

# ‘Tuesday Morning’, the schoolboy and Mann: early medieval burials at Holm Park near Ballantrae, Ayrshire, Scotland

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## ABSTRACT

*The rediscovery of human remains, correspondence and other unpublished excavation archival material in the Glasgow Museums collection of Ludovic McLellan Mann prompted the reappraisal of a short archaeological investigation undertaken in April 1931 at Holm Park, near Ballantrae, Ayrshire, by a schoolboy, Eric French and his biology teacher, William Hoyland. This article offers a re-evaluation of their fieldwork which exposed two inhumation burials, named ‘Tuesday Morning’ and ‘Tuesday Afternoon’. Eight dog whelk shells remain from an overlying diffuse shell midden spread that may reflect the remnants of a dye-processing site. The skeletons and marine shells went on temporary display at Bryanston School, Dorset. The area south of Ballantrae is well known for prehistoric flint scatter sites and the finds presented the intriguing possibility that the burials might be Mesolithic in age, the excavators believing they might even be Palaeolithic. A collection of flint cores, initially associated with the archive, now appears unrelated to this excavation for it was found with a note written by a local lithic collector, William Edgar. New osteological analysis confirmed the presence of at least two adult individuals, and one bone sample returned an early medieval radiocarbon date. This evidence contributes to national understandings of early historic burial practices in unenclosed cemeteries during the transition from Iron Age pagan to Christian burial rites, important given the paucity of 1st millennium evidence in south-west Scotland. It also offers insight into an earlier account of multiple inhumation burials, found in the general vicinity in 1879, although aspects of the precise location and relationship between the two discoveries is currently unresolved. Mann’s correspondence with French’s father, a prominent Glasgow industrialist, and with Hoyland reveals the character of archaeological social networks in western Scotland during the 1930s which have been a neglected aspect of research to date.*

## INTRODUCTION

This particular tale of long-ago people concerns the instigation of an archaeological excavation by a schoolboy in the 1930s and the involvement of a

leading Scottish archaeological figure of the time: Ludovic McLellan Mann (1869–1955). In the archaeological archive currently held by Glasgow Museums there is a discrete excavation account of human remains found with some marine shells

*This paper is in memory of Alex Morrison*

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from a known but unlocated archaeological site near Ballantrae, Ayrshire (Illus 1), excavated by Eric French and William Hoyland in 1931 (RCAHMS 1981: 15). Initially associated with flint artefacts of Mesolithic character, the archive raised an intriguing proposition that the human remains might, in fact, be Mesolithic in age. The paucity of Mesolithic burial evidence in northern Britain, outwith the Oronsay Midden sites (Meiklejohn et al 2005), warranted further investigation.

In this article we present the results of new documentary research and specialist re-evaluation of this excavation archive material, offer new interpretations of its importance and discuss the context of the excavations and Mann's involvement. Significantly, a new radiocarbon date on human bone produced a 1st millennium AD date; the wider implications of which are also discussed in light of current understandings of Scottish early medieval burial practices. The results of the modest excavation undertaken in 1931 and the recovery of discrete human remains appears to offer some resolution as to the probable context of an earlier discovery of multiple human inhumation burials uncovered in the vicinity that appear to be part of the same burial complex.

#### EARLIER ACCOUNTS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF MULTIPLE BURIALS NEAR BALLANTRAE

In September 1879 at Holm Park (formerly known as 'Dounan'), eight bodies, all inhumations with heads to the west, were uncovered. The discovery was reported by the eminent local geologist John Carrick Moore, accompanied with a note on the human remains (Moore 1881; Smith 1881; see also Moore & Smith 1885 for an identical account). The remains, exposed by Mr Walker, an artisan supervised by a tenant Mr Wright, were found during the construction of a bank to prevent erosion. The location was identified by Mr Walker's son in 1956 (then aged 82) as that of the actual bank (NGR: NX 0825 8177, Illus 1). The name 'Dounan' referred to the mains farm

(NGR: NX 0691 8053) located close to Dounan Point, 2.5km to the south of Ballantrae, which included these fields in its land. Holm Park is the site name now used for the 1879 burials (Canmore ID 60957). According to Moore (1881), the bodies lay in a 6m (20ft) square area on a raised beach (12–15m) above the sea and rested on a shingle, covered by a metre of sand which was topped with flat flagstones and overlain by a soil deposit (c 23cm thick), rich in broken dog whelk (*Nucella lapillus*) shells. All were laid east/west, heads to the west with legs close together and hands crossed over the stomach. Beneath one was the more decayed skeleton of a child, c 10–12 years old, and another body was found beneath one where the jaw appeared to be displaced. No other finds were reportedly associated with these burials.

Three skulls, parts of a pelvis, arm and leg bones were removed for presentation to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and specialist examination in Edinburgh, undertaken with the assistance of William Turner, Professor of Anatomy (Smith 1881). The skulls were identified as female – one a young adult, one an older person – on the basis of worn teeth, although this cannot now be verified as no remains are known to have survived. The general conclusion was that these interments were 'not of a very great antiquity' (Smith 1881: 279). Since their discovery, there has been considerable debate as to their probable age. In *Prehistoric Man in Ayrshire*, John Smith of Dalry describes them as 'a regular interment in Christian style' (Smith 1895: 229; see also POWiS 2020). A local retired headmaster was of the opinion that

the burials were due to a wreckage in the days when the church was at Kirkholm and as the bodies were fairly numerous and carts were few or non-existent, they were laid to rest on the side of river (McWhirther nd: 81).

