

Aspects of Settlement and Territorial Arrangements in South-east Scotland in the Late Prehistoric and Early Medieval Periods

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THIS PAPER IS THE RESULT of research related to long cist cemeteries such as Hallow Hill, Fife¹ by E. V. W. Proudfoot and ideas first put forward by C. Aliaga-Kelly in his thesis The Anglo-Saxon Occupation of South-East Scotland.² Large defended sites, possible oppida, significantly sited on watersheds, may have been key centres in pre-Anglian times. Associations of such sites with other defended settlements and farmsteads are particularly significant to this discussion of developing territorial arrangements; the term 'territorial arrangements' is used for this early period, before formal development of land organization can be recognized. Early 'multiple estates' are still difficult to identify in the archaeological record and in the landscape; in this paper we explore the level and nature of available evidence and seek to stimulate research into this aspect of the early medieval history of Scotland. The pre-1974 county names have been used throughout this paper.

Near Gullane, E. Lothian, is a low hill bounded on the N. and E. by an earthen bank. The hill is called Eldbotle (Fig. 1), a place-name of Anglian or Northumbrian origin. Eldbotle means 'the old hall or building', using the Old English word *bothl* meaning 'hall' or 'building'.³ The implication is that this was a place of importance, with dependent settlements or lands. Eldbotle was a royal possession, where charters were issued until after the reign of Malcolm IV (1153–65), who gave the place and its dependent lands to the De Vaux family.⁴ The scale and nature of the remains indicate that the site was a large enclosure of late prehistoric date, which was significant even before the Anglian Northumbrian occupation of the area. Thus, it may have been occupied almost continuously, retaining its importance up to and after the second half of the 12th century, but there has been no recent excavation to investigate the status of the site. However, recent Anglian finds from a site in the vicinity support the view that Eldbotle was an important centre.

It should be noted, for example, that Alcock's⁵ excavations on Kirk Hill, St Abbs Head, Berwickshire, revealed that the earthen bank, enclosing an area of 3 ha., overlay a palisade dated to between A.D. 600 and 700, cut into earlier

holdings. Of probably British origin⁷ this form of land organization existed elsewhere in N. Britain by the 12th century.⁸

In his study of the Manor basin in Peebleshire, Smith⁹ proposed that the associations between settlements and their dependent lands in a 'multiple estate' used boundaries and arrangements of possibly late Bronze Age date. It may be more than coincidence that at the N. end of the Manor valley there was the enclosure on Cademuir (3.6 ha.), one of the so-called *oppida*. Smith¹⁰ identified twelve possibly associated but distinct settlements with dependent land in the same valley.

Similarly, the 'multiple estate' recorded in the *Historia de S. Cuthberto*,¹¹ attributed to Simeon of Durham, as a gift of Oswy of Northumbria to the monastery of Lindisfarne, Hart¹² lists twelve settlements or pieces of land in the valleys of the Kale and Bowmont Waters, in the foothills of the Cheviot and around the enclosure on Hownam Law (8.48 ha.).¹³ In another land grant listed in the *Historia*, the bishop of Lindisfarne granted the same monastery land in what is now Roxburghshire, with boundaries including the R. Teviot and 'Duna'.¹⁴ The details of this grant given in the *Historia de S. Cuthberto*¹⁵ are incomplete, but it is probable that the boundary would have followed the Jed Water or what later became the parish boundary. If the 'Duna' referred to the Dunion, a defended settlement (6.5 ha.), W. of Jedburgh, with its internal enclosures of various dates, this may be another example of a so-called *oppidum* apparently connected with a territorial or settlement association. However, recent excavations on the Dunion have failed to provide evidence of occupation in the post-Roman period.¹⁶ House remains excavated by Proudfoot on the summit of the Dunion were of different type and were probably of later date than those on the lower slopes.¹⁷ The main fortified site was destroyed by quarrying, without excavation or analysis of the houses and summit enclosures. Nor were transects surveyed and excavated, to try and assess relationships and the chronology of the enclosures.

There is evidence that the Northumbrian Angles took over pre-existing territorial arrangements, most notably the settlements, or pieces of land, associated with Coldingham and the monastery of 'Colodaesbyrig', what became Berwick-on-Tweed. These were listed in the 1095 charter of king Edgar, and were given over to Durham.¹⁸ Alcock has also discussed the evidence for the fortification of Kirk Hill, the site of the monastery of 'Colodaesbyrig',¹⁹ with possible evidence for pre-Anglian use of the site by the British.²⁰ It is also possible that the parish boundaries preserved the lines of earlier limits.

