Rhynie, A Powerful Place of Pictland

Edited by Gordon Noble

Chapter 3

EXPLORING THE HISTORICAL
AND PLACE-NAME EVIDENCE

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3.1 Historical background

Direct textual evidence for the Rhynie area only starts to exist from the 11th century onwards, centuries later than the apogee of Rhynie, Tap o' Noth and Cairn More, but it is possible to gain some insights into the wider context in the 1st millennium AD. Our first references to the region result from Roman activity from the 1st century AD onwards. According to Ptolemy's *Geography* (AD 140×50), the area was probably inhabited by either the Vacomagi (from the Moray Firth coast to Angus) or the Taexali (in at least the area of Buchan) (Illus 3.1) (Rivet & Smith 1979: 140–1, 463–4, 484–5; Strang 1997: 26). Initially the Romans regarded
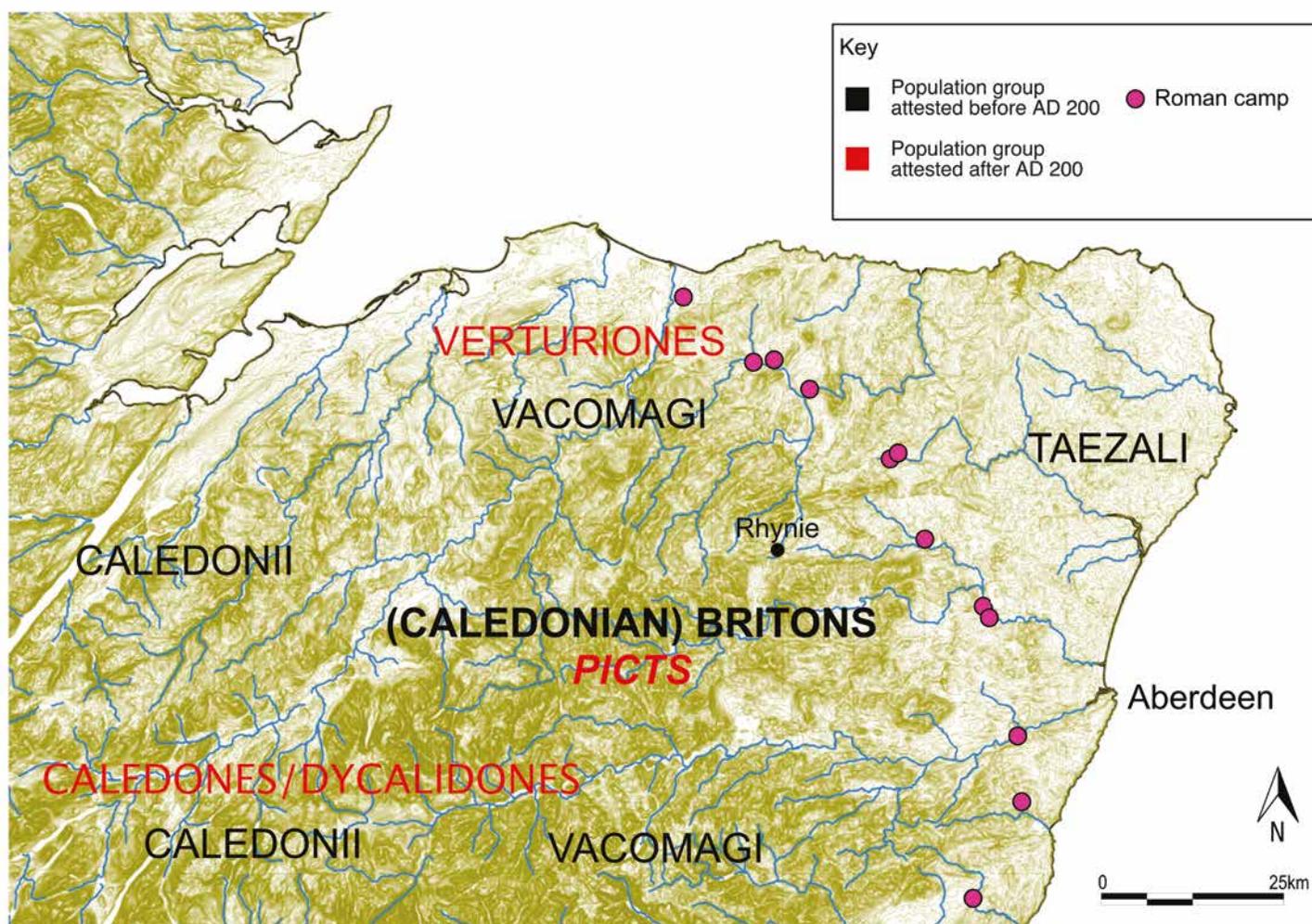
Illus 3.1
North-east Scotland in the Roman period, AD 70–410. Population groups attested before AD 200 are in black, those after AD 200 in red.
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these peoples as 'Britons' (*Britanni*), a generalisation for any inhabitant of Britain, albeit an adaptation of a Celtic ethnic word *Priteni/Pritani*, which was also used by some of the island's inhabitants for themselves, though not necessarily with the same connotations (Jackson 1954; Koch 2003).

The Rhynie area remained outside the zone of Roman control in the early centuries AD, though it is likely that the inhabitants would have been affected by their presence. Roman camps were established not far away to the east and north at Logie Durno, Glenmellan (Ythan Wells), Burnfield, Muiryfold, Auchinhove and Kintore (Cook & Dunbar 2008; Jones 2011). These probably date to the campaigns of Agricola in the 70s and early 80s and perhaps also to those of Septimius Severus in the period 208–11. In the early centuries AD it is possible that Roman raiding parties devastated the area, and that the locals fought and made treaties with them. Even when the Romans had retreated, there is increasing evidence for continued relationships with them, as was the case beyond other frontiers of the empire (Hunter 2007: 32–6, 45–8; Hunter 2010, 2014: 208–9, 212). These would include trade, diplomatic relationships, gift exchange and Roman tribute-taking, as well as people visiting the empire, to join the army for instance (Breeze 1982: 113, 139).

The presence of the Roman Empire to the south may have had important influences on the social and political makeup of northern groups (a theme explored in Chapter 12). According to the account of Tacitus, one response to Agricola's campaigns was that the polities north of the Forth in Caledonia joined together in at least a temporary alliance (*Agricola* 27.2, 29.3–4: Ogilvie & Richmond 1967: 109–11). Cassius Dio (writing in the 230s) stated that in the decades around AD 200 the peoples of the north had coalesced into two polities, the Maeatae (Μαιάται) and beyond them the Caledonians (Καληδόνιοι), who were both regarded as rebelling against the empire (Cary 1927: 216–17, 262–3). Since the Maeatae controlled land around the Forth (Taylor et al 2020: 51–4), it can be assumed that the Caledonians occupied the land to the north, perhaps encompassing the area around Rhynie.

Following the Severan wars, there is no evidence of warfare against the empire for several decades. When conflict is noted again in the last years of the 3rd century, it was conducted by the Romans against *Picti*, a new general term for people north of Roman Britain (Evans 2022). The Romans maintained outposts north of Hadrian's Wall, but it is uncertain whether they ever ventured beyond the Firth of Forth again. However, it is clear that the Picts did come to them, attacking the Roman province in the 4th and perhaps the 5th centuries AD. In the account of the 'Barbarian Conspiracy' of 367–8, Ammianus Marcellinus stated that two main Pictish groups, the Dicaledones and Verturiones (*Dicalydonas et Verturiones*), conducted a coordinated attack on Roman Britain (*Res Gestae* xxvii.8.5; Seyfarth et al 1978: vol 2, 47). The Verturiones were probably based around the Moray Firth (Woolf 2006), while the Dicaledones were at least partly located on the west coast, since Ptolemy called the ocean there Δουηκαληδόνιοσ (Rivet & Smith 1979: 44, 132, where it is transcribed as *Duecaledonius*, 338). Nevertheless, these polities may have had wider hegemonies that extended into north-east Scotland.

3.2 The regions of Pictland

Our historical sources unfortunately do not provide further information regarding the impact of this raiding, and after the end of Roman Britain there is a gap of about 150 years before useful textual evidence commences. While no events (to our knowledge) are recorded in Strathbogie, available sources can be used to partially reconstruct the wider political context, including some of the territories between the Moray Firth and the Mounth (Illus 3.2). The longer Pictish king-lists record a series of Pictish provinces or regions: *Fib* (Fife); *Fidach* (possibly connected to Glenfiddich, but see below); *Floclaid* or *Foltlaid* (likely to be Atholl); *Fortrenn* (Fortriu); *Got* or *Cat* (Caithness and Sutherland); *Ce* (Aberdeenshire); and *Circin*, a term used for the large lowland area from perhaps Strathearn, through Gowrie, Stormont and Angus to the Mearns (Broun 2000; Evans 2013). This list was essentially a geographical statement referring to at least some of the core territories of the Pictish kingdom from Caithness to Fife during Constantín's reign (862–76). Given that territorial names like Fortriu, Ce and Circin did not have a contemporary political significance after the mid-10th century at the latest, as they were replaced by other terms like Moray, Buchan, Angus and Strathearn, it is plausible that they pre-dated considerably their inclusion in the Pictish king-lists. However, it is a considerable leap to relate any of them with the Rhynie area's monuments described in this monograph, whose floruits were centuries earlier. Moreover, the Pictish king-list does not provide a comprehensive list of Pictish territories, so the territory around Rhynie may not have been included in the text.

