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Chapter 7

Medieval Township (Period 4, *c* 1100–*c* 1600)

Introduction

The arrival of the Middle Ages at Portmahomack is marked by the building of a stone church, the first version of which is termed *Church 2* and dated here to the twelfth century (*Church 1* being assigned to the elusive Pictish church, Chapter 5.4). The church builders levelled the former Pictish cemetery, likely to have been derelict by then, and incorporated many of its grave markers into the fabric of the new building. The remains of cross-slabs A, B and C should have been visible lying in the churchyard. *Church 3* was Church 2 equipped with a chancel. *Church 4* was a relatively grand church with nave, sanctuary, belfry and crypt, founded in the thirteenth century and enduring until the Reformation in the late sixteenth century. The old monastic structures were cleared from Sector 1 and the area given over to ploughing from the thirteenth century. In addition to the growing of cereals, the Portmahomack community had access to a wide variety of meat and fish to support its subsistence. The areas of the former ninth- to eleventh-century workshops and the infilled pool in Sector 2 were intensively redeveloped, initially for domestic occupation in the thirteenth to fourteenth century and latterly (in the fifteenth to sixteenth century) for the working of iron. Thus the medieval settlement grew from a village to a township, while the church provided a burial place for its people and a theatre for their beliefs and challenges.

The sequence over the three Sectors

The period 1100–1600 at Portmahomack has been provided with a chronological framework by stratigraphy, radiocarbon dates, coins and pottery (see Table 7.1). This information suggests a division into three phases. *Period 4A*, the twelfth century, is evident only in Sector 4 where a simple rectangular stone church was constructed (Church 2), and eventually provided with a chancel (Church 3). Some dating support for the building was given by radiocarbon dates on a bell-casting pit (AD 1040–1260) and the single burial (Burial 117, AD 1150–1270).

Period 4B (thirteenth to fourteenth century) saw Church 2/3 replaced by a new building (Church 4), lengthened at each end and provided with an eastern crypt. A thirteenth-century aquamanile from Yorkshire (perhaps in use in Church 2), a chafing dish and a small quantity of Scottish Redware confirm activity in the thirteenth to fifteenth century (Digest 6.18). After an interval of

intensive ceremonial use, burial returned to the nave: three of the stratigraphically earliest burials gave dates between the late thirteenth and early fifteenth century. Two burials with grave covers, one decorated and dating to about 1350 were found in situ end-on to the east wall of Church 4, showing that the crypt must have been in existence by then. As Church 4 was developing on the hill, a residential village took shape on the site of the former workshops and dried-up pool of Sector 2. A small group of imported Whiteware suggests some activity of twelfth-century date, but the greater part of the assemblage is Scottish Redware indicating activity of early thirteenth- to fifteenth/sixteenth-century date (Hall in Digest 6.18). The same Scottish Redware was found in the rig and furrow that now overran the filled in ditches in Sector 1, suggesting that the agricultural initiative also belongs to the thirteenth to fourteenth century, our Period 4B.

During *Period 4C*, from the fifteenth into the sixteenth century, there was a fire that scorched stones within the church, followed by a refurbishment that included the addition of a barrel vault to the crypt. Burial intensified, with a focus on the east end around the entrance to the crypt; the four radiocarbon dates, broadened by marine reservoir correction, gave spans from the mid-fifteenth to the early seventeenth century. Some burials were interred over the vault of the crypt. Burial should have terminated in about 1580 when the edicts of the Reformation vetoed the digging of further graves in the nave, apart from those of infants. In Sector 2, a large-scale industrial enterprise of iron smelters, smiths and tinkers arose on the site of the village, with a repertoire that included swords. This lively township was abandoned and ploughed over before post-medieval objects became commonplace.

The numismatic profile from Sectors 1, 2 and 3, although almost exclusively recovered from ploughsoil, echoes a three-part pattern. The assemblage contained no coins minted before the beginning of the thirteenth century: the sequence began with a group of pennies and halfpennies of the thirteenth to fourteenth century. There was a notable gap after *c* 1350 until *c* 1450 when base metal Scottish issues indicate a resumption of economic activity of late fifteenth- to early sixteenth-century date (*Holmes* in Digest 6.14).

Some chronological context for these events can be gleaned from the exiguous medieval records of the region. It is highly likely that the Pictish monastery was remembered in the Middle Ages: when Church 2 was founded, it became the parish church of Tarbat, dedicated to St Colman. In the thirteenth century, a

Table 7.1
Chronology for Period 4 (excerpt from Table 3.1)

Defined Period	Sector 1 [South Field]	Sector 2 [Glebe Field]	Sector 4 [Church]	The Tarbat Peninsula
HIATUS *c* 150 years 1000–1150			*up to 110 years*	
PERIOD 4 Medieval twelfth-sixteenth century PERIOD 4A Church 2/3 built 1100–1200 AD			*Start: 1085–1245* *Church 2/3* **twelfth century** Bell casting pit F107 [O-10536] **1040–1260** *Aquamanile* Burial 117 [GU-9298] **1150–1270** [Blade wound, fatal]	*Parish churches founded* c *1170*
PERIOD 4B Church 4 built thirteenth to fourteenth century	*Ploughed fields* Pottery **thirteenth/fifteenth century**	*Residence S17 and fish middens* Coins **thirteenth century–***c***1350** Pottery **thirteenth/fifteenth century**	*Church 4 and crypt built* Burial 112 [S-33403/fish] **1280–1420** Burial 110 [O-13490/fish] **1290–1410** Burial 113 [O-13491/fish] **1290–1430** [blade wound, healed] Grave cover **mid-fourteenth century**	*Fearn Abbey founded* c *1235*
PERIOD 4C Church 4 refurbished fifteenth to sixteenth century	*Ploughed fields*	*Smithy S18* Coins *c***1450–***c***1550** Pottery **fifteenth–sixteenth century**	*Church 4* *Fire; Addition of vault to crypt* Burial 30/36 Burial 101 [S-33401/fish] **1440–1630** Burial 90 [O-13521/fish] **1460–1660** Burial 98 [S-33400/fish] **1420–1620** Burial 97 [O-13762/fish] **1440–1640** Burial 43 Boots of early fifteenth century *End: 1470–1690*	*Church burnt* c *1485*

Premonstratensian abbey was founded at Fearn, which extracted its territory from the larger, older parish of Tarbat. At that time, the peninsula also hosted the seat of the Earls of Ross, at Rarichie. In the fourteenth century, the chapel of St Duthac at Tain commanded religious attention, attracting eminent pilgrims. But on the Tarbat peninsula the service of sanctity still flourished: it had a large number of chapels and holy wells, some coincident with the old Pictish ritual centres. Like St Duthac's and St Colman's, these chapels were probably representative of a late resurgence of mystic Christianity, responding to the oncoming Reformation.

The Reformation arrived in the north-east in the later sixteenth century, coinciding with the installation of new western lairds (the MacKenzies). This family remodelled the church to suit the new liturgy and social relations and provided its early reformed ministers. The site of the former industrial activities in Sector 2 became the minsters' Glebe Land, while the land to the south (our Sector 1) remained under cultivation, as it has ever since. The township and its industries translocated to the harbour. From this time on (Period 5) the information fuelling our narrative story is confined to the church (Churches 5–8) and its churchyard, these providing an index of the social and spiritual thinking of the neighbourhood.

Using this chronological framework, the story of medieval and later Portmahomack is presented in the following sections: the church from the twelfth to the sixteenth century (p 289);
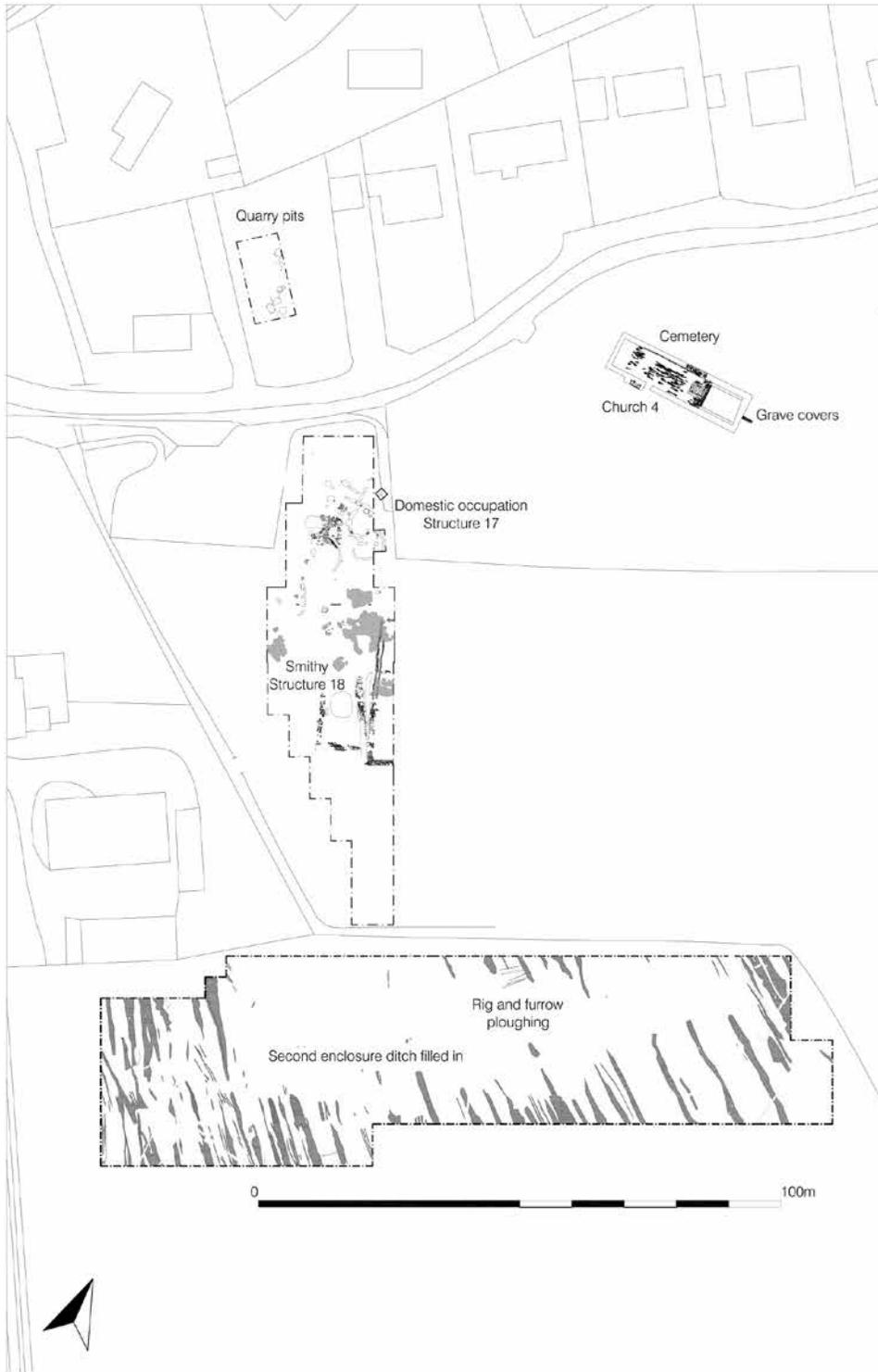
Illustration 7.1
Plan of activities in Period 4

Medieval people: the burials (p 296); Medieval diet (p 308); the village, thirteenth to fourteenth century (p 311); the township and its industries, fifteenth to sixteenth century (p 314); a context for medieval Tarbat (p 316); post-medieval Tarbat, seventeenth to twenty-first century (p 322).

The church from the twelfth to the sixteenth century

The sequence of churches was studied above and below ground, by excavation of the nave and by recording of the exposed fabric as the building was being restored and converted into a museum (Chapter 2, p 27). The full sequence of contexts and features is described in archive (OLA 6.3.1, 6.3.2, 6.3.3). During the Middle Ages, St Colman's Church developed from a unicameral building (Church 2) to acquire a chancel (Church 3) and thence to a fully fledged medieval church with nave, chancel, belfry and crypt (Church 4).

Church 2 (OLA 6.3.1 at 3.4.1)

The preparation for the first church was a layer of rubble that overlay remnants of a buried soil thought to have developed over the Period 2/3 cemetery. Church 2 was a simple rectangular single-cell building with a south door, plastered and lime-washed internally (Illus 7.2). Its east and west walls survived as foundations, while in the north and south walls the fabric that stood above ground was represented by a few courses of ashlar. Together, these walls defined a building measuring *c* 11.5m E–W by 8.0m N–S externally with an internal footprint of 9.0m E–W by 5.5m N–S. The construction technique for the walls of Church 2 consisted of foundation trenches up to 0.5m deep, filled with unbonded, closely interlocking beach cobbles and water-worn sandstone blocks (Illus 7.3a). These were overlain by a course of mortar-bonded, thin rectangular slabs on which rose the first course of interior and exterior elevations formed of large squared blocks of yellow sandstone embracing a mortared rubble core (Illus 7.3b). The yellow sandstone blocks were carefully shaped and very
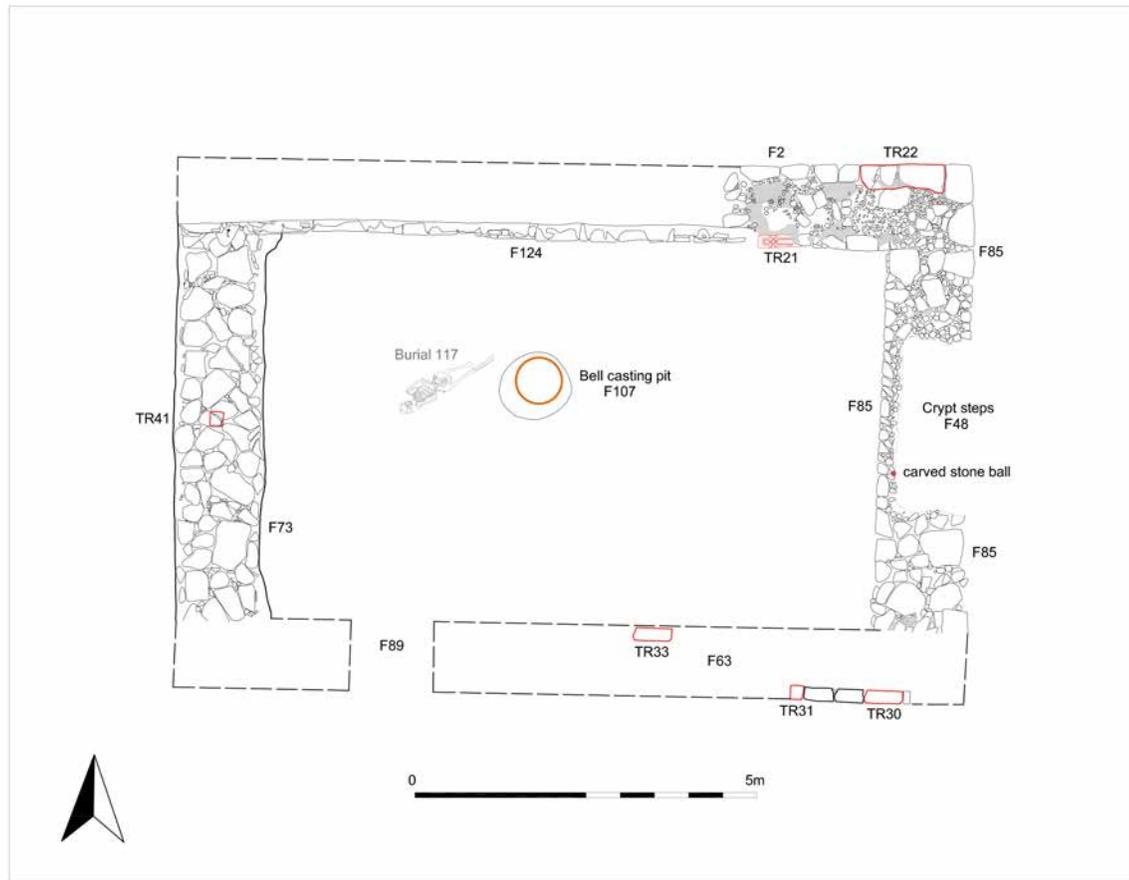
Illustration 7.2
Plan of Church 2

tightly jointed, demonstrating accomplished masonry. This stone was sourced on the peninsula (OLA 7.5.1). The eighth-century gravemarkers TR21, 30, 31, 33, 41 and the sarcophagus lid TR22 were also incorporated as building blocks in the foundations of Church 2 (Chapter 5.3; Illus 5.3.14). These were most likely brought to light during the levelling of the former monastic cemetery.

Something of the internal arrange-ment and appearance of Church 2 can be surmised from the few features assigned to the building. Internally the remains of the slab foundations of Church 2 were recorded as being partially covered with a smoothed, white plaster down to *c* 17.5m AOD and the elevations had at some stage been tooled roughly on the diagonal, possibly to aid the adhesion of wall plaster (see Illus 7.4a). The doorway for Church 2 was located 1.3m from the internal west end of the south wall and was visible as blocked lower door jambs over an in situ threshold stone at *c* 18.0m AOD (Illus 7.4b). Geological inspection of the threshold stone identified it as an extremely fine-grained sandstone, which may have been sourced differently from the stone used in the elevations; it may originate from the south side of the Tarbat peninsula (OLA 7.1.12). The change in height from the threshold at 18m AOD to the level of exposed foundations at *c* 17.5m AOD suggests that the original floor level

of Church 2 was sunken. Such indications as we have allow the building to be an initiative of the eleventh or twelfth century, with perhaps a slight bias towards the later twelfth century to align with the documented reforms of David I (pp 317–18).

Bell-casting pit

A bell-casting pit (F107) was identified among the few features internal to Church 2. It was defined in a much truncated state having been cut away by Period 4 Burials 81, 90 and 150. Associated pit features contained ash, charcoal and bronze droplets. The remnants of the feature suggested a pit measuring *c* 1.0m in diameter and a depth of *c* 0.7m, while the internal diameter of the base of the pit suggests a diameter of *c* 0.6m for the cast bell. The fill produced several bell-cope mould fragments and small droplets of bell metal. Bronze-stained charcoal recovered from the pit fill by flotation was submitted for radiocarbon dating and returned as AD 1040–1260 (Digest 3.3).

A burial in Church 2 (OLA 6.3.1/3.4.2)

Associated with Church 2 was a single burial laid out on a NW–SE orientation markedly different from either the preceding or succeeding burials (Illus 7.5). Burial 117 was identified as a male,

Illustration 7.3
Church 2: (a) foundations of the west wall; (b) core and facing of the north wall, with TR21 in situ

at *c* 16.9m AOD, being *c* 0.6m below the postulated floor level of Church 2, and was radiocarbon dated to AD 1150–1270. The verdict is that Burial 117 was interred inside Church 2, and so is included with the Period 4 burials (below).

Church 3 (OLA 6.3.1/3.4.3)

Church 3 was essentially Church 2 modified by the addition of two offset parallel stub walls at the east end surviving to a maximum length of 1.35m (Illus 7.6). The walls are interpreted as the remains of a small chancel that was subsequently cut away by the construction of the crypt of Church 4. The width of the chancel was 3.9m internally and *c* 5.5m externally, but the original length is unknown. A fragment of a Romanesque cushion capital recovered during a watching brief beneath Tarbatness Road in 2007 may have belonged to Church 2/3, and appears to belong to a respond for the springing of a chancel arch (Cait McCullagh in OLA 8.4, Plate 4). Two post-holes, both stratigraphically early features, were identified at the east end of Church 2 (F92, 93; Illus 7.6). Their location, parallel and offset from the east wall by *c* 0.9m, and adjacent to the chancel suggests they may represent the position of a screen or rail at that point. Church 2/3 was possibly provided with ceramic cruets and glazed windows: several conjoining pieces of an aquamanile imported from Yorkshire (D6.18; Illus 7.7) and some fragments of window glass were recovered from the levelling of the chancel walls in preparation for the building of Church 4.

aged seventeen to twenty-five years, of local origin. There were three cut marks on his skeleton, one on the back of the skull and two on the back of the femurs, and no evidence of healing, suggesting that the wounds were fatal. The position and nature of the cuts suggested a violent attack from behind, with a sharp weapon such as a sword. The burial had apparently been laid out with some care, with the arms crossed neatly over the lower torso. The grave had cut Period 2 Burials 114, 116 and 128 and had been subsequently cut by Period 4 Burials 141 and 148, but its relationship with Church 2 was equivocal. The skeleton lay

Illustration 7.4
Church 2: (a) external elevation of part of the south wall; (b) blocked threshold in the south wall

Illustration 7.5
Burial 117, in the nave of Church 2

Church 4 (OLA 6.3.1/3.4.4)

Church 4 was a major reconstruction, which stood for three centuries and partly survives today. The upper parts of the Church 2/3 were demolished, and its foundations extended 5.7m to the west and 10.3m to the east, defining a building 27.5m long by 7.7m wide externally (Illus 7.8). A chamfered plinth was a characteristic of the exterior of the new building and its top was recorded in architect's test pits at 17.99m, 17.93m and 17.85m AOD (OLA 6.3.3/2.3; Illus 7.9). The threshold and door of Church 2/3 were retained. A small length of stone wall was also encountered immediately outside the south door of the church (F5). This clearly related to the entrance but its purpose was not determined. Externally at the east end, the wall was seen to have been formed in dressed stonework to 16.8m AOD, suggesting the ground surface dropped away to leave the east exterior of the crypt exposed (OLA 6.3.3/2.2). Two squared stone blocks with square niches, one in situ against the east wall, are interpreted as stone supports for a reredos at the east end of the new chancel.

In Sector 3, on the beach side of Tarbatness Road, several large pits were dug, apparently to extract the fine clean sand, perhaps for making mortar for the construction of the medieval church (see Illus 7.1). In the backfills were four wire-wrap-headed bronze or silver pins and thirteenth- to fifteenth-century Scottish Redware pottery (Illus D6.1.24; OLA 6.2 at 3.5.2).

Crypt

The crypt beneath the extended chancel occupied approximately one-third of the length of the church. It had vertical east and west walls, their interior alignments differing by seven degrees (see also p 171), each abutted by the barrel vault that forms its present roof (7.10; and see Illus 5.4.3 and 4, p 169 for elevations of the east wall). An alcove (aumbry) was let into the east wall, and four lights had been inserted, two in the east wall and one each at the east end of the north and south walls (Illus 7.11a). The steps down into the crypt were cut through the east wall of Church 2 and occupied most of the footprint of the demolished Church 2/3 chancel (Illus 7.12). The medieval entrance from the nave to the steps did not survive, although given its position it is likely to have been furnished with some form of stone coping and rails.

Since the barrel vault was an addition, it represents a secondary development of the crypt which, in its original form, was probably defined by vertical walls on all four sides. A fragment of a Pictish gravemarker (TR29) was reused in the west wall of the crypt. The barrel vault incorporated two pieces of Pictish sculpture, TR20 (the Apostle Stone) and TR26 (in the north light lintel); the first of these carried traces of brown mortar and had probably already been used in Church 2. Set into the south wall of the vault was a section of a window mullion of thirteenth- to fourteenth-century date (Illus 7.11b; Jonathan Clark, pers comm) If the barrel vault was later than the thirteenth/fourteenth-century date implied by the mullion, it was still a medieval structure since it was oversailed by two burials (Burial 34 and Burial 19/31) belonging to the Period 4 group (a correction to the initial interpretation in Bulletin 3 (OLA 5.3) where the vault was attributed to the post-Reformation church, Church 5; cf G Stell in Bulletin 1, OLA 5.1). The original opening from the steps into the crypt had been remodelled and the new door frame carried a mason's mark, as well as sundry bolt holes denoting increased security. In the south-west corner a small 'basin' was recorded as a rectangular mortar patch and reflected in plaster on the adjacent walls.