More explicit evidence for the Anglian Northumbrian take-over of British sites of importance is at Doon Hill, S. of Dunbar (Fig. 3). The site is situated beside a multi-period palisaded enclosure and a multivallate defended settlement, with a farmstead of sub-rectangular plan immediately to the S. (Fig. 4). Here Hope-Taylor²¹ found that the remains of a timber hall, similar in plan to those excavated at Yeavinger, which overlay and cut into post-holes of an earlier hall containing 'well-stratified remains of iron nails, an iron knife, small and extremely abraded sherds of *terra sigillata* and coarse pottery closely similar to post-Roman wares at Yeavinger'.²²

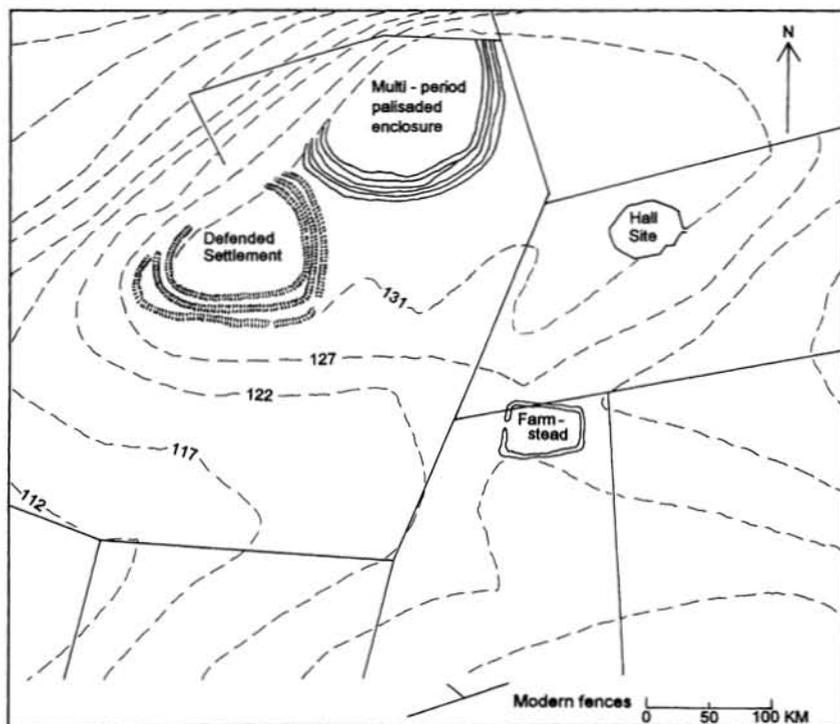


FIG. 3

Location of the the hall site in relation to other remains on Doon Hill, E. Lothian

ESTATE STRUCTURE

Such a concentration of settlement sites of late prehistoric type is not uncommon. On the Queens Park massif near Edinburgh Castle (site of *Din Eidyn*), were the two large settlements, so-called *oppida*, of Arthur's Seat and Salisbury Crags, with settlements of lesser size on Samson's Ribs and Dunsapie.

Immediately S. of the remains of Dunbar Castle, excavation between 1988 and 1991 revealed structures of Anglian Northumbrian type overlying remains of an earlier defended settlement.²³ These were probably associated with the site of the 'urbs . . . Dynbaer' mentioned by Eddius Stephanus in his *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*²⁴ as having a 'praefectus' by A.D. 680. Alcock considers that these references imply 'administrative responsibility for a wide area of NE. Northumbria, in fact the kind of area centred on an 'urbs' and the forerunner of the shires and thanages of medieval Scotland'.²⁵ Alcock also suggested that there was a shift from Traprain Law to Dunbar before the Anglian Northumbrian take-over of the area, an example of how 'an earlier power-centre inland and somewhat upland as well, had been re-located by a harbour'.²⁶ The impression of the Anglian Northumbrians taking over British sites with their associated powers and dependent lands was supported by the place name 'Dynbaer', a direct adoption of the British name and pronunciation.²⁷