3.2.1 Fortriu

In the late 7th century, the most powerful Pictish kingdom was Fortriu. Formerly thought to be a region in central Scotland, Alex Woolf has relocated this powerful polity to the area north of the Mounth (Woolf 2006). Specific textual references indicate that Strathdearn was in Fortriu, and that Forres and Kinloss were in the 'plain of Fortriu' (*Magh Fortrenn*) (Woolf 2006: 191–9), but none of these can be dated before the 10th century. There are two references indicating that there was also a broader definition of Fortriu, though again these post-date AD 900. The first is in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Version E. Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History* describes the northern Picts as separated from the southern Picts 'by steep and rugged ridges of mountains' (III.4; Colgrave & Mynors 1969: 222–3)[2]. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Version E, summarising Bede, describes these northern Picts as *wærteres be norðum morum* – ie '*Wærteres* beside the northern moors'.[3] The second reference is the *Historia Regum Anglorum*'s entry for 934. There it states that Æthelstan's land army devastated *Scotia* to Dunnotter and *Wertermorum* (Woolf 2006: 197–9). In both these cases *Wærter-/Werter-* represents an attempt to render an underlying Pictish **Uorter-* or **Uerter-* or the like with reference to the inhabitants of **Uortr-* (Gaelicised as **Fortr(iu)*). The exact location of *Wertermorum* is not clear, but it seems to have been the easternmost part of the Highlands from the Mounth to the Moray Firth, presumably relatively close to Dunnottar. Thus, by the 10th century at least, the term Fortriu had a wider meaning, perhaps indicating an area that was much larger than its original core. This broader connotation is also implied by the Gaelic 9th- or 10th-century text *Senchas Síl hÍr*, in which *Mag Fortrenn* and *Mag Cirgin* are presented as the two main plains of the *Cruithnig* (the Picts) of *Alba* (Evans 2013: 14–15).
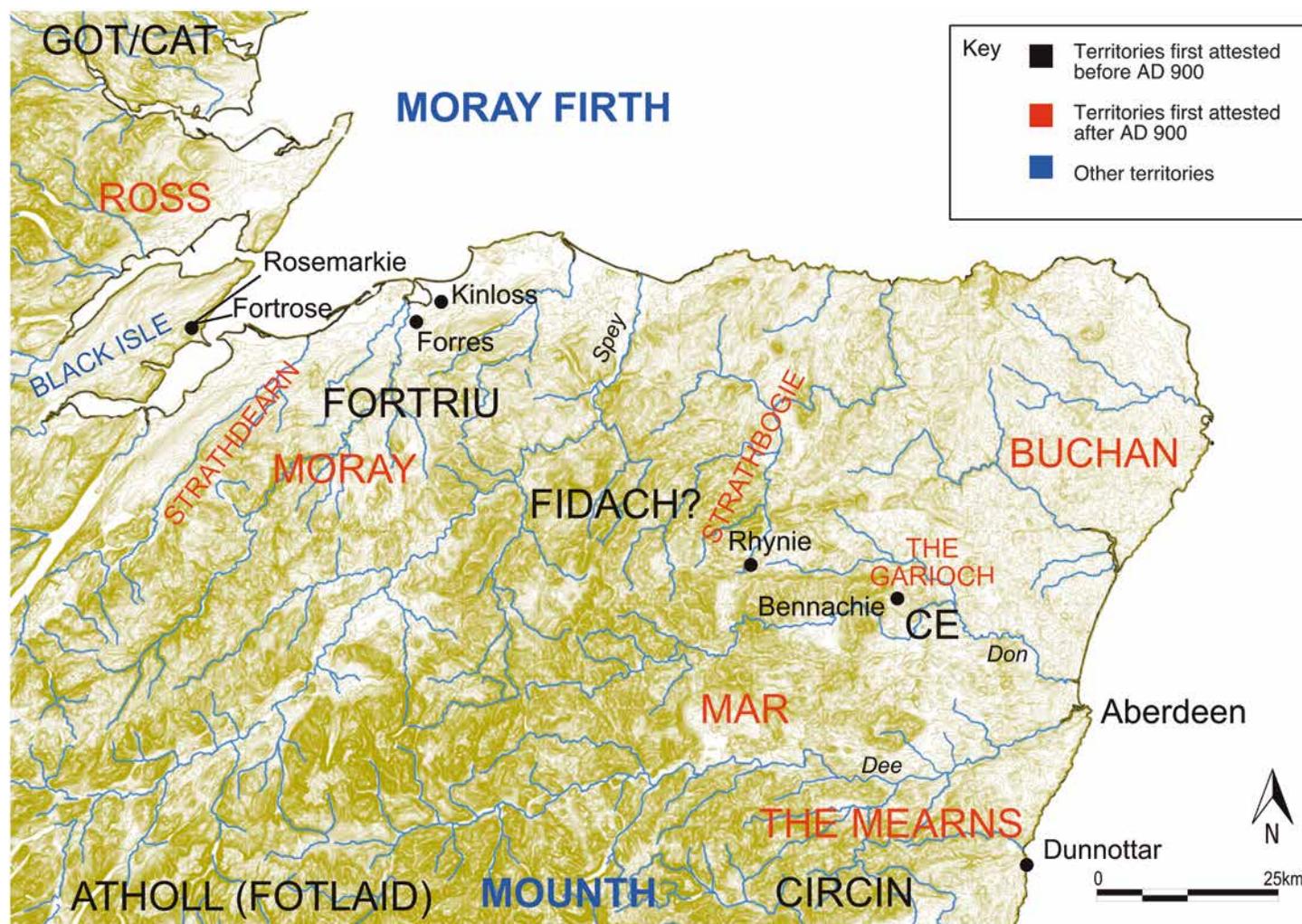
Illus 3.2
Territories and places in north-east Scotland, AD 400–1200. Territories first attested before AD 900 in black, AD 900–1200 in red, others in blue. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2024

Given its fertility, the coastal Moray Firth area from the Black Isle to the River Spey is understandably the prime candidate for Fortriu's original core. This location is strengthened by the suggestion that Fortrose on the Black Isle means 'the point or promontory of Fortriu' (Taylor forthcoming), and by the likelihood that the attack in AD 367–8 on Roman Britain by the Verturiones indicates that this group had a maritime orientation, given the distance from the province and references to incursions by sea undertaken among other participants in the 'Barbarian Conspiracy' (*Res Gestae* xxvii.8.1–10; xxviii.3.1–3, 3.7–8; Seyfarth et al 1978: vol 2, 46–8, 75–7). Moreover, from the late 6th century, this region contained the major power centre at Burghead, and by AD 700 the episcopal seat at Rosemarkie. Both of these sites suggest that the Moray Firth region was the political core of Fortriu on the eve of its late 7th-century expansion. That does not preclude the possibility that Strathbogie was part of that early Fortriu (Broun forthcoming a), since polities could contain multiple, often rival, power centres. Coastal Moray may even have been dominated by its hinterland for a period after the end of Roman Britain, by polities based at sites such as Rhynie. It should not be expected that power only radiated out from the coastal lowlands.

Nevertheless, by the late 7th century the kingdom of Fortriu, probably focused on the Moray Firth, had become the most powerful Pictish territory, controlling all the zone south to the Firth of Forth. In the Battle of Nechtanesmere (Dún Nechtain) in 685 the king of Fortriu, Bridei son of Bile, defeated the Northumbrians and expanded into southern Pictland (Fraser 2009: 50–1, 54–8, 212–16, 224). This overkingship of the Picts would have required control of the routeways between northern and southern Pictland which passed through the Rhynie area. As a result, it can be speculated that Rhynie's hinterland was one of the earlier areas incorporated into an expanding Fortriu, though it is uncertain how much earlier than 685 this process can be dated.

3.2.2 Ce and Fidach

While Fortriu became the pre-eminent Pictish region in the north, there were other first-millennium territories in northern Pictland. The territory of Ce appears in additions to the longer Pictish king-lists, dated from 862 to 876 (Broun 2007: 75–9; Anderson 2011: 245), and the name is also found in the titles of

two Gaelic tales in lists dating from the 10th and 11th centuries, as *Cruthmag Cé*, 'Pictish plain of Ce' and *Beinn Cé*, 'the peak of Ce' (Mac Cana 1980: 46−7, 61, 63; Evans 2014: 66−7). The latter has been plausibly identified as the highly visible, substantial upland area of Bennachie about 17km to the east of Rhynie, whose prominent Mither Tap o' Bennachie is the site of a hillfort with evidence for occupation in the 7th−8th centuries AD (Dobbs 1949: 137−8; Noble & Evans 2022: 106−7). Ce, therefore, is likely to have been a substantial area which included Bennachie and at least some of the lowland area surrounding the hilltop. Ce may have had a genitive form with **Gen-,* with a Latinised form of the name recorded in Adomnán's *Life of Columba* (I.33; Anderson & Anderson 1991: 62−3) when he described Artbranán as *Geonae primarius cohortis*, 'leader of the army of *Geona' (Sharpe 1995: 294, note 149; Kilpatrick 2021: 424−5). If so, this would indicate that Ce already existed in some form in either the late 6th century when Columba lived, or at the end of the 7th century when Adomnán wrote his account.

Another potential Pictish territory to the west of Rhynie could be represented by *Fidach* in the longer Pictish king-lists (Anderson 2011: 245) − if Watson's (1926: 115) very tentative and linguistically uncertain connection of this with Glen Fiddich in Banffshire is correct. However, Broun has suggested that *Fidach* in fact meant 'woody' and was included to ensure that a stanza had sufficient names beginning with F-, so it was not necessarily an established territorial name at all (Broun 2007: 79). Nevertheless, while the identification of this name with Glen Fiddich is extremely uncertain, it is more likely that it was a territorial name than simply an adjective.

