

Open or Enclosed: Settlement Patterns and Hillfort Construction in Strathdon, Aberdeenshire, 1800 BC–AD 1000

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This article presents a synthetic précis of enclosed and unenclosed settlement in Aberdeenshire over an extended period of study encompassing the later prehistoric and early medieval periods (1800 BC–AD 1000) where the perceived boundary between prehistory and history is of limited significance. The results will then be placed in a wider Scottish context, with a brief discussion of the changing nature of enclosure within the study area.

A recent upsurge in research, development, and survey work has, in particular, drawn renewed attention to a discrete cluster of around 20 hillforts in the Strathdon area, which lie well beyond Cunliffe's Hillfort Dominated Zones. In general, the settlement record is predominantly unenclosed but, in the first half of the 1st millennium BC the Strathdon area appears to reflect wider UK trends: there are relatively few hillforts and they appear to be aimed at communal gatherings. Their direct use in conflict appears to have been rare and their 'defences' perhaps marked a neutral zone rather than fortification. A putative increase in the volume of agricultural surplus may have led to increased social competition and eventually conflict. After c. 500 BC a variety of local factors influence hillfort design and there is an increase in their number and variability, before the emergence of a single dominant form from Northern Fife to Inverness, and then an abandonment of enclosure until the early medieval period. The current evidence indicates that hillforts were abandoned before the Roman incursions, perhaps by several hundred years and, while they may have been re-occupied, there is as yet no evidence for re-fortification. In contrast during the early medieval period hillforts appear to have been more actively used in both settlement and conflict. They may relate to a period of expansion amongst local competing polities and the cessation of their construction in the 7th century AD may be connected with the emergence of larger regional power structures.

Keywords: Iron Age, early medieval, hillfort, enclosure, Strathdon, Scotland, settlement pattern

The arcing crescent around the Mounth (the eastern edge of the Grampians) between the area of the Firth of Forth to the Moray Firth (Fig. 1) has long been recognised as a distinct archaeological zone (Piggott 1966). The area includes regionally distinctive Iron Age and early medieval data sets and monument types including oblong gateless hillforts with timber-laced ramparts (Feachem 1966, 66–7), hoarding (Hunter 1997), massive metalwork (Hunter 2006), and Pictish symbol stones (Henderson & Henderson 2004). The northern portion of this zone, from the Mounth to the Moray Firth; north-east of Scotland, also has

regionally specific monuments from earlier periods, for example recumbent stone circles (Bradley 2005; Welfare 2011). However, while archaeological research in Aberdeenshire started in the 18th century (eg, Williams 1777), until very recently it has suffered from both a lack of research (Ralston *et al.* 1983, 149; Harding 2004, 84) and the full publication of the work that has taken place (eg, Kirk 1958; Small & Cottam 1972; Greig 1972; Ralston 1980). As a consequence the later prehistoric and early medieval (1800 BC–AD 1000) settlement record of this area has been ill served by archaeology and the area has been generally ignored in synthetic works such as those by Alcock (2003, 8), Hill (1995), Cunliffe (2005, 599), Bradley (2007, 261), and Driscoll (2011, 264–6)

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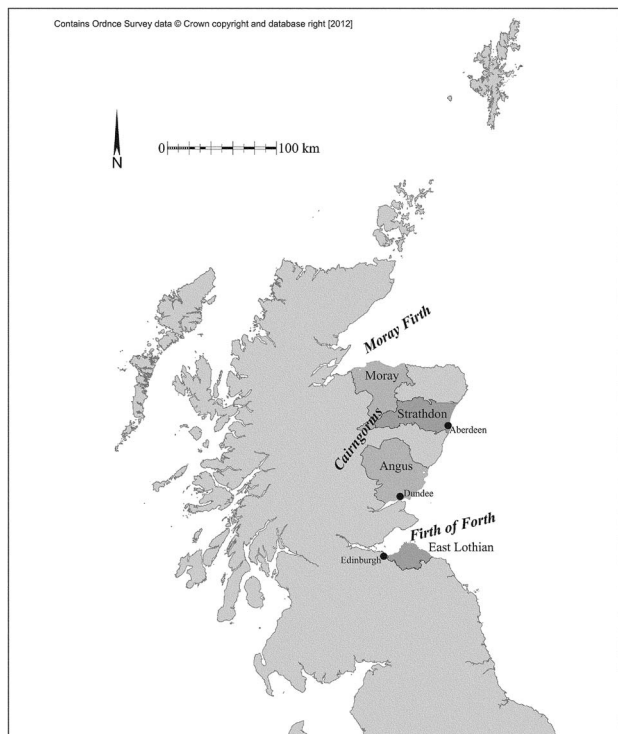


Fig. 1.

Location of Strathdon and comparator zones (Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2012)

that portray the area as a blank. This is, in part, because of a lack of evidence (eg, Haselgrove *et al.* 2001, 25, 86), however, as will be demonstrated, evidence from the wider area has been poorly disseminated and has failed to impact on assessments of the periods in question at the broader level of the British Isles.

This article will first present a brief outline of the history of research from the 18th century to the 2007 publication of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland's (RCAHMS 2007) study: *In the Shadow of Bennachie*. This is followed by a précis of recent research into settlement sequences, the evidence from which will then be placed in a Scottish context, before then being used to explore the factors behind enclosure.

While the end date of this study (AD 1000) may strike the reader as inappropriate for a prehistoric journal, it is argued that this date marks the appearance of substantial historical records in Scotland and the true end of the 'prehistoric' period (Parker Pearson & Sharples 1999, 359; Edwards & Ralston 2003).

This extended study period also allows for a genuine view of settlement patterns in the study area over the *longue durée*.

Explicitly, following Cunliffe (2005, 347) and Armit (2007, 25), the term 'hillfort' is used as a portmanteau term to describe enclosed sites of various sizes, in different locations.

HISTORY OF RESEARCH

Despite the historical issues with research and publication in Aberdeenshire there has been a recent upsurge of rescue and research work, which have reviewed the artefact record of the region (eg, Hunter 2007b; Heald 2011; Campbell 2007), the historical record (Woolf 2007; Fraser 2009), key backlog excavations (Ralston & Sabine 2000; Armit *et al.* 2011) and the field archaeology of the Don valley system, called hereafter Strathdon (RCAHMS 2007). Of particular significance to this paper is the series of rescue excavations covering 50 ha which were undertaken at Kintore (Fig. 2) in 1996–2006 (see Cook & Dunbar 2008 for a précis), in advance of an infrastructure and housing development. This was part of a wave of similar, if smaller; mitigation exercises undertaken across the north-east (see Cressey & Anderson 2011 for a summary).

The excavated sequence from Kintore ran from the Neolithic to the medieval period and included a Roman marching camp. The unenclosed later prehistoric sequence included *c.* 50 round-houses, followed by a series of early medieval unenclosed structures (Cook & Dunbar 2008). While such a scale of excavation and accompanying sequences are now relatively common elsewhere in the UK (eg, Lewis *et al.* 2010), the works at Kintore are at present unique in Scotland. However, the region's hillforts have remained excluded from this period of mitigation excavation. The RCAHMS field survey of Strathdon (2007), grouped the area's 20 or so hillforts and enclosures into a six-fold classification based on size and type of defence (*ibid.*, 100–1). This was in fact the third detailed review, following Feachem (1966), and Ralston (*et al.* 1983), each of which came up with different conclusions, none of which was based on excavation.

SETTLEMENT SEQUENCE

The settlement record for Scotland north of the Forth is interpreted as being dominated by unenclosed

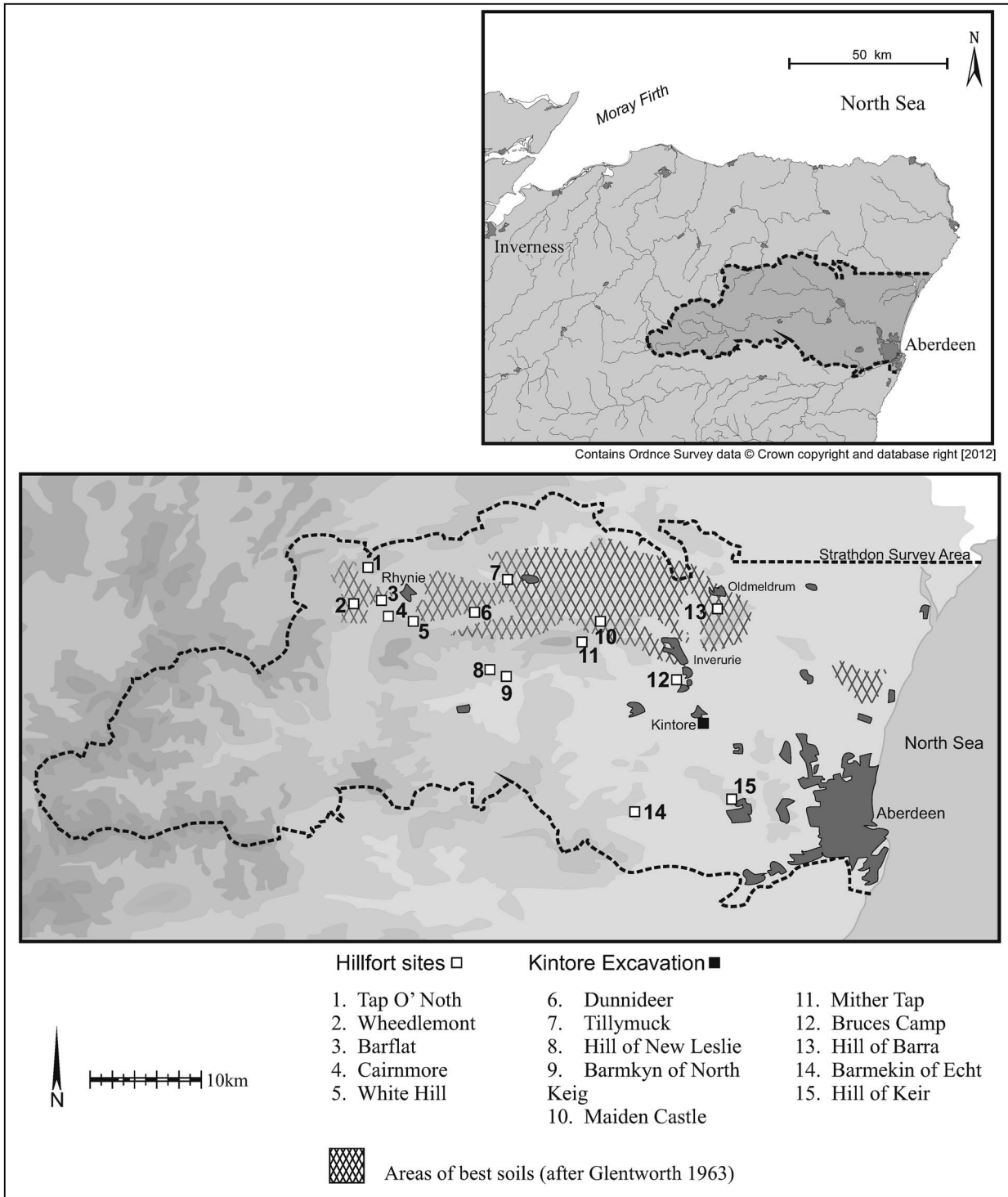


Fig. 2. Detailed plan of study area (Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2012)

