

TYPOLOGICAL VARIATION IN PRE-MODERN SETTLEMENT MORPHOLOGY
IN THE CLASHINDARROCH FOREST
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An extensive area of relict field systems and settlements survive within the Clashindarroch Forest, managed by Forestry Commission Scotland. This paper considers certain typological distinctions between a number of the settlement complexes and suggests the existence of a type of enclosed and lightly defended farmstead complex not formerly suspected in the area.

Settlement studies in the North-east of Scotland have not experienced the attention afforded other areas since the foundations were laid by Whyte (1979), with Whittington (1983) and Dodgshon (1980, for example). The Western Highlands and Highland zones have experienced most of the more recent attention, including a largescale project base at Ben Lawers in the Perthshire highlands (Atkinson et al, 2003, 2005). Pollock's extensive study of a truly lowland environment in the Lunan Valley was well-intentioned and ably carried out but amounted to an object lesson in the difficulties involved in the study of the Mediaeval landscape of lowland Scotland. The lack of a good corpus of documentary and cartographic evidence severely impeded that particular study. The piecemeal results, whilst highly informative, lacked a detailed social framework in which they could be contextualised. More recently the RCAHMS have produced an overview of the landscape around the iconic hill of Bennachie (2007). This looked at upland and lowland areas but was largely a restatement of the work carried out by Dodgshon and Whyte (*ibid.*) over two decades previously. An intensive field survey of an area of North-east Perthshire was carried out by the RCAHMS in 1990 but, again, the focus was upon an upland area rich in spectacular prehistoric and later field remains.

This preoccupation with highland settlement in Scotland finds subconscious expression even within papers purportedly considering Scotland as a whole. In considering the limit of understanding of 'Medieval or Later Rural Settlement' in Scotland, Hingley laments the "restricted nature of detailed survey ... over much of the uplands of Scotland" (2000, 11) whilst seems unconcerned with the lowlands which is "also of great importance, (although) the information value will often outweigh the symbolic associations or economic values of the sites" (*ibid.*, 13). In other words, if there is no 'heritage payback', less resources should be targetted at certain sites. It is interesting that the "relevant field projects which are addressing whole settlement systems" (*ibid.*, 12) mentioned in the text are all in highland or west coast environs: Ben Lawers (Perthshire highlands), Upper Rairts (Highland) and Milton (South Uist). It is instructive that Cooper's recent paper considering national protection strategies in England and Scotland (2010) fails to mention the necessity of knowledge acquisition as a means of better protecting our heritage. This negative approach is coupled, in Scotland, with prohibitive laws of treasure trove which actively discourage the reporting of archaeological finds. In this respect the situation is completely different to that pertaining to England and Wales. Karls' recent paper (2011) paints a gloomy picture. Over the past fifteen years in England and Wales finds recording by the public has increased twenty-fold. In Scotland it has stagnated or even slightly reduced (*ibid.*, 116-117). Such reporting is important for the recognition of material and settlement distributions and in an area like Scotland where the architectural evidence in particular is often so ephemeral, it could be vital. At Springwood Park the settlement was only noticed as a result of the distribution of mediaeval pottery (Dixon, 1998, 674). In the North-east of Scotland this has further been exacerbated by an absence of a local county or regional archaeological society. Fortunately, the recent creation of a new archaeology department at Aberdeen with a strong team might represent a start in helping to redress the problem. The initial signs are positive with the University and a local conservation body engaged in setting up an extensive landscape study of the area - Bennachie Landscapes - with a fundamental aim of training and encouraging the local communities to become actively engaged in fieldwork.

Whilst the uplands often witnessed clearance and abandonment during the late 18th century 'Improvement' campaigns, the lowlands of the North-east experienced clearance of people but intensification of agricultural practices. This has rendered much of the earlier landscape difficult to perceive. It has been largely effaced with the pre-modern 'touns' (small settlements containing a handful of families) having been replaced by replanned and rebuilt single farmsteads. This creates an impression of a farming landscape constructed on a pattern of individual farms which is completely at odds with the reality of its pre-modern pattern of dispersed fermtouns. These settlements sat within their own field systems, pasture lands and outfield resources of timber and peat. Individual farmsteads - 'outsets' - also formed parts of this pattern as did 'cot-touns' and 'mill-touns', either arranged in rows or as haphazard clusterings (RCAHMS, 2007, 189). Some outsets were later creations of the mid 18th century and some formed older elements of the landscape perhaps, in some instances, relics of earlier periods of expansion during times of climatic

