Proc Soc Antiq Scot, 110, 1978–80, 346–55

Low cairns, long cists and symbol stones

P J Ashmore*

It will be argued that some small rectangular and circular cairns and mounds found predominantly in northern Scotland belong to the pre-Viking Iron Age. Two groups will be identified: low ditched mounds like those at Garbeg and Whitebridge, and low kerbed cairns like those at Ackergill and Lundin Links. It will be suggested that these are variants on one theme, and that they possibly arose from a combination of prehistoric burial practices. Their similarity in some respects to monuments with early Christian affinities and their co-occurrence with Class I Pictish symbol stones will be discussed.

The sites described have been selected because they include low mounds overlying extended inhumations. Isolated undated extended inhumations such as that at Torrisdale, Naver (Lethbridge 1952, 182), have been ignored, as have explicitly Christian cemeteries like Whithorn. Nor are extended inhumation cemeteries such as that at the Catstane (Cowie 1978; Rutherford & Ritchie 1975, 183–9) considered.

The low mounds display a variety of characteristics. It is their combination with extended inhumation at one or more sites which makes them significant, for individually nearly all of their characteristics can be found in earlier prehistoric contexts. The mounds are flat topped, or very slightly convex or concave. They are bounded by a neat wall kerb, or a kerb of upright slabs, or are surrounded by a slight ditch with or without an external bank. They are oblong, trapezoidal, round or slightly oval. Oblong and trapezoidal ditched mounds have causeways at the corners of their ditches. They occur both singly and in small cemeteries and in the latter there are often elements of linearity in the layout of the mounds. At a few sites there is a layer of barren sand or similar material between the extended inhumation and the overlying mound. Corner posts are found at a few rectangular mounds. It is also worth noting that at several of the sites discussed long cists are found close by with the same orientation as lines of mounds or themselves defining a line on which a mound lies. At several of the sites a fragmentary or buried Class I Pictish symbol stone has been found. Yet again it must be said that the link between the sites is extended inhumation below a low flat mound, and that unexcavated sites have been included only where they incorporate several other similarities to those at which such inhumations have been discovered (Table 1).

In 1975 Mr L Wedderburn, then of Inverness Museum, excavated part of a small cemetery at NGR NH 511322 on Garbeg Farm, Drumnadrochit, following the discovery of fragments of a Class I symbol stone by the farmer, Mr J L M Younie. The cemetery consisted of 21 tightly grouped small low ditched mounds, trapezoidal, rectangular and circular. The Ordnance Survey record in discussing the comparable cemetery at Whitebridge that one of the mounds at Garbeg had a slight surrounding bank in addition to a surrounding ditch. With one exception, the mounds varied in diameter from 6·8 m to 3·4 m and between 0·5 m and 0·8 m in height; they were flat

* Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments, Scottish Development Department, 17 Atholl Crescent, Edinburgh

Table 1

Occurrence of attributes at cemeteries

	Built wall kerb	Long cists close by	Low flat round cairns	Ext. inhum. under cairn	Barren layer above inhum.	Symbol stone co-occurring	Some linear layout element	Vert. slab kerb	Low flat oblong cairn	Corner posts	Ditch
Garrywhin	×	×	×	×	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Watenan	×	—	×	—	—	×	—	—	—	—	—
Keiss	×	×	×	×	—	—	×	—	—	—	—
Birsay	×	—	×	×	×	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lundin	—	×	×	×	×	—	×	—	×	—	—
Dunrobin	—	×	—	×	×	×	—	—	×	—	—
Ackergill	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	—
Pityoulish	—	—	×	×	×	—	—	—	—	—	×
Garbeg	—	—	×	×	—	×	×	—	×	×	×
Sandwick	—	—	—	×	×	—	—	×	×	×	—
Tillytarmont	—	—	—	—	—	×	×	—	×	—	—
Whitebridge	—	—	×	—	—	—	—	—	×	—	×

topped. Their ditches were normally 0·6 m wide and 0·3 m deep, but in one case 0·9 m wide and 0·3 deep. The oblong mounds had gaps at the corners of their ditches. The exceptional mound was 7·9 m in diameter and only 0·2 m in height; its ditch was interrupted by a causeway 2 m wide (OS NNIR NH53SW 15, supplemented by author's visit).

