

The excavation of a cemetery and putative chapel site at Newhall Point, Balblair, Ross & Cromarty, 1985

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ABSTRACT

Rescue excavation was carried out in 1985 on the recorded site of an early medieval burial ground and chapel prior to the construction of a new dwelling house at Newhall Point, Balblair. A complex cluster of east/west and north/south orientated skeletons was uncovered. The roughly circular cemetery, c 20 m in diameter, was at least partly enclosed by a ditch. Crudely worked, sandstone blocks found within some grave fills formed 'head-sets'. No artefacts were found in any of the graves. The project was funded by Historic Scotland.

INTRODUCTION

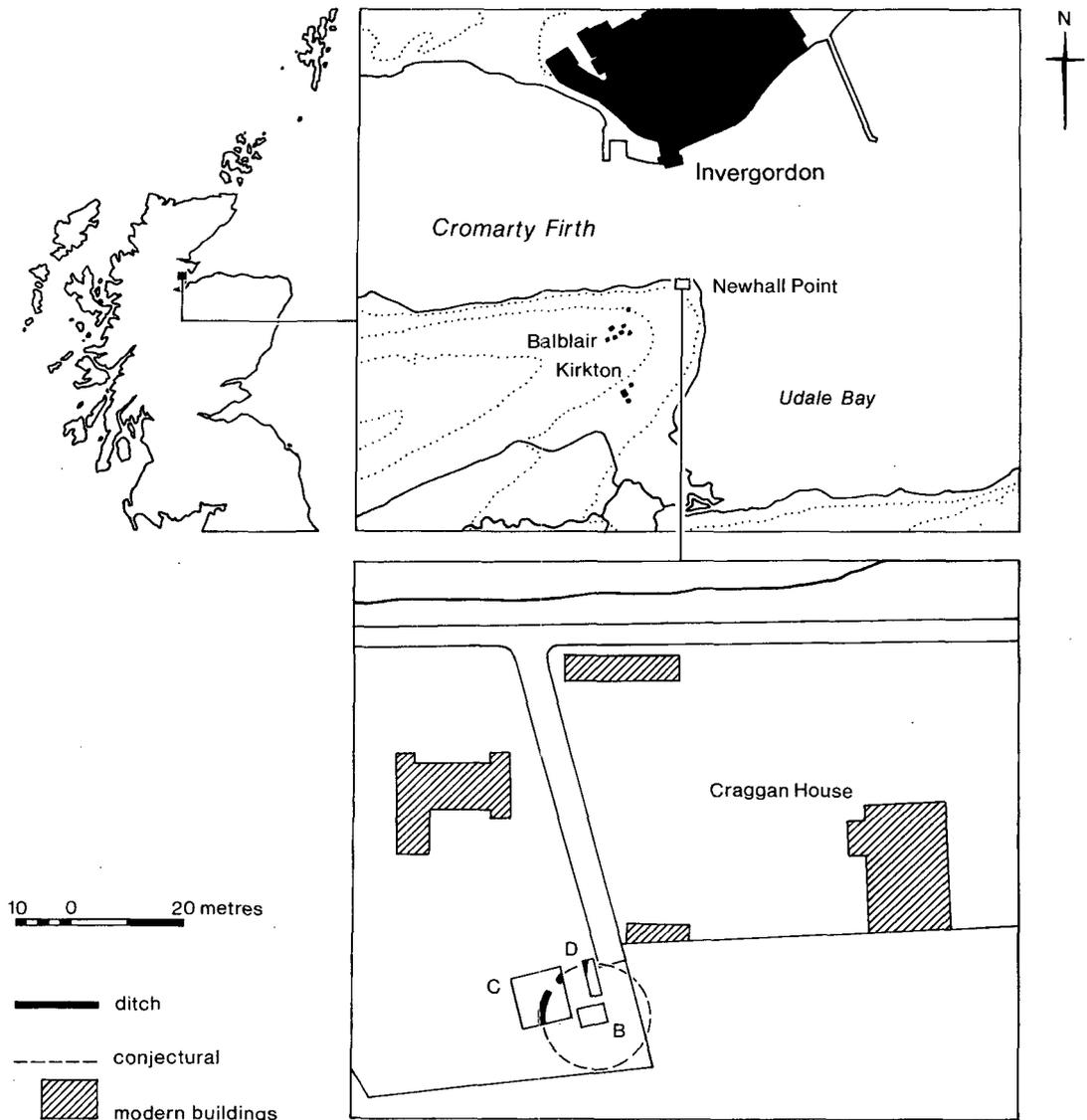
The recorded site of a pre-Reformation chapel and burial ground at Balblair, Newhall Point, Ross & Cromarty, Highland (NGR NH 70886704), was threatened with destruction in 1985 after planning permission had been given to erect a new dwelling house. A trial excavation took place over three days at the end of September 1985. The discovery of a number of simple graves prompted the commissioning of a further two weeks of excavation at the end of November, during which time the entire area threatened by the construction of the new house was rapidly examined. The project was funded by Historic Scotland (formerly, Historic Buildings and Monuments). The site has now been scheduled by Historic Scotland as a monument of national importance (Newhall Point, chapel and burial ground; reference AMH/5950).

