

THE EARLY NEOLITHIC LONGHOUSES AT LISMORE FIELDS, BUXTON: A DIGITAL LANDSCAPE MODELLING ANALYSIS

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SUMMARY

This paper applies a landscape modelling approach, based on the use of a Geographic Information System, to the positioning of the Early Neolithic timber longhouses at Lismore Fields, Buxton. By comparing the siting of the longhouses with both the physical and cultural landscape around them, and with other longhouse sites in Britain, it seeks to understand how the Early Neolithic people of the Peak District lived within their world.

INTRODUCTION

During 1985–6 Daryl Garton of the Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust excavated the remains, in the form of postholes and slots, of two Neolithic longhouses in the Lismore Fields area of Buxton (Garton 1991, 12). Radio carbon dating suggests that Building 1 dates from the first half of the fourth millennium BC and Building 2 from around the middle of the fourth millennium BC (Hedges *et al.* 1991, 287–8). Building 1 measured 15m by 5m and appears to have been divided into four roughly equal chambers via partitions running in from the sidewalls. Based upon internal layout and comparison with other longhouses entrances between the chambers were probably located along the centre of the building. The central partition appears more substantial than the others suggesting that the building might be interpreted as two successive structures of the same modular design, or as an initial 7.5m by 5m building which was later extended (Garton 1987, 251) (Fig. 1: 3D interpretation of Building 1). Building 2 has a similar plan to each of the halves of Building 1, further supporting this interpretation. One of the largest cereal assemblages from any earlier Neolithic site in England was found within the remains of Building 1 (Jones 2000), as well as remains of wild resources such as hazelnut shells, together with worked flint and earlier Neolithic pottery. These two buildings represent the only convincing earlier Neolithic longhouses found in the Peak District and two of the best preserved examples discovered in Britain as a whole.

Although found only in very small numbers, the study of longhouses is pivotal to understanding the nature of the British Early Neolithic. The domestication debate has dominated study of this period for the last two decades: did domesticated foodstuffs replace wild resources, and were people becoming permanently settled in one place from the earliest years of the Neolithic? Rowley-Conwy (2003) suggests that longhouses represent permanent habitations of settled farmers who relied on crops and herds for the mainstay of their diets. Conversely, Thomas (1996a) argues that the period saw a cultural rather than economic change where people continued to be mobile and used wild resources for their staple diets, but started to build monuments and used

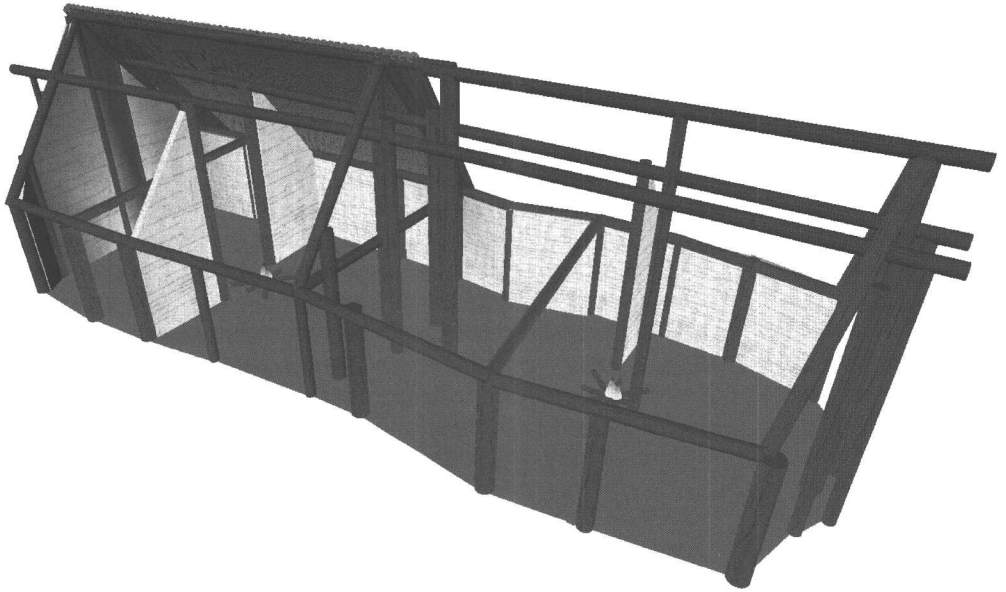


Fig. 1: 3D cut-away reconstruction of Lismore Fields Building 1, based upon this author's interpretation of a detailed plan supplied by Daryl Garton.

