VIII

The Early Medieval Settlement at Green Shiel, Northumberland

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THE site which is the subject of this paper is visited by only the more intrepid of Holy Island's numerous visitors, among whom we were happy to include a party from this Society in 1988. However, in many ways it is a far more appropriate place of pilgrimage for students of Anglo-Saxon Northumbria than the remains of the later medieval priory by Holy Island village, which has effectively obliterated the site of the famous monastery of St. Aidan and St. Cuthbert. Unlike the standing priory ruins, the stone buildings at Green Shiel are genuine survivals of the early medieval period, and this fact alone lends them considerable importance, for only a handful of sites of this era are known from Northern England. The state of preservation of the site is also exceptional; in addition to the structures themselves, bone and metal objects survive in good condition, and this is also unusual. The current programme of excavations offers considerable insight into what is otherwise a rather barren archaeological picture and this paper sets out the major results of the excavations to date in the hope that their publication will attract debate and comment, and encourage the search for new sites and finds.

THE DISCOVERY OF GREEN SHIEL

Although the importance of the site has only recently been recognized, its existence has been known for some time. In the middle of the last century the then principal landowner of Holy Island drew attention, in a short note, to the discovery of two Anglo-Saxon stycas, of King Aethelred of Northumbria (*c.* A.D. 841–49) and Archbishop Wigmund of York (*c.* A.D. 837–54) close to a group of buildings in the dune area (Selby, 1849). According to his account, the site had apparently been recently uncovered by strong, easterly winds. The coins and buildings were found in the course of construction of a "railway", presumably the waggonway from the limekilns in the dunes to the limestone cliffs and quarries on the north coast. Selby states that the group of buildings "covered an area 312 feet in length from east to the west and 341 feet in width from north to south". He located them "near to that part of Holy Island where the links and sandhills, called the Snook, are united to the enclosed and cultivated part of the island". The buildings were used as a quarry for stones for the waggonway.

Selby made a formal connection between these buildings and the coins, although the latter were found near another building, "about sixty yards from the southern end of these foundations, and on the top of the quarry from whence the stones forming the same appear to have been procured".

This brief notice was insufficient to maintain interest in the site and it appears to have been forgotten about. The published note was, however, included in a bibliography of Holy Island (Sowerbutts 1966) and thus brought to the attention of one of us (DOS) as a result of our prior involvement with excavation on the island. In 1980 during a general survey of archaeology on Holy Island the present ruins were located.

Before excavation the buildings were visible as a series of low, stony, grassy mounds. The site corresponds in its measurements, its proximity to a waggonway, and its ruinous condition, with Selby's description. Its location however is coastal and it is at some distance from the present and nineteenth-century area of farmland on the island, rather than at its junction with the dune area. It is possible that

Fig. 1. General view of Green Shiel.

Selby's account was not actually based on first-hand observation, as there is some dispute about the actual date of the discovery: in the published report he cites the date as June 1845, but a shorter, manuscript note of it which refers to the find "in the past week" (NRO 683/10/116) is dated 1848. It seems very unlikely that two such complexes exist in the dunes and we believe that notwithstanding this anomaly the two sites are one and the same. The building at which the coins themselves were found has not yet been located; this is presumably now covered again by the dunes.

The excavation at Green Shiel is part of a long-term programme of fieldwork and research into the settlement history of Holy Island from the earliest times and brief accounts of it have already appeared in interim reports on this work (Beavitt, O'Sullivan and Young, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988).

THE SITE IN ITS SETTING (fig. 1)

The building complex at Green Shiel is close to the North Shore of Holy Island (NU 125 438). It lies immediately to the south of the stony storm beach, from which it is separated by a band of dunes, occupying part of an open grass-covered plain known as the Green Shiel. The Shiel is bounded to the south and west by bands of high dune. At present it seems remote from settlement and economic activity on the island, but this appearance is misleading: there is evidence that both fishing and farming were practised in the immediate vicinity in former

times. Although there is no harbour or landing stage, net-fishing was in fact carried out along the North Shore until quite recently (Cartwright and Cartwright 1976, 94). It is only the decline in the overall size of the fishing fleet which has concentrated modern activity on the other side of the island. The shore is still exploited for casual resources: it is regularly searched for driftwood, and although wave action is now too vigorous to permit the growth or collection of the more palatable shellfish, there is some evidence that this has not always been the case. Study of the marine molluscs from the site has indicated that the shoreline was probably considerably calmer during the period of occupation (Walsh 1988, 33–36).

