

MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT ARCHAEOLOGY IN SCOTLAND¹

Lloyd R. Laing, Ministry of Works, Edinburgh

Medieval settlement archaeology, and in particular the archaeological investigation of peasant habitation sites, is a relatively recent study in Britain. In England and Wales the first important excavations to be carried out were those of the 1930's, most notably the excavations of 'longhouses' at Gelligaer Common in Glamorgan and Great Beere in Devon.² Indeed, little organized work in the field was carried out until 1952, when the Deserted Medieval Village Research Group (DMVRG) was set up to follow up the work of historians, most notably Professor Maurice Beresford.³ In 1953 work was begun on the deserted village of Wharram Percy (Yorks), following the model of similar excavations carried out by Dr Axel Steensberg in Denmark⁴, and since then excavations under the aegis of the DMVRG and other bodies have begun to build up a picture of medieval settlement types in most areas of England, and on a lesser extent in Wales.

Unfortunately hitherto Scotland has not been involved in a similar programme of research, and the situation facing Scottish archaeologists is one akin to that which faced their English counterparts twenty years ago, with important differences. In medieval England the use of wheel-turned pottery was widespread, and due to the work of G.C. Dunning and others on the finds from castles, town sites, etc. some kind of chronology for English medieval pottery had been established even by the later 1930's. In medieval Scotland wheel-turned pottery had a restricted distribution, and even where it is found an independent chronology for it is as yet almost wholly lacking.⁵ Furthermore, due to cultural poverty in medieval Scotland there are few other type fossils which can provide a chronological framework into which evidence may be fitted as it is brought to light. There is another major difference - in England there is often very good documentary evidence for the history of villages and other settlement units. Although after c.1100 some documentation is available for Scotland, especially for the south, it is in the main less useful and extensive.

The period with which we are concerned here extends from the twelfth century until the time of the 'Improvements' - the mid-eighteenth century in the South and East, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the Highlands and Islands. The twelfth century is a convenient divide in Scottish archaeology, since there is reason to suppose that due to Anglo-Norman influence and influx many new phenomena became widespread. Scottish coinage, in the light of current thought, begins in 1136⁶, following English models, and following

English models too, wheel-turned pottery seems to have spread up from Northern England. To the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century can be assigned a few meagre imports, such as the French painted jugs from Red Castle, Angus⁷, but it is not until the end of the twelfth century or more probably the beginning of the thirteenth that pottery was used at all widely in the South-east.⁸ With some possible exceptions, such as Castle Sween, Argyll, stone castle building too makes its appearance at this date.⁹ A terminal date for 'Medieval' in Scotland need not concern us - in a recent paper Mr Iain Crawford has argued in favour of 1609 (the year of the 'Statutes and Band of Iona'), which might seem convenient on historical grounds¹⁰ - but on a high social level the Renaissance had come to Scotland earlier at least in the arts,¹¹ and on a more general level the 'Middle Ages' continued into the seventeenth century, when tower houses were still being built contemporary with more stately homes.¹² Socially the decline of the importance of the clans following 1746 might be taken as a convenient yardstick, and for the purposes of this study the 'Improvements' are an obvious divide.

Rural Settlement in Southern and Eastern Scotland. The question of rural settlement in this area has been discussed from an historical viewpoint by Professor G.W.S. Barrow, particularly for the period 1100-1300.¹³ Scotland south of the Forth is in reality an extension of Northern England, and in historical and archaeological terms we can consider as a whole the region lying between Tyne and Forth. In this area the nucleated village is widespread, frequently linked with outlying settlements. Many of these villages had parochial status as early as the twelfth or thirteenth century. Where village is linked with outlying settlements, as in their English counterparts in Northumberland, Co. Durham and North Yorkshire, the group is frequently called a 'shire' - hence Coldingham and Coldinghamshire, Haddington and Haddingtonshire. This also appears further west, where we find Edinburgh, Linlithgow, and Stirling also having shire unity. Shire unity was to be found in the shire-centre and the lord, 'usually the king, a bishop or abbot or some great layman'.¹⁴

In the case of the smaller units of settlement, documentary evidence suggests that as early as the twelfth century a similar pattern existed in Southern Scotland to that in Northern England. Cultivated land extended in a large area round the village, and separate holdings comprised several rigs scattered about the cultivated land. At an early date the word 'acre' is used to refer to a rig or group of rigs - by 1200 the word rig (reifa) appears in documents.¹⁵ The main arable unit of Latin documents was the carucate (the ploughgang or ploughgate) which is referred to in documents relating to all areas of south-east Scotland. This abstract carucate is an English concept, and appears in the mid-twelfth century. Although there are few early documents relating to

