

## 5. THE ARTEFACTS

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### 5.1 Lithics

by Rob Engl

#### 5.1.1 Introduction

Two flint artefacts were recovered from stratified deposits at Beauly Substation. The artefacts were macroscopically examined and a general characterisation of the material was undertaken. General classifications and descriptions of the artefacts were based on those proposed by Ballin (2000; 2021) and Butler (2005). The artefacts consisted of a small, thick thumbnail scraper (SF05) and a burnt primary flake fragment (SF03).

#### 5.1.2 Catalogue

##### ► SF03 Context (015)

Small, thick primary flake fragment made on white flint. The artefact displays a loss of mass, colouration and crazing consistent with being heat-affected. Dimensions: 21.7mm (L) x 13.8mm (W) x 6.7mm (Th).

##### ► SF05 Context (052)

Small thumbnail scraper made on a thick, tertiary, flake of fresh honey-coloured east coast flint. Abrupt scalar retouch around 90% of the edge. Dimensions: 20.3mm (L) x 19.8mm (W) x 11.3mm (Th)

#### 5.1.3 Discussion

The two artefacts were recovered from burnt turf deposits associated with the roundhouse bank. It is likely that the artefacts were accidentally discarded during the occupation and became incorporated within the burnt turf. Alternatively, they may represent residual finds.

Lithic assemblages associated with Bronze Age domestic contexts in northern Scotland tend to be dominated by quartz with smaller and more restricted amounts of flint. The flint component of these assemblages often displays a high proportion of retouched artefacts (Finlayson 1998: 138).

At nearby Balblair Wood, the excavations of a substantial Bronze Age landscape revealed a similar limited lithic assemblage of a few flint artefacts. This

assemblage again included a small thumbnail scraper (Becket 2014).

Further afield, at Mullans Wood, Killcoy, Inverness-shire (Peteranna & Stirling 2024) a similar recorded landscape including a roundhouse, earth and stone banks, and clearance cairns produced a single flint flake. Similarly, the large-scale excavations on Bronze Age hut circles undertaken at Lairg, Highland (Finlayson 1998) and at Balbithan Wood, Aberdeenshire (Cook 2021) produced a few flint artefacts.

### 5.2 Pottery

by Orlene McIlfatrick

#### 5.2.1 Introduction

Two sherds from low-fired ceramic vessels came from Contexts (032) and (036), respectively. Context (032) was a possible occupation deposit near Posthole [035], while Context (056) was the fill of Posthole [057].

#### 5.2.2 Catalogue

##### ► SF04 Context (032)

A body sherd which survives in very poor condition, having undergone burning after initial firing in the kiln, as evidenced by the colouration and texture of the fabric. The fabric appears to be of unrefined clay and untempered, and both the internal and external surfaces have been compromised. Dimensions: 21mm (L) x 24mm (W) x 9mm (Th).

##### ► SF N/A Context (056)

A sherd recovered during soil sample processing. It survives in slightly better condition, with no sign of re-burning. It is of similar low-fired fabric to SF04, but with a few small grits as inclusions or temper. The firing profile shows a reduced grey core and reduced grey inner surface. Dimensions: 21mm (L) x 11mm (W) x 10mm (Th).

#### 5.2.3 Discussion

The potsherds are both undiagnostic body sherds, which cannot be securely dated on typological grounds. Unfortunately, low-fired plain pottery like these sherds is ubiquitous in the prehistoric ceramic record of the region. Without diagnostic features,

such as base or rim sherds or evidence of decoration, a general later prehistoric date is suggested.

The post-excavation radiocarbon dating programme may be of use with regards to greater specificity in the chronology of this small assemblage. A sample of oak charcoal was recovered from Deposit (032) and submitted for radiocarbon dating analysis which returned an assay of 1676–1511 cal BC (at 95.4% probability; SUERC-111668), suggesting Middle Bronze Age activity consistent with the suite of other radiocarbon dates obtained from the structure; it thus provides a valuable benchmark for narrowing down the chronology of the pottery.