Mr Wedderburn excavated the circular mound on top of which the symbol stone fragment had been found, a nearby rectangular mound, and the space between them; the latter was found to contain a grave and, on one side, a ditch. He also sampled an isolated circular mound. Of particular note are the gaps at the corners of the rectangular mound ditch, on each of which a small boulder had been placed. At the centre of that mound was a small rectangular stone setting with a rough kerb measuring 2·4 m by 1·7 m, under which was an E–W orientated long grave containing a decayed inhumation. Under the circular mound was a similarly oriented, similarly sized pit. In the enclosed space between, excavation of which was not completed, was a small setting of stones overlying a probably similar long pit. The isolated circular mound contained centrally a similar pit which was lined with small boulders to form a massive cist. No burial was found in it (Wedderburn & Grimes 1975).

In 1979 archaeological surveyors of the Ordnance Survey reported a comparable cemetery (NH 492171) at Whitebridge, near Fort Augustus. In addition to one rectangular ditched low mound nearly identical to the majority of those at Garbeg, it consisted of low round, rectangular and trapezoidal mounds each with a ditch broader than those at Garbeg and a slight external bank. The mounds ranged in diameter from 11 m to less than 6 m, except for one similar to the Garbeg mounds, which was 5·5 m sq. The latter was 0·8 m high, while the others were all under 0·2 m high. Later structures had impinged on the cemetery, as had cultivation; three stony mounds without ditches may be clearance heaps. The surveyors drew attention to the gaps at the corners of the ditches surrounding the rectangular mounds (OS NNIR NH41NE; Wallace 1911, 327–8, plan).

In 1953 Mrs V and Mr A Rae excavated one of four low round ditched barrows (NH 932152) at Pityoulish, Strathspey. The barrows were each 7 m diameter and under 0·45 m tall; in the centre of each was a monolith. The ditches of two of the barrows overlapped. The excavated barrow contained a complicated stratigraphy which may be summarised as follows: a long grave containing an extended inhumation was dug through a purposefully laid layer of grey sand and overlain by another layer of similar material. On top of this was placed a D-shaped figure of

boulders; the whole was then covered with mound material. It should be said that this summary omits several interesting subsidiary features. The ditch of the excavated mound was 1 to 1·2 m wide and 0·2 m deep. There was a knob of iron in the filling of the grave and what seemed to be the rusted away blade of a knife survived as a stain on the grave floor (Rae & Rae 1953, 153–60; OS NNIR NH91NW 15).

In 1925 and 1926 Mr A J H Edwards excavated a cemetery at Ackergill (ND 348549) N of Wick in Caithness, which provides an interesting comparison and contrast with cemeteries of Garbeg and Whitebridge type. He discovered seven rectangular cairns and two isolated cists roughly in line with one another, and a circular cairn also on that line but some distance from the rectangular cairns. Between the circular cairn and the others the modern road ran at a shallow angle to the general line of the cemetery. At the time the road was formed numerous human bones were found (Edwards 1926, 161) but trenching in the gap of some 50 metres which separated two of the rectangular cairns from the main surviving body of the cemetery revealed no further cairns.

The rectangular cairns were nearly square except for the largest which was markedly oblong and measured 6·1 m by 4·1 m; the others varied in maximum dimension from 3·8 m to 2·1 m. Two of the cairns had a kerb built of horizontally laid slabs, three a kerb of upright slabs, and one cairn had a kerb combining both techniques. No kerb was found round the seventh rectangular cairn. The corners of four of the mounds were accentuated by larger upright slabs, while three of the mounds had pillars central to the sides. The burial rite was extended inhumation in a long cist, nearly always built of many small vertical slabs; but the burials in the largest cairn were in a large cist built of horizontally laid slabs which was internally subdivided by vertical slab walls separating two extended inhumations. Another of the cairns held three cists, while a third held a two-tier cist. Two of the other cairns had no cist in or contiguous with the cairn material; they covered deeply buried cists from which they were separated by a thick layer of clean sand. Most of these cists were aligned roughly in the same direction as the cemetery, but two were at right angles to that line and one was set diagonally to it. Four of the seven cairns incorporated abundant white quartz stone.