There is abundant visible evidence that the area of arable land on the island was once much more extensive. Extensive areas of broad rig and furrow, of the type usually dated to the middle ages, are visible from the air. The full extent of this cannot be mapped exactly, as the spread of dunes conceals its real boundaries. However, environmental sampling by Walsh in the summer of 1990 ascertained that it probably runs right up to the edge of the boulder clay which forms a shallow cliff at the south east corner of Green Shiel.

Excavation has demonstrated that the site itself lies on a fairly deep (<2·00 metres) deposit of wind-blown sand. It is quite possible that this in turn covers an earlier embayment or actual beach deposit, but this is clearly a much more ancient feature. When the buildings were constructed they were close to, but not on, the contemporary beach.

The history of development of the dune area cannot yet be plotted in detail, but it is probable that a cyclical process of successive coverings and exposures may have operated until the present formation was more or less stabilized with the encouragement of marram grass cover this century. This process has consequences both for the site itself and its environs. As excavation indeed suggests, the volume of deposit associated with a structure is no guide to the state of preservation of its archaeological levels, as these may have been subjected to both exposure and erosion before subsequent reburial. On a macro scale, the extent of the dune area itself has probably varied considerably: if the visible extent of rig and furrow in the dunes is any guide, then the island has lost about a third of its area of arable at some time within the last millennium. The enclosure award map of 1792 indicates an area of farmland comparable with the present, but we are not yet in a position to date the encroachment more precisely. We do know however, that during the occupancy of Green Shiel the area of arable probably extended right up to the margins of the site.

All of this suggests that the site of the buildings was carefully chosen. Land which could be used for arable purposes was avoided, but the little settlement was well positioned, close to both farmland and the sea. Far from representing a period of minimal activity on the island, it would be more appropriate to view the period of occupancy of the site as a time when there was probably maximum exploitation of agricultural resources: and this has important implications, not only for the history of the island, but for the whole region. Whether the secluded location had other advantages in troubled times remains a matter for speculation.

THE SURVIVING REMAINS

As Fig. 2 indicates, the two stony banks which traverse the shiel on its eastern and western sides are modern features. These are the remains of the nineteenth-century waggonways which connect the north coast of the island with the limekilns on the edge of the dunes. On the north side of the site the high dunes appear to cover an earlier, enclosing bank. This may prove to be a sea wall or breakwater. No boundary has been identified on the southern, landward side. The group of buildings is roughly cross-shaped. All of the clearly-defined structures are aligned east–west or north–south. Before total excavation it is not possible to be absolutely certain of the precise number of buildings, but there are at least five