The promontory of Newhall Point lies on the north coast of the Black Isle in north-east Scotland, near the village of Balblair, on the south side of the Cromarty Firth (illus 1). The surrounding area is relatively flat and low-lying; indeed, the village name 'Balblair' translates as 'town on the plain' (Walker 1958, 29). Sandstone of the Devonian Old Red Sandstone group forms the bedrock in this region. The excavated site lies near the foot of a postglacial, raised-beach platform which is located some 200 m south of the Cromarty Firth coastline forming the Newhall Point promontory.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The former existence of a chapel at this site is well known locally and is marked on the 1880 Ordnance Survey map. Some corroborating evidence may be offered by the presence of the

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ILLUS 1 Site location and plan of excavated areas (Based on the Ordnance Survey map © Crown Copyright)

significant name 'Chapelton' which now applies to a cottage to the east of the site at NH 70946708. It was said to have been a Roman Catholic chapel and, therefore, presumably pre-Reformation in date, but nothing further was known, including its precise location (NMRS NH 76 NW 2; RCAHMS 1979, 19, no 120). However, it seemed likely that it must predate the former parish church of St Michael's, located only some 1200 m south of the putative chapel site. St Michael's is thought to be late medieval in date (Gifford 1992, 428-9), although the earliest mention of an incumbent seems to occur in 1533 (Walker 1958, 14).

In the earlier part of this century, trenching work uncovered 'large unchiseled stones', assumed to be gravestones; and in 1986, a further rectangular stone, possibly a cross-base, was found in a garden at Newhall Point, adjacent to the excavated area (Selby & Harden 1986, 15). Human bones were 'once discovered when digging behind the Craggan House' (Walker 1958, 13) immediately east of the excavated areas; and, more recently, a human skull was uncovered during work at Craggan House (local informant). The 'Chapel well' at NH 70916704 is a spring well which was filled in 'many years ago', according to the report of an Ordnance Survey surveyor in 1966 (NMRS NH 76 NW 2).

THE EXCAVATION

Trial excavation of two small trenches, randomly positioned in the threatened area, took place at very short notice (Areas A & B). The remainder of the threatened area was simultaneously subjected to a probe-survey in an attempt to ascertain whether any significant stone structures were present. This method was possible here because only a 0.4 m depth of topsoil overlay loose beach sand. Two east/west orientated, extended burials and one north/south extended burial were discovered during the trial. Red micaceous sandstone blocks of various sizes were found within the grave fills, especially adjacent to the skulls. These results prompted a proposal for further investigation of the site. Strong local concern that any human remains should be recovered prior to development of the site, and subsequently reburied, also influenced the decision by Historic Scotland to fund further excavation of the threatened burial ground.

No stone structures were identified by probing or excavation. Although the probe-survey clearly would not have identified the remains of any wooden chapel construction, it is almost certain, given the nature and shallowness of the underlying soils, that remains of a stone chapel would have been located by this means, had one survived in the area examined.

Excavation began in earnest at the end of November 1985. Three areas were opened: Areas B, C and D (illus 1). Areas B and C incorporated and extended the original trial trenches (one of which was Area A; hence, the absence of an Area A from this report); and Area D was positioned on the rise of a mound which appeared to warrant investigation.

After the removal of the dark grey, sandy topsoil, all three areas displayed a complex and dense array of features, mostly graves, cut into natural beach sand. On excavation, the grave depths ranged from c 0.25 m to 0.6 m. However, it was apparent that, at some time after the burial ground had been abandoned, the surface of the beach sand had been truncated; the original depths of the graves, therefore, could not be determined. The grave fills were all very similar and consisted of loamy silty sand which ranged in colour from light through to dark grey. Human bone had survived in the graves with varying degrees of preservation, ranging from fair condition through to sand stains, that is, dark grey discolorations within the grave fills. The poor state of preservation of some of the skeletons appeared to be localized; it seems likely that varying degrees of water seepage within the grave fills had produced different degrees of acidity. None of the pits identified only as possible graves (below) contained any remnants of bone or any traces of staining. No artefacts were found in any of the three excavated areas.

This report includes a concordance in microfiche which tabulates, for each grave and possible grave, their orientation, stratigraphic associations, skeletal and stone inclusions, and the nature of the surviving evidence, eg adult/infant; bone/stain. The primary records have been deposited in the archives of the National Monuments Record of Scotland. The skeletons were reburied within the original burial site by the local minister in 1986.



