

A Powerful Place of Pictland: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Power Centre of the 4th to 6th Centuries AD

By GORDON NOBLE¹, MEGGEN GONDEK², EWAN CAMPBELL³, NICHOLAS EVANS⁴, DEREK HAMILTON⁵, and SIMON TAYLOR⁶

Our understanding of the nature of late and post-Roman central places of northern Britain has been hindered by the lack of historical sources and the limited scale of archaeological investigation. New work at Rhynie, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, has begun to redress this through extensive excavation and landscape survey that has revealed a Pictish central place of the 4th to 6th centuries AD that has European connections through material culture, iconography and site character. In addition to reviewing the place-name and historical context, this article outlines preliminary reflections on five seasons of excavation and survey in the Rhynie landscape. The article also provides a detailed consideration of chronology, including radiocarbon dating and Bayesian statistical analysis. The results reveal the multi-faceted nature of a major non-hillfort elite complex of Pictland that comprised a high-status residence with cult dimensions, a major centre for production and exchange, and a contemporary cemetery. A series of sculptured stones stood in association with the settlement and cemetery and the iconography of the stones along with the wider archaeological evidence provides a rich dataset for a renewed consideration of the central places of early medieval northern Britain with wider implications for the nature of power and rulership in Late and post-Roman Europe.

¹ Department of Archaeology, School of Geosciences, University of Aberdeen, St Mary's, Elphinstone Road, Aberdeen AB252RA, UK. g.noble@abdn.ac.uk

² Department of History and Archaeology, University of Chester, Parkgate Road, Chester CH1 4BJ, UK. m.gondek@chester.ac.uk

³ Department of Archaeology, University of Glasgow, Gregory Building, Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow G12 8QQ, UK. ewan.campbell@glasgow.ac.uk

⁴ Department of Archaeology, School of Geosciences, University of Aberdeen, St Mary's, Elphinstone Road, Aberdeen AB252RA, UK. n-evans839@hotmail.co.uk

⁵ Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre, Rankine Avenue, Scottish Enterprise Technology Park, East Kilbride, UK. derek.Hamilton.2@glasgow.ac.uk

⁶ School of Humanities, University of Glasgow, 1 University Gardens, Glasgow G12 8QQ. simon.taylor@glasgow.ac.uk

INTRODUCTION

The nature of the power structures and the character of the elite centres that filled the chasm left by the demise of the Roman Empire is a subject of enduring research interest for scholars of 1st millennium AD Europe. In regions such as southern Britain, where the Roman Empire maintained control for much of the first four centuries of the millennium the written sources suggest political fragmentation following the demise of Roman governance.⁷ The political units that replaced the Roman Empire were smaller-scale and were ruled by people called kings (*reges*).⁸ However, most of our historical sources for Britain and Ireland postdate AD 600 and our knowledge of the forms of power and governance that characterised Late Roman and the post-Roman societies of the 4th to 6th centuries is less well understood. In Anglo-Saxon England, the most obvious materialization of new power structures in the post-Roman period are the large residential hall complexes that emerged in the 6th and 7th centuries AD.⁹ These included ostentatious architectural expressions that conveyed the authority of powerful magnates. These residential complexes were situated within landscapes that could include large cemeteries and sites of pagan and latterly Christian cult.¹⁰ The development of the *villae regiae* is a clear material expression of new power nodes forming in the post-Roman period, emerging from the more murky record of the 5th–6th centuries where settlement hierarchies are harder to identify.¹¹

Northern Britain and Ireland, where Roman rule was only fleetingly felt, witnessed very different trajectories from southern Britain in the Late and post-Roman period. In Ireland, regional rulership was in part materialised and enacted at provincial centres such as Cashel, Tara, Navan, Rathcroghan and Knockaulin.¹² The archaeological evidence at these regional centres suggests that the landscapes in which they were located contained places of cult and ritual and sites of inauguration and assembly, and that through time a number came to have an important early Christian dimension. The historical sources suggest elite power was also maintained by the construction of fortified complexes such as large or elaborate examples of ringforts. Ringforts were constructed from at least the 5th century,

⁷ Wickham 2005.

⁸ Wickham 2005, 312.

⁹ Eg Hope-Taylor 1977; Hamerow 2012, 23, 102–9; Thomas 2013, 126; Brennan and Hamerow 2015.

¹⁰ Eg Thomas 2013, 112.

¹¹ Esmonde Cleary 1989, 138–61; Ulmschneider 2011, 157–60; Hamerow 2012, 23.

¹² Eg Aitchison 1994; Newman 1997; Lynn 2003; Bhreathnach 2014.

but reached a floruit in the 7th and 8th centuries AD.¹³ In the Irish law tracts there was a direct correlation between the size, number of ramparts and status of enclosed sites of this kind; and in early Irish law a king was expected to be able to call on sufficient labour to build these defences.¹⁴

In northern Britain, fortified sites also dominate our knowledge of the form that central places of power and governance took in the early medieval period.¹⁵ The historical references cite sieges, battles and other important events occurring at these locations.¹⁶ However, the historical documentation is limited. Dunadd in western Scotland, for example, long interpreted as a major seat of the kingdom of Dál Riata,¹⁷ has only two early references – one recording a siege in AD 683 and the other a reference to the seizing of Dunadd by the powerful Pictish king Oengus in AD 736.¹⁸ Undoubtedly, many power centres from this period in northern Britain are completely unattested, particularly those prior to the 7th century when our historical sources are particularly scarce. Nonetheless, the historical documentation that we do have certainly suggests that the construction and use of fortified settlements in northern Britain were key materialisations of power in this region. *Alt Clut* (modern Dumbarton), for example, a hillfort within Brittonic territory, situated on the River Clyde in western Scotland, was recorded in the Irish chronicles and the ‘Life of Saint Columba’ as the seat of the ‘king of Clyde Rock’¹⁹; therefore, occupying this fort was central to the conception of the Brittonic kingship, at least from an external perspective.

In Pictland, in northern and eastern Scotland, the focus of this article, work on elite residence and fortified sites has been limited, though has been growing in recent years. The Picts are first mentioned in Late Roman sources and the kingdoms of the Picts went on to dominate north-east Scotland until the late 1st millennium AD.²⁰ In the later 1st millennium AD, historical sources suggest that royal residences were found in lowland centres such as

¹³ Stout 1997, 24–9; O’Sullivan et al 2008, 59–61. Crannogs were also an important form of high-status residence and nexus of power in early medieval Ireland, e.g. Hencken 1950; Gleeson and Carty 2013; O’Sullivan et al 2014, 58–62.

¹⁴ Eg *Críth Gablach* dating to around 700 AD: Kelly 1991, 30; Stout 1997, 18; O’Sullivan et al 2014, 82–3.

¹⁵ Alcock 2003, 179.

¹⁶ Eg Bannerman 1974, 15–16; Alcock 2003, 179–200; Woolf 2007; Fraser 2009; Evans 2014.

¹⁷ Lane and Campbell 2000.

¹⁸ Lane and Campbell 2000, 37; Fraser 2009, 213–224, 301–302.

¹⁹ Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983, 130, 154, 176, 234, 326 (AU 658.2, 694.6, 722.3, 780.1, 870.6); Stokes 1896, 253 (AT [752].2); Alcock and Alcock 1990, 98; Sharpe 1995, 123.

²⁰ Ritchie 1994, 3–5; Woolf 2007, 87–130, 312–42; Fraser 2009.

Forteviot and Scone,²¹ but earlier references to centres of power for Pictland are dominated by references to defended, often hilltop, enclosures.²² In Adomnán's 'Life of Saint Columba' (II 35), for example, the Saint meets the powerful King Bridei son of Mailcon, at his royal fortress near the River Ness.²³ In this account, Adomnán refers to the fort as being at the top of a steep path. This source also refers (II 33) to 'king Bridei's house' and 'the king's hall'.²⁴ However, detail such as this is exceedingly rare; most other references to Pictish high-status sites are simply citations of place-names, though additional descriptors such as *palacium*, used in reference to later centres such as Forteviot, are sometimes found, or the place-name itself can provide extra clues, for instance when it contains *dún* 'fort, (fortified) hill', especially in chronicle sources.²⁵ A fuller understanding of the character of these places undoubtedly needs to draw on archaeological evidence, but progress has been limited, characterised by mostly small-scale archaeological interventions, and at times limited publication of results.²⁶

The best-known series of investigations of the fortified sites of Pictland are Leslie Alcock's programmes of excavating historically documented elite sites in northern Britain during the 1970s and 1980s.²⁷ Alcock's project was explicitly geared to identifying seats of power in northern Britain by investigating sites mentioned in contemporary sources.²⁸ His most successful investigation in Pictland was that at Dundurn in Perthshire.²⁹ Here the extensive remains consist of a prominent hillfort, with the early phases comprising a timber palisade and summit citadel dating to the 5th and 6th centuries AD, with later expansion of the fort through the construction of additional terrace walls and rebuilding of the citadel defences in stone. Alcock's work in north-east Scotland was successful in providing an outline chronology for a small number of elite centres in Pictland and he brought an ingenious blend of historical and archaeological methods to the interpretation of these sites, establishing an essential baseline for the study of the phenomena of enclosure in

²¹ Driscoll 1998, 169–70.

²² Alcock et al 1989, 192; Woolf 2007, 105.

²³ Sharpe 1995, 184.

