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Rhynie, A Powerful Place of Pictland

Edited by Gordon Noble

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Chapter 11

ROMAN IRON AGE AND EARLY MEDIEVAL RHYNIE II: THE CRAW STANE COMPLEX, THE PICTISH CEMETERY AND SYMBOL STONES, AND CAIRN MORE

GORDON NOBLE

11.1 Introduction

Evidence from the Craw Stane complex excavations was laid out in Chapter 5 of this volume, while Chapter 6 explored the sequence identified from the investigations at Cairn More. In this chapter, the evidence from both sites is reviewed and considered in greater detail. Discussion includes the survival of archaeology in the valley and extends to a consideration of the phasing and parallels for both sites, which are currently few and far between. This leads into a wider discussion on the nature of early medieval settlement in eastern Scotland and the parallels for the buildings found at the Craw Stane complex and Cairn More. While there remains a dearth of settlement in the eastern lowlands of Scotland, the dataset is slowly growing and can help illuminate the surviving evidence at the two sites considered in this chapter. The material culture from both is also summarised and reviewed, with particular consideration afforded to the exceptional assemblage from the Craw Stane complex. Towards the end of the chapter, attention shifts to the cemetery and the fascinating Pictish symbol stone monuments found in the Rhynie environs.

11.2 The known unknowns

Even on well-preserved archaeological sites, elucidating the form and character of structures can prove problematic. Identifying what has been lost through agricultural activity, cultural practices and taphonomic processes is even more difficult to gauge and presents further interpretational challenges for the archaeologist. Key sites in Scotland provide stark reminders of the impact of these processes and how they can affect our understanding of complex settlement sequences. Of particular note are the rescue excavations conducted in the 1970s at Broxmouth hillfort, East Lothian – the most comprehensively excavated Iron Age fort in lowland Scotland. At Broxmouth, a remarkable series of well-preserved

roundhouses were identified alongside a complex sequence of construction and refurbishment of the enclosing elements (Armit & McKenzie 2013). However, it became obvious during the excavation and write-up that crucial detail only survived in pockets where modern and historic agricultural regimes had not removed deposits. Reuse of the site had also impacted stratigraphic integrity, with the majority of early internal occupation seemingly removed through refurbishment and occupation during the final phase of activity. Traces of the earlier settlement phases appeared to survive only in places where post-depositional events had fortuitously protected the deposits. For example, fragments of roundhouse buildings were preserved in the abandoned fort defences due to floor layers and structural features having subsided into the loose fills of backfilled ditches. The level of fragmentation and partial survival of the settlement was described as ‘sobering’ and reflected upon in the discussion chapter of the excavation volume:

Broxmouth is frequently touted as the most completely excavated hillfort in Scotland . . . Yet paradoxically, one of the major contributions of the Broxmouth excavation, through its capacity to reveal these occasional isolated windows into the vanished past, is to demonstrate how little we can ever expect to survive, even in such apparently favourable circumstances. When we extend our appreciation of these destructive processes to other sites and into the wider prehistoric landscape, the realisation of what we have lost is so overwhelming (Armit & McKenzie 2013: 494).

There is no doubt that agriculture and settlement (re)organisation, amongst other factors, have had a huge impact on the survival of deposits and structures in the Upper Strathbogie valley. At the

Craw Stane complex, the survival of material culture is related not only to preservation factors but also patterns of (re)deposition, with the vast majority of objects from the Craw Stane complex coming from the site's final abandonment phases. Workshop debris and midden layers appear to have been deliberately thrown or redeposited into the ditch, sometimes many years or decades after the initial formation of these deposits. Traces of buildings at the Craw Stane complex have also been undoubtedly damaged by agriculture and later use. Like at Broxmouth, the clearest traces of structures at the Craw Stane complex come from what is likely to have been one of the final phases, if not *the* final phase of occupation. Thus, the early phases of settlement of the interior of the Craw Stane enclosures could well have been removed/cleared away in the later phases of occupation, leaving only a partial picture of settlement for us to assess.

Archaeology has been most severely affected in the low-lying parts of the valley. Floor layers and hearths were identified at both Cairn More and Tap o' Noth. However, these were almost completely absent at the Craw Stane complex, with the exception of the fortuitous survival of features associated with Structure 4 (though here they are likely to represent only a very small percentage of the original building). Roy's Military Survey of Scotland (1747–55) shows that the Craw Stane complex and cemetery were situated in areas that have been cultivated from at least the 18th century onwards (Chapter 2). Periods of improvement as well as agricultural attrition are therefore likely to have affected these low-lying sites more than others. At the Craw Stane complex, impacts have undoubtedly been at the more destructive end

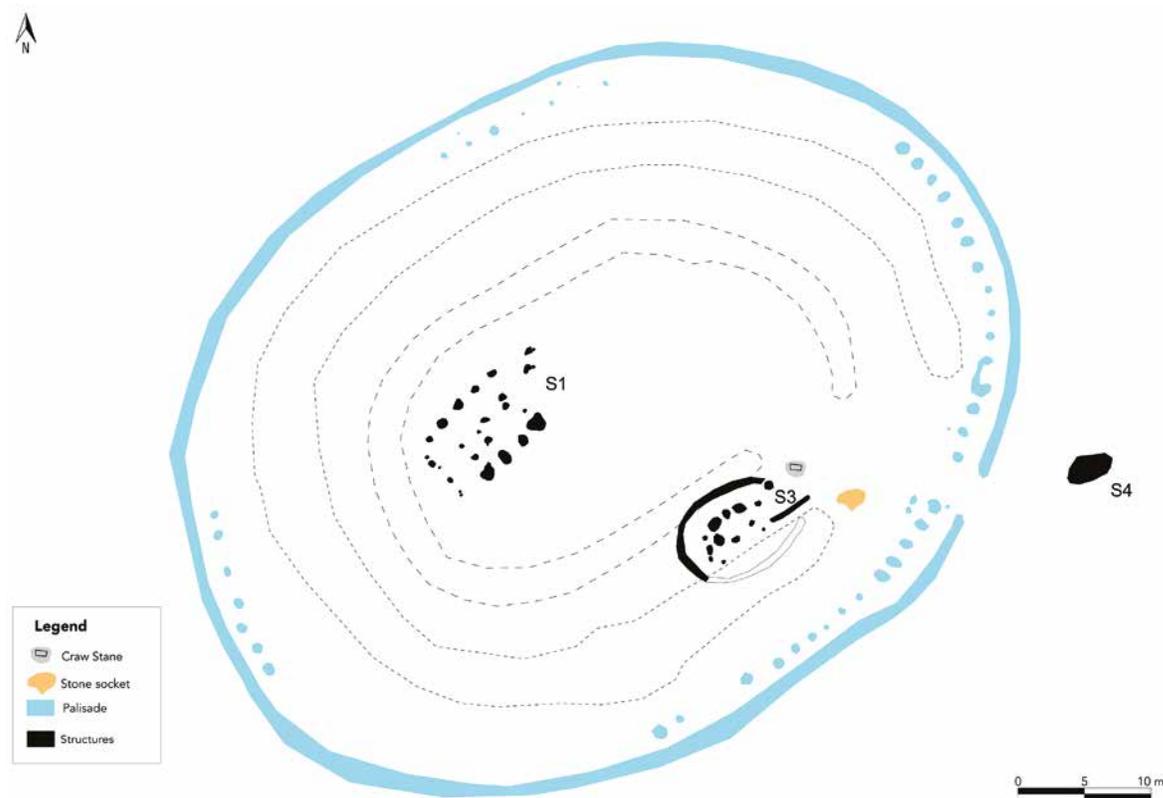
of the scale and the ploughzone experiments reported on in Chapter 5 highlight the effects that recent agricultural episodes have had on the survival of material culture. Their impact on the architectural traces of the complex is likely to have been equally severe, with no evidence for the banks/ramparts which are likely to have accompanied the ditched and perhaps wooden components of the enclosing elements. However, even at Cairn More, which today is sited in marginal ground at the edge of a forest plantation, the impact of cultivation was clear. The large hearth in the centre of the enclosure, for example, was covered by a large spread of stones which appeared to be field clearance. Moreover, the ramparts of Cairn More consisted of only relatively modest-sized stones with very little evidence for facing, suggesting that any larger stones used in the defences had been robbed out for field walls and later buildings in the surrounding landscape (including in the substantial modern enclosure wall for the Cairn More woodland). These complex patterns of post-occupation activity must be kept in mind when considering the archaeology of the Upper Strathbogie valley.

11.3 The Craw Stane complex phasing

Located in the valley below, the Craw Stane complex was in contemporary use with the lower fort of Tap o' Noth (Chapter 4). Bayesian modelling suggests activity at the complex started in the late 4th century AD, when occupation at Tap o' Noth had already been ongoing for a century. However, the main phase of enclosure at Tap o' Noth coincided with the height of the Craw Stane



Illus 11.1
Phase 1 of the Craw Stane complex



Illus 11.2
Phase 2 of the Craw Stane complex

complex in the 5th and 6th centuries AD. There is clear stratigraphic phasing to the Craw Stane complex but separating the phases and modelling their chronology is difficult given the incorporation of residual material from the repeated recutting of features such as the inner and outer ditch. The backfilling of features after the removal of timbers, standing stones and other structural features further complicates the sequence, and a plateau in the radiocarbon calibration curve during the 5th and 6th centuries AD makes modelling even more problematic. However, the stratigraphic position of Structure 3 suggests it was built after both the inner and outer ditches had been backfilled, at least towards the entrance of the complex where Structure 3 was built. The dates for Structures 1 and 4 are more consistent given that these were built in areas that seem to have seen less in the way of reworking of earlier features or whose construction perhaps involved the removal of earlier occupation phases. The dating suggests Structures 1 and 4 were later elements of the complex (Chapter 8) and, as such, two major phases to the complex can be postulated:

Phase 1: An earthwork complex consisting of the inner and outer ditches and presumably associated banks/ramparts. No clear traces of buildings can be related to this period, though these could have been built with few earthfast elements and/or were entirely removed during Phase 2 (Illus 11.1).

Phase 2: A timber-enclosed phase with a ‘palisade’ and post setting providing support for an earth or stone rampart with large internal

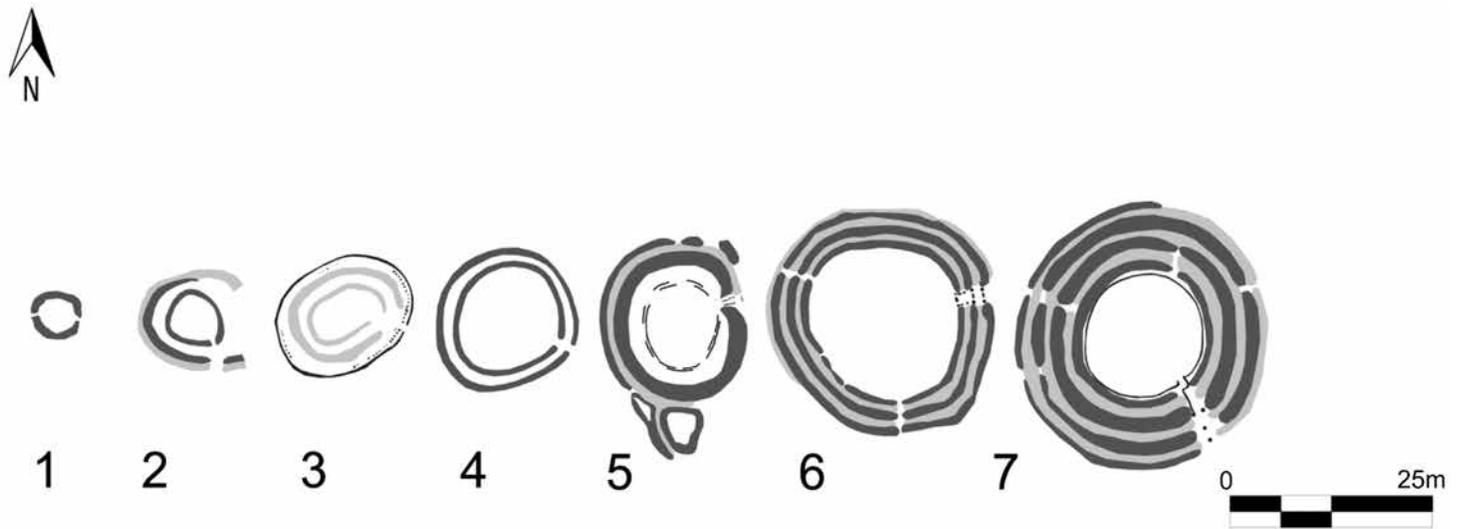
timbers and turf-built structures within. Ditches were partly or entirely backfilled in places, though parts of the outer ditch may have remained open, particularly away from the entrance where its hollows were used as shelters for metalworking (Illus 11.2).

11.4 Exploring parallels

11.4.1 Early medieval northern Britain

The size and bivallate form of the Craw Stane earthworks closely resembles those at Cairn More, with each displaying a clear complexity to their enclosing elements. While no traces of ditched components were found in the defences at Cairn More during the University of Aberdeen excavations (though see work by Cook 2011b), the timber elements in particular indicate that their construction was a major investment in resources. The character of the *Pfostenschlitzmauern*-style ramparts may have shared direct resemblances to the outer timber enclosing works of the Craw Stane settlement, though they were not quite as complex. Radiocarbon dating has shown that the two sites were contemporary for a substantial period of time during the 5th and 6th centuries AD (Chapter 8).