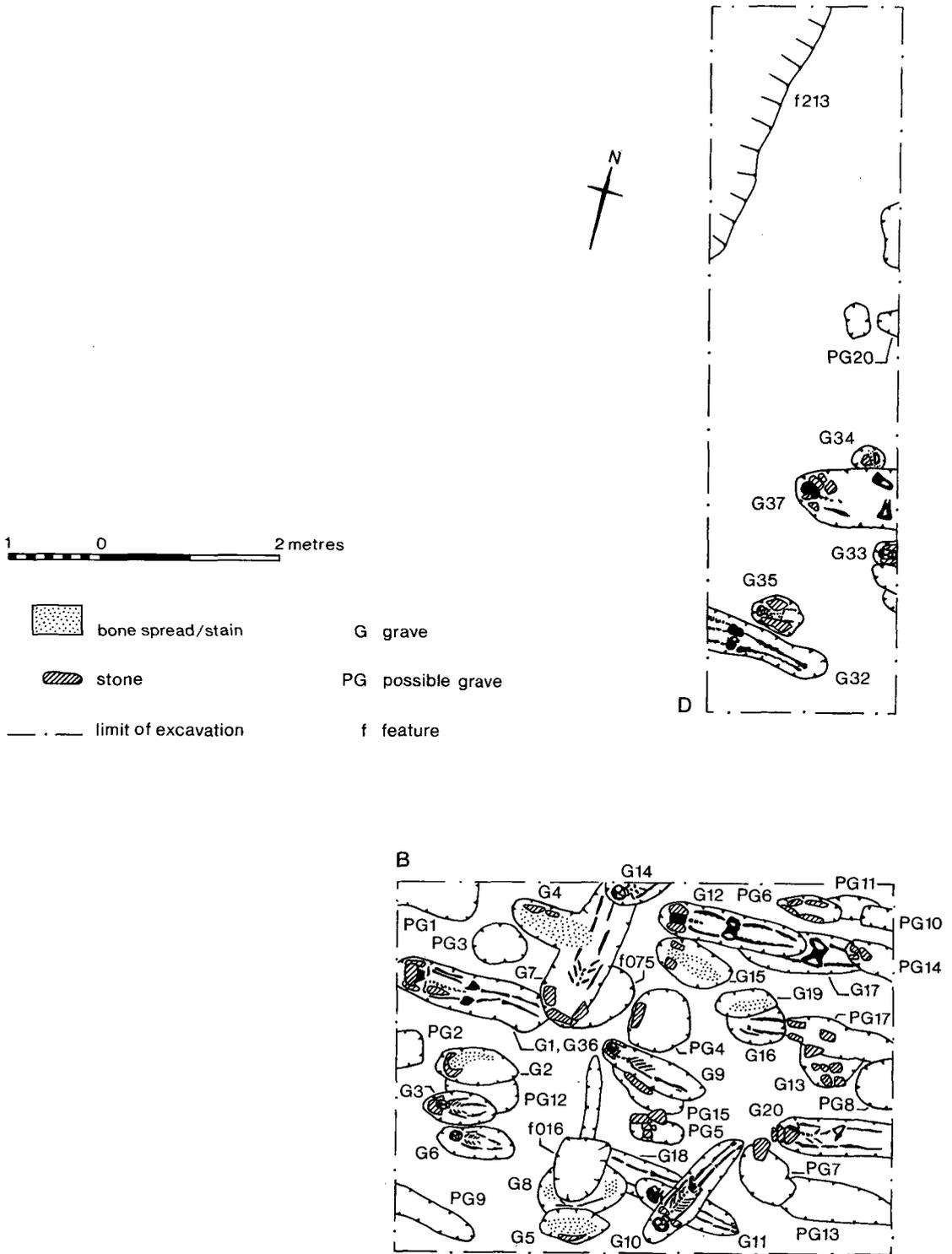
ILLUS 2 Area B: excavated features

AREA B (ILLUS 2 & 3)

Area B, the most south-easterly of the trenches, measured 5.5 m by 4 m and lay approximately in the centre of the site as reconstructed (illus 1). The dark grey-black, loamy topsoil was on average 0.4 m deep. Intercutting graves were visible immediately after the removal of the topsoil (illus 3). Altogether, 21 graves were uncovered within Area B, of which 11 were adult graves (albeit including two small adults) and 10 infant graves. Three graves were aligned north/south (Graves 7, 10 & 14); all other graves were aligned east/west. The graves were distributed relatively evenly throughout the area. In addition, 16 possible graves (pits) were investigated. These were designated possible graves wherever they exhibited one or more characteristics of the definite graves on the site, that is type of fill, dimensions, orientation or inclusions of sandstone blocks (Possible Graves 1–15 & 17: illus 3).

In the north-west quadrant of Area B, two burials were superimposed, Grave 1 being later than Grave 36. Both were contained within the same pit. In Grave 36, the skull was enclosed by three crudely shaped headstones, one set upright on each side of the skull and the third, a small lintel-like slab, resting on the upright stones. Subsequently, a large sandstone slab had been laid over this burial and a second adult skeleton (Grave 1) was placed over it. Its skull was enclosed by a similar arrangement of headstones to that of Grave 36 below.