²⁴ Sharpe 1995, 181–2.

²⁵ Bannerman 1974, 15–16; Anderson 2011, 250–252; Taylor 2011, 73.

²⁶ Carver 2011.

²⁷ Conceived in 1973. Alcock et al 1986; Alcock and Alcock 1990, 216.

²⁸ Alcock and Alcock 1987; Alcock and Alcock 1990, 216; Alcock and Alcock 1992; Alcock et al 1989.

²⁹ Alcock et al 1989, 195.

Pictland.³⁰ However, the work was keyhole in nature and provided only limited evidence for interpreting the character and evolution of these sites. The archaeological investigation of these also tended to reveal detail only on the later phases, with the origins and evidence for earlier phases often poorly attested. A fuller understanding of the central places of Pictland undoubtedly requires more ambitious programmes of investigation.

This article sets out the preliminary findings of the field investigation of an elite enclosure complex at Rhynie (Fig 1), Aberdeenshire which dates to the 4th to 6th century AD – a phase of fortified settlement poorly documented in northern Britain.³¹ The excavations reveal a type of Pictish elite settlement largely unknown – one that was enclosed by ditches (and probably ramparts) and an elaborate wooden enclosing wall, but found in a location that was of a different character to that of the classic hill or promontory forts of Pictland. The excavations also revealed an associated cemetery, with a series of Pictish Class I sculptured symbol stones located in close association with the settlement and cemetery foci. The sites in the Rhynie landscape described below are unattested in the historical record, but archaeological, sculptural and place-name evidence has begun to reveal their significance. Our programme of investigation at Rhynie has aimed to provide a more holistic account of a Pictish central place, with the excavation methods geared to revealing the ground plan of the enclosing elements and interior buildings of an elite centre with survey and excavation also extending into the wider landscape to investigate other potential contemporary sites. This article sets out initial thoughts on the results of the recent excavations in the Rhynie landscape prior to full post-excavation analysis and publication. The consideration of Rhynie will begin with a short study of the topographical and place-name evidence, before proceeding to explore the potential place of this landscape within the hazy political geography of Pictland. The article will then move on to characterise the recent archaeological fieldwork results, the artefact assemblage, and the dating evidence.

³⁰ Alcock 1988, 31; 2003, 179–200.

³¹ The initial aims of the project in 2011 were modest: to determine the character, extent and survival of the cropmark features, obtain scientific dating for the enclosures and develop a deeper understanding of the Rhynie landscape. With the identification that the Barflat enclosure complex was early medieval in date the aims shifted towards recording the major constituents of the monument complex through strip and map excavation. The work at the Barflat site and cemetery was carried out as part of the Rhynie Environs Archaeological Project (REAP) directed by the Universities of Aberdeen and Chester. The work in the wider landscape is being conducted as part of the Northern Picts project based at the University of Aberdeen.

We will conclude with a discussion of the significance of the Rhynie landscape at a local, regional and international level.

SITE LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

Today Rhynie is a small village in western Aberdeenshire, north-east Scotland with a population of around 450. The modern village is a planned 19th-century settlement on the site of an earlier settlement known as the Muir of Rhynie.³² It lies between the River Bogie and the Ord Burn at 181 m OD, making it one of the higher settlements of north-east Scotland, but it is also in a rich agricultural valley with close connections to more lowland areas to the east and north. Rhynie is located between the Cairngorm mountains and Cabrach hills to the west and the Correen-Bennachie range to the east, in a location that defines major, and strategic,³³ routeways through the hills leading northwards to the Moray coast, the upper reaches of the River Don to the south, and the River Dee and the Mounth beyond.³⁴ Other routes lead off in an easterly direction towards the Garioch and lower Don and west through Essie and the Cabrach to modern Dufftown in the southern reaches of Moray.³⁵ The site lies in the shadow of the Iron Age hillfort of Tap O' Noth, one of the most spectacular hillforts of Scotland, with a lower fort that is one of the largest prehistoric enclosures known in Scotland.³⁶ Tap O' Noth rises from a whale-backed ridge, the Hill of Noth, which rises to the west of Rhynie; from the summit of the fort extensive views can be gained across north-east Scotland, to the Moray Firth to the north and to Caithness and Sutherland beyond.³⁷

PLACE-NAME EVIDENCE

Place-names constitute a unique witness to language, society and environment which can reach far back into the 1st millennium AD, yet there have only been limited studies of place-names in Pictland and few specifically in relation to the central places of this

³² See Roy's 18th century map <http://maps.nls.uk/geo/roy/#zoom=13&lat=57.3445&lon=-2.8818&layers=roy-highlands>

³³ Simpson 1930, 48–52.

³⁴ RCAHMS 2007, 121; Brander 2014, 29. The Mounth is an eastwards projection of the Cairngorms which results in a narrow lowland pass between central and north-east Scotland, a strategic routeway in itself.

³⁵ RCAHMS 2007, 121.

³⁶ RCAHMS 2007, 103–5.

³⁷ RCAHMS 2007, 103.

region.³⁸ Nonetheless, the place-name evidence from Rhynie is an important source of evidence for the significance of this locale. As is generally the case, the documentary evidence for the place-name and parish of Rhynie is late, occurring only from the 13th century onwards, the earliest appearance being in episcopal records which record the church of *Rynyn* in 1226.³⁹ The most revealing element of the place-name is that it probably contains a word which derives from Celtic **rīg* ‘king’ (first noted by Julianna Grigg).⁴⁰ An analogous name may be Loch Ryan in south-west Scotland, one of the earliest recorded of all Scottish place-names, appearing in Ptolemy’s *Geographia* (2nd century AD) as *Rerigonios kolpos* ‘bay associated with a settlement called *Rerigionion*’. W. J. Watson, the great Celtic scholar, analysed *Rerigionion* as **re-rīg-on-ion* ‘very royal place’, with **re* an intensifier, and *rīg-on* ‘royal’, which he compares with Welsh *rhion* ‘lord, chief’; while the final *-ion* is a place-forming suffix.⁴¹ This was endorsed by Rivet and Smith and most recently by Graham Isaac, although Isaac would transcribe and analyse the name slightly differently, namely as *Rherigónion* and *Rherigónios kólpos*, ‘place of (*-io*) the foremost (*ro-*) great/divine (*-on-*) king (*-rīg-*)’, adding that ‘the (assimilatory?) realisation of **ro-* as *re-* is noteworthy’.⁴² Rhynie may contain a similar sequence of phonemes to that of Loch Ryan, namely /r/ /ai/ and /n/, earlier /r/ /i:/ and /n/. Thus, if the name Rhynie had existed as early as the time of Ptolemy, it may have contained the same elements as Ryan.⁴³ There is, of course, no evidence that it is that early, but a minimalist, and provisional, reconstruction might be **rīgonin* or **rīgonīn* ‘place of or associated with (*-īn*) a great/divine (*-on-*) king (*rīg-*)’. One of the priorities of the place-name component of the project going forward will be to follow this up more rigorously and explore other possibilities.

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

Much of northern Pictland can be described as essentially prehistoric in the 1st millennium AD, with very few historical references available for northern Scotland as a

³⁸ See Taylor 2011.

³⁹ 1226 *Moray Reg.* no. 69 (Innes 1837, 73–76); note also *Ryni* 1226 x 1242 *Moray Reg.* no. 81 (Innes 1837, 90–95).

⁴⁰ Grigg 2015, 85–86.

⁴¹ Watson 1926, 34.

⁴² Rivet and Smith 1979, 447; Isaac 2005, 202.

⁴³ There remains the problem of the extra syllable in Ryan, as opposed to Rhyn-ie. This may have come about through assimilation to the well-known Irish surname Ryan, although a mid-17th-century form (*Loch Rian* c.1636 x 1652 Gordon 61 (manuscript map)) suggests it may be part of the original development of the name.

whole until well into the 12th century or later. This is certainly true for Rhynie and its environs, which cannot be identified with any named early medieval territory or kingdom with certainty. Some Pictish territories have been identified in north-east Scotland, which may also have been kingdoms or elements of early polities that incorporated Rhynie for periods (Fig 2). The territory of Ce appears in additions to the longer Pictish king-lists, dated from 862x876, and in the titles in two lists of Gaelic tales, dating from the 10th and 11th centuries, as a *mag*, 'plain', and as *Beinn Cé*, 'the peak of Ce'.⁴⁴ The latter has been plausibly identified with the highly visible, prominent uplands of Bennachie about 17km to the east of Rhynie, whose Mither Tap o'Bennachie (Fig 2) is the site of a hillfort with evidence for occupation as late as the 8th century AD.⁴⁵ Ce, therefore, is likely to have comprised a substantial area of central Aberdeenshire, and must have included Bennachie and at least some of the lowland area between this landmark and the North Sea coast to the east, but whether it included lands in the Rhynie valley is uncertain. Another potential Pictish territory to the west of Rhynie is the *Fidach* which again appears in the longer Pictish king-lists. W. J. Watson very tentatively connected this area with Glen Fiddich in Banffshire,⁴⁶ however, Dauvit Broun has suggested that the name was simply descriptive, meaning 'woody' and not necessarily a territorial name at all.⁴⁷

In the Medieval period, to the south of Rhynie was the earldom of Mar, located on Deeside (including Braemar and Cromar) and upper Donside, its most northern extent perhaps indicated by the places Marchmar (NJ 484 232) (Fig 2) and Marchmar Wood (NJ 490 232) in Auchindoir and Kearn parish immediately to the south of the Rhynie valley, close to the watershed of the Bogie and Don river systems.⁴⁸ The first reference to this territory occurs in Irish chronicle items for the Battle of Clontarf in 1014, which specify that a *mormaer* (a regional lord) of Mar in Alba died there, but Broun has argued that Mar may have had Pictish origins.⁴⁹ Broun has recently asserted that Mar was originally confined to

⁴⁴ Anderson 2011, 245; Broun 2007, 75–9. For the tale lists, see Dobbs 1949, 137–8; Mac Cana 1980, 46, 47, 61, 63; Evans 2014, 66–7.