The diverse details of these oblong cairns must not be allowed to conceal their general similarity to one another. They were all rectangular, all but one kerbed and all covered long cists made of many small slabs. Admittedly, the orientation of the cists varied in a manner statistically indistinguishable from random; but the burial rite where determinable was exclusively extended inhumation on the back, front or left side. The distinctive but not indispensable feature of corner pillars, and less commonly mid-side pillars, will be found at other sites to be discussed below, as will the occasional separation of the burial from the overlying cairn by sterile sand.

The circular cairn was 5·5 m in diameter and contained a cist built of horizontally laid slabs very similar to but slightly smaller than that under the largest rectangular cairn. It contained four extended inhumations lying ENE, the uppermost of which had with it a bronze chain. The cairn kerb was also built of laid slabs. Although circular, all else but its height can be paralleled among the rectangular cairns, except that one of the four inhumations was flexed; and given that it lay on the same line as that of the rectangular cairns it seems likely that it is related. The two isolated cists recorded by Edwards were very similar to those under the rectangular cairns, and also lay on the line of the cemetery; there seems no reason to suppose they were not broadly contemporary with the latter. At the head of one of them was found a fragment of a Class 1 symbol stone. A Class 1 symbol stone had been found on the opposite side of the road to the circular cairn some years earlier.

The cemetery at Lundin Links excavated by Mr C Greig has not yet been published except

as part of a display at Dundee Museum. It consisted of at least five small low round cairns and at least 4 small low oblong cairns, all with boulder kerbs. In addition to the burials under the mounds at least 6 isolated long cists were present. The round cairns ranged in diameter from 4 m to 3·5 m and the best preserved oblong cairn was 3·5 m long by slightly under 2 m broad. Of the other oblong cairns one was much mutilated by erosion, another formed the bar of a dumb-bell shaped complex including two of the round cairns and the last, 3·75 m long, was internally bisected by a line of boulders and may thus be considered as two conjoined small cairns. One of the round cairns had an oval kerb containing no cairn material joined to it, beyond which lines of boulders defined a pair of horns. There were slight elements of linearity to the overall layout of the cemetery. At its W end was an apparently worked stone standing 1 m tall.

The cairns all covered extended inhumations in cists from which they were separated by a barren layer of sand. The isolated cists also contained extended inhumations. Multiple burials were found: the damaged rectangular cairn covered two inhumations, while five were found under the oval cairn which had an oval kerb attached to it. A sandstone disc 0·45 m in diameter was found in one of the oval cairns, while a fragmentary iron object was associated with one of the five burials under the oval cairn to which the oval kerb was attached. Radiocarbon dates were obtained from three inhumations. A burial under one of the oval cairns of the dumb-bell complex has been dated to the 3rd- to 6th-centuries BC (Megaw & Simpson 1979, 500), while two of the isolated cist inhumations produced dates of the 3rd to 6th- and the 8th to 11th-centuries AD respectively (Greig, C, pers comm). Several other isolated cists and groups of cists have been found on Lundin Links. Those at the cemetery discussed above cannot be regarded as firmly associated with the mounds. But their orientation was similar and it seems most economical to suppose that their layout at least took account of that of the mounds.