The east and west walls bore signs of scorching by fire and some fire-reddened stones were also incorporated into the vault (OLA 6.3.1/3.2, *Crypt*). This event occurred before the insertion of the vault and was sealed by the plaster subsequently applied to the whole crypt interior. On the floor, the earliest layer encountered during excavation overlay sand subsoil and abutted the walls. It consisted of a green clay, which may have been preparatory to a stone floor (indicated by the presence of a slab of Old Red Sandstone). The clay surface had many interesting traits: it had been marked by scoring, perhaps with numerals, and was burnt in small discontinuous patches.
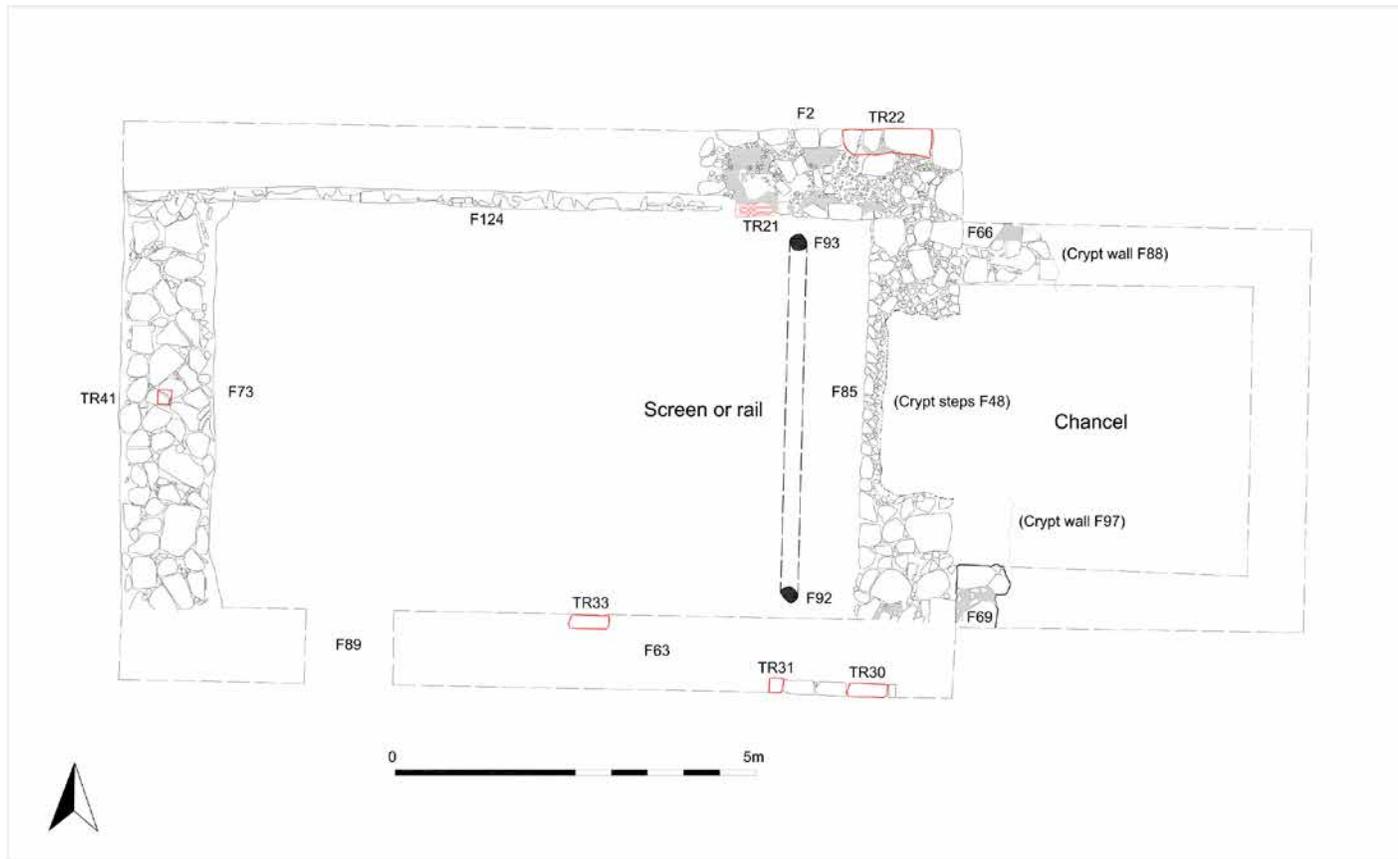
Illustration 7.6
Church 3: plan, with conjectural outline of original chancel

Sculpture

Two medieval grave slab covers were identified during modern refurbishment of the church. A late fourteenth- to fifteenth-century memorial was found bonded with two plain flagstones in the north-west corner of the church beneath the eighteenth-century blocking of the belfry arch of Church 5. The slab depicts a great sword or Claymore and bears a later inscription in the form of the initials 'AMRM' (Illus 7.13c). The presence of a medieval cross-slab grave cover within the church, albeit reset, is noteworthy and may have been originally laid in a floor of Church 4. An elaborate mid-fourteenth-century grave cover was encountered outside and end-on against the east wall of Church 4 (Illus 7.13a). The top of the slab was recorded at 17.1–17.2m AOD, which is likely to represent the fourteenth-century external ground level at the east end of Church 4. The slab carries a low-relief carving of a floreate cross on a stepped base, a great sword and two shields and dates to the mid-fourteenth century (1340–1370; Butler in Digest 5.2). A second undecorated grave cover lay adjacent (Illus 7.13b). Neither grave has been excavated or identified, and both remain in situ.

The sequence within Church 4

The early history of Church 4 was witnessed by a series of stratigraphic events. Within the nave, construction began at the floor level of Church 2 (postulated as 17.5m AOD) and while exposed the inner face of the lower courses of the walls were subject to burning. A first levelling sand was marked by amorphous scoops, patches of burning, a hearth containing a small molten lead mass and spreads of mortar (producing a lead soldering rod, 17/154). These were overlain by a more substantial but very mixed ashy layer (C1147), which contained most of the medieval material recovered by the excavation, including four sherds of thirteenth- to fifteenth-century ceramic and a fragment of locally made chafing dish, perhaps used to heat charcoal for the burning of incense (Illus 7.7; Digest 6.18). There were also thirty-eight fragments of thirteenth- to fifteenth-century window glass including a fragment of painted stick-work border (Digest 6.15). A layer of levelling sand (C1008) finally raised the floor level to 17.9m AOD and it was at this point that burial returned to the nave.

A total of eighty-eight burials were defined in the nave and over the crypt vault, representing a well-stratified sequence of graves of men, women and children (see *Medieval People*, below). Several grave backfills contained artefacts, but the dates were broad: thirteenth- to fifteenth-century ceramic and fragments of medieval glass and coins (Burials 19/31, 26, 27, 41, 58, 93, 101). Burial 34 contained a sherd from a glass hanging lamp of thirteenth- to sixteenth-century date. Burials 14 and 32 contained
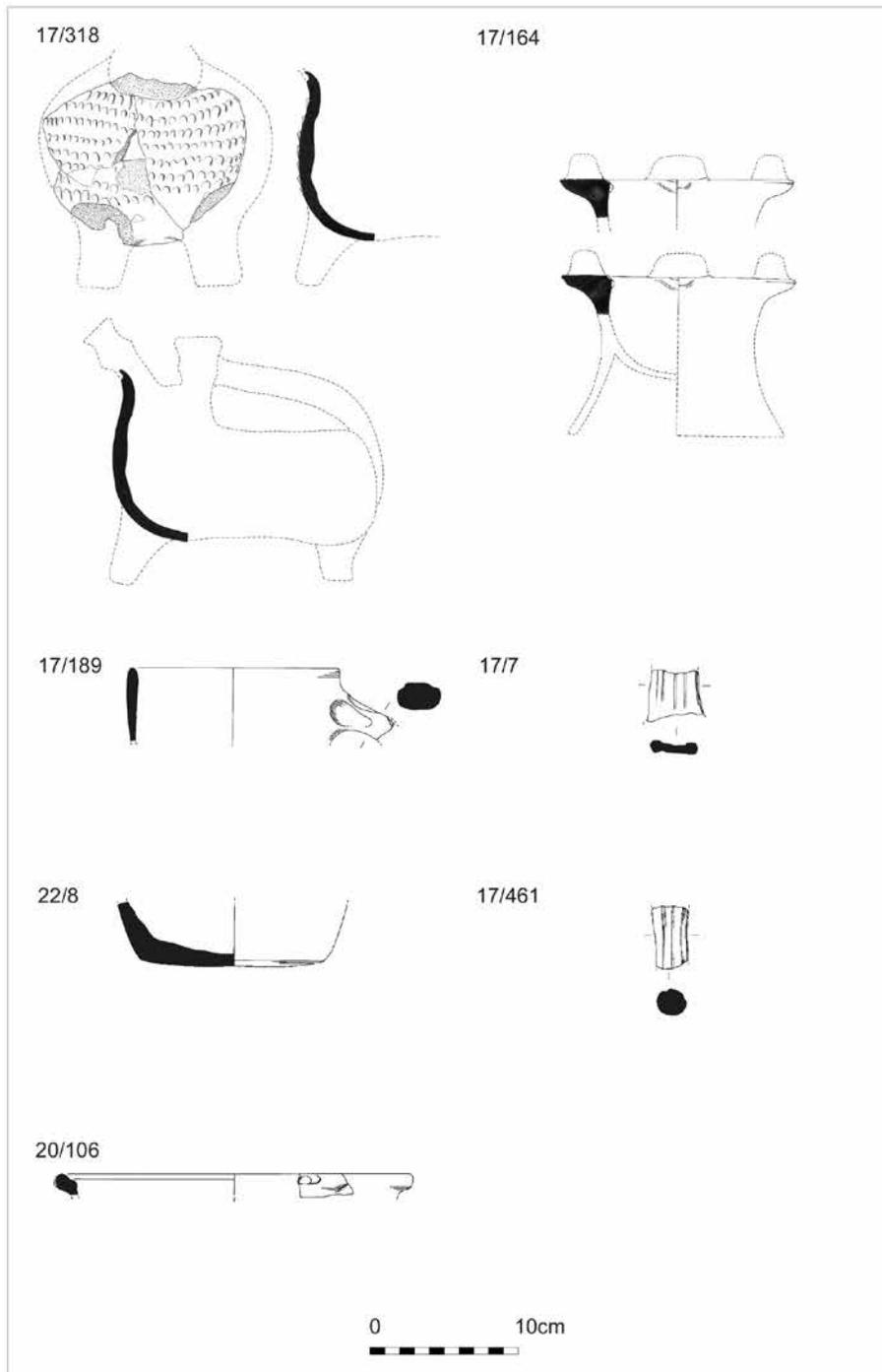
Illustration 7.7
Pottery from the church (see Digest 6.18)

stratigraphically and date between the late thirteenth and early fifteenth century (1290–1410, 1280–1420 and 1290–1430 respectively). The remaining four burials (101, 90, 98 and 97) date between the early fifteenth to early seventeenth century (1440–1630, 1460–1660, 1420–1620, 1440–1660). Although this is not a large group of dates, the first six of the burials cited constitute a single stratigraphic sequence ranging from the earliest to the latest burials, so the lack of overlap in the mid-fifteenth century may be significant (see Digest 3.2, Table 2, marine corrected dates, and stratigraphy for Sector 4, p 55). The location of the graves (Illus 7.14) suggests that burial began in the orderly rows still visible at the west end, and experienced a later surge, mainly at the east end of the nave and focused on Burial 30/36. In the late sixteenth and into the seventeenth century, burial in the nave came to an end with the onset of the Reformation (here *c* 1580), but was to continue with the interment of infants around the steps to the crypt.

Church 4 is therefore judged to have experienced three main phases in its history. After its construction, and possible fire in the thirteenth century, the nave and crypt were intensively used, presumably for liturgical purposes, and the floor level rose by 0.4m. Sometime in the fourteenth century, burial returned to the nave and a grave capped by a floriate cross-slab was placed orthogonally against the east wall. In a third phase, in the fifteenth century, preceded possibly by a second fire, the crypt was equipped with a barrel vault, plastered, and provided with lights at the above-ground east end. The aumbry may also belong to this refurbishment (cf Chapter 5.4, p 173), as well as a new plain stone frame for the door, with a mason's mark on the jamb. At the same time burial intensified especially at the east end of the nave around the entrance to the crypt where a complex ritual at Burial 30/36 appeared to provide a focus (Illus 7.15; and see below). Given the date of the previous assemblage (thirteenth to fifteenth century) and the radiocarbon dates of the burials, a date in the fifteenth century seems probable for the beginning of this latter phase. In the overall chronological concordance, the first two of these burial phases occurred in Period 4B (thirteenth to fourteenth century) and the third in Period 4C (fifteenth to sixteenth century). It is possible that there was a hiatus between them, say 1350–1450, so reflecting events that were taking place in Sector 2 (see below, p 287).

late fifteenth century coins. The later Burial 24 contained fifteenth/sixteenth-century coins. These artefacts were mainly residual, but Burial 43 wore boots and leghose dating to the early fifteenth century (for descriptions of artefacts see Digest 6.1).

Seven burials were radiocarbon dated and the results fall into two groups: Burials 110, 112 and 113 are the earliest

? reredos

Crypt

F119

F110

F110

TR29

F118

F17

F88

F48

F97

F2

F124

F127

F5

0

10m

Illustration 7.8
Church 4: plan
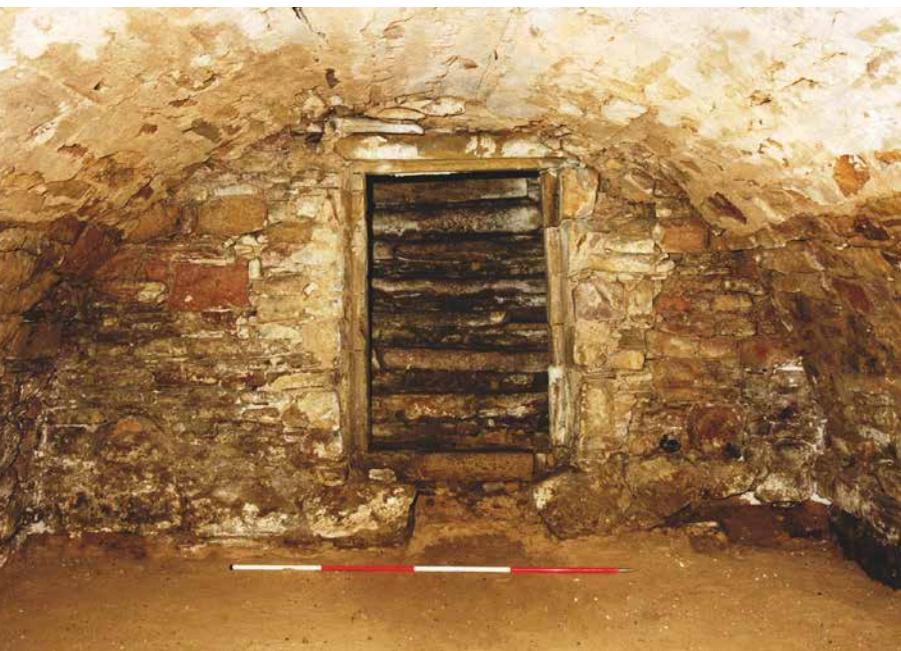
The documentary record of a major fire in 1485 offers a tempting context for the refurbishment of Church 4 at the threshold of Period 4C. This incident is discussed below (p 319), but, as also emphasised there, the medieval church of St Colman stood for at least 300 years during which accident, unrest, violence and decay would have periodically caused fires and prompted repair. The principle evidence we have for the scorching of the walls of the crypt can relate it to two different moments – during construction in the thirteenth century and more than a century later in the early fifteenth. The latter incident may have happened in 1485, but we have no corroborating evidence that it did so.

Medieval people: the burials (fourteenth to sixteenth century) (OLA 6.3.3 at 3.4.5; for data on medieval burials see Table 2 and Digest 4.1, under Period 4 and 5)

Eighty-eight skeletons of men, women and children were excavated in the church (see above and Table 7.2: Illus 7.14). Chronological analysis (above) suggested that burials in the nave belonged to an early (thirteenth/fourteenth century) and a later (fifteenth/sixteenth century) group, with a possible interval between them. However, the burial sequence is a continuum and the following study relates to a population broadly contained from the late thirteenth to the sixteenth century.

Burial rites

With a few exceptions the burials were oriented W–E. Burials were sometimes coffined (twenty-five), sometimes shrouded (ten) and more rarely both (three). Individuals interred in coffins were identified as fifteen out of thirty-nine male (or probable male) burials, four out of twenty-four females (or probable females), four out of eighteen children and two out of three infants (Burials 58, 89). Of the coffined males, eight of the fifteen were aged forty-six years plus. These figures suggest an economically stratified community, privileging males. Analysis of coffin wood samples identified species in six instances with oak, pine and ash among the assemblage (Allen in Digest 6.19).

Burial 30/36 was the site of an exceptional, if eccentric commemoration. It consisted of an oak coffin containing two bodies, Burial 30 (C1209) and 36 (C1214), and four additional skulls (C1217), the grave being sited in a prominent position opposite the crypt steps (Illus 7.15–17). At the foot of the coffin was an infant of a few weeks old, also buried in a coffin (Burial 58). The skull and mandible of Burial 36 and the mandible of Burial 30 suggest both men were aged forty-six to fifty-nine years and their recorded stature shows Burial 36 to be the tallest in the medieval population at 180cm and Burial 30 not far behind at 176cm. Among the four additional skulls, buried without their mandibles, were two young men and a woman. The sequence of burial appears to have begun with the interment of a first male (Burial 36, a westerner; C1214) on his back in an oak coffin accompanied by four crania all

Illustration 7.9
Church 4: Chamfered plinth

Illustration 7.10
Church 4: west wall of crypt with steps, interior

Illustration 7.11
Church 4, crypt: (a) north-east corner with aumbry; (b) south wall of vault with section of thirteenth/fourteenth-century window mullion

positioned to face east and arranged either side of his own skull, which carried blade wounds. Perhaps a generation later, the grave was reopened, the skull of Burial 36 was displaced, leaving the mandible in situ, and a second body (Burial 30, a local; C1209) was laid on his back over the first, his head taking the place of his predecessor. The displaced cranium assigned to the original occupant was laid on top of Burial 30 before the grave was again closed. Such skulduggery suggests something of a head cult, as well as an ongoing rivalry that continued beyond the grave (see below, p 321).

The location of this and neighbouring coffined graves were subsequently respected. Their grave *cuts* were affected by later overlying burial, but not their bodily remains or coffins. The reopening of Burial 36 to receive Burial 30 suggests that some graves were marked, perhaps by slabs, as indicated by the late fourteenth- to fifteenth-century grave slab reused within the floor of Church 5 (above). Burial 43 (with boots), an adjacent coffined burial of a mature male, aged forty-six years plus, of large stature (172cm), is notable in its juxtaposition and alignment with Burial 30/36 and its good bone survival suggesting its position was also marked. Burial 109, another male aged forty-six years or more, also of relatively high stature, represents another coffined burial on the same alignment. Nearby, another two coffined children were added to this group. A further unmolested, carefully shrouded, burial of a young man (175cm), Burial 35, lay between Burial 30/36 and Burial 43 and, although uncoffined, appears to belong in this group of burials at the east end of the nave. Another member of this group (Burial 93) was recorded as having a diet exceptionally rich in meat (Digest 4.3, p D31). The people, rites and spatial associations of this group suggest the eventful experiences of a prominent family.

Burial 43 had worn low boots and woollen leg hose (Illus 7.18); these provide a rare example of a clothed and shod burial from medieval Christian Scotland. The skeleton was identified as that of a male, aged forty-six years or older. A report on the textile identified the textile as leg hose in an undyed, heavy felted wool tabby of early fifteenth-century date. The hose were well worn

Illustration 7.12
Entrance to crypt cutting east wall of Church 2

Table 7.2
Burials of Period 4 (medieval)
All W–E, simple, extended, supine inhumations unless otherwise noted. Burial 117 is included in the Period 4 analyses

Burial	Type	Occupant	Stratification	Max. Height AOD (m)	Analyses	Date
	PERIOD 3/4					
117	Oriented NW–SE	Male 17–25 y Ht 1.63/5' 4"	Cutting Period 2 burials 114, 116, 128; cut by Period 4 burials 141, 148	c 16.9	Blade wounds to cranium, L. and R. femora. Origin local	AD 1150–1270
	PERIOD 4					
1		Prob. male Ht 1.69/5' 6"	late interment sealed by F6 flagstone floor of Church 5, overlay Burial 2, close to east end	17.5		
2		Child 1.5 y	overlain by Burial 1, close to east end	17.2		
3		Child 10–12 y	overlain by child and infant Burial 7 and infant Burial 6, close to east end	17.6	Rickets?	
5		Female 46–59 Ht 1.46/4' 9"			Healed fracture of a middle rib	
7		Child 3 y	incorporated remains of later infant burial, overlay Burial 3	17.6		
8	coffined	probable male, 17–25 y	truncated to knees by Burial 18, close to east end	17.5		
9	coffined	adult, probable male	overlay coffined child Burial 55, overlain by coffined Burial 93, close to east end	17.3		
10		child 6.6–10.5 y	overlain by coffined Burial 8, cut polished plaster slab F47	17.7		
11		child, 2.6–6.5 y		17.6		
14		child, 2.6–6.5 y	post-dated Burial 32 which contained late fifteenth-century coin	17.5		
16		child 6.6–10.5 y		17.5	Origin in west Britain	
18		male, 46+ y	post-dated coffined Burial 8	17.5		
19/31		male, 46+ y	grave fill contained thirteenth- to fifteenth-century pottery	17.5		
20		probable female, 46+ y	overlay coffined, clothed Burial 43 and overlain by Burial 5, close to east end	17.2		
21	coffined	child, 2.5–6.5	overlay coffined child Burial 119, overlain by Burial 28	17.3		
24		juvenile, 14.6–17 y	grave fill contained three coins of late 15th- to early sixteenth-century date	17.5		
25	coffined	male, 46+ y	overlay clothed, coffined Burial 43, overlain by Burial 35, close to east end	17.5		
26		infant, 0–0.5 y	overlay shrouded Burial 49, overlain by coffined Burial 9	17.2	scurvy	
27		child, 10.6–14.5 y	contained thirteenth- to fifteenth-century pottery, overlay Burial 42, overlain by coffined Burial 30/36 and coffined child Burial 21, close to east end	17.3		

Burial	Type	Occupant	Stratification	Max. Height AOD (m)	Analyses	Date
28		female, 46 y+	overlay coffined child Burial 21, late interment sealed by F6 flagstone floor of Church 5	17.5		
30	In oak coffin of Burial 36	male, 46 y+	(C1209) Interred over Burial 36 replacing position of head between four skulls, burial joined by coffined infant Burial 58 at feet, close to east end centred in nave	17.0	Origin local	
32		male, 46 y+	contained late fifteenth-century coin, overlain by child Burial 14	17.7		
34		male, 46 y+	overlain by child Burial 59, overlay crypt vault F110, fragment of thirteenth- to sixteenth-century glass hanging lamp contained in grave fill	17.3		
35		male, 17–25 y	overlay Burial 25 and 178, overlain by child Burial 3	17.1	Origin in west Britain	
36	In oak coffin, with four accompanying skulls (C1217)	male, 46 y+	(C1214) Skull removed on interment of Burial 30 over; contained thirteenth- to fifteenth-century pottery, deep late grave, burial joined by coffined infant Burial 58 at feet, close to east end centred in nave	17.1	Blade wounds to the head Origin in west Britain	
37		probable male, 26–45 y	pre-dated Burial 32	17.6		
41		male, 17–25 y	early burial in nave, overlain by Burial 27 which contained thirteenth- to fifteenth-century pottery	16.9	Origin in west Britain	
43	coffined (oak with ash lid) clothed with leg hose and shod with low leather boots	male, 46 y+	close to east end, overlain by Burial 20 and 25. Boots dated early fifteenth century,	16.8		
49	possibly shrouded	probable female, 46 y+	early burial in nave overlain by coffined infant Burial 26	17.0		
55		adult, sex undetermined, 17–25 y	cut the cut for the crypt steps F48	17.6		
56	coffined	male, 46 y+	late burial over child Burial 60 sealed by F6 flagstone floor of Church 5	17.8		
58	coffined	infant, 0.6–2.5 y	interred at feet of Burial 30/36	17.0		
62	shrouded	female, 46 y+	late burial in the nave sealed by F6 flagstone floor of Church 5, overlay Burial 64	17.8	Non-united fracture at the base of the fifth metatarsal (tuberosity) Origin in east Britain (non-local)	
63		child, 2.6–6.5 y	late burial in nave	17.8	Rickets	
64		male, 46 y+	overlay shrouded Burial 69 and overlain by shrouded Burial 62		Incomplete fracture on distal end of L fibula, with evidence of healing	

