

Fragments of bone combs from Papa Westray, Orkney
by C J Arnold

Fragments of bone combs were found in July 1975, amongst other domestic rubbish which had fallen out of a midden above the site, generally known as 'Munkerhoose' (NGR HY 48775274), which lies immediately to the W of St Boniface church. The site, which is suffering badly from coastal erosion, was recorded by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAMS 1946, 184) as a settlement site, and visible walling and midden

material were described with a summary history of the site. Though clearly an extensive monument, there is little to indicate its plan or period; it has been described as a broch (Marwick 1924, 32-3), and more recently as a Celtic monastery dated by the associated cross-incised slab which Radford believes to be not much later than AD 700 (1962, 169). The bone comb fragments (fig 9) may throw some light on the problem, though the variety in form of such objects does not allow precise dating. Large groups of bone combs are known from a few sites such as Lagore (Hencken 1950, 184-90), with comparable forms dated to the 7th to 8th centuries AD.

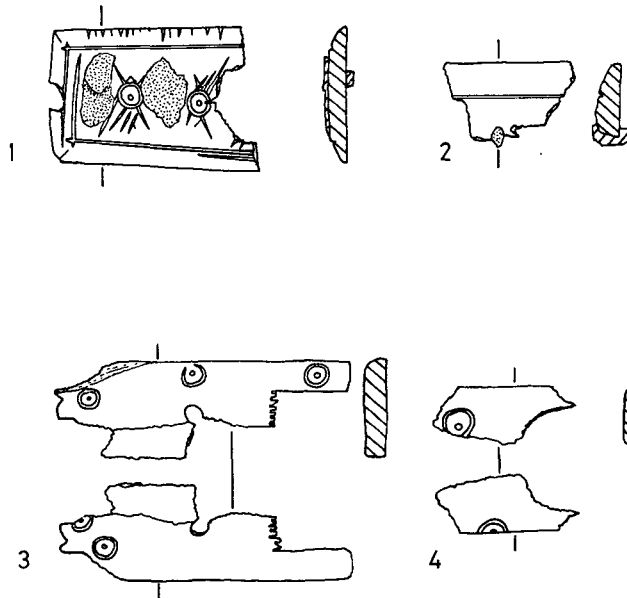


FIG 9 Fragments of bone combs from Papa Westray (1:1)

- 1 Fragment of medial plate for single-edged comb with two iron rivets *in situ*. The plate is bordered by a linear incision, whilst the central field between the rivets is decorated with the circle-and-dot motif with crudely cut incisions radiating from them.
- 2 A small fragment of a medial plate for a single-edged comb, with one rivet and a linear incision along the edge.
- 3 Fragment of the terminal of a single-sided comb with an open rivet-hole. Decorated on both faces with a circle-and-dot motif. The broken ends of six teeth remain, whilst the opposite end has also been shaped, and may therefore have had an ornamented back, a form which seems to have lasted until at least the 7th and 8th centuries.
- 4 Small fragment with circle-and-dot motif.

The objects have been deposited in the Tankerness House Museum, Kirkwall, Orkney.

REFERENCES

- Hencken, H 1950 'Lagore crannog: an Irish royal residence of the 7th to 8th centuries AD', *Proc Roy Irish Acad*, 53C (1950), 1-247.
- Marwick, H 1924 'Antiquarian notes on Papa Westray', *Proc Orkney Antiq Soc*, 3 (1924), 31-7.
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- RCAMS 1946 Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *Inventory of the Ancient Monuments of Orkney and Shetland*. Edinburgh.