Graves 1 and 36 were cut at their east end by Grave 7. Three small stone blocks associated with the fragmentary skull of Grave 7 seemed also to be the remnants of headstones, similar to those in Graves 1 and 36. They had possibly been resting against the skull and collapsed at a later date when the bone deteriorated. Grave 7 was cut on its west side by Grave 4, an infant burial. The presence of



ILLUS 3 Areas B and D: excavated features

two stones at its west end suggested that the skull may have been located here. Thus, in all, four phases of intercutting graves were in evidence here: Grave 4 over Grave 7 over Grave 1 over Grave 36. North of Grave 7, and also partly overlying it, the bone remains of another adult skeleton (Grave 14) extended into the north section of the trench. Only the upper portion of the skeleton was visible.

In the centre of the west end of Area B was a group of four pits, three graves (Graves 2, 3 & 6) and one possible grave (12). The most southerly of this group (Grave 6) contained an infant skeleton stain. Immediately to the north was another infant burial (Grave 3), its base partly stone-lined, with the remains of the skull resting on a sandstone slab. Grave 2, located immediately to the north again, was an oval grave containing the amorphous stain of a small infant. The position of the skull could not be firmly determined but may have been positioned over the sandstone slab at the west end of the grave. The close proximity and similarity of these three infant burials (Graves 2, 3 & 6), and the fact that their edges respect each other, suggest either that they were contemporary burials or else that the grave positions were marked above ground level so that subsequent interments could avoid the earlier grave(s).

In the centre of the southern half of Area B, there was a complex group of intercutting pits and graves. Grave 10 cut across two earlier graves, Graves 11 and 18. Grave 10 contained a poorly preserved adult skeleton; two small stones had been placed over the shoulders. Grave 11 contained the skeleton of a small adult, its skull facing north. It had been cut through Grave 18 which contained the remains of a badly disturbed adult skeleton.

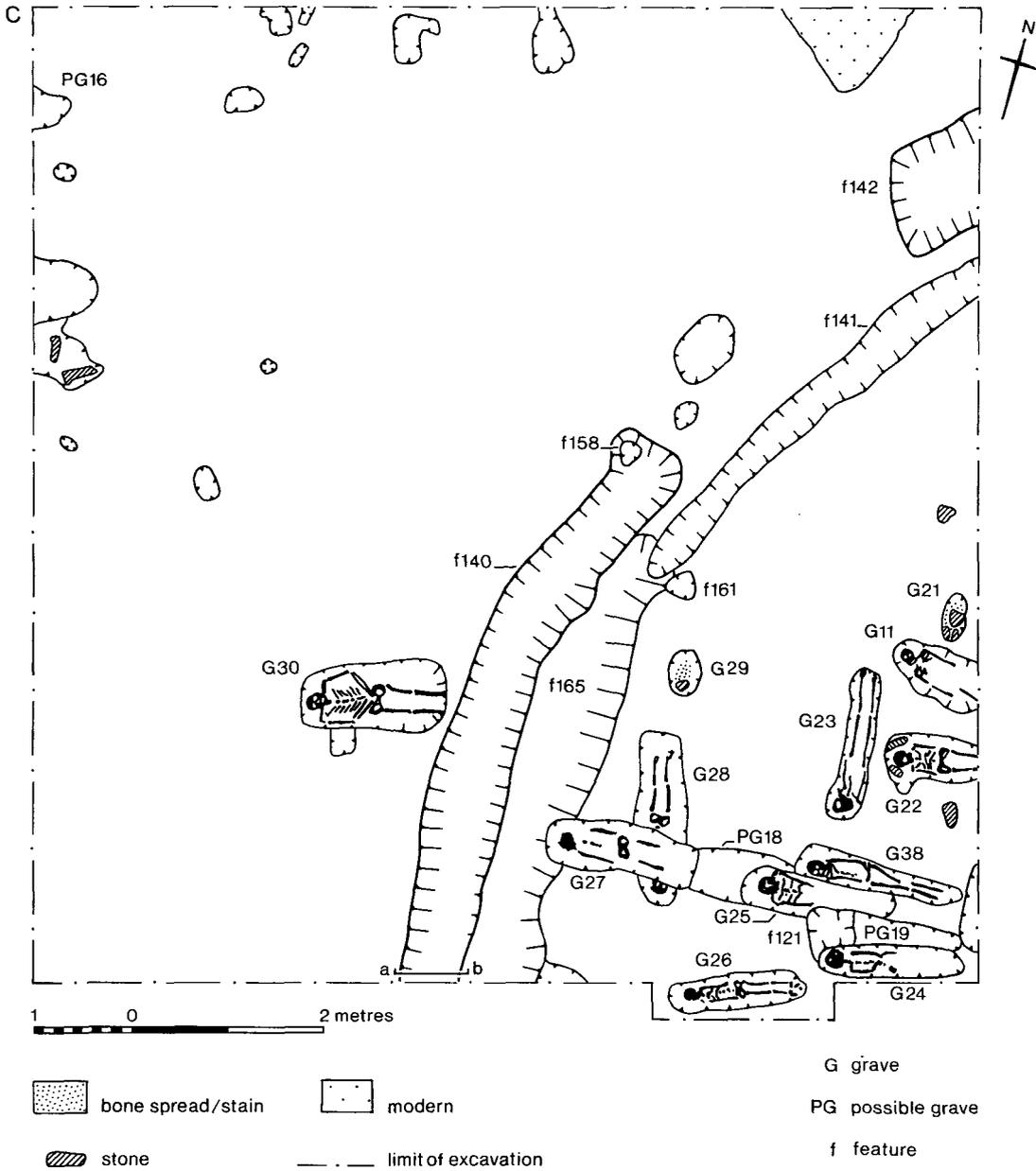
Grave 18 was also cut by Grave 8 which contained the oval-shaped stain of an infant skeleton. Within the grave fill was a residual pelvis which may have been redeposited from Grave 18. Grave 8 in turn was cut on its south side by Grave 5, a burial also containing an infant skeleton stain. A sandstone slab identified the position of the skull.