⁴⁵ Dobbs 1949, 137–8; Atkinson 2006.

⁴⁶ Watson 1926, 115; Anderson 2011, 245.

⁴⁷ Broun 2007, 79.

⁴⁸ Alexander, 1952, 186, 244, 325, 330, 333; Broun, forthcoming, drafts of which the author has kindly made available before publication. On *march*, see Taylor with Márkus 2012, 439. Our thanks go to an anonymous referee for drawing our attention to Marchmar.

⁴⁹ Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill 1983, 448; Broun forthcoming.

Deeside, but if Mar had initially been a kingdom, then its boundaries could have fluctuated over time, and could conceivably have included the Rhynie valley at some point.⁵⁰

The area that comprises Rhynie parish itself remains a blank before 1000. By the late 12th or early 13th centuries it was part of the Lordship of Strathbogie, generally regarded as a royal creation of that period.⁵¹ However, the Strathbogie name is earlier, appearing in one textual group of the king-lists of Alba and datable to about 1124 that mentions the killing of King Lulach mac Gilla Comgáin (1057–8), the nephew and successor of King Mac Bethad mac Finnlaích (1040–57), in Strathbogie at Essie, 3km west of Rhynie.⁵² The name and territory that characterised the Lordship could go back considerably earlier. The name attested in 1226 or 1227 as *Strathbolgyn*, contains the elements *strath*, meaning ‘broad-valley’, and – *bolgyn*, which includes *bolg*, ‘bag, belly’, plus an –*aidh* adjectival suffix, so the last two syllables together mean ‘bag-shaped’, probably referring to a pool of the river.⁵³ All of these elements appear in Gaelic and Welsh, so in theory the area name could have early roots going back to a time when a Celtic language was spoken, potentially as far back as the time of 4th to 6th century AD sites discussed below, although the probability of a name’s survival diminishes the further back in time we go.

From the earliest records to the 1600s, the Lordship of Strathbogie consisted of nine parishes based around the Bogie and Deveron Rivers (Fig. 1). Interestingly, despite the Water of Bogie being part of the name of the lordship, it is actually on the River Deveron, that the later medieval caput, a motte and bailey was located,⁵⁴ perhaps an indication that the smaller (at least in landscape and riverine terms) of the two straths, where Rhynie is located, had once been the more important. In terms of its later importance, Huntly was the economic powerhouse of the lordship, but 17th-century rentals show that the market at Rhynie was recorded as being of greater economic value than that at Huntly, indicating the long-term potential of Rhynie as a centre.⁵⁵ It may be that the construction of the motte and

⁵⁰ Broun forthcoming.

⁵¹ Duncan 1975, 188; Barrow 1988, 4; Ross 2015, 100.

⁵² Anderson 2011, 268, 276, 284, 288–9. The same details are also found in the Verse Chronicle inserted into the Chronicle of Melrose: Anderson 1922 vol. I, 604; Broun 1999, 153–60.

⁵³ *Moray Reg.* no. 30 (Innes 1837, 22–23); Watson 1926, 440–1; Alexander 1952, 382–3; Taylor 2011, 105, 108; Taylor with Márkus 2012, 301–2, 504; Beam *et al* 2012, <http://db.poms.ac.uk/record/factoid/46205/>.

⁵⁴ Simpson 1922, 147–50, 152. The parishes in the lordship were Kinnoir, Essie, Rhynie, Dunbennan, Ruthven, Glass, Drumdelgie, Botarie and Gartly: Ross 2015, 100.

⁵⁵ GD44/51/747/1, Rental of the Lordship of Huntly, 1600 held at the NAS (now NRS) recorded the market at Rhynie as being worth £80, four times that of Huntly. Subsequent rentals show the market at Huntly expanding

bailey at Huntly in the late 12th century or early 13th century characterized a long-term process through which the confluence around the Deveron and Bogie supplanted an earlier political and economic focus on the upper Bogie.⁵⁶

Overall, we have to recognise that the floruit of the enclosure complex and cemetery considered in this article considerably pre-dates the period when we can build up a picture of the socio-political framework of the area.⁵⁷ Certainly at the date of the complex it may be that smaller polities were present in this area than any of the later documented Pictish kingdoms or regions.⁵⁸ Whatever the extent of the polity that the sites at Rhynie considered below was part of, it is likely to have encompassed an area that comprised good-quality arable land in the lowlands and high-quality grazing in the uplands in a landscape that also gave access to important routeways between southern and northern Scotland and also areas to the east and west. This would have placed it in a strategic and economically favourable position that would have made it a suitable location for an early centre.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

THE SCULPTURAL EVIDENCE

Prior to the recent archaeological work, Rhynie was well known to students and scholars of Pictish art history as the findspot of an important group of Class I symbol stones (Fig 3),⁵⁹ the largest surviving number of Class I carvings in any one location in Pictland.⁶⁰

Eight Class I symbol stones have been recorded from the village of Rhynie and its immediate

exponentially, though 18th-century records suggest that Rhynie was still the site of a 'great fair'. Many thanks to Colin Shepherd for pointing these records out.

⁵⁶ Cf Simpson 1922, 147–50, 152.

⁵⁷ The lack of certainty really highlights the lack of a historical framework for this period in northern Scotland and the importance of archaeological evidence for revealing more about the character of 1st millennium AD sites and landscapes in this region.

⁵⁸ We can perhaps loosely draw on the Anglo-Saxon evidence here. Wickham suggests that the origins of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms lay with relatively small territories – equivalent to the size of a modern English county or less. By AD 600, kingdoms such as East Anglia, Wessex, Deira and perhaps Mercia and Hwicce were the size of around two modern English counties, but the Tribal Hidage records much smaller polities still in existence even in the 7th century: Wickham 2015, 313; See also Arnold 1997, 208–9.

⁵⁹ For Pictish art see Henderson and Henderson 2004 and references therein.

⁶⁰ In 1958 Isobel Henderson identified Rhynie as a possible origin centre for the Class I tradition based on the five stones then identified. However, she thought that Class I stones may have originated further north and that Rhynie was an important place through which the tradition disseminated: Henderson 1958, 54–55. Few scholars would attempt to identify an origin centre today, but the number of stones from certain sites is likely to be significant in terms of addressing the importance of sites without historical sources. Gondek 2006 outlines how the relative investment in the number of stones and complexity of carving and symbology is likely to be a good indication of centres of power in early medieval Scotland that can both support and add nuance to our historical understandings of the period.

environs.⁶¹ The Crow Stane (No.1) is the only example standing in its likely original position. The stones are of a variety of different geologies and are probably glacial erratics originally found in the environs of the modern village. The stones are carved by incision and include animal and abstract symbols, with two human (or human-like) figures (No. 3 and No. 7). The findspots of the stones follows a rough linear distribution with three stones found to the south (two found by ploughing and the *in situ* Crow Stane), two from the modern churchyard and three to the north from the outskirts of the modern village, a distribution spread over a distance of around 700 m.⁶² The stones are recorded from the 19th century onwards, with No. 7 and No. 8, the most recent discoveries, found in the 1970s. The most iconic stone from Rhynie is the eponymous Rhynie Man (No. 7), which was ploughed up by the farmer in 1978. The Rhynie Man stone depicts a human-like figure carrying an axe over their shoulder. The stones from Rhynie comprise examples that carry symbols which are common amongst the corpus of Pictish stones, alongside examples that have few parallels – principally the Rhynie Man axe carrier and the warrior figure (No. 3).⁶³ With regards to Rhynie Man, the parallels include only one other Class I example – from Mail, Cunningsburgh, Shetland.⁶⁴ An incised figure with exaggerated features carrying an axe and a knife is found in Golspie, Sutherland, but this appears on the back of a cross-slab and is likely to be later in date.⁶⁵ The warrior-figure is even harder to parallel, but shares stylistic parallels with incised figures from Balblair, Inverness and, more closely, from Newton of Collessie, Fife.⁶⁶

THE AERIAL RECORD

The recent archaeological fieldwork that took place was prompted both by the unusual sculptural evidence from Rhynie and also by a series of aerial photographs taken of fields immediately south of Rhynie village from the 1970s onwards. After the discovery of

⁶¹ RCAHMS 2008, 38–41; RCAHMS 2007, 119–22.

⁶² There are other concentrations of Class I stones known, such as the four at Inverurie and two others at Broomend of Crichtie and Brandsbutt (all in central Aberdeenshire), but in this case the distribution is over a larger area and there is little archaeological information to assess the significance of this particular concentration: RCAHMS 2007, 26.

⁶³ Shepherd and Shepherd 1978, 215.

