Placenames and the settlement pattern of dark-age Scotland

by G Whittington

The settlement pattern of Scotland before the 10th century is not as well understood or researched into as that of England during the same period. Much of the clarification of both favoured and repellent settlement areas in England has come from the study of placenames, as has the knowledge of immigrant entry routes and subsequent population diffusion (Cox 1972; Dodgson 1966; 1973). The possibility of work in Scotland with this approach is at present more limited, largely due to the paucity of philological work on placenames, arising in large measure from the lack of a survey comparable with that of the English Place Name Society. However, just as in England, there have been replacements of one language by another with each donating elements to the naming of features in the landscape, and this provides a possible means of elucidating aspects of the landscape in the past which are unrecorded and unremarked in any other source. This study will examine some placename evidence for features of settlement in E Scotland, that zone which lies N of the Firth of Forth and E of the main Scottish mountain mass. In this area at least four different languages have been spoken with differing temporal and spatial extents: one non-Indo-European tongue, Celtic, Norse and English. Of these it is the Celtic that is of importance to this study, but it must be realised that Celtic in Britain consists of two main branches; Q-Celtic which was or is spoken in Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man, and P-Celtic in Wales and Cornwall. This latter branch was also spoken in Gaul and Brittany, and a form akin to it was the earliest Celtic language spoken in Scotland, being introduced into E Scotland by at least the 1st century AD, but more probably during the latter half of the first millennium BC, and imposed upon a people who at that time spoke a non-Indo-European language (Chadwick 1949; Henderson 1967; Wainwright 1955). These people became known historically as the Picts, and it is with a placename element existing during their separate existence that this paper is concerned. Until the final disappearance of the Picts as a discrete political entity due to their domination and absorption by the Scots from the middle of the 9th century, P-Celtic was the spoken language rather than the Q-Celtic which was common until Anglicisation occurred. Within the present-day placenames of Scotland there are elements of P-Celtic such as *carden* (thicket), *aber* (confluence), *lanerc* (clearing) and *pert* (copse). Of greater importance for settlement studies is the placename prefix *pit*, which is the equivalent of the Welsh *peth* and which in Scotland referred to 'a share' or 'a portion of land'. The close involvement that this suggests with the land, in one way or another, is of considerable importance in trying to gain an insight into the distribution and occupation of Scotland by the Pictish people, something about which, despite some recent work (Cottam and Small 1974; Jackson, A 1971; Thomas 1963), all too little is still known.

An earlier study of the distribution of the *pit* placename element (Whittington and Soulsby 1968), confined to only a S part of the former Pictish territory, revealed a distinct preference in

its location for loamy soils and well-sheltered and well-drained positions. Coastal situations were rare. Questions that arose from this study were whether these findings were repeated throughout the zone of *pit* occurrence and whether the suggestion made by some historians that a difference existed between northern and southern Picts (divided by the mountain barrier known as the Mounth) was reflected in the placenames. A further query must also be made as to whether the placenames with this prefix all relate to land exploitation at an early or a later date in Pictish history and whether the names give any hint as to the hierarchy, if any, of settlement that existed. To these ends a placename element other than *pit* will also be considered and the evidence afforded by the Pictish symbol stones will be used.

Watson (1926) mentions 323 occurrences of the *pit* prefix. Many of these he could not identify, and even of those he could, many have proved impossible to locate. Some others have been discovered and a total of 283 has been plotted on fig 1. The overall distribution is between the S shores of the Firth of Forth and the S of Sutherland. Within this zone there are two main concentrations, one particularly strong in the area between the Forth and the Mounth and the other N of the Mounth to Easter Ross. The main mountain mass is penetrated by the placenames up the river valleys, those of the Spey and Tay especially. There are also interesting occurrences of these placenames outside the main groupings; those in the Lothians and Lanarkshire, and in the far west in Glenelg and the Great Glen. The areas of Norse settlement in Shetland, Orkney and the N and W coasts of the mainland are virtually without examples as is the zone dominated by the Q-Celts who built up the kingdom of Dalriada after migration from Ireland.