domesticated foodstuffs as a means of demonstrating identity and status. For Thomas (*ibid.*) the longhouse is either a 'special' place with spiritual significance, a place to hold ceremonies and mark important events, or a storage and distribution centre for domesticated foodstuffs used in ceremonies, or indeed, a combination of all of these. Therefore, understanding the nature of the Lismore Fields longhouses would allow a better understanding of how people lived and regarded their world around 3600 BC in the Peak District.

The typical Early Neolithic longhouse was a wooden structure tending to a minimum of 5m long, had a roof and dated from the first half of the fourth millennium BC. In mainland Britain there are around twenty-five known examples (Fig. 2; Table 1). With virtually no surviving floor levels, layout interpretation is often deduced from the lower remains of postholes, wall trenches and possible fire pits. Based around a framework of timber uprights sunken deeply into the ground, often steadied by packing stones, the walls are defined by rows of lesser postholes suggesting a wattle and daub construction (Fig. 1 shows this interpretation in a 3D reconstruction of Lismore Fields Building 1). Infrequent wall base slots might represent planked walls. End wall layouts suggest that the roofs were generally gable-ended and supported by longitudinal purlins. Based upon the strength of the conflagration that destroyed it, the roof at Claish Farm was probably of thatch (Barclay *et al.* 2002, 98), and there is no reason to assume that other longhouses were not also thatched. There is often a difficulty in identifying entrances due to the lack of surviving floors. The majority of the sites have been interpreted as having had internal partitions, often incorporating the uprights that supported the roof.

There are several reasons why so few longhouses are known. Timber construction meant that they were fragile and several, such as Lismore Fields were only discovered

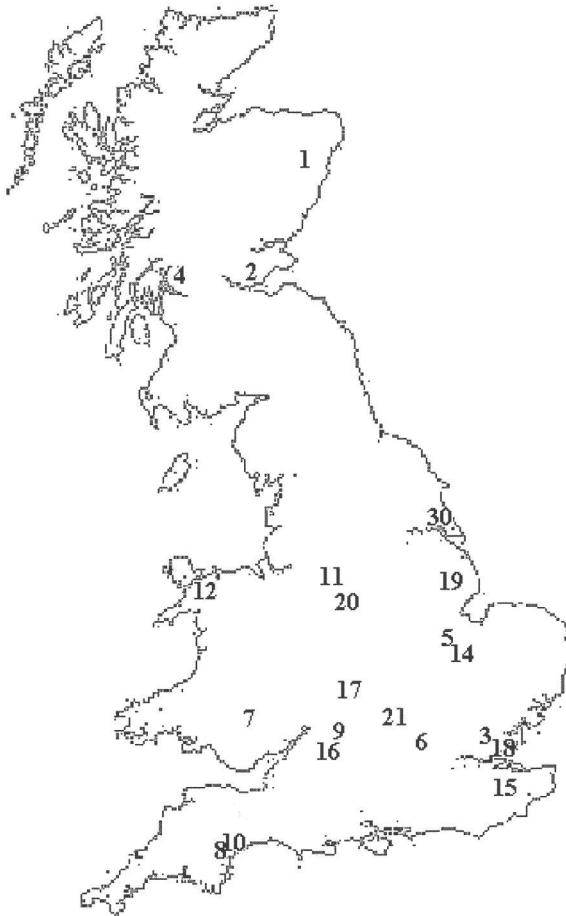


Fig. 2: Locations of known Early Neolithic longhouses in mainland Britain; see Table 1 for descriptions.

