

The Evolution of a Medieval Scottish Manor at Perceton, near Irvine, North Ayrshire

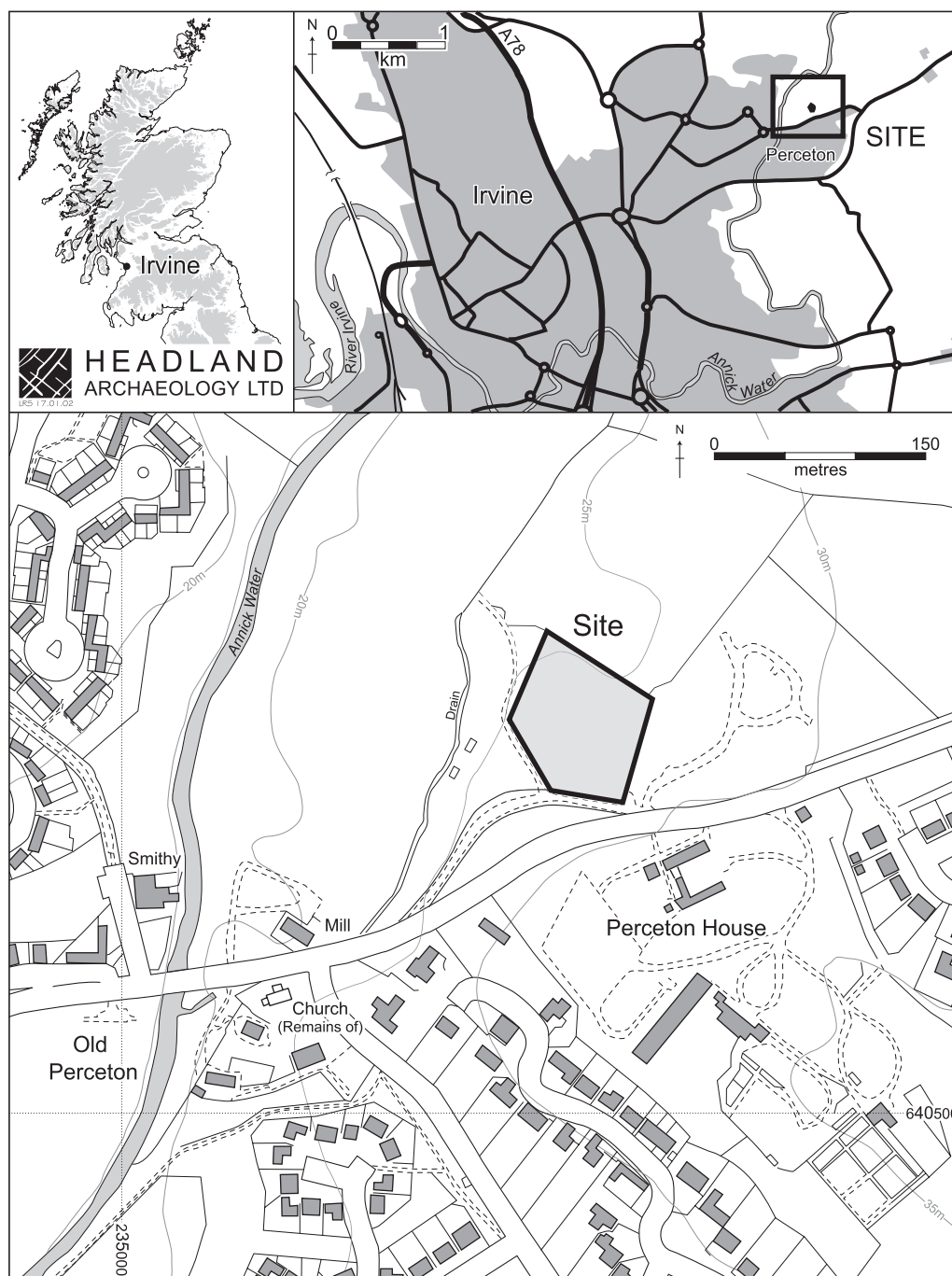
By SIMON STRONACH

with contributions by R. COLEMAN, J. FRANKLIN, M. HASTIE,
R. ORAMS, E. PHOTOS-JONES and J. DAWSON

A HOUSING development within the former grounds of Perceton House on the outskirts of Irvine led to the discovery of a 12th-century stockaded farmstead without obvious excavated parallels. At that time it is likely that the Perceton lands were run by a steward, resident in the farmstead in the name of an absentee landowner. On a general note it is suggested that this type of site may be common but rarely visible, except as a cropmark, which without excavation may be mistakenly classified as prehistoric. In the early 14th century the land became the principal residence of a member of the Stewart family. The old stockade was removed and a moat excavated, probably around a new manor house. In the late 1400s following a period of absorption in larger estates the site again became a principal residence, to one Ninian Barclay. This resulted in the building of a new mansion, mainly lying to the south of the excavated area. This was demolished in the 1720s, when another new owner constructed the present Perceton House.

In response to an archaeological condition on planning consent for a housing development, an evaluation by Headland Archaeology Ltd established the survival of truncated medieval features near Perceton House in North Ayrshire (NGR NS 3533 4077). The site lay beneath a thick growth of mature trees and shrubs, within a walled garden to the north-east of Irvine and the village of Old Perceton (Fig. 1). The garden was surrounded by farmland at the end of a spur of slightly elevated ground that extends southwards towards Perceton House. Perceton House was built by William McCreadie in the early 1770s, and is currently the headquarters of North Ayrshire Council. The excavation and this publication have been wholly funded by Mactaggart and Mickel Ltd, and curated on behalf of North Ayrshire Council by the West of Scotland Archaeology Service.

The development had been subject to a planning condition requiring only an archaeological watching brief during groundworks. However, the developer agreed to carry out an advance evaluation within the walled garden and an adjacent field. Only those trenches within the garden contained archaeologically significant features, initially interpreted as the NE. corner of a medieval moated enclosure with internal structures. In response the interior of the walled garden was stripped of topsoil under archaeological supervision. After the archaeological remains had been exposed the developer and curator agreed a mitigation strategy involving



sample excavation of all threatened features; to a minimum of 50% for pits, posts and possible beam-slots, 10% for ditches. A team of five archaeologists undertook the resulting excavation in February 2001.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

By RICHARD D. ORAM

The origins of the Perceton lands can be traced to the mid-12th-century grant of Cunningham (North Ayrshire) to the de Morville family by David I (1124–53). At this time North Ayrshire was a frontier with the sea kingdoms of Galloway, Argyll and Mann, and David's land grants to members of his Anglo-Norman court represented an attempt to integrate the region into his kingdom. The name 'Perceton' was probably derived from a personal name around this time.¹ Until the early 14th century, the estate was a component in a complex of properties held by a succession of largely absentee landlords. Following his victory at Bannockburn Robert I (1306–29) initiated a fundamental reordering of Scotland's land ownership. This rewarded his loyalists with estates confiscated from pro-Balliol lords, including Perceton. In this way Perceton passed to a cadet branch of the Stewart family, relations of the monarch and an important family in the region, who may have developed the first major manorial centre on the site. After a brief interlude of Douglas ownership in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, the estate was divided between the husbands of the three heiresses of the last Douglas lord. Nether Perceton, which can be identified with the present site, passed into the control of David Barclay of Collairnie in Fife and was given by him, in the late 15th century, to his younger son, Ninian. From the 1490s onwards, the Barclays of Perceton consolidated then extended their landed and political position in northern Ayrshire, funded by commercial interests in Edinburgh, and in 1668 were given a baronetcy. The Barclays retained control of Perceton until 1720, when the third baronet, a Jacobite living in exile, sold the property to Andrew Macredie, who soon after demolished the old house.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Over the last three decades the majority of medieval excavations in Scotland have taken place in urban centres. Much less work has been carried out on rural sites, which are more rarely threatened by structural development, although are often gradually degraded by agricultural practices. In addition, most excavation in the rural hinterland has concentrated on prominent sites such as mottes or abbeys. The result has been an incomplete grasp of Scottish medieval settlement and land-use. Recent surveys have attempted to address this imbalance, on both a local and national level.² These have highlighted the potential of rural sites and the issues they are crucial to understanding, such as the impact of Anglo-Norman feudalism. A regional survey has been undertaken by Pollock in the Lunan Valley (Angus) and

¹ G. W. S. Barrow, pers. comm.