3.2.3 Mar

In the later Middle Ages the earldom of Mar, located primarily on Deeside and Donside, lay to the south and south-east of Rhynie. Mar has been suggested by Broun to have had origins in the Pictish period as a *mormáer*dom (Broun forthcoming a; see below). The first dated reference to this territory occurs in Irish chronicle items for the Battle of Clontarf in 1014, which specify that a *mormáer* (a regional lord) of Mar in Alba died in this conflict near Dublin (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983: 448). A potentially earlier reference to Mar may survive in the text *The Reigns of Nath Í and Ailill Molt*, alongside a form of the Pictish territory of Ce (Evans 2013: 11−14). A *mormáer* of Mar is also found in 12th-century additions to the *Book of Deer* recording a property transaction made in 1131 or 1132 (Forsyth et al 2008: 138−9 (Text III)), and it survived to become an important later medieval regional lordship (see below).

3.2.4 Lost polities?

Thus, by the end of the Pictish period the Upper Strathbogie area was probably regarded as part of a larger Fortriu, but the lack of direct contemporary evidence for the locality before the 10th century means that alternatives for the dominant power in the area prior to 685 cannot be ruled out. For example, Mar and Ce might have included all or part of the area, or other unattested polities could have existed in the area before the expansion of Fortriu from around the Moray Firth. Early medieval kingdoms in Britain and

Ireland in the period from AD 400 to 800 were not generally monolithic entities with a single narrow royal dynasty ruling from a few key 'capital' places. Rather, they were often multifocal, with more than one branch of a dynasty or multiple kindreds vying for overlordship from various power bases (Charles-Edwards 2000: 21−2, 36−40, 54, 455, 527−9, 534−48; Byrne 2001; Fraser 2009: 101, 348, 361). It is therefore unclear whether the rulers of Rhynie were based in Fortriu, Ce, Mar or another territory or kingdom, but the key fact, identified through the archaeology and the place-name evidence (see below), is that there was a significant royal power centre at Rhynie which lost its exalted status in the 6th century AD.

### 3.3 The later historical context

The Rhynie area itself remains largely a blank before 1100, but later political geography offers some clues as to the status and context of the site in earlier periods. The late 9th and 10th centuries saw a transformation in language, where Pictish was replaced by Gaelic as the dominant tongue of what became the kingdom of Alba. The territories of Fortriu and Ce ceased to be mentioned for contemporary events, and new regional names such as Moray, Buchan, Mar and Strathbogie began to appear in sources, later joined by the Garioch in the late 12th century (Stringer 1985: 60−8; Woolf 2006; Evans 2014: 96−9). By the mid-12th century, Moray included much of the land from the western seaboard of Scotland to the River Spey and maybe beyond this to include Strathbogie (Ross 2011: 64−80). It is possible, but not provable, that later provinces like Moray were pre-existing divisions of Pictish territories, though this should not be assumed. Others, such as Menteith in southern Alba (Broun forthcoming a), were more likely to have been new creations that cut across pre-existing boundaries in the changing social, political and linguistic context of the 9th to 12th centuries.

3.3.1 The origins of Strathbogie[4]

In the second millennium AD Strathbogie was the name for much of the area around Rhynie. As well as being a topographical term for the catchment area of the River Bogie, Strathbogie was the name of a deanery of the bishopric of Moray by the 1220s.[5] It was (and remained until the 20th century in Gaelic) the name for Huntly, the centre of the lordship (Alexander 1952: 382−3) − Huntly being a name the Gordons brought with them from Berwickshire in the early 14th century (Illus 3.3). It is uncertain how much older Strathbogie was, and what form any earlier regional administrative units had, though many of the names of the area's local units and significant places are Gaelic, and occasionally Pictish, indicating that the later medieval situation after 1100, when our source material becomes more plentiful, was based firmly on pre-existing foundations.

The first reference to Strathbogie appears in an addition to one textual group of the king-lists of Alba, which contain notes on the deaths of each monarch (Anderson 2011: 268, 276, 284, 288−9). The same details are found in the Verse Chronicle inserted into the *Chronicle of Melrose* (Anderson 1922: vol 1, 604; Anderson et al 1936: xxiv−xxvi). Among these additions is the information that King Lulach mac Gilla Comgáin (1057−8),
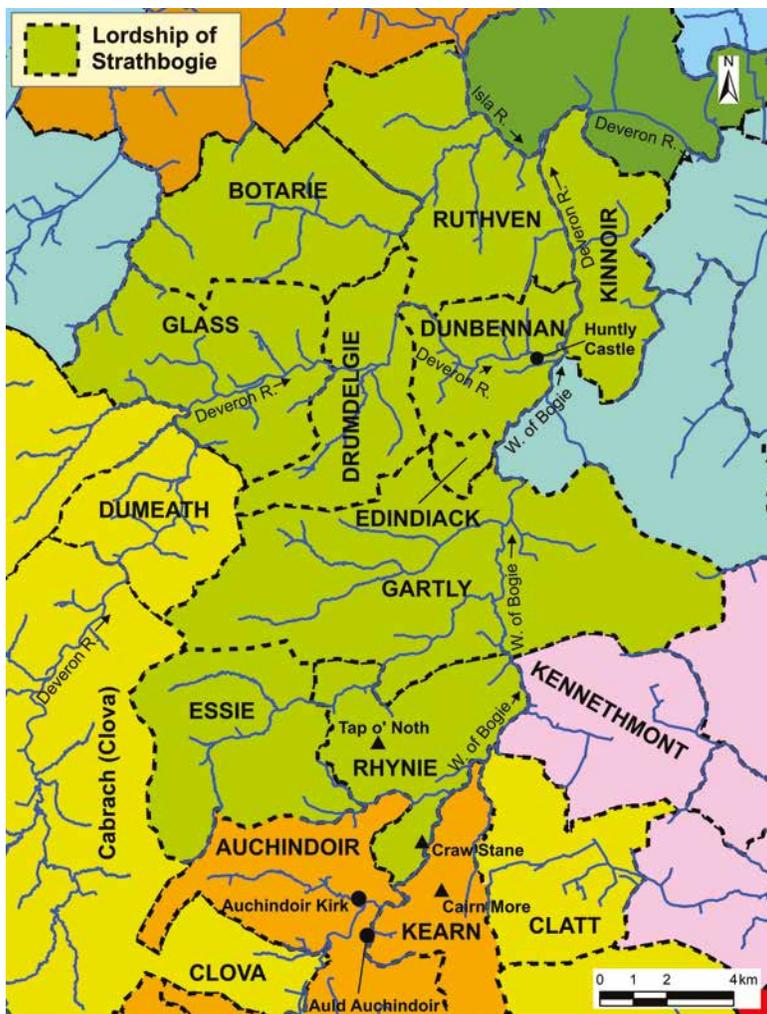
Illus 3.3
The Lordship of Strathbogie in the 1220s. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2024, and NRS data © Crown copyright and database right 2024

the stepson and successor of King Mac Bethad mac Finnlaích (1040–57), was killed 'in Essie in Strathbogie', 3km west of Rhynie. Although these notes survive in manuscripts of the 14th century or later, it is likely that they were inserted *c* 1124 (Broun 1999: 153–60). Essie is located in a valley with watercourses that flow into the Bogie, with the western edge of Essie parish running along the watershed between the catchments of the Bogie and Deveron. However, no part of Essie parish is on the Bogie itself. This is a further indication that, when it first appears in the record, Strathbogie referred to a territory which included at least part of the wider Bogie catchment area.

The main meaning of Early Gaelic *srath* is 'sward, grass(land); meadow or grassy place by a river' (*DIL*). This is also its chief meaning in Irish place-names.[6] In former Pictland, in contrast, Scottish Gaelic s(*t*)*rath*- chiefly refers to large, broad valleys and is thus used more in the sense of modern Welsh *ystrad* 'valley floor, plain, vale'. The implication of this is that the Pictish cognate was closer in meaning to modern Welsh, and that this influenced Scottish Gaelic usage (Taylor 2011: 105, 108). The earliest identified

example in Scotland may be the battle of **Srath Ethairt*, recorded in the Irish chronicles in *c* 654 and tentatively identified as Strathyre, Perthshire, in the borderlands between Pictland and Dál Riata in the southern Highlands (Watson 2002: 91; Fraser 2009: 183).[7] However, a clearer case is the battle in *Sraith Erenn* in 904 (Anderson 2011: 251), identified as Strathdearn 'the valley of the River Findhorn' in medieval Moray (Woolf 2006: 192). Furthermore, many of the Strath-names in Scotland (both in the Pictish and Northern Brittonic-speaking areas) are attached to territorial units with some kind of political or administrative dimension. These can range from parish-names such as Strathmartin, Angus,[8] and Strachan, Kincardineshire,[9] to territory names such as Strathearn and Strathclyde. Also the majority of Strath-names contain the names of their rivers. This is especially the case of straths of the larger and more important watercourses. It can therefore be confidently stated that the Bogie of Strathbogie was in origin a river-name.

Bogie, with earliest forms *bolgy(n)* or *bolgin*,[10] contains a word which derives from early Celtic **bolgo*- 'bag'. This gives Old Gaelic *bolg* 'bag, sack, belly' (modern Gaelic *balg*) and Welsh *bol* (also *bola*, *boly*) 'belly, bag, bulge'. The Pictish form would have been **bolg* or the like. The element appears frequently in Scottish place-names referring to a wide range of features including hills, pools and bays (Taylor & Márkus 2012: 301). In the context of a watercourse, the word, whether Pictish or Gaelic, probably refers to deep or 'bag-like' pools, also known as 'pots' (Watson 1926: 441). There are in fact several of these on the Bogie, two of which are named on the OS 6-inch 1st Edition map: Juncan Pot south of Huntly[11] and Lord John's Pot, Gartly.[12] The suffix *-in* is a common place-name forming suffix which almost always becomes *-i/y/ie*, in Gaelic orthography *-(a)idh*.[13] It can be assumed that the river-name Bogie was coined first, with Strathbogie being a secondary development. Given that both elements could as well be Pictish as Gaelic, it is perfectly possible that the names both of the river and its valley go back to Pictish times.