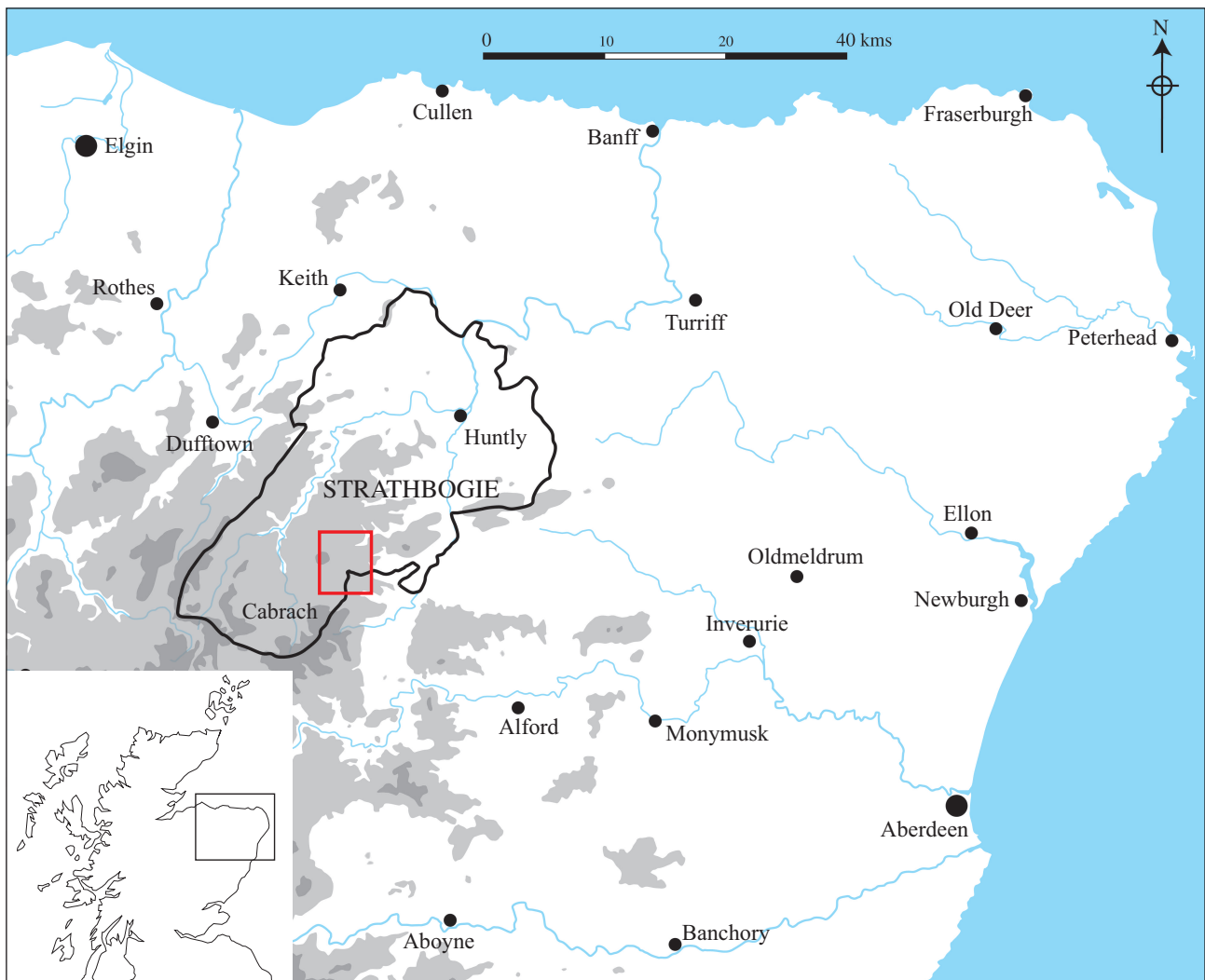


Figure 1. Location plan showing study area.

improvement or population stress.

Whilst the above is a useful and convenient ‘broad-brush’ characterisation of the settlement pattern, recent work has shown that, even within a single estate, such as the Lordship of Huntly, such a view is too simplistic. The pattern of nucleated farmtowns and dispersed farmsteads can also be seen to relate to ecological determinants and to have altered through time (Shepherd, 2011). Such findings seem to support Dodgshon’s suggestions that some earlier dispersed settlement forms may have agglomerated as a result of a restructuring of certain field systems in the wake of realigned agricultural practices (1993). Though, clearly, the dangers of using a model formulated by Dodgshon for the West Coast and replanting it here in an East Coast context without corroborative evidence should be self-evident. The common factor underlying settlement patterns and land-use strategies in the North-east in the pre-modern period is that there does not seem to be one. Subsequent homogeneity appears to be a product of the ‘Improvements’ and should not be back-projected without good reason.

But, whatever settlement type is being considered, whether of row-type, haphazard clustering or single farmstead, a ubiquitous feature of the final pre-modern phase appears to be its comparative ‘open-ness’. Individual buildings often have attached yards and may be arranged around an open ‘farmyard’ but they do not sit in a completely enclosed space. This can be seen by considering the wide range of estate plans covering the North-east as well as survivals on the ground. This short study will consider two sites which do fail to meet this criterion. It will be proposed that these sites might relate to an earlier and less visible archaeological horizon and that they may have been more widespread in certain politically-marginal areas.

The study area lies at the south-west end of Strathbogie abutting the Cabrach, which was a later addition to the historic earldom (see Figure 1). The area sits at the boundary between ‘upland’ and ‘lowland’ ecologies. During periods of better climate the fields appear to have been used for arable production, as exemplified by the site of the nearby ‘miln of Cormelet’. But, for most of the post-mediaeval period, the settlements here appear to have been mainly engaged in pastoral activities (Shepherd, 2011). According to the Macaulay Institute Land Capability for