The bivallate form and maximum external diameter (*c* 50m) of the Craw Stane complex Phase 1 earthworks are unusual, though limited parallels can be found in the corpus of enclosed settlements known from cropmark and upstanding examples in Aberdeenshire (RCAHMS 2007: 92–6, fig 6.20). Perhaps the most pertinent parallel is Maiden Castle, an early medieval



Illus 11.3

'Ringforts' in Pictland and Ireland: 1. Queen's View; 2. Maiden Castle; 3. Craw Stane; 4. Cairn More; 5. Clogher; 6. Garranes (Lisnacaheragh); 7. Ballycatteen

ringfort on the slopes of Bennachie, which has been dated to the 5th–7th centuries AD (Cook 2011a) (Illus 11.3). As noted in Chapter 6, Maiden Castle is an upstanding bivallate enclosure measuring c 35–40m in diameter with an outer ditch around 3m wide, an outer rampart 4m wide and an internal ditch 2.2m wide. A 2m thick stone wall defines an internal enclosure of around 20m in diameter. If the inner ditch of the Craw Stane Phase 1 enclosure was backed by a rampart/bank of c 2–3m thickness, then the internal area would have been around 25m x 14m – a similar area to that enclosed at Maiden Castle.

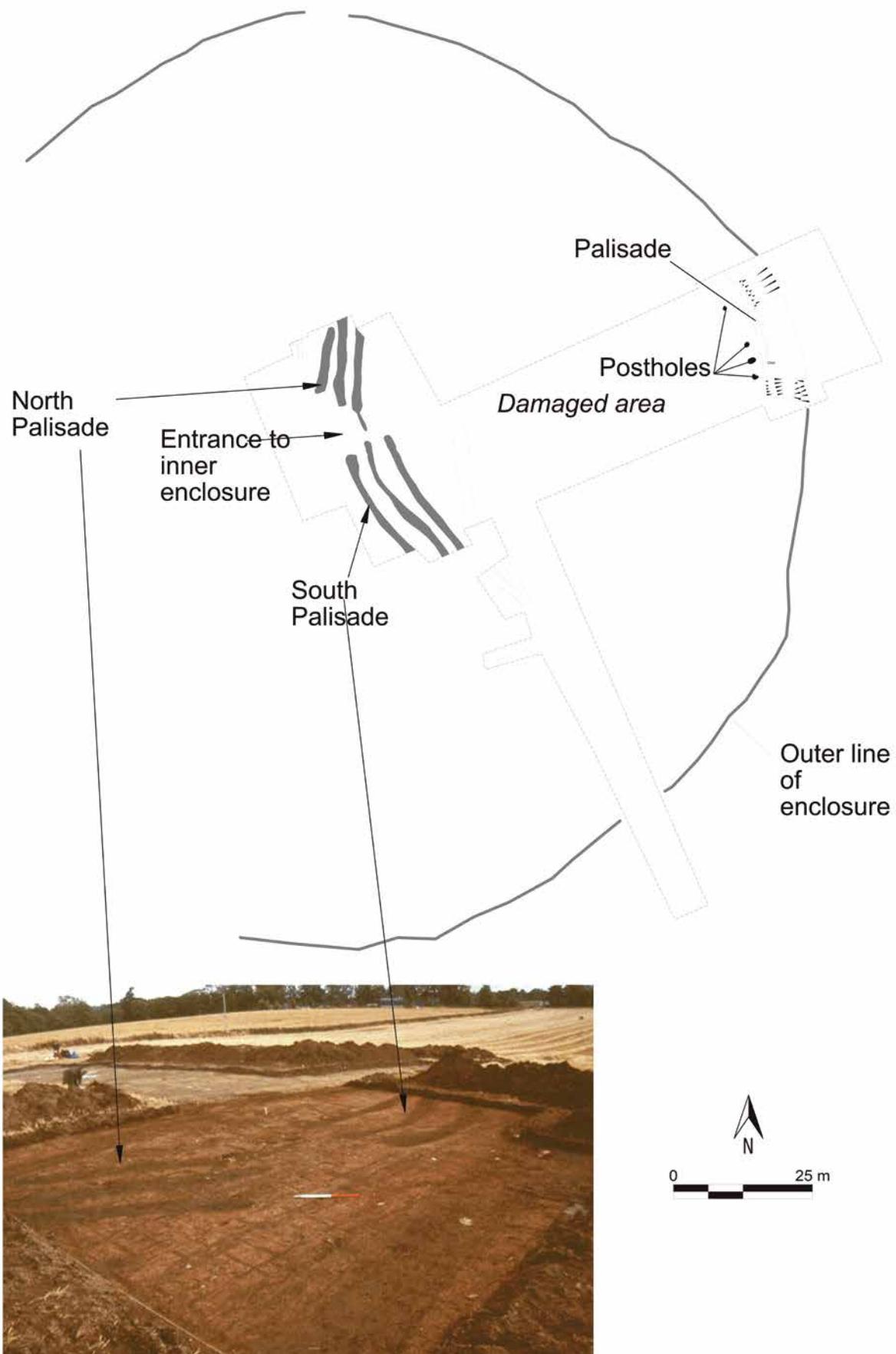
While the internal area at Cairn More would have been larger than that at Maiden Castle, both sites share similarities in their walled enclosures and were again broadly contemporary. One point of divergence is the lack of elaborate timber framing at Maiden Castle, although excavations there have been relatively small in scale. Both sites presented evidence for extra-mural activity, suggesting that settlement was not limited by their enclosing elements. The landscape setting of the sites provides another compelling point of comparison. Maiden Castle is overlooked by Mither Tap o' Bennachie, an early medieval 'nuclear fort' built on the most prominent peak of Bennachie, that has recently had phases dated to the 7th–8th centuries AD (Noble & Evans 2022: 106–7). Close to both Maiden Castle and Mither Tap is the Maiden Stone, Aberdeenshire's most impressive early medieval cross-slab, as well as the Maiden Causeway, a linear earthwork which seemingly links the two sites (Cook 2011a). This landscape, like that of Rhynie, appears to have contained multiple high-status early medieval sites and monuments.

In contrast to Phase 1, parallels for the Phase 2 outer timber setting at the Craw Stane complex are harder to find. Comparison with the palisaded enclosures of early medieval Scotland highlights the complexity of the Rhynie example and the unusual material assemblage associated with the later phase of activity at the Craw Stane complex. For example, palisade lines that divided the interior of a ditched enclosure at Upper Gothens, Perthshire, appeared to be little more than relatively modest fences (Barclay

2001) (Illus 11.4). The excavator interpreted the site as a high-status settlement, and perhaps an estate centre; however, few finds were recovered to support this hypothesis (Barclay 2001: 43). The site is therefore likely to have had a more localised role and significance than the Craw Stane complex. Moreover, this was a much later site, with two radiocarbon dates from the exterior ditch and internal palisade lines providing broadly similar results that suggested a 9th- or 10th-century date for the enclosure.

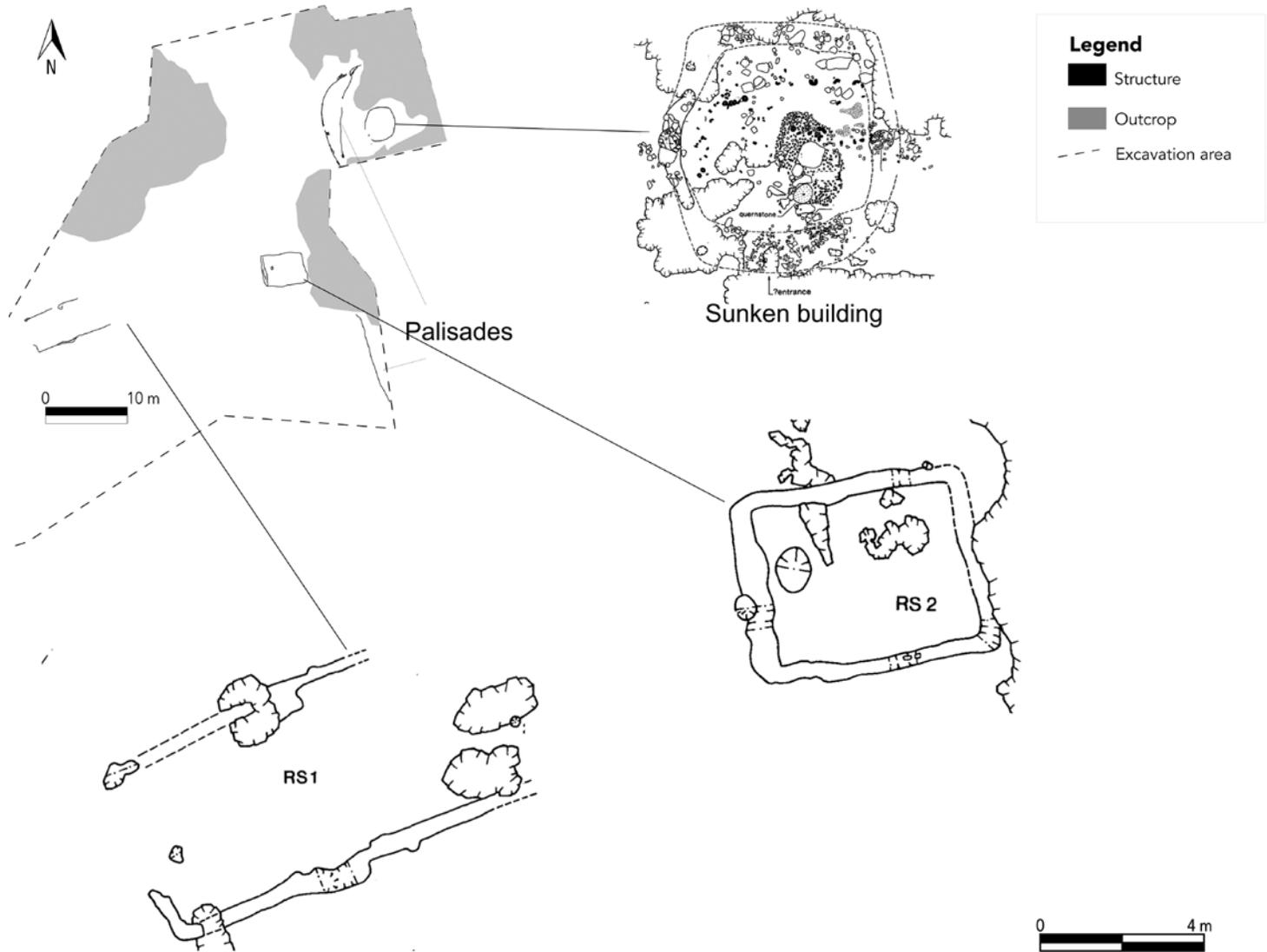
Another example is the late first-millennium palisaded enclosure at Titwood in Mearnskir, East Renfrewshire. Here, a sub-circular enclosure measuring around 36m north/south by 41m transversely was defined by a palisade slot that held closely set timbers and possibly planks (Johnson et al 2003). Within the interior of Titwood, a series of linear slots and posts may have been the very truncated remains of buildings constructed up against the northern side of the enclosure, though again there was none of the complexity of the Craw Stane enclosure complex nor the richness of finds (Johnson et al 2003: 136). A possibly earlier example of a palisaded enclosure in early medieval Scotland can be found at Ratho, Edinburgh, where two or three lines of palisade were found in association with a probable sunken-floored building and two rectilinear structures (Smith 1995) (Illus 11.5). Two curvilinear palisades c 14–15m in length extended between areas of bedrock and may have enclosed a building, while a third stretch of palisade to the south suggests the areas enclosed could have been more extensive. Though none of the palisades at Ratho were directly dated, one of the palisade fills contained a copper-alloy nail-headed pin comparable with examples found at Rhynie and Dunadd (Smith 1995: 103). A small number of radiocarbon dates recovered from the sunken building at Ratho suggests a 6th- to 8th-century AD date for the settlement, but again the palisades at Ratho were relatively slight and the finds comparatively few.

In expanding the search for parallels, more compelling examples of elaborate timber enclosures may be found in the early phases of hillfort complexes in northern Britain, where they are typically accompanied by much richer finds assemblages. One notable site is



Illus 11.4
Plan of the Upper Gothens palisaded enclosure

RHYNIE



Illus 11.5
Plan of the palisades and timber buildings at Ratho, Edinburgh

Dundurn in Perthshire, where the early phases appear to have included a palisade or timber stockade of some kind that utilised complex carpentry and both post and plank elements – similar to that which must have been used in the Rhynie outer enclosure wall (Alcock et al 1989: 200, illus 8, 201). Both imports and evidence for locally produced elite material culture were found at Dundurn, including high-status metalwork production (Alcock et al 1989: 214–22). The associated dates for this ‘palisade’ centre on the late 6th century AD, again making it later than the Rhynie complex. Perhaps directly overlapping in date with the Phase 2 enclosure at the Craw Stane are the remains of some form of palisade and post setting at Craig Phadrig hillfort in Inverness. Recent work at the site identified a potential post setting dug into the remains of the rampart of the Iron Age vitrified fort, with charcoal samples from the fill dating to the 5th–6th centuries AD (Peteranna & Birch 2019). A post hole found within this line might suggest this enclosure was of a complex form, though the scale of trenching limits comment. However, if the line of the outer foundation slot

followed the destroyed Iron Age rampart, it would have enclosed an area c 75m x 25m (0.18ha), only marginally larger than the area enclosed by the Craw Stane complex. Like Dundurn, both imports and evidence for high-status metalwork were found at Craig Phadrig (Small & Cottam 1972).