structures in the later prehistoric and early medieval periods (Macinnes 1982; Alcock 1988). However, this model was based on very little excavation (Davis 2007). In fact, prior to the year 2000, substantial excavated unenclosed settlements were rare and tended to derive from development of upland sites (Pope 2003, 421–2), Dalladies (Kincardineshire) and Douglasmuir (Angus) represented two of the few unenclosed lowland settlements (Watkins 1980; Kendrick 1995) with nine and seven round-houses respectively. Kirk's work in the Sands of Forvie (Aberdeenshire) appears to have identified 19 round-houses (1958), though they were neither fully recorded nor reported upon (Ralston & Sabine 2000). However, the existing evidence indicates that in Scotland round-houses were constructed over a long period between *c.* 1800 BC and *c.* AD 500 (Crone 2000; Ashmore 2001; Pope 2003).

With regard to early medieval settlement, there are in fact no firmly dated unenclosed settlement sites from the Firth of Forth to the Moray Firth between *c.* AD 250 and 550 (Ralston 1997). There are post-southern structures at Carlungie and Ardestie (Angus; Wainwright 1955, 92; 1963), the occasional radiocarbon date, for example, Dalladies 2 (Fettercairn; Watkins 1980, 164), but well dated formal structures like those at Easter Kinnear (Fife; Driscoll 1997) or the Pitcarmick (Perthshire) series (Harding 2004, 240–3) date to after AD 500.

Excavation in and around Kintore between 1999 and 2010 recorded in excess of 70 unenclosed structures dating from *c.* 1800 BC–AD 250 (Alexander 2000; Johnson 2004; Murray & Murray 2006; White & Richardson 2010; Cook *et al.* forthcoming), representing the largest regional assemblage of round-houses ever excavated in Scotland by a significant factor (Pope 2003, 421–2). It is not clear if the absence of round-houses after AD 250 represents a real gap or simply one in the evidence but it is echoed elsewhere in Scotland north of the Forth (Hunter 2007a, 49; see also Armit *et al.* 2011).

There are three Roman marching camps in Strathdon (RCAHMS 2007, 111–14) and excavation at Kintore revealed at least two phases of Roman occupation: one in the late 1st century and one in either the late 2nd or early 3rd century. In addition, there was a series of late dates from pits and ovens that bridge the above-mentioned gap in the settlement record (Alexander 2000, 64; Cook & Dunbar 2008, 33). These may represent the remains of highly truncated structures but, given the nature

of the site and in the opinion of the excavator, it seems more likely that they indicate a transient, less permanent system of occupation. It may well be that more structured settlement exists within the various cropmark sites (RCAHMS 2007, 94) but at present these remain untested. A subsequent genuine gap in the unenclosed sequence until the 7th–10th centuries AD reflects the wider pattern (see above), when unenclosed rectilinear structures, associated with underground storage, and corn-drying kilns appear (Cook & Dunbar 2008, 149–50 and see below).

Beyond Strathdon, but still in the north-east, important new evidence has been produced from Culduthel, Birnie, and Seafield (Murray 2007; Hunter 2007a; Cressey & Anderson 2011). These sites have significant Late Iron Age sequences (though none extends beyond *c.* AD 250), including metalworking, imported goods, and two Roman coin hoards. Intriguingly, research by Hunter (2007a, 49) indicates that there is a break in Roman imports after AD 250, which he links to a deliberate policy of withdrawal of Roman support in an attempt to destabilise local polities (*ibid.*).

The absence of coherent settlement structures extends across the 4th century conflicts between 'Picts' and the Roman provinces in southern Britain (Fraser 2009, 50–1). The 4th century Friotzheim dice tower appears to record a Roman victory against the Picts (Hall 2007, 3). The scale and extent of these conflicts are unknown, although the Barbarian Conspiracy of AD 367 involved the *Verturiones*, who are now argued by Fraser to be located north of the Mounth near Inverness, rather than to its south as traditionally proposed (Fraser 2009, 50–1). It is possible to suggest that the Verturionian sphere of influence anticipated that of the early medieval kingdom of *Fortriu*, which saw an expansion of power in the late 7th century, involving attacks on the enclosed site at Dunottar, Stonehaven (Fraser 2009, 214). All of these campaigns would by necessity have involved crossing Strathdon.

In addition, despite the apparent absence of coherent unenclosed settlement, there is clearly some form of population and activity in the area as there are both Class I Pictish symbol stones (Foster 2004, 70–1; Henderson & Henderson 2004) and a series of hoards in Aberdeenshire (Heald 2001). Fraser and Halliday (2011) have argued that Class I symbol stones are located at prominent positions along parish boundaries which appear to reflect older boundaries.

TABLE 1: UNENCLOSED SETTLEMENT PATTERN IN STRATHDON

<i>Period</i>	<i>Isolated/ agglomerate</i>	<i>Entrance orientation</i>	<i>Pits</i>	<i>Destruction by fire</i>	<i>Ritual enrich-ment</i>	<i>External feature</i>	<i>Settlement on marginal ground</i>	<i>Wider site types/finds</i>
MBA 1800–1300 BC	isolated	varied	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	
LBA 1300–800 BC	isolated	S	yes up	yes	yes	no	no	
EIA 800–400 BC	isolated	SE	yes down	yes	no	no	yes?	
MIA 400–50 BC	agglomerate	SE & NW	yes down	yes	no	yes	yes?	pit alignment
LIAa 50 BC–AD 250	isolated	SE & NW	yes same	yes	no	no	no	souterrains, large metalwork
LIAb AD 250–400	–	–	–	–	–	–	no	
EMa AD 400–650	–	–	–	–	–	–	no	
EMb AD 650–1000	isolated	?	no	yes	no	yes	no	

The environmental record is poorly understood and there have been very few pollen cores undertaken from the north-east (RCAHMS 2008, 25–43); the available evidence has been stretched from other areas to cover this zone. For example, it is not clear what impact if any the putative Late Bronze Age climatic deterioration (Ashmore 1996, 113–18; Cowie & Shepherd 2003, 165–7) had on the north-east and, indeed, its impact is disputed elsewhere (Tipping 2002; Bradley 2007, 179). Others have linked this event to the appearance of enclosure and the abandonment of marginal uplands (Thomas 1997).

During the closing centuries BC there is pollen evidence from south-east Scotland for increased woodland clearance and agricultural intensification (Tipping 1994, 31–3). This was combined with the wider adoption of the rotary quern in the second half of the 1st millennium BC across Scotland (McLaren & Hunter 2008). In the same period there is evidence from Dubton, Angus and Lairg (Sutherland) for expansion onto more marginal ground (Church 2002; McCullagh & Tipping 1998), with the latter made possible by the introduction of iron ploughs (*ibid.*, 211). These various factors are taken to indicate that there may have been an agricultural surplus produced in the second half of the 1st millennium BC and certainly in the closing centuries, and that this could well have included Strathdon.

Table 1 identifies the main trends in Strathdon unenclosed settlement and the various factors measured from it. The periods used follow the Kintore excavation (Cook & Dunbar 2008, 25), with the Late Iron Age sub-divided around AD 250. Here ‘Pits’ refers to the excavation of pits within the interior of the structure, which Brück has argued may have been dug at key points in the inhabitants’ lifecycle (1999). While this may be conjecture there are clear chronological patterns in the numbers of pits present within round-house interiors of the Kintore structures (Cook & Dunbar 2008, 347–6; 356–7). The process of ‘ritual enrichment’ described by LaMotta and Schiffer (1999), takes place near the end of active use of a round-house, prior to abandonment, where material is placed within it. This could represent the abandonment of large bulky or broken items, the dumping of rubbish from neighbouring settlements, or the deliberate deposition of material of perceived ritual significance. Within Strathdon this takes place in Bronze Age structures but not Iron Age or early medieval ones, which contain very few finds. Finally, ‘external feature’ relates to contemporaneous features relating to activity taking place externally to the structure, for example corn-dying kilns or furnaces.

This evidence points to a number of trends. Most of the sequence is represented by isolated structures: only two periods show clusters of either settlement or

external features: Middle Iron Age and Early Medieval b. In the Middle Iron Age the putative agricultural surplus of the closing centuries BC (see above) may have led to population growth and emergence of a more complex society (Cook & Dunbar 2008, 347–6). The same process may be tentatively suggested for the Early Medieval b period, from the appearance of corn-kilns and underground storage areas which hint at the large scale storage of agricultural produce (*ibid.*, 356–7). Pits within round-houses tend to be Bronze Age; in the Iron Age they appear outside structure, for example in pit alignments, which Cook and Dunbar (2008, 364) argue reflects a change of focus for ritual activity from the household to more public arenas. Ritual enrichment occurs in the Bronze Age but not the Iron Age, when structures contain virtually no artefacts at all. This represents a considerable change given the volume of material deposited in Bronze Age structures and may again suggest that deposition shifted to open air locations (Hunter 1997).

Destruction by fire is a constant feature, and it is not clear if this was by accident or design; if by design one could argue for it being part of the closure process at the abandonment of the house, or perhaps even as a result of conflict.

Entrance orientation varies within the round-house assemblage with a hint of an anticlockwise movement over time, though in addition, during the Middle and Late Iron Age at Kintore, only structures with ring-ditches and/or an erosional hollow within the interior (Cook & Dunbar 2008, 12–13; Harding 2009, 76–81) have north-west facing entrances; all the others (post-ring) face south-east. It has been argued that this may reflect variety in function or status (*ibid.*, 340–1). Certainly in north-eastern Scotland the erosional hollow tends to be focused in the northern or north-eastern sector of the round-house interior. Furthermore, within the Kintore sequence the position of the ring-ditch relative to the internal post-ring also changes: in Middle and Late Bronze Age houses it lies within the post-ring while in Iron Age round-houses it lies outside it (*ibid.*, 331–333).

