
9 DISCUSSION

The documentary evidence indicates that from the 12th century Old Rayne was part of the lands of the bishop of Aberdeen and that from at least the 15th century it was an administrative centre for some of those lands. As such it must be evaluated as a manorial centre comparable to contemporary secular sites such as Rattray, Aberdeenshire (Murray & Murray 1993). However, it was also one of the occasional residences of the bishop and must have been able to house him and his household in some comfort. Both of these facets of the site will be examined in the light of the archaeological evidence, while emphasising that only a very small part of the site has been excavated, so conclusions are tentative and limited.

The ditch appears to have been dug around the base of a low knoll, forming an irregular D-shaped plan, possibly beside an existing track or road (illus 16). This irregular plan and the use of a slight natural mound in a manner reminiscent of many mottes in Scotland led RCAHMS (2007, 154) to describe Old Rayne as difficult to classify specifically as either a

motte or a moated site. In common with both, the ditch would have provided a possibly limited defence but, as importantly, it would have both defined and emphasised Old Rayne's manorial status. It is notable that all four of the excavated ditch sections indicate that, apart from a little natural silting and erosion of the sides, the ditch was kept open and empty until the dereliction and demolition of the late 16th–18th centuries.

In size, at 75–80m in diameter, it was a reasonably large manorial site, comparing with the 60–70m of the Comyn manor at Rattray (Murray & Murray 1993) and larger than many mottes in the area (RCAHMS 2007, 152–3). The size may, however, simply reflect the physical possibilities of the site and the needs of its rural and agricultural economy rather than its episcopal status: for instance by comparison, the 13th-century bishop's palace in the more restricted urban context of Cathedral Square in Glasgow only appears to have been c 28m in diameter (Clarke & Thomson 1987). An inventory dated 1519 of the bishop of Aberdeen's urban palace in Old Aberdeen lists accom-



Illus 16 View looking west across Building 16 (foreground) and Building 10 (background) towards the village street. The 1990 excavation was on the site of the garage and picnic table on the right.

modation for the bishop, his household and guests, as well as buildings related to the domestic economy of any large medieval household: kitchens, stores, bake- and brew-houses and a doocot for fresh meat (Innes 1845, ii, 174). In the rural context of Old Rayne there would have been additional necessary buildings such as grain stores, stables and byres, and it is possible that these too may have been within the moated area. There was also a chapel on the site by the late 14th century (Innes 1845, i, 164).

The structural evidence from the Phase 3 buildings of the late 13th/early 14th centuries is indicative of the manor's status. Building 16 appears to have been at least two-storeyed and possibly of L- or T-shaped plan with dressed red sandstone at the quoins, windows and doors, and it may have had glass windows. The roof of well-graded stone slates had a ridge of glazed ceramic tiles, at least one of which was imported and highly decorated. The original function of the building is unclear but its quality suggests it may have contained private apartments or guest chambers, only being used as a kitchen at a later period. The smaller secondary Building 10 may always have been a kitchen with the adjacent cistern perhaps supplying water for both buildings.

It is beginning to appear that stone or partially stone buildings may have been more common in medieval Scotland than originally thought, with 12th- to 15th-century examples excavated in Perth, Aberdeen, Dundee, Peebles, St Andrews and Edinburgh (Murray 2010, 134-5). Nevertheless, in the 13th century a stone building of this quality would have represented a huge investment in terms of materials and demonstrates access to masons, glaziers and slaters, who would of course have been employed in church building and therefore available to the bishops. The trend of replacing timber buildings with stone has been demonstrated in the 13th century in an episcopal context at Spynie, the main residence of the bishops of Moray (Lewis & Pringle 2002, 169) and in the early 14th century in an aristocratic secular context at Rattray (Murray & Murray 1993, 124-8).

Apart from the structural evidence there was little to indicate the status or wealth of the site; there were no coins, no personal items and virtually no imported pottery. The only object which potentially might have had any ecclesiastical reference is the stone basin found in a 13th-century context. This lack appears to be in contrast to another of the Aberdeen bishop's palaces, at Fetternear (Dransart & Trigg 2008) and to the evidence from a small excavation in the precinct of the Brechin bishop's palace in Brechin, where there are a range of high-status small finds (Murray & Murray 2009, 2010a). This apparent paucity may be a bias reflecting the small area that was available for excavation, especially the lack of floor or midden deposits from the 13th- and early 14th-century phases of the site, but a wider range of artefacts might have been expected from the late 14th/15th-century midden of Phase 5.

Even in the 13th and 14th century there would

probably have been a small settlement adjacent to, but outside, the ditched area. Support for such a hypothesis is given by the evidence for a settlement beside the Moray bishop's palace at Spynie (Lewis & Pringle 2002, 11-12) or indeed the 'village' beside the secular manor at Rattray (Murray & Murray 1993). The inhabitants of the Rattray settlement included specialist craftsmen such as blacksmiths and potters and at Spynie there appear to have been fishermen living in the adjacent settlement. It is not unlikely that medieval Old Rayne may have had a mill and smithy as well as the homes of the tenants who worked on the bishop's land.

As a manor the bishop's establishment at Old Rayne would have had its own farmland as well as administering the wider estates. Traces of rig and furrow cultivation observed in the evaluation trenches 4 and 6 in the field to the east and north-east of the enclosure (illus 1 and Murray & Murray 2010b) may date back to the medieval manor, although they could have continued in use until the Agricultural Improvements of the 18th century. A couple of very abraded sherds of medieval pottery in the topsoil in this area are likely to have been from the spreading of midden material. Oats, club/bread wheat, rye and barley were all identified from samples from the Phase 3 and 4 ovens and some oats and barley from the Phase 5 midden, so it would appear likely that all may have been grown on the episcopal estates in the 13th to 15th centuries, but the sample is too limited for any trends to be identified. Oats, wheat and barley have been found regularly in urban medieval contexts, but rye is relatively rare and may have been only grown on a small scale in medieval Scotland (Dickson & Dickson 2000, 236). The environmental evidence indicates that the earlier oven 42 in Building 10 was used for both cooking meat and baking bread, or possibly drying grain (Timpany & Masson above). The slightly later oven 60 in the then derelict Building 16 appears in contrast to have been used primarily for cooking meat and fish. However, it should be stressed that such ovens could also have been used for brewing barley into ale and for preserving fish and meat by smoking, as well as for non-culinary activities such as dyeing cloth. Both the larger circular ovens (42 and 51) and the smaller keyhole-shaped oven (60) are types that can be seen among the 13th- and 14th-century ovens on the manor site at Rattray (Murray & Murray 1993, fig. 8) and similar structures are relatively frequent on urban medieval sites.

The bulk of the animal and fish bone is derived from the Phase 5 midden and is not therefore representative of the whole life of the manor. However, in common with many contemporary sites, cattle, sheep/goat and pigs were all represented, with cattle providing most of the meat eaten during this period (Smith above). The fish on the site are most likely to have been brought there from Aberdeen, or perhaps

less likely, from the Buchan coast. The dominance of haddock and cod is similar to assemblages from Aberdeen (Cameron & Stones 2001, 277–8) and Rattray (Murray & Murray 1993, 206). The minimal evidence of hunting has been noted (Smith [above](#)) and is in marked contrast to the Rattray manor, although it should be noted that deer bones were not present (or not surviving) where they might be

expected at the 13th/14th-century hunting lodge on the motte at Strachan, Aberdeenshire (Yeoman 1984, 345).

The evidence not only suggests considerable similarity between this episcopal manor and its secular counterparts but it also emphasises the very small number of manorial sites yet excavated in northern Scotland.