⁶⁴ Turner 1994. See discussion below for the potential significance of the Cunningsburgh place-name. See Shepherd and Shepherd 1978, 215 for further parallels for Rhynie Man on Class II Pictish stones.

⁶⁵ RCAHMS 2008, 98; Henderson and Henderson 2004, 70 suggest that the Golspie sculptor was using a style that expressed a “conscious archaism”.

⁶⁶ RCAHMS 2008, 70, 80. And now a new stone from Tulloch, Perth: Mark Hall pers comm.

Rhynie Man in March 1978,⁶⁷ aerial reconnaissance during the summer of the same year identified a series of circular enclosures on the farm of Barflat surrounding the position of the Craw Stane (No. 1), and the findspot of Rhynie Man (No. 7) (Fig 4). The complex identified around the Craw Stane comprised a series of cropmark enclosures surrounding the site of the *in situ* symbol stone; the enclosures sit on the summit of a distinctive knoll at the end of the sand and gravel ridge upon which the symbol stone stands. The Barflat complex overlooks the Water of Bogie, with the ridge upon which the site and Craw Stane sits sloping eastwards down to the river. Aerial photography in 1994 revealed further cropmarks closer to the modern village of Rhynie, including two large square enclosures.⁶⁸

EXCAVATION AND SURVEY 2011–17

Excavation at the Barflat enclosures and environs took place from 2011 to 2017.⁶⁹ The excavations carried out over six seasons have provided detailed insights into the complex and a contemporary cemetery. Landscape survey is also beginning to contextualise these sites within their wider landscape setting. The preliminary results of the excavations to date are detailed below.

The Barflat complex

The cropmarks at Barflat found in association with the Craw Stane suggested the presence of at two concentric ditched enclosures, with the inner ditch encircling an area 32 m x 20 m and the outer circa 50 m in diameter (Fig 5).⁷⁰ The outermost boundary, around 60m in diameter, was originally identified as a palisade, but excavation revealed this to be a more complex feature. Prior to excavation, the enclosure complex was considered unusual and traces of internal features such as pits or postholes suggested a complicated and multi-phase settlement.⁷¹ The Craw Stane evidently stood at the entrance to the innermost ditched enclosure.

Excavation has revealed that the ditched enclosures are likely to belong to the earliest phase of the site, with the boundary ditches representing substantial features,

⁶⁷ Shepherd and Shepherd 1978.

⁶⁸ RCAHMS 2007, 121.

⁶⁹ A small excavation also occurred in 2006 near the complex, focusing on a Bronze Age ring-ditch house, following geophysical survey: See Gondek and Noble 2015.

⁷⁰ RCAHMS 2007, 122.

⁷¹ RCAHMS 2007, 122. See Fig 6.20 in RCAHMS 2007 for enclosures of comparable size in Aberdeenshire.

surviving up to 4 m wide and 1.2 m deep. The outer ditch had been recut at least twice and both ditches had evidently gone out of use in the later stages of the settlement, with one building (S3) built over the infilled inner and outer ditches. It is likely that the ditches had banks of some kind, but no trace survived. The outermost and probably latest enclosure boundary was formed of an external plank and post setting, supported by an inner setting of substantial posts. The most revealing investigation of the outer enclosure system took place in 2016 when a 4 m stretch on the western side of the enclosure was excavated. This revealed an outer foundation trench that had held evenly spaced posts linked by planks that created a continuous outer wooden boundary wall. Set back almost exactly 2 m from the outer foundation trench, a series of large postholes on the interior side may have supported a wallwalk behind the outer plank and post wall. Additional postholes around the entranceway suggest that the entrance was elaborate, with additional posts for gates and other architectural embellishments. The entranceway itself was around 3 m across, much narrower than the entrances to the ditched enclosures (8–14 m). A preponderance of oak charcoal in the fills of the outer enclosure settings suggests that oak was the main structural timber for the outer enclosure boundary wall. The outermost enclosure had been dismantled at the end of the use of the site.

Internal Buildings

The excavation approach, which concentrated on establishing the ground plan of the complex through strip and map evaluation, revealed the remains of a range of structures associated with the Barflat enclosure complex. None of these were fully excavated; nevertheless, the character of the structures strongly suggest they may have only been partially timber-built – turf or other more ephemeral materials are likely to have made up an important structural element of these buildings. Indeed, structures from this period are exceedingly rare in north-east Scotland – the use of turf and non-earthfast building styles is one likely explanation for the dearth of Pictish period dwellings.⁷²

One structure identified at the Craw Stane complex consisted of a series of postholes arranged in a rectangular setting (S1) (Fig 5). The main structural timbers were on the north and south and included four large posts on each side, with those on the south showing

⁷² Wainwright 1955, 88; Ralston 1997, 34; Carver et al 2016, 228.

evidence for having been renewed. Smaller posts were also found on the west side of the building, and the excavation of one showed the presence of a squared timber. No definite features were found on the east side, but plough truncation was particularly bad on the top of the knoll upon which the eastern end of the building sat. The surviving features suggest a rectangular post-built building of at least 9 by 5 m, but the presence of turf walls or non-earthfast timbers may mean that this was a substantially larger building, of which the surviving remains represent only the main internal roof-bearing supports.

In earlier reports, a larger structure (S2) (Fig 5) was postulated, but this can be discounted.⁷³ In the 2012 excavations, linear 'settings' were found extending more than 20 m south-west to north-east. These were interpreted as possible plank settings, but further investigation showed that the sterile fill of these contrasted with the other features on site. It is likely that they were the result of natural frost-wedging.

More definitive traces of a building were found adjacent to the Craw Stane in 2012 and re-investigated in 2016. Here there was a complex series of postholes, beamslots and burnt spreads (Fig 5). These appear to have been part of a building (S3), defined by an outer beam or plank slot surrounding a series of postholes in the interior. The majority of the postholes had the appearance of being reworked or dug out, suggesting the structure, like the outer enclosure wall, had been dismantled at the end of its life. Fragments of charred planks of oak and alder were found redeposited in the backfill of the internal postholes. Structure S3 overlay the inner ditch and the exterior beam slot cut the outer ditch. Features on the southern side of the building ground plan were largely absent, but these are likely to have been lost due to erosion on the steep slope on this side of the complex. Structure S3 would have measured approximately 6 x 9 m and closely resembles the later and larger 8th century Pictish 'bag-shaped' building (S1) excavated at Portmahomack on Tarbat Ness.⁷⁴ The excavator interpreted the inner posts of S1 at Portmahomack as a cruck frame for a large building with the perimeter slot acting as the foundation for a turf or stone wall with a stone or plank internal revetment.⁷⁵ This seems the most likely interpretation for structure S3 – a timber- and turf-framed building that was constructed on the hillslope. If contemporary

⁷³ Noble et al 2013, 1142.

⁷⁴ S1 at Portmahomack was around 14.5 x 10 m in maximum dimensions: Carver et al 2016, 240.

⁷⁵ Carver et al 2016, 240.

with the Craw Stane, the Pictish stone would have stood directly next to the building's entrance. Other structures within the ditched and wooden enclosure wall were suggested by scatters of postholes and pits, some of which cut through the inner and outer ditches.

Settlement associated with the complex may have also extended outside the enclosure boundaries. Less than 10 m outside the south-east entrance of the outer enclosure, a sub-circular deposit of sand, full of charcoal and charred timbers, was located in 2015 and was interpreted as the vestiges of a floor layer of a building (S4) (Fig 5). S4 was preserved in an area downslope from the entrance and survived as a sub-circular deposit around 3 m north-south by 2.8 m east-west. This appeared to be cut into hill wash on an east facing slope. The deposit was up to 0.22 m in depth and consisted of silty sand with evidence for burnt turf and large charred structural timbers. Two iron buckles from horse harnesses or saddle girth straps and a Late Roman amphora handle were recovered from S4. The charcoal assemblage was dominated by large quantities of oak charcoal from large timbers, with lesser amounts of hazel, suggesting that the superstructure was oak framed with hazel wattle panels. The surviving evidence from S4 suggests that, as with the majority of Pictish buildings, there were few or no earthfast structural components. In the floor layers, carbonized cereal grains of barley were also recorded.

The Craw Stane symbol stone and stone socket

The Craw Stane stands directly on the line of the entranceway of the outer enclosure and between the terminals of the inner ditch. Its current position has been recorded here since the middle of the 19th century, but the stone was reset in a concrete base in the 1930s after it toppled during a storm. The stone does not face the entranceway of the enclosure complex, but whether the original orientation was retained in the 1930s is unknown. In 2015, a large cut feature was found just downslope from the Craw Stane. This feature stood at the terminal of the outer ditch, 4 m south-east of the Craw Stane. It consisted of an oval cut measuring 1.3 m by 0.9 m and 0.65 m deep. The remains of stone packing was found around a central sand fill. The presence of disturbed packing and size of the feature marked it as distinct from any posthole found on site to date. The most likely interpretation of this feature is that it was a socket for a standing stone. When found during ploughing the Rhynie Man stone was located downslope from the Craw Stane. It was suggested that, given the steepness of the field in this area, the stone may have been dragged by the plough "from an

original position on the crest of the hill shoulder, near the Craw Stane".⁷⁶ No other potential stone socket was identified during the excavations and therefore the feature identified in 2015 is a good candidate for the socket of the Rhynie Man, albeit two other Class I stones were found in the nearby church graveyard and it is possible that the feature relates to the setting of one of these.⁷⁷ Radiocarbon dates obtained from charcoal from basal fills of the feature show that it contained backfilled deposits that were contemporary with the overall site use.

