

Lecture summaries

Excavations at the prehistoric cemetery at Rullion Green, Midlothian

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Close to the site of the battle of Rullion Green lies a close-knit group of about 12 circles in the turf. The first edition of the Ordnance Survey map, recording a then current belief, labels them as the site of a Covenanter encampment, but R B K Stevenson excavated one of them in 1948 in the expectation that it was an Iron Age hut circle. His tentative conclusion, however, was that the site was an unusual sort of funerary enclosure around a cremation. In 1983 a new programme of research was launched by Dr Trevor Watkins and students of the University of Edinburgh Department of Archaeology. The prime aims of the first season were simply to resolve the doubts over the function of the site and to obtain preliminary indications of date.

The site lies on almost level turf at an altitude of about 325 m (1025') in the NE-facing foothills of the Pentland Hills above Penicuik. The small circles are tightly packed into the corner of a field of unimproved pasture. Each consists of a slight turfy bank; many show signs of an external ditch; and some exhibit slight traces of a second bank beyond the ditch. The average external diameter of the circles across the inner bank is about 6 m. Two adjacent circles, labelled C and F on the sketch-plan accompanying the OS record-card, were completely excavated.

The two circles shared various common features. Each centred on a token cremation deposit, set in the middle of a level, disc-shaped platform made of subsoil. Around each platform a shallow ditch had been dug. In both circles there was no sign of the upcast from the ditch, and the ditch had been at once filled in with stones and subsoil slightly different from that in the immediate vicinity. Only at this stage was the inner bank built, again using subsoil-derived material brought from somewhere beyond the circles. In a final phase of activity the interior of each circle was filled with loam and small, angular stones, the inner bank was coated with loam, the already filled ditch was further covered with large stones and loam, and the same materials were used to construct the outer bank.

Each circle was different from the other, however, in other important regards. In particular, Circle F had a penannular ditch, and later a penannular bank; the opening in the bank was garnished with stones as if to make a formal entrance of it. Slim evidence suggested that Circle F, the penannular ring, was commenced first. Its embanked (second) phase was laid out on a slightly revised alignment to accommodate the construction alongside of the first (ditched) phase of Circle C; and the stone piles which marked the entrance of Circle F were echoed in stone piles in the ditch of Circle C.

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No direct dating evidence was recovered (though a radiocarbon date is awaited). The objective of determining the function of the site was more simply achieved, and it is now clear that the site is indeed a cemetery of cremation deposits within circular enclosures. The only artefacts recovered were a handful of flint flakes, all (with one exception) from Circle F, and none found in association with the cremation deposit or the primary phase of construction.

More excavation is planned for 1984 in order to improve the size of the sample dug, to learn what is the range of variation within this new type of funerary monument, to gain further samples for dating, and to explore further the possibility that a circle was structurally related to its neighbours.

Excavations at Howe, Stromness, Orkney

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The excavation at Howe, Stromness, Orkney Islands was undertaken from 1978 to 1982 with financial assistance from the Scottish Development Department. The extensive multi-period settlement was excavated totally, allowing a unique opportunity to understand the complexities of a site with a long period of habitation. It was also an opportunity to produce, for the first time, a well stratified and datable sequence of pottery for the Northern Isles. The preservation of artefacts, materials and buildings in general was excellent and the stratigraphic sequence covered settlement remains from the Neolithic through to late Pictish times.

The earliest foundations on the site probably date to about 3500 BC (as the radiocarbon dates are being processed, dating is conjectural). Two buildings were recorded, both had hearths and were linked by a passage. The larger but more fragmentary structure had partitions at intervals within its long walls and had a square cross-wall with an entranceway. The other building was square in plan and produced one complete and one fragmentary axe head.

These structures were later replaced by a tomb similar to Maes Howe, Orkney. A mound of clay was thrown up within and over two circular stone revetting walls which were breached by a stone-lined entrance passage. The passage was aligned over the earlier Neolithic structures. Further revetments were added to the front of the mound and a chamber with side cells constructed within. Surrounding the mound on either side of the entrance was a shallow scoop or depression from which the clay of the mound was dug. Nothing is known of the use of the tomb as any human remains were disposed of by later disturbances.