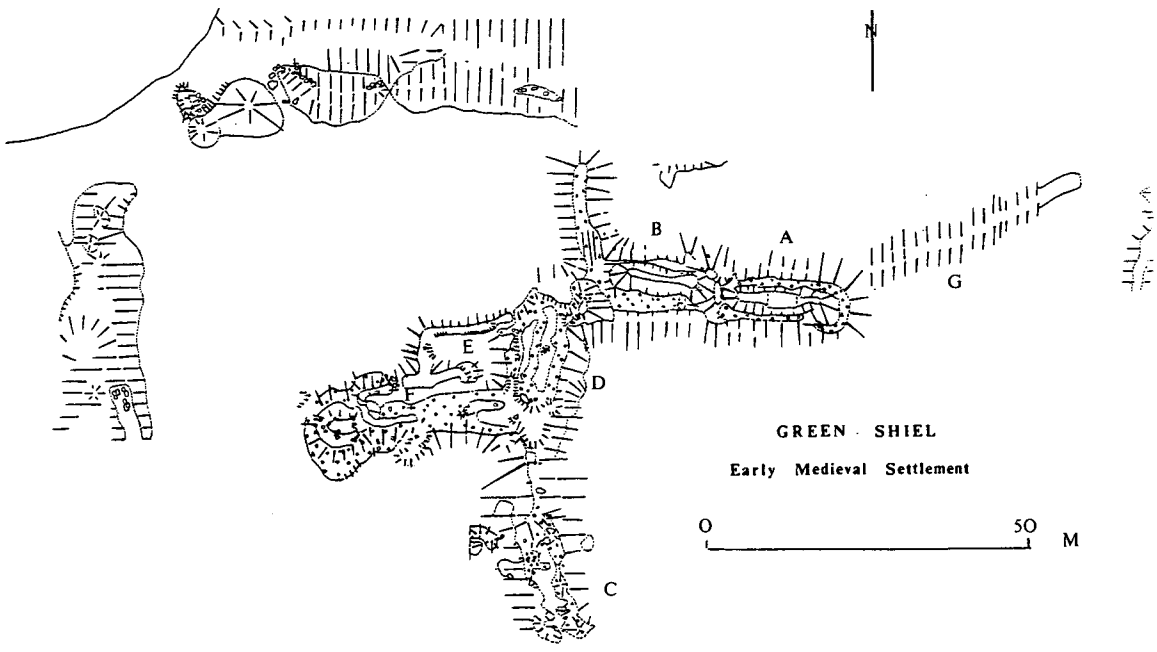

Fig. 2. Plan of surviving remains at Green Shiel, showing excavated areas.

long rectangular structures and a number of linking walls. The three most obvious were those at A, B and C. B and C have been fully, and A partially excavated, and are therefore described in some detail below. In the central area there is much collapsed stone, but one building at D, measuring 20 m × 7 m and orientated north–south can be clearly identified. There is a great deal of grassed-over rubble visible at the southern end of this building but an obvious stone wall runs southward from this rubble and links up with the northern gable wall of building C. To the west of building D is a small embanked yard or garth area, measuring 17 m × 10 m. Another narrow building (25 m × 7 m) may prove to be attached to the south side of this yard. On the west side of the enclosure, and covered by a large bank of sand is the butt-end of a wall of massive limestone slabs. At least two courses of the wall are clearly visible in the eroded sand bank. This enigmatic feature may well be the north wall of a structure orientated east–west, running west from building F. Today this putative building is merely a large, wide, bank of sand-covered rubble, surmounted at its western end by a small rectangular dry-stone chamber. Peter Fowler has suggested that this may be a later corn-drying kiln.

THE EXCAVATION STRATEGY

The excavation programme began with a trial excavation in 1984, which established the "identity" of the site, and has continued every summer since then. From the beginning the excavation of Green Shiel has been conceived as a research project and the excavation and recording strategy has been designed and developed to maximize the recovery of results from the excavated deposits whilst leaving the structures themselves intact. All excavated material has been sieved on site, initially (1984) through a 7 mm and subsequently through a 5 mm mesh. In addition, a percentage of either 2%, 5% or 10% has been retained for later fine wetsieving and flotation

in the laboratory. The purpose of the wet-sieved sample is to act as a check on the effectiveness of the general collection policy, and to recover material such as fish bone or carbonized plant remains which would normally slip through the coarser mesh used on site. Deposits characterized by high concentrations of this type of material are usually sampled in their entirety.

A modified form of the single-context planning and recording system has been used throughout, and all contexts are levelled at 50 cm intervals. Within contexts, material is removed in square metres on the basis of the site grid and this enables the spatial reconstruction of finds distributions. The volume of material in each deposit is also roughly quantified to give some indication of the comparative density of finds.

THE EXCAVATION RESULTS

Excavations have been carried out at Green Shiel every summer since 1984. So far we have examined three buildings (A, B and C: Figs. 3–8) and part of the supposed Trackway (G). Only the results from the buildings are discussed here.

Buildings A and B (figs. 3–6)

These two structures are discussed together as they share walls in common and were probably built at the same time. As Fig. 3 shows both structures have been extensively robbed, but evidence of construction techniques is still visible. The walls are built from large limestone blocks and slabs, probably obtained from the limestone outcrops on the adjacent shore. No mortar has been used in any of the construction work and, as with building C, the walls have been built with an inner and outer face and rubble core. Building A measures *c.* 19 m × 4·5 m internally and B measures *c.* 20 m × 5 m internally. All external walls are *c.* 1·50 m thick. The central, north–south wall has been robbed at both ends, but it served as the eastern "gable" wall for building B and the western "gable" wall for building A. A fragment of clay pipe from the rubble at the northern end of this wall corroborates the documentary evidence discussed above for nineteenth century robbing of the site. At its southern end this wall has been destroyed down to its lowest facing courses, but this has revealed a very interesting feature of the construction of both buildings. As well as sharing a common "gable" wall they also share a common southern and, by inference, northern wall. The southern wall of buildings A and B can be seen to be of one continuous, though irregular, build and the north–south wall forms a butt joint with it. In effect the two structures form one large "range" on the north side of the site.