The late Alex Morrison speculated that the 1879 burials could be Mesolithic in date, drawing attention to their resemblance to later Mesolithic Ertebølle inhumations at sites like Vedbæk-Bøgebakken, Denmark (Albrethsen & Brinch Petersen 1977), and to the comparable

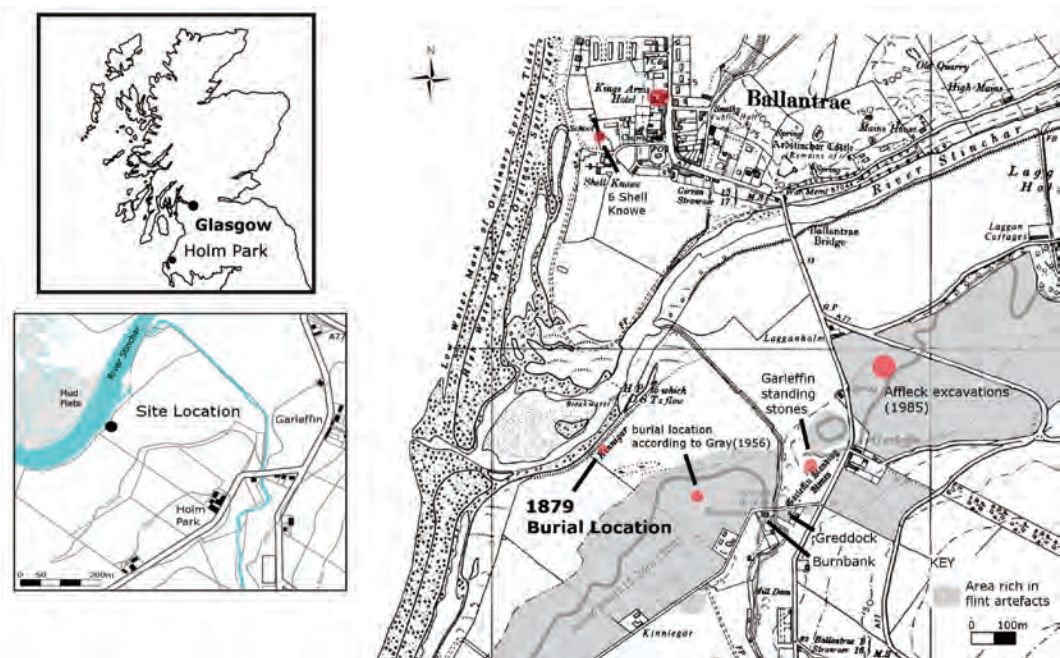
rich lagoonal environment at Ballantrae, that may have supported intensive semi-sedentary Mesolithic occupation (Morrison 1981, 1982; Morrison & Hughes 1989; see also Jardine & Morrison 1976).

The more stable and sheltered raised beaches, south of the River Stinchar at Ballantrae, are well known for extensive lithic scatters (Illus 1). A mile and a half (2.4km) long area from the Laggan Burn to near the Downan Burn was described by Lacaille (1945: 82) as the 'implementiferous stretch'. In excess of 3,000 pieces, including *c* 130 microliths, microburins as well as blade cores, were collected from ploughed fields by the Reverend William Edgar in the 1920s and 1930s (Edgar 1939; Lacaille 1954; Wright 2012). Whilst digging his relatives' cottage garden, the Reverend Ian Muirhead also discovered Mesolithic implements in the mid-1930s at Greddock (Sludden 2004), close to the now heavily destroyed Garleffin standing stones (Canmore ID 60935). Further discoveries in the same fields were also made by Gray (1956). Test-pitting nearby in advance of road construction

also yielded a small diagnostic Mesolithic assemblage (Illus 1; Affleck 1986).

### MANN AND THE SCHOOLBOY

Ludovic McLellan Mann was a significant figure in Scottish archaeology during the 1920s–40s and his personal collections formed the core of the prehistoric displays in the Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow (Ritchie 2002). It is unfortunate that his more extravagant ideas on ancient measurement, belief and cosmology (eg Mann 1930) have tended to dominate the legacy of this prolific and highly influential individual whom in his lifetime personifies the disciplinary transition from antiquarianism. The archive contains human remains, eight dog whelk shells, correspondence (nine letters) and a typescript report of excavations conducted over a few days in April 1931. This material relates to fieldwork undertaken during an Easter vacation by Eric French, a Scottish schoolboy based at Bryanston School in Dorset, and William Hoyland, his



ILLUS 1 Site location. The 1879 burial location according to Canmore with the location of ancient burials according to Gray (1956). (© Crown copyright and database rights 2020 Ordnance Survey (100025252))

biology master. Eric French (1914–?), the youngest of three sons, was one of the first pupils at Bryanston School where he was active in the rowing team. He later studied architecture and moved to South Africa after living in Jersey for a number of years, but we are unable to trace any immediate descendants there to follow his story (Penny Susan Hepple, pers comm).