² D. Pollock, 'The Lunan Valley project: medieval rural settlement in Angus', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scotland*, 115 (1985), 357–400; P. Yeoman, 'Medieval rural settlement: the invisible centuries', 112–28 in W. S. Hanson and E. A. Slater (eds.), *Scottish Archaeology: New Perceptions* (Aberdeen, 1991).

relied on crop-mark, cartographic and documentary evidence to complement limited excavation. The picture of medieval landscape that emerged was one of variety, with several types of small *toun* or settlement, individual farmsteads and higher status sites such as castles or granges. One of the problems identified by Pollock is that successful medieval farms or hamlets have continued in use to the modern period, and the remains of most will be hidden beneath modern successors. The results of a recent excavation in Perthshire, which established that a circular cropmark was early medieval rather than prehistoric, raises the possibility that much rural Scottish settlement has been misunderstood in the vacuum left by lack of excavation.³

MOATED SITES

By RUSSEL COLEMAN

As we shall see, the development at Perceton offered a rare opportunity to investigate a moated site. One of the most striking features of the medieval countryside, surprisingly little is known about this class of site in Scotland and, therefore, the historical and archaeological background is worth reviewing. The introduction of feudal systems of land tenure during the 12th and 13th centuries was accompanied by the construction of defensive structures such as mottes, ring-works and moated sites.⁴ In Scotland, the 120 or so known or possible moated sites form a much smaller group of medieval earthworks than mottes and ring-works, of which there are around 320 known examples. The moated sites are also generally slightly later in date.⁵ The distribution of moated sites in Scotland is broadly similar to those of mottes and ring-works but on present evidence there appears to be an absence of moated sites in Fife and the Lothians.

The function and purpose of moated sites in Scotland is obscure and it is possible that they filled a variety of needs. Essentially, they functioned as farmsteads, centres of manors (the smallest self-contained unit in the feudal lordship) from where the Anglo-Norman landowner of the region controlled the feudal system of agriculture. They were constructed by all seigneurial (feudal superior) sections of medieval society, whether secular or ecclesiastical. Some may have been built by the highest echelons of medieval society: for example the residence of Robert I at Cardross was perhaps best described as a moated site and other royal manors may have been moated. Most were designed to enclose a house and associated structures such as barns and stables. Some served as hunting lodges for the nobility and higher clergy. Moated sites are also known to have functioned as monastic granges or farms, lodge houses of foresters, deer park keepers and rabbit warreners.

The typology of moated sites is extremely complex. However, several broad observations can be made. The moat itself comprised a broad ditch; more often

³ G. J. Barclay, 'The excavation of an early medieval enclosure at Upper Gothens, Meikleour, Perthshire', *Tayside and Fife Archaeol. J.*, 7 (2001), 35–44.

⁴ P. Yeoman, *Medieval Scotland* (London, 1995).

⁵ G. Stell, 'Mottes', in P. McNeill and H. L. MacQueen (eds.), *Atlas of Scottish History to 1707* (Edinburgh, 1996), 430; P. Corser, 'Moated Sites', *ibid.*, 431.

than not water-filled, enclosing an area of ground usually occupied by a dwelling and associated structures. The ditch does not necessarily have to surround the inner platform or island on all sides, and natural features were often utilised (streams, promontories, etc.). The upcast from the digging of the ditch would have been used to form or raise the inner platform, and was also spread either side of the ditch to form low banks. A timber stockade or palisade would often have topped the inner bank. Within the moat, the platform or island may vary in shape and size, although is most commonly rectangular, and there can be single, double or multiple enclosures. Many derived their water direct from streams or rivers, sometimes by a series of channels and sluices, while others were dug through low-lying marshy ground. Some moats were always intended to be dry; particularly those sited on hilltops and hillsides, and some of these may have exclusively enclosed orchards, gardens or livestock.

To date only a few Scottish moated sites have been subject to archaeological investigation. Early excavations, such as Skirling Castle, Peebleshire, Bombie and Dunrod, both Kircudbrightshire, concentrated on the ditch and contributed little to our understanding of moated sites.⁶ Recent excavations, such as Wallace's House, Caerlaverock Castle, Ladywell and Castle of Wardhouse have been more successful and, if anything, highlight the complexity of these sites as they develop from simple enclosures to more defended sites — which could easily be considered castles — and some to houses and later farms. One of the largest sites known through excavation, Wallace's House, Elderslie (Renfrewshire), was built, perhaps in the 13th century, as a simple moated enclosure.⁷ The defences were partly or wholly remodelled in stone in the 14th or 15th century. A radiocarbon determination of A.D. 1435–80, from a small hazel branch found in the basal deposits of the ditch, indicates that it had already started to silt up in the 15th century. The documentary and map evidence supplemented the archaeological remains to show a site developing from a simple moated enclosure to a more defensive structure, through to a house and, in its final phase, a farm.

The development of Caerlaverock Castle (Dumfriesshire) is in many ways similar to that of Wallace's House. Built c. 1220, the first phase comprised a two-storey block in the E. corner of a moated platform.⁸ A curtain wall was then erected around the inside edge of the platform and further stone buildings added. Only 50 years after its construction the castle was moved to a new site and a corn-drying kiln and smithy were sited on the original.

On present evidence the only moated site in Ayrshire is Ladywell, near Girvan (South Ayrshire). This rectilinear enclosure partly visible on aerial photographs was subject to two trial excavations in 1996 and 1998.⁹ This work identified a ditch

⁶ W. A. Anderson, 'Report on excavations at Bombie', *Trans. Dumfriesshire Galloway Nat. Hist. Antiq. Soc.*, 25 (1946), 27–35; E. F. Burdon-Davies, 'The moated manor at Dunrod, Kircudbrightshire', *Trans. Dumfriesshire Galloway Nat. Hist. Antiq. Soc.*, 93 (1966), 121–36; J. G. Dunbar, 'Excavations at Skirling Castle, Peebleshire, 1962–3', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scotland*, 96 (1965), 733–821.

⁷ D. Alexander, 'Excavation of a medieval moated site in Elderslie, Renfrewshire', *Scottish Archaeol. J.*, 22 (2000), 155–77.

⁸ M. Brann, 'Caerlaverock Old Castle', *Discovery and Excavation Scotland* (1998), 25; M. Brann, 'Caerlaverock Old Castle', *Discovery and Excavation Scotland* (1999), 23.

⁹ P. Duffy, 'William Grant Distillery, Girvan', *Discovery and Excavation Scotland* (1998), 87.

7.5–9.5 m wide enclosing an area of approximately 50 m east to west and 40 m north to south. Initial examination of the pottery recovered from the lower fills gave a 13th- to 14th-century date for the ditch. Internal features represented by postholes and plank wall slots were also discovered.

The fourth, and final, site worthy of mention is Castle of Wardhouse (Aberdeenshire). This moated site, the residence of Sir Bartholomew the Fleming in the 13th century, was constructed on a natural platform jutting out from a hillside, with double ditches and earthen ramparts.¹⁰ Excavation revealed no trace of a later medieval curtain wall and it seems likely that the earthwork defences were maintained into the 17th century when the castle was finally abandoned. In the middle of the platform, all that had survived were the bases of deeply cut postholes, which had formed part of at least two large timber buildings.