In 1866 Laing published the results of trenching a long low sandy mound at Keiss. After the discovery of cists during road construction he found a further eight or more cists in line with a circular cairn (ND 344602). The cists were set at an angle to their overall line and spaced at approximately 4·5 m intervals, and each was covered by a small pile of stones; he did not record any kerbs to these piles. The circular cairn was discovered by extending the spacing between the cists. It had a kerb of horizontally coursed slabs and was 6 m in diameter, but otherwise similar to the 5·4 m diameter cairn at Ackergill. Towards its centre was discovered an area in which the cairn stones were 'disposed with some care' (Laing 1866, 15) and covered a cist similar to the isolated cists and to the majority of the cists at Ackergill. The skeletons were variously disposed: extended or slightly flexed but most with their heads to the S and lying on their right side. The stone tools discussed by Laing seem not to be artefacts (Close-Brooks, J, pers comm).

At Tillytarmont, near Rothiemay, three Class I symbol stones had been removed from a field in the 19th century (NJ 533473). The present farmer discovered two further symbol stones while ploughing in 1973–4 and embarked on deep tining in the hope of discovering more. It seemed desirable to forestall this and his intention to dig up areas where his tine had touched stone, and in 1975 Dr A A Woodham excavated two stone spreads and an oblong cairn 4·25 m square, roughly in line with one another. No dating evidence was discovered; under the cairn was apparently water-lain sand. Were it not for the eccentric placing of some of the graves at Ackergill, and the layer of apparently barren sand concealing two of the graves there and at two of the cairns to be discussed below it could be said with confidence that there was never a burial beneath the cairn. A scintilla of doubt must, however, remain (Woodham 1976, 6). The two stone spreads were interpreted by the excavator as the bases of platforms or cairns. One measured 5 m by 3·5 m and was roughly oval and is said to be at the point whence one of the three early known symbol stones came. The last of the five symbol stones to be discovered at

Tillytarmont came from the other stone spread, which had been grossly disturbed by agricultural activities.

The site is chiefly interesting for the large number of symbol stones found within a restricted area. In addition, at least two large white quartz boulders had been removed from the site, one perhaps from the top of the rectangular cairn, but no archaeological association can be shown between any of the symbol stones and any of the stone structures.

In 1866 Anderson excavated an oval structure at NO 313413 near Garrywhin fort at Watenan. It was in some respects comparable to the circular cairns at Keiss and Ackergill. Anderson recorded cists adjacent to the structure and the Ordnance Survey has recorded another low oval cairn (OS NNIR ND34SW 15). Nearby smaller structures recorded by the Ordnance Survey (*ONB*, 13, (1871), 276) covered graves or cists up to 5 ft (1·5 m) long. It seems possible that here too there existed a combination of circular burial cairns with horizontally coursed kerbs and adjacent cists. The evidence both of the nature of the structure and of its relationship to the cists and the other oval cairn is ambiguous.

In 1978 fragments of a Class I symbol stone were discovered at Watenan some 600 m from the site dug by Anderson, and subsequent fieldwork revealed that the largest fragment lay beside a low round cairn measuring 3 m by 3·3 m over a neat horizontally coursed slab kerb (ND 311407). In size it was similar to the round mounds at Garbeg and Lundin Links; in its method of construction to those at Ackergill and Keiss. The surrounding ground was covered by a skin of peat 0·2 to 0·3 m thick, and no cists or other cairns were visible. It is likely that no other cairns are present.

In 1976 and 1978 two small circular cairns were excavated by Mr N Pearson and Mr C Morris at Buckquoy, between the road leading to the Brough of Birsay and the sea (HY 246280). One was destroyed by marine erosion before its nature could be fully elucidated, but the other was oval, kerbed, and sealed a layer of barren sand beneath which was an extended inhumation. The cairn was similar in size to that at Watenan. The excavators suggest that the structure which was destroyed before it could be fully investigated may also have been associated with an underlying cist containing an inhumation. The structures pre-dated a Viking midden, and were thus Viking or earlier in date.

At Sandwick, at HP 619022 on the SE coast of Unst, Shetland, Mr G F Bigelow in 1978 excavated a cairn almost identical to the rectangular cairns at Ackergill. It measured 4·25 m sq over a kerb of vertical slabs and at each corner and in the middle of each side was a small stone post. Underneath it was an extended skeleton lying on its left side, with head to the S, its grave separated from the overlying cairn by a thin layer of sand, and its top defined by a line of horizontal slabs (Bigelow 1979).