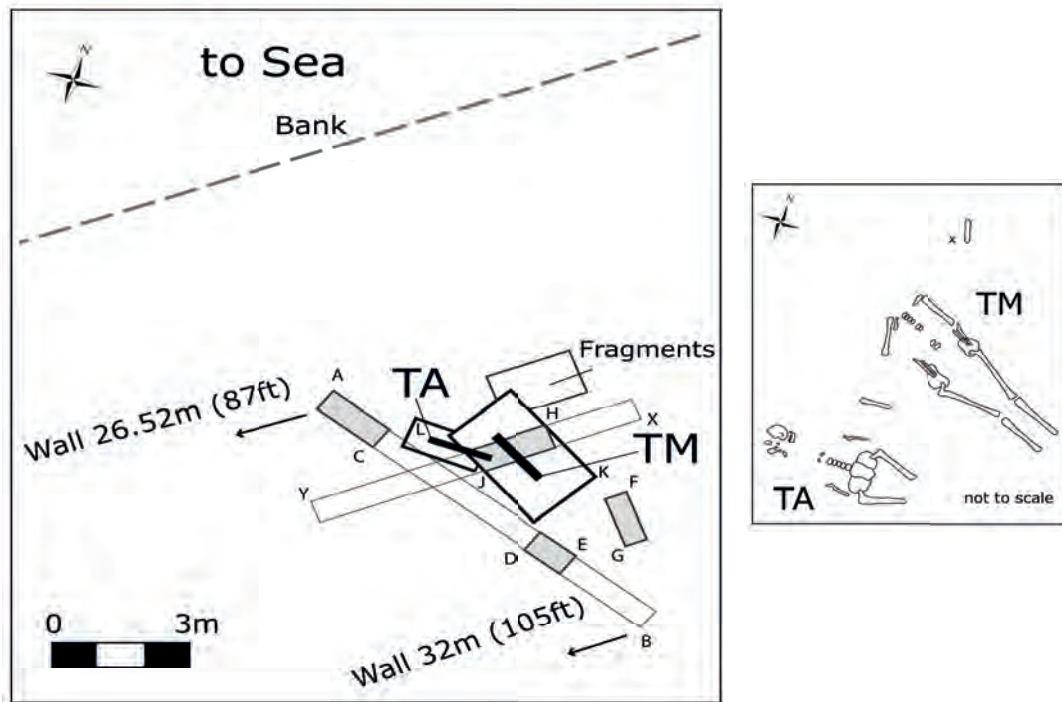
While their dig at Ballantrae was already known (RCAHMS 1981: 15), the exact location of this excavation was unconfirmed, and it now appears to be close to, or even the same site as that of the 1879 Holm Park burials, undertaken in the same field or in the immediate vicinity (see Discussion section below). Whilst staying at Burnbank, a cottage owned by Mr Walker, near the Garleffin standing stones, Eric and his father found several bones, including a few later deemed to be human, cast up from rabbit holes in an area rich in whelk shells. Intrigued by these discoveries, Eric persuaded his father, Dr James Weir French (1875–1953), an eminent engineer in the field of optics, responsible for many patents and publications, to write to Mann in March 1931 to solicit his support for an excavation. At the time, French was deputy chairman of the Glasgow-based engineering company Barr & Stroud and was later knighted in 1941 (Anon 1953; Moss & Russell 1988: 125). The first letter, written to Mann on 10 March 1931, explains their interest in pursuing fieldwork at the site, and describes that he ‘located the graves’ and in front of rabbit holes found ‘white whelks, each broken as you indicated’. Mann had previously recorded the astronomical alignment of the ‘Grey Stanes’ – the Garleffin standing stones – and it would also appear from the correspondence that Mr Walker of Burnbank told Eric and his father about this research and about the human remains previously found above the shore. Eric French had also enthused William Hoyland and another Bryanston School master, Mr King, to participate in this endeavour and ‘take the opportunity of increasing their knowledge of archaeology’ (J W French letter to Mann, 10 March 1931). To which Mann replies with information about the Grey Stanes astronomical chart which was also sent to Mr Walker. ‘The burials seem to be Azilian, and if this is the case, they are the first of that period

to be found in the British Isles’ (Mann letter to J W French, 11 March 1931). In his first letter to Mann on 13 March 1931, Hoyland writes: ‘... you found several skeletons, removed some and left the rest; and that these have not been touched since’ (Hoyland letter to J W French, 13 March 1931).

The whereabouts of the initial bones retained by Eric French is unknown, all the human bones present in the archive collection can be accounted for in relation to the letters from Hoyland to Mann and in the draft excavation report (Anon 1931). It appears that Mr King had an interest in archaeology and is named in the letters related to the identification of the bones from the rabbit holes as human as well as animal and in the plans for the proposed fieldwork. His actual participation in the excavation cannot be directly confirmed and it is likely that this was undertaken solely by William Hoyland and Eric French, with Dr French in attendance.

Conversations in the Conservative Club in Glasgow and a flurry of letters in March 1931 ensued between French senior, Mann, and Hoyland. In one letter to Hoyland on 14 March, Mann is more sanguine and doubts whether they will recover ‘very much fresh material’ and while offering them his support, comments sagely that ‘it is no easy task to explore prehistoric sites and to complete scientific reports upon the observed facts’ (Mann letter to Hoyland, 14 March 1931); a sentiment that still holds true for novices and professionals alike. Two days later Hoyland replies, thanking him for telling about the excavations at Ballantrae and that ‘there is probably plenty of material that will be of interest to us, as anything we find will be, in a manner of speaking, fresh’. In a later letter, Mann advises them to examine carefully the whole of the soil, to set shells aside for scrutiny for a number seem to be artificially broken, and to keep a watch for stone implements, noting that he picked up several in the neighbourhood during his own short visit. He writes ‘Mr Walker I think knows the exact locus’ and Mann anticipates that ‘perhaps at a depth of two or three feet [61–91cm] you will come across the skeletons’ (Mann letter to Hoyland, 18 March 1931). This reveals his pre-existing knowledge of the stratigraphic position





ILLUS 2 French and Hoyland excavation plan and sketches of the two burials, 'Tuesday Morning' (TM) and 'Tuesday Afternoon' (TA). The exact field location of their trenches cannot be established from the information provided on this plan. Redrawn from Anon 1931, figs 1 and 2 with permission. (© CSG CIC Glasgow Museum Collections)

of what we can assume to be the published 1879 burials, which are otherwise not directly mentioned in the correspondence.