3.3.2 The Lordship of Strathbogie

The first clear evidence for the Lordship of Strathbogie is found in a charter of 1226 (Moray Reg. no 30), concerning a dispute between the Bishop of Moray and David, a son of Earl Duncan II of Fife, who held the 'fief of Strathbogie' (Ross 2003: vol 1, 132). The Lordship of Strathbogie has been regarded as a creation of King William the Lion's reign (1165–1214), although documentary evidence for its extent and its lords does not begin until the above-mentioned 1226 charter (Duncan 1975: 188; Barrow 1988: 4; Ross 2015: 100). It is possible that the Strathbogie lordship was created for David, or that he gained or expanded it through his marriage to a woman known only as 'G' (Barrow 1988: 4), though the family's control of Strathbogie and the lordship itself may have begun earlier. It has been suggested that the MacDuff Earls of Fife may have held lands in Strathavon in Speyside as early as the 1130s (Taylor & Márkus 2012: 105–6; Ross 2013: 29–31). This increases the chances that the same kindred had other nearby lands north of the Mounth, including in Strathbogie, before 1200.

From the earliest records to the 1600s the lordship consisted of ten medieval parishes based around the Bogie and Deveron rivers in the medieval deanery of Strathbogie (Illus 3.3). These comprised

Kinnoir, Essie, Rhynie, Dunbennan, Ruthven, Glass, Drumdelgie, Botarie, Gartly and Edendiack (Ross 2015: 100, who omits Edendiack).[14] The caput of the Lordship of Strathbogie was not at Rhynie, but nine miles north at Huntly (Ross 2015: 100), itself formerly called Strathbogie (see above). Here the Rivers Bogie and Deveron meet. Interestingly, however, it was Strathbogie that gave its name to both the political and ecclesiastical units, even though the Bogie's catchment area is smaller than the Deveron's and includes lands in the parishes of Kennethmont, Clatt, Kearn, Auchindoir and Clova, none of which were in the medieval lordship. Neither did the lordship include the lower Deveron, closer to the Moray Firth, nor the upper part of the Deveron catchment located in Dumeath parish and the Cabrach (also known as Strathdeveron), which was formerly part of Clova parish. Nevertheless, it is the River Deveron, not the Bogie, that runs through the central part of the lordship, including next to the caput at Huntly Castle.

It is likely that Strathbogie became the lordship's name because it had once been the more important of the unit's two straths. The significance of Rhynie may be reflected in an economic importance that was only later eclipsed by Huntly. In a 1600 rental the market at Rhynie was recorded as being of much greater economic value than that at the Raws in Huntly, £80 vs £20 (Shepherd 2021: 260). This indicates the advantageous position of Rhynie as a centre, located at a crossroads for routes north to Huntly and beyond, west across the Cabrach to Moray, south to Kildrummy and Donside, and east to the Urie valley and the coast beyond (Simpson 1930: 48–52). Furthermore, Huntly was not a medieval parochial centre, since the parish of Huntly was only created in the 18th century out of the parishes of Dunbennan, Kinnoir and part of Drumdelgie (Ross 2003: vol 1, 95, 99). All this indicates that Huntly only became prominent after it was established as a military base and centre for the Lordship of Strathbogie, when the motte and bailey was built in the late 12th century or early 13th century (Simpson 1922: 149–50).

3.3.3 The Earldom of Mar, Clatt, and the Lordship of the Garioch

In the year 1200, a short distance south of Rhynie was the earldom of Mar. As mentioned above, a *mormáer* of Mar was first attested in 1014, but the role may have had earlier, perhaps Pictish, origins (Illus 3.4). After 1200, the successor to the *mormáer*dom, the earldom of Mar, included most of highland Deeside (including Braemar and Cromar) and Donside, as well as the more northerly parishes of Clova (with Cabrach), Auchindoir and probably Kearn towards the southern end of the Bogie's catchment area. Dauvit Broun has recently suggested, from the place-names Midmar
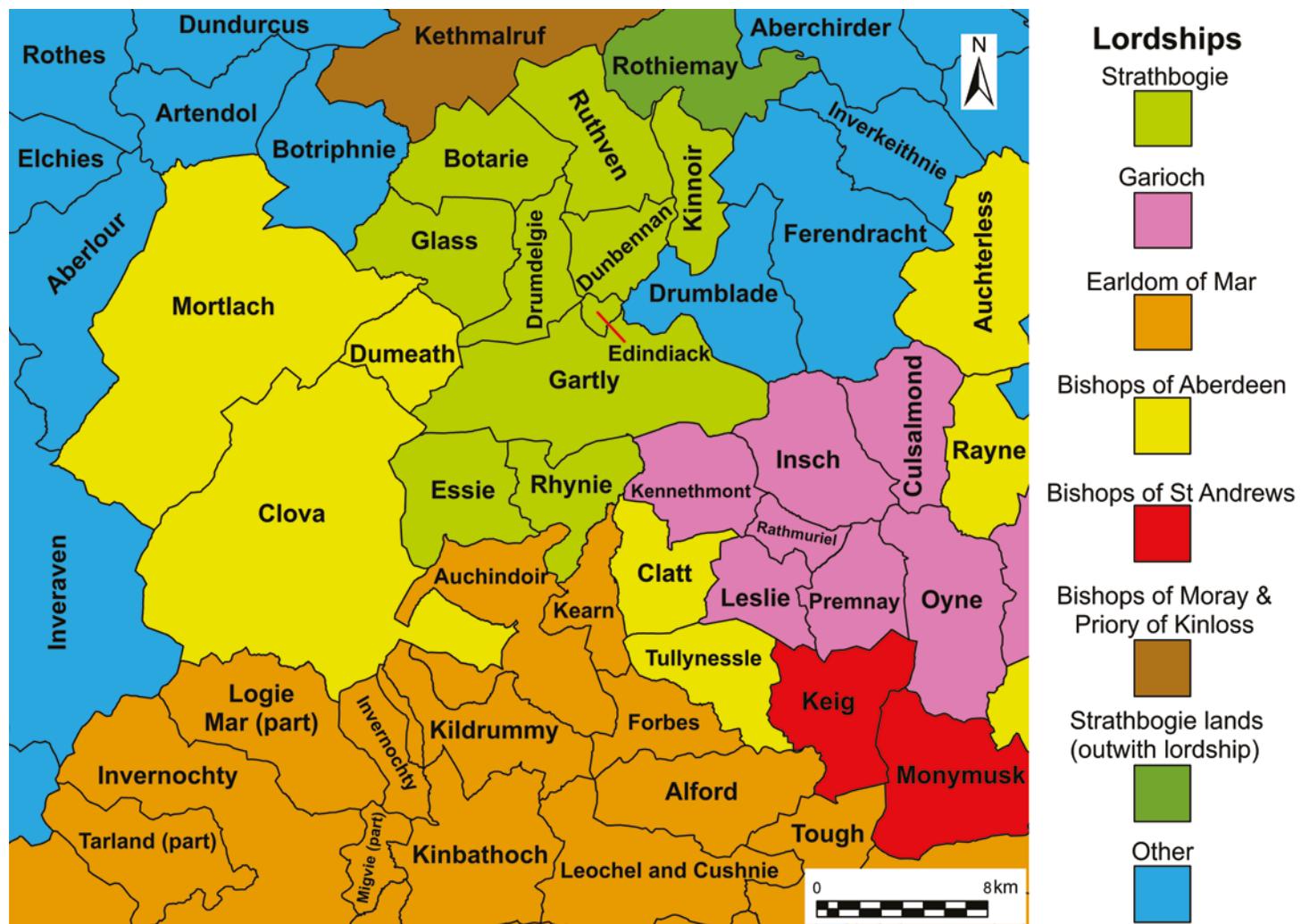
Illus 3.4
Lordships around Rhynie in the 1220s. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2024, and NRS data
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(from *Migmar) and Craigievar between the rivers Dee and Don, that Mar was originally confined to Deeside (Alexander 1952: 330; Broun forthcoming a).

Nevertheless, there are also places in the Rhynie environs that might reflect connections to Mar. In Auchindoir and Kearn parish, in the medieval parish of Kearn, at the boundary with Auchindoir parish, there is the settlement of Marchmar (NJ 484 232), first recorded in 1552. The name contains Scots *march*, 'boundary', which presumably refers to the northern boundary of Mar (Alexander 1952: 330). As a Scots name rather than a Gaelic one, it points to a relatively late coining, possibly not long before its first appearance in the record, and so cannot be used to identify the much earlier extent of Mar.

A significantly earlier name, which probably alludes to a border, is the parish-name Auchindoir, analysed below as 'davach of the boundary'.[15] Auchindoir lay on the Mar side of the boundary between the *mormáer*dom, later earldom, of Mar and the territorial unit which developed into the Lordship of Strathbogie (Illus 3.3). It also lay on the Mar side of the boundary between the deanery of Mar in Aberdeen diocese and the deanery of Strathbogie in Moray diocese (Rhynie parish). Moreover, the kirk of Auchindoir and the settlement of Auld Auchindoir were located close to the parishes of Rhynie, Essie, Kearn and Clova.

Another early name which might contain the territory-name Mar is Merdrum,[16] '(the) ridge of Mar' (Gaelic *druim*, 'ridge'). Merdrum was a large land-unit in the medieval parish of Essie, in the lordship and deanery of Strathbogie, which by the 16th century had been divided into the farms of New Merdrum and Old Merdrum (Illus 3.5). The ridge itself presumably refers to the upland area in the lands of Merdrum on the south side of the Kirkney Water from the Hill of Oldmerdrum west to Clayshot Hill (named 'Hill of New Merdrum' on RHP2254 and RHP2256, both dating to 1776). The name '(the) ridge of Mar' may have been coined because it was the last large ridge fully in Essie (and the later Lordship of Strathbogie) encountered before someone entered Mar, whether heading south into Auchindoir or west into the Cabrach (in Clova parish). It might also be speculated that Merdrum also once had a wider connotation, stretching westwards beyond Craigwater Hill, Cloichedubh Hill and Green Knowe to include all the north-western lands of Essie parish right up to the boundary with Cabrach from Mount of Haddoch northwards.

