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# **De-Henging the Henge: A biographical approach to Scotland's henge monuments**

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Philosophy

Archaeology  
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## Abstract

Henges are circular earthwork monuments built from the 32nd-17th centuries BC throughout the British Isles. Seen as a discrete monument 'type' since the early 1930s, they comprise a morphologically-varied group of sites. Excavations of henges have demonstrated them to be multi-phase sites which were repeatedly returned to, reused and rebuilt over thousands of years. The earthworks so often seen as the defining feature of henge sites are increasingly recognised as a 'late' addition to existing sites which were already long-established as significant places in the landscape.

The key aim of this thesis is to 'de-henge' henges, removing the focus from the final morphology of monuments to instead consider how henge sites were used and transformed throughout their lives. It reinterprets henge sites in Scotland, a previously neglected corpus of sites, using a biographical approach to understand the significance of the transformations effected at henge sites over time, and consider aspects of both tradition/continuity, and change/innovation over time. Henge sites are interpreted as places of commemoration where people encountered, mediated and re-negotiated their pasts and present.

The research explores relationships with the past and the creation of memory at henge sites during the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age in Scotland. It is argued that this occurred through monument construction, destruction, rebuilding and reuse; but can be best understood by focusing not only on monumental architecture, but also on the (re)use of materials and material culture, the control and manipulation of sensory experiences of (monumental) spaces, and the relationships between henge sites and other spheres of prehistoric life and death, such as house architecture, farming practices, uses of fire and the burial of (fragments of) people and objects. The thesis discusses these themes through comparison of the biographies of case study sites from Scotland, and contextualises these with reference to henge sites elsewhere in the British Mainland. The reinterpretations of Scottish henges presented in the thesis, and the approaches used, represent a contribution not only to the study of henge monuments, but also have implications for the interpretation and understanding of prehistoric monumentality more generally.

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## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Rebecca Kirsty Younger

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Research aims

Henges are earthwork monuments built throughout the British Isles from approximately the 32nd-17th centuries BC. Part of a repertoire of circular monumental architecture from the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, henges have been regarded as a distinct type of monument since the early 1930s. Comprising a morphologically- and chronologically-varied group of sites, henges have historically caused difficulties for archaeologists who have sought to classify them. Whilst archaeological approaches to prehistoric monumentality have obviously moved far beyond typological approaches, understandings of henge sites have too often remained dominated by a preoccupation with the earthwork phase of these monuments, despite the fact that excavations have consistently shown henges to be multi-phase sites.

This thesis addresses the issue of how we can seek to understand and explain the 'multi-phase' nature of henge sites. It also aims to reconsider the interpretation of henge sites in Scotland - a corpus of sites which, with the exception of those in the Orkney Islands, has received relatively little attention in archaeological literature in comparison with sites in the south of England (although this situation of neglect has begun to change over the last decade). With this in mind, the key aim of the thesis is to 'de-henge' henges, that is to remove the focus from the morphology and plan view of monuments - and away from ditches and banks - and instead consider the ways in which such places were used and transformed throughout their lives.

In order to achieve this, the thesis explores several questions:

- What approaches to the interpretation of henge sites can be employed in order to avoid focusing on any single phase of monumental construction?
- What is the significance of aspects of continuity (of location) and change (destroying and rebuilding monuments) throughout the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age at henge sites?

- Are we restricted to simply describing what changes happened over time at henge sites, or can we make sense of such changes to interpret how people may have engaged with and re-negotiated their past, present and future?
- What do comparisons and contrasts between the ways different henge sites were used over time tell us about how people interacted with and understood their past during the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age periods in Scotland?

These questions are explored with reference to case studies of henge sites in Scotland and elsewhere in the British mainland, presented as site biographies. The structure of the thesis and a brief overview of the main themes discussed in each of the chapters is given below.

## **Overview of the structure of the thesis**

Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the research context of the thesis, and establish the approaches used throughout the thesis. Chapter 2 reviews and critiques existing understandings of and interpretations of henges. It introduces some background information on henge sites and their study, especially focusing on henge sites in Scotland. This is contextualised with reference to wider trends in archaeological theory and concomitant developments in archaeological considerations of prehistoric monumentality.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical approach of the thesis. Key theoretical concepts are introduced, namely the creation of memory, and time, particularly understandings of the 'past in the past'. The chapter suggests a need for a move away from traditional concepts of monuments as memorials, to instead consider the relationship of monument construction, destruction and reuse, to the active creation of memory and the interpretation of the past (and present). This includes exploration of possible alternative views of how concepts of the past may have been constructed and understood during prehistory. Following this, the growing trend in archaeology over the past two decades of thinking about monument reuse is discussed and critically reviewed. Biographical approaches are presented as being one way in which to understand the phenomenon of monument reuse. The use of biographical approaches in archaeology is

considered in the context of limitations of dating phases of monument (de)construction and (re)/(dis)use. The concept of enclosure is also discussed, focusing on the possible use of enclosure as a means of controlling or mediating access to certain places, both physically and in people's imaginations.

The remainder of the thesis examines a total of eleven case studies of henge sites. The first eight sites discussed are all in Scotland, while the other three sites provide a comparison of sites elsewhere in mainland Britain. The case studies are presented as biographies of each individual site, followed by thematic discussions of different aspects of the biographies, which compare and contrast the life-histories of the different sites.

Chapter 4 examines the theme of henge sites as commemorative places, and focuses on the biographies of four sites: Balfarg Riding School, Fife; North Mains and Leadketty, both in Perth and Kinross; and Pict's Knowe, Dumfries and Galloway. Key aspects of the biographies of henge sites are discussed, including the relationship of henge sites to other, widespread Neolithic practices such as pit-digging and possibly in some cases farming practices. Timber structures and the use of henge sites for settlement-related activities, as well as burials both before and after the construction of earthworks are discussed. The concept of enclosure as a kind of 'wrapping' is introduced. In terms of the theme of commemoration, monument construction is seen as a means of constructing memories. Henge sites are suggested to have been places where people encountered the past, in the form of earlier monuments and earlier material culture. They are thus interpreted as places where the past, or *a* past, is visible and therefore made present; but also potentially places where the past is constructed, mediated, controlled and (re)interpreted.

Chapter 5 moves on to consider themes of continuity and change in the uses of henge sites over time. The biographies of another four Scottish henge sites are compared: Cairnpapple Hill in West Lothian; Forteviot 1, Perth and Kinross; Balfarg in Fife; and the Stones of Stenness, Orkney. As in chapter 4, these biographies are considered, not with an emphasis on describing the 'types' of monuments built on henge sites over time, but rather on the activities performed there at various times, concentrating on changes in how these sites were used and what they meant. Practices such as fire-lighting and burning



events, and the deposition of fragmented material culture at henge sites are discussed. The significance of the construction and destruction of monuments is considered. Both continuity *and* change are seen to be significant elements in the biographies of henge sites. Continuity and change are held in tension in the use and reuse of henge sites, as successive uses of henge sites reference aspects of their earlier biography, but tend to reconfigure them rather than replicating them. The uses of henge sites over time are argued to be characterised by periodic returns to 'old' places, rather than constant or continuous use of the same location. It is argued that this is the case at mini-henges and hengiform sites, as much as at larger henge sites. A protracted and complex biography of continuity and change, commemoration and transformation is suggested to be one of the key defining characteristics of henge sites.

The exploration of this theme is continued in chapter 6. Whilst the previous chapters have concentrated on reconsidering henge sites in Scotland, chapter 6 seeks to contextualise these sites by comparing and contrasting the biographies of henge sites elsewhere in the British mainland. Three sites have been selected: Dyffryn Lane in Powys; Ringlemere, Kent; and the southern henge at Thornborough, North Yorkshire. Comparison of these sites with the Scottish henge sites discussed in the rest of the thesis suggests that a long biography of commemoration and transformation is indeed a characteristic of all henge sites, and is not restricted to any particular region. While there are some similarities between the biographies of different henge sites, it is concluded that there is no single typical or 'ideal' biography for a henge site. Henging often appears late in the life of these sites, after they have already been long-established as significant places in the landscape. Yet it is concluded that henge sites were not only commemorative when the henge earthworks were constructed. Commemorative aspects can be seen throughout the lives of henge sites, with each stage of their biographies relating to the past - not only to earlier monuments or structures, but also earlier material culture, or earlier activities. In addition to monument-(de)construction, other factors such as the use of certain materials, performances involving material culture, and the manipulation of people's senses and experience, would all have contributed to the creation of memory at henge sites. Such events may have been traumatic at times, but would have made henge sites memorable places. They would also

forge remembered links with other places in the landscape, and with other people.

Finally, chapter 7 reflects on the original contributions made by this thesis, both in relation to the interpretation of henge monuments, and also wider contributions to the study of Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age monumentality. Avenues for future research are highlighted.

## **Methodology and the selection of the case study sites**

In order to achieve the aims discussed above and consider the trajectory of how henge sites changed over time, without focusing on the final morphology or any single phase, this thesis adopts a biographical approach to henge sites. The theoretical basis of site biography, and the reasons for choosing a biographical approach, are discussed in more depth in Chapter 3.

The site biographies presented in the thesis include both reinterpretations of previously excavated and published henge sites, in addition to Leadketty, a mini-henge excavated in 2012 as part of the ongoing Strathearn Environs and Royal Forteviot (SERF) project. Since writing a biography of a site requires an understanding of the phasing of the monuments, it was necessary to select sites which had been either fully-excavated, or where the area inside the bank and ditch had been excavated as well as the earthworks, and where an interpretation of the chronological sequence of the different phases of the site could be constructed. Therefore, sites selected included recently-excavated sites (e.g. Forteviot 1), but also sites where there was scope to reconsider existing understandings of the phasing of the site (e.g. Cairnpapple, Balfarg and Stenness).

Reinterpretations of previously-published sites were carried out solely based on published material, and without reference to any archival material. It was decided that this was the most suitable approach, given the timescale of the project. When previous efforts have been made to reinterpret some of the sites in question, the archives have been found to contain very limited useful material. For example, Gordon Barclay consulted the Cairnpapple archives when preparing his (1999) reinterpretation of the site, and concluded that little useful

material was found which significantly impacted his interpretation of the site, beyond what was already contained in Piggott's (1948) published report (K. Brophy *pers. comm.*). For the purposes of this thesis, it was also considered that newly available information, such as the new dates for Cairnpapple (Sheridan 2003) and the Balfarg monument complex (Gibson 2010a) had more of a bearing on the reinterpretation of sites.

Furthermore, the aim of the thesis was to deconstruct and reconsider traditional interpretations of henges. A large part of this was therefore not reassessing the results of the excavations themselves, but rather in picking apart previously-published existing archaeological interpretations of henge sites, and revisiting these interpretations in the light of more current understandings of henge sites. It was therefore felt that, given the scope of the project, the published excavation reports contained ample material to reinterpret the sites without it being necessary to consult the archives.

For future studies, consulting the archives may prove valuable, in that not all of the sites were particularly well-dated. For example, as discussed in chapter 5, all of the dates for Balfarg henge which were included in Mercer's (1981) report were on charcoal from only two postholes, and therefore did little to illuminate the phasing and sequence of the site as a whole. There may therefore be value in revisiting some of these archives in the future to determine whether there is any potentially dateable material remaining in the site archives. However, this was considered to be outwith the scope of this thesis.

The sites discussed in this thesis were also chosen to include a range of different henge morphologies, such as so-called 'mini-henges' and 'hengiforms' (Leadketty), larger sites (e.g. Balfarg) and double-ditched henges (Thornborough South). In addition, the henges discussed in this thesis include both Late Neolithic sites (the Stones of Stenness), but also henges which were probably constructed much later, during the Chalcolithic-Early Bronze Age (e.g. Forteviot 1, North Mains and Pict's Knowe). In other words, this group of sites was selected in order to be able to compare and contrast as wide a group of sites as possible, within the space and time available.

## **Note on terminology and overview of henge sites in Scotland**

As is discussed in chapter two, the way the term 'henge' has been used by archaeologists is increasingly being seen as problematic. Criticisms have been raised concerning the use of the term as something of a 'brand' (Watson 2004a: 89). The reasons for recent reticence about using the word henge at all (Gibson 2012) stems in large part from the way in which 'henge' is bound up with the typological classification of monuments - problematic for 'hengese', which form such a heterogeneous group. The historiography of the study of henges is discussed in more detail in chapter two, but a brief overview of henge sites in Scotland is included here.

Henge monuments are circular earthwork monuments, usually with an external bank and internal ditch, built from the 32nd to 26th centuries cal BC, although in parts of Scotland they continue to be constructed into the 17th century BC. Henges are found throughout the British Isles, from the south of England to the Orkney Islands, and may be seen as part of a wider tradition of circular monuments current in Britain from the later Neolithic (Bradley 1998a; Gibson 2004; Harding 2003). Most henges in Scotland are less than 30 metres in diameter, although there are also some larger henges, such as the Ring of Brodgar in Orkney, over 100 metres across (Barclay 2005: 84); and there is a tradition of 'mini-henges', less than 10-12 metres in diameter, in Perthshire and the north-east of Scotland (Bradley 2011).

Some 116 probable henge sites can currently be identified in Scotland (figure 1). This figure has doubled over the last three decades, as aerial survey has identified plough-damaged sites as cropmarks (Barclay 2005). The estimate of over 100 sites includes those sites catalogues by Harding and Lee (1987) - the last published list of known henge sites in Scotland, apart from the information in Barclay's (2005) short overview of henges in Scotland - as well as circular enclosures listed as henges or possible henges in the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS). Of this corpus of sites, about a quarter have been archaeologically-investigated, with some 26 having been excavated to date, and a further 5 investigated only through geophysical or other survey.

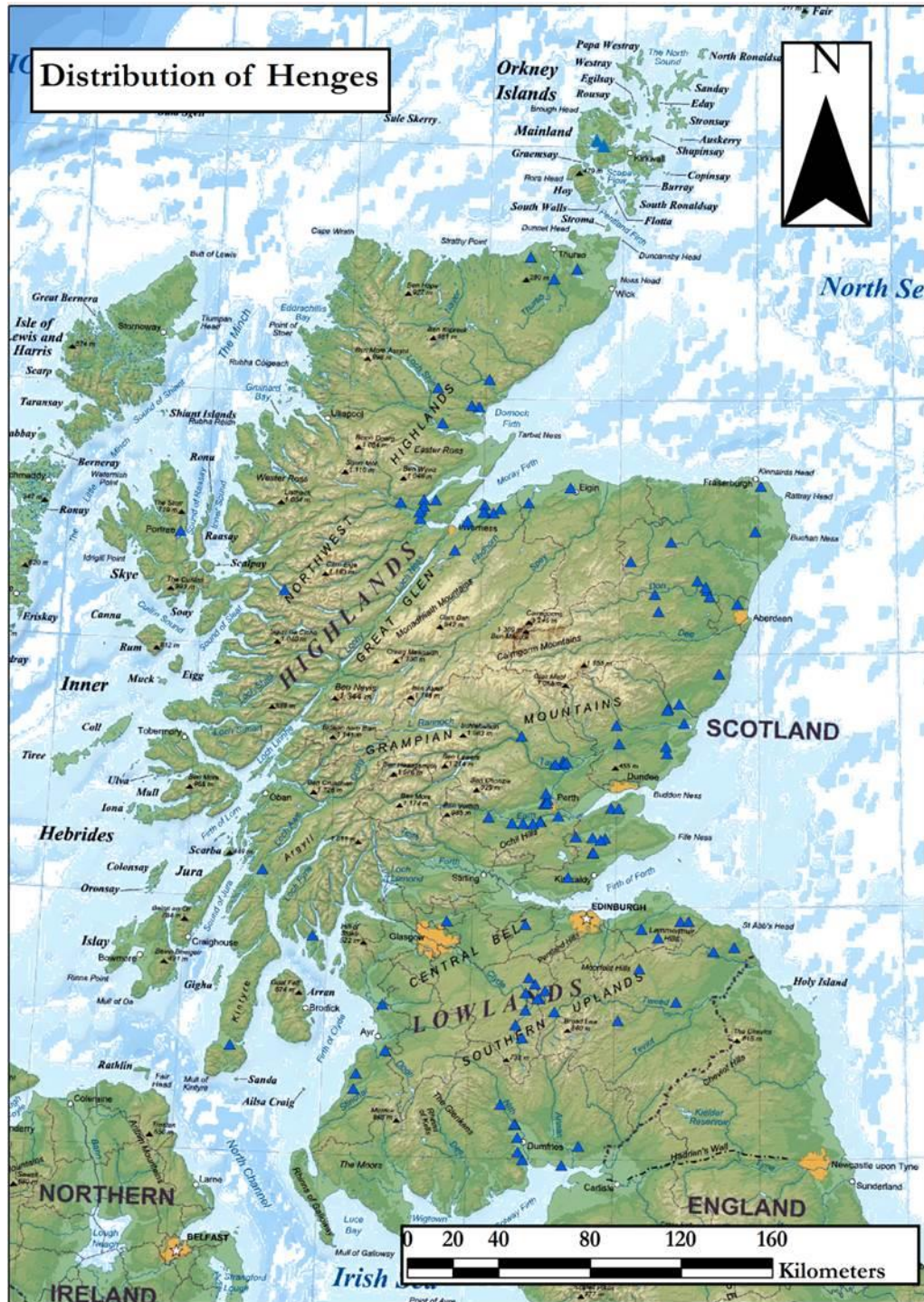


Figure 1 - map showing distribution of currently-known henge sites in Scotland (marked by blue triangles). Map prepared by Ryan McNutt.

As can be seen from the distribution map (fig. 1), the majority of known henge sites in Scotland are concentrated in the east, and in low-lying ground. This distribution, with a predominance of earthwork monuments in the east, has been noted for other monument-types in Scotland, and may reflect either a bias in the visibility and detection of cropmark monuments, or an actual tradition of

monuments being built of different materials in different regions (Noble 2006; Telford 2002). Most henges in Scotland are located in relatively low-lying positions in the landscape, for example on valley bottoms, and commonly on flattish ground, although there are exceptions such as Cairnpapple Hill in West Lothian (discussed in chapter 5), an example of a henge in a more upland, hilltop location - although such landscape settings are rare (Barclay 1999). Henge sites are also commonly located near to water, for example the henges in the Forteviot complex, also discussed in chapter 5, is located on a flat terrace above a tributary of the River Earn. Broomend of Crichton in Aberdeenshire is similarly located on a flat river terrace (Bradley 2011). In general, the landscape setting described by Richards (1996) for the Orcadian henges, the Stones of Stenness and Ring of Brodgar, which are beside water and surrounded by low hills on the horizon, may be seen as a reasonable summary of the setting of the majority of henge sites in Scotland. The landscape setting of each site discussed in this thesis is explained in more detail in their biographies in chapters 4 and 5.

Although still commonly used to describe the group of earthwork sites as described above, the word 'henge' is no longer seen as an adequate signifier by some (e.g. Gibson 2012). Arguably however, the problem is not so much the term itself, as the way in which it has been used uncritically by archaeologists (see Tilley 1999; Watson 2004a). In this thesis, the term henge is therefore retained, although with a full awareness and acknowledgement of the imperfection of *any* term used to describe such a varied group of sites. Throughout the thesis, the term 'henge site' has often been adopted instead of using the word 'henge' alone. This is done in recognition of the fact that many of the sites which eventually become henge sites did not start their life as henge monuments. The earthwork phase of these sites is only one facet (and in many cases possibly a short-lived and late addition) of places which were used in many different ways over time - a theme which is developed further throughout the rest of the thesis.

## Chapter 2: Henging the Henge

### Introduction

This chapter introduces the research context of the thesis, reviews and critiques relevant literature concerning henges, and offers an overview of the historiography of the study of henges. Some background description of henge sites is included as a starting point. The history of the study of henges is situated against the background of broader theoretical trends in archaeology.

Henges are usually most simply defined as circular or sub-circular earthwork monuments constructed across the British Isles from the Late Neolithic - Early Bronze Age, and are traditionally associated with Grooved Ware pottery. In reality, the term 'henge' has come to describe a very varied group of sites and, as discussed in this chapter, the traditional definition outlined above is no longer seen as adequate. One problematic factor relating to the study of henge sites in the north of Britain is that this traditional interpretative paradigm is largely based on henge sites in the south of England. Excavations of henge sites in the north of England and in Scotland, amongst other places (e.g. Ireland) have made it clear that sites in other areas are very different from those in southern Britain. Perhaps one of the most important ways in which these sites vary from their counterparts in Wessex is the date of their construction and use: new dating evidence has extended the chronology for henge sites in Scotland into the Chalcolithic/Early-Mid Bronze Age, which will be discussed in this chapter. In turn, this has led to the realisation that the traditional assumption of henges forming a 'package' along with certain material culture (i.e. Grooved Ware) is much less clear-cut. This presents a challenge to traditional interpretative frameworks.

Furthermore, and perhaps most crucially in the context of this thesis, has been the realisation that the earthworks seen as the defining feature of henge sites are actually only one phase in a long, often complex, sequence of development and building at henge sites. This has been demonstrated when henge sites are excavated, as they are found to be multi-phase sites - which in turn has shown the difficulties of understanding henges as a typological 'category', which is why henges need to be 'de-henged'. The chapter begins however by sketching an

overview of existing understandings of henge morphology, their relationships with material culture, and the dating and chronology of henge sites.

## **Research context: traditional descriptions and typology of henges**

Henges were first defined as a discrete monument type in the early 1930s (Kendrick and Hawkes 1932). The history of how henge studies developed in archaeology will be discussed below, and contextualised with relation to broader theoretical trends in archaeology. Henges form a heterogeneous group of monuments, and has therefore come to be seen as a problematic label by some (e.g. Gibson 2012). Therefore, it will be useful to begin by outlining traditional definitions of henge monuments, including typological treatments based on, for example, morphology or material culture associations; as well as suggesting why such approaches are now seen as problematic.

### ***Henge morphology***

Henge monuments are usually described as circular to sub-circular or oval earthwork monuments, comprising an external bank and internal ditch. They can be regarded as part of a wider tradition of circular monuments emerging in the Later Neolithic (Bradley 1998a; Gibson 2004; Harding 2003). Henge ditches are usually wide in proportion to the area enclosed, and are usually interrupted by one or two entrance causeways.

Although henges are seen as sharing this unified design of penannular or cresecentic earthworks - 'recurrent "banana and tea bowl" plans', as Roy Loveday describes them (Loveday 1998: 14) - there is acknowledge to be a great deal of variation in the morphology of henge monuments. There is for instance a great deal of variation in the configuration of the bank and ditch, and number and position of entranceways. For example, Avebury, Wiltshire has four entrance causeways; the Ring of Brodgar in Orkney appears to have had no bank (Downes *et al.* 2013: 114); Mayburgh in Cumbria has a bank composed of rubble rather than soil; and Stonehenge (which gave its name to the monument type, as discussed below) has an internal bank and external ditch.



Traditionally henges have been classified according to their morphology, and sometimes also according to their size. In 1939, the class was sub-divided based on the number of entrances: those with a single entrance came to be known as 'Class I', and those with two entrances (usually positioned at opposite sides of the henge) 'Class II' (Piggott and Piggott 1939: 140). Atkinson (1951: 82) subdivided Class II to include a further category, 'Class IIA', i.e. henges which have two ditches with a bank between them. Henge sites which enclose vast areas hundreds of metres across, such as Avebury and others in Wessex, have come to be known as 'henge enclosures', while at the other end of the scale, small henge sites generally less than c. 10-12 metres in diameter are known as 'mini-henges' or sometimes 'hengiform' monuments. On average, most henge sites in Scotland are less than 30 metres in diameter, although there are some larger examples such as the Ring of Brodgar, over 100 metres in diameter (Barclay 2005: 84). There are also groups of mini-henges in the north and east of Scotland (Bradley 2011), and perhaps also in east-central Scotland and the area around Strathearn, Perth and Kinross (see Brophy and Noble 2012a: 31).

### ***Henges and material culture***

Henges are found throughout the British Isles, and it has been suggested by some that they originated in Orkney around 3000 BC, as part of a 'package' along with Grooved Ware pottery (Harding 2003; Thomas 2010). An Orcadian origin is far from certain though, and southern origins have also been suggested for henges (Wainwright 1969; Catherall 1971). When henges were first defined as a discrete monument type, they were thought of as an English phenomenon (Kendrick and Hawkes 1932; Atkinson 1951). Henge monuments have traditionally been suggested to have developed from causewayed enclosures (Wainwright 1969; Catherall 1971; Harding 2003). The concept of a linear evolution of monument-types is problematic however - not least due to the lack of evidence for causewayed enclosures in a northern British context (Bradley 2011). Jan Harding (2003: 12-13) explains that the idea that henges first emerged in Orkney has arisen from the supposed association between henges and Grooved Ware pottery, since the earliest Grooved Ware appears in Orkney before 3000 BC. This, combined with dating evidence which suggests the Stones of Stenness henge was dug around the end of the 4th or beginning of the 3rd millennium BC, has led to the assumption that 'classic' henges (with internal ditch and external

bank) and Grooved Ware both originated in Orkney (*ibid.*). As Harding goes on to note however, this is in some ways a ‘tenuous assumption’ (*ibid.*: 13).

The association between henges and Grooved Ware may have been overstated in the literature, certainly in relation to sites in the north of the British mainland. In Scotland, apart from the association of the henge at Stenness with Grooved Ware (Ritchie 1976), there are no clear-cut associations between Grooved Ware pottery and the construction of henges. At Balfarg and Balfarg Riding School in Fife, Grooved Ware pottery has been found, but is probably not contemporary with the construction of the henge earthworks (Ritchie 1976; Mercer 1981; Barclay and Russell-White 1993; Gibson 2010a) These sites are further discussed in chapters 4 and 5. It is possible that other artefacts and kinds of material culture found at henges may pre- or post-date the construction of henge earthworks. The uses of material culture at henge sites are discussed further in the case study chapters.

Beaker pottery is not an uncommon find in excavations of henges in Scotland. This might sometimes be associated with Bronze Age burials, possibly representing activity at henge sites which long post-dates the earthworks. At Cairnpapple, West Lothian for instance, the henge site was used for burial, including cremations and inhumations associated with beaker and food vessel pottery, after the henge ditch must have silted up. A sequence of at least two, and possibly three, cairns were built, partly overlying the henge ditch (Piggott 1948; Barclay 1999). The cairns covered cist burials, containing beaker pottery; and some of the later pottery-associated burials were inserted into the side of the cairns (Piggott 1948; Barclay 1999). Sherds of beaker might also be found in the ditch fills, for example the sherds of all-over corded beaker recovered from the lower fill of the henge ditch at Forteviot (Noble and Brophy 2011a: 796). Of course, on the basis of new dating evidence, especially that which suggests that henges in the north-east of Scotland might date to the Bronze Age (Bradley 2011), it can no longer be assumed that such finds are secondary to the henge.

Harding (2003) has suggested that there is also an established link between henges and polished stone axes. Again, while this may be the case elsewhere, there is scant evidence for such an association in Scotland. Fragments of stone axe have been found at henge sites in Scotland - for example the fragments of

Craig Llwydd stone axes recovered from the old land surface at Cairnpapple Hill, West Lothian (Piggott 1948). However, the context from which the axes were recovered is thought to pre-date the henge at Cairnpapple; it is possibly contemporary with the pit-digging and deposition, possibly pre-dating the henge earthworks by centuries (Barclay 1999). For Scotland, it seems that there is little evidence for a link between henges and polished stone axes, and this is tenuous. In Scotland, it seems that associations of any kind of artefacts with the earthwork phase of henge sites are uncommon. The frequency with which Bronze Age Beaker pottery is found at henge sites, is one of the factors which had led Richard Bradley to suggest that henge monuments in the north-east of Scotland may date to the early Bronze Age rather than the Neolithic (Bradley 2011). This will be further discussed below.

### ***Chronology and dating of henges in Scotland***

Henge earthworks often enclose other features, such as timber or stone circles or settings, cists, cremation burials or cairns. In the past, these features have been used as a way of categorising henges (Burl 1969; Clare 1986, 1987). However, excavation has demonstrated that such features might pre- or post-date the henge earthworks by centuries, and therefore represent the use of a site over a long period, and several 'phases'. In some cases the chronological relationship between the internal features and the earthwork is unclear, and there has sometimes been a tendency to conflate all features into a single entity under the umbrella term 'henge', where they all appear on the same site. Therefore, although henges are often seen as Late Neolithic monuments, in fact they are almost all complex multi-phase sites, elements of which may date to the Earlier Neolithic, Bronze Age or even in some cases the Iron Age or early Medieval. When henge sites are dated, it is therefore necessary to carefully consider exactly what the dates refer to, and whether they date the construction of the earthworks, or other features which may not be contemporary with the henge.

Since henges were first identified as a distinctive 'type' of monument (Kendrick and Hawkes 1932: 83), they have been regarded as later Neolithic monuments. This assumption was for a time borne out for the majority of excavated henge sites, and it was therefore assumed that *all* henges were Later Neolithic

monuments, built roughly from 3000-2500 BC (Harding 2003). It is increasingly being recognised that the construction of henge earthworks at many sites occurred during the Chalcolithic or Bronze Age monuments, rather than the Late Neolithic. A Bronze Age henge-building tradition has been recognised particularly in certain regions, for example the north-east of Scotland (Bradley 2011). As discussed throughout the thesis, many other henges are now being dated to the Chalcolithic (e.g. North Mains, Barclay 2005; Forteviot 1, Noble and Brophy 2011a; Pict's Knowe, Thomas 2007a). Most Irish henge sites date to the Later Bronze Age or Iron Age (Condit and Simpson 1998).

Excavations at several henges in the north and north-east of Scotland have made it clear that the chronology of henges must be extended later. The construction of the small henge monument at Lairg, Sutherland was dated by charcoal from beneath the bank to after 1600-1270 BC (Bradley 2011: 159). Pullyhour in Caithness was a complex multi-phase site, with the ditch, bank and interior of the enclosure being substantially remodelled, following a period of apparent inactivity at the site (Bradley 2011: 123). The first phase of the monument consisted of a bank and penannular ditch, enclosing an area of 7m diameter. Charcoal beneath the bank of this first phase of enclosure, dates the construction of the earthworks to 1620-1450 cal BC (Bradley 2011: 122). The henge monument at Broomend of Crichtie in Aberdeenshire was also only one element of a monument complex which changed substantially over time. Activity around the site of the henge began in the earlier Neolithic, around 4200-3650 BC, and the site was used sporadically for grazing from about 3600-2400 BC (Bradley 2011: 74). A cist cemetery was built to the south of the henge site around 2450-2150 BC, and a grave was also dug in a deep shaft in what would become the centre of the henge, at around this time (ibid.: 74). Bradley argues that it was not until after 2150-1900 BC that the henge earthworks were built at Broomend (Bradley 2011: 74). Cremation burials were deposited within the henge between 1950-1700 BC; possibly broadly contemporary with a timber circle which was built outside the northern entrance of the henge, sometime after 1850-1650 BC, but before 1650-1500 BC (Bradley 2011: 74).

Bradley has suggested that the later henges in the north-east represent a 'second wave' of henge building. He argues for an earlier, Neolithic tradition of henge building, followed by a second tradition several centuries later, in the

Chalcolithic or Early Bronze Age (Bradley 2011: 111). Certainly there is little evidence to suggest that henges were built continuously throughout the later Neolithic. In fact, there is very little evidence for Late Neolithic henge-building in Scotland at all. A range of radiocarbon dates obtained from animal bones in the basal fill of the ditch at Stones of Stenness, Orkney date the construction of the henge ditch to 3350-2600 cal BC (Barclay 2005: 91). Charcoal from the middle fill of the ditch at Balfarg Riding School (BRS), Fife was dated to 3340-2880 cal BC (Barclay 2005: 91), providing a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the ditch. This date can be reconsidered in the light of Alex Gibson's (2010a) reassessment of the sequence of the Balfarg/Balbirnie complex, and it is possible that the BRS enclosure is later, perhaps dating to the Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age (*ibid.*: 65). This would be consistent with the dates of henges in the rest of Scotland, as there is an apparent gap of several centuries between the construction of these early henges, and others in Scotland. Radiocarbon dates from peat below the bank at Pict's Knowe, Dumfries and Galloway, suggests the construction of the first phase of the earthworks took place around 2410-1850 cal BC (Barclay 2005: 91). The lower ditch fill of Forteviot Henge 1 has been dated to 2469-1938 cal BC (Noble and Brophy 2011a; Brophy and Noble 2012a). It is possible that henges were being built *neither* continuously throughout the Neolithic, *nor* as two distinct traditions (*contra*. Bradley 2011: 111), but rather were built sporadically and in 'fits and starts' over a long period, beginning before 3000 BC, and continuing into the 13th century BC. In this respect, henges can be seen as part of a protracted tradition of building round monuments; the long chronology for henge-building in Scotland may reflect increasing conservatism and longevity of monumental styles from the later Neolithic.

Some of these flourishes of henge-building may have been specific to local regions. The Early-Mid Bronze Age tradition of henge building in the north-east of Scotland postulated by Bradley (2011) may reflect something of a regional tradition of henges. Gordon Barclay has noted that the distribution of henges and recumbent stone circles in north-east Scotland is almost mutually exclusive (Barclay 2005). It is also possible that the long range of dates for henges does not reflect an earlier and later tradition, but is reflective of an increasing conservatism and longevity of monumental styles throughout the later Neolithic.

The henges in north-east Scotland however are also unusual in some respects; Lairg and Pullyhour in particular enclose relatively small areas. Whilst henges and hengiforms are generally implied to be part of the same tradition, it may be possible that the smaller hengiforms are actually later than larger henges. Broomend of Crichtie is also unusual in that the timber circle is later than the henge. In most cases where a henge and timber circle are found in close association, the timber circle has been found to pre-date the henge earthworks (Gibson 2005). Usually timber circles are enclosed by henges, but even in cases where the timber circle is outside the henge ditch, the timber circle is still earlier, as at Forteviot (Noble and Brophy 2011a). At Broomend of Crichtie, it is also unusual that the timber circle and henge earthworks are not concentric. Usually the earthworks are concentric to the timber circle. At Balfarg, Fife for instance, the interior of the henge was filled with postholes, and it was possible that there were as many as five timber circles, all concentric; the henge ditch was also concentric to these (Mercer 1981). At North Mains, Perth and Kinross, the henge earthworks are concentric to one of the two timber settings within the henge, even though both are rather elliptical in shape to accommodate this (Barclay 1983, 2005).

It is worth noting also the difficulty of dating henge monuments. When henge sites have been excavated, they have almost always been shown to be complex sites which develop over long periods. Internal or external features such as pits, timber circles or burials, can pre- or post-date the henge earthworks by centuries or more. This is one of the reasons why it is problematic to regard 'henge monuments' as a singular phenomenon, and why it is misleading to refer to complex sites by a name which arbitrarily emphasises only one phase. To do so generates the assumption that all associated features are contemporary, and therefore other features, possibly belonging to other phases in the use of the site, have sometimes been used to inferentially date henge earthworks. For example, the radiocarbon dates for Balfarg, Fife are on charcoal from the fill of some of the postholes of the timber circles in the interior of the henge (Barclay 2005: 91). It is likely that these in fact pre-date the henge earthworks (Gibson 2005) - possibly by several centuries, based on comparison with other sites such as Forteviot (Noble and Brophy 2011a).

Apart from the challenges and potential pitfalls of dating multi-phase sites, the architecture of henge monuments makes it difficult to date their construction. In most cases, few artefacts are found in primary contexts associated with the earthworks. Often, material used for dating henge earthworks is obtained from ditch fills. However, the ditch fills represent the erosion of the earthworks, and therefore may relate not to the construction of the monument, but to its disuse and perhaps abandonment. Even a date obtained from the basal fill of a ditch could only provide a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the ditch and bank. In some cases, it is possible that the construction of the earthworks did not necessarily precede their erosion by a long period. North Mains, Perth and Kinross is situated on a gravel terrace. It is therefore possible that the earthworks were not very stable, and Gordon Barclay has suggested that features dug into the fluvio-glacial gravels and silts may have begun to erode within a matter of days or weeks (Barclay 1983: 133). Similarly at Broomend of Crichtie, also built on gravel and sand, Bradley believes erosion and infilling of the ditch may have quickly followed the construction of the earthworks (Bradley 2011). The question of how durable and permanent henge earthworks were, is discussed further in later chapters. It is therefore feasible that some infilling of henge ditches occurred quickly after their construction. In itself, this raises many interesting questions about why the earthworks were allowed to erode so quickly, and perhaps implies that the construction of the monument was more significant than its subsequent use (Bradley 1993). Caution is required however when using radiocarbon samples from ditch fills to directly date the construction of henge earthworks. Understanding the sequence and date of the fills is however a useful way of understanding the chronology of later uses of henge monuments, and ways in which the site may have continued to be used long after the construction of the henge bank and ditch.

### **Summary**

To summarise, henge monuments can generally be understood as earthwork monuments comprising a ditch and sometimes bank, with entrance causeway(s). Part of a wider tradition of circular monument building emerging from the Late Neolithic onwards, henges were built throughout the British Mainland and Orkney Islands from c. 32nd-17th centuries BC, or perhaps even later in places. This simple definition belies the heterogeneity and variety of sites which are

comprehended by the term. This variation has been seen as problematic by some, and demonstrates many of the pitfalls of typological approaches. As outlined below, the study of henge sites can in many ways be seen as a way of dealing with, and more recently of understanding, the diversity of henge sites.

The ways that henge monuments have been studied are reflective of wider theoretical and interpretative trends in archaeology. The next section outlines the background of the study of henge monuments to date, considering not only how they have been treated in the light of each theoretical school of thought, but also tying this in to wider trends in archaeological thought. This will be done by comparing and contrasting the treatments of various other 'types' of Neolithic monuments.

## **Henging the Henge**

In order to fully discuss henges in archaeological research, it is necessary to consider the origins of the term 'henge', since the different meanings and uses of the term over time reflect and have influenced the ways in which henge monuments have been studied and perceived by archaeologists.

The term 'henge' was first used by T.D. Kendrick in 1932 (Kendrick and Hawkes 1932), derived from Stonehenge and Woodhenge. The 'henge' label was originally applied to late Neolithic or early Bronze Age sites, thought to be 'temples' or 'meeting places'. Etymologically, the term is thought to refer to the Old English word for the lintels which top the iconic Stonehenge trilithons (Atkinson 1951). From the first use of the term, it seems that there some consciousness of it being not a wholly satisfactory way of describing these monuments. Kendrick introduces the term in a vaguely defensive tone, acknowledging that not everyone may agree with the way he uses it (Kendrick and Hawkes 1932: 83). His definition is also somewhat vague, perhaps in a deliberate effort to justify the term, or to circumvent overly rigid definitions (Thomas 2004; Bradley 2011).

Nonetheless, the term stuck, and the use of henge caught on quickly. Initial writing about henges largely deals with efforts to further define and characterise henges as a 'type' or 'class' of monument. In this sense, the inception of henge



monuments reflects the wider theoretical concerns of archaeology as a discipline at this time. Culture-historical archaeology used approaches based on classification: similar monuments or artefacts are viewed as representing a discrete entity, a culture (Trigger 2006). Thus, difference and variation are seen either as expressions of different cultures, or reflecting a linear, evolutionary change through time, each difference being a different 'type'. This explains the early preoccupation with defining exactly what a henge monument was - cataloguing variation between monuments was seen as a way of understanding it, and a means of describing a real phenomenon, rather than imposing arbitrary classifications onto the archaeological record.

In this sense, henge monuments can be regarded as much a product of 20th century archaeology as they are of prehistory (Pitts 2001; Watson 2004a: 89). The variation between henge monuments clearly perturbed archaeologists from the start. Initial writing about henges seems to pick up on the novelty of this 'class' of monuments, as it normally includes some explanation of the definition and origin of the term (e.g. Atkinson 1951). Whilst the term was taken up enthusiastically by archaeologists, there was also commonly some acknowledgement of its limitations. Writing in 1936, Graham Clark places the word *henge* in inverted commas throughout his paper (Clark 1936). The following decades saw a continuation of the concern with defining henge monuments, a further way of trying to refine the precise meaning of the term by cataloguing the form of the monuments themselves, and of coping with the difference and variation encompassed by henges. As mentioned above, henges were divided into two 'classes', I and II, based on the number of entrances (Piggott and Piggott 1939), with the subsequent addition of Class IIA (Atkinson 1951). Henges were then further classified according to the internal features they possessed, such as timber or stone settings (Burl 1969; Catherall 1971; Clare 1986, 1987).

The emphasis on internal features is interesting, and opens the potential for considering the phasing of monuments (e.g. Clare 1986, 1987), since internal features such as timber settings are unlikely to be contemporary with the henge (e.g. see Gibson 2005). The multi-phase nature of henge sites was little appreciated at the time however. Internal features were conflated and seen as a unit along with earthwork features, leading Gordon Barclay (1989) to justifiably criticise attempts to classify henges based on their internal features as a

'reductionist' approach. However, the consideration given to internal features at henge sites from the 1960s-1980s perhaps marks the beginning of a move towards broader interpretations henge monuments, and an understanding that henge sites comprise more than simply earthworks. Problematically, considering internal features of henges remains a much more straightforward task for excavated sites than for unexcavated monuments, such as those which are only known through aerial photography, leading to something of a two-tier depth of interpretation.

Aerial photography has long had an important role in the study of henge monuments, many of which, being lowland earthwork monuments, survive only as cropmarks. The first archaeological site of which aerial photos were taken was Stonehenge, by balloon in 1906 (Pitts 2001: 32), and Woodhenge was discovered through aerial photography in the early 1920s (*ibid*: 33-36). Aerial photography also played an important role in increasing the number of known henge sites in Scotland, for example the henge at Balfarg, Fife (a site previously thought to comprise only the remains of a stone setting) came to light through aerial survey in 1950 (Atkinson 1950: 58). The significance of aerial photography for the study of henge monuments is also demonstrated by Harding and Lee's (1987) work cataloguing all henge sites and 'henge related sites' known in Britain at the time.

Harding and Lee's book is also interesting in the way that it uses the word henge, and the somewhat problematic way in which they choose to define henges. They described their intention of cataloguing sites as a means of defining henges, as retrospectively 'over-optimistic' (Harding and Lee 1987). Following Atkinson's (1951) example, they define henges as Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age circular earthwork sites, with external bank and internal ditch, and one or two entrances (Harding and Lee 1987). Their definition is deliberately strict because of their conviction 'that extending the term to cover sites with other configurations dilutes its force and causes confusion' (*ibid.*: 26-9). Interestingly however, Harding and Lee include some sites which do not fulfil these strict criteria, notably Stonehenge and Avebury. Their justification for doing so is revealing of past archaeological approaches to henges and the problems of classification, and is worth quoting in full:

‘Over 90% of classic [henge] sites have an internal ditch. It would be convenient if this criteria was an absolute one; but this would have the disadvantage of excluding Stonehenge itself from the henge category. Stonehenge is admittedly a special case in many other ways, so that this is not necessarily a fatal objection, but it discourages confidence in the validity of the term and suggests that the criteria may be unduly inflexible’ (Harding and Lee 1987: 41).

Harding and Lee’s sense of frustration and regret that henges do not form a neat and straightforwardly homogeneous group is tangible, if a little bizarre, and sums up many of the concerns about defining a henge which have in the past been prominent in their archaeological study.

The concern with defining and describing sites in a specific way as Harding and Lee do, leads to a curious difference in the way certain sites are regarded in relation to one another. The concept of a ‘class’ of monument seems to apply in more than one sense, and from the way Harding and Lee discuss sites, it appears almost as if they regard ‘classic’ henges as being of a superior standing to those which are not. Thus North Mains is described as ‘a fine true henge’ (Harding and Lee 1987: 13); and exceptions are only made for the most impressive and famous of sites, Stonehenge. The implication is, that the status of all henges is raised by the inclusion of Stonehenge. Therefore it seems classification is not only a way of ordering sites to make them easier to study; but also a way of assessing the relative ‘value’ of one site against another. This is what Aaron Watson has described as the use of the term ‘henge’ as a ‘brand’ by archaeologists - ‘henge™’ (Watson 2004a). The eagerness to label and define a site is informative of Aaron Watson’s criticism that ‘Archaeologists have become preoccupied with describing what henges should be, not with what they do’ (Watson 2004a: 84). Describing a monument as a henge has been used as a shorthand means of attributing significance to a site, without actually considering its meaning or use - a problem which is not unique to henges, but has equally affected other monument ‘types’ (Brophy 2005). This can be seen in some of the early writing about henges which is largely devoted to describing the distinguishing physical features of a henge, and spend relatively few pages discussing their function (e.g. Atkinson 1951; Burl 1969; Wainwright 1969). It is also a point of contrast between more recent literature on henges, which is more largely concerned with interpretation and meaning.

Paradoxically however, as the preoccupation with merely describing henges has waned, over time there has been an increasingly uncritical acceptance of 'henges', both as a class of monuments and as a term. Early writing often included some discussion on the origins of the term, and carefully defined the sense in which it was used (e.g. Clark 1936; Atkinson 1951). In fact the name henge would often appear in quotation marks (e.g. Clark 1936; Kendrick and Hawkes 1932; Piggott 1954). This convention gradually disappeared; by the time Atkinson wrote in 1951 about the etymology of henges, he noted that the term was, however unsatisfactory in other respects, 'sanctioned by common usage' (Atkinson 1951: 81). Interestingly, there was evidently dissatisfaction with the term from the early days of its usage, although perhaps this just relates to the awareness that it was a newly-coined name.

Criticisms of the way such jargon is used unthinkingly and uncritically by archaeologists have been made, both in a general sense by Chris Tilley (1999), and specifically in the case of henges by Aaron Watson (2004a). Chris Tilley's argument was that the ways in which we perceive and understand monuments, is inextricably linked, and perhaps a product of, the language we use to describe them. He used the example of the use of the term 'megalith' as an example, arguing that the over-use of the word has led to the archaeological understanding of megaliths becoming 'frozen' (Tilley 1999: 86, 100-1). Megaliths are therefore perceived as a static, homogeneous entity, and to consider difference therefore becomes, Tilley suggests, 'unthinkable' (ibid.: 101). Tilley suggests that the language used to describe megaliths is not accurate - megaliths as constructed in text by archaeologists 'do not exist [...but] will almost certainly continue to do so', as the term is so entrenched in archaeological discourse (Tilley 1999: 101). The same might be said of henges, which despite dating to the third millennium BC, have in another sense only existed since 1932 (Pitts 2001).

The use of the term 'henge' is no more problematic than other classifications such as 'cursus', 'broch' or 'barrow', which seem to be equally arbitrary. Terms such as megalith might appear to confer meaning, whilst actually meaning nothing (Tilley 1999); but this is at least descriptive in some sense. Megalith is derived from the Greek meaning 'big stone' (Tilley 1999), and so at least refers to the form and materiality of the monument. The word 'henge' however refers

to the hanging lintels at Stonehenge; yet in archaeological discourse, it describes circular earthwork monuments. The meaning of the word is completely divorced from the context in which it is used by archaeologists. This abstraction means that although the term has been made to seem meaningful, the actual meaning of the sites it describes has largely been neglected.

Perhaps it is pertinent to remember the context in which henges were invented. Kendrick and Hawkes open their chapter on the Neolithic by remarking it is something of an ‘archaeological novelty’, and continue, ‘the truth is that we have only just begun to understand the neolithic period’ (Kendrick and Hawkes 1932: 56). The more fieldwork was done, the more knowledge of prehistory was added to. But this was the heyday of ‘pots equal people’ archaeological interpretation: new objects meant there was a new ‘culture’ (Kendrick and Hawkes 1932:25). Such an approach relied on typologies, as this was how it could be demonstrated that things conformed to known examples, or were different and new. To classify *was* to understand.

It has been noted that ordering the world by classifying, is part of the human experience and the way we understand and make sense of the world (Holten 2000: 287). As a method of archaeological interpretation however, typological approaches are problematic. Discussing the ways in which apparently neutral terms are in fact rooted in specific interpretative frameworks, Siân Jones and Colin Richards have noted that ‘classification is never neutral’ (Jones and Richards 2000: 101). This is partly because the concept of classification is predicated on measuring things against an archetype. As Jones and Richards (*ibid.*: 103) point out, within such a system, difference is seen only in terms of representing a different ‘type’. Therefore, difference does not need to be accounted for, because it is simply assumed to represent a different type, a variant category or a completely different culture. They explain:

‘The notion of an archaeological type, be it a stalled cairn or Grooved Ware vessel emphasizes an ideal normative type and suppresses variability. When operating within such a discourse it is extremely difficult to account for change between ‘cultures’ because difference is understood in relation to the idealized types of material culture and the social norms they are assumed to reflect.’ (Jones and Richards 2000: 103).

Culture-historical approaches treat all archaeological material in a similar way; from lithics and pots, to massive monuments, all are understood in terms of types. Such a system inherently lacks dynamism and flexibility of approach. The continuing use of the terminology, and thereby some aspects of the interpretative paradigms which that terminology expresses, is problematic for monuments such as henges, which vary so widely from site to site. Perhaps one of the most problematic consequences of the way sites are ordered through typology, and the use of very specific terminology which implies homogeneity - or at least linear evolution- is that it serves to mask variation.

Classification - or at least, the terminology of classification - remained prevalent however, in the case of henges as for other monuments. For henges, classification became not only increasingly complex over time, but also, as Julian Thomas has noted, increasingly inflexible (Thomas 2004: 99). This was the case despite longstanding acknowledgements of the heterogeneity of henges as a 'class' (Piggott and Piggott 1939), and despite the acknowledged difficulty of categorising henges because of the variation between sites (Burl 1969, Catherall 1971). Sites which did not fit into categories were accepted as exceptions, rather than challenges, to the rules. Classification may have been used 'for the sake of simplification' (Kendrick and Hawkes 1932: 83); ultimately however, this simplification caused complexity. This reached a zenith when Clare detailed over a hundred possible different varieties of henge types - some of which, there are no known examples of (Clare 1986, 1987). Such work can be seen as an effort to deal with variation and difference in the archaeological record. Ironically however, these ever-more-elaborate systems of classification served ultimately to downplay difference, by replacing *variation* with *complexity*, measured in terms of resemblance to a homogeneous, static and idealised norm. Clare's papers led Gordon Barclay to criticise the 'reductionism' entailed in fitting diverse monuments into inflexible categories (Barclay 1989). Nonetheless, classification - or at least, the terminology of classification - is still prevalent in the way henges are represented in archaeological discourse.

If culture-history and classification asked 'what is a henge?', then the aims of processualist archaeologists was to answer the 'how?' and 'when?'. In the 1970s-1980s, the publications of several significant excavations emphasised the role of scientific and mathematical enquiry which seems framed to answer these

questions. Part of Colin Renfrew's work in Orkney involved calculating how many man-hours it would take to dig the ditch of the Ring of Brodgar (Renfrew 1979). For a more detailed consideration of how henge sites were interpreted during the 1970s, see the case study in Box 1. When Roger Mercer found that the interior of the henge at Balfarg was full of postholes, he worked out how many timber circles were 'mathematically possible' based on their distribution (Mercer 1981). It was around this time too that Graham Ritchie excavated at the Stones of Stenness, and that radiocarbon dates and pottery from this site were used to suggest that the origin of henges and Grooved Ware in Orkney (Ritchie 1976). The emphasis on gathering data about henges, perhaps in some ways perpetuated the neglect of considering the interpretation, function and use of henges. Just as defining and labelling henges had previously been seen as providing sufficient understanding of these monuments, so gathering facts about them came to gain significance.

### ***Box 1: Interpretations of Orcadian Henges – 1970s approaches***

The 1970s saw a flourishing of interest in Orcadian henges, with the excavation of the Stones of Stenness by Graham Ritchie in 1973-4, and small-scale excavations at the Ring of Brodgar by Colin Renfrew in 1973.

Renfrew's work at the Ring of Brodgar was small-scale and exploratory, but focused largely on the boundary of the site, i.e. the ditch. His interpretations of the site were largely quantitative rather than qualitative. In describing the Ring of Brodgar, Renfrew was concerned with calculating the volume of the ditch for example, and his considerations of the society that built the monument are in no small part focused on placing a figure on how much effort, time and labour would be needed to dig the ditch. He estimates some 80,000 'man hours', or '100 men [working for] 100 days' would be required (Renfrew 1979: 213, 217). Extrapolations about the nature of society during this time are largely based on theories concerning cairns and their distribution, rather than on the henge. Beyond this, any in-depth discussion of the ritual use of the henge would be seen as problematic and inherently unknowable.

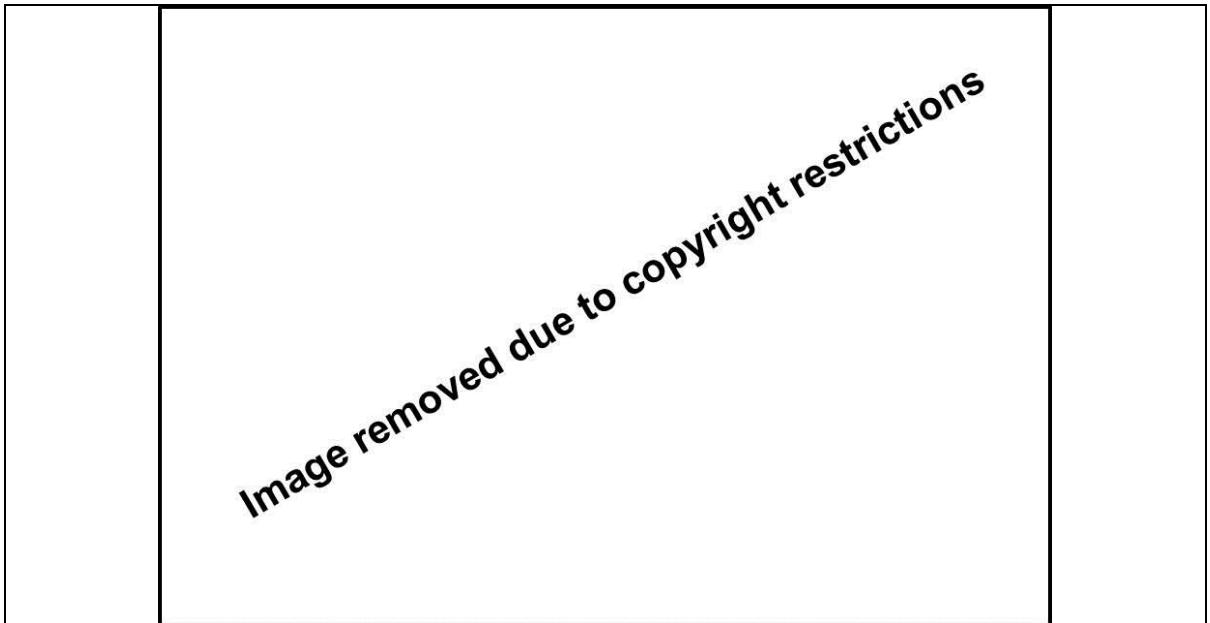


Figure 2 - Renfrew's plan of the Ring of Brodgar (Renfrew 1979: fig.14, facing page 39)

Therefore, approaches to Brodgar were about getting to grips with the logistics behind its construction, and about the final morphology of the monument, rather than on its use. Renfrew's plan of the Ring of Brodgar (fig. 2) exemplifies this: the interior of the henge is simply a huge blank space on the plan. The interior of the henge was not excavated; although the stone circle would at that time have been understood as an integral part of the henge, rather than an earlier monument or later addition. The orderly, neat appearance of the plan seems to illustrate the striving for objectivity current in the processualist approaches of the time.

Similarly, Ritchie's (1976) report on the Stones of Stenness includes sections on the astronomical alignments of the site, and on the labour required to build the henge, but offers relatively little speculation on what the site was actually used for; although he does speculate that some of the internal features may relate to use for 'offerings, sacrifices or bones' (ibid.: 18). Having excavated part of the interior of the site (fig. 3), Ritchie offers more reflection on the sequence of the internal features than does Renfrew; but this is largely framed in terms of how the construction could have been carried out according to principles of least effort (Ritchie 1976: 16).





**Figure 3 - plan of Ritchie's 1973-4 excavations at the Stones of Stenness (from Ritchie 1976: 8, fig. 2)**

Essentially, by the 70s and 80s, while henge sites such as Stenness and Brodgar were seen as impressive feats of architecture and engineering, masterminded by communities with an organised (and exclusively male) workforce working 8-hour days, interpretations of their use were limited to a vague ritual definition. In this respect, their interpretation had remained largely unchallenged since the initial interpretation of henges as a class of ritual monument four decades previously in the early 1930s (Kendrick and Hawkes 1932).

The term 'henge' also seems to have become more widely accepted as a descriptor for these sites during the 1970s-80s. The inverted commas used in earlier literature were dropped, and sites are described as henges with little discussion or definition of what the term means (e.g. Ritchie 1976; Mercer 1981). This is in some ways problematic, as it marks an increasing lack of critical notice paid to thinking about what henge monuments are used for. The implicit understanding of henges as essentially singular, single-phase monuments, was cemented. However, while it is now accepted that the term is in many ways inadequate (e.g. Gibson 2012), it is acceptable to keep using the term 'henge', providing this is done with critical awareness and acknowledgement of the more

limitations of the term (or indeed *any* term) to describe a heterogeneous group of sites.

In some ways however, the increasing acceptance of the term henge perpetuated the problematic classification of these monuments based on the bank and ditch: these sites were classified according to their boundaries. The edges of the site, the earthworks, were therefore given precedence over other features of henge sites. This is problematic because it represents classification by boundary (or indeed 'outside'), rather than by the space inside the henge which was used and experienced. For example, Renfrew's excavations at the Ring of Brodgar only concentrated on the ditch (Renfrew 1979), and the interior of the monument has never been excavated - a quite typical approach to Neolithic enclosures. Although the earthworks of the henge would presumably have played an important part in shaping people's experience of the site, they are often amongst the latest features to be built at henge sites. Much of people's experience of these sites would have been of the space inside the boundary. It is however difficult to communicate and represent such experiences (Watson 2004b).

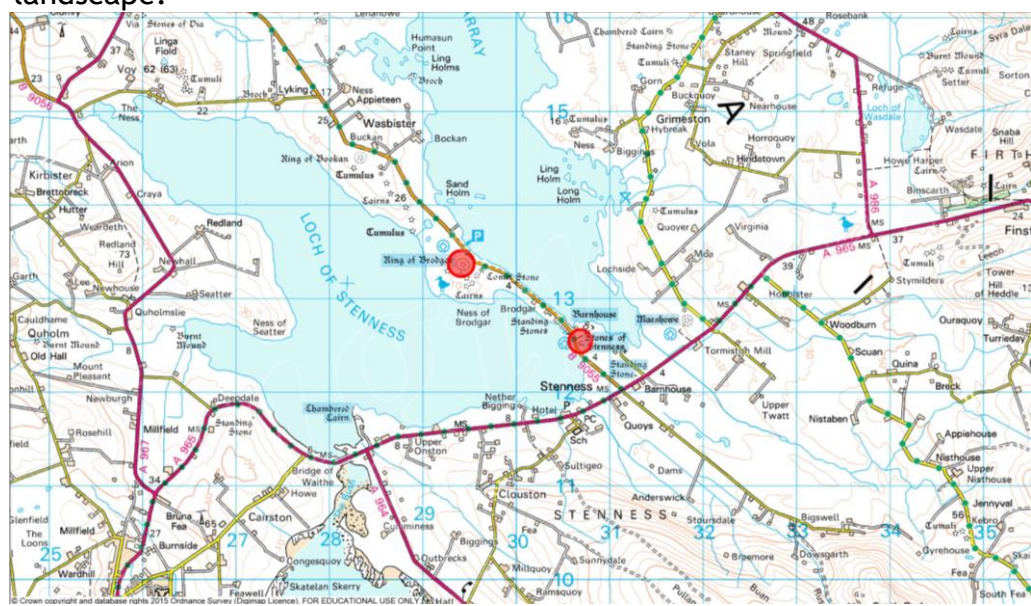
Whilst culture-historical archaeology had seen function and belief as unknowable, and processual archaeology had focussed on prosaic questions which could be answered by science and excavation, post-processual archaeology deliberately attempted to engage with questions of belief and other intangible aspects of human experience (e.g. Bender 1992). It was only with the advent of these more interpretative approaches that questions of why henges were built, what they were used for and how they were experienced were addressed in earnest. Perhaps as a reaction to the lack of interpretation offered by classification and purely scientific methods, from the mid-1990s onwards, archaeologists began to think about henges, and other monuments, by focussing on experience. Considerations of landscape and the setting and landscape context of sites often played a significant role in these interpretative accounts of henges and other monuments (e.g. Richards 1996; Watson 2004a; Cummings 2002). Often these approaches would be influenced by phenomenological philosophy, and embodied experience was seen as an important way of understanding monuments (Tilley 1994). This was a way in which the abstraction of typologies, which tended to consider sites in isolation from their

surroundings, could be overcome (Watson 2004a). An important aspect of this was the desire to consider the experience of landscape as integral not only to the experience of the monument, but also to its meaning and function. Thus Colin Richards suggested that the banks and ditches of the Orcadian henges were built to represent in miniature the surrounding hills and water, and were microcosms of the world (Richards 1996). For more detailed discussion of landscape-based interpretations of henge sites, see Box 2. Aaron Watson suggested that ‘henge-ing’ was a particular way of viewing and conceptualising the landscape, and that this could apply to other monuments such as Silbury Hill, and not only to ‘hengings’ in the traditional sense (Watson 2004a).

### **Box 2: Interpretations of Orcadian henges – 1990s-2000s**

By the 1990s-2000s, henges were still seen as somewhat problematic ritual monuments. The focus changed however from looking at the boundaries of the site and the spaces they enclosed, to an outward-looking focus which situated henges within their landscape surroundings.

Colin Richards (1996) considered the Stones of Stenness and Ring of Brodgar in relation to their landscape setting (fig. 4). He suggested that the henges, with ditches which were probably waterlogged, and banks on the outside of the ditches, may have mirrored the landscape surrounding Stenness and Brodgar, with lochs in the foreground, and hills on the horizon beyond (fig. 5). Richards suggested that the henges might therefore be seen as a microcosm of the landscape in which they were situated. The emphasis in the interpretation of henges was no longer abstract, considering henges only as a ‘type’ of ritual monument and the product of hard labour; rather they were closely linked with their landscape.



**Figure 4 - The Stones of Stenness and Ring of Brodgar, with the Loch of Stenness to the south and Loch of Harray to the north**

Such an interpretation could be reached because instead of considering the morphology of henge ditches and banks, Richards considered henges from an embodied, experiential perspective. Critically, in order to see the effect of the ditch and bank mimicking the water and hills - and the water and hills recalling the ditch and bank on a larger scale - you would need to be standing *inside* the henge. No longer were interpretations vague and abstract like those of the 1970s; rather, they were reflections of embodied, lived experiences. Another important aspect of the embodied, landscape-based approaches of the 1990s-2000s was that the landscape of the Orcadian henges was no longer an empty one, or one inhabited by merely by the structured, territorial social groups like those postulated by Renfrew (1979). By the 90s, Stenness could be placed in a context where there was a village almost next door to the monument (Barnhouse - Richards 2005). The landscape of Stenness and Brodgar was a populated landscape; no longer were henge sites mere architectural forms imposed on the landscape, they were integrally linked to that landscape, and reflected in material form people's experience and understanding of place.



**Figure 5 - the Ring of Brodgar, with the Loch of Harray (on the left) and Loch Stenness (right) beyond**

Considerations of the phasing of monuments also came to the fore at this time, and ideas of monument 'reuse' became prevalent (e.g. Bradley 1993; Bradley 2002; Barrett 1999; Gosden and Lock 1998; Hingley 1996). This is significant for

the study of henge monuments, as it opens the way to give greater consideration to the complexity of different phases of use at these sites.

Recently, there has also been a greater willingness to think beyond the traditional regions of focus of Neolithic studies, Wessex and Orkney. Increasing attention has been given to geographical areas which had previously been somewhat neglected, such as the regions around the Irish Sea (Armit *et. al.* 2003; Cummings and Fowler 2004; Cummings 2009), and also Yorkshire and the North of England, especially with regard to henges (Harding and Johnston 2000; Harding 2013). These areas are often overlooked in general accounts of the Neolithic of Britain, and in the case of northern England for example, it has been pointed out that a synthetic account of the Neolithic in this area is lacking (Frodsham 1996). The growing interest in regions outwith the chalky plains of southern England is significant for the study of henges in Scotland because Wessex has previously dominated many accounts of henge monuments. As a result, northern British henges have been somewhat neglected in many accounts of the monuments, as discussed below.

## **Henges in Scotland**

Despite the distribution of henges across the Mainland Britain, the main focus of this thesis is limited to Scotland. There are several reasons for this. There remains a need to redress the balance of studies which have focused on the south of England, and the neglect of Scottish sites in syntheses of henge monuments. As noted above, when henges were first identified as a discrete monument 'type' in 1932 (Kendrick and Hawkes 1932), it was in the context of a study of English and Welsh archaeology, and so they were initially regarded as an English phenomenon. In addition, there have been several significant excavations of henge sites in Scotland over the last decade or so which make a reconsideration of the date and character of henges in Scotland necessary (Bradley 2011; Noble and Brophy 2011a; Brophy and Noble forthcoming). Furthermore, whilst the division of any archaeological study according to contemporary geo-political borders creates an arbitrary distinction regions which would not have applied during prehistory, henge sites in Scotland nevertheless provide a good case study, including a range of earlier, later, large and small sites. A reasonable proportion of henges in Scotland have been excavated,

providing us with a good understanding of the chronology and phasing of these sites.

When Harding and Lee published their (1987) catalogue of henge sites, they recorded 50 potential henges or possible 'henge-like' sites in Scotland (Harding and Lee 1987). When Gordon Barclay wrote less than two decades later, this number had increased to around 80 known sites (Barclay 2005: 84). This highlights the significance of aerial photography to find cropmark sites in particular. As aerial survey has continued, there are now probably over 100 known sites in Scotland which resemble henge sites, and around a quarter of these have been excavated.

The problems of uncritical use of the term 'henge', and the disadvantages of simply identifying sites without interpreting them, were outlined above. Given this, is it still useful to discuss how many 'henge' sites we could list for Scotland, and to collect them into a list based on typology? Certainly it is necessary to gather data to work from as a basis for synthesis and further interpretation of these monuments. It is not useful to obsess over whether a site is a 'henge' or a 'ring-ditch', a 'hengiform' or other enclosure. Therefore, as suggested above, whilst there are drawbacks to using the term 'henge', it is acceptable to do so, assuming this is done in a critical manner, and with full acknowledgement that 'henges' form a heterogeneous group, and it can neither be assumed that they are all contemporary, nor that they are static, single-phase monuments. Such an approach is adopted in this thesis.

The lack of attention given to Scottish henges in general accounts of henge monuments is perhaps a symptom of a wider neglect of the Scottish Neolithic in syntheses of the British Neolithic. Gordon Barclay has discussed the extent to which Scotland has been marginalised in many accounts of the period (Barclay 2001). Discussion of Scottish evidence was often restricted to mentions of Orkney, which was, like Wessex, regarded as a 'luminous centre' (Barclay 2004). In the early days of investigation into henge sites in Scotland, such a bias was perhaps inevitable. For example, when Piggott excavated Cairnpapple Hill in 1947-8, no other modern excavations of henges in Scotland had been carried out, and the closest comparison was therefore Arbor Low, over 200 miles south of Cairnpapple (Barclay 1999: 19). Barclay has since done much to redress this

bias, and his work in Perthshire has demonstrated the potential significance of other regions which may traditionally be overlooked (Barclay 1983).

This emphasis on the Orcadian Neolithic has perhaps been partly responsible for the idea that henges originated in Orkney, along with Grooved Ware (an assumption which continues to be maintained, e.g. Thomas 2010). The radiocarbon dates for the Stones of Stenness are indeed amongst the earliest for any henge in Scotland, dating its construction to 3350-2600 cal BC (Barclay 2005: 91). Stenness is discussed further in Chapter 5. In the light of more recently-obtained dating evidence from other henges, the Stenness dates stand out as being significantly earlier than many other henges., and is therefore perhaps questionable. The idea of an Orcadian origin for henges may in some respects be more reflective of the contemporary narrative of the Neolithic, than of reality. It is also telling of a bias in the regions investigated: Bradley points out that before his recent excavations in north-east Scotland, no henges had been excavated and published in the 300 km between Perthshire and Orkney (Bradley 2011). Such is the extent to which Scottish henges have been overlooked that when Wainwright published his (1989) synthesis of henge monuments, only two henge sites were shown in Scotland on the distribution map of principal sites. These were the Stones of Stenness and the Ring of Brodgar in Orkney; although they are shown on the map as being located in Shetland (Wainwright 1989: 13, figure 1).

As outlined above, although a few henges in Scotland are associated with Grooved Ware pottery, an association with Beaker pottery, usually in secondary contexts, is more often to be found on Scottish henge sites. Despite the fact that the association with Grooved Ware is not really consistent with the Scottish evidence on the whole, is still prevalent in most literature on henges, which often describes this as one of the features of henge monuments. For example, Jan Harding's (2003) book on British henges states this to be the case. However, virtually the only Scottish sites mentioned by Harding are the Orcadian henges. Indeed, apart from a case study of the monument complex at Thornborough, North Yorkshire, Harding's discussion of henges is generally very Wessex-based (Harding 2003). It makes generalised statements, which may be true for the Wessex henges and henge enclosures, but are not necessarily descriptive of henges in the rest of the country. This is somewhat typical of much of the

literature on henges. The imbalance is starting to be redressed however, with more excavations being carried out in the last two decades, as reflected also in a number of publications (Richards 2005; Thomas 2007a; Bradley 2011; Noble and Brophy 2011a; Brophy and Noble forthcoming).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the study of henge monuments and their treatment in archaeological literature. Henges form a very heterogeneous and varied group of monuments, ranging in shape, size and date. Efforts to make sense of them have been influenced by typological approaches, although this has proved problematic because of the extent of variation between sites. The continued uncritical use of the term henge has been problematic, and has sometimes hindered interpretation of the use and meaning of henge monuments. In recent years, landscape-based approaches have been used to challenge traditional concerns with abstract classification based on arbitrary visual characteristics of these sites. Scotland has until recently been somewhat neglected in much of the literature on henges, but significant excavations in Scotland have made clear the complexity of phasing of many henge sites, and demonstrated that not all henge monuments are Neolithic. Whilst henge monuments are found throughout the length and breadth of the British Isles, it cannot be assumed that all henges everywhere were alike. Henges can no longer be seen as a 'type' of Neolithic earthwork monument with a circular bank and ditch, and many of the traditional interpretations of these sites have been undermined. Henges must be understood as complex, multi-phase sites, sites where activity often spans the early Neolithic, late Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Bronze Age and beyond. A simplistic understanding of henges in which our perception is dominated by a bank and ditch is no longer tenable in the light of recent excavations, aerial photography and dating evidence.