'peasant' land a charter of 1260 relating to Mow (Roxburgh) and quoted by Barrow gives an indication of the division of land.¹⁶

Apart from arable in rigs and acres, the adjacent meadow and common pasture, there were areas of hill grazing which exploited in the summer from shielings - hence Penshiel, Gameshiel, Tamshiel, etc. as place-names. Shielings were widespread in the Southern Uplands and in the Cheviots (the shielings of Riccaton, Roxburgh, went with the low-lying estate of Whitton in the time of David I), but development in connection with the thirteenth-century wool trade reduced them as did attempts by religious houses and other large landowners to acquire large tracts of hill pasture. There is no indication in early sources of 'infield' and 'outfield' cultivation, though such is possible.¹⁷

The picture gained from studying ecclesiastical organization in the area reflects a situation where settlement consisted chiefly of nucleated settlements, with or without 'shires', of Northumbrian type. In the Lothians the church was usually in the village settlement, close to the lord's residence. Such a settlement pattern is probably due to English influence in the twelfth century, and is unlikely to date from an earlier period than 1100.

Later in the Middle Ages we see the full development of the infield-outfield system from this basic pattern, and the emergence of the 'fermtoun' (farm township), kirkton (farm township with parish church) and milltoun (mill township). This survives until the eighteenth century Improvements.

Having summarized the documentary evidence for settlement, we must turn to archaeology. Here we see the documentary picture reflected in deserted village sites and in single farmsteads and shielings, with the survival in some areas of earlier settlement types, including the crannog and round hut.

Deserted villages in the area to the south of the Forth are fairly widespread - there are many in Dumfries and Galloway, in Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk, a few in the Lothians, and a few more in Ayrshire and Peeblesshire.¹⁸ In Scotland many of these deserted villages were abandoned not on account of sixteenth-century enclosures or the 'Black Death' as in England, but at the time of the eighteenth-century Improvements. This is true of many of the villages in Dumfries and Galloway, for example - Little Dalton was abandoned about 1780, Polmaddie (between Dalry and Carsphain) in the mid-eighteenth century, so too East Preston, Borron, Knock, and several others. Only a few, as far as documentary evidence suggests, were abandoned in the later Middle Ages, and frequently in these cases the precise site of the village is not known. In most cases the surface indications of villages are probably of their latest

structures, extending in date from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, though in a few cases there are surface indications of stone buildings where the village is known to have been abandoned by the sixteenth century - Kirkconnel, Waterbeck, is one such case from this area.¹⁹ Usually surface indications are of stone 'longhouses' or smaller buildings on one or both sides of a road or street, in Scotland usually raised, as opposed to the more common 'sunk way' of English deserted medieval villages. In a few cases, like Dunrod, Kirkcudbright, the village is associated with a moated manor - this is also true of Enrick, near Gatehouse.

The earliest medieval dwelling sites to be excavated in southern Scotland were those investigated in the neighbourhood of Muirkirk, Ayrshire between 1913 and 1927. Unfortunately, except for 'John Brown's House', which is a 17th-18th century longhouse of developed type, none of the buildings were planned, and though medieval and post-medieval pottery assigned to various dates was described as coming from individual sites, none was published. The earliest buildings investigated, to judge from the account, show a diversity of types. Circular huts as well as rectangular buildings appear to have been occupied in the medieval period, and one at least appears to have been an early longhouse.²⁰ A deserted village of 11 houses was dug (except for one house), the houses being unicameral structures averaging 20' by 9', with a variety of shapes - oval, rectangular with semi-circular ends, and true rectangles. They appear to have been built for the most part of turf and clay on stone foundations.²¹ John Brown's House measured 74' by 20' with a dwelling, byre, and barn under the same roof alignment, and with a central hearth. It was occupied until the late 18th century.²²