The cemetery

Excavations in 2013–14 have shown that the Barflat enclosure complex associated with the Craw Stane did not stand in isolation – there is evidence for a contemporary cemetery to the north on the outskirts of the modern village. In 1836, two of the symbol stones found in the village of Rhynie (Nos. 2 and 3) were removed during the construction of the turnpike road; a “quantity” of human bone was found near the stones at this time.⁷⁸ Antiquarian reports and local newspapers also record the discovery of east-west oriented long cist burials in this area.⁷⁹ Moreover, Rhynie No. 3, which depicts a warrior with a spear, is said to have been found in association with a cairn.⁸⁰ Near to the findspots and burials, aerial photography in 1994 revealed the outlines of two large square enclosures.⁸¹ These were targeted for excavation in 2013 (Fig 6). The two enclosures are of a very unusual type, the larger around 20 m across and the smaller 16 m. These are defined by ditches with a short segment of ditch projecting in front of a northwards aligned entranceway. Immediately adjacent to these enclosures, two square barrows were also identified during the excavations. These barrows were each around 4–4.5 m across and within one of these a stone-built cist with the partially preserved skeleton of an adult was uncovered; fragments of bone from the human skeleton were dated to 400 to 570 cal AD (SUERC-52935 1559±30, cal AD 420–570; MAMS-21252 1602±21, cal AD 400–540, both 95% probability), contemporary with the Barflat complex. The dating evidence for the larger enclosures is problematic, but radiocarbon dating of an upper fill of the ditch of the larger example

⁷⁶ Shepherd and Shepherd 1978, 211.

⁷⁷ RCAHMS 2007, 122.

⁷⁸ RCAHMS 2007, 121.

⁷⁹ Henderson 1907, 163.

⁸⁰ Logan 1929, 56.

⁸¹ Greig 1994, 26.

suggests it was present in the 7th century AD and a pit dating to the 5th–6th century AD was found inside. Nothing was found to illuminate the function of the larger enclosures, but a similar example found at the Pictish royal centre of Forteviot, Perthshire, has been interpreted as a shrine built on Romano-British models; other large square enclosures at barrow cemeteries are known from the aerial record in northern Pictland;⁸² the enclosures may have played a role in funerary ceremonies at important cemeteries.

The wider landscape

The complex at Barflat and by the modern village at Rhynie is overlooked by an impressive hillfort – the site of Tap o’ Noth (Fig 7). The forts on Tap o’ Noth comprise an upper vitrified fort, with a stone rampart defining a lower enclosure of 16.4 ha.⁸³ The upper fort is of a type that probably dates to c 400–200 cal BC, with the lower fort possibly earlier.⁸⁴ More than 100 house platforms survive within the lower enclosure. The scale of the defences at Tap o’ Noth and the size of the settlement strongly suggest that this site and environs were a major regional focus in the Iron Age. The fort is also of a type that was elsewhere reused in the early medieval period, the best known example being Craig Phadrig, Inverness-shire, which has radiocarbon dates and E-ware suggesting re-occupation of the Iron Age vitrified fort in the 7th century AD.⁸⁵ There is another oval fort at Wheedlemont (Cnoc Cailliche) to the west of the Barflat complex which, recent excavation suggests, is also Iron Age in date, however excavations at a third fort in the valley, at Cairnmore, located less than 2km to the south-east, have produced a phase of occupation dating to the 5th to 6th centuries AD. Cairnmore is a small multivallate site enclosing an area of 0.37 ha.⁸⁶ Evidence of non-ferrous metalworking was found at Cairnmore, and finds included pin and brooch moulds of a type similar to those found at the Barflat complex.⁸⁷

Extending further back in time, the Rhynie complex is situated within a rich landscape for earlier prehistoric remains.⁸⁸ In particular there are a number of

⁸² Campbell and Maldonado forthcoming; Mitchell and Noble 2017, 17.

⁸³ RCAHMS 2007, 103–105.

⁸⁴ Cook 2010, 79.

⁸⁵ Small and Cottam 1972; Peteranna and Birch forthcoming. Current Historic Environment Scotland funded work at Tap o’ Noth aims to date the major enclosing elements of the fort.

⁸⁶ RCAHMS 2007, 101; Cook 2011, 216.

⁸⁷ New excavations by the Northern Picts project (2018–19) aims to more firmly establish the chronology and character of the Cairnmore site.

⁸⁸ Gondek and Noble 2011; Gondek and Noble 2015.

Neolithic/Bronze Age monuments, including stone circles, in the Rhynie valley, with a notable concentration of rock art (relatively simple cupmarked stones which is the norm for Aberdeenshire).⁸⁹ One of the symbol stones, No. 5 from Rhynie, is a reused prehistoric monument with cupmarks on its non-symbol face.⁹⁰ Unenclosed prehistoric settlement is also attested in the valley and a number of Bronze Age and Iron Age ring-ditches have been found during excavations as part of the Rhynie Environs Archaeological Project, contributing to the impression that this was an intensively occupied landscape in the prehistoric period.⁹¹

THE ARTEFACT ASSEMBLAGE FROM THE CRAW STANE COMPLEX

The artefact assemblage from Rhynie represents one of the most extensive known from early medieval Scotland and is an exceptionally rare assemblage of this period more generally within Britain and Ireland. More than 1000 artefacts have been recovered over five seasons of excavation (Fig 8).⁹² Finds include pottery, glass, metalwork and evidence for non-ferrous metalwork production. Particularly notable are the imports of Mediterranean and Continental origin. The Mediterranean imports are the first identified at a Pictish site and include 77 sherds of Late Roman Amphorae of late 5th or early 6th century date.⁹³ These belong to at least three vessels: one LR1, one LR2 and one unidentified LRA. There is also a handful of sherds of Campbell's Group C Atlantic glass vessels.⁹⁴ Although these quantities are relatively small, they are significant, both in being so far outside the normal Atlantic distribution and in being so far inland.⁹⁵ Only two other Insular sites share the characteristics of being substantially inland (over 30 km) and having quantities of LRA

⁸⁹ RCAHMS 2007, 73; Gondek and Noble 2015, 128; George Currie pers comm.

⁹⁰ RCAHMS 2008, 40. There are a number of Recumbent Stone circles in the area that this stone could have come from. See Clarke 2007 for a list of other possible reused prehistoric stones as Class I symbol stones. Clarke argues that prehistoric stones were reused as a reaction against Christianity missionary activity, but this does not seem wholly convincing for the Rhynie case or for north-east Scotland more generally in the 5th or early 6th centuries: See Clancy 2008 for Christianity in north-east Scotland.

⁹¹ See also RCAHMS 2007, 82–83; Gondek and Noble 2015.

⁹² The number of artefacts from the site is particularly notable given the site is plough truncated, with the majority of contemporary land surfaces removed by cultivation and later land use practices. The excavation strategy was also evaluative in nature, with the majority of deposits left in situ for future investigation, suggesting that the number of artefacts outlined here is only a fraction of the total assemblage that survives on site and, given truncation, likely to be a smaller fraction again of the original total.

⁹³ Campbell 2007, 18–24.

⁹⁴ Campbell 2007, 64–69.

⁹⁵ Campbell 2007, fig 13.

imports – Cadbury Castle in south-west England and Clogher in northern Ireland, both of which have Late Roman period occupation and later royal status.⁹⁶

In terms of other object types, the Rhynie assemblage includes fragments of brooches, a range of nail-headed and disc-headed pins in iron and bronze, amber beads and other decorative dress items. The metal artefacts also include a series of square or rectangular buckles of Late Roman form, and several small pins and artefacts related to Late Roman or Anglo-Saxon toilet sets. Weaponry is also present, in the form of a dagger or sword pommel of Anglo-Saxon type in silver and an iron dagger blade. There are also objects of more everyday significance such as a complete upper stone of a rotary quern, fragments of other coarse stone tools, spindle whorls and a small assemblage of locally-made coil-built pottery. Taken together these objects throw new light on the ranges and types of artefacts being used in the 5th to early 6th centuries, a period from which finds assemblages from northern Britain are exceptionally rare.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the finds is the range of objects relating to metalwork production and redistribution. The largest proportion of objects from the site directly relates to the production of fine metalwork – there are over 350 clay mould fragments, 240 crucible fragments, 20 crucible stands and around 15 stone moulds for ingots and other objects (Fig 8 and 9). A pair of metalworking tongs was also found in a structured deposit that included significant quantities of animal bone in the backfill of a posthole. Metalworking clearly took place on site – a smithing hearth base was found slumping into one part of the outer ditch, and in another part of the outer ditch was a pit, seemingly part of an in situ smithing hearth, which had been later backfilled with debris from metalworking. The finds distribution shows that metalworking was concentrated in the innermost locations of the enclosure complex (Fig 8). Small fragments of waste material have been identified as deriving from precious metal-working and initial XRF analysis also suggests the presence of silver. The moulds include examples for producing handpins, axe-pins, small penannular brooches of Fowler's Type H,⁹⁷ larger brooches, and at least ten examples of a previously unknown type of small zoomorphic ornament featuring three

⁹⁶ See Alcock 1972; Warner 2000 for general site overviews and Campbell 2007, 110 for locational aspects of these two sites.