### 5.3 Coarse stone

by Aurimè Bočkutė & Dawn McLaren

#### 5.3.1 Introduction

Two saddle querns were recovered during excavation (Illus 9). This coarse stone tool type is associated with food production and is used for grinding cereals (Close-Brooks 1984). One quern is complete, made on an undressed, split or naturally flat-faced sandstone boulder (SF01), while the other is incomplete and fractured, fashioned on a coarse micaceous schist stone (SF02). The sandstone saddle quern (SF01) was found deposited face down within a poorly preserved podzol deposit, Context (006), in the southeast interior of the structure, which was defined by a bank or wall feature of turf and stone. SF02 was recovered from the exterior part of the wall, incorporated into the turf and stone structure, and was also found deposited face down. SF01 appears to be related to the abandonment of the roundhouse and may represent the deliberate placement of a saddle quern face down after the structure was no longer in use, while the use-life of SF02 pre-dates the building, as the quern fragment was utilised in the construction of the roundhouse.

#### 5.3.2 Catalogue

##### ► SF01 Context Group (005)

Saddle quern/possible stationary quern. Complete sub-rectangular sandstone saddle quern with a possible small area fractured from the grinding face. The grinding face is sub-rectangular in shape, following the natural shape of the stone and very slightly dished with faint peck marks from shaping

but otherwise very smooth with a well-defined edge, max W 250mm, max L 310mm. The bottom of the stone is a natural convex boulder surface. Dimensions: 420mm (L) x 290mm (W) x 160mm (Th). Context (006) Q2, poorly preserved podzol within interior of Bank (005).

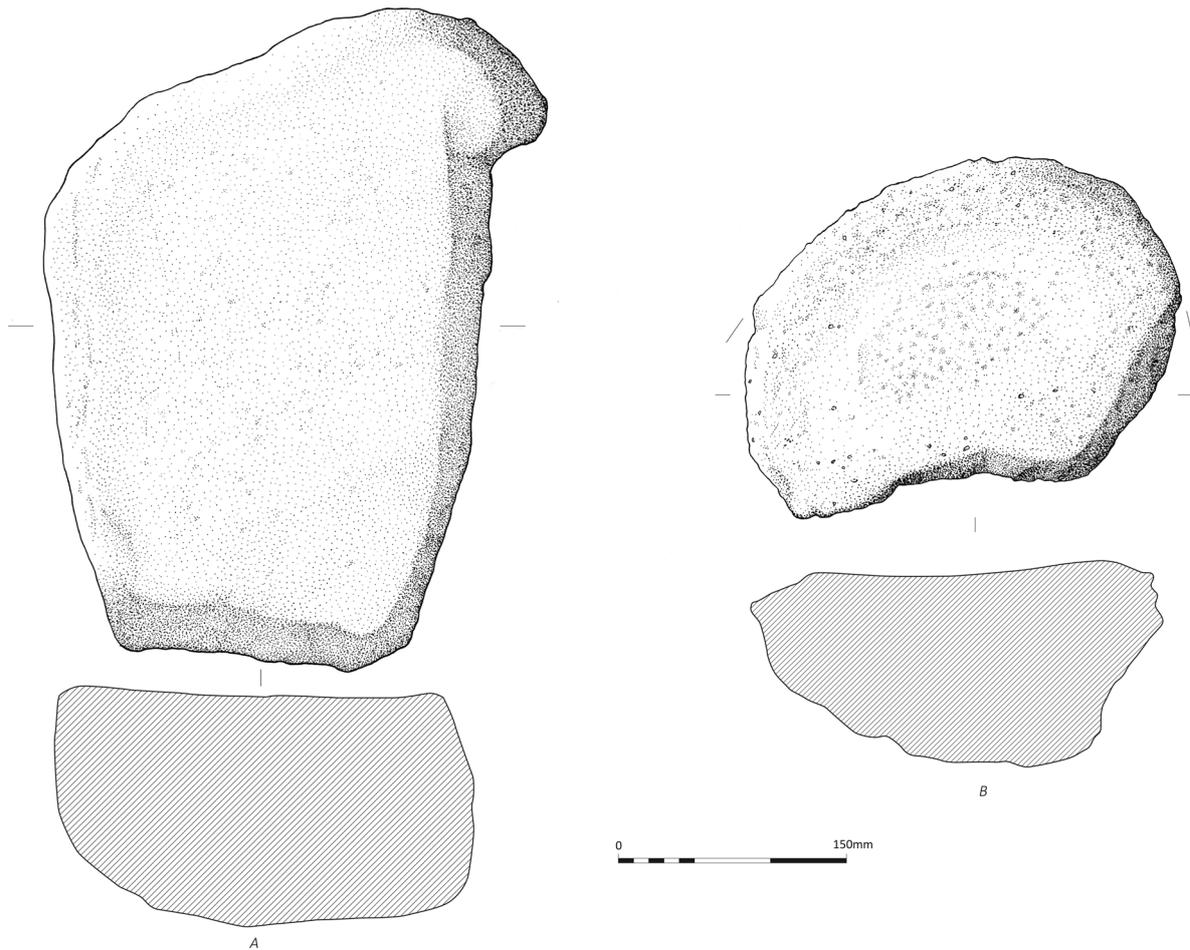
##### ► SF02 Context (014)

