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Section 3

Settlement Form, Locational Studies and Field Systems

A township through time: excavation and survey at the deserted settlement of Easter Raitts, Badenoch, 1995-1999

Olivia Lelong & John Wood

This paper presents the results of ongoing survey and excavation at the deserted settlement of Easter Raitts in Badenoch (NH 7774 0228) within the context of research into post-Medieval settlement in the Highlands and its Medieval precedents. The programme of work is organised by the authors on behalf of the Highland Council and the University of Aberdeen, with additional funding from the Highland Vernacular Buildings Trust and (since 1998) Historic Scotland.

The settlement known as Easter Raitts is defined on the west by a tumbled stone dyke running south across the shoulder, then turning to run along the contour and the south side of the cluster. It stretches as far as a small, marshy burn which runs downslope. A slightly terraced trackway is visible in the turf running along the south side of the boundary dyke, at the head of a long slope of improved ground on which rigs, flattened by harrowing, are just visible.

Another trackway winds through the settlement, leading from a gap in the western boundary dyke and crossing the burn at the other end. The settlement comprises at least 18 remains identifiable as structures¹. Some of these are clearly longhouses, based on their similarity in size and alignment to excavated examples (e.g. structure 21); most lie along the trackway and appear to face onto it. They are all aligned roughly east/west, so the prevailing winds would have swept along the buildings' axes. Other structures are aligned north/south, and some of these have opposing entrances; these are most likely barns, built to exploit the prevailing winds for winnowing grain in the draught through the entrances.

Still other structures are not so easily interpreted from the surface remains. The largest building in the township (6) lies along the south side of the trackway at the west end of the settlement, and is composed of several compartments, with

entrances leading out onto the trackway; it is aligned roughly north-west/south-east. Interpreted at first as a tacksman's house because of its size, it proved to have had a completely different history from any other building in this or other excavated townships, as will be described below. Directly outside the western boundary dyke and to the west of this large structure is a well-defined platform (5). A roughly square building (structure 2), with massive stone footings visible beneath turf banks and a wide entrance on the north-west, lies over its western part. This, too, is unlike any other building in the township in its size and shape, and cannot readily be interpreted as a byre, barn or dwelling. The eastern part of the platform is hollowed, with a slight bank which curves around the edges of the hollow, suggesting an earlier structure; it was interpreted during the initial survey of the settlement, carried out by AOC Scotland (Ltd) in 1995, as a possible prehistoric building platform. Excavation has begun to show its complex history of use and re-use.

In fact, the more one walks around the settlement and looks at the undulations in the ground, the more possible features become apparent. Most of the buildings have hollowed areas or lengths of ill-defined banking outside them, some of which might be the remains of less substantial structures, either contemporary outbuildings or remains pre-dating the more visible buildings. Three of the hollowed areas have been investigated and found to be a cobbled yard (feature 14), a small, paved outbuilding outside longhouse 21 (structure 26) and a deliberate, banked scoop onto a natural clay deposit (feature 15), probably for the purpose of quarrying and puddling the clay. Ongoing survey and excavation in the township are producing an ever more complex picture of the ways it was occupied, the changing needs and wealth of the inhabitants and the variety of buildings making up their settlement.

The survival of such extensive and varied features under grass is unusual for the Scottish Highlands, where many pre-clearance sites survive only on marginal land or in forestry; those in the straths (for example, Strathnaver) have in many cases been obliterated by post-Improvement alterations to the landscape. Easter Raitts is undisturbed by tree or heather roots, although it has been damaged by rabbit burrowing.

The programme of investigation into the township is designed to meet several objectives. The first is to research the Medieval and later rural settlement of Badenoch; the need for such research in the Highlands² has been noted by Historic Scotland³ and formulated as a policy statement⁴. Understanding the pattern of Medieval Highland settlement and how its archaeology differs from that of post-Medieval settlement is essential for devising policies for the conservation and management of this resource - the second objective of the project - as well as understanding how Highland society developed over this time span.

The third objective is to find evidence on which to base experimental reconstructions of buildings and other features. Reconstruction of buildings excavated at Easter Raitts is ongoing at the Highland Folk Museum in Newtonmore. The reconstructed buildings give the visiting public as well as the archaeological team a much better sense of how such townships appeared and of the experience of living in them. The programme also provides training in traditional building craft skills for local people. The dialectical relationship between the reconstructions and the excavations, with excavation informing the reconstruction programme and the latter posing questions for the former, is a stimulating, dynamic approach and a valuable test of the extent to which excavated evidence can be used to establish even basic constructional details of buildings.

The fourth objective of the project is to provide training in archaeological field techniques, primarily excavation. This is accomplished within the framework of a field school, as part of a three-year Certificate in Field Archaeology course developed in association with the University of Aberdeen.

