low that they probably came from plants growing as contaminants among the main crop of six-row barley, rather than as separate crops.

However, from the Bronze Age into the Iron Age naked barley was cultivated less commonly, with the hulled variety gaining prominence, as evident at Phantassie and Eweford Cottages. This increasing preference for hulled barley was not confined to East Lothian; it occurred all over lowland Scotland, as well as further afield in the rest of Britain, the Netherlands and Denmark. This revolution in agricultural practice would seem surprising at first glance, since hulled barley is much more difficult to process than naked barley. In naked barley the grain is loose in the spikelets, and threshing produces grain that can be used immediately, whereas in hulled barley the palea and lemma (the hulls that form part of the chaff) are fused to the grain and cannot be removed by threshing alone. Extra processing is required to make it suitable for human consumption. It seems likely that the move towards hulled barley was the result of a climatic downturn involving a trend towards cooler, wetter summer weather (van der Veen 1992). In these damper conditions, the open spikelets of naked barley would have been more prone to waterlogging, which would have encouraged fungal attack and sprouting of the grain while still on the ear. With hulled barley, the grain would have been better protected from wet summer weather than the free-threshing naked variety, and so a crop would have been guaranteed regardless of weather conditions.

Very few wheat grains were found at the A1 later prehistoric sites, so it is difficult to determine their place in the overall agricultural system at that time. Nevertheless, of the few wheat grains that were identifiable, emmer, emmer/spelt and (possibly) bread wheat were identified, indicating that the wheats must have had a place in the arable agricultural plan. It is impossible to determine whether the wheats were grown as locally tended crops, were traded or imported items, grew within maslin (mixed) crops or were merely accidental cultivates (weeds) among the main barley crop, as suggested for the Neolithic wheat at Eweford. Nevertheless, the presence of glume wheats (emmer and emmer/spelt) in the cereal assemblage is consistent with evidence from other later prehistoric sites in Scotland.

Oats never occurred as more than stray elements at any of the A1 sites, and these were likely to have been wild oats growing as weeds among the main cereal crop. Oats did not become the dominant cereal crop in much of Scotland until the Medieval period.

JENNIFER MILLER and SUSAN RAMSAY

stock, and in their own lives and communities, they may have seen farming as an inherent part of existence. In this view, their connections with dead ancestors, maintained through the exercise of social memory, may have seemed essential and intrinsic to life.

Farming roots

We find expressions of metaphors for the cycle of life, death and regeneration, inherent in agriculture, in the structured uses of querns, middens and human remains at many settlements in later prehistoric Lothian and further afield (see Chapter 10). Querns, built into walls, buildings

and floor surfaces, may have been potent symbols of the ongoing life and identity of each community. Midden, an important source of nutrients for the arable fields, was stored up in heaps for use as fertiliser, but it was also used in particular ways inside settlements, to mark important transitions and perhaps to ensure success in a subsequent phase. Human remains were also used in deliberate ways; these involved breaking up bodies through fire or disarticulation and redistributing them, sometimes in middens, to mark individuals' contributions to communal life and to return them to the agricultural cycle or settlement in a final contribution. These seem to have been expressions of a highly integrated, agrarian view of the world, both shaped by and feeding back into the agricultural endeavours that were integral to the life of the community, and which carried society forward from

11.2

On the edge of another landscape: The Anglo-Saxons in East Lothian

By the middle of the first millennium AD, the Lothians were occupied by a British tribe known as the Gododdin, successors to the Votadini (see text box 10.4). It is not clear whether they were the descendants of the earlier tribe, or a rival group that achieved dominance over them. Their stronghold on Castle Rock in Edinburgh began to thrive as a fortified capital after Traprain Law was abandoned, so the regional political centre certainly shifted location around that time.

During the seventh century AD, Germanic-speaking Anglo-Saxons began to settle in south-eastern Scotland. Their ancestors had first arrived in north-eastern Britain as mercenaries, invited to provide military support for warring petty kings in the political vacuum left by the Roman army's withdrawal, and they had gone on to establish kingdoms of their own. This included a powerful one in Northumbria, which spanned the north of England and eventually pushed into southern Scotland. East Lothian, with its fertile lands and relative wealth, was considered an especially fine prize (Maddicott 2000). The Anglians' control of the Lothians and other lands in southern Scotland may have progressed from remote political control, with the northern tribes paying tribute to the Northumbrian kings, to physical expansion that culminated in the siege and fall of Castle Rock in AD 638.