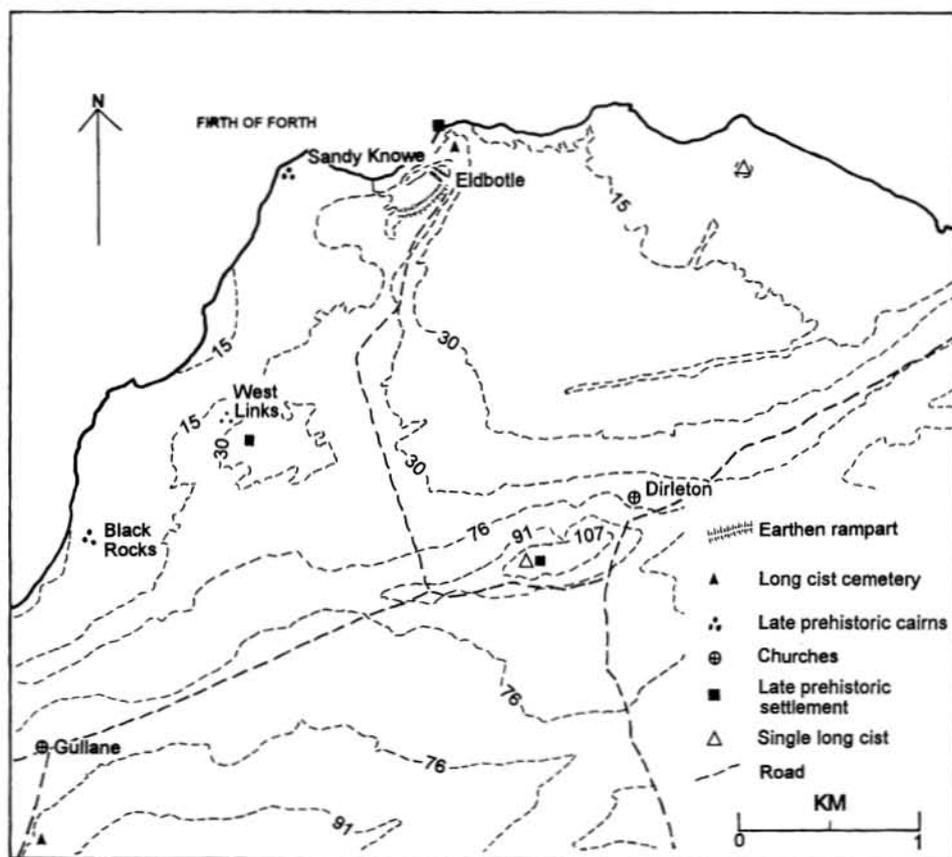


FIG. 5
Late prehistoric settlements and cairns with long cist cemeteries around Eldbole,
Gullane and Dirleton, E. Lothian

At the end of *Dere Street* was 'Esk mouth', the English version of the Gaelic 'Inveresk'. The site was of particular importance, with a Roman fort and an associated settlement of substantial buildings,⁴⁶ while aerial photography has revealed crop-mark evidence of extensive associated remains (Fig. 6).⁴⁷ This may have been the site of the 'Coria Otadinorum', or 'hosting place of the Otadini', mentioned in late Roman documents, as suggested by Rivet and Smith.⁴⁸ Indications of its being the centre of a territorial arrangement are present in the confirmation charter of David I to the abbey of Dunfermline of 1128 which listed several settlements, including Inveresk 'major' and 'minor', Smeaton, Carberry, Woolmet and a mill.⁴⁹ All of these places lay within 6 km of Inveresk. In a charter of between 1126 and 1129, Cousland is mentioned.⁵⁰ These records were confirmatory since Inveresk was part of Malcolm III's foundation grant of lands to the predecessor of Dunfermline Abbey.⁵¹ Malcolm would have granted the abbey an already developed economic or tribal centre with dependent lands and

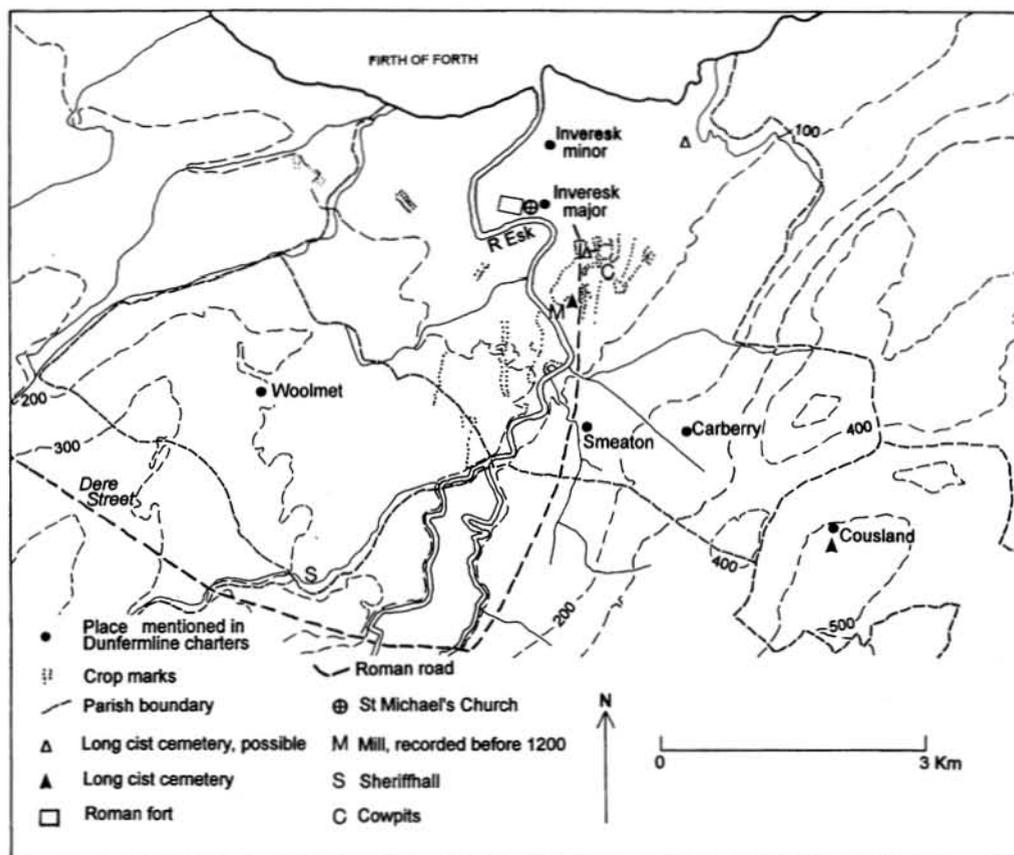


FIG. 6

The probable 'multiple estate' around Inveresk, Midlothian, including long cist cemeteries, Roman fort, crop-mark features and places mentioned in Dunfermline Abbey charters

settlements, from which he previously derived income, another example of a 'multiple estate'.