RESULTS

By SIMON STRONACH *and* RICHARD D. ORAM

THE STRATIGRAPHIC SEQUENCE

It is important to stress that preservation of deposits and features was poor, due to horticultural mixing and bioturbation. Only the bases of negative features survived, sealed by up to a metre of homogeneous topsoil. Consequently only a limited number of stratigraphic relationships were observed, mainly involving linear features. The majority of the pottery assemblage consisted of abraded sherds classified by fabric into White Gritty Ware or Late Medieval Redware, only one sherd of imported pottery was recovered (see Franklin, Appendix). The date ranges of these two fabrics overlap, and many features contained both types. Combined with the low sherd count this made phase division on the basis of pottery alone unsafe. To mitigate this six radiocarbon dates were also obtained, and are provided in Table 1. These are broadly consistent with each other and the artefacts, although one prehistoric date was returned. In producing a chronological sequence consideration of material recovered from bulk soil samples also proved useful, although of greatest use was the form and position of features. Post-excavation analysis led to the establishment of a sequence spanning some 600 years, and comprising two medieval enclosures followed by a post-medieval garden.

Subsoil sloped from 28.18 m O.D. in the south-west to 25.74 m in the north-east, corresponding to a transition from sand and gravel to wet silty clay. Full archive reports relating to the historical research, iron-working waste, plant remains and artefacts have been deposited in the site archive, summaries are provided here.

Phase 1: Late 12th- to 13th-century steward's farmstead

Historical background During the reign of King David I (1124–53), the district of Cunningham was granted to Hugh de Morville, the king's chief military officer. To control the region, the de Morvilles created a pattern of sub-tenancies, through

¹⁰ P. Yeoman, 'Excavations at Castle of Wardhouse, Aberdeenshire', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scotland*, 128 (1998), 581–617.

TABLE I
RADIOCARBON DETERMINATIONS

Context	Sample	Material	Delta 13C rel. PDB	Calibrated Age Ranges — 2s
68, Fill of 64 89, Basal fill of moat	AA-43646(GU-9475)	Cereal grain:Avena sp.	-24.10%	cal. A.D. 1044–1296
117, Fill of 118	AA-43647(GU-9476)	Cereal grain:Avena sp.	-24.80%	cal. A.D. 1296–1430
	AA-43648(GU-9477)	Cereal grain:Triticum aestivum-compactum L.	-23.70%	cal. B.C. 1501–1261
152, Basal fill of moat	AA-43649(GU-9478)	Cereal grain:Avena sp.	-25.50%	cal. A.D. 1073–1284
156, Fill of 157	AA-44417(GU-9508)	Cereal grain:Avena sp.	-25.40%	cal. A.D. 1325–1481
215, Fill of 216	AA-43650(GU-9480)	Cereal grain:Avena sp.	-24.50%	cal. A.D. 1073–1284

grants of land to kinsmen and vassals. It was probably in this way that what became the lordship of Perceton was established. In 1196, the male line of the de Morvilles failed and their lands passed to the lords of Galloway. The male line of that family also failed in 1234 and their great landholding was split between the husbands of the last lord's three daughters.¹¹ These families would not have resided at Perceton, and stewards would probably have administered the estate on their behalf.

Archaeological remains Several linear features [118, 180, 216 and 320] were interpreted as representing the eastern part of an enclosure, extending outside the garden and occupying freely draining ground (Fig. 2). One had a profile typical of a palisade trench (118; Fig. 7A), and it is thought likely they all supported a timber stockade. Two contained charred cereal grains subject to radiocarbon dating (Fill of [118], 1501–1261 B.C. ; Fill of [216], A.D. 1073–1284). It must be emphasised that the grains had not been burnt *in situ*, and may have been circulating for a long period before being deposited. All the stockade trenches contained some medieval pottery, mainly White Gritty Ware, which comprised 95% of the sherds recovered from this phase.¹² In a gap in the E. side of the palisade (Fig. 3), a shallow slot ran at right angles between two of the trenches. Three postholes were discovered to the south and the terminus of the inner palisade trench was found to contain several more. This arrangement is interpreted as the remains of an entrance into the stockade, comprising an outer gate substantial enough to require a beam slot, and a lighter inner gate founded using postholes. The NE. corner of the stockade was formed by a feature [261], which extended to a metre's depth by way of two steps descending from the SW. edge. The two fills did not contain many inclusions apart from rare White Gritty Ware sherds. The corner was surrounded by a concentration of insubstantial postholes. The purpose of this feature is not known but it was positioned at the lowest point of the stockade and seems likely to have collected

¹¹ R. D. Oram, *The Lordship of Galloway* (Edinburgh, 2001), 98–9, 107, 158 and 160.

¹² Franklin, *Appendix* (below).



FIG. 3

Entrance through the palisade, from the interior. *Photograph: S. Stronach.*

water draining from the interior. Perhaps it was used as a latrine. A ditch [325] ran to the north, where it became waterlogged and this seems likely to have had a drainage/overflow function.

The interior of the stockade contained a number of postholes with several forms. A distinctive type (e.g. 163; Fig. 7B) was large and circular with vertical sides and a flat base at depths in excess of 0.5 m. All except two of these followed a NE.–SW. alignment and may be contemporary. Their size suggested that the structure they supported was of more than one storey. Elsewhere were many smaller postholes, which do not seem to represent any single structure and are more likely to represent renovation or repair. Many had pronounced steps, whilst others were twinned, implying that unsound timbers were replaced or supported (e.g. 124, Fig. 7C). It has been estimated in poorly draining urban environments that timber posts would need to be replaced every 20 years or so.¹³ Freely draining conditions here render this a conservative estimate.

The bases of possible beam slots [110, 75] may have been the remains of a lean-to structure positioned against the E. wall of the stockade. Although this arrangement would have compromised the defensive integrity of the enclosure the beam slots did pre-date the ditch, and other features (Fig. 7D), associated with Phase 2.

In the south-east, and extending outside the excavation, was an E.–W. trench [64] with a probable return at the W. end. It had been filled with blackened sand, rounded pebbles, iron-working debris and unburnt coal. A charred cereal grain from within this feature was subject to radiocarbon dating (Fill 68, A.D. 1044–1296). Immediately to the west was an area of slightly reddened subsoil, which intensified

¹³ H. Murray, 'Medieval wooden and wattle buildings excavated in Perth and Aberdeen', 39–49 in A. Simpson and S. Stevenson (eds.), *Town Houses and Structures in Medieval Scotland: A Seminar* (Edinburgh, 1980).

with proximity to an irregular bowl-shaped cut [71], containing heat-affected sandstone flags set in clay. The subsoil had a distinct incline to the north and a flue may once have extended in this direction. The iron-working debris was primary smelting slag, but lack of charcoal and evidence for very intense heating suggests this was not a metalworking furnace.¹⁴ Given the nature of the site during this phase, a more likely interpretation is a corn-drying kiln. The L-shaped slot may have been a structural foundation for an insubstantial building, perhaps used as a coal store. The slag had been used as bedding or packing material and is not likely to have been transported far.

Four disposal pits were located between the enclosure and the possible coal store. All were similar in form and contained artefacts dated to between the 13th and 15th centuries, including an iron knife in a mineralised leather scabbard (Fig. 9).¹⁵

Generally finds were rare but a background presence of coal, charcoal, cinder, charred cereal, burnt bone, daub and abraded pot in bulk soil samples probably results from domestic activity.¹⁶ The backfills of four features contained concentrations of charred cereal grain; all were located outside the palisade and suggest that cereal processing was undertaken at a safe distance from the central buildings.¹⁷ Typically for rural medieval sites the assemblage was dominated by oat and barley, with a small proportion of wheat. Fragments of iron-working debris were more common from this phase than any other, adding weight to the theory that a smithy operated nearby.¹⁸

Phase 2: 14th- to 15th-century moat

Historical background In the aftermath of Bannockburn (1314) Robert I forfeited all three families descended from the Galloways for their opposition to his kingship. This redistribution was part of a radical restructuring of the landholding pattern of Scotland and included the re-grant of Perceton and Warwickhill to James Stewart.¹⁹ His son and successor, Sir John Stewart, was either the cousin and near contemporary of Robert, 7th High Steward and future king of Scots, or his second cousin. It must be emphasised that at this time Perceton and its lord were significant elements in the political structure of the Clyde estuary, and major components in the spreading influence of the Stewart family. In the early 1340s, John Stewart appears as a witness to a charter, designated as *dominus de Peristona*, a style that indicates unequivocally that Perceton was the main property and residence of his family. As such, it would have had a developed 'manorial' centre at its core.