## Chapter 3: Theorising the henge

### Introduction

This chapter introduces the theoretical concepts and approaches which have influenced this thesis. The key themes are: the creation of memory; and time. The chapter begins by discussing theories of memory and commemoration. Some of the traditional approaches to memory in archaeology are outlined and critically discussed. Commemoration - a key theme throughout the thesis - is introduced and defined. The chapter considers memory and commemoration in relation to relevant archaeological themes, in particular discussing memory in relation to hinging and enclosure. It is suggested that memory and concepts of the past are significant motivations for henge-building. Processes of ruination and destruction over time are also discussed, and are seen as another expression of 'pastness' at henge sites.

Concepts of time are also discussed in this chapter, particularly focusing on concepts of the past, which are important throughout the thesis. Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age concepts of the past are considered in relation to practices of monument-(re)building and the reuse. Since the limitations of dating monuments has a significant impact on our own concepts of the past, including our understanding of the phasing of monuments which are reused, approaches to dating prehistoric monuments are also briefly discussed.

This chapter also introduces monument biography. It is suggested that a biographical approach to henge sites is a useful way of considering not only the ways in which these sites were reused and rebuilt over time, but also *why* this happened. The henge sites examined in chapters 4 - 6 of the thesis are presented using a site biographical approach. This chapter gives a brief background of biographical approaches used in archaeology, laying the foundations for the development of this approach in later chapters.

## Traditional interpretations: memorialising and monumentalising

Traditionally, archaeologists have tended to assume that monuments such as henges are memorials; this is implicitly entrenched in the way we conceptualise and study monuments. The word ‘monument’, Bradley notes, comes from the Latin *monere*, meaning ‘to remind’ (Bradley 1993: 2). We understand monuments to be enduring, permanent parts of the landscape. There seems to be something of a tacit acceptance that monuments possess an abstract mnemonic quality simply because they exist as ‘old things’ in the landscape - and that because they are old, they are important and almost revered. The perceived longevity of monuments means that we see them intrinsically as points in the landscape which make reference to the past (e.g. Tilley 1994). This is how we conceptualise monuments, and it seems that we therefore assume this is what they were intended for and how monuments were understood in the past.

Memory has recently become something of a fashionable topic in archaeology. This is not however an isolated trend and the study of memory has seen a surge of interest in, for example, history, philosophy and architecture (e.g. Connerton 1989; Winter 1995, 2006; Ricoeur 2004; Whitehead 2009; Treib 2009). Historian Jay Winter describes a ‘memory boom’ during the twentieth century, as a period which saw a flourishing cultural interest in memory (Winter 2006: 1). An interest in memory has been seen by some as deeply rooted in Western consciousness (Whitehead 2009: 3), and philosopher Paul Ricoeur traces the Western concept of memory to the writings of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (Ricoeur 2004: 5ff.). Given the wider explosion of interest in memory in other academic disciplines, the archaeological interest in memory has been described by Ruth Van Dyke and Susan Alcock as ‘leaping on to a well-established band-wagon’ (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003: 2). So ubiquitous a topic has memory become that Oliver Harris has been led to wonder whether any further writing on the subject is really necessary (Harris 2009: 265). Yet archaeological interest in memory has adopted a number of foci, from exploration of the relationship between material culture and memory (Jones 2007; Mills and Walker 2008); to the enduring importance of places (monuments or landscapes) which are returned to and reused (e.g. Driscoll 1998; Hingley 1996; Thomas 2007a; Benson and Whittle 2007), and the

invention and maintenance of histories and oral traditions associated with such places (Bradley 2002; Gosden and Lock 1998). In this sense, as Dušan Borić has pointed out, memory has been used as an ‘umbrella term’ for thinking about the ‘past in the past’ (Borić 2010: 3). Indeed, there are multiple memory-related strands which still have potential to be explored by archaeologists.

However, the rootedness of much of our thinking on memory in contemporary Western worldviews should make us cautious about considering the role of memory in the past. We cannot transfer wholesale our own concept of memory into the past, and should not assume that a Neolithic, Chalcolithic or Bronze Age concept of ‘memory’ and memorialisation would be the same as ours. The way memory has been studied in archaeology is also problematic because, despite the apparent rootedness of memory in material things such as monuments, memory has often been dealt with in abstraction by archaeologists. Alasdair Whittle (2010: 35) has noted that discussion of memory in archaeological discourse do not often take agency into account. Archaeological accounts therefore too often imply that memory is independent of human action, perception, intervention and interpretation. It suggests that monuments are mnemonic because they have existed for a long time, and that memory is somehow an ‘inherent’ quality of monuments (although *cf.* Bradley 2002; Gosden and Lock 1998). Bradley has pointed out that speaking of ‘remembrance’ implies that memory is involuntary, rather than searching for and trying to remake the past (Bradley 2003: 221). Monuments such as henges might have been ‘memorial’ because they were places where people played out and monumentalised their understanding of the past. But they were also places which people changed and remade. They were therefore places where people deliberately engaged with the past. Memory is not a reflex response to a monument, and links with the past were not self-explanatory and inherent, but had to be created. Considering memory as an inherent characteristic of a monument marginalises the part played by people in remembering and constructing histories. Memory also has the potential to be exploited or manipulated for negative ends, and so it is a problematic concept.

Memory is often seen as a feature of what Bradley has called the ‘afterlife’ of a monument (Bradley 1993). Monuments are seen as objects of the past, archaic features in the landscape, and memory is often only seen as applying to

monuments after they are completed, or even after their disuse. This perspective overlooks the importance of the 'project' of building the monument (*ibid.*). If monuments can be seen as mnemonic, and the memories associated with them as actively constructed by people, then the construction and use of monuments would be an important aspect of people's engagement with and interpretation of their pasts. Mark Edmonds has explored this idea using short fictional narratives of monument building, to consider how people might have encountered and interacted with the past in prehistory (Edmonds 1999). Edmonds imagines that one way in which this might have occurred was in encounters with artefacts discovered during the construction of monumental earthworks, for example when excavating the ditches of causewayed enclosures (*ibid.*). If we are to consider monuments as memorials, we should remember the scope that such construction projects would provide for encountering the material remains of the past. A mnemonic aspect of monuments would require active interest in, and interpretation of, such remains - including earlier monumental structures. Therefore memory is created through acts of monument construction rather than only be attaching meaning to existing monuments.

The idea that monuments are memorials because of their permanence is also problematic. Monuments such as henges were not unchanging presences in the landscape, but were rebuilt, changed, and even destroyed through time. For example, at Moncreiffe Hill, one or possibly two stone settings were destroyed when the monument was altered in the Bronze Age (Stewart 1985). This would not rule out the possibility that the earthwork phase of a henge site was meant to memorialise the earlier activity which had taken place on a site. Julian Thomas has discussed the possibility that henges were meant to 'close off' a site, and were meant as the final use of a place (Thomas 2010). Henging may only have been one of a number of strategies employed at henge sites to close a site or make access difficult. Kenny Brophy and Gordon Noble (2012a) have suggested that the closure of a henge site might also often have involved blocking the entrance causeway(s), and/or constructing a mound over the interior of the site. Each strategy may have been intended to memorialise or block off the site, while maintaining differing degrees of access and visibility of what was enclosed within the henge.

In any case, it seems that many henge sites were allowed to fill in and erode perhaps soon after they had been excavated. As was noted in chapter 2, the ditches at sites such as North Mains and Broomend of Crichton, built on fluvio-glacial gravels, may have begun to fill in quickly, in the days or weeks following their construction (Barclay 1983: 133; Bradley 2011). This also seems to have been the case at some other types of earthwork monument. For example, the fills of the ditch of Holywood North cursus suggest that it was initially left open, and allowed to fill in as the ditch weathered (Thomas 2007c: 166-173).

Typically, in the case of henges, this is explained as occurring because the act of digging the ditches is more important than the ditches themselves - suggesting that the act of monument construction is the significant aspect of the monument, rather than the goal of creating a 'permanent' or long-lasting monument. Alternatively, it is sometimes suggested that the ditch at henge sites was little more than a quarry for bank material (e.g. Harding 2013: 109); although it is not certain whether all henge sites had a bank, and it has been suggested that some henges may only have had a ditch without a bank (for example the Ring of Brodgar, Downes *et al.* 2013: 114).

Paul Ashbee (2004) has also suggested that initial silting and infill of ditches would be rapid, but that thereafter, the speed and extent of silting varies depending on the form of the ditch. Ashbee goes on to point out that processes of weathering and erosion would have been understood during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, and suggests that the form of a ditch may have been intentionally chosen with a particular silting effect in mind. For example, very deep but steep-sided ditches, like the ditch at Avebury, would have silted up quickly; but shallower, broader ditches like that at Marden henge would be less prone to speedy erosion, and therefore would be visible features for much longer (Ashbee 2004: 8-10). The difference is significant because Ashbee (*ibid.*: 7) also suggests that silting, as a visible reference to the passage of time, 'may have been thought of as access to, and contact with, a perceived past.'. Therefore, the difference between a ditch which weathers and disappears from view quickly, and one which is visible (although eroded) for a longer period, represents a significant and deliberate choice on the part of the monument-builders. Other factors such as geology would also have an impact, with ditches such as that at Cairnpapple, cut through basalt, likely remaining visible for much

longer than ditches cut through gravel (Ashbee 2004: 10). In the case of henge sites, there is variation, with the ditches at some henge site being more prone to silting and severe weathering than others, according to Ashbee's reasoning.

Evidence that henge ditches were maintained or recut is not common. At Pict's Knowe, Dumfries and Galloway, the site was extensively recut, but this occurred in the Iron Age, long after the henge had filled in for the first time (Thomas 2007a). At one of the mini-henges inside the palisaded enclosure at Leadketty, Perth and Kinross, the ditch appears to have been recut at least once, possibly twice. If henge ditches were often allowed to fill in, and only seldom recut or maintained, henges may have been final, 'closing' monuments, and could therefore be seen as monumentalising and memorialising the earlier features they enclose. However, the fact that they were quickly allowed to erode away suggests that permanence and an enduring focus in the landscape were not necessarily the most important aspects of henge monuments. Henge ditches may have been built to draw attention to, or to close-off, the spaces they enclosed, and their construction may have been a way of creating memory.

Monuments may not have been permanent, but rather places of short-lived, almost temporary construction events, places which were expected to change over time. This does not mean that monuments could not also have a memorial aspect; but it might allow us to challenge our preconceived concepts of memory and memorialisation. Although we might think of memory as intrinsically static, in fact it is not. The creation of memory is ongoing, and requires active engagement with the past. As Ruth Van Dyke and Susan Alcock note, memory is not 'ready-made', but is constructed as people choose what to remember or forget - particularly so with social memory, which they describe as an 'active and ongoing process' (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003: 3). Henge sites were places which were returned to, reused and rebuilt over centuries. It is noteworthy that it is usually the site which is reused rather than any element of the monument itself. Each use of the site is different and novel, although may refer to what existed there previously - for example by enclosing earlier features, or by respecting their position by building later phases concentrically. Perhaps we can see this as a physical expression of the way memory, and interpretations of the past, were being actively reshaped over time. 'The past' may have been

repeatedly reinvented through the construction of monuments, and revisiting and rebuilding existing monumental sites.

Even an interpretation of monuments as memorials which assumes memory to be mutable and open to reinterpretation over time, is problematic in that it is predicated on the idea that people in the past understood monuments in a similar way to us - that they recognised them as old and relating to the past. We cannot take this for granted however: for example, Tilley (1996a) and Bradley (1998b) have debated whether during the Neolithic in the south-west of England, there may have been confusion between dolmens, and tors, which may have been seen as ancestral monuments rather than 'natural' features. A person living during the Neolithic, Chalcolithic or Bronze Age would have had concepts of 'the past' which were very different from our own contemporary Westernised perspectives. Furthermore, although we most readily understand memory as relating to the past, it is in fact created and perpetuated in the present. As Katina Lillios explains, memory is not so much about the past as it is about 'defining the present and managing the future of individuals and groups within meaningful, yet shifting, contexts' (Lillios 2003: 146). In this sense, memory is not only about the past, but it is also about change and the conscious definition and interpretation of meaning and identity in the present, and the ongoing renegotiation of what the past is/was, and how it is relevant. Such an understanding of memory perhaps offers more insight into the significance of what happened at henge sites. As the site is rebuilt over time, old monuments decay or are destroyed as new ones are built, the past is not preserved unchanged, but is remade, reclaimed and reshaped by a new generation. Memory might not relate to any past reality, so much as to a newly-imagined interpretation of 'pastness'. We consider the past to be something 'other', separate from the present-day. Although the past can be reinterpreted, it cannot be repeated or changed. The concept of such a distinction between the past and the present may have been irrelevant, even unimaginable, to Neolithic monument-builders. We should bear this in mind when considering why people in the past built on and reworked the sites of earlier activity.

## Commemoration and Reuse

If we can consider the use of henge sites over generations to be more than simply a memorial to the past, this need not rule out the possibility that some aspects of memory were still important in the later uses of these places. It was outlined above that memory as discussed by archaeologists tends to be abstract, and problematic because it is predicated on a notion of memory and the past which may be specific to contemporary Western society. Regardless of how ill-fitting our ideas of memory might be in a prehistoric context, at the same time henge monuments were used again, often long after they were built. This suggests that using such places, which may have been redolent of the past, was significant to people in prehistory, even if not in the sense that we understand 'memorials'. Later uses of already-ancient places and monuments during the later Neolithic and early Bronze Age suggests a deliberate effort to engage with 'the past' in these locations. It may be that this is better understood as commemorative rather than memorial.

Commemoration is not meant as an alternative term for memory, but is intended to refer to a distinctive kind of remembering and engaging with the past. Commemoration involves more than simply the preservation of memories of the past, and relies on active engagement with the past. Philosopher Edmund Casey (1987) describes the practice of commemoration involving ritualised group engagement with the past, perhaps in a special location, to remember the past but also to make sure commemoration is continued regularly and so carried into the future. Far from being an involuntary or fortuitous memory experience sparked by visiting a monument, commemoration implies a concerted and deliberate effort to remember a person or event, and thereby engage with the past. (The example of commemoration cited by Casey (1987) is that of contemporary Remembrance Day services at war memorials). Commemoration is a strategic way of remembering, with multiple motives and outcomes. It involves reference to the past, but also to the present and the future: to the past because it is a form of memory; the present, because commemoration is effected by rituals carried out in the present; and the future because commemoration is structured in such a way as to encourage future generations to continue commemorating the person, people or event -all of which may have been central to the construction and use of prehistoric monuments.



Thinking about the reuse of monuments as a kind of commemoration allows us to think more broadly than simply equating memory with the past, as it acknowledges that the present and future also play an important role in remembering. Commemoration also involves more than simply preserving memories of the past, since it relies on active engagement with the past (and therefore opens the opportunity for reinterpretation), rather than memory being considered as an inherent and pre-existing quality of monuments. This is a compelling notion for henge sites, as places which were used again and again, and were revisited and remade presumably by groups of people. Deliberately building a monument on a site which has been used before might be seen as a way of making reference to the past, but also refers to the future, as the monument would still be visible in the landscape long after its construction. *Changing* a monument could therefore be seen as an act of commemoration in the same way as building a monument could be understood as commemorative.

Yet perhaps even this idea that henges were commemorative is problematic, as it assumes the existence in the past of commemorative practices similar to those we would recognise today - and also assumes similar notions of the past, present and future. During the time when henge sites were being used, perhaps the rebuilding and remodelling of these sites was a way of trying to order or re-order the past, rather than being a kind of remembering as we might understand it. Bringing together visible references to the past and future in one location may have been a powerful act, and the visual conflation of different times at henge sites might have been one aspect of why henge sites were significant (although henging represents only one phase of use). Such activities could also be understood as a way of dealing with the present and making sense of the world. Either way, it is important to think about henges as sites which are repeatedly 'reused' over time, and to consider the reasons for, and significance of, such reuse.

Many different monuments were used over a long period, and in different ways at different times. The reuse of monuments is not restricted to henge sites; nor is it a new topic in archaeology. The topic of 'the past in the past' has become fashionable in archaeology over the last two decades. An issue of the journal *World Archaeology* (1998) was devoted to the subject. With the growing realisation that many monuments are multi-phase sites which are 're-used', the

reuse of monuments and ‘the past in the past’ in various periods and places have become a recurrent theme in much archaeological literature (e.g. Bradley 1993, 2002; Holtorf 1998; Blake 2003, to name but a few examples). Indeed, the long use-lives and multi-phase construction and use of monuments is now increasingly integrated into archaeological interpretations and understandings of prehistoric monuments (e.g. Noble 2005; Benson and Whittle 2007; Hey 2012). As well as being a helpful way of thinking about how monuments have been perceived and understood over time, thinking about the past in the past and the life of monuments long after their initial construction can also be one means of considering how people in prehistory thought about their own history.

Monument reuse is quite often seen as a way in which people attempted to legitimise present activity, by appropriating or laying claim to what were already obviously ‘ancient’ sites in the landscape. This might sometimes occur centuries or even millennia after the initial construction of a monument. It is an argument which has been applied to various periods. For example, Steve Driscoll (1998) has suggested that during the early medieval period in Scotland people may have deliberately tried to gain political power and legitimacy through association with prehistoric monuments. Richard Hingley has interpreted the reuse of Neolithic chambered tombs as houses in the Iron Age as a way in which people drew on the past and the ancestors to gain power (Hingley 1996). The past could be manipulated or monopolised, or a ‘false’ history created, as a means of controlling people in the present.

The suggestion that the past could be utilised to gain and justify power or status in the present is somewhat uncomfortable. It is also potentially problematic, in that it implies people would accept such traditions as being the ‘natural’ order of things - the way things should be or have always been done. Again, human agency and the potential for subversion and resistance may be marginalised in such an account of monument reuse.

Furthermore, it is questionable whether monuments would in the past have been recognised as having been built by earlier generations, or whether they might have been interpreted very differently. For example, the distinctions we draw today between ruinous ancient monuments, and ‘natural’ landscape features, may not have been made in the past (see Tilley 1996a and Bradley 1998b). This

is true both in the sense that there may have been ambiguity or uncertainty over the origin of such features/monuments in the landscape; but also that the nature:culture dichotomy by which we interpret the landscape may not have applied, and 'natural' features may not have been perceived as natural at all. They could have had their own origin myths, just as a monument could. Indeed, natural places may have been significant locales in their own right (Bradley: 2000). Natural parts of the landscape could have had their own meaning, such as significant rock outcrops or boulders (Bradley *ibid.*; Pollard and Gillings 2009), and therefore might have been treated in similar ways to monuments, including having their own lengthy biographies. Other parts of the landscape, such as groves of trees, may have provided the locus for aspects of everyday life (Whittle 2003), and would therefore have been significant places in the rhythm of life, just as monuments would. Such places could even be seen as forming natural monuments, while ancient monuments may potentially have been understood as equivalent to natural places. The (mythical) past attributed to significant places during the Neolithic, and the memories associated with them, may not have differed for natural places and ancient monuments.

Even if people in the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age did believe existing monuments to be humanly-made, their history may have been understood in ways we might expect. For instance, people may not have distinguished between history and myth as we do today (Bradley 2002; Gosden and Lock 1998). Stories might be made to explain how monuments came to be - but these might be consciously *constructed* stories, created histories rather than actual memories. Monuments might therefore have been seen as relating to a mythical or distant past. Monuments could have played a significant role in creating, and perpetuating, history and myth throughout the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age (see Gosden and Lock 1998). Monuments may have attracted or even necessitated the creation of myths to explain their presence in their landscape - and people may have regarded these myths as an interpretation of actual events, much as we would regard histories today. We should be mindful of the potential of monuments to inspire such myths when we interpret later (re)uses of monuments.

If ancient monuments were not necessarily regarded as humanly-made in prehistory, then they may not have been understood as memorials either - or at

least, not memorials in the sense of fixing a certain single event or person in the memory. The potential for the growth of myths surrounding the construction of monuments suggests that perception and understanding of monuments would have changed over time. Considering the reuse of monuments, and aspects of both continuity and change in how they are used and perceived over time, is therefore closely linked to understanding memory and commemoration, and concepts of the past, in the past.

## **Henging: enclosure, containment and control of the past**

Paradoxically, henges were places of continuity and of change. As discussed above, the same location was returned to and reused over long periods, but change was also a prominent aspect of how henge sites were used over time. One of the ways in which henge sites changed was the increasing importance of enclosure at henge locations over time. Sites such as Forteviot 1 and North Mains, Perth and Kinross, and Cairnpapple in West Lothian, began as open sites used for cremation burial and, at Cairnpapple, the deposition of pottery sherds and fragments of polished stone axe heads (Barclay 1999; Barclay 1983; Noble and Brophy 2011a). At each of these sites, the area in which deposition and burial had taken place was later enclosed by timber circles (and at Forteviot 1, the site and timber circle was also enclosed within an enormous palisaded enclosure); and subsequently by the construction of henge earthworks. The growing emphasis on enclosure at henge sites was an increasingly visually prominent element of the sites over time. It would also potentially dominate the way these sites could be experienced and interpreted. The change from enclosures of free-standing timber posts, perhaps visually permeable, to earthwork enclosures during the henge phase of the monument, suggest that enclosure was increasingly important as henge sites were reused through time. It was also an important decision in the trajectory of how henge sites developed. For example, not all timber circles were enclosed by henges: some of them remained as unenclosed, more permeable sites. The choice to enclose a site distinguishes it from other places which were otherwise similar in character.

The effect of enclosure on the experience of visiting a henge site would be to reduce, or exert extreme control over, movement and visibility. The experience of visiting a henge site in the later stages of its use would therefore be very

different to visiting the place when it was unenclosed (or enclosed only by a visually-permeable timber setting). Enclosing the site would cut it off and separate it from the wider world and from everyday experiences. The act of enclosing a site may therefore have worked to make it a liminal place, removed from normal experiences of other, unenclosed spaces. We might interpret the enclosure of henge sites as a way in which these places could be transformed into 'heterotopias'. This is a term used by Foucault to describe places, such as a ship or a hotel, which are at once part of, but separate from, the normal everyday existence of the rest of the world (Foucault 1986). Julian Thomas has suggested that the construction of a henge, which he argues may often have been one of the last things to happen at the site, served 'not so much [to] erase their contents as [to] establish a distance between them and the lived landscape' (Thomas 2010: 11). Creating a henge on the site of earlier activity might therefore be understood as a way of separating the place from the everyday - perhaps because it was understood to be a special, or even dangerous or taboo, place.

Henging a site could be a way of restricting access or even, in some cases, making access physically difficult. The mini-henge at Leadketty, Perth and Kinross (discussed in the next chapter) has an extremely narrow entrance, less than 1 metre across, meaning that access would be limited to single-file movement. As well as restricting movement and removing the space inside the enclosure from the rest of the landscape, enclosing sites could also be seen as a way of *containing* whatever was in the interior.

Henges were often built concentrically to earlier timber enclosures on the same site - for example at North Mains, the henge ditches were constructed to the same elliptical plan as one of the earlier timber circles (Barclay 1983). This suggests the significance of enclosure and containment at these sites. The later monuments at henge sites - including timber circles as well as the henge earthworks - could perhaps be seen as architectures of enclosure. It has been suggested that the distinctive architecture of many henge sites, with an internal ditch and external bank, was meant to contain. Richard Warner has suggested that, at hengiform sites in Ireland, there is an Iron Age tradition that such sites were places which connected with the 'otherworld'; where powerful, and potentially mischievous or malevolent beings such as leprechauns gained access

to the human world (Warner 2000). The arrangement of internal bank and external ditch was therefore intended as a defence against something which might emerge from within the enclosed space, Warner suggests. Gordon Barclay (2005), and more recently Richard Bradley (2011: xviii), have suggested that henges might similarly have been intended to contain a threat. The increasing concern with enclosure at henge sites over time, may be indicative of a growing desire to contain and control, what may have been fearful or powerful places. Eventually, this desire to cut off the interior of the henge from the wider world may have been reinforced and made complete by the blocking of the henge entrance, or even, in some cases, burying the interior beneath a mound of soil and turf, a practice which is increasingly being recognised at henge sites (Brophy and Noble 2012a).

Alex Gibson has suggested that, by enclosing the sites of earlier activity, henges were intended not only to enclose, but also to contain, and that they may have functioned as 'ghost traps' (Gibson 2008). It is unclear how effective earthworks would be as a method of containing ghosts; certainly, henging might be an effective way of containing or controlling a created 'past' for current strategic purposes. As discussed above, Thomas (2010) has suggested that henges were meant to establish distance between the contents and the world as experienced in day-to-day life. By enclosing the sites of earlier activity, henges may have been a way of establishing physical distance from the rest of the landscape. Henging a site may also have been a way of creating a *temporal* distance between the space inside the henge, and the lived-in, present-day world.

The construction of a henge could be seen as a way of creating a 'temporal heterotopia': a place which is temporally liminal, and removed from the normal flow of time. This might even have emerged as an outcome of the commemorative use of these places, as sites which made simultaneous, physical reference to the past, present and future, and may therefore have been considered powerful and significant locales. They therefore became places which needed to be removed from the everyday, because they were places where the past could be revisited and perhaps transformed, remade or reinterpreted. Henging a site may have meant the interior was frozen in time, always of the past rather than part of the present-day world; although it was

still accessible - people could experience it, and potentially alter it in the future.

The desire to enclose and separate henge sites might be seen not only as a way of containing a powerful place, but also as a means of exerting control over these locales - and of enclosing the past. The act of enclosing a site with timber circles, palisades and henges would serve to control access, but also to control visibility of the past, that is, of places where the traces of earlier activity might be seen. Henges thus become places of history, places where community biography is commemorated. Controlling both access to and visibility of these places may also have been a means of adding an aspect of mystery to them. Controlling access would transform them into, what might be called, 'imagined landscapes'. This is a phrase coined by Laura McAtackney to describe Long Kesh/Maze prison in Northern Ireland (McAtackney 2007). Long Kesh/Maze was often depicted in murals, and was an important part of people's consciousness during the Troubles. However, relatively few people actually had access to the prison or first-hand experience of it. The inside of the prison was therefore for most people an 'imagined landscape', as their concept of it was not based on their own personal experience. McAtackney describes this 'imagined quality' as an important aspect of the experience, and perception of, the prison (McAtackney 2007).

Controlling access to a henge site by means of timber posts or earthworks, would therefore be a way of transforming a previously open site, visible to anyone, into an 'imagined landscape', where the past was contained and could only be accessed by certain people. This would also mean that only the select group with access to the henge could mediate the past. Henge sites were places where reference to the past was made physically manifest in the way each successive monument used the space occupied by its predecessors; but each new use of the site also changed and transformed it. This may have been a powerful aspect of the use of the site, in that it may have allowed for commemoration of the past but also for reinterpretation of the past, with implications for the present and the future. This might have been an important reason why these places should be enclosed, contained and separated; but their perceived power might therefore also have stemmed from the enclosure of spaces, which made them secret, mysterious and 'imagined' places.

## **Destruction, ruins, commemoration and forgetting**

Henge sites might have been seen as memorial or commemorative, since their use over long periods, and the interest in enclosing sites of earlier activity, suggests an interest in the past. This might reflect commemorative practices important in prehistory which are different from our own concepts of memory. One of the ways in which this played out may have been the enclosure, containment and control of places relating to the past during the later Neolithic and early Bronze Age.

The interest in returning to and reworking sites of earlier activity may however also reflect other concerns, for example a desire to evoke or imitate the past; or to reinterpret history by rebuilding ancient sites. In revisiting and reworking sites of earlier activity, people may have been deliberately attempting to reinterpret the past by remaking and redefining the physical traces of that past. In the case of henge sites, this may have involved not only the construction of monuments on the site of earlier activity, but also perhaps the construction of monuments which were intended to appear 'old' or ruined. This would have the effect of making 'the past' visually present, but could also potentially be seen as a way of visibly representing the passage of time. Kenny Brophy has suggested that rectilinear timber mortuary structures were intended to represent ruinous timber halls, and were built in such a way as to 'mimic' the form of a partially-decayed earlier Neolithic timber hall (Brophy 2007: 90-91). One such structure is found within the henge-like enclosure at Balfarg Riding School, Fife (Barclay and Russell-White 1993) - and so may itself be another example of a structure which was perceived as ancient and therefore needed to be contained.

More generally however, henge monuments may have been built with the intention that they would quickly begin to erode and look 'ancient' and ruined. While, as noted above, we cannot assume that traces of earlier activity would necessarily have been recognised as humanly-constructed during prehistory (Tilley 1996a; *cf.* Bradley 1998b), people may have had some familiarity with processes of erosion and decay. Henge ditches may have begun to erode very soon after their construction, as for example at North Mains (Barclay 1983: 133). Timber monuments would similarly have been subject to visible decay and decline (Noble 2006). People may also have been aware of and had an



understanding of processes of decay in other aspects of life. Cummings *et al.* (2002) note for example that people would have understood the asymmetrical form of the human body because of funerary practices which involved moving around defleshed or partly decayed body parts. Visible decay and changes which acted on bodies and monuments over time could have been significant during the Neolithic, and the observation of such phenomena may have been important. The uncontrollability of these processes might also have been another factor in explaining the desire to contain and enclose places where decay might be observed.

The interest in ruins and changes over time can also be seen as an important part of memorial practices. Substantial timber or earthwork monuments might remain visible in the landscape for a long period. Some timber monuments may even have been repaired or rebuilt to prolong their lives. For example, at Hollywood North cursus, Dumfries and Galloway, some of the timber posts were replaced, with four or five posts being erected sequentially in the same posthole (Thomas 2007d: 237). Timber and earthwork monuments might therefore have been maintained so that they would still be visible even as they eroded or decayed. Some earlier activities undertaken at henge sites may have left more ephemeral traces however. Pit digging for example leaves relatively little visible trace over time (Garrow 2006). Barclay has suggested the possibility that the location of pits or graves may have been marked in some way, for example by wooden stakes, which might account for how it was possible centuries later to enclose the site of such activities (Barclay 1999). The selective remembering or destruction of certain features or events is also an important aspect of memory and commemoration, although it defies a traditional concept of memory as static (Forty and Küchler 1999).

The evocation of the past, either by building a monument to look 'old' or by building on the site of earlier activity, might also have been a way in which people sought to directly access the past, or even to repeat or recreate it. In visiting a henge site, used over many centuries and where different timescales are compressed and brought together because they are all visibly represented in one place, people may have been able to reinterpret and revisit the past. While we may think of this occurring at an abstract, conceptual level, it is also possible that visiting such a place was a way of physically revisiting the past. Cornelius

Holtorf (2009) has described contemporary reconstructions at museums or experimental archaeology as a kind of time travel, because they are a way in which people can have an experience of another time. Holtorf suggests that this experience of the past in the present, even if it is based only on an 'imagined' or fictitious version of the past, can still be seen as time travel. He defines time travel as 'an experience *and social practice* in the present that evokes a past (or future) reality' (Holtorf 2009: 33, emphasis original). Therefore, time travel need not be understood as physically or literally moving to another time, but is meant to describe immersively thinking about other times. As Holtorf notes, the concept of past and future as 'other' physical realities is based on a linear idea of time (*ibid.*: 34). Reconstructions or recreations of the past in the present can therefore be seen as a way to 'time travel' - that is, experience the past, or at least a contemporary idea of what the past was like (*ibid.*: 36). Perhaps henge sites, as places which were used again and again over a long period, and where the past was therefore made present, could be seen as places where people could 'time travel' - that is, where they could experience and engage with the past. Such engagement need not be predicated on things or places that are actually old; Holtorf notes that the evocation of 'pastness' can be enough (Holtorf 2009: 35, 37). It is possible that in returning repeatedly to sites which had been used in the past, people in the Later Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age were deliberately attempting to evoke 'pastness'. Indeed, if hinging a site served to freeze the interior in time, going into a henge might have literally been seen as a way of going back in time. This could also be one reason why henges were allowed to erode and fill in and therefore to look 'old'; and why people were interested in returning to the location of earlier activity. This can be understood as one way in which monuments were memorial or commemorative; but is not a kind of memory we are familiar with. Memory as enacted at henge sites may have referred to (amongst other things), a 'past' which was malleable and able to be reinterpreted and revisited - perhaps literally, by revisiting a site where earlier monuments had been built.

Beyond simply evoking the past or allowing a site to fall into ruin, the biographies of henge sites sometimes involved the active destruction of monuments. For example, at Cairnpapple Hill, Forteviot 1, Balfarg henge and probably also the Stones of Stenness, stone settings were destroyed as the sites

were remodelled over time. These examples are discussed in more depth in chapter 5. At Cairnpapple, the site was remodelled during the Early Bronze Age, when an existing stone circle on the site was probably dismantled, and the stones may have been reused in the construction of a large cairn in the centre of the henge (Piggott 1948). At Balfarg, a stone setting may have been partially destroyed by using fire-setting to break up the stones and remove them (Mercer 1981; Gibson 2010a). At Forteviot 1, monoliths marking a cremation cemetery may also have been broken up and removed from the site or reused during later remodelling of the site; here, the snapped stumps of the stone were left in the ground (Noble and Brophy 2011a).

Such destruction events may have been dramatic, visceral and perhaps shocking for those who witnessed them. They may however be viewed as a kind of choreographed performance of forgetting, a theatrical demonstration by which a monument is erased from view. Superficially, forgetting might be assumed to be the opposite of remembering, but in many ways is actually a corollary of commemoration, and is closely bound up with memory.

Just as commemoration and memory involve active choices about what to remember, so it is possible to make efforts to forget certain events, objects or people. Remembering is selective, not static, and if it is possible to consciously choose to commemorate certain events and commit them to memory, then the choice can also be made to forget other events (Forty and Küchler 1999). What is being discussed here is not involuntary forgetting or absent-mindedness, but essentially a deliberate strategy to construct one's own history, taking control of which events to remember or forget. This could be done for a number of reasons. For example, choosing to erase the traces of certain traumatic episodes in the past of an individual or community may be a form of catharsis, seen as a necessary step in the process of moving on and resuming normal life. Susanne Küchler (2002) has discussed the role of carved Malanggan statues used in the Pacific. These statues have a role in funerary ritual in New Ireland, and traditionally are created only for the purpose of being destroyed. The Malanggan are seen as representations of the dead, and are intended to decay, with the 'death' of the object being linked with the life-force of deceased individuals (Küchler 2002). Destruction and forgetting may not always be a traumatic event

in itself, but may sometimes be the intended outcome of the deliberate obliteration of objects or monuments.

Paul Connerton (2009) has also discussed the phenomenon of forgetting, and linked it to memory. Connerton argues that there is a close link between memorials and forgetting, because he suggests it is the fear of forgetting which prompts the construction of memorials - in Connerton's words, 'the desire to memorialise is precipitated by a fear, a threat, of cultural amnesia' (*ibid.*: 27). Paradoxically however, the very act of constructing memorials may cause people to forget; Connerton (2009: 29) suggests that in constructing a memorial, we 'discard the obligation to remember', because the physical memorial is seen as the repository of memory, and people therefore cease to rely on their own memories. The past presented by the memorial or monument thus becomes the accepted 'version' of history, even if it differs from people's own memories.

Connerton (2009: 119) also discusses the idea of 'creative destruction', when a conscious decision is made to remove a certain item or building in order to create something new. This may be a useful concept for understanding processes of destruction and forgetting at henge sites, when the destruction of old monuments might be seen as a deliberate attempt to manipulate and rework the traces of the past, replacing them with a constructed version of history represented by a 'new' monument. This idea is discussed further in chapter 5. It should be noted that this could potentially be a very subversive process: merely because it is intended that people will forget something when all physical traces of it are removed, does not necessarily mean that it will be wiped from their memories altogether.

Indeed Connerton has suggested that a desire to preserve can often be prompted by destruction (Connerton 2009: 138-9). Somewhat paradoxically, it is only when there is a risk that something will be lost and forgotten, that the need to remember is recognised. It could be argued that there is a tension between memory, destruction and forgetting. It may be that it is this tension which is often being played out in monumental form when henge sites are remodelled. Certainly in considering henge sites as commemorative places, it must be borne in mind that memory and forgetting are inextricably linked. This theme is

explored further in chapter 5, which discusses the tension between continuity and change in the reuses of henge sites over time.

## **Biographical approaches to objects, monuments and sites**

The concept of monument biography used in archaeology has grown out of the concept of artefact biography. A biographical approach to objects is based on the premise that things were not only used once or in one context, but were exchanged, used by different people and ascribed different meanings before they were disused. Objects could therefore be seen as having a 'life-history', constructed along similar lines as a person's biography would be, in order to understand how that object was used and understood at different times (Kopytoff 1986: 66-67). As Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall (1999: 170) explain, Kopytoff 'felt that things could not be fully understood at just one point in their existence'. A biographical approach therefore considers an object (or monument) over time, and as having different meanings over time. This makes it an approach which is well-suited to studying henge sites which change and are reused over time.

Since biographical approaches consider changes in the meanings of an artefact, monument or place over time, biography is linked to memory and time. The meaning of an object or monument could be seen as cumulative, in the sense that it builds on prior knowledge or perceptions. Memory and an understanding of the past (or past meanings) therefore plays an important role in constructing the biography of a monument and considering how its meanings change over time. The possibility that an object (or structure, monument or place) acquires multiple meanings throughout the course of its 'life' is central to the archaeological concept of biography. As Gosden and Marshall (1999: 170) put it,

'Not only do objects change through their existence, but they often have the capability of accumulating histories, so that the present significance of an object derives from the persons and events to which it is connected.'

The application of a biographical approach to monuments therefore tended to focus on later uses of monuments, and has also been used as a way of

considering what became of monuments millennia after their construction. As noted in chapter 2, not all features of a henge site are necessarily contemporaneous, which is one of the reasons why attempts to classify henges based on their internal features (e.g. Burl 1969; Clare 1986, 1987) are problematic. Such features are unlikely to be contemporary with the earthwork, and therefore attempts to classify henges on this basis neglect their complex, multi-phase nature and are, in Gordon Barclay's words, 'reductionist' (Barclay 1989). One way in which to fully consider the complexity of henge sites as places which change and are reused over time may be to consider their life-history, and to consider their history in biographical terms. Biographies have been written for Stonehenge (Darvill 2006) and Avebury (Pollard and Reynolds 2002); the only explicitly biographical account of a henge site in Scotland written to date has been a short biography of the Stones of Stenness, focusing only on the period from the 19th century onwards (McClanahan 2013). The biographical approach to Scottish henge sites presented in this thesis therefore represents one of the unique contributions made by the thesis.

Monument biography has been used as a way of considering a range of prehistoric monument types. For instance, Cornelius Holtorf (1998) has used a biographical approach to consider megaliths in Germany. Holtorf's life-histories of megaliths concentrate particularly on the life of the monument long after it was constructed, even in the present-day. He uses monument biography as a way of considering how people 'dealt with the relics of the past' (Holtorf 1998: 24), and takes a relatively literal approach to considering the biography of monuments, discussing the birth, childhood and 'adult life' of the megaliths (Holtorf 1998) - which is in itself derived from biographical approaches to material culture.

Holtorf also considers how an awareness of the long 'biography' of a monument, and of its age, help to situate the monument in a wider temporal context, that is, it makes people think about how the monument relates to the past and future. As Holtorf puts it,

'[a]nother possible meaning of a megalith is that of a 'Denk-mal' - something which makes people think. Recognizing that a megalith is older than anyone can remember may have inspired people to philosophize about eternity, the age of humanity, the speed of

history, the transience of individuals and entire cultures, and what these monuments may see in the future (e.g. us!).' (Holtorf 1998: 31).

For Holtorf, the awareness of how a monument fits into the perceived flow of time, and the way people understand its age, is a key factor in the monuments' significance, since it forces people to consider the past (and perhaps also the future).

When people reworked and rebuilt henge monuments, this was precisely what they were doing: engaging with their past, their future, and their place in time. It was this temporal aspect which lent significance to henge sites. As discussed in chapter 2, at all excavated henge sites in Scotland, the henge was neither the first nor last activity on the site. Building henges on the site of earlier activity, or where there were already existing monuments, suggests that they were places where people reflected on and engaged with their past. Henges, and the earlier monuments which were already on henge sites before they were hengeed, could therefore be seen as what Holtorf (1998: 31) calls 'Denk-mals': places which made people think, but specifically, made them think about their past and the passage of time. Earlier monuments on henge sites would be a visual prompt causing people to reflect on their past as they sought to explain and understand the earlier monuments. It is this relationship with the past, and the practice of building on the site of earlier monuments, which makes henge sites significant places. They were hengeed *because* these were places where there were visible traces of the past. It may even be the case that henges were not significant in their own right, but only because they marked, enclosed and contained earlier monuments. A biographical approach to henge sites helps us to understand how they accumulated significance and how their meanings changes over time, as successive generations of monument-builders each made their own mark on these places.

Beyond the level of an individual monument or site, biographical approaches have also been used in archaeology to look at the development of a whole landscape over time. For example, Timothy Darvill's (2006) study of Stonehenge and the surrounding landscape considers not only Stonehenge itself and its development over time, but also nearby sites, as well as considering, from an environmental perspective, how the landscape and vegetation may also have

changed over centuries during which monuments were built. Martin Green's (2000) account of the landscape and archaeology of Down Farm, Cranborne Chase is an extension of this principle. Similarly, Josh Pollard and Andrew Reynolds' (2002) study of the henge enclosure at Avebury considers changes in the site and surrounding landscape over a huge time-span from the Mesolithic to Medieval period. In some ways, this approach is a broadening of traditional monument biographies. Many monument biographies focus on later uses of monuments (e.g. Holtorf 1998) - what Bradley (1993) calls the 'afterlife' of monuments; whereas Darvill's account of Stonehenge, and Pollard and Reynolds' of Avebury, focus not only on the monument, but on the site where it was built. This allows them also to consider what was there *before* the monument was built, and to look at earlier phases of the use of a site.

This extension of the concept of monument biography is useful for considering henge sites, where the location is often in use long before, as well as long after, the construction of the henge earthworks. However, while these studies are excellent descriptions of the uses of these sites and landscapes over time, they give little sense that the monuments were constructed *because* of the earlier uses of the sites. The biographies in this thesis use biography to consider the relationship between later monuments and earlier activity on the same site, and to consider the reasons sites continued to be (re)used over time. Mark Gillings and Joshua Pollard (1999) have also used a biographical approach to consider the changing meanings of Avebury over time, by focusing on one single element within a wider monument. They consider the differing uses and perceptions of the landscape and monuments at Avebury, and interweave this with the biography of one single stone of the stone circle, sarsen 4. Such an integrated approach allows for a different perspective when considering the reuse of sites and the ways in which uses and meaning of monuments have changed throughout their lives.

In this thesis, attempts have been made where possible to integrate not only considerations of the phasing of monuments at henge sites, but also other archaeological evidence, such as considerations of artefacts and material culture found at henge sites, or environmental evidence. This is done in order to gain a fuller understanding of how sites were used at different times during their biographies, rather than focusing only on changes in monumental architecture.



Monuments and artefacts have too often been treated in isolation from one another in archaeology (for example books are divided into separate sections, each dealing discretely with *either* monuments *or* artefacts, e.g. Gibson and Simpson 1998; Cleal and Pollard 2004). Aspects such as the use and deposition of artefacts at henge sites would have been important in mediating and forming people's experience of these places, and therefore should ideally be considered alongside discussions of monumental architecture.

Although it is intrinsically interesting to consider how a site changed over time, some biographical accounts of monuments or landscapes are largely narrative descriptions of what happened in a location throughout time. Such accounts also consider time in a linear sense, which may be an overly-simplistic or inappropriate model to apply to prehistoric monumentality. They describe the ways in which monuments change over time, but they do not seek to explain the possible significance of change. At many henge sites, change and remodelling of the monument seems to have been a recurrent and important part of the life-history of the site. The defining feature of henge sites was not always a bank and ditch, and they are not only Late Neolithic sites, but also foci of activity in the Early Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Bronze Age, in later prehistory and beyond. In this sense, the potential of monument biography might be not simply to generate a descriptive account of the chronology of a site, but to go on to use this as a method for considering *why* changes over time might have been significant. This will also allow traditional concepts and definitions of henge monuments to be challenged and subverted.

Monument biography, in common with our contemporary understanding of memory, is predicated on a linear understanding of how a site changes over time. It also necessitates considering sites in terms of changes that occurred over generations and centuries. This perhaps skews our perception and means that the fast-paced and short-lived nature of some changes might be overlooked. Perhaps it would be more useful to consider monuments in terms of lifetimes and generations - a perspective which is now increasingly possible - than on the archaeological timescale of radiocarbon dates, which can have large error margins and give the impression of events strung out over the long term.

This inter-relationship of understanding different and changing events which happen in the same location over a long time-period is key to how a biographical approach is used in this thesis. As noted above, the concept of biography most often used in archaeology grew out of anthropological approaches to interpreting artefacts, and therefore biography has often been applied in a similar way in archaeology. Biographical approaches to objects have tended to focus on processes surrounding the production and exchange of artefacts. For example, Jody Joy (2009) has written the biography of an Iron Age mirror from Dorset, describing the various skills and relationships connected with the object. He considers the significance of the object over the course of its whole use-life, from the gathering of the raw materials, to the different crafts necessary for its manufacture, how it would have been used and displayed or kept hidden, and finally reflects on the circumstances of the mirror's deposition (Joy 2009: 546-551). Significantly, at each stage, Joy not only describes the events that impacted on the mirror, but also considers the wider social implications of the object in terms of what it communicates about social relations.

This aspect of biography - the potential to help us think through relationships and interactions between people, objects, materials and places in the past - is in some respects similar to the relational approach propounded by Chris Fowler (2013). Fowler (*ibid.*: 62) explains his relational realist approach as characterised by the understanding that all beings, things and ideas 'emerge out of relationships between other forces and entities', and each can therefore be seen as an 'assemblage' of these relationships. As such, the meanings and properties of these assemblages - whether a person, object or place - are never inherent or fixed, but are formed by, contingent on, and able to be changed through that entity's relationship with other assemblages (Fowler 2013: 62-3). In terms of applying this to henge sites, each new monument could be seen as a new assemblage, constituted by its relationships to the place it was constructed, the previous 'assemblages' or monuments which had been built there, the people who built it and the materials they used, and so on. The meanings and significance of each monument would grow out of the interplay of these relationships, and the agency of people and sites is distributed further afield than only a single place (and time) as a consequence of such relationships.

A relational approach would therefore have great potential for considering changing meanings at a site or monument over time. In particular it would be useful for challenging some of the problematic typological assumptions surrounding henge monuments (such as those discussed in chapter 2), since it emphasises the role of inter-relationships between people, places, things and materials in creating meaning, rather than deriving significance from a fixed morphological type. Within the context of this thesis however, a biographical approach was preferred, because it allows for a more temporally-located discussion of the changing significance of monuments. As James Whitely (2002) and Joy (2009) have observed in the case of artefacts, many objects are valued *because of* their biographies. So too in the case of monuments: as discussed in chapter 4, the significance of henge sites as places which are returned to repeatedly over long periods is in many ways contingent on their earlier biography. It is argued in chapter 4 that it is specifically the relationship of henge sites with a concept of the past which draws people to return to them. A biographical approach was seen as the best way to understand this, although this choice does not preclude the potentials of exploring a relational approach in future considerations of henge monuments.

As mentioned above, biographies of artefacts often focus on processes of production and exchange. Consideration of exchange obviously is not really applicable to the biography of a site or monument. Construction, reconstruction and reuse of monuments might however been seen as analogous to artefact production, and it is this aspect of monumentality which is often to the fore in biographical interpretations of monuments, such as Holtorf's (1998) consideration of megaliths in Germany. Lesley McFadyen (2006) has considered the significance of different styles and tempi of construction involved in building long barrows in southern Britain during the early Neolithic. McFadyen uses a focus on construction events to write a biography of monument construction, and points out that this focus can be used to subvert approaches which are concerned only with a finished 'type' of monument. Her focus is on monumental architecture as an event or activity, rather than a material expression of an abstract 'type' (McFadyen 2006: 123). McFadyen argues that it is through participation in monument-construction that people were involved in making and changing their world, as well as being a basis for the formation of relationships

with people, places and things (*ibid.*: 128, 132). If we understand monument or site biography as a history of construction, destruction and reconstruction, it is indeed its biography which makes it significant.

However, the use of the term 'biography' creates a metaphor with a human life. It would be problematic to suggest a direct parallel between a human biography, and the biography of a place such as a henge site. It is argued in chapter 6 that there is no single, preconceived 'ideal' biography for henge sites. A direct analogy with a human biography would require an abstract concept of a 'completed' henge site to exist, before the monument is 'born'. This is problematic for sites where it is likely construction projects were piecemeal and protracted, as argued in chapter 5. It is also problematic to consider a site has having a 'childhood', a formative period before it reaches the completion of 'adulthood'. Again, construction projects may have been ongoing, and may never have been completed. Furthermore, it is often difficult to isolate a time when a henge site 'dies'. As is shown in the biographies of henge sites presented in chapters 4 and 5, henge sites may go through more than one period of decline, abandonment and disuse throughout their 'lives', before they are again rebuilt. The biography of a site, monument or artefact should be regarded as different to a human biography. The metaphor is useful however, as it allows reflection on how events of monument construction in a particular location are contingent on earlier events, without necessarily being the direct or expected consequence of those earlier episodes. It also allows reflection on the inter-relationships of the biographies of places, monuments, artefacts and communities, when these different biographies cross over in the same location.

## **Time and dating**

Generally, prehistorians have to work within a framework of radiocarbon dates with large error margins - what Alasdair Whittle *et al.* (2011: 1) have called a 'fuzzy prehistory' of chronologies built of millennia. Radiocarbon dates can offer only an imprecise chronology (*ibid.*: 2): they give a date-range, but do not give us a refined timescale in which to work. The precise sequence and duration of events which took place over hundreds of years typically cannot be tied down using radiocarbon dating. This makes it difficult to imagine how changes which took place over time - for example, the different phases of building which

occurred at a henge site - might relate to the timescale of a human lifespan. Again, as Whittle *et al.* (2011: 4) point out, this 'smeared' chronology means that we lack any understanding of short-term changes. Events (such as the construction of a monument) are given importance because they are dateable and conspicuous (*ibid.*: 13) - the only fixed, 'known' points in a chronology which is otherwise unclear to us. It is important to bear this in mind when engaging with the context and meaning of change, as is the aim in this thesis. Whittle *et al.* suggest that as a consequence of chronologies built only on conspicuous events, prehistorians have engaged with and understood time 'in a partial, selective and incomplete way' (*ibid.*: 4).

The ways in which archaeological chronologies are built around radiocarbon dates also has the effect of skewing our concept of the speed of events in the past. For example Holtby *et al.* (2012: 207), discussing disease and the spread of the LBK, describe as 'rapid' changes which happen over the course of 2 centuries. Considered in relation to the human lifespan, it is difficult to understand how such a timescale could possibly be perceived as 'rapid'. In some ways, similarly skewed perspectives have pervaded studies of monumentality. For example, studying changes in monumental style and phases of building within monument complexes have sometimes implicitly been seen as relevant to understanding changes which happen within a human lifetime. Bradley (1993:98) for instance has described such changes as being 'as close as prehistorians can come to writing a political history'. Yet monument complexes often develop in fits and starts of episodic monument-construction events, which may be separated by centuries and, as such, may endure and have a significance longer than human memory. Changes in architecture may therefore occur slowly, compared to 'political' events.

Conversely, some monument-construction events which may have been relatively 'quick' could have had a disproportionately significant and long-lasting impact on people's memories, and indeed on the landscape. Jan Harding (2013: 7) has suggested that the large henge monuments at Thornborough in North Yorkshire (discussed in chapter 6) might have been relatively rapid monumental projects. He suggests the Thornborough henges were only used for a short time, perhaps 'a few days' (*ibid.*). While the henges may only have been used for a short time, the construction of three double-ditched henges, each more than

200 metres across, would constitute a major construction project. Gathering together the workforce, planning the project and amassing the necessary resources alone must have been a significant undertaking; such an event would surely create a lasting imprint in the memory of the community.

In short, we need to be thoughtful and somewhat cautious when considering change in prehistory through the lens of monument-construction, using a chronology of radiocarbon years. We should be aware of the possibility that events such as monument construction may have occurred at a different pace from the rhythms of everyday life. Changes may have occurred at different tempi in different spheres of life (see Ingold 1993); monument-building is only one facet of prehistoric life. The lives of sites such as henges, which were used and reused over long periods, may have been characterised by long periods during which there was little physical change to the monuments - but perhaps punctuated by periodic episodes of dramatic change. Such periods of change may have been separated by generations, but this might have served to make them more traumatic (and concomitantly, more memorable) events. With this in mind, we can begin to move towards a more nuanced understanding of monument reuse and rebuilding, and consider the contingent, changing meanings - and enduring significance - of place, materials and the past, in the past.

If we are to understand henges as places which changed and were rebuilt over long periods of time - and were significant for this reason - then it is important to understand at least the sequence and duration of events at henges. The complexities and difficulties involved in this was briefly mentioned in Chapter 2. Dating henge sites is difficult not only because they are multi-phase sites used over centuries; but also because in order to gather informative and meaningful dates, a detailed understanding of the phasing of the different features is required in order to understand exactly what is being dated. This would involve, for example, bearing in mind that internal features such as timber circles might pre-date the earthworks by centuries (Gibson 2005); or that dates obtained from ditch fills date the filling-in of the henge rather than its construction. This has not always been taken into account when dating henge sites in the past (for example, the dates for Balfarg, discussed in chapter 5, are actually from the timber circle, not the henge), meaning that many henge sites are actually

relatively poorly-dated, and the chronology of the different phases little-understood.

Furthermore, henges in Scotland are rarely directly associated with artefacts. This is a contrast to henges in the Wessex chalkland, the construction of which can be dated by bone or antler tools from the ditch floor; acidic soils in Scotland mean that such material rarely survives (Stenness, where dateable animal bone survived in the basal ditch-fill, is exceptional). Consequently, the construction of henges in Scotland can only really be dated either relative to earlier or later features of the site; or by material obtained from ditch fills or under the bank, i.e. dating may often only provide a *terminus post quem* or *terminus ante quem* for henge construction. Dates for henges in Scotland therefore tend to rely on radiocarbon dating, or occasionally other methods including optically stimulated luminescence (OSL). The difficulties involved in dating the construction of henge earthworks can be compounded at sites which were later extensively rebuilt, as was the case at Pict's Knowe, Dumfries and Galloway, where the ditch was recut almost in its entirety in later prehistory (Thomas 2007a). Indeed, we should be aware of the problems inherent in dating sites with a lot of evidence for re-use.

Understanding the sequence and dating of henge sites is important in understanding their chronology however; but we should be aware when considering the life-history of henges that we have only a 'fuzzy' (Whittle *et al.* 2011: 1) and incomplete understanding of how these sites were used over time; and that our focus on certain events at these places may be a biased and imperfect product of our own distinctive (mis)understanding of the way henge sites were used over time, as it is a reflection of a prehistoric reality.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored the themes of commemoration and the creation of memory at henge sites. Although memorialisation has long been associated with monumentality, the approach adopted in this thesis is more subtle. Commemoration is seen as an active process, by which the creation of memory and the negotiation of the past is negotiable and fluid. It is here presented as a practice which can in part be enacted by (re)visiting and (re)building monumental sites. Henging sites can be seen as an important facet of the

practice of commemoration, as henge-building can be understood as a way of enclosing the past and controlling its mediation. This is discussed in the next chapter, as is the role of henges in creating temporal heterotopias and imagined landscapes.

As well as monument (re)construction and (re)building, destruction and ruination are seen to play a significant role in the creation of memories at henge sites. Indeed, this may be as much an integral part of commemoration as is the construction of 'permanent' monuments, a theme which is discussed throughout the rest of this thesis (and see also Küchler 2002).

Commemoration and the creation of memory at henge sites is thus argued to be bound up with practices of monument construction and destruction, and the repeated (re)use and return to the same location in the landscape. Memories are created through the protracted and often complex performance of monument construction and destruction, monumentalisation and concealment, which worked together in the past to mediate people's idea of their histories through both their experience and imaginations. Henge sites are therefore about much more than simply a bank and ditch. Perhaps the best way to appreciate the changing meanings of henge sites over time is by understanding the biographies of hinged places - an approach which is adopted in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

A criticism of (artefact) biographies, in the words of Andy Jones, is that they are 'idealised: they encompass the life course of classes of artefacts rather than individual artefacts' (Jones 2007: 78; see also Tilley 1996b). It is hoped that, by looking at individual henge sites in turn, this thesis will do more than just create a single generalised 'ideal' biography of henge sites. Gillings and Pollard (1999: 190-191) have written that an advantage of a biographical account is that it challenges concepts of monuments as 'planned, and fully coherent, wholes', allowing us instead to understand the meaning of monuments as 'local, and highly contingent' (*ibid.*). Such is the aim of this thesis: to 'de-henge the henge', removing the focus from any single phase in the life of henge sites, and consider instead the significance of the changing meanings of these places throughout the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age.



## Chapter 4: Commemoration

### Introduction

This chapter will explore in greater depth the theme of henges as commemorative places which was introduced in chapter 3. The chapter will use as case studies the 'biographies' of a number of excavated henge sites, reinterpreting them with reference to the theme of commemoration. The site biographies will outline the different ways henge sites have been used over time, and will include discussion of the phasing, chronology and dating of the site, and the variety of different monuments built on the same place over time. The biographies will form the starting point in my consideration of the importance of understanding and interpreting the long sequences of use at henge sites. The chapter will explore the idea that it may be more useful to think of these sequences as indicative of commemoration and reinterpretation of the past, rather than simply as memorialisation or reuse.

The chapter includes biographies of four sites: Balfarg Riding School (hereafter BRS) in Fife; North Mains, and the recently-excavated mini-henge site at Leadketty, both in Perth and Kinross; and Pict's Knowe, Dumfries and Galloway (fig. 6). These narratives have been called 'site biographies' rather than the more traditional 'monument biographies', because they do not simply describe one monument, but seek to tell the story of a site, which may have included several different monuments throughout the course of its 'life'. Using a site biographical approach means that the biographies are not always relative to the henge - the henge monument should be seen as only one aspect of the life of the site. Following on from the description of each of these sites using a biographical framework, all four sites are discussed synthetically, placing them within a wider Scottish context. In particular, the discussion will consider similarities and contrasts in the trajectories of how these four places changed over time. The possible significances of the use of sites over long periods will also be discussed. In particular, the chapter will consider how the longevity of use of a site for different purposes could be seen as reflecting past understandings and (re)interpretations of the past, present and future, and how the perception of new monuments built on the site of old, may have been a significant aspect of

this. The chapter will seek to interpret this as a process of commemoration enacted at henge sites.



Figure 6 - map showing location of sites mentioned in case study

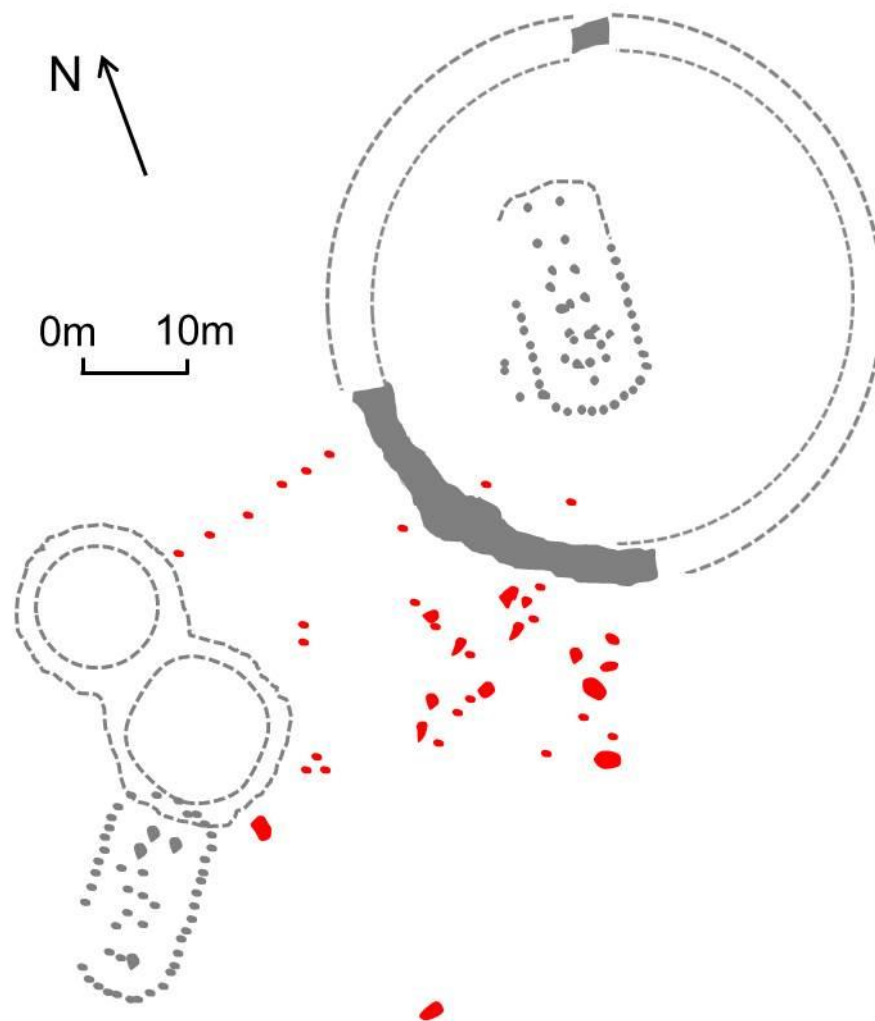
## Site biography 1: Balfarg Riding School

The henge-like enclosure at Balfarg Riding School, Glenrothes, Fife forms one part of a monument complex, which also includes Balfarg henge, as well as Balbirnie stone circle, pits, ring ditches and Beaker and Food Vessel burials (Barclay and Russell-White 1993). Excavated by Gordon Barclay in 1983-1985,

Balfarg Riding School (BRS) was found to have, in common with other henge sites in Scotland, a long life history, and to have been used in multiple different ways over a protracted period of several centuries and many generations.

### ***Early Neolithic place-making: pit-digging and pottery deposition***

The earliest archaeologically visible activity in the area which would later become the Balfarg-BRS monument complex consists of a series of pits, some of which have been dated to the fourth millennium BC (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 60). Radiocarbon dates for the pits, and other features at BRS, are shown in table 2 and figure 6 below. These pits were situated on the undulating plain to the east of the Lomond hills, between the Rivers Eden to the north, and the River Leven 1.75 km to the south of the site (*ibid.*: 48,54). This area of land may have been prone to flooding at the time the monument complex was built (*ibid.*: 54). The excavators, Gordon Barclay and Christopher Russell-White, note that these pits represent the first ‘recorded episode’ of activity in the complex, which would be used for over 1500 years (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 167). The pits were grouped in two areas within the complex, including a series of pits located to the south of the area which would later be defined by the BRS enclosure, as can be seen on the plan below (fig. 7); the other group of pits being located just to the west of the location where Balfarg henge would later be built (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 60). Early Neolithic pottery was deposited in some of these pits (*ibid.*). The excavators suggested that these features reflected a ‘coherent complex of activities involving the digging of pits and their careful backfilling’, and that the pottery had been ‘carefully and deliberately’ placed in the pits (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 60).



**Figure 7 - plan of the place-making activity at BRS henge site. Pit group shown in red, later features in grey (redrawn after Barclay and Russell-White 1993, illustration 6 and Noble 2006 p144 fig 6.3)**

Some fragmentary Earlier Neolithic pottery sherds, contemporary with those in the pits, were also found in the ditch of the BRS enclosure (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 61). However, these were recovered from a context in which Grooved Ware pottery and Beaker pottery were also present which, combined with the fragmented state of the Early Neolithic sherds, led Barclay and Russell-White to interpret them as possibly having been incorporated into the henge ditch fills due to the ‘disturbance of earlier Neolithic features during the digging of the henge ditch’ (*ibid.*: 61). The possible significance of encountering earlier material culture while constructing monuments will be discussed later in this

chapter. Barclay and Russell-White (1993: 168) suggest that the pits at Balfarg may reflect ‘a form of ritual activity’ (e.g. structured deposition) in or near a settlement; and that the later monuments were built on the site specifically because of the existence of these earlier activities (*ibid.*) which we could call an act of place-making, or site-making - the events which may first have established Balfarg as a significant location. The practice of digging pits and depositing fragments of pottery may in itself have been significant, and was widespread during the Early Neolithic, or rather was certainly not restricted to sites which would later be henge. The possible significance of these practices at henge sites is discussed in chapter 5. In terms of the biography of the pots deposited in the Balfarg Riding School pits, it is only possible to speculate as to whether the material was already fragmented when it was brought to the site; or whether whole pots were brought to the site, smashed there - either accidentally or more likely, deliberately - and some of the sherds deposited at the site. Perhaps some of the other sherds, not deposited at the site, were removed to be deposited elsewhere throughout the landscape, or to be kept, used and exchanged as fragments. Details of the pottery and other artefacts deposited at the site throughout its use- life can be found in table 1.

**Table 1 artefacts deposited at Balfarg Riding School during each phase of use**

| <b>Balfarg Riding School (Barclay and Russell-White 1993; Gibson 2010a)</b> |  |                  |  |                 |   |
|---|--|------------------|--|-----------------|---|
| <i>Date</i>   | <i>Uses and structures</i>               | <i>Artefacts</i> |  |                 | <i>Comments and condition</i>   |
|   |  | <i>Material</i>  | <i>Type</i>  | <i>Quantity</i> |   |
| 37th-34th centuries BC – c.3000 BC  | pit-digging, deposition, pits backfilled | pottery          | Carinated Bowl; Plain Bowl (37th-34th centuries); Grooved Ware | 68 sherds       | Sherds from at least 39 different vessels, found in 17 different pits. Includes rim sherds and body sherds. Some sherds fragmentary.                    |
|   |  | stone            | fragment of flaked stone                                       | 1 piece         | Broken fragment of flaked stone.  |
| Middle-Late Neolithic   | earlier rectilinear timber structure     | pottery          | Grooved Ware   | 7 sherds        | 7 sherds from 4 different vessels, recovered from 3 postholes (4 sherds from surface of posthole; 2 from postpipe; one from half-way down fill of pit). |
|   | later rectilinear timber structure       | pottery          | Grooved Ware   | 7 sherds        | Included some rim sherds and base sherds. Some fragmentary. From secondary post-holes and filling of post-pipes, so not primary to the structure.       |

|                                     |  |         |   |   |   |
|-------------------------------------|--|---------|---|---|---|
|                                     |  | flint   | secondary chunk of flint; flakes of stone | 3   | Secondary chunk of flint, and other flakes of worked stone, from three of the internal post-pipes.  |
| Late Neolithic                      | pit-digging and deposition in 5 pits outside BRS enclosure | pottery | Grooved Ware                              | c.73 sherds                                 | Included rim sherds. Some very small fragments. Some sherds had evidence of scorching/burning. At least 25 different vessels represented. |
|                                     |  |         | plain Neolithic pottery                   | 4 sherds                                    | Undecorated and undiagnostic sherds.  |
|                                     |  |         | AOC beaker                                | 1 sherds                                    | Very abraded.   |
|                                     |  | flint   | flakes                                    | 5   | Found in 3 of the pits. One flake has retouch on edge.  |
|                                     | henge ditch dug  | -       | -   | -   | -   |
| henge ditch fills in: primary fill  | -  | -       | -   | Clean – primary fill silt, sand and gravel. |   |
| Late Neolithic-<br>Early Bronze Age | henge ditch fills in: middle fills                         | pottery | Grooved Ware                              | >186 sherds                                 | Pottery recovered from 5 sections through ditch.  |
|                                     |  |         | Beaker                                    | 5   | Probably moved by animal activity.  |
|                                     |  | flint   | flakes                                    | 2   | Including one serrated edge flake.  |
| Early Bronze Age                    | henge ditch fills in: upper fill                           | pottery | Grooved Ware                              | >10   | Probably residual.  |
|                                     |  |         | Beaker                                    | >309  | Very fragmented. Significant remains of less than 6 vessels; fragments of more. Recovered from 3 of the sections through the ditch.       |
|                                     |  | flint   | various                                   | >71 pieces                                  | Various flaked stone including scrapers, retouched flakes, serrated edge flakes, and one reworked flake from a barbed and tanged point.   |

## ***Building and enclosing: transforming Balfarg***

### **Timber structures**

It is possible that the next activity in the area of the Balfarg pits included the construction of a rectilinear timber structure (fig. 8). This structure comprised a rectilinear setting of posts enclosing several other posts, some of which cut one another, suggesting at least two phases of timber construction at the site (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 85). Some of the postholes relating to the

secondary phase of the timber structure were associated with Grooved Ware pottery. The structure may therefore not have been associated with Grooved Ware in its primary phase (*ibid.*). Grooved Ware pottery was also found in the lower-middle fills of the BRS enclosure ditch (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 88). As was noted in chapter 2, relatively few henge monuments in Scotland are associated with Grooved Ware pottery in primary contexts. The inclusion of Grooved Ware in the lower ditch fills at BRS therefore suggests that it may be a relatively early (i.e. Late Neolithic) henge in a Scottish context. However the Grooved Ware might be residual from the construction of the timber structure, in which case the construction of the henge would post-date the Grooved Ware.

The timber structures at BRS have been interpreted by Barclay and David Hogg as possibly supporting a wattle fence, with free-standing timbers in the interior; they suggest that they would not have supported a roof (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 169-73). They consider that the timber structures may be Early Neolithic mortuary structures (*ibid.*: 178). The presence of Grooved Ware pottery in both the lower fills of the henge ditch and the secondary phase of the timber structure, suggests the possibility that the earliest phase of the timber structure pre-dated the henge. It is therefore possible that the henge ditch was dug to enclose the earlier timber mortuary structure. At other henge sites, timber settings such as timber circles normally pre-date the henge earthworks (Gibson 2005). This might also support the interpretation of the sequence offered for BRS, with the henge ditch being constructed around the pre-existing timber structure.