As stated above, hillforts were excluded from this research. In the absence of any direct dating a variety of models was explored for their construction and date including an early medieval origin (Ralston 1987); whether they had ceased to be built prior to the Roman invasions (Hanson & Maxwell 1983, 12–14) or abandoned before completion in the face of

invasion (Shepherd & Ralston 1979, 20); and whether some were contemporaneous with the invasions (Fraser 2005, 40). However, in general, the Strathdon sites were assumed to be Iron Age (Armit & Ralston 2003, 172–8) and were ignored in early medieval synopses (Alcock 1988). This interpretation was supported by the absence of both early medieval imported goods (Campbell 2007) and non-ferrous metalworking (Heald 2011). Beyond Strathdon early medieval hillforts were rare, located on the coast, and associated with elite (or royal) settlement in a hierarchical pattern and in use in the late 4th–early 9th centuries, before being abandoned in favour of unenclosed high status sites (Fraser 2009, 366).

APPROACH

In order to link the hillforts to the unenclosed sequence the author examined one site from each of the RCAHMS' six fold classification using key-hole excavation techniques (eg, Alcock & Alcock 1992). Such an approach minimises costs by restricting the level of fieldwork and thus the resultant post-excavation and reporting entailments. The research strategy was boiled down to a single question: to when do the enclosing works date? Key-hole trenches focused on ditches and ramparts, entrances were avoided, and excavation was minimised wherever possible. Taphonomically secure charcoal samples were recovered and dated to provide a framework for enclosure of an individual site. While the key-hole approach is not without its criticism (eg, Clarke 2001) and problems since it dates individual events in a complex site rather than establishing an overall sequence, the explicit aim of the project was to provide a structured contribution to a narrative of the role of enclosure in 1st millennia societies in north-east Scotland. Having established such a narrative structure this permits more complex questions regarding chronology and function to be asked by future researchers and for the model to be tested.¹

HILLFORTS OF STRATHDON ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

While specific hillforts in Strathdon had been subject to repeated survey and comment, even back to the 18th century (Williams 1777), none had been subject to any modern excavation. The RCAHMS volume placed 18 forts and one cropmark enclosure in the

scheme outlined below, although the order has no chronological significance (2007, 100–1; Fig. 2). A 20th site, Mither Tap, Bennachie was not included in this scheme. The sites are focused on the northern and eastern edge of the Bennachie range of hills, although one (Barmkyn of North Keig) is on the southern side of this range. This may indicate that the sites are connected to the main routes north–south and east–west around the hill range rather than those going into it. However, this distribution may also be connected with the quality of the soils which predominantly belong to the Insh Association, being amongst the most fertile in Aberdeenshire (Glentworth 1963, 43–4). The same parcel of land also contains the densest concentration of both Neolithic and early medieval sites and artefacts in the region (RCAHMS 2007, 75, 118).

The classification system can be summarised as follows:

- Type 1: oblong forts (Dunnideer and Tap o’Noth inner fort);
- Type 2: multivallate forts (Barra Hill and Barmekin of Echt);
- Type 3: large forts (Dunnideer outer enclosure, Bruce’s Camp, and Tillymuick);
- Type 4: very large enclosures (Hill of Newleslie and outer fort at Tap o’Noth);
- Type 5: small enclosures (Wheedlemont, Maiden Castle outer enclosure, and Barflat).
- Type 6: small thick stone walled enclosures (Cairnmore, Barmkyn of North Keig, White Hill, Hill of Keir, and Maiden Castle inner enclosure).

Two modifications are offered to this scheme. Both Type 2 hillforts, Hill of Barra and Barmekin of Echt have two phases (RCAHMS 2007, 98–99); Type 2a is therefore proposed to describe the outer multivallate fort with multiple entrances and Type 2b to define the second phase: a univallate fort with a single entrance, but within Type 2a.

The second qualification is more contentious. The Type 6 enclosures include two forms: those that could just be (but were not necessarily) roofed (Maiden Castle inner enclosure, Hill of Keir, and White Hill) and those that could not be (Cairnmore and Barmkyn of North Keig). A similar argument has been advanced in Argyll by Harding (1984) who argued that the ‘dun’ grouping (RCAHMS 1971, 18) homogenised sites

that could be roofed and those that could not be and that this could well mask chronological or functional differences. Thus the author proposes for Strathdon that Type 6a represents small, potentially roofable structures and 6b larger, non-roofed ones.

The precise dating of small, roofable circular stone structures is unclear, since though many have clear Late Iron Age origins and are argued to be cognate forms with brochs, they frequently display early medieval reuse (Harding 1984; Armit 1990, 55–9; Taylor 1990), leading to considerable debate as to whether some may be *de novo* early medieval constructions (Alcock 2003, 186–90). As will be demonstrated, evidence from Maiden Castle, Insh (Cook 2011a) supports this latter contention.

The oblong forts, Dunnideer and Tap o’Noth, are part of the series first identified by Feachem (1966, 67, fig. 5). They are rectangular, with massive stone timber-laced ramparts, frequently vitrified, without obvious entrances, often on prominent hilltops, and most commonly found between the Firth of Forth and the Moray Firth in two discrete clusters: the first at Angus, Perthshire, and North Fife and the second around Inverness (Fig. 3). While the massive walls of these forts and the apparent absence of entrances lends them the air of impregnable fortresses, others have suggested non-defensive ceremonial functions, with parallels to both European *Viererckschanzen* and the Banqueting Hall at Tara (Harding 2004, 87). One of the more famous examples, Finavon (Alexander 2002), derives from a ‘nemeton’ place-name (Watson 1926, 250), which has been linked to ritual locations in accounts of ‘Celtic’ religion (Ross 1974, 62–3), although this appears to be the only such example. In addition, it is increasingly clear that *Viererckschanzen* are far more complex than previously suggested and many are likely to be normal settlements (Von Nicola 2009). In the absence of modern excavation within the interior of an oblong fort, it is more prudent to avoid detailed discussions of their functions. Their precise date has also been subject to vigorous debate (Alexander 2002; Cook 2010b): recent archaeomagnetic and radiocarbon dating suggests that they were destroyed in the closing centuries cal BC (Gentles 1993; Ralston 2006, 151), perhaps with a flourish centred around 250 BC (Cook 2010b).

These massive ramparts represent a substantial investment of resources (timber and stone) as well as effort. Their subsequent vitrification, a process by which stones are fused together at temperatures in

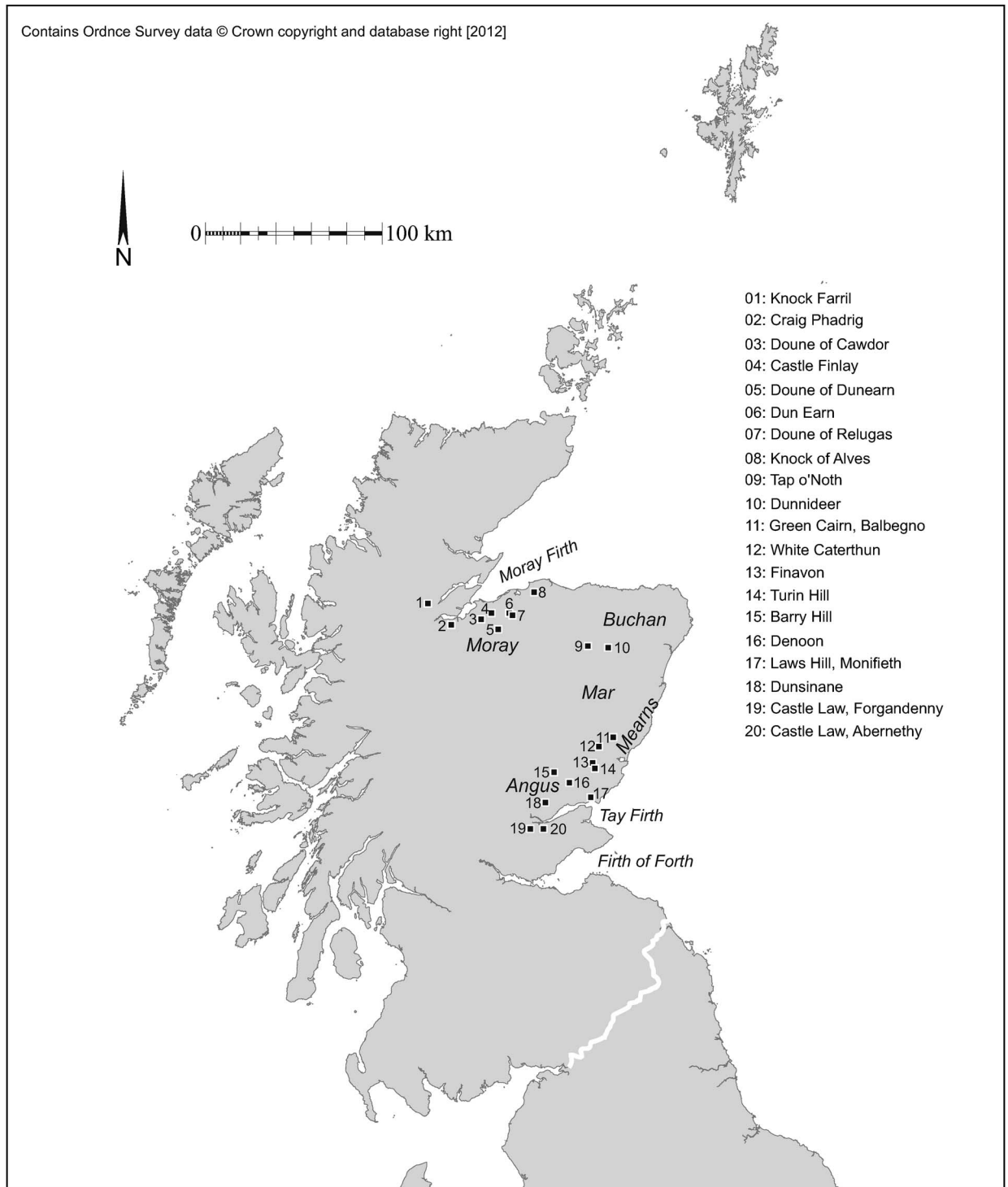


Fig. 3.
 Distribution of oblong forts across Scotland (after Feachem 1966 & Ralston *et al.* 1983) (Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2012)

excess of 1000°C (Ralston 2006, 146), represents an even more impressive investment (Ralston 1986). Vitrification requires timber-laced ramparts and involves substantial quantities of fuel over an extended period of time; it is argued that the level of vitrification present on Dunnideer and Tap o’Noth would take days, if not weeks, to achieve (Ralston 2006, 163). The resulting smoke during the day would be seen from far and wide, while the fire at night would be seen over an even further distance, creating a stunning display. Ralston (*ibid.*) has argued that those sites with vitrification around their entire circuit (eg, Dunnideer and Tap-o’Noth) may have required two phases of firing, given prevailing winds.