Looking further south, palisades or enclosing complex timber outworks have been suggested to be a feature of a number of elite Anglian settlements in south-east Scotland. At St Abb’s Head in the Scottish Borders, Leslie Alcock found two lines of palisade under a complex rampart at a site that may be referred to in various Anglo-Saxon sources as *Colodesbyrig/Colodaesburg* (Alcock et al 1986: 262–4). The rampart could have enclosed an area up to 3ha, but whether the palisades followed the line of the later rampart for its full course is unknown and their relevance as a parallel to the Craw Stane is uncertain. Alcock linked the palisades with a secular fortification implied by the *burg* element in the *Colodaesburg* place-name. However, the enclosure could also be potentially associated with an early phase of the monastic settlement recorded at this location,

perhaps acting as a vallum enclosure of some kind. Another Anglian settlement in the Borders at Whitmuirhaugh, Sprouston, is associated with two different palisaded enclosures, one of which is around 0.72ha in extent, though neither has been directly dated (Smith 1991: 272). A confirmed early medieval palisade did form part of the defence of Phase 8 of Dunbar and would have enclosed an area of around 0.47ha, but here the palisade appears to have cut off a coastal promontory so again does not provide a direct parallel to the Craw Stane complex (Perry 2000: 59). However, the standing of Dunbar as a high-status *urbs regis* Anglian settlement is notable (Alcock 2003: 212–7; Perry 2000: 7, 29–63).

Further south, the ‘Great Enclosure’ at Yeavinger was formerly believed to be a palisaded enclosure associated with an Anglo-Saxon elite centre (Hope-Taylor 1977). Recent work by the University of Durham has since shown that this was actually a prehistoric enclosure that was largely levelled by the time some of the fence lines associated with the Northumbrian palace complex were constructed (Sarah Semple, pers comm). Additional palisades can be found nearby at Milfield, where the largest example, a massive 12ha palisade, appears to have enclosed a royal hall complex (Gates & O’Brien 1988: 3, fig 1). This is obviously of a different scale to the enclosure complex at Rhynie, but similarities can be found in a smaller palisade that surrounded the main series of hall buildings at the heart of the Milfield settlement (Gates & O’Brien 1988: 3, fig 1). This smaller example measured 140m east/west by 50m transversely and was divided into three sections, with the largest hall straddling the middle and westernmost enclosures. The smaller halls were central to the middle enclosure, which was square and around 50m across. Given the position of the largest hall, it may be that the smaller enclosure with the smaller halls represented an earlier phase that would be comparable in size to the Rhynie enclosure complex. However, Milfield does not yet have a secure chronology other than it is likely to have post-dated Yeavinger (Hope-Taylor 1977: 4–5). The danger of over-interpreting these sites based on morphology or perceived date alone is evident from the re-examination of the Great Enclosure at Yeavinger, as well as Doon Hill in East Lothian (Ralston 2019). At the latter site, large timber longhouses were identified by Hope-Taylor as comprising a series of Anglian halls enclosed by a circular palisade, and were formerly cited as a direct parallel for the Craw Stane complex (Noble & Gondek 2011: 321). However, both the buildings and the palisade at Doon Hill have now been shown to be Neolithic in date (Ralston 2019).

11.4.2 Other Insular parallels

With regards to the evidence outwith northern Britain, no early medieval palisaded/timber enclosures have been identified in either south-west England or Wales, although several examples are now known from Ireland. Whilst Irish early medieval enclosed settlements have generally been classified into forms defined by earth and stone ramparts, a series of timber-defined enclosures dating to this period have been identified through development-excavations. These include sites such as Lowpark (Co. Mayo), Ballynagallagh (Co. Limerick) and Adhadegnan (Co. Longford), all of which have historical associations or finds assemblages that indicate some degree of status. The initial settlement at Lowpark was unenclosed and associated with ironworking but a secondary

phase included a double palisade around 40m in diameter (Gillespie 2007). The palisades were associated with a series of features including internal pits and post holes, a souterrain, and what may have been a large rectangular timber building and the remains of a large roundhouse. Over 1.34 tonnes of iron slag were recovered from the site, alongside a large assemblage of artefact that included iron knives, quern stones, copper-alloy ring-pins, a bone pin, beads and a gold filigree panel of likely 6th- to 7th-century date (Gillespie 2007: 19, 23). A larger double palisaded enclosure dating to the 8th–9th century cal AD was excavated at Ballynagallagh, Lough Gur, Co. Limerick (Cleary 2006). Here, small quantities of iron slag, furnace bottoms, iron objects, a copper-alloy tube and clip, and a possible clay mould indicated the presence of onsite metalworking (Cleary 2006: 27). The site may have been connected to the *Eóganacht of Áine*, a royal lineage from Munster, whose seat was at Knockainey a few kilometres to the south-east (Cleary 2006: 35). A further early medieval palisaded site at Adhadegnan, Co. Longford, comprised a multiphase enclosure around 24m in diameter and appeared to have been in use during the 4th–6th century AD, making it closer in date to the Craw Stane complex than the other examples (Kerr et al 2009: 395–6). Within the enclosure at Adhadegnan, ironworking debris was found alongside the remains of a possible smithing workshop. Overall, these recent findings from Ireland are a significant development in our understanding of early medieval palisaded enclosures. While none provide a direct parallel for the Craw Stane Phase II enclosure in terms of architecture, the connections to the *Eóganacht of Áine* at Ballynagallagh and the metalworking evidence from all three sites provides some indication that these enclosures held an elevated status. However, none of the sites showed evidence for Mediterranean or continental imports, nor the full density or richness of metalworking evidence found at the Craw Stane complex.

Perhaps better parallels for both the character of the enclosure complex and the finds assemblage of the Craw Stane complex are a small number of high-status and relatively early ringforts found at Clogher (Co. Tyrone) and Garranes (Co. Cork). Clogher was a royal centre of the kings of *Ui Chremthainn* of the chief kingdoms of Airgialla (Warner 1988: 58; Warner 2000b). The early medieval settlement at Clogher was constructed within a 1.5ha Late Bronze Age hillfort and its early phases included a large wooden enclosure c 50m in diameter (Waddell 1998: 270, 277; O’Brien & O’Driscoll 2017: 25, 33). The post-built enclosure was constructed in association with an external flat-bottomed ditch, with counterscarp bank and an additional palisade on the outside (Warner 1988: 58). A series of midden layers in the primary ditch fill produced a multitude of high-status finds including imported glass and pottery, metalworking evidence such as crucibles and bronze droplets, and complete precious metal objects. Clay moulds attest to the onsite production of penannular brooches, as does workshop debris that was found scattered throughout the interior. Both the character of the finds assemblage and the architecture of the 5th- to 6th-century phases at Clogher provide compelling similarities with the Craw Stane evidence.

Another intriguing parallel for the Craw Stane complex (and Cairn More) is the cluster of ringforts at Garranes, Co. Cork, the seat of the *Ui Echach Muman* of Munster. The largest ringfort in the Garranes landscape is Lisnacaheragh (Illus 11.3) – a circular

enclosure of around 110m diameter surrounded by three closely spaced banks and ditches (O'Brien & Hogan 2021: 1). Another large enclosure, Lisnamanroe, lies 80m to the west of the site (O'Brien & Hogan 2021: 1). Lisnacaheeragh was the focus of extensive craft working and imported pottery and glass, with its Late Roman amphorae assemblage being the largest known in Ireland (O'Brien & Hogan 2021: 261, fig 7.28). Cruickshanks (Chapter 7) highlights the close parallels between the material assemblage at Lisnacaheeragh and the Craw Stane complex.

The richness of its import evidence and craftworking marks Lisnacaheeragh out from the more typical Irish ringfort, but another indicator of difference, is the complexity and number of its enclosing elements. Around 80% of Irish ringforts were univallate, with the majority of the remainder consisting of bivallate enclosures (Stout 1997). Only a very small number of trivallate enclosures like Lisnacaheeragh have been identified. Across Ireland, larger multivallate forts tend to be associated with higher-status finds and this may reflect 7th-century legal texts that appear to link enclosure complexity and status (Stout 1997: 123–6; O'Brien & Hogan 2021: 6–7; though see discussion in O'Sullivan et al 2014: 82, 189–92; O'Brien & Hogan 2021: 353). Certainly, the rich assemblage of artefacts including Mediterranean and continental imports found at Lisnacaheeragh, and at an even more complex ringfort at Ballycatteen (Co. Cork), suggest that multivallate ringforts did tend to have an elevated status (Ó Ríordáin & Hartnett 1943; O'Brien & Hogan 2021).

Overall, there are nuances in the early medieval Garranes landscape that mirror those of the Upper Strathbogie valley. At Garranes, the majority of imports were identified at Lisnacaheeragh while only a handful of sherds of imported pottery and glass were found at Lisnamanroe, despite it being contemporary and only 80m away. The excavators interpreted the relationship between the two in terms of a steeply hierarchical society, with Garranes likely to be the residence of a petty king while Lisnamanroe may have been of less elevated status, possibly that of a dependent lord or high-status client (O'Brien & Hogan 2021: 314, 353, 357–8). This relationship may be pertinent for considering the links between the Craw Stane complex and Cairn More within the Rhynie environs (see Chapter 12).

11.4.3 Summary

At present, there are few direct parallels for the Craw Stane complex and Cairn More ringfort to be found amongst the archaeology of northern Britain. The earthwork elements can be paralleled in north-east Scotland across sites classified as ringforts, though there are currently very few with confirmed dates in the early medieval period (Noble & Evans 2022: 101–2). The timber enclosure at the Craw Stane complex is even more unusual and whilst very broad parallels can be drawn to the early phases of high-status hillforts such as Dundurn and Craig Phadrig, the hilltop setting of these is a contrast to the more low-lying setting of Rhynie. Scottish palisaded enclosures that are found in low-lying settings fail to match the richness of evidence or the complexity of the enclosing works of the Craw Stane complex, and currently the specific morphology and character of the Craw Stane complex remains unique in its regional setting. The most compelling non-local parallels are the Irish royal sites of Clogher and Garranes, where the size and

character of the enclosures, their relatively low-lying location and the concentration of import evidence and craft production provide closer parallels to the Craw Stane complex and its material remains.

11.5 Settlement in eastern Scotland

11.5.1 History of research

In his chapter on 'Houses and Graves' in the 1955 volume *The Problem of the Picts*, Wainwright began with this sentence:

It is a sad, if somewhat surprising, fact that we cannot with confidence affix the label 'Pictish' to a single dwelling or to a single burial (Wainwright 1955: 87).

Wainwright was at pains to identify what a Pictish house may have looked like, though he was aware of the potential of a settlement archaeology of the Picts and recognised that this would permit a much closer examination of their economy, lifestyle and vernacular traditions. Wainwright pointed to the post-broch settlements of sites like Jarlshof on Shetland as one way to proceed in recognising Pictish period dwellings. Indeed, in the decades that followed, a range of first-millennium AD settlement types were identified in the Northern Isles including cellular, figure-of-eight and rectilinear building forms at sites such as Scatness in Shetland and Howe, Buckquoy and Pool on Orkney (Ritchie 1977; Ballin Smith 1994; Hunter 2007; Dockrill et al 2010).

However, in eastern Scotland, identifying early medieval settlement has continued to be more problematic (eg Maxwell 1987: 33–5; Ralston 1997; Driscoll 2011: 257–64; Noble & Evans 2022: Chapter 2). One of the few breakthroughs was made in the Perthshire uplands, where a tradition of longhouses known as Pitcarmick-type buildings has been recognised. These comprise turf-walled longhouses with one end for residence and a paved byre end for housing animals (Carver et al 2012: 146, 161; Strachan et al 2019). What characterised early medieval settlement in the lowlands of mainland Scotland, however, continues to allude investigators. A few sites, such as those represented by cropmarks at Lathrisk, Fife or Newbarns, Angus (see below) may suggest that Pitcarmick-style buildings were a feature of lowland landscapes too, though this idea remains largely untested (Dunwell & Ralston 2008: 137). Indeed, much of the lowland settlement evidence appears to have been highly truncated and typically presents as isolated features such as crop-drying kilns, pits and post holes, and areas of paving. Frustratingly, this poor level of survival reveals little detail of the nature of lowland settlement and its economy (eg Coleman & Hunter 2002; Cook & Dunbar 2008: 149; Dunwell & Ralston 2008: 135–6; Noble & Evans 2022: Chapter 2).

Studies of the Pictish lowlands have tried to draw on the aerial record to fill the lacuna. Driscoll (1991), for example, attempted to use the aerial record in a consideration of state formation in lowland Scotland, but many of the sites highlighted remain to be investigated by the spade or have been shown to be earlier in date than the Pictish period (Driscoll 1991: 95, 104). Preconceived notions of what Pictish settlement in the lowlands may have looked like have also hampered progress. For example, since the 1970s, the aerial record of eastern Scotland has been

searched for hall-like buildings of the kind found at Anglo-Saxon royal settlements. This was largely influenced by Hope-Taylor's work at Yeavinger and Milfield, and the (misinterpreted) findings at Doon Hill which suggested that early medieval timber halls could be identifiable in Scotland (Ralston 2019). Possible examples of halls were recorded in the earliest sorties of the Royal Commission and led to the excavations of the timber hall at Balbridie in Aberdeenshire, which (like Doon Hill) turned out to be Neolithic in date (Reynolds 1980; Fairweather & Ralston 1993). Other identified halls in the aerial record such as Boysack and Noranbank in Angus, and Newbiggins and Wester Fintray in Aberdeenshire are equally likely to be Neolithic (see Maxwell 1987: 33, fig 1). Elsewhere in Aberdeenshire, a cropmark at Mondboddo, cited in the literature as a likely Pictish hall (eg Foster 1996: 58; Ralston 1997: 29), proved to be a post-medieval barn set within a plantation enclosure (Noble & Sveinbjarnarson 2012: 18). Examples from Muirton in Moray and Glendruidd in Inverness-shire have also turned out to be doubtful (Carter & Russell-White 1993). The results here again warn of the dangers of interpreting too much from the aerial evidence and of presuming that certain structural forms found further south may have also characterised the architecture of Pictland.