The scoop around the mound to the South was later infilled by the demolition of the Neolithic features and by the growth of a substantial midden deposit in the W. A shallow gully enclosed the midden and its related settlement(?), and an entrance was placed to the S. What other defensive arrangements went with the gully are unknown but a well was dug outside the entrance to the enclosure. The gully was later replaced by an external clay rampart, a V-shaped ditch and an internal defensive wall. These defences honoured the southern entrance and probably now enclosed the whole of the Neolithic chambered-tomb mound. It is known that the defensive walls were rebuilt two or three times, that another well was constructed within the defences in the E, and that there were associated phases of settlement.

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The next datable period is that of early Iron Age activity about 500–600 BC, when the chambered tomb and its clay mound were dramatically altered and partially removed for the insertion of a round-house with an earth-house, which was probably used as a cellar. The entrance passage of the Neolithic tomb was utilized as a drain from the round-house, with an outlet coursing its way southward across the enclosed area to exit into the defences. Alteration of the mound was linked to major rebuilding of the defences with a massive stone-faced clay rampart and large external ditch. The south well was presumably demolished, if not already abandoned, at this time. Evidence for settlement within the enclosure is scant because of later Iron Age levelling but it is presumed that a related settlement existed.

The same problem of related settlement remains exists for the next phase of development, when the round-house was rebuilt as a more substantial and impressive 'broch-like' (Broch 1) structure. The building was enlarged to accommodate internal cells flanking the entrance, which was positioned over the now silted-up drain. Internal staircases with landings were also constructed within the thickness of the walls to the E and W. Slight alteration to the defences may have also occurred.

Much of the uncertainty about the earlier structures is due to their extensive clearance and levelling by the later Iron Age (Broch 2) builders dating to c AD 0. The earlier 'broch' was rebuilt with walls 5 m thick encasing the Neolithic clay mound and an external chamber was added W of the entrance. A semi-circular passage, central living area with hearth, and four large lidded cupboards completed the internal arrangements of the broch. Within the ramparts, but over the levelled remains, three houses either side of the entrance were constructed. These were well planned with living areas, side chambers, ovens, cupboards, hearths and external yards. The preservation of these buildings was remarkable with the walls of one building surviving to a height of over 2 m. The accumulation of hearths and floor deposits suggest that the village was long lived. The round-house defences were maintained and repaired during this phase, but were gradually infilled with domestic debris which was periodically cleared out when the ditches were recut. Collapse of the tower's outer wall face on the W, its general instability and a fire within the village, caused a retreat from the settlement and an end to this major phase.

After these setbacks some of the buildings were levelled in front of the broch tower and the foundations of new structures constructed within their ruins. The ruins of some Broch 2 houses were revitalized for domestic habitation and industrial use, but there was a distinct concentration of iron-working activities in the new structures and within the broch tower. This phase of the site is characterized by 'iron-working workshops'. The development of buildings over the rampart and ditch to the S suggest that defence was no longer as important as it was formerly. During this period, probably from c AD 300 onwards, a transition to the finer Pictish pottery wares was made. Eventual collapse of the broch tower both internally and to the S towards the workshops produced a shift in activity towards the E.

The beginning of the last phase, the Pictish period, is marked by the construction within the rubble collapse from the broch tower, of a stalled building with apsidal ends and large, but double domestic hearth. It seems to have been replaced by a farmstead, composed of a house and sheds to the E. This was later extended into a two-house unit with more sheds constructed into the outlines of earlier structures. Decline of these units produced a movement across the site to the W where a new farmstead was built. There were numerous alterations of structures during this phase but their eventual decline led to the final abandonment of the site.

Work is still progressing on the writing of the structures' report and on the cataloguing and integration of the finds material. Future study will undoubtedly change the emphasis of the phasing and some of the detail, but the general sequence of events should be consistent.

Excavations on the Fairy Knowe, Buchlyvie, Stirlingshire

Lorna J Main*

The Fairy Knowe is a 7 m high natural boulder clay mound situated 24 km W of Stirling (NGR NS 586 943). Its outlook northwards is across the flat carselands of the River Forth while to the S the land rises to the Gargunnoch Hills. Excavations, funded by the Scottish Development Department, took place between 1975 and 1978 and an interim report appears in the *Forth Naturalist and Historian*, 3 (1978), 99–111.