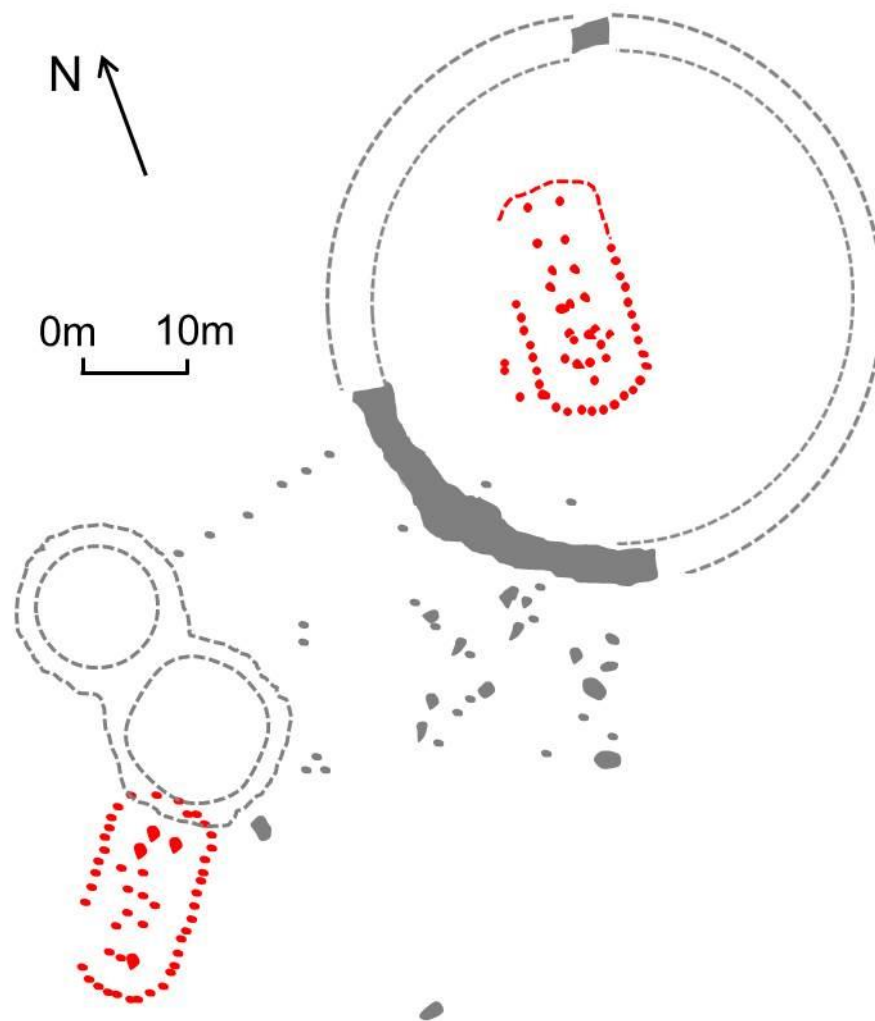


Figure 8 - rectilinear timber structures at BRS (redrawn after Barclay and Russell-White 1993, illustration 6 and Noble 2006 p144 fig 6.3)

## Henging

The ditch at BRS, in common with other henge ditches, was proportionately wide relative to the overall diameter of the enclosure ditch (fig. 9). The site was probably henged during the Late Neolithic, c. 3335-2896 cal BC; the radiocarbon dates for the site are shown in table 2 and fig. 10. The ditch varied in width, but was between 2.2 and 4.5 metres across (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 90). No evidence was found for a bank during the excavation, although it is possible that the earthworks had also comprised a bank. The ditch had been partially destroyed by a modern road, but although the area it defined was not perfectly



circular, it was probably originally around 38-42 metres in diameter (*ibid.* 90). The ditch, which varied in depth from 0.5-1.1m, had three distinct fills. Grooved Ware pottery was recovered from the middle fill, and Beaker pottery from the upper fill of the ditch (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 90). This suggests that the ditch remained open throughout this time, although it is a little unclear whether it eventually filled-in naturally, or whether material was deliberately deposited in the ditch. It may be the case that after the ditch had originally been excavated, it was left open for a time and allowed to fill naturally as the ditch sides (and bank, if there was one) eroded, before finally being capped off and deliberately backfilled when burnt material and pottery were deposited into the ditch. This interpretation is based on the suggestion by Barclay and Russell-White (1993: 57) that the Beaker fragments from the topmost fill of the ditch may have been deliberately deposited in the ditch. The excavators noted that the ditch is dug into friable soils, and suggest that it might only have taken 'weeks or months' for erosion of the ditch to begin and the primary silt fills to form (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 178).

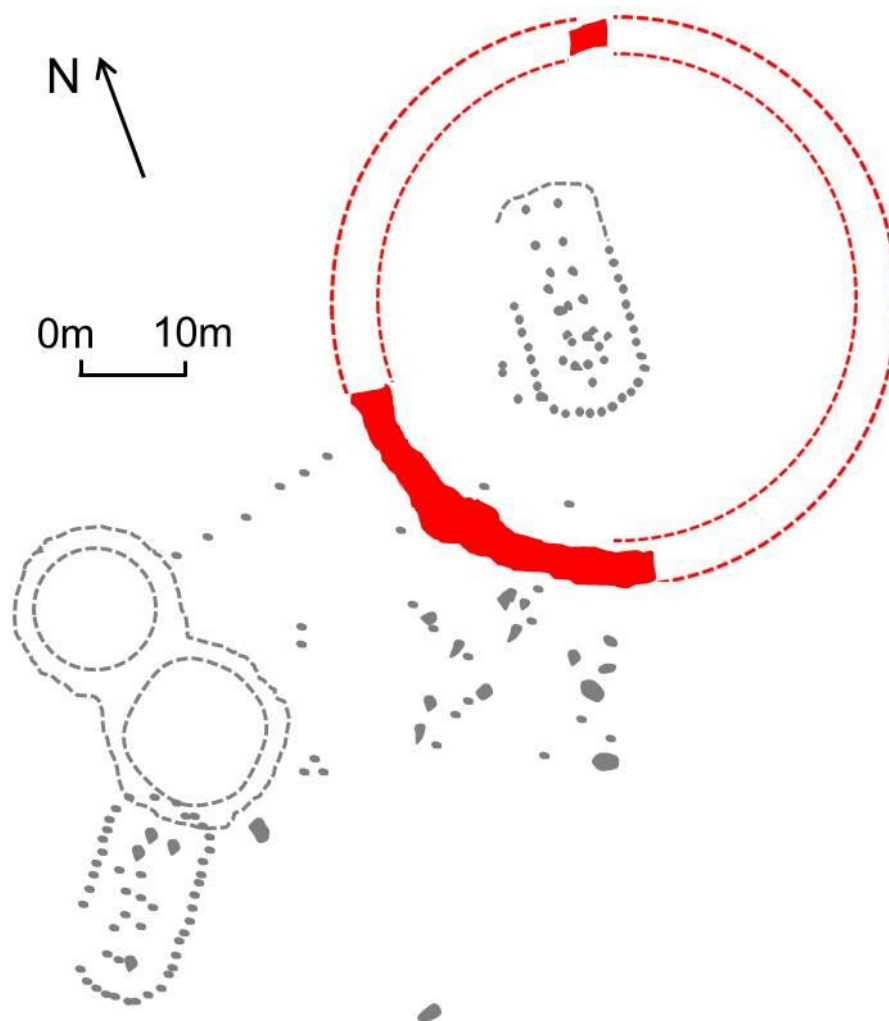


Figure 9 - the henge ditch at BRS (redrawn after Barclay and Russell-White 1993, illustration 6 and Noble 2006 p144 fig 6.3)

Table 2 radiocarbon dates for Balfarg Riding School

| Balfarg Riding School radiocarbon dates (after Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 160-1) |                                  |  |                   |  |
|---|----------------------------------|--|-------------------|--|
| Dates calibrated using OxCal 4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2014)                                  |                                  |  |                   |  |
| Sample number   | Context                          | Material   | Uncalibrated Date | Calibrated date (95.4% probability unless otherwise specified) |
| Early/Mid Neolithic pit group south of BRS enclosure                                  |                                  |  |                   |  |
| GU-1903   | 8017 – charcoal-rich fill of pit | <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> ,<br><i>Corylus avellana</i> ,<br><i>Fraxinus sp.</i> | 4765±55 bp        | 3650-3376 cal BC   |
| GU-2604   | 8017 - charcoal-rich fill of pit | <i>Corylus avellana</i> ,<br><i>Quercus sp.</i> ,<br><i>Salix sp.</i>        | 5170±90 bp        | 4237-3770 cal BC   |

|   |   |  |            |                          |
|---|---|--|------------|--------------------------|
| GU-2605   | 8017 - charcoal-rich fill of pit                                  | <i>Quercus</i>                           | 4950±90 bp | 3961-3536 cal BC         |
| GU-2606   | 2050 - charcoal-rich fill of pit                                  | <i>Corylus avellana</i>                  | 4720±70 bp | 3638-3370 cal BC         |
| UtC-1302  | 2212 – grain within potsherd from fill of pit                     | <i>Hordeum sp.</i>                       | 4830±40 bp | 3698-3523 cal BC         |
| Charcoal-rich fill of BRS ditch containing Grooved Ware |   |  |            |                          |
| GU-1670   | 013/012 – charcoal-rich ditch fill                                | <i>Corylus avellana</i>                  | 4425±50 bp | 3335-2917 cal BC (95.5%) |
| GU-1904   | 013/102 – charcoal-rich ditch fill                                | <i>Alnus, Betula, Corylus spp.</i>       | 4385±55 bp | 3327-2896 cal BC         |
| Grooved Ware pits outside BRS enclosure                 |   |  |            |                          |
| GU-1902   | 1002 – fill of pit with Grooved Ware                              | <i>Alnus, Betula, Corylus, Salix spp</i> | 4250±85 bp | 3090-2580 cal BC         |
| Timber structure inside BRS                             |   |  |            |                          |
| GU-1905   | 7023B – charcoal from interior post-pipe of timber structure      | <i>Alnus sp</i>                          | 4285±55 bp | 3089-2696 cal BC (95.3%) |
| GU-1906   | 7044B – post-pipe from boundary post at southern end of structure | <i>Quercus, Alnus spp</i>                | 4155±70 bp | 2897-2503 cal BC         |
| GU-1907   | 7041B - post-pipe from boundary post at southern end of structure | <i>Quercus, Alnus spp</i>                | 4330±85 bp | 3338-2696 cal BC (95.5%) |

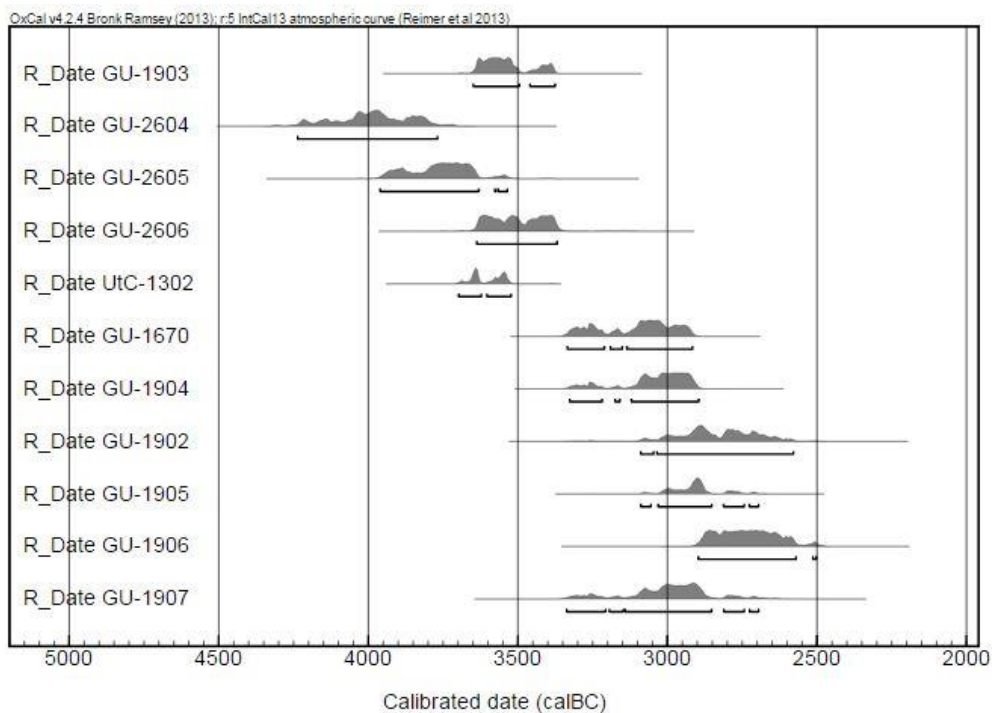


Figure 10 plot of radiocarbon dates for BRS

### ***Beyond the Henge: Later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age activity in the Balfarg monument complex***

Later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age activity at BRS seems to have occurred outside the henge, to the west of the enclosure ditch, and to have avoided the area inside the ditch (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 110). It is possible that later monuments built as part of the Balfarg/BRS complex avoided the interior of the henge because the site had been mounded over by this time. Part of the rectilinear timber structure inside the BRS ditch was covered by a layer of stones and soil, and Barclay and Russell-White (1993: 83, 173) suggest that this material may be the remains of a mound overlying the structure. The interior of the henge may therefore not have been a focus of activity during the Bronze Age because it was inaccessible at this period, having been buried under a mound. Constructing a mound over a site could have served both to seal the site, but would also prevent access to a place, perhaps putting it beyond use (Brophy and Noble 2012a). Kenny Brophy and Gordon Noble (*ibid.*) suggest that blocking access to henge sites at the end of their lives, by restricting or blocking the entrance and sealing over the interior with a mound, may have been a more widespread practice at henge sites than has hitherto been appreciated.

During the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, other monuments were built in the area outside BRS henge, including cairns and ring ditches (fig. 11). A series of postholes, pits, and several burials also date to this period (*ibid.* 110-111). Similarly, elsewhere in the monument complex, at Balfarg henge to the west of the BRS enclosure, the area to the west of the henge and outside the south-west entrance, was used for cremation burials in the Bronze Age, although there were also Early Neolithic pits in this area (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 142-3).

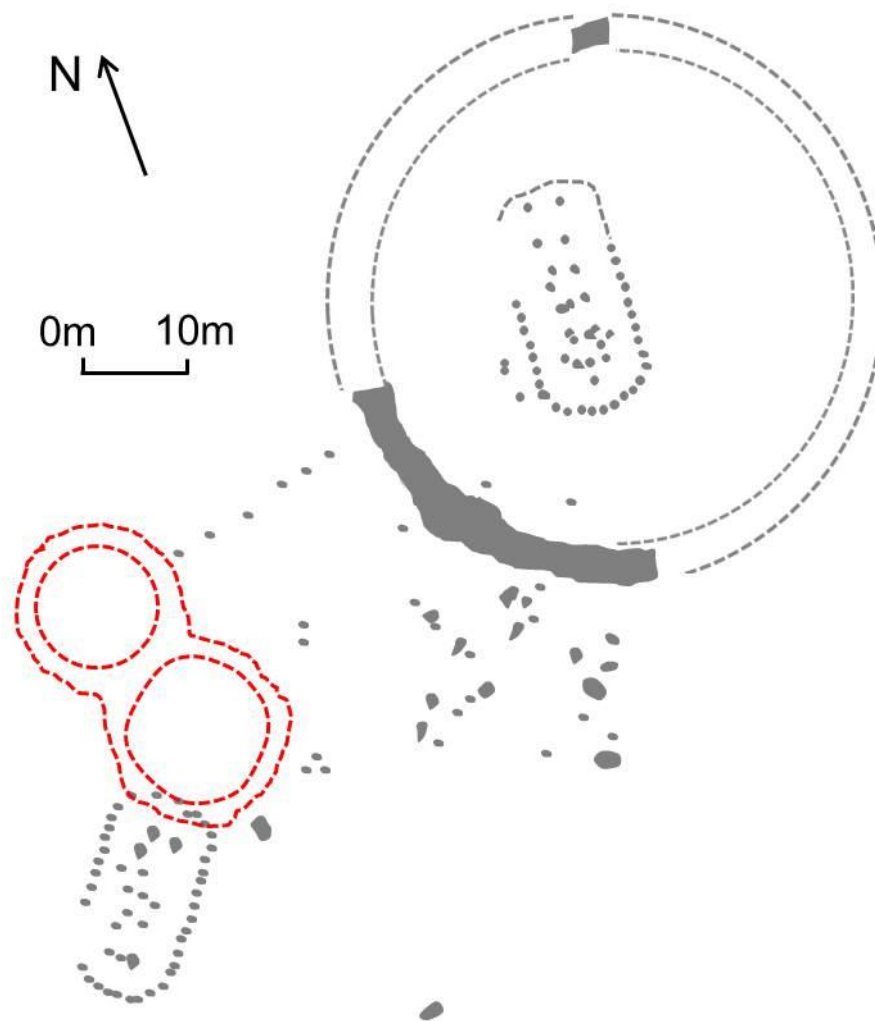


Figure 11 - ring cairns built to the south of BRS henge (redrawn after Barclay and Russell-White 1993, illustration 6 and Noble 2006 p144 fig 6.3)

### ***Summary of BRS biography***

In summary, the area around BRS was a focus for pit-digging and pottery deposition during the Early Neolithic. Interestingly, and perhaps somewhat unusually when the site was later henged, the ditch was dug immediately to the north of these pits, but did not actually enclose them. Perhaps by the time the henge was built, the exact position of the pit groups had been forgotten, but their general location was remembered. Alternatively, the henge may have been deliberately and carefully sited to be very close to the earlier pits without

actually disturbing them. If this is the case, then BRS may be unusual in this respect - at most other henge sites, the earthworks appear to be carefully located to enclose a variety of earlier features. Perhaps at BRS, it was considered more important to enclose the timber structures (or the remains of the timber structures) than it was to enclose the location where the pits had been dug. In his recent reinterpretation of the Balfarg-BRS-Balbirnie monument complex, Alex Gibson (2010a: 67) notes that there are several pits inside the henge at BRS which were associated with Grooved Ware pottery. Gibson considers that the site was henge during the Late Neolithic period when Grooved Ware was being used and deposited in the monument complex (*ibid.*: 65). This suggests that at least some of the pits at BRS may be broadly contemporary with the digging of the henge ditch. It also attests to the use of this area for pit-digging and pottery deposition over a protracted period, perhaps spanning many generations. Gibson (2010a: 65) notes that Early Neolithic activity at BRS, including the deposition of Carinated Bowl and Plain Bowl pottery, occurred during the 37th-34th centuries cal BC.

The rectilinear timber structure at BRS, possibly a mortuary enclosure, was built immediately to the north of some of the pits. The structure was built over two phases; or there may have been two separate structures, the second having been erected on the footprint of the earlier structure. The later of these two timber structures was associated with Grooved Ware pottery. Given that the timber structures at BRS (the one enclosed by BRS henge, and that located to the south-west of the site) are only associated with Grooved Ware in the latter part of their lives, Gibson (2010a: 65) suggests the possibility that the timber structures at BRS may in fact date to the Middle Neolithic, and are associated with activity involving the deposition of Impressed Ware elsewhere in the monument complex. During the Late Neolithic, and possibly around the period when the timber structure had already been rebuilt and, a circular henge ditch was dug, enclosing the timber structure. Grooved Ware pottery was present in the lower ditch fills, while the upper fills were associated with Beaker pottery. The timber structures were probably mounded over, possibly during the Later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, and the ceremonial focus of the complex shifted to the unenclosed area, outwith the henge ditch. This included funerary activity and cremation deposits, and the construction of a ring-ditch and cairn to the south-

west of the henge at BRS (Gibson 2010a: 65, 68). The area may not have been used exclusively for funerary activity during this period, and there are two possible cooking pits, as well as various post-holes, pits and a paved area, between BRS and the henge at Balfarg (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 146). One of the cooking pits can be dated to the 17th-14th centuries cal BC (Gibson 2010a: 68). The henge site at Balfarg is discussed in the next chapter. The interior of both of these henges seems to have been avoided during this period, most likely because they were covered over by mounds. Paradoxically however, they were not completely disarticulated from the quotidian landscape, as people evidently continued to live their everyday lives nearby these monuments - in the vicinity of what may already, by that time, have been considered 'ancient' or ancestral places.

## **Site biography 2: North Mains**

Like Balfarg Riding School, the henge site at North Mains, Perth and Kinross was a focus for monument-building and burial over millennia. North Mains was excavated in 1978-9, again by Gordon Barclay, prior to the development of a landing strip on the site (Barclay 1983: 123). Apart from dates obtained for some internal features such as postholes, dating all of the events at North Mains initially proved somewhat difficult. Some features could only be dated relatively; and even this may prove challenging for a site where clear stratigraphic relationships do not exist for all features. Similar problems have been encountered at other henge sites (see for example the discussion on Balfarg henge in chapter 5). This accounts for some of the rather vague dates used in the following biography of North Mains. The chronology of the site was in some degree clarified when further radiocarbon dates became available over two decades after the site had been excavated. These dates were obtained as part of the National Museums of Scotland cremated bone dating programme (Barclay 2005: 86; Sheridan 2003). The site at North Mains was used from the third millennium BC, for pit-digging, burial and enclosure, culminating in the use of the site for early Christian burials in the first millennium AD (Barclay 1983).

### ***Place-making: pit-digging and cultivation***

The earliest archaeologically-visible activity at North Mains, in the area which would later be enclosed by the henge earthworks, took place during the third millennium BC. In common with the site at BRS, the site chosen for pit-digging at North Mains was a flat area of ground between two rivers, the River Earn and the Machany Water; on the south-east of the site is a steep drop down to the Machany Water (Barclay 1983: 123). On the horizon, the view is of hills: the Ochils to the south, and the Grampian Hills on the north and north-east (*ibid.*). The first use of this site included digging three pits (fig. 12), and the cultivation of the old land surface (Barclay 1983: 125). This included probable evidence of ard cultivation, which occurred at some point prior to the construction of the henge bank (*ibid.*: 180). Although no actual ard marks were found during excavation, it was considered likely that the disturbance of the soil under the barrow had been caused by ard cultivation (*ibid.*). It is possible that the same area was also used to graze livestock; a 'gleyed fossil topsoil' was found, which 'may have been formed by the activity of stock' (Barclay 1983: 180). Possible evidence of cultivation on sites that later have monuments built on them has been found at several other sites, although this is usually far from unequivocal. At Pitnacree in Perth and Kinross, the depth of the soil and the angle of pottery and stone fragments have been used to suggest that the site was cultivated (Coles and Simpson 1965; Barclay 2003: 142). A barrow was subsequently built on the site. At site 1 within the monument complex at Machrie Moor on Arran, extensive evidence of cultivation was found when the site was excavated. This included numerous stakeholes, interpreted as a fenced field-system, in addition to ard marks and associated pits (Haggarty 1991). The period of cultivation at Machrie Moor was considered to post-date timber structures found at the site, but pre-dated the construction of the stone circle (Haggarty 1991; Bradley 2002: 90-91). Richard Bradley (2002: 91) points out that the stake holes and the ard marks are not aligned with one another and so may not be contemporary. This suggests the possibility that the land was cultivated over several seasons or years. Interestingly, Bradley considers that the ard marks and field systems at Machrie Moor need not be interpreted 'in terms of everyday land use' (*ibid.*). He asserts that the cultivation of the site could have been a means of removing any signs of previous activity on the site, a process which he suggests may be akin to burning down a timber structure (Bradley 2002: 91). This may be the case,



however cereal pollen was also found in association with the ard marks at Machrie Moor (*ibid.*); while this obviously does not preclude the possibility that the land was worked with the aim of removing traces of past activity from the landscape, it could also suggest a more prosaic aspect to the ploughing of the land.

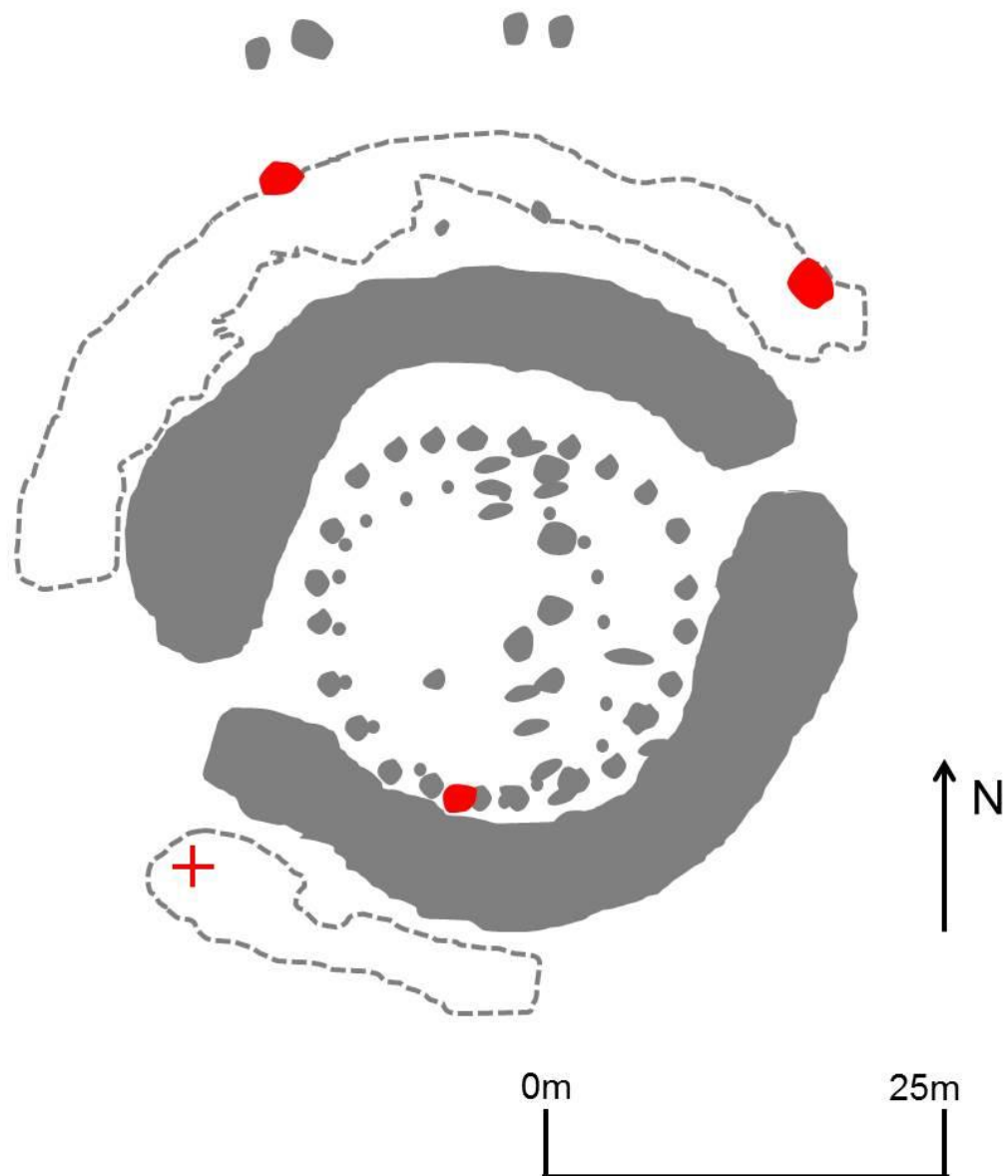


Figure 12 - plan showing location of pits, and pre-henge burial (+) at North Mains, in relation to later features on the site (redrawn after Barclay 2005:87, fig 8.8)

Of course, we should be cautious in drawing clear distinctions between what we suppose to be 'everyday' uses of a landscape, such as putting up fences or ploughing, and perceived 'ritual' activities such as monument-building. All of these activities may have been normal elements within the life-experience of a person living during the Early Neolithic. Repeated or seasonal activities such as ploughing could take on a ritualised aspect, and visiting or constructing 'ritual' monuments could have taken on their own regular rhythm and be repeated throughout a person's life. It is feasible that at different times, both 'ritual' and 'everyday' activities could have taken place in the same location. At the recently-excavated site of Wellhill, Perth and Kinross, evidence was found of a field system with ard marks. A group of large pits, some containing sherds Late Neolithic Grooved Ware pottery, and others containing Bronze Age pottery. Some of the pits had been recut several times. A posthole was also found, from which the post had been removed, before the posthole was backfilled with burnt material, fragments of burnt bone, and many sherds of Grooved Ware pottery which appear to have come from up to five different vessels (Wright 2014). Evidently, sites which were cultivated during the Early Neolithic may have continued to attract attention, including possible 'ritual' attention such as pit-digging and pottery deposition, for generations after their use.

Ploughing the land before building a monument may therefore simply reflect the 'everyday' use of the land for farming. At North Mains, perhaps it is this early cultivation of the site which is being commemorated when the site is later monumentalised. Ploughing the land may have been an important, distinctive and highly visible sign of the choice to adopt a lifestyle largely reliant on farming for subsistence. Alternatively, it could simply have been a way of preparing the land prior to the construction of a monument.

At North Mains, part of the area where the pits had been dug was then enclosed by a timber circle, or probably by two successive timber circles (figs. 13 and 14). Dates obtained from charcoal in the post-pipes and packing of the larger of these two timber settings range from 3350-2200 cal BC (Barclay 2005: 91 table 8.2). Dates for North Mains are presented in table 3 and figure 15. This timber circle encloses a smaller setting of pits/postholes, which is more irregular in shape, being elliptical in plan rather than circular. These pits probably also represent a timber setting, although several of the pits showed no evidence of

post-pipes. This may however reflect the removal of posts from the setting (Barclay 1983: 150). This smaller putative timber circle yielded no artefacts or dateable material (*ibid.*), therefore it is impossible to definitively say whether one timber circle succeeded the other, or whether they might both have been built - or at least upstanding - at the same time. Here, it is supposed that the smaller timber setting was earlier, as this seems more logistically plausible.

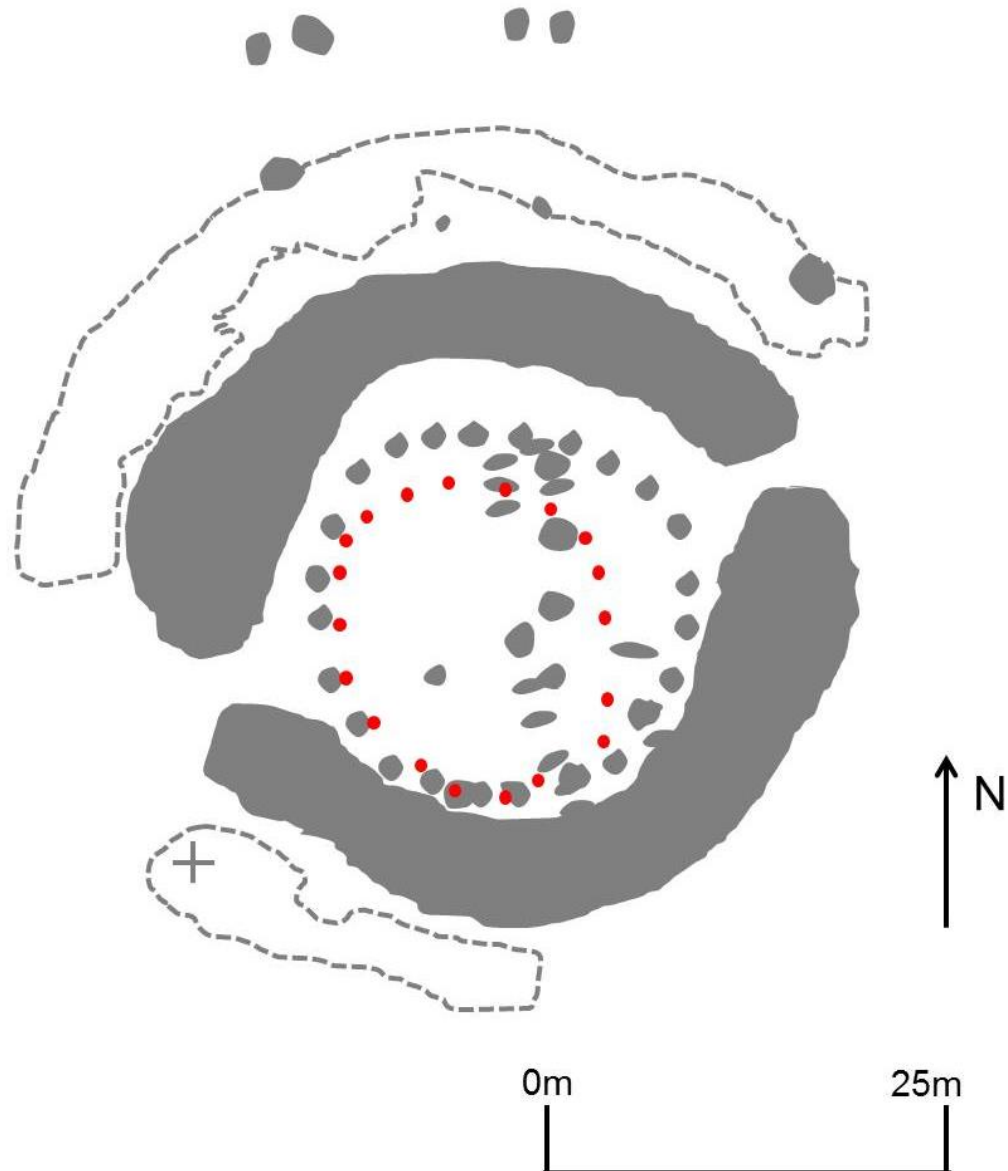


Figure 13 - the smaller timber setting at North Mains (redrawn after Barclay 2005:87, fig 8.8)

After the construction of the larger timber circle (fig. 14), the site was used for at least one burial. One of the cremation burials was sealed underneath the

henge bank, and therefore must pre-date the earthwork phase of the site (Barclay 1985: 125) indicating that this is very much a 'Bronze Age henge'. This burial has been dated to 2200-1910 BC (Barclay 2005: 86; Sheridan *et al.* 2002). If the timber posts had not been removed, it is possible that some of them might still have been standing by the time the burial took place a little to the south-west of the timber circle(s). Although the burial under the bank pre-dates the henge, it was deposited in this location after part of the site had already been enclosed by timber circles, but was positioned outside the area defined by the posts.

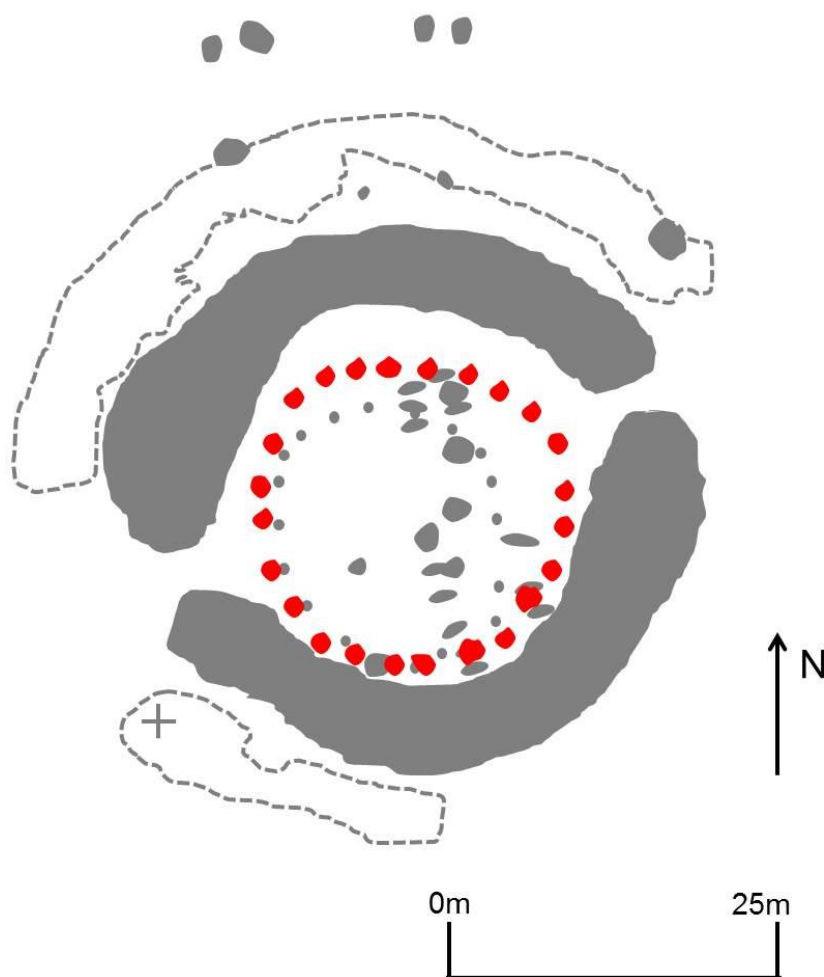


Figure 14 - the larger timber setting at North Mains (redrawn after Barclay 2005:87, fig 8.8)

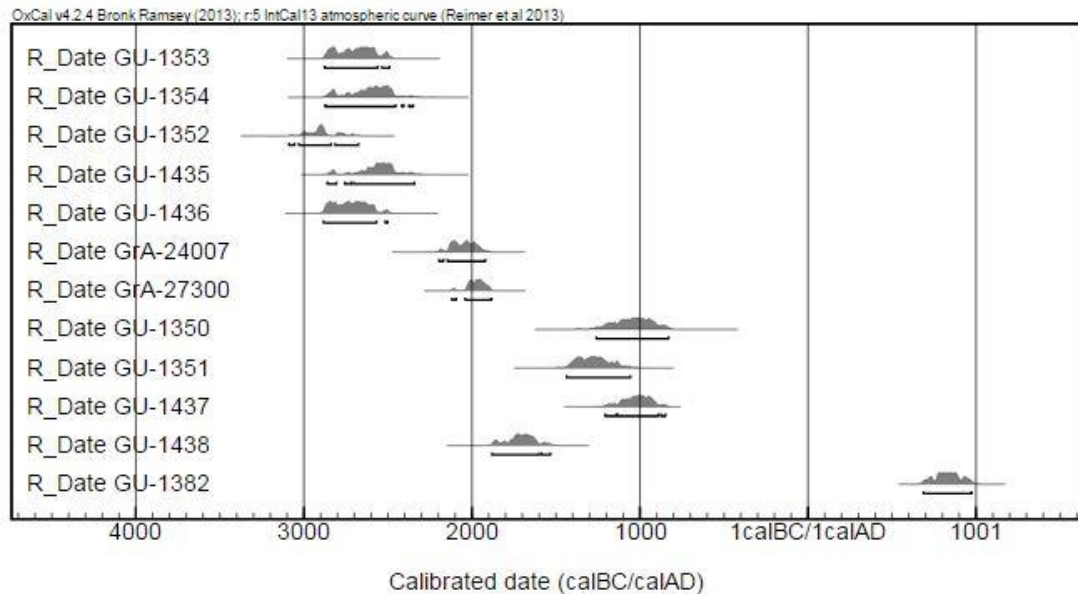
The long-established and well-recognised interpretation of the relationship between timber circles and henges is that where timber circles occur on the same site as a henge, the timber phase usually pre-dates the henge earthworks

(Gibson 2005). Alex Gibson argued that this was the case at North Mains, where the post-ramps used in the erection of the timbers were positioned so near to the edge of the ditch that it could be considered too difficult to build the timber circle if the henge ditch had already been dug. He suggests a sequence for North Mains where a timber circle is built on the site, possibly during the Middle Neolithic (*ibid.*: 45-46). This is then enclosed by the larger timber circle, constructed in the Late Neolithic, before the site is finally hinged in the Early Bronze Age (*ibid.*). This sequence is based on the dating of the burial to the Early Bronze Age, as referred to above, and suggests that the timber circles were built ‘perhaps up to several centuries earlier’ than the construction of the henge (Barclay 2005: 86-88).

**Table 3 radiocarbon dates for North Mains**

| <b>North Mains radiocarbon dates (Barclay 1983: 259; Scottish Radiocarbon Database)</b> |  |   |                          |  |
|---|--|---|--------------------------|--|
| Dates calibrated using OxCal 4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2014)                                    |  |   |                          |  |
| <i>Sample number</i>  | <i>Context/feature</i>                                     | <i>Material</i>                                   | <i>Uncalibrated Date</i> | <i>Calibrated date (95.4% probability)</i> |
| Timber circle A – primary packing   |  |   |                          |  |
| GU-1353   | A/7 – charcoal from primary packing of posthole            | <i>Oak</i>  | 4102±60 bp               | 2877-2492 cal BC                           |
| GU-1354   | A/5 – charcoal from primary packing of posthole            | <i>Oak</i>  | 4040±70 bp               | 2893-2351 cal BC                           |
| Timber circle A – middle fills  |  |   |                          |  |
| GU-1352   | A/7 – burnt plank from middle fill of posthole             | <i>Oak</i>  | 4280±60 bp               | 3089-2676 cal BC                           |
| GU-1435   | A/1 – charcoal from middle fill of posthole                | <i>Charcoal – species not specified in report</i> | 4015±65 bp               | 2861-2342 cal BC                           |
| GU-1436   | A/13 – charcoal from middle fill of posthole               | <i>Charcoal – species not specified in report</i> | 4130±60 bp               | 2884-2501 cal BC                           |
| Burials   |  |   |                          |  |
| GrA-24007   | Burial A – cremation burial sealed underneath henge bank   | <i>Bioapatite from cremated bone</i>              | 3665±45 bp               | 2196-1921 cal BC                           |
| GrA-27300   | Burial B – Adult female burial associated with Food Vessel | <i>Human bone</i>                                 | 3610±35 bp               | 2120-1885 cal BC                           |
| GU-1350   | F6 – pit with burning/cremation                            | <i>Burnt material</i>                             | 2855±85 bp               | 1260-832 cal BC                            |
| GU-1351   | F6 – pit with burning/cremation                            | <i>Burnt material</i>                             | 3035±70 bp               | 1436-1056 cal BC                           |
| GU-1437   | F5 – pit with burning/cremation                            | <i>Burnt material</i>                             | 2845±60 bp               | 1207-849 cal BC                            |
| Pit possibly associated with burning/deposition in the top of timber circle A           |  |   |                          |  |

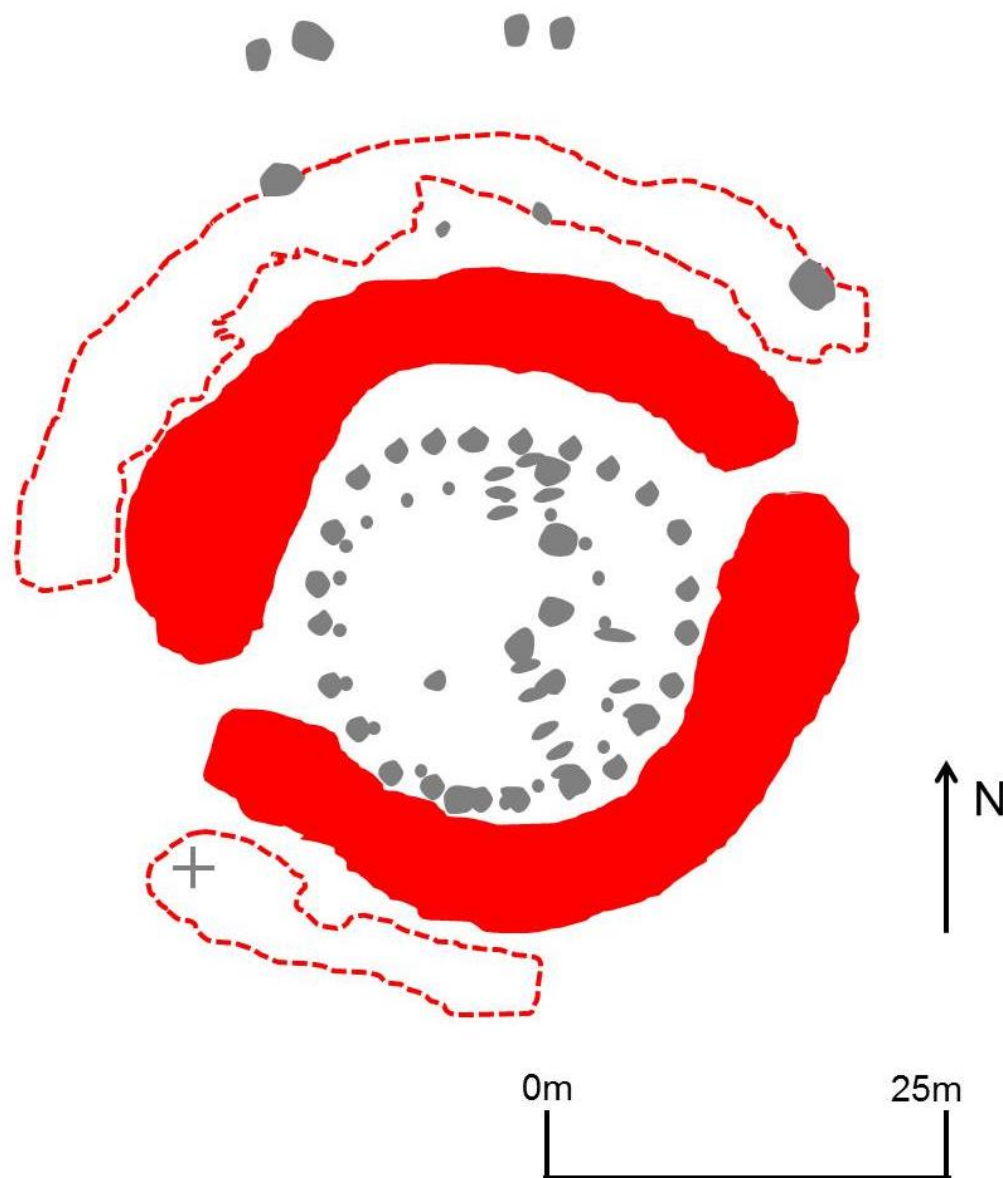
|                     |   |                      |            |                  |
|---------------------|---|----------------------|------------|------------------|
| GU-1438             | F33 – pit possibly associated with burning/deposition in top of timber circle A | <i>Not specified</i> | 3400±60 bp | 1881-1534 cal BC |
| Long grave cemetery |   |                      |            |                  |
| GU-1382             | Long Grave 3  | <i>Human bone</i>    | 1190±60 bp | cal AD 687-974   |



**Figure 15 - plot showing radiocarbon dates for North Mains**

### ***Henging***

At some point after the construction of the timber circles (and possibly the removal of some of the posts), and after the deposition of the cremation burial around 2000 cal BC, a henge was constructed on the site. The bank sealed the cremation burial, while the ditch and bank were constructed concentrically to the larger of the timber circles, replicating its slightly elliptical plan (fig. 16), indicating that whatever the time gap between the construction of the timber and earthwork enclosures, the former must have been evident in one form or another by the time the site was henged.



**Figure 16 - henge earthworks at North Mains (redrawn after Barclay 2005:87, fig 8.8)**

During the early 2nd millennium BC, there was an episode of burning on the site, which Barclay (1983: 126) suggested occurred while the timbers of one of the timber circles were rotting. He considered that this happened during the same phase of use of the site when the henge earthworks were constructed. If this is the case, then it suggests that some or all of the timbers were still standing when the henge monument was built around them. The burning might also have been used as a method of clearing the site prior to the construction of the earthworks.

As noted, the date of the cremation burial underneath the bank acts as a *terminus post quem* for henge construction, suggesting that the henge at North Mains was constructed during the Early Bronze Age, a comparatively ‘late’ date according to traditional henge chronologies, but nonetheless a date which is consistent with other henge monuments in Scotland, including Pict’s Knowe and Forteviot 1 (*cf.* Barclay 2005; Noble & Brophy 2011a).

### ***Resumption of funerary activity: later burials at North Mains***

After the construction of the henge earthworks at North Mains, the site continued to be used, and became a focus for burials during the early-mid second millennium bc (Barclay 1983: 126). Some of these burials were associated with pottery, including Beaker, Food Vessels and cinerary urns (*ibid.*). During this period, the site was also used for what the excavator described as ‘ritual/domestic activity’, including the deposition of ‘domestic or ritual debris’ such as burnt bone, charcoal and pottery, in some of the hollows formed by the decay of the timber circle (Barclay 1983: 133-4). Details of the artefacts found at North Mains are shown in table 4. The location of the burials inside the henge earthworks, on top of decaying timbers, and in one case inserted into the northern arc of the henge bank, suggest deliberate interest in placing the burials in places resonant of, and indeed directly in reference to, the physical traces of earlier activity on the site. Alex Gibson (2005: 75) suggests that the timber circles may have been visible only as ‘a ring of depressions where the posts had once stood’ by the time the Beaker and Food Vessel burials were deposited at North Mains.

**Table 4 material culture from North Mains**

| <b>North Mains (Barclay 1983)</b> |                                       |                  |      |          |   |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------|------|----------|---|
| <i>Date</i>                       | <i>Uses and structures</i>            | <i>Artefacts</i> |      |          | <i>Comments and condition</i>   |
|                                   |                                       | Material         | Type | Quantity |   |
| 3rd millennium BC                 | pit-digging (3 pits); ard cultivation | -                | -    | -        | No finds – some charcoal fragments in pits  |
| 3350-2200 cal BC                  | timber settings                       | pottery          | ?    | 5 sherds | Sherds/fragments from the top of postholes. Abraded fragments/crumbs, probably body sherds. One piece scorched. |
| 2200-1910 cal BC                  | cremation burial                      | -                | -    | -        | -   |
| After 2200-1910 cal BC            | henge                                 | -                | -    | -        | -   |



|                             |  |            |                                  |    |  |
|-----------------------------|--|------------|----------------------------------|----|--|
| early-mid 2nd millennium BC | burials inside henge, in henge bank and on top of decaying timbers | pottery    | Food Vessel                      | 4  | 2 complete Food Vessels, accompanying burials. Another represented by 6 sherds and 3 fragments. The fourth complete apart from base. |
|                             |  |            | Beaker                           | 1  | Mostly complete, apart from parts of lower body.   |
|                             |  |            | Collared Urn                     | 2  | Both in fragments when found, but almost the whole pot represented in each case.   |
|                             |  | stone      | struck stone                     | 7  | One flake of chert. The others inner chips, inner flakes and retouched pieces, some burnt.   |
| early-mid 2nd millennium BC | burning; deposition in hollows of decayed timber circle            | pottery    | possible Early Neolithic pottery | 2  | Tiny fragments. Abraded.   |
|                             |  |            | Beaker                           | 8  | From 4 different postholes. Some sherds decorated.   |
|                             |  | baked clay | possible daub                    | 12 | Fragments.   |
|                             |  | quartz     | inner chunk                      | 1  |  |
| mid-late 1st millennium AD  | long grave cemetery  | burnt bone | -                                | -  | Fragments in fills of 3 graves – tiny quantities, probably accidental inclusion.   |

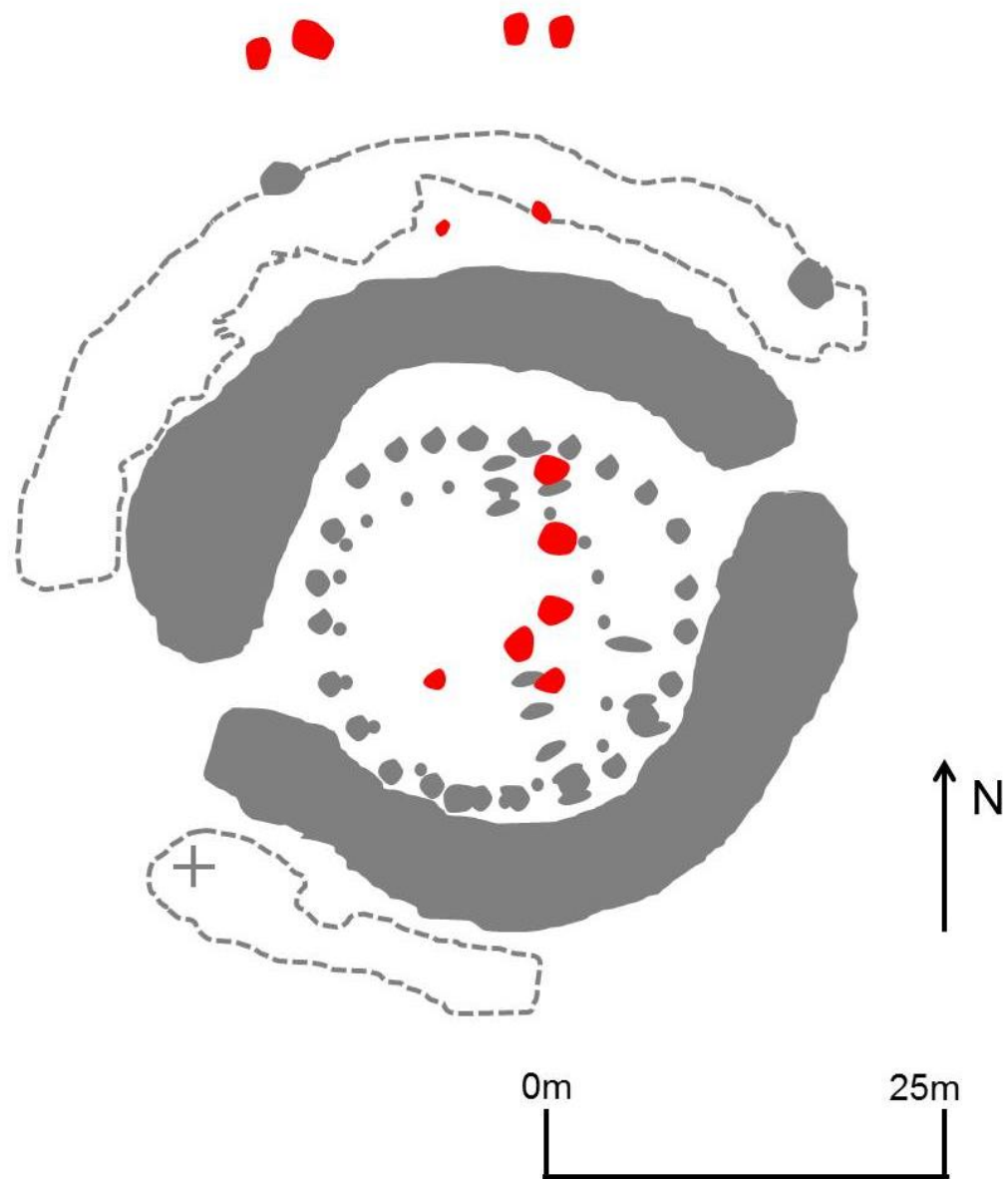


Figure 17- 2nd millennium BC burials at North Mains (redrawn after Barclay 2005:87, fig 8.8)

Following this, the area to the north of the henge was used as a pyre site, and for burial, during the late second millennium BC (Barclay 1983: 126; fig. 17). The henge site was later used again for burial millennia later, in the form of a long grave cemetery inside the enclosure, dating to the mid-late first millennium AD (*ibid.*: 126; fig. 18).

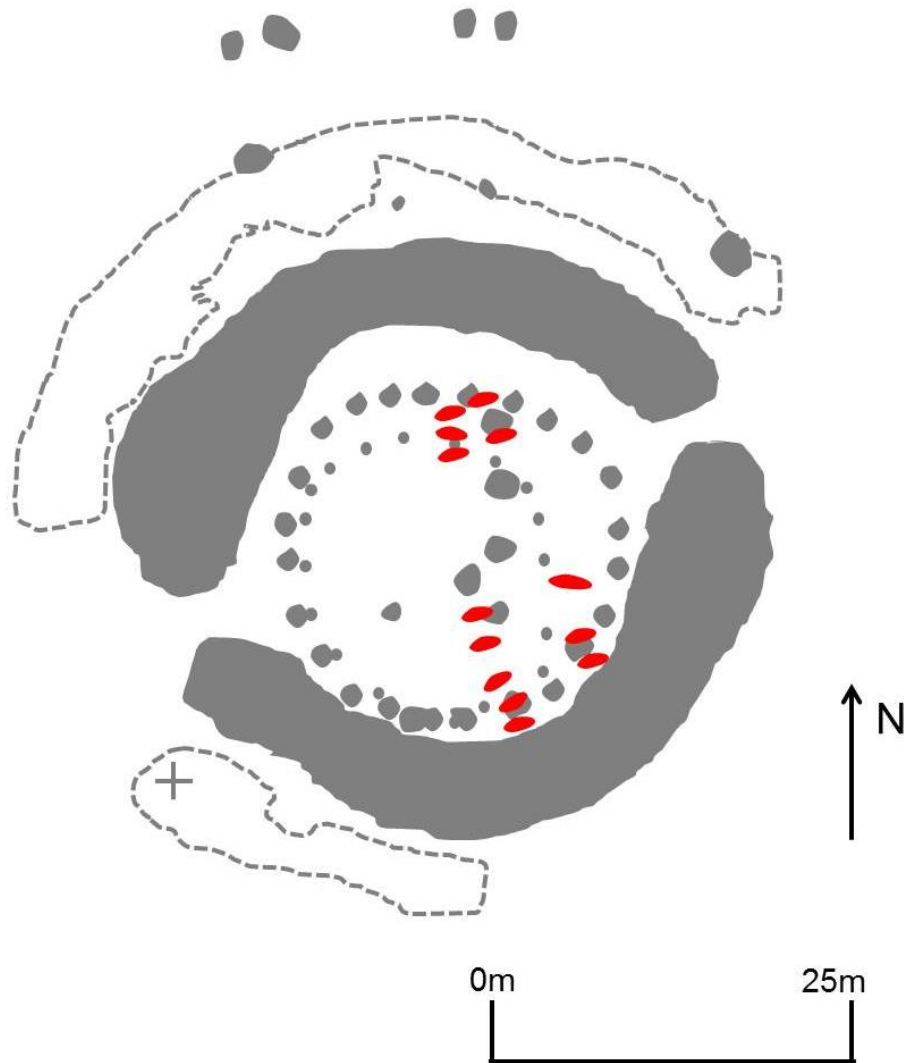


Figure 18 - first millennium AD long grave cemetery inside North Mains henge (redrawn after Barclay 2005:87, fig 8.8)

### ***Summary of North Mains biography***

At North Mains, archaeologically-visible activity began at the site during the third millennium BC, when the site was cultivated and pits were dug there. Later, emphasis changed to enclosure, with the construction of two timber circles on the site, one enclosing the other. A cremation burial was placed to the south-west of the timber enclosures. After the burial, when some of the timbers had started to rot *in situ*, there was a fire at the site. Possibly around the same time, a henge monument was constructed to enclose the earlier (by this time possibly decaying or partially burnt) timber circles. The henge site was then used as a burial site during the early-mid 2nd millennium BC. Despite this change

in the way the site was used, the burials were placed in locations which related to the earlier uses of the site - inside the henge, in the henge bank, and amidst the rotting timber circle.

### **Site biography 3: Leadketty**

The mini-henge at Leadketty, Perth and Kinross was initially discovered through aerial photographic survey, which identified the site as a series of cropmarks. The site was excavated in 2012 as part of the Strathearn Environs and Royal Forteviot (SERF) project (see Driscoll *et al.* 2010). The henge at Leadketty is located within a large palisaded enclosure, and forms part of a larger cropmark complex. The Leadketty cropmark complex comprises various other features, including ring ditches and numerous pits, and some additional hengiform monuments. Although the excavated henge monument at Leadketty was small, about 12-13 metres in diameter (Brophy *et al.* 2012: 25), it is likely that it was nonetheless a multi-phase site which, in common with many larger henge monuments, developed and was remodelled over time.

#### ***Place-making: timber structures and settlement during the Late Neolithic***

The site at Leadketty is located on a south-facing terrace slope, on a terrace above the Duncrub Burn (Brophy *et al.* 2012: 3). It is on the south side of the Earn valley. Little to no dateable material was recovered during the excavation of the mini-henge at Leadketty. However it is argued here that the earliest archaeologically-visible activity on the site of the henge consisted of timber structures. These included two 'post and slot' features, consisting of linear slots with a rounded post-hole like feature at one end (fig. 19). The northernmost of the post-and-slot features was cut by the henge ditch, making it demonstrably earlier than the henge (fig. 20). These features have been interpreted as possible structural elements of a Neolithic building, possibly of post and plank or wattle construction (Brophy *et al.* 2012: 29-31). They are similar in appearance to some features found about 40 metres to the south-east of the henge, which were associated with what has been interpreted as a Late Neolithic building, possibly a house, associated with Grooved Ware pottery (Brophy *et al.* 2012). The house was also of timber construction, with four central postholes, and the

entrance defined by a 'porch' (*ibid.*). It seems that the area to the east of the mini-henge may therefore have been used for settlement during the Later Neolithic, before the henge was constructed.



Figure 19 - post-and-slot feature (Photo: SERF)

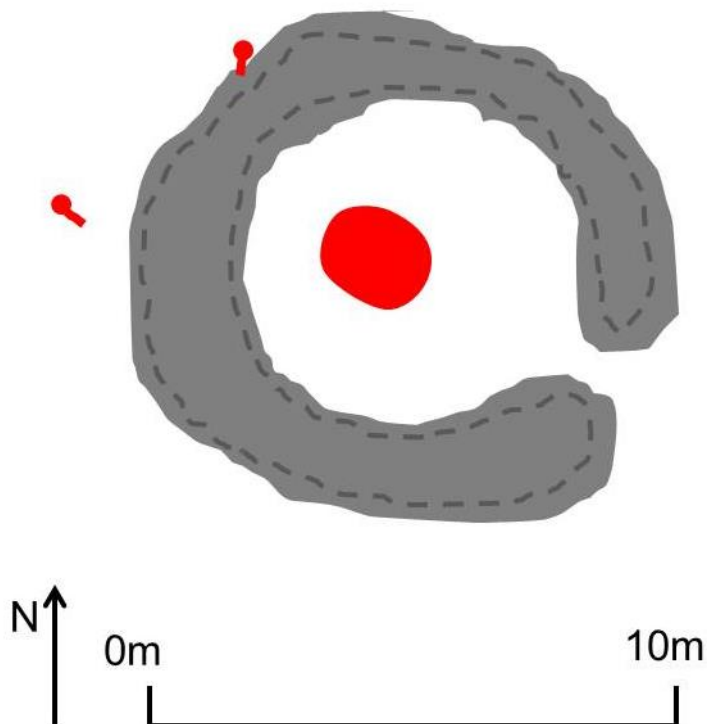


Figure 20 - sketch plan of Leadketty, indicating approximate position of post-and-slot structures to the west of the henge, and large central posthole

The large palisaded enclosure, which encloses both the mini-henge and the four-poster building/house, has also been dated to the Later Neolithic. Some of the postholes of the palisaded enclosure were found to contain Grooved Ware pottery, as well as undecorated pottery, flint tools and charred hazelnut shells (Brophy et al 2012: 40). The palisaded enclosure is therefore broadly contemporary with the settlement, and it is possible that people were living inside the palisaded enclosure during the Late Neolithic (*ibid.*: 44). If the structural timber features found near the henge are associated with this Late Neolithic settlement, then it seems plausible that the palisaded enclosure, like the other timber elements of the complex, pre-dates the mini-henge. This was certainly the case at the nearby monument complex at Forteviot, where the timber monuments and palisaded enclosure are earlier than the earthwork monuments built inside them. Forteviot is discussed in the next chapter.

Within the area enclosed by the henge ditch was evidence of a timber monument of a different character, and on a much larger scale, than the relatively ephemeral post-and-slot structures. Within the mini-henge ditch, located off-centre within the interior, was a massive posthole, approximately 2.45 metres in diameter and 1.48 metres deep (figs. 21 and 22; Brophy et al. 2012: 22). On the basis of these dimensions, and the distribution of packing material, the posthole could have supported a large post, between 0.57 and 0.97 metres wide, and up to 5.4 metres long, potentially standing 4 metres above ground (*ibid.*: 24). Such a post would weigh in the region of 6 tonnes (*ibid.*). Since the internal area enclosed by the henge was small, only some 8 metres across, accessible by a narrow entrance causeway less than a metre across, it is likely that such a large and heavy post would have to be manoeuvred into position and erected before the construction of the henge earthworks.



Figure 21 - large posthole in interior of Leadketty (Photo: SERF)

There was no evidence to suggest that the enormous post rotted *in situ*, rather some disturbance of the packing stones suggested that it had either collapsed or been deliberately removed perhaps to be re-used elsewhere (Brophy et al. 2012: 24). Again, the potential large size of the post make it more feasible that the post was removed before the mini-henge was constructed, suggesting the henge may have enclosed a place where a post *used* to stand. If however the post was still standing when the henge ditch was excavated, it would have occupied most of the available space inside the henge. This may have served to further restrict movement in what was already a small space.

### ***Henging and re-henging: the henge ditch and recuts***

The mini-henge at Leadketty enclosed only a small area. The internal space demarcated by the ditch, which was sub-circular in plan, was only some 8 metres x 5.8 metres. The ditch was wide, varying between 3.5 - 4 metres wide (fig. 22); taken together with a putative external bank, the henge earthworks were completely disproportionate to the space enclosed, a henge trait. The space inside the henge was accessible via a single entrance on the south-east, which was extremely narrow, the causeway between the ditch terminals being

less than a metre across (Brophy et al 2012: 25; fig. 23). No evidence for any activity was found within the small area enclosed within the henge other than the huge posthole described above.

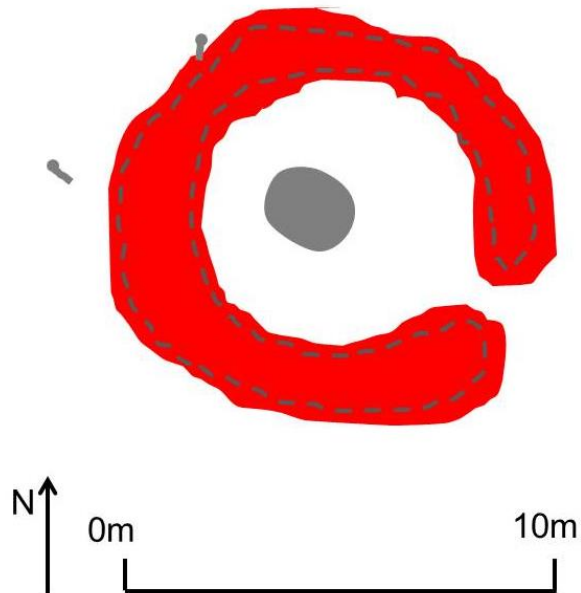


Figure 22 - plan of Leadketty henge ditch

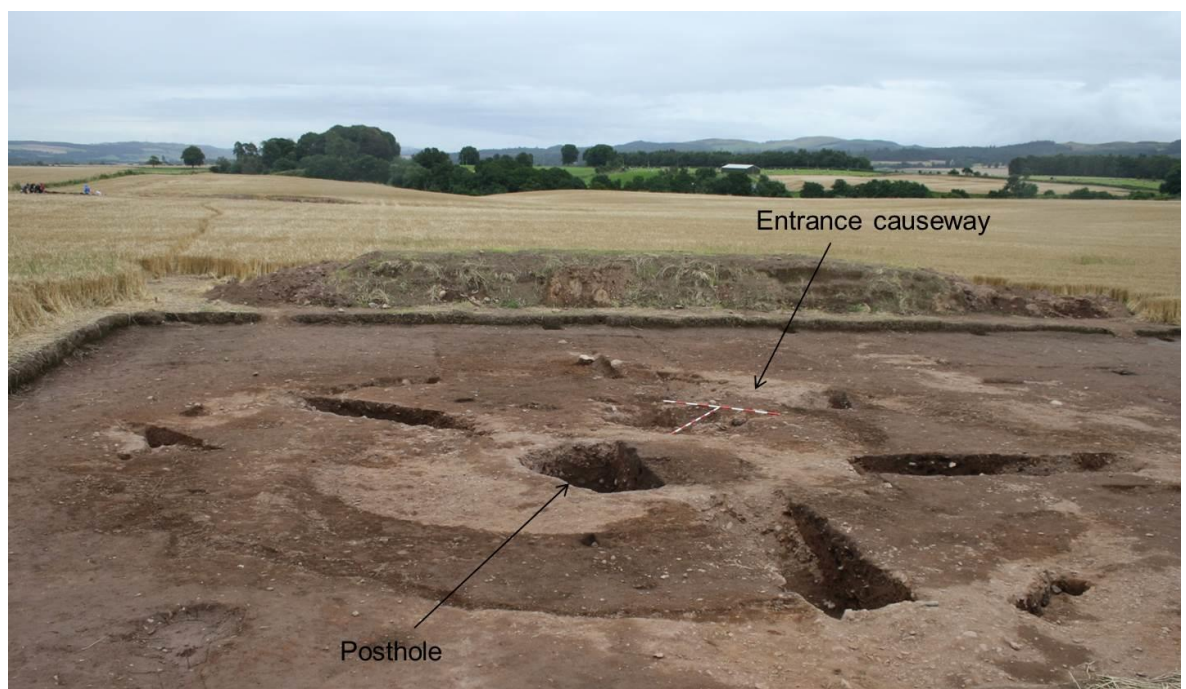


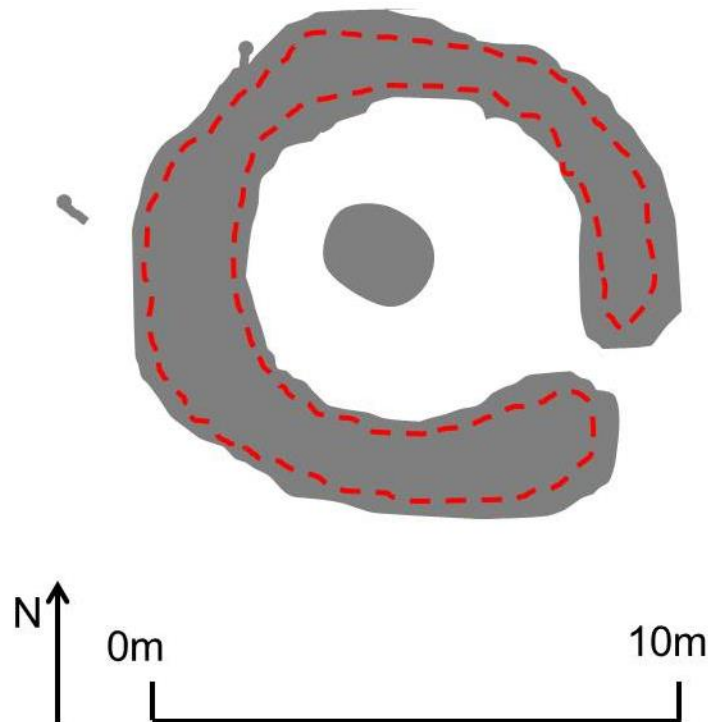
Figure 23 - Leadketty mini-henge (Photo: SERF)



After its construction, the ditch at Leadketty was allowed to fill in naturally for a time. When it was partially silted however, the ditch was subsequently recut (figs. 24 and 25). The recut ditch was narrower than the original ditch, but equally as deep. It seems that the henge ditch was recut a second time in some places, but this was not evident everywhere on its complete circuit. This third incarnation of the ditch may in fact have taken the form of a series of pits or postholes, and could be seen as relating to the modification of the site, rather than maintenance of the ditch (*ibid.*: 25, 31). Although little or no dating evidence was recovered from the mini-henge at Leadketty, it is morphologically somewhat similar to mini-henges found in the north and north-east of Scotland, which recent excavations have demonstrated to be of mid-Bronze Age date (e.g. Pullyhour, Caithness; Lairg, Sutherland - see Bradley 2011). Other small henges are also found in Strathearn, including the site at Moncreiffe (Stewart 1985). Like Leadketty, the site at Moncreiffe had a long biography of use, including the construction of a timber setting, and also a complex sequence of two subsequent stone settings (*ibid.*). Two mini-henges were also excavated in 1988 at Belhie (Ralston 1988). One of the Belhie mini-henges was associated with cremation burials, while Beaker sherds were retrieved from the ditch of the other (Ralston 1988: 27; Brophy and Noble 2012a: 31). A mini-henge was also found just to the south of the larger Henge 1 at Forteviot (Brophy and Noble 2012a: 30). Leadketty could therefore be seen as part of a tradition of building very small henges in Strathearn, as they all share similarities. A Bronze Age date for the mini-henge at Leadketty would be consistent with the chronology suggested above, in which the mini-henge post-dates Late Neolithic settlement and timber structures at the site.