Archaeological remains The palisade was replaced by a substantial ditch [72], which emerged from the S. baulk and ran for 40 m before returning to the west (Figs. 4–5). Assuming that the exposed part of the ditch is typical, it represented the NE.

¹⁴ Photos-Jones, *Appendix*.

¹⁵ Franklin, *Appendix*.

¹⁶ Hastie, *Appendix*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Photos-Jones, *Appendix*.

¹⁹ J. M. Thomson et al. (eds.), *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum* (Edinburgh, 1882–1914), i, No. 39.

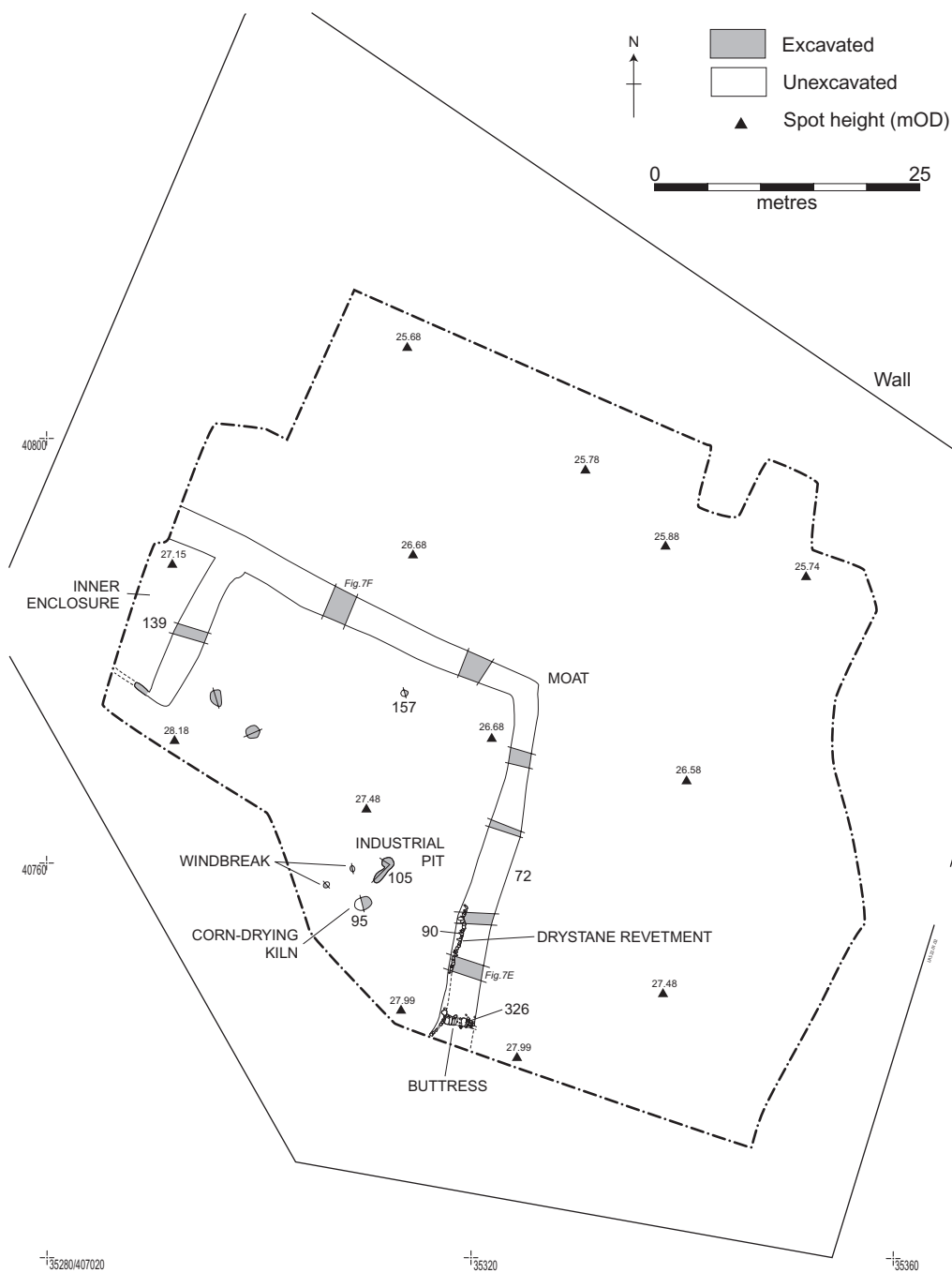


FIG. 4

Phase 2: 14th- to 15th-century moat. *Drawn by L. Speed.*



FIG. 5

Eastern side of moat with drystane facing in background. Photograph: S. Stronach.

corner of an enclosure of substantial size, and rectangular or square in plan. It would seem likely to have extended west to the edge of higher ground, represented by the drain shown in Figure 1, and indeed this may have been incorporated and ensured the moat was wet on this side. Elsewhere the ditch was cut through sand and gravel subsoil, and probably did not hold water for the majority of the time. The southern extent of the enclosure is not known but given the limitations to north, east and west, the size of the enclosure can be estimated at roughly 100 m each way, comfortably within the range established for medieval moated sites.²⁰ A total of six sondages were excavated across the ditch, which had a width up to 3.5 m and depth up to 1 m (Fig. 7E–F). All encountered a homogeneous upper fill similar to topsoil [73], which contained an assemblage of 13th- to 16th-century pottery and one, possibly intrusive, sherd of 16th- to 18th-century reduced ware.²¹ The upper fill was likely to have been dumped deliberately in order to level the ditch, and sealed accumulations derived from weathering or silting of the surrounding subsoil. Two charred cereal grains from these accumulations were subject to radiocarbon dating (Fill 89, A.D. 1296–1430; Fill 152, A.D. 1073–1284). A stretch of drystane wall [90] had been constructed against the moat's inner face and corresponded to a widening. It seems likely to have flanked an entrance, and a

²⁰ F. A. Aberg, *Medieval Moated Sites* (CBA Res. Rep., 17, London, 1978).

²¹ Franklin, *Appendix*.

later drystone buttress [326] provided support for the wall. This extended part way across the ditch, and was clearly constructed when it was already partially filled. Basal accumulations increased downslope along the E. side of the enclosure, which was expected due to topography. However, along the N. side, basal deposits were deeper upslope to the west. The counter-intuitive relationship between topography and accumulation of material may reflect activity concentrated on the other side of contemporary ditch cut [139]. This ran at right angles to the outer ditch, had a similar depth of around 1 m and the basal fill contained several pot sherds dating to the 13th or 14th century. At the S. terminal a shallow groove ran to the west. There were no structural remains within the excavated part of the enclosure and this seems most likely to represent the edge of, and probable entrance into, an inner enclosure. The principal building may have been located within this, to the west of the excavation area.

The excavated part of the interior is likely to have been an open yard. It contained two pits [105] linked by a shallow channel and their form was suggestive of an industrial function. A nearby feature (Cut 95; Fig. 7D) contained an *in situ* clay lining underneath some charcoal and burnt clay against its W. side. Impressions of branches preserved in the hardened clay suggested it derived from the burning and collapse of a wattle and daub structure.²² The feature also contained a concentration of grain and weed seeds, including flax.²³ These factors and the shape and dimensions of the pit are consistent with it being the base of a corn-drying kiln.²⁴ After it fell out of use the kiln was levelled with a dump of midden material, containing a relatively large amount of pottery, mainly Late Medieval Reduced Ware, and fragments of charred wooden bowls (Fig. 10), one made of ash, the other alder.²⁵ Also in the vicinity were two postholes, one of which contained Late Medieval Reduced Ware. These may have been part of a surrounding structure, such as a windbreak. A scoop [157] filled with coal fragments and located in the north of the yard contained a charred cereal grain subject to radiocarbon dating (fill 156, A.D. 1325–1481).

