

Rethinking Scotland's Neolithic: combining circumstance with context

Kenneth Brophy*

ABSTRACT

In 1985, a seminal review of Scottish Neolithic studies from an outside perspective written by Ian Kinnes was published in these Proceedings. Kinnes's paper offered a discussion of the state of knowledge of Scotland's Neolithic at that time, reviewing 40 years of excavations results. He was also critical of, as he saw it, the parochial and derivative nature of Neolithic studies in Scotland. In this paper, written 20 years after Kinnes's significant contribution, the response to this charge will be discussed. A review of major developments in Neolithic studies since 1985 has also been undertaken, the results of which are included here. The impact of developer-funded archaeology and aerial photography in particular has generated substantial new data not available to Kinnes; these data have been generated within a new theoretical climate in Neolithic studies, and this too will be addressed. Reviews of evidence for settlement and monuments are presented as case studies to exemplify progress made since 1985.

There is no reason, other than that of modern political expediency, why the 'Scottish Neolithic' should exist as an entity... This poses the basic problem: parochial definition without parochial thought (Kinnes 1985, 16).

Just over 20 years ago, Ian Kinnes wrote a seminal paper on the Scottish Neolithic, published in these *Proceedings*, in which he characterized most syntheses of Scotland's Neolithic since Childe (1935) as 'derivative or local in overall method' (Kinnes 1985, 15). He argued that interpretations of the period in Scotland tended to treat the country as a homogenous entity and were parochial in their tone. Barclay (2004a, 41) has noted the deliberate paradox inherent in Kinnes's paper – a call for locally derived interpretations and ideas applied to local problems, but without further isolating Scotland from wider discourse. The charge of parochialism is a hurtful one, and all the more so when originating from an

external source. Similar criticisms have more recently been made by Barclay (2001a; 2004a; 2004b), who contended that only in the 1970s did prehistorians in Scotland move beyond the pervasive image of Scotland as a largely highland landscape in the Neolithic. Such historical traditions led to the homogenous interpretations criticized by Kinnes (including Piggott 1962; MacKie 1975; Feachem 1977). In effect, 'Highlandism' went hand in hand with parochialism in the sense that Scotland's Neolithic was viewed as different and difficult, by both outsiders and those working in Scotland. Parallels and analogies for Neolithic sites in Scotland were sought from elsewhere (often southern England) in the face of the apparent paucity of evidence (Barclay 2001a, 14).

What then are we to make of Kinnes's contribution two decades on? His paper is one of a series of review pieces commissioned by the

* Department of Archaeology, Gregory Building, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ

Society of Antiquaries of Scotland from external commentators on aspects of Scottish archaeology (see also Fowler 1987; Woodman 1989). Kinnes was an ideal candidate to assess the Neolithic in this context: an Englishman based at the British Museum in London. The content of the paper, and his lengthy acknowledgements, suggest that Kinnes took his charge seriously. There is no doubt that the paper was a genuine attempt to shake Scottish Neolithic studies out of some kind of malaise born of parochialism and a lack of self-confidence. Rather than attempt some kind of intellectual colonialism, Kinnes's paper advocated a way forward that more carefully balanced locally-derived interpretation with the wider British and even north-west European Neolithic. This paper is an attempt to offer a view on how successfully this challenge has been met since the 1980s.

The past 20 years have been marked by a number of important changes, notably an explosion of data in Scotland and major theoretical developments within Neolithic studies. This has allowed a more regionally driven, and interpretive, agenda in Neolithic studies in Scotland with a strong academic focus, articulated in a number of conference proceedings and other publications (cf Sharples & Sheridan 1992; Ritchie 2000; Edwards & Ralston 2003; Barclay & Shepherd 2004; Cummings & Pannett 2005). Popular publications have presented colourful introductions to the subject based on such research (Ashmore 1996; Barclay 1998). Together these offer a refreshing, if rather fragmented, picture of Neolithic studies in this country. However, it is also clear that there has been no attempt as yet to write an academic synthesis combining the data gathered in recent decades with wider developments in archaeological theory, in particular that applied within Neolithic studies (although Noble (2006) was unpublished at the time of writing). Perhaps a model for such a publication is Cooney's (2000) excellent study of Ireland's Neolithic. Far from being parochial, Cooney's volume is a confident statement of the regional identity of

Ireland in the Neolithic within the wider context of the British Isles.

This academic discourse has been driven, paradoxically, by an explosion in information from developer-funded excavation. There have also been a number of notable research excavation projects (eg Barclay & Maxwell 1998; Barclay 2003a; Richards 2005; Thomas in prep) and developments in various forms of survey, including aerial reconnaissance (see below) and geophysical survey (eg Collier et al 2003). Fieldwalking, often not exploited adequately in 1985, is now more widely employed. Radiocarbon dating strategies are now more clearly defined and the techniques better; and a larger body of environmental evidence and material culture is also available to us. Clearly, however, we cannot simply judge our current interpretations of the Neolithic against those of 20 years ago based on a greater quantity of data, better science and more publications alone. Syntheses of the British Neolithic that marginalize the Scottish material have continued to be published (cf Barrett 1994; Thomas 1999a; Malone 2001). It is how these data are used that is crucial: for instance, when Kinnes was writing, he discussed exciting new cropmark discoveries, but there was little context within which to place them and in some cases no sense of whether they were even Neolithic. Consequently, they formed only a minor element of his paper. We are now in a better position to exploit 'new' forms of data such as cropmarks because of ground-truthing excavations and different interpretive frameworks.

This paper is divided into two parts, both addressing strands of Kinnes's paper. First, I will consider the quantifiable difference between Neolithic evidence in 1985 and the present day. Second, I will offer some alternative narratives to those presented by Kinnes. His paper included a summary of all that was known, posing questions along the way and suggesting future research priorities. For my purposes, I will focus on two specific aspects of Scotland's Neolithic touched upon by Kinnes: settlement evidence

and aspects of monumentality. Both will be more in-depth analyses of the implication of data accrued over two decades, and present radically different perspectives from Kinnes. These two aspects of life overlap and this will be made explicit through a brief case study of 'timber halls', a group of early Neolithic monuments in the eastern lowlands that in so many ways illustrate both the potential and limitations of the archaeological record. The paper will conclude with reflection on how Neolithic studies in Scotland have changed since 1985.

Before going any further, it is worth defining the spatial and temporal parameters of this paper. Although there was no such thing as Scotland in the Neolithic, that is not to say that the term is entirely without relevance. Barclay has noted that contemporary administrative expediency has shaped the parameters of certain projects and syntheses of data; 'the border has effected the practice of archaeology, and in particular the writing of prehistory' (Barclay 2002, 781) and modern politicization has meant that Scottish prehistory has been written about, and conceived of, in a certain way (Barclay 2001a) that would not have been appropriate south of the border. The temporal parameters are equally embedded in the modern world. Despite increasing ambiguity between Neolithic lifestyles and those in the periods on either side, I have taken the term Neolithic as the period from around 4000 BC towards the latter half of the third millennium BC. Ashmore (2004, 133–4) has recently noted that domesticates began to appear in Scotland between 3800 and 3700 BC, placing the beginning of the Neolithic in a hiatus of dates between 4250 and 3750 BC (Ashmore 2002, 785). I have not considered sites where the earliest diagnostic trait was Beaker pottery (the parameter also used in Phillips & Bradley 2004). The arbitrary use of Beaker pottery for the purposes of this paper places the end of the Neolithic at somewhere just after 2500 cal BC (Ashmore 2004, 131–2).

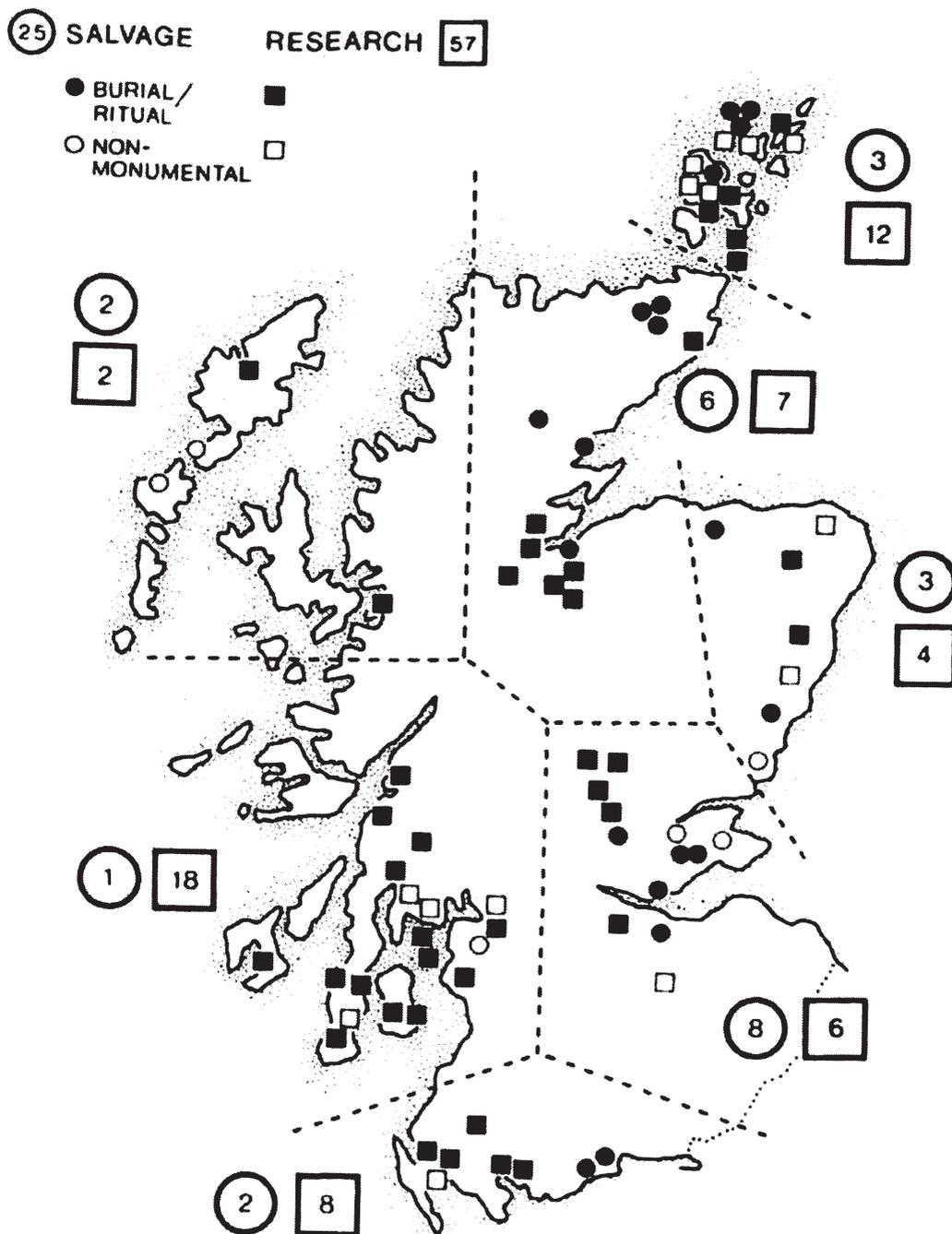
This paper is by no means comprehensive, and does not present an exact mirroring of

Kinnes's paper; this would require a far longer essay, perhaps even a book. There is little discussion here, for instance, on developments in our understanding of material culture, although a synthesis of these data is long overdue. Instead my objective is to demonstrate through select examples not only the wider range of evidence available to us but also the potential for overlapping Neolithic narratives to be developed. Neolithic sites and materials found within Scotland should be interpreted on their own merits, but within a wider milieu of Neolithic studies in north-west Europe; these scales of analysis are overlapping, not mutually exclusive, an argument implicit in Kinnes's paper.

THE DATA EXPLOSION

As Ian Kinnes (1985, 15) noted, 'it seems that Scottish prehistory depends on the marginal'. Hence the comfort of belonging we can all feel now that some 50 cursus monuments have been discovered in Scotland compared with the single identified example of 25 years ago (Clarke 2004, 45).

The sheer increase in the quantity of data that we have now compared with the 1980s is not a measure of how much more we know. This should be judged by how we use this evidence to write more appropriate and ambiguous accounts of the past. The more data we have, the more difficult it becomes to rely on our traditional classifications and paradigms. However, we cannot use the data uncritically, and must also consider in what ways it has been gathered. Archaeological processes have an important role in the generation and patterning of data, and this must be acknowledged. Dealt with sensitively, the expansion of the archaeological record in the past 20 years offers a context from within which a wider range of regional and interpretive approaches have developed. Excitingly, new Neolithic narratives are being generated due to work classified by Kinnes as 'salvage' as well as traditional research projects.