Figure 24 - section of western arc of ditch, showing recut (Photo: SERF)



**Figure 25 - sketch plan indicating the recut henge ditch at Leadketty (outlined in red). Note that the extent of the recut is putative; during excavation the recut was only visible in section, not in plan, and may not have comprised a full circuit of the ditch**

### ***Mounding/sealing/blocking the henge***

Following the modification of the mini-henge by re-cutting the ditch, the site at Leadketty was later altered again. The latest phases of activity on the site of the mini-henge probably involved blocking the entrance and sealing the interior of the henge, probably by constructing a mound of re-deposited boulder clay over the henge. Perhaps more compelling evidence for the mounding over of the Leadketty mini-henge is the position of the post-medieval plough furrows immediately to the north and south of the henge, which alter slightly from their parallel course at this point, and splay out to pass either side of the henge. This suggests that there were extant upstanding earthworks covering the henge at this period (Brophy et al 2012: 30). The re-cutting of the ditch might be contemporary with the mounding of the site, as material from the mound may have been obtained from the silted ditches. In this way, mounding the henge could be understood not only as a way of sealing the site and preventing any access to (or sight of) the interior, but is also a way of incorporating material

from earlier phases of the monument into its later reincarnation as a mounded site - an idea which will be discussed below.

Again, due to the fact that the mini-henge was evidently kept 'clean' and therefore was lacking in dateable material, it is impossible to say precisely when the re-cutting and mounding of the henge took place. A summary of the material culture from Leadketty is shown in table 5. It is possible that mounding may have been one of the final phases of remodelling of henge sites (Brophy and Noble 2012a). Some deposits of burnt bone and charcoal were present in the post-medieval plough soil which formed the upper fill of the ditch and the central posthole. It is possible that these may be disturbed cremation deposits, although this is not certain, as only small amounts of bone were recovered (Brophy et al 2012: 27-8). If they do represent the remains of cremation deposits however, it may suggest the use of the henge site for burial - perhaps with cremated remains being deposited in the mound which covered the site, although this is a conjectural interpretation based on known sequences at other henge monuments.

**Table 5 material culture from Leadketty**

| <b>Leadketty (Brophy et al. 2012)</b> |  |           |                       |           |   |
|---------------------------------------|--|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|---|
| Date                                  | Uses and structures                                  | Artefacts |                       |           | Comments and condition                                  |
|                                       |  | Material  | Type                  | Quantity  |   |
| Late Neolithic                        | palisaded enclosure                                  | pottery   | Grooved Ware          | 3 sherds  | Sherds from postholes.                                  |
|                                       |  |           | ?                     | 32 sherds | Undiagnostic body sherds.                               |
|                                       |  | flint     | worked flint – flakes | 37        | Including some burnt flint.                             |
|                                       |  | hazelnut  | burnt shell           | 1         | -   |
|                                       |  | clay      | daub?                 | 1         | Possible fragment of daub.                              |
| Late Neolithic                        | putative timber building                             | pottery   | Grooved Ware          | 8 sherds  | 1 identified as rim sherd.                              |
|                                       |  | pottery   | ?                     | 99 sherds | Predominantly body sherds; 5 rim sherds, 2 base sherds. |
|                                       |  | flint     | flakes                | 7         | -   |
|                                       |  | clay      | daub?                 | 1         | Possible fragment of daub.                              |
|                                       | large upright post                                   | lithic    | flint                 | 1         | 1 piece of flint debitage from upper fill of posthole.  |
|                                       | post collapses or is removed                         | -         | -                     | -         | -   |
| Mid Bronze Age                        | hanging  | -         | -                     | -         | -   |
|                                       | abandonment/disuse? – henge ditch allowed to silt up | -         | -                     | -         | -   |

|  |  |   |   |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|
|  | partial recutting of henge ditch               | - | - | - | - |
|  | access to henge blocked, construction of mound | - | - | - | - |

### ***Summary of Leadketty biography***

It is suggested here that the sequence for the mini-henge at Leadketty began with timber structures, possibly including a building or house, inside a large palisaded enclosure. An enormous timber post was erected near to the building (although the relative chronology of these events is unknown), and was subsequently removed, possibly before the mini-henge ditch was dug, although this is not certain. A small henge was constructed around the site of the large post. It may have been constructed as a way of commemorating the earlier timber structures at the site. Some time later, after the henge ditch had begun to be filled, the ditch was recut. The ditch was recut a second time, again after a period of being allowed to fill in. Finally, the henge was mounded over, meaning that later ploughing had to veer around the edges of the henge. It is possible that material for the mound was obtained from the recutting of the infilled ditch. The narrow entrance of the henge may have been blocked with clay as part of the mounding over of the site. Some cremation burials may have been deposited on the site of the mini-henge.

### **Site biography 4: Pict's Knowe**

The henge site at Pict's Knowe, Dumfries and Galloway was excavated in 1994-1997 by Julian Thomas as part of a wider campaign of investigating Neolithic monuments in SW Scotland (Thomas 2007a). The henge had been significantly damaged by recent animal activity: the interior, and inner edge of the bank, had been entirely denuded of turf due to rabbit burrowing; and the ditch deposits had been truncated by cattle walking over the site to drink water from the waterlogged ditches (Thomas 2007b: 44). Despite this, the site yielded evidence suggesting multi-phase use over a long period.

### ***Place-making: Early Neolithic activity at Pict's Knowe***

Pict's Knowe is located on a low sandy knoll, on a flat valley floor of a small stream, Crook's Pow (Tipping et al. 2007: 6). The knoll is located in the centre of the valley, and the Nith Estuary is 2km to the east of the site (*ibid.*). According to environmental and pollen analysis of the area around Pict's Knowe, the valley in which the site is located had been worked for more than 3000 years before the henge monument was built there (Tipping et al. 2007: 35). Some of the earliest archaeologically visible activity on the henge site was represented by Early Neolithic pottery. This included carinated and S-profile pottery, thought to date from c.3900-3300 BC, found underneath the henge bank (Peterson and Roberts 2007: 132; fig. 26). The material culture found at Pict's Knowe is detailed in table 6. Early Neolithic activity at the site was also attested by a scatter of pottery sherds and lithics underneath the southern bank of the henge (fig. 27; Thomas 2007a: 144). It is possible that some of this material was associated with pits or possibly tree-throws, possibly representing temporary structures on the site (*ibid.*) and woodland clearance. Much of the pottery was extremely abraded, and some of the sherds were very small fragments (see table 6). Partly this was due to the acidity of the soil; but the very fragmented condition of the pottery suggests the possibility that for a long episode of their lives, the pot sherds had been lying around on the surface of this sandy knoll. In summary, Early Neolithic activity at the site included people visiting the site and depositing material in an area which would later be enclosed by the henge; but Thomas notes that Early Neolithic activity at the site was not necessarily long-lasting (Thomas 2007b: 56).



Figure 26 - rim fragment of S-profile Carinated bowl (1) from Pict's Knowe (Source: Peterson and Roberts 2007: 132, Fig. 14.1)

Table 6 finds from Pict's Knowe

| Pict's Knowe (Crone <i>et al.</i> 2007; Driel-Murray 2007; Peterson and Roberts 2007; Thomas 2007b) |   |   |   |                           |  |                                   |
|---|---|---|---|---------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Date  | Uses and structures   | Artefacts   |   |                           | Comments and condition   |                                   |
|   |   | Material  | Type  | Quantity                  |  |                                   |
| c.3900-3300 BC  | Temporary wooden structures? Woodland clearance? Pit-digging and deposition; deposition in tree-throws. | Pottery   | Carinated; S-profile                        | over 423 sherds/fragments | Pottery extremely fragmented and abraded because of acidic soil. Mostly body sherds, but also some rim fragments. Underneath henge bank. |                                   |
|   |   | Lithics – chert, pitchstone and devitrified glassy volcanic rock. | bladelets (including some broken bladelets) | 13                        |  | From layer underneath henge bank. |
|   |   |   | chunks                                      | 8                         |  |                                   |
|   |   |   | chips                                       | 9                         |  |                                   |
|   |   |   | broken pieces of projectile points          | 2                         |  |                                   |
|   |   |   | flake                                       | 39                        |  |                                   |
| leaf-shaped point   | 2   |   |   |                           |  |                                   |
| 2450-1900 BC  | Peat accumulates on the site  | -   | -   | -                         | -  |                                   |
| after 2450-1900 BC  | Henging   | pottery   | Grooved Ware                                | 3 sherds                  | Badly abraded. Possible Grooved Ware, but undecorated. 1 possible rim sherd. From lower fill of henge                                    |                                   |

|   |   |         |  |                          |   |
|---|---|---------|--|--------------------------|---|
|   |   |         |  |                          | ditch.  |
|   | Burial  | pottery | Collared Urn   | 259 fragments and sherds | Destroyed urn – very badly abraded. Associated with cremated bone – possibly a cremation deposited in urn – maybe animal bone rather than human.  |
| ?end of third/beginning of second millennium BC | Henge interior blocked/mounded?   | -       | -  | -                        | -   |
| 120BC – AD 240                                  | Henge ditch recut, bank refurbished. Timber platform constructed over ditch. Woodworking and metalworking. Deposition in ditch. | wood    | woodworking debris; offcuts and woodchips; debris from wood-turning; roundwood; pegs | 339 pieces               | Included objects made of oak, alder, ash, hazel, birch and willow. Waterlogged.   |
|   |   | ceramic | crucible   | 10 sherds                | Used for copper alloy working. Abraded – fabric of sherds only held together by slag.   |
|   |   |         | lamp   | 1                        | Possible lamp.  |
|   |   | leather | Roman shoe sole  | 1                        | Left inner and middle sole of Roman shoe. Worn – foot imprint visible, damage to toe. Size suggests would fit adult male. From south terminal of recut ditch, found amongst woodworking debris. |

Also pre-dating the henge at Pict's Knowe was a curious feature consisting of an oval pit and two large post-holes. The posts had subsequently been removed from their postholes, and the pit and postholes were covered by a mound (Thomas 2007a: 145). This feature pre-dated peat growth on the site, and therefore could be dated to sometime between 4000 and 2400 BC (*ibid.*). The pit/posts and mound also therefore pre-dated the henge earthworks, but were located on the axis of the henge entrance (fig. 27; *ibid.*) suggesting that this feature had an enduring significance.

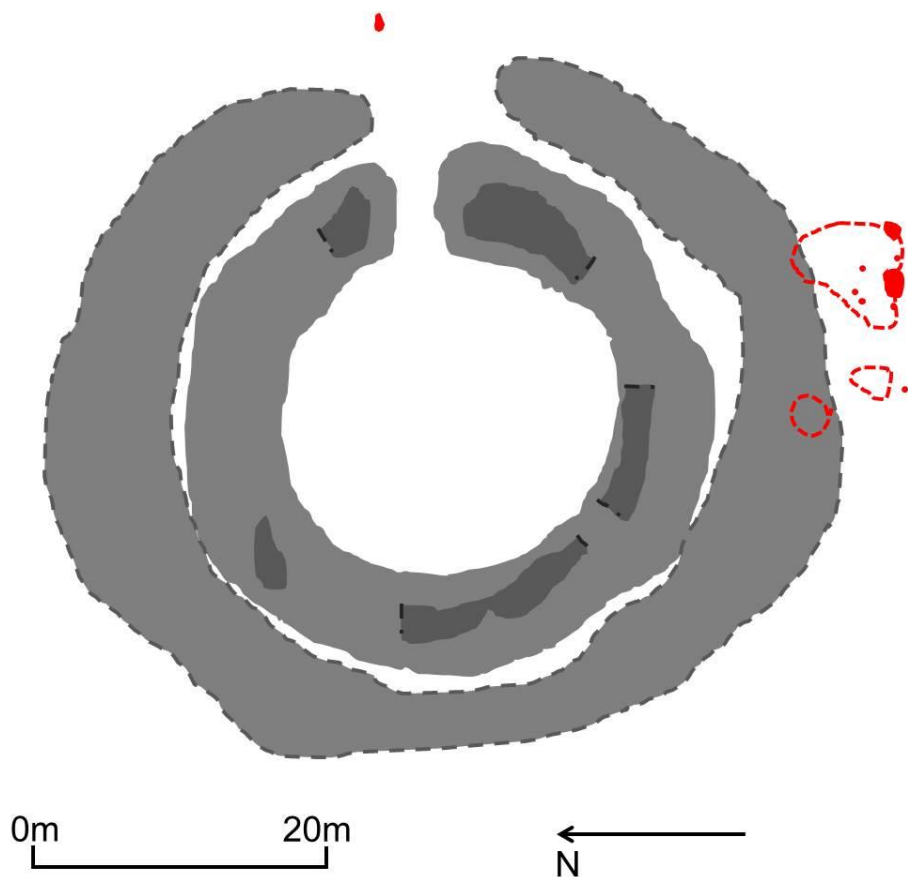


Figure 27 - plan of place-making activities at Pict's Knowe. The oval mound is to the east of the henge entrance. The distribution of pottery sherds is shown to the south of the henge. (Redrawn after Thomas 2007b figs. 4.1, 4.8 and 4.12)

### ***The henge monument***

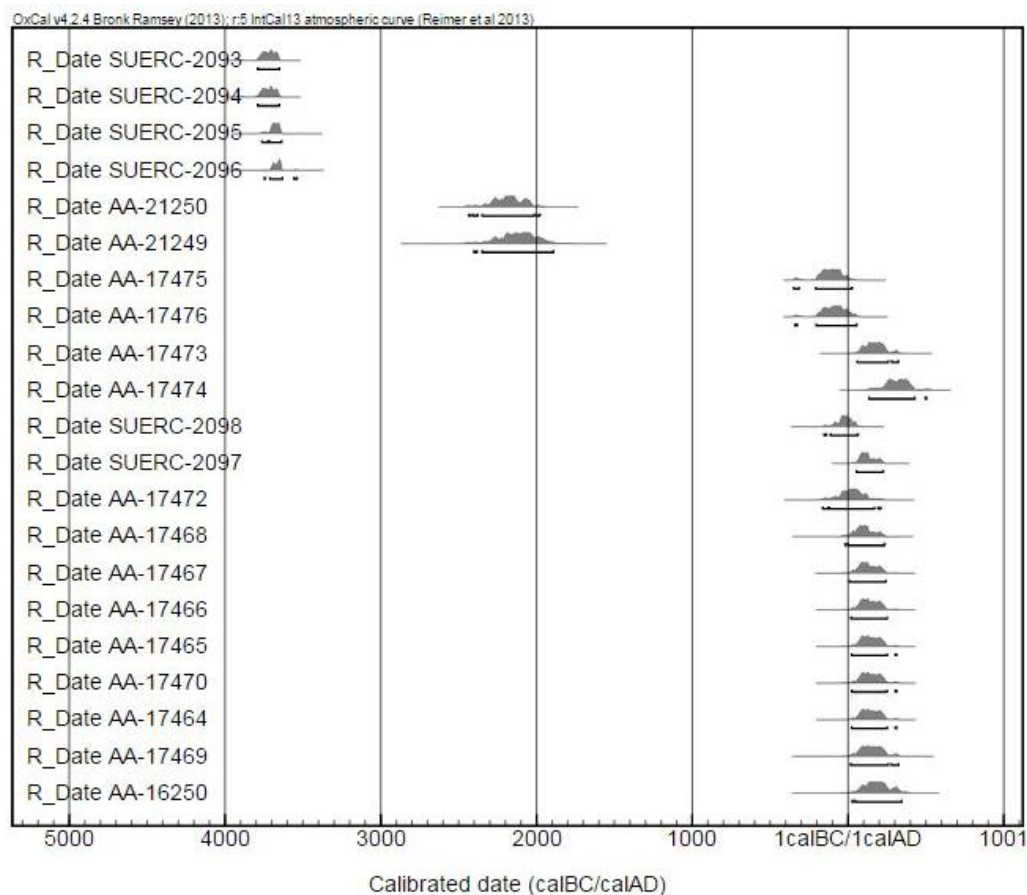
The henge at Pict's Knowe was constructed after a period of peat accumulation on the site. Dating the peat sealed underneath the henge bank therefore provided *terminus post quem* dates for the initial construction of the henge earthworks to 2452-1900 cal BC, and 2454-2030 cal BC (Thomas 2007a: 145). Radiocarbon dates for Pict's Knowe are shown in table 7 and figure 28. Later Neolithic pottery was found on the site, including one possible (and potentially very late) Grooved Ware vessel from the primary phase of use of the henge (*ibid.*: 146). Despite extensive later remodelling and re-cutting of the henge earthworks, it therefore seems plausible that there had been Later Neolithic activity on the site at Pict's Knowe; although based on the radiocarbon dates for the pre-henge peat it is more likely that the henge earthworks date to the Chalcolithic or Early Bronze Age (Barclay 2005: 91).



**Table 7 radiocarbon dates for Pict's Knowe**

| <b>Pict's Knowe radiocarbon dates (Ashmore 2007)</b> |   |                       |                          |  |
|--|---|-----------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Dates calibrated using OxCal 4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2014) |   |                       |                          |  |
| <i>Sample number</i>                                 | <i>Context</i>  | <i>Material</i>       | <i>Uncalibrated Date</i> | <i>Calibrated date (95.4% probability)</i> |
| Early Neolithic pit – sealed under henge bank        |   |                       |                          |  |
| SUERC-2093   | Charcoal from pit (fill 6270) sealed under henge bank.                                  | <i>Alder</i>          | 4945±35 bp               | 3791-3652 cal BC                           |
| SUERC-2094   | Charcoal from pit (fill 6471) sealed under henge bank.                                  | <i>Alder</i>          | 4945±35 bp               | 3791-3652 cal BC                           |
| SUERC-2095   | Charred hazelnut shell from pit (fill 6725) sealed under henge bank.                    | <i>Hazelnut shell</i> | 4900±35 bp               | 3763-3638 cal BC                           |
| SUERC-2096   | Charcoal from pit (fill 6725) sealed under henge bank.                                  | <i>Hazel</i>          | 4875±35 bp               | 3748-3538 cal BC                           |
| Peat layer underlying henge bank                     |   |                       |                          |  |
| AA-21250   | Peat layer which underlies henge bank. Date from top of peat layer.                     | <i>Peat</i>           | 3760±60 bp               | 2436-1979 cal BC                           |
| AA-21249   | Peat layer which underlies henge bank. Date from bottom of peat layer.                  | <i>Peat</i>           | 3715±80 bp               | 2401-1891 cal BC                           |
| Silting of primary ditch                             |   |                       |                          |  |
| AA-17475   | Wood from silting layer (285) in bottom of primary ditch.                               | <i>Wood</i>           | 2085±50 bp               | 349 cal BC – cal AD 25                     |
| AA-17476   | Wood from fill (123) of primary ditch.  | <i>Wood</i>           | 2065±55 bp               | 342 cal BC – cal AD 56                     |
| AA-17473   | Wood from silted fill of primary ditch.   | <i>Wood</i>           | 1845±50 bp               | cal AD 60-324                              |
| AA-17474   | Charred wood from silted fill of primary ditch.   | <i>Wood</i>           | 1715±60 bp               | cal AD 135-504                             |
| Capping layer within henge bank                      |   |                       |                          |  |
| SUERC-2098   | Charcoal from 'capping' layer within henge bank. Possibly disturbed by animal activity? | <i>Hazel</i>          | 2020±35 bp               | 153 cal BC – cal AD 63                     |
| SUERC-2097   | Charcoal from 'capping' layer in henge bank. Possibly disturbed by animal activity?     | <i>Oak</i>            | 1885±35 bp               | cal AD 55-226                              |
| Recut of henge ditch and woodworking activity        |   |                       |                          |  |
| AA-17472   | Wood from secondary recut of ditch.   | <i>Hazel</i>          | 1970±65 bp               | 163 cal BC – cal AD 210                    |
| AA-17468   | Wood from recut of ditch.   | <i>Hazel</i>          | 1905±50 bp               | 19 cal BC – cal AD 235                     |
| AA-17467   | Wood from recut of ditch.   | <i>Wood</i>           | 1885±50 bp               | cal AD 9-244                               |

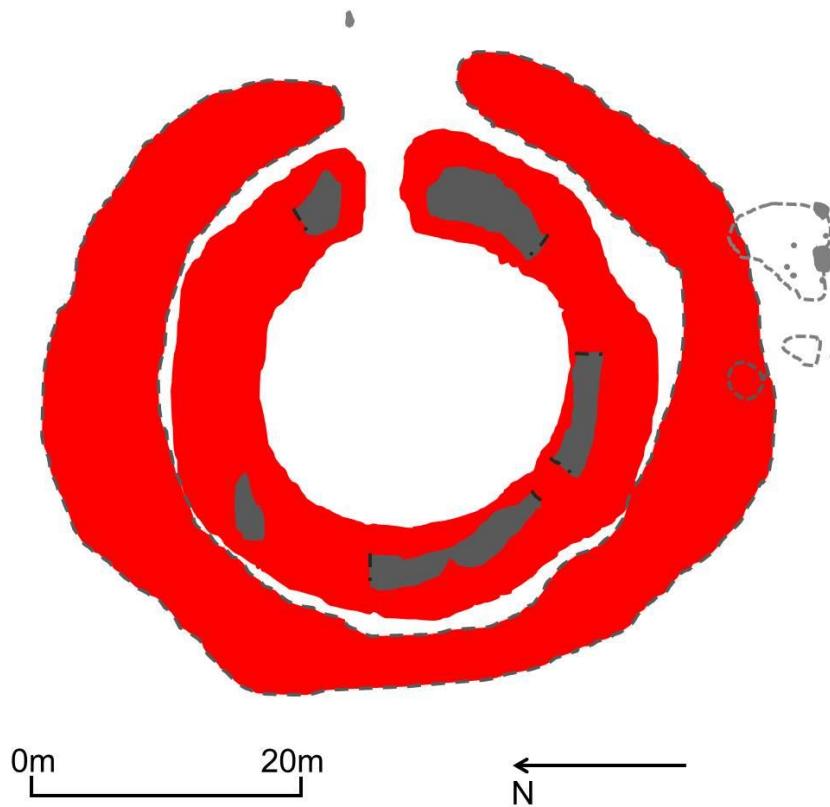
|          |  |                       |            |               |
|----------|--|-----------------------|------------|---------------|
| AA-17466 | Twigs and roundwood from recut of henge ditch, north terminal. | <i>Birch</i>          | 1875±50 bp | cal AD 21-251 |
| AA-17465 | Oak wood from recut of ditch, north terminal.                  | <i>Oak</i>            | 1870±50 bp | cal AD 25-311 |
| AA-17470 | Willow leaves from recut of ditch.                             | <i>Plant (willow)</i> | 1870±50 bp | cal AD 25-311 |
| AA-17464 | Oak wood from recut of ditch, north terminal.                  | <i>Oak</i>            | 1870±50 bp | cal AD 25-311 |
| AA-17469 | Oak from a post from recut of ditch.                           | <i>Oak</i>            | 1865±60 bp | cal AD 18-325 |
| AA-16250 | Wooden peg/'ard' from fill (122) of recut of ditch.            | <i>Wood</i>           | 1835±65 bp | cal AD 28-345 |



**Figure 28 - calibrated radiocarbon dates for Pict's Knowe**

The henge at Pict's Knowe enclosed an area some 20-25 metres in diameter (fig. 29; Thomas 2007b: 46). As mentioned above, the interior area had been severely damaged by modern animal activity, including extensive animal burrowing, meaning that any internal features had been destroyed (*ibid.*). The ditch was

broad, a maximum of some 5.45 metres across (*ibid.*: 64). It was however relatively shallow, reaching a maximum depth of 0.6 metres (*ibid.*; fig. 30). The bank and ditch had one entrance on the east. After the henge ditch had been dug, it probably became waterlogged (fig.31; Thomas 2007b: 61).



**Figure 29 - henge earthworks at Pict's Knowe (Redrawn after Thomas 2007b figs. 4.1, 4.8 and 4.12)**



Figure 30 - Pict's Knowe henge ditch during excavation in 1995 (Source: Thomas 2007b: 58, plate 4.6)



Figure 31 - oblique aerial photo of henge earthworks at Pict's Knowe, with standing water in ditch (source: RCAHMS/CANMORE)

### ***Burial and blocking: the Early Bronze Age at Pict's Knowe***

As explained above, the damage caused to the interior of the henge by recent animal activity made it difficult to discern whether there had been activity inside the henge, either pre- or post-dating the earthworks. However, the recovery of pottery from sieving during the excavation of the site hints that there may have been activity inside the henge, possibly including a secondary burial. Sherds of a Collared Urn were found inside the entrance of the henge, along with some cremated bone (Peterson and Roberts 2007: 132-3). This suggests the possibility that the henge site at Pict's Knowe was used for at least one cremation burial during the Early Bronze Age.

The location of the Collared Urn cremation burial in the henge entrance also suggests the possibility that the burial blocked or closed off access to the henge. Intriguingly, it is also possible that the cremated bone found with the Collared Urn was not human, but animal bone (Peterson and Roberts 2007: 133). It is also possible that the interior of the henge had been sealed over by a barrow or mound (Thomas 2007b: 44), although this also could not be confirmed because of the modern damage to the site.

### ***Later Prehistory: Pict's Knowe in the Iron Age***

During Later Prehistory, it seems that the henge site at Pict's Knowe attracted a great deal of interest. The earthwork was investigated and the ditch reopened, the ditch being recut at some point after it had started to fill in (Thomas 2007b: 59), although the recut ditch was not as wide as the original (fig. 32). Wooden objects, including collapsed hurdles, a wooden keg, and possible woodworking debris, were recovered from the primary fills of the recut ditch (*ibid.*: 61-3). As well as the extensive recutting of the ditch, parts of the bank were also dated to 50-240 cal AD, and 120 cal BC-70 cal AD, suggesting that the monument was 'refurbished' during the first centuries AD (Thomas 2007a: 147). A timber platform was constructed over the recut ditch (*ibid.*: 148). In addition to the remodelling of the earthworks, woodworking and the deposition of wooden objects, Pict's Knowe was also used for metalworking. A Late Prehistoric crucible was found, which had been used for Copper alloy working (Peterson and Roberts 2007: 132), and some slag was found at the site. Evidence of

metalworking has been found at some other henge sites, including the mini-henge at Moncreiffe in Perth and Kinross (Stewart 1985), and also in the vicinity of the possible hengiform monument at Home Farm, Portree on the Isle of Skye (Suddaby 2007: 121). Henge 1 at Forteviot may also have been used for craft production, possibly glass manufacture, during the Early Medieval period, as a glass droplet was found in the upper rubble fill of the henge ditch; the interpretation that the droplet relates to craft production remains only tentative (Noble and Brophy 2008: 14). The site at Forteviot is discussed in chapter 5. It seems that during this period of use, the site was not only used for craft production, but that there may have been a ritualised or ceremonial aspect to some of this use: a number of perforated wooden pegs found at the site may have had a ritualised use, or may have been part of a structure (Thomas 2007a: 152). In addition to the wooden objects deposited in the recut ditch, the remains of a Roman shoe were also discovered in the ditch - although it is unclear whether this was a prestige item, or was simply discarded at the site (Driel-Murray 2007: 128-9).

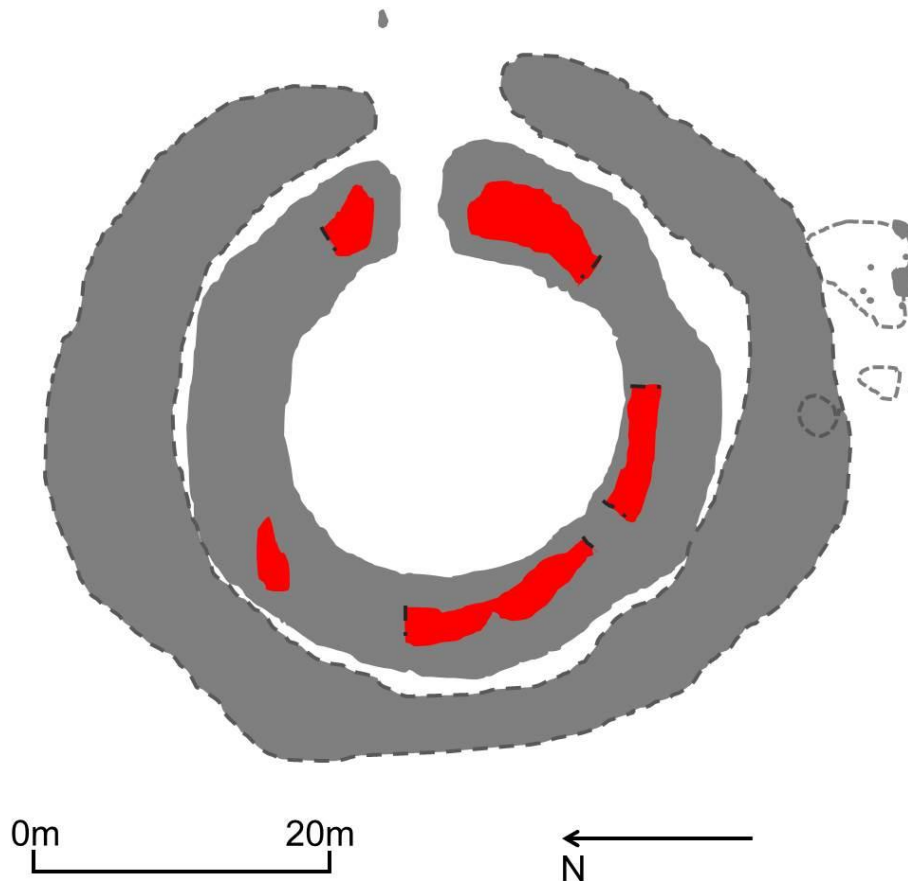


Figure 32 - excavated parts of the recut ditch at Pict's Knowe (Redrawn after Thomas 2007b fig. 4.12)

### ***Summary of Pict's Knowe biography***

The first archaeologically-visible activity at Pict's Knowe dates to the Early Neolithic, when lithics and Carinated pottery were deposited at the site. This activity may have been linked to pit-digging on the site, and there was also some interest in the deposition of material in tree throws. A mound-and-post structure was built on the location which would later become the henge entrance. During the Late Neolithic, more pottery was deposited at the site, including some Grooved Ware. The henge earthworks were constructed. The site was possibly then used for burial, and a cremation burial, possibly the remains of an animal, was buried in the henge entrance, contained in a Collared Urn. During the first quarter of the first millennium AD, the henge was extensively remodelled: the ditch was recut, and material was added to the bank. A timber platform was constructed over the ditch, and the site was used for metal working, and the possibly ritualised production of wooden objects.

## Comments and comparison

### ***Early Neolithic activity: pits and deposition***

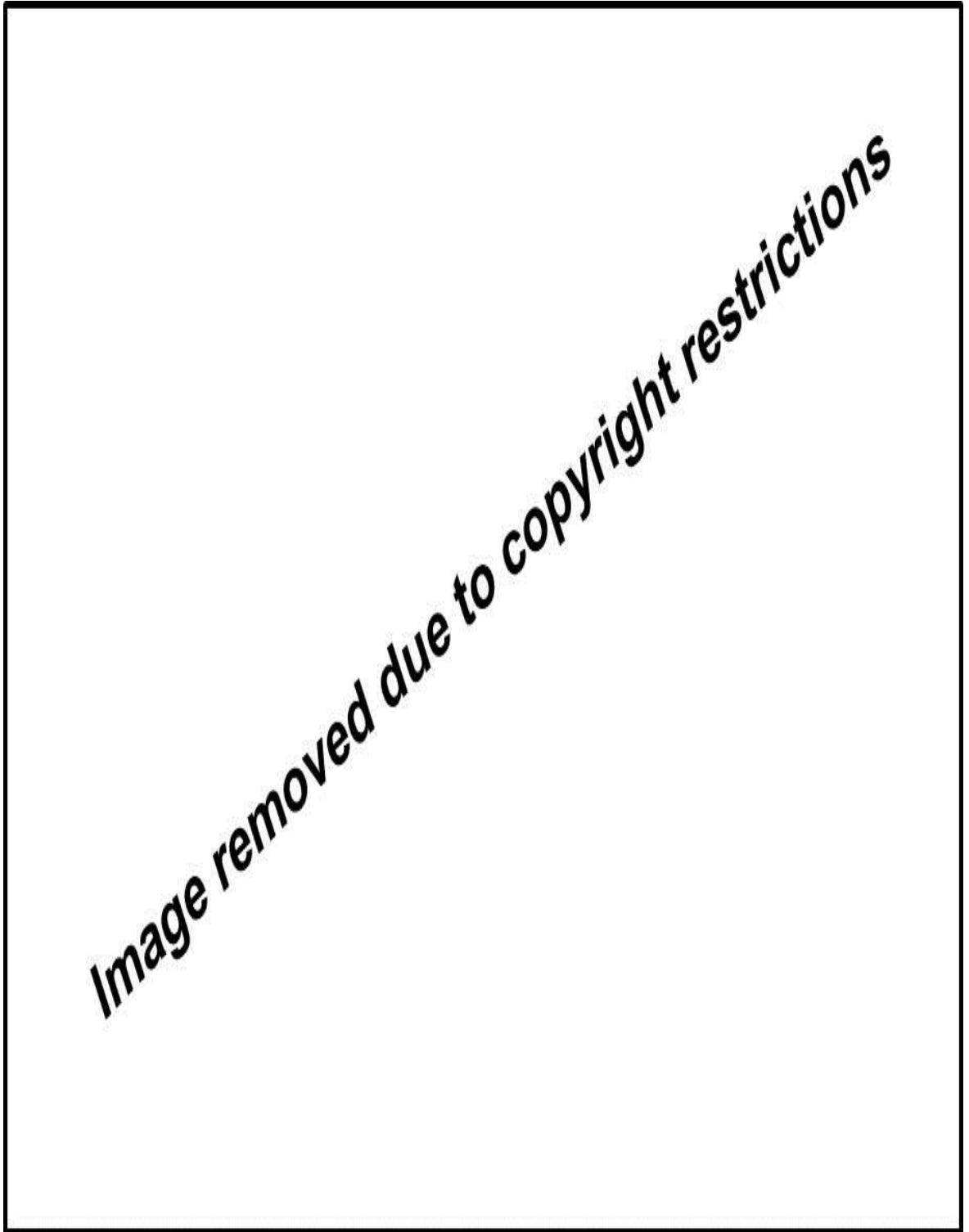
The sites at BRS, North Mains, Leadketty and Pict's Knowe are all considered to be henges (or a mini-henge in the case of Leadketty). Yet these labels do not tell the whole story: there are some differences in the ways the sites were used over time as well as some similarities in the 'biographies' of the sites. I want to explore these subtleties for the remainder of this chapter.

It seems that there are some common elements in the ways these four sites were used before henges were built in these places. There is evidence for Early Neolithic activity at three of the sites: BRS, North Mains and Pict's Knowe (pre-henge activity at Leadketty remains undated). The character of the Early Neolithic use of these sites varies, but in general includes pottery deposition and pit-digging. At Pict's Knowe, the early Neolithic carinated pottery sherds found under the banks were thought to date in the region of 3900-3300 BC (Peterson and Roberts 2007: 132). Radiocarbon dates obtained from the peat underlying the bank were significantly later however, providing *termini post quem* of 2452-1900 cal BC, and 2454-2030 cal BC, for the construction of the henge (Thomas 2007a: 145). The earliest use of the site therefore pre-dated its transformation into a henge by a significant period, potentially several hundred years. This is paralleled at other sites, including North Mains. At North Mains, there is evidence of early Neolithic pits, and early Neolithic cultivation; but the henge was not built until after 2200-1910 cal BC.

Looking elsewhere, at Cairnpapple Hill henge, West Lothian, there was a similar sequence of Early Neolithic pit-digging pre-dating the construction of the henge, and Gordon Barclay (1999) suggested that the pits must have been marked in some way to preserve their location. (The site at Cairnpapple will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). Certainly, if the pits dug at these sites during the Early Neolithic were backfilled, it seems likely that they would quickly become almost invisible. Duncan Garrow (2006) excavated and backfilled a small experimental pit in June 2002, and photographs show that it becomes almost impossible to find the location of the backfilled pit within three years (fig. 33). If the henge earthworks were dug deliberately in reference to the much-earlier



pits at North Mains, then it is probably necessary that their locations were marked in some way, perhaps in ways that are not archaeologically visible. Bradley (2002: 91) has suggested that at Machrie Moor, where timber circles were later replaced in stone, the site was either marked by a remaining upright post; or, the location of the earlier structures was remembered because they were 'indicated by small patches of unploughed land'. Perhaps sites which had been used for pit-digging, or for building timber structures, were later visible because they were avoided. Such locations may have been respected, or taboo, and were therefore left alone by later users of the land - perhaps meaning that they remained visible, and attracted the attention of later monument-builders.



**Figure 33 - Duncan Garrow's experimental pit, photographed between June 2002 and May 2005 (Source: Garrow 2006: vii)**

The coincidence of Early Neolithic pits at sites that would later become henges recurs often enough to suggest that it is a deliberate choice to monumentalise and embellish the traces of earlier activity, rather than just the random

presence of earlier remains at henge sites. However, the timber settings and henges at these sites do not always enclose the earlier pits. At BRS for example, while there are Earlier Neolithic pits in the area around the henge, they are not all inside the space defined by the henge ditch. It is unclear why some pits should be enclosed by timber settings and henges, but not others; perhaps not all of the pits were marked; or perhaps it was considered sufficient that the timber settings and henges should simply mark the general location in which the pits were dug and the pottery deposited, and it was not seen as necessary to enclose all of them.

Pit-digging during the Neolithic was a widespread practice across the British Isles (Thomas 2012). Certainly it was not an activity which was restricted only to henge sites, and not all pit-digging sites went on to become henge places. There has been debate about whether pits and the materials deposited in them represent settlement-related activity, i.e. the disposal of rubbish, or whether they reflect 'ritual' activity such as structured deposition (*ibid.*: 3ff.). If pits represent 'ritual' deposition activity, then pit-digging may have been important as the place-making activity which transformed henge sites into significant places. On the other hand, if pits can be seen as indicative of settlement activity, then it may be that henges marking the site of earlier pit-digging are commemorating earlier places of settlement. It may be that, as Kenny Brophy and Gordon Noble (2012b: 63) suggest, the significance of pits lies 'somewhere on a spectrum between these two extremes, neither wholly ceremonial nor completely mundane'.

In relation to Neolithic monument-construction in the Upper Kennet Valley, Pollard (2005) has suggested that there was a close relationship between sites which had been used for occupation, including cultivation, and monument-building. He argues that at some sites, such as Beckhampton Road, there was a 'gradual shift from "routine" to "special" activities over time' (*ibid.*: 106). It may be that there is a similar trajectory at some henge sites, including those discussed in this chapter, which are first used for 'everyday' activities such as cultivation, pit-deposition and settlement-related activities, but are later monumentalised. As discussed above in relation to pit-digging however, it is difficult (and perhaps unnecessary) to draw a sharp distinction between 'everyday' and 'special' activities, as these spheres may have been combined in

many aspects of life. For example, Pollard (2005: 110) points out that seemingly-mundane practices such as creating a midden might reflect 'more than casual refuse disposal', because the midden 'is the product of deliberate strategies of accumulation' (*ibid.*). 'Everyday' place-making activities such as deposition could therefore be seen as reflecting carefully-orchestrated uses of materials and sites every bit as much as later monument-building would.

Pit-digging, in common with other aspects of Neolithic life, may have been an activity which was part of everyday life, but had ritualised aspects. It may have been a repeated act, perhaps associated with some symbolic significance. Duncan Garrow *et al.* (2005) have suggested that some pit deposition sites may have been used repeatedly, although not continuously, over long periods. Sporadic returns to the same locations, whether to dig pits and deposit artefacts, or to build monuments, may therefore have been part of the rhythm of Neolithic life. This theme, and the theme of pit deposition, is discussed further in the next two chapters.

### ***Farming practices at henges and other monuments***

At North Mains, it was suggested that the earliest place-making activity at the henge site may have included the use of the site for pastoral agriculture - indicated by gleying possibly formed by cattle (Barclay 1983: 180) - or arable cultivation, although no plough marks were found (*ibid.*). The valley where Pict's Knowe was built was also used for farming before the henge was built. At Pict's Knowe, there is evidence that this included cereal production (in contrast to the possible pastoralism at North Mains), as cereal pollen was found in the area surrounding the site (Tipping *et al.* 2007: 35).

It is possible that some other monumental sites were also used for farming before they were monumentalised, although as is the case at North Mains, the evidence is somewhat ambiguous. At Pitnacree, Perth and Kinross, the depth of soil beneath the barrow and the angle of pottery sherds and stone fragments has been interpreted as evidence that the site was cultivated prior to the construction of the barrow (Coles and Simpson 1965; Barclay 2003: 142). The use of sites for farming before they were monumentalised suggests that during the Early Neolithic, these sites were not set aside as special 'ritual' or monumental

places, but rather were part of the landscape of everyday life, part of a landscape used for farming, herding animals, and food production. This underlines again the extent to which a monumental:domestic dichotomy is a contemporary construct, and is not reflective of Neolithic lifeways. Similarly, at the recently-excavated site at Wellhill, Perth and Kinross, ard marks possibly representing a Neolithic field system were found on a site which was later used for pit-digging, and possibly also the erection and destruction of timber structures or timber uprights (Wright 2014). Pit-digging at Wellhill was a complicated and long-lived practice, which included the excavation of large pits, some over a metre in diameter, which were re-cut more than once and used for the deposition of pottery from the Late Neolithic - Mid Bronze Age. The practices of cultivating the land, and its use for pit-digging and deposition, is similar to the place-making activities at henge sites like North Mains. As discussed above, such practices were widespread Neolithic practices, but only select sites where such activities were undertaken were chosen to be henged.

Alternatively, evidence of ploughing or ard marks may relate not to farming, but to the preparation of a site before monuments are constructed there. Bradley (2002: 91) has suggested that this was the case at Machrie Moor, where the site was ploughed after the timber structures had been constructed, but before the stone circles were built. Bradley (*ibid.*) states that there is 'little reason' to interpret the ard marks at Machrie Moor as relating to 'everyday land use'. He suggests that the ploughing of the site 'may also have served to eradicate the traces of earlier activity on Machrie Moor' (*ibid.*). It is possible then that the evidence from sites like Pitnacree and North Mains may reflect the preparation of the ground surface before any monuments were constructed there - perhaps a ritualised cleansing of the land. However, if this is the case, and the intention behind the ploughing was, as Barclay (2002: 91) suggests, to 'eradicate' earlier remains, this does not explain why people went on to consistently select sites for monument-building where there were earlier remains, and to construct monuments which seem to deliberately refer to earlier monuments. There is evidence at some sites however that the site was prepared before monuments were built - for example at Dyffryn Lane, Powys (discussed in chapter 6), the ground surface was stripped before the henge was constructed (Gibson 2010b).

It is possible therefore that what has been interpreted as evidence of farming prior to the construction of monuments on the same site, may instead have been one of the first stages in monument-building: levelling and preparing the ground surface. However, this may not have been the case at all sites. Some henge sites may have deliberately commemorated sites which were used for farming. In a consideration of the evidence for Neolithic and Bronze Age farming in the British Isles, Chris Stevens and Dorian Fuller (2012) have argued that although cereals were introduced to Britain c.3950-3850 cal BC, in the earliest Neolithic, cereal appears to decline between 3650-3600 cal BC. By the Late Neolithic, cereal is almost absent from the archaeological record, and Stevens and Fuller (*ibid.*: 714-715) suggest that cereal cultivation declined or may have been abandoned entirely in some regions after 3350 cal BC. They suggest the possibility that there may have been a 'population collapse', and possibly a deterioration in the climate, around this time (*ibid.*: 715, 718). Perhaps this was the reason sites like North Mains and Pict's Knowe were monumentalised and commemorated: arable cultivation may have been significant because it related to the earliest part of the Neolithic and the initial adoption of Neolithic lifeways.

By the time henges were built at North Mains and Pict's Knowe, crop-growing may have failed and been abandoned long ago. These sites might have been henged because they were special places, relating to a way of life which was remembered, but no longer sustainable. Perhaps monumentalising these sites was a way of commemorating the trauma that this would entail, especially if it coincided with population decline and a worsening climate, as Stevens and Fuller (2012) suggest. Or, the sites at North Mains and Pict's Knowe may have been commemorated because the cultivation practices which had taken place there were being re-emerging. Stevens and Fuller (2012: 715) argue that cereal cultivation 'briefly re-emerged' in parts of Mainland Britain during the Beaker period, c. 2300-2000 cal BC. If this is the case, then the resurgence of crop-growing may broadly coincide with the period of Chalcolithic henge building, when sites like North Mains and Pict's Knowe were being built. These sites may have been henged to mark, commemorate and perhaps celebrate, a lost way of life which was being rediscovered.

### ***Timber settings***

The next archaeologically-visible event in the biographies of most of the sites involves timber settings. There is evidence of timber settings or timber structures at all four sites; but although BRS, North Mains, Leadketty and Pict's Knowe all have at least one timber phase of some description, it takes a very different form at each of the sites. At all four sites however, the timber settings are likely to pre-date the construction of the henge earthworks.

At North Mains, there were two sub-circular timber settings. As mentioned above, the relationship between timber circles and henges is fairly well-established, and the usual sequence of timber circle pre-dating henge (Gibson 2005) seems to be borne out at North Mains also. At North Mains however, it also seems likely that one timber circle succeeded another. Gibson (*ibid.*) suggests that the smaller, innermost timber setting may be the earlier of the two, and indeed suggests that it may be the earliest 'monumental phase' at the site. The construction of timber monuments at henge sites might therefore have been a significant, and long-lived, episode in the life of a henge site. Timber monuments are typically implied to be simply a single pre-earthwork phase at henge sites, overlooking the fact that there may be several successive phases of timber construction at these sites (e.g. Harding 2003). Indeed it has not always been appreciated that timber structures pre-date the henge earthworks at these sites, and they have in the past been seen as integral to the architecture and experience of the henge (Clare 1986, 1987). Furthermore, as Kirsty Millican (2007: 7, 28) has noted in assessing timber circles in Scotland, there has been a tendency to view timber circles as merely forming part of a larger monument such as henges, meaning that consideration of factors such as the possible function of timber circles has been overlooked. The biographies of sites such as North Mains, where there appears to be two successive timber settings, suggests that in actuality, the construction of timber structures may have been a long-lived, multi-phase construction event in the life of a henge site.

The timber structures found on henge sites are not limited to timber circles, but may include various forms of structure. The timber settings at BRS are different to those at North Mains, being rectilinear, and possibly a mortuary structure. Rectangular structures are found on other henge sites, although the association

of timber circles and henges is probably better-known. A probable rectangular setting was found within Henge 2 at Forteviot (Brophy and Noble 2010); and a similar rectangular timber structure was also found within the prehistoric enclosure at Brownsbank in South Lanarkshire, which may be a hengiform enclosure (*ibid.*: 15; Brophy and Noble in prep.). At BRS the timber structure inside the henge was constructed in two phases, suggesting again an interest in multiple phases of timber monument construction. Evidently the process of constructing timber monuments at henge sites is a longer, more involved and complex practice than has sometimes been implied. Timber circles and timber structures associated with henges cannot therefore be seen only as timber precedents to the earthwork phase of the site, but are significant multi-phase monuments in their own right. At North Mains and BRS, Barclay suggested that the erosion and filling of the henge ditches occurred soon after the initial construction of the earthworks. It may be that at some henge sites, the construction and reconstruction of timber monuments was in fact a more protracted practice than the construction of henge earthworks.

At Leadketty, the timber phases were different in character to those at North Mains or BRS, although it is likely that here too the timber elements of the site involved several phases of construction, pre-dating the earthworks. Timber structures in the vicinity of the mini-henge at Leadketty included 'domestic' structures - the possible Grooved Ware house to the south-west of the henge. The 'post and slot' features at Leadketty may also have been structural (i.e. possibly buildings, or at least roofable) - a contrast to timber settings at sites such as North Mains, where the timber circles might simply have been settings of free-standing posts.

Another similarity between some of the multi-phase timber structures at these henge sites appears to have been the removal of posts from their settings. At Leadketty, the massive central post may have been withdrawn from the posthole. Similarly, at Pict's Knowe, the construction of the pre-henge post-and-mound structure involved at one point the removal of the two posts flanking the oval pit which was later sealed by the mound. At North Mains, by contrast, it seems that at least some of the posts may have been retained and allowed to rot *in situ* while others may have been burnt. Perhaps the decision to retain some posts was the result of a selective process, as Barclay notes the possibility that



some posts were removed (Barclay 1983: 150). It seems that there was no single practice associated with the treatment of timber structures and settings on henge sites, with treatment of posts varying from site to site, and even within the same site. Different henge sites developed in different ways over time, and it seems there was no single, universal way of using certain materials.

The practice of altering or removing timbers, where it occurs, could perhaps be understood within a broader practice of modifying earlier monuments. The construction of timber setting, erecting upright timber posts, and subsequently removing them can be seen as part of a long process of construction, destruction and reconstruction of monuments on henge sites. The logistics of such practices are intriguing. For example the central post at Leadketty was large, and therefore also heavy and difficult to move; it does not appear to have rotted *in situ*, so the task of removing the post would be a difficult, dangerous and memorable one. The removal of the post would possibly even recall some of the processes involved in the erection of the post - digging a hole to hold or remove the post, a team of workers, maybe the use of ropes to move the post. The later removal of parts of existing monuments could thus be seen as a way of deconstructing the monument, dismantling it, while recalling - and perhaps even mimicking or reversing - some of the actions and events involved in the original construction of the monument.

### ***Henges and Settlement***

Henges, and indeed monuments in general, are not traditionally associated with settlement or 'domestic' evidence. Perhaps this is partly due to a tendency to set up a dichotomy between the ritual and the domestic - a dichotomy which has been recognised as likely to be false in recent decades. Colin Richard's excavation of the Neolithic village at Barnhouse in Orkney, in close proximity to the Stones of Stenness, and in the midst of a landscape replete with Neolithic monuments, demonstrated that settlement and monuments can be found close together in the same landscape (Richards 2005; Stenness will be discussed in Chapter 5). Recent excavations at the large henge enclosure at Durrington Walls, Salisbury Plain in the south of England have shown a close relationship between the henge and settlement, with the henge having been constructed on the site of an earlier 'village' (Parker Pearson 2012).

At henge sites in central mainland Scotland, there is also some evidence that henges were associated with earlier settlement, although this is more limited and ephemeral than the evidence from the Stones of Stenness/Barnhouse and Durrington Walls. Barclay and Russell-White (1993: 168) suggested that the Early Neolithic pits in the Balfarg/BRS complex may reflect 'a form of ritual activity close to or within a settlement'. They infer this on the basis that there was some evidence of cultivation underneath the ring-cairn, and also due to the presence of numerous carbonised cereal grains, which they interpret as evidence that there was a settlement nearby. It is not known exactly where the putative settlement was located in relation to the (later) monument complex (*ibid.*). The relationship between henge monuments and pits is also interesting. Digging pits may have been the first stage of henge construction: Barclay (1983) and Thomas (2007a) have suggested that the henges at North Mains and Pict's Knowe may have begun life as discrete pits, which were later joined up and enlarged to become the ditch terminals. The significance of this in relation to henge building recalling/imitating earlier activities is discussed further below.

Apart from the tentative and ephemeral relationship between settlement and henge monuments at BRS, perhaps clearer evidence of a relationship between settlement and henges can be found at Leadketty. Close to the mini-henge at Leadketty was a structure interpreted as a Late Neolithic 'Grooved Ware house' (Brophy et al. 2012). Elements of the construction of the Grooved Ware house included 'post and slot' features, similar to a feature found under where the putative henge bank would have been, and interpreted as structural. It is also possible therefore that the mini-henge at Leadketty was constructed to overlie an earlier house.

If there is a relationship between Later Neolithic settlement and the mini-henge monument at Leadketty, what form does this relationship take? If the henge references aspects of an earlier settlement or house, it is interesting to consider exactly what is being referenced. At Leadketty, the mini-henge is located close to the earlier house, so the henge is perhaps marking the location of earlier settlement. However, the relationship with pits mentioned above suggests that henge construction may also have recalled specific activities involved with everyday life - such as pit-digging. The processes involved in henge construction, and indeed in timber circle construction, may also have resembled some of the

stages involved in house construction - digging pits, and the erection of timber posts.

At some periods during the 'life' of a henge site, the site may even have resembled a house, even if it was not actually used for settlement. Bradley (2013) has suggested that there may be close links between timber house architecture, and monumental architecture. Similarly, some timber structures associated with henges may have looked similar to ruined buildings (Brophy 2007). Possibly some timber structures, including timber circles, may have resembled timber houses which were under construction. The construction of a timber house may involve the erection of a timber frame which, prior to the addition of walls and a roof, may have looked not dissimilar to a timber circle. An example is shown in the photographs below, showing a partially-built reconstruction ('Iron Age') timber roundhouse, and a reconstruction of a henge and timber circle, at Archaeolink (figs. 34 and 35). The reconstructed roundhouse is actually based on Greenbogs structure A, a late Neolithic, Grooved Ware associated house in Aberdeenshire (Noble *et al.* 2011). It may be that some round houses and timber circles were, in skeletal form at least, very difficult to tell apart from one another. Apart from circular timber settings, other timber structures might also be seen as having house-like qualities, for example a rectangular timber structure within Forteviot henge 2 had an axial post, a feature which may be associated with house architecture (Brophy and Noble 2010).



Figure 34 - building a reconstruction timber roundhouse at Archaeolink (Photo: Scran)



Figure 35 - a reconstruction of a timber circle inside a henge at Archaeolink (Photo: Scran)

### ***Enclosure and wrapping***

None of the four sites discussed in this chapter began their life as enclosed places. Place-making activity involved pit-digging and the deposition of pottery sherds at North Mains, Balfarg and Pict's Knowe; and the erection of a large free-standing timber post at Leadketty. Yet all four sites were later enclosed, and indeed enclosure seems to have been a significant concern at each of the sites during certain stages of their lives. Just as there was variation in the use

and treatment of timber at each of the sites, there is also variation in the ways the sites are enclosed.

Enclosing a site which had previously been open and unenclosed would transform both the experience of visiting the site, and the appearance of the site. In the biographies of North Mains and Balfarg above, the construction of timber circles on the sites was seen as the first phase of enclosing the site. It is perhaps worth questioning whether or not we can consider timber settings as enclosures. Possible links between Late Neolithic house architecture and timber circles were discussed above. If timber settings are seen as representations of house architecture, we might ask whether or not we can regard them as enclosures, particularly given that it is uncertain whether they formed a continuous barrier, or simply consisted of free-standing timbers. I suggest that they can be seen as having a similar effect on a site as enclosure would: they would demarcate a space, control access, and affect visibility. By separating off a distinct space from the rest of the site, timber structures might also be seen as mimicking or paralleling other aspects of house architecture, e.g. creating a safe, sheltered or private 'indoor' space. Timber settings would not necessarily have to be roofed to create the feeling of containing a separate space. Also, a house or timber structure can be seen as another way of creating a screen or barrier - it is another form of 'wrapping' (Richards 2013a).

Perhaps it is more useful however to consider such demarcations of space not in terms of enclosure, but in terms of wrapping. Timber circles and henges mark out space, perhaps in a way which is different from our understanding of enclosure - that is, they may not be intended to keep anything in, but to create a barrier of separation. Colin Richards (2013a) has suggested that we should think about sites such as timber and stone circles, and henges, as a way of wrapping something, not just as sites with an inside and outside. Wrapping is a strategy which does not only apply to monumentality, but may be employed on a number of scales and in various contexts - from wrapping presents, to architecture (Richards 2013a: 16-17). There may be a number of reasons for wrapping something, according to Richards (*ibid.*: 17): concealment; protection; containment; unification; and re-presentation. Several of these resonate with the understandings of henge sites presented in this thesis. For instance, the idea of creating 'imagined landscapes' - concealing the contents of the timber

circle/stone circle/henge in such a way that their reality is only revealed to a select few, and others can only imagine what they are - might be achieved by using a monument as a form of 'wrapping' to hide whatever (or whoever) is inside the timber/stone setting or henge. Equally, if the contents of the henge (real or imagined) are deemed to be powerful or important but ambiguous, wrapping the site in layers of timber, stone and earth (and perhaps also water, if henge ditches became waterlogged) would be a means of both containing and protecting it. Wrapping a site might serve to make access difficult even for those who were allowed in. At Pict's Knowe for example, this may have been exacerbated by the erection of screens: some of the stakeholes found at the site possibly supported screens, arranged in such a way as to force zig-zagging movement at the entrance of the henge, making the interior seem mysterious (Thomas 2007a: 147). Enclosure and screening could add an element of drama or surprise when visiting the monument: visibility would be restricted, and the contents of the interior (whether structures or people) would not be revealed until the last minute, when the visitor was close to them.

Importantly, wrapping might therefore offer protection in more than one direction: protecting the outside world from the dangers within (see Warner 2000); but also perhaps protecting the contents from external corruption or unwanted prying eyes. Paradoxically, the act of wrapping a site may have encouraged such potentially taboo activities - the imagined, secret landscape inside the wrapping, at once physically present and intangible, might have proved a strong draw for curious onlookers. As Richards (2013a: 17) puts it:

'Skins or membranes are potentially paradoxical entities in that although physically containing and concealing, they also advertise and draw attention to that being concealed.'

We should consider the possibility that, whatever the intentions behind wrapping a site, henge sites could equally, perhaps for different people at different times (e.g. different times of day or night) have played host to socially marginal behaviour. Earthwork barriers in the form of henge banks and ditches could have been circumvented, and stone or timber settings might be made permeable, whether or not they were 'meant' to be.

However, Richards (2013a: 17) suggests that the process of wrapping puts the emphasis on the 'skins' or membranes - on the wrapping material, rather than on what is wrapped. This also seems to be the case at henge sites such as Leadketty or Forteviot (discussed in the next chapter), where the enclosures are 'nested' within other, larger enclosures; or sites like North Mains, where there are series of concentric enclosures beginning with timber enclosures, and working outwards (over time) to the earthworks of the henge. Thus, over time, the sense of enclosure is elaborated and increasingly emphasised - the sites are *more enclosed* than we might suppose they would 'need' to be. The emphasis is not on creating a pragmatic barrier, a fence, but rather on the *act* of creating an enclosure - the practice of wrapping becomes the significant event.

In his discussion of wrapping, Richards also discusses how wrapping might sometimes be added to places which were already significant or where there were already existing structures. For example, he suggests that at Stonehenge, the enclosure of the site by successive earthworks and stone monuments may constitute a form of 'mnemonic wrapping' (Richards 2013a: 19). Richards (*ibid.*) argues that the horseshoe-shaped setting of bluestones at Stonehenge is somewhat paradoxical, in that 'it refers to an earlier monument, but the specific architecture of this earlier monument is transformed and rendered unrecognisable'. This concept of 'mnemonic wrapping' could in many ways sum up the uses of henge sites which over the course of their lives are transformed into something which may well have been 'unrecognisable' to the people who first used the site, even though the later configurations of these places usually still respect or refer to earlier features in some way. Wrapping a site might both preserve it (by cutting it off from everyday uses of the land which might destroy traces of earlier activities), and simultaneously transform it into an altogether different place. This tension between memory and transformation seems to be at the heart of how henge sites were returned to and repeatedly reconfigured over time.

### ***Henges and Burial***

When Kendrick first described henges as a monument type in 1932, he defined them specifically as *not* being burial places (Kendrick and Hawkes 1932: 83). Despite this, it is not uncommon for burials to be discovered on henge sites (see

for instance Burl's (1969) review of henge internal features in relation to regional traditions). Burial at henge sites might often be associated with reuse of the site (e.g. burials which post-date the henge such as the cist burial at Forteviot 1). In some instances however, burial activity pre-dates the construction of henge earthworks. At North Mains, this included the cremation burial which provided a *terminus post quem* for the henge earthworks, being sealed underneath the bank (Barclay 2005). It is unclear exactly how long after the burial the construction of the henge earthworks took place, but the henge may have been deliberately located to cover over (rather than enclose) the burial.

Pre-henge cremation cemeteries are known at Forteviot 1 and Cairnpapple (as well as Stonehenge), which will be discussed in Chapter 5. At each of these sites, their use as burial places may have played an important role in place-making, transforming the sites into significant places long before they were henged. Later uses and monumentalisation of some henge sites may have been a way of commemorating earlier burial activity.

While some burials at henge sites pre-dated the construction of the earthworks, others may have been more or less contemporary with the construction of the henge. For example Gibson (2010a) suggests that the construction of the henge at Balfarg may be closely contemporary with the central cist burial. Similarly, some of the later burial activity at North Mains may be broadly contemporary with the construction of the henge earthworks there (Barclay 2005; Brophy and Noble 2012a: 23).

It may be the case that some henge sites were being used in a way analogous to enclosed cremation cemeteries. Indeed, there is some ambiguity between two monument types, and distinguishing between them may sometimes be unhelpful. Some sites, such as Balneaves Cottage in Angus, or the small hengiform enclosure at Achinduich Farm, Lairg in Sutherland (Bradley 2011) were also used for cremation burials, and have sometimes been called enclosed cremation cemeteries rather than henges. They also share some henge-like characteristics and could perhaps be regarded as hengiform monuments. For example at Balneaves, several cremation burials, including some associated with pottery, are enclosed by a small ditch. The ditch is about 10-12 metres in diameter, but



despite the small area it encloses, is fairly wide, up to c.2m across in places (Russell-White *et al.* 1992: 289-294). A disproportionately wide ditch is usually seen as a henge trait. Balneaves Cottage may therefore be considered a mini-henge; although it may be more useful to consider *how sites were used*, rather than being too preoccupied with classifying a site as being *either* a henge/hengiform *or* an 'enclosed cremation cemetery. The hengiform at Lairg, in keeping with other 'mini-henges', probably dates to the early-mid Bronze Age. Three cremation burials from within the enclosure have been dated to 1620-1450 cal BC, 1690-1510 cal BC, and 1690-1520 cal BC (Bradley 2011: 150). Perhaps later hengiform enclosed cremation cemeteries were intended to look similar to other (perhaps earlier) enclosed sites which were being (re)used for burial during this period.

In some cases, later (re)uses of henge sites for burial may have represented a repetition of the original use of the site - for example some of the burials at North Mains may have post-dated the construction of the henge. Indeed by the Early Bronze Age, North Mains may have become a funerary landscape, with the construction of a barrow some 200 metres to the west of the henge, into which burials were placed (Barclay 1983). The barrow was also surrounded by a ditch (*ibid.*), another parallel with the nearby henge site. The location of burials at BRS is in contrast to North Mains, where burials were found both within and outside the henge. At BRS, it seems that during the Late Neolithic and Bronze Age, burials occurred at various other locations within the monument complex. Excavation has shown that there was burial activity during these periods at cairns and ring cairns in the area surrounding the henge, but not in the interior of the henge itself (Barclay and Russell-White 1993). It is possible that this was the case because the henge at BRS had been covered by a mound by that time. Although no evidence was found for burials at Leadketty, some small fragments of cremated bone were recovered from the upper ditch fills. These were such small concentrations that it is impossible to say whether they represent burial deposits or not. Since it is probable that the mini-henge at Leadketty was mounded over, any later burials might have been placed in the mound, and so might subsequently have been lost to plough truncation.

### ***Comparing sequences at henge sites***

It seems there is a pattern at some henge sites whereby the site is used for deposition before the henge is built, followed by a phase of timber structures or monuments on the site, before the construction of the henge earthwork. At some sites the henge may be subsequently blocked or mounded over (Brophy and Noble 2012a). Later/final uses of henge sites often includes burial, which may or may not relate to mound building activity. This is of course a very broad-brush and generalised outline of the development and use of henge sites over time. As is evident from the description of the four sites discussed in this chapter, there is a great deal of variation in the way different henge sites were used at different times, and the trajectory along which each henge site developed is different at each site. This suggests that there was not necessarily a single, prescribed way at any point in time which would govern how a henge site would be used, or how it would look. Nevertheless, there are some parallels and general themes in the way henge sites were used. Figure 36 compares the ways each of the four case study sites discussed in this chapter were used over time. It deliberately avoids depicting this as a linear development over time, in order that no single phase should be given precedence as a perceived end point or goal of the use of the site.

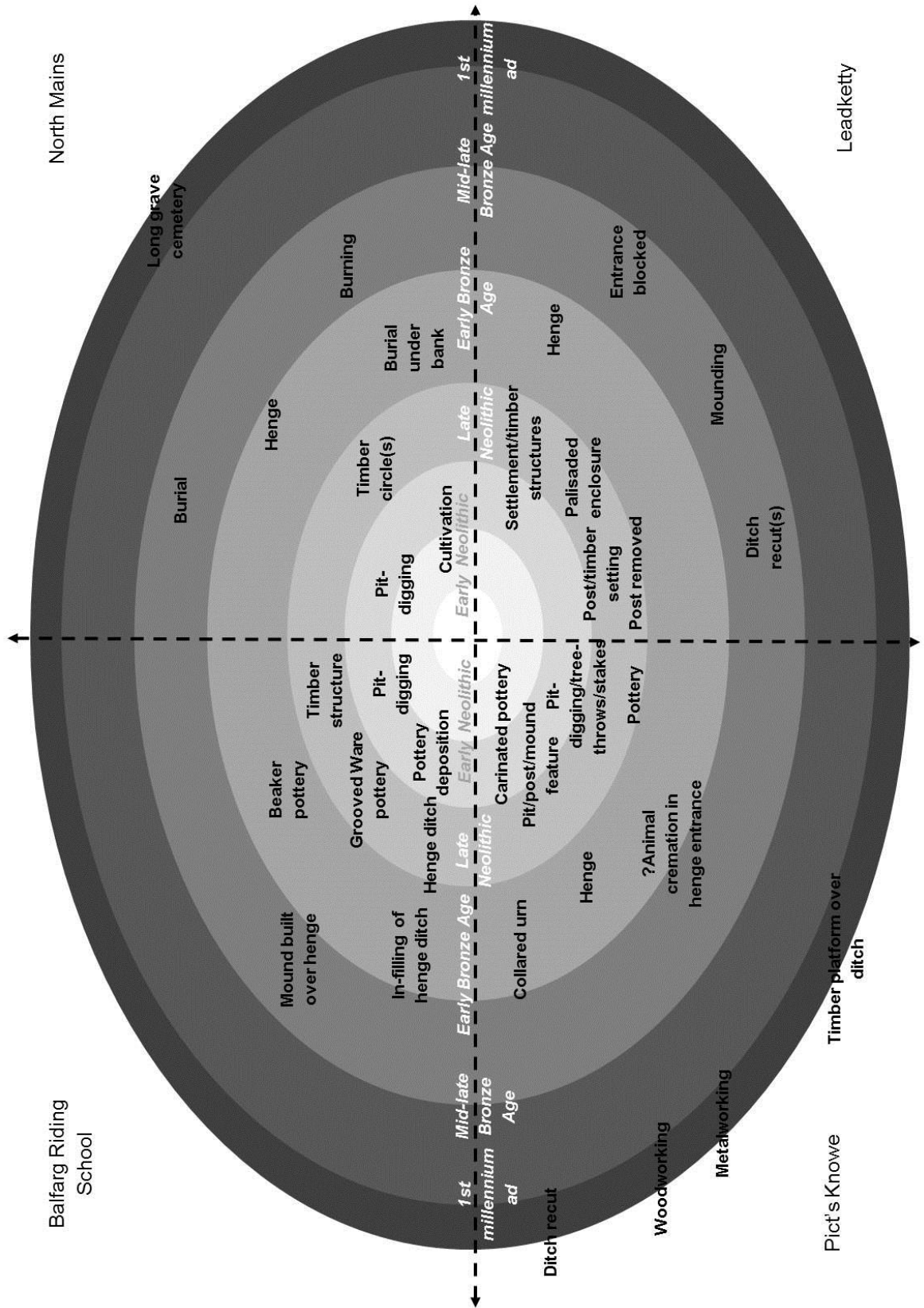


Figure 36 - diagram comparing the biographies of BRS, North Mains, Leadketty and Pict's Knowe

As can be seen on the diagram, there is apparently a striking *lack* of archaeologically-visible activity at all four sites during the mid-late Bronze Age. Indeed at two of the sites, Leadketty and Balfarg Riding School, there is no evidence for further monument-building or ceremonial uses of the henge sites after the early-mid Bronze Age. At Pict's Knowe and North Mains however, the sites were used into the first millennium AD - for burial at North Mains, and for metal- and wood-working at Pict's Knowe. At Leadketty and BRS, this period of apparent inactivity may be explained if the sites were mounded over, possibly during the early-mid Bronze Age. The presence of later prehistoric activities at Pict's Knowe and North Mains may therefore suggest that these sites were never mounded over, meaning that the space inside the henge, and indeed within the in-filled ditches, was available for later use. This serves to highlight the variation in the way different henge sites developed over time: some henge sites were closed over by the construction of a mound, but others were left open.

Even at Pict's Knowe and North Mains however, there is a lack of activity during the last part of the Bronze Age. Perhaps this was a period during which henge sites were not considered suitable/safe/acceptable places to build monuments, and were therefore avoided. Or perhaps activities at henge sites during the late Bronze Age were more archaeologically ephemeral: if the activities undertaken did not involve the construction of structures or monuments, digging or deposition, then it is unlikely that they would be picked up archaeologically. However the sites could still have been visible, and even visited, during this period.