Phase 3: 16th- to 17th-century mansion and garden

Historical background During the late 14th and 15th century the estate passed by marriage into the Douglas then Barclay families, and both are likely to have acted as absentee landlords. In 1489, the Ayrshire properties were separated from the main Barclay inheritance and passed to Ninian Barclay.²⁶ The lands would once again have become a principal residence, and it seems a likely juncture for the old moated manor to have been replaced by a new mansion. In the mid-16th century a letter shows quite clearly that (Nether) Perceton proper, the excavated site, was still the most important element in this portfolio of interests, and was described as the location of the tower and fortalice of Perceton.²⁷ Following the Reformation

²² Franklin, *Appendix*.

²³ Hastie, *Appendix*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Dawson, *Appendix*.

²⁶ L. Barclay, *History of the Scottish Barclays* (Folkestone, 1915).

²⁷ M. Livingstone et al. (eds.), *Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scotorum* (Edinburgh, 1908–), iv, No. 952.

William Barclay of Perceton appears to have been a beneficiary of the break-up of the Kilwinning abbey estate. By the time of his death in 1584, the Barclays of Perceton had been established as a substantial lairdly family. In a royal confirmation of 1627 a picture of the centre of the estate is offered.²⁸ It contained: part of the 'terras dominicalium' — the demesne lands or Mains of Perceton — the tower and mansion, the garden known as 'lie yaird' and 'lie schiephous', a sheep-pen. The Barclay connection with Perceton ended in 1720 when it was sold to Macredie, the provost of Stranraer. Leslie Barclay, writing in 1915, recorded that Macredie pulled down the old house shortly after he acquired it in 1720 and that only a triangular orchard wall 'against the base of which the house was built' was left. The present Perceton House, which was completed in 1780, occupied a new site.

Archaeological remains Narrow ditches, predominantly following a NE.–SW. axis consistent with the surrounding garden wall, dominated this phase (Fig. 6). These were interpreted as part of a drainage system, and included a small pond [222]. Elsewhere, stratigraphic relationships were absent and finds scarce. Irregular form and evidence of extensive root action were interpreted as indicating planting features. More regular features included a pair of lime mortar patches, possibly bases for statuary, and a row of shallow holes, which may represent hedges. The features clustered around the pond, leaving the impression that it was a focal point. Finds were scarce but included sherds of 17th- to 18th-century pottery, clay-pipe fragments and some green bottle glass.²⁹

A large area of disturbed subsoil [59] ran parallel to the orchard wall and extended outside the trench to the south. Excavation showed it to be shallow in profile, and to contain much rubble and a 17th- to 18th-century clay-pipe stem. It also contained a fragment of French pottery, thought to date to the mid-16th century.³⁰ The feature was not wholly exposed but its nature suggested it was structural rather than horticultural. The date of the clay-pipe fragment recovered from the fill is consistent with the demolition of the Barclay residence in the 1720s and it is tempting to interpret this feature as representing the position of the house built against the base of the triangular orchard wall, as recorded by Leslie Barclay. The historical record dating to 1627 mentioned above seems to indicate that the house had been constructed by this date, and that a medieval 'tower' may still have been standing.

DISCUSSION

THE STEWARD'S FARMSTEAD

The Phase 1 enclosure, dated to around the end of the 12th century, is a type of site without ready parallel. The closest example, excavated at Upper Gothens in

²⁸ Thomson et al. (eds.), op. cit. in note 19, viii, no. 1093; *Index to the Particular Register of Sasines for Sheriffdom of Ayr and Bailiaries of Kyle, Carrick and Cunningham 1617–1660*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1935–7), i, 17.

²⁹ Franklin, *Appendix*.

³⁰ Franklin, *Appendix*.

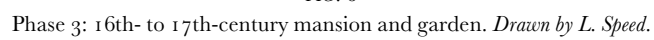


FIG. 6

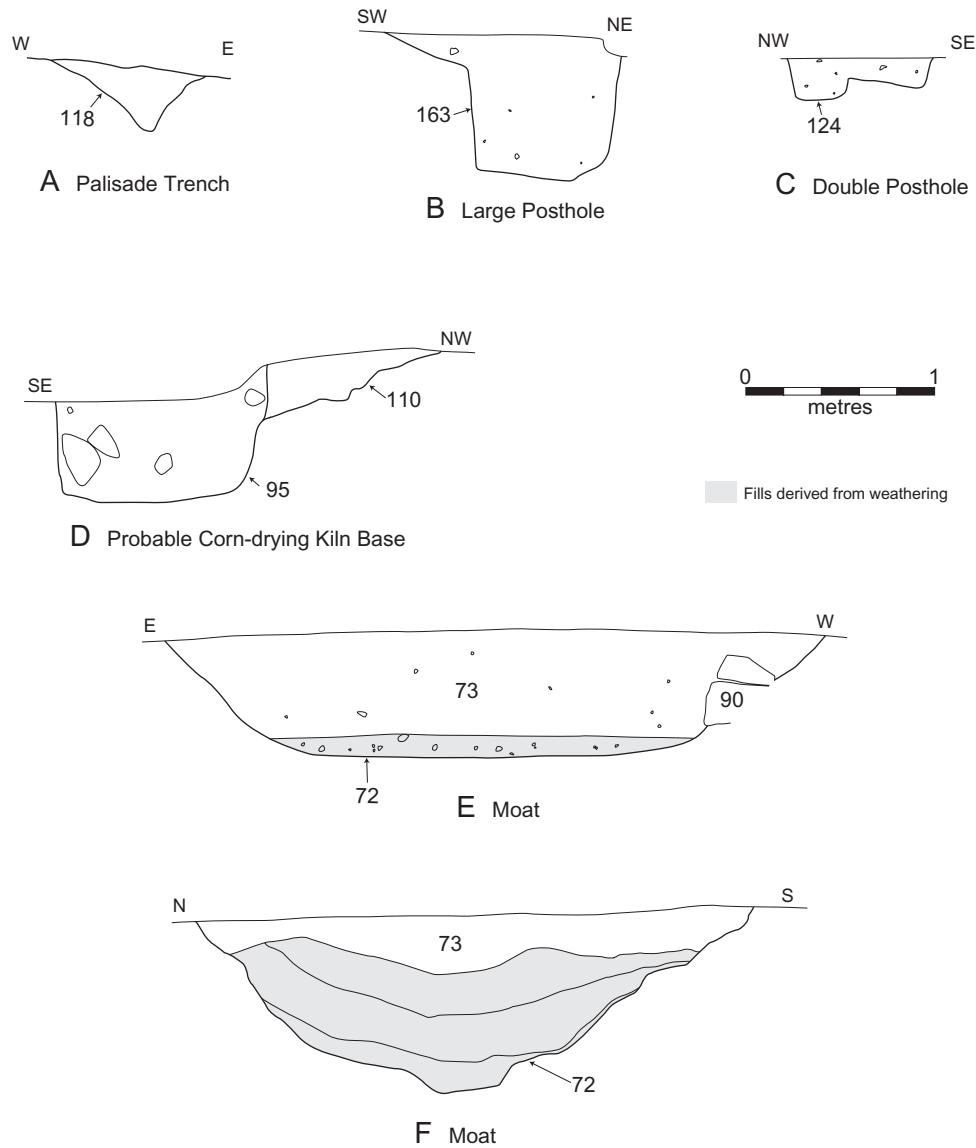


FIG. 7

Profiles through selected features. *Drawn by L. Speed.*

Perthshire, dated to the Early-medieval Period rather than the feudal 12th century, and is consequently likely to have existed within a different settlement hierarchy.³¹ The historical background is invaluable in establishing that this is not a new type of lordly residence. Rather it is a local centre, probably occupied by a steward, and

³¹ G. J. Barclay, 'The excavation of an early medieval enclosure at Upper Gothens, Meikleour, Perthshire', *Tayside Fife Archaeol. J.*, 7 (2001), 35-44.

among many owned by a family of national importance. In this case the de Morvilles, who probably resided in a motte a little to the east around Dreghorn.