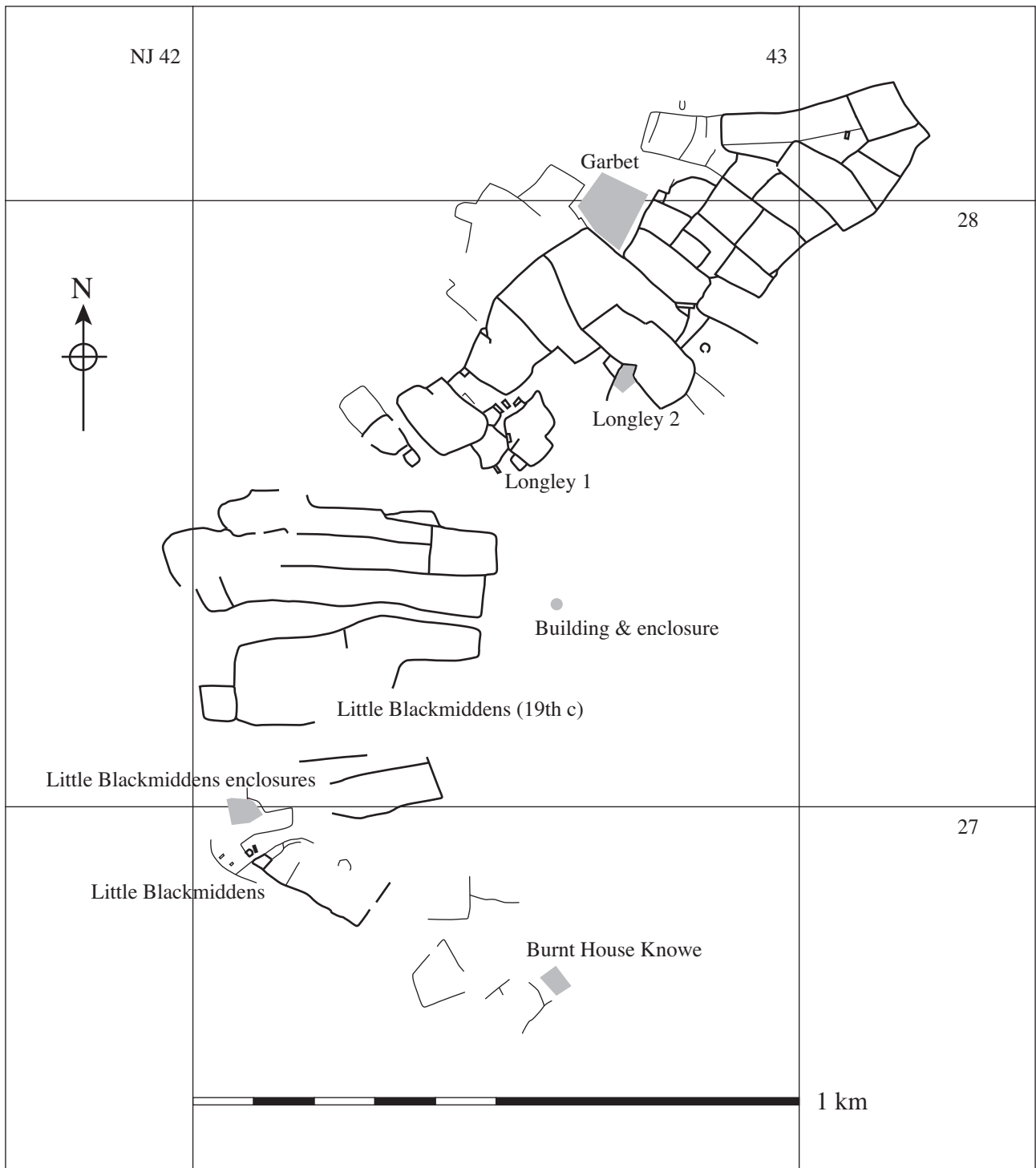


Figure 2. The surviving fieldscape remains of Garbet, Longley and Little Blackmiddens.

Agriculture characterisation of 1983, the area is now classified as suitable only for grass production. It should be remembered, however, that such classifications reflect present day agricultural perceptions and contemporary climatic conditions. The soils belong to the Inch series of drifts derived from gabbros and allied igneous rocks giving Brown Forest Soils with Humus-iron podzols and gleys. The Macaulay Institute soil survey of 1982 describes the associated landforms as undulating lowlands and the resultant soils capable of supporting some arable and permanent pasture. As noted, these findings are in keeping with the known archaeological evidence which suggests some use of the land for limited arable production during periods of climatic optimums or population stress. Otherwise, the land has a post-16th century history of pastoral activities. This can be clearly seen by reference to the detailed form of the rentals for the area dating from 1600 and, intermittently, carrying through into the 19th century (*ibid.*). This area at the south-west end of what is now the Clashindarroch Forest saw the only 'sheep clearance' to affect the Lordship of Huntly during the period of the 'Improvements'. As a result of this and subsequent forest cover a remarkable relict landscape has been preserved.

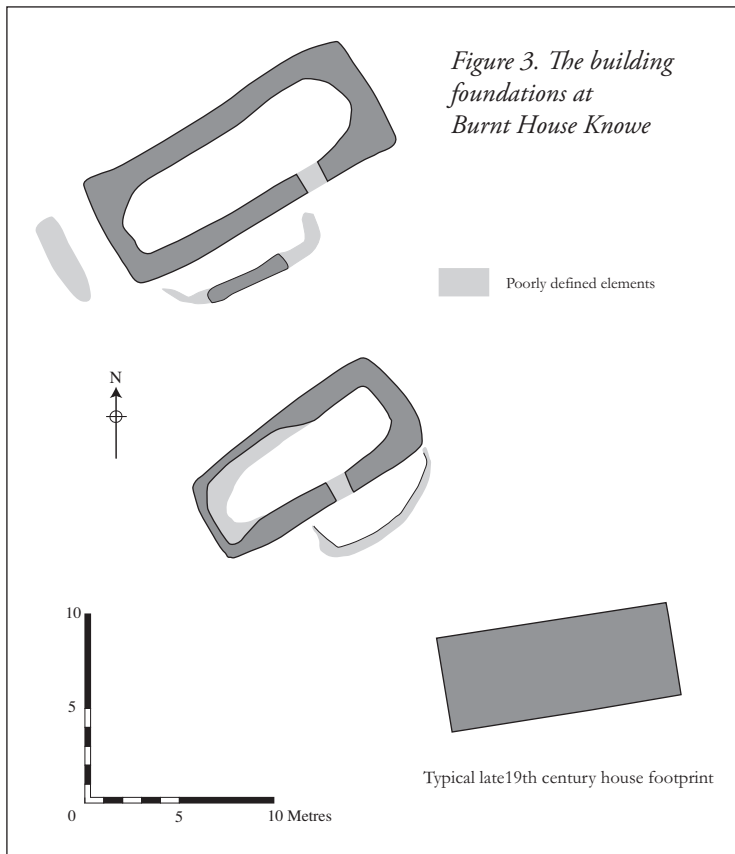


Figure 3. The building foundations at Burnt House Knowe

Many of the 'feal' dykes within the study area are shown on two estate plans (RHP 2254 and 2257) both dated 1776. (These field boundaries are composed of a mixture of stones and sods in variable proportions dependant upon the surrounding conditions). Many others are visible on the RAF aerial photographic coverage of 1946. This present study has recorded what was visible on the ground in 2011 (Figure 2). It should be noted that the author has covered this ground over a number of years and previously unnoticed dykes are still becoming newly apparent as the vegetation changes. It is likely that this survey records the minimum number of features still recognisable on the ground. A tentative date for the system has suggested a horizon in the first half of the 16th century or earlier, these suggestions being made from a study of estate plans and supporting documentary evidence (Shepherd, 2007, 71-72).

It is immediately apparent on the ground that the dykes portrayed on the 1776 plan survive in a far more substantial state than those not illustrated. A reasonable conclusion might be that the dykes unrecorded in 1776 had fallen

into disuse by that time. (The lighter field lines depicted on Figure 2 show the fields which appear to belong to this earlier period of land-use). By extension, it would seem that the settlement of Garbet, also unrecorded on the 1776 plans and sitting amongst these relict fields, had itself fallen into dereliction by then. This seems to be reinforced by the pattern of rental changes noted from 1600 to 1760. In 1600 Longley and Garbet were assessed as individual units with Garbet paying the larger rent. By 1654 Garbet was being assessed with Boganloch (a rental unit lying to the north-east of the fields depicted in Figure 2) with Longley not being noted. This state of affairs was repeated in the 1728 rental, although the Poll Tax for 1696 does include two entries for Longley. By 1760 Boganloch occurs as the sole rent-paying unit in this part of the forest. Therefore, although farmsteads were still inhabited in the 1760s in the vicinity of Longley, by that time they formed mere subsets within the rental for Boganloch. By the time an (undated) estate plan was drawn in the early 19th century (RHP2255) none of the settlements noted here, with the exception of Boganloch, appear to have been in existence.

The feal dykes around Burnt House Knowe are as equally indistinct as the abandoned field boundaries north and west of Garbet. The estate plans do not show any detail for this area and the single farmstead and small enclosure at Little Blackmiddens is only shown as an indistinct sketch. It is likely that this area had also fallen out of regular infield use (ie. being in a state of annual cultivation) by this time. No mention of Blackmiddens occurs in the rentals though it is noted in the earliest charter for the area in 1508 (Paul, 1984a). The name 'Burnt House Knowes' was noted on the 1st Edition OS map and does not seem to be otherwise attested.