Archaeology and place-name evidence provide a few clues to the nature of that expansion into the Lothians. Settlement evidence from the Anglo-Saxon period, in the form of what are called *grubenhäus* structures, has been found on the promontory fort at Dunbar in East Lothian and at Ratho Quarry in Midlothian. Both the fort at Dunbar and the large timber hall at Doon Hill may have been high-status centres for local rulers, and there may have been another at Whitekirk (although this has also been interpreted as a Neolithic timber hall; see Chapter 8). The nearby village of Tyninghame, which has an Anglian place-name, was probably the site of a monastery founded by St Baldred in the eighth century. Aethelstaneford in East Lothian is traditionally thought to have been named for an Anglian commander who was killed in battle there in the ninth century. A scatter of Anglian artefacts found in East Lothian also hints at their influence there (Blackwell 2004).

In spite of these clues, however, we cannot be sure how many Anglians emigrated to and colonised the Lothians and, if they did, to what extent they mingled with or overran existing communities. Types of artefacts and buildings do not necessarily equate to certain ethnic groups, and even place-names can be introduced or imposed by political rulers from a distance. The way that the Anglian hall at Doon Hill so closely mimics an earlier building would suggest that the people who built it were drawing upon long-standing traditions about the place and its architecture, perhaps in order to integrate themselves into an alien social landscape.

OLIVIA LELONG

one generation to another.

What were the roots of this complex, metaphor-rich, agrarian world view? There are clues from the A1 sites and others in southern Scotland that they may have reached back as far as the origins of farming in the region (see text box 11.2). The tradition of putting particular objects into pits began in the early fourth millennium BC, when Lothian communities were in the early stages of farming practice. Each year they put other small, potent objects (seeds) into the ground and reaped food. As Hill (1995a) points out, ritual behaviour is essentially a technology, designed to bring out transformation. Putting certain objects into the ground may have been a metaphor for sowing; burying pieces of pottery or stone may have seemed a way of bringing about certain social transformations, or preserving power or prosperity or health. Powerful objects may have been buried to guarantee agricultural success and ensure fertility, or as a means of appealing to the spirit world for insurance against crop failure (*cf* Bradley 1984, 159 for a similar argument regarding deposits in Iron Age storage pits).

At Chapelfield, Cowie, for example, people were gathering particular collections of objects and putting them into pits in the early fourth millennium BC. The objects included Neolithic pottery, pitchstone blades, coarse stone tools, hammerstones, pounders and anvils, as well as broken saucer, saddle and trough querns, hearth waste and possibly human waste (Atkinson 2002; see Chapter 8). All of these things would have signified something else in the minds of those who assembled and deposited them. The querns may have been references to the agricultural efforts that sustained the community, as might the hearth waste and human waste (midden constituents). At Eweford West, huge quantities of burnt cereals were strewn across the site in the third millennium BC, perhaps a gesture of thanks for successful harvests, or the desperate sacrifice of a much-needed crop in the hope it would yield more grain (see Chapters 4 and 9).

Middens accumulated through daily life, feasts or wakes; their accumulation was governed by structuring principles probably very different from our own (Hill 1995, 17). They may have been seen as repositories of social memory – piles of detritus to which associations clung like smells – and they were valuable sources of nutrients for the arable fields. Midden material and hearth waste were used in various deliberate ways throughout prehistory, in the Lothians and elsewhere, and they could play important roles during social transitions (McOmish 1996). Pits making up the alignment at Knowes were filled with hearth waste in the late fourth millennium BC (see Chapter 3). Burnt animal bone and charcoal went into the slightly later pits at Overhailes along with the flint tools and pottery (see Chapter 4), perhaps the remains of cooking fires and meals at the gathering that culminated in filling the pits. Hearth waste (or pyre material?) was put into both of the first millennium BC cists at Pencraig Hill and Eweford West, along with human remains (see Chapter 6). Midden material was used to fill in the ditches of enclosed settlements like Eweford Cottages in the late first millennium BC (see Chapter 6), expressing important changes in communal identity, and at Phantassie, to mark the beginning of a new phase in the settlement's history (see Chapter 7). The collective life histories of the objects and organic materials making up middens may have imbued them with certain powers, both practical and symbolic, in the minds of generations of Lothian communities. They made vital contributions to agricultural success, and their perceived powers could also transfer to the social and spiritual realms.

The ways that people viewed farming and its relationship to social life undoubtedly changed considerably over the four millennia of prehistory during which they practised it in the Lothians, and this is not to suggest that it was uniform throughout. In the fourth and third millennia, communities may have raised only small quantities of crops and a few animals, combining this with gathering, fishing and hunting to meet their needs. Agriculture contributed part of what made society function, but not all; ritual acts referred to it but also to other aspects of life. As farming intensified in the first millennium BC, requiring greater investment in time and labour, it would have become more fully integrated into social life and thought, and found more modes of expression in symbolic behaviour, like those outlined above. The relative paucity of evidence for wild foods at excavated later prehistoric settlements suggests that, by this time, the skills that had made Mesolithic Lothian dwellers proficient hunters, gatherers and fishers had faded from social memory.