The fieldwork is building on the results of earlier archaeological investigations into MoLRS settlements, such as Fairhurst's⁵, and experimental work like that at the Highland Folk Museum⁶ to further understanding of such sites. Before presenting the results of the work carried out so far, a brief consideration of the broader landscape in the Medieval and post-Medieval periods will help to set them in context.

The Medieval and post-Medieval landscape

Easter Raitts is best documented in the post-Medieval period, around the time of its first and main episode of clearance in 1803. However, there is strong evidence for its existence from the Medieval period.

The settlement lies in Badenoch, a region defined by its topography and a political entity from the Medieval period, if not earlier. It stretches from the west end of Loch Laggan along the valley carved by the River Spey to Aviemore, and to the watersheds on either side (see figure 1). As such, it has a topographic coherence which may have made it a discrete political unit from the early Medieval period, as was Atholl, its neighbour to the south.

The earliest reference to the placename Raitts mentions a thirteenth-century chapel⁷, dedicated to the Celtic saint Molúog. This was one of a series of such chapels strung along the strath during this period and subordinate to the chapel at Kingussie, with others at Banchor, Dunachton, Invertromie, Nuide, Insh, Kinrara and Alvie. Barrow has suggested that Kingussie may have been the old secular capital of Badenoch, perhaps the seat of a royal thanage, although Ruthven became its secular capital in the high medieval period⁸. That the chapels at Raitts, Dunachton and elsewhere were dedicated to Celtic saints further suggests early Medieval (pre-Norman) ecclesiastical loyalties.

The locations of many of these chapels correspond to davochs. In 1371, at the beginning of Robert II's reign, Badenoch was recorded as containing 60 davochs; by 1603, the rentals record a total of 52.5 davochs, but the number of distinct township placenames (when split settlements such as Easter, Wester and Mid Raitts are counted as one) is 59, or 60 if Shevin at the head of Strathdearn is included⁹. This may be evidence that the Medieval system of land division continued in some form, influencing the development of township sites into the Medieval and post-Medieval periods. According to Barrow:

'It would hardly be surprising if this continuity could be, as it were, pushed back in time so that the pre-feudal land assessment of Badenoch might well belong to a period much earlier than the twelfth century'¹⁰.