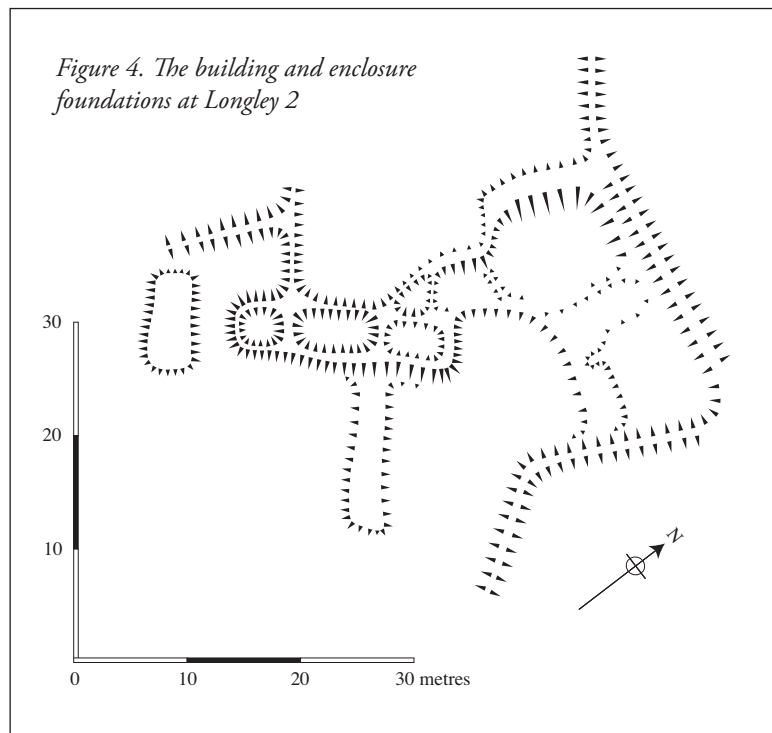


Figure 4. The building and enclosure foundations at Longley 2

The proximity of the knowe - approximately a hundred metres from the buildings depicted in Figure 3 - might be significant in possibly alluding to the structures which have only fairly recently been noted. The relative width to length of these buildings, apparent in the survey, is worthy of comment. They are wider than is usual for 18th century longhouses in the area (cf. Figure 4) and do not seem to conform to that tradition. This may be a function of date or usage. However, such a width might suggest construction at a time when good constructional timber was not such a rarity as it was to become after the 1500s.

Longley 1 (see Figure 2) appears to be a 'classic' pre-modern open settlement comprising scattered longhouses, outbuildings and yards (Dodgshon, 1980, 63). Dykes and enclosures here suggest some developmental process through time though nothing to make it stand out from the many such remains seen widely across the North-east. Intriguingly, it is this general conformity and lack of appreciable chronological depth which makes it stand out amongst the other sites discussed here. Though perhaps even this apparent 'conformity' might be simply masking a more complicated history lying beneath a more complete final phase 'makeover'. Longley 2 (referred to as 'The Bog' on RHP 2257) survives in a quite unhappy state. Figure 4 shows the main longhouse which is depicted on the 18th century estate plan. However, the survey also demonstrated a further probable building platform running south-eastwards from the longhouse and another platform lying to the south-west. The former appears to be narrower than the surviving longhouse foundations whilst that to the south-west is broader and, speculatively, might share proportions more reminiscent of those encountered at Burnt House Knowe. The foundations of the longhouse are very substantial as are most of the feal dykes in the immediate area. The other platforms are very slight in comparison and this also applies to other remains lying to the north of longhouse, between it and the massive feal boundary dyke. These might contain further structural elements relating to earlier buildings.