The remains suggested that the site operated as a farm, and there also seems to have been iron-working in the near vicinity. The evidence for crop-processing indicated that a mill may also have been present, and the drain running to the immediate west of the enclosure (Fig. 1), could have provided a power source. First edition Ordnance Survey maps of Perceton depicted a ruined pre-Reformation church, a mill and a smithy. In essence this estate centre seems likely to have originated as part of a network introduced by David I through his Anglo-Norman court, and intended to bind the Clyde area firmly into his growing Scottish kingdom.

The rather elaborate and defensive entry into the stockade would certainly have provided protection from banditry. It could also have reflected the vulnerability of the new estates, whether from raids led by neighbouring chieftains or members of a resentful indigenous population. As part of a local hierarchy with the de Morville's motte at its peak, the farmstead's role would certainly have included the assertion of feudal control over the peasant population, and the stockade may also have been important psychologically.

The lack of small estate centres in the archaeological record has been noted previously, and probably indicates a lack of visibility rather than a genuine absence.³² In a hierarchy we would expect these to outnumber lordly sites such as mottes. The Perceton stockade may have survived because of the success of the estate, with progressively larger and grander residences built to the south. It is also possible that many cropmarks, currently classified as prehistoric, will eventually be recognised as part of the feudal landscape.

THE MOATED MANOR

By RUSSEL COLEMAN

The study of moated sites has been dogged by the difficulty of associating individual sites with scant documentation, and also dating their construction. The most significant contribution of this project to our understanding of moated sites in Scotland has been in identifying the landowning families involved, and matching the archaeologically clear development of the site, from simple palisade to a grander moated site, with the return of absentee landowners to permanent residency.

The conjectural area enclosed by the Perceton moat (100 × 100 m) is not large in British or European terms, but is in comparison to the previously excavated Scottish sites mentioned in the Background section. However, it would seem that at Perceton the excavated area lay mainly within an open yard. It is probably unwise to stress the importance of any apparent difference in size without knowing what the enclosed area accounted for within each site. Presumably a smaller moat could surround a larger and more prestigious house with the yard located elsewhere.

³² McNeill and MacQueen (eds.), *op. cit.* in note 5, 431.

Moated sites were clearly status symbols, and were adopted by the wealthier members of society. They were constructed by all seigneurial sections of medieval society, whether secular or ecclesiastical; the majority enclosed structures, which might be termed manor houses. The phenomenon of the moated site also underlined the separateness and exclusive character of the lord's share of the wealth in the community. In Scotland, the crucial question remains the small number of moated sites in comparison with England and other parts of North Western Europe. Why are there only 120 or so sites? Was Scotland not as feudal as we believe? Or are they missing from the archaeological landscape because they developed from simple moated enclosures to castles, tower houses or modern farmsteads? The sheer number recorded in England and elsewhere suggest that they became fashionable with those of less wealth and social standing, and so that during the 13th and early 14th century, a period of population growth, even prosperous yeoman farmers were building them. Perhaps the absence of this emerging rural middle class is why Scotland does not contain the large numbers of moated sites evident elsewhere.

THE POST-MEDIEVAL MANSION AND GARDEN

At the very end of the medieval period another change of ownership resulted in Perceton being resurrected as the principal seat of the Barclay dynasty, which was very successful in expanding its financial interests and influence. A rise in status was again accompanied by the demolition of an aged residence and the construction of a new building, probably against the garden's standing south wall, with a formal garden stretching in front.

As throughout Perceton's history, marked changes in the archaeological remains reflected new ownership. Three types of medieval site were encountered, and the construction of each could be related to historically documented changes in tenure, from the earliest foundation of the feudal system. The sequence of stockaded estate centre, moated manor and then mansion is currently unique, at least in Scottish terms, but probably reflects our very partial knowledge of the feudal medieval landscape.

APPENDIX: SPECIALIST REPORTS

THE ARTEFACTS

By JULIE FRANKLIN

The pottery (Tab. 2)

In total 295 sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the site, all Scottish-made apart from one French sherd. Imported vessels are rare on Scottish rural sites, being generally restricted to ports, and to a lesser extent hinterland towns and high-status sites such as abbeys and castles. The local wares were similar to those found in the nearby burgh of Ayr.³³ Though a much smaller assemblage, it is nonetheless useful in one important respect: the site's radiocarbon dates provide rare independent dating.

³³ J. Franklin and D. W. Hall, *Pottery Report for Excavations in Ayr* (forthcoming).

TABLE 2
POTTERY FRAGMENTS BY PHASE

Fabric	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Unphased	Total
White Gritty Ware	120	53	12	24	209
Late Medieval Reduced Ware	6	59	4	17	86
Post-Medieval Wares			3		3
Total	126	112	19	41	298

Phase 1 (late 12th–late 13th century) The majority of the sherds (95% or 120 in number) were of Scottish White Gritty Ware. Found on an increasing number of West-coast sites, White Gritty Ware is no longer considered exclusively an East-coast fabric. It is likely that it was produced in the west, though a production site has yet to be identified. The sherds were quite varied, from white to pale pink and buff, some with an orange heat skin. Most of the sherds were small and abraded. Few were glazed though on several sherds this has clearly worn away. Jug shoulders and handles in particular were glazed, varying from pale green to olive green, occasionally amber. Only one sherd was decorated, presumably from a jug, with a vertical applied strip of pronounced triangular profile.

Most of the sherds appeared to be from jugs. Only one jar rim from this phase (Fig. 8) and two from the entire assemblage could be identified, compared to four jug rims. Both are the same simple everted shape, in the illustrated case slightly thickened. This differs from the standard East-coast squared jar rim but has parallels from medieval Ayr. Few body sherds bore the characteristic traces of sooting from use as cooking pots. Six sherds were of a reduced fabric, generally sandy or smooth and olive glazed. These sherds were either intrusive or marked the beginning of a Red and Grey Ware industry on the W. coast.

Phase 2 (early 14th–15th century) Late Medieval Reduced Ware in the form of large olive-green glazed jugs formed the largest part of the assemblage (53% or 59 in number). Generally the fabric was reduced to varying shades of grey, and ranged from sandy to relatively smooth, both with some mica content. The craftsmanship was generally poorer and vessels were fired at a lower temperature with resulting flaky surfaces. Only two sherds were decorated, again with applied strips, though these were not carefully executed.

White Gritty Ware sherds still accounted for a large proportion of the assemblage, though with a greater tendency towards pink firing clays. These sherds tended to be smaller and many were probably residual.

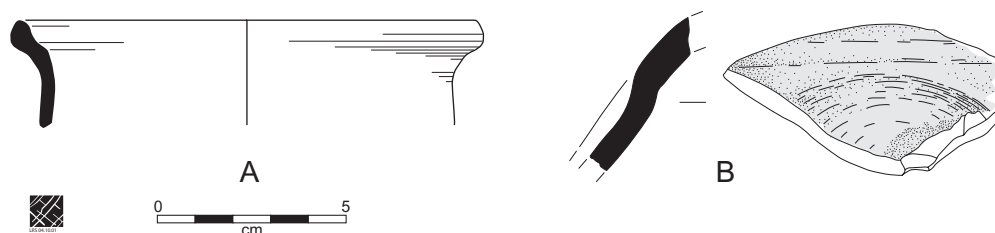


FIG. 8

Selected pottery. (A) White gritty jar rim, unglazed, [104] Phase 2; (B) Beauvais earthenware, [058] Phase 3. Amber lead glaze on ?exterior. Unknown and irregular form, speculative illustration.