One house (house 6) was recently excavated in the deserted village at Douglas Burn in Selkirk. This was a two-roomed building nearly 35' by 18'. It has been dated by a sherd and a knife to the late medieval period.²³ At Crumhaugh Tower, Roxburgh, a 'longhouse' was excavated in 1965, 100' by 21', divided by cross-walls into three - a byre, with cobbles and drain, and extended living quarters, divided into a cobbled and uncobbled area. The walls were clay-bonded, as is usual with such buildings in Scotland. A fourteenth century date has been suggested for this building.²⁴ At Little Dunagoil, Bute, a thirteenth-century longhouse defined by post-holes and walls was excavated in 1960, associated with another, possibly earlier, long stone building.²⁵ At Cumbernauld a late medieval rectangular cottage has been investigated, with rubble-built walls and stone floor, associated with other structures. Pottery suggests it was constructed in the 14th-15th century, and occupied into the sixteenth.²⁶ Several medieval farmsteads have been investigated in Renfrewshire, most notably Shewalton Moor, Knapps, and Walls Hill, Shewalton Moor

homestead was similar to Knapps, and has not been excavated.²⁷ Both Walls Hill and Knapps have been dug, and plans published. In the case of Knapps a complex of structures was identified within an enclosure wall, and dated to the 14th-15th centuries.²⁸ The Walls Hill²⁹ farmstead appears to date from the 13th-14th century, and was again a type of 'longhouse' similar to those that survived until the 18th century in Ayr and Renfrew, to judge from contemporary accounts.³⁰

Of later date than the above is the house excavated by the Royal Commission at Lour, Stobo, Peeblesshire. Here a late village was associated with a tower house. The dwelling investigated was found to consist of two rooms, a dwelling with indoor midden and hearth set off-centre, and a 'storeroom'. Initial occupation dated from the seventeenth century.³¹

At Manor, Peeblesshire, Mr R.B.K. Stevenson excavated in 1939 a scooped enclosure of medieval date, consisting of a cluster of quasi-circular huts with roofs supported on more than one post, surrounded by an enclosure wall.³²

Crannogs were presumably being built and occupied in the south as well as further north at least until the seventeenth century - in 1608 there is an Act against the building of 'crannaks'.

From the above it can be seen that in medieval southern Scotland there was a variety of dwellings in use, from stone-built longhouses and smaller farmsteads to round huts, scooped enclosures and crannogs. Certain earthworks, sometimes taken as being Iron Age from their location and form, must also surely be medieval enclosures.

The types of structures that have so far been excavated compare closely with parallels from Northern England - notably those in the deserted villages of West Whelpington, Northumberland³³, West Hartburn, Co. Durham³⁴ and at Memmerkirk, Northumberland³⁵ on the east, and the primitive steading at Millhouse, in Westmorland.³⁶

The Highlands and Islands. The Scottish Highlands are the area of the Highland Clearance Villages, which have been the subject of study of a number of scholars, most notably Dr Horace Fairhurst³⁷ and Dr R.A. Gailey.³⁸ The term 'clachan' is usually used to describe these villages, though the name is misleading as in linguistic usage it refers specifically to the equivalent of the Lowland 'Kirktoon'. The term 'baile' is perhaps more apposite, meaning as it does 'farm township'.³⁹ If we take, for example, an area like Perthshire we find that the clusters of ruins of the Clearance villages consist of drystone

buildings of varying size, including long rectangular buildings 50' by 14' of true longhouse type. Associated with these are usually smaller structures about 30' long, which may have lacked a byre. Some of the long buildings are divided into single-roomed buildings; associated are platforms of stone for the peat stack. Thatch appears to have been the normal roofing, on a cruck framework (or perhaps one should say scarfed truss), with the crucks set in slots high up the walls. The houses seem to have had central hearths.

Associated with the clusters of buildings are enclosures - stack yards or gardens, and corn drying kilns.⁴⁰ As one might expect, the variety of house types is considerable, though the longhouse is mainly a phenomenon of Argyll, Islay, Jura and West Perthshire, and perhaps Sutherland.⁴¹ Such complexes of buildings are associated with a system of cultivation which centres on the group farm, worked on the runrig system with infield and outfield cultivation.

Both field survey and excavation at sites such as Lix and Rosal in Perthshire suggest that the clachans are in fact late⁴² - the Improvements which resulted in the replacement of the clachans by single farms began in the Highlands about 1780, but were not generally underway especially in the north-west until the early nineteenth century.⁴³ For the most part the existing ruins do not date before the period of rapid development of clachans following 1745, and in actual fact we cannot find the antecedents of the type - both Fairhurst and Gailey have suggested that in reality the stone-built clachans do not go back before the eighteenth or late seventeenth century, and had more primitive antecedents built of less solid materials, such as timber, wattle, turf or peat.⁴⁴

Yet the type of settlement that the clachan represents is one of considerable antiquity, and may originally have come from the Lowlands, surviving in the north until a time at which it had become completely obsolete in the south and west. The key at present to an understanding of the clachans must lie in Lowland archaeology.