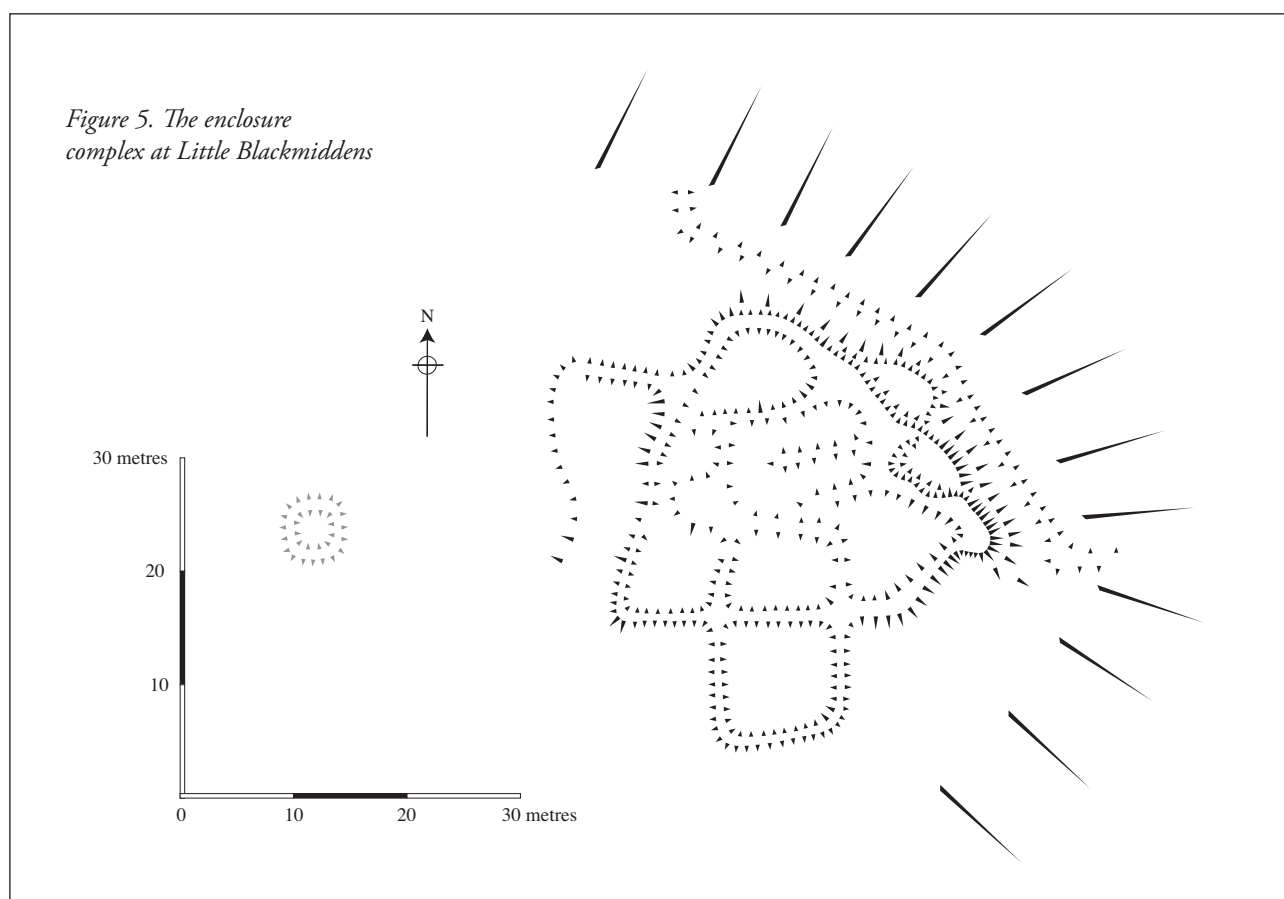
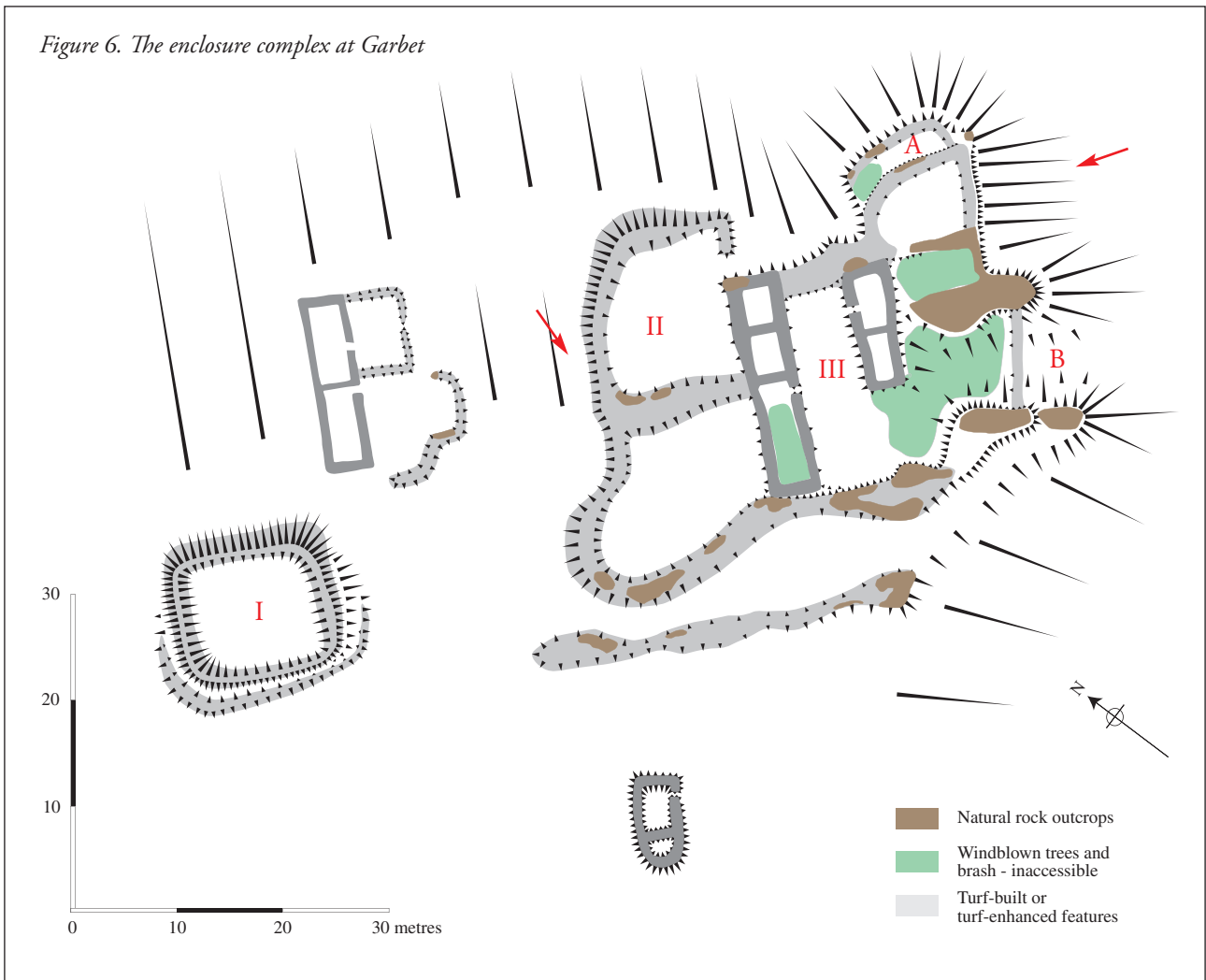


Figure 5 portrays an interesting array of remains which could only be appreciated after surveying as the site is badly covered by windblown trees. (This also made surveying the site quite an interesting experience). The site sits at the end of a ridge overlooking steep scarps on three sides. It would not be the most obvious siting for the usual late mediaeval farmstead of the area, even if it did resemble such a site - which it hardly does(!).

It is of irregular shape with a diverse range of dykes and banks. Those overlooking the steepest scarp on the north-east side are quite monumental and include some massive boulders. The dykes appear to be made by linking natural outcrops of rock. The feal dyke contouring around the hill below these dykes forms part of the field system

Figure 6. The enclosure complex at Garbet



as shown on Figure 2. The other two sides of the main enclosure are less substantial though this may be simply a product of differential survival, especially as less use is made of large boulders as the outcrops do not occur on this flatter area. The annexe to the south does seem genuinely less robust and may be a later addition, though the apparent continuation of its lines into the main enclosure might argue against this. Within the northern central part of the enclosure is at least one apparently sub-rectangular arrangement of banks which might form foundations for a building - though this is highly speculative. To the west of the site is a separate badly denuded sub-rectangular, hollow-centred feature. Its purpose is also unknown though some form of kiln might be suggested. Below the main enclosure on the north-east steeply-

encarped side are two small, irregularly-shaped platforms. Certain features pertaining to these remains at Little Blackmiddens may find correlates within the settlement complex at Garbet (Figure 6).



Picture 1. The northern enclosure from the north-west (see western arrow on Fig.6).