Building A (fig. 4)

This was the first part of the site to be excavated, in 1984. Subsequent work has taken place in 1989 and 1990. The southern wall is the best preserved and in its central section the 1984 excavation revealed that it still stands to a height of *c.* 1 m (some 4 courses). With the exception of some of the inner facing-stones at the north-east corner, the eastern wall has been completely robbed out. However, the presence of clearly visible stone holes in the sand allows a reconstruction of the wall's line and thickness. There is a well-constructed doorway *c.* 1 m wide, with a fine sill stone in the north-east corner of the north wall. An enigmatic, stone-lined feature, tentatively identified as a drain, runs from the south-east section of the structure in a south-westerly direction (fig. 5). No reasonable explanation can be offered for the construction of a drain without a bottom lining directly on sand.

Internal Deposits

The 1984 trial excavation (located to examine a high proton-magnetometer anomaly against the mid-section of the south wall) revealed a deposit of dark, brownish-black sand, overlying natural golden sand to a depth of *c.* 18–20 cm. This in turn was overlain by collapsed stone walling from the southern wall. This dark

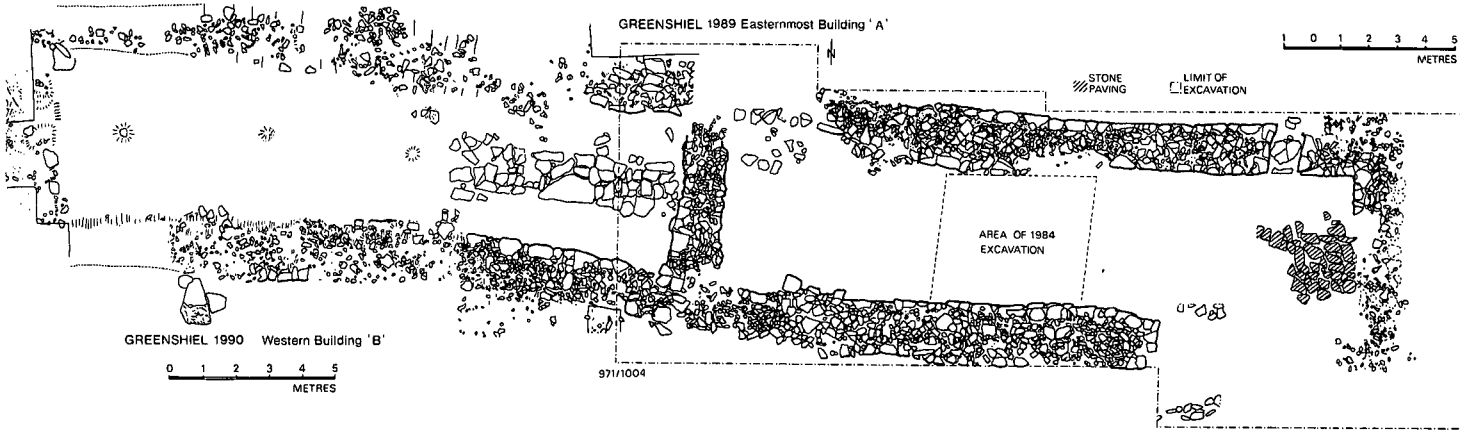

Fig. 3. Plan of buildings A and B after excavation.

Fig. 4. Building A during excavation.

brownish-black sand layer was only visible in the eastern facing section of the 1984 excavation and the deposit was thickest against the southern wall, petering out in the central area of the building. Further excavation in 1989 followed this context westwards beneath further wall collapse, up to the base of the west wall. The deposit was not visible east of the 1984 excavation.

At the east end of the building are the remains of a paved floor area, overlain by blown sand lenses. This parallels the flooring visible in building B. No evidence for internal roof supports has so far been recovered in building A. During the 1990 season, high winds had a dramatic scouring effect on all open areas of the excavation. This winnowing action clearly accounts for the way in which deposits are better preserved close to the main walls. In the central part of both buildings where the sand was loose and free-flowing it was clear that the original stratigraphy has effectively been mixed by the wind.

Building B (fig. 6)

This building was completely excavated in

Fig. 5. Possible stone drain south of building A.