Most that is to be learned about the Pictish way of life from this placename element will not come from the overall distribution shown on fig 1, which is at too small a scale. All the placenames have been plotted at a scale of 1:50,000[1] and each one has been examined in relation to its immediate environmental conditions, mostly in the field. It is noticeable that certain areas are largely avoided; that to the immediate E of Inverness, the coastal lowland between the rivers Spey and Deveron, and much of the Buchan plateau. The majority of occurrences lies below 183 m (600 ft) except where there are sheltered localities in the interior river valleys. From fig 1 and earlier published maps of a similar but less complete form, one striking feature is not readily apparent. As was found in the earlier large-scale study of the S zone, the coastal area is virtually shunned. Today's settlement pattern in E Scotland embraces large numbers of coastal sites. Was there another settlement name which has not yet been recognised or has disappeared, or did the Picts not find the sea coast attractive? The coastal fringe is generally fertile but the *pit* sites, with a handful of exceptions, all lie well back from the shore. The examination of the *pit* sites in the field has, in the main, shown that the conclusions drawn in the earlier work in relation to shelter and sloping site requirements obtain for the whole area of occurrence. Those regarding soil requirements were not completely borne out. Emphasis was laid on the fact that the *pit* sites were located on the Brown Forest Soils whereas the Podsols were avoided. At first an examination of the *pit* sites to the N of the area originally investigated seemed to contradict this evidence; the sites occurred on Podsols most frequently. Since the first survey, however, Land Use Capability maps have been published or are available for consultation for much of E Scotland. These maps classify land according to its suitability for agriculture in seven classes.

Class 1 Land with very minor physical or climatic limitations which do not interfere with the sustained production of cultivated field crops.

Class 2 Land with some physical or climatic limitations which under good management is capable of sustained production of field crops.

Class 3 Land with moderately severe limitations which restrict the choice of crops and/or require special cultivation practices.

