

9. CONCLUSION

The location of the site offered clear practical benefits: the surrounding area was generally flat, it has free-draining sands and gravels, and is close to a source of fresh water. However, a further incentive for choosing this particular location may have been the surviving elements of an earlier prehistoric ritual landscape. To this day, the area of the site is dominated by Loak Court Hill barrow, and this is likely to have been an even larger and more visibly significant feature during the period when the settlement was occupied. The Loak standing stone is also likely to have been known to the occupants of this settlement, while the large pits containing evidence of timber uprights in Area 2 and a single Middle Neolithic radiocarbon date from Pit 944 might point to a more extensive early prehistoric ritual landscape. The presence of earlier prehistoric features found in conjunction with later prehistoric settlement appears to be a recurring theme, with Neolithic features having been recorded alongside Iron Age features at sites such as Newmills, Grantown Road and Dubton Farm. While this may simply reflect the fact that a good area to settle during the Neolithic period remained a good area to settle in the Iron Age, visible surviving remains may have acted as a catalyst for choosing that location.

The identified structures were typical of those dating to the later prehistoric period but nonetheless provide valuable information on construction and distribution. There has been a long-running debate as to whether or not roundhouses identified only as a post ring would also have had a ring groove defining the outer wall. Only one of the roundhouses at Loak Farm consisted of both a post ring and a ring groove, while the remainder consisted of a post ring only. The size of the larger post rings might indicate that

this was the full extent of the structure, but this could not be definitively proven. Two ring ditches may also have been roundhouses and have parallels at Macallan Distillery, Craigellachie (Dunbar 2017) and at Wardend of Durris (Russel-White 1995). Four- and six-post structures of the type found at Loak Farm are predominantly found in central southern Britain and are indicative of very fertile regions able to produce surplus grain. While the lack of cereal grain in the archaeobotanical assemblage does not support this at Loak Farm, the structures may have been associated with other agricultural practices.

Although the material assemblage was relatively small, it provides a valuable insight into the activities carried out on site. The pottery assemblage is considered typical of later prehistoric assemblages from mainland Scotland, while parallels for stone tools such as perforated cobbles are known from the wider region. Smithing hearth-bottom slag thought to date from the early medieval period was recovered from two of the pits, while a hollow stone and two unworked stone blocks which may have been used as rests provide further evidence of metalworking.

Overall, the excavations carried out at Loak Farm give a valuable insight into what appears to have been an extensive later prehistoric settlement of Mid to Late Bronze Age date. The evidence suggests that this was a thriving community living in substantial timber roundhouses producing sufficient grain to allow a significant surplus to be stored in four- and six-poster above-ground structures. Iron Age radiocarbon dates associated with two ring ditches suggest a more limited continuity of occupation throughout the Iron Age, while three pits and a possible kiln associated with metalworking and grain processing produced much later dates, suggesting reoccupation during the early medieval period.