⁹⁷ See Fowler 1963 for brooch typology.

dimensional animals (Fig 9 and 10). The assemblage has huge implications for the dating of important object types. The Type H penannular brooches, for example, are widely found in Britain, but it has previously been difficult to date them due to a lack of good contextual information. The chronology of handpins has also been extensively debated;⁹⁸ the only known production sites are in northern Scotland, despite the pins themselves being widely distributed, but the dating evidence is far from secure or comprehensive for the development of these objects.⁹⁹ The Barflat site at Rhynie is the first location to have produced more than one mould for a handpin, with all examples from well-stratified contexts. The finds and their dating will provide vital fixed points in our typological sequences and overall the finds assemblage gives a rare insight into the production and use of an important range of 5th to 6th century artefact types.

DATING THE RHYNIE COMPLEX

To date there is a total of 35 radiocarbon dates from charcoal and charred cereal grains from the excavations across nine feature groups that include the ditches, a number of the internal structures, and a range of additional features from the Craw Stane complex (Table 1). Dating was based on single entities,¹⁰⁰ and standard methodologies.¹⁰¹ The preliminary dating results are given in Figure 11.¹⁰² A Bayesian approach was adopted in the analysis (Fig 11),¹⁰³ with stratigraphic relationships modelled where possible. The material modelled includes samples from the outermost post and plank boundary,¹⁰⁴ including from

⁹⁸ See discussion in Youngs 2005.

⁹⁹ Campbell and Heald 2007, 177.

¹⁰⁰ Ashmore 1999. See Table 1 for all the dates included in the modelling.

¹⁰¹ The samples were pre-treated, combusted, graphitised and measured by accelerator mass spectrometry at the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre. See Dunbar et al 2016.

¹⁰² Calibrations have been calculated using the probability method: Stuiver and Reimer 1993.

¹⁰³ Buck et al 1996. Bayesian statistics provides a method of allowing different types of information (eg radiocarbon dates, phasing, and stratigraphy) to be combined to produce realistic estimates of calendar dates. The technique used is a form of Markov Chain Monte Carlo sampling, and has been applied using the program OxCal v4.2. Details of the algorithms employed by this program are available from the online manual or in Bronk Ramsey 1995; 1998; 2001; 2009. In the model, the calibrated radiocarbon dates are shown in outline and the posterior density estimates produced by the chronological modelling are shown in solid black. Highest posterior density intervals used to summarise these distributions in the text are given in italics to reflect the fact that they are modelled, and emphasise that they are not absolute and would change given a different set of parameters or 'prior' beliefs.

¹⁰⁴ Eg palisade posthole samples (SUERC-35639/40/43, -66398, and -66425). The two results from palisade posthole 15333 (SUERC-66398 and -66245) are statistically consistent ($T'=2.3$; $v=1$; $T'(5\%)=3.8$). All tests for statistical consistency follow the method of Ward and Wilson 1978.

the backfill from the dismantled outer wall foundation trench.¹⁰⁵ Samples from both the inner and outer ditch were incorporated into the model,¹⁰⁶ as were samples from structures S1, S3 and S4,¹⁰⁷ and the possible stone socket.¹⁰⁸ The primary model has good agreement ($A_{\text{model}}=83$) showing good correlation between the archaeological stratigraphy and modelled sequence. The model estimates that the dated activity at Rhynie began in *cal AD 330–390 (95% probability; Fig 11; start: Rhynie)*, and probably in *cal AD 355–380 (68% probability)*. The activity took place over a period of *100–225 years (95% probability; Fig 12; span: Rhynie)*, and probably *135–200 years (68% probability)*. Dated activity ended in *cal AD 480–570 (95% probability; Fig 11; end: Rhynie)*, and probably in *cal AD 510–560 (68% probability)*.

DISCUSSION

Various strands of evidence brought together here for the first time can be used to explore the significance and context of the Rhynie valley in the 1st millennium AD. The recognition that the place-name Rhynie is likely to include the early Celtic word **rīg* ‘king’ provides a very illuminating area of research for considering the significance of this landscape. The minimal interpretation of the name suggests an early form of Rhynie might have been **rīgonin* or **rīgonīn*, a ‘place of or associated with (-īn) a great (-on-) king (*rīg*)-’.

¹⁰⁵ (SUERC-35638, -66394/9, -66400, -66424, and -66431/2). The two results from context 15334 are not statistically consistent ($T'=4.6$; $v=1$; $T'(5\%)=3.8$; Ward and Wilson 1978), nor are the two results from 15345 ($T'=6.6$; $v=1$; $T'(5\%)=3.8$). This would suggest the fill from the palisade trench contains material deposited over a protracted period of time, and this is consistent with an interpretation of much of the material coming from redeposited backfill after the palisade had been dismantled.

¹⁰⁶ Of the four results from samples submitted from the inner ditch, SUERC-45548 can be placed later in the stratigraphy than SUERC-45554. SUERC-45553 is from the basal fill in the outer ditch and earlier than SUERC-45547, while SUERC-35637 comes from a lower fill than SUERC-35649. There are two results (SUERC-66388/9) from context 15191 that are statistically consistent ($T'=0.3$; $v=1$; $T'(5\%)=3.8$), and could be the same actual age.

¹⁰⁷ Of the five results (SUERC-45538/9 and -45544/6/9) from structure S1, there are two in stratigraphic order. SUERC-45538 is earlier than SUERC-45546. There are two results (SUERC-66390/1) from context 15112 associated with structure S4. The two results are statistically consistent ($T'=0.0$; $v=1$; $T'(5\%)=3.8$), and could be the same actual age. There are three results (SUERC-35641/2 and -35648) from structure S3, with SUERC-35648 coming from a discrete charcoal spread from within the structure. Structure S3 is definitely later than the inner ditch, and probably later than the outer ditch. The overall modelling explores both possible readings of the stratigraphy.

¹⁰⁸ (SUERC-66426/30). These measurements are statistically consistent ($T'=1.7$; $v=1$; $T'(5\%)=3.8$), and could be the same age.

With the very limited historical sources we have for northern Scotland, historical analysis is likely to remain frustratingly speculative. However, it is clear that the Rhynie landscape was situated in an area that had long had a strategic significance and in the later Pictish period was in an area towards the edges of two documented Pictish polities, Fortriu and Ce, but whether it was an area controlled by either, or indeed whether these polities or regions existed as early as the Barflat complex and associated cemetery is uncertain. The detailed dating we now have for the site shows that the Barflat complex at Rhynie began to develop as early as the late 4th century AD, most likely in the period *cal AD 355–380* and ended in the mid 6th century (*cal AD 510–560*), occupying a particularly shadowy period in the 1st millennium AD, with the complex ending before our historical sources for Pictland begin to increase in the 7th century.

In Pictland, and northern Pictland in particular, the dominant polity by the 7th century was Fortriu. A few specific places and rivers, can be identified from textual references as lying in Fortriu, but these – Strathdearn, Forres, Kinloss – are all much further west on, with good circumstantial evidence also to link the northern part of the Great Glen and Ross to Fortriu.¹⁰⁹ Thus, it seems unlikely that Rhynie was part of an early Fortriu, but its placement towards the eastern extent of that kingdom may provide clues to the demise of the Barflat complex. The later 7th century was obviously an important period for the evolution of the polity of Fortriu, but there are a few fragments of evidence indicating that Fortriu was already developing and perhaps an expansionist power before the Battle of Nechtansmere in AD 685 when Fortriu defeated the Northumbrians and expanded into southern Pictland.¹¹⁰ The name Fortriu has antecedents in the Iron Age tribal group the *Uerturiones*, first mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus in the late 4th century AD, suggesting that the kingdom of Fortriu had a substantial prehistory. Moreover, our sources also suggest that Pictish kings located in areas to the west of Rhynie may have been expanding their territories when the Barflat complex came to an end. The powerful Bridei son of Mailcon, probably a king of Fortriu, who ruled from the mid-550s to 584, had, according to Adomnán's 'Life of Saint Columba' (written c 597), a sub-king of the Orkneys in his attendance at his River Ness stronghold.¹¹¹ While that might reflect the situation of

¹⁰⁹ Woolf 2006, 192, 195–6, 199–201.

¹¹⁰ Fraser 2009, 50–51, 54–8, 212–16, 224.

¹¹¹ Sharpe 1995, 196 (II.42), notes 294 and 324; Woolf 2006, 201; Fraser 2009, 99–103.

Adomnán's time, rather than Bridei's, there is another fragment of evidence that the 6th century Bridei had expansionist tendencies. The Annals of Ulster contain two items (duplicates of the same record) in c 558 and 560 stating 'The flight/migration before the son of Maelchon' (either Bridei or an otherwise unrecorded brother).¹¹² This is likely to be a contemporary item, which, if nothing else, indicates the power and maybe expansionism of Bridei's dynasty in the same period that the fortified complex at Barflat, Rhynie fell out of use.¹¹³

Other processes or natural phenomena could also have contributed to the demise of an important early centre in the Rhynie valley. In much of Europe, including Ireland, there is evidence that the mid-6th century was punctuated by plagues and famines.¹¹⁴ Given that much of the population is likely to have survived only at subsistence level, and that plagues affected elites, if these phenomena reached Rhynie, this could have undermined its rulers. In the 1st millennium there is strong evidence that rulers, whether Christian or not, were thought to be responsible to some extent for the natural prosperity of their subjects and realm.¹¹⁵ These, or other similar difficulties, could have broken the ideological authority of the leaders at Rhynie, resulting in the demise of the site. The adoption of Christianity could also have had an effect, but given the early date for the Barflat complex and associated cemetery, it is unlikely that conversion to Christianity would have led to the demise of the area as a centre of power.¹¹⁶ It is also possible that an elite focus in the Rhynie valley had a longer lifespan than current dating evidence suggests – the elite centre may have shifted to another site in the Rhynie valley in the mid 6th century. Exploring this possibility constitutes a second phase of the project with ongoing work at other sites in the landscape such as Tap o' Noth and Cairnmore assessing the chronology and longevity of other notable enclosed sites in the wider landscape.