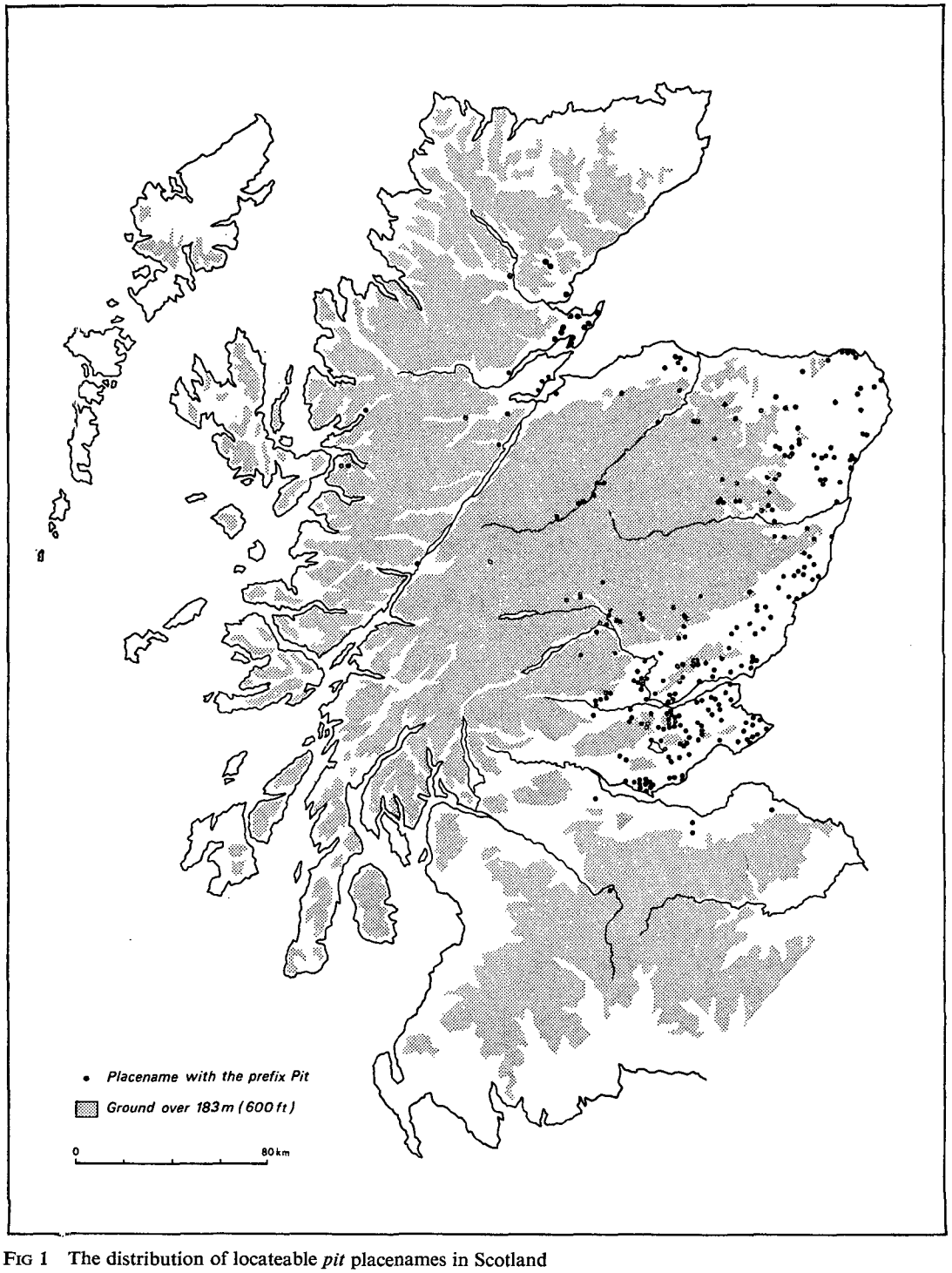

FIG 1 The distribution of locateable *pit* placenames in Scotland

Class 4 Land with severe limitations which restrict the choice of crops and/or require special cultivation practices.
Class 5 Land with very severe limitations which restrict its use to permanent pasture, but mechanised improvement practices may be possible.
Class 6 Land with very severe limitations which restrict agricultural use to rough grazing. Mechanised improvement is impracticable.
Class 7 Land with extremely severe limitations, e.g. built-up areas, industrial waste tips, steep mixed bottom land, bare rock outcrops and high mountain tops.

Although these classifications apply to modern cultivation capabilities, it is feasible to argue that the environmental conditions which they embody would have applied equally in the past. Unless massive changes in soil structure, fertility and texture are envisaged, such as have been argued for some sites (Evans 1975, 99 and 137), in general the most desirable land now would have been as desirable in the past. Certainly poorly drained areas in low-lying locations would have persisted even during the supposed ameliorating conditions of the 6th to the 13th centuries.

In the earlier survey of *pit* placenames, certain areas of land that appeared to be desirable, in that they supported Brown Forest Soils, were devoid of these names. The easy conclusion here is that the name once existed there but has since disappeared. With the evidence of the land capability maps, however, it is more likely that these areas never supported *pit* sites, because the land, despite its good soil base, suffered from other detrimental environmental factors. Such areas are not in either Class 1 or Class 2 in relation to land use capabilities. In the areas to the N of the original survey area, the amount of Brown Forest Soil decreases until it becomes extremely patchy in the far N, most soils being podsolised to a certain extent. The degree of free drainage in these Podsols varies however and those that are freely drained come into the Class 2 category in the land-use capability rating. Thus in examining the distribution of the *pit* sites, the important factor seems to be not the type of soil but the soil potential. In virtually every case the sites are located on either Class 1 or Class 2 soils. Class 1 soils are very restricted over the whole area N of the Forth, and Class 2 soils occur over smaller areas once N of the Mounth. It is noticeable that fewer *pit* sites exist N of the Mounth and are more sporadic in their occurrence. The distribution of the *pit* sites appears to agree with the distribution of the best soils in E Scotland; those which are best suited to arable agriculture. While such soils would also be good for pasture, it would seem unlikely that arable agriculture had not become the mainstay of the Pictish economy. Cereal growing, as attested by pollen analysis from several sites, had occurred in Scotland for at least three thousand years before the Picts came into existence. There can be no reason therefore for assuming, as Thomas (1963, 67) appears to, that the Picts were essentially a pastoral community.

In the earlier examination of the *pit* placename no attention was given to its date of occurrence. What must be questioned is whether it came into existence as a manifestation of one settlement process, either short or prolonged, or whether it belongs to different periods of colonisation. In an attempt to examine this, attention has been turned to the suffixes of the *pit* placenames (fig 2). These, as a group, have not been given much attention by the philologists but some have been interpreted. They are of Q-Celtic form, in some cases definitely taken over from earlier P-Celtic forms. The suffixes fall into several groups; those with natural topographic associations, those with human topographic associations, those which are related to agriculture in one way or another, those associated with people, either by name or occupation, those named after wild animals and finally those where there is involvement with the church. In terms of actual penetration and possible diffusion of this placename element, the suffixes tell very little unfortunately in that most of them could have been used at any period of Pictish land exploitation. Perhaps, however, an analysis of all the suffixes might bring discrete groupings and associations to light.