The preceding paper by Dr J Close-Brooks describes the rectangular cairn recently excavated at Dunrobin, Golspie, Sutherland. To summarise: adjacent to where a Class I symbol stone was discovered in 1977, Dr Close-Brooks found remains of a rectangular cairn about 9·5 m by 7 m with a kerb of laid boulders. It comprised a layer of pebbles over a layer of sand beneath which was a cist containing an extended inhumation with head to the W.

The sites discussed above have been selected on the basis that they include small mounds of, or similar to, types containing extended inhumations. A less satisfactory criterion has also been that they are not recognisably early prehistoric. Yet each individual characteristic of them can be found in the Neolithic or Bronze Age: horizontal slab kerbs on round or trapezoidal mounds are common in the Neolithic of the N; kerbs of vertical stones surrounding small low round mounds are found in the Middle and Late Bronze Age; extended inhumation is found in the Neolithic, while single-grave burials are a characteristic of the Chalcolithic. Linear ceme-

teries, or cemeteries with linear element are well known in the earlier Bronze Age, particularly in Wessex, and in the later Bronze Age in Orkney (Hedges 1979). It is the combination of elements which distinguishes each of the cairns and cemeteries described here. Yet within each cemetery there is a considerable variety of detail, and the differences between the cemeteries are not negligible. Thus, although it will be argued that all the sites discussed above should be regarded as related to one another, it must be thought likely that they cover between them a long period: they cannot be demonstrated to belong to narrow chronological horizon.

Whitebridge and Garbeg share several characteristics; they are composed of low flat-topped mounds with ditches, and trapezoidal, rectangular and round mounds occur. At Whitebridge all but one mound had a low bank outside its ditch, while at Garbeg the opposite was true. At both sites the characteristic gap at the corners of the ditches of the rectangular mounds was noted. In default of further excavation the sites cannot be dated internally, for the symbol stone fragments at Garbeg were not stratified within a mound, and could have found their way on to the site long after carving of the stone and long after the mounds were built. The extended single inhumation rite proven at Garbeg suggests but does not define a late prehistoric or historic date for the cemetery while the later structures at Whitebridge suggest only that that cemetery preceded the middle 19th century. It is likely that neither of the cemeteries is unique, for they are so unobtrusive as to be hardly noticeable in long heather. Although two examples are not enough to define a class, particularly when each emphasises some characteristics rare at the other, we can refer to them as cemeteries of Garbeg/Whitebridge type, characterised by containing low flat mounds surrounded each by a small ditch, by the presence of rectangular or trapezoidal mounds in addition to circular ones, and by the presence of gaps at the corners of the ditches of the straight-sided mounds. Low external banks may be expected outside some of the mounds. The mound diameter range can be expected to fall between c 11 m and c 3·5 m, while the height range will probably be between 0·8 m and 0·1 m; the larger the area of the mound the lower its height can be expected to be.

That Ackergill was related to Garbeg and by extension to Whitebridge is suggested by several similarities. At both excavated sites the burial rite seems to have been extended inhumation in a long cist or grave. The covering mounds were low and both oblong and circular mounds were found. At both sites fragments of symbol stones occurred, although at neither in strict association with burials. The most convincing link is provided by the corner posts. The internal kerb cairn in one of the rectangular mounds at Garbeg is very similar in size to the smaller rectangular cairns at Ackergill: pending further excavation it can only be noted that the corner posts went with the enclosing mound at Garbeg, rather than the kerbed cairn. The gaps at the corners of the rectangular ditches at Garbeg and Whitebridge provide a similar specific link.