The other striking aspect of the sequences as compared in fig. 36 is the longevity of use at all four sites. With the exception of Leadketty (the dating of which is as yet poorly understood, pending radiocarbon dates from recent excavation), the sites were used from the early Neolithic onwards. At Leadketty, the first archaeologically-visible use of the area immediately in and around the mini-henge occurs during the Late Neolithic.

The general pattern evident at BRS and North Mains, of deposition and timber structures pre-dating the henge earthworks, is paralleled at some other henge sites. For example, at Forteviot 1 in Perth and Kinross, and Cairnpapple, West Lothian (both discussed in Chapter 5), cremation burials and timber circles pre-

dated the henge at each site, as discussed above. However, the parallels are not exact, and other sites, such as Leadketty, may have developed along different lines - for example, it is not clear that the mini-henge at Leadketty was ever used for burial in the way that other henge sites such as North Mains (and indeed other mini-henges like Lairg) seem to have been associated with the deposition of cremated remains.

In comparing and contrasting the biographies of various henge sites, it is worth noting that not all henges are contemporary. As discussed in chapter 2, henge sites were built sporadically over a long period, spanning the Late Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age, and even into the Middle Bronze Age. It should be noted however that this is not altogether unusual - it has long been accepted that other monument 'types', such as timber circles and stone circles, were being built in similar forms for over a thousand years. While the henge phases at North Mains and Pict's Knowe may be broadly contemporary, BRS may be earlier (although *cf.* Gibson 2010a), and Leadketty is probably later (although this is a preliminary supposition based on comparison with other mini-henge sites). The endurance of interest in building henge-like monuments over such a long time period perhaps hints at a certain conservatism in monumental styles during the later Neolithic-mid Bronze Age. Alternatively, the stability in monumental forms - i.e. an enduring concern with enclosing sites, and with the construction of similar circular ditched monuments - may be a facet of the concern with the past which can be discerned in the use of many henge sites. Sites may have been used in similar ways in an effort to perpetuate, or to remember, historical ways of using these places.

That there is not a single 'typical' biography for a henge site, that each site was used in different ways during an extended era of henge-building, highlights some of the problems of understanding henge monuments as a single, discrete monument type, as discussed in Chapter 2. The character of henge sites as multi-phase monuments is increasingly well-known, as is the case for other monument types such as barrows and chambered cairns (e.g. see Hingley 1996) which were also reused over long periods. The range of dates for henge construction, which is increasingly evident as more excavation takes place, is an added barrier to seeing henges as a single 'type' of monument - and also means that a note of caution is required when drawing comparisons between henge

sites. Although two sites may be labelled as ‘hengés’, this does not mean that they are necessarily contemporary. Other differences between henge sites should also be borne in mind when making comparisons. Mini-henges like Leadketty, and others in north and north-east Scotland such as Pullyhour and Lairg, have long and complex biographies. Yet can we really understand them as typologically equivalent to larger henge sites? The experience of constructing and visiting a tiny henge like Leadketty, would no doubt have been very different from being inside a larger space like the area enclosed by Pict’s Knowe or BRS. Considering such sites in terms of how they might be experienced may well be far more useful for understanding henge sites, than considering the morphology of henges from a typological perspective.

Although my intention is not to suggest that all henge sites are the same, the remainder of this chapter discusses some of the general similarities in the way henge sites have been used: namely, their potential use as places of commemoration; the ways in which they refer to and imitate the past; and their role in presenting the past, and controlling and mediating people’s encounters with their past during the later Neolithic-mid Bronze Age.

## **Discussion: henge sites as commemorative places**

### ***Building as remembering***

In chapter 3, it was suggested that henge monuments could be interpreted as commemorative places. Commemoration was described as involving active and ritualised engagement by a group of people with the past, enacted in the present to ensure that a memory was carried forward into the future (Casey 1987). In order to more fully consider how we might understand the repeated (re)construction of monuments on henge sites as a form of commemoration, this section will discuss in greater detail how the process of constructing monuments might contribute to making such locales into commemorative places. It will also consider exactly what henges may have been commemorating.

The process of constructing a henge may have recalled some of the earlier activities that took place on the same site. Gordon Barclay (1983: 181) has suggested that the process of creating the henge at North Mains began with the

excavation of round pits which became the ditch terminals. Julian Thomas (2007a: 146) suggested that the henge at Pict's Knowe was constructed in a similar way. Early Neolithic pits were found on the site of both Pict's Knowe and North Mains. The actions involved in constructing the henge monument therefore recalled earlier digging activities that had taken place on the site. Constructing a henge could be seen as a way of commemorating the Early Neolithic pit-digging at these sites: excavating the henge ditch repeats and refers back to the actions involved in pit-digging. Early Neolithic pits were also found at BRS.

Henge monuments were almost certainly deliberately sited on the location of earlier activity. Barclay and Russell-White (1993: 168) suggest that this may have been a way of legitimating ceremonial activity at the sites. The idea that later monuments may have drawn on earlier sites to increase their perceived legitimacy has been well-rehearsed in the archaeological literature (e.g. Driscoll 1998; Hingley 1996) and was discussed in chapter 3. Here, it is considered as commemorative - a way of drawing attention to, claiming, remembering and interpreting the past. At all of the henge sites discussed in this chapter, monuments were constructed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC with reference to earlier structures or features in the same location. It is interesting to consider the extent to which these earlier features remained visible by the time later monuments such as henges were built, which in some cases may not have been until centuries after the earlier activity. Some of the features in question, such as the pits at BRS, North Mains and Pict's Knowe may have been relatively ephemeral. It is questionable how long a pit would have remained visible, especially if it had been backfilled after items have been deposited in it. As discussed above, experimental pits dug and backfilled by Duncan Garrow disappeared from view within a few months, and were relatively quickly covered by vegetation. At Cairnpapple in West Lothian (a site which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5), the henge was, like North Mains, Pict's Knowe and BRS, built on a site where pits had been dug during the Early Neolithic. Barclay hypothesised that, in order for the henge to be located on the site of the pits, they might have been marked in some way, for example with stones or wooden stakes (Barclay 1999). If such places were marked, was it with the intention that these places would be remembered, returned to and embellished or monumentalised? Or was it so that they could be avoided - a message which was

misunderstood or disregarded by later monument-builders. At North Mains, charcoal, burnt bone and pottery, including Beaker pottery, was deposited into the hollows formed by the decay of timbers in the larger timber circle (Barclay 1983: 134). This suggests that these features were still visible as the monument decayed, and suggests that the traces of the monument either remained visible for some time, or else quickly attracted interest after the timbers rotted. Evidence of this practice of depositing objects into the decayed remains of earlier structures has also been found at Forteviot Henge 2 in Perth and Kinross, where sherds of Beaker pottery were placed into the hollows formed after the posts of the rectangular timber structure had decayed (Brophy and Noble 2010).

The monumentalisation of sites of earlier activity, including places which had been cultivated (like North Mains) or settled (like Leadketty), reminds us that memory and commemoration are interwoven aspects of everyday life. Memory is not only associated with monuments, but plays an important role in other arenas. Discussing the ways in which life involves repeatedly returning to specific locations, Julian Thomas (2007e: 260-1) also points out that different lifestyles necessitate different kinds of remembering. For example, memories of the bloodlines of animals are significant to farming communities, and represent a different kind of interaction (with animals and with memory) from those prevalent in, e.g. hunter-gatherer societies. New ways of living might involve their own distinctive modes of remembering. Perhaps the reconfiguring of monumental places like henge sites reflects the changing form and role of memory amongst communities as their way of life changed over time. Building new kinds of monuments at these places may have reflected wider change, but the builders were careful to refer to the past.

### ***Encounters with the past***

Since henge sites were places which were returned to over time, it is interesting to consider the nature of people's encounters with the past at these places - specifically, whether people came into contact with earlier material culture, and how they interacted with the physical traces of earlier activity. In this section I will consider how earlier material culture might have been experienced and interpreted. Would they have been recognised as 'old' or 'ancestral', as humanly-made traces of past activity, or as something else altogether?



There is some evidence to suggest that people did encounter earlier material culture during the construction of the henge at BRS. Early Neolithic pottery sherds were found in the ditch, to the north of an Early Neolithic pit group. Barclay and Russell-White (1993: 61) suggest that the pottery sherds might have found their way into the ditch due to the disturbance of earlier features when the ditch was being constructed. Such objects may have been a tangible link to the past - if they were recognised as being old. Perhaps finding such objects while digging a henge ditch would not be unexpected: locations for henges were deliberately chosen because there had been earlier activity there. The discovery of 'old' objects like pottery sherds - which would presumably be a recognisable material, even a familiar object for people during the time when henges were being constructed - would perhaps serve as confirmation that this was the 'right' place to construct a monument.

Whether the discovery of artefacts such as pottery during the construction of monuments was an expected part of monument-building, or whether it was a surprise, encounters with these objects would require interpretation. People's encounters with earlier monuments and material culture would influence not only their understanding of their own past, but also the ways in which they interpreted the landscape and world in which they lived in the present (Hingley 1996; Barrett 1999; Bradley 2002). As archaeologists in the 21st century Western world, we see artefacts as tangible, physical remains of past peoples, and use them to interpret something of the past. During the Later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, people may have interpreted artefacts differently. Mark Edmonds has written a series of narratives in his (1999) book *Ancestral Geographies of the Neolithic*, in which he imagines various aspects of Neolithic life, including monument-building and encounters with earlier material culture and human remains. He speculates that such encounters would trigger memories and stories, and would be linked to the ancestors. Indeed, Edmonds (*ibid.*) speculates that even materials such as flint, which we would understand as natural resources, could have been understood as gifts from the ancestors.

Given that distinctions between nature and culture may have been conceived differently during the Neolithic and Bronze Age from our own understandings of these categories, it is possible that artefacts may not have been understood as humanly-made objects. However, given that materials such as pottery would be

familiar during these periods, and the manufacture of such materials would be understood - and also given that the sites chosen for monument-building were attractive because they were associated with earlier activity - it seems likely that artefacts would have been understood as humanly-made or at least had ancestral associations. It does not necessarily follow, however, that they would have been associated with the distant past. Stray finds of artefacts during prehistory may have been viewed as little more than natural curiosities. Indeed, we have no way of knowing how the past was conceived of during the Neolithic; seasons, generations and genealogy might have been prominent. Understandings of time might be contingent on lifespans and generations, and therefore a Neolithic concept of the distant past would likely be completely different to our own contemporary westernised perspective. However, the construction of monuments on sites which had been used over centuries suggests an interest in the past. At North Mains, charcoal, burnt bone and pottery, including Beaker pottery, were deposited in hollows formed by the decaying timbers of the larger timber setting inside the henge (Barclay 1983: 133-4). This suggests not only an interest in investigating and marking the physical traces of earlier activity, but also implies some understanding of them as old places, since there is an interest in the decayed/eroded parts of the monument.

This understanding of monuments as old places, and indeed insight into past practices and the use of monuments, is evident at some other henge sites. At Moncreiffe House, the mini-henge site was used for metalworking during the Iron Age. Pieces of bone were used as additives during the metalworking process (Stewart 1985). The use of such material may have been pragmatic, and the discovery of burials which could provide useful resources for the metalworking may have been serendipitous. Or perhaps the mini-henge was specially selected as a metalworking site because it was known or expected that there would be burials there. This suggests not only an interest in material culture, but also an awareness and knowledge of the uses and nature of monuments where such materials could be found. Such knowledge might not have been generally known, but, we might imagine, may have been part of the lore or (perhaps secret?) traditions associated with being a craft worker - or, indeed, a monument-builder.

Of course, it is not only via the discovery of artefacts that people encounter the past. The very act of revisiting a site which had been used before, observing the remains of earlier monuments, and choosing it as a site to build a new monument, requires engagement with the material remains of the past. Oral histories or folk memories and stories associated with such places might also have been a way in which people encountered the past, in a way that was linked to specific places in the landscape. One of the ways in which people interacted with the past at henge sites was the construction of monuments which referred to earlier structures on the site. The construction of henges to enclose timber circles for example is carried out in such a way as to make deliberate reference to the earlier monuments. At North Mains for instance, the henge is built concentrically to the larger of the two timber settings, sharing its elliptical shape in plan.

During some episodes in the life of henge sites, reference to the past was even more marked than simply the form of a monument respecting/reflecting an earlier structure. At some henge sites, probably including Leadketty and BRS, mounds were constructed which presumably covered the henges and all traces of earlier activity. At Leadketty, the mounding of the mini-henge may have been associated with the re-cutting of the ditches: the in-fill of the ditches may have been a source of material for the mound. This recycling of material would mean that mounding the site could be seen as a way of incorporating earlier material into a monument. The very substance of the old, existing monument was re-shaped to form a striking new monument on the site of the old one. Perhaps upstanding earthworks or remnants of bank would also be incorporated into the new monument. Reshaping a monument therefore involves not only reference to the past, but the literal remaking of the physical traces of the past.

The construction of earthworks at henge sites - both the henge earthworks, but also mounds - refer to and demarcate the past. However, they do so in very different ways. Henging a site and mounding a site could both be seen as ways of separating off or blocking access to a part of the landscape. In particular, they separate places within the landscape which are redolent with traces of past activity. Henges do this by restricting visibility and movement. They enclose an interior space inside wide ditches and banks, spanned only by narrow entrances. The old monuments inside the henge are made more secret, but crucially, they

are still accessible. The entrance to the henge may be narrow and restricted, but there is still an entranceway. By contrast, mounds block access to the past irreversibly. There is no point of access to a sealed mound of earth. The act of constructing a mound over earlier monuments makes them irrevocably inaccessible and secret.

### ***Presencing the past***

If henges were commemorative places, then encounters with the past at these sites cannot have simply been serendipitous events which occurred by chance during the construction of a monument. Rather, they were places where people expected to encounter the past, and perhaps the monuments themselves were deliberately constructed in such a way as to engineer an experience of the past for those visiting the site. As discussed in chapter 3, an important aspect of commemoration is the reference made to the past and the future in a single (present) location. At henge sites, the prolonged use of the same location over centuries, and the construction of monuments which conspicuously referred to the past, may have fulfilled this role. It is argued here that henge sites were places which brought together the past and present in a physical, tangible way - places where people could not only conceptually engage with the past, but could actually view and experience a sense of 'pastness' (see Holtorf 2009).

One way in which this may have been the case at henge sites is the possibility that henges were not only meant to physically contain and showcase the past, but may even have been intended to look old and ruined. Although at some sites, including Leadketty and Pict's Knowe - and also at Stonehenge - (Darvill *et al.* 2012) the henge ditches were recut, this is fairly unusual, and it seems to have been a more common practice to simply allow the earthworks to erode and the ditches to silt up. This certainly seems to have been the case at North Mains, where Barclay suggested that the ditch, dug into gravel, could have begun to silt up as little as weeks or months after it had been dug (Barclay 1983: 133). There is no evidence to suggest that any attempt was made to halt the process of erosion by re-cutting the ditches (*ibid.* 181). Perhaps the monument was simply left to erode: the ditches would quickly begin to fill-in, and the monument would soon lose the appearance of being newly-constructed. The encroachment of vegetation, too, would add to this illusion unless weeding was regularly

undertaken. There is evidence at some sites that efforts were made to control vegetation growth on henge earthworks; for example at the Ring of Brodgar in Orkney, fires may have been set in the henge ditch to stop weeds growing on the site (Downes *et al.* 2013: 110). Such evidence pertaining to the maintenance of a site is rare, perhaps because such activities would be ephemeral in their nature and leave little tangible archaeological evidence in many cases. The extent to which vegetation was allowed to grow on a monumental site would have an important impact on the aesthetic of the site and its appearance and would therefore influence the experience of those visiting the site; and therefore may be an avenue which would warrant further investigation in future.

It is also possible that henges were not only intended to appear 'ancient', but also were intended to enclose and contain things that were. Kenny Brophy has suggested that the timber structure at BRS was intended to resemble a ruined timber hall (Brophy 2007). The possibility that the structure was built in such a way as to deliberately mimic a ruined building raises several interesting possibilities. For example, it suggests that people were aware of the existence of old buildings in the landscape, and could recognise what they looked like. But if this was the case, then why build an imitation of an old building, and then convert it into a henge? Why not simply build a henge on the site of a genuinely old building? This may have been the case at some henge sites - for example, the mini-henge at Leadketty was built close to a Grooved Ware house, which may well have been ruinous or old by the time the henge was built. Henge sites may already have been ancient places by the time henge earthworks were constructed there, with use-lives extending back over long periods; and yet it seems possible that at BRS people chose to build imitations of ruined or old structures on these sites. Would these have been recognised as new structures, albeit built on an ancient site, which had been made to appear old? Or would people have believed them to be ancient structures? Perhaps they were used to evoke a sense of 'pastness'? Either way, it seems henge sites were places where people were concerned with replicating or memorialising old places and old practices.

The physical state of timbers might also have been used as an indication of the age of earlier monuments - e.g. rotting timber circles at North Mains (see Barclay 1983: 126). Of course, it is difficult to ascertain exactly when the

monument would visibly begin to decay. Perhaps the timber circle was still relatively whole and complete by the time the henge was built, and it was later, when the site was used for burial, that the structure was noticeably decaying - and that a 'dying', decaying monument was chosen as the appropriate place to bury the dead. Gordon Noble has even suggested that the use of trees in monuments might have been seen as a metaphor for human life and death (Noble 2006: 101) and there is no reason why timber did not continue to reflect human life cycles when included within a monument.

However, even if earlier timber structures were not actually decayed by the time the henge was built, they might still have been noticeably old - or, at least, not new. A timber structure which had stood even for a few years or decades, colonised by moss and lichen and exposed to the elements, might look different to a newly-constructed monument. Of course, the appearance of timber monuments above ground level is something of an unknown quantity. Some of the timbers used in monument construction - such as the unusually large post inside the Leadketty mini-henge - were so substantial that they must already have been old trees when they were chopped down and incorporated into monuments. Perhaps they were selected deliberately because of this: their very appearance may have suggested antiquity (Noble 2006). Either way, it seems that henge-builders had an interest in enclosing things that looked visibly old: traces of old settlements, the rotting timbers of earlier monuments, or ancient trees, were enclosed by the henges at BRS, North Mains and Leadketty.

It is possible that this was part of the process of commemorating the past: such places may have been understood as special or powerful, and therefore needed to be enclosed. The need to contain them and hide them within henges - which were sometimes inaccessible places, such as at Leadketty with its tiny, narrow entrance - suggests that they may even have been dangerous or fearful places. As discussed in Chapter 3, it has been suggested that hengiform monuments in Ireland were intended to defend against a contained threat (Warner 2000), and Barclay has wondered whether henges in Scotland might therefore have served a similar purpose (Barclay 2005). However, while enclosing a site by the construction of a henge might make the site more difficult to access, it would still be accessible - at least for some people, some of the time, we assume,

since henges have entrance causeways. The containment provided by henges is not absolute and suggests access was still required at times for a select few.

Furthermore, not all henges neatly enclose all existing structures on the site where they are built. Sometimes they are built directly on top of earlier features - for example the henge at North Mains seals a burial underneath the bank. Should we view this as a subtly different phenomenon from enclosing earlier structures? The distinction between enclosure, which retains an element of accessibility, and sealing under mounds (or banks), which seems more permanent/irreversible, is discussed below.

While henges can be seen as 'presencing the past' - drawing attention to, elaborating or mimicking ancient sites - they did so in a limited, or rather controlled, way. Access to and visibility of the ancient things contained in and sealed off by henges was restricted. Enclosing and sealing these traces of the past may also have served to separate them from the rest of the landscape, symbolically distancing them from everyday life: containing them within 'heterotopias'.

### ***Henges as Heterotopias: containing the past***

In chapter 3, it was suggested that henges could be interpreted as 'temporal heterotopias', as places which were perceived as being separated from the normal flow of time. This will now be discussed in more detail with reference to the four case study sites discussed in this chapter. In particular, this section asks how henge sites might have been physically demarcated as places which were outside time. It will also look at how people using these four sites dealt with the physical traces of the past, at different points during the 'biography' of the site. Finally, it will consider how the ways in which sites changed may have influenced memory, although this is a theme which will be examined in more depth in chapter 5.

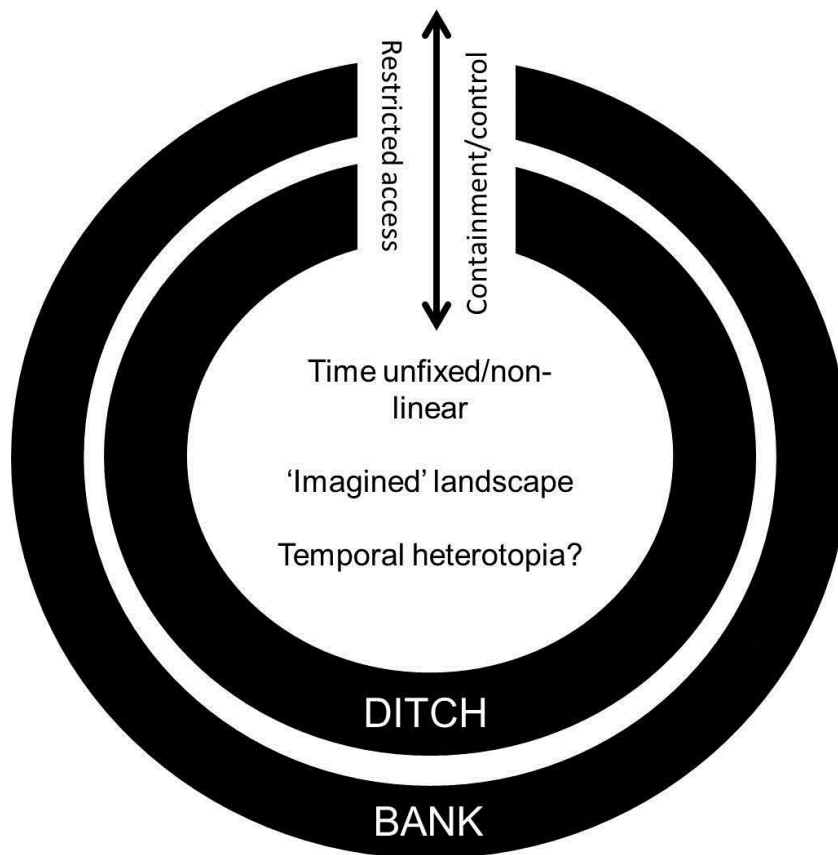
It seems that some henge sites were not only cut off from the landscape by means of enclosure, but also by their location in the landscape. At Pict's Knowe, the situation chosen to build the monument may have added to the feeling of being separated from the rest of the world, even before the enclosing henge

earthworks were constructed. Pict's Knowe is situated on a sandy knoll in a valley bottom, meaning that it is located, as Thomas (2007a: 142) notes, 'at the juncture between wet and relatively dry land'. The ditches, which were probably often waterlogged, enclosed a dry area, while the landscape outside the henge was boggy (*ibid.*). The landscape of Pict's Knowe was therefore one of contrasts and perhaps ambiguity, the henge enclosing a space which was markedly different from the surrounding landscape.

Pollen analysis of the site suggests that by the time the henge was built at Pict's Knowe, the valley had been known and worked in for 3000 years or more, and there is evidence for cultivation (in the form of cereal pollen) in the area surrounding the site (Tipping et al. 2007: 35), as discussed above. Tipping et al. (*ibid.*: 36) suggest that around the time the henge monument was constructed, changes in the environment of the valley floor would have made the land increasingly marginal and 'difficult', and that consequently the area of the henge became 'increasingly disconnected from day-to-day activities' (*ibid.*: 36). Changes in the landscape over time meant that by the time Pict's Knowe was henced, it was already becoming a 'heterotopia', a place which was different from the surrounding landscape and separated from the everyday. The henge perhaps commemorated this change, by monumentalising a location which had once been part of the quotidian landscape, but was now a wet and liminal landscape.

Unlike Pict's Knowe, located in a place which although accessible, was marginal to people's everyday lives, other henge sites only became heterotopias as they became increasingly enclosed over time. Not all henge sites relied on location alone to create an impression of being separated from the rest of the landscape. Barclay (1999: 23) points out that 'while many henges have views of a pronounced horizon, the monuments themselves are often not easily seen from other places.' This would presumably involve a sense of the dramatic in a visit to a henge site, the location of which may not be obvious from a distance, but which is then revealed when the visitor is close to the site. It may also have added to the sense of hidden-ness associated with the enclosure of henge sites, and would add another level of containment for whatever was inside the henge.





**Figure 37 - schematic diagram showing how enclosure might have made henge sites 'heterotopias'**

Henge sites were not necessarily heterotopias at all times during the life of the site. At some points for example, they were unenclosed, meaning that they would be relatively easily accessible. Henge sites might have started off as unenclosed sites, however over time there was an increasing emphasis on enclosing the sites and restricting the visibility of the interior. At some sites, this extended to the restriction of movement around the sites over time. At Pict's Knowe, it is possible that the interior was screened off - posts in the interior suggest that stakes/posts/screens may have been employed to force people to move in a zig-zagging pattern as they moved inside the henge (Thomas 2007a). Structures such as posts or screens may have dictated paths and movement around other monuments too - for example at Broomend of Crichtie, an arc of posts in the interior of the henge would have channelled movement to one side of the henge, rather than straight through the middle between the entrances - forcing the visitor to take an indirect route through the henge (if the posts were still standing when the henge was built).

This device of enclosing the interior of the henge within multiple boundaries - i.e. inside timber circles and earthworks (and, at Leadketty, enclosing a discrete area inside a larger palisaded enclosure) - would perhaps add to the impression that these were 'imagined landscapes' (McAtackney 2007; fig. 37). As discussed in Chapter 3, henge sites could be seen as imagined landscapes because the contents of the interior were known about, but not visible. The inside of the henge would not be visible fully until it was revealed 'at the last moment', i.e. when a visitor to the site had negotiated a narrow entrance and more than one kind of enclosure. Whatever was contained within the henge was hidden, even though the monument surrounding it was highly visible in the landscape. The traces of the past so carefully demarcated at henge sites were hidden and contained, but rather than preventing any access to or sight of the contents, access was controlled - mediated through certain routes, and perhaps through certain people. Perhaps the nature of encounters with the past at henges was also controlled, and the strictly controlled access a way of manipulating people's experience of 'the past', as represented by the way old things were presented inside the henge.

## Conclusion

Henge sites were places which developed over time, rather than single discrete monuments. As the case studies in this chapter have shown, sites like Balfarg Riding School, North Mains, Leadketty and Pict's Knowe were used for centuries. Not only were these sites used over a long period, they were used in many different ways - for deposition, for the construction of timber monuments and timber structures, for settlement and for burial, as well as for the construction of henge monuments. It is this combination of the remodelling of existing, old monuments, and the repeated practice of constructing new kinds of monument, that made these distinctly places of active commemoration, rather than simply passive memorials.

Although henge sites seem to be places which refer to past activity, since the same location is used for monument-building over long periods, it is perhaps more accurate to describe henges as commemorative rather than memorial. Memorialisation implies a desire for permanence and stasis. Henge sites, by contrast, are places which change over time. Although they may be permanent

places, the monuments themselves are not permanent, as they are rebuilt and reshaped over time. Some are actively destroyed or removed, for example via the removal of posts from timber monuments discussed above. Henge sites and monument complexes like the sites discussed in this chapter were places where a tension between continuity/permanence, and change/transience, was expressed in the rebuilding of monuments over time. As Thomas (2007a: 2) notes of Pict's Knowe and other nearby monuments, these were places of 'enduring significance', but also places where 'events of construction and performance might be fleeting and sometimes ephemeral'. Henge sites were places linked with memory not because they were used in the same way repeatedly, nor because permanent monuments were built there, but rather because they were places which drew people back, time and again, over generations.

Henge sites may also have been commemorative in that they not only referred to the past, but may have imitated it, or directly referred to earlier activities carried out at the same site. In this sense, they were places that embodied a 'nostalgia' for old ways. The construction of timber monuments, or digging pits and ditches, may have directly recalled or re-enacted events which had taken place at the site generations before. They were therefore not only places where people remembered, but places where people took an active interest in negotiating their past. In referring to earlier activity by reusing the same location, as well as by building monuments as a kind of re-enactment of the past, henge sites drew attention to the past. While containing the traces of past activity, they also perhaps presented it to those who visited the site. The architecture of enclosure at henge sites, which made them heterotopias, cut off from the everyday, would also serve to mediate and control these encounters with the past.

This chapter has largely focussed on henge sites as places which referred to the past - places where people built monuments as an active form of remembrance, where people encountered the past, experienced the past in the present, and contained the past. Chapter 5 will move on to consider the tension between henges as places of continuity with the past, and places which simultaneously changed. It will consider henge sites not only as places which echoed the past, but as places where people expressed new ideas by building new kinds of monument.

## Chapter 5: Change and Continuity

### Introduction

The previous chapter discussed ways in which we might reconsider henge sites not as unchanging monuments, but as places of commemoration. This chapter examines in greater depth the different ways in which henge sites were used over time; specifically, it compares aspects of continuity in how the sites were used, and the ways in which they changed over time. As in chapter 4, this is done by exploring the biographies of four excavated henge sites in Scotland (fig. 38) as case studies which will form the starting point for the subsequent discussion.



Figure 38 - map showing location of sites discussed in Chapter 5

The chapter will focus on Cairnpapple in West Lothian; Forteviot 1, Perth and Kinross; Balfarg in Fife; and the Stones of Stenness, Orkney. The biographies will summarise the ways in which these sites were used from the Early Neolithic to the Chalcolithic/Bronze Age.

## **Biography 1: Cairnpapple**

The henge site at Cairnpapple Hill, West Lothian was excavated by Stuart Piggott in 1947-8 - the first modern excavation of such a site in Scotland. Cairnpapple, like all other henge sites excavated in Scotland since, proved to be a complex, multi-phase site. When Piggott excavated Cairnpapple, the closest geographical parallel for comparison was Arbor Low in Derbyshire, located over 200 miles to the south (Barclay 1999: 19). Piggott's interpretation of the site developed within the confines of a pre-radiocarbon dating era, using a 'compressed chronology' for the Neolithic (*ibid.*). The henge at Cairnpapple Hill could be seen as occupying an 'unusual' location for a henge monument, being located on a hilltop when most henge sites are more low-lying (Barclay 1999: 23-4). However, Barclay notes that the location of Cairnpapple is similar to other henge sites in that it is not easily visible from other places in the surrounding landscape - a phenomenon which Barclay considers may have been a deliberate choice which the builders of the henge went to 'considerable trouble' to achieve (*ibid.*: 24).

Since Piggott excavated Cairnpapple, many more henge sites in Scotland have been excavated, providing more local comparisons, and the site has been convincingly reinterpreted by Barclay (1999). It is Barclay's reinterpretation of the phasing of the site that forms the starting point for the current discussion of Cairnpapple, and the narrative has been strengthened further by new radiocarbon dates that have recently become available (Sheridan *et. al.* 2009: 214).

### ***Place-making: fragments and fire***

As noted above, the site at Cairnpapple is in a hilltop location. Cairnpapple Hill is located in the Bathgate Hills and is 305 metres high (Barclay 1999: 24). There are extensive views from the site, which overlooks the Firth of Forth to the north (Piggott 1948: 69-70). On the horizon is an impressive panorama of distinctive hills: the Ochils to the north, with Schiehallion visible in clear weather; the Pentland and Moorfoot Hills to the south; North Berwick Law to the east; and to the west, Goat Fell on Arran is visible, although only in very clear conditions (*ibid.*: 71). The wide-ranging view from the top of Cairnpapple Hill was perhaps a contributing factor in attracting interest to the site, first as a location for pit-digging and deposition, and later for monument-building.

In his reconsideration of the phasing and interpretation of the henge site at Cairnpapple, Barclay (1999: 39) noted that the site was first established as a 'special' place during the Early Neolithic. It is likely therefore that the first use of the site, when it began to be marked as a significant place in the landscape, was many centuries before the site was made into a henge. The earliest activities to take place at Cairnpapple seem to have been characterised by deposition, and by hearths.

Six hearths were found at Cairnpapple. Piggott (1948: 88) believed that the hearths were contemporary with the henge and beaker burials. Barclay however considers it more likely that the hearths pre-dated the henge monument, and that either some or all of them belong to the first phase of activity on the site (Barclay 1999: 39). Of the six areas of burning identified, five of them were inside the area which would later be enclosed by the henge, and three of these were underneath a later cairn (*ibid.*: 32; fig. 39). The sixth hearth was sealed beneath the henge bank (*ibid.*). No radiocarbon dates are available for any of these hearths, but it is a reasonable assumption that they date broadly to the fourth millennium BC (see Barclay 1999: 28, 39).

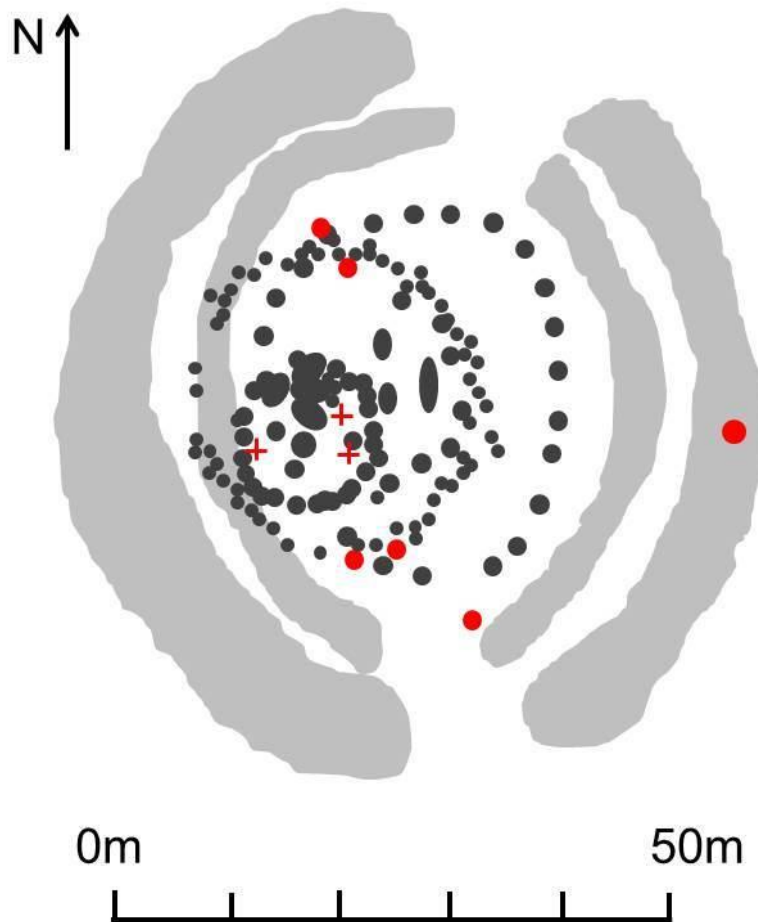


Figure 39 - hearths at Cairnpapple (●), and findspots (+) of axe fragments and pottery.

Although no artefacts were directly associated with the hearths (Piggott 1948: 88; Barclay 1999: 32), the site was also used for deposition at this stage in its life. Fragments of two axeheads, and sherds of plain-bowl pottery were found inside the area later enclosed by the henge (Barclay 1999: 39). Details of the finds are shown in table 8. Barclay considers it likely that these belong to the same phase of activity as the hearths (*ibid.*). The axeheads and pottery are probably Early Neolithic, dating to the fourth millennium BC (Barclay 1999: 28). The axe fragments were found, according to Piggott, on the old land surface which pre-dated the cairns (Piggott 1948: 79). Petrographic analysis carried out on the axe fragments following Piggott's excavation demonstrated that the raw material of one of the axeheads originated in Great Langdale in the Lake District (Group VI), and the other from Penmaenmawr (Group VII) in North Wales (*ibid.*: 80).

Piggott (1948) suggested that the axes may have been broken during their use to clear the site of trees in preparation for monument-building on the site. While this is one possible interpretation of how the axes came to be deposited at the site, it is possible that these objects had an even more interesting biography. The fragment from the Penmaenmawr axe may be the only Welsh axe found in Scotland, meaning that it would stand out as a precious and exotic artefact. If it was a special enough object that broken fragments of it should be kept and deposited at a significant site in the landscape, it is interesting to consider where the other fragments of the axe may have ended up. Perhaps they were taken away from Cairnpapple, perhaps to be curated and exchanged elsewhere. One of the Cairnpapple axe fragments has been retouched (fig. 81), suggesting that it was a precious material that was kept and reused even after the axe had broken. That such an object was deposited at Cairnpapple underlines the importance of the site. It is also interesting to note that both of the axe fragments deposited at Cairnpapple were from the cutting edge of the axes, implying careful selection of which fragments of objects should be deposited at Cairnpapple - i.e. not just any pieces of the axe, but the part of the axe which related most directly to its use and function. An axe with the cutting edge removed is no longer useful as an axe, suggesting the possibility that the object had 'died' and was beyond use as an axe once part of it had been left at Cairnpapple. Its significance then lay not in its functional purpose as an axe, but in the material, the place of deposition, and perhaps also the links between people and places created by the dispersion of the other fragments amongst members of the community. The significance of the deposition of fragments of objects at henge sites will be discussed later in the chapter. The actual date of the axe deposition at Cairnpapple will perhaps always be dubious, given the lack of specific contextual information, although the cairns provide a *terminus ante quem* for their deposition.

**Table 8 finds from Cairnpapple Hill**

| <b>Cairnpapple (Piggott 1948; Barclay 1999)</b> |                      |           |                       |          |  |
|---|----------------------|-----------|-----------------------|----------|--|
| Date  | Uses and structures  | Artefacts |                       |          | Comments and condition   |
|   |                      | Material  | Type                  | Quantity |  |
| Second half of 4th millennium BC                | Hearths. Deposition. | stone     | axeheads (fragmented) | 2        | Broken fragments from cutting edge of axe. One Great Langdale (Group VI), from old land surface outside cairn; one Penmaenmawr |



|                                 |   |             |                              |   |   |
|---------------------------------|---|-------------|------------------------------|---|---|
|                                 |   |             |                              |   | (Group VII), has retouch on one edge, from old land surface underneath cairn.   |
|                                 |   | pottery     | plain-bowl pottery sherds    | 2 | Body sherds, one from old land surface, the other included in the backfill of the North Grave.  |
|                                 |   | flint       | flakes                       | ? | Unrecorded number of flint flakes from old land surface under cairn.  |
| Late 4th millennium BC          | Cremation burial. 'Arc' setting of posts/pits.  | bone/antler | pins                         | 2 | Fragments of bone pins found with 2 of the cremation deposits.  |
|                                 |   | flint       | burnt chips                  | ? | Unrecorded number of burnt flint chips included with one of the cremation deposits.   |
| 3rd millennium BC               | Enclosure – stone circle constructed.   | -           | -                            | - | -   |
| 25th-23rd centuries BC?         | Enclosure – henge earthworks constructed.   | -           | -                            | - | -   |
| Late 3rd-early 2nd millennia BC | Burial: Beaker burial and 'North Grave' burial with monolith. 2 cist burials. Stone circle demolished and stones used to build first cairn on site. | pottery     | Beaker - complete            | 3 | Accompanying burials. 2 from North Grave.   |
|                                 |   |             | Beaker - fragments           | 1 | Base fragment. From North Grave.  |
|                                 |   |             | Food Vessel                  | 1 | From cist burial.   |
|                                 |   | wood        | oak (carbonised)             | 2 | Carbonised wooden objects recovered from North Grave. One a mask, tablet or cup overlying teeth. One interpreted as a club or paddle.             |
|                                 |   | stone       | 'maul'/possible hammerstone? | 1 | Stone found in cist – interpreted by Piggott as a maul. Possibly a hammerstone used for creating the cupmarks in cist A?                          |
| Late 3rd-early 2nd millennia BC | Larger cairn built over first. Burials in surface of cairn.   | pottery     | Collared Urn                 | 2 | Associated with cremation deposits buried in the surface of the larger cairn. Complete but not intact – the top of one of the urns had collapsed. |
|                                 |   | bone        | pin                          | 1 | Accompanying one of the urned cremation deposits.   |
|                                 |   | antler      | pin                          | 1 | Broken fragment of pin. Red deer antler. Accompanying one of the urned cremation deposits.  |
| 1st millennium AD               | Burial – four long graves.  | -           | -                            | - | -   |

The site at Cairnpapple was also used for burial - a use which Barclay (1999: 39) noted spanned several centuries. At the time Barclay wrote, it was thought that most of the burials dated from the Early Bronze Age onwards i.e. they were associated with Beaker or Food Vessel pottery, or with cairns, and therefore that the burials post-dated the enclosure of the site by a timber circle and henge. However, more recent radiocarbon dating implies that the site was in fact used for burial for an even longer period than Barclay had considered. A series of cremation burials was found, associated with an 'arc' of pits or postholes (fig. 40). One of these was accompanied by a bone or antler pin, which has been dated to 3341-3024 cal BC at  $2\sigma$  (Sheridan *et al.* 2009: 214). This remains the only available radiocarbon date for the site at Cairnpapple (see table 9 and figure 41). These burials may be broadly contemporary with other earlier Neolithic activity at Cairnpapple, and the site may have been used for the deposition of cremated human remains as well as hearths and the deposition of fragments of pottery and axeheads. The use of a site as a cremation cemetery centuries before its later conversion to a henge monument is paralleled at other excavated henge sites, notably at Stonehenge, where the cremation cemetery dating to the 3rd millennium BC is the largest Neolithic cremation cemetery known from the British Isles (Parker Pearson 2012); but also (and more locally to Cairnpapple) at henge 1 at Forteviot in Perth and Kinross. The site at Forteviot will be discussed further below.

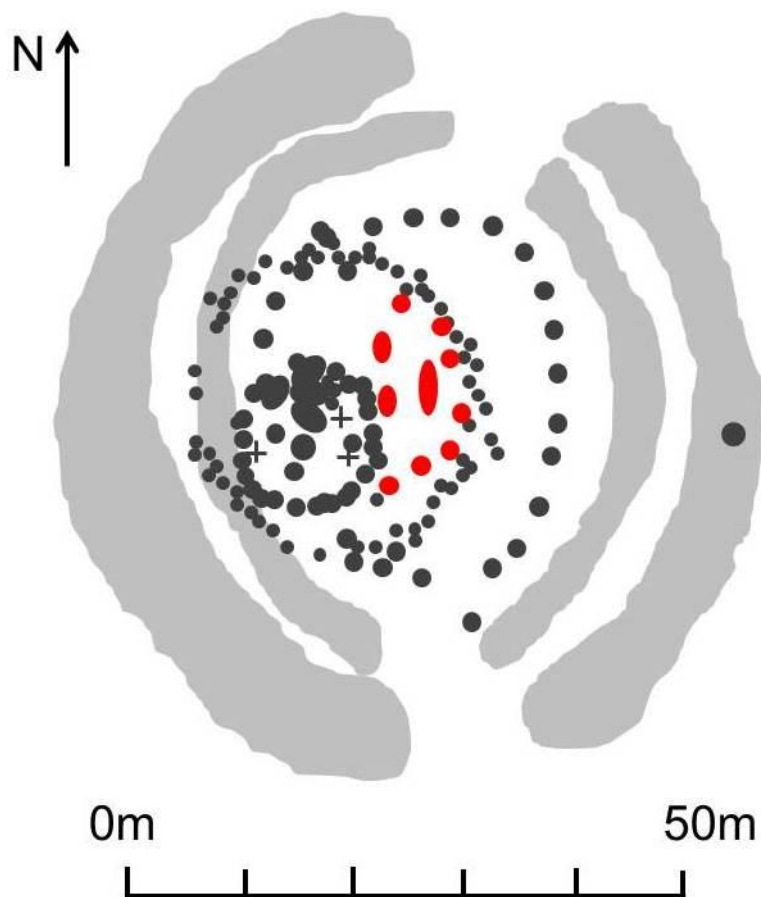
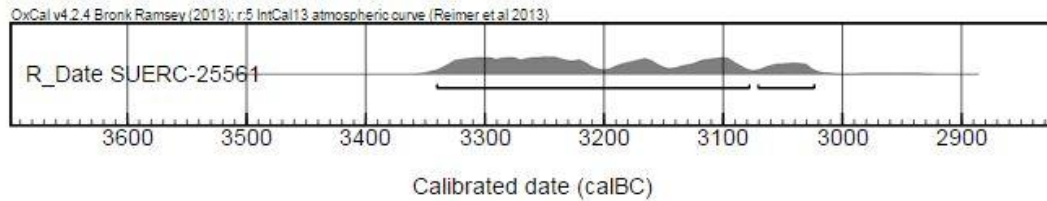


Figure 40 - the 'arc' of pits or postholes associated with cremation burials at Cairnpapple

Table 9 radiocarbon dates for Cairnpapple

| <b>Cairnpapple radiocarbon dates (Sheridan <i>et al.</i> 2009: 214)</b> |  |                    |                          |  |
|---|--|--------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Dates calibrated using OxCal 4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2014)                    |  |                    |                          |  |
| <i>Sample number</i>  | <i>Context</i>   | <i>Material</i>    | <i>Uncalibrated Date</i> | <i>Calibrated date (95.4% probability)</i> |
| Cremation burial from 'arc' of pits (pre-henge)                         |  |                    |                          |  |
| SUERC-25561 (GU-19423)  | Burnt pin accompanying cremated human remains, in 'arc' of pits. | <i>Bone/antler</i> | 4470±35 bp               | 3341-3024 cal BC                           |



**Figure 41 - plot of the Cairnpapple dates**

The cremations at Cairnpapple were either in or beside an ‘arc’ of pits - more accurately described as straight lines of pits, rather than an arc, as Barclay (1999: 25) points out. Because of this variation in the way the cremations were deposited, Barclay has also suggested that they may have been deposited over a long period (*ibid.*). Piggott (1948: 76) describes these pits as being ‘near the centre of the Henge area’. The manner of the deposition of cremated remains at Cairnpapple shares parallels with Henge 1 at Forteviot (discussed below), where some cremations were deposited in a large pit, while others were placed in the socket of a standing stone (Noble and Brophy 2011a).



**Figure 42 - reconstruction drawing depicting fire-lighting and the burial of potsherds (based on evidence from Balfarg, discussed below in this chapter. Artist: Jan Dunbar; from Barclay and Grove 2001: 14)**

***Enclosing: timber/stone circle and 'henging'***

After the use of the site for deposition, burial and burning during the earlier Neolithic, the site was enclosed. The first enclosure on the site probably took the form of an oval setting of 24 timber posts, measuring 35 metres by 28 metres (fig. 43; Barclay 1999: 28, 39). Although Piggott (1948: 70,76) suggested that the holes were stone-holes, and that the setting was a stone circle, Barclay (1999: 25) considers that there is no evidence to suggest that these held stones, and were more likely to have been postholes. This interpretation seems plausible based on comparison with similar henge sites such as North Mains (which Barclay excavated), where there had been two timber circles before the construction of the henge monument (see discussion of North Mains sequence in Chapter 4). However, Alex Gibson (2005: 73) suggests a sequence of 'lithicisation' at Cairnpapple, with a timber circle being 'replaced' with a stone one. More recently however, Richard Bradley and Alison Sheridan have suggested that Piggott's interpretation may have been correct, and the setting could have been stone rather than timber (Gibson 2010a: 70-1).

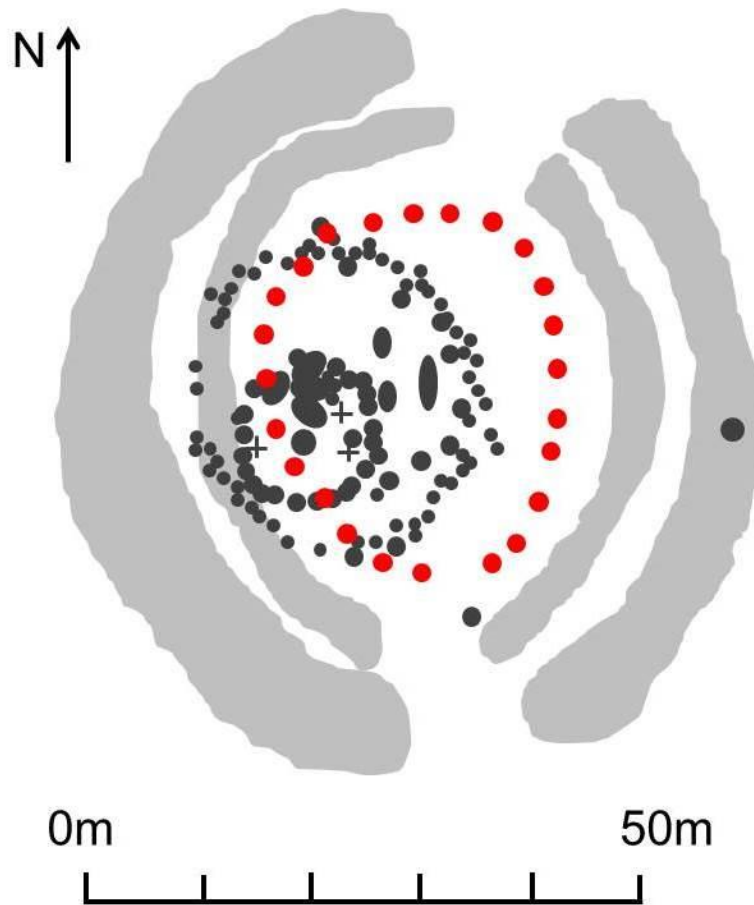


Figure 43 - the timber or stone circle at Cairnpapple

Unfortunately, while Piggott's report contains plans and profiles of several of the stone/post holes (fig. 44), he did not include detailed sections. It is impossible to distinguish from the profiles of the holes whether they held stones or timber posts. Some of them (e.g. 'stone-hole 16' in fig. 44 below) resemble ramped postholes, but these could equally be ramped stoneholes. However, Piggott had experience of excavating stone holes, and the morphology of the features - which have a wide, shallow posthole - makes it more probable that they are stone holes rather than postholes. Piggott did include some sections of the entire site including the cairn and henge ditch, and some of the putative stone holes are included on this. From this section (fig. 45) it can be seen that there is no apparent post-pipe or other features which particularly suggest the hole held a timber post. The fill of the stone-hole appears homogeneous, which could suggest that the stone (or possibly timber post) has been removed and the

stone-hole has been backfilled. The question of whether these features represent a stone circle or a timber circle cannot be satisfactorily resolved. Here, the timber circle interpretation is favoured, as this seems more likely based on the similarities of the Cairnpapple biography with sites such as North Mains or Forteviot 1 where there are timber settings. This does not preclude the possibility that there was a stone setting at Cairnpapple however, or indeed a timber setting replaced in stone, as Gibson (2005: 73) suggests.

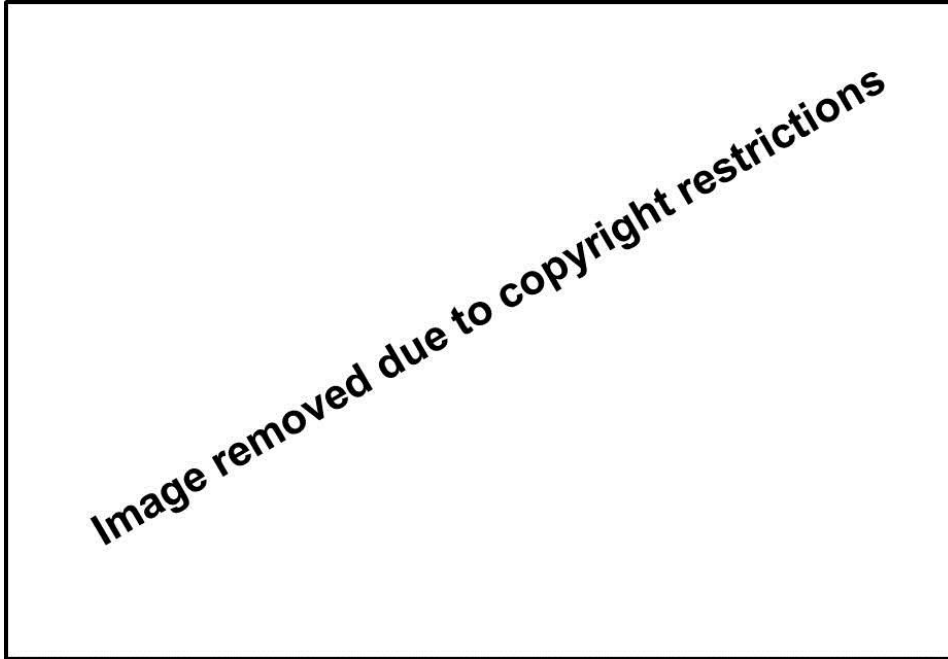


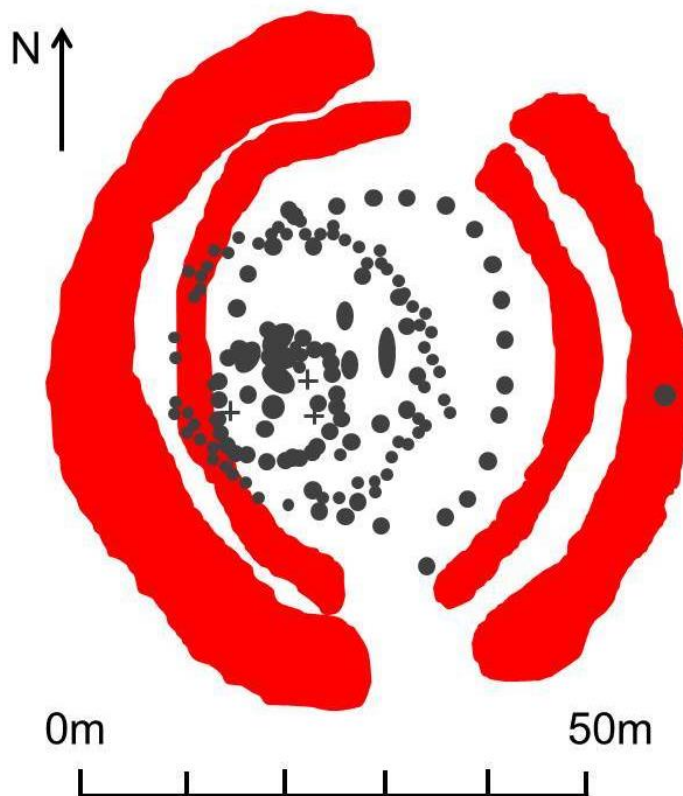
Figure 44 - profiles of the postholes/Piggott's stoneholes at Cairnpapple. From Piggott 1948: 85, fig. 7



Figure 45 - section of cairn at Cairnpapple, showing one of Piggott's putative stone-holes. From Piggott 1948: fig. 11

After the area of deposition and hearths had been demarcated by the timber circle, Cairnpapple was enclosed by a henge earthwork (fig. 46). Barclay (1999: 39) considers that the bank and ditch belonged to the same phase of activity as the putative timber setting, along with a pit complex, and a structure that Piggott (1948) described as a 'cove', similar to the stone settings at Avebury. Barclay is dubious of the nature of the 'cove' setting at Cairnpapple, since there is nothing to suggest that it held monoliths at any time, and suggests that it may instead represent the remains of a 'less-monumental stone structure', or may be related to quarrying of material for the later cairns (Barclay 1999: 39). The henge, timber setting, pits and 'cove' were not necessarily constructed at the same time, Barclay notes (*ibid.*). Although there is no dating evidence for the timber (or stone) setting or the henge monument, based on comparison with other henge sites in Scotland it seems likely that they may have been constructed as much as several centuries apart, as was the case for instance at North Mains (see Chapter 4) and Forteviot 1 (discussed below). It also seems likely that the henge bank and ditch would have been built *after* the timber (or stone) setting, since this is normally the sequence where timber circles and henges are found together. Based on the similarities with the henge sites at North Mains and Forteviot 1, it is possible to speculate that the henge at Cairnpapple may have been constructed during the Chalcolithic or Early Bronze Age, perhaps sometime during the 25th-23rd centuries BC.





**Figure 46 - the henge earthworks at Cairnpapple, and their relationship to earlier and later features at the site**

Piggott (1948: 82) viewed the ditch simply as a quarry to obtain material for the bank, which survived variously to a height of c.0.61-1.22 metres at the time of excavation. The ditch was wide, about 3.66 m across, and was cut into the basalt bedrock. The depth of the ditch varied depending on the hardness or ‘rotten’-ness of the rock; Piggott noted that a ‘partial causeway’ had been left on the west side of the monument, where the rock evidently proved particularly stubborn, as only ‘the top surface had been scraped away’ (Piggott 1948: 82). Elsewhere however, the ditch was around 0.91 m deep, with a maximum depth of c.1.22 m (*ibid.*). Piggott describes the area enclosed by the ditch as an ‘oval’ area in plan, measuring c.44.2m by 38.1 m (*ibid.*). The lower fill of the ditch was a clayey-silt, which Piggott describes as probably having ‘been deposited rapidly and by water action’ (*ibid.*: 83). In common with other henge monuments, it seems possible that the ditch at Cairnpapple may have begun to fill in naturally, and been allowed to do so, relatively quickly after its original excavation (as was discussed in Chapter 4 with reference to Balfarg Riding School and North Mains).

## ***Burial***

After the site at Cairnpapple had been enclosed by a henge, it was again used for burial sporadically over a period of several centuries, during which time, Barclay notes, various different styles of burial were utilised at the site (Barclay 1999: 39). The use of various different burial practices at henge sites is also evident at other sites, for example, at the Forteviot monument complex. The first to take place on Cairnpapple Hill since the earlier Neolithic cremation burials may have been a small Beaker burial (*ibid.*). This was located inside the area enclosed by the henge. Barclay suggests that the next burial at the site was the 'North Grave' (*ibid.*). This impressive 'monumental' grave incorporates an oval stone setting, and a monolith (fig. 47). It may have been around this period of Cairnpapple's use for burial that the first cairn was built on site, as Barclay (*ibid.*) considers that the North Grave was 'almost certainly' covered by a cairn (fig. 48). Shortly after the construction of the elaborate North Grave and cairn, two cists were constructed beside the North Grave, and a cairn consisting of clay and stone built over them (Barclay 1999: 39, 41). This cairn included a kerb of large stones, which Piggott (1948) believed were the stones which had been used in the putative earlier stone circle (Barclay's timber circle), reused in the construction of the later cairn. Barclay is sceptical that the kerb stones were reused from an earlier phase of the site, and suggests that a kerb is a typical feature of other cairns in the region (Barclay 1999: 35).



Figure 47 - monumental 'North Grave' with monolith. Photo: Piggott 1948 plate XXI/RCAHMS

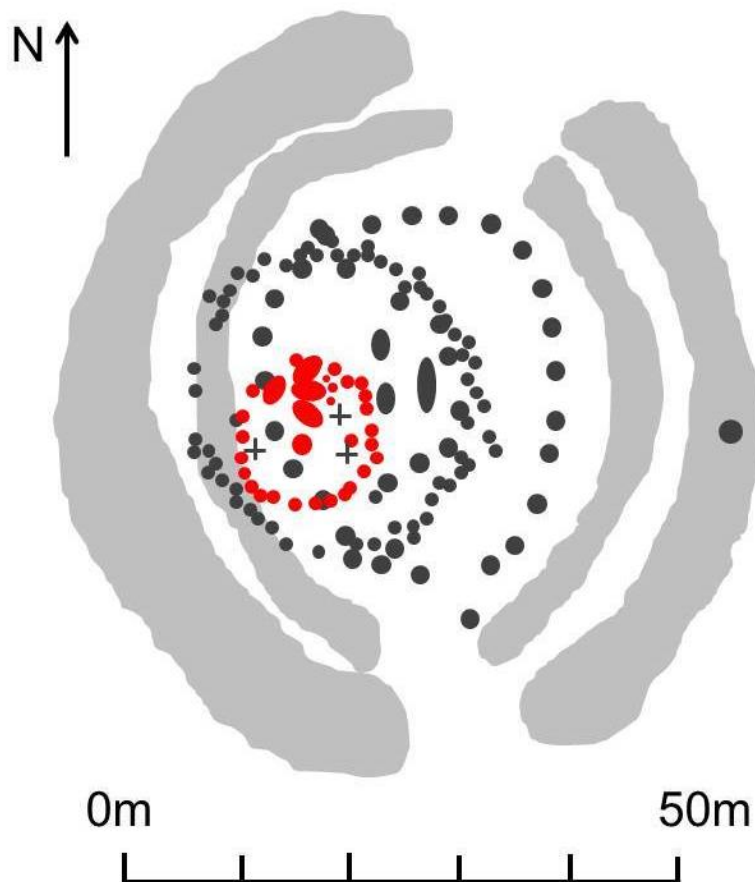
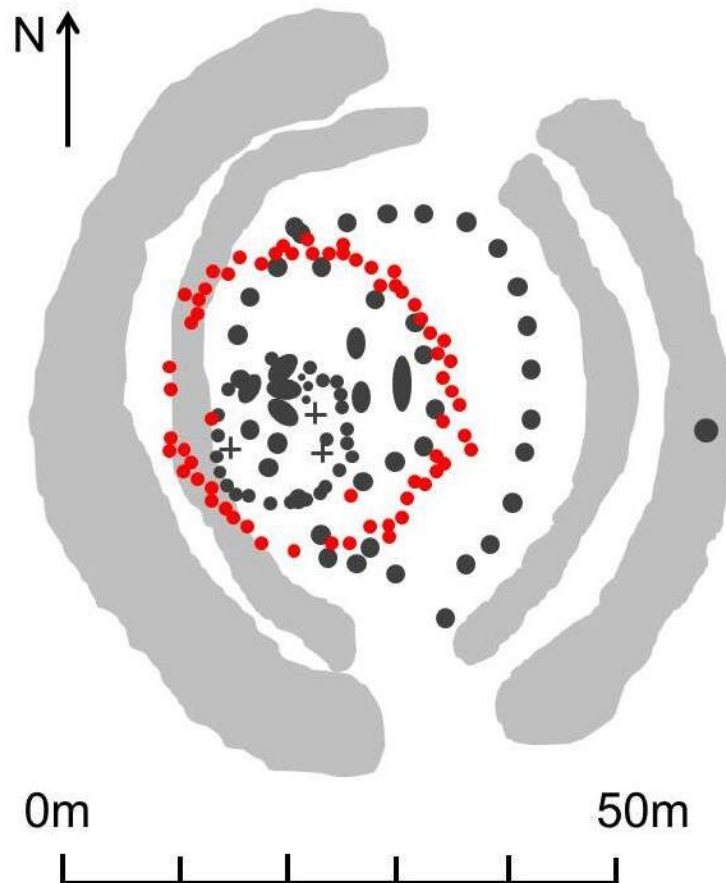


Figure 48 – plan of the first cairn at Cairnpapple, covering the North Grave and beaker burial

Whatever the origin of the kerb stones, the cairn was subsequently subsumed by the construction of another, larger cairn - probably the third successive cairn to be built at Cairnpapple (Barclay 1999: 41). This cairn is concentric to the earlier cairn that it covers (Barclay 1999: 35), and Barclay suggests that it may have been 'intended only to enlarge or monumentalise' the previous cairn (*ibid.*: 41). Two urn burials may have been inserted into the surface of the final, largest cairn (*ibid.*), and so it is possible that burials continued to be placed there some time after the construction of the cairns. The cairns themselves partially overlie the earlier henge ditch (figs. 49, 50, 51), which must have been at least partly filled-in by that time.



**Figure 49** - plan of the final, largest cairn at Cairnpapple, which overlies the henge ditch on the west

Cairnpapple continued to attract burials for a long period after its initial use for this purpose, with four long graves being added to the site, probably in the early

Christian period (Barclay 1999: 41). These were located outside and just to the east of the final cairn, but still inside the area which had been defined by the henge earthworks.

### ***Summary of Cairnpapple sequence***

There is ambiguity over the correct order of some of the events in the 'life' of the henge site at Cairnpapple, and even a certain amount of uncertainty over the interpretation of some of the features. There are many 'free-floating' elements, which have no clear stratigraphic relationship to other features, and are undated. For example, the 'cove' feature could have been a timber structure, or pits; the date of the hearths is not known, and it is not even certain that they are all contemporary (Barclay 1999: 34). Barclay (1999: 34) notes that Harding (1987) even suggested that the 'stone' (or timber) setting, cremation cemetery, 'cove', henge and beaker burials, which comprise Piggott's Period I and II, could have occurred in 'reverse order' from that suggested by Piggott. The sequence suggested here is plausible when compared to other henge sites, but other interpretations of the sequence are possible. The first (archaeologically-visible) activity at Cairnpapple probably took place during the Early Neolithic period, when the site was used for the deposition of pottery sherds, axehead fragments, and several cremation burials, one accompanied by a bone pin. Fires were set on the site, in six discrete 'hearth' areas. Probably some centuries later, the site was enclosed by a timber 'circle'. Later, a rock-cut ditch and bank were constructed on the hilltop, concentric to the earlier timber setting, and enclosing the area which had earlier been used for burial and deposition. Later still (perhaps after the henge ditch had begun to fill in), the site was again used for burial, from the early Bronze Age onwards. Associated with this burial activity, a succession of three cairns was built on the site. Cairnpapple continued to be used episodically for burial over several centuries.



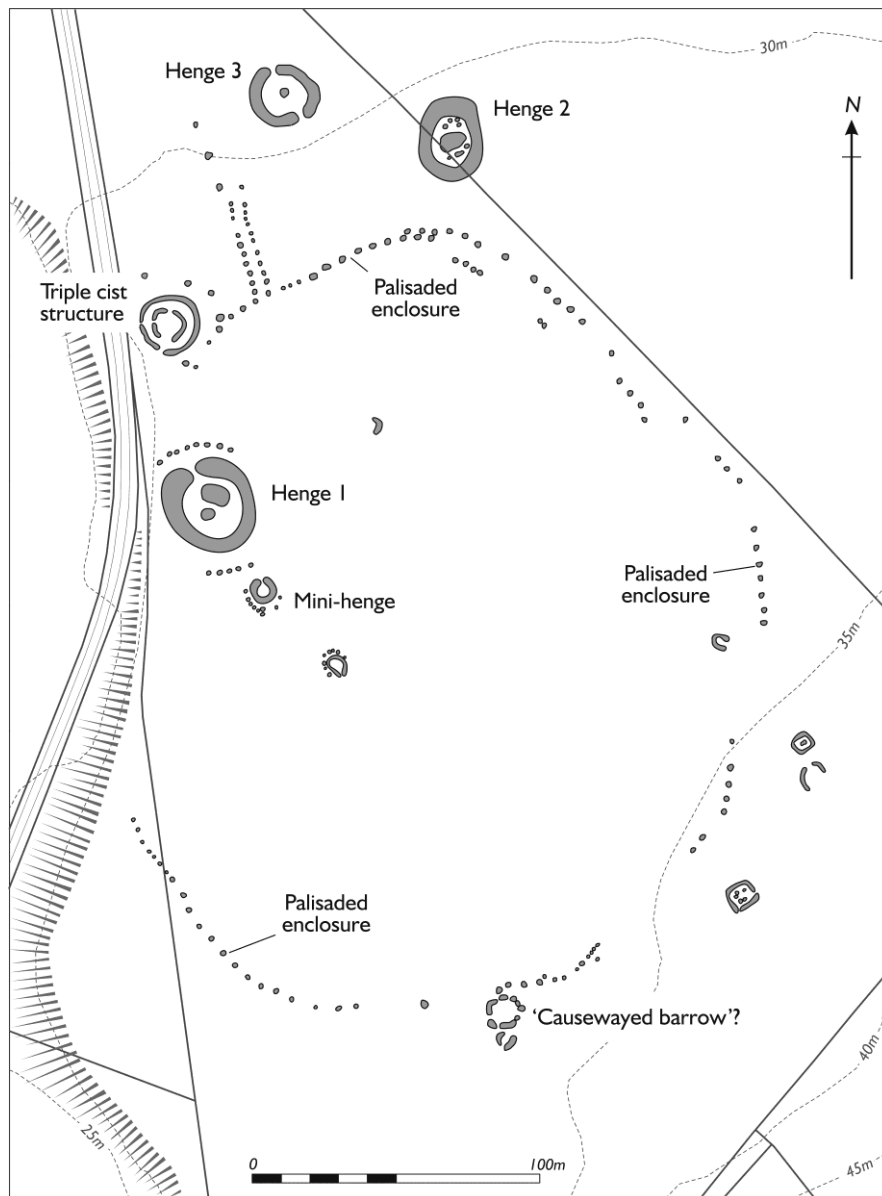
**Figure 50 - cairn material at Cairnpapple, now part of the modern presentation of the site to visitors.**



**Figure 51 - ditch (in foreground) and kerb of larger cairn at Cairnpapple. The grassy mound is a concrete dome covering the monumental cist burials.**

## Biography 2: Forteviot 1

The monument complex at Forteviot, Perth and Kinross was discovered as a series of cropmarks via aerial photographic survey in the 1970s (St Joseph 1976, 1978). The cropmarks represent a group of monuments spanning the Late Neolithic up to the 1st millennium AD; a transcription of the cropmarks is shown below (fig. 52). The complex of monuments is situated above a tributary of the River Earn, on a gravel terrace just to the south of the modern village of Forteviot, with the Gask Ridge of hills to the north and the Ochil Hills to the south. The Forteviot complex forms part of a wider, rich archaeological landscape, the monument complex at Leadketty (discussed in chapter 3) being located less than 4 km to the south-west. The prehistoric monuments at Forteviot include a large palisaded enclosure, timber circles, barrows and several henge and hengiform monuments. The site continued to be used into the early medieval period: there are Pictish square barrows a little to the north-east of the main concentration of prehistoric monuments at Forteviot, as well as evidence of Iron Age and Early Medieval activity within and around the monuments themselves. Excavations were carried out within the monument complex from 2006-2010, as part of the Strathearn Environs and Royal Forteviot (SERF) project (led by Glasgow and Aberdeen Universities and funded by Historic Scotland). This biography will focus largely on only one of the monuments within the complex, Henge 1, although other parts of the monument complex will be discussed in relation to this site. Henge 1 is located inside the Late Neolithic palisaded enclosure, and was excavated over two seasons in 2008-9 (Noble and Brophy 2011a; Brophy and Noble 2012a).