### THE FRENCH AND HOYLAND EXCAVATIONS

Undeterred by inexperience, and with Mann's sound instructions and support in hand, the fieldwork commenced on Monday, 12 April 1931. According to the contents of a letter from Hoyland to Mann (see Illus 4) and an almost identical typescript report (Anon 1931), the first day was spent measuring the field and obtaining consent from the tenant farmer. Attention focused on an area of about 6m square where broken dog whelk shells were thrown up by rabbits. The following day, three separate sections of a trial trench were dug but no shell-rich deposits or bone encountered (Illus 2). A fourth area was

more successful and the following stratigraphy recorded: about 0.46m below the surface was a layer of flagstones and beneath this, at about a foot depth (0.3m), numerous dog whelk shells. Two vertebrae appeared, and the rest of an incomplete skeleton was exposed, orientated north-west/south-east with the left arm underlying the pelvis and the right over it (Illus 3). Fragmentary remains of skull fragments presumed to be from this individual were found the next day, 0.6m away.

In a hurried note to Mann, handwritten by Hoyland at lunchtime from the Kings Arms Hotel, Ballantrae, the excitement is tangible as they break from uncovering a first skeleton, orientated north-west/south-east, named 'Tuesday Morning' on account of when it was discovered (Illus 3). Later on, in the same trench to the west, another femur, presumed to be that of this individual, was found and a second incomplete skeleton 'Tuesday Afternoon' was exposed (Illus 2;



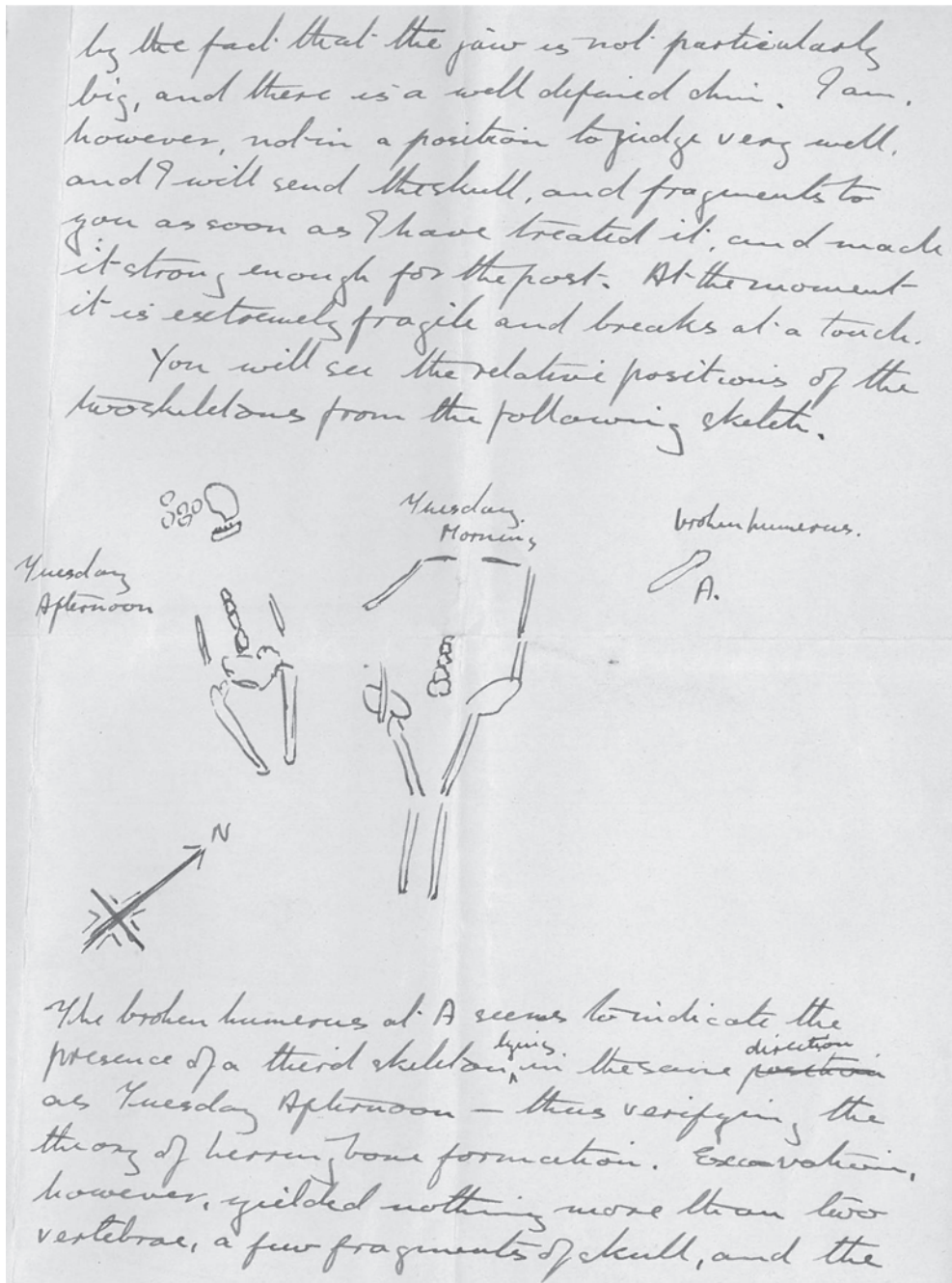
ILLUS 3 French and Hoyland photograph of the excavation of 'Tuesday Morning'. (© CSG CIC Glasgow Museum Collections)