The power of fire

The durable, fire-hardened kinds of artefacts that do survive in structured deposits are testimony to the transformative power of fire, and there is evidence from the Lothians of how fire was perceived and used in different contexts over time. At both Pencraig Hill and Eweford West, the large timber mortuary enclosures that stood there in the fourth millennium BC were burnt down – as were the pyres holding bodies inside them, possibly at the same time (Chapter 2). At Eweford East in the mid-to-late third millennium BC, two parallel timber post alignments and a circular timber enclosure were also burnt down, probably in sections over several phases (Chapter 3). At Pencraig Wood, a wooden post may have marked out a place where cremated human bone and pottery were put in pits in the mid second millennium BC; this post was eventually burnt.

These events would have made brilliant spectacles, with dramatic effects upon sight, sound, smell and hearing to those who watched the flames catch and burn. They may have been the culmination of rites or ceremonies that marked important stages in the use of the monuments. The deliberate destruction of the structures does not appear to have expressed rejection of an old order that created them, because the Eweford West structures were rebuilt and the Eweford East alignments continued to develop; the ceremonial traditions associated with them carried on in some form. Rather, the firing events may have been seen as essential stages in the lives of the monuments, important rituals that transformed them and also those who witnessed their destruction.

Fire's symbolic potency is also evident in the kinds of objects which people were putting into pits and other structured deposits from the fourth millennium BC onwards – pottery, metalwork and cremated human bone. In a sense, this is a circular argument: these things survive in the archaeological record because they were subjected to fire; therefore, we see them as significant, not knowing what else was also deposited and considered important, but which does not survive. However, there are indications that the processes that transformed and created these remains were perceived as symbolically powerful.

The use of fire to transform clay into pottery vessels has received relatively little attention compared to metalworking (Barnett and Hoopes 1995; Hill 2002), but it may have been perceived as equally spiritually charged, particularly during the fourth and third millennia BC after the technology was first adopted in Britain. This could account for the emergence of certain widely occurring forms of pottery (such as Grooved Ware and Beakers) and their uses in highly structured deposits in pits and cists; their significance derived partly from the powerful processes that created them. We may see a lingering sense of this significance in the uses of pot sherds in later prehistory – for instance, their frequent use as packing for posts, in essence as foundation deposits, perhaps to ensure luck or success in a new house.

Budd and Taylor (1995, 141) have highlighted the evidence from social-anthropological studies that metalworking often has associations with religion or magic; it is a process that turns stones (ore) into objects that can be used to kill or maim, or into things of great beauty and value. They argue that bronze smiths in third to second millennium BC Britain were also political leaders who were perceived as magicians or shamans. Knowledge of and skill in bronze working were two of their chiefly qualities which elevated them above competitors, and the depositing of bronze objects was a form of extravagant sacrifice (akin to potlatch) that helped maintain their authority. In addition, copper alloy working may have carried with it a sense of ritual pollution, given the noxious fumes it emitted, and so was best carried out apart from settlement areas. The special qualities of copper alloy working and its products, and their powerful roles in society, may be reflected in the careful ways that bronze objects were deposited in third millennium BC Scotland. At Eweford West, a bronze halberd was placed in the stone cairn during the second millennium BC, when people were also intermittently visiting the place to put decorated pots and cremated human remains into the ground (see Chapter 5) – all objects transformed by fire, and hence, we would argue, powerful points of mediation between the living and the spirit world.

In the context of the social implications of metalworking, the widespread adoption of iron involved not only a forging technology replacing an alloying and casting one, but a fundamental reorientation of society and a falling apart of old orders. Iron workers may have been less tied to particular tribes or lineages, as they were not dependent on controlled supplies of tin; they may have operated as itinerant smiths who provided certain liminal services to communities who could keep them – and the risk of ritual contagion – at a safe distance (Budd and Taylor 1995, 140). Alternatively, members of each community may have taken on the role of blacksmith as part of their everyday routines, although the process may have continued to be imbued with a sense of transformative magic. Iron smithing involved transforming raw materials into objects vital to the agricultural cycle, objects which in turn would transform plants into sustenance, animals into food – or which could bring about death. It produced knives or swords that could kill people or butcher animals; ploughshares and scythes that were needed to sow and harvest crops; chisels to make querns to further transform grain; axes to cut fuel, and so on (Hingley 1997, 9). The smithing process, and iron objects themselves, may have been seen as metaphors for life and death, embedded in the agricultural cycle. Like querns (and, in several cases, wooden ard-shares (Hingley 1992, 38)), they were sometimes set into the boundaries that defined communities' homes in later prehistory. Hingley (1990b) has reviewed the evidence for iron currency bars set into the boundaries of settlements in central and western England, arguing that such deposits represented both the agricultural cycle and relations of power.