1990. Most of the walling has been severely robbed out, but, again, stone holes along the line of the west wall and the remaining rubble core of both the north and south walls shows their basic course and thickness. Removal of wind-blown infill revealed a very well-preserved area of paving measuring *c.* 7 m east–west and 1·5 m north–south at the east end, abutting the eastern wall. Three internal post holes were excavated, running centrally down the mid and western sections of the building. These are the first clear features relating to techniques of roof-support that have been recovered in our work at Green Shiel. All are roughly circular, measuring 40 cm, 44 cm, and 60 cm in diameter respectively, moving from east to west. As well as being important structural features, those post holes also provide further evidence of how the buildings have been scoured in the past. The easternmost feature only survived to a depth of 30 cm, the central post hole was only 26 cm deep but the western-most feature was 50 cm in depth. This latter seems to have been well-preserved because it was covered by consolidated sand layers which protected the surface beneath.

No doorways were visible in any of the external wall-lines, although the presence of a large sandstone slab outside the building at its south-west corner may indicate the former location of one possible entrance into the structure. Curiously, the floor level is effectively

Fig. 6. Building B after excavation.

"stepped-down" from that of the adjacent building, and the south wall has been revetted into the natural sand.

Building C (figs. 7, 8)

This is the southernmost of the buildings in the Green Shiel complex. It was completely excavated in three seasons in 1985–1987. The building is orientated roughly north–south and measures *c.* 18·5 m × 4 m internally; it is divided into a series of compartments. Like the other two structures described above all of the surviving walls, both internal and external, are built in the dry stone fashion. Most of the external facing-stones of the western wall, which is nearest to the nineteenth-century waggonway, have been robbed-out but the others are reasonably well-preserved. The building was entered through a doorway in the east wall, in its central section. It is possible that there was in fact a cross-passage here, with opposing doorways, but unfortunately the west wall was too robbed-out at this point to establish this with certainty. A further anomalous feature was the addition of a second entrance way on the west side, in the northern gable-end. This latter is of some interest as it is "funnel" shaped, opening out into the second of the five compartments visible inside the building. Indeed, all of the entrances to these compartments with the exception of that leading to the self-contained, paved, room at A are

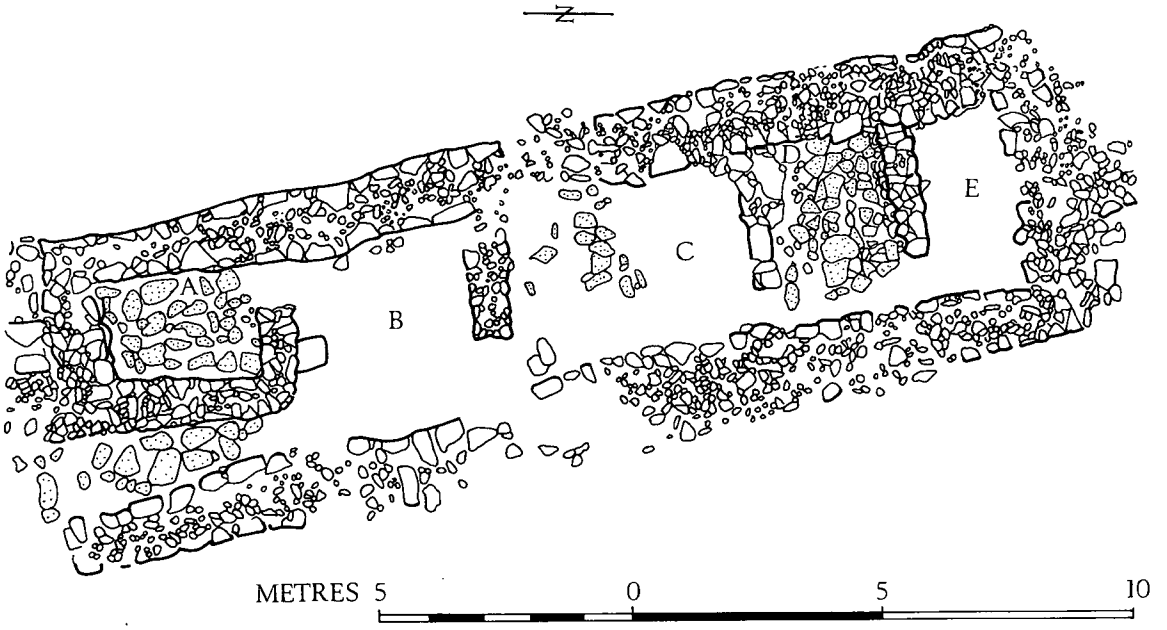

Fig. 7. Plan of building C after excavation.

on the western side of the building.