Burial	Type	Occupant	Stratification	Max. Height AOD (m)	Analyses	Date
65	coffined	child, 6.6–10.5 y		17.6	possible blade wound	
66		male, 26–45 y	overlay shrouded Burial 78 and overlain by infant Burial 73	17.6		
67/68		female, 26–45 y, including pre-term foetus in womb, Burial 68	disappeared beyond western limit of intervention	17.5		
69	shrouded	female, 46+ y	overlay shrouded Burial 78, overlain by Burial 64	17.6		
71		child, 2.5–6.5 y	overlay Burial 80, sealed by F6 flagstone floor of Church 5	17.5		
72		adult, sex undetermined	post-dated coffined Burial 112	17.5		
74		male, 46+ y	sealed by F6 flagstone floor of Church 5	17.6	Fracture of the styloid process, L third metacarpal	
75		adult, probable male	cut by Burial 77	17.6		
76		adult female skull only				
77		male, 26–45 y	cut Burial 75, cut by Church 5 bell casting pit F4	17.7		
78	shrouded	female, 26–45 y	overlain by shrouded Burial 69 and Burial 66	17.8		
79/114		probable female, 17–25 y	overlay Burial 105, cut by F63, flue/vent for Church 8	17.9		
80		male, 46+ y	early burial in nave, overlain by infant Burial 70 and child Burial 71	–		
81/87		child, 6.6–10.5 y		17.5		
82		female, 46+ y	later interment in nave, overlay coffined child Burial 86			
83		probable female, 26–45 y	cut by clothed, coffined Burial 43	17.3		
84		male 46+ y	late interment in nave sealed by F6 flagstone floor of Church 5, overlay coffined child Burial 86	17.5		
85		probable male, 17–25 y	late interment in nave sealed by F6 flagstone floor of Church 5, overlay Burial 120/132 and Burial 104	17.2		
86	coffined	child, 6.6–10.5 y	post-dated coffined Burial 108 and overlain by Burial 82 and 91	17.4	Origin in west Britain	
88	coffined and shrouded	female, 26–45 y	post-dated coffined Burial 161 and sealed by F6 flagstone floor of Church 5	17.4		
89	possibly coffined	infant, 0.6–2.5 y	overlain by Burial 84, post-dated Burial 91	17.4		

Burial	Type	Occupant	Stratification	Max. Height AOD (m)	Analyses	Date
90	shrouded	male, 46+ y	post-dated radiocarbon dated coffined Burial 113, post-dated by coffined Burial 98	17.4	Disabled	AD 1460–1660
91	shrouded	female, 26–45 y	post-dated coffined child Burial 86, post-dated by coffined child Burial 89	17.4		
92	coffined	female, 26–45 y	early burial in nave, overlain by Burial 178	17.4		
93	pine coffin	male, 26–45	late burial in nave, grave fill contained thirteenth- to fifteenth-century pottery	17.2	High meat diet	
94	coffined	adult, probable male		17.8		
95		female, 46+ y		17.5	severe osteoporosis	
96		adult, probable male	post-dated Burial 106	17.5		
97	shrouded	probable female, 46+ y		17.4	Scheuermanns-Schmorls disease	AD 1440–1640
98	coffined	male, 26–45 y	post-dated radiocarbon dated Burial 90	17.4		AD 1420–1620
99		female, 46+ y		17.5		
100		female, 26–45 y		17.4		
101	coffined and shrouded	female, 46+ y	grave fill contained thirteenth- to fifteenth-century pottery	17.4		AD 1440–1630
102		female, 26–45 y		17.3		
103		male, 26–45 y	post-dated by coffined Burial 93	17.4		
104		adult, probable male	post-dated by Burial 85	17.5		
105		female, 46+ y	post-dated by Burial 79/114	17.5	Well-healed incomplete fracture on distal end of R fibula Anomalous diet	
106		female, 46+ y	post-dated by Burial 96	17.7		
107		male, 17–25 y		17.8		
108	coffined	male, 26–45 y	post-dated Burial 50, post-dated by coffined child Burial 86	17.1		
109	coffined	male, 46+ y	post-dated by coffined child Burial 119	17.0		
110	shrouded	child, 10.6–14.5 y	post-dated by coffined Burial 113	17.1	scurvy? Origin in west Britain	AD 1290–1410
112	coffined	male, 46+ y	early burial in nave, post-dated by coffined, shrouded Burial 101 and Burial 72	17.2		AD 1280–1420
113	coffined and shrouded	male, 46+ y	very deep grave, post-dated by radiocarbon dated Burial 90	16.6	rickets? Blade wound to skull	AD 1290–1430

Burial	Type	Occupant	Stratification	Max. Height AOD (m)	Analyses	Date
115	coffined	adult, probable female	post-dated by Burial 24 which contained late fifteenth- to early sixteenth-century coins	16.8		
119	coffined	child, 10.6–14.5 y	post-dated coffined Burial 109, post-dated by coffined Burial 93	17.2	Origin west Britain	
120/132		male, 46+ y	post-dated by Burial 85, later truncated by flue/vent F63 for Church 8	17.5		
134		probable male, 17–25 y	cut by Church 5 bell-casting pit F4	17.6		
150		adult male	early burial in nave, post-dated by coffined Burial 108	17.0		
161	coffined	male, 26–45 y	post-dated child Burial 175, post-dated by coffined Burial 88	17.2		
175		child, 6.6–10.5 y	early burial in nave, post-dated by coffined Burial 161	17.5		
178		adult, sex undetermined	post-dated by Burial 35 and101, post-dated coffined Burial 92	17.5		
190		child, 2.6–4.5	cut by Church 5 bell-casting pit F4	17.9		

indicating they had been used in life prior to burial in the grave (Digest 6.17). The footwear was identified as a pair of low boots also of an early fifteenth-century style (Digest 6.16). The man was interred within an oak coffin, lidded with ash (Digest 6.19).

Infant burials (OLA 6.3.3 at 3.4.6)

A total of twenty-one articulated infant burials (0–2.5 years) were recorded within the nave and a further twenty-four were represented in the 'charnel' layer beneath the flagstone floor of Church 5. A further fifteen infants were identified in the assemblage of disarticulated bone amounting to a noteworthy total of sixty infant burials within the church. Of the articulated infant burials, four clearly belonged to Period 4, being stratified with Period 4 adult burials (Burials 2, 26, 58 and 89), while the remaining seventeen were identified as the latest, or probably the latest, interments in the sequence. The infants represented in the 'charnel' also suggest late interment. The group of late articulated infant burials have been assigned as Period 4/5 to acknowledge that, as a group, some may have been interred during the later part of Period 4 and some could belong to Period 5. Burial 29 interred in the north aisle certainly belongs to Period 5 (p 324).

The distribution of this group of late infant interments suggests that burial near the crypt was favoured (Illus 7.19). Burials 4, 12, 13 and F31 (double burial) formed a row, while Burials 33, 6 and the remains of an infant recorded at the feet of Burial 7 suggest further ordering. Two of these burials were shrouded, but coffins are absent. Orientation of burial varies notably, as compared to adult burials, with the two infants in F31 buried W–E and E–W. Burial 57 was also oriented E–W,

Burials 15 and 29 were oriented S–N and N–S respectively, the latter apparently tucked between two walls. Burial 59 was that of a young child placed beneath and above flagstones, a noteworthy divergent burial rite and is grouped here accordingly. Children may have been favoured with sanctified locations long after these were no longer available or perhaps potent for most adults. The children's cemetery at medieval Inchmarnock continued into the seventeenth and eighteenth century (Lowe 2008, 93).

Analysis of Human Remains (Digest 4.1–4.5; for Sarah King's full report, see OLA 7.2.1.1; the osteological detail in the Catalogue D4.1 has been revised and enlarged by Shirley Curtis-Summers)

The medieval group of eighty-eight Period 2 burials breaks down into sixty-six adults (thirty-nine males or probable males, twenty-four females or probable females and three undetermined adults), eighteen children, three infants and one juvenile (Table 7.2). There was also a group of late infant burials that could be ascribed to Period 4 or 5 (see above). The stature of the medieval individuals from Tarbat was slightly less than their Scottish contemporaries. Overall, however, the average medieval female height of 5' 1" (154.94cm) and the average male height of 5' 6" (167.64cm) were not greatly different than the average modern Scot (females: 5' 4" (162.56cm); males: 5' 10" (177.80cm)) (Knight 1984).

Health

The majority of individuals at Tarbat lived to relatively older ages in comparison to other medieval Scottish assemblages, with
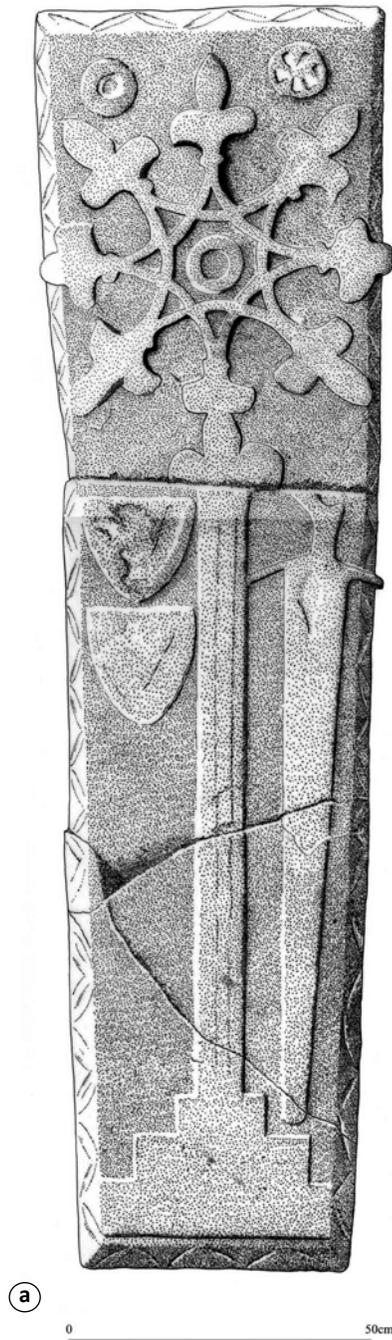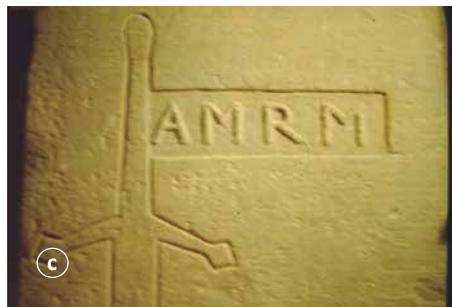
Illustration 7.13
(a), (b) medieval grave covers abutting exterior east wall of Church 4; (c) medieval grave cover from the west end (detail)

There was a high prevalence of dental enamel hypoplasia at Tarbat, suggesting that environmental stress during childhood may have been experienced more often (or more severely) by the Tarbat individuals, particularly by the females. In contrast to other Scottish assemblages (with the exception of Glasgow Cathedral), the Tarbat individuals did not have very many infectious lesions on their bones (Period 2 = 8.1% and Period 4 = 9.3%). In all assemblages, including Tarbat, the majority of the lesions were on the lower limbs.

Metabolic disease was low at Tarbat, with very few individuals showing signs of cribra orbitalia (9% in Period 2 and 3.8% in the medieval period). Unlike other Scottish assemblages, there were several cases of rickets observed in the Tarbat articulated and disarticulated remains. These children may have been swaddled or kept indoors (out of the sun) and/or ate foods which lacked vitamin D.
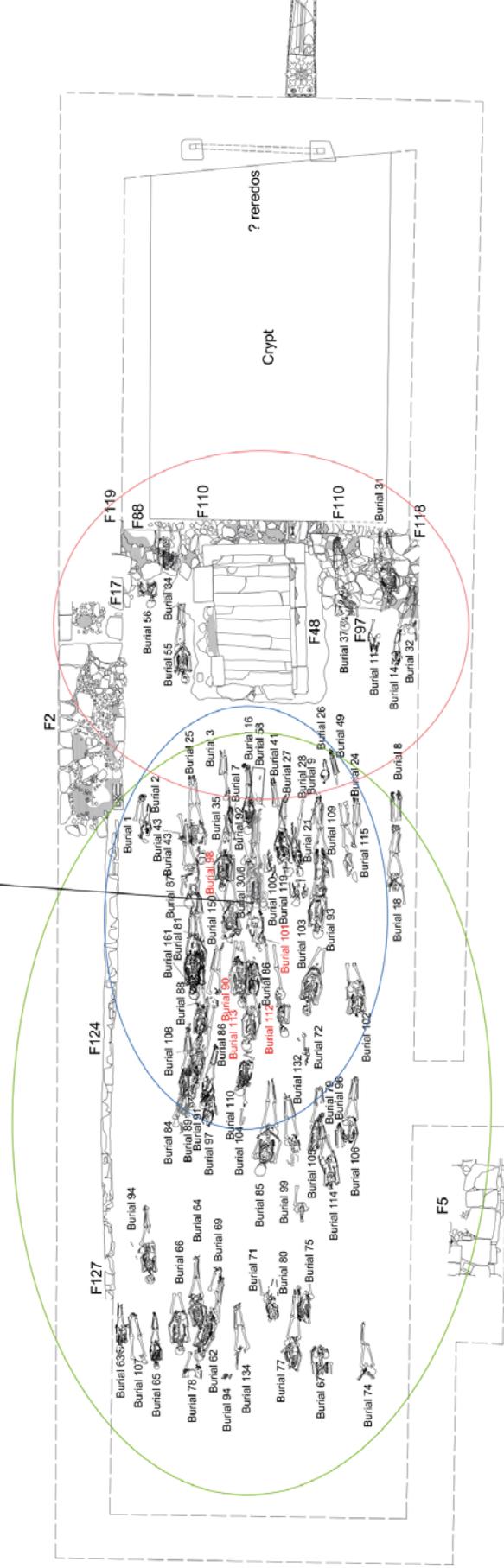
Tarbat also differed from other Scottish assemblages by having five possible cases of neoplastic disease (two from articulated burials, one from the disarticulated material and two from the 'charnel' deposit). One case was a possible metastatic carcinoma, perhaps secondary to prostate cancer. Another was a possible primary tumour to the face (basal cell carcinoma?) with secondary changes (metastasis) to the scapula, pelvis, ribs and a lumbar vertebra. The changes on the disarticulated bone remains undiagnosed, although osteoclastoma may be a possibility.

Medieval trauma

There was one case of mother and pre-term foetus dying together (Burial 67/68). Two medieval individuals had suffered blade attacks. The first case was the young adult male buried in Church 2 (Burial 117, above) who had three sharp-edged cut marks on the skeleton. One was present on the left parietal (near the occipital), and extended 53mm in length. It was slightly angled, so that it sheared the outer table of the skull, and only partially extended into the internal table. The second cut was on the proximal end of the posterior surface of the left femur, and was 33mm in length. Another was found on the proximal end of the right femur (posterior lateral surface). This cut was approximately 4mm deep, but only the cortex was affected. There was no evidence of healing suggesting that the individual died at the time the cuts were made. The

the exception of Glasgow Cathedral (twelfth- to fifteenth-century phase; Digest 4.2). At that site, most individuals died as middle or old adults. There was also an almost identical ratio of females to males at Tarbat and Glasgow Cathedral. There was a high frequency of dental disease, particularly in medieval females, which may be indicative of a difference in diet (and oral hygiene) between the sexes. It is possible that women may have been eating more high-carbohydrate foods (or more sugary foods) than the males. It has been suggested that the consumption of animal protein may be associated with better dental health (Digest 4.2).

Illustration 7.14
Burials in Church 4

Phase 1 - 13th to 14th century

Phase 2 - 15th to 16th century

Phase 3 - 16th to 17th century

Radiocarbon-dated burial

Burial 112

10m

0

Crypt
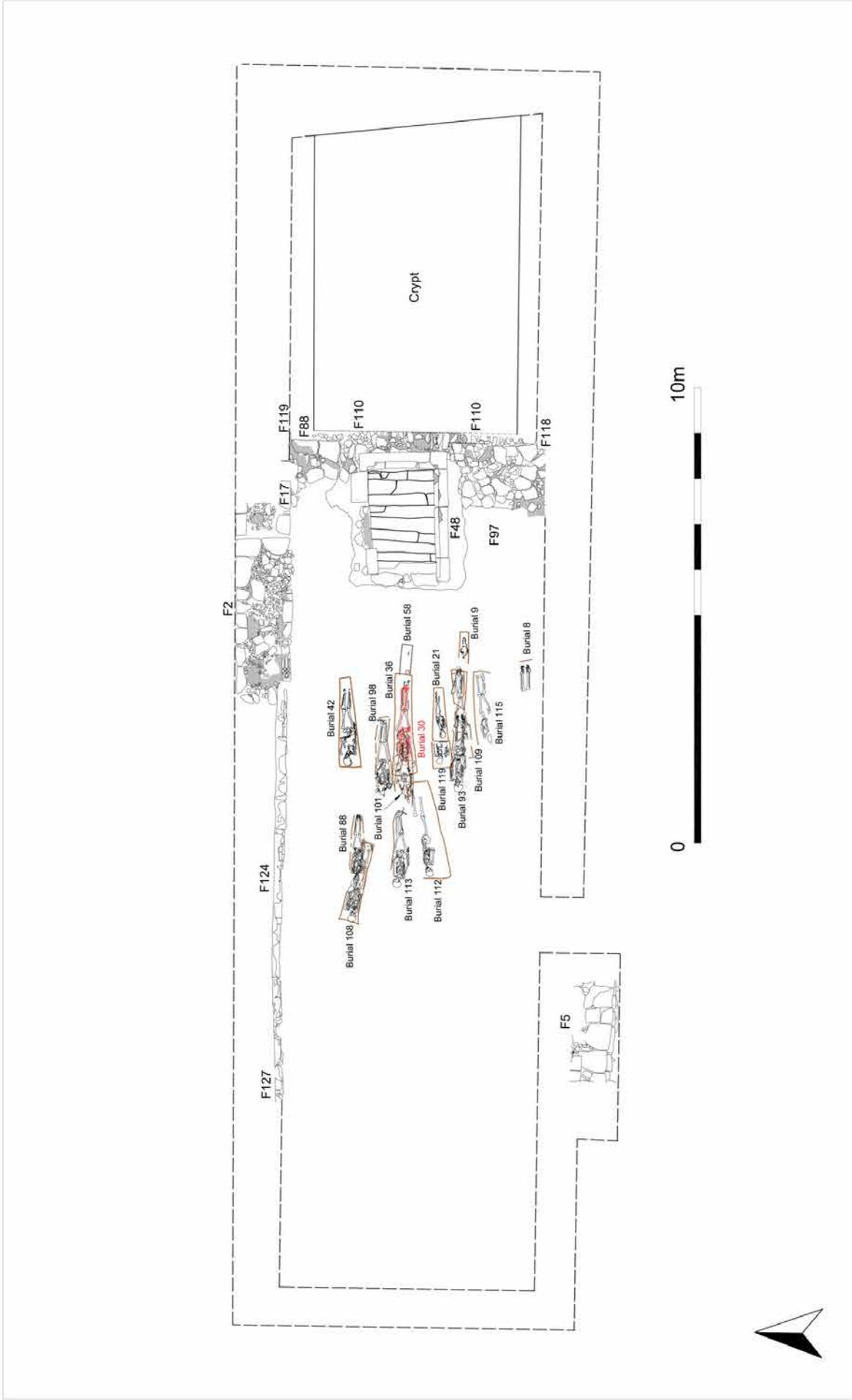
? reredos

Burial 30/36

Illustration 7.15
Church 4: burial 30/36 and other high status burials at the opening to the crypt
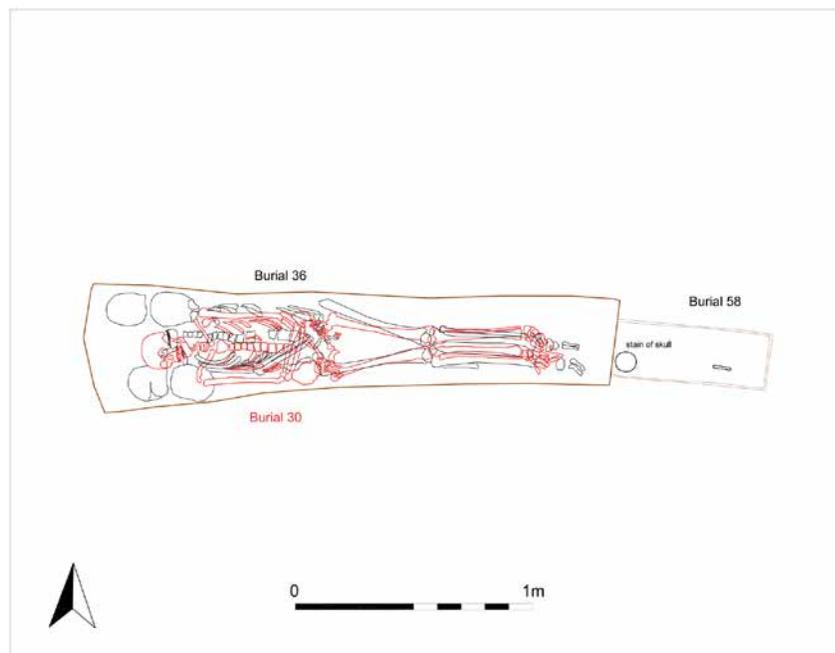
Illustration 7.16
Burial 30/36 group

scoliosis. Ossification of ligaments was also present on a number of lumbar vertebrae, but only L4 and L5 were fused. In this case, the fusion was large and bulbous in appearance. It was also noted that this individual had an area of ossification on the base of the skull (lateral to the left occipital condyle), resulting in limited mobility to raise the head, and causing the head to be permanently faced slightly to the left side. No sacroiliac fusion was present.

Provenance from oxygen and strontium isotope analysis (Digest 4.4)

Of the eleven specimens examined, only two grew up in the area: Burial 117, who died of blade wounds and was buried in Church 2, and Burial 30, who displaced the westerner Burial 36. Burial 62, one of latest burials, had been raised elsewhere in eastern Britain. The remaining eight were from west coast Scotland. The group comprised three men (Burials 35, 36 and 41), one woman (Burial 88) and four children (16, 86, 110, 119). Burial 110 and probably Burials 35 and 41 were among the earlier burials in

placement of the cuts, and the type of cuts, suggested a violent attack from behind, with a sharp weapon such as a sword.