Fragment of a saddle quern. Fragment of a sub-oval saddle quern made from a coarse mica-rich heterogeneous schist. The working surface of the quern is slightly dished and contains small patches of very smooth remains of a possible more homogenous quartz lens that was shaped and ground; the stone may have been discarded once the grinding surface wore away. Width of grinding face is 230mm; length unknown. The quern is fractured across the width with a sheet of stone missing from the bottom; three modern mechanical tool marks are present on the bottom near the fracture. Dimensions: 295mm (L) x 235mm (W) x 110mm (Th). Context (014) Q4, on top of and exterior to stone collapse from turf and stone wall, Context (013).

#### 5.3.3 Discussion

SF02 is a fragment of a saddle quern, fractured along its width. The reason for breakage cannot be determined; however, its friable material quality can lend itself to accidental fracture. The find is distinctive for its unusual choice of stone for a quern. It is a coarse, heterogeneous micaceous schist rich with mineral clasts interleaved with finer textured quartz—a granular material which would have eroded during the grinding process. However, possibly for this reason, the quern fragment does not appear heavily used. The grinding face is naturally rough, slightly dished and contains smooth patches of ground quartz that form evidence for the extent of the grinding face. SF01 is a large complete sub-rectangular quern stone with a slightly dished grinding face, a well-defined smoothed edge, and a natural sub-rounded boulder underside, a commonly recognised form of saddle quern, elsewhere described as a stationary quern (Engl 2008: 215).

Saddle querns have been in use since the Neolithic, remaining the predominant type of grain processing tool through the Bronze Age and into the Iron Age, and are occasionally found in



**Illus 9** Saddle Querns: A = SF01; B = SF02 (Mark Hoyle, AOC Archaeology)

association with later prehistoric (Bronze Age and Iron Age) hut circle sites, such as that investigated at Beaully Substation. The suite of radiocarbon dates from the structure provides evidence of Middle Bronze Age activity and this is entirely consistent with the forms of the saddle querns recovered.

Similar querns have been recovered from other later prehistoric roundhouse sites in the region, such as Upper Suisgill and Lairg, Sutherland (Barclay 1987: 184, 187–8, figs 28–29; Clarke 1998). The small assemblage of four saddle querns from Lairg is probably the most illustrative in comparison to the Beaully examples. Three of the six roundhouses investigated at Lairg, had querns associated with them (Clarke 1998: 128). These included a large quern (Find 3171) found amongst the rubble infilling of House 1 (ibid).

A friable granite quern (Find 2081) from House 2 was found to have been re-used amongst the secondary floor slabs within the building and was found face down (ibid). A third quern (Find 2033) came from the tilled ground between Houses 2 and 3. A fourth, large, quern (Find 2080) was deposited, with its grinding face placed towards the ground, in the fill of a gully to the rear of House 3 (ibid). The practice of abandoning or depositing querns face down after use is widely observed across Scotland in the later prehistoric period. This likely reflects traditions dictating the appropriate means of decommissioning quernstones, which were central to subsistence activities and may have symbolised agricultural fertility and the lifecycle of the household (Watts 2014: 47–8).