Only two large timber buildings dating to the first millennium AD are known from the eastern lowlands of central and north-east Scotland. A structure at Newbarns was excavated by the University of Edinburgh's Angus Field School in 1999, and was found to be rectangular with rounded ends and measured *c* 18m long and 6m wide (McGill 2004; Dunwell & Ralston 2008: 138–40). The wall line was defined by a shallow slot with the impressions of rounded and squared timbers evident at the base. External and internal posts may have formed the foundation of crucks or external buttresses, but the foundations for this structure were much more modest than the hall complexes of Anglo-Saxon England. Indeed, Newbarns may not have been a hall at all – it could have been a lowland example of a Pitcarmick-style byre-house (Dunwell & Ralston 2008: 140; Strachan et al 2019: 124) or even an agricultural structure, as no obvious hearth was identified and a range of crop-processing pits were found nearby. The Newbarns structure was also relatively late, with radiocarbon dates spanning the 8th–11th centuries AD. A further large timber building has since been identified at Callendar, Falkirk, immediately south of the Antonine Wall. The building was at least 15m long and 7m wide internally and defined by a shallow rectangular gully with rounded ends that may have held timbers that faced a turf wall (Bailey 2007: 49). A central line of post holes suggests the building was a two-aisled structure, and part of the building was paved. Like Newbarns, the building was relatively late, with radiocarbon dating suggesting 9th-century occupation, and scant finds evidence precluded any understanding about its status or function. Overall, despite decades of aerial photography, development and research-led fieldwork, only a handful of Pictish period structures can be identified in the lowlands of eastern Scotland. This is particularly pronounced for the earlier part of the Pictish period *c* 4th–7th centuries AD, and the remains that have been found suggest relatively modest structures. Consequently, the range of building forms found at the Craw Stane complex, Cairn More and Tap o' Noth, despite their fragmentary state, are very welcome additions to the settlement corpus of first-millennium AD

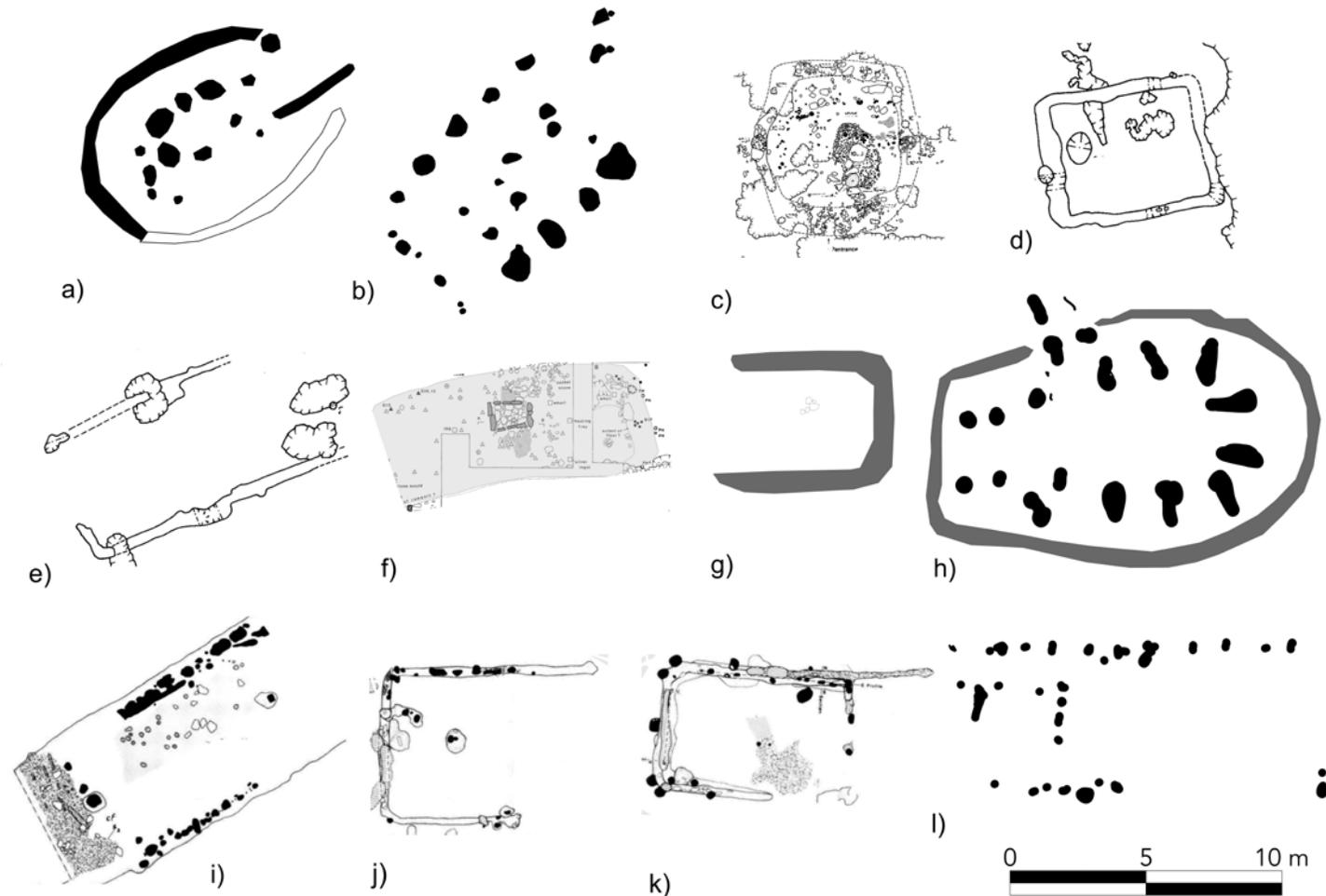
lowland Scotland and can help situate and illuminate a number of settlement trends in this era.

11.5.2 Architectural trends

The Scottish Archaeological Research Framework notes the rarity of early medieval structures, with only a handful of examples known on the mainland (ScARF 2012: section 1.4). In the lowlands, it seems likely that the main reason for this was the character of early medieval buildings, whereby the majority were built with turf walls with timber framing that incorporated very few earthfast elements (Ralston 1997: 24; Noble et al 2020a; Noble & Evans 2022: Chapter 2). In areas subjected to repeated cultivation, the detection of non-earthfast timber or turf architecture will undoubtedly prove problematic and will likely continue to hamper our search for Pictish period settlement. While the likely hundreds of buildings at Tap o' Noth are a surprising addition to the corpus from first-millennium AD Scotland, it is a sobering thought that none of these structures would have survived in more low-lying settings given the levels of truncation in such prime agricultural zones.

Like those at Tap o' Noth, the structures identified at Cairn More had few associated post holes or earthfast structural features, despite large squared posts being used extensively in the revetment for the ramparts of the fort (Chapter 6). Shalen Prado's innovative analysis of the exterior structure at Cairn More (Chapter 8) has conclusively shown that this building did indeed have turf walls, which are evidenced by phytolith and micro-algae signatures preserved within the floor layers. Elsewhere in Pictland, similar evidence for turf walling is suggested by the few examples of buildings identified in early medieval hillforts in eastern Scotland. For example, at Clatchard Craig in Fife, investigations of the upper citadel revealed a floor layer and central hearth of a rectangular building *c* 9m x 4m but no outer wall or posts were identified (Illus 11.6f). The only evidence for a wall line of any kind was a pivot stone indicating a doorway at one end of the building. At Portknockie, a promontory fort on the Moray coastline, excavation revealed the truncated remains of a turf-walled, sub-rectangular structure around 7m x 5.5m that was aligned east/west with an open (or truncated) western end (Ralston 1987: 20–1) (Illus 11.6g). The only structural feature other than the wall identified was a probable post pad towards the centre of the building.

As a whole, the evidence from eastern Scotland strongly suggests that turf-walled cruck-framed buildings with few earthfast features were the norm in the Pictish era and that identification of such structures in the arable lowland zones will remain a challenge. The difficulty of finding settlement in eastern Scotland mirrors that of other areas such as western mainland Scotland and Wales. In Argyll, for example, the mid to later first millennium AD has a very sparse settlement record consisting almost entirely of enclosed settlements, principally hillforts and duns, along with a handful of crannogs. Within these enclosed settlements, few coherent ground plans of internal buildings are identifiable (Lane & Campbell 2000: 255–8; Campbell & Batey 2016). Likewise in Wales, it is principally through enclosed sites that the settlements of the early medieval period have been identified, though the corpus of unenclosed settlement has been very slowly growing (Edwards 2023: 137, 159). Here, the paucity of



Illus 11.6

Comparative plans of select early medieval buildings in Scotland: a) Rhynie Structure 3; b) Rhynie Structure 1; c–e) Ratho; f) Clatchard Craig; g) Portknockie; h) Portmahomack S1; i) Dunbar Building 5 j) Dunbar Building 2 k) Dunbar Building 1; l) Lockerbie Phase I

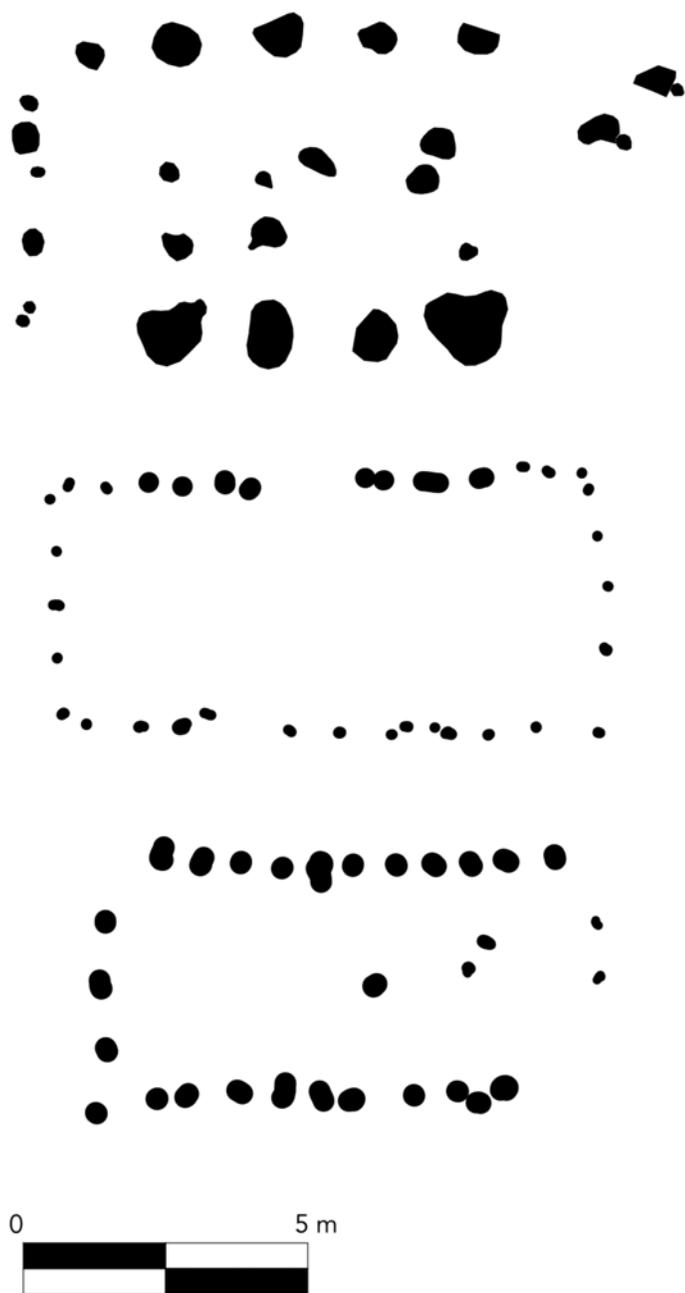
early medieval buildings has similarly been ascribed to the use of turf and timber structures with few earthfast remains (Campbell & Lane 1993: 61; see also Edwards 2023: 173–6). Overall, the patchy evidence from western and northern Britain, and the commonplace use of turf and non-earthfast forms of construction, contrast strongly with the much more substantial post-built and timber-framed buildings in eastern England (eg Hamerow 2012), and makes the identification of any early medieval buildings in north-east Scotland notable.

11.6 The Rhynie buildings and their wider context

As evidence of Pictish architecture, the partial remains of Structures 1, 3 and 4 identified at Rhynie can seem very slight. However, given the general dearth of domestic buildings of this period (and the now clear evidence for the use of non-earthfast construction methods and turf walling in nearly all identifiable contemporary buildings on mainland Scotland), the finding of any sort of structural elements, however truncated, is noteworthy. Had the buildings within the Craw Stane complex been built solely in the manner of the turf or stone-walled structures excavated at Dunnicaer or Clatchard Craig

(see Noble et al 2020a; Noble et al 2022; Close-Brooks 1986), it is unlikely that any trace would have survived the repeated ploughing of the field in the 1970–90s and that of any previous decades/centuries. Clearly the buildings at Rhynie did employ some earthfast elements, suggesting their construction was of a relatively unusual form for this era.