Vitrification has no chronological or geographical significance and occurs across Europe (Ralston 2006, 143–63). At present there are no vitrified structures in England or Wales but the process is likely to be related to the slaked (limestone) ramparts of the Welsh Marches (Cunliffe 2005, 636; Moore 2006, 63). Several models behind vitrification have been discussed: accidental fire, constructional factors (a deliberate act undertaken to strengthen the rampart), and a deliberate act of destruction (Mackie 1976; Ralston 2006, 162–3). Accidental fires would be unlikely to have such sustained effects and the unpredictability of the process suggests it was not constructional (*ibid.*). Given the inherent difficulties of achieving vitrification, the current totals presumably represent an underestimate of the number of forts fired, the majority reaching insufficient temperature to vitrify sufficient material for it to be observable.

Current views tend to see vitrification as either an act of aggression following capture (Armit 1997, 59; Ralston 2006, 163) or as ‘ritual closure’ at the end of the site’s active life (Armit 2005, 52–3; Moore 2006, 63), akin to the destruction of many Neolithic ritual monuments (Noble 2006, 45–70), or as argued for the Kintore unenclosed round-houses (see above; Cook & Dunbar 2008, 342–3).

In addition to the hillforts, Strathdon also contains over 60 cropmark enclosures. The RCAHMS (2007, 93–4) mapped a range of sizes but made no attempt to further classify them. Some are the ploughed equivalents to some of the hillfort types. For example, Barflat, a small multivallate enclosure (*ibid.*, 100) is similar to the Type 5 enclosures at Wheedlemont and Maiden Castle, while others (*c.*39, *ibid.*) appear to be single large round-houses set within enclosures, and there are clearly a number of more substantial

enclosures. However, without excavation, it is impossible to comment further.

RESULTS

Six sites (Fig. 4), representing the different classes within the revised RCAHMS hillfort scheme, were sampled and are described below. Of these, five were successfully dated. It should be noted that the reasons for selecting these sites over others were entirely pragmatic, ie, ease of access, landowner willingness, etc. In addition, within the immediate environs of Kintore and the unenclosed round-house sequence, were two cropmark enclosures: Wester Fintray and Suttie (RCAHMS 2007, 94), which were also sampled. Two other relevant sites were also subject to excavation: Mither Tap, Bennachie (Atkinson 2007) and Barflat, Rhynie (Noble & Gondek 2010; 2011). The detailed results have been published elsewhere (see Cook 2011b for a *précis*) and only the key results are summarised here (Table 2).² Table 3 presents an extrapolation of the excavation results across the RCAHMS scheme.

The most obvious trend is that the predominant settlement type in the north-east is unenclosed; the 20 or so hillforts in the sample area derive from a *c.* 3000 years period. There are also large areas of Strathdon without any hillforts (Fig. 2) although there is no absence of suitable hills. It seems unlikely that many examples have been destroyed elsewhere, as agricultural improvements has tended to avoid hilltops (Bruce Mann pers. comm.).

The dated hillforts cluster into two broad periods: the Early–Middle Iron Age and the early medieval period (Fig. 5). Hill of Newleslie, the outer enclosures of Tap o’Noth, Hill of Barra, and Barmekin of Echt, remain undated. The first two are argued to be Late Bronze Age by comparison with other large hilltop enclosures, such as Eildon Hill North in the Scottish Borders (Rideout *et al.* 1992, 62–3) and Traprain Law, East Lothian (Armit *et al.* 2002; though see Sharples, 2011 for a *contra* argument). Evidence for the other two is based on comparison with the Brown and White Caterthuns in Angus (Dunwell & Strachan 2007).

It is also apparent that, while the majority of sites have some level of earlier enclosing works, most of the hillforts are apparently *de novo* locations and only four (Tap o’ Noth, Dunnideer, Hill of Barra, and Barmekin of Echt) are located within earlier enclosures,

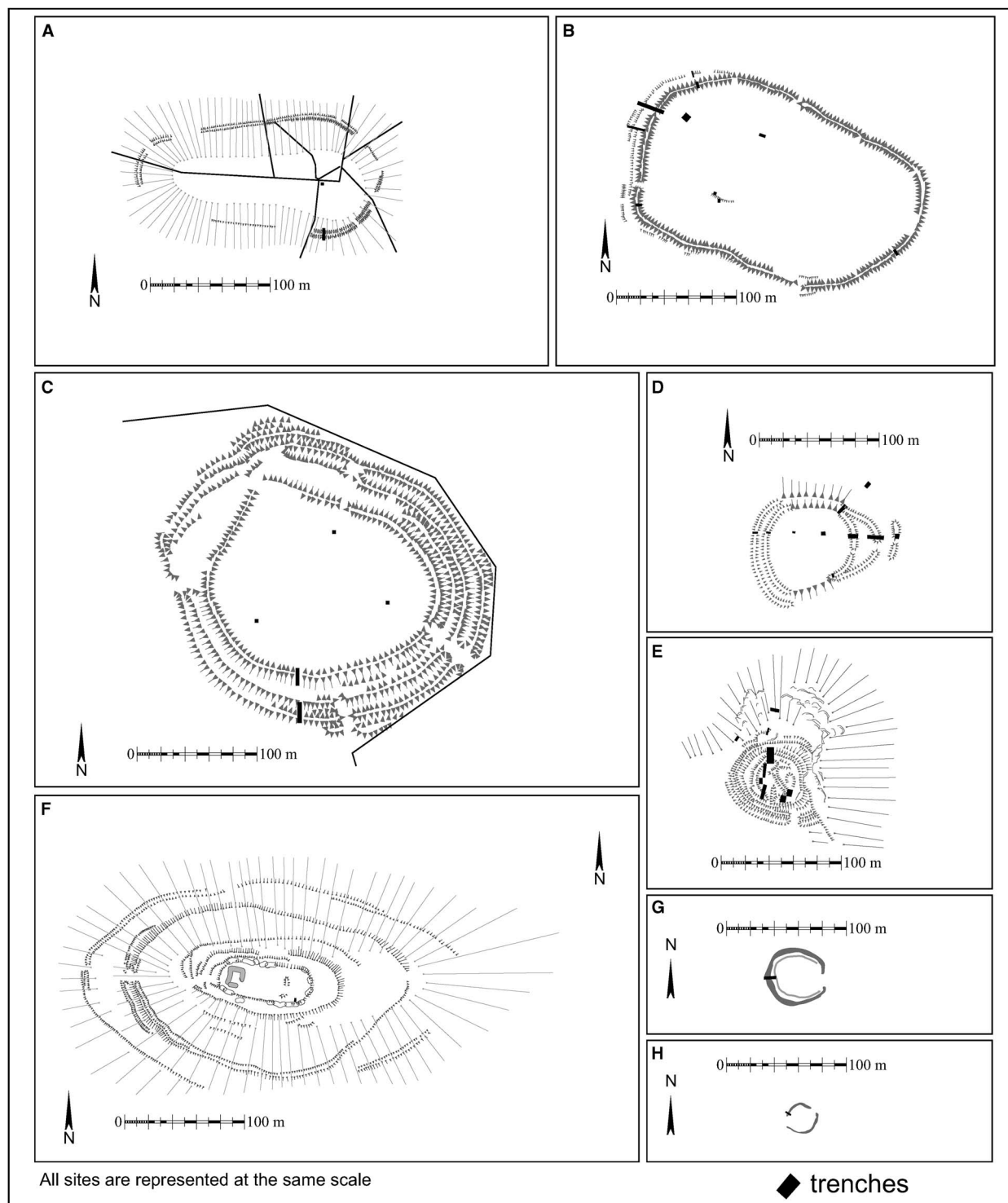


Fig. 4.

Plans of sampled sites. A: Hill of Newleslie; B: Bruce's Camp; C: Hill of Barra; D: Cairnmore; E: Maiden Castle; F: Dunnideer; G: Suttie; H: Wester Fintray (Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2012)

TABLE 2: RADIOCARBON DATES FROM SAMPLED SITES

<i>Site</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Depositional context</i>	<i>Date BP</i>	<i>Calibrated 1σ</i>	<i>Calibrated 2σ</i>	$\delta^{13}C\%$
Hill of Barra	SUERC-28729	charcoal	Burnt wood within lower fill of ditch	secondary	2405 ± 35	520–400 BC	560–390 BC (79.4%)	–25.8
Dunnideer	SUERC-28730	charcoal	Burnt wood within collapsed rampart	Primary	2210 ± 35	330–270 BC (28.0%) 260–200 BC (32.1%)	390–190 BC	–25.0
Dunnideer	SUERC-22161	charcoal	Burnt wood at base of collapsed rampart	Primary	2180 ± 30	360–280 BC (44.7%) 240–160 BC (23.5%)	370–160 BC	–25.9
Suttie	SUERC-12918	charcoal	Charcoal in fill of ditch	secondary	2160 ± 40	360–290 BC (30.8%) 240–160 BC (33.0%) 140–110 BC (4.5%)	370–90 BC	–27.7
Wester Fintray	SUERC-12916	charcoal	Charcoal in fill of ditch	secondary	2275 ± 40	400–350 BC (35.8%) 290–230 BC (32.4%)	410–340 BC (42.6%) 320–200 BC (52.8%)	–27.8
Maiden Castle	SUERC-22160	charcoal	Charcoal under inner enclosure wall	Primary	1500 ± 30	AD 530–640	AD 540–600	–27.9
Maiden Castle	SUERC-15909	charcoal	Charcoal within fill of ditch	Secondary	1495 ± 40	AD 535–620	AD 500–650	–25.4
Maiden Castle	SUERC-15908	charcoal	Charcoal under outer bank	primary	1540 ± 40	4AD 30–570	AD 420–610	–25.0
Hill of Barra	SUERC-28728	charcoal	Charcoal in basal fill of ditch	secondary	1615 ± 35	AD 480–540	AD 380–580	–26.1
Cairnmore	SUERC-32840	charcoal	Under middle rampart	secondary	1510 ± 30	AD 410–550	AD 480–540	–26
Cairnmore	SUERC-32839	charcoal	Destruction layer over rampart	primary	1580 ± 30	AD 500–630	AD 535–600	–25.9