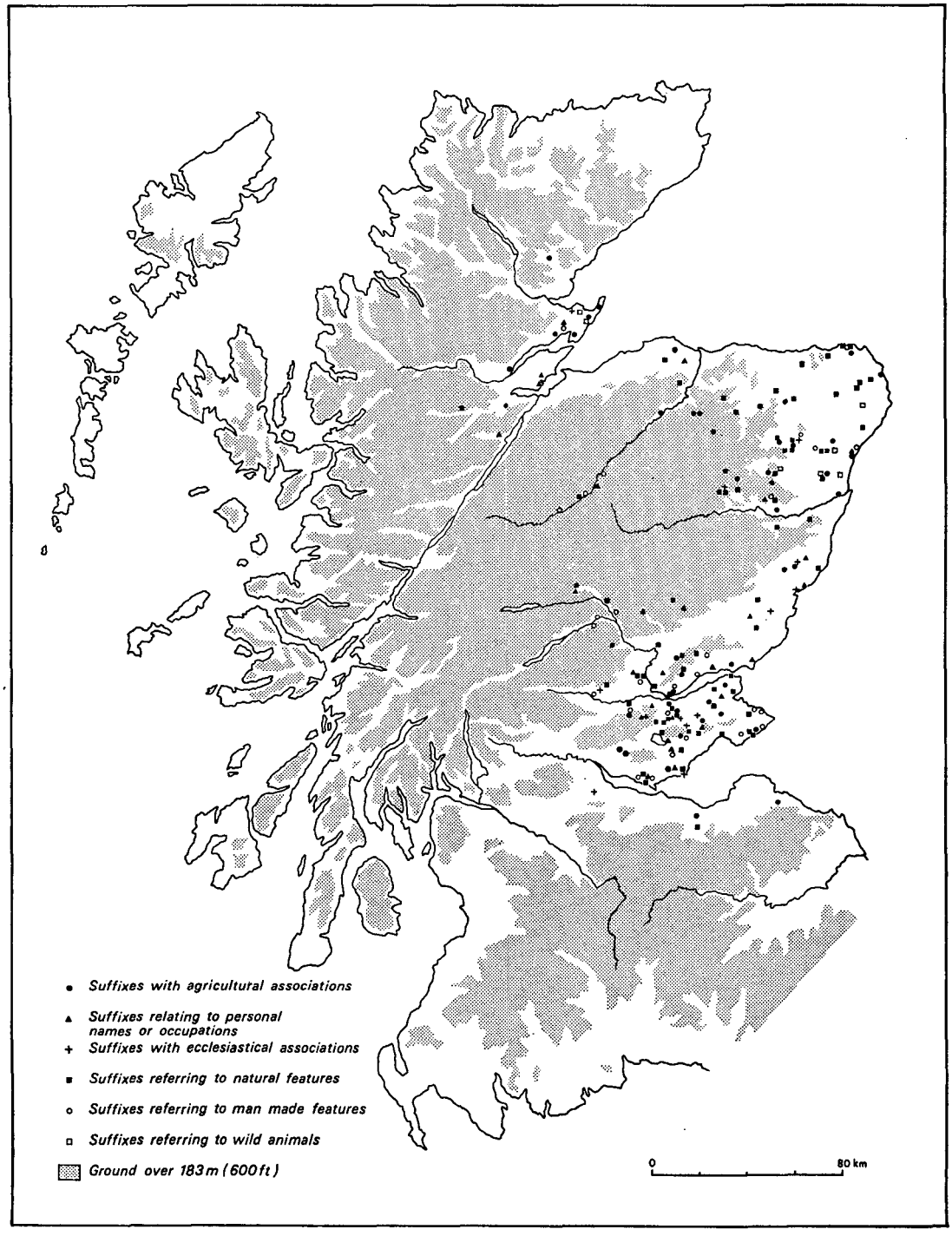

FIG 2 The distribution of certain suffix groupings of *pit* placenames

Those *pit* prefixes with natural topographic feature suffixes occur throughout the whole area which is not surprising as natural features would be commonly used to designate a settlement entity. Of those in this category, however, over one half have the same suffix. *Pittendreich*, or similar forms with the same meaning, occurs from the very S to the far N. The suffix is to be rendered as 'on the slope' or 'with the view'; the fact that 'on the slope' is mentioned would indicate not only were there other settlement forms or units in the area not on the slope and which needed a reference term for the *pit* but also that a site on a slope was commonly sought. This latter point fits in with the environmental evidence collected in the field from the present-day location of the sites bearing *pit* names. Of the remaining suffixes, reference to trees is next most common; in no instances are the larger arboreal species used, the names being confined to birch, hazel, holly and rowan. This is not surprising as palynological evidence shows that much tree clearance[2] had been achieved at a very early date in lowland E Scotland. What would be surprising without the evidence from the Land Use Capability Survey are the very few occurrences of suffixes which refer to poor land. Placename surveys in other areas of Britain frequently show, as they do in later times in Scotland, the use of such terms. 'Moorland', 'boggy' and 'sedgy' are used here in a few instances but in so few as to make it appear that such conditions were unusual. It is also noticeable that they occur in areas where there are other *pit* placenames close by; almost as though there has been a movement on to poorer land (in each case on Class 3 land) as a result of expansion. 'Stony' and 'rocky' also occur and in every instance refer to locations at some altitude, e.g. 228 m (750 ft).

The *pit* placenames with human topographic suffixes are fewer in number than those of a natural origin and are even more circumscribed in spread. The majority refers to elements of the earlier landscapes – cairns and standing stones. The use of ford as a suffix also occurs.