The failure of all excavation at Inveresk to locate artefacts or structures of post-Roman date or type limits interpretation of the developing settlement organization there. However, at Edgebucklin Braes (NT 361 728) nearly 2 km E. of Inveresk, and within that parish, road building before 1850 'revealed upward of twenty burials . . . laid down without much regard for order',⁵² while SW. of Cowpits Farm, less than 3 km SW. of Edgebucklin Braes, aerial photography has revealed two groups of oriented burials: 23 at NT 347 709⁵³ and probably 20 at NT 348 710, oriented towards a 7 m square cropmark to the W.⁵⁴ Such archaeological evidence implies more than organized burial, with one site being used for burial by several early Christian settlements. It is possible that the site at Edgebucklin Braes was earlier than that near Cowpits Farm, where ordered burials in at least two rows could reflect improved organization at a later date. At present

there is no means of interpreting whether each cemetery served one settlement group, nor of identifying the influences or changes in settlement that might lead to shift of burial site, for example, from Edgebucklin Braes to the site near Cowpits Farm.

Immediately S. of the site near Cowpits was the Shire Mill, near the Shire Mill Haugh, reflecting the tradition of Inveresk having its own 'shire' distinct from that of Edinburgh. There was also a Sheriffhall at the southernmost point of the parish of Inveresk, which may have been the seigneurial centre for this possible 'shire'. Inveresk was important in Roman, post-Roman and medieval times because of its position at the end of a major route, at the mouth of a river, a natural landing place. Prime quality land lay immediately S. of the naturally defensive site, on a hill within a bend in the river Esk. This is where the parish church was located.

In the Lothians, information against which to compare structural and artefactual evidence for settlement and territorial arrangements is limited. Although Edinburgh could be expected to have dependent lands, the only relevant detailed early document is the composite foundation charter for Holyrood Abbey (Fig. 7), dating to between 1142 and 1150, but containing earlier information from 1128.⁵⁵ This was late, long after the Anglo-Norman settlers could have influenced territorial organization in the area. The charter also included places outwith the immediate vicinity of Edinburgh, such as Whitekirk in East Lothian, and it refers to St Cuthbert's church at 'Kyrchetun' with its dependent chapels at Corstorphine and Liberton and the dues owed to it. Inverleith, Broughton and the Dean village are also included. Dixon mentions other places in the vicinity, such as those with the Old English element *tun*⁵⁶ and Craiginat, the former name for Restalrig Hill, with the Gaelic element *annat*, for an old church or chapel.⁵⁷ These indicate linguistic and settlement development in the area.

The place name 'Kyrchetun' incorporates the late Old English place name element *cirice*, which referred to a meeting place for religious activities.⁵⁸ Four examples of the term have been identified in the Border Counties: Channelkirk in the upper Leader valley, Selkirk at the junction of the Ale and Etrick Waters, Ashkirk on the upper Ale Water and Hobkirk on the Rule Water.⁵⁹ Channelkirk stood at the head of the Leader basin, near a number of defended settlements, while Selkirk was across the valley of the Etrick Water from the possible hall site at Philiphaugh.⁶⁰ Hobkirk lay below the complex of enclosures and the defended settlement on Bonchester Hill (3.75 ha.). The latter situation is identical to that of St Cuthbert's at 'Kyrchetun', immediately below Edinburgh Castle.

The site of Kirkliston in W. Lothian is noteworthy because the place name incorporates the Cumbric *lios*, for a lord's residence.⁶¹ The site (Fig. 8) was one of the principal possessions of the see of St Andrews, recorded as 'the seat of rural jurisdiction over all their estates besouth Forth'.⁶² If the see did take a pre-existing estate centre, supporting archaeological and documentary evidence is lacking at present. Within the parish are Chester and Winchburgh incorporating the Old English elements *caister* and *burh*, respectively,⁶³ reflecting English-speaking settlement or occupation during the post-Roman and early medieval period. Although the modern village of Winchburgh lies on a ridge, the site of the later Niddry