TABLE 3: EXTRAPOLATED EVIDENCE ACROSS RCAHMS SCHEME

<i>Period</i>	<i>Dated sites</i>	<i>RCAHMS type</i>	<i>Interior use only</i>	<i>Extrapolated sites</i>	<i>No. forts (de novo or refortified)</i>
MBA	–	–	–	–	–
1800–1300 BC					
LBA 1300–800 BC	Hill of Newleslie?	4	–	Tap o'Noth outer	2
EIA 800–400 BC	Hill of Barra Outer?	2a	–	Barmekin of Echt outer	2
MIA 400–50 BC	Hill of Barra inner, Bruce's Camp, Dunnideer inner, Wester Fintray and Suttie	1, 2b, 3, cropmark enclosures	–	Barmekin of Echt inner Tillymuick, Tap o'Noth inner, Dunnideer outer	7 (+ 2 cropmark enclosures)
LIAa 50 BC–AD 250	–	–	Bruce's Camp	–	–
LIAb AD 250–400	–	–	Bruce's Camp	–	–
EMa AD 400–650	Maiden Castle inner, Maiden Castle outer, Cairnmore, Barflat	5, 6a, 6b	Bruce's Camp; Mither Tap	White Hill, Barmkyn North Keig, Hill of Keir, Wheedlemont, Hill of Barra	9
EMb AD 650–1000	–	–	Mither Tap	–	–

although this number might increase with further excavation.

The Early/Middle Iron Age evidence indicates the following sequence of dated events:

- Hill of Barra inner enclosure: constructed before 560–360 cal BC
- Bruce's Camp fired after 410–340 cal BC
- Dunnideer fired between 390 and 257 cal BC, and most likely towards the latter end of that range, as well as being probably constructed in the same period but after the outer Type 3 hillfort
- Wester Fintray constructed before 320–200 cal BC
- Suttie constructed before 370–90 cal BC

It is difficult to establish a definitive chronology within the sample. In specific cases the stratigraphic sequence helps. For example, the Dunnideer inner enclosure was constructed *after* the outer enclosure (Type 3) and thus, by extrapolation, Bruce's Camp (also a Type 3) is likely to be earlier than Dunnideer. However, how does the Hill of Barra inner enclosure (constructed before 560–360 cal BC) relate to Bruce's Camp (destroyed by fire after 410–340 cal BC) as the dates overlap so the sites could be contemporaneous? And how do they both relate to the two cropmark enclosures? At present none of the sites can be

confidently dated to the final two centuries BC and the bulk of radiocarbon dates are focused between *c.* 600 and 200 cal BC. It is further argued that this represents a sequence rather than a cluster of contemporary sites.

This appears to suggest a move from a variety of forms and sizes of hillfort and enclosure to a single form: the oblong fort, although the possibility exists that the cropmark enclosures at Wester Fintray and Suttie were contemporaneous or later. However, despite the lack of internal evidence, it may be more appropriate to see these as part and parcel of the increasing complexity of unenclosed settlement at Kintore, perhaps even as elite residences.

The change in hillfort design encompasses a move from multiple entrances (Hill of Barra outer) to single entrances (Hill of Barra inner; Bruce's Camp) to no entrances (Dunnideer oblong enclosure). In addition, the enclosing works become generally more substantial (Hill of Barra outer to Dunnideer); more regular in size around their circuit (Hill of Barra and Bruce's Camp are at their largest at the entrances while Dunnideer and Tap o'Noth are a regular size), and timber-lacing is introduced into their construction (Bruce's Camp and Dunnideer). It might be argued that timber-lacing itself produces larger and more evenly constructed ramparts but this was not the case at Bruce's Camp. Finally, the

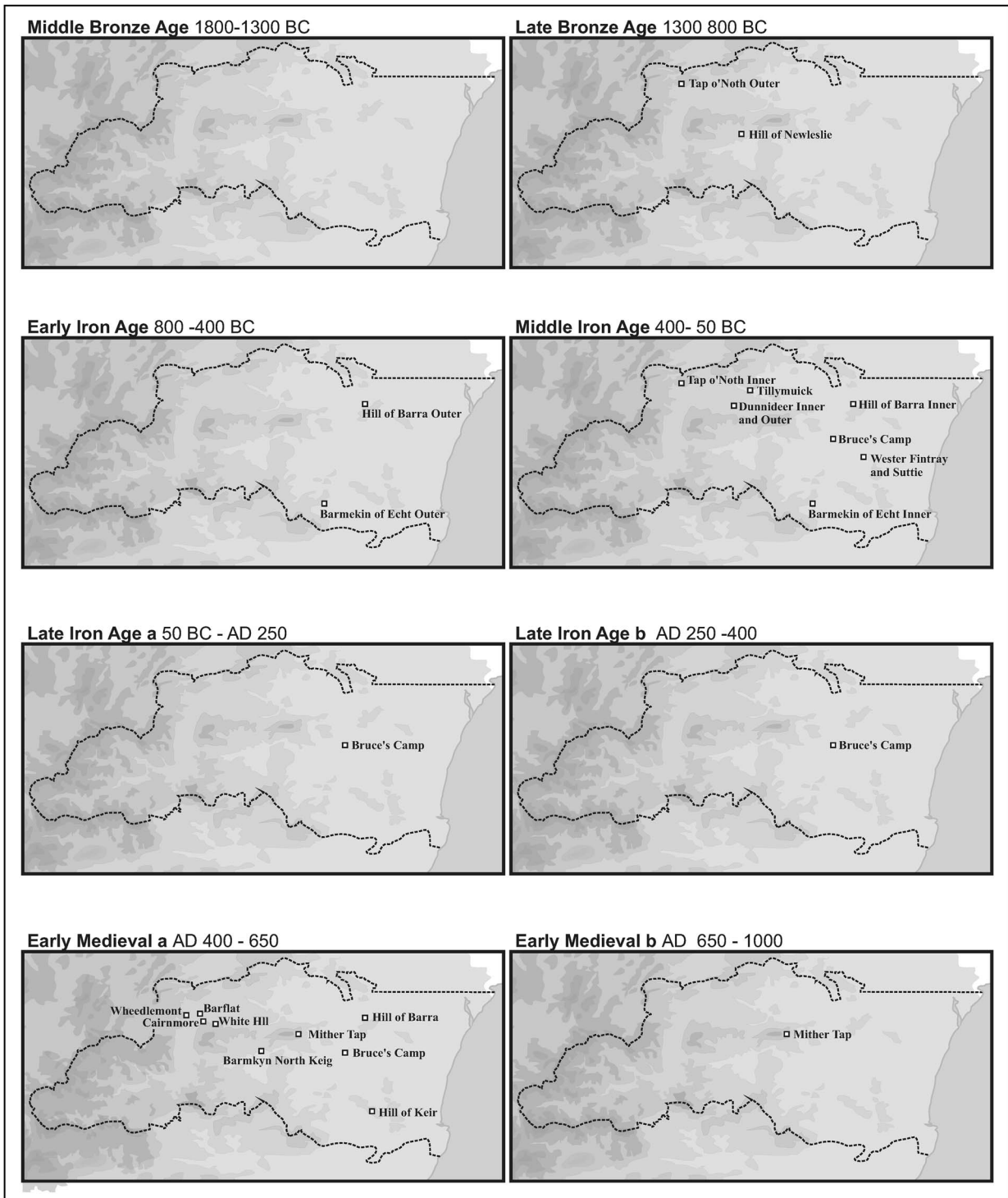


Fig. 5.

Extrapolated distribution of hillforts over time (Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2012)

latest hillforts (Dunnideer inner and Tap o'Noth inner) have the smallest internal areas.

The number of potential early medieval sites (9) is surprising and a dramatic change from the current interpretation (Cook 2011b). However, the dating evidence is more equivocal as there is less scope for stratigraphic relationships than for the prehistoric sites. Moreover it is not clear if these represent successive or contemporaneous sites. The bulk of the radiocarbon dates cluster around cal AD 380–650, with later activity at Mither Tap dated to cal AD 640–780.

It is assumed that these sites are all roughly contemporaneous and, on this basis, there are three types; large or impressive ones (Hill of Barra and Mither Tap), medium-sized (Cairnmore, Wheellemont, and Maiden Castle outer), and small (Maiden Castle inner enclosure, Hill of Keir, and White Hill). Precisely how such sites relate to each other is unclear but it seems likely that there was some form of hierarchical relationship, given the nature of contemporary society (Alcock 2003, 31–46; Foster 1998; 2004). One might assume that the larger or more impressive sites performed the role of a *caput*, with smaller sites acting as estates, along the lines proposed by Driscoll (1991). However, to date, all the rich material culture one might associate with a *caput*, such as metalworking or high status goods, as found at Burghead (Moray) and Dunadd (Argyll; Edwards & Ralston 1978; Lane & Campbell 2000) is located at the smaller sites such as Maiden Castle, Rhynie, and Cairnmore. However, this might simply be a product of limited excavation and the possibility of recycling of high status goods to lower status sites should not be forgotten (Crone & Campbell 2005, 84). Alternatively, it may be that the scale of this putative territory is wrong; perhaps Burghead (the largest enclosure in early medieval Scotland; Alcock 2003, 192–7) was the Royal *caput* with the Strathdon sites reflecting three layers of regional and local centres.

In addition, there are two foci for the distribution: Rhynie and Inverurie. Each cluster is also associated with a group of Class I Pictish symbol stones (RCAHMS 2007, 124); there are eight stones around Rhynie, including the famous Rhynie Man (Shepherd & Shepherd 1978) and a more disparate nine between the southern edge of Inverurie and Kintore, many of which appear to be close to their point of origin (Fraser & Halliday 2011, 315). The two clusters are also loosely focused on the two most prominent hills in Aberdeenshire: Mither Tap, Bennachie and Tap o'Noth.