Of the *pit* placenames associated with people, either by actual name or occupation, there is a surprisingly small spread in both classes. Of the personal names, Kenneth is the commonest while the most frequent occupation is that of 'teller of stories'; this latter group is entirely restricted to Fife and Angus. There is interestingly one *pit* placename designated as that 'of the lepers'. Within this group of placenames associated with people the importance of the church is recognised. Many suffixes refer either to a saint (St Blane most commonly), to the Annat (*andóit*, a patron saint's church or a church that contains the relics of the founder) or to a servant of the church – custodian of the gospels, priest, dewar, cleric. This suffix highlights one of the many problems besetting the use of placenames, that of element substitution. Are these church suffixes the original ones or were they changed when land was given to the church? There are examples in 11th-century literature of *pit* placename units being donated to the church but these have not been physically located, perhaps evidence for the changing of names after donation.

Perhaps the most interesting suffixes belong to those that have agricultural associations because they could shed some light on the type of agriculture practised, assuming as always that the Q-Celtic suffix is a translation of the earlier form which matched the P-Celtic *pit*. Very few of the suffixes refer to pasture land. Those that do are mostly in the far N, Easter Ross and Sutherland, or occupying low-lying positions near rivers; such placenames are all on Class 3 land. Other suffixes refer to 'good land', e.g. near Leuchars in Fife, where the majority of land, apart from that where the *pit* placename is located, is of blown sand or glacial sands and gravels; others to domesticated animals (calves, goats, kids, oxen, stirks, cowbyres); and to arable produce (corn and meal). From this it would appear that a mixed farming economy was practised, with those areas that were marginal in terms of drainage being given over predominantly to pastoralism (hence the *pit* qualification) while those on the best land (Class 1) could have been predominantly arable.

While dealing with the agricultural suffixes of the *pit* placename, it is convenient to raise the question of what in settlement terms the word *pit* denoted. The word itself stands for 'a portion' or 'a share' and the later Q-Celtic prefix *bal* has been considered to be its synonym. There is the possibility that *pit* referred to two things, an actual settlement, i.e. a house or group of houses, and a land administration or agricultural unit. That it had a land assessment connotation there would seem to be little doubt. Among the placename suffixes there occurs frequently the idea of subdivision: the fourth share (e.g. *Pitkerro, Pit ceath ramh*), the middle share (e.g. *Pitmedden, Pitmedon*), the fifth share (e.g. *Pitcog, Pit coig*). That the prefix had a spatial connotation is also attested to by such names as *Pitfaed* (the long share) and *Peattie* (formerly *Pettygask*, the tail-like share). Did the *pit* units form part of a land administrative hierarchy with perhaps that division being administered from a central settlement which bore and assured the survival of the *pit* name? At a later date the land unit known as the *davoch* gave rise to locality names and very few settlement names. Was the *pit* a smaller unit than this and thus more likely to be associated with an eventual fermtoun? The only example of a *pit* placename which still exists and which seems to have a locational connotation rather than a discrete settlement association is *Pittentrail* in Sutherland and this may merely be because the settlement has disappeared. From the spacing of the *pit* placenames it is clear that they are related to small territorial units.[3] In certain areas, e.g. S and N Fife, there are as many as ten of these placenames in an area of five square kilometres. However, even allowing that some of the placenames have disappeared, the uneven distribution indicates that a *pit* unit was variable in extent. Thus at an early stage it appears that land units were probably only of nominal areal extent and more likely delimited and perhaps assessed for taxation on their agricultural potential; the *pit* placenames are more crowded together in the areas of freely drained Brown Forest soils than anywhere else. What appears to be further evidence that *pit* was a land unit comes from the *Book of Deer*, a Latin version of the gospels which in its margins and on blank pages has Q-Celtic notices of grants, which seem to have started in and extended on from the 6th century, to the monastery of Deer in Aberdeenshire. One such entry reads 'Gartnait and (Ete) the daughter of Gillemichel gave Ball Domin in Pet Ipuir to Christ and to Columcille and to Drostan' (Stuart 1896, 93). Here is a settlement (Ball) of Q-Celtic nomenclature which apparently lies within another, and therefore larger unit, designated by a *pit* name (the present *Pitfour* probably, in Old Deer parish, Aberdeenshire). Further evidence of this kind occurs in another entry in the *Book of Deer*: 'Malecoluim son of Cinaed, gave (the) king's share in Bidbin and in Pett meic Gobroig and two davochs of Upper Rosabard' (Stuart 1896, 92). This quotation also has a bearing on the earlier suggestion that the *pit* was perhaps a smaller unit than the *davoch*. Barrow (1973, 59) suggests, however, that the *pit* unit and the davoch might have been the same in that several ploughgates and *davochs* have *pit* names. The latter quotation from the *Book of Deer* could support this idea. But Barrow also notes (1973, 59) that 'rather oddly, three ploughgates in Moulin, Perthshire, are found in the late twelfth century with four placenames attached to them, three being *pett-names* and the other name in *baille*' (*bal*). The first quotation from the *Book of Deer* suggests that *bal* was a smaller unit than *pit* and indeed the enormous number of placenames in *bal* in E Scotland connotes a very small land administration unit, probably commensurate with a population not only increasing by natural growth in more peaceful conditions but also by mass immigration (Henderson 1967, 102). It might be suggested that at this time the *pit* unit was replaced in name by the *davoch*, which in many instances adopted the name of the dominant settlement, also in *pit*, and that the pit settlement took on a status similar to that of the new *bal* settlements. In some areas where the P-Celtic element was strongest the *pit* element survived in settlement names while in others it was replaced by *bal*, instances of which are quite frequent, e.g. *Pitcruivie* in Fife which was for a period called