Name	Location	Probable date	References
Balbridie (Fig. 2: 1)	1km south of River Dee, Grampian region of Scotland	3900BC–3500BC	Barclay <i>et al.</i> 2002 Fairweather & Ralston 1993 Ralston 1982.
Balfarg Riding School Structure 2 (Fig.2: 2)	Fife, Scotland	Early Neolithic	Barclay & Russell-White 1993 Barclay 1996 Barclay 2002
Chigborough (Fig. 2: 3)	Maldon, Essex	Early Neolithic based on ceramic types	Adkins & Adkins 1991 Darvill 1996 Brown 1997

Name	Location	Probable date	References
Claish Farm (Fig. 2: 4)	On flood plain of the River Teith, near Callander, Stirling, Scotland	3800BC–3500BC	Barclay <i>et al.</i> 2002 Barclay 2002
Etton (Fig. 2: 5)	Near Maxey, Cambridgeshire	Early Neolithic by association	Pryor 1988; 2003 Darvill 1996
Gorhambury (Fig. 2: 6)	Hertfordshire	3696BC–3389BC	Neal <i>et al.</i> 1990 Darvill 1996
Gwernvale (Fig. 2: 7)	Black Mountains, Wales	c. 3100BC	Britnell & Savory 1984 Darvill 1996
Haldon (Fig. 2: 8)	Devon	Dating difficult — probably later early Neolithic by association	Willock 1936; 1937 Piggott 1954 Griffith 1995 Darvill 1996
Hazelton North (Fig. 2: 9)	Gloucestershire	3780BC–33690BC	Saville 1990 Darvill 1996
Hembury (Fig. 2: 10)	Devon	Early Neolithic by association	Liddell 1931 Piggott 1954 Darvill 1996
Lismore Fields 1 & 2 (Fig. 2: 11)	Buxton, Derbyshire, England	LF1: 3800BC–3650BC LF2: 3650BC–3350BC	Darvill 1996 Garton 1987; 1991
Llandegai 1 (Fig. 2: 12)	Near Bangor, Wales	4000BC–3600BC	Lynch & Musson 2004 Darvill 1996 Gwenydd Archaeological Trust 2005
Llandegai 2 (Fig. 2: 12)	Near Bangor, Wales	Early Neolithic based upon ceramic types	Gwenydd Archaeological Trust 2005
Mill Street (Fig. 2: 13)	Driffield, Humberside.	Later early–Neolithic	Dent (no date) Darvill 1996
Padholm Road (Fig. 2: 14)	Fengate, Peterborough, England.	3140BC–2920BC	Pryor 1974; 2001; 2003 Darvill 1996
Pilgrim's Way (Fig. 2: 15)	Medway Valley, Kent, England	Early Neolithic based on comparison	Hayden & Stafford forthcoming
Sale's Lot (Fig. 2: 16)	Gloucestershire	Early Neolithic based on relationship with barrow	O'Neil 1966 Darvill 1982; 1987; 1996; 2004
Stretton-on-Fosse 5 (Fig. 2: 17)	Warwickshire	Dating uncertain, probably later early–Neolithic by association	Gardiner <i>et al.</i> 1980 Darvill 1996
The Stumble (Fig. 2: 18)	Maldon, Essex.	Later early Neolithic.	Wilkinson & Murphy 1985; 1986; 1987 Darvill 1996
Tatershall Thorpe (Fig. 2: 19)	Lincolnshire.	4782BC–4609BC	Chowne <i>et al.</i> 1993 Darvill 1996

Name	Location	Probable date	References
Warren Field (Fig. 2: 1)	1km north of River Dee, Grampian region of Scotland	3800BC–3700BC	
White Horse Stone (Fig. 2: 15)	Medway Valley, Kent, England	3980BC–3630BC	OAU 1999; 2000 Hayden & Stafford forthcoming
Willington –A (Fig. 2: 20)	Derbyshire	Early Neolithic	Wheeler 1972; 1979 Vine 1982 Darvill 1996
Yarnton (Fig. 2: 21)	Thames Valley, near Oxford, England	3950BC–3640BC	Hey 2001

Table 1: Summary of possible longhouses of early Neolithic Britain.

when searching for other types of site. Others, such as Gwernvale (Britnell and Savory 1984) and Hazelton North (Saville 1990) were covered by later monuments. Megaw and Simpson (1979, 86) suggest that many are buried under deep river valley alluvium. Although this was the case at White Horse Stone, Thomas (1996b, 2) disagrees, citing the Raunds Project where wide scale excavation found tombs but no longhouses. In Ireland, where larger areas are excavated, more longhouses have been found (Rowley-Conwy 2003, 125) and it does seem to be the case that in north-west Wales Jane Kenney's large excavations are turning up more examples (Kenney *pers. com.*). Nonetheless, one cannot escape from the possibility that they have been found in such small numbers largely because they were only built in small numbers; Neolithic pits, containing structured deposits, are even less substantial yet have been found in great numbers.