Grave 9, in the centre of Area B, contained the skeleton of a small adult. The whole skeleton had been positioned on its left side. Two upright sandstone blocks were found on either side of the skull. East of Grave 9 were two intercutting infant burials, Grave 16 cut by Grave 19, both oval in shape. In Grave 15, another infant burial located immediately to the northwest, the skeleton was identifiable by a stain in the grave fill, with the skull being positioned between two roughly shaped, upright sandstone blocks. The position of Grave 15 was respected by Grave 12, an adult burial. Its skull stain had two sandstone blocks placed on either side of it. To the east, Grave 12 cut Grave 17, an adult skeleton.

Grave 13 was located at the east end of Area B. Five sandstone blocks survived along the north and south sides of the grave beneath the skeleton stain of an infant burial. To the south was Grave 20, containing an adult skeleton. Two stone blocks beneath the skull had both tipped to the east; and a horizontal stone slab, roughly triangular in shape, lay over the skull. These had the appearance of a three-stone headset.

AREA C (ILLUS 4)

Area C, a trench measuring 10 m by 10 m, was located so as to include the estimated north-western edge of the burial ground threatened by development. It encompassed one of the trial trenches (Area A: hence the absence of an Area A in this report). The most prominent feature within Area C was a curvilinear ditch which clearly formed a boundary to the cemetery (illus 4). The boundary ditch was pierced by an entrance some 1.7 m wide, although whether this was the sole entrance to the enclosure is not known. The ditch terminals on either side of the entrance were butt-ended. This boundary ditch (F140 & F142) was a primary feature; it had steep, straight sides and a flattish base, and varied in depth from c 0.6 m to 0.75 m deep (illus 5). At the points examined, three fills were distinguished: at its base, an iron-stained sand (F154), then a layer of grey-black sandy midden (F153), and finally, a mid-grey sandy midden (F152).



ILLUS 4 Area C: excavated features

Where the longer section of the primary ditch was exposed in Area C (south of the entrance: *illus 4*), it was cut on its southeast side by a second, shallower ditch (c 0.4 m deep on average), F165, which contained a single fill of grey-black loam. This ditch followed the same curve as the primary ditch and terminated only 0.42 m short of the original entrance into the enclosure. Where it terminated, it was cut by a third ditch (or gully), this time a narrower, shallower feature (F141), only up to 0.22 m deep, and filled with sterile, grey-black, humic loam. Gully F141 curved on the same alignment as the two earlier ditches but continued across the original entrance. If it too had served as a boundary to the cemetery, as is at least plausible, then it may be that the entrance had been moved slightly to the south.

Two possible post-holes were recorded near the south terminal of the original entrance (*illus 4*). The first, F158, was located within the edge of the primary ditch; it was 0.25 m in diameter and up to 0.3 m deep. The second possible post-hole displayed similar dimensions to the first but was located 1 m to the southeast, cutting the terminus of the secondary ditch, F165. Their precise function and associations are unclear.

Within Area C 12 graves were positively identified, only two of which contained infants; 11 were clustered within the boundary ditch, a single adult grave occurred immediately outwith the ditch. Four of the graves were aligned north/south (Graves 21, 23, 28 & 29), including the two infant burials; the other eight were all aligned east/west. A further three possible graves were also identified: three pits which contained similar fills to the graves, but no skeletal remains or stains (Possible Graves 16, 18 & 19).

Grave 30, the single grave located outwith the cemetery, contained an adult burial. The grave seems to have been cut slightly too short for the body and the feet had had to be compressed into the space available.

The cluster of 11 burials sited within the boundary ditch in the southeast quadrant of Area C included nine adult and two infant burials. Grave 28, which contained an adult skeleton, had been cut by the adult burial, Grave 27. This same grave also cut the secondary boundary ditch (F165) at its west end. Bone samples were taken from both Graves 27 and 28 for radiocarbon dating. The results (all uncalibrated) were remarkably similar: 920 ± 50 BP (AD 1030 ± 50) for Grave 28 (GU-2071) and 940 ± 50 BP (AD 1010 ± 50) for Grave 27 (GU-2073). Grave 28 was poorly preserved, with the body surviving in parts only as staining within the grave fill.

In Grave 29, which contained the skeleton stain of an infant, a sandstone block overlay the south end of the grave. Grave 21, the other infant burial in Area C, also survived only as a skeleton stain within the grave fill; two small, upright blocks were noted on either side of the body stain and one larger sandstone block occurred over the centre of the body.