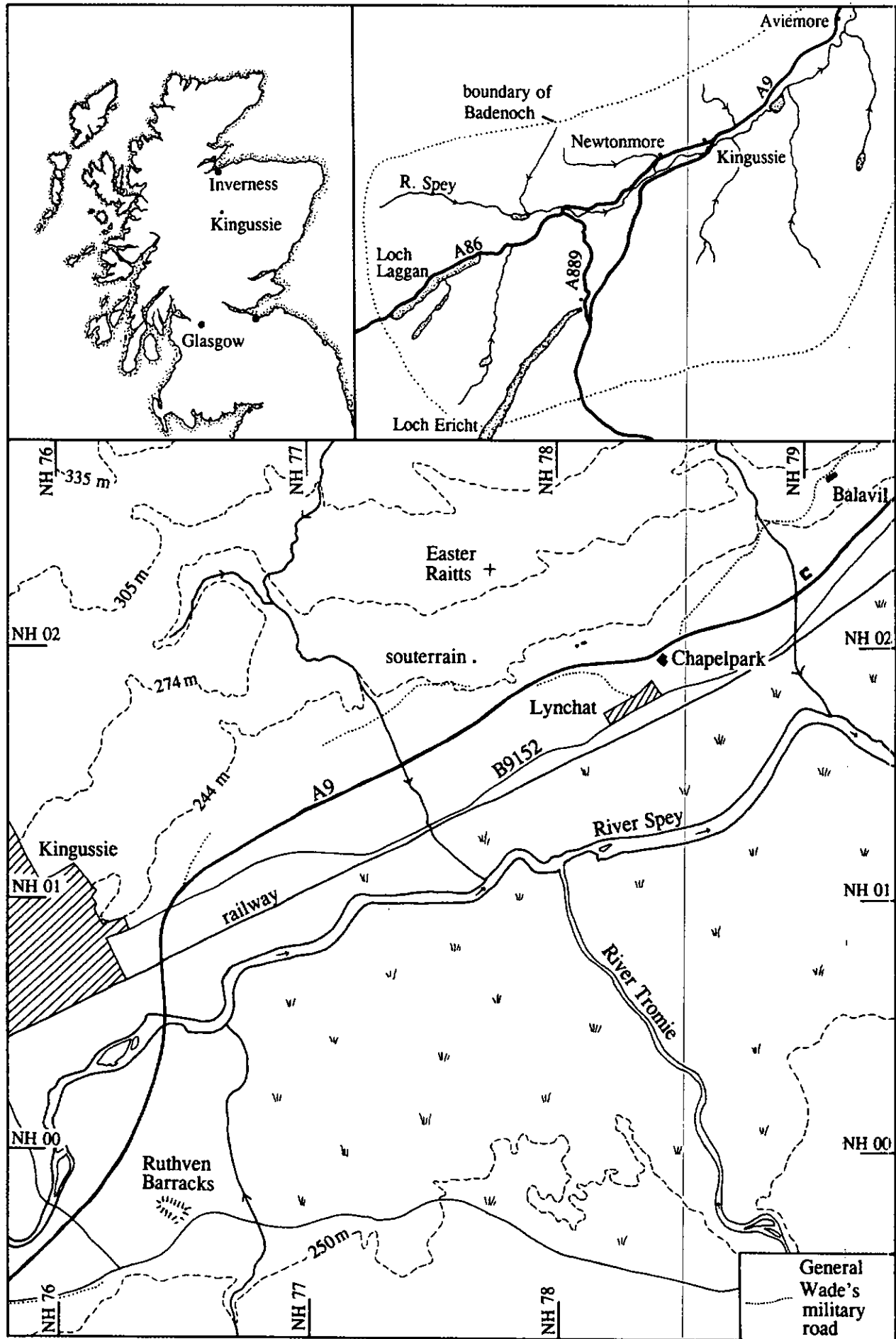


Figure 1: Location map

barrow also argues that the twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw a transition from rural shrines, chapels, holy wells and other sacred sites, each with its dedication or protective saint, to territorial parishes presided over by incumbent priests who were maintained by annual tithes of grain, animals and their products. The existence at Raitts of a chapel of either kind implies an associated population which it served and who supported it, and therefore an established settlement at Raitts can be assumed from at least pre-Norman times¹¹.

In the thirteenth century, those living at Raitts would have witnessed significant changes in political control of the area with the establishment of the Comyns, an Anglo-Norman family, in the lordship of Badenoch. They built Ruthven Castle as their seat on the natural motte in the centre of the strath, within view of Raitts and strategically positioned to monitor movement through the corridor which the strath forms between Moray to the north and the passes of Corrieyairack and Drumochter to the west and south-west, which lead to West Highlands and Atholl respectively. By 1371 their control had passed to Alexander Stuart, the fourth son of Robert II and better known as the Wolf of Badenoch. The lands and chapel at Raitts, however, were owned by the church. In 1380, during an ongoing clash of wills between the Bishop of Moray and the Wolf of Badenoch, the Bishop was required to present himself at Kingussie to show his titles to church lands in the lordship of Badenoch, including 'lands of the chapels of Rate and Nachton'¹².

By 1452, the lands which included Raitts had been granted to the first Earl of Huntly, of the Gordon family; from the late fifteenth until the late eighteenth centuries, Raitts was held in feu from the Gordons by the Mackintoshes of Borlum¹³. In 1788 the Mackintoshes sold the estate to James MacPherson, the controversial translator of Ossianic poetry. His eldest son James inherited Raitts, and like many other Improving landlords of the period, he cleared the inhabitants from the land to make way for more profitable sheep in 1803¹⁴.

The three settlement clusters visible today at Raitts may not date to this early period, but they were probably present in the 1590s, when Timothy Pont mapped the area. He shows three settlements along the shoulder - named West Rait, Mid Rait and Rait - which correspond to them;

Easter Raitts is either the middle or the eastern of these. Evidence of settlement at Raitts from the fifteenth century onward survives in the form of rentals, held among Gordon and Mackintosh family papers at the Scottish Record Office (R Noble, pers comm).

In the century preceding their eviction, the inhabitants of Easter Raitts must have witnessed many of the first signs of the changes that transformed the Highlands in the post-medieval period. The building of Wade's military road, which runs along the base of the slope just below the township, and of Ruthven Barracks on the site of Ruthven Castle brought an influx of soldiers from the south¹⁵. In their train must have come unfamiliar ideas, ways of dress, prostitutes and traders bringing mass-produced goods¹⁶. In this sense Easter Raitts is, in its latest phase of occupation, similar to many rural settlements around the world within the European empires - or even native British settlements located near Roman army installations. In all these cases, the native settlements would have been affected by the invading army's presence, and this may be reflected in the artefact assemblage recovered in excavation.

The archaeological remains at Easter Raitts are a kind of record of its occupation, formed certainly over the last several decades of the township's life and very likely over a much longer time span. In contrast to records written by outside observers, however, they were created incidentally, by the people themselves. These were people who could not or did not write their own stories, belonging as they did to a culture which valued oral tradition, but who nevertheless left material traces as a record of their daily lives: the houses and byres they built, the floors they laid, the hearths they used and the rubbish they threw away or trampled into the ground. This archaeology is the best record we have of those lives, and of how they changed in the decades and perhaps centuries before 1803.