In the Western Isles the traditional 'blackhouse' probably does not stem from a Viking antecedent as Rousell suggested, but has another origin.⁴⁵ Building 2 excavated at Udal in 1964 has been dated to the period 1000-1600 and has been tentatively identified as the type of house that was the antecedent of the blackhouse: it bears a typological relationship to the 18th-century houses of North Uist.⁴⁶ Udal is providing us with a sequence of buildings extending down from the Viking period through the medieval and post-medieval periods and which will possibly provide valuable keys to our understanding of settlement studies in the area of the Lordship of the Isles. It has shown that in the Western Isles at least there is an unbroken tradition of local pottery manu-

facture, which suggests that other parts of Western Scotland may also have a tradition of unglazed local wares of 'craggan' type, even though the finer glazed wares are absent. A clue is perhaps provided by Huntly Castle, where the finds do not only include glazed wares but sherds of coarse unglazed ware of 'craggan' type.⁴⁷

The Northern Isles. Pottery in both Orkney and Shetland is relatively rare, and almost certainly imported from centres of production on the east mainland or even from the continent. In Shetland, apart from the earlier medieval pottery from Jarlshof, there is very little pottery that can be said to antedate the fifteenth or sixteenth century, at which time it seems a reasonable amount was being imported similar to that found on the mainland. A sherd of 'craggan'-like pottery from the Sands of Breckin, Yell, may be Iron Age⁴⁸ but could in fact be a native medieval or early post-medieval vessel. The only post-Norse medieval buildings to be excavated in Shetland are those of the farmstead at Jarlshof. This measured over 63' by 20', with a small annexe. Although built in Norse style it was not of Norse type, nor indeed does it conform to the traditional longhouse plan, though later modifications confuse the plan - it was converted into an outhouse or byre. Adjacent to it was a barn with corn-drying kiln in its north-west corner. The earliest occupation of the farmstead dates from the late thirteenth or fourteenth century, and it probably continued in use until the 'New Hall' was built in the sixteenth century. The corn-drying kiln is of particular interest, since it is circular rather than square. The round type is also characteristic of Orkney, and there is good reason to believe that it spread from there to Shetland.⁴⁹

It may be inferred that stone-built farmsteads of this or similar type were being built in Shetland throughout the Middle Ages and even later, and they are probably closely related to some of the old Orkney farmsteads which are still standing and date to the 17th-19th centuries, like Nether Benziecleit.⁵⁰ There is some archaeological evidence from Orkney to argue that here too the round corn-drying kiln and stone farmstead has an earlier origin. In the Northern Isles the absence of timber resulted in a stone tradition, which need not stem from Norse ancestors as Roussell suggested.⁵¹ It can be demonstrated that parallels for them can be found on the Scottish mainland.

In Orkney pottery is again fairly scarce until the later medieval period, though some of earlier date (13th-14th century) has been found at sites like Birsay and Kirkwall. Kirkwall, however, had a flourishing trade throughout the medieval period, especially with Bergen, and pottery is to be expected there.

Conclusion. The above brief survey of necessity has only been able to discuss

a few themes in outline - descriptions of houses, notably in the early travellers' accounts, the earliest of which date back to the fifteenth century, have not been discussed,⁵² due to lack of space. Nor for that matter have certain archaic building techniques, such as the use of alternating stone and turf, since this has already been admirably discussed elsewhere.⁵³ It is hoped that the nebulous nature of some of the evidence has served to emphasise the pressing need for more fieldwork in Scottish medieval archaeology.