An old adult male (Burial 113) had a healed wound to the right parietal bone (near the occipital), possibly as a result of a sharp blade. The wound was oval – approximately 45mm by 35mm – with definite edges associated with a flat surface, suggesting that the bone was sheared. Within the oval, the bone surface was very slightly irregular, but did not affect the inner table of the skull. The interpretation of a healed blade injury may be supported by the number and type of other fractures present on the skeleton. Together, these injuries suggest that this individual had experienced violent conflict earlier in his life. Three adult men and two adult women had suffered fractures, either to the hand, foot, leg or rib (Table 7.2).

Disablement

Trauma to the vertebrae can result from compression fractures caused by a vertical force induced by a hyperflexion injury, or secondary to osteoporosis (Digest 4.2). One example of the latter may be observed on Burial 95, an old adult female from the medieval period. The bones of this individual were light and it is likely that one of her thoracic vertebral bodies collapsed as a result of osteoporosis. An old adult male (Burial 90) demonstrated fusion of the bodies (square), apophyseal joints and laminae between T4 and T5 (all vertebrae were present). In addition, T4 was slightly collapsed on the right side resulting in
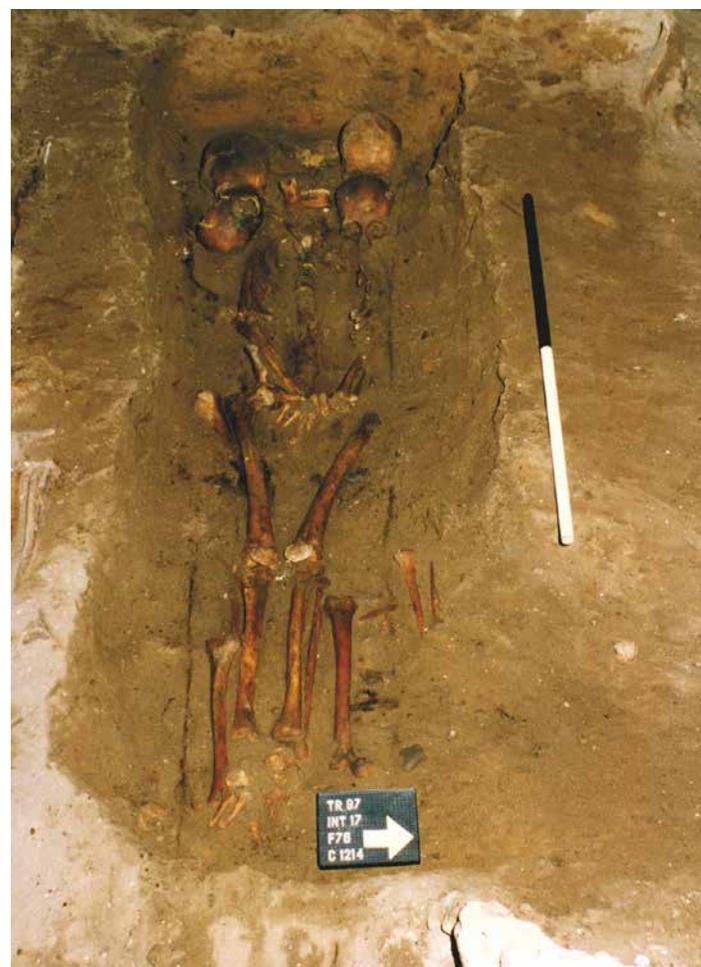

Illustration 7.17
Burial 30/36 excavated

Table 7.3
Age group composition, based on dental development, eruption and tooth wear, in the charnel

Age Range	0–1	2–5	6–10	11–15	16–20	21–30	31–40	41–50	50+	Years
Number in sample	12	37	13	4	0	7	14	6	10	Total 103
% of total sample	11.7	35.9	12.6	3.9	0	6.8	13.6	5.8	9.7	

Church 4, while Burial 88 would be among the later. Immigration from the west coast was thus a continual theme of Period 4. (For results of C/N isotope and starch analysis, see *Diet*, below.)

Charnel deposit (for the specialist report, see Don Brothwell in OLA 7.2.1.3)

A disturbed deposit of 13,485 disarticulated bones was recovered by sieving from beneath the flagstone floor of the nave of the post-Reformation Church 5. It represents a chronologically mixed group, but relates mainly to the later medieval period, and thus to the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The atlas vertebrae show that at least seventy-four individuals were present. Of paired bones, the left calcaneum establishes 105 people, and as these specimens were all adult, and we know from the right femur that there are at least sixty-six young children, it implies a minimum of 171 bodies in the sample. *Sexing* was achieved on fifty-one adult individuals, and this was on cranial evidence. Of this sample, twenty-four were considered to be female, and twenty-seven male (52.9%). The age range is shown in Table 7.3.

There was considerable *child mortality* in the under-six year olds. Moreover, in the adults there is a significant number of individuals surviving beyond fifty years, a result also noted in the other Tarbat samples (where the percentage is even higher). This suggests that the community suffered from the usual range of destructive childhood illnesses, but survival into adulthood was linked to a healthy diet and immune response. From tibiae and femora, the mean *male stature* estimates were 168.5cm and 168.3cm, which are comparable with the ordinary Scotsman of the 1950s (Clements & Pickett 1952; and see above).

Basic craniometric measurements were taken as defined in Brothwell (1981) and these were used in a multivariate analysis, employing the Penrose (1954) 'size' and 'shape' statistic. Eighteen measurements were retaken on a sample of early (Pictish) Tarbat skulls, to compare with the charnel sample. It was also possible to assemble data on Scottish Bronze Age short-cist burials, Iron Age people from North Yorkshire, a West Scottish medieval series, a small medieval group from Carlisle and an eastern Scottish long-cist (medieval) series (OLA 7.2.1.3). The most divergent population from the charnel sample is the Yorkshire Iron Age community. Similarly, the Scottish Bronze Age short-cist group were well separated. Of the more contemporary groups, the Glasgow and Carlisle series were more similar to the Tarbat charnel group, with the Scottish long-cist medieval and Tarbat Pictish groups being the most biologically similar. It is possible to tentatively conclude from this that the charnel group was not significantly different from the earlier Pictish people, and that both displayed biological affinities with the Scottish eastern long-cist communities (but compare the results from O/Sr isotope analysis, above).

Among *non-metric cranial traits*, the occurrence of epipteric bones is perhaps noticeably higher in the charnel sample. Similarly, lambdoid ossicles are far more frequent in the charnel

Illustration 7.18
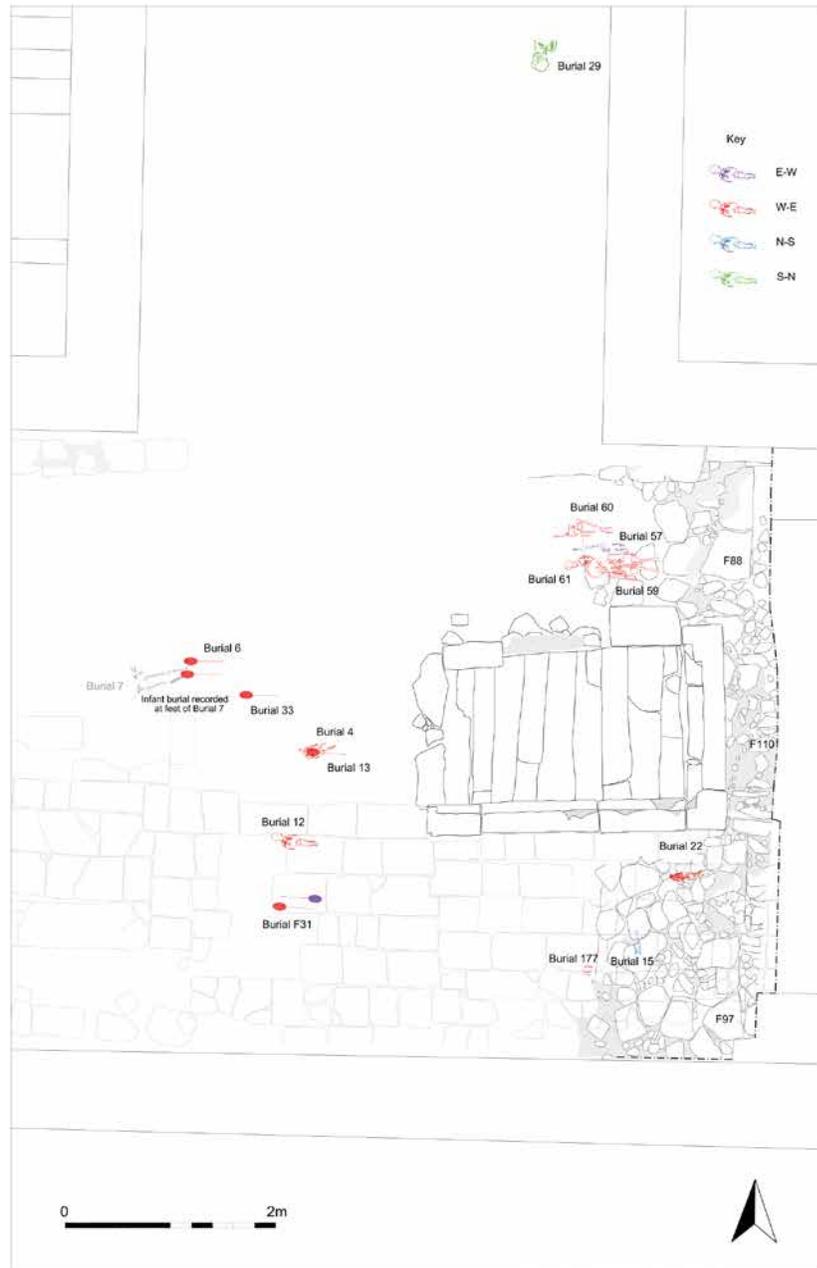Burial 43, leather boots and hose

Illustration 7.19
Plan of infant burials in Periods 4 and 5

engaged in much conflict or many accidents. There is one healed broken nose. There were two examples of serious tumours, a probable meningioma (Skull TI) and bone destruction in life interpreted as the result of metastatic (secondary) tumours, developing from a primary cancer elsewhere. This type of pathology is uncommon in cemetery samples, but the Tarbat material has produced more cases than usual.

Medieval diet (thirteenth to sixteenth century)

Evidence for the subsistence base of the medieval community comes from the ploughing, animal bones, starch and carbon and nitrogen isotope ratios. There were no plant remains. The animal bone assemblage was small but there were major fish and shellfish deposits in Sector 2 in this period. A number of artefacts relating to food production are considered below.

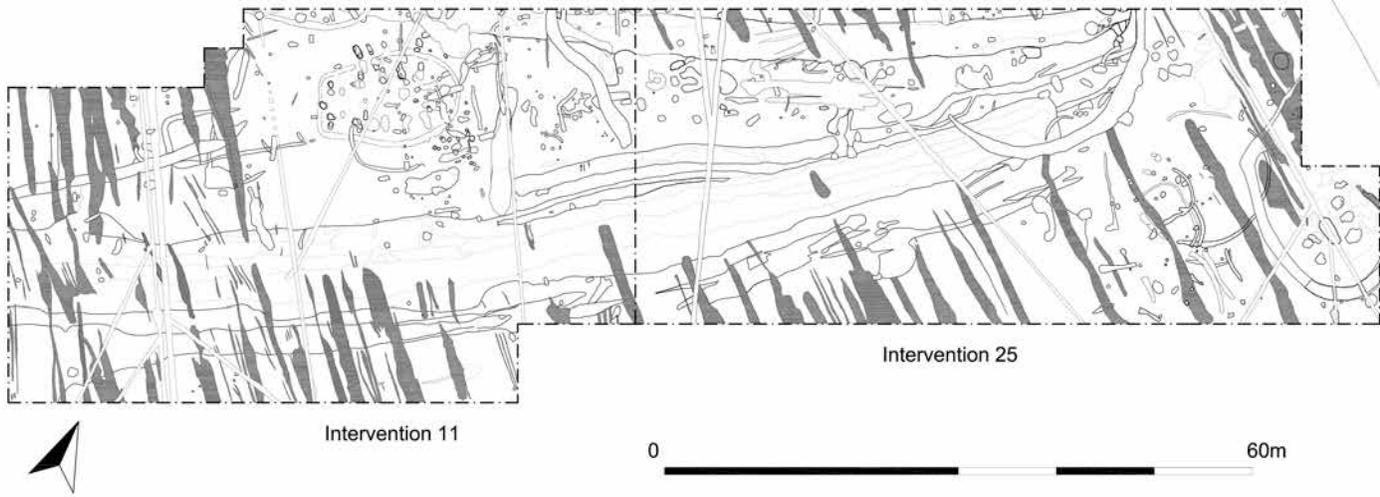### Cultivation in Sector 1 (OLA 6.1/3.5.1)

Clearing and levelling in Sector 1 is thought to have followed a lengthy hiatus and represents the first wholesale reorganisation of land use in this area since the digging of the second monastic enclosure ditch in the eighth century (p 178). Several posts were removed from S1, but no clear incidences of posts having rotted in situ (see Table 2 in Chapter 5.9). The well, S8, appears to have been finally disused and levelled in Period 4. Manual dumping of stone was accompanied by clearance of vegetation and the mechanical backfilling of the second enclosure ditch, S16 (p 186).

Ridge-and-furrow cultivation subsequently appeared throughout the sector (OLA 6.1/3.5.2). It was initially recorded from the air (see Illus 2.1) and then in detail on the ground (Illus 7.20). The furrows are oriented broadly NNW–SSE and spaced *c* 6m from centre to centre of furrows. In pre-excavation observations, the features appeared to cease at the Period 2 enclosure ditch system, although it became clear that, though discontinuous over the dip of the ditches, furrows reappear either side. Dateable material from the furrows consisted primarily of medieval pottery dominated by Scottish Redware dating to the thirteenth to fifteenth century (Digest 6.18). The pottery had most likely arrived with manure. In addition to the ceramics, three medieval coins were recovered from Sector 1: a silver penny of King Henry II/III (1205–7), a silver penny of Edward I/II (1280–1) and a Scottish round silver halfpenny of John Baliol (1292–6) (Holmes in Digest 6.14). Coins minted before the thirteenth century are generally scarce, but there are ceramic traditions of the eleventh to twelfth century, such as Gritty wares, that are not represented in the assemblage. Overall, the material contained within and associated with the furrows suggests a thirteenth-century date for the onset of the ridge-and-furrow cultivation.

individuals. Evidence for pathology was slight. There was no clear evidence of tuberculosis, leprosy or syphilis. In the adults, the prevalence of rickets was no more than 1.1%. There was no clear evidence of scurvy. Moderate and restricted osteoporotic pitting occurred on the external surface of three skulls, but the changes were insufficient to indicate vitamin C deficiency. Between 30% and 40% of adults were showing some degree of arthritic change at the time of death. Other joint changes were not well represented. Surprisingly little oral pathology was notable in this charnel sample. Ante-mortem injuries to bones in the charnel sample are relatively uncommon, and suggest that the community was not

Illustration 7.20
Medieval ridge and furrow in Sector 1

Intervention 25

Intervention 11

0   60m

Determination of diet

While it was clear that the medieval community was engaged in serious cereal production from the thirteenth century, direct information on what was eaten came from analysis of the skeletons buried in the church of Period 4). *Stable isotope ratios* of carbon and nitrogen (Curtis-Summers in Digest 4.3) showed medieval human $\delta^{13}C$ values ranged between –20.4‰ and –17.1‰ ($\Delta = 3.3‰$), with a mean of –18.8‰ ± 0.9‰ (1σ). Medieval human $\delta^{15}N$ values ranged from 12.7‰ to 16.6‰ ($\Delta = 3.9‰$), with a mean of 14.8‰ ± 1.0‰ (1σ). The $\delta^{13}C$ and $\delta^{15}N$ values were therefore higher in the medieval individuals than those of the monastic phase (Period 2). The faunal baseline shift reflects a significant trophic level increase in $\delta^{15}N$ and a shift towards higher $\delta^{13}C$ ratios. This implies that the human population was eating both terrestrial protein and marine fish.

Mean $\delta^{13}C$ and $\delta^{15}N$ isotope values for the medieval male and female bone collagen revealed little significant statistical difference, suggesting both men and women from this group consumed similar foods of C3 plants and terrestrial and marine protein. However, atypical isotope results were found in one adult female (Burial 105) from Period 4 who had the lowest $\delta^{13}C$ (–20.4‰) and $\delta^{15}N$ (12.7‰) values of this group. The isotope results from this individual fell within the Period 2 group and differed from the other medieval individuals in both $\delta^{13}C$ ($\Delta = 1.3‰$) and $\delta^{15}N$ ($\Delta = 2.0‰$), suggesting a more terrestrial-based diet (Digest 4.3).

No significant difference in diet was apparent for males in different age groups. But a twenty-six- to forty-five-year-old male (Burial 93) had the highest $\delta^{13}C$ and $\delta^{15}N$ isotope values out of the whole group and a whole trophic level difference compared to, for example, the two forty-five-plus males (Burial 64 and Burial 113) that have the lowest $\delta^{15}N$ isotope values out of the males from this group. This may reflect a division in the types of animal protein that were being consumed. Analysis of *starch* showed that four individuals in Period 4 (Burials 16, 88, 91 and 100) had been eating oats or wheat and some tubers (Walters in Digest 4.5).

Illustration 7.21
Overview of Sector 2 in Period 4B, showing flattened shell middens
(pale patches)

Illustration 7.22
Overview of gulleys of S17 cutting through earlier Period 3 road (S13/F18)

Evidence from the faunal assemblage

Food remains from animals, fish and shellfish were retrieved mainly from Sector 2. Within the medieval assemblage, domesticates show an increase of sheep/goat at the expense of cattle and pig, in comparison with the earlier periods (Chapter 3, p 69). Though reduced in numbers, a preponderance of adult cattle were being killed, commensurate with dairy farming (OLA 7.3.1 at 4.2).

Compared with Period 2, which had an assemblage twice its size, the medieval period showed the largest number of *horse* bones (174, 9.88% NISP; cf three, 0.10% in Period 2) and of dogs (198, 11.24%; as opposed to sixty-two, 2.05%). Chicken and geese, red deer and roe deer were present in comparable numbers to Period 2. *Wild creatures* included cat, fox, wolf, hare, redshank and curlew. There was an increase in porpoise and whale and a decrease in the culling of seals (Digest 7.1).

Illustration 7.23
Part of a shell midden with a buried dog on the east side of Int 24

There were large middens of *shellfish* in the central area of Sector 2 (Holmes in Digest 7.3; OLA 6.2 at 3.5.3; 7.3.2.1; Illus 7.21). As with the earlier period, winkles dominated the medieval assemblage by weight, and given their small size compared to the other common shellfish, this suggests the intensive exploitation of this species. Mussels and limpets were recorded in significant numbers from the middens, along with a small number of crab claws and oyster shells. These species could have been easily gathered from the shore. Although it is possible that shellfish were exported from the site, it is most likely that the accumulations of shells derive from animals eaten by the inhabitants of the settlement, forming an important part of the diet.

The middens also contained evidence for the first serious exploitation of *marine fish* (Holmes in Digest 7.2). The majority
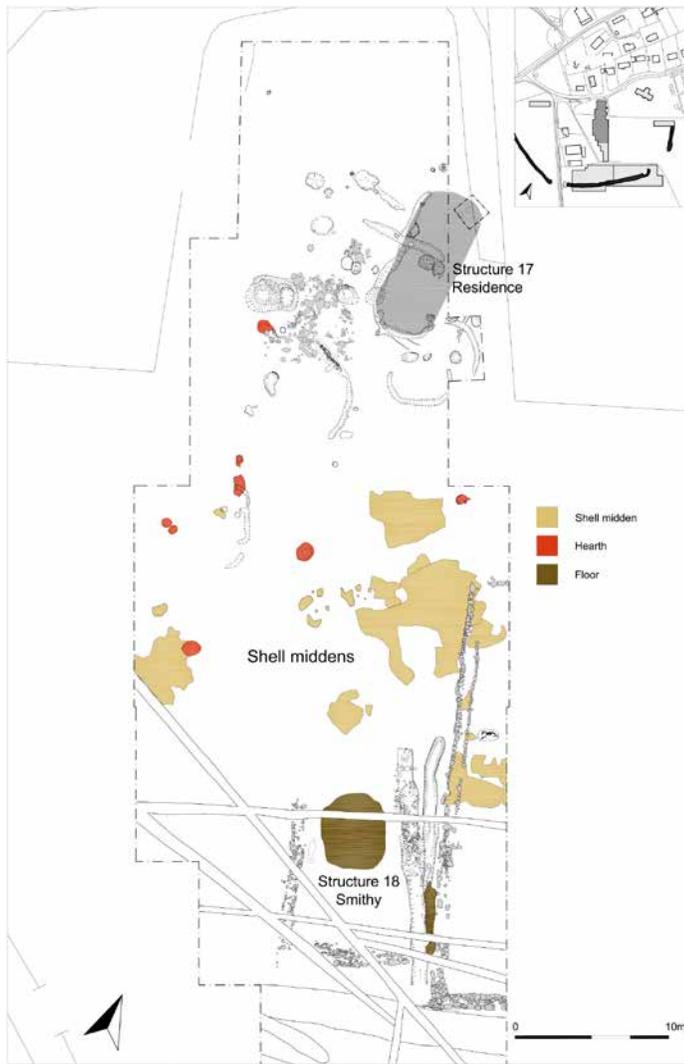
Illustration 7.24
Master plan of Sector 2 in Period 4

Based on archaeological, faunal, starch and isotopic evidence, the medieval community had access to cereals (including wheat and oats), beans, beef, mutton, pork, poultry, eggs, dairy produce, winkles and sea fish caught from the shore and out in the deep. They were also making use of dolphins and whales, presumably for oil. The artefacts and bones found in the middens suggest that the community was well provided with food and probably generating a surplus (see below).

The village (thirteenth to fourteenth century) (OLA 6.2/3.5.1)

The resumption of settlement activity in Sector 2 after an interval of *c* 200 years was identified by features and deposits cutting the post-occupation grey 'blanket' of sand that formed over the trading station of Period 3. In the northern part of the site, features assigned to Period 4 were identified where they cut into the pebbled road or encroached over soils covering the
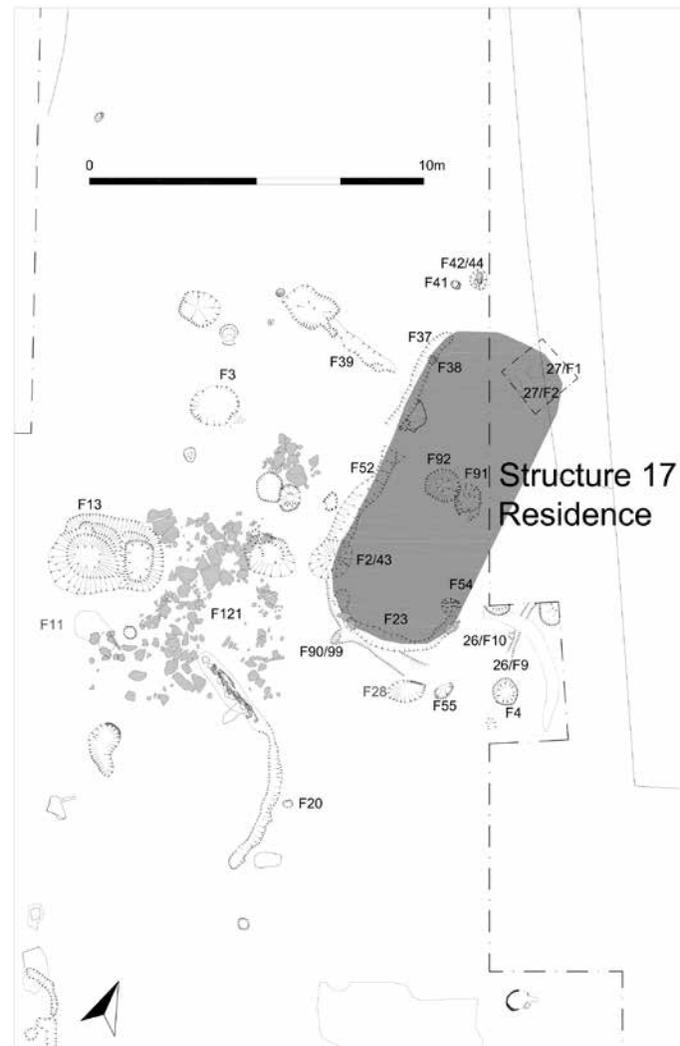
Illustration 7.25
Elements of medieval dwelling S17

of the assemblage derives from large numbers of cod and haddock, but includes various demersal species living on or near the ocean floor, ie flatfish (plaice, halibut and possibly dab), conger eel, halibut, haddock and saithe all of which could be caught from close to the shoreline. Other species are benthopelagic and can be caught at all depths such as herring, cod, and pollack. All these fish occupy littoral zones, and can be found within the range of the continental shelf, so could be caught from the shore or from a small boat keeping close to the coast. Herring, cod, conger eel, halibut, haddock and saithe may be caught further out to sea. Butchery marks on cod and haddock were consistent with the filleting, curing and (by implication) export of fish. The increase in the acquisition of gadid family species (ie cod, saithe, pollack and haddock) reflects the intensification of the fish trade in both Scotland and Europe in the Middle Ages (Barrett et al 1999, 356, 378, Fig 378; Barrett et al 2008; Holmes in Digest 7.2).

road surface. An area of occupation was marked by a series of curvilinear gulleys (S17), truncated to a depth of 0.20m or less, suggesting that floor levels had been ploughed out. Further west were stone slab surfaces (F121), a possible oven (F3) and a well (F13) likely to belong to an associated occupation (Illus 7.22). Contemporary with these structures were the shell middens (above), which were focused in the centre of Sector 2, over the former monastic pool (Illus 7.23). These parts of the site were developing from the thirteenth to fourteenth century, here Period 4B. The plan of medieval features encountered in Sector 2 will be found in Illus 7.24.