Fieldwork Results, 1995-1999

Survey of the township remains by Magnar Dalland and Andrea Smith of AOC Scotland (Ltd) in 1995 established the complexity of the surface remains¹⁷. Trial-trenching that same year, directed by Kirsty Cameron of the Centre for Field Archaeology, investigated several of the structures (5, 6 and 11) and other features and

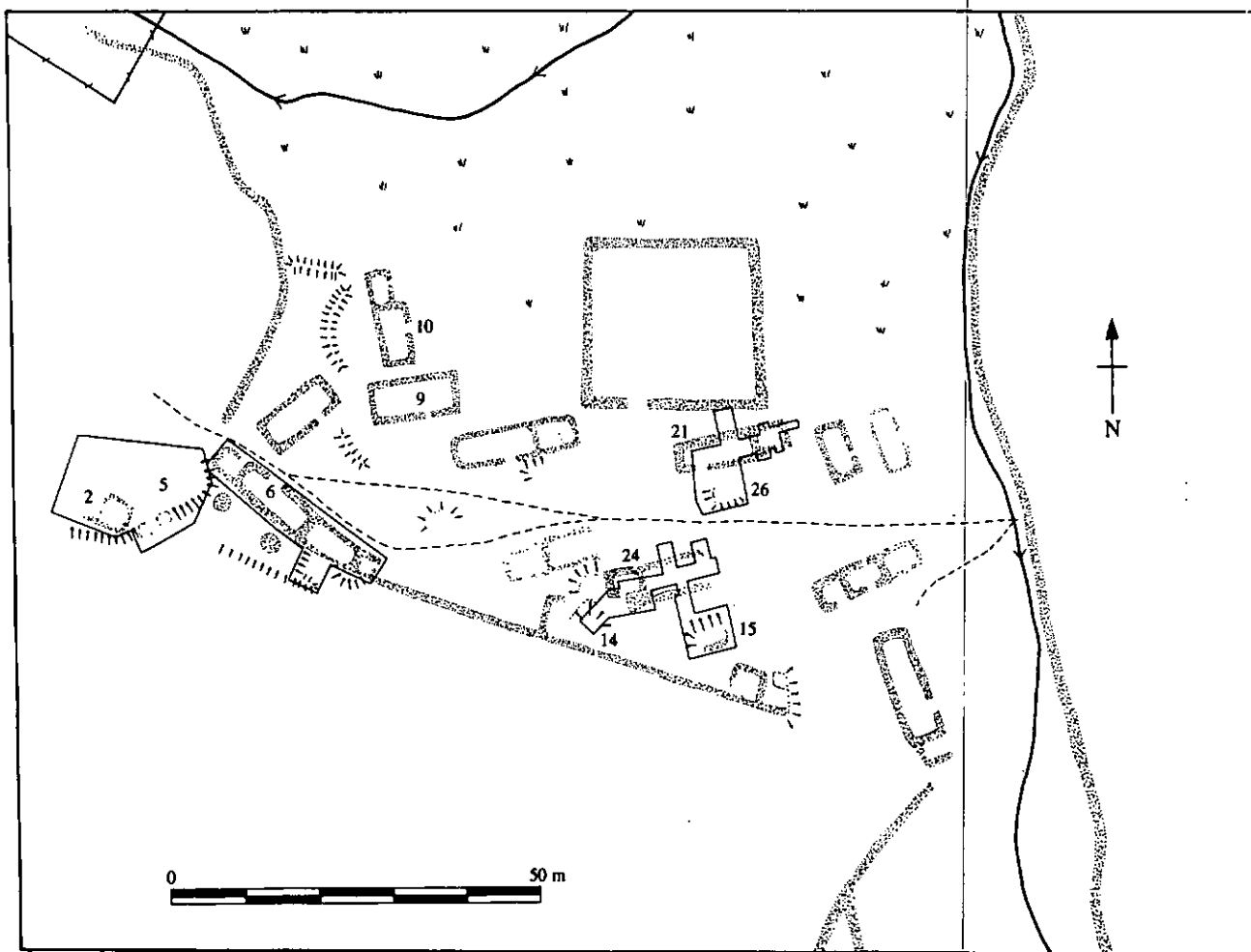


Figure 2: Plan of township of Easter Raitts (after Dalland & Smith 1995)

found well-preserved wall faces and beaten earth floors, and a metallised surface to the track which runs through the settlement¹⁸. This exploratory season established the settlement's potential for producing evidence for reconstructions and for providing training in excavation techniques.