This section will attempt to place the Strathdon settlement sequence in a broader context by examining the presence/absence and form of enclosure on Scotland's lowland east coast (the Scottish Border to the Moray Firth; Fig. 1). In broad terms, Scotland's hillforts form part of a distinctive northern British cluster, both physically and morphologically distinct from those of southern Britain (Harding 1976, 361–2; Frodsham *et al.* 2007, 258). In turn, the east coast Scottish evidence is broken into two broad zones: there are large numbers of hillforts in south-east Scotland (the Scottish Borders and East Lothian) and considerably fewer north of the Forth (Armit & Ralston 2003, 181; Halliday & Ralston 2009, 461). In general, the majority remain undated but considered to be Iron Age in origin (Armit & Ralston 2003, 172–8; *Scarf* 6.5).

There have been, of course, numerous individual excavations but only two regional hillfort programmes of survey and excavation in Scotland: East Lothian and Angus. A third smaller zone (the Moray Coast) has also been subject to detailed research and has specific relevance to Strathdon. However, in all three areas no attempt has been made to link the unenclosed and enclosed settlement sequences. The key sites are listed in Table 4.

East Lothian

East Lothian is the most densely studied region in mainland Scotland (Lelong & MacGregor, 2007, 239–69). Yet among the 350+ varied forms of hillforts and enclosures in the East Lothian HER only 16 (4.5%) have been excavated and dated (Fig. 6; see summary in Cook & Connolly 2010). Additional excavation within this corpus tends to reveal increased complexity (Haselgrove 2009, 226–31). That said there are some broad trends:

- During the Late Bronze Age, substantial enclosed sites (Traprain Law) are surrounded by a network of smaller curvilinear enclosures (eg, Standing Stone).
- Multivallate enclosures are constructed 600–400 cal BC (eg, Broxmouth and White Castle). with a wide variety of forms and scale of settlement.
- In the closing centuries BC curvilinear enclosures reappear (eg, Fishers Road East and West, St Germain's).

TABLE 4: BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES FOR REGIONAL COMPARANDA

<i>Region</i>	<i>Site Name</i>	<i>Reference</i>
East Lothian	Traprain Law	Armit <i>et al.</i> 2002
	Standingstone	Haselgrove <i>et al.</i> 2009
	East Linton	Haselgrove & Hale 2009
	White Castle	Cook & Connolly 2010
	Broxmouth	Hill 1982
	Fishers Road East & West	Haselgrove & McCullagh 2000
	St Germain's	Alexander & Watkins 1998
	Foster Law	Haselgrove & Hale 2009
Angus	Castle Park, Dunbar	Perry 2000
	White & Brown Catherthuns	Dunwell & Strachan 2007
	Finavon	Alexander 2002
	West Mains of Ethie	Wilson 1980
	Hurly Hawkin	Taylor 1982
	Turin Hill	Alexander & Ralston 1999
Moray	Elliot	Cameron <i>et al.</i> 2007
	Cullykhan	Megaw & Simpson 1978, 499
	Burghead	Edwards & Ralston 1978
	Green Castle	Ralston 1980

- Rectilinear enclosures of various forms are built around the same time (eg, Foster Law); these appear to be filling in gaps in an existing settled landscape.
- While some enclosures are abandoned in the early decades of the 1st century AD, others are maintained.
- New fortifications are established and existing ones refortified in the 4th–5th centuries AD (eg, Traprain Law and Dunbar Castle Park)
- There are no *de novo* fortifications in the 6th–8th centuries.
- Oblong gateless forts with massive walls, frequently vitrified (eg, Finavon, White Catherthun inner) and destroyed by fire 200–1 cal BC (this author argues that they lie at earlier end of this range).
- Small enclosed promontory forts perhaps dating from the middle of the 1st millennium to the closing centuries BC and early centuries AD (eg West Mains of Ethie and Elliot).
- Brochs, with examples built inside earlier promontory forts, dating to the earlier centuries AD (eg, Hurly Hawkin).
- Undated small stone built circular enclosures, c. 20–25 m in diameter, constructed later than the oblong series (eg, Turin Hill).

Angus and South Aberdeenshire

Angus was as ‘unsorted’ by Haselgrove *et al.* (2001, 25). Edinburgh University’s Angus and South Aberdeenshire Field School (Finlayson *et al.* 1999) identified six types of enclosure and placed them in a regional context (Dunwell & Ralston 2008, 61–89; Fig. 6):

- Large hill-top enclosures dating to before c. 400 cal BC (eg, White and Brown Catherthuns).
- Multivallate enclosures of varying size (100–400 m diameter) with multiple entrances dating to around c. 500 BC (eg, White and Brown Catherthuns and Mains of Edzell).

A number of factors are worth drawing out. First is the variety of multivallate hillforts: it is not clear if the White and Brown Catherthuns (Dunwell & Strachan 2007) are contemporary with smaller enclosures like Mains of Edzell, given the larger error range on dates from the latter (Strachan *et al.* 2003, 52). Perhaps the most significant factor is the distribution of the oblong forts which shows two tight clusters, with a southern one in Angus, Perthshire, and northern Fife. The precise meaning of the clusters depends upon the function of the oblong series, which is much debated. However, the distribution is very clearly a significant

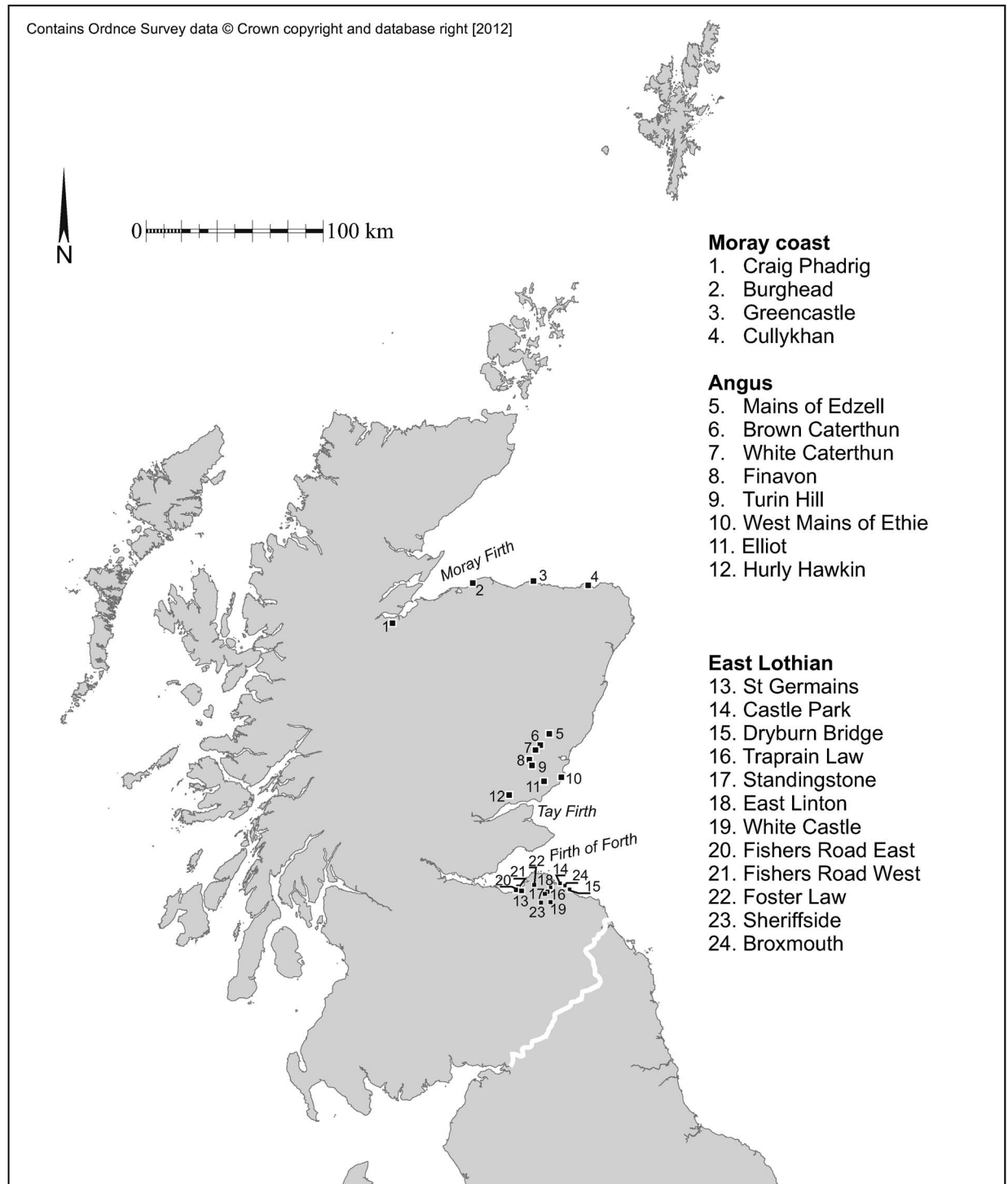


Fig. 6.
Distribution of sites mentioned in text in East Lothian, Angus, and the Moray Coast (Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2012)

indication of population and/or power structures in the closing centuries BC. The same evidence indicates a clear move from hillforts with multiple entrances to those with none, eg, White Catherthun outer enclosures to the inner oblong fort (Dunwell & Strachan 2007). At present, while there are Late Iron Age defended sites, for example Ironhill East, West Mains of Ethie, or Hurly Hawkin, these appear to represent impressive single households rather than larger enclosed sites (McGill 2003; Wilson 1980; Taylor 1982). The presence of Roman goods may reflect their status. Finally, while there are references to early medieval defended sites, for example Dunottar and Dundurn (Alcock 1981), only Dundurn has been confirmed by excavation (Alcock *et al.* 1989). The Edinburgh University Field School failed to find evidence of any new early medieval hillforts (Dunwell & Ralston 2008, 88–9).

Moray Firth coast

The south coast of the Moray Firth was subject to a series of excavations in the 1960s and early 1980s, none of which has been fully published though the evidence has been presented in a series of summary papers (eg, Megaw & Simpson 1978, 499). However, the cluster of both hillforts and excavations represents an important although small scale dataset, within another lacuna identified by Haselgrove *et al.* (2001, 25). The excavated sequence and key features can be summarised as follows (Fig. 6):

- The timber laced gateway at Cullykhan appears to be contemporary with the oblong fort at Craig Phadrig.
- The oblong series appears to be located at the western end of the Moray Firth while Cullykhan is to the east (Fig. 6).
- There is evidence for internal use in the 3rd–5th centuries AD (eg, Cullykhan and Craig Phadrig).
- De novo fortification occurs in the 4th–9th centuries (eg, Green Castle).
- Burghead features both elaborate carved bulls and iron nails within its timber-laced rampart.