On the east bank of the River Bogie opposite Rhynie was Kearn parish, probably in the earldom of Mar, and then Clatt parish (which also included a small stretch of the east bank of the Bogie, encompassing Blairindinny) (Illus 3.4). The church of Clatt and its territory (*schira*, 'shire') were already possessed by the bishops of Aberdeen by 1157, when this status gained papal recognition (Abdn Reg. i, 5–7). East of Clatt lay the Lordship of the Garioch, which included the parish of Kennethmont, located north of Clatt and on the east bank of the Bogie opposite the northern part of Rhynie parish. The Garioch was given by King William the Lion to his brother Earl David between 1179 and 1182 (Barrow 2003: 266; RCAHMS 2007: 139–40; Broun forthcoming a). It became the name of the whole lordship which extended east beyond Inverurie to Fintray on the northern bank of the River Don, including lands not originally called the Garioch (Stringer 1985: 60–7).

Thus, the development of the Lordship of the Garioch indicates that such units could preserve existing territorial names,

while transforming their extents and nature, by becoming larger or smaller secular units. Under such a model it could be suggested that over time Strathbogie lost lands east and south of Rhynie but gained others beyond the Bogie catchment area to become a lordship centred on Huntly by the 13th century. This potentially included lands that came to be under the lordships of Mar, the Garioch and the bishops of Aberdeen, turning Rhynie from a central into a peripheral location in Strathbogie.

3.3.4 Parishes and the Dioceses of Moray and Aberdeen

By the end of the 12th century the environs around Rhynie were divided up into parishes, each with its parish priest, who provided pastoral care chiefly through the administration of the holy sacraments, supported by the payment of teinds or tithes. A settlement was deemed to be in the parish to whose church it paid teinds.[17] The parishes were grouped together into bishoprics, with the bishop having overall responsibility for the smooth running of the system. The bishop was provided for by lands belonging directly to the bishopric (known as mensal lands), as well as various dues exacted from the churches in his diocese. In order to make his task more manageable, most dioceses were divided up into deaneries, each one managed by a dean. There is evidence from elsewhere in Scotland that both parishes and deaneries were often based on earlier secular units of lordship (Barrow 1975: 127;
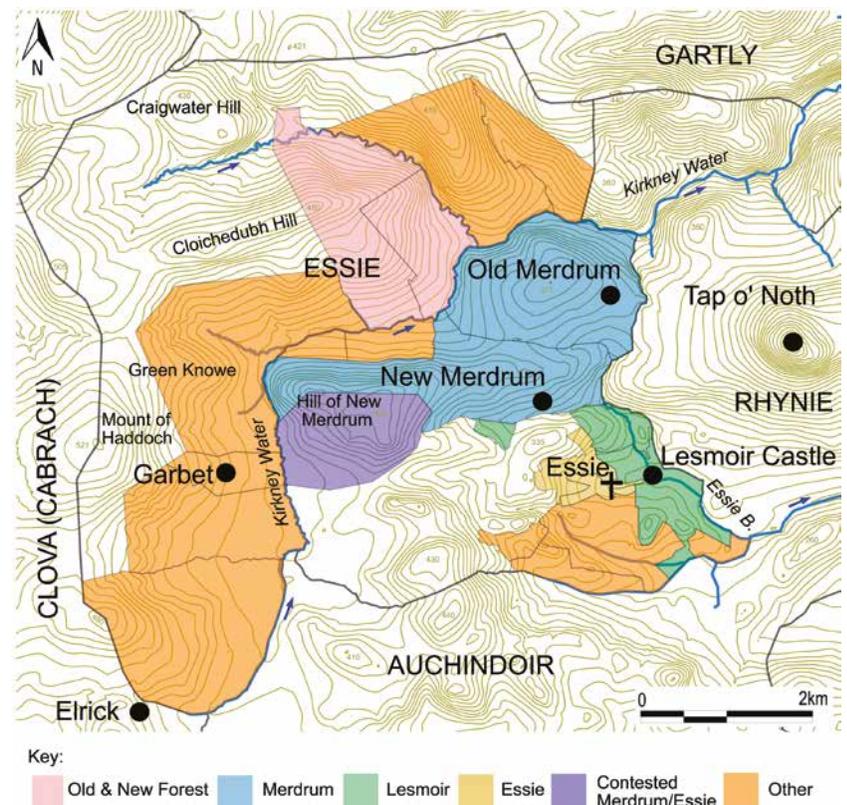
Illus 3.5
Essie parish with farm units from RHP2254 and RHP2256, both AD 1776.
Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2024, and NRS data © Crown copyright and database right 2024

Rogers 1997). The wider Rhynie area was especially complex in this regard (Illus 3.6), with Rhynie itself being in the diocese of Moray and the deanery of Strathbogie, while adjacent parishes to the east and south were in the diocese of Aberdeen, one (Kennethmont) in the deanery of Garioch and two (Auchindoir and Kearn) in the deanery of Mar. These largely map onto the pattern of secular lordship, though not exactly, since the deanery of the Garioch included lands of the bishops of Aberdeen in addition to the Lordship of the Garioch (Stringer 1985: 65–6).

The situation immediately before the emergence of the medieval bishoprics of Moray and Aberdeen in the first half of the 12th century is complex. According to later accounts, at some point before 1130, probably in the 11th century, Mortlach near Dufftown in Banffshire became an episcopal centre (see Woolf 2007a: 312–14 for an examination of the evidence). Woolf (2007a) has argued that the bishopric of Mortlach was established by Máel Coluim III (1058–93)[18] to project control into Moray, with Mortlach's bishop in charge of subordinate peripatetic bishops (*chorepiscopi*) with jurisdiction north of the Mounth. While this is an attractive theory, it is one created in the absence of reliable contemporary evidence for 11th-century Church organisation. What is clear is that in the first decade of David I's reign (1124–53) a bishop's seat was established near the mouth of the River Don, just north of the burgh of Aberdeen; the first bishop styled 'of Aberdeen' was Nechtan, who first

appears in the record in 1131 (Watt & Murray 2003: 1; Forsyth et al 2008: 138). The new bishopric of Aberdeen included Mortlach, from where the bishops claimed that their see had been transferred. Mortlach lay at the very western edge of this area, close to the Spey, with only a thin arm of the Moray deanery of Strathbogie separating it from that river.[19]

It is around this time that the bishopric of Moray is first mentioned. Its cathedral church, after some moving around, finally settled in Elgin in the early 13th century. It is likely that the bishops of Moray sought to include areas under the jurisdiction of Mortlach when the latter was incorporated into the bishopric of Aberdeen. The political background to this ecclesiastical 'musical chairs' (or *cathredae*) is almost certainly the final incorporation of the semi-independent territory of Moray into the kingdom of Scotland (Woolf 2007a: 317–22). Although there is nothing explicit in the record, there is some evidence to suggest that the deanery of Strathbogie was in contention, since as late as 1157 the Pope confirmed to Edward, Bishop of Aberdeen, the teinds (perhaps just from royal lands) from between the Dee and the Spey.[20] However, at this time the western edge of Aberdeen diocese did not reach the Spey because parishes in the Moray deaneries of Strathbogie, Elgin and Strathspey came in between its diocesan parishes and that river.

The church of Mortlach appears to have been dedicated to St Moluag, a high-profile Scottish saint whose cult was centred
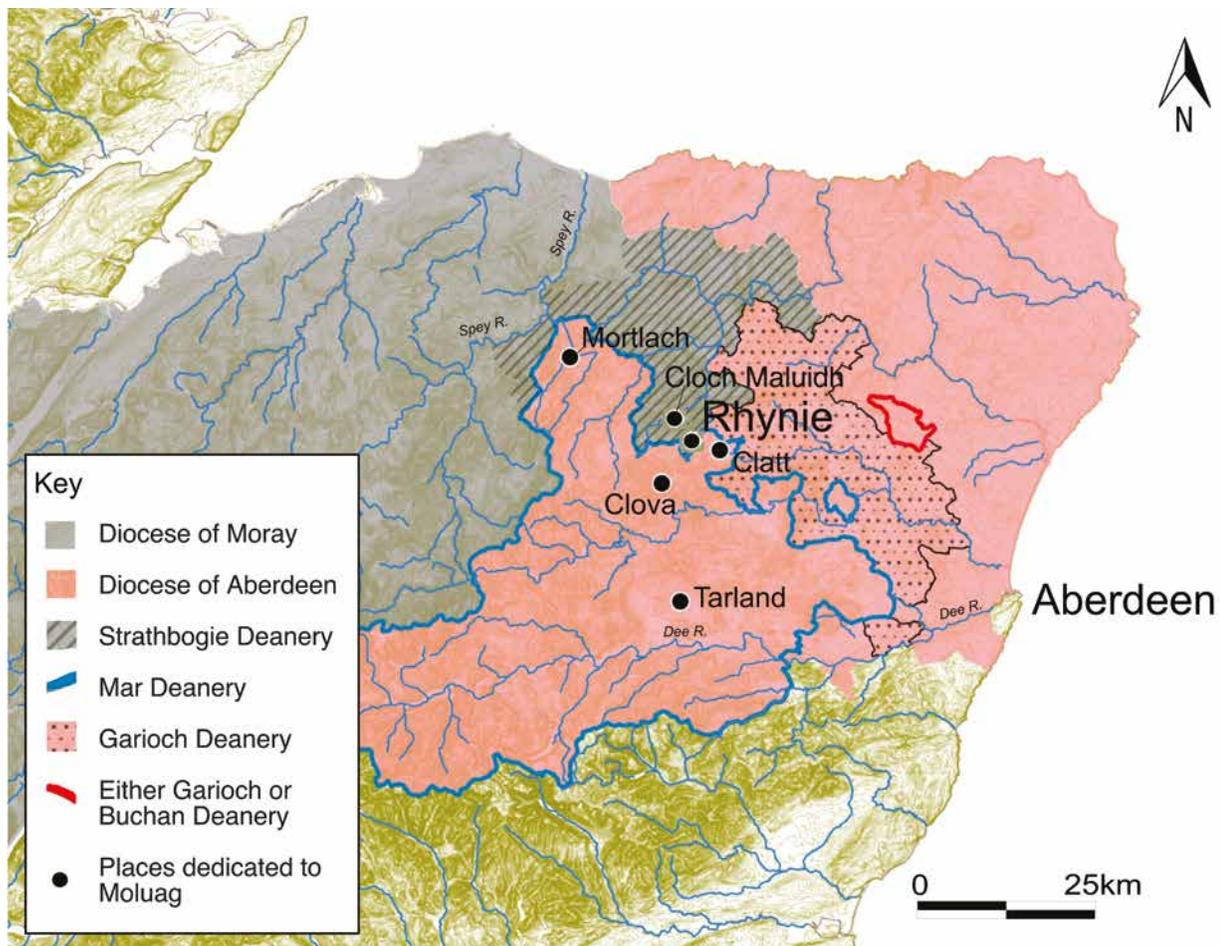
Illus 3.6
Dioceses and deaneries relating to the Rhynie area, *c* 1260. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2024, and NRS data © Crown copyright and database right 2024