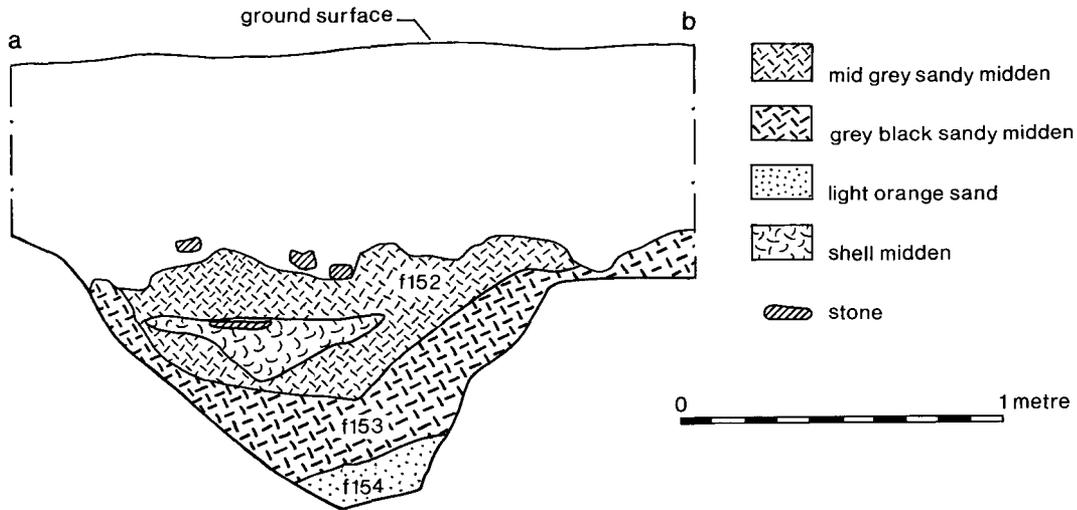
Grave 22 contained the skeleton of an adult with its skull positioned on its side. Two stones located above the skull had been partly disturbed. Grave 31, another adult grave, also contained two small sandstone blocks which rested on the shoulders of the skeleton. Grave 26 contained a small adult, the skull again on its side.

Grave 25 overlay and partly cut through Grave 38; both contained adult skeletons. The skull in Grave 25 was wedged between two upright stones. Both graves appeared to overlie Possible Grave 18.

A pit (F121), almost square in shape and 0.38 m deep, predated Grave 25 but was cut through by Grave 24, an adult burial. The pit contained a fill of dark grey, humus-rich sand. A scatter of other possible pits were recorded, but most lay outwith the boundary ditch of the cemetery and formed no recognizable pattern (*illus 4*).

AREA D (ILLUS 3 & 5)

Area D was a trench some 7.5 m long and 2 m wide, designed to cross the boundary ditch and penetrate the interior of the cemetery (*illus 3*). The most prominent feature uncovered was a relatively large pit, F213, with a maximum depth of 0.8 m (*illus 5*). Later disturbance of the



ILLUS 5 Area C: section across boundary ditch (F140)

pit had obscured its original shape. The boundary ditch was not revealed here; it thus seems likely that this pit post-dates the cemetery enclosure and had destroyed the evidence for it in Area D.

Area D contained five positively identified graves: three adult and two infant burials. It also included part of Possible Grave 20, in which no skeletal remains were identified. All the graves were aligned east/west (illus 3).

Graves 32 and 37 were only partly revealed. They both contained adult skeletons and each of them had infant graves located immediately adjacent on their north side (Graves 35 & 34 respectively). As the adult and infant grave pairings respected each other, it seems reasonable to suppose that each pair is contemporary and it may be conjectured that each represents a mother and child. Both of the infant graves contained grave-associated stones. On either side of the Grave 35 skeleton stain were stones which tipped into the centre of the grave over the stain. The infant burial in Grave 34 survived only as a grey stain beneath two small sandstone blocks; these also tipped towards the centre of the grave. The skull of adult Grave 37 had five grave-associated stones around it, the two most westerly of which tipped in towards the centre of the grave. These probably represent a disturbed head-set of stones covering the skull. Finally, Grave 33 contained an adult skeleton; on both sides of the skull were two upright sandstone blocks, again probably the remnants of a head-set of stones.

THE DATE AND DURATION OF THE CEMETERY

Because of the poor condition of many of the skeletons and the local desire for their prompt reburial, it was decided not to proceed with specialist analysis of the human skeletal remains. Instead, the available post-excavation funds were used to obtain radiocarbon dates from the two, crosscutting, north/south and east/west burials in Area C (Graves 27 & 28 respectively). The calibrated results were as follows:

Lab Ref	Grave	Aligned	Calibrated	Probability
GU-2071	28	N/S	AD 1020–1150 AD 1010–1230	(70.09%) (96.11%)
GU-2073	27	E/W	AD 1010–1125 AD 990–1215	(68.85%) (96.02%)

These statistically indistinguishable radiocarbon dates seem to disprove the initial hypothesis: that Grave 28, aligned north/south, may have predated the cemetery enclosure. Instead, it seems that both graves date broadly to the 11th to 12th century. The implication of this is that the other north/south burials as well need not be earlier than the east/west burials. In one case at least, a north/south aligned grave is later than an east/west aligned grave (north/south aligned Grave 10 (Area B) cuts the east/west aligned Grave 11). There is, therefore, no obvious chronological distinction between the north/south and east/west burials and it is a reasonable supposition that the north/south burials, as well as the east/west ones, were inserted within an enclosed cemetery.