While the evidence is limited, it is clear that destruction by fire is commonplace in this region's sequence. There is clearly some variation of design and form in the third quarter of the 1st millennium BC

as well as an absence of de novo fortification between *c.* 200 BC and *c.* AD 300. The relationship between Green Castle and Burghead is unclear and could be well be hierarchical. Finally, it is worth stressing that the early medieval kingdom of Fortriu is now considered to be located north of the Mounth and potentially around Moray (Woolf 2006).

Comparison

Despite the large physical area and limited data set, there are a number of patterns discernible across Scotland's Lowland east coast hillfort sequence. This evidence sits within a broader theoretical context as to the nature and function of enclosure and its putative connection with warfare (eg, Armit 2007; Lock 2011). To date this debate has focused on the prehistoric period to the exclusion of the early medieval where, in general, a one-to-one relationship between warfare and hillfort construction is assumed (Cook forthcoming). Given the limited evidence this paper cannot engage in this debate but will touch briefly upon function.

It is argued that in the Late Bronze Age there are large enclosures in East Lothian (Traprain Law; Armit *et al.* 2002) and Strathdon (Tap o'Noth outer and Hill of Newleslie). This grouping may also include Angus (Brown Catherthun; Dunwell & Strachan 2007) which has a large hilltop enclosure dating to before *c.* 400 BC, and should also include Eildon Hill North (Rideout *et al.* 1992). However, in East Lothian, Traprain Law is surrounded by smaller contemporaneous enclosures (Haselgrove *et al.* 2009). The equivalents have not yet been identified in either Angus or Strathdon.

While the interior of Hill of Newleslie is featureless, Tap o'Noth outer contains over 100 hut platforms and quarry scoops (RCAHMS 2007, 104). It is difficult to imagine how the surrounding area could have supported such a population and so this total may derive from aggregation over time (Bradley 2007, 256). These enclosures compare favourably with Cunliffe's Hill-Top Enclosures (2005, 30–1) which date to the Late Bronze Age, are lightly defended, and appear to be the focus for communal gatherings.

Around 500 BC there is again a series of similar sites across Scotland's east coast: large circular multivallate hillforts with multiple entrances, for example, White Castle (Cook & Connolly 2010) and Broxmouth (Hill 1982) in East Lothian, Brown and White Catherthuns

(Dunwell & Strachan 2007) in Angus, and Barmekin of Echt and Hill of Barra in Strathdon. Again, in both Angus and East Lothian there is some evidence for other forms of contemporaneous enclosure. At both Hill of Barra (Cook 2012) and Whitecastle (Cook & Connolly 2010) the defences are more substantial at the entrances, becoming slight banks (Hill of Barra) or terraces (Whitecastle) away from them.

These sites appear to have functioned as meeting points, the variety of entrances perhaps indicating access by different tribes or at different seasons (Dunwell & Strachan 2007). Under such a model it may be possible to argue for different communities constructing specific sections of the enclosing works. That both Hill of Barra and Barmekin of Echt move to single entranced enclosures suggests a radical change in how such sites were accessed which, in turn, may point to significant changes in wider society – perhaps the increasing dominance of one social group over former peers?

This potential linkage begins to break down after 500 BC with an increase in the number and variability of enclosure forms in both East Lothian (Haselgrove 2009, 229) and Strathdon. The appearance of promontory forts in Angus and the Moray Coast may also relate to this period, although the evidence is limited (Ralston 2007, 11).

The subsequent increase in number and variability of enclosure forms appears to imply the replacement of broad national trends with more local influences. In Strathdon these changes includes the move from multiple entrances to single ones (Cook 2010a; 2012), as discussed. At roughly the same time the unenclosed settlement sequence in Strathdon appears to have become more complex, perhaps involving smaller enclosed elite settlement.

This period also witnesses a clear cultural break either side of the Forth: to the south the number of enclosures continued to grow, with rectilinear enclosures filling in gaps in a densely settled landscape. The construction or maintenance of enclosures continued until the 5th century AD, though with changing numbers and foci (Haselgrove 2009, 230).

To the north, the oblong forts appear in three clusters: Moray, Angus, and two sites in Strathdon (Fig. 3). In Angus and Strathdon the oblong series appears to be the final phase of large enclosure (Dunwell & Strachan 2007, 88; Dunwell & Ralston 2008, 72–86; Cook 2010b); the stratigraphic relationship of the examples from Moray is presently unknown.

While it would be tempting to argue that the oblong forts relate to conflict, their broad geographical and chronological spread appears more likely to reflect a period of social competition expressing itself through their construction and subsequent destruction. The extended period of their destruction may represent the time required to assemble and transport the necessary resources required to both construct and subsequently destroy them in an appropriate manner. Similar arguments were proposed for funerals and the associated resources required for feasting (Miles 1965). In this context, it is worth stressing the difficulty of achieving significant vitrification (Ralston 1986) and it may be that vitrification was the desired outcome for oblong forts and its scale and extent a source of pride and celebration.

Further variation emerges: in Angus small promontory forts and brochs were constructed across the closing centuries BC–early centuries AD (Ralston 2007, 11; Dunwell & Ralston 2008, 86–8). These sites are smaller than earlier enclosures and may reflect the growth of discrete localised elites. However, in Strathdon and the Moray Firth coast, there are no brochs or *de novo* hillforts and only limited evidence for reuse of promontory forts (eg, Cullykhan, Moray; Greig 1972) during this period. Across the whole of the area between the Firth of Forth and the Moray Firth at this time there emerges a distinctive metalwork style and approach to hoarding (Hunter 1997; 2006). Hunter argued that this hoarding pattern indicates a more equal and less hierarchical society, the so-called ‘farmer republics’. To reiterate, this evidence occurs across both Angus and Strathdon and is independent of the presence or absence of brochs and promontory forts. It is not clear if the small enclosed sites of Angus reflect the breakdown of the ‘farmer republics’ or just regional variation.

In the early medieval period the enclosed settlement record is dominated by small numbers of large sites such as Burghead, Green Castle, and Dunottar (Alcock 1988), which demonstrate a considerable variety of forms (Ralston 2004). It is, at present, only in Strathdon where a variety of small scale enclosed sites have been identified (Maiden Castle, Cairnmore, and Barflat). These sites appear to indicate hierarchical settlement, as would be expected from the current models (Driscoll 1991; Foster 1998). The nature of the apparent clustering of enclosed sites and Class I symbol stones at Inverurie and Rhynie and, in turn, their relationship with Burghead and Green Castle is

unclear, but may reflect discrete but contemporaneous polities – or perhaps they represent functional or chronological differences. Certainly, Burghead continued to be used and fortified after the 7th century AD, when no more *de novo* hillforts were built in Strathdon (although Mither Tap was reoccupied) and it may be that the settlement became more hierarchical in the 7th–9th centuries with the series of smaller enclosed sites reflecting the last vestiges of Hunter’s ‘farmer republic’ society as it became a kingdom (Fraser 2009, 66).

Another complicating factor is Christianity which, following its introduction to Aberdeenshire after AD 500–600 (Alcock 2003, 59–69) is likely to have altered existing power structures and thus hillfort occupation. It is certainly the case that the distribution of Class I and Class II stones are different (RCAHMS 2007, 118–24). Given this, the later reuse of Mither Tap, Bennachie is interesting, Johnston (1903, 38) and Watson (1926, 264) consider that the name ‘Bennachie’ may mean the ‘hill of blessing’ as opposed to the ‘hill of the Ce’ (Dobbs 1949) and that it may be linked to early Christian activity. In addition, Mither Tap is at the centre of a cluster of Class II symbol stones (Fraser & Halliday 2011, 322) as well as two potentially early medieval Christian centres: Fetternear and Abersnethock (Fraser 2009, 110). However, this can only be a tentative suggestion.

At present it is not clear if this pattern is real or simply reflects the absence of excavation in other areas; certainly the latter makes more sense (Cottam & Small 1974; Dunwell & Ralston 2008, 88). However, it may be that the various boundaries of Scotland’s east coast have influenced hillfort design. For example, the cultural boundary north and south of the Forth may have influenced hillfort construction in East Lothian where, unlike the Moray Firth coast, there are no confirmed *de novo* hillforts in the 6th–9th centuries. A similar pattern is also apparent in Strathdon where no new hillforts are constructed after the 7th century. In addition, there are clear regional patterns north and south of the Mounth in the distribution of specific Pictish symbols (Clarke *et al.* 2012, 161).

The broad conclusion is that, in the first half of the 1st millennium BC there was some level of linkage in hillfort design from East Lothian (and potentially the Borders) to Aberdeenshire but that after *c.* 500 BC, and a period of variation and presumably social competition, the record became more diverse and the east coast split into an increasing number of regions

and sub-regions. These regional differences are reflected in the presence/absence of hillforts and also in the style and nature of enclosure, for example oblong forts occur north of the Forth and brochs south of the Mounth.

In the early medieval period there appears to be considerable level of regional variation but the data does not yet allow us to define or distinguish between chronological, functional, and geographical variation. Where the evidence does exist it indicates a contraction from multiple small sites to fewer larger or more impressive ones.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the later prehistoric and early medieval settlement record of Strathdon and the wider north-east of Scotland is exceptionally rich. However, this wealth of material has not been synthesised at a national level. The existing record has been greatly built upon by both recent rescue mitigation and small scale key-hole research. These works have allowed, for the first time the creation of an outline settlement narrative for the area.

During the first half of the 1st millennium BC Strathdon hillforts appear to reflect wider UK trends: there are relatively few and they appear to be aimed at communal gatherings. After *c.* 500 BC a variety of local factors influence hillfort design and there is an increase in their number and variability, before the emergence of a single dominant single form from northern Fife to Inverness (the oblong series) and then an abandonment of enclosure until the early medieval period. It has not been possible to determine changes in function across the prehistoric period but even if these sites continued to serve or represent a community there is a clear societal change represented by the change in entrances – from multiple to single to none – which, in turn, coincides with a restriction in internal space. The current evidence indicates that hillforts were abandoned before the Roman incursions, perhaps by several hundred years and while they may have been reoccupied there is as yet no evidence for refortification.