A ring, 8 m in diameter, of 11 large postholes representing a round-house was cut into the pink clay of the mound. Three yielded the stumps of their oak posts still *in situ*. Along the inner edge of nine of these postholes ran a small irregular groove. The presence of regularly spaced stakeholes in several sections of this groove suggests that the wall of the building was probably of wattle and daub construction set on a framework of stakes. The entrance lay in the E and the house was provided with a central hearth. An inner ring of posts gave support to the roof. The house was surrounded by a palisade set in a trench some 800 mm deep and 300 mm wide. The enclosure was 21 m across. No small finds were associated with the round-house but the radiocarbon date for one of the posts was 80 bc \pm 55 (GU-1244).

Some time in the late 1st century AD a broch was built on the site of the round-house. Its close relationship with the earlier structure suggests that some remains of the round-house were visible when the construction of the broch commenced. It was 8.2 m in diameter and its inner wall partly overlay the round-house posts. The narrow broch entrance was paved and lay in the E; its central hearth overlay earlier hearths. The broch was circular in plan and of the solid-based type. One small intra-mural chamber was located. Some 500 small finds were recovered, mainly from the black occupation layer and the areas of paving in the broch interior. They included several fine bronze penannular brooches and finger-rings. Finds of Roman coins and pottery confirm that the broch was built and occupied during the late 1st/early 2nd centuries AD.

The occupation of the broch came to a sudden and violent end. There was considerable evidence of burning with charred grain and whole artefacts scattered over much of the interior. Some of the iron nails still had charred wood adhering to them. The broch wall was completely demolished in the northern quadrant, with the inner face surviving only as ghost marks in the clay. The radiocarbon date from the destruction level of the broch is later than might be inferred from the Roman material, ad 210 \pm 45 (GU-1109).

Camelon Roman Forts 1899–1981

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The southern part of the Roman military complex at Camelon on the western outskirts of Falkirk, has been the subject of two major campaigns of rescue excavation: the first of these was carried out in 1899–1900 in advance of the construction of foundry buildings along the north side of the Falkirk to Glasgow road; the second dates to between 1975 and 1979 when one of these

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same foundry buildings, some years since converted into a bus-building factory, was scheduled for redevelopment, followed by a programme of resewering.

The Camelon fort complex consisted, in its most developed phase, of a 3.2 ha (8 acre) fort (termed by the 19th-century excavators the *north camp*) with an annexe attached to its north side and another, the so-called *south camp*, attached to its south side. The industrial developments which prompted the excavations affected the more southerly part of the *south camp*, notwithstanding which, the 1899 excavators paid most attention to the unthreatened *north camp*, producing little more than an outline of the defences and the plans of a few of the stone structures which lay within the *south camp*. A study of the published site plan, together with an unpublished version now housed at Falkirk museum, clearly indicates that the site is multiphase, pointing to the existence of an earlier enclosure underlying the Antonine fort and its south annexe. This conclusion is reinforced by the pottery from these early excavations, which includes 1st- as well as 2nd-century material.

The recent excavations proved the existence of two Flavian enclosures and two major phases within the south Antonine annexe: this annexe was shown to have been used, in part at least, for industrial purposes. The intensity of the 2nd-century use of the site, which included the digging of many large and deep pits, had caused considerable destruction to the underlying levels and it is not possible at present to put forward a coherent plan of the structures which lay within the 1st-century enclosures. Small scale research excavation in the *north camp* in 1981, designed to pick up the northern boundary of one of the Flavian enclosures, succeeded in this aim but also produced unexpected evidence for a further Flavian site, the buildings of which lay on the same alignment as those of the Antonine fort which overlay them.

Two particular points of interest arising from the excavations concern the date of the earliest material from the Flavian occupation, and the terminal date of the Antonine occupation. Historical considerations would seem to dictate a date no earlier than AD 79–80 for the foundation of the site, but the artefactual evidence retrieved included *terra nigra* (the most northerly find of this pottery which hitherto had been found no further north than Corbridge on the Tyne), 'pre-Flavian' fine wares, and glass and metalwork of pre-Flavian types. On the terminal date of the site (relevant to the wider question of the terminal date of the occupation of the Antonine Wall and of Roman Scotland as a whole) it may be observed that none of the pottery dates later than c AD 160, while of the collection of coins from the site (a total of 126 of which 62 are old finds and 64 derive from the recent excavations) none need date to later than the principate of Antoninus Pius.