Illus 4). This second skeleton, orientated WNW/ESE, was more fragmentary but half the lower jaw with three intact teeth survived and with the head to the west. The next day, more fragmentary human remains of a possible third individual were found in the vicinity, identified by them as a broken humerus, along with some skull fragments, two cervical vertebrae and a broken femur (see Duffy below). 'A broken humerus was found, which suggested a third skeleton, possibly lying in the same direction as Tuesday Afternoon, and thus verifying the theory that the bodies were buried in herringbone formation' (Anon 1931: 2). Clearly the general area was much disturbed by rabbit activity, but the orientation of this individual suggested to French and Hoyland that the bodies were originally arranged in a herringbone formation (the same expression used for the 1879 burials, see Moore 1881).

With these results the excavation concluded and Hoyland left Ballantrae on Friday, 16 April with the skeletons. 'We are taking away several hundredweight of stones, but I am afraid only a

very few show signs of having been worked by man. There is a large number, though that shows the marks where the shells have been broken' (Hoyland letter to Mann, 16 April 1931). As no other stone artefacts are present, this may refer to the weight of soil or retained shell samples now unaccounted for. French headed back to Glasgow with some large-scale plans (now lost) to show Mann, who was unable to personally visit the excavations on route to Stranraer, as had previously been arranged.

In the last letter to Mann, handwritten from Ballantrae, Hoyland promises to send him a complete report, once a more thorough examination of the remains has been undertaken – only the typescript report survives and while unauthored, it shares text and expressions with Hoyland's letters, suggesting he is the author (Anon 1931). He also states his intention to treat the fragmentary bones before posting them to Mann: 'I will send the skull and fragments to you as soon as I have treated it and made it strong enough for the post. At the moment it is extremely fragile and breaks at a touch' (Hoyland



ILLUS 4 Extract from a letter from William Hoyland to Ludovic McLellan Mann on 16 April 1931 with sketch showing the relationship of the burials. (© CSG CIC Glasgow Museum Collections)

letter to Mann, handwritten from Ballantrae, 16 April 1931).

Nearly all the bones are coated with an unknown preservative (see The human remains section below). In this letter Hoyland also asks for clarification of the likely date of the burials, based upon a now unaccounted for diagram made by Mann in the Conservative Club, and returned in the letter to him, in which Mann stated that the burials probably dated to 21,000 BC. Hoyland says they are actually in the position on the raised beach suggested to date from 13,000–15,000 BC. Eventually, the material made its way back to Mann, but it is clear from an extract in the Bryanston School 1931 summer newsletter that the remains went on display at the school first. The shells and teeth that are still mounted on card with typed card labels in the archive appear to relate to this temporary exhibit. A typescript sign titled ‘Tuesday Morning and Tuesday Afternoon’ reads:

These two skeletons were dug up by Mr Hoyland and Eric French (now an Old Bryanstonian), on the West coast of Scotland, not far from Ballantrae, in the Easter holidays of 1931. Tuesday Morning is the skeleton of a full grown man or woman. Tuesday Afternoon is the skeleton of a child of about 16 years. They belong to the Azilian period, and have been estimated by one authority as dating back as far as B.C. 20,000, though it is probable that they are not as old as that. The ground was much disturbed by rabbits and no trace of Tuesday Morning’s skull could be found, only teeth. The skeletons were covered with broken shells which had probably been put there to provide ‘lunch’ for the two souls on their journey to a better land.

There are four other typed labels dated 14 April 1931: ‘Teeth Tuesday Afternoon’, ‘Whelk Shells (*Purpura Lapillus*) Used for Food’, ‘Tuesday Afternoon a child about 16 years of age’, ‘Tuesday Morning a full-grown man or woman’ and eight dog whelks and 14 human teeth mounted on separate cards. The school magazine *The Bryanston Saga*, summer 1931, also has a short piece written by E V G F and W F H in which they describe the two skeletons as being ‘covered by a thick layer of broken whelk shells’ and that they now ‘rest in a glass case, awaiting

a careful examination by Sir Arthur Keith, who will be able to tell us more about them’ (Katie Marriott, pers comm).

#### THE HUMAN REMAINS

Paul Duffy

Two sets of human remains from the French and Hoyland excavations were subject to analysis as part of the project, according to current discipline standards and guidelines (Bass 1995; Historic Scotland 1997; Aufterheide & Rodriguez-Martin 1998; Mays et al 2002; Brickley & McKinley 2004). Within the box containing Skeleton 2 were a number of additional fragments of longbone and skull, and a midshaft and distal end of a right femur, most probably the additional material described by Hoyland.