Balcruivie.[4] Whatever the detail of the *pit* placenames, however, there can be little doubt that they were associated with land units and that, as Barrow concludes, they became appendicia of a shire system at an early date.

In relation to the occupation and exploitation of E Scotland it should be asked whether there is evidence other than that afforded by the *pit* placenames. Apart from the other P-Celtic words referred to earlier, which do not necessarily denote anything other than natural features, one other placename is of interest. This is a word cognate with the Welsh *tref*. In Wales this element is very common and referred to a homestead or hamlet but in Welsh also had the connotation of a land division – a combination of meanings similar to those suggested for *pit*. In Scotland *tref* placenames are common in the S but N of the Forth and Clyde they are almost entirely restricted to the E; only one example occurs in the W, in Lochcarron, and thus the overall distribution is very similar to that of the *pit* element. The *tref* element is however not as common as *pit* and there is some doubt as to the origin of this word in E Scotland. Unlike the *pit* element which is followed by a Q-Celtic element, *tref* is preceded by one. The occurrence of *tref* placenames is somewhat puzzling for if that word had the same connotation in E Scotland as it had in Wales and possibly in SW Scotland then a further complication is added to the system of land division in the area. Obviously this whole problem still demands much research.

In the territory in which the *pit* element occurs, and indeed beyond it, are monuments which were undisputedly created by the Picts. These are symbol stones (Henderson 1967, 104–160 and pls 28–65; Thomas 1963). They fall into two groups: Class I monuments which are rocks and boulders, roughly dressed and with symbols incised with shallow relief; Class II monuments are dressed stones on which the relief is much higher. The distribution of these stones is shown on fig 3. It is considered (Henderson 1967, 110) that the practice of erecting these stones began in the area N of the Mounth and that Class I stones date from the period AD 500–700, but more likely from 650–700, while the Class II stones date from *c* 710 until as late as perhaps the downfall of the Pictish hegemony in the mid-9th century. These stones are of particular interest in a consideration of the settlement placenames of Pictland in that they provide definite evidence of Pictish occupation and are, within narrow restrictions, tied to a certain location. Their overall distribution is remarkably similar to that of the *pit* placenames but they also occur in the Outer Isles and in the Orkney and Shetland Islands. The meaning of the stones and especially of the symbols on them has been the object of much speculation. Two theories have emerged in recent years: one suggests that the stones were funerary monuments of a Pictish ruling class that was Celtic speaking (Thomas 1963); the second theory is more recent, more convincing and, moreover, provides a clarification of points raised by the formulation of the first theory. In the second theory, Jackson (Jackson, A 1971) considers the stones to mark alliance/marriage arrangements in a matrilineal society in which avunculocal residence occurred. Thus the important kinship underpinnings of the Pictish unity were displayed. The detail of the symbols is of little concern here but the location of the stones is of importance. The number of stones indicates that they commemorate the alliances of only a small proportion of the population, probably of the ruling class, as suggested in the funerary monuments theory. Thus the stones have territorial division overtones and, as with the placenames with the *pit* element, their location becomes significant when considering the occupation of E Scotland by the Picts. In very few cases do the symbol stones and the *pit* placenames lie in close coincidence; in many more cases stones exist in areas where no *pit* placenames are to be found and vice versa. In certain places, e.g. Rhynie in Aberdeenshire, a great proliferation of stones occurs and no *pit* placenames occur at all. Setting store by the location of the symbol stones is, however, perhaps even more dangerous than for the location of the *pit* placenames. The majority of the stones are or were in past or present churches, churchyards or burial