on Lismore (Argyll) but who was believed to have died and been buried at Rosemarkie (Ross). The sources both for the dedication of Mortlach and the saint's death and burial at Rosemarkie are from 16th-century Aberdeen.[21] Moluag was the patron saint of Clatt, a prebendal church of Aberdeen.[22] The parish church of Tarland, granted by the mormáer of Mar to the priory of St Andrews, was also dedicated to him.[23] It is also likely that he was the patron saint of Clova, a medieval parish now united with Kildrummy. He certainly had an important presence in Clova: the medieval chapel or church now known as St Luke's Chapel is dedicated to him, since it is referred to in the early 18th century as *Sommiluaks Chapell*, ie Saint Mo Luag's.[24] All the above (Mortlach, Clatt, Clova and Tarland) are in the diocese of Aberdeen, deanery of Mar.

One other trace of Moluag's cult in the Rhynie area is the topographical feature of Cloch Maluidh on the slopes of Tap o' Noth. This is a Gaelic name meaning 'Moluag's Stone' which according to Macdonald, who had a deep knowledge of the area, refers to

> a spur of rock jutting out on the side of the Tap o' Noth overlooking Scordarg, and half way up the Tap. The face of this perpendicular rock is about 30 feet high, and behind, standing clear of the hill, it is 7 or 8 feet high.[25]

As a Gaelic name containing a saint's name, it can be assumed that it was coined in the medieval period. Alongside the concentration of Moluag sites, the naming of such a prominent topographical feature only further indicates how strong the cult of Moluag was within the wider Rhynie area. Their presence at both ends of the important route through inhospitable terrain between Mortlach to the north-west and Rhynie and Clatt (including the Cabrach) to the south-east suggests that Moluag was seen as protecting the traveller along this critical routeway.

3.4 Place-names in and around Rhynie

The environs around the archaeological sites at Rhynie, Tap o' Noth and Cairn More were part of a wider evolving secular and ecclesiastical picture, upon which the analysis of place-names can shed further light. Place-names can provide evidence for various aspects of social history such as language, land-use, settlement, administration of justice, and more generally the changing perception and interpretation of the environment through time. The following selective analysis, focused on high-status centres around the excavated sites, is drawn from surveys of place-names in the medieval parishes of Rhynie and Essie (later simply Rhynie), Auchindoir, Kearn (later united as Auchindoir & Kearn), Gartly, Clatt, Kennethmont and to a lesser extent Cabrach. These surveys have utilised a number of sources, which record transactions, agreements, rentals and taxes relating to landholdings and churches from the 12th century onwards. They include the cartularies of the bishoprics of Moray[26] and Aberdeen (*Moray Reg.* and *Abdn. Reg.*), the Register of the Great Seal (*RMS*), the 16th-century and 17th-century *Retours*, rentals, sasines and taxation records, and from the late 18th century onwards, estate plans and maps, such as 1st Edition Ordnance Survey maps and their accompanying Ordnance Survey Name Books.[27] These sources show that by the

12th century the Rhynie area was predominately Gaelic-speaking, though some Pictish place-names survived. By 1200 Scots and Flemish speakers were settling in the Lordship of the Garioch to the east.[28] Over time, Scots expanded into the Rhynie area, replacing earlier Celtic nomenclature or being used to name new settlements. By about 1500, when we see the larger landholdings divided into two or more separate units, the affixes distinguishing these new divisions are all in Scots, for example Auld and New Merdrum (Rhynie), first appearing as such in 1511. Gaelic continued to be spoken in Strathbogie well into the 17th century, though there is evidence that it was no longer spoken by the inhabitants of Huntly and Rhynie parishes by 1728 (Withers 1984: 176). Gaelic lingered longer in the upland areas, with the adjacent parish of Cabrach still recognised as Gaelic-speaking in 1705, although Gaelic had 'declined markedly there' by the mid-18th century (Withers 1984: 55, 255–6). It persisted much longer in Upper Deeside, its last native Gaelic-speaker dying in 1984 (Gaelic in the North East 2023).

3.4.1 Rhynie parish

The modern Rhynie parish was formed through the union of the parishes of Rhynie and its western neighbour, Essie, after the Reformation in the early 17th century (Ross 2003: vol 1, 96) (Illus 3.5 and 3.7). The boundary between the two can be relatively clearly deduced from two 18th-century estate plans (RHP2254 and RHP2256), so it is clear that both the Craw Stane complex and Tap o' Noth were in the medieval parish of Rhynie. Presumably the main early secular centre of what later became the parish of Rhynie was the high-status Craw Stane complex near the site of Rhynie old kirk. Rhynie first appears in the episcopal records of the diocese of Moray in the 1220s as (the church of) *Rynyn* or *Ryny* (Moray Reg. nos 69, 73, 81). The place-name, however, provides important evidence for the early significance of this location as it has every appearance of being a Celtic coining containing 'great king' or 'very royal'. This interpretation is based on the analogy of the evolution of the closely comparable (Loch) Ryan (Wigtownshire), which is one of the earliest recorded of all Scottish place-names, appearing in Ptolemy's *Geographia* as *Rerigonion* (Grigg 2015: 85–6). This has been interpreted variously as 'very royal place' (Watson 1926: 34; Rivet & Smith 1979: 447) and 'place of the foremost great or divine king' (Isaac 2005: 202). The fact that we do not have such early forms of Rhynie makes an overly close comparison problematic. However, there is no reason to doubt that Rhynie contains early Celtic *$r\bar{\imath}g$* 'king' (which can also be translated adjectivally as 'royal'). Thus, a minimalist and provisional reconstruction of Rhynie in early Celtic might be *$r\bar{\imath}gonin$* or *$r\bar{\imath}gon\bar{\imath}n$* 'place of or associated with (-īn) a great (-*on*-) king (*$r\bar{\imath}g$*-)' – see Noble and Evans (2019: 59) for a more detailed analysis of this name. As far as labels go, and given Rhynie's situation within the historical kingdom of the Picts, it would be uncontroversial to describe Rhynie as a Pictish place-name. In fact, given the analogous (Loch) Ryan, the name could well pre-date the Pictish period by several centuries.