Aspects of Viking and early medieval timber building in Ireland and Scotland

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The study of around 100 wattle and wooden buildings excavated in Dublin (10th–12th century), Perth (12th–14th century) and Aberdeen (12th–14th century) suggests certain approaches to the excavation and interpretation of domestic timber buildings on archaeological sites. Discussion of the plans and reconstructions of individual buildings will not be repeated here

*Hill of Belnagoak, Methlick, Aberdeenshire

as they are available elsewhere (Murray, H K 1982 in Murray, J C (ed), *Excavations in the medieval burgh of Aberdeen, 1973–1981*, Edinburgh, 224–8 (= *Soc Antiq Scot Monogr Ser*, 2); Murray, H K 1983 *Viking and early medieval buildings in Dublin*, Oxford (= *Brit Archaeol Rep*, 119); Murray, H K forthcoming 'The wooden and wattle buildings from Perth High Street', Perth High Street Excavation Committee). All the sites involved had good organic preservation which allowed details of timber construction to survive.

Parallels between the Irish buildings and the later Scottish ones show how certain features which occur in both contexts can be interpreted as techniques dictated by the requirements of the building materials rather than as evidence of cultural links. Further, by looking at the use of materials such as wattle from any date or context it is often possible to interpret the function of particular details of construction. For example, the wattle on the gables of some hay barns in the Applecross peninsula illustrates how wattle without cladding can often be deliberately used to encourage free ventilation while keeping out the worst rain or snow; a valuable attribute not only for hay, but also for byres or latrines.

The good organic preservation of these buildings can also warn against over-simplified interpretation of buildings on sites where only posthole evidence remains. A good example is the large group of buildings from Dublin which had double wattle walls, that is two parallel wattle walls which probably sandwiched some form of insulation material between them. In the Dublin examples it can be stated with absolute certainty that both walls were contemporary, but if interpretation had depended on posthole evidence the walls could easily have been judged to have been non-contemporary. Awareness of the possible variations in the use of building materials such as wattle can help to avoid such misinterpretation.

Much recent work on excavated timber buildings has concentrated very strongly on measurement and detail, but details, such as the diameters of individual posts or the intricate recording of innumerable sections of post-pits, are only important in relation to the complete building, complete not only in plan but in three-dimensional form. Excavated buildings must, therefore, whenever possible, be reconstructed, in words, drawings, models or even full-scale. Without reconstruction, and this applies as much to settlements as to buildings, there is no possible justification for excavation. For, while accurate primary recording is vital, it is of no value without interpretation in real and human terms. The diameter of a post for example is only the record of its base diameter, so not only must we estimate its possible function in the building and thereby its height, but also, where it is possible to identify the wood we need to look at the sort of tree from which the post came and estimate its original degree of taper and flexibility and fit these factors into the reconstruction. Post depth must not only be seen as related to the function and load-bearing capacity of the post, but also understood as a human action in the sense that a post is hammered in more or less, dependent on the firmness of the ground in a particular season, or even the tiredness of the builder.

Oddities of plan may equally be seen in terms of people as lazy, vain or idiosyncratic as ourselves. One building in Perth High Street illustrates the 'snob value' of rebuilding only the path-side wall in superior plank and sill construction, while the hidden walls remained in 'cheaper' wattle construction. A building with a D-shaped plan in Dublin used the maximum ground area while avoiding a pit in a very crowded urban property.

In conclusion, we must never be afraid to attempt to build a picture of a structure or settlement from the excavated evidence, while accepting that any such interpretation is only one of several possibilities. Not all reconstructions will merit publication, but unless the archaeologist has tried to think of the evidence in these terms he will only be able to present a list of disembodied and inarticulate facts disguised in a plethora of specialist reports.

Buildings, paintings and statuary at Glamis Castle under Patrick, 1st earl of Strathmore, c 1670–95

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One of the most interesting and entertaining 17th-century documents surviving in Scotland today must surely be the so-called *Glamis Book of Record*, written in the years between 1684 and 1689 and in part an autobiographical account of the building and other works of Patrick, 1st earl of Strathmore in the last quarter of that century. This account, in conjunction with other documents of the period preserved in the charter room at Glamis, provides a vivid picture of the earl and his activities which can be closely related to the castle as it stands today.

Among documents of exceptional interest is the contract between the earl and the Dutchman de Wet, dated 1688, for the decoration of the chapel which formed part of a new wing added by the earl in the 1680s to the north-east corner of the earlier tower-house. De Wet had been brought to Scotland originally to paint the portraits of the Scottish monarchs in the Long Gallery at Holyroodhouse and was employed by the earl both at Castle Huntly and Glamis. The scenes on the chapel ceiling were to be copied from a Bible then in the house which has since disappeared, but which was evidently illustrated either by the engravings of Boetius a Boelswert, first published in 1622, or more probably by the inferior copies of Van Houe, published in 1672. The paintings in general closely follow the originals, but there are also significant exceptions to this general rule.