ILLUS 1 'A regional assessment of Neolithic sites investigated in Scotland since 1945' (from Kinnes 1985, 17)

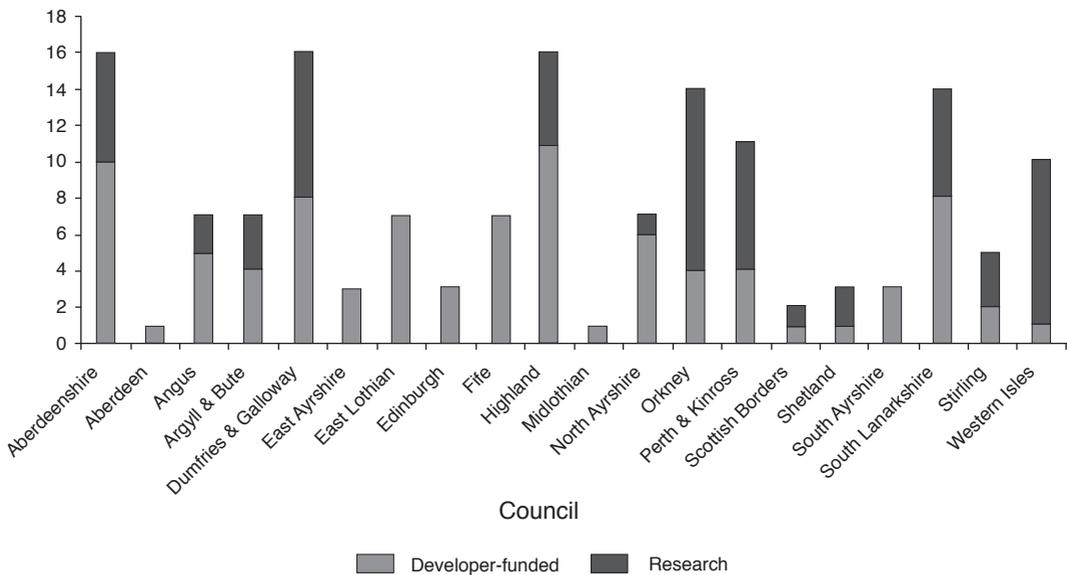
THE CHANGING FACE OF EXCAVATION

One measure of how things have changed since 1985 is to quantify, as Kinnes did, the number and nature of excavations in Scotland that have revealed Neolithic evidence. Any comparison can only be rough, as it is not entirely clear what Kinnes's parameters were. He drew on what he termed 'formal investigations', by which he meant excavations, presumably of any scale, that revealed Neolithic dates or material culture. He noted 82 such investigations in the 40 years prior to 1985, although he noted that, for a third, 'the scale of excavation or retrieved information is minimal' (ibid, 16). These 82 sites were broken down based on the motive for excavation, whether monumental or not and by geographical location (illus 1).

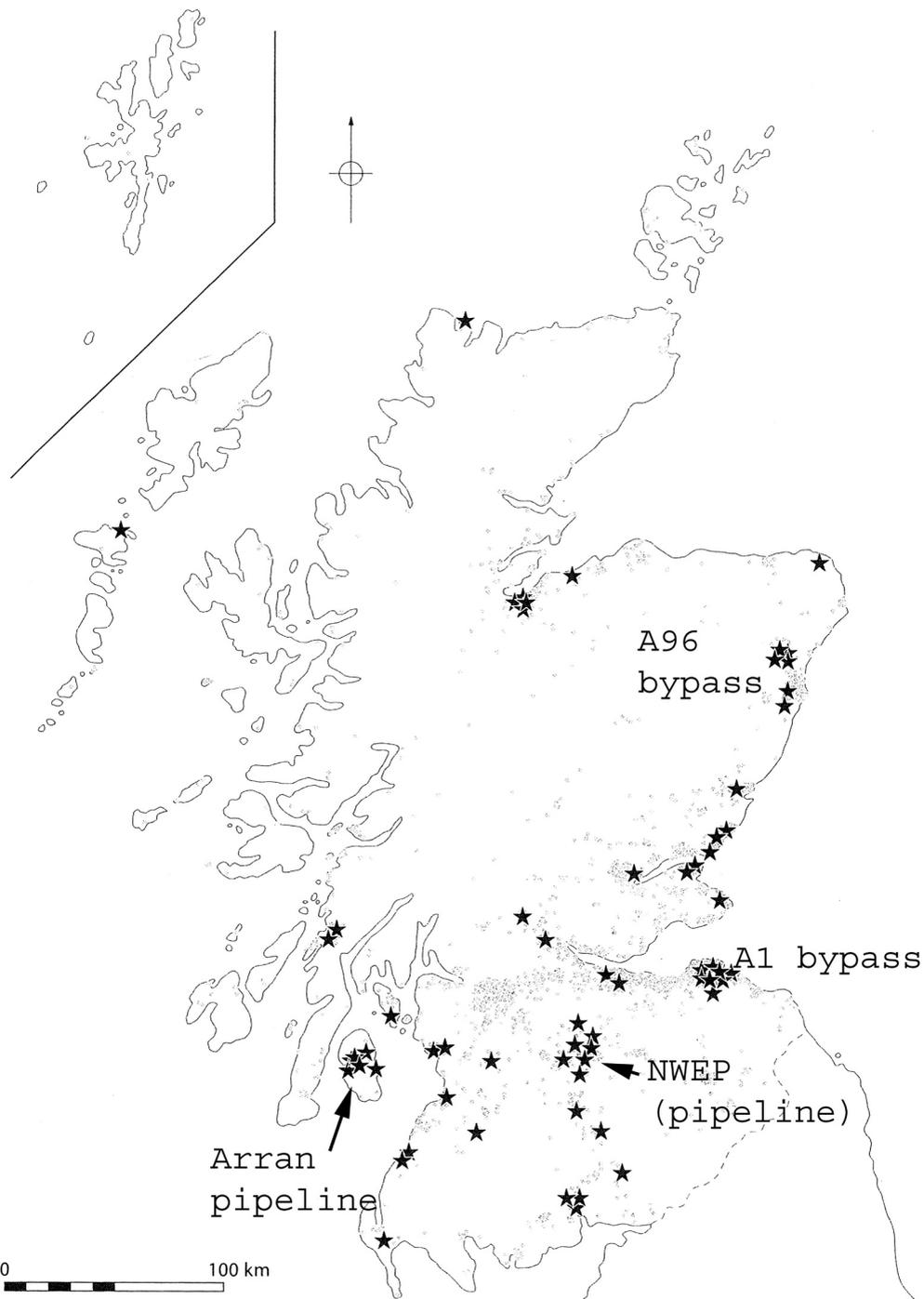
In trying to compile similar statistics, a list of 'formal investigations' undertaken in the 20-year period 1985–2004 was compiled in preparation for this paper. It was constructed by trawling through the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS), 20 years of *Discovery and*

Excavation in Scotland (DES), national and regional journals and the database compiled by Bradley (funded by the AHRB) of developer-funded fieldwork in Scotland in the period 1990–2003 (Phillips & Bradley 2004). Included were excavations on sites and monuments already regarded as Neolithic and investigations that revealed, often unexpectedly, Neolithic traces in a secure context. Sites excavated over a number of seasons were only counted once, and the dating parameters as discussed above were applied. Kinnes made little of lithic scatters and non-invasive surveys; I will consider these in more detail below.

Over the last 20 years, at least 153 excavations in Scotland have fulfilled the above criteria (illus 2). This is a substantial increase on the dataset that Kinnes was working with (almost double), gathered within half the time period he drew on. On closer analysis, the data very much reflect changes in excavation practice in Scotland. In the 40 years leading up to 1985, 69% of the 'formal investigations' had been research projects, while the remaining



ILLUS 2 Number of research and developer-funded excavations that produced Neolithic features in the period 1985–2004, per council area. Councils with no such excavations have been left out for reasons of space



ILLUS 3 Many Neolithic discoveries made in the period 1990–2003 lie on the routeways of a series of discrete developmental projects. Each star represents a Neolithic site excavated or discovered as a result of developer-funded archaeology in this period (after Phillips & Bradley 2004, 25)

31% were 'salvage' interventions (illus 1). This proportion has now dramatically altered, with almost 60% of the excavations undertaken in the past 20 years of a developer-funded (or rescue) nature, ranging from major road and housing developments, through to intervention forced by coastal erosion and quarrying. This should not be a surprise, and is largely down to changes in planning legislation and the introduction of NPPG5 (Scottish Office 1994). Within the period 1990–2000, the number of field projects undertaken by commercial units tripled, 75% of this work being funded by commercial clients (Carter 2002, 870). Bradley's AHRB project recorded over 60 sites where Neolithic evidence had been recovered in the period 1990–2003 from a range of watching briefs, evaluations, field surveys and excavations (Phillips & Bradley 2004; see illus 3). What Kinnes (1985, 16–17) called salvage excavation has since become an integral part of Scottish archaeology. This differentiation between research and rescue does not really matter in terms of the data derived. However, it is important to consider the reason for excavations occurring when we try to derive patterns from this material.

The effects of the impetus for fieldwork are far reaching; one of these has been a major change in the distribution of excavated Neolithic sites and features. Kinnes (illus 1) broke the country into seven regions and listed the number of sites for each region. A similar analysis (albeit using current council boundaries) shows some dramatic differences (illus 2). Perhaps the most noticeable trend is a considerable increase in work in the eastern lowlands, from 21 sites in 1945–84, to over 60 in 1985–2004. By contrast there has been proportionately less work in south-west and western Scotland, the notable exception being the Western Isles, and while Orkney remains a major focus of Neolithic studies, this area experiences a drop in the proportion of overall excavations from 18% to 9%. We should be cautious about reading too much into these figures as it is largely a product of contemporary planning policy and

where developments occur. As illus 3 shows, the distribution of evidence from developer-funded projects (1990–2003) reflects a series of discrete developmental events, and a degree of serendipity. For instance, all excavations of Neolithic sites in East Lothian in the last 20 years were developer-funded, took place in 2001–3, and all but one were linked to the upgrade of the A1 road (eg Gooder 2001; Lelong & MacGregor in prep). By contrast, where developmental pressures are rare, such as Orkney and the Western Isles, excavations tend to be almost entirely undertaken for research purposes. The haphazard nature of the formation of the archaeological record has been noted elsewhere (cf Bradley et al 1994; Phillips & Bradley 2004, 37–9; Brophy & Cowley 2005). Because of the artificiality of the distribution of evidence, it is the detail of individual sites and features in a regional context that may be significant rather than wider superficial patterns.

Although Kinnes attempted to sub-divide his 82 sites in terms of 'burial/ritual' and 'non-monumental' (illus 1), this is not a judgement I have made. Such judgements are often impossible to make for a specific site as these concepts were almost certainly not mutually exclusive in the past. There are many sites that defy simple categorization into one or the other of these groups; still other sites are simply impossible to assign any definitive function to either because they survive in a limited form with little context, or because they do not appear to conform to any of our preconceived typological classes. Ritualized activities were not confined to monumental structures; monumental structures were not necessarily associated with entirely ritualistic activity; and 'domestic' traces may have had ritual elements.

There have been two further positive developments in Neolithic studies in Scotland since 1985, both instigated by Historic Scotland. Firstly, there has been a conscious effort to achieve more reliable, useful and accurate C¹⁴ dates. Kinnes regretted the quality of radiocarbon dates in his paper:

There are over 200 radiocarbon determinations available for the period but a high proportion of these are of limited value, relatively few fulfilling the essential criteria of multiple contextual dating (Kinnes 1985, 16).

Ashmore (1998; 2002, 784; 2004, 125–7) notes a range of problems of dating charcoal from bulk samples and decayed bone. Gradually, however, unsuitable or unhelpful dates are being eradicated through the use of single entity dating, multiple dates within contexts and new techniques (Ashmore 2002, 786). This has led to many more, and incontestable, dates being available to us than to Kinnes. The number of Neolithic dates has now more than trebled since 1985 (Ashmore 2002, 784; and pers comm). Secondly, Historic Scotland's Backlog Project encouraged older and more recent excavations to be brought to publication (Barclay & Owen 1995), many of them Neolithic sites. Instead of relying on unpublished information, DES entries and interim statements, we are now in the position of being able to consult more final reports and site archives for far more sites; at the same time, however, there is now a mountain of 'grey' literature with which to familiarize ourselves.

THE IMPACT OF AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE

One of the key factors in our conception of the Neolithic now, as opposed to a few decades ago, are the results of aerial reconnaissance. Described by Barclay (1995, 8) as '... the process which has more than any other better defined the vastness of our ignorance', aerial photography has transformed our conception of Neolithic

monumentality and inhabitation of the landscape. Sorties in Scotland were initially infrequent and often focused on Roman and 'native' targets (Jones 2005), carried out for the Cambridge University Collection of Aerial Photographs (CUCAP). In 1976, RCAHMS established their Aerial Survey Programme, which quickly began to identify a wide range of cropmarks across lowland Scotland (Maxwell 1979; 1983a). When Kinnes was writing, little synthetic work had been undertaken on the fast accumulating body of cropmark evidence, and therefore he made limited use of cropmark sites in his discussion (although see Kinnes 1998). It was not until the publication of the south-east Perth 'inventory' (RCAHMS 1994) that cropmark evidence was fully integrated into any synthesis of prehistory in Scotland.

We can quantify approximately how the available cropmark data has increased since 1985. We know that in the mid-1980s there



ILLUS 4 Many cropmark enclosures, such as this one at Brownsbank, South Lanarkshire, may have Neolithic origins (© Crown Copyright RCAHMS)



ILLUS 5 Excavations at the timber hall at Claish, Stirling: ground-truthing a cropmark
(© Crown Copyright RCAHMS)

were at least eight known cursus monuments (Kinnes 1985, 41; Loveday 1985), fewer than a dozen henge monuments (Harding & Lee 1987), three palisaded enclosures, a handful of possible 'timber halls' and 32 pit-circles (the majority of which were Later Prehistoric; Tolan 1988). Kinnes mentioned virtually none of these sites, although emphasis was given to non-megalithic mortuary sites, some of which were revealed by aerial survey (eg the Inchtuthil long mortuary enclosure, Perth & Kinross, subsequently excavated; Barclay & Maxwell 1991). Kinnes's focus on mortuary structures is understandable, given his wider interest in this topic (1992a; 1992b).

Since then, many more possible Neolithic sites have been identified through cropmark evidence (Cowley & Brophy 2001; Barclay 2005; Brophy 2005; Hanson 2005) and subsequently demonstrated through excavation.

