Lecture Summaries 2002–2003

The making of classical Edinburgh

Richard Rodger

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For almost 40 years A J Youngson's *The Making of Classical Edinburgh* has been a standard work in relation to the development of the New Town. Youngson placed considerable emphasis on the importance of James Craig's plan for the New Town of Edinburgh and in the preface to a subsequent edition, stressed the importance of the system of land tenure. In this lecture, based on his deeply researched book, *The Transformation of Edinburgh: Land, Property and Trust in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press 2001) Richard Rodger showed that there were serious misgivings about Youngson's view. The New Town was certainly developed on the basis of Craig's plan, but Rodger explained that it was a two-dimensional plan. As such, it had very ambiguous meaning in practice.

Rodger posed a number of questions to capture the property issues of the late 18th century. How could Craig's plan be applied if it did not specify how far houses should extend to the rear of the plot? How could Craig's plan have force over the rear of houses if the facades of New Town houses were so variable in appearance? How could the height of party walls be governed by the Craig plan since it was impossible to render this on a two dimensional document? If these important details were not explicit, then how could the plan have any force over outhouses and stables?

And since no buildings were identified on the rear of plots on Craig's plan, were these always intended to be gardens, and if so, why were they not shown in the same manners as the gardens in St Andrew's Square? The Craig plan was uncertain, and as legal opinion eventually showed, unsafe as the basis for future property development.

Certainly, James Craig's plan governed the initial building phase. The agreements between builders and the first residents were based on a contract. There were almost no stipulations or 'real burdens' about what the 'future use' of the buildings might be and a series of disputes began as early as 1772, becoming more frequent as the first residents died or moved out of their New Town properties. Their successors sought to adapt and improve the original buildings. Craig's plan made no provision for this 'change of use'. The middle class property investors of Edinburgh realized that they needed to be sure that their future amenity and thus property investment would not be compromised by the actions of others who might build unsightly and unhealthy structures on adjoining properties. A series of legal disputes between neighbours resulted, often over what could be built in the back yards of the New Town houses around St Andrew's Square. There was so much work for lawyers over this issue from the 1770s, some of it involving expensive actions in the Court of Session and on several occasions in the House of Lords, that Rodger argued this showed how flawed the Craig plan was as the basis of property development in Scotland between 1760 and 1840.

Milestones in legal history, therefore, in 1772, 1818 especially, and finally in an

Aberdeen case in 1840, created 'real burdens; in Scots Property. That is, strict limitations on what could be built, what uses property could be put to, and what charges and obligations could be exacted, were created by this means. Feuing was reinvented to serve the needs of the middle classes, to protect their investments, and to assure them of their future use and amenity. Crucially, these restrictions were passed on to succeeding generations, and carefully stipulated in the feuing charters, which from 1818 became the basis of property law.

The Craig plan and its loose property controls provided a useful basis for the initial development of the New Town. But its vagueness over the future use of property threatened to stall the development of Edinburgh's New Town specifically and Scottish urban development more generally. By resolving this, principally in a legal decision in 1818, the future of property development throughout Scotland was assured. More importantly, feu-duties and real burdens applied to property in the long run. The middle classes were reassured about their investments; annuitants, institutions and endowments depended on feu-duties for their incomes were delighted; and builders and developers found a ready source of capital in the purchase and sub-feuing of land. Scottish urban development, Richard Rodger concluded, had much to do with James Craig's plan for the New Town, but only in the sense that it caused conflict between neighbours and anxiety amongst investors. So, for the long-term benefit of propertied middle classes it was superseded by a crucial legal decision in 1818 that re-cast Scots property law. Victorian tenements were the natural high-rise result.

Bodies under the floor: prehistoric roundhouse life at Cladh Hallan, South Uist

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Cladh Hallan was first reported on as an archaeological site during quarrying almost a century ago. It was re-discovered in the 1950s and has been excavated since 1988 in tandem with sand quarrying. The southern part of the site is a large settlement mound, about 80m in diameter, of which the northern end has been excavated. At the base of the mound there is a Beaker cultivation soil with characteristic cross-ploughed ardmarks. After about a metre of windblown sand had covered these, the site was used as a cremation cemetery. One of the cremations was selected to form the base of a small hearth within the centre of a boat-shaped, wooden-walled house, probably towards the end of the second millennium BC. The house was eventually dismantled and ploughed over. Thereafter, an alignment of large pits (of varying depths) was dug north-east/south-west across the site. Two of these cut through the house but one was used in antiquity to dig underneath the hearth and remove some of the cremated bones.

The filling-in of the pit alignment was the prelude for construction of a terraced row of roundhouses, built around 1000 BC. These were also preceded by a curious, very small roundhouse whose use was short-lived. The row of roundhouses were joined together by party walls and aligned north/south with east doorways. The northern three have been excavated and a fourth is located – there is room on the south side of the mound for another three. Within the roundhouses there was a variety of foundation deposits – a broken quernstone, a stone-slabbed 'drain' with a human scapula fragment, and many

pits with ceramics – of which the most spectacular were four human burials. There was one under the north-east quadrant of each house and an additional one – a woman – on the south side of the north house. This dwelling seems to have had a particular association with death, since there was a cremation pyre platform outside its doorway, cremated bones from its pit fills and an infant burial under its third phase.