Notes

1. The paper I originally gave at the Symposium was in two parts, first a discussion of medieval settlement and the reasons why a first season of research excavation at Kirkconnel, Waterbeck, Dumfriesshire was carried out in 1968. The second part was a report on the results of that season, when a 'Dark Age' hall was investigated. As an interim report on the excavation has already appeared in print [Current Archaeology (Nov. 1968) and more briefly in D. & E. Scotland (1968), 19] and the full report is forthcoming in Trans. D. & G. N. H. A. S. XLVI along with a discussion of some of the problems of Dark Age timber buildings in Britain, it was felt that it would be more useful if I here gave an expanded version of the first part of my paper.
2. For Gelligaer, see Fox (1937) and Fox (1939). For Beere, Jope (1958).
3. Beresford (1954).
4. Hurst (1956) for Wharram Percy. For general background of DMVRG see Hurst (1965). A convenient summary of Steensberg's method in Hurst (1956).
5. Laing (1968), 139.
6. Stewart (1968), 190.
7. Wilson (1963), 325.
8. I hope to publish the evidence for this in the near future, meanwhile, see Laing (1969), 141-3.
9. For Castle Sween, Cruden (1960), 22-3. For origins of stone castle building in Scotland, Cruden, op.cit., Chap.2.
10. Crawford (1967), 85.
11. In architecture the Great Hall at Stirling or the Outer Entrie of Linlithgow Palace may be said to be Renaissance - see Cruden (1960), 144-9. In coinage James V's 'Bonnet Piece' is a masterpiece of Renaissance numismatic art. Lindsay from many points of view is a 'Renaissance' writer.
12. Crawford (1967), 87; Cruden (1960), 190-1.
13. Barrow (1962).

14. Barrow (1962), 125.
15. Barrow (1962), 125.
16. Barrow (1962), 126.
17. Barrow (1962), 127.
18. So far preliminary fieldwork has failed to locate any deserted villages in Lanarkshire, but here the hilly nature of the terrain might suggest that there are few such sites. Medieval habitation here was probably in isolated huts and steadings (platform settlements?) and earthworks at present taken to be Iron Age. There are a few possible settlements of another sort, e.g. Robertson earthwork is seemingly an enclosed settlement and not a castle only. A few sites have been located north of the Forth along the east coast - e.g. Pitmiddle, Angus.
19. Information on Dumfries & Galloway sites partly based on notes kindly provided by Mr E.A. Truckell.
20. Fairbairn (1927), 283.
21. Fairbairn (1927), loc.cit.
22. Fairbairn (1927), 287-9.
23. D. & E. Scotland (1965), 36; (1966), 42.
24. D. & E. Scotland (1965), 36.
25. D. & E. Scotland (1960), 24.
26. D. & E. Scotland (1960), 39.
27. D. & E. Scotland (1965), 15.
28. Newall (1965).
29. Newall (1960).
30. Eadie, paraphrasing Aiton's 'General View of the Agriculture of the County of Ayr' (1811), 114-5 described a house thus: 'The part of the building which served the family for lodging, sleeping, eating, dairying, was the 'inseat', about 12 to 14 feet square, with a fire in the centre or at the gable, without jambs or smoke funnel. On large farms another apartment, the 'spense' held the meat chest, sown tub, some beds, a cask to collect urine called the wash tub, spinning wheels and reels when not in use and the gudewife's press if she had one. The other part of the building was occupied by the cattle which generally entered the same door as the family, the one turning by the "trans-door" to the kitchen and through it to the spense, the other by the "heck-door" to the byre or stable. The "trans" and "heck" doors were in the centre of the partition, so that people in the "inseat" saw butt to the cattle, the cattle ben to the people.'
31. Dunbar & Hay(1963).
32. Stevenson (1942).
33. Jarrett (1962).
34. Still & Pallister (1964); Still & Pallister (1967).

35. Harbottle & Cowper (1963).
36. Loundes (1966).
37. Gailey (1962).
38. Fairhurst (1960).
39. Crawford (1967), 88.
40. Fairhurst (1960), 67-8.
41. Fairhurst (1960), 69.
42. Fairhurst (1964), 150-63.
43. Fairhurst (1960), 71-2.
44. Fairhurst (1960), 74; Gailey (1962), 170-3.
45. Roussell (1934).
46. Crawford (1964), 6.
47. My attention was drawn to this by Mr Norman Robertson. Many vessels are represented, and the majority are hand-made copies of medieval jugs of 13th-14th century date. There is some glazed wheel-made pottery of the period from the site, and it would appear that here we have a local attempt to imitate imports.
48. D. & E. Scotland (1967), 43.
49. Hamilton (1956), 190-3.
50. Plan in Roussell (1934), 81.
51. Roussell, op.cit.
52. Hume Brown (1890), passim.
53. Fenton (1968).

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