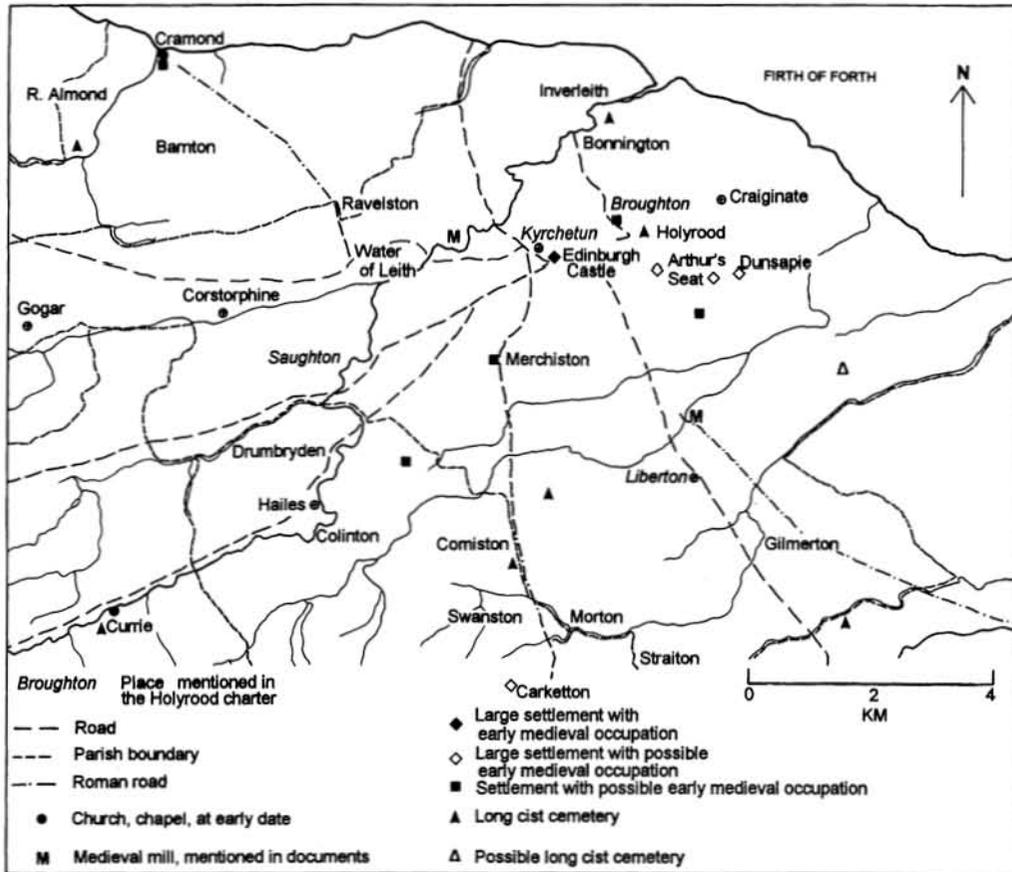


FIG. 7

The vicinity of Edinburgh showing large settlements, settlements with early medieval occupation, and place names, including those mentioned in the Holyrood charter

Castle, on the Niddry Burn, more closely resembles the meaning of Winchburgh: 'bend (of a watercourse) fortification'.⁶⁴ At the W. edge of the parish was Niddry, from the Cumbric *newydd tref*, for 'new settlement'.⁶⁵ This place lies beside the site of a defended settlement discovered by aerial photography.⁶⁶ By definition the term *newydd tref* points to the existence of older settlements and their lands, from which the new settlement would be separate.

The use of *tref* in a place name is of considerable interest (Fig. 9) since this word was used in documents to describe the dependent settlements of pre-Norman 'multiple estates' in Wales.⁶⁷ Other *tref*-element place names have been identified in the Lothians, such as Tranent, E. Lothian and Niddrie Marischal near Edinburgh.⁶⁸ Although none has been recorded as associated with 'multiple estates' or estate centres, these might be identified if a multi-disciplinary approach to such a study were adopted. For example, Barrow discovered that Duddingston,