The differences between the cemeteries are slightly greater than the variety within each one. The mounds at Whitebridge are broader on average than those at Garbeg, which are in turn broader than those at Ackergill. The disposition of mounds at Whitebridge is not organised; there are short linear runs of mounds at Garbeg, while Ackergill is a linear cemetery. Whitebridge has fairly broad ditches and external banks to its mounds; Garbeg mounds are surrounded by a shallow narrow ditch and they stand prouder than those at Whitebridge; at Ackergill no ditches were detected, the mounds were generally kerbed, and they were intermediate in height between those at the other two cemeteries. Nevertheless the diversity within each cemetery – the random orientation of inhumations at Ackergill, the variety of shapes at all three cemeteries – does point to an indifference to detail, and may imply a conglomeration of various traditions.

Lundin is intermediate in nature between Ackergill and Garbeg. The conjoining of oblong and round mounds links it with the latter while its siting and cists link it with the former, as

does the presence of a barren layer of sand between burials and overlying cairns. It lacks the specific features of corner posts, common to the other two sites. Yet it contains no features which cannot be matched at them.

Of the others Pityoulish seems akin to Garbeg and Whitebridge, while Keiss, Sandwick, Birsay, Dunrobin, Watenan, Garrywhin and Tillytarmont seem more like Ackergill and Lundin. Of the isolated sites only Pityoulish with its central monolith has a distinctive feature not matched at one of the larger cemeteries.

The occurrence of symbol stones at five of the 12 sites discussed is remarkable. At Ackergill Edwards found a fragment by the most westerly of his cists. A second symbol stone recorded by Romilly Allan as from south of the Bay of Keiss was according to Mrs Duff Dunbar of Ackergill found just S of the road through the Ackergill site (Edwards 1927, 179). The fragment from Garbeg was found on the excavated round mound. The five symbol stones from Tillytarmont came all from one field, and the position of one of the recent discoveries corresponded to that of one of the excavator's stone spreads. At Watenan a large fragment lay by the cairn and a small fragment on top of it. At Dunrobin the slab lay apparently face down over one side of the cairn. While there is no stratigraphical evidence that any symbol stone was originally associated with any cairn, the case for a historical significance to their co-occurrence rests adequately on the lack of symbol stones (fragmentary or buried) at any of the many early prehistoric cairns which have been excavated in Scotland.

The decorative elements on the stones, and their combinations, are all fairly common. The fragment from Ackergill bore a rectangular symbol with a bite out of the top, and a medial horizontal division from which a cusp sprang downwards. The other stone was broken when recorded; it bore a fish and a rectangular symbol divided by a medial horizontal division of a double line filled with arcs from the two end arcs of which sprang two terminal spirals downwards, while the upper half of the rectangle was filled with freehand linear scrollwork. It also bore part of an ogam inscription reading upwards from the bottom NEHTERI .... The rectangles from the two stones were stylistically different. The fragment from Garbeg bore part of a crescent and V-rod and traces of another symbol, perhaps a Pictish beast. Those from Watenan bore part of a single crescent and V-rod.

The five stones from Tillytarmont bore (1) a bird, comb case and mirror, (2) a crescent and V-rod, and a double disc and Z-rod, (3) a crescent and concentric rings, (4) an eagle and a beast, and lastly (5) a serpent and Z-rod, an arch, a mirror and a comb case. The stone from Dunrobin is discussed in detail by Dr Close-Brooks in the preceding paper. It cannot be held that the stones form a group distinct from the generality of Class I symbol stones.

It is not argued that all the cairns or groups of cairns described above originally had symbol stones with them, nor that all Pictish symbol stones of Class I were originally associated with extended inhumations in cists or cairns. Yet the radiocarbon date from Dunrobin is precisely what would have been expected for the symbol stone from typological arguments, and the lack of symbol stones on early prehistoric cairns precludes the possibility that the symbol stones were put on or by the low cairns merely because the latter were there. Thus it may be argued that the cairns were part of the cultural heritage of those who used the symbol stones.

The origins of Pictish culture are not well understood. If the low cairns were part of the material expression of that culture their origins are of special interest in the light they may throw on the broader problem. The remainder of this paper will consist of a brief discussion of various possibilities.