THE STUDY

Five case study areas were chosen to compare with the Lismore Fields landscape. These contained the most convincing examples of longhouses (Table 1) and gave a relatively good coverage of the whole of Britain. The project used a landscape archaeology approach based around a bespoke Geographical Information System (GIS) to model the case studies. Each landscape was examined to determine the attributes of its physical characteristics, and to compare these to the siting of the longhouse(s) to attempt an understanding of why particular locations were chosen. The longhouses' positions were also compared to those of roughly contemporary man-made features around them to identify the relationships and differences between the longhouses and the cultural landscape. It is unfortunate that many of the surrounding monuments used in the case studies have not been precisely dated and so may not be exactly contemporary. Once the analysis was complete a number of common themes between the location of Lismore Fields and other longhouse sites were examined to shed further light on the Early Neolithic of the Peak District and other areas where longhouses have been found.

INTERPRETATION

Hodder (1994, 77), Whittle (1997, 20) and Bradley (1998, 36; 2003, 220) all see long barrows originating from the remembrance of ancestors via the decaying remains of continental Linearbandkeramik (LBK) longhouses, therefore, might British longhouses also represent a remembrance of ancestors? This is problematic if the bulk of the population were descended from the Mesolithic occupants of Britain rather than LBK immigrants (as was once thought). However, perhaps the native population were attempting to build a new history to declare they were Neolithic and identify themselves with a small number of continental travellers they had contact with. This phenomenon might be viewed in much the same way as elements of the native population of early Roman Britain building Roman style villas to create new identities for themselves (Millet 1990, 82). Therefore, if long barrows were adopted from the continental practice of ancestral remembrance to proclaim identity, then the Lismore Fields longhouses could also have fulfilled this role as a reflection of either the LBK longhouses or of the contemporary, but fewer in number, post-LBK continental longhouses. That British longhouses are sometimes placed on sites used in the past for occupation adds further weight to them having been constructed in part in remembrance of ancestors just as long barrows might have been.

However, the Lismore Fields longhouses had a different relationship with the landscape to that of the long barrows. Lismore Fields is on the western edge of a wide limestone plateau but the nearest long barrows are grouped over 4km to the east and further from the edges of the plateau (Fig. 3). At some case study sites, such as White Horse Stone, the longhouse is within a few hundred metres of the nearest long barrow which is part of a tight grouping, and at others, such as Balbridie, the barrows are dispersed over a larger area and the longhouse is more distant, but in all cases the longhouse is at or beyond the edge of the cluster of barrows. The Lismore Fields longhouses were around 250m from the River Wye, much nearer than the study area's average distance to a watercourse of 490m. The long barrows to the east of Lismore Fields are each closer to the nearest watercourse than the average for the area, however they tend to be near minor watercourses and access to these is often via much steeper ground. This pattern is reflected in a number of the case studies, for instance Yarnnton, Llandegai, Claish Farm, and Balbridie. Lismore Fields is sited at an elevation of 300m OD but the area's long barrows are all at a greater elevation, ranging from around 320m up to 435m with an average around 360m. In the other case studies the majority of long barrows also follow this trend of being sited on higher ground than the longhouses. It would appear that the builders had no desire to make the Lismore Fields longhouses appear prominent in the landscape. A suggestion further supported when their view-sheds are compared to those of some of the surrounding barrows. Not only do the barrows frequently have wider and longer views than the longhouse site, but there is also intervisibility between several of them. Only one, Five Wells, might have had a direct sight line to Lismore Fields but the distance is such that it is doubtful that this was intentional. Intervisibility between longhouses and long barrows is also limited in other case studies.