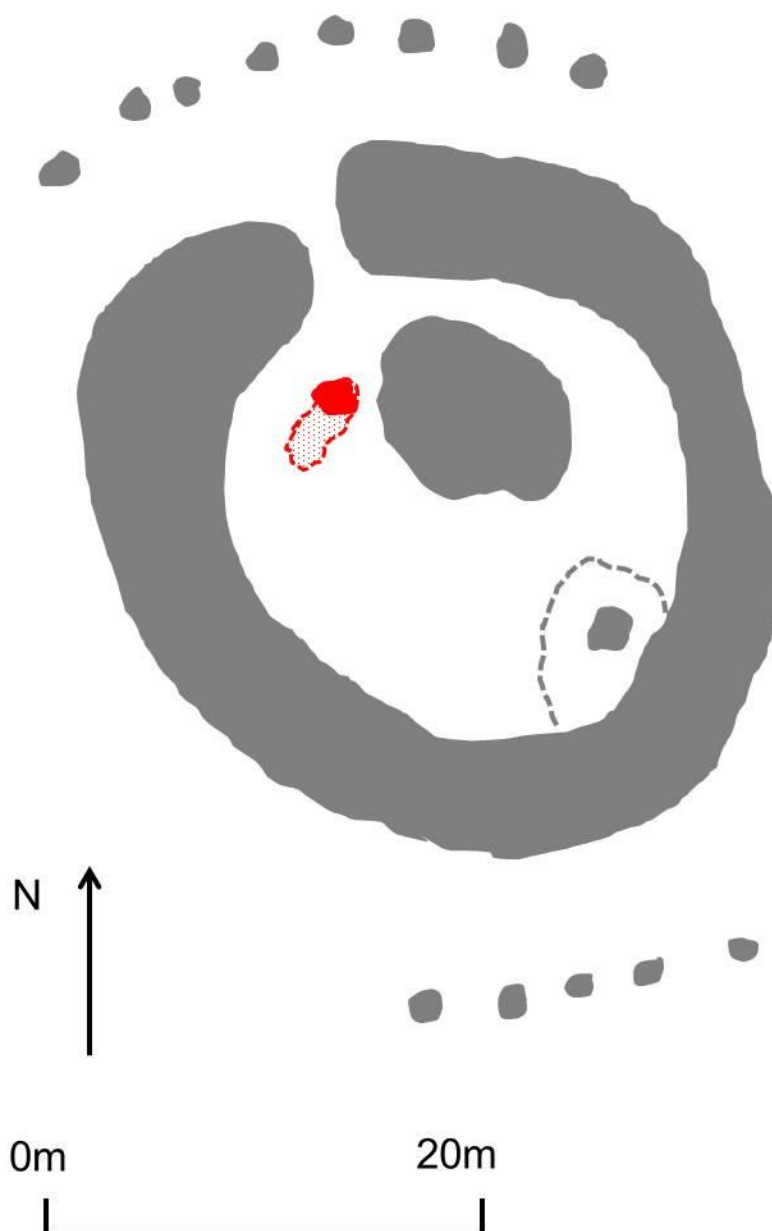
**Figure 52 - transcription of the cropmarks of the prehistoric and early medieval monument complex at Forteviot, Perth and Kinross. Image: SERF project**

### ***Place-making: burial***

The earliest activity identified on the site of Forteviot Henge 1 was a cremation cemetery (fig. 53). The cemetery consisted of at least nine cremation burials, all located within the area which, centuries later, would be enclosed by a series of timber and earthwork monuments (Noble and Brophy 2011a: 790). The cremation cemetery included the remains of adults, children, and animals, and has been dated to the Late Neolithic, 3090-2638 cal BC at 95% confidence (*ibid.*). The cremation deposits were associated with cut features, in one instance a pit which contained several burials, including two which were in recuts within the



pit (*ibid.*). This suggests repeated or episodic use of the site as a cremation cemetery. One of the cremations was accompanied by undecorated pottery sherds, possibly an 'accessory vessel' accompanying the burial and another by fragments of bone pins (Noble and Brophy 2011a: 790). A leaf-shaped arrowhead was also found associated with the cremation cemetery. This arrowhead was made of baked siltstone, and the tip of the point was snapped off. Given the Late Neolithic date of the cremation deposit, it is possible that the arrowhead was a curated item, perhaps an object with some personal significance which was kept for several generations, before it was finally chosen as an object to be buried in the cremation cemetery. These objects found in the Forteviot cremation cemetery are similar to some of the artefacts that were associated with 'pre-henge' cremation burials and burning at Cairnpapple Hill, and will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.



**Figure 53 - plan of the cremation deposit, and probable area of cremation cemetery, shown in relation to later features at Forteviot 1**

It is possible that the cremation cemetery at Forteviot may have been marked by a monolith or a stone setting. One of the cremation deposits was associated with a broken piece of sandstone, possibly a snapped standing stone, and so the cremation cemetery may have been marked by a standing stone (or stones); alternatively, it is possible that the cremations were placed at the site after the stone setting had been 'decommissioned' (Noble and Brophy 2014a). Although nine more discrete cremation deposits were recovered, it is possible that the

cemetery originally included more burials, although it is difficult to be certain because of the extent to which the site was later modified (Noble and Brophy 2011a: 790-1). The cemetery seems to have been a significant draw for later activity.

### ***Enclosure: timber monuments and henging***

Perhaps some centuries after the site at Forteviot had been used for burial, a tradition of enclosure began at the site. The largest enclosure at Forteviot may also have been the earliest: a huge palisaded enclosure, radiocarbon dated to 2926-2467 cal BC at 95% confidence (Noble and Brophy 2011a: 793). A table showing the radiocarbon dates for the palisaded enclosure and other features at Forteviot is shown below (table 10, see also fig. 54). Based on the extent of the cropmark, Alex Gibson has calculated that the boundaries of this timber monument enclose an area of about 6 hectares (Gibson 2002a: 18). Despite the massive scale of the area enclosed, the entrance avenue was relatively narrow - about 4-5 metres in width, but 35 metres long (Noble and Brophy 2011a: 791-3). The posts which formed the enclosure were substantial oak posts, which may have stood as tall as six metres above ground (Noble and Brophy 2011a: 793). The term 'palisaded enclosure' may be misleading, as the spacing of the postholes at Forteviot makes it more likely that the enclosure was formed of free-standing timbers, rather than a fenced palisade (Noble and Brophy 2011b). Nonetheless, the timbers would have formed a substantial barrier; it is likely that whole tree trunks, perhaps weighing at least 1-2 tons, were used in its construction (fig. 55; Noble and Brophy 2011a: 793). The posts may also have been set into a low bank (K. Brophy *pers. comm.*).

**Table 10 dates for Forteviot 1**

| <b>Forteviot 1 radiocarbon dates (after Noble and Brophy 2011a: 794, table 1)</b> |   |                 |                          |  |
|---|---|-----------------|--------------------------|--|
| Dates calibrated using OxCal 4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2014)                              |   |                 |                          |  |
| <i>Sample number</i>  | <i>Context</i>                            | <i>Material</i> | <i>Uncalibrated Date</i> | <i>Calibrated date (95.4% probability unless otherwise stated)</i> |
| Cremation cemetery  |   |                 |                          |  |
| SUERC-29184   | 628/1050 charcoal from cremation deposit. | <i>Alnus</i>    | 4240±30 bp               | 2911-2705 cal BC   |
| SUERC-29185   | 641/1070 charcoal from cremation deposit. | <i>Alnus</i>    | 4315±30 bp               | 3003-2779 cal BC   |

|                          |   |  |            |                          |
|--------------------------|---|--|------------|--------------------------|
| SUERC-29186              | 617b/1041 human bone from cremation deposit.      | <i>Fragment of long bone from lower leg.</i> | 4275±30 bp | 3003-2779 cal BC (95.5%) |
| SUERC-29187              | 628b/1050 human bone from cremation deposit.      | <i>Fragment of long bone from lower leg.</i> | 4370±70 bp | 3331-2885 cal BC (95.5%) |
| SUERC-29199              | 530b/1049 human bone from cremation deposit.      | <i>Bone from femur.</i>                      | 4180±30 bp | 2887-2666 cal BC         |
| Palisaded enclosure      |   |  |            |                          |
| SUERC-21564              | 159/066 charcoal from palisaded enclosure         | <i>Quercus</i>                               | 4155±40 bp | 2881-2620 cal BC         |
| SUERC-21565              | 150/058 charcoal from palisaded enclosure         | <i>Quercus</i>                               | 4250±40 bp | 2926-2680 cal BC (95.3%) |
| SUERC-21570              | 121/SF061 charcoal from palisaded enclosure       | <i>Quercus</i>                               | 3965±40 bp | 2576-2345 cal BC         |
| SUERC-21571              | 118/SF051 charcoal from palisaded enclosure       | <i>Quercus</i>                               | 4065±40 bp | 2856-2481 cal BC         |
| SUERC-21572              | 103/050 charcoal from palisaded enclosure         | <i>Quercus</i>                               | 4140±40 bp | 2876-2586 cal BC         |
| SUERC-21573              | 032/053 charcoal from palisaded enclosure         | <i>Quercus</i>                               | 4025±40 bp | 2834-2467 cal BC         |
| SUERC-21574              | 044/043 charcoal from palisaded enclosure         | <i>Quercus</i>                               | 4065±40 bp | 2856-2481 cal BC         |
| SUERC-21575              | 112/SF020 charcoal from palisaded enclosure       | <i>Quercus</i>                               | 4070±40 bp | 2859-2486 cal BC (95.5%) |
| Timber circle            |   |  |            |                          |
| SUERC-23237              | 334/313 charcoal from timber circle               | <i>Quercus</i>                               | 4065±30 bp | 2850-2488 cal BC         |
| SUERC-23246              | 333/331 charcoal from timber circle               | <i>Quercus</i>                               | 4005±30 bp | 2580-2468 cal BC         |
| Henge ditch: lower fills |   |  |            |                          |
| SUERC-23248              | 362/352 Charcoal from lower fill of henge ditch.  | <i>Alnus</i>                                 | 3880±30 bp | 2467-2236 cal BC         |
| SUERC-29178              | 643/1068 Charcoal from lower fill of henge ditch. | <i>Quercus</i>                               | 3790±30 bp | 2336-2135 cal BC         |
| SUERC-29179              | 645/1068 charcoal from lower fill of henge ditch  | <i>Alnus</i>                                 | 3780±30 bp | 2296-2060 cal BC         |
| Fills of henge ditch     |   |  |            |                          |
| SUERC-23243              | 379/358 charcoal from fill of henge ditch.        | <i>Corylus</i>                               | 3725±30 bp | 2203-2033 cal BC         |
| SUERC-23244              | 345/334 charcoal from fill of henge ditch         | <i>Alnus</i>                                 | 3810±30 bp | 2398-2141 cal BC (95.5%) |
| SUERC-29176              | 609/1034 charcoal from fill of henge ditch        | <i>Corylus</i>                               | 3650±30 bp | 2135-1939 cal BC         |
| Henge ditch: upper fills |   |  |            |                          |

|             |   |                               |            |                          |
|-------------|---|-------------------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| SUERC-23238 | 311/316 charcoal from upper fill of henge ditch     | <i>Corylus</i>                | 3790±30 bp | 2336-2135 cal BC         |
| Cist burial |   |                               |            |                          |
| SUERC-26112 | 004 bark from cist.                                 | <i>Birch bark</i>             | 3675±30 bp | 2141-1956 cal BC         |
| SUERC-29196 | 801/1115 charcoal from cist.                        | <i>Betula</i>                 | 3690±30 bp | 2196-1977 cal BC (95.3%) |
| SUERC-29197 | 609/1034 charcoal from henge ditch fill beside cist | <i>Corylus</i>                | 3650±30 bp | 2135-1939 cal BC         |
| SUERC-29200 | SF1020/1110 wood from cist                          | <i>cf Salix</i>               | 3705±30 bp | 2200-1985 cal BC         |
| SUERC-29198 | SF1017/014 flower seeds from cist                   | <i>cf Filipendula ulmaria</i> | 3590±30 bp | 2028-1884 cal BC         |
| SUERC-29199 | Flower from cist.                                   | <i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>    | 3740±35 bp | 2279-2033 cal BC         |

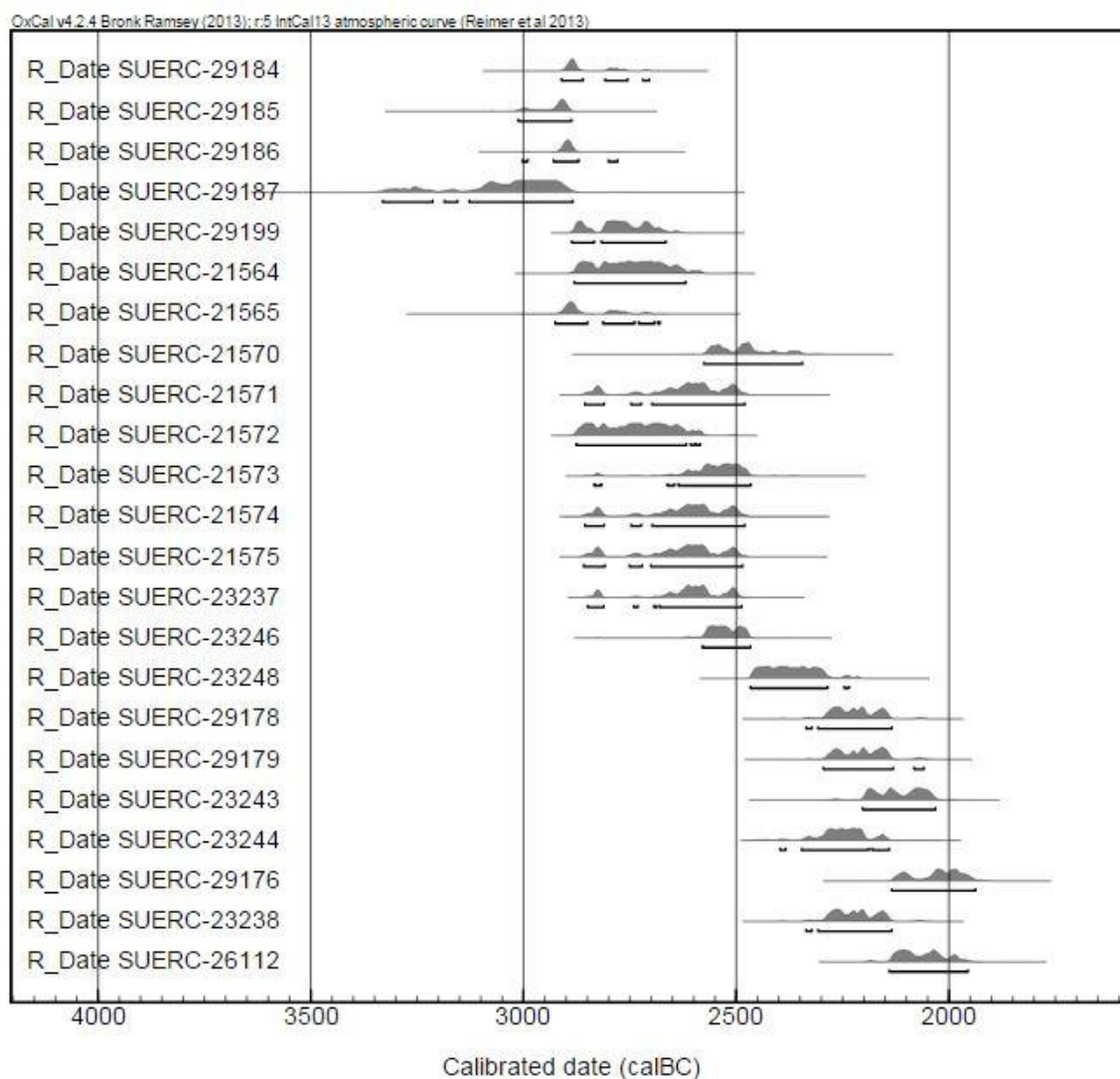
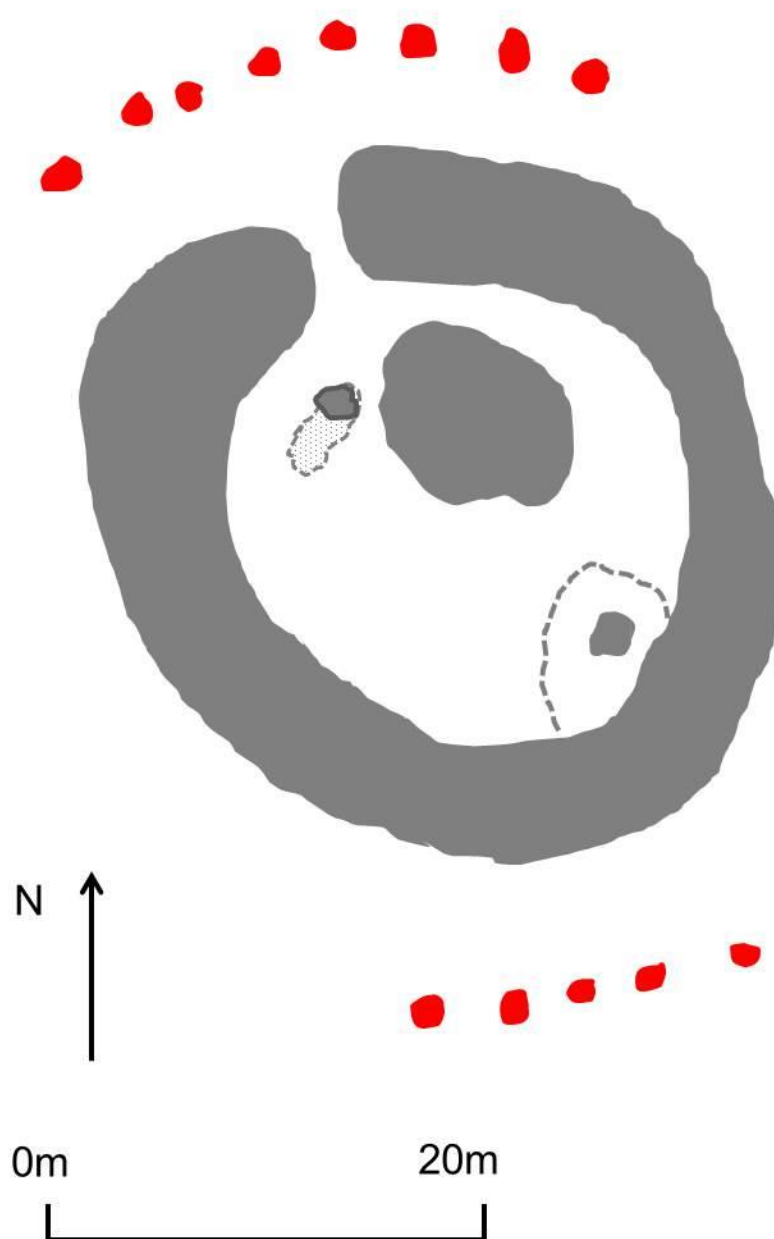


Figure 54 plot of Forteviot 1 dates



**Figure 55** - a reconstruction of the timber 'palisaded' enclosure at Forteviot. Image: Alice Watterson

Around the same time, or perhaps a few generations after, the large palisaded enclosure was being built at Forteviot, a smaller timber monument was built inside it (fig. 56). This monument was also constructed of large oak posts, arranged in a circle c.45 metres in diameter, enclosing the earlier cremation cemetery (Noble and Brophy 2011a: 795). Little material culture was found associated with either of the timber monuments (*ibid.*: 793, 795). This timber circle has been dated to 2850-2467 cal BC at 95% confidence (Noble and Brophy 2011a: 795), and the excavators have suggested that the main reason for its construction may have been to enclose, and restrict access to, the cremation cemetery, which may have been marked in some way, for example by a low mound (*ibid.*).



**Figure 56 - plan of the timber setting enclosing the cremation cemetery at Forteviot 1**

After the construction of the timber circle, the area of the cremation cemetery was enclosed by a henge bank and ditch (fig. 57). The henge ditch was constructed inside, and concentric to, the timber circle, and the outer bank of the henge may have incorporated some of the posts from the earlier timber monument (fig. 58) - although no trace of the bank was found during the excavation (Brophy and Noble in prep.).

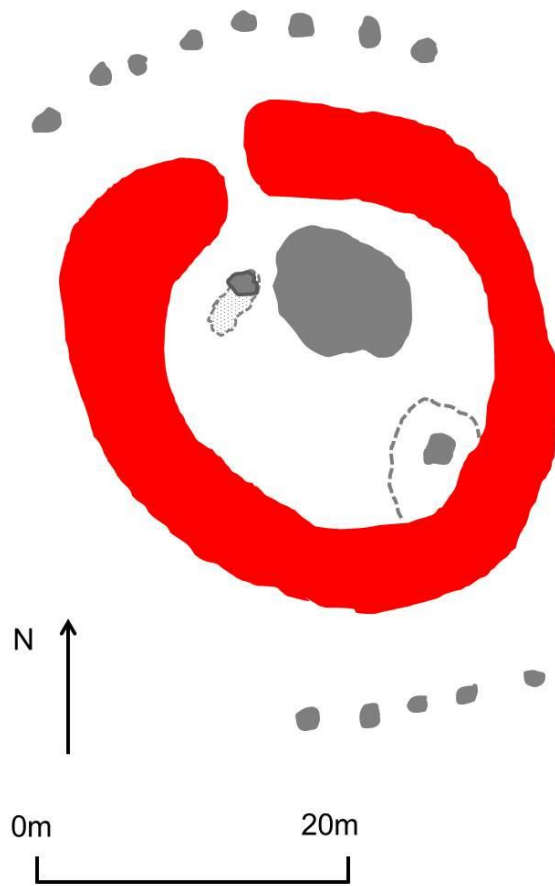


Figure 57 - the henge ditch at Forteviot 1



Figure 58 - reconstruction of a henge in use at Forteviot, showing the timber monuments as 'ruins' by the time the henge has been built. Image: Alice Watterson



In chapter 4 it was suggested that henge ditches may generally have been allowed to fill in soon after the earthworks were constructed. This may have been the case at Forteviot 1 as well: Noble and Brophy (2011a: 795) suggest that the lower fills of the henge ditch accumulated quickly in the centuries after the construction of the henge (the lower fills have been radiocarbon dated to 2468-2236 cal BC, 95% confidence). After the first fills had accumulated, the ditch may have remained open (and the site in use) for some time: clayey fills with charcoal flecks above the initial fills of the ditch suggest that the ditch was waterlogged, and the inside of the henge was being used for fire-setting (Brophy and Noble in prep). Dates from the upper fills of the ditch also suggest that the henge was in use for a significant period after its initial construction, over the period 2468-1938 cal BC (95% confidence). It is likely therefore that the construction of the henge at Forteviot occurred later than the 'traditional' 3000-2500 BC bracket for henge monuments. However, a slightly later Late Neolithic-Chalcolithic date for Forteviot 1 is consistent and broadly contemporaneous with the construction of other henges in central and southern Scotland e.g. North Mains, and possibly Pict's Knowe, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The dates for the ditch fills at Forteviot 1 indicate that it took centuries for the ditch to fill in, and the monument would therefore have been visible over a long period - several generations at least. Certainly, the earthworks were substantial. The ditch was as much as 10 metres wide, and 1.8-2.8 metres deep, enclosing an area roughly 22 metres in diameter (Noble and Brophy 2011a: 796). Sherds of Beaker pottery were found in the lower fills of the terminal of the henge ditch. Details of all the finds from Forteviot 1 are given in table 11. The Beaker sherds from the ditch appear relatively fresh and unabraded, suggesting the possibility that they were brought to the site as a whole pot, and were fragmented at Forteviot, with some of the sherds being placed in the base of the ditch terminal, and the others taken elsewhere, perhaps to be curated as mementoes, or to be deposited elsewhere in the landscape. In addition, some burnt material was deposited (perhaps dumped or deliberately pushed in?) in the henge ditch (*ibid.*).

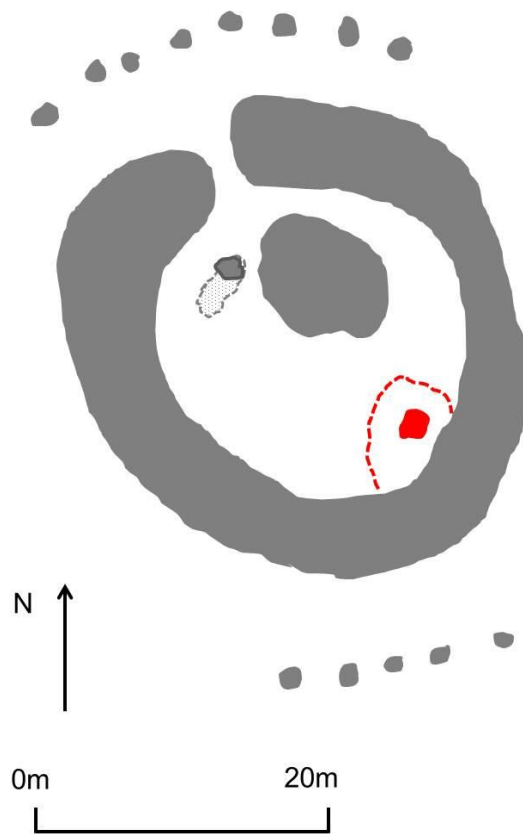
Table 11 finds from Forteviot 1

| Forteviot 1 finds (Noble and Brophy 2011a) |   |                 |                                   |          |   |                  |
|--|---|-----------------|-----------------------------------|----------|---|------------------|
| Date                                       | Uses and structures   | Artefacts       |                                   |          | Comments and condition  |                  |
|  |   | Material        | Type                              | Quantity |   |                  |
| Late 4th-early 3rd millennium BC           | Burial - cremation cemetery. Stone setting.                         | pottery         | undecorated sherd                 | 1        | Sherd of undecorated pottery, accompanying cremation deposit.   |                  |
|  |   | bone            | pin                               | 1        | 1 small fragment of bone pin, accompanying cremation deposit.   |                  |
|  |   | baked siltstone | leaf-shaped arrowhead             | 1        | Tip of arrowhead has been broken off.   |                  |
| First half of 3rd millennium BC            | Enclosure – construction of palisaded enclosure.                    | bone            | burnt bone                        | -        | Fragments of burnt bone found in upper fills of some postholes.   |                  |
|  | Construction of timber circle enclosing site of cremation cemetery. | -               | -                                 | -        | -   |                  |
| Second half of 3rd millennium BC           | Henge ditch dug. Ditch begins to fill in.                           | pottery         | Beaker                            | 2        | Broken sherds of AOC Beaker. Both from same vessel. From lower fill of eastern terminal of henge ditch.                                 |                  |
|  | Henge ditch is waterlogged. Fire-setting inside henge.              | -               | -                                 | -        | -   |                  |
| End of 3rd/beginning of 2nd millennium BC  | Burial: cist with dagger burial                                     | quartz          | pebbles                           | 8        | Laid in base of cist.   |                  |
|  |   | birch bark      | -                                 | -        | Possible mat/bier.  |                  |
|  |   | bronze          | dagger                            | 2        | 1 large dagger with gold mount on pommel. Possibly in sheepskin sheath. 1 knife/small dagger, associated with possible fire-making kit. |                  |
|  |   | wood            | -                                 | 5        | 5 fragments of wooden objects, possibly wooden vessels.   |                  |
|  |   | organic matter  | meadowsweet                       | -        | Flower buds, seeds and plant material from meadowsweet.   |                  |
| 2nd millennium BC – 1st millennium AD?     | Henge ditch filled in – top of henge ditch filled with rubble.      | pottery         | unidentified – possibly Neolithic | 3        | Small and very abraded sherds from upper fills of ditch.  |                  |
|  |   | lithics:        | Arran pitchstone                  | bladelet | 1   | Broken bladelet. |
|  |   |                 | jasper                            | flake    | 1   | -                |
|  |   |                 | chalcedony                        | flake    | 3   | -                |

|                   |  |         |        |                 |             |  |
|-------------------|--|---------|--------|-----------------|-------------|--|
|                   |  |         | flint  | scraper; flake  | 2           | flake broken,  |
|                   |  |         | quartz | flake           | 8           | -  |
| 1st millennium AD | Craft production (metal-working, glass-working). Large pit dug inside henge. | glass   |        | droplet         | 1           | -  |
|                   |  | metal   |        | Fe object       | 1           | Hammerscale also found,  |
|                   |  | pottery |        | Roman; Medieval | unspecified | Very abraded sherds. Found in backfill of large medieval pit inside henge. |

### ***Monumental burial***

After the henge ditch had partially silted up, Forteviot Henge 1 was used for another burial. In the period 2199-1977 cal BC at 95% confidence (Noble and Brophy 2011a: 796), a stone cist was constructed in the south-east sector of Henge 1 (figs. 59, 60). The pit in which the cist sat cuts the partially-silted henge ditch (*ibid.*). The burial was accompanied by a bronze dagger with gold on the pommel (fig. 61), as well as various other artefacts, including another smaller knife, and possibly a fire-making kit. The body may have been laid on a mat or bier of birch bark (Noble and Brophy 2011a), and possibly surrounded by quartz pebbles (fig. 60). A floral tribute of meadowsweet flowers was strewn or placed in the grave (fig. 62), before the cist was sealed with a large capstone, with an unusual abstract carving on its underside (Noble and Brophy 2011a). It is possible that the cist was covered by a mound (Brophy and Noble 2012a), and the stony upper fill of the ditch may derive from a putative cairn, which possibly collapsed or was destroyed at a later date (Brophy and Noble forthcoming).



**Figure 59 - plan showing the capstone covering the cist at Forteviot 1; the dotted line indicates the extent of the cut in which the cist was constructed**



**Figure 60 - the cist at Forteviot Henge 1. Photo: SERF**

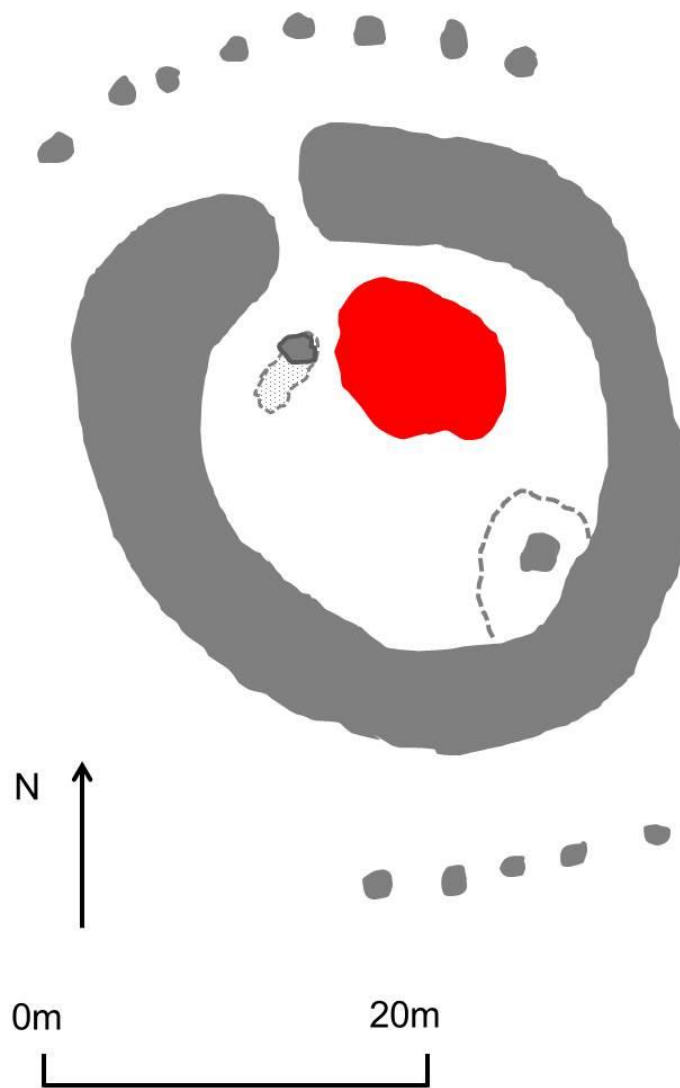


**Figure 61 - the dagger from the cist burial at Forteviot Henge 1. Photo: SERF**



**Figure 62 - reconstruction of the Forteviot cist burial, with dagger, pottery vessels and floral tribute (meadowsweet) being placed into the grave. Image: Alice Watterson**

Henge 1 continued to be reworked during later prehistory and the early-medieval period, when parts of the earthwork may have been levelled. The site was probably used for craft production, as there is some evidence of metal- and glass-working on the site of the earlier henge, before a large pit was dug in the centre of the monument (fig. 63) during the early medieval period (Brophy and Noble 2012a: 26).



**Figure 63 - the large medieval pit dug in the centre of Forteviot 1 henge**

It should also be noted that although this biography has focused on Henge 1, other hengiform earthwork monuments were also built in the Forteviot complex, inside the palisaded enclosure, and clustered outside the entrance avenue of the timber monument (see fig. 52 above). Not all of these have been excavated, but they include another two henge monuments, a circular enclosure surrounding a triple cist structure, and a mini-henge (Brophy and Noble 2012a) as well as other putative monuments which show as cropmarks, such as a possible causewayed barrow just outside the southern edge of the palisaded enclosure. Some of these hengiform monuments themselves had long biographies - biographies which parallel that of Henge 1 in some respects. For example, within Henge 2 (outside and to the north of the palisaded enclosure), a timber setting was found to pre-

date the henge. This was a rectangular setting of posts, which was broadly contemporary with the timber circle on the site of Henge 1 (Brophy and Noble 2012a: 28-9). Sherds of all-over-corded (AOC) Beaker, along with pieces of stone and some charcoal, were deposited in the lower fills of the Henge 2 ditch, again in the terminal area. The entrance causeway at Henge 2 was subsequently dug away, creating a continuous ditch, enclosing the space, a feature which may reflect the conversion of Henge 2 into a barrow (*ibid.*). Henge 2 has been dated to c. 2400 cal BC, continuing up to the first half of the second millennium cal BC (*ibid.*), meaning that it is roughly contemporary with (or perhaps slightly later than) Henge 1.

### ***Summary of Forteviot 1 sequence***

The earliest known activity at Forteviot 1 was probably a late Neolithic cremation cemetery, where the remains of adults, children and animals were buried. The cemetery may have been marked by a standing stone (or stone setting), later broken. Alternatively, the stone setting may have been the first activity there, subsequently broken, the snapped stump of the stone becoming a focus for burial. In the centuries after the cremation cemetery was in use, Forteviot became a focus for large-scale timber monuments. A huge enclosure of oak posts was built. The area immediately surrounding the cremation cemetery was also subsequently enclosed by a timber circle. During the Chalcolithic period, hengiform monuments were built in and around the palisaded enclosure, including one which subsumed the timber circle enclosing the earlier cremation cemetery. Sherds of Beaker pottery were deposited in the base of this henge ditch, which was then allowed to fill in, while the henge continued to be used. Fires may have been set inside the henge, and some of the charcoal found its way into the silted and waterlogged ditch. By the Early Bronze Age, the site was used for burial again. An impressive cist was built inside Henge 1, and a mound may have been constructed over it. This was not located in the centre of the monument, but partially overlying the henge ditch. The mound was later destroyed, although the site continued to attract interest as a venue for craft-working, and to incite investigation, including exploratory digging in the centre of the monument during the Iron Age/Early Medieval periods.

### **Biography 3: Balfarg**

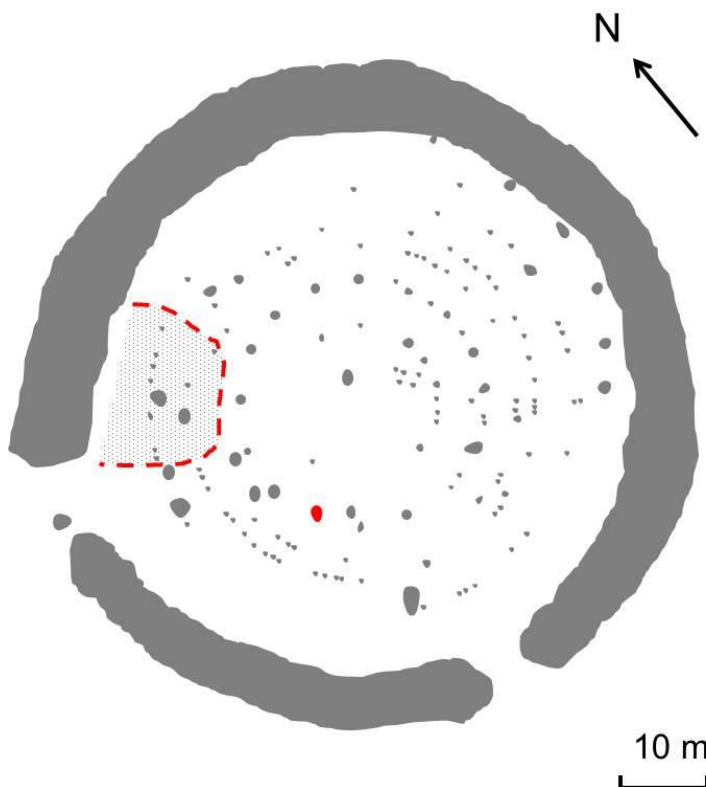
The third case study in this chapter is Balfarg, another henge site within the same monument complex as Balfarg Riding School (discussed in chapter 4). Although two standing stones were visible on the site, the henge element of the site at Balfarg was discovered through the identification of the ditch on aerial photographs taken in 1947 (Mercer 1981: 64), and was then surveyed in 1950 by Atkinson (1950: 58). The area around the henge had been farmed since at least the late 18th century (Mercer 1981: 63), and by the time of its discovery and survey in 1950, the henge earthworks had been ploughed almost flat, although Atkinson detected some slight remnants of an external bank on the north and east of the ditch circuit (Atkinson 1950: 58). Balfarg henge was excavated by Roger Mercer from 1977-78, in advance of the expansion of a new town, Glenrothes, and the construction of a housing estate on the site of the henge and standing stones (Mercer 1981: 64). More recently, new radiocarbon dates have become available for some of the other sites within the Balfarg monument complex, leading to the reinterpretation of the phasing of Balfarg by Alex Gibson (2010a). Gibson notes however that the sequence at Balfarg Henge is not well-understood, due to a paucity of dateable material from the site, plough truncation, and a 'lack of stratigraphical relationships' between features on the site (*ibid.*: 65). A lack of stratigraphical relationships between features is something of a recurrent theme in the excavation of henge sites (for example at Cairnpapple, as discussed above; and at Ringlemere, discussed in chapter 6).

#### ***Place-making***

In common with the kinds of place-making activities taking place at other sites such as Cairnpapple, the earliest events at Balfarg involved pottery deposition and burning. These activities were carried out on a knoll of glacial till. Like other sites which were later henged, this knoll is located on flat ground, in this case within a shallow basin, and surrounded by hills on all sides (Mercer 1981: 65-6). East Lomond Hill is located 7km away to the north-west, and there are hills visible on the north-eastern horizon also (*ibid.*). More immediately, on the south, the site is bounded by a natural gully; this gully would later form part of the henge ditch (*ibid.*). Gibson (2010a: 71) describes the earliest events at Balfarg as 'Grooved Ware-associated pyro-ritual activity', which he dates to the



end of the third millennium BC. Gibson equates this partly with what Mercer names 'Layer U2' in the excavation report, a discrete deposit covering the north-western area of the site (fig. 64), and which included an assemblage of pottery sherds (Mercer 1981: 84). The pottery from Layer U2 includes sherds from at least 16 different vessels, some of which are represented by multiple sherds; and Mercer (*ibid.*: 96) notes that 14 of the vessels from Layer U2 are also represented by sherds found in the sockets of one of the timber settings on the site, timber circle A. More information on the pottery, and other finds from Balfarg, is given in table 12. Mercer suggests that this reflects the use of material from Layer U2 in the backfilling of timber circle A, and he suggests that the timber circle is contemporary with other Grooved Ware related deposition activity on the site (Mercer 1981). Gibson (2010a: 71-2) believes that the timber circle belongs to a later phase of activity at Balfarg however, an interpretation which seems more convincing based on comparison with other excavated henge sites such as Forteviot 1 or North Mains, where timber settings post-date and, in the case of Forteviot enclose, the sites of earlier deposition and burial (Noble and Brophy 2011a; Barclay 1983).



**Figure 64 - plan of place-making activity at Balfarg - spread of pottery sherds 'Layer U2' (stippled area), and pit with burning (redrawn after Mercer 1981: figs. 25 and 40)**

**Table 12 finds from Balfarg**

| <b>Balfarg (Mercer 1981; Gibson 2010a)</b> |  |                  |  |                 |  |         |           |                 |    |   |
|--|--|------------------|--|-----------------|--|---------|-----------|-----------------|----|---|
| <i>Date</i>                                | <i>Uses and structures</i>   | <i>Artefacts</i> |  |                 | <i>Comments and condition</i>  |         |           |                 |    |   |
|  |  | <i>Material</i>  | <i>Type</i>                            | <i>Quantity</i> |  |         |           |                 |    |   |
| 37th-34th centuries cal BC                 | pit-digging (in monument complex, but not in area of henge)        | pottery          | Plain Bowl, Carinated                  | 68 sherds       | Sherds from at least 39 different vessels, found in 17 different pits. Includes rim and body sherds.   |         |           |                 |    |   |
| end of 3rd millennium BC                   | Pottery deposition; pit-digging; burning; possible pottery-firing. | pottery          | Grooved Ware                           | 58 sherds       | From at 16 different vessels. Grooved Ware sherds from pottery firing pit were base sherds; unweathered joints with some sherds found in backfill of timber circle.                                    |         |           |                 |    |   |
|  |  |                  | other                                  | 6 sherds        | From possible pottery-firing pit (which also contained Grooved Ware sherds). 4 vessels represented by 1 sherd, and another represented by 2 sherds.  |         |           |                 |    |   |
| after 29th-25th centuries BC               | timber settings; fire-lighting nearby                              | pottery          | Late Neolithic, including Grooved Ware | c.160 sherds    | From c.42 different vessels. Mostly body sherds, but also rim sherds and base sherds. In backfill of postholes; some Grooved Ware sherds from same vessels as those from late 3rd millennium activity. |         |           |                 |    |   |
|  |  |                  |  |                 |  | lithics | flint     | flake           | 54 | Includes primary, secondary and inner flakes. Some burnt.   |
|  |  |                  |  |                 |  |         | flint     | chunk           | 1  | -   |
|  |  |                  |  |                 |  |         | flint     | natural pebbles | 3  | -   |
|  |  |                  |  |                 |  |         | flint     | retouched       | 6  | All from fill of posthole A11. 4 of the retouched pieces are broken. One is a 'reused part of polished stone axe' (Mercer 1981:126) |
|  |  |                  |  |                 |  |         | quartzite | split pebble    | 1  | -   |
|  |  |                  |  |                 |  |         | quartzite | flake           | 1  | -   |
|  |  |                  |  |                 |  |         | quartz    | flake           | 1  | -   |
|  |  |                  |  |                 |  |         | mudstone  | chunk           | 1  | -   |
| agate                                      | natural pebble   | 1                | -                                      |                 |  |         |           |                 |    |   |
| by mid-3rd millennium                      | stone setting  | -                | -                                      | -               | No finds from stone sockets.   |         |           |                 |    |   |
| second half of                             | hanging  | -                | -                                      | -               | No finds or  |         |           |                 |    |   |

|   |  |         |                     |   |   |
|---|--|---------|---------------------|---|---|
| 3rd millennium BC OR 21st-19th centuries BC |  |         |                     |   | charcoal from lower fills.  |
| 2023-1916 cal BC (1σ)                       | young adult buried in centre of henge. Cairn/mound possibly constructed, covering burial and henge interior. | pottery | Beaker with handle. | 1 | Placed in grave; position suggests handle turned towards hands of the occupant of the grave. Beaker covered by thin stone slab – a 'lid'? |
|   |  | flint   | knife               | 1 | In grave, beside the handled Beaker.  |

Elsewhere within the Balfarg-BRS-Balbirnie complex, the earliest activity appears to have included pit-digging and the deposition of Plain Bowl and Carinated pottery (see table 12), during the earlier Neolithic, dated to the 37th-34th centuries cal BC at BRS (Gibson 2010a: 65). The earliest activity on the site of Balfarg henge however involved the deposition of Grooved Ware pottery. It seems that the place-making deposits at Balfarg henge were therefore rather 'late' in date, compared to other locations within the monument complex, but also in comparison with other henge sites such as Cairnpapple, where the deposition pre-dating the henge probably took place during the Early Neolithic (Barclay 1999). The use of the Balfarg-BRS area as a focus for deposition seems therefore to have been long-lived; but it may be that the specific location which would become the site of Balfarg henge did not attract attention until the Late Neolithic.

As well as the scatter of pottery from Layer U2, Grooved Ware was also found in a pit at Balfarg. This pit, Mercer's 'Feature X2' (fig. 65), was located inside the area which would later be enclosed by the timber circle, in the south of the site (Mercer 1981: 81). Mercer recorded that this pit contained 'a mass of burnt material', including cremated bone, and also sherds of Grooved Ware pottery (Mercer 1981: 81). The pit also contained fragments from five other vessels, one represented by two sherds, the other vessels only represented by single sherds in this feature (*ibid.*: 97). In addition to charcoal and burnt bone, the pit also contained evidence of *in situ* burning (Mercer 1981: 97; Gibson 2010a: 67). It is possible that the pit could have been used for firing pottery. There is little archaeological evidence for Neolithic pottery firing sites in Britain, partly

because of the difficulties of distinguishing between firing sites, and cooking pits and hearths (Gibson 2002b: 36). Analysis of Neolithic pottery suggests that it was probably open-fired in a bonfire or a pit, but that the firing time was short, and therefore rarely affected the ground under the fire or the sides of the pit (Gibson and Woods 1997: 49). Excavation of an experimental pottery-firing pit at Leicester University has demonstrated that even with repeated use of the same pit, with a fire reaching 800°C, the effect of the heat on the sides of the pit may only be 'minimal' (Gibson 2002c: 45), as can be seen in fig. 66. Alternatively, and perhaps more likely, the pit could have been a cooking pit; the burnt bone in the pit may have been animal bone (Gibson 2010a). Either of these interpretations of the pits suggest the possibility that the biographies of some of the Grooved Ware pottery found at Balfarg could have been very closely connected with the site, even before their deposition. If the pit was used for firing pottery, then perhaps some of the pottery sherds found at Balfarg had been fired here. At the end of their life, they were then returned to the place they had been produced to be deposited. If however the pit was used for cooking, then perhaps some of the pottery vessels which were deposited as sherds at Balfarg, had been used at Balfarg during when they were whole. The same pots used for cooking, eating and drinking, might have been broken, and left at the site where they had been used.



**Figure 65 - Mercer's 'Feature X2', the pit at Balfarg containing Grooved Ware sherds and burnt material. (Mercer 1981:102, fig. 30)**



Figure 66 - section of experimental pottery-firing pit (Gibson 2002c: 46, fig. 18)

The earliest activity at Balfarg therefore included pit-digging, fire-setting, pottery deposition and possibly also pottery firing. Fragments of pottery were deposited, some in a pit, but others seemingly were scattered on the land surface. This included sherds of Grooved Ware pottery, and some of these fragments may later have been moved and re-deposited during the construction of one of the timber monuments on the site, either accidentally or deliberately. It is not clear how long the site was used in this way; the pottery sherds could have been deposited in a one-off or short-lived event, or gradually, over a longer period.

### ***Monumentalising and Enclosing: timber, stone and earthworks***

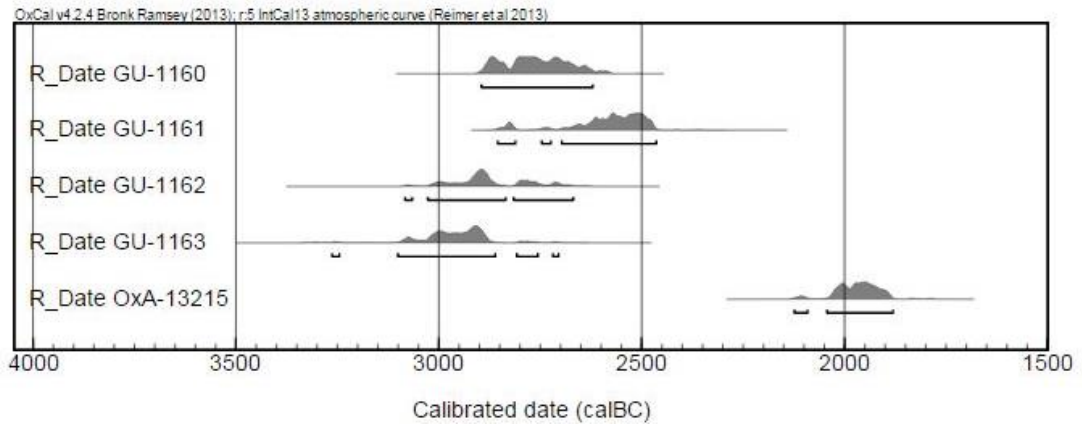
#### **Timber settings**

After the site had been established as a significant place through pottery deposition, or perhaps through activities or ceremonies surrounding these acts, one or more timber settings were constructed at Balfarg. Gibson (2010a: 72) believes the timber setting (or settings) to have been constructed after the 29th-25th centuries cal BC. This is based on radiocarbon dates obtained from two postholes. The radiocarbon dates for Balfarg are given in table 13, and figure 67. Unlike Forteviot 1, where the timber circle encloses the location of the earlier cremation cemetery, at Balfarg, only some of the earlier features seem to be

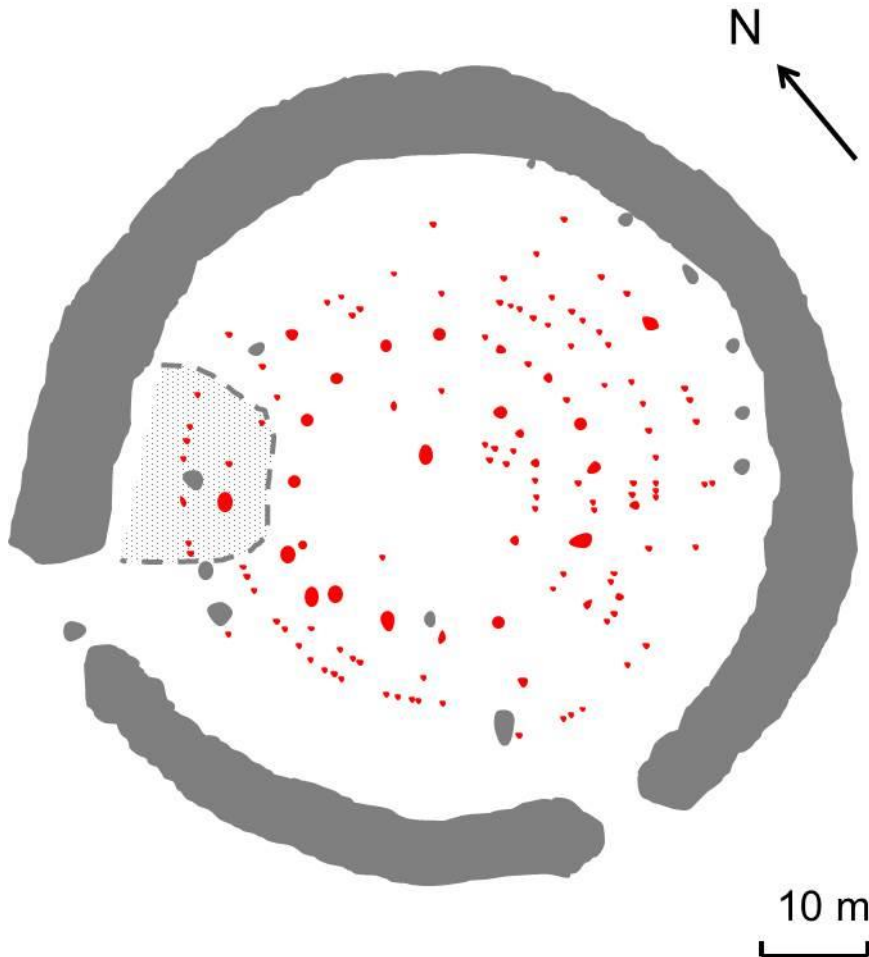
enclosed by the timber circle for which there is the most convincing evidence (Mercer's 'Timber Circle A'). Timber circle A encloses the pit which contained Grooved Ware sherds and evidence of burning. However, the spread of pottery sherds (Layer U2) is located *outside* the area enclosed by the timber circle (fig. 68). The timber circle may have been constructed to monumentalise the general location of earlier events, rather than to enclose the traces of these events. Alternatively, given the available dates for the timber circle (table 13; fig. 67), there is a possibility that the construction of the timber circle could be broadly contemporary with some of the Grooved Ware deposit. It is also possible that there was more than one timber setting at Balfarg. Excavation revealed concentric circles of putative postholes within the area later enclosed by the henge (fig. 68). Mercer (1980: 108) considered it possible that there had been up to five timber circles on the site. The outer two of these putative timber circles enclose the area where pottery sherds had been deposited.

**Table 13 radiocarbon dates for Balfarg**

| <b>Balfarg radiocarbon dates (Mercer 1981; Sheridan 2007)</b> |  |                   |                          |   |
|---|--|-------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Dates calibrated using OxCal 4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2014)          |  |                   |                          |   |
| <i>Sample number</i>  | <i>Context</i>                                   | <i>Material</i>   | <i>Uncalibrated Date</i> | <i>Calibrated date (95.4% probability unless otherwise specified)</i> |
| Timber circle A   |  |                   |                          |   |
| GU-1160   | A7 – charcoal from base of backfill in posthole. | <i>Alnus</i>      | 4180±50 bp               | 2896-2621 cal BC  |
| GU-1161   | A11 – charcoal from fill of posthole             | <i>Alnus</i>      | 4035±50 bp               | 2855-2465 cal BC  |
| GU-1162   | A11 – charcoal from fill of posthole             | <i>Quercus</i>    | 4270±60 bp               | 3084-2669cal BC   |
| GU-1163   | A11 – charcoal from fill of posthole             | <i>Quercus</i>    | 4315±60 bp               | 3264-2706 cal BC (95.3% probability)                                  |
| Beaker burial   |  |                   |                          |   |
| OxA-13215   | Beaker burial inside henge                       | <i>Human bone</i> | 3605±37 bp               | 2124-1881 cal BC  |



**Figure 67 - plot of radiocarbon dates for Balfarg**



**Figure 68 - the timber settings at Balfarg (redrawn after Mercer 1981: 112, fig. 40)**

The innermost timber circle, timber circle A, seems to be regarded by both Mercer (1981) and Gibson (2010a) as the timber circle for which there is the most convincing evidence. This setting consists of 15 postholes, forming a circle

approximately 25 metres in diameter. The timber circle is inside the area later enclosed by the henge, and the ditch is concentric to it on the north and east (Mercer 1981: 80). Mercer recorded that the posts would have been between 0.4 and 0.6 metres in diameter, with two larger 'portal posts' of roughly 1 metre diameter on the west-south-west arc of the circle (*ibid.*). He later describes these two larger posts as forming a "porch"-type arrangement' (Mercer 1981: 149). If the timber circle did indeed have a 'porch-like feature', then the structure may have been intended to mimic some aspects of house architecture, as suggested in Chapter 4. There is also an entrance causeway across the henge ditch on the west-south-west side, and so it is possible that this may simply have been a way of marking the preferred direction from which the site was to be entered, both when the timber circles were in use, but also later when the henge earthworks were constructed. Apart from the 'massive' (Mercer 1981: 149) postholes forming the 'porch' on the west-south-west, there is perhaps more variation in the size of the postholes than Mercer implies. As can be seen on the plan (fig. 68), some of the 'postholes' on the north-eastern arc of timber circle A are of very small diameter, and look more like stakeholes. The timber circle may in part have consisted of large posts interspersed with smaller stakes; or perhaps this segment of the timber circle supported some kind of screen. Alternatively, it may be possible that the smaller stakes are not contemporary with the larger posts forming the timber setting, and may have been added later, a possibility which will be discussed below.

In a continuation or revival of earlier burning events at the site (represented by the evidence of in-situ burning in pit X2), fires may also have been lit at Balfarg or in the vicinity of the site while the timber circle(s) were being constructed. Charcoal from various species of wood, including oak, willow, alder and hazel, was found in the backfill of the postholes. Mercer (1981: 152) dismissed the charcoal as nothing more than 'accidental inclusions'. Whether or not the charcoal was deposited deliberately, its presence reflects fire-lighting on or near the site, and perhaps the later reprisal of some of the first place-making events at Balfarg. Late Neolithic pottery, lithics and fragments of burnt bone were also found amongst the packing in the postholes (Mercer 1981: 152). These included some Grooved Ware sherds which originate from the same vessels as sherds found in the earlier 'Layer U2' (*ibid.*: 96), and so the construction of the timber



circle may have included the incorporation of earlier objects into the fabric of the timber circle. Perhaps significantly, these artefacts were not incorporated into a visible part of the finished timber setting, but were placed in the packing - so they would only be visible during the construction of the monument, and perhaps only those who had been involved in building the timber circle would know that the artefacts were there. The placement of material culture within the monument could therefore be seen as another means by which people exerted power and control over the past. Gibson (2010a: 68) has suggested that the burnt bone fragments also found in the postholes of timber circle A are probably animal bone, and that this is in contrast to the use of other sites in the monument complex, such as Balbirnie stone circle, where human bone was deposited.

It is not known whether all of the timber structures at Balfarg are contemporary, or whether they were built over long periods. Until recently, the only radiocarbon dates obtained for Balfarg were for timber circle A (see table 13). After the construction of the timber settings, it is possible that the timber monuments were dismantled. Mercer suggests the possibility that the timber posts were carefully removed from their sockets, and that the empty postholes may then have been left open for a(n unspecified) time (Mercer 1981: 81). Evidence for the removal of the posts is scant however: apart from one posthole in timber circle A, which Mercer suggests shows evidence that the post was withdrawn, the only evidence that the posts were removed is the absence of post-pipes (*ibid.*). There are other interpretations for this, and it is possible that some of the pits may never have held upright posts.

### **Stone setting**

At some point after the construction of the timber settings, the timber circle(s) were 'replaced' with a stone setting or possibly a stone circle (fig. 69; Gibson 2010a: 72). There may even have been two concentric stone settings (Mercer 1981). It is difficult to securely place the construction of the stone circle(s) within the sequence of construction events at Balfarg; Gibson (*ibid.*) tentatively suggests that the construction of the stone setting takes place during 'the second quarter and almost certainly by the middle of the 3rd millennium BC'. This is in contrast to Mercer's (1981) interpretation of the site, as he originally

believed that some of the Grooved Ware-related activity, the timber circle and henge were all broadly contemporary (his 'Event 1'), and that the stone setting was constructed *after* the henge ('Event 2'). This interpretation was in keeping with the understanding of henges at that time, as stone circles were seen as an integral internal feature of some henges which could be used to classify them as distinct from those henges which contained different internal features (Catherall 1971). Gibson's chronology, in which the timber setting is succeeded by a stone setting, and subsequently by a henge, is more convincing on the basis of comparisons with more recently-excavated sites, and with the growing realisation that henge earthworks are often one of the latest features to be constructed on henge sites (Thomas 2010).

The construction of the stone setting at Balfarg may post-date the putative destruction of the timber settings, as Mercer notes that one of the possible stone holes cuts one of the post pipes (Mercer 1981: 160). This suggests that the stone setting was, at least in part, a reconstruction of the earlier structure, with the timbers 'replaced' by stones - an act described by Gibson (2005: 73) as 'lithicisation'. This is reminiscent of the replacement of timber settings in stone at other sites, such as Machrie Moor (Haggarty 1991; Bradley 2002). It suggests that the stone circle was deliberately meant to recall, and to directly refer to, the earlier monument.

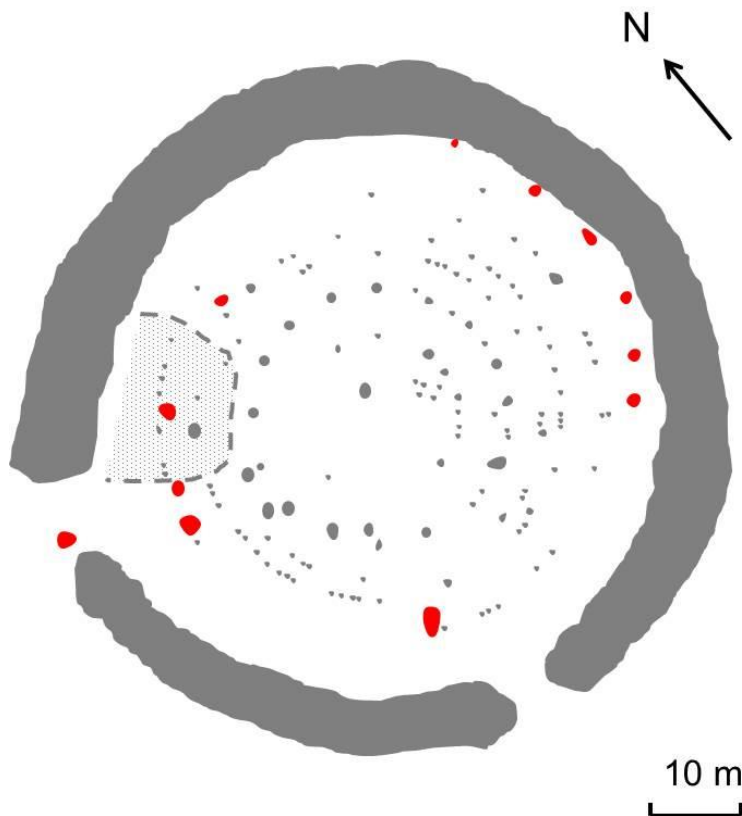


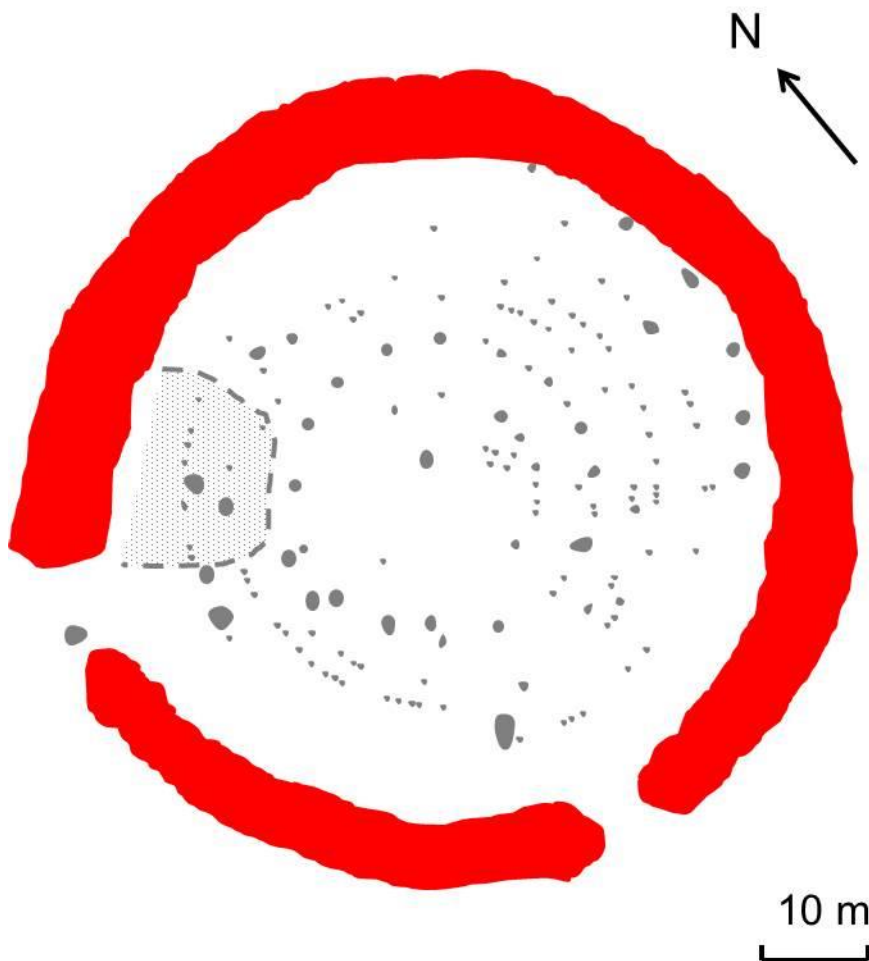
Figure 69 - plan of stone settings at Balfarg (redrawn after Mercer 1981: 112, fig. 40)

At some point during the life of Balfarg, the stone setting was also deliberately dismantled, with all but two of the stones being removed from the site (Gibson 2010a: 69). Gibson (*ibid.*) suggests that they may have been removed from the Balfarg-BRS monument complex altogether, as radiocarbon dates from nearby Balbirnie stone circle disprove the possibility that the stones from Balfarg were reused in the construction of Balbirnie. It is not clear when the stones were removed, or where they ended up. Gibson (*ibid.*: 69-70) raises the possibility that the stone circle was dismantled when the henge was built, which may also have occurred at Cairnpapple; but given that two stones were retained at Balfarg, Gibson considers it more likely that the stone circle was dismantled later, perhaps when the stones became an obstruction to ploughing. Mercer noted that there was evidence of burning in the base of two of the stone sockets, which he considered likely to represent the ‘use of burning to destroy the stones’, potentially at any time during the life of the site (Mercer 1981: 163). It is possible that the destruction of the stone setting involved fire-setting, perhaps using the heat to fracture the stones and break them into pieces ready to be removed from the site.

## Henging

After the construction of the stone setting(s), the site at Balfarg was enclosed by henge earthworks, concentric to the earlier timber circles (fig. 70). Gibson (2010a: 72) dates the construction of the henge ‘towards the end of the second half of the third millennium’. The ditch was substantial, about 2.5 metres deep (Mercer 1981: 66). Mercer believed that it had originally been dug ‘as one exercise’ and, having been constructed in a single event, there is no evidence to suggest that the ditch was ever recut (*ibid.*: 66). The henge ditch appears to have been left to fill-in naturally, and the excavator notes that the primary fills of the ditch were formed initially of material weathered from the ditch sides, while later fills comprised material which eroded from the bank (*ibid.*). These lower ditch fills were devoid of any artefacts, and Mercer further noted that even charcoal flecks were virtually absent from the lower fills of the ditch (*ibid.*). This implies that after its construction, which may have been a relatively quick or short-lived event, the henge was either kept very ‘clean’, or was for a time abandoned altogether.

Unusually, the circuit of the henge is formed by a ‘natural gully’ on the south, rather than by the ditch (Mercer 1981: 148). The henge therefore seems to have had two entrance causeways, approximately on the south and south-west of the site, formed by either end of the gully.



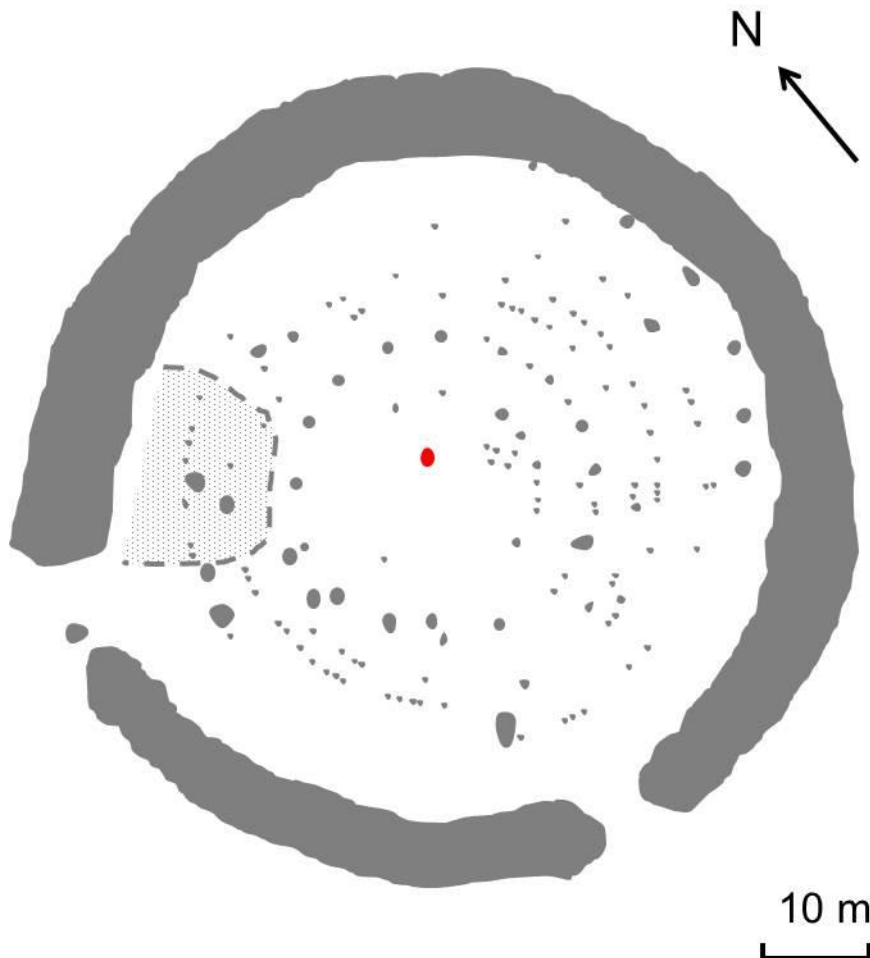
**Figure 70 - the henge ditch at Balfarg, enclosing the earlier timber and stone settings (redrawn after Mercer 1981: 112, fig. 40)**

On the north-eastern arc of the ditch, the edge of the henge ditch is very close to some of the stone holes (as can be seen on fig. 70). Perhaps this was intentional, and the henge was intended to close off only the space occupied by the earlier stone setting. Would the close proximity of a 2.5m deep ditch have de-stabilised the earlier monolith? Perhaps the construction of the ditch therefore precipitated the destruction of the stone circle. Alternatively, the henge may have been constructed *after* the destruction of the stone setting, and therefore simply enclosed the site of the stone circle, but not the stones themselves.

### ***Burial***

After the construction of the henge - or perhaps around the same time the henge was being built - the site at Balfarg was used for the burial of a young adult,

possibly male (Mercer 1981: 164), accompanied by a handled Beaker vessel and a flint knife. The burial has recently (in 2004) been radiocarbon dated to 2023-1916 cal BC at  $1\sigma$  (Sheridan 2007). Gibson has suggested that the construction of the henge may therefore also date to the 21st-19th centuries cal BC if contemporary with the Beaker burial (Gibson 2010a: 72). Similarly, North Mains henge may be broadly contemporary with, or slightly post-date, some of the Early Bronze Age burial activity at the site (*ibid.*).