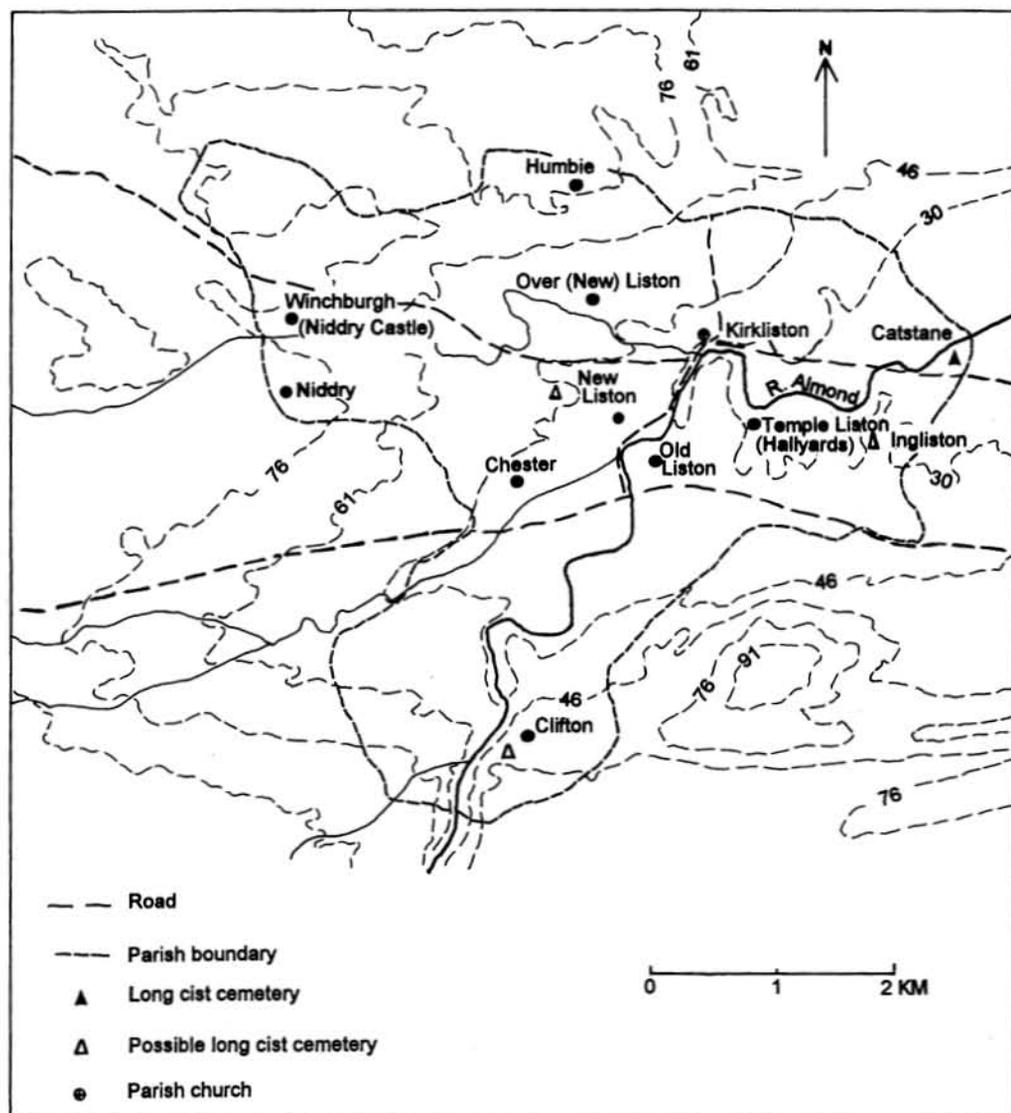


FIG. 8

Significant place names, settlements and long cist cemeteries in the parish of Kirkliston, Mid and W. Lothian

on the S. edge of the Queens Park massif, was formerly known as 'Treveren', a *tref*-element place name,⁶⁹ although nothing is known of its possible relationship with the nearby defended settlements or with the land organization centred on Edinburgh Castle.

Four significant *pit*-element place names lie S. of the Forth: Bantaskine formerly 'Pettanaskin' near Falkirk, Pittendreich at Lasswade on the Esk, Pentecox

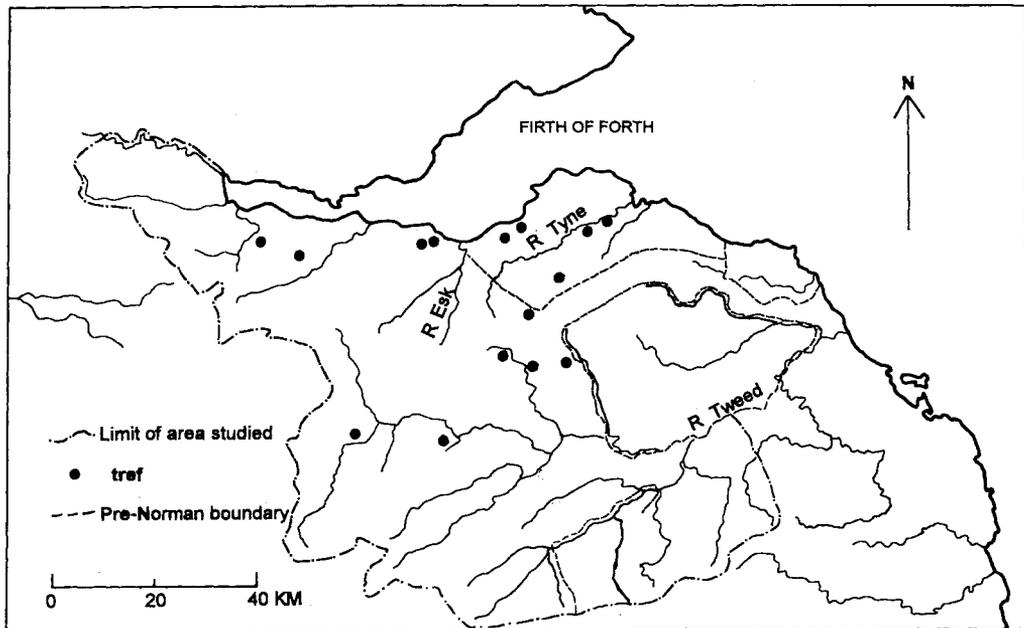


FIG. 9

Tref place names in the Lothian area

near Dalkeith, and Pitcox near Dunbar.⁷⁰ Although these may have been of 9th-century or later date, brought by people of Scotto-Pictish origin, the use of *pit*, a land use term, probably reflected already existing territorial and settlement associations. All four names imply aspects of land ownership ('the sunny hill', 'the gospel share' and two examples of the 'fifth share of a five household settlement').⁷¹