These differences in situation might suggest that although remembrance of the ancestors may have had an influence upon the longhouses, it was not the primary reason for construction in the way that it might have been with long barrows. Furthermore, the

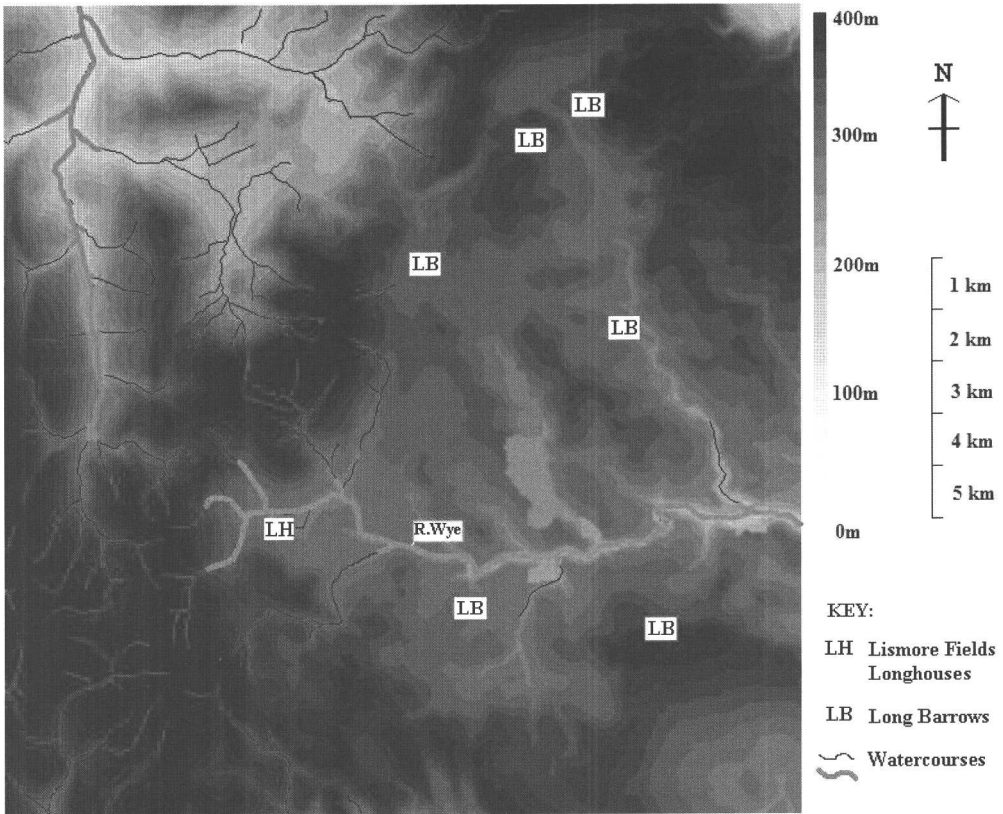


Fig. 3: The case study area around Lismore Fields. Topographical data: © Crown Copyright/database right 2005. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service.

finds from the longhouses rarely contain human remains, although bone survival at Lismore Fields was very poor (Garton 1991, 15). As longhouses and long barrows each appear to have different positional characteristics and contain a different array of material culture, it does not seem that longhouses and long barrows were interchangeable as 'special' places.

After barrows, causewayed enclosures are the second most numerous surviving type of major earthwork from the British early Neolithic but are not found in the Peak District, the closest being near Lichfield. In her work on competitive feasting Cross (2003, 211) suggests that longhouses served the same function as causewayed enclosures, that of housing ritual feasting, based on the similarity in status foodstuff remains found at each, and on the apparent mutually exclusive distribution of the two structures (*ibid*). The landscape position of the two site types does appear to show similarities: Oswald *et al.* (2001, 91) describe a valley floor sub-class of causewayed enclosure that are found very near to either the largest river in the area or to a confluence with that river. The Lismore Fields longhouses are only 90m from a stream and 250m from the River Wye, much nearer than the area's average. The same is true of the other case study longhouses: all are nearer to a major watercourse than the average