Aerial reconnaissance has been responsible for the discovery of perhaps many hundreds of Neolithic sites, adding examples to established monument classes (Brophy 2005, 1–2), but also discovering a range of 'new' types of sites, and sites that appear to be, as yet, unclassifiable (illus 4). Our understanding of monument classes has been transformed, from the discovery of a form of cursus defined by timber posts rather than earthworks, to the establishment of 'timber halls' as an important element of the fourth millennium BC (illus 5). Paradoxically, the more henge monuments we find (with 80 henges and 'minihenges' now known as cropmarks), the more variety is encountered and the less, therefore, the term 'henge monument' seems appropriate (Barclay 2005). Our whole understanding of monumentality has changed, I would suggest, with a shift in emphasis from megaliths to timber and earthwork sites. The

range of cropmark evidence has helped to clarify regional variation, and also allowed us to participate in wider contexts; palisaded enclosures, for instance, are now found across the British Isles and mainland Europe (Gibson 2002).

As with excavation evidence, we cannot uncritically interpret the distribution of cropmark discoveries in Scotland. The flying programme of RCAHMS, principle aerial surveyors in Scotland since 1976, has tended towards areas with dryer arable land, partly because virtually all flights leave from Edinburgh airport and partly because of the expectation of better results, skewing the distribution of cropmarks

to eastern and south-west lowland Scotland (Hanson & Macinnes 1991; Hanson 2005, 75–7). Personal bias in flying preferences has augmented this pattern (Cowley 2002; Brophy & Cowley 2005, 13–22) and there are also difficulties in interpreting cropmarks. Excavations at Balbridie (Fairweather & Ralston 1993), Huntingtower (Barclay 1982) and Upper Gothen (Barclay 2001b) have shown that we cannot take it for granted that morphological parity can help us classify and date cropmark sites. Also, limited use has been made of other aerial resources, such as vertical photography and aerial coverage of upland areas (cf Horne et al 2002). These problems aside, it is clear



ILLUS 6 The Raeburnfoot section of the Eskdalemuir bank barrow running up the centre of the aerial photograph, still visible as an earthwork for several hundred metres, but only identified in the 1990s (© Crown Copyright RCAHMS)

that aerial reconnaissance has made a major difference to our view of the Neolithic in a short period of time.

Other forms of non-invasive survey have also influenced Neolithic studies in Scotland. Phillips (in Phillips & Bradley 2004, 19) notes that 91 new prehistoric sites were identified by developer-funded field-survey in 1990–2003, and some of these finds were Neolithic. Upstanding field monuments of Neolithic date are still being found; Barclay (2004a, 38) notes the discoveries of Herald Hill long barrow, Perth & Kinross, and Auchenlaich long cairn, Stirling, in the 1990s, and to this can be added the 2km long bank barrow at Eskdalemuir (RCAHMS 1997, 107; illus 6). These sites, along with the Cleaven Dyke (Barclay & Maxwell 1998) and Droughduil 'Motte' (Thomas 2004), show the benefit of reviewing unproven traditional interpretations of earthworks. Kinnes (1985) and others after him (eg Barclay 1992, 114; 1995, 9) expressed the urgent need for more and larger-scale fieldwalking projects. The only major success story following fieldwalking that Kinnes (1985, 27) could draw on was Barnhouse, Orkney, where excavations had just begun. More recently, some major projects have shown the benefit of large-scale systematic fieldwalking projects, often in collaboration with local archaeology societies. Projects in Caithness (Pannett in prep), Clyde Valley (Johnson 1997), Strathearn (Barclay & Wickham-Jones 2002) and northern and north-eastern Scotland (eg Phillips 2005) have allowed a better understanding of prehistoric inhabitation of the landscape. Lithic scatters at Biggar Common (Johnson 1997), Melbourne Crossroads (eg Ward 1997) and Kinbeachie (Barclay et al 2001) have, upon excavation, revealed putative Neolithic settlement traces (see below). The establishment of the Lithic Scatters Database in the 1990s (eg Barrowman 2000) was another important step in the process of rationalizing the data gathered from formal and informal fieldwalking projects. Barclay (2003b, 72) was rightly cautious against making the simplistic

assumption that lithic scatter = settlement, but by focusing on scatters that produce ceramics, and considering them within their local context, this may provide another useful and relatively unexploited resource.

MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

Kinnes (1985, 18) rightly discussed Scotland's Neolithic as a 'catalogue of limitations', but we are in the fortunate position now in having a larger and more diverse body of data with which to work. A combination of aerial survey, field-survey, developer-funded excavation and fieldwalking has added hundreds of new sites of Neolithic date to the NMRS, strengthening the record in eastern Scotland in particular. Aside from absolute dating, I have not even touched on the other benefits of all of this work: assemblages of pottery, lithics and other material culture have increased greatly, and there has also been a substantial increase in the environmental data available for analysis.

This increase in data has occurred in a changing intellectual climate within prehistoric studies, which has found its outlet in the re-interpretation of well-known monuments (eg Barclay 1999), and the application of new approaches including landscape archaeology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, metaphor, biography and techniques from GIS to geophysical survey. Practitioners of such 'new' approaches are still largely drawn to chambered cairns (eg Jones 1998; 1999; Watson & Keating 1999; Cummings 2002; Phillips 2002; Fraser 2004; Noble 2005), but are undertaking studies that would have been unimagined 20 years ago. The apparent replacement of empirical excavation and survey of such monuments with 'soft' interpretive approaches demonstrates a sense that traditional techniques have not generated satisfactory narratives about past monuments and society beyond description, date, cultural affinity and functionality. In this same interpretive spirit, I will now consider in a little more detail two ambiguous elements of

Neolithic studies: settlement evidence and our current understanding of monumentality. I hope to demonstrate that exploiting this wide ranging body of data to the full, it is possible to create a radically different Neolithic from that proposed by Kinnes.

LOOKING FOR SETTLEMENT

It is not clear what might be expected to characterize domestic sites, spatially or culturally (Kinnes 1985, 24).

There is a great deal of disagreement about the degree of sedentism and types of structures in which Neolithic people lived, the traces ‘domestic’ activity may have left in the archaeological record and whether one single model can be applied to the whole country. Kinnes (1985, 25–9) certainly found resolving these issues difficult. There is no consensus as to how such terms as ‘house’, ‘domestic’ and ‘settlement’ can be applied to the Neolithic of the British Isles, and the less loaded terms ‘structure’ and ‘building’ have largely replaced ‘house’ in discussions of the evidence. Regardless of how we define what a house actually may have been (as a physical entity as well as a social concept), Neolithic people must have slept, eaten and cooked, nurtured their children and moved their bowels somewhere.

There seem to have been two responses to this problem: either to argue that we have lost the evidence for houses (cf Darvill 1997; Gibson 2003), or there were none in the first place. Kinnes (1985) seems to have been a proponent of the former position. The lack of buildings could be explained, he argued, by Scotland’s geomorphology, with alluvial and colluvial deposition burying the flimsy traces of settlement evidence; furthermore, houses may have been built in a way that left little or no archaeological traces. Such methods could include ‘sleeper-beamed construction’ and ‘turf-walled crofts’ (ibid, 25; Loveday in prep), or, as Barclay (2003a, 71) puts it, ‘relatively light

structures’. However, there is certainly evidence for alternative models beyond this position.

One such model, the so-called ‘mobile Neolithic hypothesis’, has been rehearsed elsewhere in some depth (cf Cooney 1997; Whittle 1997; Thomas 1999a; Barclay 2003c; Gibson 2003). The argument runs that people in the Early Neolithic, despite the use of domesticates, maintained similar patterns of movement in the landscape to hunter-gatherers, living in temporary tent-like structures or slight timber buildings rather than substantial ‘houses’. Although this became something of a British Isles-wide orthodoxy in syntheses published in the 1990s (Tilley 1994; Thomas 1997; 1999a, 33; Edmonds 1999), it rapidly became clear that this model was based largely on evidence from southern England and Wales. The model did not work so well when faced with the evidence from Ireland (Cooney 1997; 2000; 2003) or Scotland (Barclay 1997; 2003b; 2003c), where permanent settlement seems more reasonably to be in evidence. As ever with such arguments, the real solution almost certainly lies somewhere between these positions; the evidence accumulated in the intervening years since Kinnes wrote has increasingly pointed to a series of ‘levels’ of settlement of varying degrees of permanency and a range of functions, with variation across the country and through time. Some of this evidence will now be addressed, although a detailed discussion on timber halls has been reserved until later.

BUILDINGS

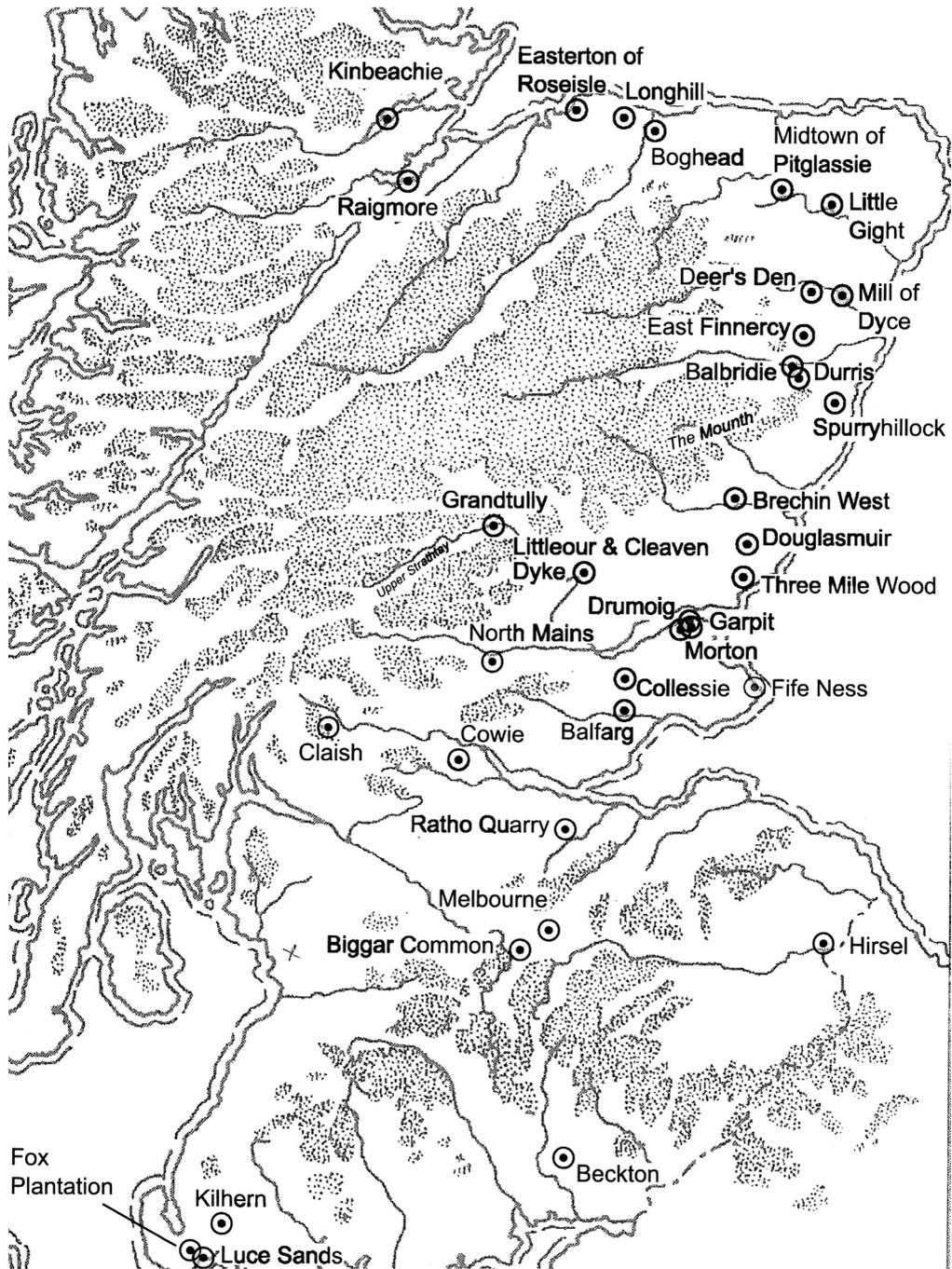
Barclay (2003c, 148) has recently written, the ‘people of early Neolithic Britain ... lived in light timber houses ... which should not be dismissed as impermanent’ and has argued much the same for the Later Neolithic. In 1985, Kinnes had found little to indicate that this was the case. With the exception of Balbridie, only two possible Neolithic timber buildings had been identified at that time on mainland Scotland – Raigmore and Auchategan – and their ‘domestic

credentials' were (and still are) unclear. More promising evidence was available from the Western and Northern Isles, and Kinnes was prophetic as to the untapped potential of these areas for settlement evidence. In the Western Isles, we have the spectacular discovery of Eilean Domhnuill, North Uist, a settlement on a small islet occupied throughout the period 3650–2600 cal BC (Armit 2003, 93; in prep). Other discoveries made in the Western Isles in recent years, such as the multi-period sites Alt Chrisal and Carinish, suggest far more potential still to be realised. Perhaps even more remarkable has been the discovery and excavation of a range of Neolithic settlements and buildings on Orkney subsequently to Knap of Howar (Ritchie 1983). Excavations at Barnhouse were underway by 1985, and subsequent investigations at Crossiecrown, Ness of Brodgar, Pool and Stonehall (cf Hunter 2000; Clarke 2003; Card & Cluett 2004; Richards 2005) have added to an impressive grouping of (mostly) Late Neolithic 'villages'. These discoveries have largely supported Kinnes's tentative chronology of settlement on Orkney, moving from isolated farmsteads to conglomerated 'villages' (1985, 27). Shetland has a remarkable pattern of stone-built prehistoric settlements and field-systems that has not yet been adequately studied or understood beyond key sites such as the Scord of Brouster (Whittle 1986; Barclay 1997).