Structure 17

The concentration of features occupying well-drained areas next to the present Tarbatness Road and above the valley in the northern part of Sector 2 belonged to a domestic or residential

Illustration 7.26
Medieval oven, F3

area. Among the truncated gulleys was a rectilinear group that could define the stance of a building, oriented NE–SW and disappearing beyond the eastern limit of intervention. Gulleys thought to relate to the stance of this building were identified as F90/F99 with post-in-trench F23 and post-hole F55 (south); F52/F37 with post-holes F38, F41, F42 and F44 (west); and F9 with post-hole F10 (east), which together define an elongated narrow stance measuring *c* 12.0m × *c* 6.0m. Features located internally included three small post-holes F54 and F1 and F2. Together they made up *S17* (Illus 7.25). Two intercutting rubbish pits contained a deposit

Illustration 7.27
Medieval well, F13

of pure winkle shell, a whale rib, a fragment of rotary quernstone and two whetstones. These lie within the possible building stance and could constitute storage pits given over to rubbish disposal in their last use.

To the west of S17 was a hearth or oven (F3) and a possible well (F13) with adjacent hard standing (F121). The hearth was defined as a raised platform of brightly coloured ash surrounded by a halo of charcoal within a shallow scoop measuring 1.20m diameter and associated with a cluster of stake-holes (Illus 7.26). The hard standing (F121) had reused a fragment of rotary quernstone (14/1329). The large pit (F13) had been cut through this pavement (Illus 7.27). It is identified as a possible well, although there was no conclusive evidence for its purpose other than that it penetrated as far as the water table during the seasons of excavation. It consisted of a substantial sub-oval cut deep into the sand subsoil measuring 3.5 × 2.0m and in excess of 1.5m deep with a broadly shelving form. The feature had filled with multiple soily deposits markedly lacking in cultural material apart from occasional shell fragments and animal bone. Notably, the feature contained no slag, suggesting it had been backfilled before the

Illustration 7.28
Finds from medieval village in Period 4B: (a) rotary quern (24/4592) and (b) iron netting tool (24/611)

phase of metalworking activity commenced in Period 4C (see below). Dispersed rubbish pits were also identified, containing shell, fish and animal bone, pottery and a half-complete upper stone of a rotary quern. The large middens to the south are likely to have been generated by this thirteenth- to fourteenth-century community.

Artefacts in action

The cumulative artefactual evidence provides a picture of comfortable self-sufficiency (see Digest 6.1 and Illus D6.1.21–27 for details of Period 4 artefacts). Evidence for the growing of

crops, the processing of grain and the preparation of meal for bannocks and porridge comes from the possible oven F3 and the assemblage of mica schist rotary querns (14/1696, 1938, 1947/1999/2000/2001, 24/985, 1753–5, 4592) (Illus 7.28a). The assemblage of waste from exploitation of marine resources is joined by a small group of fishing equipment including the complete netting tool (24/611; Illus 7.28b), iron fish hooks (24/1882, 2665) and two lead fishing weights (24/4650, 29/40). It seems that these resources were exploited and enjoyed by the inhabitants of the village and were plentiful enough to generate a surplus of fish which was preserved and sold. The rise in sheep numbers also indicated an exploitation of secondary products endorsed by the assemblage of spinning and weaving tools. Five sherds of Scottish Redware (25/749, 24/1366, 1992, 2276 and 2940) and the head of a bovid femur (24/2139) were fashioned into spindle whorls for spinning wool joined by a red deer antler picker-cum-beater (24/4578), while garment finishing was indicated by an iron needle (24/2129) (Illus 7.29). Personal items also indicate that quality items were not beyond the reach of the inhabitants, including wire-wrap-headed pins for clothing and hairstyling including silver examples (15/2, 4, 112), decorative buckles (14/485, 487, 25/750), strap ends (11/4552) and belt fittings (11/2994, 14/1279 and 1499). The medieval middens also yielded sixty-four sherds of ceramic (almost exclusively Redware), slag, a fragmentary rotary quernstone and a whetstone indicating that the middens also incorporated a component of domestic waste.

Period 4 also yielded the largest number of horse bones, and an assemblage of three complete or near-complete horseshoes dateable to the thirteenth to fifteenth century (24/2514, 2871 Clark Type 4 and 24/3019 Clark Type 3) and over forty horseshoe nails suggest that horses were relied on for transport and traction
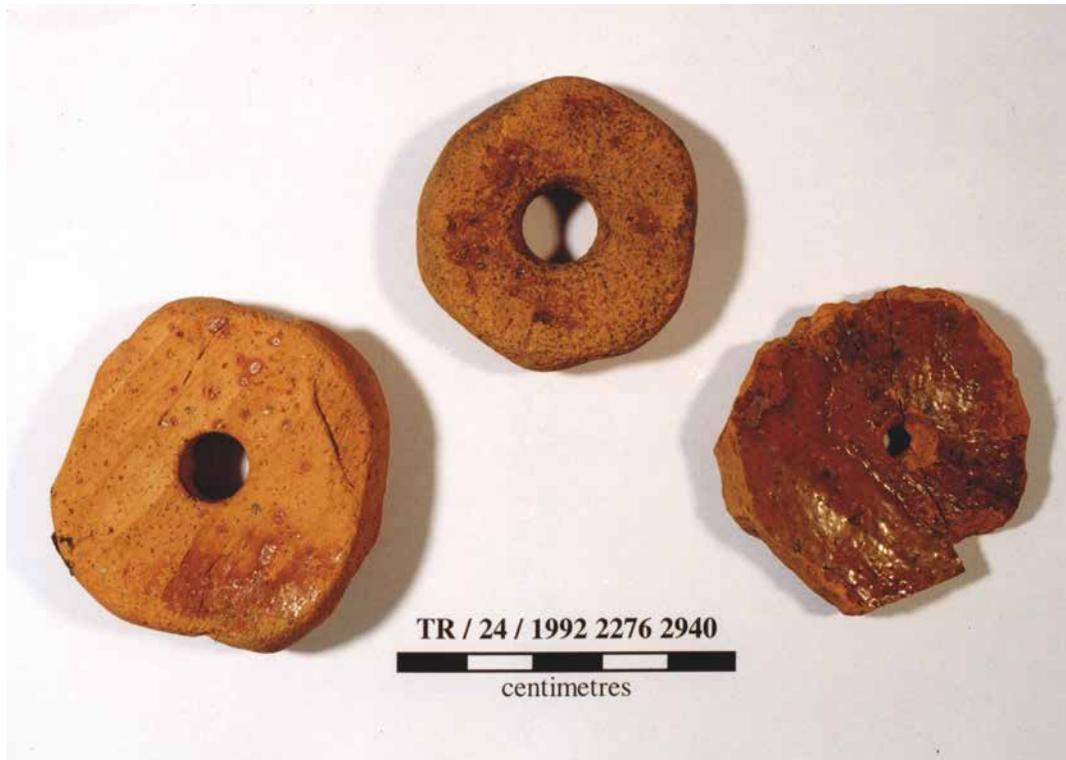
Illustration 7.29
Textile working: spindle whorls (24/1992, 2276, 2940)

and that farriers were active nearby. Basic horse equipment is joined by finds of regalia which indicate the presence of a mounted elite: a tinned snaffle-bit cheek piece (24/2781), a section of leather spur strap decorated with fleur-de-lys mounts (14/486), a harness pendant (14/1760) and harness strap connector (14/1285). Further high-status artefacts can also be related to the later part of Period 4 including a very fine one-piece miniature bone comb (Ashby in Digest 6.4, 2.1; 24/1805).

The township and its industries, fifteenth to sixteenth century (OLA 6.2/3.5.4)

In the southern part of Sector 2, an area of intensive ironworking arose in the fifteenth to sixteenth century (Period 4C), focused on a smithy *S18*. There was overlap in activity between the three

Illustration 7.30
Overview of ironworking in Sector 2, Period 4C
(north)

Illustration 7.31
Components of smithy S18: walls F128, F196, F97 showing
slag distribution (right); smithy floor F109 (above)

zones, which may be seen together on Illus 7.24. In its largest extent, contemporary with the fifteenth-century enhancement of Church 4, the settlement was affluent, productive and deserving of the term 'township'.

The spreading of the middens of mixed shell in the area of the former pool was perhaps in an attempt to reclaim a zone that was periodically wet and unusable. It was here that a rectilinear stone-built enclosure was erected, host to an ironworking building or smithy (Scots *smiddy*) (Illus 7.30, 31; *S18*). However, evidence for ironworking was also widely distributed over the northern part of Sector 2 and into the neighbouring fields. In the north of the sector, there was a possible iron-smelting hearth (F11) comprising a stone-lined pit (F11/F58) and flue (F57) with a fragment of vitrified furnace lining. Another small pit (F28) was filled with ironworking slag including smithing hearth bottoms, tap slag and vitrified furnace lining. Ashy fills and waste from metalworking found their way into pits and hollows left by the prior domestic occupation. Among this material were ironworking slags and copper-alloy scrap, a copper-alloy vessel patch, a fragment of leather spur strip with fleur-de-lys mounts, two conjoining fragments of small grindstone, two mounts, and a fragmentary buckle frame (see Digest 6.1; Illus D22–4). A group of gulleys, many of which post-dated those of S17, produced hammerscale, a roughly shaped stone disc and a fragment of small grindstone (14/1770 and 1819), two conjoining fragments of a large stone mortar or metalworking mould for wrought sheet-working (14/1480, 1577), and two rough stone discs (14/1621 and 1865).

From late Period 4 contexts across the north end of Sector 2 and 3 also came evidence for the cold repair of copper-alloy vessels. Six paperclip rivets (14/494, 1274, 1276, 1278, 1778, 24/505) and six vessel repair patches with rivets in situ (14/489,
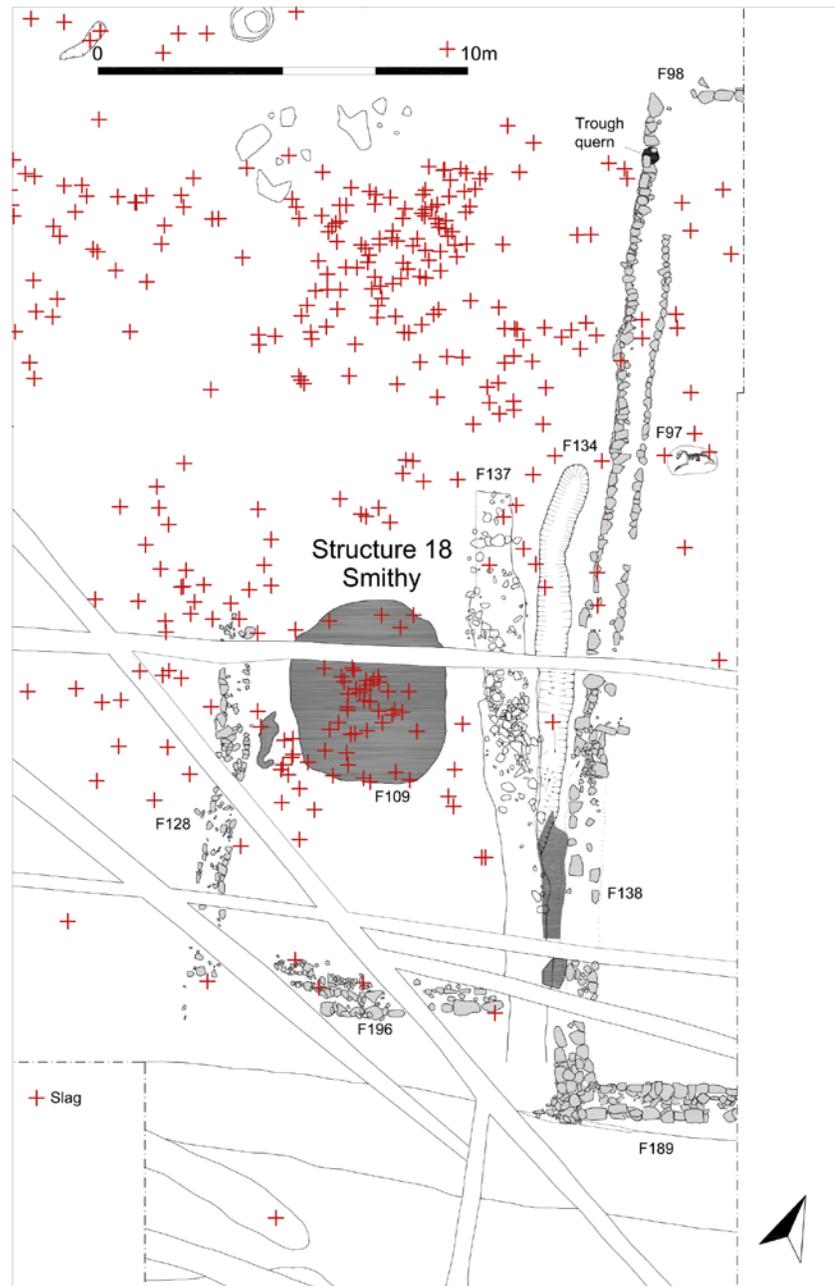
495, 1565, 1578, 15/12 and 44) were found along with thirty-five fragments of copper-alloy sheet scrap and dross (Illus D6.1.27). When the assemblage is compared with those recovered during excavations on rural sites where they are commonly retrieved in single figures, the numbers appear significant (Ford 1995, 1014–15; Ford 1998, 707). The assemblage stands comparison with specialist areas associated with similar waste in medieval urban sites such as Perth (Ford 1987, 127–9; Bowler et al 1995, 961) and York (Ottaway & Rogers 2002, 2813–15). Assuming the vessel repair requirements of a village would not constitute full-time employment for a permanent repair workshop and, in the absence of contemporary structural activity beyond the erection of windbreaks, it seems probable that the work was undertaken

by itinerant smiths or '*tinceards*'. The location of this activity, on dunes close to the medieval churchyard and permanent forge, would seem an appropriate location for itinerants to pitch camp and provide such services, probably on a seasonal basis. In any case, the material indicates at least quasi-specialist, rather than home-based, repair.

The smithy

A set of stone-walled enclosures was identified on the eastern side of Sector 2 south (Illus 7.30). The most eastern enclosure was formed primarily by a wall (F97), measuring in excess of 27.0m long and oriented N–S, post-dating the shell middens (Illus 7.31). A large fragment of Bronze Age trough quern had been reused within the make-up of the northern corner of the enclosure wall. The wall was flanked to the west by a series of two broad, shallow ditches, possibly drains (F134, 137). At its north end, a right-angled length of wall oriented W–E appeared to be associated and continued beyond the eastern limit of the excavation (F98). Towards the southern corner, a robber trench (F138) was defined; much of the stonework had been salvaged along a distance of 5.5m of wall F97; this feature may in fact represent a wholesale episode of robbing not detected elsewhere. At the southern terminus, F97 turned east at a right angle and continued beyond the eastern limit of the excavation as F189.

To the west of this first enclosure two further walls defined a second: F128 oriented N–S and F196 oriented W–E. Together they enclosed an area measuring *c* 10.0 × 9.0m set against F97. All the walls survived to no higher than a few courses of dry-stone, often much less. They appeared to have an earthen core and served an open-fronted, shed-like structure facing north, defined as *S18* (S18). S18 contained two large spreads of slag-rich material, one (F109) consisting of a black, sticky clay silt with patches of concreted ironworking slag and in situ burning, effectively a thin, expanded lens of slaggy, burnt deposits forming a sub-circular area measuring *c* 6.0m in diameter and which on excavation proved to be no thicker than 0.15m. Large pieces of slag were concentrated notably in the north-east corner and patches suggesting in situ burning. Many fragments of slag incorporated copper-alloy discolouration. Surrounding F109 was a distribution of slag, consisting often of whole smithing hearth bottoms. The core of the southern corner of wall F97 also consisted of smithing hearth bottoms. A further area of concreted floor surface (C1496) contained dense ironworking slag, probably crushed smithing hearth bottoms, and frequent fragments of vitrified furnace lining; spheroidal hammerscale possibly indicative of fire-welding was recovered from the deposit by flotation. The small enclosure was almost certainly host to a structure in which ironworking was undertaken. Many processes of iron-smithing are undertaken at waist height, so no ground-level features need be anticipated, and often in gloomy lighting conditions, so the building is likely to have been roofed, but open-fronted. F109 is likely to have formed on the floor of the building. Several stone objects were in use during adjacent ironworking, including two fragments of large rotary grindstones for sharpening large iron implements (24/2174 and 2175), a roughly shaped disc (24/2056) and two large roughly hewn blocks with sharpening marks (24/2718 and 2179). Medieval depictions show that three people would have been required to use the grindstones – two turning and one sharpening – suggesting a team of smiths were employed in the workshop (Ottaway & Rogers 2002, 2798).

The ironworking activities in Sector 2 were further defined by the assemblages of *slags* recovered (Digest 6.9). Evidence for *smelting* took the form of a possible smelting hearth (F11), recorded as a stone-lined shallow pit measuring *c* 0.6m in diameter. A total of 1.5kg of *tap slag* was recovered from the feature along with 0.20kg of *vitrified furnace lining*. Other evidence for smelting was recorded in the form of 1.25kg of tap slag and a slag cake with tap slag on its surface. Evidence for *secondary smithing* was dominated by the smithy, defined as an open-fronted stone-built structure measuring 9 × 10m in plan abutting a stone-walled enclosure (S18). The walls enclosed a large spread of concreted slag that included patches of in situ burning and some lenses of discolouration from copper alloy, perhaps from brazing. Slag recovered from this deposit (F109) and from nearby features included thirteen *smithing hearth bottoms* including two doubles, along with 6.6kg of *dense slag*. Spheroidal hammerscale was recorded from the associated slag spread (C1496). The wall core of adjacent wall (F97) was filled with complete *smithing hearth bottoms* while thirty-two others were recovered from a nearby spread of rubbly hard-core.

Examples of excavated smithies are few, but include fourteenth- and fifteenth-century examples from Goltho and Burton Dassett. The dimensions of the Tarbat smithy are broadly comparable with the structures identified at these two sites (Goltho, 8 × 4m; Burton Dassett, 14 × 15m) (McDonnell 2000, 165). The Period 4 *hearth bottoms* are exceptionally large and compare well with a similar assemblage recovered from Eilean Donan Castle (Digest 6.9). These latter were associated with a late medieval episode of smithing of large iron items; a hearth filled with slags was radiocarbon dated to AD 1450–1640 (95%) (Starley 2010). Items smithed at Tarbat are also likely to have been sizeable and may be conjectured to have included the manufacture of arms. More than 150 Highland bloomeries of the late medieval period have been located, thought to have been extracting iron from bog ore and supplying ironworkers in both town and country (Photos-Jones et al 1998; Photos-Jones & Atkinson 1998, 891, 902). Late medieval ironworking detected at Highland settlement sites is thought to have been stimulated by inter-clan warfare and conflict (Atkinson 2003; and see below).

Discussion – a context for Medieval Tarbat

Each of our sectors at Portmahomack reports a different sequence and different aspects of life, reminding us that the Middle Ages is not a singularity. For convenience and for concordance we have divided up its five centuries into three periods: in Period 4A (the twelfth century) a church is built on the hill (Church 2/3), with a single burial, a casualty of blade wounds, buried inside it (Burial 117). The new ideology does not disapprove of the reuse of Pictish masterpieces in the foundations. In Sector 1 and 2, there is neither continuity nor discontinuity: nothing moves, we know nothing of subsistence or industry.

Period 4B, the thirteenth and fourteenth century, starts with a new prosperity and devotion. The grand Church 4 with its crypt, nave, chancel and belfry is constructed and equipped for serious ritual. Burial begins again with incomers from the west of Scotland, including children; western immigrants continue to be strongly represented throughout Period 4. High status is indicated by an inscribed and a floriate grave cover. A residential area, with building, well and oven, springs up in Sector 2 by the road next to the church. Sand is quarried. Shellfish are gathered and deep-sea fish are caught. In Sector 1, the remains of the overgrown eleventh-century farm are levelled into an extensive ploughed field, growing cereals.

In Period 4C, the fifteenth to sixteenth century, Church 4 is refurbished after a fire, given a new floor and the crypt is improved with a vault and a new door frame. A high-status focus for burials inside the nave is provided by the skeletal drama played out at the tomb between the supporters of Burial 36 (a westerner) and Burial 30 (a local). A minor surge of burial follows, including many from western Scotland, some arriving as children. The burial of children and infants continue to dominate the crypt entrance up to the Reformation and after. Down in Sector 2, a widespread iron industry rises, with smelting and smithing on a large scale focused on a stone enclosure in the south. Evidence for tinkering forms a small but significant element of the metalworking evidence and a possible rare glimpse of a professional itinerant minority. The industry and its assemblage indicate residents or clients belonging to an equestrian warrior class. The relative grandeur of the church, the burials employing decorated stone slabs, the ritual of Burial 30/36, the hints of a mounted elite, the evidence for fish processing and the possible making of iron weapons all point to a settlement of increasing status between the village of the thirteenth century and the township of the fifteenth to sixteenth. What context can we find for these events?