proximity to water in their areas: White Horse Stone and Pilgrim's Way are near the Medway, Claish Farm is near the Teith, Balbridie and Warren Field are near the Dee and Yarnton is near the Thames. Llandegai is not near a major river, but overlooks the Menai Straits. Riverine causewayed enclosures also tend to occupy lower ground adjacent to high ground (*ibid*, 95). This is certainly true of the Lismore Fields location at an elevation of 300m OD, compared to an average for the study area of 350m, and close to the gritstone hills that surround the limestone plateau and rise up to 450m OD. Again, this trend can be found at many of the other case study sites where the longhouses were consistently placed on ground that is below the average elevation for the area but very close to some of the highest ground. The causewayed enclosures are often oriented toward the valley rather than wider vistas (*ibid*, 97) and the focus can often be in an upstream direction (*ibid*, 96). Both of these characteristics are true of Lismore Fields: positioning the longhouses only a few hundred metres away could have provided much better views of the wider landscape, but instead they were built in an area of lower visibility where the main views of the River Wye were upstream. Several causewayed enclosures are also sited on the interfaces of ecological zones, just as Lismore Fields is near the interface between the limestone plateau and gritstone hills, and these trends were also displayed in the other longhouse case study sites.

Do these similarities mean the two types of structure served a common purpose? Cross's suggestion that they are mutually exclusive is questionable. The White Horse Stone, Llandegai, Chelmer and Padholm Road longhouse sites all have causewayed enclosures relatively nearby (Oswald *et al.* 2001, 80). Some causewayed enclosures have timber buildings within them although lack of relationship between earthworks and building make assessing contemporaneity difficult. Scale is also a problem: even for quite large numbers of people the causewayed enclosure could be an inclusive structure, but the longhouse was comparatively exclusive, providing limited internal space, suggesting that different social practices were carried out at each. Cross (2003, 211) counters this argument by proposing that longhouses suited lineage groups with tight kinships and that causewayed enclosures suited those with looser kinships. Cross's association of longhouses and causewayed enclosures based upon the existence of status foodstuffs at both, such as the cereal assemblage at Lismore Fields, only holds true if those foodstuffs were indeed regarded as status items. Rowley-Conwy (2003, 122; 2004, 90; Jones and Rowley-Conwy, forthcoming) suggests the evidence for cereal and other domesticates being associated with special places is not as straightforward as thought by some (e.g. Thomas 1999, 62–88; Richmond 1999, 35). Perhaps it is the case that these two kinds of site, longhouse and causewayed enclosure, have similar positional characteristics not because they served the exact same purpose but because they were both built by people who viewed, used and moved through the landscape in a similar way. That longhouses and riverine causewayed enclosures were close to relatively major watercourses suggests these watercourses represented key corridors through the landscape, either via simple craft or just as navigational aids through dense Early Neolithic forests. The importance of rivers is further shown when the orientation of longhouses is examined. If occupied during the winter one might expect longhouses to be oriented east-west, as many were in Ireland (Cooney 2000, 62) and as was Lismore Fields 1, to allow maximum warming by the sun on their long axes. But the Lismore Fields longhouses are also aligned roughly parallel to the River Wye and to the small

stream to the south-east. This similarity between longhouse alignment and that of the local river or river valley is found at many of the other case studies and only one other is also aligned east-west. This was not an attempt to respect riverside contours because at some examples, such as Lismore Fields, the slope is unnoticeable and at others, Llandegai 2 and White Horse Stone, it appears that the builders had to construct a terrace to achieve these alignments.

As outlined above, the positioning of longhouses in an area of low lying land very close to an area of significantly higher ground, provided varied ecologies and resources within easy reach of the longhouse. Summer uplands would have been ideal grazing for both domesticated cattle and sheep, and for hunted animals such as deer. Higher ground in several of the case studies may have had less tree cover in places, making it good for summer pasture and the growth of wild plants which would have attracted grazing animals. In winter denser forest cover on the lower ground would have offered more shelter. Despite the continuing argument concerning the extent to which the Early Neolithic people relied on domesticated crops, it is accepted that some domesticates were grown and that some wild resources were used. Growing cereal would have required a period of sedentism for at least part of the group while crops were tended. A point near to the area's major watercourse and with the best access to both lower and higher ground would seem ideal for this. No remains of field boundaries or ploughing have been found around longhouses, but for small scale cultivation ploughing is not needed and hedges could have been used as field boundaries (Robinson 2000, 89). Indeed, some pollen diagrams show a rise in hawthorn, sloe and hazel at this time (Gibson 2003, 139). Furthermore, cereal grain is not easily transported, thus it seems probable that the relatively large amount of cereal found at the Lismore Fields longhouses was grown reasonably nearby. This does not necessarily mean, however, that longhouses were permanently occupied farmhouses, the drainage immediately around Lismore Fields may have been poor (Garton 1991, 13) and thus not ideal for winter use.