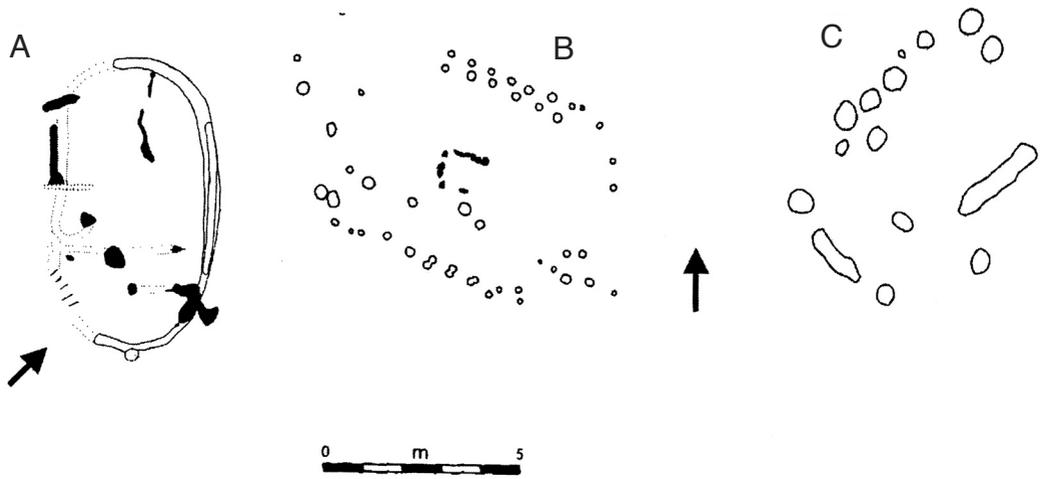
The evidence for mainland Scotland has already been comprehensively reviewed by Barclay (1997; 2003b). However, there is a suggestion that a range of locations exist where people may have lived, for varying reasons and over varying time periods, ranging from ephemeral shelters to larger timber-framed rectangular buildings, oval timber buildings and maybe even timber halls. Recognizing such structures is extremely difficult and sometimes happens by chance. Even when found, such diverse structures are often problematic to interpret and Kinnes himself struggled to reach a clear conclusion on Balbridie and Raigmore. Not only is there doubt as to whether some

structures were roofed or not, there seems to be a more fundamental problem in recognizing domestic as opposed to non-domestic, or 'ritual', functions. Timber buildings, and even pits, could be interpreted as either domestic or ritualistic features and this led to disagreement about the role and function of these in the Neolithic (eg Darvill 1997; Topping 1997). Yet it is also clear that virtually all domestic activity has a ritualized nature (such as cooking) and at the same time highly charged sacred and ceremonial actions could be played out within the domestic sphere (such as the placement of the coffin in the family home on the night before a funeral). There is, therefore, no reason why structures and even pits could not have fulfilled both roles (Pollard 1997, 110; Thomas 2004). If we continue to look for the equivalent of our modern notion of a house (Barclay et al 2002, 125–7; Barclay 2003a, 81), we will probably never find it.

Excavations over the past two decades have greatly enhanced the range of potential living places that we have in mainland Scotland, and various contributions by Barclay (1997; 2003b; 2003c; Barclay et al 2001; 2002) have traced the development of the dataset and our understanding of that data (illus 7). The three timber buildings alluded to by Kinnes have now increased to around a dozen, albeit not all firmly dated to the Neolithic; not a great return (there are at least 109 'certain and probable' buildings in England and Wales; Darvill 1997, 79). Often the interpretation of these buildings is speculative, a 'join-the-dots' exercise based on the occurrence of clusters of pits and post-holes on excavation plans (see illus 10). Typical of this type of site is the structure found at Kinbeachie Farm, Highland, a rectangular building measuring 7 × 4m, defined by pits, interpreted as the heavily truncated remnants of post-holes (Barclay et al 2001). Burnt material from these pits suggested that the site was used in the period 3500–2920 cal BC. Barclay has suggested that this could have been a small roofed building, or that the pits may represent the internal structure of a larger building (ibid, 82). Although there is no



ILLUS 7 Map showing excavated possible settlement sites in eastern and southern Scotland (from Barclay 2003a, 72)



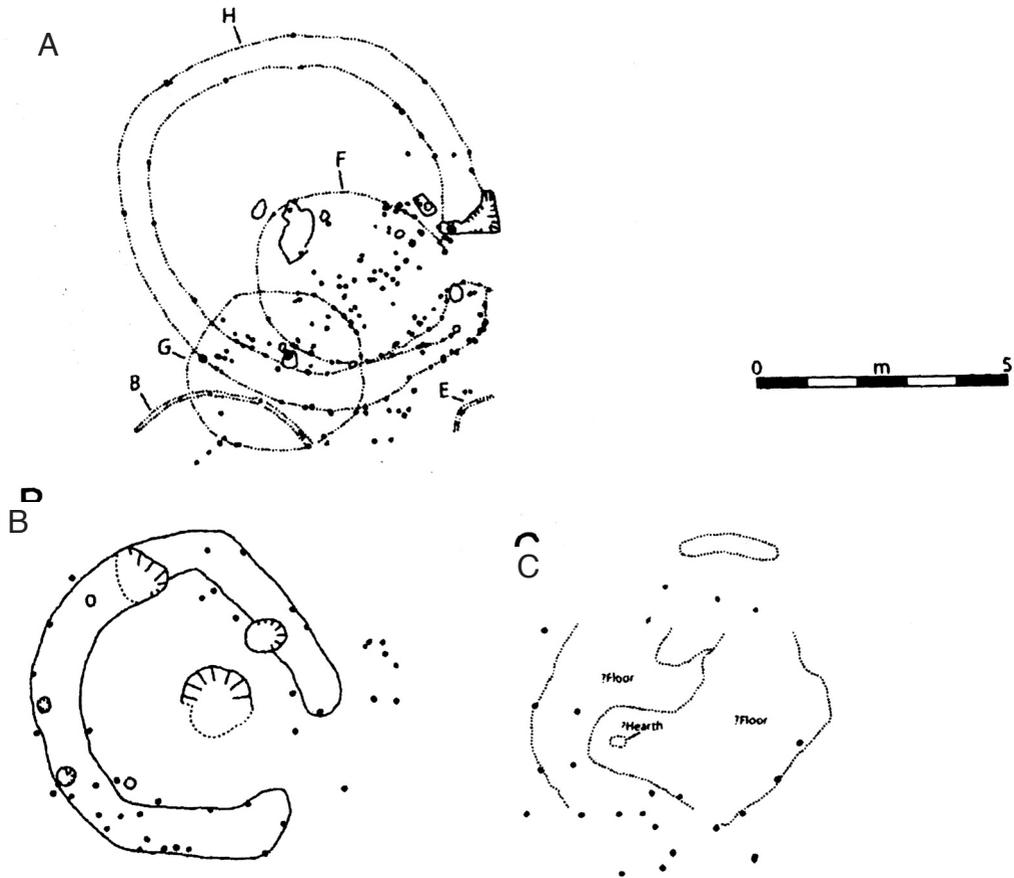
ILLUS 8 Putative Neolithic rectilinear buildings in Scotland. (A) Kingarth, Argyll and Bute (after Mudie & Richardson forthcoming); (B) Raigmore, Highland and (C) Kinbeachie, Highland (both after Barclay 2003b, 74)

direct evidence, it would seem that Kinbeachie may well have been a dwelling place, perhaps as part of a larger settlement, and may have been in use for several decades. Undated rectangular structures have also been excavated at Ratho Quarry, Edinburgh (two structures; Smith 1995), Drumoig, Fife (James & Simpson 1997) and Kingarth Quarry, Bute, Argyll & Bute (Mudie & Richardson forthcoming), all of which could be regarded as Neolithic buildings due to associations with Neolithic features and their morphology (illus 8).

Interestingly, a few examples of oval or sub-circular buildings have also been discovered at Chapelfield, Cowie, Stirling (Atkinson 2002) and Beckton Farm, Dumfries & Galloway (Pollard 1997; see illus 9). At Cowie, a series of oval to circular timber structures, occurring over several phases of activity in the Neolithic, was excavated in the 1990s, with an apparent move from small oval buildings in the Early Neolithic to double-walled circular structures in the Middle Neolithic (Atkinson 2002). These latter buildings were no more than 4.2m in diameter, and a very similar structure in terms of shape, construction, size and entrance

orientation was found at Beckton Farm, amidst a series of possible hearths and four-poster structures (Pollard 1997). This building (F111) was associated with Grooved Ware. A similarly sized circle of post-holes, again with an entrance in the east, was found associated with a polished stone axe at Fox Plantation, near Stranraer (Barclay 2003b, 80; MacGregor in prep). Together with possible oval structures at Station Brae, North Ayrshire (Addyman et al 2004), this may indicate a tradition of slight, oval buildings in central and south-west Scotland.

The discovery of timber-framed rectangular buildings and oval structures with slight stake-supported walls perhaps reflects patterns elsewhere in the British Isles. In Ireland there are 'two basic forms to the settlement archaeology of the Irish Neolithic, large rectangular buildings ... and smaller round buildings' (Cross 2003, 195). There is some disagreement as to whether these are contemporary, or if the rectangular buildings are earlier. Cooney (2000, 67) has argued that both existed at the same time and represent permanent (rectangular) and temporary (round) forms of settlement. Darvill (1997, 93, fig 6.10) notes the presence



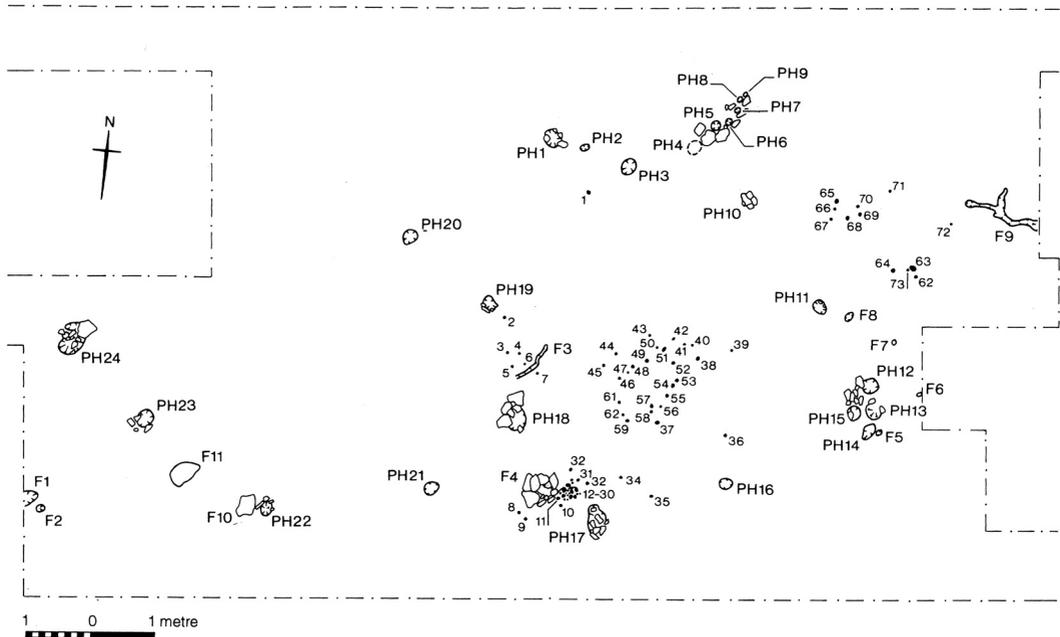
ILLUS 9 Putative oval / sub-circular Neolithic buildings in Scotland. (A) Cowie structure H (after Atkinson 2002, 146); (B, C) Beckton Farm F111 (B) and F136 (C) (after Pollard 1997, 78 and 75). North is to the top of the page

of a number of stake-walled oval or circular buildings in Later Neolithic England and Wales. There is no clear chronology in Scotland as yet, although the oval buildings in Scotland, where dated, do appear to belong to the latter half of the Neolithic.

PITS AND OTHER EPHEMERAL SETTLEMENT TRACES

The optimistic eye might detect a vaguely rectilinear pattern in the features but one of the pits had clearly undergone ‘structured deposition’ (Barclay 2003b, 77).