The evidence from these linguistic artefacts may be fragmentary, but it indicates associations and details of settlement hierarchy and economic roles in the literal meanings of the place names. Nearly all the documentary records of land organization date to the 12th century or later, with the obvious exception of those recorded in the *Historia de S. Cuthberto*, a rare example of a pre-Norman record of territorial arrangements in Scotland. These conform to the model of the 'multiple estate', where settlements or pieces of land lay near a single central settlement or 'caput'. It is probable that such arrangements were originally quite fluid, becoming more rigid as time went on, influenced by other factors such as the development of a landed aristocracy and of tied or bonded settlements as well as by land donations to the church. Certainly lands were acquired piecemeal by the church and a study of these specific units could lead to a greater understanding of individual farms and settlements in the preceding periods.

The influence of Christianity led at first to certain settlements having a recognized common meeting place for religious activities, where cemeteries eventually developed, initially without a church building.⁷² The later parish system or structure of a church and its dependent chapels probably reflected earlier

territorial arrangements, around which the earlier Christian activity had developed. Later the established church was of crucial importance to the formalizing of territories as it acquired lands and power. It recorded properties and boundaries, requiring stability and firm boundaries in order to establish its ownership and secure its income. Through this it encouraged stability. Monasteries and churches were not particularly prone to changes, unlike the secular lordships which could be affected by deaths, marriages, wars and political developments.

Other less easily traceable factors, such as climatic change, population fluctuations and settlement shift could have led to differences in the size, extent and rate of the development of formal territorial and settlement associations. There were probably differences in the size and extent of associations between upland and lowland parts of SE. Scotland. There may even have been cultural differences between the populations of the parts of the Tweed basin and the peoples of the Lothians, although detailed archaeological evidence for this is lacking.

Evidence for the British, Cumbric-speaking natives survives in the place names. As well as the examples of *pit* and *tref*-element settlement place names, there are those which refer to fortification and enclosure, such as the Old English *burh* and *caister*, the Cumbric *caer* and the Gaelic *dun* and *cather*. In the valley of the Gala Water (Fig. 10), Halltree and Torquhan are examples of the use of *tref*, while Cathpair, Caitha and Pirncader use *cather*.⁷³ It is significant that all these place names lie beside the remains of defended settlements, implying some continuity of settlement in the area. Examples of the use of such elements in the place names associated with some of the so-called *oppida* include The Dunion, Bonchester Hill, the Chesters, Bolton and Cademuir, which use the elements *dun*, *caister* (twice), and *cather*, respectively. Artefactual evidence for the post-Roman period is limited to a blue glass bead found during excavation of at Bonchester Hill,⁷⁴ while coarse pottery from the Dunion, dated loosely as late prehistoric, along with querns of 'Roman Legionary' type, could have continued in use.

CONCLUSION

An important topographical association is that between possible early church or burial sites and the remains of defended settlements. The churches and graveyards at Hobkirk, St Cuthbert's, and Jedburgh lie below the defended settlements on Bonchester Hill, Edinburgh Castle and The Dunion, respectively, perhaps reflecting a development from the earlier practice of burial in ground outside the defended settlement, as at Broxmouth Hill, near Dunbar.⁷⁵ However, stronger evidence for burial and religious rites associated with economic or social centres may be seen in the delineated and bounded burial grounds, with organized rows of graves, which have been found by aerial photography and associated with hall settlements at Sprouston, Roxburghshire and at Philiphaugh, near Selkirk.⁷⁶

The range of evidence available for the study of territorial arrangements in SE. Scotland has been examined here, though the lack of datable evidence continues to pose problems and could lead to information relating to different stages of development being treated as contemporary. Further research could be