The field school's pilot season, directed by Jonathan Wordsworth in 1996, investigated two structures (9 and 10); although neither was fully excavated, the evidence suggested that structure 9 was a house and structure 10 a byre, with a drain leading out to the marshy ground to the north. The walls of both were of a double skin of substantial drystone footings with a core of angular heaving, squared at the corners and with good external and internal facing. An internal ledge ran along the north wall of structure 9 and decayed turves, probably from the roof or collapsed walls, were found overlying the interior of both buildings.

Three subsequent seasons of excavation (1996-1999), directed by Olivia Lelong, have found evidence for the mode of construction and

occupation of a longhouse and outbuilding (structures 21 and 26), the subsequent re-use of another longhouse for animals and the addition of a substantial byre late in its sequence (structure 24)¹⁹, the gradual expansion of animal accommodation in the largest building in the township (structure 6)²⁰, the quarrying of clay and construction of a puddling pool (feature 15), and the re-use of what appears to be a prehistoric building platform (feature 5)²¹.

The best-preserved longhouse, structure 21 (see figure 2), had been built by scooping slightly into a natural gravel slope on the north to create a level surface, and laying one and in places two courses of a double skin of stone footings, with a rubble and earth core; it measured c 10 m east/west by 3.5 m internally, with an annexe 4 m by 3 m built against its east end. The superstructure above the footings had been of turf, built against and on top of them with a thick batter. This was evident from thick, wedge-shaped deposits of brown and black-brown loam lying against them; variously leached stripes visible in the sections showed the layers of

individuals turves, or remnants of successive turf walls which had slumped and been mostly removed for fertiliser, to be replaced by a new turf wall.

Inside the main part of the house, the entranceway led onto a roughly paved surface and around to the north side of the hearth - sunwise, as traditions of folklore support²². The entrance paving overlay a scoop filled with burnt material, with postholes dug into its eastern edge; the constituents of the burnt fill included hazel, willow, birch and alder²³, perhaps elements of a hurdling screen to protect the hearth from draughts through the doorway, which had caught fire and burnt. Beside the hearth to the west was a rectangular, compact deposit of decayed turf, interpreted as the remains of a turf seat. Fragments of clay tobacco pipe were found at the north-east corner of this seat, conjuring a picture of someone habitually perched by the hearth, smoking.

The hearth itself had clearly been the focus of the house, and had had two phases of use. An earlier phase was represented by burnt pink clay and sand, ringed by postholes, perhaps to support some cooking apparatus. Three layers of trampled, charcoal-stained earthen floor survived to the south of the hearth (where they would have been less exposed to traffic than on the north), and these appeared to be contemporary with the earlier hearth. At some point - at about the time when mass-produced ceramics began to be broken in the house, as they appeared in the stratigraphy only after this - the focus of the house was remodelled. Clean yellow sand was laid over the hearth and to the south, as a base for a new, substantial stone hearth and for large paving slabs forming a crescent to the east and south of it. A much-repaired iron spade foot had been retrieved from a fire (fragments of its burnt handle survived) and left on the floor exposed during this phase of remodelling; it was then covered by the next earthen floor. Another two phases of flooring followed.

The centre of the house was featureless except for small patches of clay flooring. It seems likely that box beds stood in this area, forming a partition between the hearth and the eastern part of the house and accounting for the missing sequence of floors here. To the east were two platforms, built of sandy soil and capped with stone, on either side of a well-packed stone walkway or drain.

This was tentatively interpreted as a dairy, on the basis of sherds of milk pan found among the stones of the platform. The eastern annexe to the house, with its own separate entrance, was interpreted as a small byre, with areas of hard-standing and a small milking stand with a tethering post in the south-west corner.

Over the interior of the main part of the longhouse lay a deposit of thick, rooty decayed turf, probably representing collapsed walls or roof, which was rich in artefacts: many pieces of broken eighteenth century pottery; part of an iron cooking pot; a musket flint; brass buttons, and a flat iron, among other objects. This had the appearance of an abandonment deposit, indicating either that the inhabitants left the house in a mess as they were leaving, or that it was used as a midden after its abandonment. The age of the artefacts suggests that this longhouse was abandoned when the township was cleared in 1803.

Outside the main entrance to the longhouse, a scooped feature (26) was investigated on the assumption that it might be a midden. It proved instead to be a paved outbuilding, apparently built late in the life of the house (as only the latest of successive phases of cobbling outside the longhouse entranceway were contemporary with the outbuilding). It had been scooped into the natural gravel, with sand laid as a base for its paved floor and evidence for a slight wall around it in the form of postholes and a linear depression around the edges of the paving (see figure 2).