Twelfth century

Macbeth, one of the active principals of the last chapter, was killed by the Cumbrian Prince Malcolm, son of Duncan, that same *Malcolm Canmore* who established a dynasty that would rule Scotland until the death of Alexander III in 1286. Among the eight children of Canmore's second marriage to the English princess Margaret was David, who with his mother was to redesign Christianity in Scotland. From David's accession as David I

in 1124, and especially after his conquest of Moray in 1147, we can expect the arrival of a new order in Portmahomack (Oram 2004, 96). The pre-existing Christian churches encountered by the reformers exhibited a fine diversity of married priests in secular, monastic and culdee communities: 'There were countless shrines, chapels, hermitages, possibly even small churches, bearing ancient dedications to an enormous variety of
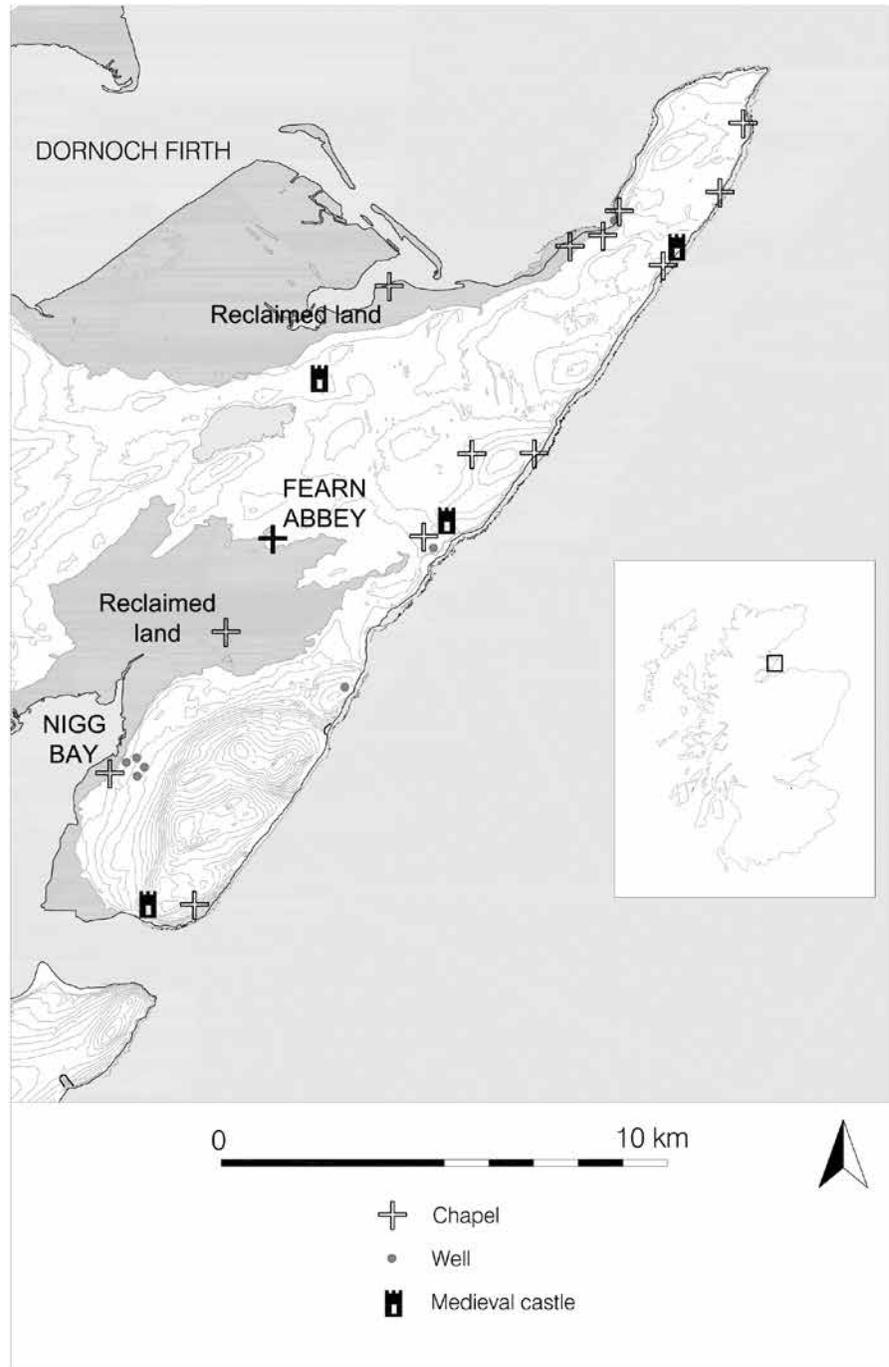

Illustration 7.32
The Tarbat peninsula in the Middle Ages showing chapels and holy wells, castles, Fearn Abbey, its millstream and reclaimed land

saints, the overwhelming majority of whom were of Celtic origin … Only a small proportion of these sacred sites were selected for permanent parish kirks and we hardly ever know why one site was preferred to another' (Barrow 1981, 73).

In this case we can guess, namely that the site of the Pictish monastery had not been forgotten. A well-read enthusiast may have founded a chapel on the ruins of Portmahomack, acting as Aldwin of Winchcombe did at late eleventh-century Jarrow (Cramp 2005, 35). Such pious retrophilia might have been widespread. The Tarbat peninsula had sixteen chapels in the Middle Ages and in excess of twenty-five holy wells (Digest 8; Illus 7.32). Is this survival or revival? And if revival, when? And why then? Until better information comes from the chapel sites themselves, the twelfth century, and the new religious energy of Margaret and David seems the least inappropriate context for the building of Church 2. As discussed in Chapter 5.4, stone church building in Scotland is not impossible before the twelfth century: it is implied by the monolithic stone arch from Forteviot (Cameron 1994) and by architectural sculpture at Portmahomack itself (p 149). But examination of standing or even excavated buildings has failed to offer much certain church fabric before the late eleventh century (Fernie 1986; Cameron 1994; Alcock 2003, 285). John Dunbar proposed two major periods of church building in the Highlands, the first from *c* 1175 to 1250 and the second from 1375 to 1410 (Dunbar 1981, 39, 49). Early churches of the first period have an oblong nave and a small square-ended chancel, entered by means of a narrow chancel arch as in two examples on the Isle of Bute, constructed between 1170 and 1200. There was Romanesque carving around the doorways. St Mary's Chapel, Lybster, is also a small two-chambered building with a square-ended chancel and nave with west doorway, but in Ross, Sutherland and Caithness, comments Dunbar, early architectural remains 'make a decidedly poor showing' (Dunbar 1981, 39, 49).

In the course of the twelfth and thirteenth century the liturgical free-for-all was visited by a rigorous transformation: 'A high degree of uniformity was imposed generally on the whole of western Christendom … As a result the peculiarities of many regional churches of the west, that of Scotland among them, were ironed out' (Barrow 1981, 62). So when did the cleansing fire reach Easter Ross? There was a diocese of Ross in the twelfth century but 'there is no record of an early bishop's church and the see was not fixed permanently at Elgin until the thirteenth century'. Moreover 'it is hard to be sure how far parish churches in any recognizable sense existed in Scotland before *c* 1120' (Barrow 1981, 68, 73; Cant 1986).

David died in 1153, and if he is not to be credited with the conditions for refounding a church at Portmahomack, we can infer an interest of the Scottish church and king at least from 1179, when William I ('The Lion') built a castle at the south end of the Tarbat peninsula at Dunskeath (Grant 2005, 107); there is an *Annat* place-name close by (Watson 1904, 52–3), which should refer to an early chapel with the relics of its founder. Church 2/3 gives little sense of standing in a thriving settlement. It was eventually equipped with a chancel, cruets and an altar rail. Modest and orthodox, but different from what is to come, it is assigned to the later twelfth century until we know better.

Thirteenth to fourteenth century

Alexander Grant feels that our region was not properly incorporated into the Scottish kingdom – and thus the broader Christian Europe – until the appointment in 1215 of the first Earl of Ross, Farquhar MacTaggart; 'the frontier between Ross and Moray was still, in many respects, the effective frontier for the kings of Alba' (Grant 2005, 110; cf Barrow 1981, 51). 'Macintaggart' (*Mac an t-Sagairt*, son of the priest) was said to have been lord of the secularised monastery of Applecross (Munro 1984, 127). He defeated the invading Irish Norse on behalf of Alexander II, crushed the Galloway Rebellion of 1235, was father-in-law to Olaf of Man, and a player on the international stage. According to the Chronicle of the Earls of Ross (*Chronicle* 1850, 1–3) he won the earldom in a wrestling match with a Norman Dougall Duncanson. In the 1220s he founded Fearn Abbey in Kincardine parish, and some fifteen years later moved it to Fearn on Tarbat in pursuit of 'tranquillity, peace and quietness' (Munro 1984, 128), bringing with it a lingering association with Whithorn, the Galloway monastery that maintained the right to present the Abbot of Fearn into the fourteenth century (Adam 1991, 29; *Chronicle* 1850, 5). The lands of New Fearn were cut out of the parish of Tarbat, which was therefore already in existence (Fraser & Munro 1988, 10). In 1255 there was a church at Portmahomack, served by a canon of Fearn Abbey and in 1274 a canon of Fearn was assigned vicarage revenues. The canons of New Fearn were still drawing revenues from the vicarage of the church of St Colman in 1529, when Pope Clement VII confirmed them. *Nova Farina* (New Fearn) sounds like a place valued for its cereal production (Watson 1904, 40). Fearn Abbey had a mill and is reported to be an example of a community that developed its agricultural production with the assistance of imported soils (Barber 1981, 359, Fig 45).

The first half of the thirteenth century would seem to be an appropriate time for reinvestment in the old settlement of Portmahomack, attracting settled fishers and putting the surrounding land under the plough. The new larger, grander church building with its crypt and west belfry (Church 4) seems to fit the mood and needs of the thirteenth century, when the performance of ceremony was a full-time and regulated business. The parish statutes of that time demanded that a church be divided into two, the nave built and maintained by the parishioners and the chancel paid for by the rector, and the fourth Lateran Council of 1216 decreed that parish churches should have a resident priest. The Benedictine church on Iona, built in 1200 with an aisleless choir and a single string course, was enlarged around 1220 to include an undercroft, which recalls the design of our Church 4 (Dunbar 1981, 41; Ritchie 1997, 104).

The early fourteenth century saw the rise of Tain, where in 1321 Earl William Ross endowed a collegiate community to serve the cult of St Duthac, which was to draw royal pilgrims and exercise power as an 'immunity' until the eighteenth century (Oram et al 2009, 25, 55). However, the Earls of Ross continued to take a strong interest in the Tarbat peninsula. Hugh succeeded William in 1323 and died in battle 1333 at Halidon Hill. He appears to have been based at the Rarichies, giving this estate (between Balintore and Nigg) to his younger son Hugh (Munro 1984, 128). The small fort still known at Easter Rarichie is assumed to be of Late Iron Age date (p 102), but it is not impossible that it had a

real or assumed connection for the Rosses. Hugh Jr of Rarichie was long seen as the chief Ross ancestor. He launched the Munro family as allies, granting land to the father of Robert Munro for faithful service. Robert himself was killed in 1369 in defence of the earldom (Munro 1984, 130–1).

Fifteenth to sixteenth century

In the fourteenth century, the earldom of Ross apparently had no lands on the west coast (Munro 1984, 128) but in the early fifteenth century that changed. Alexander Leslie, Earl of Ross had a sister married to Donald, Lord of the Isles, who in 1411 made a bid for the earldom. King James I, returning from prison in England, resolved the dispute in favour of Alexander in 1436 and for the next forty years Ross and the Western Isles were held as a joint possession. Alexander and his son John were much in Easter Ross but conditions were clearly propitious for incoming families from the west, as reported by the stable isotopes (p 60). In 1476, John was discovered to have been guilty of disloyalty and the earldom was forfeit to the crown (Munro 1984, 129–30).

Numerous feuds and land claims contested by the clans began to be written down in sixteenth-century manuscripts and subsequently collected in later grand surveys. One of these incidents described in Eyre-Todd's *Highland Clans of Scotland* is of interest since it describes a raid on the church at Portmahomack: 'Again and again the Rosses had suffered molestation … and when at last, driven to desperation and thoroughly infuriated, they gathered their forces and marched against the Mackay Chief, they were in the mood to teach a severe lesson. The Mackays, with Angus of Strathnaver at their head, finding themselves fiercely attacked, sought shelter in the church of Tarbat. There several were slain, and, the church being set on fire, Angus Mackay and many of his clansmen were burned to ashes. To avenge this 'cruel slaughter', Ian Riach MacKay gathered his men, and, helped by a force of the Sutherlanders, his neighbours on the south, invaded the territory of the Rosses and proceeded to lay it waste with the utmost fury' (Eyre-Todd 1923, 471). This culminated in the battle of 'Aldy Charrish' or 'Aldecharwis' where the Rosses were heavily defeated by the Mackays, losing at least eleven of their leading men. *The Calendar of Fearn* names them and gives the date of the battle as 7 June 1487. It has been located in Strathoykel or near Loch Shin (Monica Clough, pers comm; Adam 1991, 91–3).

This rather specific event offers an equation with the patches of burning seen in St Colman's Church before it underwent its fifteenth-century renewal. But it does not have to be unique. In 1427 Thomas Mackay of Creich confronted Alexander of Freswick in St Duthac's chapel, Tain, murdered him and some of his household and then burnt the place down. Such feuds and their violent outcomes also provide an oblique context for the
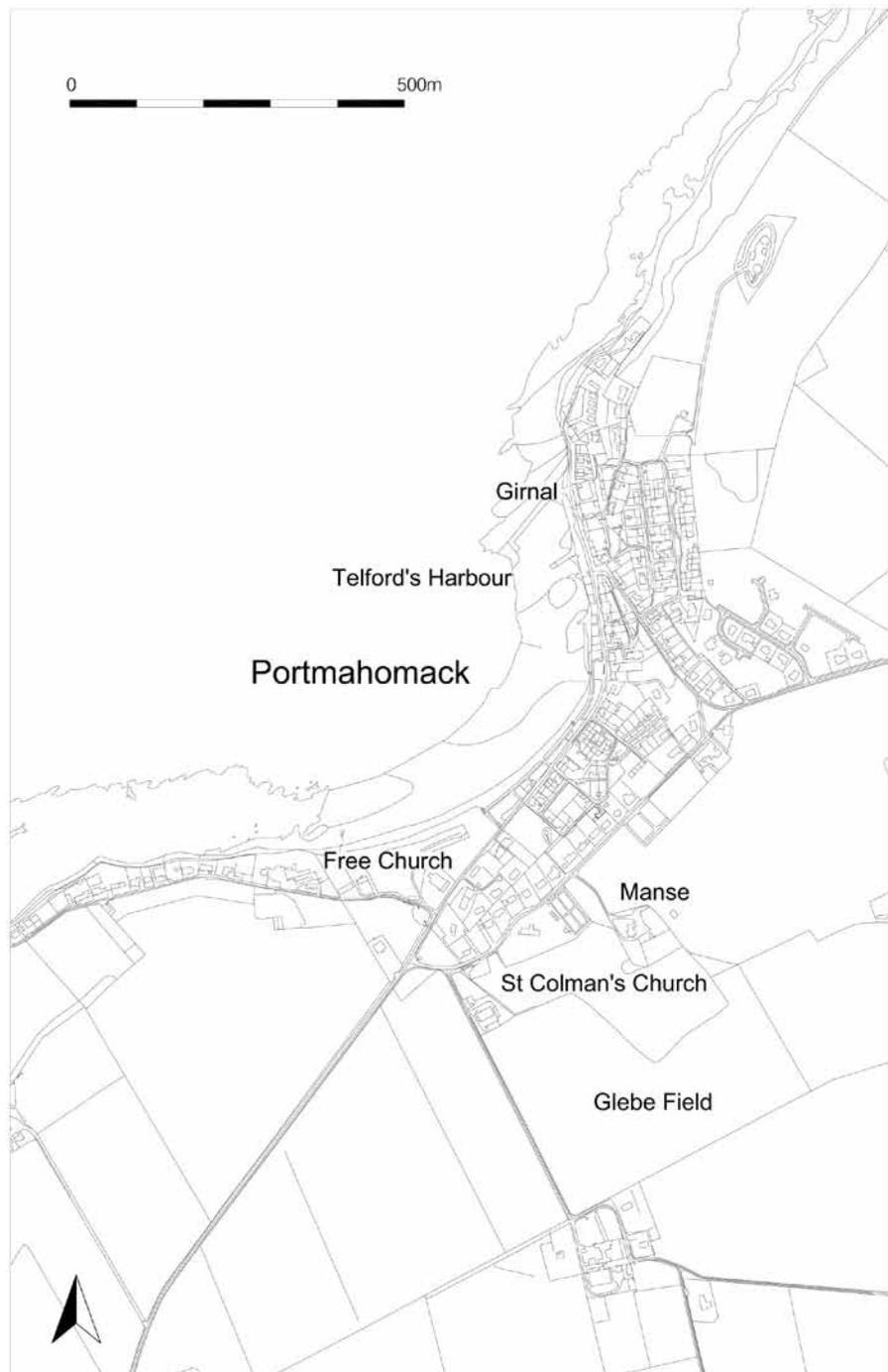
Illustration 7.33
Map of post-medieval/modern Portmahomack, showing the site of Telford's Harbour
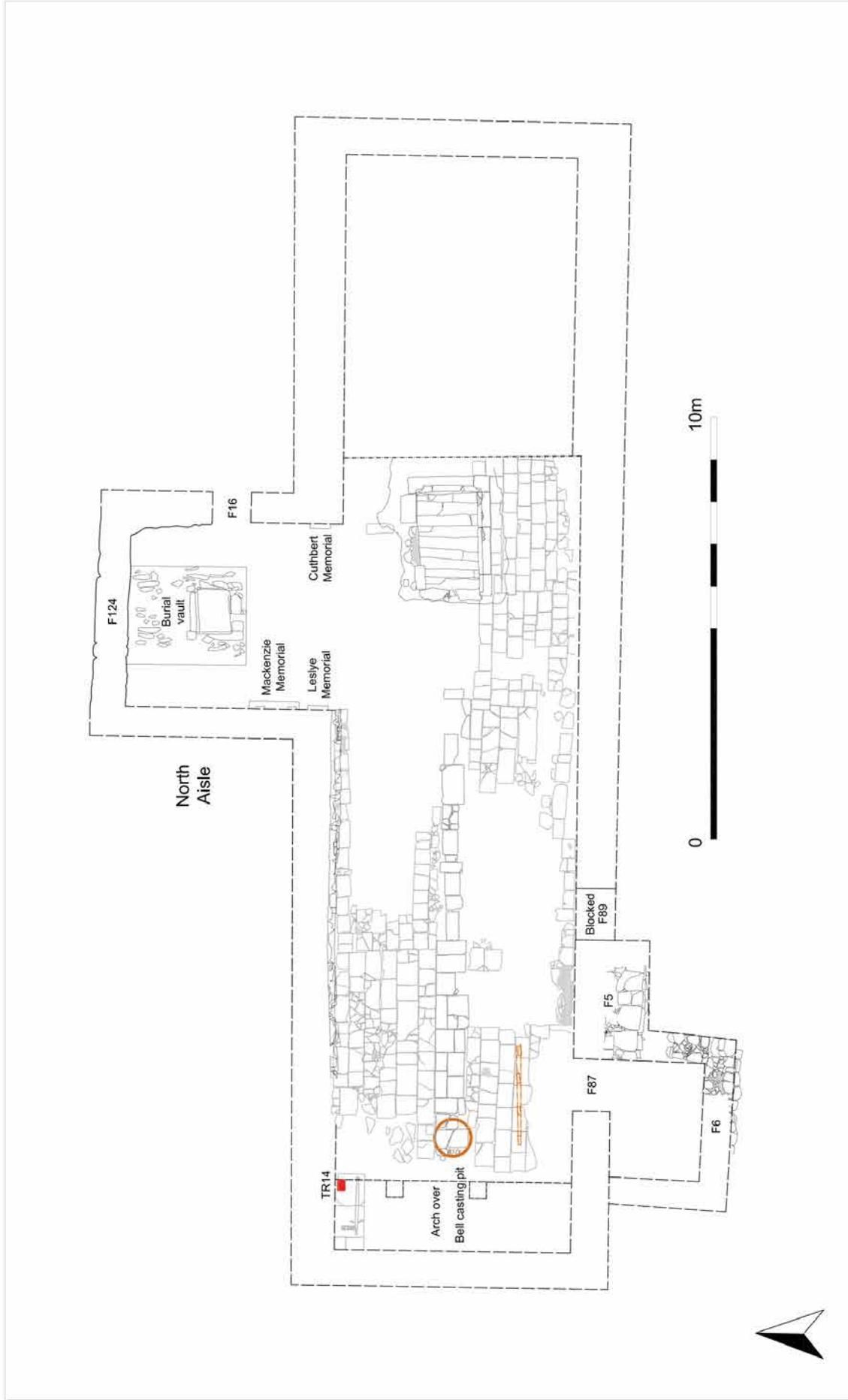
F124

F16

Burial
vault

Mackenzie
Memorial

Leslye
Memorial

Cuthbert
Memorial

North
Aisle

TR14

Arch over
Bell casting pit

Blocked
F89

F5

F87

F6

0

10m

Illustration 7.34
Church 5, the Reformation church (seventeenth century)

remarkable burial complex that was placed opposite the entrance the crypt. The skeleton of an adult male (Burial 36), who was born in the west, died from blade wounds to the face and was buried with four skulls placed beside his, was superseded, physically and probably in reputation, when his coffin was reopened for the burial of another adult male (Burial 30), a local. The burial of a young child apparently lay in close association (p 324). This episode seems to evoke the life and death of clan leaders and their enemies, family, companions and heirs. The ritual recalls a still vigorous practice ultimately inherited from the Iron Age, where dominance was signalled in severed heads. It is reprised on Sueno's stone and mentioned in the *Annals of Ulster* – where Aed son of Niall took 'twelve score heads' after a victory over the Norse in 865. For the Middle Ages, the *Chronicle of Melrose* records one of Farquhar MacTaggart's early exploits, presenting heads to King Alexander after putting down a MacWilliam

uprising in 1215 (Sellar 1993, 106–7). In the early fourteenth century, Randolph, Earl of Moray captured Eilean Donan on behalf of the king and exposed the heads of fifty 'misdoers' on the walls (Munro 1984, 131).

This incessant clash of weapons must have kept the Portmahomack metal-smiths busy. Presumably the settlement was still in Ross hands and would remain so until the Reformation. In spite of the western pressures, there were deep loyalties to perceived east-coast ancestors. By the mid-sixteenth century, Portmahomack had its own relic, that of St Colman, 'whose merits were attracting increasing numbers of people'. The *Aberdeen Martyrology* (Edinburgh University Library MS 50) that offers this anecdote gives the saint's day as 15 February, which aligns it approximately with Colman of Lindisfarne, whose feast day was 18 February (Carver 2008a, 15, n 21 for sources). The likelihood is that the relic was housed in the

Illustration 7.35
(a) Leslye memorial; (b) the flagstone floor of Church 5; (c) William Mackenzie's grave and memorial

crypt, where pilgrims could negotiate the steep steps to visit it and the new openings at the east end would light their way. However, this particular visitor attraction was soon to be closed down.

The new arrangements in the crypt and the numerous late medieval chapels and holy wells recorded on the peninsula imply an intense investment in Catholic piety on the eve of the Reformation. Between 1560, when the veneration of relics was officially prohibited, and 1588, when it got its burghal charter from King James VI, Tain exchanged spiritual for economic advancement. On Tarbat too the loosening of the old allegiances was no doubt assisted by post-Reformation asset stripping and increasing prosperity (Oram et al 2009, 36–9).

Post-Medieval Tarbat: St Colman's Church from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century (Period 5)

At the Reformation, which reached Tarbat in the late sixteenth century, the industrial settlement abandoned its situation outside the church: the old ironworks were ploughed for the minister's Glebe and all became farmland. The residential and business end of Portmahomack was transferred to the north end of the beach ('the Port') where a girnal survives from the seventeenth century and Thomas Telford improved the harbour in the eighteenth (Illus 7.33). From now on, the history of the investigated site is focused on the church, which supplies an ongoing vignette of society and religion in a theatre of ever-shifting scenes until the twenty-first century. The church was recorded in detail prior to its conversion to a visitor centre in 1997 (OLA 6.3.1 at 3.5; OLA 6.3.2). The graveyard was surveyed and all its memorials catalogued (see below). The documentary story of the church was compiled and presented in skilful detail by Alexander Fraser and Finlay Munro (1988).