Phantassie produced a hint of the perceived potency of metalworking in the late first millennium BC. An iron draw bar was discovered, which had been used make copper and brass wire for ornaments or chain mail; shavings of pure copper and brass still clung to its holes, and the purity of the metals indicates a Roman origin (see text box 7.4). It was found in a thick layer of midden-rich sediment that was dumped over the principle structure of the phase 2

11.2 The Bass Rock, seen from Eweford West.

farmstead after it was abandoned, marking a significant transition in the settlement's evolution – perhaps a kind of closure deposit for the house itself (*cf* Bradley 2005, 52; see Chapter 10). The draw bar was found sticking upright in the midden, where it had been pushed into the soft, rotting matrix. Its presence in a symbolic deposit points to the powerful processes of creation and transformation for which both the draw bar and the midden stood.

Evidence for these themes resonates across the nine millennia of prehistory during which people inhabited the Lothians. Various generations shared concerns that are fundamental to the experience of being human: needs for food, shelter and clothing; for physical, emotional and spiritual well being, and for the survival of family and community. People addressed these concerns in how they produced or found food, built houses and other buildings and treated their dead, weaving them into their daily lives in ways that varied over time. What all the generations over at least five of those millennia had in common was a a reliance on the agricultural cycle, played out over and over in the same landscapes. The societies in which they lived would have had certain social, conceptual and physical constraints that helped to shape how different generations acted – constraints such as beliefs in supernatural powers, unequal power relations between members of society and the need to ensure survival.

Conclusion

As we drive through East Lothian on the upgraded A1, our wheels traverse a landscape through which people have been journeying for at least 10,000 years. Those past journeys related to the different rhythms that governed peoples' lives. In the early millennia, they included annual movements to the uplands to hunt deer, or travels to the coast to gather sea birds and fish. Struck stone tools from Pencraig Hill, South Belton, Phantassie and the Eweford sites evoke the movements of people hunting singly or in groups along the coastal plain, from around 9,000 to 4,000 BC. With the adoption of farming in the early fourth millennium BC and for thousands of years afterward, people were regularly driving their herds to pasture on

the uplands. They were moving around their settlements regularly and rhythmically: to sow crops and cart midden to the fields, to collect firewood from forests and water from burns. The charcoal assemblages from Eweford Cottages and Phantassie evoke journeys to forests and moorland to gather timber and heather, and to fields to harvest grain.

People also ventured from their dwellings for other reasons, to satisfy spiritual and emotional needs at monuments to their ancestors. The similarities in form between the mortuary enclosures at Eweford West and Pencraig Hill (and their similarities to others across Britain and northern Europe) hint at people's travel from one place to another in the fourth millennium BC, carrying images of monuments in their minds. The pits at Overhailes, filled with pottery and stone tools during the later third millennium BC, recall a long journey to this spot from eastern England. Other imperatives would have decided the time and place for social gatherings – the birth of a child, the death of an elder, the acquisition of a long travelled artefact or the exchange of marriage partners. These different rhythms of life may have been intimately bound together; trips could have been both practical and meaningful. Accounts of journeys, places, events, objects or people would have been told and retold, spun and rewoven by generations around hearths at home, while putting dead into the ground or revisiting places of ancient significance. Those rhythms changed in scale and composition over the millennia: some chimed long and clear, while others became faint echoes from a hazier past.

As our journeys, now safer and faster, take us daily to Edinburgh for work, monthly to visit relatives in Dunbar or annually to the south on holiday, we share the legacy of the landscape bequeathed to us by so many previous generations. Traprain Law and Berwick Law still catch our eye; the sweeping coast and rolling hills still frame our sense of the region, and the rivers Esk and Tyne still tie the lowlands to the uplands. The texture and appearance of the land have changed again and again over the 10,000 years since people first returned to it, following the vegetation and wildlife into the emptiness left when the ice sheets melted. We still share many concerns with our distant ancestors, concerns inherent in the rhythms of life and the very nature of human existence: our sense of place in a landscape, in our society, in our local community and in our own family. The discoveries we have made along the new A1 have brought us into contact with ancient but familiar themes, revealing stories that had long been lost to time – stories about people more like ourselves than we might imagine, yet who lived lives that were almost unimaginably different.

What will the archaeologists of the remote future make of the A1 expressway itself? Will they recognise it as an ancient transport route, or attribute some more esoteric function to it? If they correctly divine the road's purpose, will they debate the motivations behind our early third millennium AD journeying, arguing over whether it was a ritual, social or economic phenomenon?

As they make sense of the traces of our own journeys through the East Lothian landscape, as well as those of its earlier inhabitants, perhaps they will recall the words of Henry Miller, who wrote: 'One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things.'