Structure 1 at the Craw Stane complex had the most obvious archaeological footprint, which consisted of a rectangular arrangement of large post holes, some of which supported squared timbers. These suggest that the structure was substantial, with the posts perhaps being roof-bearing or the foundation for cuppill trusses (see Strachan et al 2019: 121). If these were indeed central roof-bearing posts, Structure 1 would have had to have outer turf walls. In such turf-built traditions, rectangular structures are known to have extended up to 8–9m wide (Strachan et al 2019: 129). Alternatively, if the posts represented the outer walls, then the minimum size for Structure 1 would be around 5m x 8–9m. This would have been similar in size to the 7th-century building within the upper citadel of Clatchard Craig, which was also likely to have been a turf-walled building (Close-Brooks 1986: 143–5) (Illus 11.6f).



Illus 11.7

The Craw Stane Structure 1 (top) compared to two post-built structures from Mucking, Essex

In terms of its shape and size, Structure 1 resembles Buildings 1 and 2 found in Phase 7 of the high-status Anglian enclosed settlement at Dunbar, East Lothian (Illus 11.6i–k). Like Structure 1, both Buildings 1 and 2 were timber-built and had no evidence for a wall line on their eastern side. Other architectural parallels at Dunbar include the use of planks as well as posts, which were found at Structure 3 in the Craw Stane complex. The timber buildings at Dunbar were also relatively modest in size, ranging from around 6.5m to 13.5m in length. Though the chronology for Dunbar is generally poor, radiocarbon dates associated with the earlier buildings calibrate to the 5th and 6th centuries AD,

suggesting they were broadly contemporary with the Rhynie examples. The probable Anglian trench-built rectilinear structures found at Ratho, East Lothian, were also comparable in size to Rhynie Structure 1 (Smith 1995: 100), as was a *c* 5m x 12m post-built structure that pre-dated a larger 7th-century Northumbrian hall building at Lockerbie in Dumfries and Galloway (Kirby 2011) (Illus 11.6c–e, l). Indeed, further south, the majority of Anglo-Saxon buildings in southern England prior to the 7th century rarely exceeded 12m in length (Gardiner 1993: 38; Hamerow 1993: 8, figs 54–6; Hamerow 2012: 22). Examples include the 5th- to 6th-century post-built structures at Mucking, Essex, and the ‘hall-houses’ of West Stow (West 1985: 10–4, 111–12; Hamerow 1993) (Illus 11.7).

Structure 3 at Rhynie was severely truncated, having been constructed on a notable slope with the downslope side of the building lost entirely. The interpretations of form and shape outlined in Chapter 5 would suggest this was an oval structure, with the only direct parallel being the heel- or bag-shaped buildings found at Portmahomack (Carver et al 2016: 214–16). Despite the Portmahomack examples being larger and constructed much later in the 8th–9th centuries AD, broad similarities can be identified. S1 at Portmahomack was supported by eight larger posts at the wider end of the building – similar to the six or seven posts that were present in the centre of the Rhynie structure (Illus 11.6h). Additionally, smaller posts like those found at Rhynie were also evident in the narrower north-east end of S1 (Carver et al 2016: 38). An outer wall trench of the Portmahomack structure was argued to consist of a stone foundation for a turf wall that was revetted on the inside by planks. Structure 3 at the Craw Stane complex may have been built in a similar manner, with the wall trench and charred plank fragments found in the interior perhaps the vestigial remains of internal wall cladding for turf outer walls. This interpretation is made possible by the very partial survival of the outer wall slot – a seemingly fortuitous consequence of the need to dig the upslope wall foundations into the subsoil. Without this survival, the building remains would have consisted only of a series of closely spaced post holes and the recognition of this structure as a building of any kind may have been missed.

The survival of Structure 4 was perhaps even more remarkable. The floor layer lay directly on the subsoil and extended for around 3m north/south by 2.8m east/west, and would have undoubtedly been removed by later ploughing had it not been for the hillwash in this area of the site. Despite this, the floor is still likely to be just a fragment of what originally survived. Indeed, this could have been a substantial building given the large, charred oak timbers found in the interior which may have come from roofing or timber framing (Chapter 5). The partly preserved remains of Structure 4 are reminiscent of the floor found just outside the outer enclosure of Cairn More, where phytolith analysis was able to confirm the presence of turf walling and provide possible evidence of a grass and heather thatched roof (Chapter 8). Many more of these turf-built, timber-framed structures could have been present at the Craw Stane complex but are highly unlikely to have survived the repeated ploughing of this field in the late 20th century (Chapter 5).

Despite their truncated nature, the limited structural traces from the Craw Stane complex can shed light on wider architectural transformations. The ground plan of Structure 1 suggests

that rectangular architecture was present at the Craw Stane complex from the 5th or early 6th century at the latest. Some of the structures on Tap o' Noth (Chapter 10) may have also been sub-rectangular. Recent discoveries at Dunnicaer, Aberdeenshire, indicate that rectangular buildings were present in north-east Scotland from at least the 3rd or 4th centuries AD. This adoption of rectangular architecture is notably earlier than what has been identified in Ireland, where the tradition was not common until the late first millennium AD (O'Sullivan et al 2014: 92–3). However, Structure 3, like the heel-shaped buildings at Portmahomack, appears to represent a transitional form between circular and rectangular architectural traditions, while the external building at Cairn More and many of the house platforms at Tap o' Noth imply that circular architecture simultaneously continued to be used. This suggests that Late Roman Iron Age to early medieval settlement in north-east Scotland was characterised by a diversity of architectural forms. This diversity is also evident in the post-broch phases of settlement in the Northern Isles in the early to mid-first millennium AD, where a range of cellular, rectangular and round structural forms are known and even intermixed at the individual site level (Noble & Evans 2022: 71–9). Such diversity may reflect increasing social stratification in this era, with different architectural forms potentially indicating differences in status (though functional differences and the independent evolution of vernacular form may also have contributed to the broad range of architectural types now recognised in Pictland).

Looking further afield, both rectangular and circular building forms are known from early medieval Wales and Ireland – a contrast to the dominant rectangular form that was present in Anglo-Saxon England (O'Sullivan et al 2014: 88–93; Edwards 2023: 134–82). In Ireland, early medieval roundhouses were built of stone, turf, or timber and wattle, and consisted of single or double-roomed dwellings that leave relatively ephemeral traces of their archaeological signature and materials (O'Sullivan et al 2014: 90). Rectangular buildings were built in a similar manner, with stone, earth or turf used for walling, though they may have been slightly more robust given the use of elements such as stone foundations (O'Sullivan et al 2014: 93). In either case, where early medieval buildings do survive in Ireland they tend to be of relatively modest proportions. For example, at Moynagh Lough crannog, a royal site mentioned in the Déisi genealogies, the largest house was found to be only c 11m in diameter (Bradley 2011: 23). At Garranes, the only surviving building within Lisnacaheragh ringfort was a 9m diameter roundhouse (O'Brien & Hogan 2021: 96). Rectangular dwellings in Ireland were similarly modest, with average lengths of around 6–8m (O'Sullivan et al 2014: 93). In early medieval Wales, both rectangular and round buildings were constructed using timber, clay, turf and stone, and were of generally modest scale (Edwards 2023: 174). Rectangular buildings are known from at least the 7th century, but the tradition may go earlier in some parts of Wales (Edwards 2023: 181).

Overall, while it is difficult to summarise patterns on an inter-regional scale, the evidence from Pictland for architectural diversity and the relative modesty of structure size and materials has much greater resonance with western Britain and Ireland than it does with Anglo-Saxon England. In the latter, nearly all

buildings were rectangular from at least the 7th century onwards and even in rural settings could be of substantial size and built using comparatively robust materials (eg Hamerow 2012). Indeed, the buildings in Pictland contrast sharply with the monumental proportions of the hall complexes known at 7th-century *villa regis* centres (eg Thomas 2018), though Structure 1 may be comparable with the larger timber buildings known from 5th- and 6th-century Anglo-Saxon sites such as Dunbar, Lockerbie and Mucking (Hamerow 1993; Perry 2000; Kirby 2011). With regards to function, the truncated level of the structures makes it difficult to say much about the roles these buildings played at the Craw Stane complex or at Cairn More. Structure 1 is likely to have been the largest building and was located closest to the centre of the Craw Stane enclosure complex. In this respect, it may have played a central role in the functioning of the site, perhaps acting as both a residence and a place where feasting took place (Chapter 12). By contrast, Structure 3 appears to have been located right next to the Craw Stane and the socket for another stone. Its location and unusual architecture suggest it may have played a more specialised role, perhaps even some form of cult or ritual building similar to those found at magnate complexes in Scandinavia (see discussion in Chapter 12). Structure 4 shows that settlement also occurred outside of the enclosure complex and highlights the difficulties in interpreting the density of structures and their roles at the complex, given that other buildings of this form may well have been entirely removed by ploughing. Indeed, the geophysical evidence and aerial photographic evidence hint that more structures may survive outwith the immediate area of the Craw Stane complex (Chapter 5, Section 5.3); however, the dating and veracity of these features will have to await future exploration. At Cairn More, a building similar to Structure 4 survived better due to the collapse of the outer rampart and less intensive modern cultivation at this site, but even here the evidence was slight. In the interior of Cairn More, a very substantial hearth survived, though the outline of this building, and its size and form, again alludes full characterisation.

Nevertheless, while the structures identified at the Craw Stane complex and Cairn More were not well preserved, their survival is notable given the lack of domestic architecture from Late Roman Iron Age and early medieval contexts across lowland Scotland. Buildings appear to have been constructed using a range of non-earthfast materials including turf, timber and plank framing, but those at the Craw Stane complex were clearly more elaborate and of a different form to the majority of structures we know of from eastern Scotland during the mid to later first millennium AD. The external building at Cairn More has the most direct evidence for the use of turf (Chapter 8), but the structures at the Craw Stane complex and in the interior of Cairn More are also likely to have used such materials. The origins of the turf-built, late first-millennium AD Pictcarmick-style longhouses of central Scotland have been sought along the rim of the North Sea and further south in England (see Carver et al 2012: 191–3; Strachan et al 2019: 129–32, 150). However, the evidence from the Upper Strathbogie valley would suggest that traditions of turf-walled buildings – both round and rectangular – were already a feature of the local vernacular in lowland Scotland from at least the 5th and early 6th century AD, and almost certainly earlier (Noble et al 2020a).

11.7 The material assemblage

GEMMA CRUICKSHANKS

Almost 1,200 artefacts from the Craw Stane complex attest to the crafts, daily life and trade networks that defined early medieval activity in the Upper Strathbogie valley (Chapter 7). Metalworking debris dominates the Craw Stane assemblage, revealing large-scale production of exquisite animal figurines, jewellery and a range of other fittings. Items were worked from copper alloys and silver, while silver refining can be identified through rare evidence found in a number of stone vessels. A range of ancillary craft activities, such as the creation of intricate ceramic moulds and the carving of stone ingot moulds and crucibles, would have been essential to metalworking. Iron slag and glass waste attest to other high-temperature crafts, all of which required an array of resources, specialist knowledge and skill. The presence of ceramic tuyère fragments, for example, indicate that bellows were used to increase heat; however, these were likely made from wood and hide and as such do not survive. A small number of items illustrate other craft activity taking place: a spindle whorl indicates spinning plant or animal fibres into yarn, while two hide-rubber cobble tools and a fragment of worn pumice would have likely been used during the preparation of hides.

Fragments of imported glass vessels and Late Roman Amphorae from the Craw Stane complex reveal that the community of the Upper Strathbogie valley were connected to Mediterranean, Germanic and Atlantic trading networks (Campbell 2007). The Late Roman Amphorae would have held wine or olive oil from the Mediterranean. They are the first to be found in Pictland and the most northerly yet. More personal items such as the fine iron axe-headed pin, copper-alloy nail-headed pins, iron buckles, glass and amber beads are all glimpses of personal ornamentation. The mould assemblage shows that a range of more elaborate jewellery, such as penannular brooches and handpins, were also being made. Weaponry or fragments of weapons are uncommon finds on early medieval sites in general (Campbell 2007: Tables 16–19), but a copper-alloy dagger or sword pommel found at the Craw Stane complex indicates some level of martial culture. The pattern-welded knife evokes larger Anglo-Saxon ‘fighting knives’ or *seax* (eg Härke 1992), but whether they were viewed as the tool of a warrior or a wealthy craftsworker in Pictland is unknown.

This combination of large-scale craft production, high-status objects and access to a range of exotic goods indicates that the community who lived in the valley held power, wealth and important continental connections. However, a complementary assemblage of more local material illustrates that there was not sole reliance on these trade networks. Handmade pots, for example, were being produced locally at the Craw Stane complex, despite its occupants having access to a range of imported vessels. Analysis of phytoliths on a sample of sherds revealed they were used to cook or store a barley-based meal such as porridge or stew, providing a glimpse of local agricultural production and consumption (Section 7.14). A range of stone tools were manufactured from local stone types, including rotary querns for the daily task of grinding grain to make flour for food (Section 7.10).

Analysis of patterns of deliberate artefact deposition is more commonly used to understand prehistoric assemblages in Scotland (eg Armit & Büster 2020: 169; Campbell 1991; Engl 2008: 223–5), but there are some striking examples at the Craw Stane complex which echo those older traditions. An intact rotary quern found in a ditch, ornate pins placed in the palisade, and a set of tongs that had been deliberately bent before being placed in a post hole with articulated animal remains are all likely to have been intentionally deposited as part of a ritual. They may have served as a foundation offering at the beginning of the site and/or structure’s life, or a closing deposit towards its end. Though the Craw Stane complex was not solely a ritual or sacred site (see Chapter 12), a range of cosmological traditions are likely to have underwritten the lives of those who lived and worked here. Alongside familiar pottery traditions and stone tool types, these behaviours provide local roots to a range of sites which have assemblages which are otherwise difficult to parallel.