Even if domesticates were not grown at Lismore Fields, its position would still have been ideal for a group operating partial 'tethered' mobility. The early British Neolithic may have seen, at least among some groups, cyclical return to one or more places, either based upon seasonal or social time (Whittle 1997; Pollard 1999). The main group itself may have broken up into subgroups, one of which could have stayed at the 'tethering site', while others would have moved out into the landscape to collect resources or to tend animals. There is little evidence for how long the 'tethering site' would have been occupied at each visit, it may have been anything from a season to a generation; therefore this way of living within the landscape does not easily fit into explanations of the Neolithic as either strictly sedentary or strictly mobile.

As an occupied 'tethering site' the Lismore Fields longhouses would have fulfilled a number of functions. They would have provided shelter for those who did not move out to satellite camps and could have provided storage for the foodstuffs that were grown either on site or brought back from the wider landscape. A similar system of base camp and satellite sites is postulated for the later Mesolithic (Young 2000) without the need for longhouses, or other monuments, to form a 'tethering' point. This suggests something had changed in the Neolithic use of landscape. This may have been crop growing, either as special status foodstuffs or as staples, at the 'tethering site'. It would

seem logical to reuse the same area each season rather than clearing new areas. Although there have been arguments against this on grounds of soil degradation, non-intensive forms of agriculture would not have damaged the soil rapidly (Jones 2000, 83). Longhouses might also have been built to mark sites or house ceremonies of aggregation: either for sub-groups coming together to re-form the main group, or for visits from outsider groups. Space within a longhouse was linear in nature and divided by internal walls, suggesting fewer people could have attended ceremonies held there than for instance at causewayed enclosures, and that there may have been an element of ranking based upon where each individual could position themselves within the longhouse. Therefore, as Cross (2003, 211) suggests, the longhouse might have housed most often the reuniting of a single group or extended family, rather than have been a meeting point for different groups.

Later Mesolithic aggregation probably took place in late summer and early autumn (Spikins 2000, 110). It is not unreasonable to suggest that social practice in the Early Neolithic would have maintained many later Mesolithic traditions even if the economic basis differed to some extent. Indeed, evidence of Mesolithic activity was found at Lismore Fields (Garton 1987, 250). That the remains of some foodstuffs found at longhouses tends to suggest late summer and early autumn occupation adds further weight to this group aggregation model. However, one should note Rowley-Conwy's (2004, 90) caution in viewing foodstuff remains in this way: prominent markers of autumn, e.g. hazelnut shells, often survive better.

An alternative, or additional, theory, to the 'tethering site' explanation for the positioning of longhouses, is that of a transitional or transformative place. Lismore Fields, located on the interface between low and high ground and between different ecologies, is also near to a river which offered easier passage between these different areas. The longhouses therefore may have been located to mark boundaries between different worlds, both in terms of the physical landscape and cultural meaning. The interfaces between low and high ground were seen as spiritually and socially important in many past societies (Bradley 2000, 26). An ethnographic parallel might be drawn from the Kets of western Siberia (Zvelebil 2003) who followed rivers as a means of travelling across the landscape. Their belief system involved a three layered universe: the underworld (sea), the earth (lowland) and the sky (highland), all linked by a cosmic river just as various parts of the landscape are linked by a physical river. Transitional places between these worlds were seen as liminal and dangerous places of transformation, sometimes marked by shrines and ceremonies to allow safe movement across thresholds. The Zafimaniry of Madagascar revere high ground as a special place due to the views it provides (Bloch 1995); as with the British Neolithic, much time is spent in dense forest so they associate clarity of vision with clarity of mind and health. In the British Neolithic, the position of several longhouses suggests they were in pre-eminent locations for rites to have been held as people left the lowlands and started the climb upwards towards the heavens. The importance of these sites might have been further heightened by folk histories and traditions dating back to the later Mesolithic when a seasonal round was enacted between lowlands and highlands. Young (2000, 189) suggests that Mesolithic late summer residential base camps were actually situated on lower parts of the uplands allowing easier access to satellite camps via minor rivers and