The broad contemporaneity of the radiocarbon dates also indicates that Grave 28 was probably not marked on the ground surface, since Grave 27 was inserted across it relatively soon afterwards. Two significant inferences are possible from the relatively high number of intercutting burials. First, it seems likely that the positions of burials may not always have been marked on the ground surface, or were only indifferently marked, and that all visible traces of them soon vanished. Where the positions of graves respect each other, it seems likely that they are very close in date (for example, the two pairs of possible mother and child graves in Area D; and the set of three similarly aligned, infant graves in close proximity to each other in Area B).

Second, it seems unlikely that the cemetery was established to receive the victims of an epidemic or some other catastrophic event. A longer period of use is indicated by the intercutting burials (in Area B for instance, there is a minimum of four phases of intercutting graves, represented by Graves 1, 4, 7 and 36). The date of foundation and duration of use of the cemetery cannot be accurately ascertained, however, not only because of the limited nature of the excavation but also because of the inherent variables in calculations of this kind. When discussing the 200 or so burials in a long cist cemetery at Parkburn, Lasswade, Midlothian, Henshall (1956, 260) pointed out that 'a group of 10 families with 5 persons would need only 4 generations to fill all the graves, or 6 families with 4 persons would require only 8 generations'. Even this general calculation makes no allowance for any flurries or subsidences of burial activity reflecting normally fluctuating population numbers. These could be caused, for instance, by the effects of epidemics, the inclusion of outsiders, the temporary absence of a significant number of the community, or any number of other factors. On present evidence, therefore, all that can be said is that the Balblair cemetery could have remained in use over two, three or more centuries, but was almost certainly in use during the 11th to 12th century.

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

A total of 38 graves was positively identified within the three excavated areas: 24 adults and 14 infants. A further 20 possible graves were identified. These are interpreted as graves with reasonable confidence, despite the absence of skeletal evidence. Thus, a minimum of 58 graves is probably represented within the excavated areas, which together represent somewhat less than one-quarter of the projected total area of the cemetery. Therefore, it is possible that upwards of 200 graves may lie within the Newhall Point, Balblair, cemetery.

All of the adult skeletons were extended inhumations, the vast majority of which lay on their backs; bodies were occasionally interred on their sides. As would be expected with Christian burials, no artefacts were found within the graves. Moreover, the lack of pins within the grave fills would suggest either that shrouds were not used to wrap the bodies, or that any shrouds were removed prior to burial, or even that pins were not used to fasten the shrouds.

Twenty-one of the Balblair graves contained grave-associated stones within their fills, and 11 of these burials seem to have been furnished with stone head-sets. The use of head-sets and other stone fittings therefore seems to be a significant phenomenon of the Christian burial custom in this cemetery. Excavation of the early medieval cemetery at Kirkhill, St Andrews, revealed five 'flanked-skull graves': that is, graves with slabs flanking the skulls, similar to the Balblair head-sets, out of an estimated 330 burials – though many graves were so badly disturbed that the details of burial were not recoverable (Wordsworth 1980; Clark forthcoming). One of these 'flanked-skull graves' has been radiocarbon dated to AD 661–778 (calibrated to the one sigma level of confidence). At Kirkhill, there was no obvious distinction in date between the 'flanked-skull graves' and those without stones flanking the skulls, and the same seems to be true of the Balblair graves. Some corroboration of the notion that 'flanked-skull graves' may mimic higher status lintel graves comes from Hallow Hill, also in St Andrews, where almost 150 graves have been excavated (Proudfoot *et al* forthcoming). None of the Hallow Hill graves seems to have had 'flanked-skulls', but the vast majority of them were well-built long cists of the sixth to ninth centuries AD in which additional stones by the skulls would have been superfluous.

Long cist cemeteries were in use from at least the fifth to the 10th or early 11th centuries AD (Dalland 1992, 204), but the traditions of the immediately succeeding period are much less well attested archaeologically, and far too few cemeteries (especially rural ones) have been excavated to allow the recognition of any regional variations. Nevertheless, the stone flanking of skulls seems to represent an enduring burial tradition in early medieval eastern Scotland, albeit much less common than the use of fully stone-lined, long cist or lintel graves.