Garbet has suffered quite badly through forestry work in the past and by the effects of windblow. The latter also precluded a thorough examination of all the ground. The root systems of fallen trees have torn up a number of lengths of the turf bankings which formed much of the main outline of the system. These turf walls linked the natural stone outcrops together in a system of small enclosures reminiscent of those

defining the Little Blackmiddens complex. Also similar to Little Blackmiddens is the small platform (A) perched between a line of natural rocks above it on its southern long side and a drop below the low bank wall along its northern long side. This small platform is unlikely to have been of use as a pen (though this is not completely impossible) and perhaps might possibly be seen to have accommodated a small and slightly-constructed building.



Picture 2. The north-west enclosure banks from the north-west (see eastern arrow).

The south-western side of the main complex is marked by a line of naturally-outcropping rock which seems to have been enhanced by banking material, though the traces of this are now so slight as to be questionable (cf. Little Blackmiddens enclosures above). North-eastwards from this, the main enclosure bank also makes use of the natural rock outcrops but is more clearly seen to have been developed by the addition of banking material. The north-west side is a substantial earthwork increasing in height towards the northern corner as the natural ground falls away towards the field systems below (see Pic.1). Tucked in behind this bank appears to be the only viable entrance to the complex. However, another possible entrance way (B) lies along the south-east side leading steeply up between two imposing outcrops. This would give access directly to the yard between the two buildings though, in its present form, this approach has possibly been blocked by a turf bank. Though fallen trees make identification of any pertinent features impossible. This side is largely composed of rock outcrops overlooking quite steep slopes (see Pic.2) with the proposed entrance way being the only reasonable line of approach. It is difficult not to see the main enclosure complex here as having a quasi-defensive function, albeit hardly impregnable.

Other features of this site fit more commonly into the usual farmstead design of the area. What appears to be the remains of a kiln barn lies to the south-west and to the north of this is a substantial earth-banked enclosure similar to one at the pre-modern farmstead of Little Blackmiddens (see Figure 2). The inside area is raised higher than the outer ground surface and might, therefore, be the result of the addition of a plaggen soil for horticultural

purposes (see below). Around the southern half of the perimeter of this enclosure are the remains of what appears to be a low bank defining an earlier enclosure. North-east of this enclosure lies a substantially-founded building very typical of the area. South-east of that are the curvilinear remains of a further earlier enclosure feature, also making use of large natural boulders as part of its construction. The unenclosed longhouse also has an earth-banked rectilinear enclosure attached to its eastern side. This formal rectilinear shape makes an important point. The neat and tidy orderliness of the 'Improvers' was clearly already long visible in the countryside before their strictures took firm hold.

Soil cores were taken from a number of areas around the site and the results are tabulated in Figure 7. (See Figure 6 for coring sites). These seem to demonstrate that the yard associated with the unenclosed longhouse (I) as well as that laying to the west of the enclosed longhouse (II) were enhanced

Area (see Fig.6)	Core No.	Description
Yard I	1	250mm topsoil on top of stone
	2	370mm topsoil with 50mm sandy 'B' horizon
	3	350mm topsoil with 50mm sandy 'B' horizon
SW of Yard I	1	160mm topsoil with 60mm sandy 'B' horizon
	2	220mm topsoil with 75mm sandy 'B' horizon
	3	120mm topsoil with 60mm sandy 'B' horizon
Yard II	1	450mm topsoil with 60mm sandy 'B' horizon
	2	450mm topsoil with 60mm sandy 'B' horizon
	3	400mm topsoil with 60mm sandy 'B' horizon
'Farmyard' III	1	95mm humus over compacted gravelly surface
	2	100mm humus over stone
	3	180mm increasingly mixed profile onto 50mm sandy 'B' horizon (This last core was taken towards the southern end of the 'farmyard')
Enclosure bank (SW of II)	1	Cored to 800mm - brown homogenous loam with slight sandiness all the way down

Figure 7. Soil core results from the site of Garbet

by the addition of extra soil. The area outwith the first yard but west of the outcroppings of rock demonstrated a much shallower topsoil though with a similar depth of subsoil. This might suggest that both enclosed areas were used for growing foodstuffs rather than as animal enclosures, at least in their final phases. The depth of Yard II compared with the depth of its adjacent embankment further suggests that a natural high point was being used and enhanced by the addition of the enclosing bank to accentuate the height differences between the inside and the outside of the enclosed area. The cores taken from between the two enclosed buildings indicate that a humus-rich overburden has developed above a compact and surfaced area.

With respect to the construction of the buildings, a distinction might be drawn between the unenclosed longhouse and the two enclosed structures. Firstly, the unenclosed building is more robust in construction and, if its regularity is not simply a matter of differential preservation, appears to be more geometrically regular in shape - as per its attendant enclosure. The enclosed longhouse is less well preserved and, as a result, the entrance to its northern end (internal or external) is not obvious. It might be suggested that if the most recent entrance to the enclosure lay along the north-eastern side, admission to the inner yard could only be gained through doorways in the north end of this longhouse. This, however, cannot be demonstrated without excavation. The second and smaller structure is noteworthy for its irregular shape, appearing to reduce in width from north-east to south-west.

All of these structures are likely to have been built using the common pre-modern technique of the area: stone foundation course(s) with turf walls above. The roof will have been supported by 'couples': paired timber uprights supporting opposing rafters. The uprights might be incorporated into recesses left in the stone foundation course and wall or, alternatively, placed on pads on the floor in the corners and against the inner wall facings. Slight recesses were sometimes left in order to accommodate part of the width of the uprights. Such a feature might argue against the use of crucks as against simple bays formed from upright posts. A vertical post would sit neatly within the cavity whilst a cruck is more likely to have left an awkward angle as it bent inwards. Dixon's work at Springwood Park claims the site offers evidence of cruck design (1998, 748) but, unless I am missing something, nothing in the evidence there precludes a more simple design of upright posts with wall plate.

Attention should also be drawn to the possibility of survival of a rather more sophisticated suite of architectural features than is often assumed for buildings of this period in the north of Scotland. Ongoing investigations of a very small pre-modern farmstead near Huntly is supplying evidence of great attention being paid to drainage and



ornamentation around the house (see Pics. 3 and 4). Here a drainage gully behind the small house fed



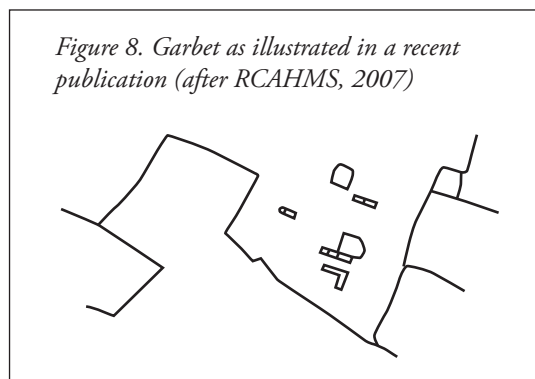
Pictures 3 and 4. Contemporary cobbling and culverting at Clune, Huntly.

a culvert running beneath a fine cobbled path, down along the length of that path before being culverted once more beneath it. From here it continued along the side of a second cobbled surface before leading into a soakaway. It should be noted that this house is, in scale, closer to the smaller of the enclosed structures being discussed here and forms part of a much smaller farmstead complex. Such features might, therefore, be assumed to augment the structures being considered here.