The other longhouse investigated (structure 24A) had been built by terracing steeply into the northern slope, again to create a level surface; otherwise its construction was similar to that of longhouse 21. Its entrance had originally faced south over the strath, leading out onto a cobbled apron; an iron key was found tucked between stones beside the entrance. This had later been sealed up and the interior had been re-used for animals, which had scoured out most traces of flooring and other evidence for human occupation, except for the fire-cracked stones of the central hearth. At this late phase in the building's life, a small but substantial stony structure (24B) had been built over its east end, re-using one cruck from the earlier house. A drain led out of this structure to a hollowed, thickly cobbled yard (feature 14) to the south-west. On the basis of its substantial nature, the later

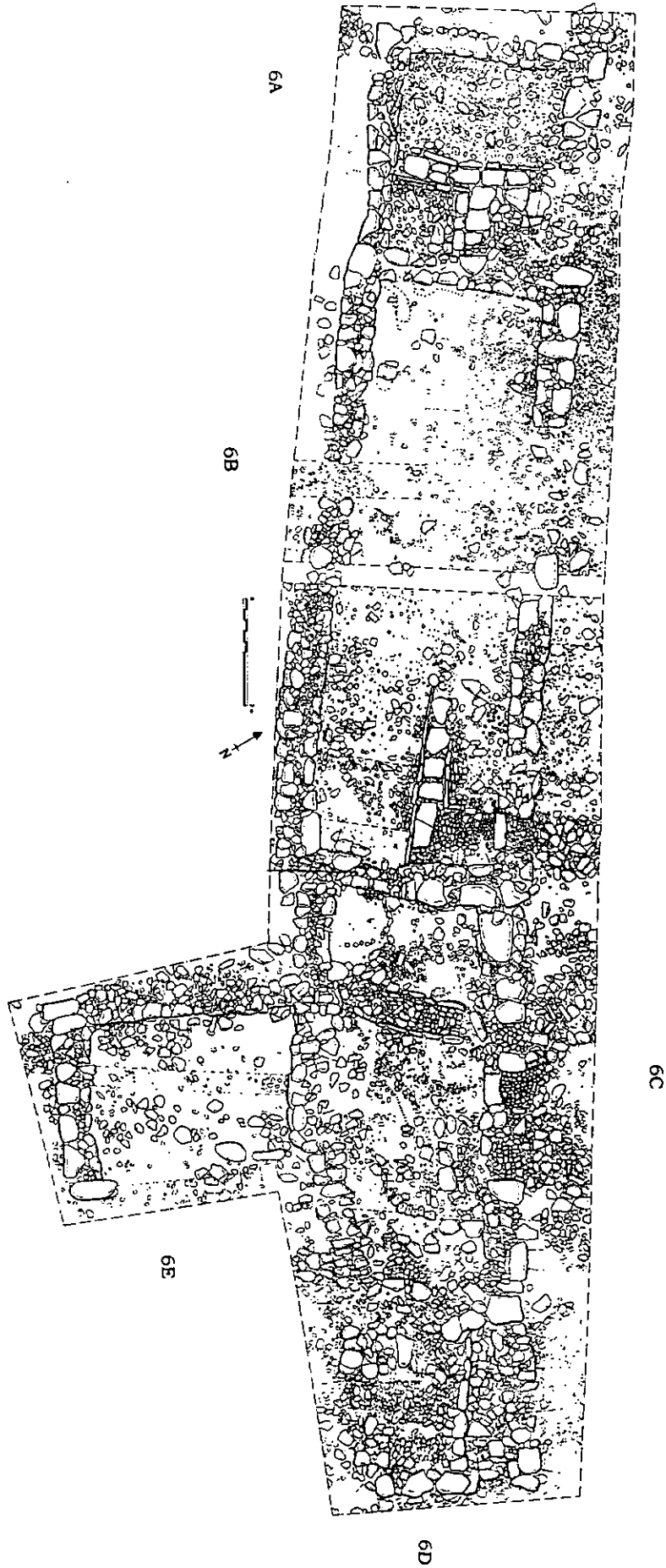


Figure 3: Plan of structure 6, the byre complex excavated in 1998

building (24B) was interpreted as a pig house, as pigs would have required extra measures to contain them.

The cobbled apron outside the original entrance to 24A led out to a small, sub-rectangular scoop (feature 15). Excavation of this, also on the assumption that it might be a midden, showed that it was in fact a deliberate scoop onto a natural clay deposit. The north side of the scoop had been built up and revetted, and along the south side a slight earthen bank had been built. The surface of the clay was deeply etched with water-worn channels, and artefacts found directly on the surface showed it had been left exposed. The combination of the deliberately exposed clay and the revetment and earthen bank led to its interpretation as a clay puddling pool. The clay was quite coarse, and by leaving water (contained by the revetment and bank) on its surface those quarrying the clay would have let it soften and let the finer particles rise and the coarser particles sink. It would then have been usable for floors, like those found in some of the structures (21 and 6B), or perhaps for daub.