In the early medieval period hillforts appear to reflect the emergence of an increasingly hierarchical settlement pattern (the bulk of the population apparently living in open settlements); quite how this relates to either the departure of the Roman state or the emergence of Christianity is unclear.

Within the broader north-east region the contraction of hillforts over time appears to reflect a move from a less hierarchical society, with multiple smaller foci, to a kingdom with centralised resources and significantly fewer hillforts, which tended to be larger or more impressive and may encapsulate this move from ‘farmer republics’ to kingdoms.

This is clearly not the last word on this subject. Hillforts are a varied and complex set of monuments that represent a variety of responses to internal and external pressures and influences. However, we need more data in order to compare and contrast different regions across the totality of the UK’s past, and this must begin with more dates and sequences. The way to resolve many of these issues is through large-scale research programmes and well-structured mitigation exercises. However, in both the current economic climate and in the spirit of localism, low impact, tightly defined programmes of key-hole excavation, using volunteers, should be part of the overall package. Such work can achieve significant results for a fraction of the price of larger scale studies.

Endnotes

¹ The work was undertaken in the author’s holidays with support from friends, colleagues, and volunteers between 2004 and 2011 and involved six hillforts and two cropmark enclosures. Geophysical survey was not undertaken on any of the sampled sites simply due to funding restrictions. The total costs of the programme were c. £10,000 and thus well within the gift of most research bodies providing that a mosaic approach is adopted.

² All radiocarbon dates quoted were calibrated using the University of Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit calibration program (OxCal3).

Acknowledgements: The various constituent projects were funded by The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, the MacKichan Trust, the Glasgow Archaeological Society, the Hunter Archaeological Trust, the Council for British Archaeology, Aberdeenshire Council, the Greenspan Agency, AOC Archaeology, Oxford Archaeology North, Historic Scotland, and the author. Thanks are also due to the many volunteers and colleagues who gave their free time, advice and support, and in particular the late Ian Shepherd, Moira Greig, Bruce Mann, Dr Ann MacSween, Dr Fraser Hunter, Dr Anne Crone, Dr Ciara Clarke, Dr Denise Druce, Dr Gordon Cook, Strat Halliday, Rachel Newman, Hana Kdolska, Stefan Sagrott, Rob Engl, Lindsay Dunbar, Martin Cook, Jamie Humble, Gary Stratton, Stuart Dinning, Anna Hodgkinson, Graeme Carruthers, and David Connolly, for the illustrations. Martin Cook, Bruce Mann, David Connolly, Fraser Hunter, Derek Hall, and three anonymous referees commented on drafts of the text. All mistakes remain the responsibility of the author.

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RÉSUMÉ

Ouverts ou fermés: Modes d'occupation et construction de forteresses de sommet de colline à Strathdon, Aberdeenshire, 1800 av. J.-C. à 1000 ap. J.-C., de Murray Cook

Cet article présente un résumé de synthèse d'occupations ouvertes et fermées dans l'Aberdeenshire sur une période d'étude prolongée couvrant de la fin de la préhistoire au début du moyen-âge (1800 av. J.-C. à 1000 ap. J.-C) périodes pendant lesquelles la perception de la frontière entre préhistoire et histoire n'a qu'une signification limitée. Les résultats seront ensuite replacés dans un contexte écossais plus étendu avec une brève discussion de la nature changeante des enclos à l'intérieur de la zone étudiée.

Une récente impulsion dans les travaux de recherche, développement et prospection a, en particulier, attiré une attention renouvelée sur un groupe diffus d'environ 20 forteresses dans la zone de Strathdon qui se trouve bien au delà des Zones Dominées par les Forteresses de Cunliffe. En général, l'inventaire des occupations est pour l'essentiel non clos, mais, dans la première moitié du premier millénaire av. J.-C. la zone de Strathdon semble refléter les plus grandes tendances du Royaume-Uni: il y a relativement peu de forteresses de sommet de colline et elles semblent être destinées à des rassemblements communautaires. Leur utilisation directe dans des conflits semble avoir été rare et leurs 'défenses' marquaient peut-être une zone neutre plutôt que de fortifications. Une augmentation putative du volume des surplus agricoles peut avoir conduit à une compétition sociale accrue et éventuellement à un conflit. Après environ 500 av. J.-C. divers facteurs locaux influencent la conception des forteresses et elles augmentent en nombre et en diversité avant l'émergence d'une seule forme

dominante de Northern Fife à Inverness, et ensuite un abandon des enclos jusqu'au début de la période médiévale. Les témoignages actuels indiquent que les forteresses furent abandonnées avant les incursions romaines, peut-être plusieurs centaines d'années avant et, bien qu'il soit possible qu'elles aient été réoccupées, il n'y a jusqu'à maintenant aucun témoignage de refortification. Par contraste, au début de la période médiévale, les forteresses semblent avoir connu un regain d'activité à la fois sous la forme d'occupation et de conflit. Ceci peut avoir un rapport avec une période d'expansion parmi les entités politiques locales en compétition et la fin de leur construction au VII^e siècle ap. J.-C. peut être liée à l'émergence de plus grandes structures régionales de pouvoir.

ZUSSAMENFASSUNG

Offen oder umschlossen: Siedlungsmuster und Wallanlagenkonstruktion in Strathdon, Aberdeenshire, 1800 BC bis AD 1000, von Murray Cook

Dieser Artikel präsentiert einen zusammenfassenden Abriss von eingefriedeten und offenen Siedlungen in Aberdeenshire über einen längeren Zeitraum, der jüngere vorgeschichtliche und frühmittelalterliche Perioden umfasst (1800 BC bis AD 1000), wobei die gedachte Grenze zwischen Vorgeschichte und Geschichte von geringer Bedeutung ist. Die Ergebnisse werden schließlich in einen größeren Zusammenhang innerhalb Schottlands gestellt, einschließlich einer kurzen Diskussion des Wandels des Charakters von Erdwerken und Einfriedungen im Untersuchungsgebiet.

Ein Aufschwung in Forschung, Entwicklung und Feldarbeit in jüngster Zeit hat die Aufmerksamkeit erneut auf ein gesondertes Cluster von etwa 20 Befestigungsanlagen im Raum Strathdon gelenkt, die weit außerhalb von Cunliffes „Hillfort Dominated Zones“ liegen. Grundsätzlich besteht das Siedlungsmuster überwiegend aus offenen Siedlungen, doch in der ersten Hälfte des 1. Jahrtausends v. Chr. scheint die Region Strathdon allgemeinere Trends in Großbritannien zu reflektieren: Es gibt relativ wenige Befestigungsanlagen, und diese scheinen auf kommunale Versammlungen ausgerichtet gewesen zu sein. Ihre unmittelbare Nutzung in gewaltsamen Konflikten scheint dagegen selten gewesen zu sein, und ihre „Verteidigungsanlagen“ markierten vielleicht eher eine neutrale Zone als eine tatsächliche Befestigung. Eine vermutete Zunahme in Agrarüberschüssen kann zu größerem sozialem Wettbewerb und schließlich auch zu Konflikten geführt haben. Etwa nach 500 v. Chr. wird die Gestaltung der Wallanlagen durch eine Vielfalt lokaler Faktoren beeinflusst und eine Zunahme in ihrer Zahl und Variabilität ist feststellbar, bevor ein dominanter Typ von Northern Fife bis Inverness entsteht und schließlich die Anlagen bis zum Frühmittelalter aufgelassen werden. Die gegenwärtige Datenlage spricht dafür, dass die Anlagen vor dem römischen Einbruch verlassen wurden, vielleicht mehrere hundert Jahre früher, und auch wenn sie vielleicht wieder genutzt wurden gibt es bislang keine Hinweise, dass sie auch wieder befestigt wurden. Im Gegensatz dazu scheinen die Wallanlagen im Frühmittelalter wieder intensiver genutzt worden zu sein, sowohl durch Besiedlung als auch in gewaltsamen Auseinandersetzungen. Dies kann mit einer Phase der Expansion von lokalen konkurrierenden Gemeinschaften in Verbindung stehen, während die Beendigung ihrer Nutzung im 7. Jahrhundert mit der Entstehung größerer regionaler Machtstrukturen verknüpft werden kann

RESUMEN

Abierto o cerrado: patrones de asentamiento y construcción del poblado fortificado de Strathdon, Aberdeenshire, 1800 BC a AD 1000 por Murray Cook

Este artículo presenta una síntesis de los asentamientos cercados y no cercados en Aberdeenshire a lo largo de un amplio período de estudio que abarca los últimos períodos de la Prehistoria y la Alta Edad Media (1800 BC y AD 1000), donde los límites entre Prehistoria e Historia son de limitada significación. Los resultados se presentan en un contexto más amplio a escala de Escocia, con una breve discusión de la naturaleza cambiante de los recintos dentro del área de estudio.

Un incremento importante en la investigación, con el desarrollo y la realización de nuevos trabajos de síntesis han atraído una atención renovada sobre un discreto conjunto de 20 castros en el área de Strathdon, que se

encuentra más allá de la zona dominada por el poblado fortificado de Cunliffe. En general, el patrón de asentamiento es predominantemente no cercado pero, en la primera mitad del primer milenio BC, el área de Strathdon parece reflejar las tendencias observadas en el resto de Reino Unido: existen relativamente pocos castros y parecen estar destinados a agrupaciones comunales. Su uso directo en los conflictos parece haber sido excepcional y sus defensas quizá marquen una zona neutral más que una fortificación. Un aparente aumento en el volumen del excedente agrícola podría haber provocado un incremento de la competencia social y, eventualmente, de los conflictos. Después de *c.* 500 BC, el diseño de los castros está influenciado por una variedad de factores locales y se produce un incremento tanto de su número como de su variabilidad, antes de la emergencia de un único modelo dominante desde el norte de Fife a Inverness, y el posterior abandono de los recintos hasta los inicios de época medieval. La evidencia actual refleja que los castros fueron abandonados antes de las incursiones romanas, tal vez por varios cientos de años y, si bien podrían haber sido reocupados, no hay ninguna evidencia de refortificación. En cambio durante el inicio de época medieval los castros parecen haber sido utilizados más intensamente tanto como asentamiento como en los conflictos. Estos podrían estar relacionados con un período de expansión entre competidores políticos locales, y el cese de su construcción en el siglo VII AD podría vincularse con la emergencia de estructuras regionales de poder de mayor entidad.