**Figure 71 - the location of the Beaker burial (highlighted in red) near the centre of the henge ditch at Balfarg**

The Beaker burial at Balfarg (fig. 71) is contained in a cut feature, not a cist, but was covered by a large slab weighing approximately 1.5 tonnes (Mercer 1981: 72-3). The burial and the henge may then have been further monumentalised by the construction of a large mound, cairn or barrow covering the burial and the centre of the henge site (Mercer 1981: 79; Gibson 2010a: 72). Some of the features located within the central area of the henge may in fact

relate to the construction of a barrow on the site. As discussed above, the putative timber structures at Balfarg included a number of concentric rings of timbers. Mercer (1981: 158-9) notes that some of these timbers are of a small diameter (stakes rather than large posts), and he suggests that the best parallel for such a structure may be found in Early Bronze Age round barrow construction. Some of the stakeholes or postholes at Balfarg may represent a supporting structure for the construction of a mound, rather than free-standing timber settings. Gibson (2010a: 71-2) agrees that a mound may have been constructed over the site, perhaps contemporary with the Beaker burial, around 'the turn of the 2nd millennium'. He believes that a mound may represent a 'more permanent' form of closure than a henge (*ibid.*: 73). Certainly, it seems that the 'final' uses of Balfarg at around this time may have reflected a concern with 'closing-off' or sealing the site. There is a stone located in the western entrance of the henge (see fig. 69), which may represent the blocking of this entrance and a desire to restrict access to the interior of the henge via this entrance causeway.

### ***Summary of Balfarg sequence***

The biography of Balfarg henge site is, like the other henge sites discussed here, long and complex. Activity at Balfarg may have begun relatively 'late' in comparison with other henge sites, with the first activity on the site occurring in the Late Neolithic, at the end of the third millennium BC. This involved the deposition of fragments of Grooved Ware pottery on the site, and some burning and fire-setting, possibly connected with cooking or even pottery-firing. Sometime over the next few centuries, from the 29th-25th centuries cal BC, the site was monumentalised through the construction of one or more timber circles, perhaps meant to mimic aspects of contemporary house architecture. The construction of these timber structures involved the incorporation of earlier artefacts into the fabric of the monument, and possibly also the revival of fire-setting-related events that had taken place on the site perhaps some years earlier.

At some point after this, the timber settings were deliberately destroyed, the timbers removed from their sockets, and the timber structures replaced by a stone setting. The stone setting was probably constructed by the mid-3rd

millennium BC (Gibson 2010a: 72). Subsequently, the stone setting was also destroyed, perhaps using fire-setting to aid in the process of breaking up the stones. All but two of the stones were removed, and the site was then enclosed by henge earthworks. Perhaps at the same time, during the 21st-19th centuries BC (*ibid.*), a young person was buried in the centre of the henge, accompanied by a Beaker vessel. The whole site was probably then blocked off: a monolith may have been erected in one of the entrance causeways of the henge, blocking access to the interior. The inside of the henge was filled with rings of stakes, which were finally covered over by a barrow.

Archaeologically-visible uses of the site at Balfarg seem therefore to have ended after the Beaker burial and the construction of a mound covering the site. This appears to be in contrast to other sites such as Forteviot and Cairnpapple which, although also probably mounded over (at least partially), continued to be used into the early Medieval period. The question of why some sites continue to be used, while others are not, will be discussed in chapter 6.

## **Biography 4: Stones of Stenness**

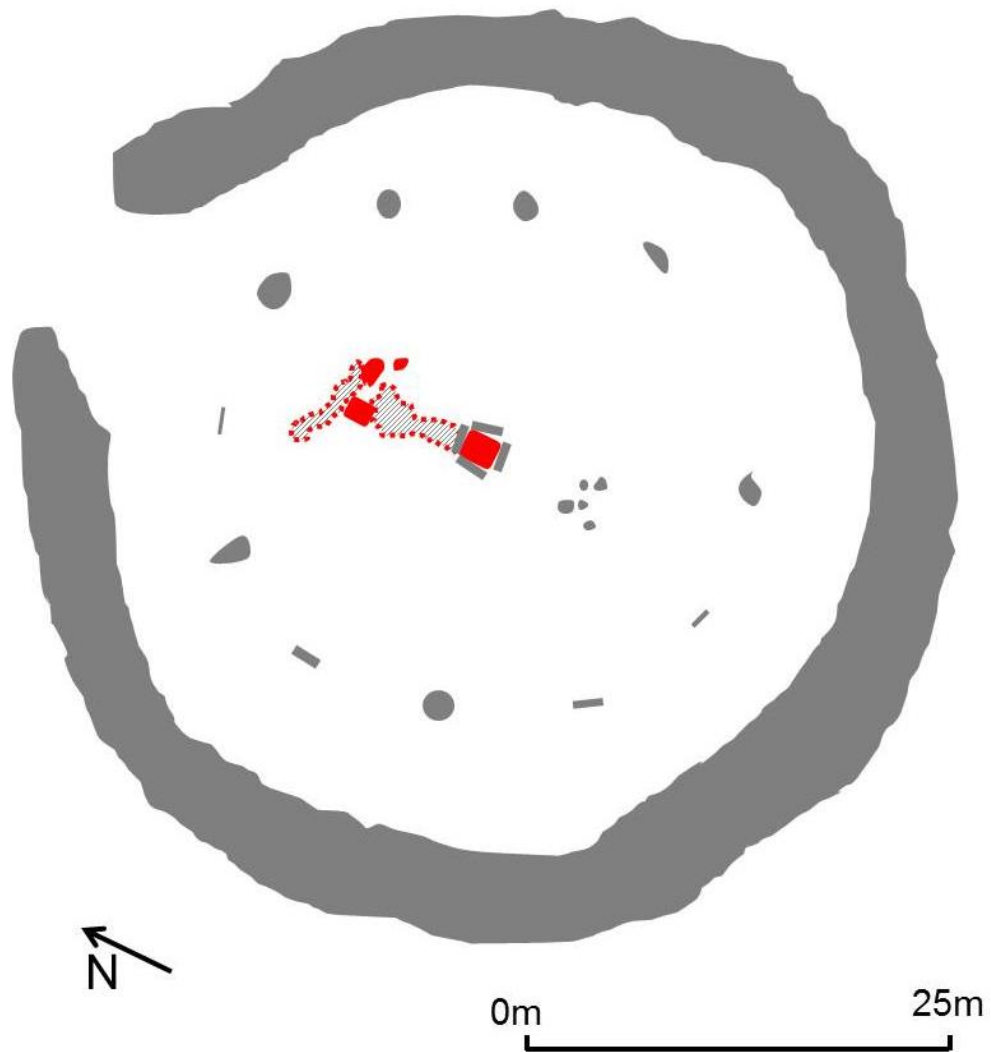
The henge site at the Stones of Stenness in Orkney is part of an extensive and impressive complex of monuments which includes the Ring of Brodgar, Maeshowe, and the recently-discovered site at Ness of Brodgar - together forming the 'Heart of Neolithic Orkney' UNESCO World Heritage Site. Stenness was excavated by Graham Ritchie in 1973-4. It has since been reinterpreted by Colin Richards (2005) following excavations at the nearby Neolithic settlement site at Barnhouse and the henge and passage grave site at Maeshowe. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Stones of Stenness is argued by some to be the oldest henge monument in the British Isles. Perhaps for that reason, or for the prominence given to Orcadian sites in Neolithic studies, Stenness has been frequently discussed in henge literature (e.g. Wainwright 1987; Harding 2003). Despite this, the sequence of construction at Stenness is in fact quite poorly understood. The majority of available radiocarbon dates for the henge are from the earliest fills of the ditch. Ritchie (1976: 18) made note of the fact that the interior of the henge had not been completely excavated and, as was the case with other henge sites at the time, could not be 'fully interpreted'. Even after Richards' (2005) reinterpretation, it is still impossible to definitively determine



which order some of the internal features were built in. Here, both the excavation report (Ritchie 1976) and the reinterpretation (Richards 2005) are discussed, although the biography also draws largely on comparison with other excavated henge sites to suggest a chronological order for the events which happened at Stenness.

### ***Place-making: hearths and fragments at an unenclosed site***

The site at Stenness is on a small promontory between two lochs, the Loch of Harray to the north and north-east, and the Loch of Stenness to the south-west. Low hills surround the site, located in a bowl within the landscape (Ritchie 1976: 1). There is a view of the distinctive Hoy Hills on the south-western horizon. Some of the earliest activity to take place on the site at Stenness may have included lighting fires in one or possibly two hearths. These were located in the central part of the area which would later be enclosed by the henge monument (fig. 72). The central square feature is quite a large hearth, measuring 2.1 by 1.9 metres (Ritchie 1976: 12). Square hearths are a distinctive feature of the Orcadian Neolithic. The hearth was associated with a layer containing fragments of charcoal and small pieces of burnt bone, as well as a flint flake. The pieces of burnt bone were not identifiable, but Ritchie considered it likely that they were pieces of animal bone (*ibid.*). Within the hearth were pieces of a burnt material known as 'cramp' (Ritchie 1976: 12-13), a substance which may be formed by burning seaweed (*ibid.*: 48). Evidence of burning and cramp was also found at the site of Barnhouse Odin, a demolished stone setting 70 metres north-north-west of the Stones of Stenness (Richards 2005: 208-9). At Barnhouse Odin, Richards suggested that the cramp resulted from 'substantial episodes of burning', in quantities paralleled to a Grooved Ware firing site at the nearby settlement at Barnhouse (*ibid.*: 209). As mentioned above, the hearth at the centre of the Stones of Stenness was associated with small fragments of pottery and possibly pieces of animal bone. It is possible therefore that the hearth may have been used for cooking or perhaps even firing pottery; however this is largely speculative. The evidence of the cramp only really allows us to suggest that seaweed was being used as fuel on the central hearth.



**Figure 72 - the two hearths and possible timber structure at the Stones of Stenness, with a stony spread between them (redrawn after Ritchie 1976: 8, fig. 2)**

A little to the north of the large square central hearth is another square-ish feature which is more difficult to interpret. Ritchie (1976: 13-14) believed this to represent a small timber structure comprising four corner posts linked by slots. A deposit of decomposed wood from this feature has been dated to 3100-1000 cal BC ( $2\sigma$ ) - providing little enlightenment about how this structure might fit into the chronology of Stenness. Ritchie associated this feature with two stoneholes which were beside it, which he considered may have formed a 'porch'. He believed this structure was linked to the central hearth by a 'path' of flat stone slabs, and describes a post-and-beam timber feature on the eastern side of the central hearth (Ritchie 1976: 13-14). Colin Richards has reinterpreted Ritchie's timber structure as a 'dismantled hearth', which may have been part

of a monumentalised entrance to the interior of the henge (Richards 2005: 222). Based on comparison with other excavated henge sites such as Cairnpapple, where there are multiple hearths, an interpretation of the feature as a second hearth seems plausible. However, it seems unlikely that such a hearth would form a monumental entrance to the site, given that episodes of burning at henge sites normally seem to occur before the enclosure of the site. If the site was open at this time, the supposed monumental entrance-porch may not be contemporary with the hearths. Richards' interpretation also does not explain the presence of decayed wood in the northerly square feature. There was also a wooden post-and-slot feature on the east side of the large central hearth, so it may be the case that there were two hearths at Stenness, which were both associated with timber structures.

More recently, Richards (2013b: 74) has suggested that there was a 'big house' on the site at Stenness, similar to the nearby large stone-built structure at Barnhouse. Richards (*ibid.*) argues that the entranceway to the Stones of Stenness, a 'threshold hearth' flanked by upright stones, 'exactly replicates' the entrance arrangement of the largest structure at Barnhouse Neolithic village. The Stenness house, Richards (*ibid.*: 74-5) argues was later demolished, although the central hearth remained; and the location of the earlier 'big house' dictated the layout of the later stone circle (Richards 2013b: 77). Evidence for the 'house' is however relatively ephemeral, with only the hearth and a stony spread remaining, and so it is difficult to be absolutely certain whether there really was a house on the henge site at Stenness. However, the hearth certainly seems to reference elements of house architecture.

The hearth(s) at Stenness were reconstructed later in the life of the site, which will be discussed in more detail below. This means that, although there is a radiocarbon date from one of the timber structures associated with one of the hearths, it cannot be assumed that the timber structure is contemporary with the use of the hearth. It is therefore difficult to determine when the hearth(s) were in use at Stenness. At Cairnpapple, the hearths pre-dated the construction of the henge. The fire-related activities at Stenness may also have occurred early in the life of the site, when it was still unenclosed. The hearths perhaps relate to the place-making events at Stenness and the establishment of the site as a significant location before the construction of the henge. If the burning

events at Barnhouse Odin, Stenness and Barnhouse are broadly contemporary, then the burning activity at Stenness may have occurred during the Later Neolithic, although this is not certain.

As well as the evidence of burning at Barnhouse Odin, it seems that the area immediately to the north of Stenness was also used for the deposition of fragments of objects. A broken fragment of a polished stone mace-head was found at Barnhouse Odin, and another piece (from a different mace-head) has been discovered just to the north of Stenness, 'on the field surface adjacent to the henge' (Richards 2005: 225; fig. 73). The first events at Stenness may therefore have involved not only fire-lighting, but also the deposition of broken fragments of objects near to the hearth(s), just to the north of the location which would later be enclosed. This is reminiscent of the place-making activities at Cairnpaple.

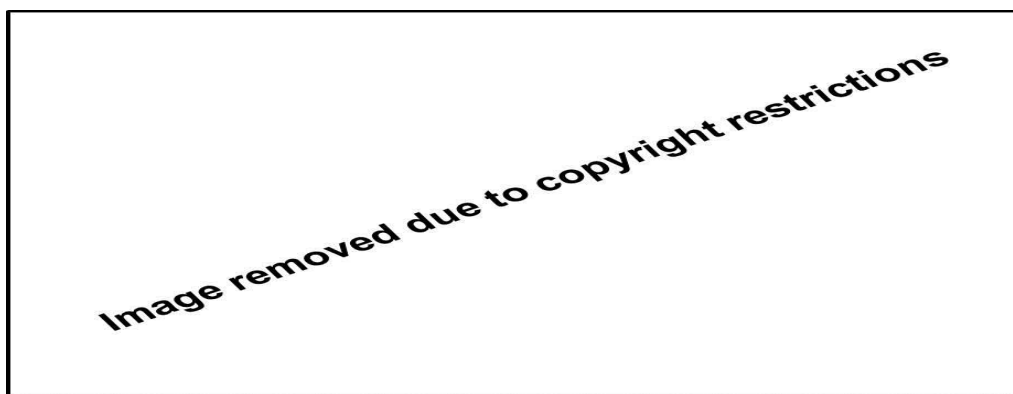


Figure 73 - broken maceheads from Barnhouse Odin (left) and surface of field to the north of Stenness (from Richards 2005: 224, Fig. 8.28)

### ***Monumentalising the 'domestic'***

After Stenness had been established as a significant place by lighting fires there, and perhaps also depositing broken mace-heads in the vicinity of the hearth(s), it seems that the site became increasingly monumentalised over time. This may have begun with the construction of the putative timber structures beside the hearths. It is possible that timber monuments may have been constructed at Stenness at some periods during the life of the site. At Barnhouse Odin to the north, one of the standing stones, which was probably destroyed in the Later Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, may have been preceded by a timber upright

(Richards 2005: 215), and Richards (*ibid.*: 20) has suggested the possibility of a similar wood-to-stone sequence at Stenness.

The hearth(s) themselves were reconstructed, perhaps as part of a process of 'decommissioning' them. Richards (2005: 221) describes the central hearth at Stenness as having a long history of use and reconstruction, including (or possibly concluding with) the addition of four large stone slabs to the central hearth. Richards (*ibid.*) suggests that these stones may have been removed from one of the buildings within the nearby settlement at Barnhouse, and the stones 're-situated' at Stenness. It seems that following this 'monumentalisation' of the hearth, it was no longer used for fires (Richards 2005: 225).

The gradual elaboration of the site at Stenness through this process of 'lithicisation' may have drawn on aspects of house architecture. As mentioned above, the area between the two hearths was joined by what Ritchie (1976: 13-14) believed to be a paved area. There was also a pair of stoneholes between the two hearths. Richards (2005: 216) suggests that pairs of monoliths are reminiscent of door jambs in Late Neolithic houses, and that they are intended to delineate pathways for moving around this space. He also reinterprets the stony spread, Ritchie's 'path' as deriving from the wall of a building, and that there may have been a building in this location 'at an early point in the history of the Stones of Stenness' (*ibid.*: 222). In chapter 4 it was suggested that structures such as timber circles may have recalled elements of house architecture. At Stenness, it seems possible that the henge may have enclosed the remains of a stone-built structure. The possible re-use of stones from Barnhouse in the central hearth at Stenness may have been another way in which the site was monumentalised in such a way as to create connections between the site at Stenness and 'domestic' settlement architecture. The settlement at Barnhouse (fig. 74) is 150 metres north-east of the Stones of Stenness. Richards (2005: 206) suggests that people may have been people living at Barnhouse before the construction of the monuments nearby, but that settlement there continued by the time the henge at Stenness was constructed (*ibid.*: 218).

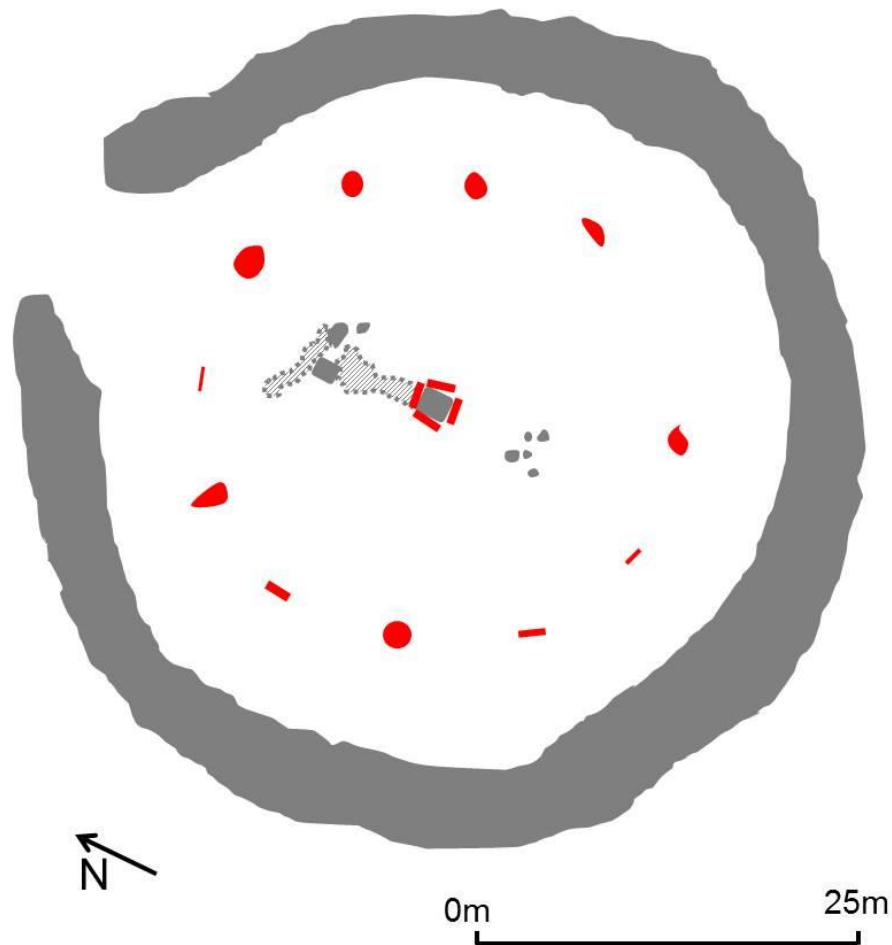


**Figure 74 - the settlement at Barnhouse (in foreground) and the Stones of Stenness (on right of picture)**

### ***Stone circle and enclosure***

The monumental lithicisation of the site which may have begun with bringing slabs from Barnhouse to reconstruct the central hearth continued with the construction of a stone circle on the site at Stenness (fig. 75). This probably consisted of eleven or twelve stones forming a circular setting 30 metres in diameter (Ritchie 1976: 9). The stones were sourced from a quarry site at Vestra Field (Richards *et al.* 2013: 128), meaning that they would have had to be transported some distance to bring them to Stenness, a difficult and risky undertaking (*ibid.*). The stone setting surrounded the central area with the hearth(s) and putative timber structure and stone building. The construction of the stone circle may not have happened as a single one-off event, but may have occurred over a long period. Richards (2005: 224) has suggested that the stones may have been erected ‘sequentially’ and that the stones do not represent a ‘unitary project’. Rather, he envisages that this phase of the site’s use may have

seen the piecemeal construction of a monument with stones added individually, perhaps to commemorate a certain person, group or ancestor (*ibid.*: 217-8).



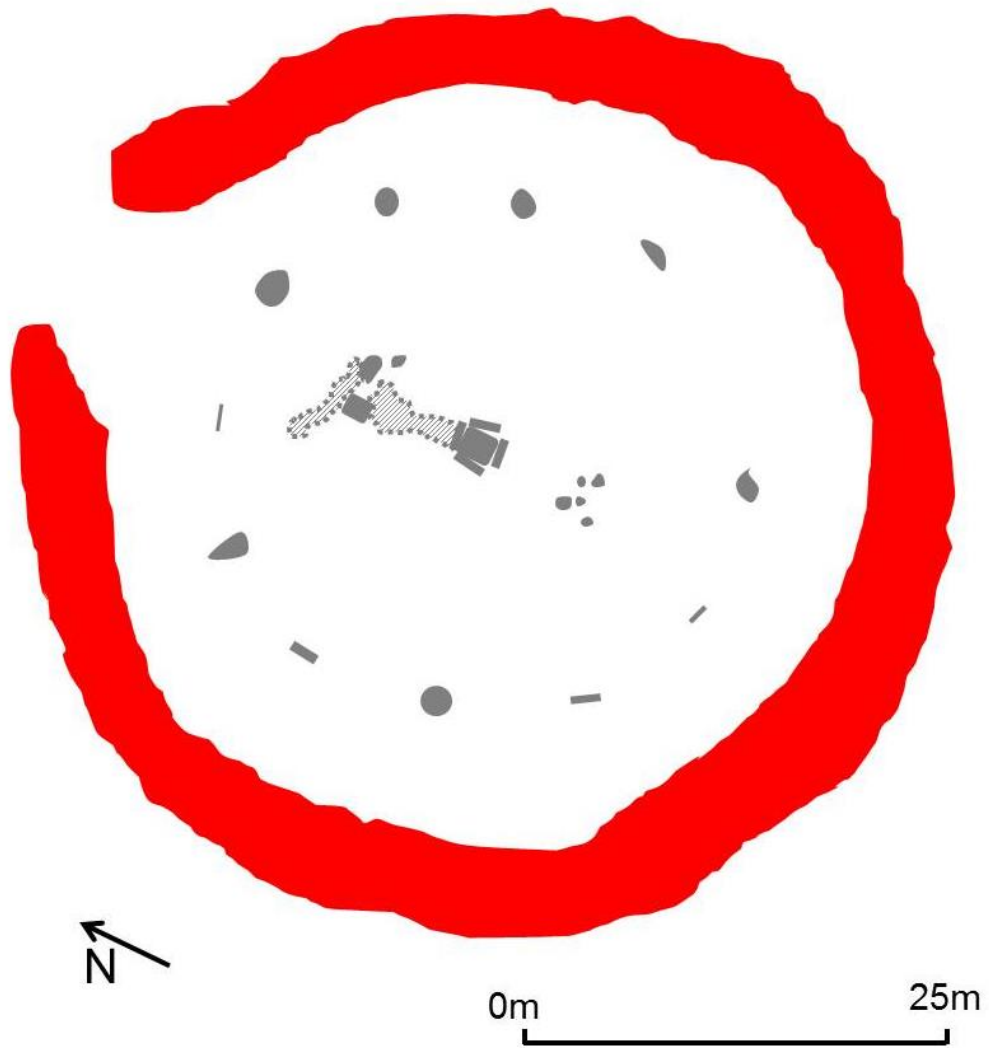
**Figure 75 - the 'lithicisation' of Stenness: the slabs added to the central hearth, and the stone circle (redrawn after Ritchie 1976: 8, fig. 2)**

It is unclear when the stone circle was constructed. It was partially destroyed by the removal of some of the stones at a later point in the life of the site. By the nineteenth century, only two upright stones remained at the Stones of Stenness (Ritchie 1976: 1). One of the stones at Barnhouse Odin to the north of Stenness, known as the Odin Stone, was broken up in 1814 (*ibid.*), and it is possible that some of the stones at Stenness were also broken down and removed around the same time. However, excavations at Barnhouse Odin suggest that at least one of the stones there may have been taken down during the Late Neolithic or Early

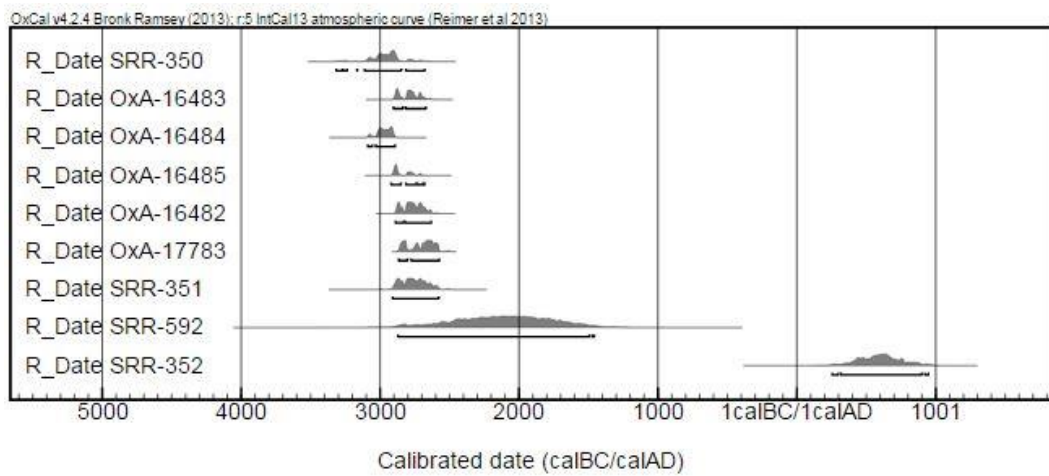
Bronze Age (Richards 2005: 215). Charcoal and fire-reddened stones were found in the socket (*ibid.*), suggesting that the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age destruction of the stone setting at Barnhouse Odin may possibly have been associated with fire-setting. If some standing stones were being broken down in the area around Stenness during the Later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, then it seems possible that some of the Stenness monoliths were also demolished during this period. This is far from certain however, and it is equally if not more plausible that the stone removal at Stenness was much more recent, an historic rather than a prehistoric event.

After the construction of the stone circle, a henge ditch was built which enclosed the stone setting and the earlier structures and hearths (fig. 76). The construction of the henge earthworks at Stenness would have been a significant undertaking - the ditch was 44 metres in diameter, c. 4 metres wide and c. 2.3 metres in depth, with the base of the ditch cut about 1 metre into the bedrock (Ritchie 1976: 10; Richards 2005: 218). Dates from animal bones found in the lower fill of the ditch suggest that the henge was constructed sometime during the 30th-26th centuries cal BC. The dates for Stenness are presented in figure 77 and table 15. The bones recovered from the ditch included wolf or dog bones, sheep bones, and comprised mostly mandibles and the ends of limb bones - an assemblage which Ritchie (1976: 10) considered to be indicative of refuse from food or 'sacrifice', or from the manufacture of clothing or other artefacts. Richards (2005: 223) argues that it is more likely that Stenness was used for the consumption of food rather than for artefact production. The food may have been prepared at Stenness, or prepared elsewhere and then transported to the site (*ibid.*).





**Figure 76 - the henge ditch at the Stones of Stenness, enclosing the hearths and stone circle (redrawn after Ritchie 1976: 8, fig. 2)**



**Figure 77 - plot of radiocarbon dates for Stenness**

**Table 14 radiocarbon dates for the Stones of Stenness**

| <b>Stones of Stenness radiocarbon dates (Ritchie 1976; Scottish Radiocarbon Database)</b><br>Dates calibrated using OxCal 4.2 (Bronk Ramsey 2014) |   |                        |                          |  |
|---|---|------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <i>Sample number</i>  | <i>Context</i>  | <i>Material</i>        | <i>Uncalibrated Date</i> | <i>Calibrated date (95.4% probability)</i> |
| Bottom fill of ditch  |   |                        |                          |  |
| SRR-350   | Animal bone from basal fill of ditch.   | <i>Bone - collagen</i> | 4310±70 bp               | 3317-2679 cal BC                           |
| OxA-16483   | Cattle hoof from basal fill of ditch.   | <i>Bone</i>            | 4209±39 bp               | 2904-2670 cal BC                           |
| OxA-16484   | Cattle bone from basal fill of ditch.   | <i>Bone</i>            | 4346±39 bp               | 3089-2892 cal BC                           |
| OxA-16485   | Cattle bone from basal fill of ditch.   | <i>Bone</i>            | 4243±39 bp               | 2921-2681 cal BC                           |
| OxA-16482   | Wolf bone from basal fill of ditch.   | <i>Bone</i>            | 4178±38 bp               | 2890-2575 cal BC                           |
| OxA-17783   | Cattle bone from basal fill of ditch.   | <i>Bone</i>            | 4111±32 bp               | 2866-2575 cal BC                           |
| Central hearth  |   |                        |                          |  |
| SRR-351   | Charcoal from the central hearth, associated with Grooved Ware sherds and burnt bone. | <i>Charcoal</i>        | 4190±70 bp               | 2910-2578 cal BC                           |
| Putative timber structure beside central hearth   |   |                        |                          |  |
| SRR-592   | Wood from putative timber structure beside central hearth.                            | <i>Wood</i>            | 3680±270 bp              | 2872-1459 cal BC                           |
| Pits with 1st millennium AD pottery   |   |                        |                          |  |
| SRR-352   | Charcoal from pit C.  | <i>Charcoal</i>        | 1430±150 bp              | cal AD 256-948                             |

Sherds of Grooved Ware pottery were also found in the ditch at Stenness along with the animal bone (*ibid.*). These included pieces of at least four Grooved Ware vessels which were found near the bottom of the terminals of the henge ditch (Ritchie 1976: 11). The artefacts from the Stones of Stenness, including the Grooved Ware pottery, are quantified in table 15. Richards envisages Stenness as the site of ‘lavish’ feasting, lit by fires in the central hearths, with the stones decorated with skins or dye (Richards 2005: 224). This would only be possible if the hearth was still in use and all the stones were still standing by the time the henge had been constructed. But it seems that the central hearth was no longer used after it had been ‘monumentalized’ with the addition of the four large slabs from Barnhouse (Richards 2005: 225). As with the pottery deposited at Balfarg, the biographies of some of the vessels which ended up broken in the

ditch at Stenness may have been linked with the site during their use-life as well as when they were deposited. It seems plausible that the pottery sherds deposited in the ditch terminals, came from vessels which had perhaps been used during fire-lit, night-time feasts at Stenness.

**Table 15 finds from the Stones of Stenness**

| <b>Stones of Stenness (Ritchie 1976; Richards 2005)</b> |   |                  |                       |                 |  |
|---|---|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--|
| <i>Date</i>   | <i>Uses and structures</i>  | <i>Artefacts</i> |                       |                 | <i>Comments and condition</i>  |
|   |   | <i>Material</i>  | <i>Type</i>           | <i>Quantity</i> |  |
| Late 4th/early 3rd millennium BC?                       | Hearths. Timber structure. Deposition to north of site.                               | Flint            | flake                 | 1               | Has edge damage from use. From fill of slot beside central hearth.   |
|   |   | Stone            | polished mace-head    | 2               | Deposited on ground surface, in the area adjacent to the henge site on the north.  |
|   | 'Lithicisation': hearths reconstructed/rebuilt using slabs. Stone circle constructed. | pottery          | Grooved Ware          | 26 sherds       | From at least 9 different vessels. Includes both wall and rim sherds. Associated with central hearth feature.  |
| 30th-26th centuries BC                                  | Henging. Feasting. Henge ditch becomes waterlogged.                                   | pottery          | Grooved Ware          | 28 sherds       | From base of ditch terminals. Includes both wall and base sherds. From at least 4 different vessels.   |
|   |   | stone            | retouched flint flake | 1               | From eastern ditch terminal.   |
|   |   |                  | slate disc            | 1               | From eastern ditch terminal.   |
| 1st century AD  | Pit-digging near centre of henge.   | pottery          | not specified         | c.13 sherds     | At least 5 sherds of pottery recovered from 1st century AD pits. A further 8 sherds of iron age pottery, from 8 different vessels, recovered when stones re-erected in 1906. |

After the construction of the henge and its use for feasting, the ditch may have been allowed to become waterlogged (Richards 1996). Interest in the site may have persisted for some time. Five metres to the south of the central feature was a group of five pits (fig. 78), some containing pottery and carbonised cereal;

charcoal from the base of one of the pits has been dated to cal AD 256-948 (95.4% probability). Sherds of Iron Age pottery were also found when one of the monoliths was re-erected in August 1906 (Ritchie 1976: 7). This suggests that the interior of the henge at Stenness was not mounded over as some henge sites may have been, but remained accessible and visible for several millennia after the henge had been constructed.

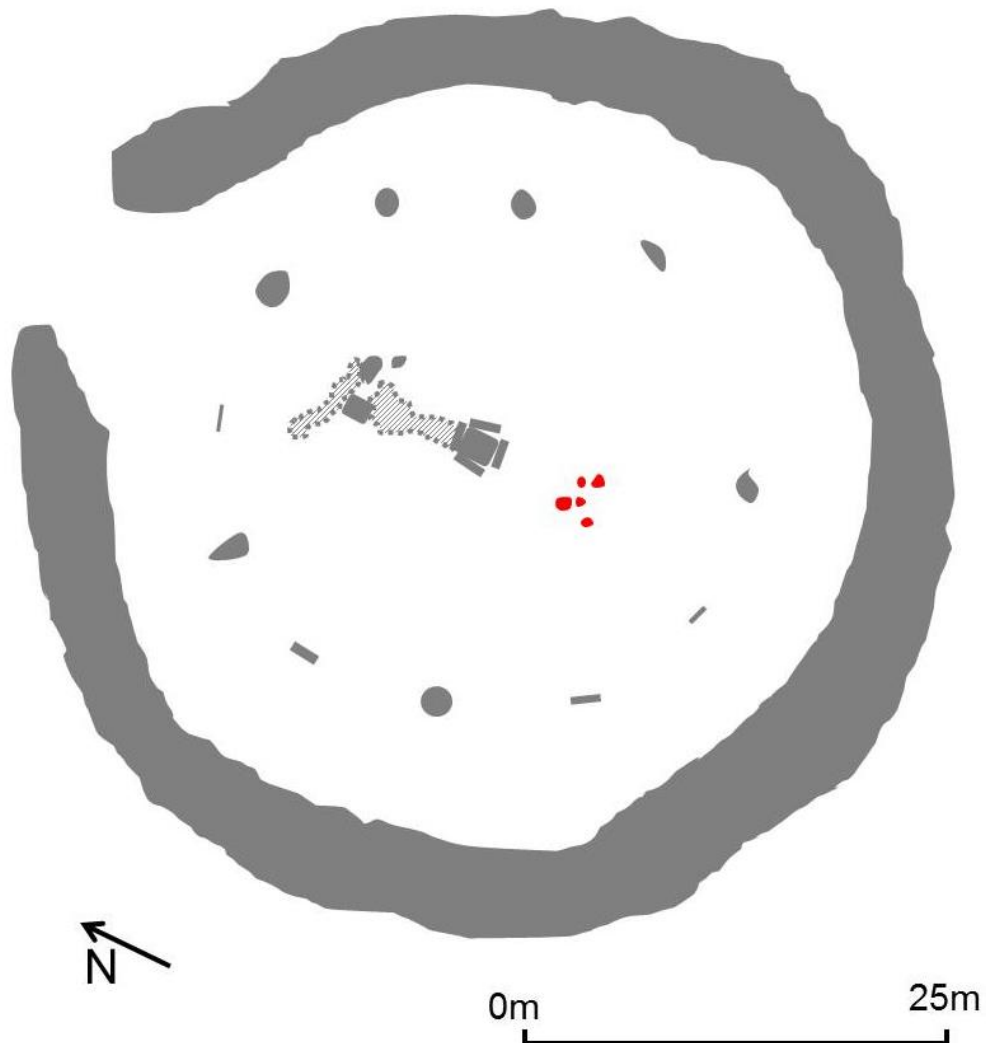


Figure 78- the group of Iron Age pits in the centre of the henge at Stenness (redrawn after Ritchie 1976: 8, fig. 2)

### ***Summary of Stones of Stenness sequence***

The sequence of events at the Stones of Stenness is in many ways relatively poorly-understood, and some of the major events in the life of the site, such as

the construction of the stone setting, remain undated. Activity at Stenness may have begun during the Later Neolithic, when seaweed was burned (producing 'cramp') in a hearth (or possibly in two hearths). These hearths were in the centre of the area which would later be enclosed by the stone circle and henge. The hearth(s) were in use sometime during the 30th-26th centuries cal BC, during which time the site may have been used for feasting. The Grooved Ware vessels containing the food were deposited on the site. Broken fragments of polished stone maceheads may have been deposited in the area between the hearths and the stone setting at Barnhouse Odin to the north. After this, at some point during the 29th-15th centuries cal BC, a timber structure may have been built on the site, perhaps as a way of elaborating one of the hearths. The hearths were later put out of use, and one of them was monumentalised with the addition of 4 large slabs, brought to the site from the nearby settlement at Barnhouse. During this part of its life, the site of Stenness may have resembled aspects of a settlement, with aspects of its architecture recalling 'domestic' architecture. There may have been a stone building constructed around the central hearth.

After this, a stone circle was constructed on the site. The construction of the stone circle was probably a protracted project, with individual stones being brought to the site and raised one at a time over a long period. At some time during the 30th-26th centuries cal BC, a henge ditch was dug, surrounding the stone circle and also enclosing the site of the hearths, timber structure and stone building. The construction of the henge may have been closely followed by feasting at the site, and the remains of the feast, including animal bones and some pieces of Grooved Ware pottery, were deposited in the ditch of the henge. The ditch may have been allowed to fill up with water, although the site of the henge remained visible and accessible for at least the following four millennia, during which time at least one pit was dug inside the henge, and some pottery was deposited near one of the monoliths of the stone setting. At some point in the life of Stenness, although perhaps as recently as the 19th century, the stone circle may have been partly demolished, with some of the stones being removed from the site.

## Comments and Comparison

### ***Place-making: fire and burning at henge sites***

At each of the four sites discussed in this chapter, burning and fire-setting, or activities associated with the process of burning, played an important part in the establishment of these sites as significant places. At Cairnpapple and Stenness, this involved setting fires in discrete hearths on the site. At Balfarg, the in-situ burning in the pit 'X2' may have been associated with place-making activity. Excavations at Forteviot 1 have not revealed any evidence which suggests that burning took place on the site which would later be elaborated by a timber circle and henge (although later disturbances of the henge interior may have removed such traces); but the place-making activity involved the deposition of cremated human remains. Although the site at Forteviot 1 was not directly associated with burning, the deposition of material created and transformed through fire could be considered an indirect association between the henge site and burning. Cremated human remains were also deposited at Cairnpapple during the early life of the site. The recurrence of fire-lighting, burning and deposition of burnt remains early in the lives of these sites suggests that the activities associated with these fires may have been significant, since the sites were later elaborated and monumentalised. Indeed in the case of Stenness, the central hearth itself is monumentalised by boxing in the hearth with four large slabs, which may have been transported to the site specifically for this purpose.

Reflecting on some of the possible uses and associations of fire might give insight into the reasons why these four sites became important after fires were lit there during the Early Neolithic (or at Stenness, during the Late Neolithic). It is possible that during this period, fire may sometimes have been associated with transformative, even 'magical' processes. For example, Alex Gibson (2002c: 50) has suggested that pottery manufacture, and potters, may have been perceived as having a 'magical facet' during prehistory. Potters could control and knew how to effect the transformation of pottery into usable vessels through the process of firing (*ibid.*). Fire would also be the means of performing other processes which are crucial parts of everyday life, for example cooking food. Fire was certainly used to 'transform' each of the henge sites discussed in this chapter, at various times during their lives.

The potential transformative effects of fire would not necessarily be limited to everyday activities. Fire could also play an important role in rituals and transformations associated with death, specifically the physical transformation of a body during cremation. Cremation may have been a costly practice in terms of the resources and time which would be necessary to cremate a body (Leach 2012: 8). It is possible to imagine that cremating a body on a funeral pyre would might also have been a memorable and visually-impressive spectacle (fig. 79). Although there is nothing to suggest that the site of Henge 1 at Forteviot was used for cremation, cremated remains were deposited there, and so the site may still have been indirectly associated with these magical, transformative processes. At Cairnpapple, where there were multiple hearths, the site was also used during the Early Neolithic for a cremation burial. The 'fire-pit' feature at Balfarg could feasibly have been used for cooking, or even (like any hearth potentially could) for firing pottery, and so may have held more direct associations with transformative fire-related activities. Stenness may have played host to feasting during the Later Neolithic (Richards 2005), and so could have been associated with cooking food. The fires, burning and burnt material found at each of these sites, and the transformative and magical processes associated with the fires, may have been a significant part of the transformation of these sites into special places. Fire may also have played a significant role in the creation of memories. Gordon Noble (2006) has suggested that spectacles associated with burning, such as burning down a monument, would be so dramatic that they became fixed in people's memories, a phenomenon known as 'flashbulb memories'.



**Figure 79 - visualisation of a funeral pyre. Image by Alice Watterson**

We cannot assume however that fire was understood as ‘magical’ in all contexts in which it was used in the Early Neolithic. Fire could also have had associations with ‘domestic’, everyday activities. This may have included cooking; but may also have included pottery firing. Although it was suggested above that pottery firing may have been ‘magical’ in some respects because of the transformative effect of the fire, it is likely that pottery manufacture was not a specialist occupation during the Neolithic, but was carried out by households as and when required (Gibson and Woods 1997: 54-7). These possible everyday associations of fire do not necessarily mean that these practices were not still regarded as special. Some henge sites may have become places where the everyday and the ‘domestic’ were commemorated and monumentalised. For example at the Stones of Stenness, and perhaps also at Balfarg, the earliest uses of the henge sites may have included feasting, with food stored or served in Grooved Ware pottery, and the animal bone and pottery sherds being deposited on the site. Feasting would not be an everyday practice, but might be seen as an aggrandized and perhaps performative version of everyday mealtimes - perhaps made all the more special if it is carried out in a special location such as a henge site. At Stenness, once the hearth was no longer used, it was monumentalised by the addition of large stones brought to the site from a nearby settlement (Richards 2005). Perhaps the hearth had become taboo, and the stones were



meant to seal it. There may also have been a structure, perhaps recalling aspects of house architecture, which was commemorated and monumentalised by the construction of the stone circle and henge. At Stenness, it may have been the use of the site for everyday activities, and the link with 'domestic' aspects of life, which made the site special and was commemorated by the henge.

It may be that some henge sites were made special because of their earlier association with 'houses of the living' and everyday life, while other henge sites were connected with and commemorated the dead and 'houses of the dead'. Houses of the living and houses of the dead have long been regarded as analogous, and similarities between 'domestic' architecture and structures associated with the dead have been noted. Mike Parker Pearson has suggested that a linking of certain henges for the living with other henges for the dead occurred at Stonehenge and Durrington Walls, where it seems that Durrington Walls was associated with houses, the living and timber architecture; and Stonehenge was associated with the ancestors, the dead, cremation burials and stone architecture (Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998; Parker Pearson 2012). This 'pairing' of ceremonial sites for the living with sites for the dead may also be borne out at other sites. It has been suggested that Forteviot, with its cremation cemetery, may have been associated with the dead, and that Leadketty, where Grooved Ware pottery and possible houses have been found inside the palisaded enclosure, was associated with the living (Brophy and Noble forthcoming) - although Forteviot 2 enclosed a rectangular house-like structure, and so the relationships between the complexes may be more subtle (*ibid.*). A similar relationship could be suggested for Balfarg Riding School and Balfarg: the timber structure at BRS may have been a mortuary structure (Barclay and Russell-White 1993: 178); while the henge site at Balfarg, associated with burnt animal bone and a possible cooking pit, may have been dedicated to the living rather than the ancestors.

It should be noted however that while the sites-of-the-living:sites-of-the-dead pairing suggested for Stonehenge and Durrington Walls may have been paralleled at other henge sites, the distinction of timber architecture being associated with the living, and stone reserved for the dead, is not universally replicated at other sites. Balfarg and Stenness may both have been used for feasting, but later were monumentalised in stone, not only in timber, suggesting that the uses of timber

and stone in monumental architecture are more complex than simply a distinction between timber architecture for the living, and stone for the dead. However, it is also possible that the use of different materials at henge sites over time could reflect transformations in the ontological status of these places over time. This might be seen, for example in the 'lithicisation' of sites, for example the replacement of timber settings with stone circles at sites like Cairnpapple and Balfarg. It is possible that this reflects a move towards the symbolic 'death' of a site, and marks an important stage in the biography of such places. This would also be reflected in the occurrence of burial at a late stage in the lives of many henge sites. The use of henges for burial, as is the case at North Mains, Cairnpapple, Forteviot 1 and Balfarg, might be a response to these sites as places at the end of their lives, and associated with death.

Burning and fire are not only associated with place-making activities at henge sites. It is also possible that fire may have played a part in the later destruction of some parts of the monuments built on these sites. For example Mercer (1981: 163) suggested that burning may have been used in the destruction of the stone setting at Balfarg. Although destructive and different from the burning events which took place during the early life of henge sites, the use of fire to destroy monuments would also have had the impact of transforming these locations.

### ***Fragmentation: material culture and deposition at henge sites***

#### **Material culture and henge sites**

As discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to pottery, material culture at henge sites which is contemporary with the henge is traditionally sparse in Scotland. There are exceptions, for example the beaker pottery found in the lower fill of the henge ditch at Forteviot 1 which may be contemporary with the likely Chalcolithic date of the henge. The Grooved Ware pottery sherds from the Stones of Stenness may also be roughly contemporary with the construction of the henge or the use of the site following the construction of the henge. The animal bones used to date the henge at Stenness are also likely to be contemporary with the construction and use of the henge, but they are so far a unique example in a Scottish context, where bone preservation is typically poor,

especially in the mainland. Much of the material culture found at henge sites seems to pre- or post-date the construction of the henge.

At Cairnpapple, Forteviot, Balfarg and the Stones of Stenness, a range of different materials and different kinds of object were deposited at the henge sites at various stages in the lives of the sites. These included polished stone axes, pottery, cremated bone and bone pins (although it is notable how little material was deposited at these sites overall). The diverse range of objects deposited at these henge sites seem in most instances to have been deposited as fragments rather than whole objects - a deliberate practice which will be discussed below. In some ways, hinging may have been a relatively short-lived aspect of how henge sites were used, and they may at some times during their lives have been more significant because they were places of deposition.



**Figure 80 - AOC beaker sherds from the lower fills of the henge ditch at Forteviot 1. Photo: SERF project**

### **Fragments and fragmentation at henge sites in Scotland**

The deposition of fragmentary objects is not restricted to henge sites; nor indeed is it restricted to the British Neolithic and Bronze Age. John Chapman (2000; and Chapman and Gaydarska 2007) has discussed the concept of fragmentation in archaeology, largely in relation to the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Copper Age in the Balkan region of Europe. Chapman (2000: 5-6) suggests that many fragmented objects in the archaeological record cannot simply be

interpreted as rubbish, but that items which have been deliberately broken and deposited reflect specific kinds of social relations, which Chapman describes as 'enchainment' - in which people view themselves as 'fragmented', and people give parts of themselves to others via the exchange of pieces of fragmented objects. It should also be remembered that objects such as cremated bone could be seen as fragmented people.

In relation to the fragmented material found at henge sites in Scotland, where broken pieces of objects are deposited in ditches or scattered on the old land surface, it is significant that Chapman notes that fragmented objects can potentially still hold an important place in people's consciousness, and in social relations, even after their deposition. A traditional interpretation of such an event may be the symbolic death of an artefact, i.e. it is buried because it has been 'killed' (Chapman 2000: 23). The reality may be more complicated, as an object may continue to exert influence even after its 'death' and burial. Chapman (*ibid.*: 49) writes:

'It may be helpful to think of much discarded material as analogous to the buried bone remains of dead ancestors - as part of the common past of the living, closely connected to the living though discarded and, for the most part, unseen.'

The potential for an artefact to be remembered and still considered socially significant after its deposition may be particularly relevant within the context of henge sites, such as Cairnpapple, where the deposition of fragmentary material (polished stone axe fragments) may have been one of the place-making activities which inaugurated the use of the site and its continuing significance in the following centuries.

Piggott (1948: 79-80) suggested that the axes deposited at Cairnpapple (which included fragments of the cutting edges, see fig. 81) were broken while in use to clear vegetation from the site. The idea that the axe fragments found at the site were the very same ones used to clear trees from the land in preparation for monument construction is interesting. However, it seems more likely that the axes were deliberately fragmented, and deliberately deposited at the site, rather than simply being discarded as a by-product of monument-building. The repeated incidence of fragments of objects at various henge sites suggests that

this was a deliberate practice. Furthermore, as Chapman (2000: 7) points out, the fragmentation of ground or polished stone objects is 'both technically difficult and aesthetically damaging'. Broken pieces of a polished flint axe were also found at Balfarg, in one of the postholes (A11) of the timber circle (Mercer 1981: 115, 125-6). Mercer (*ibid.*: 118) noted that these pieces were so small that they were probably already broken by the time they were brought to the site and deposited. One of the broken pieces was retouched however and was used 'as a separate tool' (Mercer 1981: 118). This suggests the possibility of a degree of expediency in the occurrence of fragmented artefacts at henge sites, as Piggott implied was the case with the axe fragments at Cairnpapple. It is also possible however that the fragment may have been chosen to be reworked and reused because it was seen as special or significant because it was a fragment of another artefact. Perhaps a combination of expediency and rule-bound deposition was in play at Cairnpapple.



**Figure 81 - stone axe fragments from Cairnpapple. Piggott 1948: 103, fig. 16**

The difficulties of fragmenting stone artefacts are in contrast to objects made of other materials, for example fired clay objects, which Chapman (2000: 7-8) notes are easy to break into fragments. Accidental breakage would also be much more likely with pottery than would be the case for stone objects such as axes.

Fragments of pottery were deposited at some of the henge sites discussed in this chapter. For example, pieces of at least 37 different pots were found at Balfarg (Mercer 1981: 128); and at Forteviot, sherds of undecorated pottery were associated both with one of the pre-henge cremation burials (Noble and Brophy 2011a: 790) but fragmented pottery was also found in the henge ditch (AOC Beaker sherds from the fill of the ditch terminal).

Why deposit fragments of objects at a henge site? It was mentioned above that Chapman (2000) and others (e.g. Fowler 2004) have interpreted the occurrence of fragmented objects in the archaeological record as representing relationships between people. Chris Fowler (2004: 8-9) suggests that this may relate to people viewing themselves as partible, dividual people - that is, a person is 'composite and multiply-authored', and social relations are conceived in terms of owing part of oneself to another person - which may be enacted via the exchange of objects, as parts of the dividual person may be identified as objects. If the exchange of fragments of objects can be seen as representative of a relationship, then I suggest that the deposition of fragments at a specific location may be a method of establishing a relationship with that place. Therefore we might understand the deposition of fragments of artefacts at henge sites as symbolic of a person's connection with a certain location, a means by which people established an association between themselves (or perhaps their family or household?) and a significant place in the landscape. This may have been particularly important when the deposition was amongst the first activity at a site, for example at Cairnpapple, where the deposition of polished stone axe fragments may have been associated with the inaugural activities which first established Cairnpapple Hill as a special place which would later be monumentalised; and at Forteviot 1, where the site was initially used as a cremation cemetery.

The deposition of fragments of pottery may have held further significance. Ann Woodward (2002) has argued that sherds of Beaker pottery may have been treated as heirlooms or relics during the Early Bronze Age in Britain. Woodward (*ibid.*: 1042) suggests that fragments of pottery which exhibit 'ancient breaks', or are missing 'significant' sherds such as pieces of rim, can be identified as heirlooms. The fragmentary condition of such objects could therefore be seen as deliberate. Woodward also discusses how sherds of pottery may have been

curated, for example by storing sherds in a box or wrapped in cloth; or by depositing the pottery in a midden, from which pieces of the pottery could later be retrieved (Woodward 2002: 1041). The practice of retrieving pottery sherds from middens to redeposit them elsewhere may also have been carried out during the Neolithic period in parts of Scotland. Becket and MacGregor (2012: 61) have noted evidence for animal dung in some pits in addition to various artefacts, which they suggest may reflect the deposition in pits of material which had previously been placed in a midden. Amelia Pannett (2012: 140) has suggested similar practices occurred in south Wales during the Neolithic period, as there is evidence that midden deposits including pottery and food waste were allowed to build up for some time before being buried in pits. This continued into the Early Bronze Age, and at Cilsan in Carmathernshire, South Wales, there is evidence that the midden material deposited in the pits included a deliberately broken flint scraper (*ibid.*). Robin Jackson and Keith Ray have similarly suggested that some of the pottery deposited in pits during the Neolithic may already have been old by the time it was deposited. In some instances this included the deposition of 100-year-old pottery along with pottery which was new when it was deposited (Jackson and Ray 2012: 158). A very abraded sherd of Beaker was found in the Food Vessel burial within Forteviot 2 henge (Brophy and Noble forthcoming). Perhaps this was an heirloom deliberately placed in the grave, or a fragment of a vessel which was meant to represent another person. The deposition of fragments of pottery, and in particular of 'old' pieces of pottery, perhaps in an effort to recall the past, seems to have been a relatively widespread practice in various parts of Britain during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age - and one which was not restricted to henge sites.

Woodward suggests a distinction between 'heirlooms', deriving from known locations and therefore important because of ancestral or generational associations; and 'relics', sherds from unknown locations which but which are recognised as ancient and therefore associated with the past 'in a generalized sense' rather than directly associated with any specific ancestor (2002: 1041). Such heirlooms could potentially include objects discovered while digging into earlier monuments. If it is the case that pottery fragments were sometimes curated and therefore reminders of the past, then it may be that by depositing

pottery at henge sites, people were not only establishing a relationship with a place, but were also implicating or recalling the past (or even their ancestors) when they did so. It is difficult to be certain whether or not the fragments of pottery deposited at Cairnpapple, Balfarg, Forteviot and Stenness were 'relics' or 'heirlooms'. Some of the pottery deposited at Balfarg, for example the Grooved Ware sherds from 'Feature X2' (the pit with in-situ burning) were only from the base of the vessel, i.e. the rim was missing, one of Woodward's criteria for identifying heirloom vessels (Woodward 2002: 1042). The sherds of Grooved Ware deposited during the early life of Balfarg may therefore have already been old when they were deposited. Other explanations are possible, including post-depositional factors; the excavator suggested that the 'upper part of the vessel may have been the casualty of erosion and cultivation' (Mercer 1981: 81). The practice of depositing heirlooms may later have been practiced at other monuments within the Balfarg complex however. Gibson (2010a: 63) suggests that some of the Beaker pottery deposited at Balbirnie stone circle 'may already have been old when deposited'.

It could be argued that the practice of depositing 'old' pieces of pottery may have been one facet of a more generalised interest in 'the past' during the Early Bronze Age. This may have included a fascination with old material culture, either in the form of curated objects or objects which were fortuitously discovered; and also an interest in old monuments, in sites which were already old and perhaps even ruined by the Early Bronze Age. Woodward argues that pieces of ancient pottery were not only curated during the Early Bronze Age, but may also have been used as a raw material in the production of new pottery, for example, sherds of pottery may have been ground up to use as grog (Woodward 2002: 1041). Gibson (2002c: 32) has suggested that since the use of grog (crushed pottery) to make new vessels would necessitate 'the destruction and pulverising of former pots [it] may itself be a symbolical act referencing such concepts as continuity and rebirth'. Some potters used human bone as temper, meaning that some pots could literally have incorporated ancestral remains (Woodward 2002: 1041-2). This may have been the case at Balneaves Cottages in Fife (*ibid.*), a hengiform site where a cremation cemetery is enclosed by a circular ditch. If people became interested in incorporating 'ancestral' remains into new material culture during the Bronze Age, this may have been one of the



reasons for the interest in investigating and re-using existing monuments, including henge sites, during this period. People may have visited these sites in the hope of finding useful, interesting or old things, but also because they were interested in, and wanted to create links with, the past.

Some of the fragmentary objects deposited at henge sites may have been special not because they were old, but perhaps because they were recognisable as 'exotic' objects. The two fragments of polished stone axe found at Cairnpapple each originally came from different and far-flung sources. The raw material for one of the fragments has been identified as Langdale in the Lake District, and the other from Penmaenmawr in North Wales (Piggott 1948: 80). It is likely that the distant sources of the stones - which may have been known of, and were perhaps recognisable because of the colour and appearance of the axes - added significance to these items, even when they were fragmented. Similarly, the two axe fragments from Balfarg were made of polished flint. The only locally-available source of flint is beach pebbles (Mercer 1981: 118). These fragments of objects may have been prized possessions, considered valuable because they were made of material which was not necessarily easily available in the surrounding area.

The deposition of fragments at henge sites is not necessarily limited to objects. It is possible that in some cases the practice extended to the deposition of fragmentary human remains in the form of 'token burials' such as some of the cremation deposits at Forteviot as the weight of cremated bone recovered is less than may be expected for a single cremated adult (Leach 2012: 21). Some of the burials associated with the stone uprights at Balbirnie stone circle, near Balfarg henge and Balfarg Riding School, may not represent 'the complete remains of discrete individuals', but the burial of a token amount of cremated bone (Gibson 2010a: 52). It is possible that such deposits were meant to stand for the whole body. Chapman (2000: 104) suggests that if the form of a fragment has a distinctive form, it can 'signify the (absent) whole'. Token burials may therefore be a way of representing the person whose remains are deposited. It also means that some of the remains can be retained, or deposited elsewhere. Fowler (2004: 66-7) relates the practice of token burial to a concept of personhood in which people are seen as partible - the person is dividual, a composite of parts which may be identified as objects and exchanged to forge or cement social

relationships. The practice of token burials may therefore be linked to the exchange and deposition of fragments of artefacts.

The practice of token burial may also have been practiced at the recently-excavated site at Newton Farm in Lanarkshire. Some of the features at Newton Farm are similar to place-making activities at henge sites such as Cairnpapple and Forteviot. The earliest activity at Newton Farm was a group of six shallow pits, some of which may have been postholes, dug during the Early Neolithic. Pottery was found in four of the pits, and a fragment of quernstone was deposited in one of the pits, along with several fire-cracked stones (O'Brien *et al.* 2009: 4-6). Like the pit at Balfarg, there was evidence of in-situ burning in one of the pits, as the sides and base of the pit were burned (*ibid.*: 5). A possible token cremation burial, probably dating to the Early Bronze Age, was found in a seventh pit (O'Brien *et al.*: 6). The burial of token amounts of cremated remains may therefore have been a long-lived practice. Like the deposition of fragments of pottery and other material culture and pit-digging, it was obviously not a practice which was restricted to henge sites.

It is possible that the cremation deposits at Forteviot 1 were not token burials, but rather were 'curated' remains, which had been taken from another location before later being re-deposited in the cremation cemetery at Forteviot (Leach 2012: 21). The cremated remains may have been treated very carefully. Leach (*ibid.*: 41) notes that many of the cremation deposits at Forteviot include both small bones and bone fragments, suggesting that the collection of cremated material after burning on the pyre was 'meticulous'. This adds weight to the argument that these are indeed token burial deposits. The careful curation of bones before their eventual deposition suggests the possibility that, as with the possible curation of heirlooms, people were interested in and valued 'old' objects, and considered henge sites (or sites that would later be henged) to be appropriate places to deposit such curated material.

### ***Stone monuments: construction and destruction at henge sites***

Each of the four sites discussed in this chapter incorporated a stone setting or a stone circle at some point in their lives. At Forteviot 1, this may have taken the form of standing stones associated with the Early Neolithic cremation cemetery

(Noble and Brophy 2011a: 790). Piggott (1948), drawing on comparison with Arbor Low, suggested that there was a stone circle at Cairnpapple, a possibility which cannot be ruled out. The North Grave at Cairnpapple also incorporates a standing stone. Standing stones are still extant at both Balfarg and Stenness. At Balfarg, only two stones remain, but they may once have formed part of a larger stone setting or stone circle (Mercer 1981; Gibson 2010a). The stone circle at Stenness may never have been completed (Ritchie 1976: 16); only two remained upright by the 19th century, and two further stones were re-erected in 1906 (Ritchie 1976).

Stone monuments such as standing stones tend to be associated with permanence and memorialisation (Cummings 2008: 154). Based on analogy with Madagascan monuments, Mike Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina (1998) have suggested that stone monuments are associated with the dead and ancestors. Stone monuments are perceived as forming an enduring presence in the landscape. For example when describing Balfarg, Mercer (1981: 63) wrote that

‘the site of the henge monument at Balfarg [...] has always been known by virtue of two massive standing stones which have remained set up on its interior.’

We should however be wary of assuming stone monuments to be ‘permanent’. Chantal Conneller (2011: 82) notes that as a material used in the construction of monuments, stone is often seen as enduring, solid, hard and permanent, but goes on to urge caution in assuming that these are the only properties of stone which would be of interest to monument-builders:

‘While not disputing that hardness and durability are among the properties of stone, and that these may often have been to the fore when certain monuments were constructed, this should not be taken a priori as the property selected for, simply because the monument has endured’ (*ibid.*).

This enduring visibility of monuments in the landscape can arguably be seen as the reason they have often dominated Neolithic studies (Barclay 1995; Brophy 2006; Garrow 2006: 3).

While stone as a material may endure almost indefinitely, stone monuments are not necessarily so long-lived. At all four of the sites discussed in this chapter,

there is evidence to suggest that the stone settings were deliberately demolished or dismantled. Piggott (1948) believed that the stone circle at Cairnpapple was dismantled, and the stones repositioned to form the kerb of the cairn which covered the two large stone cists. He evidently regarded this as akin to wanton vandalism carried out by people far removed from the builders of the original monument, describing the demolition of the stone circle during a period when 'the sanctity of the site had been forgotten', and 'the old shrine was despoiled' in order to construct a burial place for 'an alien Bronze Age chief' (*ibid.*: 70). It is worth noting however that Barclay (1999) reinterpreted the evidence for the stone circle as a timber setting.

At Forteviot, the stone setting was represented by a broken slab of sandstone, suggesting that the stone had been snapped at some point (Noble and Brophy 2011a: 790). The stone may have been a marker for the Early Neolithic cremation cemetery. It is not clear at what stage in the life of the henge site the standing stone was snapped. Perhaps it was broken down during the construction of the cist burial and the putative cairn which covered the cist, as may have been the case at Cairnpapple. The broken standing stone may even have been incorporated into the cist or cairn material (*pers. comm.* K. Brophy).

Therefore, stone monuments, far from being permanent, may in fact have been mutable and sometimes deliberately dismantled or reconfigured. At Stonehenge for instance, the stones were 'moved around and re-erected many times' during the repeated re-building of the monument (Parker Pearson 2012: 43). The reworking of stone monuments and reuse of the stones in later monumental 'projects' may reflect the commemorative (rather than memorial) use of henge sites. The re-use of the stones may have been a way of using old materials in a new way, actively reworking the past. Stone monuments would therefore have been regarded very differently in the past than they are in contemporary society. Blaze O'Connor and Gabriel Cooney (2009: xxiii) have pointed out that according to some non-Western contemporary perspectives, stone is understood as 'active, animate and alive with potential power and sacredness', and may have been understood in a similar way in the past.

The circumstances of the destruction of the stone settings at Balfarg and Stenness is less clear than at Forteviot and Cairnpapple. At Balfarg, the stone

setting (or possibly settings, as both Mercer (1981) and Gibson (2010a) suggest the possibility that there were two stone circles at Balfarg) was not completely destroyed, as two stones were left upright on the site. Unlike Forteviot 1, where a snapped-off portion of the stone was left in position, the dismantling of the stone setting(s) at Balfarg seems to have been more complete or more careful. In fact Mercer considered the remaining evidence for the Balfarg stone settings to be so scant that it seemed 'unlikely that the presence of stone settings on the site would have been put forward at all had the surviving stones not existed' (Mercer 1981: 160). Even substantial monuments may therefore be relatively difficult to detect archaeologically if sites have been deliberately reworked and stones removed. Gibson (2010a) suggested that possibility that the Beaker burial at Balfarg was covered by a mound. Perhaps, as at Forteviot 1 and Cairnpapple, the stone setting(s) were taken down when the burial and the cairn or mound were built.

At Cairnpapple and Forteviot, and possibly also at Balfarg, the demolition of the stone settings may have been linked to the construction of a new monument on the site, and to burial. At Stenness, it is not clear why the massive stones of the stone circle were taken down, or what happened to them after the setting have been dismantled. At least one of the stones must have been left in situ, since it was discovered there and re-erected during the early 20th century reconstruction of the site. If the stone setting was indeed completed in prehistory, which may not have been the case (Ritchie 1976), the other stones were presumably removed from the site at some point. This may also have happened at Balfarg, although Gibson (2010a: 69) points out that the stones from Balfarg could not have been used in the construction of nearby Balbirnie stone circle, based on the radiocarbon dates available for the construction of Balbirnie.

The dismantling and reconfiguration of stone monuments at henge sites may have been part of the commemorative use of these sites, an active renegotiation of memory by reworking an existing monument. It is significant to note that at Cairnpapple, and perhaps also at other sites such as Forteviot 1, the stone monuments were not only taken down, but the stones themselves were re-used on the same site and incorporated into a new monument. In chapter 4 it was suggested that at Leadketty, the ditches may have been recut as a way of

incorporating the fabric and material of an old monument into a new monument when the site was mounded over. The dismantling of stone settings and reuse of the stones in the construction of new monuments may have been another means by which people reworked their past by physically reworking the fabric of existing monuments. In the case of stone monuments, it is possible that once incorporated into the new monument, individual stones may have still been visible or recognised as discrete elements of the old demolished monument. For example at Cairnpapple, Piggott suggested that the stones from the stone setting were used to form the kerb of the later cairn, and so may have been recognisable and on display. It was suggested above that fragments of objects may have been symbolically important during the Neolithic and Bronze Age, and represented aspects of people's identity and relationships (with one another, and with places and the past). The reuse of stones in monument-building could be seen as a larger-scale version of the exchange or deposition of fragments of artefacts. Fragments of monuments were moved about and used to create new monuments, as a way of restating people's relationship to a place or to the past.



**Figure 82 - the broken standing stone *in situ* at Forteviot 1 (Photo: SERF)**

At Forteviot 1, the stump of the broken standing stone was left in the ground (fig. 82). This may be an accident of the way the stone broke when it was taken down. However, it may be a deliberate strategy of leaving behind a fragment of the standing stone in its original location. As noted above in relation to the deposition of fragmented objects, the burial of an object may remove it from sight or from circulation, but does not remove it from people's memory and consciousness (Chapman 2000: 49). Leaving the broken piece of stone in the ground at Forteviot 1 may have been a way of 'burying' the stone, hiding it from view, while still holding a place in people's memories, and retaining a relationship with place. This would be particularly poignant and significant if the other part of the stone was subsequently (re)used in the construction of the cist and cairn. This seems to hint at a complex repertoire of monumental architecture which drew on both seen and unseen elements. Jones (2009: 168) has suggested that the interplay of concealment and revelation was significant in

Neolithic monumentality, for example in stones being broken up and hidden when they were incorporated within cairns. As Jones explains,

‘the process of concealment is also one of revelation as, through burial, a large stone cairn draws attention to the significance of that which is buried’ (*ibid.*).

The later monumentalisation of the site at Forteviot 1 may also similarly have served to draw attention to the hidden traces of earlier activity at the site, including the cremation cemetery and the broken monolith.

The construction and reconstruction of stone monuments would no doubt have been a major and memorable event - and perhaps a traumatic or dangerous one - involving communities in planning and anticipation of quarrying, moving and building with massive pieces of stone. The effort and spectacle of erecting a standing stone on a scale such as the monoliths at Stenness is an impressive feat in its own right, but the processes involved in building a monument extended beyond the site itself. It requires finding a source where suitable stones can be obtained and quarried. Moving a stone would necessitate the production of tools, ropes and rollers, creating what Richards (2009: 57) calls ‘webs of interdependence’ between people. Dismantling a stone setting and moving the stones to form a new monument may involve many similar relationships and events.

Even before stones were quarried and carried off to be built into monuments, they may have held a special significance for people. According to Joshua Pollard and Mark Gillings (2009: 30-31), stones are linked to myths and ancestors, and have cosmological significance or even social agency in many societies. Quarrying and moving stones would have had a visible impact not only on the site where the megaliths would eventually be erected, but on the wider landscape. The journey taken by a stone as it was dragged through the landscape would leave a scar across the surface of the land, leaving a marked ‘pathway’ in its wake, and Richards (2009: 58) suggests that such pathways could subsequently have been used commemoratively. It would be possible for people to start at a ‘finished’ monument, and retrace the steps they took when dragging the stone, walking from monument to stone-quarry. At henge sites where stone settings were dismantled and dragged into position to form a new



monument, the trails left by the stones (and perhaps the stumps of stones or the craters of re-excavated stoneholes) would have been visible for a period of time, a reminder of how the component parts of the monument had been rearranged.

Moving stones from quarry to site, or from one monument to another, would not only have a visual impact on the landscape but may also alter people's perception and understanding of the landscape. Pollard and Gillings (2009: 38) imagine the impact of removing significant stones from their original locations in the landscape:

‘shifting their locations radically reconfigured the social geography of the region, leaving gaps where these significant “place-stones” once were’.

At henge sites such as Forteviot and Cairnpapple, where it is likely that stone monuments were dismantled and the stone reused on the same site, the removal of stones from an existing monument to create a new one may have had a similar impact as removing a stone from the landscape, leaving a gap where the old monument had once been. The effort and potential impact of re-working monuments in this way suggests that it constitutes more than an opportunistic reuse of materials that are already on-site, and may rather represent the deliberate breaking of a monument into fragments to reconfigure the site both physically and in people's understanding and imagination.

### ***Comparing sequences***

As was seen with the comparison of the sites discussed in Chapter 4, considering the biographies of henge sites reveals that while there is no single ‘typical’ biography of a henge site, there are similarities in the trajectories of how some sites are used and change over time. This is the case with Cairnpapple, Forteviot 1, Balfarg and the Stones of Stenness. Each of these sites has a unique biography; but despite the individual trajectory of each site, and the fact that they were each established in different places and at different times, there are similarities in the ways they were used at certain stages during the life of each site. The sequence of the main events to occur at each site (focussing on the Early Neolithic to Early Bronze Age) can be compared in fig. 83.