Discussion

The types of settlement discussed here from one small area of landscape demonstrate the range of architecture underlying what superficially can appear to be a very homogenous group. The Garbet settlement is briefly discussed and illustrated by the RCAHMS (2007, 202-203) in the light of the inspection of aerial photographs and a field visit. The accompanying plan to that text (Figure 8) demonstrates the dangers and limitations of such brief appraisals. In all fairness, it was only through the carrying out of the site survey that the overall design of the Garbet and Little Blackmiddens enclosures became apparent. Both areas are severely masked by brash and windblown trees which render the sites impossible to view as complete entities (see panorama Pic. 5).

In terms of dating, only the murkiest attempt at a relative chronology can be attempted in the absence of dateable deposits. And it is salutary to note that, were it not for the estate plans and rentals already alluded to, there would be no chance of such an attempt being made. As noted above, the late 18th century estate plans fail to show either of the enclosure complexes at Little Blackmiddens or Garbet. Usually, on estate plans in this area - often seemingly executed by the same hand - derelict buildings are recorded as 'old stances'. (The 'miln of Cormellet, RHP 2254, being a case in point). This suggests that these two complexes were, by c.1776, well and truly out of use. The unenclosed longhouse at Garbet appears to be later. It is more regular in form, is in a better state of preservation and the stone foundation walls stand much higher - though this may simply be a product of its better preservation. Assuming this to be the latest functioning house on the site, it is likely to have gone out of use by c.1700. If it had a life expectancy of a couple of generations, this would assume a construction date somewhere in the mid 17th century with the enclosed buildings preceding this. A date in the late 16th century would not, therefore, seem unreasonable. This assumes that the two enclosed buildings are contemporary with the enclosures and not later insertions. This is, of course, a further possibility. I have suggested previously (Shepherd, 2007, 72) that the field systems here are likely to belong to the first half of the 16th century. Perhaps the enclosed farmstead might also belong to that period. Its quasi-fortified nature would be explicable in terms of a farmstead lying at the extreme western end of the Lordship of Huntly in an area prone to a degree of lawlessness and raiding. The Cabrach had only been added to the Lordship in 1508. Previously it formed a part of the march of the Earldom of Mar and for a while was under the control of the Forbes family - well known for their bruising encounters with the Gordons. In 1592 William MacIntosh of Clan Chattan invaded the Cabrach as part of a different long-running feud with the Gordons. Two years later the Cabrach was the gathering place of Huntly, Errol and their supporters prior to the battle of Glenlivet (MacDonald, 1891, 166-167).



Comparative sites are hard to come by. But, this might not be so surprising given the slight nature of many of the surviving elements even within a complex which, even like Garbet, was abandoned early and saw little subsequent development. Furthermore, little close attention has been paid to rural settlements such as these in the North-east. The extensive compendium of sites covered by the impressive RCAHMS survey of North-east Perth (1990) contains few obvious parallels as judged from the drawn plans. Lennoch-more farmstead in Glenshee (*ibid.*, 142) might, however, be one which could be considered in this context, seeming to be a completely enclosed settlement complex of similar areal extent. Another settlement located upon an elongated and enclosed knoll at Glenkilrie (*ibid.*, 134-135) might also bear consideration in this context. A further example from south Aberdeenshire might also be cited. It appears not to be enclosed but consists of a range of buildings, the main one of which sits upon a crag in a commanding position overlooking the Cowie Water at Brucklaw in Fetteresso Forest (Shepherd, 2008, 21). The mass of quartz stones beneath its main wall overlooking a steep scarp suggests that it may have been purposefully adorned with these in order to give a sense of the dramatic. To suggest that Scotland in the later mediaeval period contained a range of lightly defended farmsteads in fringe locations should not cause too much consternation. The absence of demonstrably late Mediaeval structures in such locations from the recorded database should, however, be a cause for some concern.

The bastle houses of the border countries of Scotland and England clearly seem to have originated as responses to threats of aggression and are far more defensible than what is being suggested for Garbet. Ward's work at Glenochar is highlighting the importance of these places in the local settlement pattern. However, Glenochar appears to have functioned as a small 'gentry' residence seeming to help provide defence for a limited local population. The material investment also appears to have been of a more substantial nature than at Garbet. Unless evidence comes

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Picture 5. Panoramic view across site from the north.

to light for further dwellings in the vicinity which might have looked to the enclosure for defence (and this is not inconceivable), the social context for Garbet would seem to be different to that at Glenochar. Uttershill Castle in Penicuik started life as a 16th century bastle house but its subsequent documentation as a manorial centre marks it out as being probably of at least local social importance from its inception (Alexander *et al*, 1998, 1017-1018). They are considered here to be the dwellings of minor lairds or more substantial farmers (*ibid.*, 1043). Perhaps a more appropriate parallel for the bastle in the North-east might be the small towers of the 'bonnet lairds' which developed after the feuing of ecclesiastical lands in the second half of the 16th century in Strathisla, abutting Gordon lands to the north (Sanderson, 1974). In this instance prestige is likely to have been a greater motivator than fear of attack. The situation at Garbet could never have been this and the inhabitants never more than tenant farmers of the Gordon Lordship. The 1600 rental for Garbet suggests that it was a small settlement engaged in predominantly pastoral activities and there is no suggestion in the 16th century charters that it had been any more important at that time. The enclosures at Little Blackmiddens suggest another similar site and it is probably most appropriate to see them as single farmsteads or outsets pushing the boundaries of settled agriculture into a politically- and ecologically-marginal environment. It is possible that the Little Blackmiddens enclosures may represent a site earlier known as Longley. Its smaller size in comparison with Garbet would reflect the rental discrepancy between these two sites evidenced by the 1600 rental. Though whether this rental relates to the open or enclosed dwellings on those two sites is open to debate.