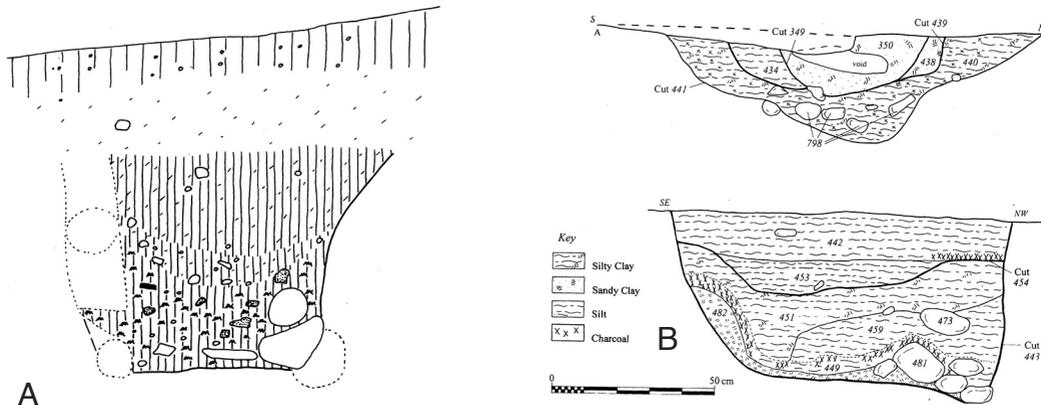
Discovered mostly in the last 20 years, these less-patterned remains hint at domestic activity (or low-key ritualistic activities, depending on the perspective adopted). Some 50 sites have been identified with isolated, or clusters of, Neolithic sub-surface features (and this does not include any pits associated with a structure or monument) to the point where they have become the ubiquitous Neolithic traces in lowland archaeology (Pollard 1997, 111). Sites that consist of individual or scatters of pits (often containing broken pottery and burnt material), stake-holes, possible post-holes and even ‘hearths’ are relatively commonplace. Often the features refuse to resolve themselves into any



ILLUS 10 Plan of excavated features in Area 2, Biggar Common. Can we join the dots to create possible Neolithic structures? (From Johnston 1997, 200)

coherent structure. In particular, the interpretation of pits has tended to oscillate in recent decades between a storage function and 'structured deposition' (Richards & Thomas 1984; Thomas 1999a, 62–88), with little apparently in between. Kinnes himself acknowledged the ambiguous nature of pits, noting that they were less likely to have an explicit domestic purpose such as storage, and more likely to be indicative of what he called 'organized deposition'. The association of such features with a jumble of other features, sometimes including what could be interpreted as ephemeral wind-breaks or tent-like shelters, simply adds to the ambiguity (illus 10). There has been a marked reluctance to interpret such features as anything other than either domestic refuse pits, or receptacles for deliberate, 'odd' deposits. In fact, such features could as easily have been used for a combination of what we call ritual and domestic actions, with no apparent differentiation drawn between them (Thomas 2004, 172).

The interpretation of pits is always difficult, especially so in the case of isolated pits. One such example was found at Carzield, Dumfries & Galloway (Maynard 1993; illus 11b). Discovered as it eroded from a stream bank, the pit contained sherds of two Early Neolithic carinated vessels, bladelets of Arran pitchstone, burnt cereal grains, hazel nutshells and three fragments of a polished stone axe made from material from Great Langdale, Cumbria (Group VI), all in the lower fills. The excavator concluded, 'This pit is part of the growing evidence for Neolithic domestic material in Dumfries & Galloway' (ibid, 27). At Park Quarry, Aberdeenshire, gravel extraction revealed a scoop no more than 10cm deep and 1.5m long that contained carinated pottery sherds, burnt flint flakes and other lithics, and a complete Scots Pine cone at the base of the feature (Shepherd & Greig 1991). Many more pits, in at least six clusters, containing Carinated and Impressed Ware pottery as well as lithics



ILLUS 11 Neolithic pits: structured deposition, rubbish pits, or both? (A) Carzield (from Maynard 1993, 26); (B) Cowie Pit VII, E (top) and NE (bottom) facing sections (after Atkinson 2002, 151)

and burnt hazelnuts, were found in advance of housing development at Dubton Farm, Angus. The excavator concluded that although many of the pits showed signs of structured deposition, the balance of evidence pointed to a location that was inhabited seasonally (Cameron 1999, 68–70). How do we interpret such features? The information from them is tantalising. Is this random rubbish, or careful ceremonial deposition? The pottery was apparently ‘thrown’ into the Carzield pit (Maynard 1993, 27), but such an act is characteristic of both rubbish disposal and structured deposition.

More likely ritualized use of pits has been noted at settlement sites like Cowie and Beckton. At Cowie (Atkinson 2002, 147–55), a range of large pits in the vicinity of the oval structures were interpreted as being evidence for structured deposition, and some (such as Pit VII; illus 11a) were notable not just for the ‘odd’ deposits placed in them, but the repeated opening and backfilling of the features (‘ritual performance is an exercise in quotation’: Thomas 2004, 172). The juxtaposition of everyday objects such as smashed ceramics and broken quern stones in pits at Cowie seem as good an indicator as any that there was a close association with domestic activities and ritualized performance. As with

other aspects of everyday life, the digging of a pit and the deposition of something in it could have been simultaneously an act of simple expediency and a moment governed by a series of social rules. Rubbish may well have been deposited in pits, but perhaps only certain forms of rubbish were appropriate for deposition under the ground, and perhaps only certain people were allowed to throw or place the material in. The breaking of objects may have altered their social role, either through giving them power, or consigning them to death and burial. Material culture, structures and monuments could have had shifting meanings in their manufacture, use and decline.

The evidence from pits has implications for our understanding of everyday life, but also ritual practice and monumentality. They are indicators of a whole host of activities, found in conjunction with the most ephemeral temporary structures, such as on Biggar Common (Johnson 1997), as well as the largest of monument complexes. Pits offer another route into mapping Neolithic inhabitation of the landscape as well as an insight into practices that took place in a variety of different contexts across the Neolithic.

They are also valuable repositories of information for us as archaeologists: for instance,

our understanding of the form, chronology and distribution of pottery styles such as Grooved Ware has greatly advanced through these 'stray' but contextualized discoveries (Cowie 1993; Cowie & MacSween 1999; Clarke 2004, 52). Information on domesticated and wild resources is also invaluable, often in a secure datable context, and the discovery of exotic and mundane material (from polished stone axes to hammerstones) is helpful in different ways. Rich environmental evidence is also recoverable from these sealed deposits (eg Atkinson 2002, 173ff). The increase in evidence for one-off and repeated acts of deposition has implications for our understanding of a wide range of Neolithic activities. Even if they contained extraordinary things, pits should be included in our narratives of everyday life.

SETTLED AND UNSETTLED

The range of settlement evidence we now have indicates that the Neolithic was not as sedentary as Kinnes may have been entitled to expect. We cannot generalize but, in the mainland, there appears to have been a Neolithic that was neither wholly sedentary nor as mobile as some would believe. The range of evidence for settlement is indicative of various activities taking place at prescribed locations across the landscape, at varying scales of temporality. Temporary tent-like structures and some timber buildings could have been associated with activities such as hunting, crop monitoring, flint knapping and resource gathering. We could also speculate that such traces were indicative of a transhumance economy, left by small groups travelling (taking with them ideas, expertise and material culture), or by certain social groups spending some time away from the main community (such as adolescents, menstruating women, the ill or dying). Ephemeral traces such as hearths, stake-holes, pits and post-holes may represent a whole range of activities linked with the maintenance of society, both economically and ideologically, of which a place to stay was only one. These

may have formed a network of places with different temporalities of inhabitation, perhaps with larger timber structures hinting at more permanent forms of settlement. Not that we should assume that all timber structures were wholly domestic spaces; examples exist of sites like these that were cult or mortuary 'houses' in the Danish Neolithic (Kjaerum 1967; Becker 1993), and we must always consider the possibility that some of these buildings had non-utilitarian roles. Timber (and stone) buildings could just as easily be used for crafts, food storage or production, ceremonial purposes, animal penning and so on. Although settlement seems to have been more fixed in Orkney and Shetland, there may also have been an element of mobility in the Western Isles. Armit (2003, 98) notes that, despite the longevity of use of Eilean Domnhuill, it could only ever have been seasonally occupied. Within the cycle of life for early farming communities, places were permanently important, but temporarily inhabited.

We have a better idea now of 'settlement and houses' than Kinnes could have had, with over 50 possible and probable settlement sites identified since 1985. What is clear is that the pattern is far more complex than he could have envisaged, and seems to have had strong regional components. There seem to have been many different strategies and responses to finding shelter and defining communal spaces, but this should not surprise us. We should expect that people were adapting perhaps well-known timberworking techniques and styles of living to their own ends. The role that timber halls may have played in settlement patterns, at least in the Early Neolithic, will be considered below. As with monumentality, in everyday life Neolithic people were coming up with pragmatic solutions to a variety of problems, but were reaching these solutions within wider ideological and social parameters. The action of returning to the same place again and again mirrors patterns of ceremonial and mortuary practice, suggesting all aspects of Neolithic life were ritualized.

REDEFINING MONUMENTALITY

Despite the sorts of evidence outlined above, monumental sites still dominate Neolithic studies. However, fieldwork and a new interpretive climate have led to the development of a very different sort of monumentality than Kinnes highlighted. The focus of study has, due to the results of extensive fieldwork (see above), shifted from burial to ritual, from megaliths to earthworks and timber monuments, from western and northern Scotland to the south and the east, from upland to lowland. Kinnes dedicated a large proportion (11 pages) of his 1985 synthesis to burial monuments and mortuary practice, including a detailed look at non-megalithic mortuary practice in Eastern Scotland, coinciding with his interest in such sites in England (Kinnes 1992b). Such a synthesis of Scotland's Neolithic could not be written in this way now, with more emphasis required on enclosures and timber monuments to reflect the changing dataset. Research on chambered cairns has been restricted to a handful of excavations, notably at Maes Howe and Crantit, Orkney (Ballin-Smith 1999; Richards 2005), Cairnderry and Bargrennan White in the south-west (Cummings and Fowler in prep) and Kilcoy South, Highland (MacGregor & Loney 1997). Bradley's excavations at Balnuaran of Clava (2000a) resulted in the re-interpretation of Clava cairns as Bronze Age in date. This is not to say that mortuary practice and burial monuments have not been studied: as noted already, chambered cairns have been subject to a number of re-interpretations. Attention is gradually switching to non-megalithic mortuary structures (Noble 2006). Timber mortuary structures at Inchtuthil, Perth & Kinross (Barclay & Maxwell 1991), Balfarg Riding School, Fife (Barclay & Russell-White 1993), Pencraig Hill, East Lothian (Lelong & MacGregor in prep), Kintore, Aberdeenshire (Glendinning 1998) and possibly Brownsbank, South Lanarkshire (Brophy & Noble in prep) have built on Kinnes's detailed research on this topic (Kinnes 1985, 37–41; 1992a).

How we define a monument is also changing, in terms of materiality, temporality and function (Brophy 2004a; 2005; Thomas 2004). The construction of monuments included a wide range of materials that have traditionally been downplayed due to the prominence of megalithic studies. The sources of material used to construct monuments has become the object of study in itself in recent years, from tree type to stone source, including fieldwork such as the investigation of the probable quarry for the Stones of Stenness standing stones at Vestra Fiold, Orkney (Richards 2002). Furthermore, 'natural' features have been drawn more explicitly into the interpretation of monuments, including water and variations in local topography, what Bradley (2000b) has termed an 'archaeology of natural places' (and see also Richards 1996; Brophy 2000a). Excavations have shown complex sequences of development for sites that suggest that they were not complete 'sites' as we see them in plan, but rather places that were a focus for a variety of constructional and depositional events, often spread out over millennia. This, along with a range of new and unusual cropmark discoveries, has led to welcome reflection on monument typologies that have underpinned Neolithic studies for so long. The description of monuments has become more ambiguous, so much so that approaches that are explicitly typological no longer offer satisfactory narratives (Brophy 1999; Waddington 2001; Barclay 2005). Kinnes's (1985, 31) comment that typologies 'predicate unilinear arguments which offer their own proof' seems prescient now more than ever.

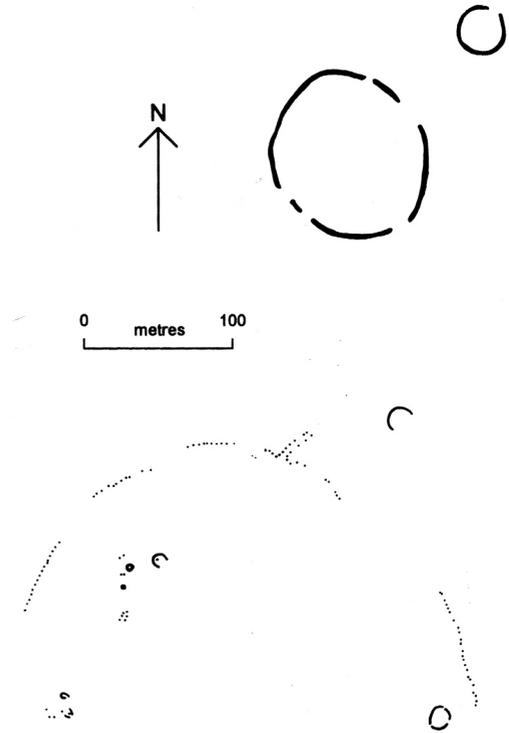
In this section of the paper, I would like to redress the balance and look at elements of monumentality at which Kinnes only hinted but which have since become more apparent to us; for instance, he mentioned pit-defined cursus monuments, henges and palisaded enclosures all too fleetingly in his analysis. This discussion will focus on two groups of sites – earthwork enclosures and timber monuments. Again,

timber halls have been left out of this discussion, and will be addressed in more detail later.

EARTHWORK ENCLOSURES

Kinnes noted that no 'causewayed enclosures' had been found within the cropmark record in Scotland; Clarke (2004, 45) has more recently argued that bemoaning the lack of causewayed enclosures is akin to parochialism. A number of potential candidates have been put forward in recent years (cf Barclay 2001c; Oswald et al 2001, 158; Waddington 2001), notably Leadketty, Perth & Kinross (illus 12), West Lindsaylands, South Lanarkshire and Sprouston, Borders (Smith 1991, 266), but excavations at several putative sites have so far proved fruitless in terms of Neolithic evidence (Mercer 1983; Barclay 2001b; Brophy et al 2004). Such interrupted ditch enclosures appear to be ubiquitous in the Early Neolithic across much of Europe, with notable concentrations identified in England, Italy, France, southern Scandinavia and across central Europe (Darvill & Thomas 2001; Oswald et al 2001; Varndell & Topping 2002), but not yet Scotland. We have no reason to believe that this is not a real 'gap' in the archaeological record (Brophy 2004b). If instead we accept that 'causewayed enclosure' is an umbrella term for sites that fulfilled a whole range of social roles in the Early Neolithic across Europe, then our research may be more usefully targeted towards other structures, such as timber halls, that fulfil some of these roles (see below).