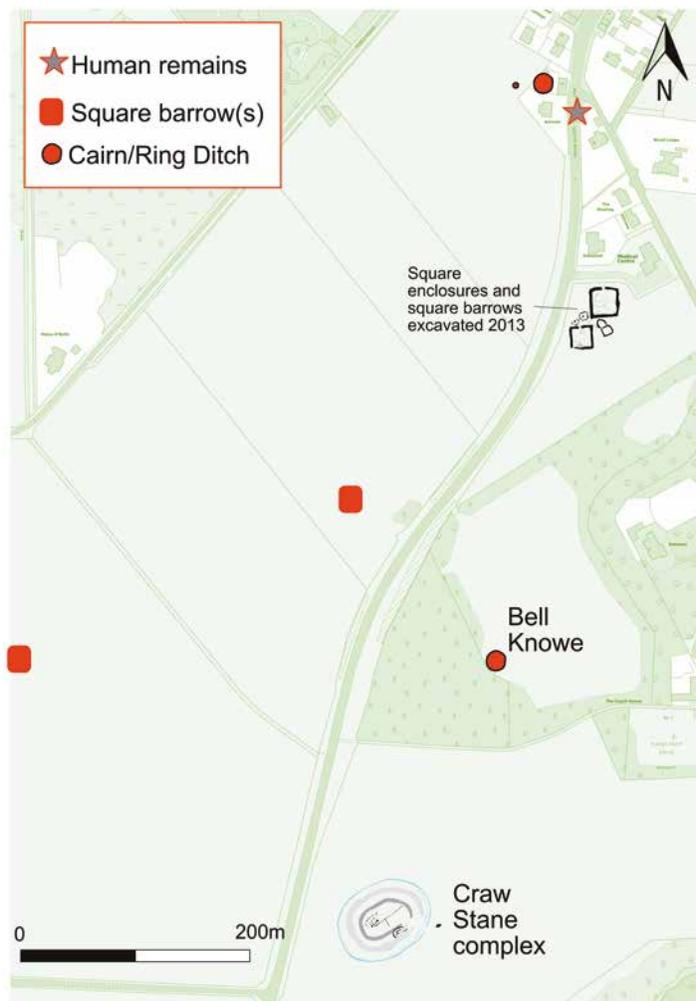
There are currently no known contemporary parallels in Scotland that cover the scale, range and quality of the Craw Stane assemblage. Sites like Eilean Olabhat (North Uist), Scatness Broch (Shetland), Trusty’s Hill (Dumfries and Galloway) and East Lomond (Fife) cover parts of the same period and have produced evidence of non-ferrous metalworking, including some silver, but their assemblages are much smaller and less diverse than the Craw Stane complex (Armit et al 2008; Dockrill et al 2015; Toolis & Bowles 2017; Noble & Evans 2022: 66–70). The mould assemblage from the Craw Stane complex is particularly impressive, and represents the casting of a minimum of 67 unique objects. Considering that this assemblage was recovered from around just 14% of the surviving deposits in the outer ditch, the total number of items produced could be 600 or more. Closer parallels to this scale of production can be found at Dunadd in Argyll, the monastic centres at Portmahomack, and the Irish ringforts at Garranes (Campbell & Lane 2000, Carver et al 2016; Ó Ríordáin 1942).

Returning to Rhynie’s more immediate environs, the metalworking assemblages from Tap o’ Noth and Cairn More are much smaller in scale, but similar traditions of practice are evident. The small details of mould construction, crucible forms and products all indicate a shared workshop tradition between the three sites, if not the same metalworkers, implying collaboration amongst a series of interconnected sites (Section 7.8; See Chapter 12). Overall, the range and quality of artefacts recovered from the Upper Strathbogie valley are a remarkable survival which shine fresh light on crafts, adornment, long-held traditions, wide-ranging contacts and local collaborations in a previously poorly understood period.

11.8 The Rhynie Cemetery

The 2013 season confirmed the presence of early medieval burial monuments in proximity to the Craw Stane complex. This was a significant result that built on the antiquarian identification of human remains at the southern outskirts of the village and the identification of square enclosures by aerial photography in the 1990s (Greig 1994) (Chapter 5). The two square barrows excavated in 2013 contained different styles of interment, with one showing evidence for a wooden coffin or split tree trunk and the other a well-built long cist. Dates recovered from the long cist

RHYNIE

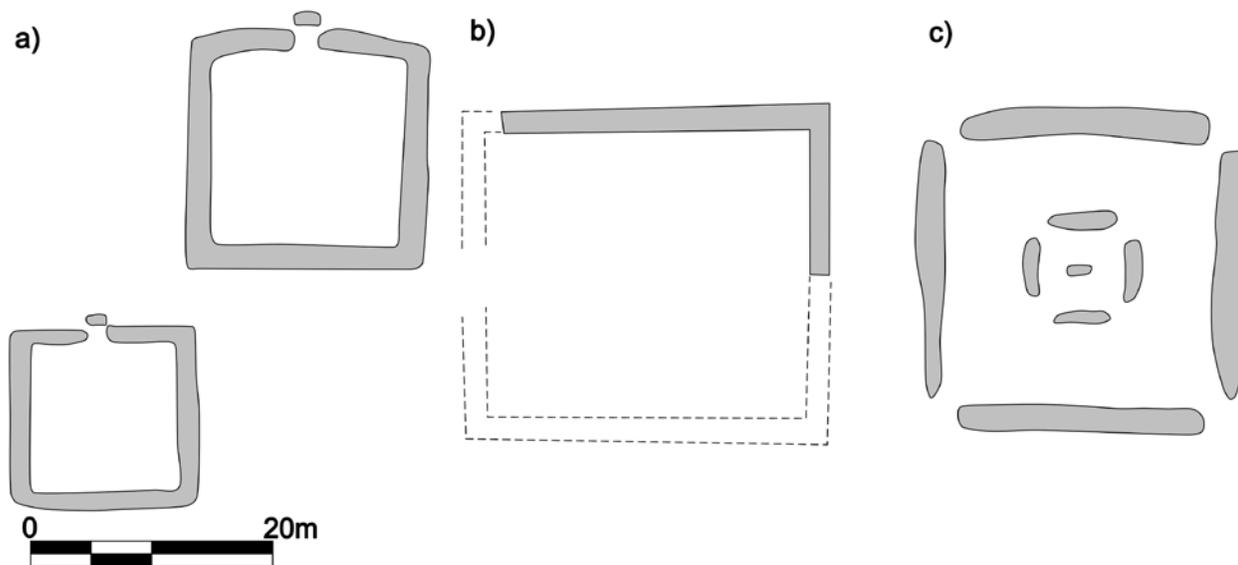


Illus 11.8

Map showing possible extent of early medieval cemetery as indicated by cropmarks of possible barrows, documented cairns and barrows and records of human remains found within the village. Based on OS MasterMap® 1:1000 map layer EDINA Digimap

burial suggest the interment occurred when the Craw Stane complex was at its peak. Rhynie is one of a growing number of early medieval cemeteries known in Aberdeenshire (see Mitchell & Noble 2017), most of which are modest in scale – though this seems at least partly due to the poor definition of cropmarks in this region (Fraser & Halliday 2011: 312). Indeed, it was only the larger square enclosures that showed up on the Rhynie aerial photographs rather than any of the square barrow monuments. While some additional potential barrow monuments were identified through geophysical survey, the square enclosures showed up only faintly and the two excavated barrows and graves did not show up at all, suggesting that many more could be awaiting discovery (Chapter 5).

As it stands, the remains at Rhynie constitute a small cemetery, but various strands of evidence suggest its original size could have been substantially larger and likely extended under the modern village (Chapter 5). Antiquarian finds of human remains and cists may allude to burials contained within barrows or cairns that were lost due to the expansion of the village in the 19th and 20th centuries (Henderson 1907: 163) (Chapter 5), while the presence of the cairn within the garden of Ashvale Cottage could represent the cairn Logan (1829) recorded as being found in association with Rhynie No. 3 symbol stone (Chapter 5). This was located around 200m north of the square barrows excavated in 2013, and cropmarks of additional possible square barrows were identified approximately 400m and 600m to the south. Logan (1829: 57) also recorded numerous circles, cairns and barrows on the Muir of Rhynie, none of which remain upstanding today. All in all, this suggests that the Rhynie cemetery could have covered an extensive area, making it of a similar scale (or perhaps even larger) than the known Pictish barrow cemeteries of north-east Scotland (Illus 11.8). These tend to follow gravel ridges or breaks of slope and can cover areas up to 100–200 m in length (eg Mitchell & Noble 2017: 12–16, figs 6, 9 and 10). Further investigations may well reveal more burial monuments and graves and begin to



Illus 11.9

a) Rhynie square enclosures compared to b) Forteviot square enclosure and c) large square barrow at Greshop, Moray

map the boundaries of this cemetery at Rhynie. However, a significant portion of any *in situ* remains, particularly to the north of the site, are suspected to have been removed by the modern village and the roads, paths and modern infrastructure to the south of the village.

Even though only a very small portion of the cemetery is likely to have been revealed, an unusual aspect is the juxtaposition between the barrows and the two larger square enclosures that measured up to 20m across. The enclosures were originally identified as possible barrows by the RCAHMS Donside survey due to a similar morphology and their association with the general findspot of human remains from around the southern outskirts of the village (RCAHMS 2007: 121). A recent survey of north-eastern Pictish cemeteries have identified a number of sites with larger square features around 20m across, and examples like Greshop (Illus 11.9c) and Pitgaveny in Moray have clear grave-cuts evident in the aerial record or actual burials have been identified through excavation (Mitchell & Noble 2017: 30, figs 4–6). In contrast, the two Rhynie enclosures did not contain any surviving burial features, and their unusual entrance arrangements mark these monuments as atypical. The closest parallel to these features is the large square enclosure excavated at Forteviot, Perthshire, which was interpreted as a Roman Iron Age shrine (Campbell et al 2019; Campbell & Driscoll 2020: 66). The Forteviot enclosure appears to have formed an early focus for the Pictish cemetery at a site that subsequently became an early medieval royal centre in the later first millennium AD (Campbell et al 2019: 91; Campbell & Driscoll 2020: 66) (Illus 11.9b). Larger square enclosures are also known at some Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemeteries and have similarly been interpreted as shrines (Blair 1995).

Given their lack of material culture, the function of the Rhynie square enclosures is difficult to establish, but their unusual form, like the example at Forteviot, may indicate a specialised ritual role. Their proximity to burial monuments suggests that this was likely linked to death and funerary rituals, where they may have defined areas for gathering during the use of the cemetery. In this scenario, the peculiar entrance arrangements may indicate highly charged entrance points into areas of exclusion and restriction, and a desire to contain and control access to the interior and the activities that went on in that space. There was no clear evidence from their fills as to whether the ditches had an external or internal bank, but an external bank seems most likely given the possible presence of a standing stone on one side of the interior of Square Enclosure 1 (though it is possible that any standing stone was removed or already toppled by the time of construction). Should the monuments have featured an external bank, the projecting section of ditch at the entranceway would have created a significant barrier to access, perhaps even a void that had to be stepped over or bridged with some form of walkway. As noted in Chapter 9, the presence of external banks at Iron Age sites in Ireland are suggested to be a reverse of defensive architecture; a way of defending the outside world from something powerful, liminal and perhaps dangerous inside (Warner 2000a). In this respect, the enclosures may have served to demarcate a space associated with the rites of passage of the dead and to contain the powerful and perhaps malevolent forces that may have been associated with a transition to the afterlife. Should this be

the case, they would represent another space within the overall central place complex of the valley that was associated with cult and ritual (Chapter 12). The dating of the square enclosures is uncertain, but it seems likely they were contemporary with the 5th- to 6th-century AD square barrows. Whatever the exact context and date of these enclosures, their presence, along with the square barrows and antiquarian records of a wider cemetery, suggests that what is now the south side of Rhynie village was a liminal place in the landscape and an important arena for death and ritual.