Phase 3 (16th–17th century) A probably mid-16th-century sherd of French Beauvais pottery (identified by G. Haggarty and J. Lawson) from a vessel of unknown form was found in a

feature interpreted as the foundation of a Late-medieval or early post-medieval mansion, demolished in the 18th century. As it is the only imported sherd recovered from the excavation its presence suggests an increase in status, which corroborates the archaeological and historical evidence. An increasing number of Beauvais sherds have been found in Scotland in recent years, notably from nearby burghs Ayr and Dumbarton.³⁴ The most common form found is a platter or dish. The Perceton sherd is a much more unusual irregular form, not immediately identifiable.

Only three post-medieval sherds were recovered: two sherds of white salt-glazed stoneware and a fragment of tin-glazed earthenware. This is consistent with most of the area being used as gardens from the 17th century onwards.

The small finds

An iron whittle-tang knife from a pit (Fig. 9) was the only recognisable tool from the site. Traces of a leather scabbard, preserved by mineralisation, were visible in x-ray, though no details or decoration could be distinguished. Whittle-tangs (whereby the tang was narrower than the handle into which it fitted) were superseded by scale-tang knives (where the tang was the same width as the handle) during the medieval period. In London, scale-tangs were more common by the 15th century.³⁵ At Perceton the knife was associated with 13th-century pottery.

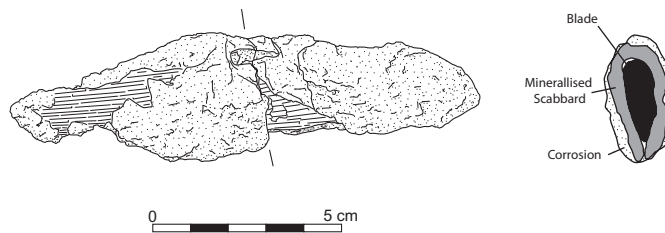


FIG. 9

Iron knife with mineralised scabbard, [52] Phase 1.

An iron object (not illustrated) was found in a probable disused corn-drying kiln (Cut 95, Phase 2). It appeared, in x-ray, to be thinner at one end and folded over. It was possibly a tool, or piece of a part-worked iron bar.

Other finds were of a structural nature: a large iron staple and three pieces of stone, which appeared to have been shaped for use as roof slates. Only one of these was holed, a piece of true slate (blue-grey with iron pyrites crystals), shaped with a rounded top end and a large square peg hole (Phase 2). Two further pieces, one of similar slate (Phase 1), one of a dark grey shale (Phase 1), are without peg holes and therefore may have had an alternative function, though they do have neatened and smoothed edges. The date range attributed to Phase 1 is an early context for stone roofing, particularly on a rural site. Roof slates have been occasionally found on medieval sites in Scotland but generally in urban areas, and from 14th-century or later contexts.³⁶ Evidence for earlier use is extremely

³⁴ Franklin and Hall, op. cit. in note 33; D. W. Hall and J. Franklin, 'The Pottery', in R. Coleman et al., *Four Excavations in Medieval Dumbarton* (forthcoming).

³⁵ J. Cowgill, M. de Neergaard and N. Griffiths, *Medieval Finds from Excavations in London. 1: Knives and Scabbards* (London, 1987).

³⁶ A. Cox, 'Backland activities in medieval Perth: excavations at Meal Vennel and Scott Street', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scotland*, 126 (1996), 733–821; A. Cox, 'The artefacts', in G. Brown and M. Roy, 'Excavations at 27–35 Panmure Street/72–8 Murraygate, Dundee', *Tayside Fife Archaeol. J.*, (2000), 53–8; B. Ford, 'Stone Objects', 147–50 in P. Holdsworth (ed.), *Excavations in the Medieval Burgh of Perth 1979–1981* (Edinburgh, 1987).

sparse but a 12th- to 13th-century example is known from St Andrews.³⁷ The first documented mention of a slated tenement in nearby Irvine dates to 1418–19.³⁸ Thatch or wooden shingles would have been the usual roofing materials and wooden buildings, such as those of Phase 1 at Perceton, were never likely to have been slated. However, Ayrshire is close to slate sources in the West Highlands and it is possible that slate was used to cover some kind of structure. Particularly, it could have been used for its fireproofing qualities in buildings close to dangerous sources of heat and sparks, such as a metalworking furnace, or indeed to cover a fuel store. One of which is thought to have been located close to the site during Phase 1.

The post-medieval finds Very few finds could be securely dated to later than the 16th century: a few pieces of bottle glass and three clay pipe stems. Again this is consistent with most of the site being used as gardens in the post-medieval period.

The wooden bowls

By JO DAWSON (*species identification by* MHAIRI HASTIE)

Three fragments of wooden bowl were recovered from a single context, interpreted as backfill within a disused corn-drying kiln (Cut 95, Phase 2; Fig. 10). The wood had been preserved as a result of carbonisation. Species identification revealed the rim sherd to be alder (*Alnus* sp.), while the base sherd and the remaining fragment were ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), suggesting a minimum of two bowls were represented. Both alder and ash are native species and would have been readily available.

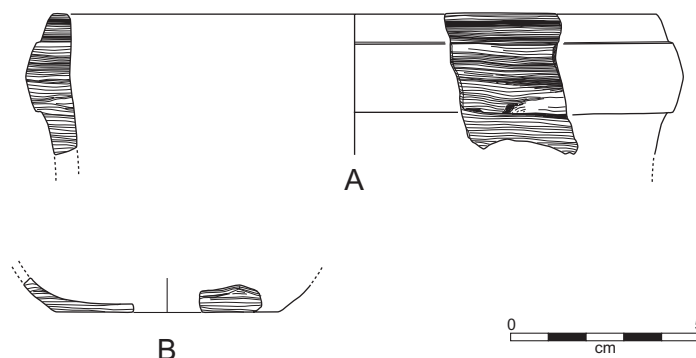


FIG. 10

Wooden vessel fragments, [94] Phase 2. (A) Alder; (B) Ash.

The grain pattern and orientation were examined and found to be consistent with the usual orientation of the lathe-turning axis, at right angles to the grain of the trunk.³⁹ The method used to produce lathe-turned bowls in the medieval period has been used up to the present.

The pottery from the feature dates the wooden bowls from early 14th to early 15th century. Ceramic vessels do not tend to be in the form of bowls during this period and the wooden vessels would have performed different functions. In a domestic context they would have been used for food preparation and tableware, whilst ceramic pots would have

³⁷ A. Cox, 'Miscellaneous objects', 88–9 in M. J. Rains and D. W. Hall (eds.), *Excavations in St Andrews 1980–89: A Decade of Archaeology in a Historic Scottish Burgh* (Glenrothes, 1997).

³⁸ A. T. Simpson and S. Stevenson, *Historic Irvine: The Archaeological Implications of Development* (Glasgow, 1980).

³⁹ J. Barber, 'Excavations on Iona, 1979', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scotland*, 111 (1981), 282–380.

been used for storing, pouring and cooking.⁴⁰ Wooden vessels would have been cheaper and easier to produce compared to ceramics. Therefore a larger number of these would be expected on a domestic site, but preservation conditions bias recovery firmly in favour of ceramics.

THE PLANT REMAINS

By MHAIRI HASTIE

Method

For environmental analysis soil samples were retained from all primary fills of pre-garden features, particularly from basal ditch sediments (up to 30 litres from each context), and from a representative sample of secondary deposits and garden features.