Skeleton 1, ‘Tuesday Morning’ (Glasgow Museums: A.1955.96.482.1-23) was found to be one individual and was *c* 50% complete. Preserved elements were mostly complete but had suffered from some cortical erosion. Much of the bone had also been treated with what appeared to be a lacquer consolidant or glue. The individual was identified as an adult, based on fusion of the longbones, and was assessed as a possible female, based on the morphology of aspects of the pelvis, supported by metric data from the femur. Stature was calculated at between 164–70cm in height, using measurements obtained from the right tibia. Evidence of mild spinal joint disease was found on the 5th lumbar vertebrae, which showed evidence of slight osteophyte formation around the margins of the superior and inferior articular surfaces. The individual also had a non-metric trait known as a distal septal aperture, which was observed at the distal end of both humeri. A fragment of a spinous process from a thoracic vertebra was found to be free of consolidant and was submitted for radiocarbon dating (see below).

Skeleton 2, ‘Tuesday Afternoon’ (Glasgow Museums: A1955.96.481.1-34) was found to be one individual and was *c* 50% complete. Preserved elements were generally fragmented and had suffered from some cortical erosion. Much of the bone had also been treated with a



similar consolidant to that observed on Skeleton 1. This individual was identified as an adult, based on fusion of the longbones and dental development, and assessed as a possible male on balance of evidence between morphology of the skull and pelvis. It was not possible to obtain measurements to allow stature to be calculated and no evidence of pathologies or non-metric traits were observed.

RADIOCARBON DATE

A single radiocarbon date was obtained on an untreated spinal process from a thoracic vertebra (Glasgow Museums: A1955.96.482.8.1) associated with 'Tuesday Morning' and returned a date of AD 427–581 (95% probability; SUERC-43769, see Illus 5 and Table 1).

THE MARINE SHELLS

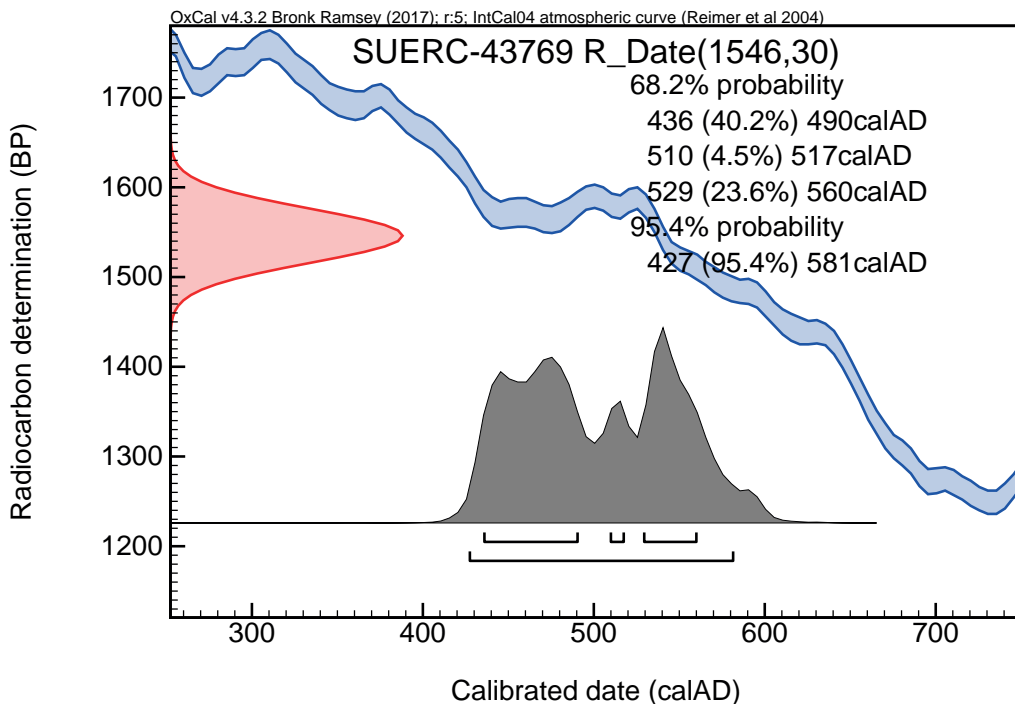
Species identification by Ruby Cerón-Carrasco  
 Of the eight shells of the marine gastropod species *Nucella lapillus* (dog whelk) mounted

on black card, only three are complete (overall length range 24.4–31.2mm). Eaten since the Mesolithic (Russell et al 1995), dog whelks are found throughout Scotland on rocky shores but rarely appear in great quantity in later periods (Cerón-Carrasco 2005). Elsewhere along the Atlantic façade, this species was collected for the production of purple dye (eg Dupont 2011; Murray et al 2011). While post-depositional breakage cannot be entirely ruled out, some of the Holm Park shells display breakage often associated with extraction of the hypobranchial gland which turns from green to purple on oxidation (Cole 1753).