11.9 The Pictish symbol stones of Rhynie

WITH ANDY HICKIE, HAMISH FENTON AND JOANA VALDEZ-TULLETT (RHYNIE NO. 5)

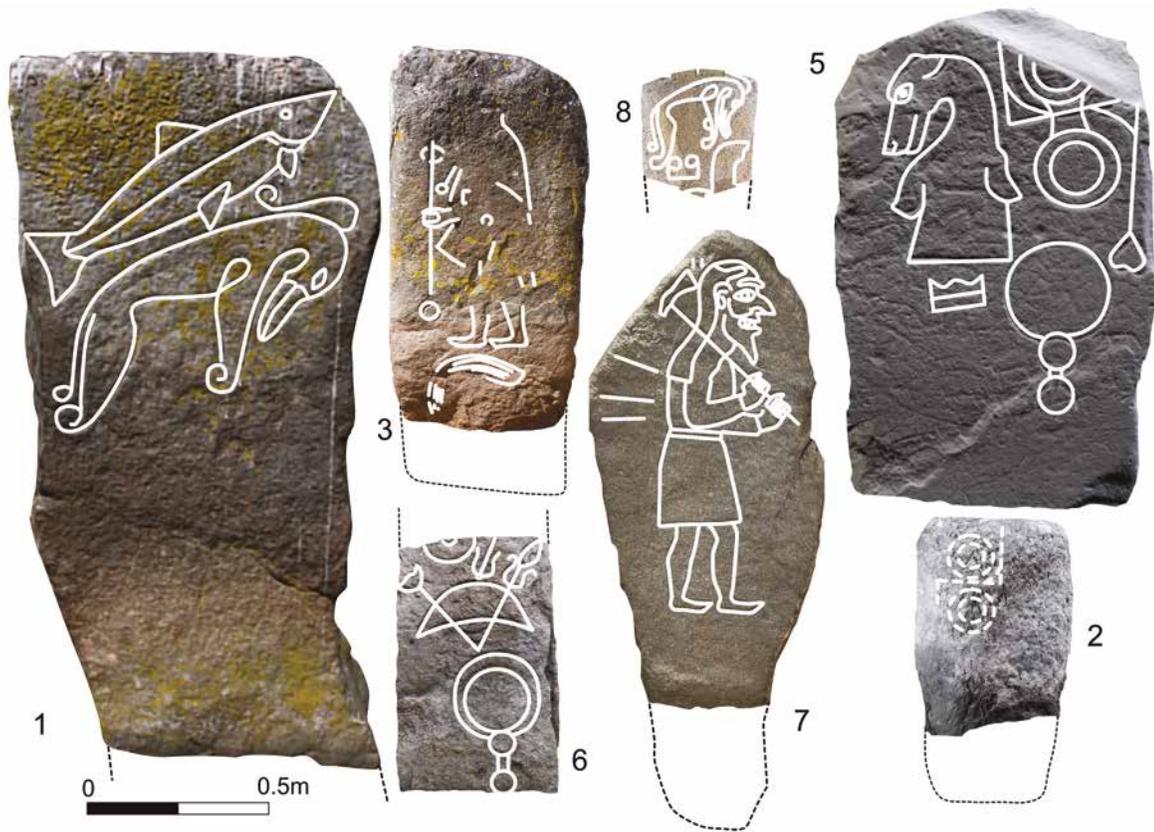
11.9.1 The context of the monuments

The concentration of symbol stones found in and around Rhynie village provided an early insight into the significance of the site and its environs (see Chapter 2 for a review of the history of discovery and for a description of the individual monuments) (Illus 11.10). Now, with the recent findings of this project, we can begin to understand more about their context and relationships. At least three of the stones were found in close association with the Craw Stane enclosure complex, and it is highly likely that two of these belonged to the primary phase of construction given that both the Craw Stane and the stone socket were located at the terminals of the inner and outer ditch. The Rhynie Man monument (Illus 11.11) was found directly downslope from the Craw Stane, near the entrance to the complex, and so it is reasonable to assume that this stone originally stood in the socket by the outer ditch (Chapter 5). Structure 3 was located immediately next to the Craw Stane, with the likely entrance of the building facing the symbol stone and the socket for the other stone. It is therefore possible that the Craw Stane may have been erected at the same time as Structure 3, though the proximity to the entrance of the complex was perhaps the most important element in the positioning of the stones.

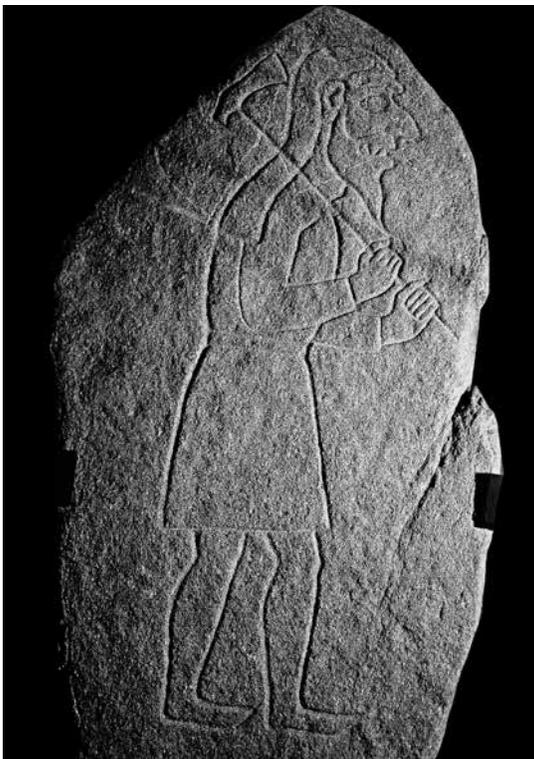
The Craw Stane has traditionally been identified as a reused standing stone (eg Clarke 2007: 33), and it is possible that it was already upright when the Pictish complex was established. In this instance, it may have been used to mark a prehistoric burial, with the recovery of a Bronze Age Beaker only a few metres from the Craw Stane in 2005 appearing to support this hypothesis (Cook 2005). However, very limited evidence for prehistoric activity was identified during project excavations (Chapters 5 and 9). Moreover, there were no features found directly next to the Craw Stane that would suggest the stone actually related to anything other than the position of the first-millennium AD enclosures and the structures within. In this respect, it seems more likely that the stone was established in association with the enclosure complex rather than being an *in situ* prehistoric monument.

Aside from the Rhynie Man (No. 7), the other stone found in the vicinity of the Craw Stane complex was Rhynie No. 8. This stone is of a different character to the others in the Rhynie corpus, being much more modest in size (Illus 11.10). Its size and form are comparable to Dunnicaer No. 1, a symbol stone recovered from

RHYNIE



Illus 11.10
The Rhyndie symbol stones



Illus 11.11
Rhyndie Man © Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service

the Late Roman Iron Age promontory fort in south-east Aberdeenshire (Noble et al 2018a: 1342). Both Rhyndie No. 8 and Dunnicaer No. 1 contrast with the typical standing-stone style monument that dominates the Pictish symbol stone corpus, and several of the Dunnicaer examples have been interpreted as ‘plaques’ suitable for being set into a rampart (eg Alcock & Alcock 1992: 282; Alcock 1996, 2003). It is therefore conceivable that Rhyndie No. 8 was built into the rampart of the Craw Stane Phase 1 enclosure (Noble et al 2018a: 1342).

Rhyndie No. 5 and No. 6 came from the Rhyndie churchyard and were found built into the foundations of the parish church. Thus, little can be said about their original context – they may have come from either the cemetery, the Craw Stane complex, or a different location entirely. The other group of stones, Nos 2–4, all came from near the village. The exact location of No. 4 is uncertain but is said to have been standing at the Mains of Rhyndie in the 18th century, seemingly near the village on the southern outskirts of the settlement. Rhyndie No. 2 was recovered during ploughing of a field near the village, while No. 3 is said to have been found in association with a stone cairn (Logan 1829: 56). The potential funerary context for No. 3 is intriguing given that its warrior figure imagery has close parallels with the individual featured on a stone from Collessie, Fife, which was similarly located adjacent to a cemetery with large square barrows (Hall et al 2020: 56, Plate IV) (See also Chapter 12). Though a burial context for symbol stones has been questioned (eg Clarke 2007), there is little doubt that some stones were associated with funerary monuments. The symbol stone at

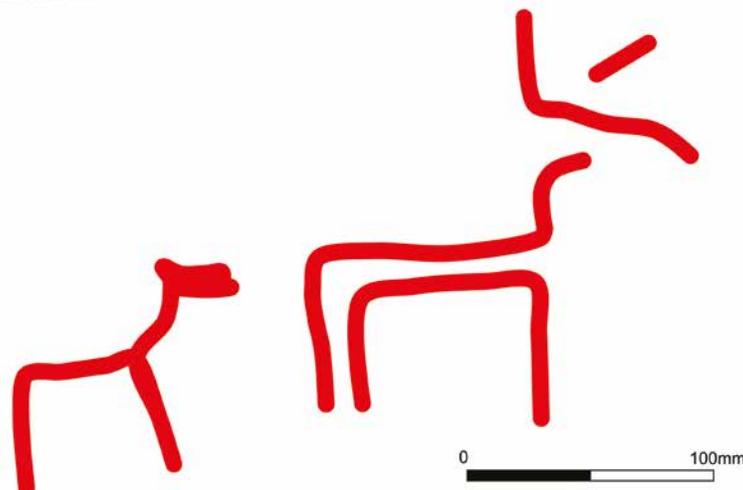
Dairy Park, Sutherland, for example, was found directly above a burial mound during ploughing (Close-Brooks et al 1981). A number of the Highland examples, such as Garbeg in Inverness-shire and Ackergill in Caithness, also appear to have been deployed in direct association with burials or more generally located in proximity to cemeteries (Wedderburn & Grime 1984; Ritchie 2011 – see also Noble et al 2018a).

11.9.3 Dating

The relationship between the location of the Rhynie stones, the Craw Stane complex and the cemetery strongly suggests that the carved stone monuments belong to the main period of activity of those sites – ie the 4th–6th centuries AD (Noble et al 2018a: 70). As noted above, the Craw Stane and the socket of another probable standing stone, possibly the Rhynie Man, stood at the terminals of the inner and outer ditch of the Phase 1 enclosure at the Craw Stane complex. They could, of course, have been set up after the complex went out of use, but the relationship between these monuments and the terminals of the Phase 1 enclosure is compelling. Moreover, by the time Structure 3 was constructed, the outer ditch had already been at least partly backfilled, meaning that the placement of the stone in relation to the terminal after this date would have been rather fortuitous. There are also telling links between the art on the stones and objects found in the ground that indicate they were contemporary, most notably the axe carried by Rhynie Man and the axe pin found in secure and dated deposits in the palisade upper fill.

Regarding the stones found nearer the village, the relationship between the findspots and the cemetery is likely to be a key in understanding their phasing. Square barrow cemeteries of the form found near the village generally date between the 4th and early 7th century AD (Maldonado 2013; Mitchell & Noble 2017: 22). The only dated monument from Rhynie was the square barrow with the central long cist, which provided a 5th- to 6th-century determination. Typological assessments of the stone imagery may offer further clues to their date: the warrior carving on Rhynie No. 3, for example, carries a spear type that has associations with moulds for spearbutts found in 4th- to 6th-century AD contexts (Hall et al 2020: 138).

In general the style of carving and the motifs selected on the Rhynie monuments has been given a date range of the 4th–6th centuries AD based on a contextual understanding of their context, some stylistic parallels and a typology of carving style developed for the wider Pictish symbol stone corpus (Noble et al 2018a: 1341–2). In this context, ascribing a date to the likely earlier zoomorphic motifs identified on Rhynie No. 5 (Chapter 5) is a major challenge. Although Scotland has many examples of rock art, animal depictions are rare. Moreover, dating any form of stone carving is difficult due to the lack of associated contexts, but finding parallels for such rudimentary designs is particularly tricky. The simplicity of the motifs' morphology and the lack of defining stylistic characteristics make it very difficult to establish comparisons. Geographically, the closest parallels are the simple animal designs found in a series of caves in Fife. Within Constantine's Cave, there are a series of deer carvings in a similar pose to the Rhynie examples – ie in profile and depicted by linear lines (Wace & Jehu 1915: 242, fig 7; Stuart 1867: plate 29) (Illus 11.12). Other potential parallels are a possible animal depiction within Court Cave in East Wemyss (Illus 11.13a), where

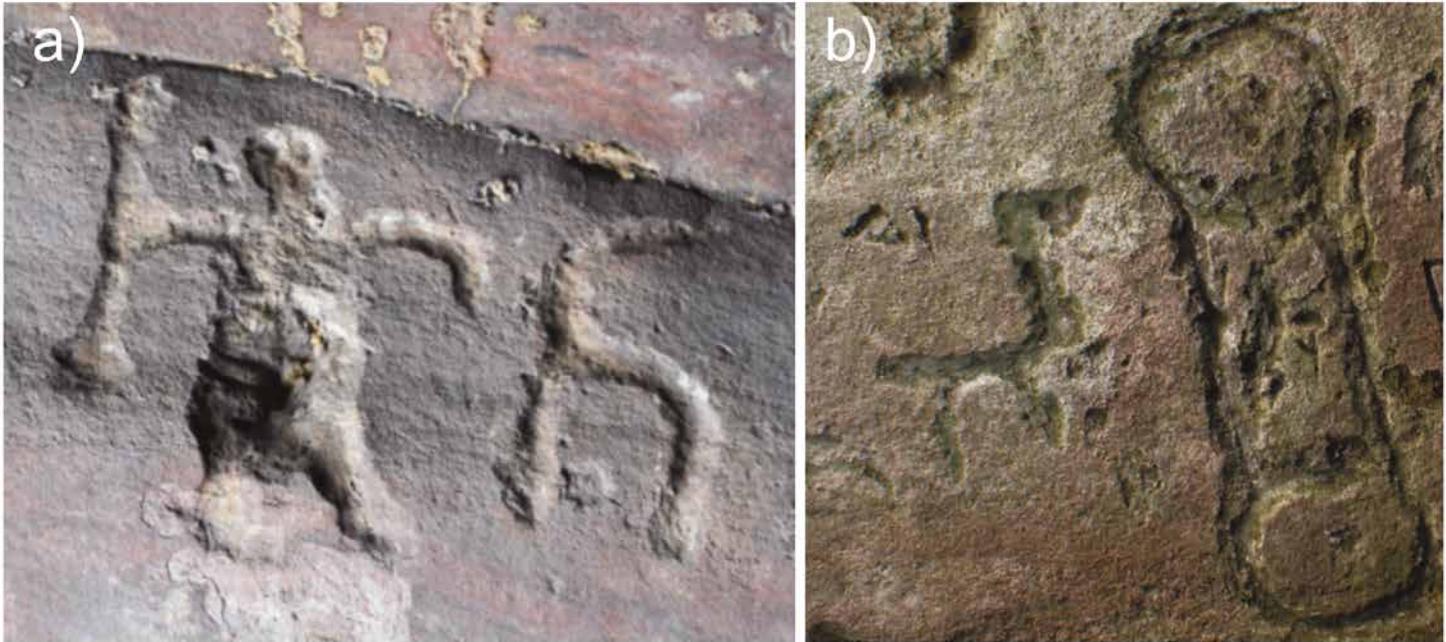


Illus 11.12

Constantine's Cave, Fife: above) QGIS visualisation of a rock art panel at the back of the cave showing two zoomorphic designs; below) transcription of the designs