It should be stressed that the original referent for the name is not the present village of Rhynie, which grew up on the muir or rough grazing of Rhynie and was thus named Muir of Rhynie, appearing as such on early OS maps. Muir of Rhynie grew up
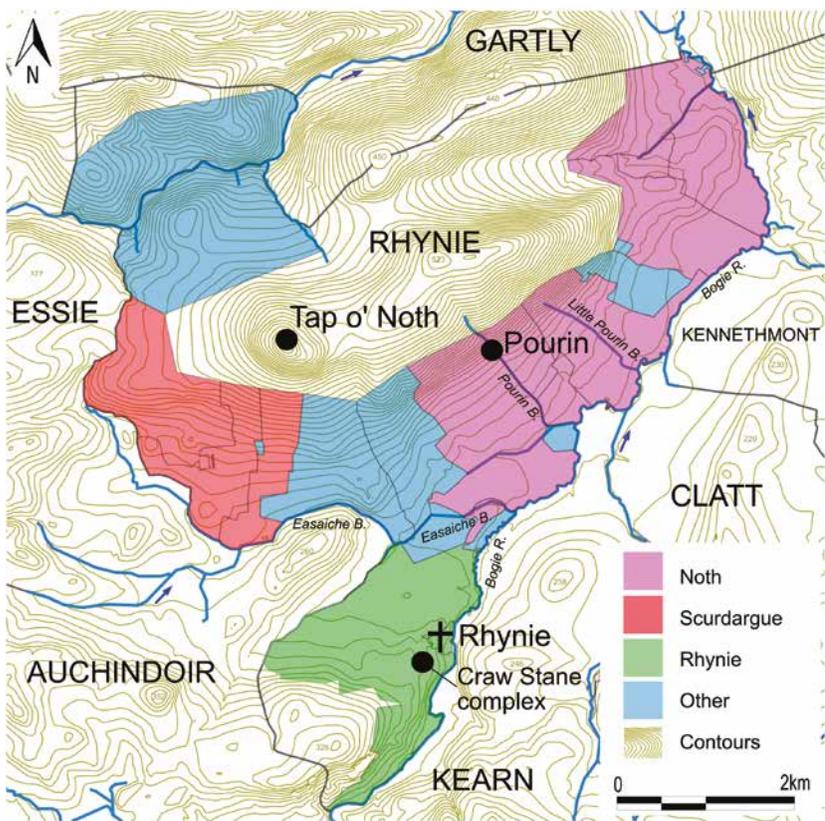
Illus 3.7
Rhynie parish with farm units from RHP2254 (1776). Contains OS data
© Crown copyright and database right 2024, and NRS data
© Crown copyright and database right 2024
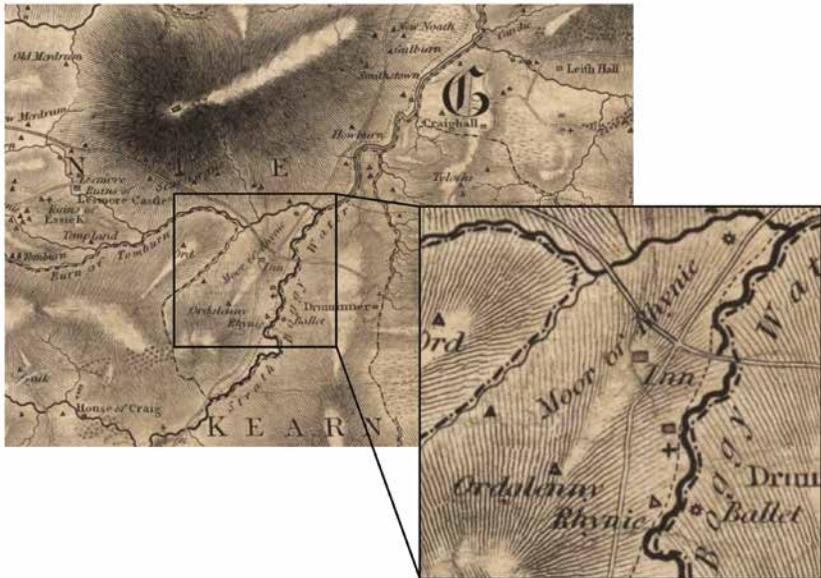
Illus 3.8
Rhynie and its immediate vicinity on James Robertson's topographical and military map of the counties of Aberdeen, Banff and Kincardine of 1822. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland under the Creative Common Attribution (CC-BY) licence

around a market stance, still shown on early editions of the OS map, conveniently situated at the crossroads of the north/south road from Donside to Huntly (now the A97) and the west/east road from the Cabrach to Kearn and the Garioch (now the A941). However, the earlier core of Rhynie parish was further south of the present village around and to the south of Rhynie old kirk. This can clearly be seen on Robertson's map of 1822 (Illus 3.8), which has perhaps only an Inn at *Moor of Rhynie* near the crossroads, whereas *Rhynie* is located south of the parish kirk in the vicinity of the Craw Stane complex. Robertson's depiction is broadly confirmed by earlier maps by Robert Gordon (Gordon 32, dating to *c* 1636–52), Roy's military map of *c* 1750 and the RHP2254 estate plan of 1776 (which does, however, show that there was a settlement at Muir of Rhynie by the late 18th century). Together, these provide strong evidence that the early modern Rhynie settlement was located at roughly NJ 498 262, only about 100−200m south-east of the Craw Stane complex. Therefore, the place-name Rhynie indicates the royal nature of the high-status early medieval complex located around the Pictish stone known as the Craw Stane and near the site of the medieval parish church with its impressive collection of Pictish stones (Noble et al 2019c; Chapters 5, 11 and 12).

After Rhynie the most important name in the parish is Noth, which can also be dated to the Pictish or even pre-Pictish period. Noth was originally the name of a territory almost 5km in length which abutted the lands of Rhynie to the north-east.[29] It may derive from a word for 'bare, naked, exposed', cognate with modern Welsh *noeth*, meaning 'naked, stripped, bare'. This could have described the steep hillside of Tap o' Noth or perhaps it indicates that, when the name was first coined, the territory of Noth was relatively clear of tree cover in contrast to much of the surrounding landscape. Should the latter be true, it may be that the lower slopes to the east near the Bogie and perhaps to the south were more intensively used for arable farming, providing an important source of food for both the activities on Tap o' Noth and the royal residence at Rhynie.

This territory can be reconstructed with some confidence from the settlements and relief features containing the name Noth. On both the OS 6-inch 1st Edition and the OS Landranger maps this includes Bogs of Noth, Glen of Noth, Hill of Noth, Mill of Noth, Milton of Noth, Newnoth, Oldnoth, Raws of Noth, Smithston (of Noth) and Tap o' Noth. Tap o' Noth itself is a Scots secondary formation meaning the top or highest point of the lands of Noth, which, along with the Hill of Noth, was commonty or common land to all the adjoining farms (1776 RHP2254). The fact that all the names of the above settlements have a Scots element indicates that the territory of Noth was divided up many centuries after the name for the original territory was coined. The boundary between Noth and Rhynie on the 1776 Estate Map (RHP2254) appears to be near the Burn of Easaiche, on which lies the Mill of Noth, which perhaps served both Noth and Rhynie. Two prominent standing stones on the south bank of the burn, just outside the Noth area, may have been repurposed as additional boundary markers.

On the lands of Noth there was a place called Pourin, which first appears as a cottage at NJ503292 in 1870 (OS 6-inch 1st Edition). The cottage is long gone but the name survives in two small burns, Burn of Pourin and Burn of Little Pourin. This is itself an indication that Pourin was once substantial enough for it to have

been divided. Despite such a late appearance in the record, the name probably derives from G *pòr* 'cropland' plus a diminutive suffix (Taylor 2011: 105; Taylor & Márkus 2012: 473). It seems, therefore, to attest to arable land usage, perhaps at a time when the pastoral economy was the norm in Noth.

Alongside the Pictish (or even pre-Pictish) names of Noth and Rhynie, there are smaller land units, such as Scurdargue and Clashindarroch, and a peppering of minor features that chiefly have later Gaelic names. In the later medieval period there was no clear secular centre of importance in the parish of Rhynie. According to later Gordon family texts, John Gordon, who lived *c* 1400 and was an ancestor of significant branches of the family, including those based at Lesmoir in Essie parish and Craig in Auchindoir, was associated with Scurdargue (Bulloch 1903: 26–30; Ree 1907: 21, 32). Scurdargue lies to the south-west of Tap o' Noth, 2.3 km north-west of Rhynie, and is unequivocally a Gaelic name (*Scordarg* 1511, *Scordarg* 1535). It contains the element G *sgòr*, defined variously as 'a sharp, steep hill rising by itself; steep precipitous height on another hill or mountain; a peak'. It is not entirely clear to which local feature it applies, though given its location on the lower slopes of Tap o' Noth it is possible that it refers to the Tap itself. The second element is G *dearg* 'red', in relation to which Macdonald (1891: 255) wrote: 'I am told that there was a rock of reddish colour long quarried for road-making, but which has almost disappeared by the reclamation of the land'. However, Scurdargue first appears in sources in 1511 (*RMS* ii. no 3599), so there is no strong evidence for this as a significant early medieval centre.

It is much more likely that Lesmoir, just to the west of Rhynie parish, near to Scurdargue, acted as the main lordly centre in the area in the post-1200 era, and probably considerably earlier (Illus 3.5). Today, Lesmoir is represented by the two farms of Milton of Lesmoir and Mains of Lesmoir, with the ruins of Lesmoir castle very near to the latter's farm steading. The castle lies right beside the boundary of the former parishes of Essie and Rhynie (Shepherd 2021: 24–5, fig 6), suggesting that it was a centre of lordship which once stretched well into Rhynie. The Castle of Lesmoir is

> represented by a circular earthwork of a medieval homestead moat, possibly of the Frendraught family, holders of lands of Essie before the third quarter of the 13th century, and fragments of a late medieval fortalice, all largely hidden by farmyard rubbish (Shepherd 2006).

Its name is significant, underlining as it does the important role it played in secular lordship from many centuries before the 13th century and its first appearance in the record (*Lesmoir* 1561 x 1577 *RMS* iv no 2637).

As it stands, Lesmoir is a Gaelic name containing the generic element *lios* (Old Gaelic *les*) qualified by Gaelic *mòr* 'big'. Old Gaelic *les* is defined as 'the space about a dwelling-house or houses enclosed by a bank or rampart'; also 'sometimes the bank or rampart itself'. The above-mentioned circular earthwork may very well be the eponymous *les*. In modern Scottish Gaelic its primary meaning is 'a garden', while in Ireland it is a remarkably common place-name element, with hundreds of examples displayed on the distribution map in Flanagan and Flanagan (1994: 111).[30] In his important study of this element, MacDonald (1987) identified

only 12 names containing *les-/lis-* across the whole of Scotland. A few more can be added to his list (see Taylor & Márkus 2012: 426–8) but even so it presents a stark contrast to Ireland. Mac-Donald concluded that in former Pictland, as well as in Northern Brittonic-speaking areas of southern Scotland, it refers especially to high-status places, some of them parishes, having a similar meaning to that of the cognate Welsh *llys* m. and f. 'court, manor house, hall', while retaining its basic meaning of an enclosed space. This does not mean that all *les-/lis-* names north of the Forth necessarily go back to the Pictish period, but it does at least indicate substrate influence on the Scottish Gaelic use of the word (MacDonald 1987; Taylor 2011: 107).

Lesmoir occupies a strategic position controlling a significant route from Strathbogie into Moray via Mortlach and on to Elgin. It is worth noting than on this route about half-way between Lesmoir and Mortlach (Dufftown) is Lesmurdie, 'Murdoch's *les*', which may have played a similar role in controlling the thoroughfare (MacDonald 1987: 41). In this regard, Lesmoir could have taken on a role similar to that of the fort on Tap o' Noth and might even have been originally established when the fort was in use, or have taken over from the fort and the palace complex at Rhynie as the local centre of power in the early medieval period.