Fifty-eight samples were subjected to a system of flotation and wet sieving in a Siraf-style flotation tank. The floating debris was collected in a 250 µm sieve, and once dry, scanned using a binocular microscope. The majority of samples (47) contained small amounts of carbonised material including cereal grains, weed seeds and charcoal. Identifications were made with reference to the modern comparative collection of Headland Archaeology Ltd and seed atlases.⁴¹ Botanical nomenclature generally follows that of the *Flora Europea*.⁴²

Results

All botanical material recovered was preserved by charring. The results are summarised by phase in Table 3. The assemblage is typical of rural medieval sites with oat and barley the dominant cereal crops. The samples generally contained low concentrations of charred remains although some higher concentrations of oat and barley were present in specific features. Other economic species included low concentrations of the grains of bread/club wheat, flax seed, and possibly rye. In most cases there was no evidence to suggest that the remains were charred *in situ*, and the plant remains were not likely to be associated with the features from which they were recovered. Given the low frequency of plant material across the site any context related variations in plant species is difficult to interpret. Therefore the following discussion concentrates on broad differences in composition at the level of phase.

Phase 1 (12th- to 13th-century steward's farmstead) The largest concentrations of cereal grain and wild taxa were recovered from this phase. In absence of any obvious conflagration deposits the likely source of the charred material is from either domestic or small-scale crop processing. It is then likely to have been reworked and redeposited into many contexts.

Four contexts: the fills of palisade trench [180], linear feature [220], pits [270] and [55], contained higher concentrations of cereal grain. Interestingly these features were all at the edge of or outside the main enclosure. Recovery of cereal remains from these tends to suggest that crop processing was probably undertaken beyond the confines of the stockade.

⁴⁰ A. Crone, *The History of a Scottish Lowland Crannog: Excavations at Buiston, Ayrshire 1989–90* (Edinburgh, 2000).

⁴¹ G. Berggren, *Atlas of Seeds and Small Fruits of Northwest-European Plant Species with Morphological Descriptions: Part 2 Cyperaceae* (Stockholm, 1969); G. Berggren, *Atlas of Seeds and Small Fruits of Northwest-European Plant Species with Morphological Descriptions: Part 3 Salicaceae-Cruciferae* (Stockholm, 1981).

⁴² T. G. Tutin, V. H. Heywood, N. A. Burges, D. H. Valentine, S. M. Walters and D. A. Webb, *Flora Europaea* (Cambridge, 1960–80).

TABLE 3
THE PLANT REMAINS BY PHASE

Latin name	Plant part	Common name	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
<i>Wild Taxa</i>					
Corylus avellana L.	nut shell	hazel	+		+
Polygonum persicaria/lapathifolium L.	nutlet	persicaria/pale persicaria	44	5	
Polygonum spp.	nutlet	knotgrass	18	4	
Rumex spp.	nutlet	dock	13	8	
Rumex acetosella	nutlet	sheep's sorrel		1	
Chenopodiaceae indet.	nutlet	fat hen family	4		
Chenopodium album L.	nutlet	fat hen	2		
Spergula arvensis L.	seed	corn spurrey	14	14	
Stellaria media (L.) Vill.	seed	chickweed	3	14	
Ranunculus spp.	achene	buttercup	6	8	
Trifolium sp.	seed	clover/trefoil		1	
Raphanus raphanistrum L.	siliqua	charlock	1		
Brassica/Raphanus sp.	seed	mustard/charlock	3		
Vicia/Lathyrus sp.	seed	vetch/pea	2	1	
Viola sp.	seed	violet		2	
Galium aparine L.	seed	cleavers	15		
Stachys spp.	nutlet	woundwort	1	4	
Galeopsis sp.	nutlet	hemp-nettle		4	
Mentha sp.	nutlets	mint		2	
Crepis sp.	achene	hawk's beard	1		
Lapsana communis L.	achene	nipplewort	22	9	
Juncus spp.	seed	rush		57	
Gramineae indet.	caryopsis	grass family	27	4	
Carex spp.	achene	sedge	16	19	
Carex spp.	culm nodes	sedge	+		
Carex spp.	rhizome	sedge	1	1	
Straw	culm nodes	straw	++	+	
Monocotyledons	culm base	root/tuber fragments		+	
<i>Economic Species</i>					
Triticum aestivo-compactum L.	caryopsis	bread/club wheat	4	2	
Triticum sp.	caryopsis	wheat	3	1	
cf. Triticum sp.	caryopsis	wheat	1	1	
Triticum/Hordeum sp.	caryopsis	wheat/barley	1	1	
Hordeum vulgare	caryopsis	barley	436	8	4
cf. Hordeum vulgare	caryopsis	barley	6		
Hordeum vulgare (hulled)	caryopsis	hulled barley	88	10	
Hordeum vulgare (hulled - twisted)	caryopsis	hulled barley	1		
Hordeum vulgare (hulled - straight)	caryopsis	hulled barley		1	
Hordeum vulgare	rachis internode	barley	2	3	
Avena sp.	caryopsis	oat	1363	69	21
cf. Avena sp.	caryopsis	oat	21		
cf. Secale cereale	caryopsis	rye	2	1	
Cereal indet.	caryopsis	indeterminate	47	7	3
Linum usitatissimum L.	seed	flax	3	29	

Phase 2 (14th- to 15th-century moat) The quantity of plant material recovered from this phase was considerably less than that recovered for Phase 1, and probably reflects the lower number of archaeological features encountered.

One of the few concentrations of grain came from a well-stratified deposit within a sub-rectangular, clay-lined pit. The charred grain and associated weed seeds were directly overlain by a slump of burnt clay and charcoal [314], within which were preserved the impressions of a wattle structure. The pit, was cut into a slope and had very similar dimensions to previously uncovered pit kilns, for example those excavated at the medieval monastic site of Hoddom.⁴³ This, together with the clay-lining, collapsed wattle and daub superstructure and concentration of grain, all lead to the conclusion that this was probably the base of a corn-drying kiln. The flue would have extended to the south, where a distinct dip in subsoil was noted, but like the rest of the structure has since been removed. The seeds suggest it may also have been used for drying flax.

THE INDUSTRIAL WASTE

By E. PHOTOS-JONES

At Perceton, the industrial waste from metalworking activities was recovered in low concentrations from many contexts and all phases. Much of this material was thought to have been reworked or redeposited. However, an L-shaped slot [64] associated with the Phase 1 enclosure, contained a high concentration of industrial waste and was interpreted as a primary context. A single bag containing slag deriving from the fill was examined and three samples analysed. The texture, morphology, chemical and mineralogical composition of the three suggests they represent primary smelting slag. The waste derives from the smelting of local ores using charcoal, probably in a low shaft furnace. However, at Perceton the waste was found in association with much unburnt coal, not the fuel normally used in a bloomery. This must be interpreted as suggesting the slag within the fill represents a secondary deposit. Although it is almost certain that primary smelting could not have happened very far from the site, the remains here do not represent those of a metalworking furnace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Headland Archaeology Ltd would like to thank Andrew Mickel, Bob Fraser and Paddy Malone of Mactaggart and Mickel for assistance during fieldwork. Hugh McBrien of WoSAS offered useful comments and advice during the excavations, as did Professor G. Barrow following a presentation. Dr Tim Holden and Russel Coleman managed the project. Ross Murray, Jo Dawson, Jonathan Millar, Mhairi Hastie, Mike Middleton and Martin O'Hare carried out the fieldwork, under challenging February conditions. Gordon Barclay kindly provided information relating to his excavations at Upper Gothen. E. Photos-Jones is indebted to R. Ruiz-Nieto, SASAA, for IT support, and to D. Sneddon and R. Macdonald, Earth Sciences, Glasgow University, for technical support. Conservation work and X-rays were organised by Kim Dalland. Julie Franklin is grateful to George Haggarty and John Lawson for offering comments on the pottery.

⁴³ T. G. Holden, 'The botanical evidence', in C. Lowe, *Excavations at Hoddom, Dumfriesshire: An Enclosed Holy Place of the Late First Millennium AD* (forthcoming).