The curving ditch segments in Area C (F140 & F142: *illus* 4) are interpreted as the primary phase of cemetery enclosure. The ditch would have defined the limit of a consecrated area for Christian burials. A roughly circular cemetery with an estimated diameter of 20 m is postulated on the basis of the projection of the excavated arcs of ditch, F140 and F142, in Area C (see *illus* 1). This would also enclose all the burials recorded in Areas B and D. Area B, with its high concentration of burials, would seem to have been located approximately in the centre of the circular enclosure. Only one definite burial was found outwith the enclosure (Area C: Grave 30). A note of caution must be sounded here: it should be remembered how little of the enclosure ditch itself was revealed in excavation; the projected circular enclosure is only a working hypothesis in the absence of further evidence.

The primary enclosure was pierced by an entrance, approximately 1.7 m wide, on its north-west side. It is unknown whether there was more than one entrance to the cemetery. Examination of the section of the enclosure ditch (*illus* 5) indicated that the ditch was deliberately filled, at least partly, with midden material; subsequently, it continued to fill with sand with midden inclusions. This infilling coincides with a secondary enclosure phase during which the primary ditch, F140, was recut along its inner edge (F165: *illus* 4). It is conceivable that there had been a fence or some other boundary marker within the primary ditch or recut, but no traces of any such feature survived because of the loose nature of the sand subsoil and ditch fill. Had the ditch and its recut been left open, they would almost certainly have become silted up or filled with windblown sand in a short space of time. Pits F161 and F158, positioned at the terminals of ditch F140 and recut ditch F165, are interpreted as two post-holes and may have once housed the end-posts of a fence within the enclosure ditch, or possibly gate posts at the entrance.

At some point after the recutting of the primary ditch, the north-west entrance to the enclosure was obstructed or blocked by the insertion of a narrow curving ditch, F141. This is

interpreted as evidence that the entrance was relocated at this time. Pit F213, of unknown function at the north end of Area D (illus 3), probably obscures the continuation of the primary enclosure and represents later disturbance of the original ditch.

The cemetery – probably circular – at Newhall Point, Balblair, is reminiscent of many early Christian chapel sites, such as that at St Ninian's Point, Isle of Bute (Aitken 1955, 62–76), where a circular wall about 60 m in diameter surrounded a stone-built chapel; and the chapel and burial ground at Kilbride, Strathlachan, Argyll, which lie within a roughly circular enclosure about 30 m in diameter (RCAHMS 1992, no 56). There is a growing body of evidence for the replacement of earlier wooden chapels by stone-built chapels from around the 10th century onwards; at Ardwall Isle, Kirkcudbright, for instance, the Phase II dug graves were aligned with a timber oratory but underlay a stone-built chapel (Thomas 1967). No evidence has so far been found for a chapel within the enclosure at Balblair, but it must be emphasized that the probe-survey was carried out only in the area immediately under threat. In short, it is quite possible, or even probable given the 11th- to 12th-century context, that the remains of a small stone or wooden chapel are located elsewhere within this enclosure. This suggestion may be supported by the oral tradition and scanty historical evidence for the existence of a pre-Reformation chapel at this site.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the limited scale of the project, this development threat provided a rare opportunity to investigate part of a rural, low-status burial ground dating from at least the 11th century AD, a period in which very little is known about rural Scotland. The majority of comparable sites are high-status chapel and ecclesiastical sites, and/or located in urban areas. The lack of any artefacts, coffins or evidence for shrouds has limited the interpretation of the site, but this absence of evidence may in itself mirror the poverty of the community.

Three points arising from the excavation results seem of particular importance:

- (1) *The presence of a probably circular boundary ditch enclosing all but one of the burials.* This enclosure may have demarcated a roughly circular cemetery some 20 m in diameter. The enclosure ditch was recut at least twice during its existence, and its entrance appears to have been relocated on at least one occasion, implying maintenance of the cemetery over a reasonable length of time.
- (2) *The statistically indistinguishable radiocarbon dates from two intercutting north/south and east/west graves.* The presence of two adult and five infant north/south burials within a probably circular enclosure which was in existence when at least one of the north/south adult interments was made, and the fact that one of the north/south graves is broadly contemporary with at least one of the east/west graves, implies that the north/south burials, as well as the east/west burials, represent Christian burials interred in consecrated ground.
- (3) *The presence of grave-associated stones in more than half of the definite burials.* The inclusion of three-stone head-sets in 11 of the graves, and the repeated occurrence of slabs above and below the skeletons, would suggest that the inclusion of stones with the burial was a low-status Christian ritual in this part of Scotland during the 11th to 12th century AD. It may be that these crudely worked stones were intended to 'mimic' higher-status lintel graves.

The close proximity of the Newhall Point, Balblair, cemetery to the sea, as well as its relatively modest size, suggests that this cemetery may have served a small fishing and ferry-point

community, located somewhere along the seashore to the north. The question remains as to why the cemetery was abandoned. To judge from the density of graves within the areas examined, and the lack of any evidence for a break in continuity of burial on the site, it seems likely that after a period, at a guess perhaps two or three centuries at most, all the available space within this cemetery had been filled. If the community continued to flourish, a new cemetery may have had to be established elsewhere. It is conceivable that this occurred in the late medieval period when the parish church was located at Kirkmichael, some 1200 m south of the cemetery at Newhall Point.

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