All the foundation burials, except for the skeleton of the young teenager under the middle house, showed signs that the bodies were long dead before burial. The woman's lateral incisors had been carefully removed and placed in her hands. The man buried under the north house was actually a composite of three different male skeletons – the head of one, the mandible of another and the torso of a third. Their radiocarbon dates support the evidence for their delayed burial and the torso's date centres on 1600 BC. The extreme flexing of this and the woman's skeleton indicate that the bodies were bound or wrapped very tightly. Results of Fournier-transform infrared spectroscopy, mercury porosimetry and small-angle X-ray scattering suggest that the decay of the man's body was arrested by preserving it in peat for about a year. This simple form of mummification would have preserved the soft tissue for what appears to have been many centuries before burial around 1000 BC. Isotope results indicate that the diet of all of these people was largely terrestrial and that they were local to the islands.

Each roundhouse was different in the way it was lived in. The middle house was the largest and had a circular porch or forecourt. An association with metalworking was indicated by the deposition of about 200 clay mould fragments for swords, spears, ornaments and a razor in the floor levels of both the house and forecourt. The south house was the poorest in terms of the quality and quantity of finds on its floors or in its foundation deposits. A gold-plated bronze penannular ring was found outside the doorway of the north house in its final phase.

The three roundhouses were also lived in for different periods of time. The middle one was most long lived with eight uninterrupted rebuilds over a period of half a millennium or more. Soft floors of these and other roundhouse surfaces at Cladh Hallan have provided a remarkable insight into the spatial patterning of micro-debris to inform us of activity patterns within the houses. Carbonized plant remains, ceramics, faunal remains and small finds can all be plotted across the floor to provide patterning which is not normally retrievable. The consistent arrangement of interior space – food preparation in the southeast, working activities in the south-west, sleeping platform in the north – supports models hypothesized prior to excavation of a sunwise ordering of space in which the timing of the day's activities conforms to the movement of the sun around the house. That this circular arrangement might also embody the sunwise cycle of life was also supported by the selection of the north-east quadrant for burial of humans and dogs.

At least two of the Cladh Hallan burials provide interesting evidence for mummification in the Bronze Age. The burial of these mummies within roundhouses, replacing the tradition of boat-shaped houses, may have represented a religious or ideological overthrow of a local social order founded on ancestral beliefs. The change seems also to have accompanied economic changes as well, with more permanently occupied houses, an intensification of dairying, and perhaps a more extensive system of cropping and fallowing.

New work on the origins of the Scots of Dál Riata

Ewan Campbell

Edinburgh, 13th October 2003

The orthodox accounts of the origins of the Scots of Dál Riada state that they invaded Argyll from north-east Antrim around AD 500, under their leader Fergus Mor. In the process they displaced a native Brittonic-speaking (P-Celtic) populace. This traditional account is based on historical sources, but has been accepted by other disciplines such as archaeology and linguistics. However, an examination of the evidence for this supposed migration reveals very little that is solidly based, and it can be postulated that the Scots of Argyll were the native inhabitants of that region.

If there had been any substantial movement of people into Argyll, there should be *some* sign of this in the archaeological record, even though few would now accept a simplistic equation of material culture and population groups. The areas of material culture where we might expect to see signs of incomers from a different cultural group are personal jewellery such as brooches and pins, and settlement forms (both areas were aceramic at the time). The ringforts of Ireland are the characteristic early medieval settlement form, with over 40,000 recorded, and occupied by all ranks from kings to the lowest grade of free farmer. A substantial proportion of the inhabitants of Ireland must have lived in these structures. None, however, are known from Argyll, even though there are suitable areas for their construction. The duns of Argyll are quite distinctive in their hill-top location, and structural features not found in ringforts. They have been inhabited since at least the middle of the first millennium BC and show no sign of changes associated with new peoples. The personal jewellery also shows no sign of Irish influence. The zoomorphic penannular brooch was the main type of brooch in 4–6th-century Ireland, but none have been found in Argyll. The main type of brooch in western Britain, Fowler's Type G, is found in Ireland, but at a later date than those manufactured at sites such as Dunadd. The few Irish items found in Argyll can be attributed to the movement of individuals. Archaeology provides no evidence for a movement of people from Ireland to Scotland.

The historical evidence is also flawed. Recent work has shown that supposedly contemporary evidence of a migration in sources such as the Irish *Annals of Tighernach* or the *Míniugud Senchusa Fher nAlban*, was in fact inserted in the 10/11th century and manipulated to reflect the political views of that time. While there clearly was an origin legend locating the home of the Scots in Antrim, this falls into the category of a widespread European tradition of the time which traces eponymous founders of dynasties back to mythical or spiritual figures. The manipulation of such stories to give justification for claims to land can be demonstrated in some cases, making it likely that the story was an attempt by the Scots of Dál Riada to claim sovereignty over areas of Ireland.

The linguistic evidence for the former P-Celtic speakers in Argyll depends on one word. In Ptolemy's *Geography* of the second century AD, the tribe named *Epidii* are located in Kintyre. This has been taken to indicate that theses people spoke P-Celtic, but it is as likely that the name is a P-Celtic form of the tribe's name, or the name given to the tribe by a P-Celtic speakers in neighbouring areas. The source for Ptolemy's information was probably a native Briton living in Central Lowlands of Scotland. Against the evidence of this one word, the complete lack of P-Celtic placenames in Argyll is striking.

An alternative view sees the North Channel not as a barrier to communication, but an enabler. In this viewpoint, the Highland massif, *Druim Alban* (Spine of Britain) to early

medieval writers, was the real barrier to communication between the diverging P- and Q-branches of Celtic. The native population of Argyll always spoke Q-Celtic, and was never invaded by the Irish. For a time in the early medieval period, the Gaels of Argyll claimed parts of Antrim, creating 'Irish Dál Riada' and origin legends were constructed to bolster this claim.