Church 5 (OLA 6.3.1 at 3.5.1)

Church 5, the Reformation church, was a modification of Church 4; the axis of worship changed from a congregation facing east to one facing south. An annexe was added on the north side, called in local usage 'the north aisle' (Illus 7.34). The entrance into Church 4 was blocked and a *new doorway* cut into the south wall, manifest as a surviving threshold. External features associated with this new entrance suggest it was provided with a *porch* and a series of four niches cut into the flagstone floor suggest an internal screened *lobby entrance*. The *entrance to the crypt* was decommissioned as a reliquary and eventually earned
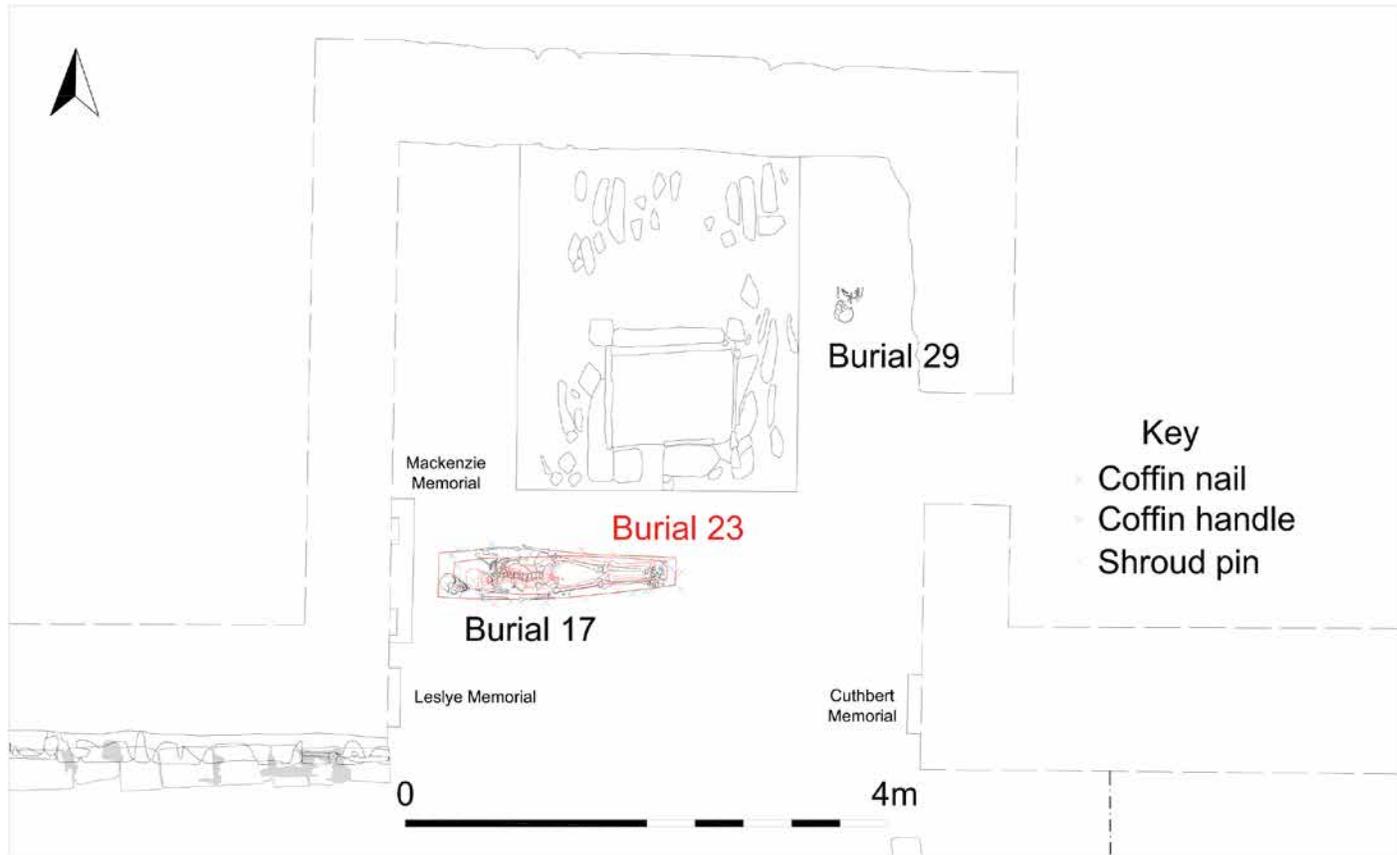

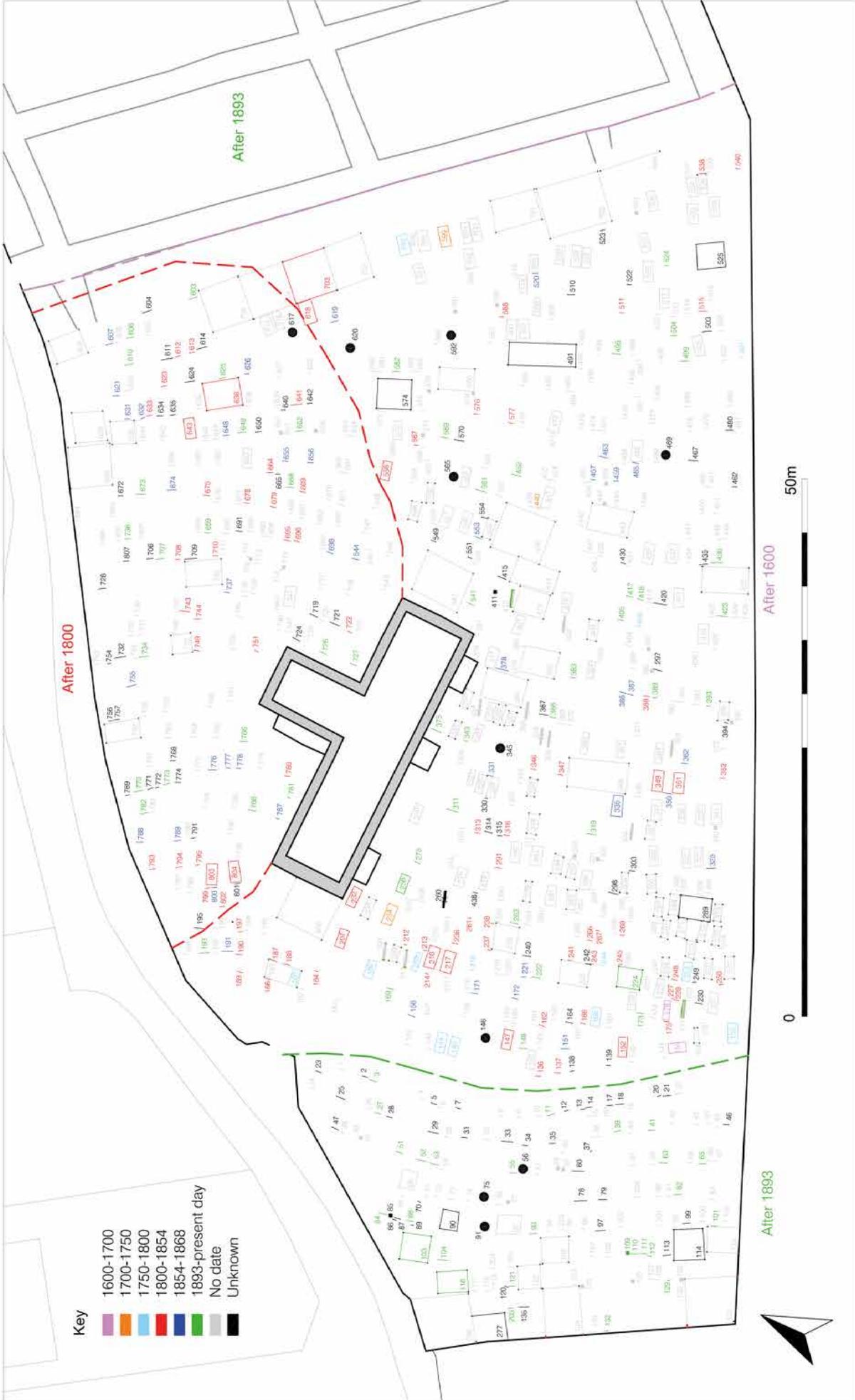*Illustration 7.36*
Burials in the north aisle

Illustration 7.37
Churchyard map, showing sites of memorials and boundaries by date

a new role as a fuel store with a padlocked trap door (see below). A *belfry tower* was constructed with the aid of a relieving arch strengthened by two stone drum columns and by the reuse of ship's timbers in the fabric. Immediately adjacent to and centred on the drum columns a bell-casting pit was excavated. It was a steep-sided and sub-circular pit measuring 1.2m in diameter and 1.3m deep, and two fragments of clay bell mould were recovered from the backfill (20/265). The construction of the *north aisle* involved the addition of a small annexe measuring 4.5 × *c* 4.0m to the north side of the church close to the former nave/chancel junction. A 4.5m length of the Church 2/4 north wall was demolished to foundation level and three new walls built, the northernmost misaligned to the orientation of the medieval church. There was a doorway in the east wall of the north aisle. A square *burial vault* with entrance hatch was constructed in the centre of the aisle.

In the nave, a *flagstone floor* was laid on a thin bed of preparatory sand (Illus 7.35b). A piece of lead window came, derived from a figural scene (17/13) and nine fragments of plain, late medieval glass, along with a piece bearing fifteenth-century Gothic lettering were recovered from the sand (Wilmott in Digest 6.15). This assemblage suggests that late medieval glazing schemes, which may have included personal dedications or memorials, were stripped out. In addition, 108 fragments of plain window glass of sixteenth- to seventeenth-century date were recovered during clearance of the crypt, implying that reglazing in simple, large, rectangular leaded quarries was undertaken for Church 5. The reuse of the late fourteenth- to fifteenth-century grave cover in the north-west corner of Church 5 is the notable exception to an apparent dispensation with internal ornament in the nave and the initials 'AMRM' are likely to have been added to the reused slab at this time, perhaps commemorating members of the Munro family.

Burials associated with Church 5 (OLA 6.3 at 3.5.2)

The flagstone floor signalled the end of burial in the nave with the possible exception of a special group of infants, which are thought to spill over from the sixteenth into the seventeenth century (above). Two successive adult inhumations were excavated within the north aisle beneath the Mackenzie monument (Illus 7.35c). Burial 17 was that of a mature man in an elaborate coffin, and assumed to be William Mackenzie, while the successive Burial 23 in a matching coffin containing a mature woman is assumed to be his widow. Infant Burial 29 was located within the north aisle close to the laird's vault suggesting the possibility of familial association, perhaps an illegitimate child not treated to formal burial (Illus 7.36). William Mackenzie, as we learn from his teeth, arrived from a childhood home in the west between the age of seven and twenty-six years old (Digest 4.4). He died in 1642 at about forty-five years old.

The majority of Period 5 burials would have been interred outside the church. Memorials dating from the seventeenth century have been recorded within the extant churchyard and boundary features encountered during the excavation of the service trench (F1) may originate in this period with the Period 5 cemetery marked with a bank and ditch (Illus 7.37).

Dating

A post-Union twopence of James VI of 1623 (17/11) was recovered from beneath the flagstone floor, and precisely the same date (1623) is shown on two stone plaques dedicated to the Leslye/Cuthbert family inserted into the walls of the north aisle, providing further *termini post quos* (Illus 7.35a). It is possible that these memorials were concomitant with the building of the aisle and represent endowments by the Leslye/Cuthbert family towards its construction. The headstone of the Mackenzie monument dated 1642 is also let into the west wall of the aisle.

Discussion

The new interior space was created as a result of the Reformation, and reflected its thinking (Howard 1995, 193; Dunbar 1996). *The First Book of Discipline* (1560) summed up the new liturgical requirements as: a bell to bring the people together, a pulpit to preach the word, a basin for baptism and a table for communion. The intercession of saints was no longer sought, so that there was no more need of access to a relic in the crypt. A wooden pulpit was sited against the south wall; this and the position of the north aisle opposite shows how the axis of worship had changed. The purpose of the north aisle was to house the laird's family and provide him with a family burial place. In 1581 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland forbade burial within churches, a stricture repeated four times before 1643. Thus burial was to be no longer in the nave but 'lying in the most free air'. However, burial vaults were erected by important families, and these could be within the church, as at St Colman's, under the north aisle.

At the Reformation, Tarbat Church was first assigned as a *mensa* to the Bishop of Ross. The lands of Fearn Abbey were being apportioned by the crown in the mid-sixteenth century and the old buildings of the abbey were acquired by Nicholas and then Thomas Ross who converted the Dorter into a hall and kitchen (*Chronicle*, 19–20). By 1563 'the chapter ceased to exist in any recognisable sense' (Adam 1991, 30). In 1626–1628, Fearn parish, including the Abbey, was separated from the parish of Tarbat (to which it had originally belonged). By 1634 Sir John Mackenzie was chief heritor and had the right to the north aisle (Fraser & Munro 1988, 31, 47). The Laird was increasingly significant in the control of religious thinking, as well as in the economic and social control of the local inhabitants. At St Colman's he entered via a private door in the east wall of the north aisle. The bones of his relatives lay in a special burial vault beneath his feet. The construction of the north aisle had presumably been achieved before 1623, the date on two cartouches inserted in its walls. In 1690 an act in favour of Presbyterians was passed by William and Mary, and Tarbat may have then ceased to be Episcopal in name. It became one of fourteen churches in the possession of George, Lord Tarbat, First Earl of Cromartie, Sir John Mackenzie's heir. Ballone Castle, built in the late sixteenth century presumably by the Dunbars who held the property from 1507, was acquired by the MacKenzies in 1623 (Canmore). The Christian religion now became an overt instrument of the aristocracy, and the relationship between the local landowners and the minister was to become ever stronger over the next 300 years.
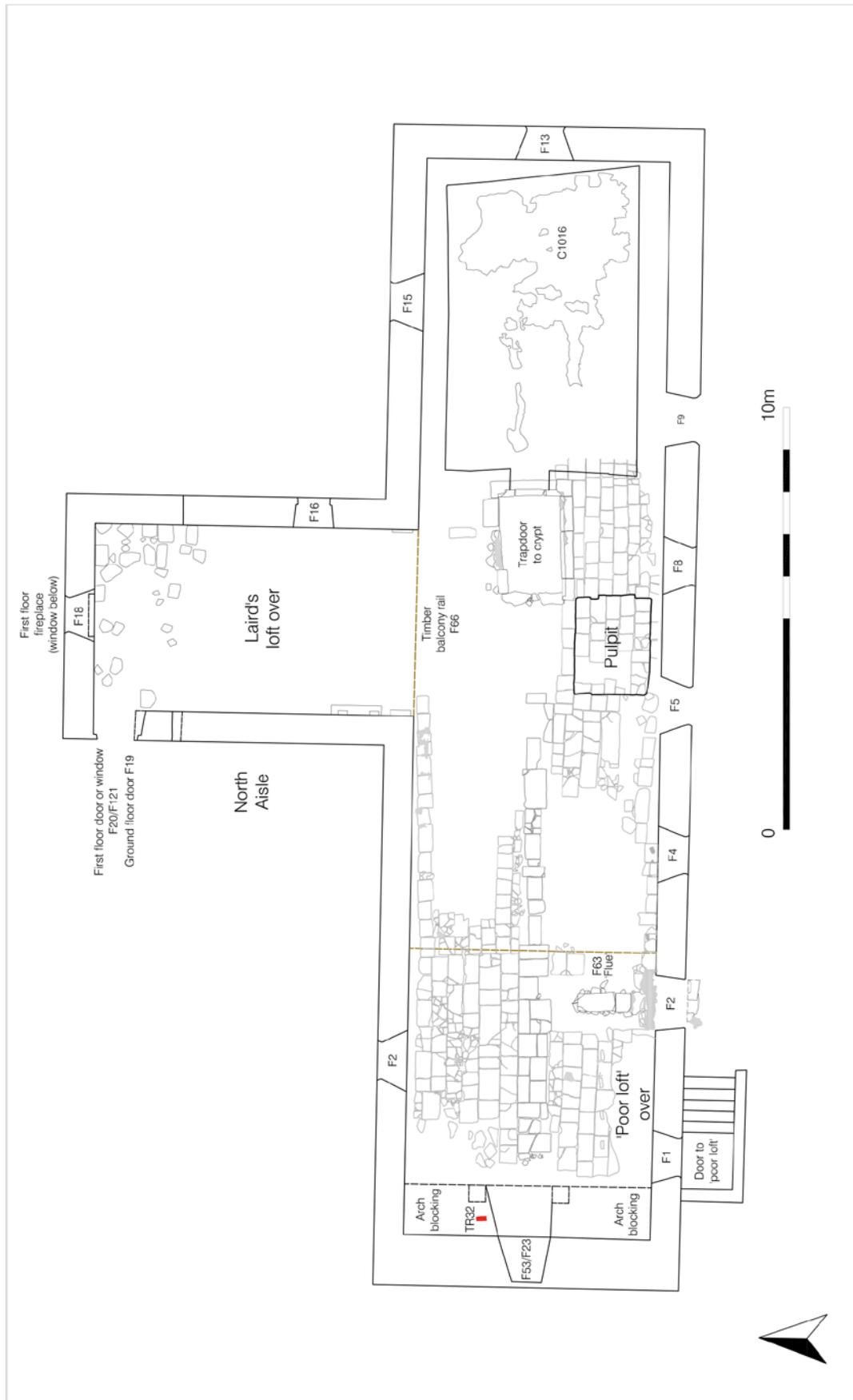
Illustration 7.38
Church 6: eighteenth century

Church 6 (eighteenth century) (OLA 6.3.1 at 3.6.1)

Church 6 was a refurbishment of Church 5, using the same footprint, with the exception of the northward extension of the north aisle (Illus 7.38). The *west gable end* of Church 4 had been retained within Church 5 where it also supported its belfry arch; this structural arrangement was retained wholesale for Church 6. A total of *three doorways* now served the *south side* of the ground floor of Church 6 and were seen to be integral to the fabric of the wall F2 (square head), F5 (later converted to a window) and F9 (arched head) with F2 persisting in use to the present day. The door for Church 5 was dismantled to threshold level and the remnants of the threshold blocked. Punctuating the space between the doors of Church 6 were *two windows* assigned F4 and F8. Access to a *first-floor west gallery* was facilitated by an external stair leading to a door (F1; with a square head). A stone 'flue' consisting of bonded sandstone sides and a slab cover was constructed beneath the threshold for south door (F2) beneath the flagstone floor. The feature ran from the south side of the threshold and continued into the body of the church measuring a total 3.0m in length.

The *north wall* required far less intervention and may have survived largely intact, although externally the two ground-floor windows appeared integral with the surrounding fabric. Observations at the east end made during replacement of external harling suggest that some of the east gable was retained. The *north aisle* of Church 5 was substantially remodelled for Church 6 with evidence for the partial reuse of the west and east walls and a new north wall sited further north. The remodelled aisle consisted of a northwards extension to the annexe measuring *c* 6.6 × 4.4m and the creation of an upper storey; the fabric of these walls was bonded with red clay. The east door for the Church 5 north aisle was converted to a window (F16) while a new integral window lit the annexe from the north (F18). A *small flue* for a stove to heat the ground floor was identified and assigned F3; the ceramic drains used for the flue were consistent with a mid-eighteenth-century date onwards. A new *ground-floor entrance* was provided close to the north end of the west wall, noted as integral to the fabric of the new west wall (F19). It is not clear how the first floor loft was accessed for Church 6, as no evidence for an internal or external stone or timber stair was identified, although a blocked door at first-floor level (F121), converted to a window probably for Church 7, is the most likely candidate for an entry point. The first floor was provided with a fireplace. A *timber balcony* was inserted at the front of the loft into the nave.

A *west gallery* was inserted over the relieving arch and columns of the belfry and was accessed via an external stone stair, becoming timber in construction internally and cutting across the belfry arch and its blocking. Externally, this stair overlay the remains of the porch of Church 5. Internally, evidence for a flat gallery was identified in the fabric and evidence for a barrel-vaulted ceiling was also preserved as a scar. A timber balcony was provided at the front of the gallery looking into the nave. Access into the belfry was via a stair from the west gallery.

The extant distinctive *birdcage belfry* is attributed to Church 6. The existing belfry arch of Church 5 was strengthened to bear the new load by the insertion of rubble blocking beneath and to either side of the Church 5 stone pillars. This was also plastered over. The rubble blocking also partially obscured the reused late fourteenth- to fifteenth-century grave marker set into the flagstone floor initiated in Church 5.

Analysis of the debris found in the crypt showed that it was used for the storage of peat fuel. It is postulated that the fuel was imported to serve the fireplace and stove within the church, namely those in the laird's loft and lower north aisle. In the *churchyard* several memorials dating to 1750–1800 cluster against the western churchyard boundary of Church 6 (see Illus 7.37).

Discussion

It is recorded that a series of inspections and estimates led to the erection of Church 6, which began in the 1720s and took some forty years to realise (Fraser & Munro 1988, 45). The iconic Tarbat belfry, made in beautifully shaped and fitted ashlar is thought to be the work of Alexander Stronach, the dynastic name taken by at least three generations of master masons living in Tarbat, and active between 1634 and 1790. The present church bell is inscribed: 'The Church of Tarbat. John Milne fecit 1764' but a later inscription reads 'Recast 1908'. Provision was made for a greatly increased congregation: a flat gallery constructed at the west end would have held another fifty people; this area would become known later as the 'poor loft', and this may have been its original intention. At the east end a more modest gallery, supported by two joists, may have been intended as an organ loft. There were now no fewer than five doors in the south wall. Starting from the east, the first was accessed by a staircase and led to the supposed organ loft. The next was arched and may have been that for the minister, who could access a pulpit on the south wall, now the focal point of the service. The next two led to the nave and the last provided access to the west gallery. The congregation thus found its way through three doors suggesting that places were allocated and society was thoroughly ranked. The Laird's family continued to use their private east entrance into the ground floor north aisle.

Church 7 (late eighteenth to early nineteenth century)

Church 7 was a series of adaptations to the interior and access arrangements (Illus 7.39). These involved an increase to a total of seven access points, the creation of more galleries and the raising of the church wall head and gables by *c* 1m including the north aisle, and the remodelling of the church roof. Changes to the *north aisle* included raising the wall head, gable and roof. An *external stair* was built against the west wall that led to a newly inserted door, providing direct access into an upper floor – the 'laird's loft'. The previous access into the loft was converted to a window (F121). The ground floor was divided into two spaces by the insertion of a *timber partition*. This space, opening directly into the nave, would likely have housed parishioners, perhaps still gaining entry via the east door (F16) or directly from the nave, while the space behind the partition, accessed via the west door (F19), may have been reserved as private space for the laird.