The pre-Viking Iron Age kerbed burial cairns of the southern Baltic are circular, oval, rectangular or triangular, and are associated with symbol stones dated to the 7th and 8th centuries

of Lindquvist's Class I. The latter display warriors, symbols and animals and are not to be confused with the better known stones of his classes II and III with their relief decoration, epic scenes and, in the case of Class III, runes. It seems better for the moment to consider these a parallel and unconnected development, for in detail they are very different from the Scottish sites: they are rich in gravegoods and the symbol stones form part of the cists under the cairns. Although Scottish symbol stones are used to build cists, it is a rare practice in which use of the symbol stone could be secondary.

It is worth considering whether the upstanding Scottish sites are related to a series of structures belonging to approximately the same period and known largely from the N and W of the British Isles: the cella memoria, the leacht and the corner post-shrine (Thomas 1971). There are in south-west Ireland several small rectangular enclosures defined each by a fence of upright stones, which Thomas has argued are related to the cella memoria of the Mediterranean (eg Illaunloghaun, 5 m by 7 m; Killabuonia, 3 m by 3 m). But the fences do not enclose cairn material, and their function is different. Leachta all seem to be rectangular with horizontal slab walls, but they are smaller in plan and taller than the Scottish cairns. We must conclude that although a combination of the two could produce something similar to the low cairns described above neither of these two early Christian structures provides a satisfactory protoytype. The corner-post shrines however, may be related. Leaving aside those from St Andrew's and Iona, Monifieth and Ardwall, and those with a firmly medieval date, we may concentrate on those from Burghead, Papil and St Ninian's Isle. They consist of slotted corner-posts and wall slabs. At Burghead and Papil the slabs were decorated with scenes in a style appropriate to Class III stones, and at Papil and St Ninian's the shrines included slotted posts in the middle of their longer sides. In plan, and in having a taller stone at the corners and at the middle of the longer sides these double shrines recall in all but size the cairns at Sandwick and Ackergill. However, even if one tries to avoid pre-conceptions about the likely date of the low cairns covering extended inhumations there is no evidence that they are as late as even the earliest corner-post shrines; for it has already been noted that the isolated cists dated late at Lundin may be much later than the cairns there. The shrines have a different function, are smaller, and are, apart from that at Burghead, found in distinctively Christian contexts. The possibility of a link between corner-post shrines and cairns remains, but the relationship must, if it exists, be the reverse of that required to explain the cairns. It must also be considered possible that the corner and mid-side posts of the cairns derived from timber post and panel prototypes, as Thomas has suggested for the corner-post shrines.

If the origin for the practice of extended inhumation under oblong cairns is to be sought neither in contacts with the Baltic nor with Christian influence, perhaps it may be looked for in a native Iron Age context. The oblong burial enclosures revealed by air photography in the Lunan Valley (SASAM 1978) are thought by Stead to be related to La Tène barrow cemeteries in Yorkshire (Stead 1979, 30). Only one such Scottish barrow group, at Boysack, has been tested by excavation. There, a square-plan ditch surrounded a deep grave containing an extended inhumation, near the skull of which was a small piece of iron (Reynolds, D, pers comm). Near the Moray Firth, in NE Inverness, similar cropmark sites are known; but unlike those of the Lunan Valley their ditches are interrupted by corner causeways. Examples are known from Kerrowaird and Allanfearn Station (SASAM 1979, 12). Were the oblong cairns at Garbeg or Whitebridge ploughed they would appear similar both in shape and size. Extended inhumation in the Yorkshire barrows is proven by the first century BC, at the Burton 'Makeshift' cemetery (Stead 1979, 11–15), and if we are not to look for a direct continental link to explain the Scottish cropmark sites then, earlier or later (Stead 1979, 32, 38, 93) we could tentatively suggest a similar

dating for some at least of the sites in the Lunan Valley. It seems that extended inhumation was practiced in a native context in S Scotland by the 2nd century AD (at Broxmouth, E Lothian, where it contrasts with crouched inhumations of the 2nd century BC (Comrie, J & Hill, P, pers comms) and has no obvious local predecessors). Yet the lack of non-Roman La Tène influenced metalwork N of the Midland Valley of Scotland (Stevenson 1966, 20–30) implies that if there was a connection between the Arras Culture burials and those of N Scotland it was an indirect one.