The compartment at A measures 3 m north–south and 2–2·5 m east–west internally and has an irregularly paved floor. This room was filled by one major sand blow and was virtually devoid of any finds. The other four compartments are all demarcated by dry-stone partition walls, the best preserved of which, standing to a height of 70 cms, is that between compartments D and E. All of these walls are secondary inserts into the building, forming clear butt joints with the eastern wall.

Compartment D, with its slab paving, is the only one within which definite floor deposits were recorded, although greyish-brown staining visible in the sand of the other compartments may indicate the presence of decayed organic material. No features which could be clearly interpreted as roof-supports were observed, although two large flat slabs aligned centrally to the building in compartments B and E may have acted as pad stones.

Abutting the northern end of the structure a section of dry stone walling, standing to *c.* 1·3 m was revealed. This is part of the large enclosure wall which runs northwards into the mass of tumbled stone at the centre of the site.

THE FINDS

All of the buildings have produced well-preserved animal bones, the commonest of which are those of cattle, sheep, fish and birds. However, against this general background several finds stand out.

The 1984 excavation in building A revealed a large piece of whalebone, provisionally identified as blue whale, and while we would not suggest that the community at Green Shiel were actively involved in whaling, it does seem likely that they exploited beached animals when available. Secondly, in 1989, a fully articulated calf skeleton was found in the south-west corner of the building, beneath the collapse of the walls and above the dark

Fig. 8. Building C after excavation.

brownish-black sand layer in the interior of the structure mentioned earlier.

Similarly, in building C, within the rubble of the doorway, between compartments D and E, a further complete calf skeleton was discovered and the skeleton of a fully-grown cow was found in a pit in compartment E. Immediately to the east of the building just south of the entrance, a large dump of butchered cattle bone was recovered.

Virr's analysis of these last two articulated skeletons, (Virr 1989) has shown that the calf was between 8 and 18 months old at the time of death and that the cow was between 35 and 40 months at death. Virr has also analysed all of the available cattle metapodials from the building and suggested that the number of animals represented in the material lies somewhere between 19 and 55 (including the two articulated skeletons). A substantial percentage of the cattle (some 45%) were calves under two years of age at death and only two animals were clearly older than this when they died. Initial attempts at sexing the cattle population represented in the bone evidence from building C suggest that there are more cows present

than bulls. Few of the bones relate to prime cuts of meat and it seems likely that the best cuts were removed from this part of the site. The age distribution and the preponderance of female animals over males may suggest a cattle economy based on dairying. In addition to the bones of domesticated animals the presence of antler, seal and fish bone from this building indicates that the inhabitants of the site were involved in hunting and fishing as well as agriculture. Bones of the now extinct Great Auk have also been recorded in the bird bone assemblage.

The marine molluscs from building C have been studied by Walsh (1988). The assemblage is dominated by the common periwinkle, *littorina littorea*, which makes up 68·2% of the overall total; in some contexts it can comprise over 80%. Limpet (*patella*) and flat periwinkle (*littorina littoralis*) constitute 18·9% and 11·35% of the total assemblage respectively. The sand at Green Shiel is fairly alkaline, and this probably accounts at least in part for the scarcity of mussel (*mytilus*) as it has been shown experimentally that it is prone to disintegration under alkaline conditions (Walsh 1988, 18–22). It is probable that much of the shellfish was collected in the immediate vicinity of the site and the quantities suggest that it constituted a relish rather than a staple diet.

The 1984 excavation also revealed clear evidence for metal-working at Green Shiel in the form of lead slag. Fuel-ash slag, smithing slag and clinker have also been recovered from building C (Bradley and Walsh 1987).

Other finds include an amber bead, a large iron key, a finely worked strip of bronze which may have been a binding and a possible stone ard-tip, all from building C. Two whetstones were discovered in building B. One was broken into two conjoining pieces which were found on either side of the paved flooring at the east end of the building. The second example also came from the area of paving. However, the most interesting find so far is the iron spearhead found in 1984, just beneath the turf in the central section of building A and now on display in the Priory Museum (fig. 9). This has a split socket and a very shallow midrib, with a triple ridge moulding at the junction of the shaft and blade. It is of Anglo-Saxon type and probably dates from the late ninth or early tenth century.