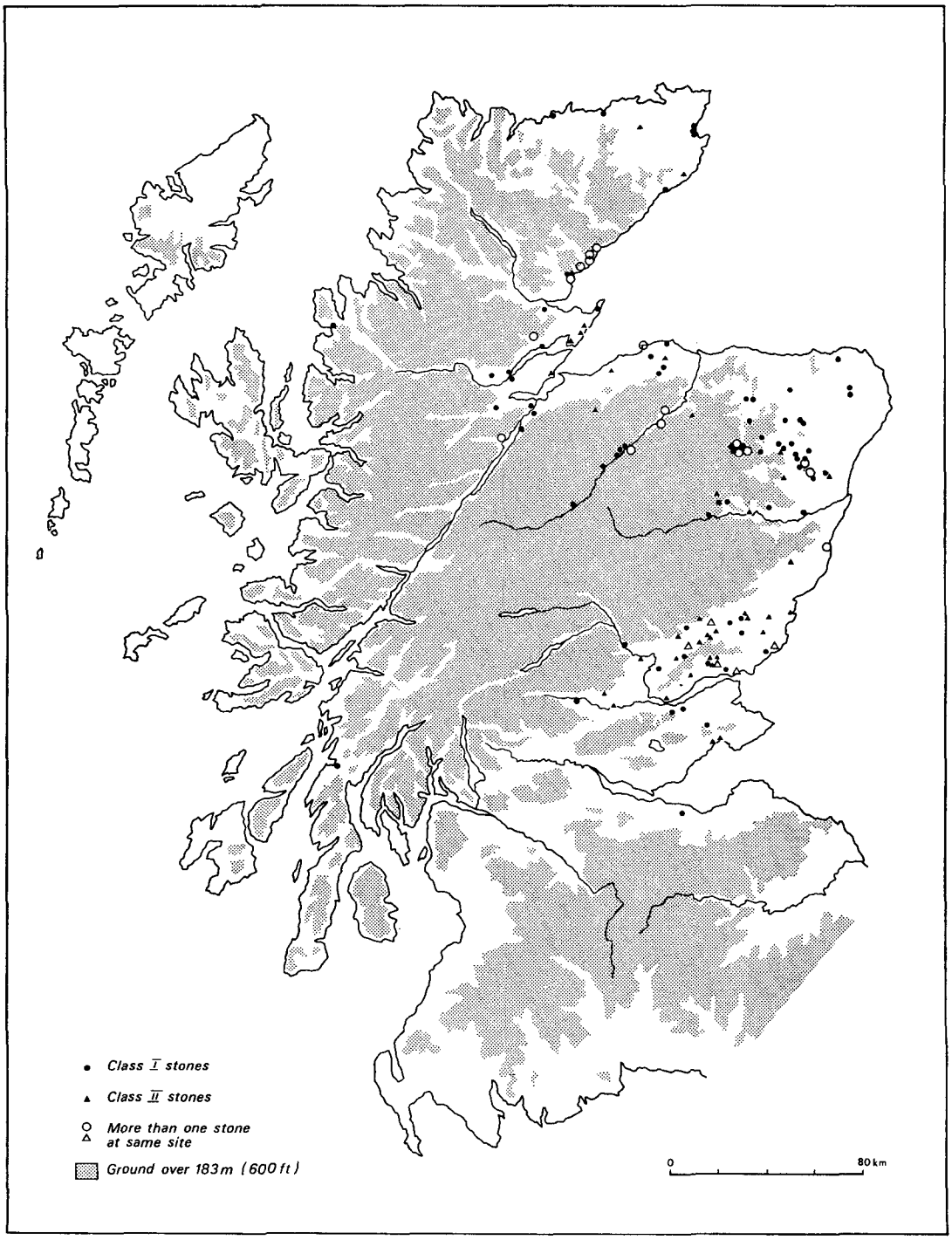

FIG 3 The distribution of Class I and Class II Pictish symbol stones

grounds. Does this indicate that these church sites had great importance in the Pictish settlement pattern? Or is it perhaps the case that these stones were moved from other locations to church sites at some date after their erection? Certainly many stones occur well away from churches. If, however, these stones were positioned in important settlements where they would be readily seen, rather than on the boundaries of territories, then settlements other than those indicated by the survival of the *pit* placenames have to be visualised. With the added likelihood of some form of housing groups existing below the level of the *pit* settlements, then a settlement hierarchy is feasible; certainly the ruling class had to live somewhere. It is here that the conjectures of Jones (1958 and 1961) come to mind.