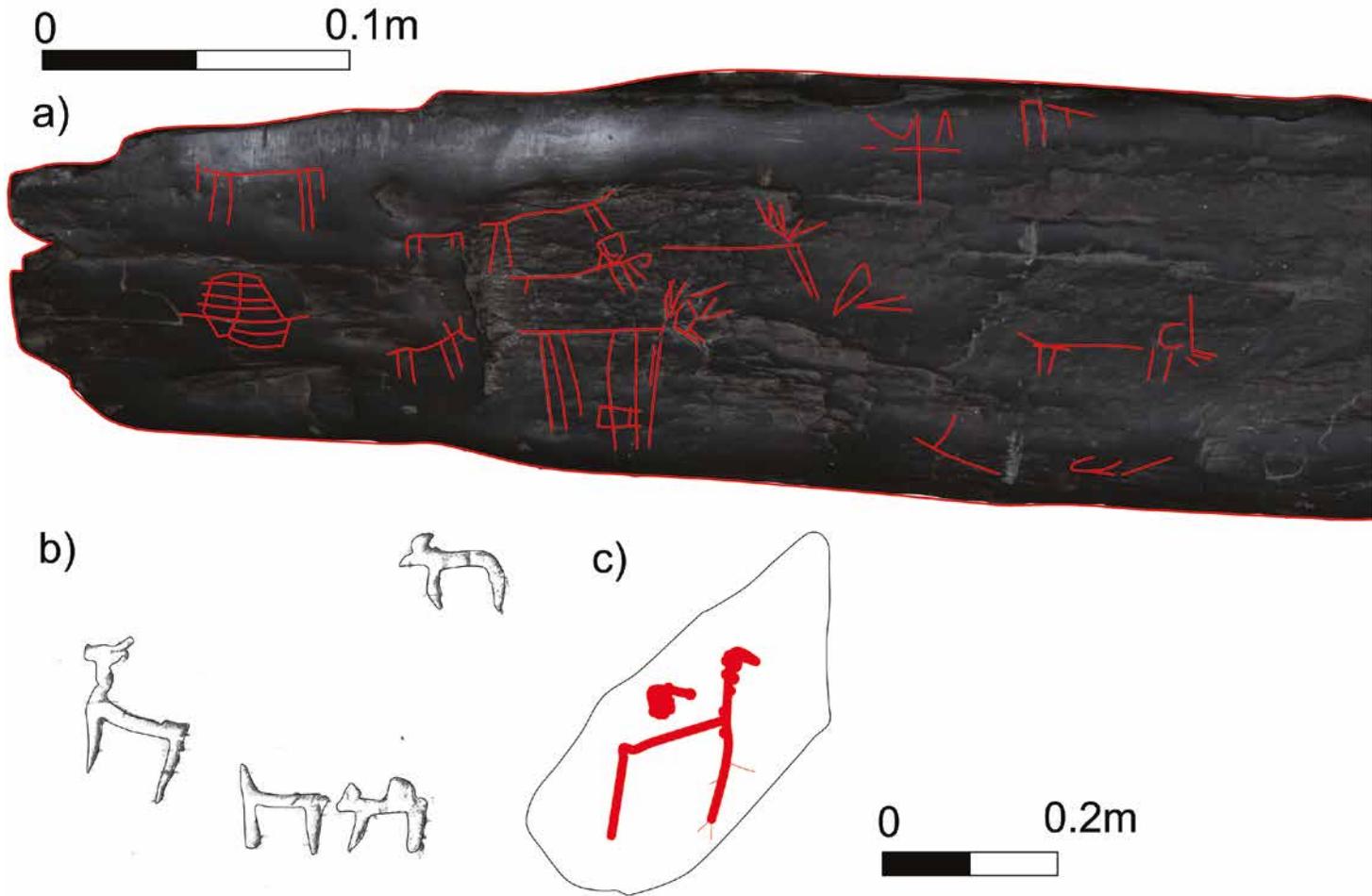
a similar animal-like depiction is found side-by-side with a human holding a club or a spear. Another example is found in Jonathan's Cave, which appears to be paired with a double-disc carving (Illus 11.13b). The Pictish symbol carvings found in caves, like the one found next to the zoomorph in Jonathan's Cave, have recently been attributed to the 2nd to 4th centuries AD, based on their stylistic similarity to the carvings from Dunnicaer, Aberdeenshire, found within the rampart of a securely dated promontory fort (Noble et al 2018a, 2020a). It is therefore possible that the Rhynie No. 5 zoomorphs belong to this period given their resemblance to one of the animals at Wemyss and the latter's apparent association with a Pictish symbol (Illus 11.13b).

However, further afield relatively simple zoomorphs have been ascribed prehistoric dates such as on standing stones from the Isle of Man and on chalk blocks from Sussex (Illus 11.14) (Darvill et al 2005: 292; Russell 2000: 50–1; Teather 2015), and



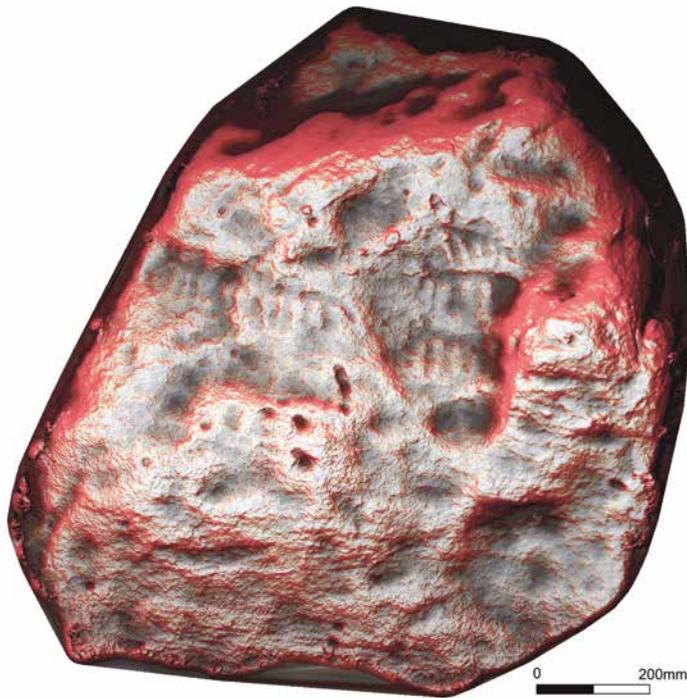
Illus 11.13

East Wemyss, Fife: a) Court Cave; b) Jonathan's Cave. Images © Save Wemyss Ancient Caves Society



Illus 11.14

Parallels for Rhynie No. 5: a) incised examples from Cronk ny How, Isle of Man; b) Goatscrag, Northumberland; c) Cissbury, Sussex. Cronk ny How RTI base image provided by Manx National Heritage



Illus 11.15

QGIS visualisation of Escaraveirão I – R1 (Monte Faro, Valença, Portugal).
Original imaging by Joana Valdez-Tullett

even further afield the occurrence of both cup-marks and zoomorphic images is also broadly congruous with prehistoric examples of zoomorphs from Iberia (Illus 11.15). While figurative art remains rarely attested in prehistoric Britain, more examples including zoomorphs have been discovered in recent years (eg Valdez-Tullett et al 2023), thus we should certainly not rule out a prehistoric date for the motifs on Rhynie No. 5, but dating evidence for all of these examples is problematic. Perhaps the closest parallel for Rhynie No. 5 in Britain, other than the Fife cave examples, is Goats Crag, Northumberland, where a number of roughly pecked deer carvings are found on living rock. These latter carvings have been ascribed both prehistoric and Roman Iron Age dates (Burgess 1972; van Hoek & Smith 1988: 34) (Illus 11.14b), highlighting the uncertainties of establishing a chronology for such schematic designs. Overall, without the ability to directly date the carving or the stone's context, the chronology of the motifs on Rhynie No. 5 is likely to remain uncertain, but they are likely at least to pre-date the Pictish symbols on the same stone as the mirror appears to cut through two of the quadrupeds. The Pictish symbols on Rhynie No. 5 would fit comfortably within the 5th- to 6th-century date range suggested in the symbol typology outlined by Noble et al (2018a), but how much earlier the zoomorphic carvings are is much less certain.

11.9.4 A naming tradition?

The function and meaning of the Pictish symbol stone tradition has been debated for well over a century (Noble et al 2018a: *supp mat S1*). Over 200 stone monuments with carved symbols are known from eastern and northern Scotland; approximately

two-thirds of these are incised symbol stones and the other third are cross-slabs (RCAHMS 2008). Attempts to decipher the meaning of the symbols has resulted in wide-ranging interpretations that include icons of pagan or Christian religion (Earl of Southesk 1893; Allen & Anderson 1903), symbols of rank or tribal identity (Diack 1944; Thomas 1963; Henderson 1967), symbols of marriage alliances (Jackson 1984) and memorials to the dead (Laing & Laing 1984; Driscoll 1988; Mack 2007), as well as countless 'fringe' ideas and speculations (see Noble et al 2018a). The most persuasive interpretation is that monuments featuring paired symbols represented some form of naming system (for a fuller summary, see Noble et al 2018a; Noble & Evans 2022: Chapter 6). The roots of this research lie with Samson (1992), who saw the common pairing of symbols as key to their interpretation, arguing that the symbols did not work in isolation but rather as pairs to represent personal names, perhaps acting as two elements of a dithematic name. Forsyth (1997) also identified symbol pairs as 'the fundamental syntax' of the Pictish symbol system, and more recent work utilising statistical analysis has supported the interpretation that the messages conveyed by the symbols are likely to have been names (Lee 2010; Lee et al 2010 – though see Sproat 2010). A naming system or other form of identity marking is clearly suggested by some later monuments such as the cross-slab from Dunfallandy, Perthshire, where two seated figures and a mounted individual are shown with symbol pairs directly next to them. The correlation of symbols with human figures can also be identified on other monuments, such as Meigle in Perthshire and Woodwrae in Angus (eg Allen & Anderson 1903: 38; Stevenson 1955a: 123; Noble & Evans 2022: 243, fig 6.13).

So what if we apply the naming interpretation to the stones from the Rhynie environs? The Rhynie Man (No. 7) does not feature any additional symbols and appears to be an isolated example in the Rhynie corpus. However, the paired symbols on Rhynie No. 1 and No. 8 may denote the names of individuals, perhaps significant elites, who were intimately associated with the Craw Stane complex. The two stones found in association with the parish church, No. 5 and No. 6, also have paired symbols, as do Rhynie No. 2 and No. 4 found near the village. The warrior, Rhynie No. 3, may additionally have had a single symbol or pair of symbols carved towards the base of the stone (Hall et al 2020: 130). Thus, a possible seven of the eight monuments from Rhynie appear to have displayed symbol pairings, with some also featuring the mirror and comb motif (Illus 11.10). More unusually, the symbol(s) on No. 3 were accompanied by a human figure – a combination that can also be observed on the Collessie warrior stone (Hall et al 2020: 132). Each of the Rhynie stones feature a unique set of symbol combinations, meaning that if they were indeed communicating names or identities of some kind, these were likely to denote different individuals. Given that the Craw Stane complex was in use for a period of up to 200 years (Chapter 8), this could reflect a generational commissioning in which a new stone was erected every *c.* 25–30 years (the approximate length of a human generation). However, it is equally possible that all, or at least the majority, of the stones were carved within a relatively short period of time. For example, the pairing of the Craw Stane and stone socket by the terminals of the Phase 1 enclosure might indicate that a pair of monuments was erected in association with the construction of the earlier ditched

monument. It has also been proposed that the small, plaque-like No. 8 might have been built into the rampart of bank of this same enclosure, again suggesting broad contemporaneity of at least this group of stones. Unfortunately, without the ability to directly date the carvings themselves, there is little more we can say about the relative date or sequence of the corpus.

11.10 Conclusions

The evidence uncovered at the Craw Stane complex, Cairn More and the Rhynie cemetery comprise remarkable discoveries that will enrich our understanding of the archaeology of Late Roman Iron Age and early medieval Britain and Ireland. While modern agriculture has undoubtedly had a huge impact on their survival, the excavations still provide an unprecedented insight into a 4th- to 6th-century AD elite centre in north-east Scotland, which can now be related to other contemporary sites in the valley such as Tap o' Noth (Chapter 10), and helps situate the eight symbol stones

known from the Rhynie environs. At the Craw Stane complex at Rhynie in particular, we can point to the huge implications that the material assemblage will have for our knowledge of society of this period, the craftworking traditions that were in place in early Pictland, and the elite culture that this assemblage reveals. The settlement evidence also marks a huge leap forward in our knowledge of the scale and complexity of society of this era, as well as the settlement traditions and trends of northern Britain in the Late Roman Iron Age and post-Roman period. There are currently few parallels for the Craw Stane complex, and indeed for Tap o' Noth and Cairn More, but those that can be identified indicate that these were quite exceptional sites whose significance will only fully emerge through comparison and debate in the years to come. Nonetheless, tentative exploration of the significance of these major sites of the Upper Strathbogie valley and the carved stones from the Rhynie environs, and how these diverse landscape elements were interrelated, forms the focus of the final discussion chapter (Chapter 12).