Towards the middle of the fourth millennium BC, however, another class of monument first identified in England did appear in Scotland; indeed, radiocarbon dates suggest that cursus monuments may have originated north of the border (Barclay & Bayliss 1999). As late as the 1970s, there was no real sense that there was a cursus 'tradition' in Scotland; however, by 1985, nine examples were known in Scotland (Kinnes 1985, 41; Loveday 1985). From then on, a combination of heightened awareness that



ILLUS 12 Leadketty, Perth and Kinross. A cropmark complex combining earthwork and timber enclosures, including a palisaded enclosure, putative causewayed enclosure and mini-henges (from Barclay 2001c, 151)

such sites existed on the part of air photograph interpreters due to results of RCAHMS aerial reconnaissance, and the retrospective interpretation of older air photographs, led to a steady increase in the number of known sites to as many as 50 (Brophy 1999; Brophy & Cowley 2005, 15–8; Brophy & RCAHMS in prep). Among this number were a series of pit-defined cursus monuments, first identified as cropmarks by Maxwell (1979) and so-called because they share the same overall morphology as cursus monuments, but with a different form of definition. These unusual sites led Kinnes (1985) and Loveday (1985) to place cursus monuments within a continuum of earlier Neolithic rectilinear monuments that included mortuary structures and earthworks.

Excavations at a range of earthwork ‘cursus monuments’ have been revealing. Radiocarbon dates obtained suggest that these are monuments of the fourth millennium BC, not the third, as had generally been believed when Kinnes wrote (see Barclay & Bayliss 1999). The Cleaven Dyke, Perth & Kinross, underwent excavation and detailed topographical survey in the mid-1990s



ILLUS 13 Aerial photograph of the cropmark of Holywood South cursus, Dumfries and Galloway (© Crown Copyright RCAHMS)

(Barclay & Maxwell 1998). Consisting of a single central mound and flanking ditches, the Cleaven Dyke survives as an earthwork for about 1.8km: until Maxwell’s (1983b) re-interpretation it had been believed to be a Roman *vallum*. One of the great achievements of the project was to show that the monument had been constructed in segments over an unknown period of time, augmenting a freestanding round mound with an increasingly long tail. The monument ‘grew’ in a south-easterly direction, with repeated acts of

construction occurring perhaps annually or less frequently. Thomas’ excavations at two ditched cursus monuments at Holywood, Dumfries & Galloway, suggested an alternative process (illus 13). The re-cutting of the ditch at Holywood North cursus means that the earthwork element of the monument was more likely to have been constructed in one event and its boundary maintained; the inclusion of a timber element within the monument is a wider link with different monument traditions (Thomas 1999b; 2004; in prep). Other excavations have also shown that the construction of cursus monuments was neither the earliest nor the latest phase of activity in those particular locations (Brophy & RCAHMS in prep); pre-cursus activity in the form of hearths, pits and post-holes was found at the Cleaven Dyke and Holywood North, and subsequent Early Bronze Age burial activity was discovered at Holywood South and Curriestanes, also in Dumfries & Galloway (Brann 2003).

Segmented construction, like pre-monument activity and post-monument re-use, is a characteristic of henge monuments, and many timber monuments as well. Barclay’s (2005) recent discussion of henge monuments in Scotland raises these issues, as well as questioning the status of the typological label. The traditional focus on the boundaries of henge monuments for classificatory purposes has perhaps given undue emphasis to one phase of the monument – the earthworks – over other aspects of these sites such as internal features (Gibson 1998; Barclay 2005). The relationship between henge monuments and timber circles

demonstrates this problem: timber circles have long been regarded as merely secondary developments when associated with henges (eg Burl 1969). However, recent research has indicated that, where dating is available, the timber circle is usually the earlier component of the two (Barclay 2005). The integrity of the term 'henge' is also questionable; over half of the 80 possible henge monuments in Scotland are less than 30m in diameter (ibid, 84), yet these share a label with larger enclosures across the British Isles that are several hundred metres in diameter. The reductionist nature of monument typology means that this range of sites is lumped together, despite the fact that they may not be of the same date and almost certainly did not all serve the same function.

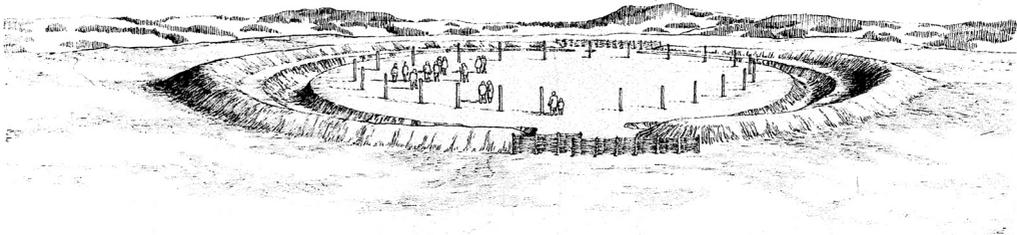
Advances have been made in our understanding of such earthwork enclosures, and one of the conclusions we might draw is that monuments can be construed as illusional, constructs of archaeological discourse. Archaeological engagements with them have traditionally been boiled down to labels, morphology and dimensions, with a tendency to focus on site plans. We now know this to be a misguided approach. Barclay (2005, 92–3) writes, '... the earthworks we know as henges now seem only to be parts ... of complexes of ceremonial and burial activity stretching from the early Neolithic to the late Bronze Age and beyond',

and similar sentiments could also be voiced for other enclosure types. The two-dimensional nature of our encounters with monuments disguises the time depth and individual human acts that embodied them, suggesting a more subtle approach to monuments is needed than was available to Kinnes in the 1980s. One such way forward is a wider consideration of monumentality in all of its forms.

TIMBER MONUMENTS

How would our view of centrality differ if some of the major complexes of timber or turf revealed by aerial photography had instead been of stone, and had survived as monuments to the present day? (Barclay 2004a, 35)

Although timber monumentality has been recognized for quite some time, it was usually regarded as a secondary, or less important, element of stone and earth sites, either preceding stone circles as at Temple Wood, Argyll & Bute (Scott 1988–9), or as an embellishment of henges (see above). A variety of timber structures were also recognized as early phases of long barrows, round barrows and cairns, including Lochhill, Dumfries & Galloway (Masters 1973), Pitnacree, Perth & Kinross (Coles & Simpson 1965) and a range of other sites (Kinnes 1985; 1992a). At times, timber phases of monuments



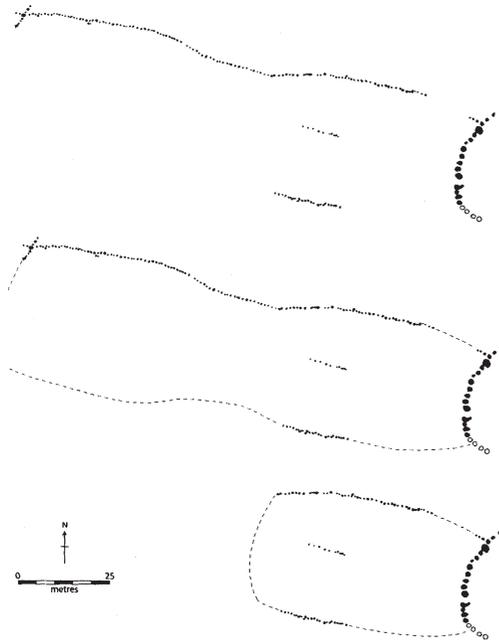
ILLUS 14 Reconstruction drawing of Cairnpapple Hill henge monument, West Lothian, by David Hogg, showing the internal timber circle, which probably preceded the earthworks (© The copyright is the property of DJ Hogg and may not be reproduced)

went unrecognized, as with the timber circle at Cairnpapple Hill, assumed by Piggott to be a stone circle (Piggott 1948; Mercer 1981, 155; Barclay 1999; illus 14, above). Yet the evidence increasingly suggests that timber was also used to construct a range of enclosures, or frequently set on fire as part of distinct events within monumental sequences (Noble 2006, 45ff). The quantity and variety of timber sites is such that typology cannot keep up with the range of variants on circular and rectilinear forms now known. The excavation of such features has revealed similar patterns to many of the sites already discussed, including segmented construction, deposition, burning and repetition. It may well be that earthwork sites were merely short-lived phases of timber monuments rather than the other way round.

A range of circular timber enclosures has been excavated, mostly of the Middle–Late Neolithic. These range in size from the free-standing timber circle at Carsie Mains, Perth & Kinross, just 12.5m in diameter (Brophy & Barclay 2004), to the palisaded enclosures at Dunragit, Dumfries & Galloway, and Meldon Bridge, Borders, well over 100m across. Timber circles in Scotland share a number of characteristics that suggest re-use and alteration on a number of occasions. For instance, some timber circles were re-worked into stone circles, as at Machrie Moor, Arran, North Ayrshire (Haggarty 1991), or into henge monuments, as at Cairnpapple and North Mains, Perth & Kinross (Barclay 2005). Others have a tendency towards concentricity, demonstrated with a double circle at Machrie Moor I, a triple circle at Dunragit and six rings at Balfarg, Fife, suggesting the reiteration of the circle on several occasions. Aside from Dunragit, where the timber enclosures were built one after the other (Thomas 2004), there are smaller timber circles enclosed with the palisaded enclosures at Forteviot, Perth & Kinross, Leadketty and Meldon Bridge (Gibson 2002). Monuments seem to have been initially relatively ‘open’ with free-standing timbers (perhaps with lintels to emphasize circularity; Gibson 1998, 108), but

were then closed off from outside spectators by the use of palisades or the construction of henges to enclose or replace them. Whatever form they took, it is no longer possible to view timber circles as only temporary versions or prototypes of stone circles.

A still more extensive range of rectangular and linear monuments was constructed from timber posts, and many of these also show evidence for segmented construction and repeated acts of construction that re-stated specific alignments and orientations. Typological labels such as ‘pit-defined cursus monument’ and ‘avenue’ are very difficult to impose within this continuum, and there is compelling evidence that such sites were, like the timber used to define them, organic constructs that grew and changed through time. (Indeed the growth and decay of woodland may have been reflected in the lifecycle of timber structures.) When excavated it is frequently difficult to pick apart sequences of construction, where monuments may have been altered on an annual or more frequent basis. The ‘pit-defined cursus’ of Bannockburn 1, Stirling, seemed to have been constructed bit by bit, with posts in small groups (Rideout 1997), a feature also noted at the rectangular enclosures at Douglasmuir, Angus (Kendrick 1995), Castle Menzies, Perth & Kinross (Halliday 2002; illus 15), the ‘cursus’ at Upper Largie, Argyll & Bute (Ellis in prep) and the parallel pit-alignments at Eweford, East Lothian (Lelong & MacGregor in prep). The builders could easily have constructed straight and regular sides for these sites, but chose not to. The continual re-enforcement of alignments is also apparent at sites such as the parallel post alignments at Holm, Dumfries & Galloway (Thomas 2004; in prep), where a sequence of burning and subsequent post erection using the same post-holes was evident. The renewal of an important alignment may also explain the multiple parallel pit-alignments at the cropmark sites at Inchbare, Angus (Brophy 2000b). Finally, a curious mixture of posts and pits define some of these monuments, including Eweford, Upper Largie and Milton of Rattray, Perth & Kinross



ILLUS 15 Castle Menzies Home Farm: possible sequences of development of the 'enclosure'. Note the wobbly sides and the enlarged, curved 'terminal' area (after Halliday 2002, 12)

(*ibid*), while the cropmark Mill of Fintray cursus, Aberdeenshire, has both earthwork and pitted elements (Shepherd & Greig 1996, 72–3).

One consistent feature of Neolithic timber monuments is the juxtaposition or superimposition of elements of circular and rectilinear monuments, with the rectilinear usually the earlier of the two (cf Thomas 2004; Barclay 2005; Brophy & RCAHMS in prep). For instance, a pit-defined cursus was discovered beneath the Dunragit palisaded enclosure (Thomas 2004, 176), and another preceded the Upper Largie timber circle (Ellis in prep). The post-alignments at Eweford run adjacent to a large, possibly contemporary, timber circle (Lelong & MacGregor in prep), and several ring-ditches and timber circles lie at the ends of various alignments at Holm (Thomas 2004). The Castle Menzies post-alignments seem to terminate at an arc of very large post-holes

(Halliday 2002; illus 15). At a different scale, all four palisaded enclosure sites have linear avenues, and there may be other expressions of this relationship, such as the U-shaped pit enclosure abutting Bannockburn 1 (Rideout 1997) and a horseshoe setting of timbers within the timber circle settings at Machrie Moor 1. These relationships appear to be deliberate, with inter-cut features physically linking the old with the new (eg Thomas 2004, 176).