3.4.2 Kearn parish

The medieval parish of Kearn, which included the archaeological site at Cairn More, lay to the east and south of Rhynie. It was situated between the Bogie and Carlinden Burn to the west, the Kearn, Cannie and Gadie burns to the east, and extended south to the Correen Hills (Illus 3.9). It was in the deanery of Mar in the diocese of Aberdeen, and probably in the earldom of Mar. Though amalgamated with the parish of Forbes and then Auchindoir, Kearn's boundaries can be reconstructed from an estate map (RHP260/1) produced *c* 1771 for the Forbes family (for discussion, see RCAHMS 2007: 143). At that time the Forbes family dominated the parish from their seat at Druminnor Castle, which is only 270m from the parish church of Kearn (Shepherd 2021: 255–63).

Kearn parish contained a mix of arable and pastoral land to the north and west, including the haughlands by the Bogie opposite Rhynie whose relative fertility is indicated by the farm-name Barflat (*Beirflat* 1595 *RMS* vi no 225), 'a flat or level ground where bear or barley is grown'. Much of the parish's land in the south consisted of upland grazing (RHP260/1; Shepherd 2021: 255–63). Kearn's place-names follow the pattern of the area more generally, with the more significant and established settlements such as Druminnor, Cairndard, Cairnmore and Cushnie being of Gaelic origin, while the later, often less important ones, as well as smaller natural features, were subsequently coined in Scots.

Within the parish there is a small cluster of settlement-names with the element *càrn* 'a cairn, a tumulus' situated around the early medieval enclosed site or fort on the hill of Cairn More (*càrn mòr* 'big cairn'). These include Cairnmore to the south-west of the hill, while to the north there is Cairndard and the neighbouring, no longer inhabited small settlement of Cairnbeg (*càrn beag* 'little cairn'). Cairndard seems to be the core settlement given that it appears in the record centuries before the others.[31] It can be analysed as Gaelic 'cairn or tumulus of the height', most likely with reference to the fort of Cairn More. The hill itself first appears on
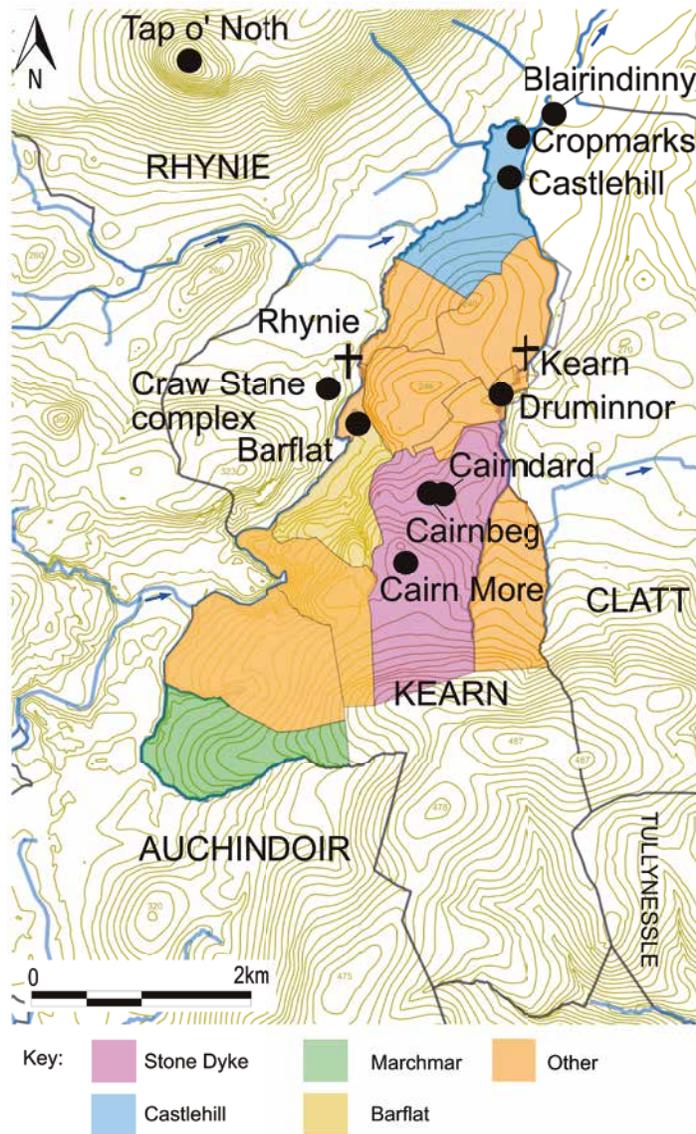
Illus 3.9
Kearn parish, including farm units from RHP260/1 (*c* 1771). Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2024, and NRS data © Crown copyright and database right 2024

a *c* 1771 estate plan (RHP260/1) with a more prominent ring, perhaps intended to depict the banks of the early enclosure. The plan has no trace of the later settlement of that name but does show a piece of land called *Cairn more folds* to the north of the hill and west of Cairndard. While all these names are coined by Gaelic-speakers, the sequence is probably: 1) Cairndard, with reference to both the hill and the settlement, perhaps contrasting the perceived remains of the fort with the group of cairns 750m to the south-west on elevated but slightly lower ground; 2) as Cairndard became primarily the name of a sizeable land-holding, the hill with its fort became known as Cairn More 'big cairn'; 3) this then gave its name to the later settlement of Cairnmore, while Cairnbeg was named to pair with Cairnmore. Cairndard's antiquity is underlined by the archaic definite article, which pushes its coining back into the 12th century at the latest (Ó Maolalaigh 1998:

20−1). The main point here is that these name-givers were using Gaelic *càrn* as a generic term to refer to any perceived prehistoric structure.

The name Kearn itself applies to the northern part of the parish around the medieval parish kirk (now only a graveyard at NJ514266) and Druminnor, the centre of lordship of the Forbeses, who held the lands of Kearn and Forbes from the 1270s at the latest.[32] This was reflected in Druminnor Castle's alternative name, Castle Forbes. Druminnor[33] is a Gaelic name probably meaning 'the ridge of the confluence' (Gaelic *inbhear* 'river-mouth, confluence').[34] If so, the eponymous confluence is that of the Kearn Burn with the Water of Bogie. At this most northerly part of Kearn parish, in the narrow tongue of land formed by these two watercourses as they run roughly parallel to each other just before they meet, lies the farm of Castle Hill. This may refer to Druminnor Castle or a quite different feature all together. Aerial photography has revealed the cropmarks of a possible enclosure on a large natural knoll at the above-mentioned confluence, about 350m north of Castlehill farm steading (NJ52NW 69). An arc of ditch about 2m in breadth is visible on the south flank of the knoll, suggesting a roughly circular or oval enclosure with an internal diameter of between 35m and 40m. (NRHE ID 107474, 17669, cf 17660). Beside this feature, on the other side of the Kearn Burn in the parish of Clatt, is Blairindinny.[35] The final element in this name may be G *dún* in the sense 'fortified hill',[36] and if so, is likely to refer to the above-mentioned site. The name Kearn[37] probably derives from Old Gaelic *cern* 'angle, corner, recess', modern Gaelic *ceàrn*, with a similar meaning, and may refer to the above-mentioned tongue of land, or the wider area between the River Bogie and Kearn Burn, that includes Druminnor.

3.5 Conclusions

When considering all the historical and place-name evidence, it is clear that the general lack of early textual evidence relating directly to the environs of Rhynie renders analysis difficult for the first millennium AD. As a result, archaeological research provides evidence that is not matched by textual evidence and therefore has to be assessed primarily on its own terms. However, even though Rhynie, Tap o' Noth and Cairn More do not appear in first-millennium sources, the later evidence, especially from place-names, does enable these centres to be placed in historical contexts to some extent. The name Rhynie highlights the royal significance of that centre, and later place-names and land units provide evidence for the hinterlands associated with each of these Pictish sites. It is uncertain whether the rulers of Rhynie were part of a polity beyond Strathbogie, but certainly by the late 7th century at the latest, the region had been incorporated by Fortriu into their kingdom of the Picts.

Later medieval evidence allows us to reconstruct tentatively the development of this area after these sites fell into disuse. For example, place-name evidence indicates that Rhynie and Tap o' Noth, both with Pictish (or even pre-Pictish) names, were superseded at least partly by the Gaelic-named Lesmoir. Moreover, east of the Bogie in the parish of Kearn, the centre of power shifted from the significant hillfort now known as Cairn More to Druminnor, the centre of the Forbes lordship.

At their peak, Rhynie and Tap o' Noth were probably at the centre of a substantial Strathbogie territory, but they moved to

the periphery after their decline. Mar came to include Auchindoir and probably Kearn (with the new boundary embodied by the Gaelic place-names Merdrum and Auchindoir); the Garioch included Kennethmont; and Clatt was held by the bishops of Aberdeen. By 1200 a reshaped Strathbogie was recentred on what later became known as Huntly, leaving Rhynie on the edge of the lordship. By the 12th century, the hinterland of Rhynie was also ecclesiastically divided into the dioceses of Moray and Aberdeen and their deaneries of Strathbogie, Mar and the Garioch. To some extent this reflected the secular situation in the region, in addition to complex pre-existing religious structures and devotion to saints, most notably those associated with the bishopric of Mortlach and its patron saint, Moluag. These later divisions attest obliquely to the strategic significance of the area, which contained important routes through the Highlands connecting lowland Aberdeenshire and Scotland south of the Mounth to the Firthlands in the north. For centuries, kings of the Picts and Scots had a strong interest in preventing rivals from exercising hegemony over this region, as the rulers of Rhynie had presumably achieved when the Craw Stane complex was flourishing.