¹¹² Fraser 2009, 68–9. AU 536.3 (AT kl. 47.1) (*perditio panis*); AU 539.1 (*perditio panis*); AU 545.1 (mortality); AU 549.3 (mortality) (CS 551); AU 554.2 (AT kl. 61.2, CS 554.2) (*pestis*).

¹¹³ Fraser 2009, 94–5 has argued that this could have been a later addition c 700 when Iona was politically close to Fortriu, in order to show that Fortriu was involved in Argyll affairs at an early date, but the obscurity of the item's wording would make it very poor propaganda.

¹¹⁴ Fraser 2009, 68–9. AU 536.3 (AT kl. 47.1) (*perditio panis*); AU 539.1 (*perditio panis*); AU 545.1 (mortality); AU 549.3 (mortality) (CS 551); AU 554.2 (AT kl. 61.2, CS 554.2) (*pestis*).

¹¹⁵ For the precariousness of most of Irish society, and the dire social consequences of natural disasters, see Ó Corráin 2005, 574–83; Fraser 2009, 68, has speculated that the plagues may have reached Scotland. For rulers as decisive for a kingdom's natural as well as human prosperity, see Oakley 2010, esp. 20–1, 46, 155–7, and for Ireland specifically, see Jaski 2000, 58, 73–81.

¹¹⁶ Clancy 2008.

Turning specifically to the archaeology, in terms of the wider context there are as yet few parallels for the Barflat complex at Rhynie. Indeed there is only a small number of identified Pictish sites in eastern Scotland and these are generally restricted to hill or promontory forts.¹¹⁷ With regards to hillforts we know that by the 7th century, complex multivallate forts were being constructed in Pictland and elsewhere in northern Britain and by this stage they were generally defined by stone-faced, timber-laced ramparts.¹¹⁸ However, at sites like Dundurn, Perthshire, the early phases appear to have consisted of a palisade or timber stockade of some kind.¹¹⁹ The phase 1 palisade at Dundurn is poorly understood, being interpreted from slight remains and small keyhole trenches, but it clearly utilised complex carpentry and both post and plank elements, similar to that which must have been utilised in the Rhynie outer enclosure wall¹²⁰ Recent work at Craig Phadrig, Inverness, has identified that in the 5th–6th centuries, some form of palisade or perhaps post and plank setting was constructed on the ruins of an impressive Iron Age vitrified fort.¹²¹ Thus, similar architectural elements of the Barflat outer enclosure may have been present in the early phases of other Pictish elite centres, but our knowledge of the development of these sites is limited by the small scale of previous archaeological investigations and the early phases being compromised by later building episodes.

In terms of size, Rhynie, at around 60 m in diameter for the outer enclosure, can seem slight, but it compares well with the size of even the developed phases of major Pictish hillforts – it is comparable, for example, to the area of the summit citadel and upper enclosures at Dundurn.¹²² In terms of the internal buildings of northern elite centres, our knowledge is also frustratingly slight. Few definitive ground plans of buildings have been found within any of the previously excavated elite centres of early medieval northern Britain. At Dunadd, the summit citadel with an internal diameter of around 20 m could have been roofed, but this is uncertain, and no definite building foundations were found elsewhere in the fort.¹²³ At Clatchard Craig, Fife, a multivallate hillfort in southern Pictland, excavations in the upper citadel revealed a floor layer and central hearth of a probable 7th-

¹¹⁷ Ralston 2004; Noble et al 2013.

¹¹⁸ Noble et al 2013, online appendix.

¹¹⁹ Alcock et al 1989, 200.

¹²⁰ Alcock et al 1989, 201.

¹²¹ Peteranna and Birch forthcoming.

¹²² Alcock et al 1989, 202.

¹²³ Lane and Campbell 2000, 251.

or 8th-century building. Like at the Barflat complex, little structural detail survived of the building at Clatchard Craig, with no definite traces of an outer wall, but a pivot stone indicates a doorway and the extent of the floor layer suggests a building of around 9 m by 4 m – comparable in size at least to the structures found at the centre of the Barflat complex.¹²⁴ Recent excavations at Dunnicaer, Aberdeenshire, a promontory fort dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, where preservation levels were greater, has shown that the architecture of buildings within this fort again clearly involved few earthfast elements, but surviving floor layers and hearths suggest modest buildings of around 6 m in length/breadth.¹²⁵ Excavations at Burghead, Moray have also identified structures of similar dimensions to those at Rhynie, again with few earthfast components.¹²⁶ After the 3rd century AD, the settlement record in mainland Scotland becomes exceptionally difficult to trace, a situation that characterises Scottish rural settlement more generally till the 18th or 19th centuries.¹²⁷ It seems very likely that structures at Rhynie and other Pictish sites incorporated timber structural elements (not always with earthfast elements) with plank revetting in some cases and turf or stone outer walls.¹²⁸ The lack of preservation of the internal structures at Rhynie makes it difficult to address whether these buildings were residences, workshops or more specialized structures, but the animal bone assemblage, evidence for cereals and quern stones, handmade pottery and the metalworking evidence suggest a successful centre of production and consumption that almost certainly had a residential dimension of some kind.

As well as comparing the Barflat complex to other Pictish fortified complexes, it is important to explore the parallels between the enclosure complex and elite centres elsewhere in Britain and Ireland. Indeed, while the size and character of structures at the Barflat complex display some parallels with the hill and promontory forts that are a well-known component of Pictish archaeology, topographically and architecturally the Barflat

¹²⁴ Close-Brooks 1986, 145.

¹²⁵ MacIver and Noble 2017.

¹²⁶ A building of around 9 x 5 m was found during 2017 excavations at Burghead: Sveinbjarnarson and Noble 2017.

¹²⁷ Eg Fenton and Walker 1981, 73–76; Hunter 2007, 48–50; See RCAHMS 2007, chapter 3 for a detailed consideration of the destruction of archaeological remains in Aberdeenshire in cultivated landscapes, and chapters 7–8 for a consideration of the lack of rural settlement in a post-Iron Age context.

¹²⁸ As argued for early Pictish structures at Portmahomack: Carver et al 2016, 86. Similar issues surrounding the survival (or lack of survival) of buildings at early medieval sites exist in western Britain, at Cadbury Castle Somerset, for example. At Cadbury, Alcock found that there were few earthfast components to the rampart or to a putative timber hall found within (Alcock 1972, 176–7; Alcock 1995)

complex finds closer parallels with elite centres found in regions further to the south and west. The position of the Barflat complex in the valley below a topographically dominant Iron Age hillfort, for example, resembles the later Anglian royal site of Yeavinger, Northumberland, which sits in the shadow of the large Iron Age fort of Yeavinger Bell.¹²⁹ Indeed, the construction of plank architecture has direct parallels with elite architectural traditions found at Anglo-Saxon royal centres, but the evidence from Rhynie is substantially earlier than the Anglian examples.¹³⁰

The Barflat complex also shares important parallels with elite centres in early medieval Ireland. The scale of the enclosing elements and the low-lying location of the Rhynie enclosures finds good parallels with high-status ringforts in Ireland.¹³¹ One of the most direct parallels is Clogher, County Tyrone, a major site of the Airgialla. In the 6th century AD, Clogher was a c 50 m diameter enclosure.¹³² Finds from Clogher include an important assemblage of Late Roman amphora and it was also an important centre for brooch production,¹³³ providing clear links to the character of the finds assemblage at Rhynie. Interestingly, there are also direct architectural links, for the architecture of the early phases of Clogher was also dominated by a large wooden enclosure boundary – indeed Warner highlights the use of the place-name *Durlas*, interpreted as *darles*, ‘oak enclosure’, for royal sites in Ireland.¹³⁴ *Durlas* ‘oak enclosure’ would be an apt word to describe the timber components of Clogher and Rhynie.

The links between Rhynie and Clogher highlights that one important shared element between early medieval power centres in northern Britain and Ireland is the evidence for production of metalwork and the presence of imports.¹³⁵ The finds from the Barflat complex of Mediterranean and Continental imports provide the best evidence yet that Pictland was

¹²⁹ Hope-Taylor 1977, 6.

¹³⁰ While the Rhynie Barflat buildings were much more modest than those found at Anglo-Saxon hall complexes, it is important to stress the early date of the Craw Stane complex with the structures at Rhynie more comparable to Anglo-Saxon buildings of the 5th–6th centuries. Anglo-Saxon buildings of this period rarely exceeded 12 m in length: Hamerow 2012, 22. The post-built structures 2, 3 and 4 at Mucking, for example, were just over 10 m in length, though, unlike in many Pictish buildings, earthfast elements were evident marking the line of the exterior walls: Hamerow 1993, 8, figs 54–56. The evidence from Rhynie shows that northern traditions may have been important models for emulation during the development of the Anglo-Saxon elite complexes of the 6th and 7th century AD.