These are recurring patterns that do not necessarily reflect universal Neolithic traditions, but rather shared ideas that may have had a wide currency but been played out in different architectural styles. We should not see these recurring themes as exclusive to timber monuments, however, with several examples of earthwork henge monuments replacing cursus monuments known in England (such as Thornborough, Yorkshire; Harding 2003, 90–9) and Maxey, Cambridgeshire. What is remarkable about some of these timber monument complexes is the repeated use of a site where materials were not as enduring as earthworks, with constructional events being many centuries apart. Thomas (2004, 174) has noted that 'again and again quite astonishing effort has been expended in re-establishing spatial configurations that may in some cases have already been quite ancient'. Timber circles and rectilinear enclosures seem to have represented distinct architectural traditions that were brought together for a particular reason, combining traditions. The further combination of timber and earthwork, as at Cairnpapple or Holywood North, may have signalled a change in the bounding of space as the Neolithic progressed.

PLACES, NOT MONUMENTS

This is an altogether different type of monumentality from that discussed by Kinnes, when mortuary activity seemed more prominent than ceremony, performance and ritual in the archaeological record. In fact, as the Neolithic progressed, communal activities seem to have

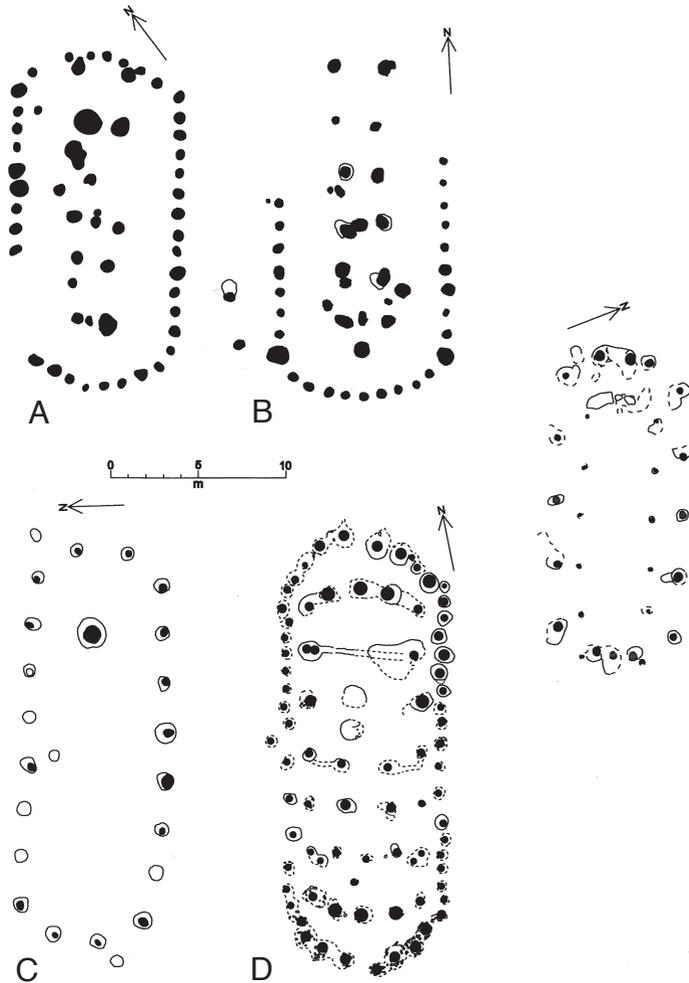
moved from explicitly burial to ceremonial monuments, and this may have been reflected in a gradual shift from rectilinear to circular spaces within the landscape. The re-shaping of space at some places may have drawn legitimacy from earlier activity in a location, exploiting the enduring nature of certain sacred places in the landscape, places like Balfarg and Dunragit. If anything strikes me as significant about our conception of monumentality now, it is that the places themselves and the actions that took place at them that should be the focus of our study (Bradley 1993; Tilley 1994; Brophy 2004a; Thomas 2004). Places that were used for deposition and fires in the Early Neolithic (and in some cases the Mesolithic) became the focus for a series of constructional events and actions that had an impact on the archaeological record (burning, deposition of objects and cremated human remains, digging and post erection) but also bodily movement and acts of performance that we cannot directly detect. Monuments were only one outcome of Neolithic ritualized activity; some places were also the focus for repeated acts of house building and flint knapping, so that the Neolithic world was understood through a network of places that each had a biography and a role, and where only certain forms of behaviour were appropriate. These places are the places that we now define inadequately as ‘settlements’, ‘monuments’, ‘lithic scatters’ and so on, places that were held together through memories and stories, and altered through time as ideologies and fashions changed. It is perhaps now appropriate to concentrate on a small group of places that demonstrate these principles.

TIMBER HALLS

The label used to describe this small group of sites originated from their morphological similarity to cropmarks of Early Historic sites such as Doon Hill, East Lothian (Reynolds 1978). Indeed, the majority of the 20 or so sites classified as timber halls in the NMRS probably

date to the first millennium AD (Brophy 2007). The Neolithic timber halls, however, embody a number of the themes discussed so far, not least because they appear to fall into both settlement and monument categories, and they challenge our assumptions about cropmark interpretation and site morphology. This class of monument was familiar to Kinnes through a few sites, although he did not group them together. He dedicated two lengthy paragraphs to discussing the function and implications of Balbridie, concluding, ‘there seems no reason to deny it the status of Neolithic farmhouse: whether croft or manor remains to be seen in future perspective’ (ibid, 27). He also discussed the (then) recently excavated Balfarg Riding School structures, as two timber, but non-domestic sites (ibid, 40). In fact only a few years later, Smith (1991, 266–70) pointed out that a range of structures within the cropmark record of eastern Scotland have superficial similarities to Balbridie, and a coherent group of possible large timber buildings began to develop.

Analysis of the cropmark record for parallels, and a series of excavations, mean that we now have between ten and 15 potential or confirmed Neolithic timber hall-type sites, classified in the NMRS under various terms including timber halls, ‘mortuary enclosures’ and ‘pit enclosures’ (Barclay et al 2002). Seven have now been excavated – a healthy proportion. Aside from those mentioned by Kinnes – Balbridie (Fairweather & Ralston 1993) and Balfarg Riding School (Barclay & Russell-White 1993) – there have also been excavations at Littleour, Perth & Kinross (Barclay & Maxwell 1998), Claish Farm, Stirling (Barclay et al 2002), Carsie Mains, Perth & Kinross (Brophy & Barclay 2004), and most recently at Warren Field, Aberdeenshire (Fraser & Murray 2005), and Station Brae, North Ayrshire (Addyman et al 2004). These excavations have shown that these sites had very similar ground plans, but were not all built at the same time, did not have the same physical appearance, nor did they serve the same function (Brophy 2005, 9–10).



ILLUS 16 Excavated timber hall plans. (a, b) Balfarg Riding School 1 and 2; (c) Littleour; (d) Claish; and (e) Carsie Mains (from Brophy & Barclay 2004, 18)

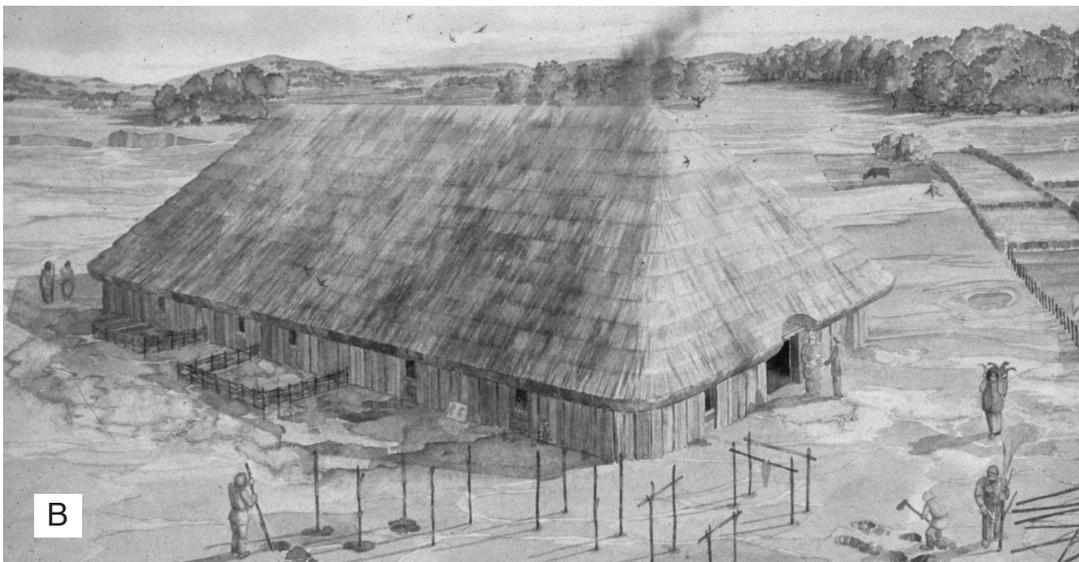
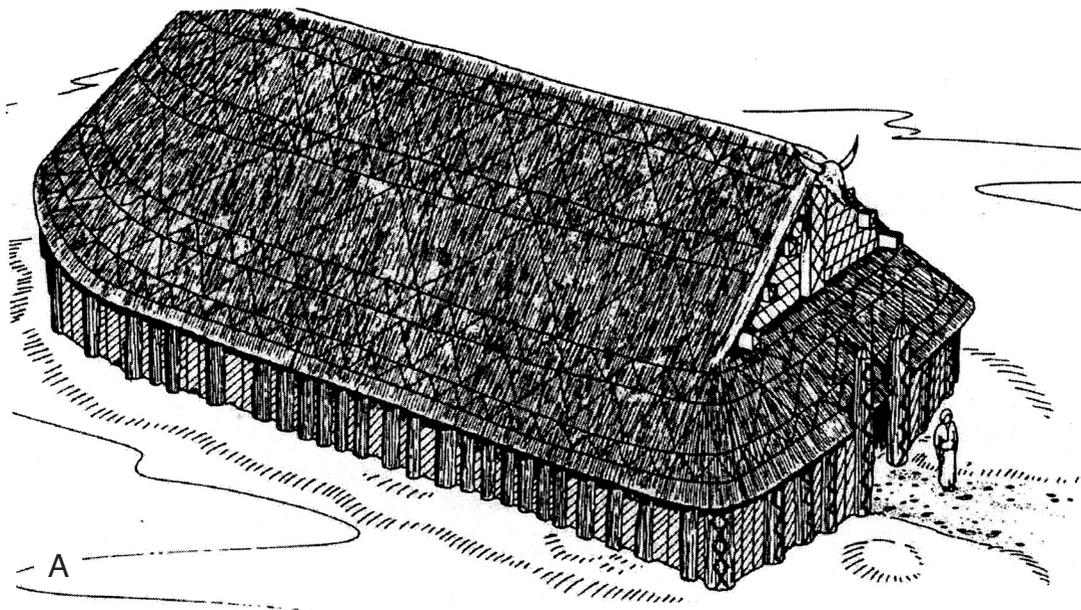
Yet superficially – in dimension and plan – these sites have much in common (illus 16). They are all relatively small rectilinear ‘enclosures’ (no more than 25m long and 12m wide) of timber construction. They all appear to have internal features, although these vary greatly, as does the form of the boundaries. As a group of monuments, they appear to display less variation than is evident within the henge or cursus classes (Barclay 2005; Brophy & RCAHMS in prep). Indeed, close analysis of the

ground plans of the excavated sites has revealed uncanny similarities. Balbridie and Claish have a very similar layout of internal subdivisions, while Littleour and Claish have virtually identical external plans (Barclay et al 2002), and so on. But these sites were not experienced during the Neolithic as ground plans. They represent a range of very different structures and roles (potentially including places for dwelling, meetings, storage and ceremonial and mortuary activities), and appear to have been constructed in two different ‘waves’ within the fourth millennium BC.

The earlier group of timber halls appear to have been roofed buildings; certainly, they were roofable (which is not necessarily the same thing). There are three of these currently confirmed: Balbridie, Claish Farm and Warren Field. These were substantial timber buildings (the smallest, Warren Field, 20m × 9m) dating to the period c 3900–3600 cal BC, and all were burnt down. All three had a series of internal spatial divisions and they also entrances on one or both ends (with Warren Field possibly having a ‘porch’). There is certainly evidence to support a ‘domestic’ role for these structures: each had evidence for cereal growing in the vicinity, Warren Field may be associated with a pit-alignment that could be viewed as a field boundary and much pottery was found that could easily be interpreted as everyday domestic wares. However, they could equally be viewed

as structures with a more esoteric role, with odd features discovered at each. At Claish, there were several unusual internal features including two pits (F15 and F19) that were used initially for various deposits, and then laterally had fires set within them at some depth (in one case on

a layer of potsherds). At Balbridie, a substantial quantity of cereal was found in one location in the structure (Fairweather & Ralston 1993, 316), possibly indicating a role in storage or feasting; and at Warren Field, a large pit at one end of the structure contained various unusual objects,



ILLUS 17 'The little house on the prairie'? Visions of Balbridie, by (A) by Alan Braby (© Alan Braby), and (B) by David Hogg (© The copyright is the property of DJ Hogg and may not be reproduced)

including broken pottery, Arran pitchstone and fragments of a wooden bowl with carvings.