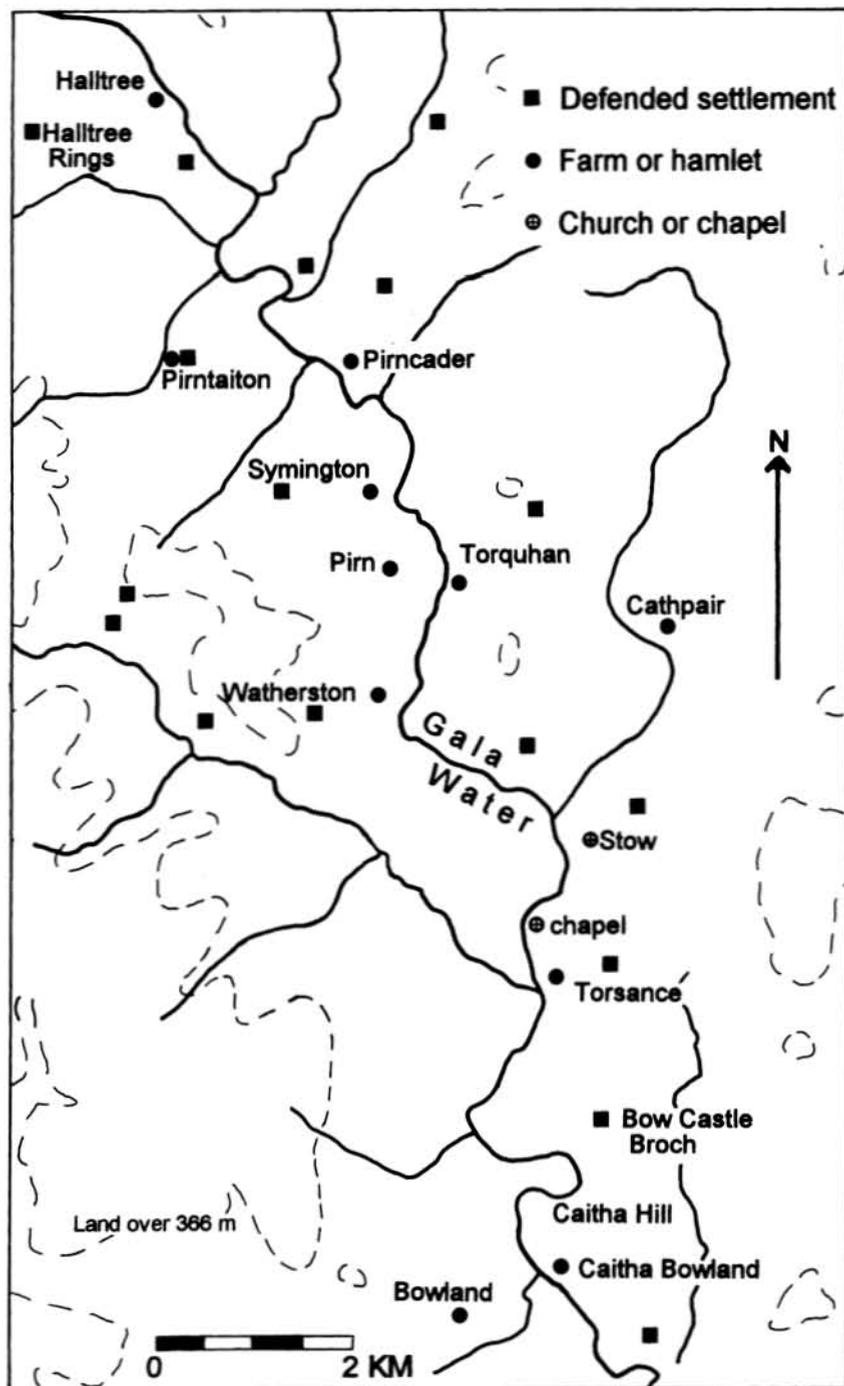


FIG. 10

Tref, pîrn and cathair names around Stow in the basin of the Gala Water, Midlothian

carried out, following Smith's work on the settlements in the Manor valley,⁷⁷ considering the possible associations of settlements that developed into the parishes and lordships of 12th-century and later Scotland. Moreover the written records of such associations provide indications of the territorial structures that may have existed between the 7th and 12th centuries. By contrast, the place names and occupation of the defended settlements have not been so closely dated since there has been little research or archaeological fieldwork, to follow the pioneering studies of Nicolaisen and Barrow.⁷⁸

A compilation, classification and detailed study of all the examples of settlement-derived place names that appear to apply to defended settlements in SE. Scotland, together with aerial photography, followed by systematic fieldwork and excavation would develop a valuable database. It should then be possible to identify post-Roman or medieval occupation of such sites and any associated settlement or land management boundaries. In this way understanding of the history of land use, of land management and boundary development could be considerably advanced.

The 'multiple estates' model is useful for the study of territorial arrangements, including associated settlements and centres with religious and burial foci. Place names may be selectively studied to identify particular types of sites; significant advances have been made with regard to the study of administrative organization in some areas of England such as Northamptonshire,⁷⁹ while Barrow⁸⁰ has pioneered such studies in Scotland. Certain components, such as possible subsidiary and central settlements could be identified and their developmental positions studied over successive centuries, as suggested by Driscoll.⁸¹ Detailed archaeological field survey, supported by a targeted excavation strategy, is required in upland and lowland areas with recorded examples of 'multiple estates' in order to trace the development of territorial arrangements in Scotland from the probably loose associations of the late prehistoric period to the more organized structure of the early medieval period. From such study, the relationship of the incoming Angles with the continuing British population of SE. Scotland may be clarified.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank Professor G. W. S. Barrow for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this paper and for his generosity in offering additional information. The illustrations were all prepared by Michael J. Roy.

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