¹³¹ Stout 1997; O’Sullivan et al 2008, 58.

¹³² Warner 1988, 58; Warner 2000.

¹³³ Warner 1988, 57.

¹³⁴ Warner 1988, 57.

¹³⁵ Campbell 2007, 123–4.

directly keyed into the Atlantic trading system, with the quantity of material from the site suggesting that this was a primary centre for redistribution in the region.¹³⁶ In terms of the range and character of objects found at the site, Rhynie also shares many of the key characteristics of high-status sites located in Atlantic Britain and Ireland with the presence of weaponry, jewellery and precious metals.¹³⁷ The production evidence is particularly revealing and can be compared to the extensive evidence for craftworking at other northern elite centres sites such as Dunadd, Mote of Mark, and Brough of Birsay, though the craftworking evidence at these sites is later in date than the Rhynie assemblage.¹³⁸ Like at other elite centres, it is likely that the brooches, pins and other objects being produced at Rhynie were redistributed by elites to cement social relations with their followers, acting as a means of creating networks of affiliation and at the same time firmly establishing social differentiation and the elite control of resources;¹³⁹ but what is again surprising is the early date and richness of the Rhynie assemblage. The Rhynie valley was clearly the location of a precocious and early central place with metalwork production an important source of power and wealth.

In terms of considering the nature of power at elite centres, the sculpture from Rhynie is a particularly significant element of the material evidence. While the assemblage of stones from Rhynie include examples with few specific parallels, carved stone monuments or carvings on outcrops are not unknown from early medieval central places more generally in northern Britain. Well-known examples include the footprint and boar from Dunadd in western Scotland, Pictish style carvings from Trusty's Hill in south-west Scotland and bull carvings from the largest Pictish fort known at Burghead.¹⁴⁰ In each case, these sites have been interpreted as major power centres within their regional setting. In Pictland other, as yet unexcavated, sites may provide similar evidence of unusual sculpture marking high-status settlements. The Rhynie Man, for example, is paralleled by the similar, though more modest (in terms of size), carving from Mail (Cunningsburgh), Shetland.¹⁴¹ The

¹³⁶ Campbell 2007, 123.

¹³⁷ See Campbell 2007, Tables 17–19. Table 19 shows comparable sites in Scotland – to date only silver working not gold has been found at sites in Pictland. The sword pommel from Rhynie is the first from a defended site in Pictland. See also Campbell 1996.

¹³⁸ Curle 1982; Lane and Campbell 2000; Laing and Longley 2006.

¹³⁹ Nieke 1993, 128; Campbell 2007, 116.

¹⁴⁰ RCAHMS 2008, 64, 66; Gondek 2015; Toolis and Bowles 2017.

¹⁴¹ Turner 1994.

place-name Cunningsburgh probably derives from Old Norse *konungsborg* ‘king’s fort’,¹⁴² hinting at the perceived high-status nature of this site in Shetland in the later 1st millennium AD when the place-name was probably coined.¹⁴³

The character of the human-like figures depicted on Rhynie No. 3 and No. 7 suggest that the role of the Rhynie landscape in the 4th to 6th centuries AD did not lie exclusively within the sphere of settlement and production. Cult dimensions to the Rhynie sculpture have been recently cited, with the Rhynie Man interpreted as a figure involved in animal sacrifice.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, the intertwining of cult and ritual with sites of residence and centres of production and consumption has been noted widely across Europe. The evidence from Anglo-Saxon England, at high-status sites such as Yeavinger, for example, suggests that cult and ritual was an inseparable element of these settlements.¹⁴⁵ In Ireland, cult and sacrifice has also been highlighted as an important dimension of royal sites.¹⁴⁶ In Scandinavia, too, the character of finds from a number central places suggests that elements of ritual practice were integral to the emergence and development of major central places, with a number of ‘cult’ buildings implying that ritual, and an architectural focus for such practices, formed an important element of political authority at these sites.¹⁴⁷ New forms of cult and ritual more generally seem to have underpinned the new socio-political identities that emerged across north-west Europe in a Late and post-Roman context, and at elite centres these dimensions of power were deeply interwoven with secular trappings of power and rulership.¹⁴⁸ The evidence from Rhynie preserves on stone representations and depictions of practices of sacrifice and symbols of authority that will provide an important vein of evidence for discussions on the nature of rulership.

In Pictland, the alignment of sacred and secular power is emphasized both in the archaeological evidence and in some of the few textual sources we have for this period and

¹⁴² Stewart 1987, 48–9. The earliest forms he gives are: *Konesbrocht*, *Konosbrocht*, *Konnesbrocht* 1507, *Cunnisburgh* 1565.

¹⁴³ For a thoughtful and usefully cautious discussion of this name in relation to the place, see Johnston 1999. For the argument that the eponymous ‘king’s fort’ is Mousa Broch, so named by the Norse because of its relative magnificence and great size, see Smith 2016, 16. Thanks to Brian Smith for these references.

¹⁴⁴ Noble et al 2013, 1147.

¹⁴⁵ Hope-Taylor 1977, 97–102 argued that the hall complex was aligned on prehistoric barrows and the hall complex included a cult structure D2 as a central component of its layout.

¹⁴⁶ See for example Newman 2007; papers in Schot et al 2011; Gleeson 2012 and Gleeson and Carty 2013.

¹⁴⁷ Eg Brink 1996, 237; Ringtved 1999, 50; Watt 1999, 173; Hedeager 2011, 152.

¹⁴⁸ Eg Sundqvist 2002, 166; Ringtved 1999, 49; Hedeager 2011, 152.

region. In Adomnán's account of the 6th century Pictish king Bridei's fortress near Loch Ness, the presence of druids (*magi*) within the king's court is vividly highlighted in vignettes of Columba's life and miracles, used to highlight confrontations between Christianity and paganism.¹⁴⁹ The stones at the Barflat complex such as the Craw Stane and the Rhyne Man suggest that monumental symbols of identity and perhaps pagan belief were on prominent display at the enclosure complex. The iconographic evidence from Rhyne is a visceral reminder of the sacral dimensions of early kingship, and may help us re-examine evidence from other sites. The sacrificial practices that stones such as the Rhyne Man stone depict, for example, may have been much more widespread across Britain and Ireland; axe hammers of the type depicted on the Rhyne No.7 have been found at sites such as Cadbury Castle, Somerset and Lagore, Ireland.¹⁵⁰ It may be that the practices that the Rhyne Man embodied were a much wider part of early medieval rulership that has hitherto not been fully recognised.

Other important monuments from Rhyne can also be highlighted. The warrior figure, No. 3, was originally found near the northern extent of the cemetery and near to two large square enclosures of a type that have been interpreted at Forteviot as shrines, with parallels with similar features at Anglo-Saxon cemeteries.¹⁵¹ This suggests that other foci, perhaps also with cult dimensions, existed in the Rhyne landscape. At the cemetery, the presence of the No. 3 stone, carved with a figure with spear and shield, suggests that a warrior ethos was also intertwined with the ideology of rulership at Rhyne. Clearly the power of sites such as Rhyne drew on ritualized, spiritual and martial dimensions, with these concepts embodied and materialized through the sculpture that stood within the enclosures and in the surrounding landscape. The stones from Rhyne and the new contextual information provided by the excavations adds important iconographic and material evidence to our narratives regarding the importance of the sacral dimensions of rulership in early medieval Europe.

¹⁴⁹ I.37, II.33. In Ireland the status of druids had diminished by the 7th–8th centuries, but they were still present and influential enough to be included in lists of privileged people in law tracts: Kelly 1991, 59–60.

¹⁵⁰ Alcock 1972, 80–81; Hencken 1950, Fig 40a. The Cadbury example was found in the entranceway of the fort, perhaps ritually deposited. It was associated with Anglo-Saxon metalwork of probable 6th century date: Alcock 1972, 104, pl 79. Parallels can also be drawn with the axe hammer in the Sutton Hoo ship burial, although again this Anglo-Saxon example is likely to be later in date than the Rhyne Man depiction.

¹⁵¹ Blair 1995; Campbell and Maldonado forthcoming.

CONCLUSIONS

Bringing the evidence together, we would suggest that Rhynie was a high-status centre of the Picts from the 4th to the early 6th century AD, the first major non-hillfort secular elite site investigated in detail in Pictland to date. The evidence for fine metalworking from the Barflat complex shows that this was a major centre for production and long-distance trade, and the presence of buildings and the artefact and faunal assemblage suggest that, at least at times, the Barflat site acted as a residence. The Rhynie place-name suggests the valley was associated with a royal elite and the sculptural assemblage suggests cult and martial dimensions to the orchestration of power. With the recent excavations and on-going post-excavation analysis, the rich sculptural, architectural and material evidence from Rhynie can now begin to directly contribute to international debates and dialogue on the emergence of central places, the origins and development of particular architectures and iconographies of rulership, and the pathways to power followed by ruling elites in the early medieval period in northern and western Europe.

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Abbreviations

RCAHMS Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland

CS *Chronicum Scotorum*

AU *Annals of Ulster*

AT *Annals of Tigernach*