streams flowing out of the surrounding high ground. The importance of this type of location may have been carried forward into the Neolithic marking these sites as special places even if mobility models had changed; indeed, Thomas (1999, 223) thinks that mobility patterns with aspects not dissimilar to those of the Mesolithic may still have been in place during the time of longhouses. A tradition of remembering places of ancestral importance is demonstrated at Hazelton North (Gardiner 2003, 106) and Gwernvale (Britnell and Savory 1984), where longhouses were built upon previous Mesolithic occupation sites and, later, long barrows were built over the longhouse sites. Indeed, the placing of many longhouses on the edge of barrow groups might further support the suggestion that these structures were placed in liminal locations between worlds, in this case perhaps between the worlds of the living (houses) and the ancestors (tombs).

CONCLUSION

It would thus appear that longhouses fit both the mobile hunter-gatherer or the settled farmer models equally well. Perhaps this demonstrates that the wrong question is being asked and that it was not a choice between one form of lifestyle or the other, but that people were selecting aspects of both as it suited them. Thus, the Lismore Fields longhouses did, in part, represent a settlement area where people could find shelter while they grew and tended crops, and, indeed, some people probably stayed there during the winter months to guard the store of cereal grain which would be needed for next year's planting. These people, possibly the elderly and women with children, would have regarded the Lismore Fields longhouses as their home, while others within the group would spend little time at the longhouse, instead travelling out into, and around, the wider landscape of the Peak District. Some would have moved domesticated animals between grazing areas: the limestone plateau in the winter and the gritstone hills in the summer, and others would have hunted wild animals such as deer. On their return to Lismore Fields there would have been ceremonies performed to re-integrate them back into the group and stress the roles held by each; some of the meat they brought back would have been consumed in feasting as would some of the domesticated foodstuffs grown around Lismore Fields. Grain might even have been used to brew ale for these occasions (Dinley and Dinley 2000). These aggregations would have conferred a special status upon the longhouses and made them a symbol of the group coming together and being reborn each year. That the longhouses might have been located at a place used by the group's ancestors would have further emphasised the site's importance to the people's identity and history in the changing times of the Early Neolithic.

The River Wye would have been an important route way across this part of the Peak and up into the hills, and would have attracted people from other areas for whom the longhouse would also have had meaning. These people would have travelled to the area to trade, exchange news, make marital commitments and reinforce loyalties and social relationships with the Lismore Fields group. Moving upstream from the east, outsiders would have passed the long barrows which emphasised the Lismore Fields group's claim on the land by demonstrating their ancestors were buried there. On reaching

the longhouses they would have found major structures, further emphasising their owner's claim on the land, and marking the place where the socially dangerous meeting ceremonies took place.

The Lismore Fields longhouses demonstrate a sophisticated lifestyle in the Early Neolithic which made use of both domesticated and wild resources, and allowed a complex social dynamic. It is probable that the longhouses did not have a single meaning, but rather meant different things to different people depending upon context. They provided shelter, storage, a ceremonial centre, a link with the ancestors and a mark of identity. And perhaps, most of all, they provided an *axis mundi* that allowed people to position themselves within their world.

NOTES

Recent discoveries

Two more longhouses have been discovered since the research for this paper was completed. The first is a further example in north Wales, excavated by Jane Kenney of the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, at the Parc Cybi site, Holyhead. The other is another large Scottish longhouse at Lockerbie Academy, Dumfries and Galloway, excavated by CFA Archaeology.

Unlikely longhouses

Darvill (1996) lists a number of potential longhouses that are omitted from the above table due to lack of size or to the unconvincing layout of the remains: Chew Valley (Rahtz & Greenfield 1977), Carn Brea (Mercer 1981; 2003), Crickley Hill (Dixon 1988), Kemp Knowe (Mortimer 1905; Piggott 1935; 1954), Eaton Heath (Wainwright & Donaldson 1972; Wainwright 1973) and Windmill Hill (Smith 1965).

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