Window inserted with wall head F14

East gallery

F15

F11

Stair to East Gallery

Raised north aisle wall head

F16

First floor fireplace (window below)

F18

Laird's loft over

North aisle partitioned

Forbes memorial

F9

Trapdoor to crypt

Pulpit

F8

Canopy over pulpit

Vestry

F7

F6

Window F88

Ground floor door F19

First floor window

F21

Stair to Laird's loft

North Aisle

F4

Raised wall head

F3

Gallery window

10m

F2

West gallery with barrel roof

F1

Door to gallery

Door to belfry
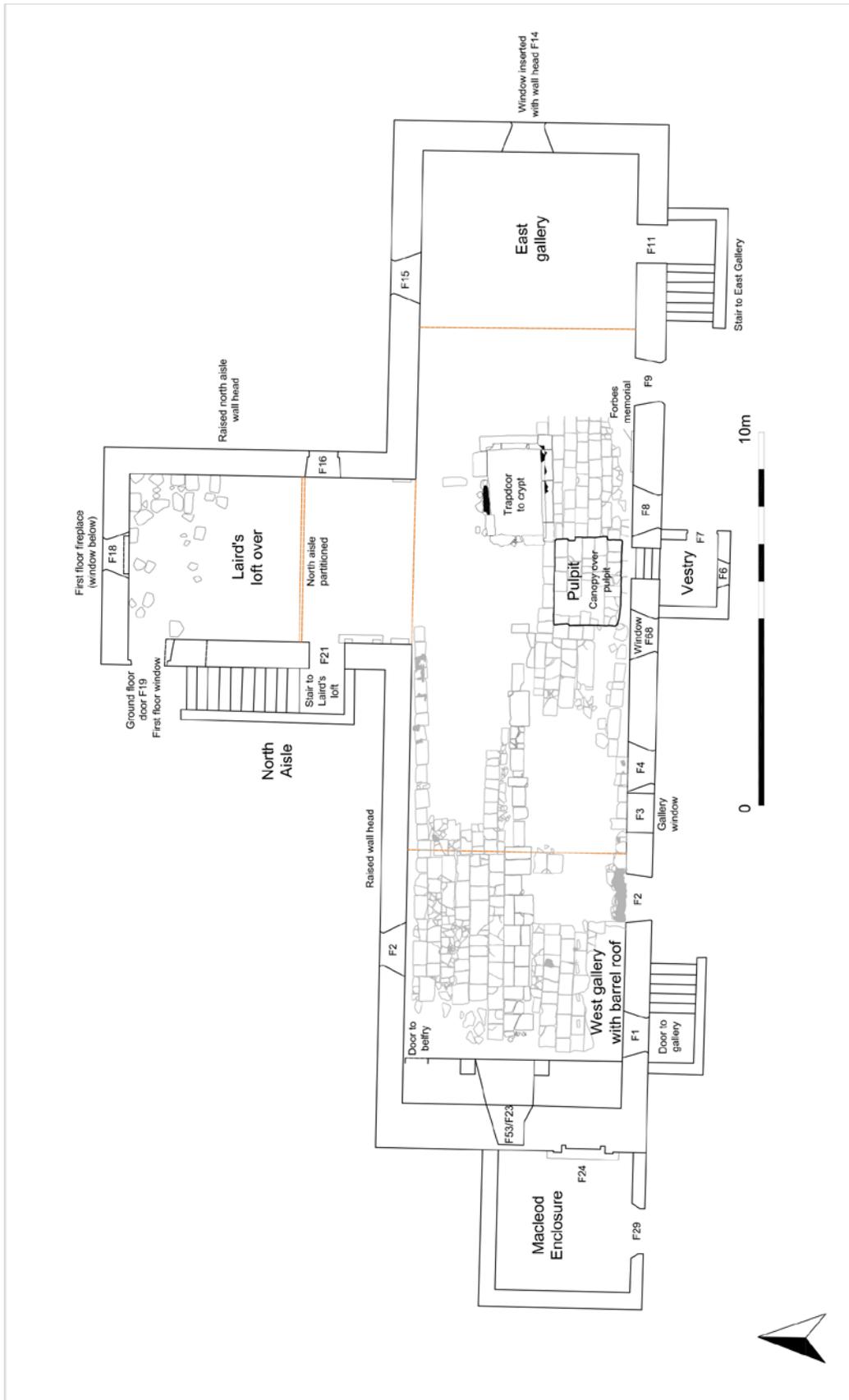
F2

0

F53/F23

F24

Macleod Enclosure

F29

Illustration 7.39
Church 7: late eighteenth to early nineteenth century

Remodelling of the *west gallery* included the creation of a sloping floor providing improved views into the nave and the minister for the heritors and their families who now occupied the former poor loft. A small light was provided for the new loft, facilitated by and probably concomitant with the raising of the wall head. The new church roof provided more headroom and the barrel-vaulted ceiling was removed. Access to the belfry was retained and gained from this gallery. An *east gallery* appears to have been inserted, with an external stair providing access to a door opening, notably straight sided (not chamfered like the doors of Church 6). This door (F11) provided entry to the gallery, which was set at the same height as the laird's loft and the west heritors' gallery. The elevated position and separate entrance suggests the east gallery, like its counterparts, was reserved for parishioners of some standing. The gallery was lit by a new large window (F14) inserted into the east gable, again facilitated by the raised wall head.

Along with more segregated means of entry into the church, a *south vestry* was built sequentially after the raising of the wall head, but very probably as a coherent part of the development. The vestry consisted of a small annexe measuring 1.7 × 1.4m internally and was accessed via a door in its east wall. The interior space was lit by a single window in the south wall and contained a small vestment cupboard in the north-west corner. Access into the pulpit was via a door with timber lintel. A small flight of steps led into the pulpit, which was fitted with a canopy and was the focal point for all galleries and the body of the nave. Evidence for the location of the pulpit in the floor suggests that it persisted in use from Church 5 until the end of Church 7. The three windows of the south wall were heightened, as facilitated by the new wall head.

This period also saw an increase in *memorials in the churchyard*, some of which were markedly elaborate and ostentatious while others are notably humble. The construction of the *Macleod enclosure* outside the west end of the church belongs to part of the growth of investment in elaborate memorials. The enclosure measured *c* 4.5m × *c* 4.0m and it was accessed via a flat-headed entrance set originally with a gate. The enclosure was constructed for the burial of members of the Macleod family of Geanies. Some time after 1807 a memorial to two sons of Donald Macleod of Geanies, who died in 1805 and 1807 respectively, was erected within the enclosure. Exactly when this memorial was erected cannot be determined confidently since a subsequent memorial to Donald Macleod who died in 1834 was not erected until forty years after his death. This later memorial to Macleod, initiated by his last-born child Catherine in 1874, implies that the remains of Macleod, his wife Margaret Crawford and their second son lie in the enclosure; their eleven other children were not permitted that honour. Donald and Margaret were married for nineteen years, during which time Margaret gave birth to twelve children before her death in 1781. A record of the churchyard memorials is curated at the Tarbat Discovery Centre.

Discussion

This period saw a steep rise in the population of Portmahomack and consequently in the number of parishioners. This resulted in crowding inside the church, prompting attempts at alleviating pressure on space while enhancing class distinctions. Ground-floor space within the laird's aisle was given over to parishioners, the 'poor loft' of Church 6 was adapted as a more high-status space for use by the heritors and their families and an eastern gallery was created; the laird's loft and the east and west galleries were high-status areas incorporating separate entrances and elevated viewpoints.

A visitation of 1780 had resulted in the unanimous agreement of the heritors 'to have the aisle belonging to Sir John Gordon and to which he has exclusive right, fitted up in such a manner as to answer the purpose of accommodating the parishioners in attending divine service, the said John Gordon having given his consent to this under condition that the thing is to be done at the joint expense of the heritors, which was also agreed to' (Fraser & Munro 1988, 46–7). It was also agreed that the west gallery, at that time dedicated to the poor of the parish, should be reallocated to the use of the heritors for the price of the seats. This agreement meant that the Laird and the heritors could rise from the ground together. Each part of the community – laird, heritors, minister, upper class, professionals and poor – was now truly consigned to his own estate. Assuming a modicum of space around the pulpit, the whole church now had a capacity for some 1,000 souls.

We get a flavour of a late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Ross-shire cleric (and his sermons) in the person of William Forbes, who was Minster of Tarbat from 1797 to 1838. His brother-in-law described him as 'a profound and scriptural divine … at one time in a flow of high spirits, laughing until his eyes ran over at his own anecdotes – at another sunk in the deepest gloom, which his countenance, naturally dark and sallow, was particularly well suited to express'. William Forbes' exacting standards led him to falsely accuse a parishioner of making his maid Jean Purves pregnant, leading the aptly named Archibald Dudgeon to challenge him to a duel. (In fact the guilty party was Archibald's brother.) William Forbes is remembered in a remarkable eulogy in stone which still hangs on the south wall of the nave, next to the pulpit he occupied for forty years (transcribed in Carver 2008a, 167).

Church 8, after 1843 (OLA 6.3 at 3.7.1)

Church 8 (Illus 7.40) was the form of the building following the Disruption of 1843, when the minister and most of the congregation abandoned it in favour of the Free Church. The principal changes adopted by the relict parishioners were the return of worship to a W–E axis facing a raised timber platform, and the contraction of space required for a much reduced congregation. The western gallery and both floors of the north aisle were blocked off, while the eastern gallery was dismantled to allow the construction of a new vestry. A timber floor was inserted over most of the flagstone floor, some of the flags stacked to form joist supports. Access into Church 8 was reduced to a single south door reusing that of Church 6 (F2). The easternmost south door of Church 6 (F9) was blocked, incorporating the remains of a seventeenth-century grave cover slab to a Mackenzie 'and his spouse' and a post-medieval slab incised with a capital 'A' and further lettering, both of which remain in situ.
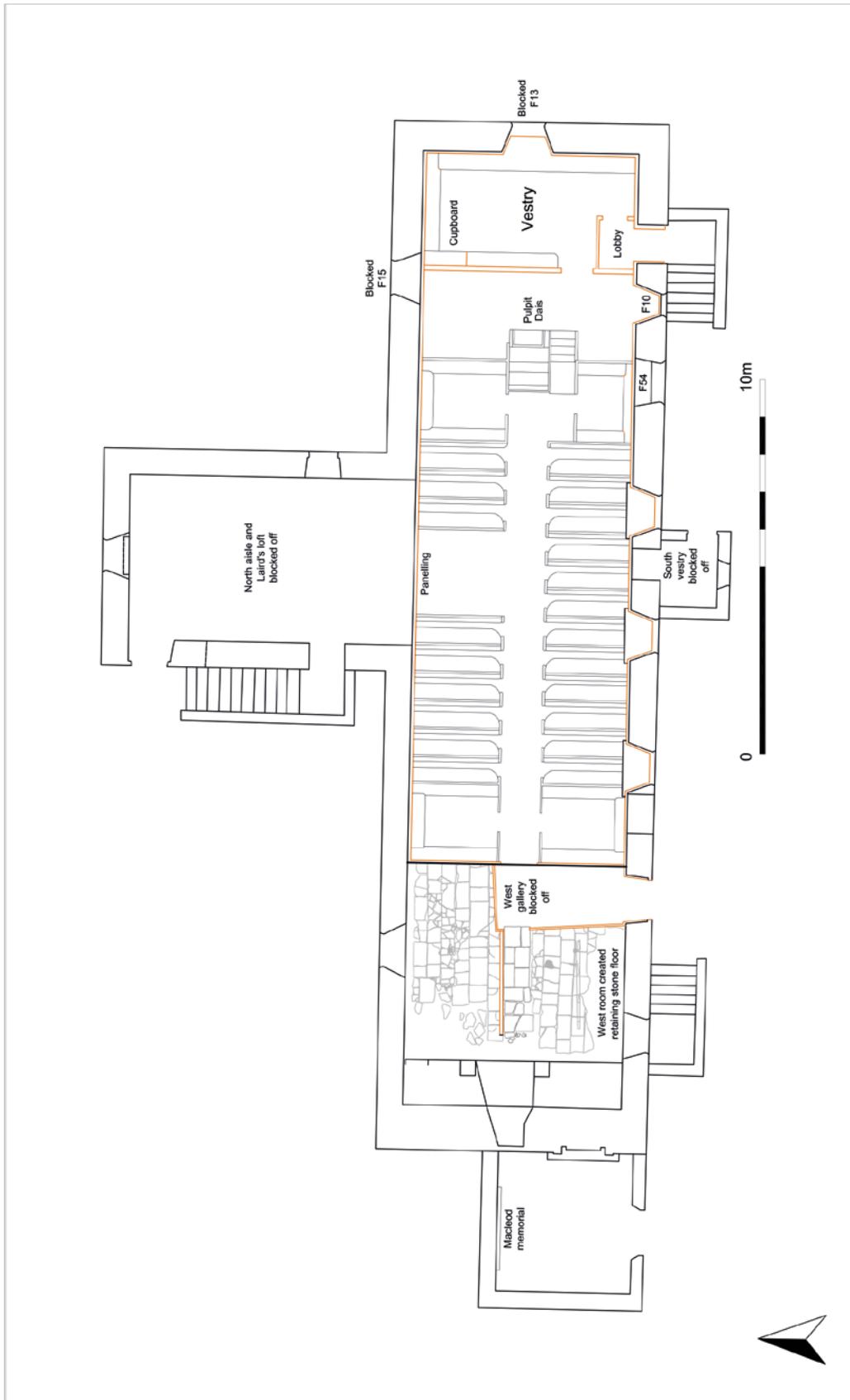
Illustration 7.40
Church 8: the church of the post-Disruption era, after 1843

The *raised east end* incorporated a timber gallery with a *precentor's box* and *vestry* behind. This arrangement rendered the previous pulpit and south vestry obsolete; the pulpit canopy was removed and the door from the south vestry blocked off. The creation of the new vestry required the blocking of east and north windows F13 and F15, while window F10 was inserted adjacent to the south door F11 to light the new pulpit which also retained the use of the former east gallery window F14. The vestry was partitioned from the nave by timber-panelled stud walls. As part of the general contraction of space within Church 8, a *west room* was formed to the left of the entrance by timber stud walls. Within this space the flagstone floor continued in use up until the conversion of the church in 1997. The room was lit with the pre-existing windows of Church 6 and 7 (F22 and F23).
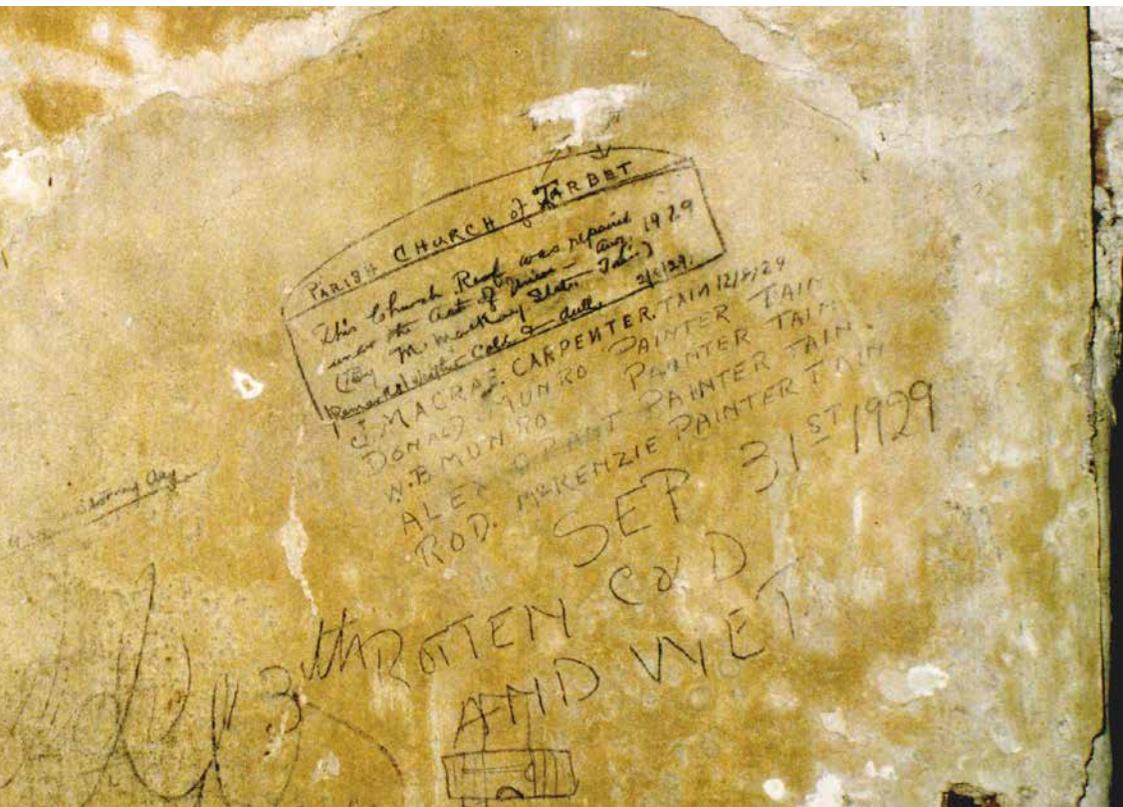

Illustration 7.41
Graffiti made in 1929

The latest layers cleared from the crypt (Int 13) were derived from an extended period of disuse and neglect, now that the fuel store was redundant. The bone component within the fuel peat layers was not consistent with the importation of fen peat and it was evident that the crypt had been colonised by a variety of animals. A minimum of eighteen hares were identified, along with a leveret, rabbits, dog, cat and kitten, many species of bird as well as amphibian and fish bone. At least some of the remains might be attributable to importation by carnivorous animals such as owls and otters – which may have been responsible for the presence

of amphibians and fish. The assemblage suggests that the space had become wholly abandoned by this stage and that the windows were unglazed, allowing ingress to animals. Further features were identified as likely burrows.

Other material recovered seemed to imply some use for the disposal of soil perhaps from grave digging. A fragmentary nineteenth-century memorial stone was identified, along with disarticulated human bone, fragments of leather shoes and ironwork, perhaps coffin fittings. Most notably, six fragments of early medieval sculpture were recovered including three conjoining fragments of slab with incised interlace (TR17). A further small remnant of spiral decoration (TR18) and two fragmentary grave-marker cross-slabs were identified, one with a hollow-armed cross on both sides (1389), the other preserving a pecked cross arm with a double-looped terminal (1384) (Chapter 5.3). An assemblage of fifteen coins from the late medieval period onwards was also recovered (Digest 6.14). A further nine copper-alloy shroud pins were identified along with a late medieval thimble, lace chapes and other dress accessories along with a possible bone stylus.

Discussion

The change of layout and use between Church 8 and its predecessor (Church 7) was the result of a surge in the old struggle between laird and landowners on the one hand and the rest of the congregation on the other. Land reform and improvement was to the benefit of the landowners, but not necessarily to that of their employees, many of whom were being dispossessed by the Highland Clearances. Ministers played a crucial role in this, since their advice and strictures could be pivotal. In the early nineteenth century, the labourers were increasingly supported by ministers of a new Evangelical persuasion, and matters came to a head in 1843, when ministers and congregation broke with the bonds of the heritors and marched out to form the Free Church of Scotland. At Portmahomack, the new Free Church building was erected between St Colman's and the beach (where its successor, dating to 1893, now stands) and most of the congregation joined it. St Colman's congregation, which had numbered over 1,000 before 1843, had dwindled to eighty-five ten years later.

The old Church was adapted to its new circumstances, reaching back into the past to emphasise its authentic ancestry (Church 8). The direction of worship returned to the traditional W–E axis. High box pews were placed at either end of the nave with smaller unenclosed seating in between. A lower ceiling was inserted, and the openings to the north aisle, upper and lower, were

boarded up with timber panelling which also continued round all the nave walls. The nave walls and vestry were painted in lemon yellow (upper half) and terracotta red (lower half) separated by a horizontal black stripe.

Tarbat Old Church had now become the preserve of 'high church' parishioners. In 1866, the General Assembly permitted the return of music and Tarbat subsequently acquired an organ. The eastern platform was shared by the organ and the lectern that held the Bible. In front of it was a box from which the precentor would read out extracts of the sacred texts while the congregation awaited the minister's sermon. The sermon, which might continue for an hour or more, was delivered from the platform above. Perhaps with these lengthy perorations in mind, nineteenth-century heritors were obliged to provide seating spaces for their parishioners to the measure of 18×29 inches per posterior.

However, financial support was not lacking. In 1801 the manse had been totally rebuilt, and the Glebe enlarged from four acres to six acres and two roods. In 1851 a grass Glebe was provided for the minister and in 1874 the land held by Minister Campbell amounted to twelve acres. Geanies made over a small part of their land that adjoined the north-east part of the Glebe. In 1856 an inspection recommended extensive repairs to the church, manse and outbuildings. Church walls, the harling, the roof, stone stairs, windows and doors all needed repair. Notwithstanding the existence of the popular Free Church, the Tarbat churchyard continued to be the main place for the burial of everyone, and the Churchyard was enlarged in 1868 and again in 1893 (Illus 7.37).

The Tarbat churchyard is the resting place of a number of Ross-shire families. The Rosses themselves who held sway in the pre-Reformation centuries are found all over the burial ground. The Mackenzies who rose to fame after the Reformation have a number of clusters of fine monuments, which probably locate their *lairs*. We can also track the resting places of Munros, Mackays, MacLeods, Skinners and many others who lived and died in Easter Ross and knew the Port and its ever-varying fortunes.

In the twentieth century, the upkeep of St Colman's Church was a continuing challenge. In 1928 the church, manse and Glebe were transferred from the heritors to the Church of Scotland Trustees. Graffiti records a repair job in 1929 (Illus 7.41), but only seventeen years later, in 1946, the Church was declared redundant and in 1980 the now derelict building was purchased by Tarbat Historic Trust for £1. This was the point of departure for its restoration and rebirth as a gateway to Scottish history (Illus 7.42).
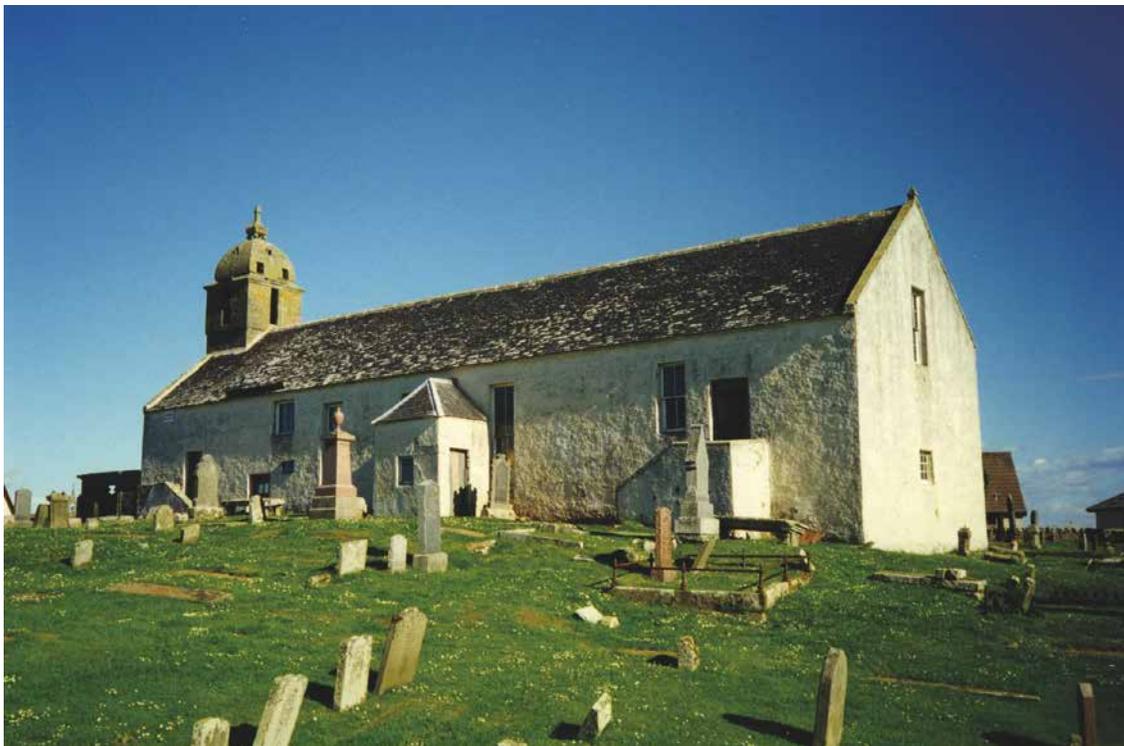

Illustration 7.42
St Colman's Church restored in 1999