That outsets were attested from the late fifteenth century and increasingly into the 16th is noted by Dodgshon (1980, 53). Locally this can be evidenced in the records of the Bishops of Aberdeen with regard to the intake of new lands. At Blairindinny on the east bank of the Bogie in the mid 15th century (REA, I, 250) and at Edinglassie in Glass at the beginning of the 16th (REA, I, 364). Late Mediaeval (15th/16th century) expansion and woodland destruction is a motif common across north-west Europe and Scandinavia (cf. Groenewoudt *et al* for the case for the Netherlands, 2007, 17-34; and Lagerås for the Swedish situation, 2007). Unsurprisingly, where archaeologically-recognisable, these expansionist units almost always take the form of individual farmsteads. How these were architecturally constructed in the North-east is a live question. It is perhaps worth reflecting upon another type of more 'upmarket' site and its frequent archaeological invisibility. Stronach notes in respect of Scottish medieval moats how, "*this type of site may be common but rarely visible*" (2004, 143). Though usually pertaining to an earlier period, the absence of these more substantial sites should send a warning concerning the loss of evidence. Even Mediaeval castle earthworks in Aberdeenshire appear to have survived as upstanding monuments to find their way onto late 18th century estate plans (at Inch and Balquhain) only to be, in the intervening period, completely agriculturally removed. And in a landscape now dominated by stone structures, it is easy to forget that the balance of building resources might have been otherwise, especially amongst the rural population. Aberdeenshire saw almost total woodland destruction by the 1650s (Gordon, 1662) and, since the late 18th century, has been dominated by a building tradition based upon the use of stone. However, the deserted 13th/14th century Mediaeval burgh of Rattray was constructed of timber-framed buildings - stone being reserved for the church and elements of the lordly residence (Murray and Murray, 1993). Many features of the late Mediaeval expansionist phase of rural settlement at the subsistence level are likely to have been ephemeral and will have "dissolved into the landscape" (Banks and Atkinson, 2000, 70). It is in this light that the remains at Garbet need to be considered.

The dating of the sites discussed here is, of necessity, highly speculative. But the evidence suggested by the cartographic and documentary evidence does give a sense of the developmental sequence and is not unreasonable when considered with the evidence from the surrounding fieldscape. The extent to which the complex could ever genuinely be seen as 'fortified' is obviously equally questionable. That elements of natural outcrops were linked by lengths of turf bank does not seem open to doubt. How these functioned clearly is. The enclosures so constructed

do not conform to the usual open farmstead and fermtoun designs more widely recognised in the area and exemplified here by Longley 1 and 2, the farmstead of Little Blackmiddens and the unenclosed longhouse at Garbet. The fact that a second complex similar to the enclosed Garbet one occurs as close as it does (at Little Blackmiddens) is also instructive. As they stand, the enclosure banks are weak and ill-defined. But, it is not possible to know what other deterrents might have been included in the design, such as hedges or fences. Also, the plaggen soil attached to the unenclosed longhouse must have derived from somewhere. (The plaggen soil in the yard attached to the enclosed longhouse might also have been a later addition after that house had gone out of use). The overall plan of the enclosed farmstead would certainly have been constructed more easily, and to better agricultural ends, where the later longhouse was placed or, in fact, anywhere else in its vicinity. The choice of site, on the most rocky and craggy part of the immediate landscape, as was also the case at Little Blackmiddens, is likely to have been chosen for some other good reason. It might be interesting to speculate whether this site gives a context for the single enigmatic documentary reference for 1535 (Paul, 1984b) concerning the lands of Clune with “lee pele”. This is the only reference to this small fermtoun just outside Huntly which, by 1600, had become subsumed within the larger neighbouring farming unit of Gibston. (Clune survives as the footings of a number of small farmsteads, cottages and their yards spread along the springline - Pics 3 and 4). ‘Peels’ in the North-east are usually far more substantial fortifications, such as mediaeval ringworks, and it is hard to imagine that such a lordly site could have pertained to this small community. A lightly defended farmstead similar to that noted at Garbet here might, however, have warranted such an identification. Though in this case it could hardly be said to have been in a ‘politically-marginal’ position.

Finally, if the relative chronology of the Garbet complex does lead back to the 16th century, what can be speculated concerning the structures at Burnt House Knowe? If the enclosed longhouse is 16th century, this suggests that what was to become the traditional farmhouse type of the area was already in place by that time. But, the buildings at Burnt House are of a very different nature. Their width relative to their length appears to be far greater, unless this is simply a matter of differential survival. On balance this seems unlikely and the possibility must exist that these structures are of the earlier 16th century or before. Other than that, they must be seen as a strange and almost unique aberration amongst other contemporary buildings. To reach beyond these tentative suggestions concerning date and context, further evidence is required and, as Donnelly notes (2000, 743), this would necessitate the application of an integrated approach utilising a broader range of environmental science. But, in the absence of an appropriate ‘heritage funding outcome’, such an investment in mere knowledge acquisition may be deemed an inappropriate luxury.

Conclusion

I hope to have demonstrated three things. Firstly, that the range of settlement types and architecture still available for study in the North-east of Scotland warrants a much closer appraisal. The local vernacular building tradition must be seen as temporally more variable than superficial surveys to date have suggested. Furthermore, in concentrating on the preservation of a few ‘showcase’ sites with narratives containing commodity value for the heritage industry, the integrity of this broader database is being permitted to erode badly.

Secondly, that the old-fashioned approach of a measured survey can still be a powerful tool for site interrogation. By being forced to translate what is on the ground into meaningful squiggles on paper/computer screen, assumptions and preconceived notions are forced into being re-evaluated and questioned. It might be a bit dated, but it works and is comparatively cheap!

Thirdly, that the variability inherent in the sites noted above would have undoubtedly gone unnoticed before destruction were it not for the Moray and Aberdeenshire Forestry Commission Conservancy’s policy of actively looking for, identifying and recording the built heritage in advance of forestry work. Some parts of the sites had already suffered machine degradation in previous operations when the machinery was less destructive than it now is. This is an almost complete late/post-mediaeval enclosed ‘semi-lowland’ landscape and is important for offering a comparative set of farming mechanisms to juxtapose with those of the more widely investigated highland regions. It is hoped that this brief study goes some way to help demonstrate that potential.

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SOURCES:

Records held in the National archives of Scotland:

RHP 2254	Estate plan of Rhynie and Essie, 1776.
RHP 2255	Estate plan of Rhynie and Essie, early 19th century.
RHP 2257	Estate plan of Longley, Garbet and Boganloch, 1776.
GD44/51/747/1	Rental of the lordship of Huntly, 1600.
GD 44/51/747/4	Rental of lands of Strathbogie and Cabrach, 1654.
GD44/51/748/7	Huntly Rental, 1728.
GD44/51/740/4	Rental for the Lordship of Huntly, 1760.

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