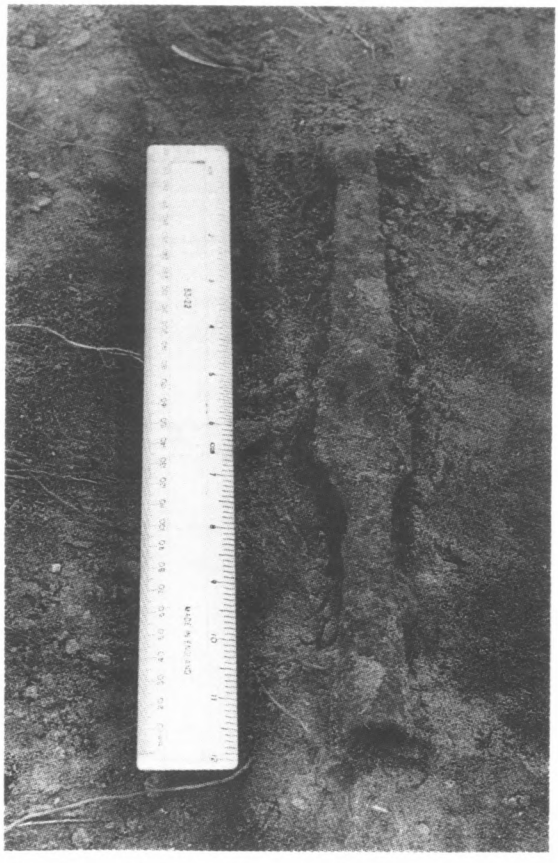

Fig. 9. Anglo-Saxon spearhead from Green Shiel.

On the whole, finds other than bone and shell have been rather scarce, but there are a number of coin finds. The 1989 excavations in building A revealed six, (all Northumbrian stycas) and the excavation of building C produced three coins, two stycas of Eanred (*c.* A.D. 810–41) and Aethelred (*c.* A.D. 841–59) and a penny of Aethelred of Wessex (A.D. 866–71), the most northerly site find for a coin of this type.

INTERPRETATION OF THE BUILDINGS

None of the three excavated buildings is demonstrably a dwelling-house: there were occasional patches of charcoal in all structures, but nothing which can be clearly identified as a hearth. However, it is just about conceivable that the erosion of deposits in the centre of A and B has removed vital evidence in this respect. The lack of close parallels is some hindrance to interpretation, but it is clear that some features are common to A and B: the areas of flat paving at the eastern end, and possibly the use of large paving slabs at doorways. The internal complexity of building C suggests a rather different function. Initially this was interpreted as a byre and this explanation may be still the most appropriate. The other two structures if they were not dwelling-houses must presumably have fulfilled some agricultural purpose. The enigmatic, drain-like feature on the south side of A suggests that it too may have housed animals. It is possible that wooden stalling was constructed which has left no visible trace.

In building B, the small size and range of species of the marine molluscs from some areas in the central part of the building may offer some clue to function. The assemblage looks like the naturally-occurring range found on seaweed, which might have been collected and stored for a variety of purposes.

The actual size of the settlement in human terms can only really be estimated on the basis of dwelling-houses. It seems unlikely that there are more than two of these, and it can be tentatively proposed that we are dealing with a population of perhaps something between ten and twenty individuals. The community was presumably more or less self-supporting in terms of food and technology: the presence of a number of barns or byres suggests that it was probably engaged in surplus production of foodstuffs.

THE DATE OF THE SETTLEMENT

The date of the Green Shiel settlement can be set fairly clearly within broad parameters, and, perhaps more controversially, within rather narrow ones. The coin evidence implies that the site was occupied in the middle of the ninth century: the question at issue is really how long the buildings were in use before or after that time. An origin in the eighth century is conceivable, but unlikely on the basis of the surviving coinage. At the outside, it is most improbable that there were still people living at Green Shiel when the monastery on the island was re-founded at the end of the eleventh century: the total absence of ceramics alone argues for desertion before this date. However, it is possible to lend some substance to the speculation that the site was actually only occupied for a fairly short time within this fairly broad span, and abandoned in the last quarter of the ninth century, possibly as a consequence of the last Viking attack in 875 when the monastic community finally quit the Island (Sawyer 1978, 5). The spearhead is the only find from the excavations for which a slightly later date is feasible, and the general poverty of material culture supports the idea of a fairly short occupation. Admittedly it would be wrong to infer too much from the cut-off point provided by the coin evidence, since we can only guess what, if any, coin was circulating in northern Northumbria in the late ninth or tenth century after the arrival of Halfdane's army and the collapse of the kingdom.