Evidence of the importance of beasts in the life of the township emerged in structure 6, the largest building in the township (see figure 3). Before excavation it was clear that it had been built over different phases; it had four compartments, with entrances to three leading out on to the track, and a marked drop in level and shift in alignment between the two middle cells. A fifth compartment abutted these on the south, outside the dyke built onto the structure and forming the township's southern boundary.

The earliest building phase was the largest compartment (6B), which had two entrances. The eastern one led into a byre, with a paved drain running between two roughly cobbled areas. The western one led into an area covered by three phases of clay flooring, which had been separated by an internal partition from the byre. Although this was initially interpreted as a threshing barn, samples taken of each floor proved empty of cereal grains or any other evidence of its use²⁴. There was no sign of a hearth or any other evidence of human occupation, so the use of this part of structure 6 remains a mystery.

A small byre with a central paved drain and areas of cobbling to either side had been built on the west end of this room. To the east, a more

substantial structure had been added, apparently by digging into the natural slope to level the surface and in the process undercutting the original east wall of structure 6B. Its wall face had been dropped by inserting stones in an uncoursed fashion beneath the original footings. Two entrances, side by side, led into this room; beside the western one, a cobbled platform abutted the building and ran through the thickness of the wall. Inside, below the platform, a deep, cobble-floored drain formed of upright slabs ran diagonally across the entrance to lead through the southern wall into the outshot compartment (6E). The drain from byre 6B may also have been diverted through the rebuilt common wall, perhaps to drain animal urine into a vat for use in some industrial process such as dyeing or tanning leather. Later, both entrances and the cobbled platform had been sealed by walling. The rest of this room had a roughly cobbled floor, with a large, boulder-edged scoop at the east end, not fully understood during excavation. It might have been a dairy, as sherds of milk pan were found just outside one entrance.

The outshot compartment (6E) had been built onto this industrial area, but certainly while its drain was still functioning, as greasy black material from the drain had spread over its north-west interior. This room's broad entrance and rough flooring indicated it had probably been used for animals, perhaps as a temporary shelter, or for tools or seed used on the adjoining arable land. Finally, the eastern compartment (6D) had been added at a late stage. It was a small byre, with a drain leading out of its east end (and entrance) and gaps in its cobbled flooring indicating partitions between animal stalls.

The construction of extensive accommodation for animals, its gradual expansion over time and the addition of space for some kind of industrial processing, perhaps of animals products such as urine or milk, indicates the great importance of animals - probably cattle, sheep and goats - to the economy of people living at Easter Raitts. The discovery of a building exclusively given over to animals and associated functions is, to the authors' knowledge, unique among excavated Highland post-Medieval buildings. It certainly does not fit the usual model, gleaned from ethnohistorical sources as well as excavation, of a few cattle overwintered with the human occupants in a byre dwelling. As such, this multi-phase building adds significantly to our

understanding of the variety of ways people accommodated animals in the post-Medieval Highlands, and perhaps of their expanding herds and therefore wealth over time. An alternative explanation is that, given Easter Raitts' proximity to a major north/south drove route along the foothills to the north and to Wade's military road (and its Medieval precedent²⁵, people in the township may have been offering overnight stabling for pack ponies and beds for their owners traversing the road.

Finally, the project's focus turned in 1999 to the edges of the township, with the excavation of a large platform (5), identified during the 1995 survey as a possible prehistoric building platform, and a turf-covered stone structure (2) built over its west side. Excavation has still to be completed, but has so far shown that the more prominent structure (2) has a complicated history. It was originally a larger, paved building, but was shifted south-eastward and shortened during the eighteenth century; sherds of this date were found beneath the floor of the later extension, and a sickle dating to c 1800 was found in its collapsed walling. The wedges of fist-sized, rounded stones in a turf matrix lying against the south wall suggest the walls of this phase were of alternative stone and turf above the stone footings.

To the north and west of this structure, many fragments of tap slag were found in layers post-dating the buildings abandonment. These concentrated around a broad hollow on the north side of the platform, where a fragment of furnace lining was also found; *in situ* evidence of iron production has not yet been found, however. Several relatively unabraded sherds of prehistoric pottery, including two pieces of AOC Beaker, and a flint blade of probably Neolithic date, were also found in these layers. Although not *in situ*, they do indicate the probable use of this platform in prehistory.

Excavation in 1999 concluded with the removal of the post-abandonment layers, recording of a curving structure built of large, deep-set boulders around the north side of the platform, and the excavation of several slots which established the character and depth of the exposed archaeology, the absence of post-Medieval material in these layers and the presence of more prehistoric pottery and negative features sealed beneath a post-Medieval ground surface. The 2000 season

will complete the excavation of this complex set of features on the township's periphery.