De Wet's paintings include the portrait of the earl and his sons which now hangs in the upper hall at Glamis. The view of the castle in the background records its appearance on completion of the earl's works. Earlier buildings in front of the castle have been removed and replaced by a series of walled courtyards and gardens; the medieval wing E of the tower has been repaired and a new wing added to the W, thus providing the symmetrical facade so much desired by his lordship. The courtyards shown in the painting in front of the castle were demolished in the 18th century, but the gateways with their satyrs and gladiators, which were the work of a local mason, Alexander Crow and dated 1680, were moved at the same time to their present position on the boundaries of the estate.

The earl not only provided gardens but equipped them with appropriate statues, including representations of four Stuart kings. Two of these survive flanking the approach to the castle, as well as a bust of the earl now housed in a circular recess over the entrance. These can now be shown to be the work of another Dutchman, Arnold Quellin, who worked in London for Grinling Gibbons and who signed a contract with the earl in 1685. The two missing statues have not been traced but that of James VII and II can be shown by reference to an 18th-century engraving to have closely resembled that of the king which now stands in front of the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square.

The *Record*, documents and the castle itself reveal in much detail what was achieved by the earl but also, indirectly, something of the castle which he inherited from his ancestors. The early development of the castle, however, has yet to be studied in detail, and it is already clear that the story is a good deal more complex than appears at first sight.

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John Ewen, of Aberdeen, 1745–1821; merchant, politician, poet and connoisseur

Stuart Maxwell*

John Ewen was born on 20 April, 1745 (not 1741, as in the *DNB*) in Montrose, the son of John Ewen, occupation unknown, and Mary Callender. He married Janet Middleton, daughter of a wealthy stocking manufacturer in Aberdeen, in 1766, in which year he first advertised his business there as a hardware merchant. His wife, whose money probably financed Ewen's venture, died in 1767. Their only child, Elizabeth, married James Grahame, of the Morphie family; the marriage broke down and their son, Barron, was brought up by his grandfather; there is an obituary of Barron in our *Proceedings* for 1877–78.

Ewen's business prospered: he dealt in jewellery and silver plate, and also in watches, spectacles, soft goods, sunflower oil, cartridges, musical instruments, prints and many other things. He also diversified at different times: into property in Aberdeen; a bleachfield at Laurencekirk, where he had for a time the tack of a small farm from his friend Lord Gardenstone; a company running stage waggons between Aberdeen and Edinburgh, and 'ventures' to North America. Only an early (late 1760s) account book survives among the papers now on loan in St Andrews University Library, but there is much business and personal correspondence, with gaps, from 1766 to his death in 1821. After providing for his family, he bequeathed some £14 000 to Montrose to found a college there on the model of Robert Gordon's in Aberdeen. After a long legal battle, however, his will was overthrown and his family inherited the money.

Ewen's interests were many and varied. One was the Musical Society of Aberdeen; he was almost certainly the author of *The Boatie Rows*. He collected paintings and drawings and commissioned Alexander Nasmyth to paint the Views of Old and New Aberdeen now in possession of the city. He was a manager of the Gaelic Chapel and concerned in all the Aberdonian charities and good works of his day. He was the Secretary of the Scottish Committee for Burgh Reform and for many years a Police Commissioner in Aberdeen. John Ewen was also an early (1782) Corresponding Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Despite the survival of silver spoons seemingly marked by him, there is no evidence in his papers that he ever worked silver; they do afford much evidence that he employed goldsmiths, in Aberdeen and elsewhere. Many accounts detail how, among others, James Gordon, James Wildgoose, John Sheriff and Nathaniel Gillet repaired his customers' possessions and made flatware and jewellery. Larger items were commissioned in Edinburgh, Sheffield and London. There is also evidence that one London watchmaker marked some of the watches that Ewen sold with Ewen's name. His customers ranged from the nobility to some 40 chapmen in Aberdeen and the north-east, whom he supplied with the small wares they carried round the countryside.

John Ewen was a major figure in the political, economic and cultural life of the north-east for over 50 years.

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