The suggestion was discussed earlier as to the involvement of *pit* in a system of territorial division. Barrow (1973, 59) hypothesised that the shire could well have been superimposed upon a system of *pit* divisions. It would be of interest to speculate as to the time by which the *pit* element could have come into existence. It is here that recall must be made of the *pit* placenames that lie outside the main distribution; those S of the Forth and those in the far W. At the same time it is necessary to consider the Class I and Class II symbol stones that lie beyond the area of *pit* placenames in the Outer Isles and in Orkney and Shetland. In these three island groups and in the N of Sutherland and Caithness there are no *pit* placenames. Placenames in *pet* exist in the Shetland Islands but this element does not have the same derivation as the one which occurs in the mainland placenames with *pit*. It is derived from the Norse word for the Picts (Sommerfelt 1958), and settlements named after them along with the evidence of the symbol stones mark these N islands as having at one time been part of Pictland. The presence of Picts and symbol stones, but the total absence of *pit* placenames, could indicate that this method of demarcating land units came into existence after the 9th century, by which time Norse control over these areas had become complete. The absence of the *pit* placename in S central Scotland (Scottish controlled Dalriada) seems to back up this idea. Thus a late date for the *pit* land unit seems to be indicated. This would fit in with the recent suggestion by Nicolaisen (1975, 5), who considers that the *pit* placenames were 'coined during a bilingual period in the ninth and tenth centuries when Gaelic speakers had already settled in the Pictish territory in considerable numbers'. Thus a late date for both the *pit* placename and the land unit seems to be indicated. But there are features which leave a doubt as to this dating. If *pit* and *davoch* were the same, why and when did the latter designation take over? If the names are as late as this, why did *pit* survive but the presumably P-Celtic suffix disappear? Why was the whole name not converted into Q-Celtic at a time when P-Celtic was being replaced? There is in fact a different way of looking at the *pit* element. It is possible to advance a theory that the *pit* unit and placename were wiped out by different land systems and placenames in areas where other languages became dominant, Norse customs and names being complete in the N and the Isles and Scottish systems in Dalriada. To further this suggestion, return must be made to the *pit* placenames S of the Forth. This territory was part of the powerful British kingdom of Manaw Gododdin from AD 550 until it was swallowed up by the Angles of Northumbria sometime in the 7th century. Indeed, it is most likely that until 685 even Fife was under the direct control of the Angles for thirty or so years (Henderson 1967, 53). If the Pictish placename with its land division association came into existence during the 9th and 10th centuries, how did it come to occur in the lands S of the Forth? A new land unit system is hardly likely to have been suffered in an area where one already existed (the *tūn* of the Anglo-Saxons) and even less so if it were introduced by a very few settlers as is indicated by the paucity of the placename. The appearance here is more of a remnant system, survivors of a previously existing system of which the majority of examples was eliminated. In placenames the *pit* element could have survived while the land division disappeared. Those *pit* placenames which survived in the

Q-Celtic dominated area of Glenelg in the W may well have undergone a similar process. If this is the case then the *pit* placenames are early and may well have had a greater spread, as did the Picts, than the evidence from E Scotland alone suggests.

This study has probably raised as many problems as it has solved, but perhaps it has also focused attention on some features of Pictish settlement which can be unravelled. Until more Pictish archaeological sites are identified, placenames will provide the main evidence for the settlement pattern of this people. The symbol stones, while helpful, may not have anything to do with the actual sites of settlements, only their broad areal context. The most exciting feature to emerge is the high probability of a link between the medieval land assessment units and those of prehistoric times. Hannerberg (1959; 1966) has already shown for Sweden that the medieval markland assessment was not based on a contemporary taxation of farm size but in the main on converted prehistoric value assessments. Finally, it must also be stressed that the present study has only examined one Pictish placename element. The next stage must be to examine all the known placename elements, by relating them to their topographic environments and above all searching for the relationship, perhaps hierarchical in nature, which must exist between them.

NOTES

1 All located examples are now recorded with six-figure National Grid References and will be made available to anyone wishing to make further study.

2 There are dangers in considering the latter three trees as evidence only of secondary tree growth in that each species is also associated with magical beliefs and thus their use in a placename might have more than vegetational relationships.

3 The testing of potential association by the drawing of Thiessen polygons proved to be entirely unhelpful. The more sophisticated method of constructing hexagonal nets is of very dubious validity in this context due to the problems of undiscovered placenames which could radically alter the network so constructed.

4 The substitution of *pit* by *bal* is of considerable importance in this study. Suggestions have been made that the distribution pattern of *pit* placenames cannot be used for serious study in that too many may be lost due to *bal* substitution. However, this substitution may be very late. Dr A G Macpherson of Memorial University tells me that *Pitgowan* in Laggan, Inverness-shire can be traced in various of its forms (*Pitgoun*, *Pitgoune*, *Pitegowen*, etc.) from 1572 until 1791. Then in 1794 it is replaced as *Balgoun* and then the *pit* and *bal* forms alternate in use until 1807 after which *Balgoun* (or a form of it) is used exclusively until 1854. Evidence such as this from the Mackintosh Muniments, 1442–1820, the Papers of Macpherson of Cluny (Scottish Record Office) and the Laggan Parish Register could be forthcoming from similar records; such research will do much to resolve one of the *pit* placename problems.

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