
7 CONCLUSIONS

The features excavated at Hallhill are difficult to relate to previously excavated rural settlements, having little in common with even the closest excavated medieval settlement at Eldbotle (Morrison et al 2008). This may in part be due to the degree of truncation, which has made interpretation of the vestigial remains a challenge. However, the ditches and gullies which appear to delineate structures are unlike anything seen at other contemporary sites and the best parallel identified so far is on Sanday. The ‘sunken-floored’ structures (F13, F14) are rare in Scottish rural medieval archaeology, the only potential parallel being a working area previously identified at Birnie, Moray (Hunter 2003); although this yielded no datable finds it is likely to have Early Historic or medieval origins. F13 and F14 appear most likely to be the remains of a short-lived workshop, possibly of stone-based turf- or timber-walled construction and associated working area.

The artefact assemblage from this site gives a potential date range from the 12th to 15th centuries, although centred on the 13th–14th centuries, and is typical of a rural settlement in the high medieval period when compared with the more abundant examples south of the border. However, comparison with the finds from Springwood and Eldbotle shows it to have less variety. Few imported pottery types were present at Hallhill, despite its coastal proximity, and the range of metal and stone objects was limited. Single objects which might be considered unusual on a rural site are the fragment of painted window glass and the iron arrowhead, although the occasional presence of hunting arrows is known in rural settlements in England and does not need to imply high status or elite connections. Bone preservation at Springwood was poor, but Hallhill is similar to Eldbotle in producing a relatively large quantity of horse (Henderson 2002), and in view of this the possible spur and horse harness fragments are of interest. Both Hallhill and Eldbotle produced very few fish bones despite their proximity

to the sea, and this must be related to the nature of the soil. The mollusc remains have been interpreted as fishing bait, suggesting that the occupants were involved in at least some fishing. However, with almost two miles between Hallhill and the closest part of the coast, fishing is unlikely to have been the main source of either food or income for this settlement.

It seems that most of the usual medieval rural activities were taking place at this site. There is evidence for farming and stock-rearing; exploitation of animals for food, skins, wool and horn; grinding of grain; and possibly hunting. In addition, the inhabitants of this settlement were able to exploit the nearby coastal resources, particularly shellfish and sea coal. Unusually, there is no evidence for smithing activities, so presumably the horses present on this site had to be taken elsewhere for shoeing, and metal objects were obtained from nearby markets such as Dunbar itself.

Although little evidence survives for the structural types present on this site, the amount of stone present suggests that this material was largely used for footings. Like the houses at Springwood, it is probable that the stone footings were simply bases for turf or clay walls. Whether they had cruck-framing or used some other method of roofing cannot be reconstructed from their surviving plans. The smallest building, the possible workshop, seems to have had some form of heating, and the possible structure in enclosure F19 may have had a firepit, but there is no real evidence for other internal structures such as partitions or drains.

With the hindsight offered by future excavations, it might be possible to offer a better interpretation of the features present at Hallhill. For now the best we can offer is that we seem to have the edge of an agricultural field system, the possible remains of turf-walled long houses constructed on shallow levelled platforms, with associated areas of craft or industrial activity and at least one workshop.