THE COINS

If the two coins found near the site in the nineteenth century are combined with nine recovered in the course of the excavation then a total of eleven coins has so far been recovered at Green Shiel, from different parts of the site. This is a remarkably high figure, given both the general paucity of finds, and the type of site involved. Direct, numerical comparisons with other sites are problematic due to the fact that the recovery rate will certainly be affected by soil type, actual volume of deposit and methods of excavation. For what it is worth, however, Hinton has attempted to

evaluate numbers of coin finds from various English urban/commercial sites of the eighth to eleventh centuries (1986). His sample is heavily biased in favour of southern England, but ninth-century coin losses are relatively sparse, only York producing a total in excess of that at Green Shiel, with 22 stycas and five other coins from post-1960 excavations. However, the Royal site at Bamburgh, not considered by Hinton, has in fact produced at least 67 stycas (Pirie 1986a, 81). The Green Shiel total is directly comparable to the number of ninth-century coins from Coppergate (Pirie 1986b) and in excess of the total number of eighth and ninth-century coins from the monastic sites of Monkwearmouth (6) and Jarrow (10) (Pirie 1986a, 74, 80). A sharp contrast between urban/commercial centres and contemporary rural sites is not justified on present evidence: of the other three excavated rural settlements of this period in the north Ribblehead has also produced a styca, and the excavated areas of the other two are rather small.

It can be argued that the abundance of coin is at least partly due to the sieving policy: five were recovered through sieving. Also, stycas are relatively low-denomination coins and one would naturally expect that their casual loss would be more easily tolerated than that of the more valuable pennies. Nonetheless, whilst it would be premature to draw far-reaching conclusions, given the paucity of rural archaeology of this period, it does seem reasonable to propose that coinage was circulating and presumably in use for economic purposes on rural sites in the ninth century. This in itself suggests a more buoyant and flexible economic system than that usually portrayed in both documentary sources and the archaeological literature.

THE BUILDING TRADITION

The structures at Green Shiel find no close parallels in the building tradition of Northern England at this early date, although there are important gaps in the evidence. One of the principal justifications for the scarcity of early medieval settlements in the north lies in a combination of two factors: the choice of timber as the original building material means that these sites will only be visible as cropmarks, and the present preponderance of pasture over arable in the region makes sites of this type much harder for the archaeologist to detect. Those sites which are known include a number of well-known complexes of timber halls in a supposed Anglo-Saxon tradition, usually dated to the seventh century or thereabouts, at Milfield, Sprouston, Thirlings and Yeavering and the recently published sunken-featured buildings at New Bewick (Youngs, Clark and Barry, 1987). There are also three sites in marginal upland locations which have produced artefacts or Carbon 14 dates indicating that they are broadly contemporary with Green Shiel. Only that at Simy Folds in Teesdale has been fully published (Coggins, Fairless and Batey 1983). The other two settlements are those at Ribblehead (King 1978) and Bryant's Gill, Kentmere (Dickinson 1985). All of these sites have rectangular buildings with stone foundations although the extent to which they were stone-walled is a matter for debate. They provide closer parallels for Green Shiel than the Anglo-Saxon settlements of Northumberland, but this must be seen as a general comparison in terms of form and choice of building material rather than much similarity in plan detail. Green Shiel is considerably larger and more complex, and its siting cannot be considered marginal. The other sites are in areas of ninth- or tenth-century Scandinavian settlement and it has been suggested that some or all of them may represent the settlements of Viking colonizers (Morris 1981, 241; Graham Campbell 1980, 74–75; Dickinson 1985). This is certainly not an explanation with great appeal to Lindisfarne.

It is clear, however, that even if they are without obvious precedent, the structures at Green Shiel do represent a logical and economical, even if opportunistic, exploitation of local resources. Good structural timber may have been in short supply on Holy Island in the ninth century: good building stone has always

been abundant. The construction methods may be undeveloped but the buildings survived. As archaeologists, we can be thankful that the inhabitants of Green Shiel made such good use of their local environment.

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