The distance in time and space between the Yorkshire burials and cemeteries similar to Garbeg or Ackergill is great; many links are missing in the argument. Yet excavation of the Scottish sites has been biased towards those where a symbol stone has been discovered and it is thus hardly surprising that most of what little dating evidence there is has pointed towards the second half of the 1st millennium AD. It is desirable that further excavation of crop mark sites in the Lunan Valley and excavation of those in NE Inverness should be undertaken to counterbalance this bias, and it will not be until such work is attempted that we shall have a rational basis for assessing the likely origins of the upstanding Scottish sites. For the moment the most stimulating hypthesis to test is that the La Tène burial tradition continued sufficiently long in Scotland to be incorporated in Pictish culture.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to the Archaeology Branch of the Ordnance Survey for being allowed to obtain some of the information from its Record cards and plans, and to those others named who have allowed me free access to unpublished information. I am also grateful to Dr J Close-Brooks, Mr J Davidson, Dr A Ritchie and Mr J B Stevenson for enabling me to remove some errors and misconceptions, and to Mrs L Linge for bringing the site at Pityoulish to my attention.

REFERENCES

Anderson, J 1866 'Report on the ancient remains of Caithness', *Mem Anthrop Soc London*, 2 (1865–6), 226–56.

Bigelow, G F 1979 *Preliminary Report of the* 1978 *Excavations at Sandwick, Unst.*

Cowie, T 1980 'Excavations at the Catstane, Midlothian 1977', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 109 (1977–8), 166–201.

Edwards, A J H 1926 'Excavations of graves at Ackergill', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 61 (1926–7), 196–200.

Laing, S 1866 *Prehistoric Remains of Caithness*. London & Edinburgh.

Lethbridge, T C 1953 'Excavations at Kilpheder, S Uist', *Proc Prehist Soc*, 18 (1952), 176–93.

Lindquvist, S 1942 *Gotlands Bildsteine*. Stockholm, 1941–2.

Megaw, J V S & Simpson, D D A (eds) 1979 *Introduction to British Prehistory*. Leicester.

Morris, C 1979 'Birsay, Orkney: "small sites" excavation and survey', *Archaeol Rep 1978 Univ Durham*, (1979), 11–19.

ONB *Ordnance Survey Object Name Book.*

OSNNIR *Ordnance Survey National Non Intensive Record.*

Rae, V & Rae, A 1953 'Excavation of a bowl barrow at Pityoulish', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 87 (1952–3), 153–60.

Ritchie, J N G & Thornber, I 1977 'Small cairns in Argyll', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 106 (1974–5), 15–26.

Rutherford, A & Ritchie, J N G 1975 'The Catstane', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 105 (1972–4), 183–8.

SASAM 1978 Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, *Archaeological Sites and Monuments of the Lunan Valley*. Edinburgh.

SASAM 1979 Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, *Archaeological Sites and Monuments of NE Inverness*. Edinburgh.

Stead, I M 1979 *The Arras Culture*. York.

Stevenson, R B K 1966 'Metalwork and some other objects in Scotland and their cultural affinities', *in* Rivet, A L F (ed), *The Iron Age in Northern Britain*, Edinburgh, 17–44.

Thomas, C 1971 *The early Christian Archaeology of North Britain.* London.
Wallace, T 1911 'Military roads and fortifications in the Highlands', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 45 (1910–11), 318–33.
Wedderburn, L M & Grimes, D M 1975 *A cairn at Garbeg, Drumnadrochit, Inverness.*
Whimster, R 1977 'Iron Age burial in S Britain', *Proc Prehist Soc*, 43 (1977), 317–28.

The Society is indebted to the Scottish Development Department (Ancient Monuments) for a grant towards the cost of publishing this paper