LITHIC ARTEFACTS

Dene Wright

Twenty-one flint cores (18 platform, three bipolar) were initially identified with the French and Hoyland excavation archive material (Glasgow Museums: A.1955.96.483; see Discussion section below). Of these platform



ILLUS 5 Radiocarbon date calibration curve

TABLE 1  
Radiocarbon date

<i>Sample</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Radiocarbon age BP</i>	$\delta^{13}\text{C}$ <i>Rel. VPDB</i>	<i>Calibrated age range</i> <i>68% probability</i>	<i>Calibrated age range</i> <i>95% probability</i>
SUERC-43769 (GU29074)	Human thoracic vertebra (A1955.96.482.8.1)	1546 ± 30	−21.6‰	AD 436–560	AD 427–581

cores, four are single platform cores, 13 with opposed platforms and another has a later transverse platform (definitions after Finlayson et al 2000). There are seven cores each with blade and flakes as the dominant removals and four with non-specific platforms. The bipolar cores are reworked platform cores. Most are made on sub-rounded beach pebbles; condition is predominately fresh, six are patinated. Overall core lengths are 15–34mm (average 23.33mm); the majority are intensively worked and are in keeping with the character of coastal Mesolithic finds from the area (Wright 2012, 2014).

## DISCUSSION

The 1879 Holm Park burials prompted much subsequent speculation as to their date, but there is now a question about their precise location, as well as the exact location and indeed their relationship to the French and Hoyland excavations. On the basis of the archive work and currently available evidence, we consider there is a strong case to be made that both these discoveries represent part of the same burial site, although this matter cannot be definitively resolved at this time with the present information. Given the indication from the letters that Mann predicts the character of the burials, other stratigraphic similarities and observations, we assume for the purposes of discussion that this is indeed the case. In the French and Mann correspondence, the site is only referred to as ‘the human remains found on the crest overlooking the sea’ (J W French letter to Mann, 10 March 1931) but the original finds of bone are identified as being in the field adjacent to Burnbank cottage. It is therefore highly unlikely

that an entirely different site is involved, such as the presumed shell midden at Shell Knowe, Ballantrae (Canmore ID 275902; Swan 2005).

The handwriting on a note found with the flint cores clearly belongs to William Edgar. Correspondence in the Hunterian Museum from Edgar to J Graham Callander (1873–1938, then Director of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland) in July 1935 recounts his frustration with Mann’s apparent disinterest when told earlier that year of Mesolithic flint artefacts, including microliths, found at Greddock by Muirhead (who is also in direct correspondence with Callander about his finds in 1935). This may be because Mann had already collected Mesolithic artefacts from the surrounding area, as stated in a letter to Hoyland. No flint artefacts are mentioned directly by Hoyland, nor are any present with the Bryanston exhibition material. It seems most prudent to interpret these in light of the associated note as material collected by Edgar and unrelated to the 1931 excavations. In one letter to Callander in July 1935, Edgar mentions the proximity of ancient burials associated with shells on the lower beach near the sea, which he suggests might be Viking and includes a very ambiguous sketch plan. Gray (1956: 7) questions the accuracy of Edgar’s finds locations and states that he was ‘told quite definitely’ of the ancient burials being ‘not far from the “H” of “Holm Park” on the [6"] OS map’ (see Illus 1). This would place the burials on the upper raised beach, closer to the stone circle. This is the same field as Edgar’s Greddock site and where both he and Muirhead collected lithics. It may well be that this field is the actual location of French and Hoylands’ excavations and potentially also that of the 1879 burials. Doubt must now remain

over the currently accepted 1879 burial location identified by Mr Walker, son of the finder, and the location as being at NGR: NX 0825 8177 (NMRS: NX 08SE3). It is possible that Gray's location was where material was excavated for the construction of the bank, thus revealing the burials, not beside the bank itself. In 1879, the original context of the burials is given as sand, above which lies a possible paved surface overlain with a dog whelk shell rich soil. If the actual location of the 1879 burials is that subsequently opened by French and Hoyland then backfilling of the exposed remains in the 1870s and extensive rabbit activity may account for the more mixed stratigraphy encountered by the inexperienced French and Hoyland, but mention is made by them of quantities of dog whelk shells and the burials were evidently lying beneath this deposit.

The recovery of marine shells from neighbouring fields is mentioned by both Muirhead and Callander in their correspondence of August–September 1935, and dog whelk shells are present in the Muirhead Collection, Hunterian Museum. The species representation might lend some support to its interpretation as a potential processing site, of unknown date, for dye extraction. Sites such as Iniskea North, Co. Mayo (Henry 1952), demonstrate likely dye processing for manuscript paint during this period and the association at Holm Park is intriguing if inconclusive (although see Light & Walker 2017 for interpretative caveats).

The radiocarbon date identifies one of these human burials as early medieval in date. No indication of cause of death is evident in the skeletal analysis presented above. There is little to support an interpretation of the burial as a shipwreck rather than a designated burial place. In the absence of recording to a modern standard and with the caveats discussed above around the burial location and associations, there is little else we can say about the nature of the possible early medieval cemetery uncovered at Holm Park and re-excavated by French and Hoyland. The small population size, of eight individuals, is typical of rural 'field cemeteries' unassociated with settlement in this period (Maldonado 2011: 140–1). The differences in position within an

overall trend for easterly orientation is also normal for small cemeteries in Scotland, which have been shown to exhibit clustering that might account for such small variations (Dunbar & Maldonado 2012). The presence of at least one juvenile is not enough evidence to suggest that this is a 'Christian' cemetery, as early medieval cemeteries of the 5th to 7th centuries across Scotland show a trend for majority adult populations with few infants and juveniles, regardless of landscape location (Maldonado 2011: 174–7).