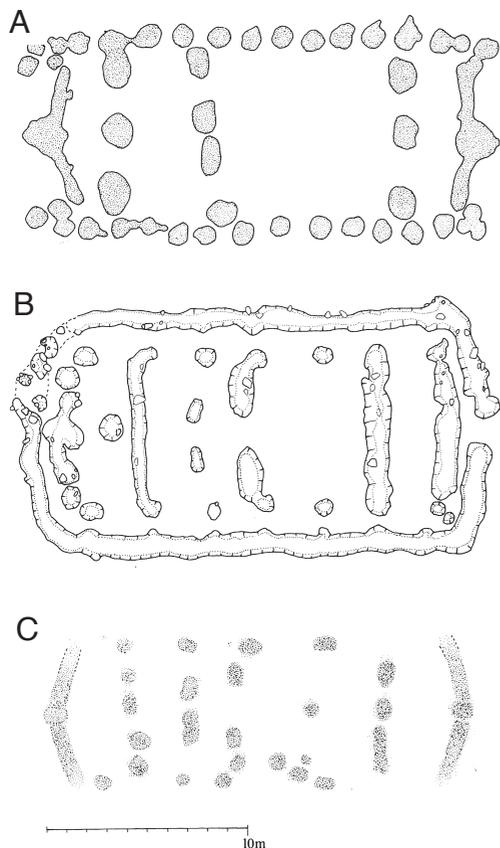
Balbridie was initially viewed as something of a Holy Grail in Scottish archaeology, a potential timber longhouse of apparently European origins (see illus 17), and an indication of permanent sedentary farming right at the beginning of the Neolithic (eg Kinnes 1985; Fairweather & Ralston 1993; Ashmore 1996, 32–3). In the absence of the final published excavation report, however, the site has increasingly been the focus of re-interpretations depending on the fashion of the day, and its domestic credentials have been called into question (eg Topping 1997). The excavations at Claish prompted a thorough re-evaluation of such timber halls, viewing them as high-status roofed buildings that may have fulfilled a wide range of roles within society, one

of which might have been as temporary dwelling places: ‘The conclusion of the present authors ... is that Claish was a roofed building but that it was not a normal “farmhouse”’ (Barclay et al 2002, 131). Cross (2003) made an analogy between (smaller) timber halls in Ireland and causewayed enclosures in England, suggesting that timber halls offered a communal meeting place for scattered agricultural communities. Certainly, we could view such buildings in Scotland as playing such a role (alongside long barrows) in the fledgling farming communities of eastern lowland Scotland around which to arrange their lives. However, these structures were regarded or utilized, at the end of their lives they were burnt down.

Some centuries later, the ‘timber hall’ template seems to have been revived, or to have



ILLUS 18 The Carsie Bridge cropmark (centre of photograph), a ‘mortuary enclosure’ near Littleour and Carsie Mains, and contender for another variation on the ‘unroofed’ timber hall tradition (© Crown Copyright RCAHMS)



ILLUS 19 Timber hall sites in Scotland: (Top) Doon Hill A, (Middle) Balbridie (both from excavation plans) and (Bottom) Sprouston cropmark transcription (from Smith 1991, 268)

survived, in the form of a range of structures that share a similar ground plan to these three earlier buildings, albeit they appear to have been unroofable. The structures at Littleour (Barclay & Maxwell 1998) and Carsie Mains (Brophy & Barclay 2004), both within easy reach of the Cleaven Dyke, were constructed towards the end of the fourth millennium BC, and appear to have been small rectangular enclosures defined by free-standing timbers. Both of these structures are notable for a lack of material culture; a pit with Grooved Ware and various lithics found within Littleour post-dated the structure, and the only lithics associated with

Carsie were found 'deposited' in a tree-throw adjacent to the site. Another variation of the timber hall form, again from the second half of the fourth millennium BC, is found in Fife, in the form of a pair of structures at Balfarg Riding School (Barclay & Russell-White 1993). These were defined by a possible 'fence', and contained various structures interpreted by the excavators as excarnation platforms. At the end of their use-life, they were 'replaced' by a mound and then a henge (although it is possible, although unlikely, that all of these features were contemporary). Although each of these four unroofed 'timber halls' was built and in use centuries after the roofed buildings were burnt down, clear parallels exist. The external ground plans of Littleour and Claish are, when laid upon one another, almost identical and there are similarities between elements of Balfarg Riding School 1 and 2, and Claish as well (Barclay et al 2002, 109–11). Furthermore, the presence of 'aisles' of timbers at Carsie, large axial posts at Balfarg Riding School 2 and Littleour, and the potential for a tree to have acted as an axial post at Carsie, all appear to mimic roof-supporting architecture.

There is clearly more work to be done on this strange group of sites. A series of cropmarks could well add to our understanding of both Early and Middle Neolithic timber halls. Noranbank, Angus (Barclay et al 2002, 11) and Sprouston, Borders (Smith 1991, 268; illus 18) are both close matches for Balbridie and Claish, and there may be others misinterpreted as Early Historic sites. There are also good parallels for unroofed timber halls, notably Carsie Bridge (illus 19), near the Cleaven Dyke; Nether Kelly, Angus could conceivably fall into either category. Developer-funded excavations have also thrown up possible parallels, such as a putative timber hall at Station Brae, North Ayrshire (Addyman et al 2004) and an unusual 'domestic' rectangular enclosure at Wellbrae, South Lanarkshire (Alexander & Dunwell 1992).

We appear to have a closely related group of roofed buildings dated to the early centuries

of the Neolithic, with at least five known examples from Aberdeenshire to the Tweed (and no doubt the distribution would have extended into northern England; Clive Waddington pers comm). Evidence from Claish and Balbridie suggests these may have been built under instruction of one individual, or to a shared plan (Barclay et al 2002, 98ff). Later in the fourth millennium BC, certainly a few centuries later, a range of sites mimicking or faithfully reproducing elements of these buildings appeared again in the eastern lowlands, but these appear to have been unroofed, and to have been less uniform than the earlier sites. It has been argued (Barclay et al 2002; Brophy 2005; 2007) that the constructional similarities between these two 'traditions' suggest that some kind of architectural language may have been in operation at this time in eastern Scotland. This may have taken the form of traditional styles of setting, or pacing out of structures (memory of which was retained for many centuries), as well as the deliberate physical inclusion of motifs or components of other sites in the planning of monuments.

The architectural similarities of these structures cannot easily be resolved by our modern labels. While domestic in appearance, the roofed structures also included motifs and elements more commonly associated with timber and stone mortuary structures (Kinnes 1985, 26; Ralston *in* Barclay et al 2002, 122). The unroofed sites appear to embody structural elements that recall roof support, but could not have supported permanent roofs, and seem to have been the focus of ceremonial activity, mortuary activity and ritual. It is also impossible to typologically separate timber halls from other 'types' of structure; the earliest incarnation of timber hall may have been an exaggerated version of smaller dwelling places, while the later versions may have been cursus monuments in miniature. The cropmark record of timber halls and 'long mortuary enclosures' is a blurry continuum (Loveday 2006, 75ff). This transformation from roofed to unroofed timber halls may represent

wider social changes within the Early–Middle Neolithic; for instance, this could be related to changes in burial practice within society, as well as an increasingly formalized ritualization of the wider landscape. Perhaps the norms and conventions of setting out high-status buildings as the ancestors did was then subverted by an entirely different constructional process; 'big houses' were replaced with 'cult houses' in a very public manner (Bradley 2005, chapter 2; Brophy 2007).

There are wider implications for Neolithic studies and cropmark interpretation. This small group of sites, when drawn together under the typological umbrella of the woefully inadequate term 'timber hall', allows us to question the whole notion of grouping sites based on their morphological characteristics alone. That sites with the same ground plan served such diverse functions with vastly different physical appearances above ground and over a period of almost 1000 years should serve as a warning about the discontinuity between the ways we categorize the past and how it may actually have been (Brophy 2005). Sites that seem similar in ground plan may have served entirely different roles in the past, and sites that appear superficially different, may in fact have had similar meanings. The top-down approach to defining monuments through morphology alone does not consider the complex temporalities of such sites or the ritualized performances that may have defined them in the past. Reductionist strategies cannot deal adequately with the cross-pollination of architectural motifs that seems to have occurred in the Neolithic. Buildings and monuments were a combination of the material and the social, tied up in the memory of a society as well as its needs and ideologies. This may mean that constructional processes may have been, on the one hand, improvisational (to meet local and current requirements), but on the other governed by a number of social regulations (with their roots in the past and external contacts). Containing echoes of wider traditions (from Scotland and beyond), timber halls illustrate the

possibilities of the archaeological record to tell us something about the prehistoric past, but also about our own archaeological practice.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This paper has not been the attempt to offer the broad-ranging synthesis of all that we know about the Neolithic period that Kinnes (1985) offered; while his coverage was broad but necessarily superficial due to his brief, I have tried to concentrate in more depth on a narrower range. Kinnes's paper was written from the perspective of an 'external' observer, arguing for independently derived interpretations of Scotland's Neolithic, reversing the trend of applying ideas from elsewhere to Scottish material. There is no doubt in my mind that this is now happening; reflecting on Barclay's historiography of Scottish prehistoric studies (cf 2001a; 2004a; 2004b), it is clear that what is important is not looking for a mythical Scottish identity or homogeneity in the past, but rather in not losing our Scottish identity in the present. Now a twofold process is taking place, where Scottish material is being placed into a wider context within the British Isles and continental Europe, but these connections are derived from an increasingly regionalized approach, thus avoiding the charge of parochialism.

Material and monumental traditions within the Neolithic of the British Isles operated at a range of scales. There was a network of regional traditions and larger-scale trends; while some monument and material culture styles seem to have a fairly restricted currency, others are found across wide geographic areas. It is still difficult to reconcile these contradictory patterns, even when we recognize them, and none of the major theoretical movements in 20th-century British archaeology managed to address this issue adequately. Culture-historians saw Scotland as a largely homogenous unit in the Neolithic (Barclay 2004a). 'Interpretive' archaeologists created a universal explanation

for settlement patterns, the mobile Neolithic hypothesis. Neither position really considered the variability of the archaeological record. Various attempts have been made to define regionality within Scotland's Neolithic, with mixed success, often falling back on the icons of Orkney, chambered cairns and Grooved Ware (eg Sharples 1992; Clarke 2004), or simply mortuary evidence (Kinnes 1985; Telford 2002). Yet regionality is not necessarily best defined by the unusual and exotic (Harding 1991; Barclay & Brophy forthcoming) but by the everyday and 'mundane'. Regionality as a concept works most usefully at the level of interaction between local and wider scale patterns, and should not be assigned fixed boundaries (Noble 2006; Brophy & Barclay forthcoming). Networks involving movements of ideas, objects and people, of exchange and obligation, are the mechanisms that drove and ordered Neolithic society, a society that was never static.

Rough regional traditions can be identified (cf Telford 2002, 301–3), but these were not fixed in space or time. For instance, the eastern lowlands had timber halls, pit-defined cursus monuments, long barrows, timber mortuary structures and Carinated Wares in the Early Neolithic, but they also had henge monuments, palisaded enclosures and Grooved Ware in the Later Neolithic as the 'region' starts to fragment. Such changes are in a sense typical of the Neolithic elsewhere, but show a specific regionalized response; we can picture the connections from elsewhere that influenced such material culture and monumentality, suggesting multiple networks of interaction and exchange. We can also recognize intra-regional variability, local responses to wider developments. People and communities were involved in networks of interaction with a variety of external communities. This is something that polished stone axe studies have long suggested, and on which perhaps DNA and isotope analysis may shed more light in future years (Richards 2004). This may also open up means for testing connections between Scotland,

Ireland, England, Wales, France and other parts of north-west Europe, connections that have gone out of favour due to their association with diffusionism, but recently revived (eg Sheridan 2003; Tresset 2003). While I strongly disagree with the position that Balbridie was the 'little house on the prairie' outpost of colonists who sailed up the River Dee, there is no doubt that certain elements of the structure, and the ceramics used at Claish (Sheridan *in* Barclay et al 2002, 88), echo earlier traditions in the mainland European Neolithic. We should see communities in Scotland as active participants in wider networks of movement and exchange, not the last, passive recipients of Neolithic culture in Europe. One welcome development in recent years that addresses this issue is the study of the Irish Sea area (eg Cummings & Fowler 2004).

How successful have we been in developing Neolithic studies in Scotland without lapsing into parochialism? On the face of it, I would argue, there has been great success, with a substantially more balanced archaeological record between eastern and western, upland and lowland Scotland, a shift of focus away from Orkney, and mature debate about the interaction between idiosyncratic and familiar elements of the Neolithic in Scotland. There are, of course, some who will beg to differ – the nature of this paper for instance focuses on Scotland and is written by a Scot. Perhaps this is parochial or with only regional significance. However, Barclay has shown that a Scot can write critically about the Scottish Neolithic without stooping to the level of anti-Englishness or petty nationalism. The combination of material unique to Scotland, with materials drawn from more distant Neolithic repertoires, has to be studied at regional, national and international levels simultaneously, not in isolation. Like people in the Neolithic, archaeologists are bound into a network of knowledge and connections. We should not confuse regionality with parochialism. Perhaps appropriately, Ian Kinnes himself considered the role of Scotland within Neolithic Europe recently, in a paper entitled, 'Context not circumstance'

(2004). In this paper, he re-states the paradox he wrote of in 1985, the surprising uniformity of some elements of the Neolithic across north-western Europe, but also the uniqueness of many elements of Scotland's (and the British) Neolithic. He offers this advice:

Scotland has much to offer and much to learn. Forget strict parallel chasing: the last two centuries ... have produced much information and many narratives: these are the true parallels (2004, 142).

In order to understand the Neolithic, many narratives are required, not so that we can hedge our bets and offer many answers to one question, but because there are so many questions. Scotland's Neolithic was diverse. Our understanding of this diversity has been transformed in 20 years, and we can expect this to happen again in the next few decades – that is the nature of archaeological discourse. Kinnes handed down a challenge in 1985 – constructive criticism – and that has been more than met in the succeeding years. The potential for continuing to develop our ideas about how dozens of generations of people lived spanning two millennia in prehistory has never been more exciting.

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