Conclusions

Future work at Easter Raitts will also focus on possible evidence for the settlement's Medieval occupation, in the form of more denuded building remains, and begin to look beyond the township to the Medieval and later use of the surrounding landscape.

The ongoing work at Easter Raitts is creating an ever more complex picture of the township's occupation, mainly in the decades preceding its clearance but potentially of its earlier use as well. The evidence for the expansion, remodelling and re-use of several buildings shows that the people who made up the township were continually re-working the spaces in which they lived, the areas outside them and the shelter they provided for animals, the key to their livelihood. It also has shown that they re-used a probable prehistoric building platform, and must have come across pieces of material culture from that earlier occupation.

The physical traces of the lives of people occupying the township, created through careful building, careless discarding or simply the dust and trample of everyday existence, are our best and closest contact with what it was like to live in Easter Raitts. That existence was shortly to change enormously with the Improvements - a change which preserved those traces while it altered forever the lives that had left them. Their material environment was part and expression of a social and conceptual system with a long, sinuous history and a fierce integrity. The ongoing work at Easter Raitts can show us not only what that Highland society was like when the township was cleared, but also how it came to be that way.

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¹⁹ Lelong, O 1997 *Excavations at the Deserted Settlement of Easter Raitts, Badenoch: 1997 Interim Report*. Highland Council, Inverness.
²⁰ Lelong, O 1998 *Excavations at the Deserted Settlement of Easter Raitts, Badenoch: 1998 Interim Report*. Highland Council, Inverness.

The archaeology of deserted rural settlement in north-west Wales

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Introduction

Recent work by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (henceforth the Trust) on deserted rural settlement in north-west Wales has begun to examine a class of sites variously described in the literature as 'long huts', 'platform houses' and 'homesteads', the first systematic examination. These sites are numerous in the regional sites and monuments record (henceforth SMR) (figure 1), but are poorly understood: at the outset of the project around a thousand sites were recorded, representing c 10% of the SMR entries, and numbers were increasing annually. They exist as isolated sites, in pairs and in groups of three or more. Often, they are in association with enclosures or field systems. Although they are mostly to be found in upland or marginal areas, they also exist in lowland settings. Such sites have been interpreted as Medieval or post-Medieval in date, and their functions as agricultural settlements of some kind. Relatively few have been surveyed in detail and fewer than a dozen in the area have been excavated.

The study of Medieval settlement in the area (as in the remainder of Wales) has very much been the preserve of historians. A bibliography listing all relevant articles and books concerned with the historical setting of the Medieval period (especially the twelfth century onwards) would be extensive.¹ In contrast, little systematic work has been undertaken to relate this to sites on the ground, and the number of archaeological publications is limited.

Background

In much of Wales, the archaeological evidence for rural settlements of the post-Roman and pre-modern periods is usually termed 'platform houses' or 'long huts'. The term 'platform house' appears to have been coined during work in the late 1930s in the Glamorgan uplands.² It was used to describe remains of rectangular structures laid

out perpendicular to the contours of hill slopes, their upper ends cut into the slope, and the spoil used to terrace their other ends to obtain a flat building site. A protecting 'drainage hood' was a common feature around the upper end, while the buildings themselves were timber-built with opposing entrances along their longer sides. They dated to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

In the 1950s, Colin Gresham recorded the same basic type of rectangular structure in Gwynedd,³ referring to them as 'platform houses'. He saw them as a response to two specific non-human determinants - a sloping site and heavy rainfall - and the orientation (perpendicular to the slope), he thought, was to minimise the potential for inundation.

Gresham acknowledged variations to this basic form, including stepped platforms and platforms with more than one structure, which he put down to particularly steep slopes or "the special needs of the builders".⁴ On some, all traces of the building had gone, while others contained the remains of stone foundations which were always "rectangular, with a proportion of length to breadth of not more than two to one; the general tendency being towards length and narrowness". Some houses were cross-divided into two rooms. The walls were dry-stone built and generally 3-4 ft wide, with facing inside and out, and doorways, where they could be defined, were in the centre of the long side of the building: occasionally there were opposing doorways. Buildings varied in length from 18 to 60 ft and in width from 9 to 20 ft., and they were found singly, in pairs, or in groups of three or more.

Gresham also noted the regular presence of small, usually oval enclosures defined by earth banks lying below the lowest part of the platforms, often showing signs of their interiors having been at least partially levelled, but without obvious entrances. He suggested that they might be associated with storage, as opposed to animal pens or cultivation.

The Royal Commission, in their Inventories for Caernarfonshire (published in three volumes between 1956 and 1964), recorded many rectangular structures across the county. In addition to 'platform house', they used the terms 'long hut', 'long-hut group', as well as 'sub-rectangular hut' to describe them.⁵