Occupation and burial evidence dating to the 1st millennium in south-west Scotland and this part of south Ayrshire is limited. There is an enclosed cemetery at Montfode, Ardrossan, 89km north of Ballantrae. Here around 60 graves, including long cists, partial cists and simple graves, were excavated and a radiocarbon date of AD 540–610 returned on a human femur from a long cist grave (Hatherley 2009: 204). There is also another potential cemetery site at Kirk Hill (c 30km to the north of Ballantrae), a hill-top enclosure identified from the aerial photographic record (Cowley 2009). Therefore, this new radiocarbon date adds much to our scant knowledge of known regional sites of this period and confirms burials of this date that are situated near a megalithic monument complex.

This discovery helps draw attention to the systemic fieldwork biases that have led to the under-reporting of discoveries in south-west Scotland particularly (Cowley 2009; Maldonado 2011: 139–40). But more than just placing a new dot on a distribution map, the landscape location raises some questions of its own. The build-up of early medieval shellfish middens has been demonstrated in Aberdeenshire and is tied to the incipient commercialisation of maritime resources in the Viking Age (Noble et al 2018). Viking-Age occupation of sandy coastal settlements and the formation of 'farm mounds' are well-understood processes linked to land-taking in Orkney (Milner et al 2007; Harrison 2013: 15–16; Noble et al 2018). Regardless of whether the midden is contemporary with the burials, we can now see these fitting into a pattern which is recently emerging through radiocarbon dating of human remains in

museum collections. A deliberate strategy of inserting ‘pagan’ Viking burials in prehistoric monuments as a form of legitimation has long been recognised in Scotland (Harrison 2007; McLeod 2015). However, less attention has been paid to the evidence from western and northern Scotland of burial in coastal settlement mounds as a long-term commemorative strategy, linked to the emergence of inhumation burial in the later Iron Age (Maldonado 2011: 84–7). For instance, the long cist cemetery of Galson, Lewis, dated to the 1st to 5th centuries AD, is a type of site which looks very much like a typical early medieval cemetery but for its landscape location – cut into a ‘kitchen midden’ or settlement mound – and the Iron Age date of the inhumations (Neighbour et al 2000). The exact nature of the association of the burials and marine shell-rich deposits excavated by French and Hoyland, like those noted earlier at Holm Park, is not fully resolved, but there is now further evidence for long-term reuse of Mesolithic shell middens at Caisteal nan Gillean, Oronsay, where radiocarbon dating revealed that inhumations encountered in 19th-century excavations were inserted in the 7th and 13th centuries (Sheridan et al 2017: 211–12). Along with the dating of the probable Holm Park cemetery to the 5th or 6th century, these new discoveries reveal a more continuous, yet poorly understood, phenomenon linking early cemeteries and the sea from prehistory to medieval Scotland and beyond (cf Pollard 1999).

The serendipitous nature of archaeological research is well known and the excavations undertaken by French and Hoyland therefore offer some potential resolution of outstanding questions about the date, if not the precise location and nature, of multiple inhumations uncovered in 1879, as well as questions about fieldwork practice in the 1930s. The historiography of archaeology in Scotland and its professionalisation more generally has, with a few exceptions, not yet seen significant focused study in its own right. Research so far concerning this period has largely focused on the biographies and contribution of key individuals like Vere Gordon Childe (Ralston 2009), Armand Donald Lacaille (Morrison 1996), and Ludovic McLellan Mann (Ritchie 2002), in addition to

the development of salient institutions such as the National Museum of Scotland and learned societies such as the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and the Glasgow Archaeological Society (Stevenson 1981; Mearns 2008). What is clear from the correspondence associated with this 1930s schoolboy adventure is that it offers further insights into the character of archaeological social networks in the west of Scotland and the authoritative position of Mann. It is evident that the foray into archaeology influenced Eric French’s father, James Weir French. He became a member of Glasgow Archaeological Society in 1931 (nominated by Mann, the then President) and went on to publish on Egyptian and ancient glass technology (French 1934). In conclusion, what began as the resolution of possible Mesolithic burials has uncovered a much more intriguing tale of Dark Age funerary practices and glimpses of equally compelling stories about those making archaeology happen in the mid-20th century.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NF and DW fondly remember our conversations with Alex Morrison about the Mesolithic of Ayrshire and musings over the age of the Holm Park burials. The illustrations are the work of Alice Watterson and Nyree Finlay. We are grateful to Katinka Dalglish, Jane Flint and Dr Ellen McAdam for their support for this project and for the initial invitation to re-examine this archive. The post-excavation analysis and radiocarbon date was funded by an award from the John Robertson Bequest fund, University of Glasgow, to NF in 2012. Our thanks to Katie Marriott, archivist at Bryanston School, for further background information on Eric French and the school in the 1930s; and to John Malcolm, Historic Environment Scotland, and Jim Mearns, archivist for the Glasgow Archaeological Society. Thanks also to Dr Alison Sheridan, National Museum of Scotland, for confirming the absence of extant material from the 1879 burials in the NMS and University of Edinburgh Anatomy collections and for her efforts to resolve the location of the 1879 remains; and Dr Sally-Anne Couper, formerly of the Hunterian Museum, who facilitated access to the Callander and Muirhead correspondence. We are also grateful to



Penny Susan Hepple for biographical details of Eric French. Finally, the text was much improved by the constructive comments of several critical friends, among them Ewan Campbell and the reviewers.

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