The earliest place-making activity of all four sites includes burning or the deposition of burnt materials, and the deposition of objects, including the deposition of fragmentary material at some of the sites. At two of the sites, Stenness and Balfarg, this activity is associated with fragments of Grooved Ware pottery, and burnt animal bone. Stenness and Balfarg were probably both the location where a feast was held at least once during the Late Neolithic. By contrast, at Cairnpapple and Forteviot 1, the place-making activity occurs during the Early Neolithic, and is associated with the deposition of cremated human remains. The place-making events at each site appear to involve some similar practices and materials, despite the fact that the events at Cairnpapple and Forteviot may precede the events at Balfarg and Stenness by two or three centuries, and that Cairnpapple and Forteviot are associated with the dead in a way that Balfarg and Stenness are not during the early part of their lives.

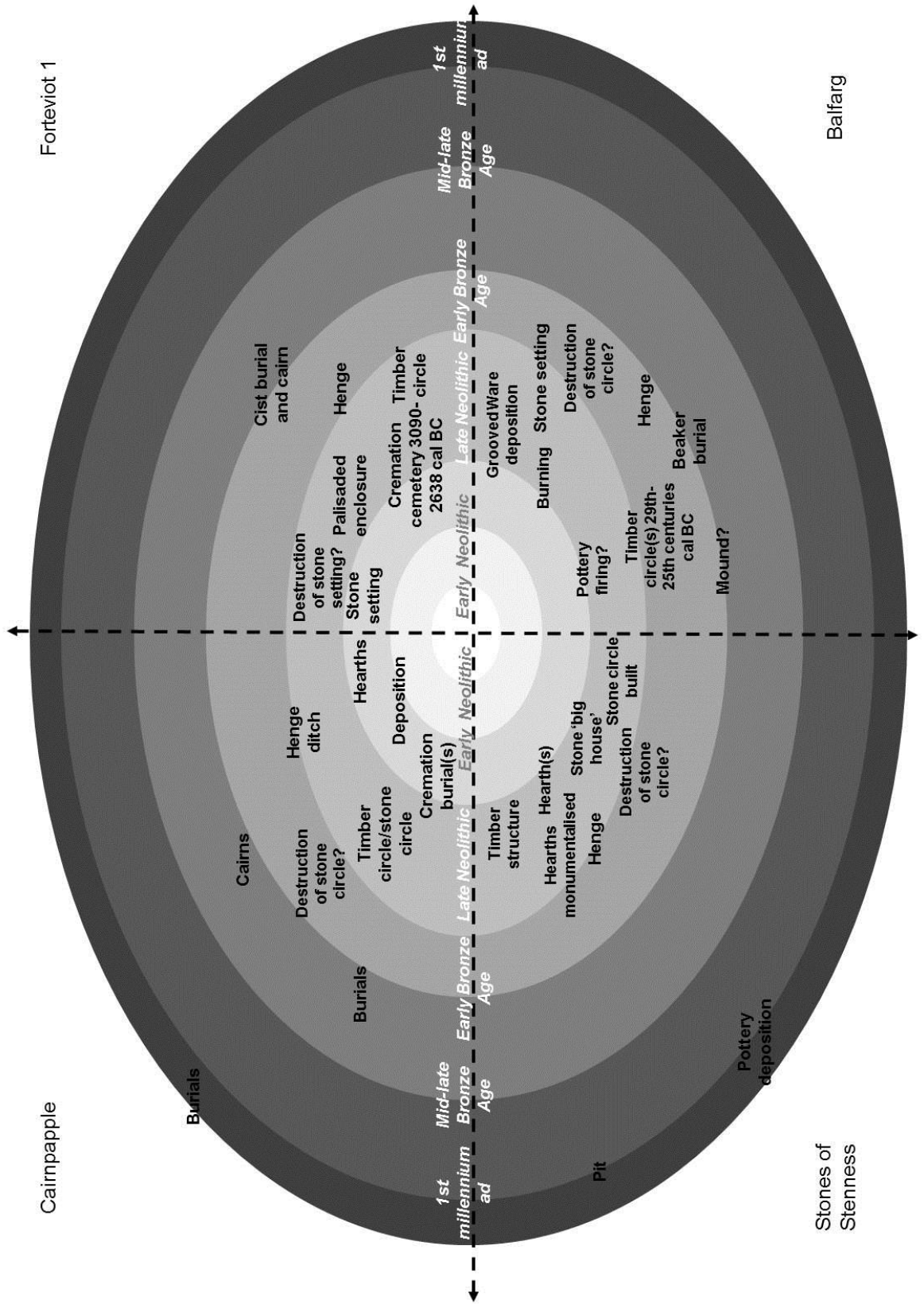


Figure 83 - a comparison of the biographies of Cairnpapple, Forteviot 1, Balfarg and the Stones of Stenness

As with the sites discussed in the previous chapter, the sites at Cairnpapple, Balfarg, Stenness and Forteviot 1 become enclosed over time. At Forteviot 1 and Balfarg, this involved multiple timber structures, which at Balfarg may later have been replaced by stone settings. At Stenness, and possibly Cairnpapple, the sites were marked and surrounded by a stone setting. Each of the four sites was eventually enclosed by a henge monument. Although the henge monument is built at a relatively 'late' point in the life of each site (i.e. after the site has already been used for some time for other purposes), the construction of the henge probably did not occur contemporaneously at these four places. There are no dates for the construction of the henge earthworks at Cairnpapple or Balfarg. Gibson (2010a: 72) believed that the ditch at Balfarg was dug 'towards the end of the second half of the third millennium', and may have been associated with the Beaker burial. Henge 1 at Forteviot was probably constructed just before 2468-2236 cal BC (95% certainty), the dates of the lower fills. Based on comparison with Forteviot 1 and Balfarg, the ditch at Cairnpapple may also be contemporary with the Beaker burials at that site, and may well post-date the cremation burials (one of which has been dated to 3341-3024 cal BC) by several centuries. The ditch at Stenness, by contrast, is probably earlier than any of the other henges discussed in this chapter, the lower fill having been dated to the 30th-26th centuries cal BC.

The site at Stenness is unusual in a wider Scottish context in that it seems to be an 'early' henge, but that the place-making activity occurred relatively late when compared to sites such as Cairnpapple or Forteviot 1. The hearths at Stenness (which may have been used during the earliest phase of activity on the site) were probably in use during the Late Neolithic. By contrast, the first activity at Cairnpapple occurs during the Early Neolithic. At Balfarg, the first activity includes burning and the deposition of Grooved Ware pottery, which is similar to the first activity at Stenness. At Balfarg however, as at Cairnpapple and Forteviot 1, these first uses of the site occur centuries before the construction of the henge. Stenness is unlike the other henge sites discussed in this chapter, as the henge (like the hearths) is associated with Grooved Ware and dates to the Late Neolithic. The transition from place-making fires and feasting, to the construction of timber structures, stone settings and a henge,

apparently occurs much more rapidly (i.e. over a shorter period) at Stenness than it does at Forteviot, Balfarg or Cairnpapple.

Stenness is also unusual because it is not used for burials during the Early Bronze Age. Forteviot 1, Cairnpapple and Balfarg all become foci for burials from the Early Bronze Age; in the case of Balfarg, the construction of the henge may even be closely associated with the Beaker burial, and may be contemporary with the burial rather than with the Later Neolithic activity on the site (Gibson 2010a). Perhaps there is a distinction between henges such as Forteviot 1 which were built from the 25th century BC onwards and associated with monumental burials or beaker burials; and 'early' henges such as Stenness, built around the 30th century BC, on a site which may not have been used for such a long period, and was never used for burial. Stenness may be anomalous in having been used for a relatively short period, when compared to the other sites discussed here. The suggested biography of Stenness is based largely on comparison with other sites, but it is possible that the use of the site for feasting and then its monumentalisation and enclosure occurred over decades rather than centuries. The changes over time at Stenness may have been rapid, taking place within the lifespan of an individual. At Forteviot 1, Cairnpapple and Balfarg, although events such as the hinging of the sites may have been short-lived, one-off events, the sites were most likely in use over several generations.

It should be noted that even using a biographical approach to examine the 'life' of a henge site in detail, some significant events in the life of these sites remain obscure and difficult to detect archaeologically. For example it is difficult to date events such as the destruction of the stone settings at Forteviot 1 or Balfarg. These are events which would have had a major impact on the appearance and use of the site but which, being destructive events, seem to have left little or no dateable evidence.

## **Discussion: Continuity and Change at Henge Sites**

### ***Change***

In the previous chapter, it was suggested that henge sites were places of commemoration, that is, they were places where the past was remembered - or

perhaps even re-enacted or re-interpreted altogether - in an active and dynamic way. Rebuilding monuments and reworking sites over time were seen to be a key aspect of the commemorative role of henge sites, and that it was a way of reworking the past, represented by an 'old' site or existing monument, in the present. The tension between continuity (of location) and change (as monuments are rebuilt) is therefore an important facet of the practice of commemoration at henge sites.

It is important to consider continuity and change at henge sites not only in terms of architecture, monuments and physical/visual changes to the site over time, but also changes in how the sites were experienced and perceived by those who used them at different times throughout their lives - changes in what these places meant. In their discussion of the sites in the Balfarg-Balfarg Riding School complex, Gordon Barclay and Christopher Russell-White (1993: 202) consider not only changes over time, but the possible reasons for these changes:

Developments on a site can very often be seen as a change in the definition of space, perhaps in some cases reflecting a change in function or status of the site. We must ask why there is movement from one focus to another for a different function, and movement from one focus to another for what seems to be a similar function.

At henge sites, the converse may also be true, and we must consider why people maintained the same focus and continued to use the same site for different 'functions' over time.

For example, the site at Forteviot 1 was used (not necessarily continuously, but at least during sporadic episodes) during a period of *at least* five hundred years, or, more probably, a millennium. During this time, the same site was used as a cremation cemetery marked with standing stone(s); the stone(s) were taken down, and the site was enclosed multiple times within a timber palisade and timber circle; before the site was henged, used for burial, and perhaps covered over with a cairn or mound. Cairnpapple and Balfarg had similarly long and varied lives, which probably also spanned several centuries. The Stones of Stenness may have been used over a shorter period, but the site was still significantly altered and used in a range of different ways (albeit in a manner which may be specific to an Orcadian context). Adapting the henge site to each

new use would have required a significant amount of care, planning and effort, and perhaps ritual intervention. For example, the early cremation burials, pits and hearths at Cairnpapple would presumably have left little visible trace above ground. Enclosing the traces of this early place-making activity would therefore not have been easy, and may have required considerable effort such as marking the location of these features in order for the later enclosure by timber or stone settings to be possible. The process of demolishing stone settings at Cairnpapple, Balfarg and Forteviot would also have been difficult, time-consuming and probably emotionally-charged. It was obviously important that the same site should be used again.

The effort and planning which went into monument construction may have been a feature of monumentality in general, whether the monument was built on the site of earlier activity or not. Ethnographic accounts of contemporary monument-building, including the erection of standing stones (Hoskins 1986) but also the construction of timber monuments (Layard 1942) reflect the enormous cost, and significant risks involved in monument construction. The preparation for such events could take years, and may be accompanied by events such as singing, feasting and dancing (Hoskins 1986; Layard 1942). We can imagine that monument construction, and perhaps also destruction, in Neolithic and Bronze Age Scotland may have been attended by similar events. Certainly, feasting seems to have taken place at Stenness and perhaps also at Balfarg.

Periods of construction and destruction would also have been the times when change was most evident, and most striking and dramatic, at henge sites. This may be linked to the use of henge sites for commemoration (or perhaps for specific commemorative events?), and the idea discussed in the previous chapter that commemoration and the appropriation of the past at henge sites was a participative practice, linked to the construction of monuments as much as, or even more than, the 'completed' monument. Ideally, the biography of a site would include a consideration of the construction of the monuments, rather than simply a description of the phasing of successive 'completed' monuments.

Monument construction is not the only means by which a site can be transformed, and we should not overlook the transformative power of smaller acts such as deposition and burning. Such acts may have played a significant role

in effecting transformation at henge sites. As discussed above, deposition was a place-making activity at many sites, and therefore may represent the initial transformation of a site into a special place which is later monumentalised. Fire also played an important transformative role, not only at henge sites, but in other spheres of life. At henge sites, it seems that fires may have been lit during periods of transformation, for example during place-making activities, as at Cairnpapple, but also possibly when sites were being prepared for the construction of new monuments, as at Dyffryn Lane in Powys (discussed in the next chapter). Deposition and fire-lighting may lack the high-impact archaeological visibility of a monument, but as may have been impressive and memorable spectacles when they were carried out - thus transforming places in people's memory and imagination as much as (or more than) they visibly transformed a given location.

### ***Concentricity vs. asymmetry***

Henging a site or constructing a new monument on the site of an existing monument would have changed the ways in which a site could be experienced and used. In the previous chapter, it was noted that the enclosure of henge sites would change how the site looked, but would also have an impact on how it was used and accessed. Besides enclosure, other changes at henge sites over time would also affect the way people could move around the site, and which parts of the site would be visible and accessible.

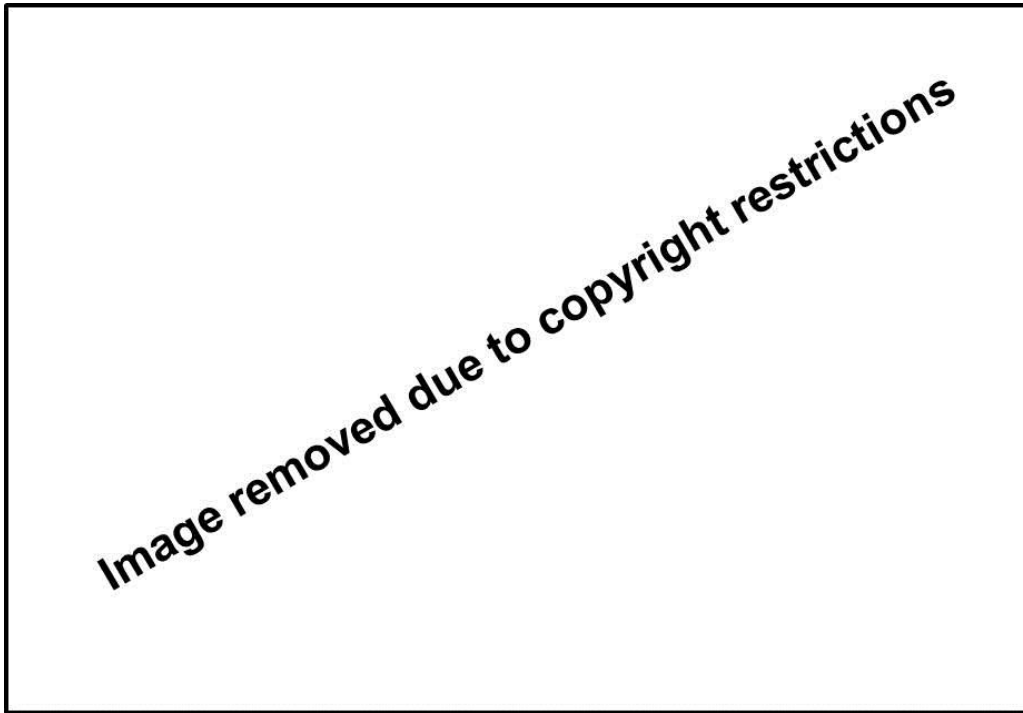
The earliest monumentalisation of some henge sites such as Balfarg and possibly Cairnpapple involved the construction of timber circles. In each case, these timber settings were constructed in such a way that they marked off the area where the deposition and/or burial(s) had taken place. This arrangement of space seems to be respected and adhered to when the next construction project begins. At Forteviot 1, the timber circle may have been preceded by a monolith or stone setting. After the construction of the timber circle however, the construction of the henge ditch several centuries later respected the position of the timbers, and the henge was built inside the timber circle and concentric to it. The construction of the henge monuments at Cairnpapple and Balfarg have not been dated, but it is likely that the sequence of construction at these sites is similar to that at Forteviot 1, and that the henge earthworks post-date the



timber (and possibly stone) settings, perhaps by hundreds of years. The henge earthworks at Cairnpapple and Balfarg are also constructed concentrically to the earlier timber settings. At Cairnpapple, this has resulted in the henge earthworks following the slightly elliptical plan of the stone or timber setting (see fig. 46 above). At Balfarg, there may have been an even greater effort to emphasise concentric circles as there were probably multiple concentric timber circles. The henge is also concentric to these on the north and the east, but the southern arc of the henge ditch is formed by a natural gully or stream.

The continued emphasis on circularity and concentricity between the timber/stone settings and the henge earthworks perhaps several centuries later suggests that an enduring concern with demarcating space in this way at henge sites. Presumably the emphasis on concentric, circular monuments may have restricted or directed people's movement around the site in certain ways. Perhaps people were directed around the circumference of these sites, and discouraged from ever setting foot in the interior.

This changes later in the lives of the sites: by the time the sites are used for burial during the Early Bronze Age, the emphasis is no longer on concentricity. At Forteviot 1, when the cist burial is added to the site around 2199-1977 cal BC (95% confidence), it is positioned opposite the henge entrance, but cutting the henge ditch, which was partially filled-in by that time. At Cairnpapple also, the monumental burials and the cairn covering them partially overlie the earlier henge ditch. Piggott (1948) viewed the construction of the burial and cairn as a slighting of the existing monument, almost as cultural vandalism. While the construction of the cairn could be seen as destructive, it may instead reflect a change in the use of the site. Concentricity was no longer a significant concern when monuments were being built, and the way people moved around the site had evidently changed. Access to different areas of the site was allowed, and the centre of the monument was no longer blocked off by timber and stone settings, nor hidden inside henge earthworks. The henge ditch had filled in, and while it was still visible, may have eroded enough that people could walk over it.



**Figure 84 - reconstruction drawing of the construction of the largest cairn at Cairnpapple, depicting how the cairn overlies the partially-filled henge ditch. (Artist: Jan Dunbar, in Barclay and Grove 2001: 22)**

The situation may have been different at Balfarg, where the Beaker-accompanied burial is located near to the centre of the henge monument (Mercer 1981). Perhaps this is because the burial was closely contemporary with the construction of the henge, as Gibson (2010a: 72) has suggested. This is in contrast to Forteviot 1, where the cist post-dated the construction of the henge by two centuries or more.

At some henge sites, it seems there is a change from a concern with concentricity when timber settings and henge earthworks are built - what Mercer (1981: 106) describes as a 'predominant "circularity"' - to a different use of the space in henge sites, with later burials being built to one side, overlying the earlier henge ditch, and avoiding the central area. It may be that the central area is not so much avoided as deliberately left clear as an area where people can gather inside the area enclosed by the henge, and beside (and presumably with a good view of) the area used for burial. While the construction of the cists at Cairnpapple and Forteviot 1 saw a change in the use of the site and the way space was manipulated by the monument-builders, it was evidently still important to the cist-builders that the burials should be located *inside* the

earlier henge monuments. At Cairnpapple, the each of the successive cairns are constructed inside the area enclosed by the henge, although they overlie the ditch and are offset to the western side of the axis between the two causeways of the henge monument (Piggott 1948: 70, 76, 92; Barclay 1999: 44). People were still interested in monumentalising the area inside the henge, and in this sense there was an aspect of continuity to the continued use of henge sites over time.

### ***Continuity?***

Despite the changes in the way henge sites were used over time, there were aspects of continuity, such as the repeated use of the same location as discussed above. However, given that henge sites were used over very long periods of time, this should not be taken to mean that they were used *continuously*. The use of the Stones of Stenness may be an exception, since the use of the site for feasting, the construction of a structure or house there, the monumentalisation of the site with stone monuments and the henging of the site may all have occurred in relatively quick succession. At Cairnpapple and Forteviot however, the use of the site spans the Early Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age or even later, as both sites still attract interest during the first millennium AD. It may therefore be more accurate to consider the continued interest in henge sites over long periods as repeated episodes of use and a recurrent return to an 'old' place, rather than in terms of continuous use of a site.

The repeated use of henge sites for various activities including burial seems not to be restricted to larger sites such as Cairnpapple, nor to sites such as Forteviot 1 or Balfarg which form part of a larger complex of monuments. Mini-henges such as the small hengiform monument at Leadketty (discussed in chapter 4), Pullyhour in Caithness, or Achinduich Farm near Lairg, Sutherland also have complex biographies. The site at Pullyhour may have first been used during the Late Mesolithic, as several diagnostic lithics were recovered from a lithic scatter in the centre of the henge monument (Bradley 2011: 120-2). A small henge monument was later built on the site; a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the henge dates its construction to sometime after 1620-1450 cal BC at  $2\sigma$  (*ibid.*). The bank was constructed in two phases, the second phase being added after 1369-1126 cal BC at  $2\sigma$  (*ibid.*: 126). During this second phase and the

reconstruction of the site, the ditch was partially recut and a small gravel bank was constructed inside the henge (*ibid.*). A small post was erected inside the henge, and a second post, made of pine, was erected on the edge of the bank to the south-east of the entrance causeway (*ibid.*: 128). The pine post has been dated to 2573-2348 cal BC ( $2\sigma$ ), and Bradley (2011: 128) suggests that it may have been found in a bog, and could already have been old when it was put up. The post was later removed and the entranceway blocked with stone (*ibid.*: 130).

The small hengiform monument at Achinduich Farm, Lairg enclosed only a small area between 5.8 and 7.4 metres across (Bradley 2011: 149). The ditch had a single entrance causeway on the south, outside of which was a posthole, which may have been erected several hundred years after the ditch had been dug (*ibid.*: 149). Inside the henge ditch were two pits, one of which contained a cremation burial, the other a Cordoned Urn which contained two cremations (*ibid.*: 150). The cremations have been dated to 1690-1450 cal BC ( $2\sigma$ ). Oak charcoal under the henge bank provides a *terminus post quem* of 1600-1270 cal BC ( $2\sigma$ ) for the construction of the henge, while the post outside the entrance was dated to 751-241 cal BC,  $2\sigma$  (Bradley 2011: 153). It seems then that the site at Achinduich Farm began when the cremations were deposited there. Shortly afterwards, the cremations were enclosed within a small henge monument. Much later, a post was erected outside the entrance, which may have served to mark the site or to make access into the small internal area more awkward.

Even at Achinduich Farm and Pullyhour, which are much smaller and later than the sites discussed in this chapter, the same location is repeatedly returned to over long periods, as at Forteviot, Cairnpapple and Balfarg. Some of the events which occurred at the smaller sites are also similar to those at the larger sites: deposition of everyday objects (lithic scatter at Pullyhour), and burial (cremations at Achinduich Farm). While the location remains constant however, the sites are not used continuously, and there may be several centuries separating some of the episodes of activity at these small sites, as at Forteviot, Cairnpapple and Balfarg. Despite the lacunae of apparent inactivity at these sites, their re-use and modification seems to be significant.

An important part of the recurrent use of henge sites may have been the re-institution of old practices as part of the modification of these sites at various times. For example, digging ditches may be seen as the reprisal of earlier pit-digging activities. On occasion, as at Pullyhour, Leadketty and Pict's Knowe where the henge ditches are recut, this extends to an almost direct repetition of earlier activity. In other instances however, later uses of the site may refer to the past in a more symbolic way. This could include dismantling existing monuments and moving pieces of them to form new structures, as discussed above with reference to the cairns at Cairnpapple, the central hearth at Stenness and the possible re-use of a broken standing stone in a cairn at Forteviot 1. In such cases, the individual parts of the monument may have held their own significance as parts of monuments, and we cannot assume that stones or timber only became significant once they were built into a larger monument. In other cases, the 'symbolic' reference to the past and reuse of henge sites may have involved bringing 'old' things to the site. This could include large objects, such as the bog pine erected at Pullyhour, but also possibly fragments of curated objects including bone (as may have been the case at Forteviot 1) and possibly pieces of pottery which had been treated as heirlooms, as discussed above.

It seems then that henge sites tend to be used episodically rather than continuously. The same site may be returned to more than once over a period of several centuries, giving the impression of continuity of location. Henge sites are used in different ways over time however, and so change and innovation may be as important as continuity at these sites. Paradoxically however, it seems likely that the reason for the repeated use of these sites is that they were 'old' places, sites which had been significant in the past. Their re-use often seems to refer to the previous uses, and may sometimes directly draw on, imitate or manipulate the past. This included the deposition of old, curated material, as well as returning to existing sites and reworking old monuments.

## Conclusion

In Chapter 4, it was argued that henge sites were places of commemoration, and that this involved a combination of returning to the same site repeatedly, and altering and rebuilding the site. This theme of continuity and change has been discussed in more depth in this chapter. Sites such as Balfarg, the Stones of

Stenness, Forteviot 1 and Cairnpapple were returned to for sporadic episodes of monument rebuilding over many centuries. Having once been established as special places, these sites continued to attract attention and embellishment for generations before they were ever henge. Despite an interest in rebuilding these sites and creating new monuments there, these were places where people expressed an interest with the past - whether by burying pieces of 'heirlooms' or ancestors there, or by taking pieces of old, existing monuments and reconfiguring them into something new, or even possibly reviving old practices such as pit- or ditch-digging.

This enduring interest in the past, expressed by returning to old places or existing monuments in the landscape seems to have been played out at most henge sites, including those such as Forteviot 1 and Balfarg which form only one site within a larger monument complex. Even at Stenness, which may have been an early henge and a relatively short-lived site, the same process of rebuilding and reworking an existing site takes place. At all of the henge sites discussed here, the long sequence of change culminates when the site is closed off by the henge, perhaps used for burial, before being finally sealed under mounds or cairns as at Cairnpapple and probably Balfarg.

In the next chapter, the themes discussed here in relation to only a handful of henge sites in Scotland will be considered in relation to henges in other parts of the British Isles. Many of the events which took place at henge sites such as fire-setting, pit-digging, burying fragments of artefacts or building timber or stone settings, are not unique to henge places. The next chapter will consider why some sites are henges while others remained unenclosed.

## **Chapter 6 discussion: Re-henging the henge? Biographies of memory and transformation**

### **Introduction**

In chapter 2, ‘traditional’ understandings of henge monuments, as well as more recent interpretations, were discussed. Typological understandings of henge monuments have continued to hold sway over many aspects of our interpretations of henge sites - as has been the case for many other ‘types’ of monuments, such as stone circles (Richards 2013a). Henges are still widely understood to be circular ritual earthwork monuments dating to the Late Neolithic. This is despite the fact that more recent interpretations of henge sites have produced a more nuanced understanding of henges, leading some to even suggest that the term ‘henge’ should no longer be used (Gibson 2012). Crucially, recent years have seen an increased awareness that henge monuments are often ‘late’ arrivals in the history of a site, often being built on the site of earlier activity (Barclay 2005; Thomas 2010). This phenomenon, although increasingly recognised, has been the subject of little dedicated study in relation to henge sites, and was the starting point for this thesis.

Chapter 3 began to explore possible alternative ways in which to understand the ‘re-use’ of sites, and the appearance of henges late in the life of the sites where they are built. It was argued that this could be understood as a form of commemorative practice, and that ‘henging’ could be understood as one of a number of strategies used to transform space throughout the Late Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age. In the case of henge sites, this transformation of sites often involved the separation of an area of the landscape from everyday space and time through enclosure - described in chapter 3 as the creation of a heterotopia and/or an imagined landscape. It was suggested that a useful way in which to consider this transformation over time (ideally without privileging any particular single phase of monumental construction) would be to use a biographical approach to think through henged sites.

Chapters 4 and 5 put this biographical approach into action, focusing on eight excavated henge sites across Scotland. These sites were chosen for a number of reasons: they had been excavated or recently reinterpreted, meaning that a

reasonable amount of information was available about the ways the sites had changed over time. The sites chosen also included a range of both larger henges (e.g. Balfarg) and small 'mini-henges' or hengiforms (Leadketty), as well as a variety of 'early' (i.e. Late Neolithic) henges (Stenness) and 'late' henges (e.g. Forteviot 1, North Mains). The focus on Scotland was deliberate, since sites in Scotland (outwith Orkney) have often been largely overlooked in studies of henge sites (e.g. Wainwright 1989; Harding 2003). Recent publications and projects, including Bradley's series of excavations of henges in the north-east of Scotland (Bradley 2011) and excavations conducted as part of the ongoing SERF project (Noble and Brophy 2011a; Brophy and Noble forthcoming) have done much to change this situation, and this thesis was written in the light of these important projects and publications. The thesis also argued that the transformation of a site to become a henge place was often the culmination of the use of a site which may have been important over several generations. While the discussion in chapters 4 and 5 concentrated on the specific sites discussed, this chapter will include more general discussion of these topics in relation to henges in Scotland, and elsewhere in the British Mainland.

It seems that there is no single ideal or 'typical' biography for a henge site. However, there are some aspects of the biography of a henge site which do apply to most, if not all, henge sites. The henge earthworks are not the first element to be constructed on the site. The establishment of henge sites as a special location may involve pit-digging, the deposition of fragments of material culture, and in some cases, activities associated with burning, or even with cremation burial. The site of these place-making events may later be elaborated and marked by a timber structure. The timber structures built at these sites may be long-lived and multi-phase structures in many cases. They may then be superseded by stone monuments, which may in turn be demolished or rebuilt. Henging the site generally occurs 'late' in the life of the site, after it has already been used for generations (perhaps even beyond living memory in most cases). This may represent the transformation of these sites into a place which was accessible, to one which is separated off from the quotidian landscape. The separation may be made complete and more final and irreversible by blocking the entrances to henge earthworks, and sometimes by raising a mound to cover the interior of the site. It should be noted that while henges are sometimes said



to be the final, 'closing-off' phase of a site (Thomas 2010), henging may be only the beginning of the end of these sites, and it is not unusual for henge sites to continue in use even after they have been henged. This usually involved burial activity, sometimes including very elaborate burials (such as the cist in Forteviot 1, or the monumental burial marked by a monolith at Cairnpapple), and sometimes associated with the covering of the site by a mound or cairn (e.g. insertion of burials into the cairns at Cairnpapple).

## **Biographies of transformations: henge sites in a wider British context**

The case studies presented in this thesis have looked at the individual biographies of eight henge sites in Scotland, and the discussion in each chapter has focused on similarities between the life histories of each site. This does not mean however that all henge sites have a similar biography, and, as pointed out in chapters four and five, the biography of each individual henge site varies. It should be stressed then that although there may be general observable trends in the ways henge sites were used over time, there is no single or 'ideal' biography that describes the life-history of all henge sites. Henge sites being widely distributed across the British Isles, and with a wide range of dates and very variable morphology, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is no single 'ideal' biography of a henge site. As Alex Gibson (2010b: 246, my emphasis) has pointed out,

'The chronology of circles of stone and timber and of henges is still by no means clear and site sequences and narratives may vary from site to site: *there need be no universal model.*'

This also highlights the importance of considering the individual biography of each individual site, rather than relying on generic typological monuments - not only for henge sites, but also for other 'types' of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments. Beyond being a way of re-interpreting henge sites, the biographical approach presented in this thesis therefore also has useful applications for the study of monumentality more generally.

In comparing the stone circle and henge sites, the Ring of Brodgar and the Stones of Stenness in Orkney, Jane Downes *et al.* (2013: 118) highlight the

differences between the two sites: that not only were they constructed at different times and at different scales, but the character and biography of each site is also very different. They conclude that:

‘Any assumption of equivalence or analogue between the two [...] is suggested to be a misplaced acceptance of typological reasoning. The common denominator between the two seems to be less about final morphology, and more about transformational practice’ (Downes *et al.* 2013: 118).

The same can be said of other henge sites. For example, both Leadketty and Balfarg enclose timber structures; but it would be difficult to argue that a tiny henge like Leadketty, enclosing an area only 8 metres in diameter, could be seen as equivalent to an enclosure such as Balfarg which is over 60 metres in diameter. The use of biography employed in this thesis seeks to address the issue highlighted by Downes *et al.* (2013: 118), and to remove the focus away from typology and the ‘final’ morphology of the site, and instead to consider ‘transformational practice’ and the different ways in which henge sites were used and transformed throughout their lives.

In many ways, the biographies of henge sites might be seen as a history of both commemoration (practices connected with memory and monumentalisation) and transformation. While the biography of each henge site is individual to that site, the themes of commemoration and transformation are recurrent within and between the life histories of many henge sites, and will also frame the discussion of henge sites presented in this chapter.

As explained above, this thesis has focused on reconsidering henge sites in Scotland and therefore henge sites located elsewhere in the British Isles have not been considered. However, in order to understand the biographies of Scottish henge sites in context, three henge sites from elsewhere in the British Mainland are considered here for comparison: Dyffryn Lane in Powys; Ringlemere, Kent; and the southern henge in the Thornborough complex, North Yorkshire (fig. 85).

These three sites were selected for a number of reasons. Two of them (Dyffryn Lane and Ringlemere) have been excavated within the last 15 years, and all three have been recently published (within the last five years) - meaning that

the published accounts are written to a high standard and contain a reasonable amount of information about the phasing and sequences of the sites. This made it possible to construct a biography for each of these sites. In addition, each of the three sites is located in a different region (figure 85) - Thornborough in the north of England, Ringlemere in the south-east, and Dyffryn Lane in Wales. As a result, the selection of these particular henge sites meant that a comparison of the biographies of henge sites across several different areas was possible.



Figure 85 - location map showing sites discussed in chapter 6

### ***Biography 1: Dyffryn Lane, Powys***

The henge site at Dyffryn Lane, Powys in Wales was first investigated in the 19th century, but was re-excavated by Alex Gibson in 2006 (Gibson 2010b). Dyffryn Lane henge forms part of a larger Neolithic and Bronze Age monument complex, including a mid-4th millennium BC long barrow and enclosures, and ring ditches and a large pit, probably dating to the Bronze Age (*ibid.*: 213). The monument complex is located in the Severn Valley near the confluences of the Severn, Camlad and Rhiw rivers (*ibid.*). In common with the Scottish sites discussed in this thesis, the henge site at Dyffryn Lane was used over a long period, and has an extensive and varied biography which began long before the site was henged.

#### **Place-making: pits, pottery, food and fire**

The first archaeologically-visible activity on the site comprised pit deposition (Gibson 2010b: 229). Pit digging and deposition at Dyffryn Lane was practiced over a long period, beginning in the 3rd quarter of the 4th millennium cal BC, and continuing until the beginning of the 3rd millennium cal BC (*ibid.*; fig. 86). Various materials were deposited in a group of three pits, including: sherds of Peterborough Ware dating to the Middle Neolithic (fig. 87); stones which had been fractured by heating; and hazelnut shells (*ibid.*: 227, 229). Analysis of the Peterborough sherds from the Dyffryn Lane pits led Gibson (2010b: 238) to describe the pottery as 'functional'. The pottery may have been manufactured locally to the site, and residue analysis of some of the sherds revealed that some of the vessels held 'ruminant dairy lipids', confirming that at least some of the pottery had been used before the sherds were deposited in the pits (*ibid.*).



Figure 86 - sections and plan of the three pits used for deposition at Dyffryn Lane (Source: Gibson 2010b: 234, fig. 21)



**Figure 87 - Middle Neolithic (Peterborough Ware) pottery sherds from Dyffryn Lane pits (Source: Gibson 2010b: 327, fig. 23)**

The pit deposition at Dyffryn Lane may have been practiced over a long period: Gibson suggests at least two distinct episodes of deposition, on the basis of the pottery evidence. Significantly, the second phase includes pottery which was very abraded when it was deposited, and which may therefore have been residual (Gibson 2010b: 242). An alternative interpretation would be that these abraded sherds may represent curated material, perhaps retrieved after middening, and which may therefore be a kind of antique object, the deposition of which was an important way of forging a relationship with the past. It should also be noted that, although the pit deposition may have been practiced (probably sporadically) over a long period, it was evidently focused on a specific location, and did not extend over a large area, since only three pits were found at the site (although only the north-east quadrant of the henge was excavated).

Pit-digging and the deposition of fragmented objects, food-related material, and material associated with (and altered by) fire, is reminiscent of place-making

activity at some of the excavated henge sites discussed in this thesis, including the pit deposition at Balfarg Riding School and Cairnpapple, and the association of food or feasting debris at the Stones of Stenness. Gibson (2010b: 229) notes that the pits appear to be by far the earliest activity at the site, pre-dating any other excavated features by at least a century, and maybe by as much as half a millennium. This raises the question of how the location of these activities was remembered, given that in-filled pits would be ephemeral features, and little visible 100 years after they had first been dug. It suggests the possibility that later elaborations of the site may have commemorated a 'mythical' past rather than specific activities or events which were remembered by members of the community. The deposition of pottery which had been used to contain food or drink raises the possibility that during the early life of Dyffryn Lane, it was a place where people met to share food or perhaps to feast - either as part of everyday 'domestic' life, or perhaps associated with special occasions. This is reminiscent of the place-making activity at the Stones of Stenness, which probably involved cooking and feasting. Incidentally, it also highlights the importance of integrating the detailed study of artefacts, with the study of monuments, in order to get a full picture of what events occurred at a site.

### **Monumentalising Dyffryn Lane: wrapping, construction and destruction**

A century or more after the site at Dyffryn Lane had played host to pit deposition, a stone circle was constructed at the site. A *terminus ante quem* for the construction and use of the stone circle suggests that it may have been built and used around 2900-2500 cal BC (Gibson 2010b: 229). When Gibson excavated the site, six stones remained, forming a circle c.11 metres in diameter (*ibid.*: 227). A seventh stone had been removed from the southern side of the circle, although this was a relatively recent event, as the foil from a cigarette packet was found in the fill of the hole created by the removal of the stone (*ibid.*). However, earlier alterations had also been made to the stone circle, with one of the stones having been toppled (*ibid.*; fig. 88). A *terminus ante quem* from iron pan overlying the toppled stone suggests that this happened before 2487-2268 cal BC at 95.4% probability (*ibid.*: 229). Gibson believes that the stone circle was not repaired after it was ruined (*ibid.*).



**Figure 88 - toppled standing stone at Dyffryn Lane (Source: Gibson 2010b: 232, fig. 18)**

It is unclear whether the ruination of the stone circle was deliberate or not. The destruction of stone settings at henge sites has already been discussed in chapter 5, for example the removal of the stone setting associated with the early burials at Forteviot 1; and the near-complete destruction of the stone circle at Balfarg. In some instances the stones may have been re-used in the construction of a new monument, as may have been the case at Cairnpapple, where the stones were moved and incorporated into the kerb of a cairn. At Moncreiffe House, the first stone setting on the site was destroyed, but a second stone circle was constructed (Stewart 1985). The stone circle at Dyffryn Lane was not repaired or reinstated after the stone collapsed.

### **Henging Dyffryn Lane**

The next archaeologically-visible event at Dyffryn Lane was the construction of a henge monument. A hearth sealed underneath the bank has been dated to c.2574-2401 cal BC, providing a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the earthworks (Gibson 2010b: 232). Gibson therefore suggests that the henge was built sometime during the third quarter of the 3rd millennium cal BC, 'shortly



after' the stone circle had been ruined (*ibid.*). He also suggests that the site was de-turfed prior to the construction of the henge, and that it was on this de-turfed land surface that the hearth was lit (*ibid.*). The stripping of the ground surface at Dyffryn Lane gives an interesting and quite rare insight into the processes involved in constructing an earthwork monument, and into how the site looked during phases when different monuments were being constructed. Considering the preparation and maintenance of sites in connection to earthwork-building may be an interesting avenue for further research, although at many sites only scant evidence may be available for activities such as turf removal or weeding, which are often archaeologically-ephemeral, although they may have had a significant impact on the appearance of the site in prehistory.

The stone circle at Dyffryn Lane was probably already ruined by the time the henge was built. It may be that it was the perceived impression of ancientness created by a visibly dilapidated site which attracted the attention of the henge builders, and which necessitated the 'wrapping' of the site inside the earthworks. It is also possible however that the henge formed a second 'skin' at the site, and that the stone circle had already formed the first layer of wrapping at the site, perhaps forming a (permeable?) barrier to demarcate the location of the earlier pits.

The henging of the site at Dyffryn Lane coincided with the lighting of a hearth after the ground surface had been prepared. Lighting the fire may have been associated with the transformation of the site and marking the transition from stone wrapping, to earthworks. Given that the dating of the hearth suggests that it is more closely contemporary with the disuse or abandonment of the stone circle, and the preparation of the site before it was transformed into a henge site, the idea that the hearth was associated with the transformation of the site rather than being purely 'functional' seems plausible. Conversely, it should also be borne in mind that the association of the hearth with the transformation of the site need not preclude a more prosaic functional interpretation. For example, the hearth could have been used for cooking (or simply for warmth and light) during the actual construction of the henge - or could have served a range of roles, some pragmatic, others ceremonial.

### Closing the site: mound construction at Dyffryn Lane

After the henge had been constructed, the centre of the enclosed area was covered over by a mound (fig. 89). The mound was composed of redeposited soil and redeposited tuft (Gibson 2010b: 220, 232). Gibson believed that, although the mound settled over time so that by modern times the stones of the stone circle were visible sticking out of the top of the mound, when the mound was constructed the stones would have been completely covered by it (*ibid.*: 232). The mound was constructed after c. 2487-2268 cal BC (95.4% probability), meaning that it is possible that the mound may post-date the construction of the henge (depending on how closely contemporary the hearth and the henge were), and that therefore the mound may represent, in Gibson's words, 'possibly the final monumental episode at the site' (*ibid.*). According to Gibson, the construction of the mound was followed only by the abandonment of the site, a long period during which the ditch filled in (Gibson 2010b: 232). It does not appear that the site was used for any later burials for instance (*ibid.*), in contrast to the scenario at sites such as Cairnpapple, where later burials were inserted into the mound (Barclay 1999: 41).



Figure 89 - aerial photo of the henge site at Dyffryn Lane; the darker area in the centre shows the approximate extent of the mound (Source: CPAT/Gibson 2010b: 218, fig. 4)

## Summary

The life of Dyffryn Lane began some time in the late 4th-early 3rd millennium BC, when the site was used for pit-digging and deposition. Fragmented material possibly including curated material, and material associated with dairying, was deposited in three pits which were dug on the site. Dyffryn Lane might, in common with North Mains, commemorate certain early farming practices or pastoralism, given the possibility that some of the vessels held dairy products; or, like the Stones of Stenness, the earliest use of the site may have included people coming together to share a feast as well as depositing fragmented objects on the site. The site where the pits had been dug was monumentalised, probably between 2900-2500 BC, when a stone circle was constructed on the site. This was destroyed - it is impossible to be certain whether the destruction was carried out soon after the stone had been erected, or when they were already generations old - and the site remained ruined until it was henged.

The process of henging Dyffryn Lane began by stripping the turf off the site of the ruined stone circle, and lighting a fire on the bare earth surface. The henge was constructed after c.2574-2401 cal BC. Perhaps soon after the site had been enclosed by the henge, at some point after c.2487-2268 cal BC, the interior of the site was sealed over by a mound. After this, the henge ditch gradually filled in, and it seems that the site was abandoned. Over time, the soil forming the mound settled, and the tops of the ruined stone circle became visible again, protruding from the top of the mound.

## ***Biography 2: Ringlemere, Kent***

The site at Ringlemere near Sandwich in East Kent was excavated between 2002 and 2006 because the site, believed to be a barrow, was at risk of damage from ploughing, and in order to contextualise an Early Bronze Age gold cup discovered at Ringlemere by a metal-detectorist in 2001 (Parfitt and Needham 2012: 81). The excavation revealed that the barrow, which formed a focal point for several other surrounding barrows, had actually begun life as a henge. The site proved complicated: over 230 cut features were found inside the henge, sealed under the barrow (see fig. 90), and little dating evidence was retrieved (*ibid.*: 84). The

interpretations of the site discussed here are based on Keith Parfitt and Stuart Needham's (2012) interim publication.

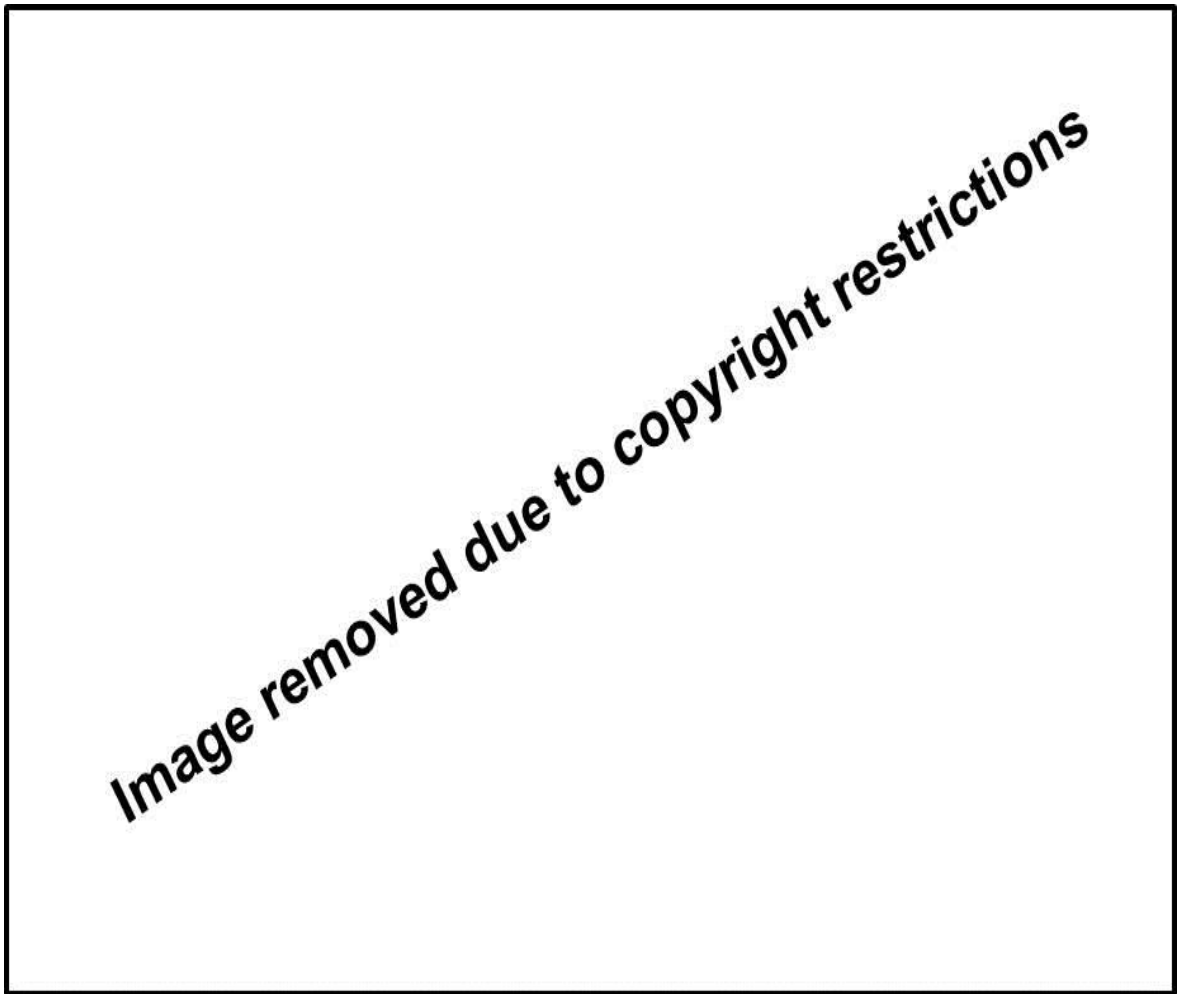


Figure 90 - internal features at Ringlemere (Source: Parfitt and Needham 2012: 85, fig. 3)

### **Place-making: deposition and Early Neolithic settlement**

Flint scatters found on the 13 hectares surrounding Ringlemere suggest that this area was the focus of repeated activity during the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age (Parfitt and Needham 2012: 84). It is difficult to isolate what the place-making activity on the actual henge/barrow site was, because of the jumble of some 235 features inside the henge and underneath the barrow, few intercut one another, making it hard to understand the chronology of the site (*ibid.*: 86). The site may have begun life as a settlement site, perhaps during the late 4th-early 3rd millennia BC, as some of the features have been dated to this period (Parfitt and Needham 2012: 88). A possible circular or oval building on

the site has been dated to 3770-3645 cal BC (*ibid.*). One of three hearths found at Ringlemere was associated with an oval structure with a possible entrance porch (Parfitt and Needham 2012: 87-88). The site may have been used for settlement over a long period, or a series of structures may have been built there, as Parfitt and Needham (2012: 88) suggest there may have been Grooved Ware-associated settlement on the site as well. This may be paralleled at the mini-henge at Leadketty, where slots predating the henge may relate to an earlier building, and there is an adjacent Grooved Ware-related house or structure, as discussed in chapter 4 (and see Brophy *et al.* 2012).

### **Wrapping and defining spaces: post settings and ‘cove’**

An oval or horseshoe setting of pits or posts, measuring some 30 x 25.5 metres across, was also discovered at the site. Parfitt and Needham (2012: 87) note that this horseshoe setting was concentric to the henge, and that indeed the horseshoe plan is ‘echoed in the shape of single-entrance henges’. A parallel for a horseshoe timber setting can be found at Machrie Moor, Arran, where some of the timber circles had internal horseshoe-shaped post settings (Haggarty 1991). Two pairs of postholes inside the horseshoe setting form what Parfitt and Needham (2012: 87) describe as a ‘trapeziform’ structure. It may be however that these form a kind of ‘four-post’ structure inside the ring or horseshoe of posts, and might therefore resemble aspects of Neolithic house architecture (fig. 91) - either an actual house, or a structure which was meant to recall house architecture (see discussion in chapter 4).



**Figure 91 - plan of the horseshoe post-setting and internal trapezoidal setting at Ringlemere (Source: Parfitt and Needham 2012: 88, fig. 4).**

Two 'L'-shaped slots were located in the centre of the site, which Parfitt and Needham (2012: 86) describe as possibly forming a small timber structure or 'cove', c. 2.4x1.2 metres. An 'avenue' of four posts ran away from the cove to the west, although it is not clear whether or not these were contemporary to the 'cove' or not. Dating the 'cove' also proved problematic: two radiocarbon dates were obtained, but Parfitt and Needham (2012: 87) report that these were 'very divergent', and each was therefore discounted. The southern 'cove' slot cuts one of the central postholes inside the horseshoe setting, suggesting that the rectangular structure is later than the horseshoe setting (*ibid.*). Parfitt and Needham consider that the site may have been unenclosed before this point, and that the construction of the cove is more closely linked to the construction of the henge (*ibid.*). It may be that marking the site at Ringlemere with a horseshoe-shaped post setting and then a smaller timber 'cove' structure may represent the beginning of a growing concern with enclosure at the site, with each subsequent timber structure/setting enclosing a smaller space.

### Hearths and burnt bone

A second hearth, overlying features to the south of the horseshoe setting, was associated with some unidentified cremated bone, dated to 2885-2640 cal BC (Parfitt and Needham 2012: 87). Parfitt and Needham (*ibid.*) suggest that this hearth may relate to the construction (or possibly the dismantling) of the horseshoe setting, which may have occurred during the early 3rd millennium BC. It is possible therefore that this hearth might be associated with the destruction or decommissioning of the putative timber horseshoe, and with the henging of the site - a possible parallel with Dyffryn Lane, where the transformation of the site by henging was also marked by lighting a fire. The unidentified bone could represent the use of the site for burial during this period; or, perhaps more likely given the previous use of the site for settlement, it might represent the remains of cooking or feasting on the site at some time in the Mid-Late Neolithic (as may have been the case at the Stones of Stenness).

### Henging Ringlemere

The site was hinged, although it is unclear exactly when this event took place in the life of Ringlemere. Parfitt and Needham (2012: 84) suggest it is equally likely that the henge could date from the Later Neolithic, Chalcolithic or Bronze Age. The henge ditch enclosed an area, slightly oval in plan, some 41.5 metres (east-west) by 43.75 m (north-south), and although no bank survived, the fill of the ditch suggests the possibility that there may have been a bank, which has later been levelled, since the silting patterns in the ditch suggested material had slipped in from a putative bank (Parfitt and Needham 2012: 85). The ditch was quite substantial, varying in width from 2.5-6m, and surviving to between 0.9 and 1.5 metres deep, although it may possibly have been up to 1 metre deeper before the site was truncated by ploughing (*ibid.*). There is a single entrance causeway, 2.5 metres wide, on the north (*ibid.*). The ditch may have been seasonally waterlogged, and there is no evidence that it was ever recut (*ibid.*: 86). There was a bed of flint cobbles in the ditch at its southernmost point (*ibid.*).

### **Pits and mounds: burying pots and burying the past**

Three pits were found to the east of the central ‘cove’ area, two of which contained a complete or near-complete Beaker, and one of which similarly contained a complete/near-complete Beaker, in addition to the lower part of a second vessel (Parfitt and Needham 2012: 87). Parfitt and Needham (*ibid.*) suggest that the pit with two vessels may have been large enough to contain a ‘small, tightly crouched inhumation’, but that the other two were too small to be graves, unless they represent infant burials. However, as discussed later in this chapter, while fragmented pottery may be deposited on its own, complete vessels are more commonly associated with inhumation burial rituals (see Jones 2001). The Beaker pits at Ringlemere may represent burials then, or perhaps the pots were buried as ‘stand-ins’ for people. The (re-)use of henge sites for burial during the Early Bronze Age (including burials associated with Beaker pottery) is a well-known phenomenon at other henge sites (e.g. Cairnpapple and North Mains).

At some time in the life of Ringlemere, access to the interior of the henge was blocked or restricted, as a posthole is located in the middle of the entrance causeway (Parfitt and Needham 2012: 86). Since the Beaker pits appear to be the latest feature inside the henge, the entrance may have been blocked after the Beakers were deposited in the pits.

After the entrance to the henge was blocked, the site was eventually sealed off more permanently with the construction of a mound covering the interior of the henge. It may have been constructed at the turn of the third and second millennia BC (Parfitt and Needham 2012: 89). The mound may have been constructed in at least two phases. The first comprised the construction of the core of the mound, which was formed of decayed turves. The turf contained what Parfitt and Needham (2012: 90) describe as ‘residual midden material’, including flint, and broken pottery - mostly Grooved Ware, but also some Beaker pottery. They suggest that this material was derived from the ground surface outside the ditch, rather than deriving from the henge ditch (*ibid.*).

A timber façade was added to the mound, bedded in to a trench cut into this central turf layer (Parfitt and Needham 2012: 90). A layer of ‘orange-brown clay-



loam' was subsequently added, surrounding and probably covering the original turf core (*ibid.*: 89-90). Parfitt and Needham suggest that there is no evidence of burial associated with the mound (*ibid.*); although, if the Beaker pits are in fact burials, they may be associated with the construction of the mound. A feature was cut into the turf layer of the mound, associated with an amber object, and this may also be where the gold cup was found (*ibid.*: 90). This seems to mark the final archaeologically-visible activity on the henge/barrow site at Ringlemere.

The possibility that the mound at Ringlemere was constructed in more than one episode recalls the phases of cairn construction at Cairnpapple, where each subsequent cairn-building event enlarged the existing cairn. The layering of different soils to create the mound may suggest the creation of different 'skins' or wrappings (see Richards 2013a), and might therefore represent the culmination (and most irreversible stage) in a process of 'wrapping' the site at Ringlemere which began with the erection of screens and structures around hearths, and continued with the creation of the horseshoe setting and the henging (and subsequent blocking) of the site.

### **Summary**

Activity at Ringlemere may have begun during the Mesolithic, as Mesolithic lithic scatters (as well as Neolithic and Bronze Age lithics) were found in the general area around the henge site. By the Early Neolithic, the site may have been used for settlement in a timber structure with a hearth. Subsequently, another timber structure was built at Ringlemere: this time a horseshoe-shaped setting of posts, which may have been meant to represent or commemorate the earlier house which had previously stood on the site. Over time, gradually smaller spaces were enclosed at Ringlemere, as the horseshoe setting was replaced by a much smaller, rectangular timber structure - the 'cove'. At some point during the Middle-Late Neolithic, another hearth was built on the site. Unidentified burnt bone was found in this hearth suggesting the possibility that during this phase of its life, Ringlemere was again used for either everyday 'domestic' activities such as cooking (if the bone belonged to an animal), or perhaps for more unusual events such as feasting. Alternatively, if the burnt bone was human, the use of the site may have changed dramatically. After the hearth had been lit and used,

the site was eventually henged. Pits were dug inside the area enclosed by the henge, and almost-complete Beakers were placed in these pits. After this, the only entranceway into the henge was blocked. The site was covered over by a mound, making it visible in the landscape (attracting the construction of other, later barrows or mound around the mounded-over henge), but concealing the contents of the henge from sight. The mound incorporated ancient objects, earlier pottery and lithics gathered up along with the mound material. Another layer later was added to this mound. Eventually, a pit was dug in the top of the mound, and possibly a gold cup was laid there.

### ***Biography 3: Thornborough, North Yorkshire***

The three large henge sites at Thornborough in North Yorkshire have, in parallel with many of their Scottish counterparts (as already mentioned), been somewhat overlooked in overviews of the British Neolithic, despite comprising what Jan Harding (2013: 1) has called ‘one of the largest earthmoving episodes ever undertaken in later Neolithic Britain’. Harding suggests that this ‘neglect’ is due to the location of the Thornborough complex, far from either Orkney or Wessex, the traditional foci of Neolithic studies in Britain (*ibid.*: 1-2). The Thornborough complex comprises three henges, each with two entrances, located on Thornborough Moor, a flat fluvio-glacial plateau, with the River Ure to the south and south-west (*ibid.*: 2; fig. 92). The henges are arranged on a NW-SE alignment, and are each c.0.55km apart (Harding 2013: 2). The henges were built on the site of an earlier cursus and round barrow; at least ten further round barrows and a pit alignment also share the plateau (Harding 2013: 2). This biography focuses on the southern henge, although other parts of the monument complex are also discussed.

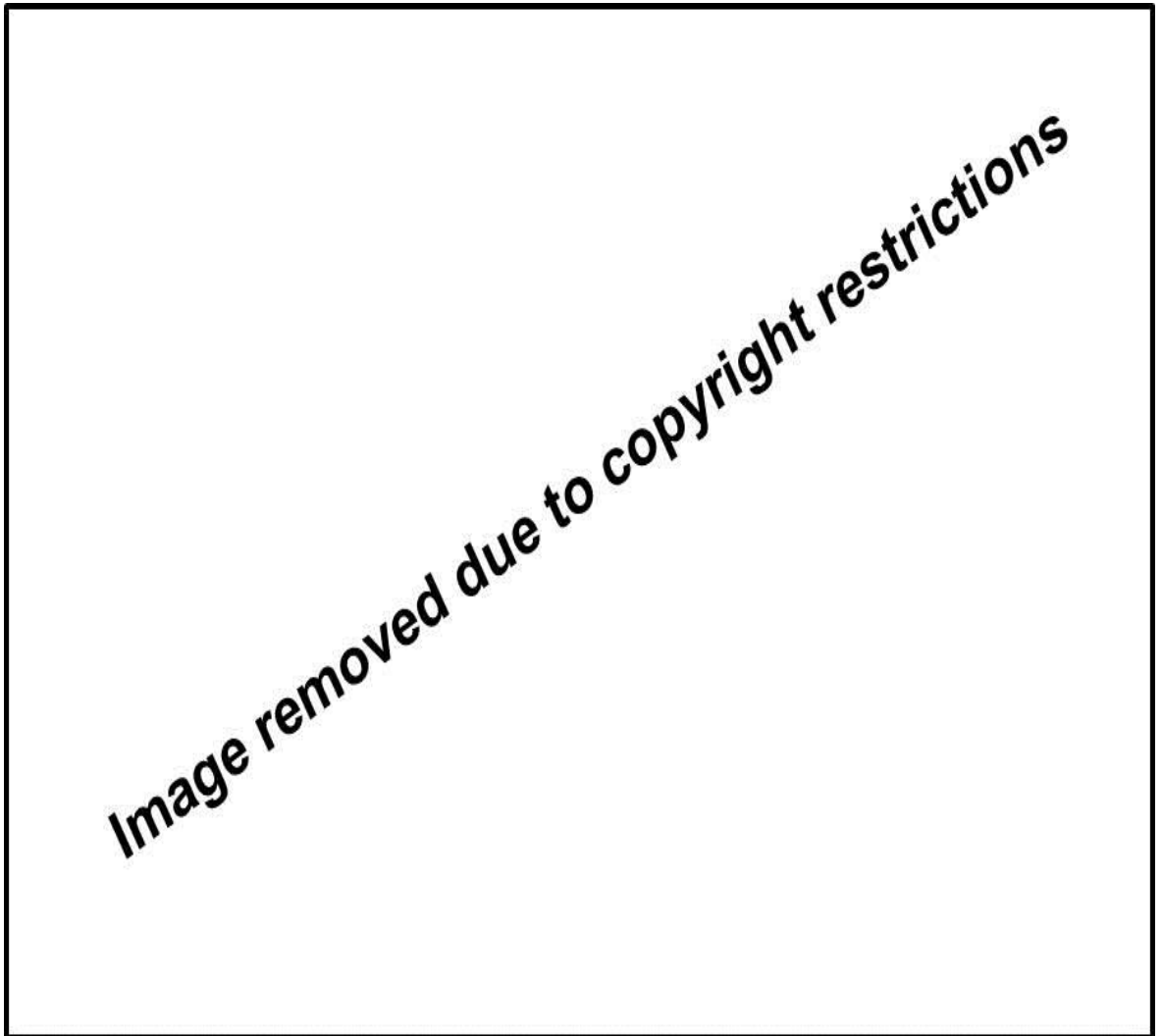


Figure 92 - plan showing the three Thornborough henges (Source: Harding 2013: 3, fig. 1.2)

### **Place-making at Thornborough South: burial and barrow**

The excavation of the southern henge at Thornborough in 1996 and 1997 largely concentrated on the ditches and causeways (Harding 2013: 95), as a consequence of which, it is impossible to be certain whether there was earlier activity enclosed by the construction of the henge. Certainly, the area of the monument complex was a significant place before the construction of the henges on the site.

The earliest archaeologically-visible activity in the monument complex at Thornborough occurred during (or possibly before) the early 4th millennium BC, when the area a little to the north of the southern henge was used for knapping. The knapping site was subsequently monumentalised by the construction of a

triple-ditched round barrow (Harding 2013: 142). The use of the site at Thornborough for knapping suggests that this area might have been used for everyday activities, before the focus changed to building ceremonial monuments - perhaps in common with other henge sites discussed in this thesis, which may commemorate earlier settlement. Indeed, Harding suggests that although people might have lived and worked on the Thornborough plateau during episodes of monument-building, generally the area is no longer settled as it becomes 'progressively monumentalised' during the 3rd millennium BC, since lithics were not found in the area of the henges (Harding 2013: 190, 197-8).

Associated with the triple-ditched barrow was a gypsum-lined pit, which contained a composite burial constituted from the body parts from several different individuals (Harding 2013: 142). Bringing together parts of different bodies in one burial might be a way of bringing together several people (perhaps representing several families or communities?), and their burial together in the same location may be seen as a way of creating a relationship between these groups, and the site at Thornborough (see discussion on fragmentation in chapter 5; Chapman 2000; Fowler 2004). The use of Thornborough for a composite burial, perhaps as a way of establishing relationships between partible, dividual people and a special place, may be similar to the practices of depositing fragments of objects and possible token burials as a place-making practice at some henge sites, as discussed in chapter 4. The burial at Thornborough is not henged however, although it is 'wrapped' and monumentalised by the barrow. Evidently the establishment of a significant place by burying fragments of people or objects did not always necessitate that the site would later have to be henged.

The triple-ditched round barrow had a long biography in its own right, being rebuilt at least twice, but it eventually went out of use, perhaps by the second half of the fourth millennium BC, when the focus of the monument complex moved to the cursus (Harding 2013: 142). After this, the focus of monument-building at Thornborough changed to henging: the central henge partly overlies the earlier cursus (*ibid.*: 143).

### **Pit-digging and timber structure at Thornborough South**

At Thornborough South, a large pit and seven postholes or stakeholes were found. These were located in the western site of the northern entrance of the southern henge, and the excavator believed that they may represent an 'earlier entrance structure', or might be 'broadly contemporary with' the henge (Harding 2013: 108-9). One of the postholes was partially overlain by an earthwork feature (*ibid.*). The interpretation of these features is obscure, but they seem to suggest that a timber structure may have existed on the site of Thornborough South before it was henged. An oval mound overlying an earlier pit and two postholes was found in the entranceway of the henge at Pict's Knowe (Thomas 2007a: 145), and probably also pre-dated the henging of the site. The association of timber and earthwork structures at the entranceway of the henges at Pict's Knowe and Thornborough South suggests that the henge was meant to mark the location of these earlier structures.

### **Henging**

The henge at Thornborough South consisted of two ditches, with an inner bank, and a putative outer bank (Harding 2013: 109-110). Unfortunately, neither the inner nor outer ditch was able to be dated (*ibid.*). The henge earthworks represent a substantial undertaking: the (inner) bank was at least 3.5 metres wide, and survived to a maximum height of 0.34 metres (Harding 2013: 100). The henge enclosed an area some 240 metres across (*ibid.*: 2). The ditches at Thornborough might have been dug in discontinuous sections (Harding 2013: 49). Perhaps the construction of concentric ditches dug in segments recalled the earlier project of building the triple-ditched barrow. The henge at Thornborough South may have been a project carried out in stages, since the inner and outer ditches are not necessarily contemporary, although Harding (2013: 144) suggests that both ditches are contemporary, as they both would be required to provide sufficient material for the bank. The question of whether the bank or the ditch was more significant in henge sites has been a topic of some debate; certainly it is by no means certain that every henge had a bank. For example, it has recently been suggested that the Ring of Brodgar did not ever have a bank (Downes *et al.* 2013: 114). At Thornborough, however, it seems that the bank was an important part of the monument. The inner bank was coated in gypsum (Harding 2013: 51),

which would have made it stand out in the landscape, and given it a shiny, white appearance. If the ditches were not contemporary, perhaps one was intended to 'wrap' or contain the other, as an extra barrier between the interior of the henge and the landscape beyond.

As mentioned above, the construction of the henge at Thornborough South has not been dated. Harding (2013: 63) has suggested that the morphology of the Thornborough henges may be reminiscent of early henges, on the basis of the outer banks which are somewhat irregular in appearance. He considers henges to be Late Neolithic monuments (*ibid.*), although as already discussed this may not be a sound assumption and it may have been later. Excavations of other double-ditched henges have shown that sites of this particular morphology might also be Chalcolithic or Early Bronze Age monuments, for example the lower fills from Condicote, Gloucestershire have been dated to 2279-2031 cal BC and 2100-1920 cal BC (Harding 2013: 144).

The material culture found at Thornborough does not help to clarify the question of when the site was henged. Two Neolithic pottery sherds were recovered. Harding (2013: 198) suggests that this reflects a 'pathological obsession' with keeping henges clean. It seems more likely, however, that rather than being a sign of 'pathological' tidiness, it was simply the case that only very select objects would be deposited at a henge site, or that the activities undertaken at henge monuments did not require any objects or props. A Late Mesolithic or Early Neolithic blade fragment was found in the lowest fill of the north-west terminal of the inner ditch at Thornborough south (fig. 93). Harding (2013: 100) suggests that this is 'residual'. An alternative explanation might be that it represents the deliberate deposition of an heirloom - or an ancient object discovered while digging the henge ditch - in the terminal.



Figure 93 - fragmented lithics from the inner ditch at Thornborough South (Source: Harding 2013: 105, fig. 4.36).

### Blocking and filling

The henge at Thornborough may have gone out of use relatively soon after it was constructed. Harding (2013: 99) considers that the outer ditch at Thornborough South either collapsed or was deliberately backfilled, ‘immediately’ after it had been dug. A radiocarbon date obtained from the top of the primary fill of the ditch suggests that this may have occurred in the Early Bronze Age, although Harding (2013: 101) dismisses this date as being ‘of little value’.

Once the filling-in of the henge ditches had begun, fires must have been lit somewhere around the site; the second fill of the ditch contains charcoal flecks (Harding 2013: 100). The next fill in the ditch consists of redeposited bank material, suggesting deliberate levelling of the bank, which Harding (*ibid.*) believes may have been the result of ploughing.

The northern entrance of the henge might also have been blocked, as several timber uprights, or possibly a low fence, were erected on the inside of the bank across the entrance (Harding 2013: 96; fig. 94).



Figure 94 - plan of the northern terminal of the inner ditch at Thornborough South, showing postholes in the entrance causeway (Source: Harding 2013: 102, fig. 4.33).

### Pit/post alignment

Given the lack of precise dating evidence, it is difficult to pinpoint when the blocking and levelling of the henge occurred, and when it went out of use. However, it seems that by the early-mid Bronze Age, the focus of the monument complex shifted to the area just outside the henge. A post alignment was constructed to the west of the southern henge around 1750-1525 cal BC (Harding 2013: 110, 136). Fragments of objects including lithics and pottery were placed in some of the postholes (*ibid.*: 134-5). The post alignment continued to be used or added to into the Middle Bronze Age, when c. 1300-1120 cal BC, Middle Bronze Age pottery with burnt food residue was placed against a standing post in one of the postholes (Harding 2013: 137). The presence of post pipes in some of the postholes (*ibid.*: 118) suggests that the timbers were left to rot *in situ*. The site at Thornborough may have continued to be used for deposition (and perhaps



also feasting?) when the henges were in a state of disrepair or partially filled-in, and as the posts decayed. The post alignment may possibly be associated with two round barrows (Harding 2013: 136).

### **Later uses of Thornborough south henge**

While the outer ditch was partially filled-in, arguably by the Early Bronze Age, the inner ditch may have survived until much later, when the earthworks were partially levelled and the ditch filled-in during the Medieval period (Harding 2013: 110). Thornborough South may have continued to attract attention into the 13th-14th centuries AD, when the site was possibly used for fairs, races, and other gatherings (*ibid.*). A sherd of green glazed pottery was found on top of one of the earthwork features in the entrance (Harding 2013: 109). The use of Thornborough South into the Medieval period implies that, in contrast to smaller henges such as Dyffryn Lane or Ringlemere, the henge at Thornborough was never covered by a mound. Perhaps this is due to the large area enclosed by the henge, which may have been too large to cover entirely, although it would still have been possible to construct a small mound over part of the interior. Blocking access to the interior by blocking the entrance may have been an alternative to covering over the henge, although it seems like a much more temporary measure, given that the earthworks were later levelled. Perhaps any mounds associated with the henge were levelled when the earthworks were filled-in. After the henge had gone out of use, the monument complex was used for burial mounds, as barrows were constructed on the plateau (Harding 2013: 65). It may be that by this time, the focus had already moved away from the henge site, and further blocking or concealment of the henge interior was not considered necessary.

### **Summary**

The life-history of Thornborough South is complex and in some respects obscure. The Thornborough plateau first became a significant place when it was used for knapping before or during the early 4th millennium cal BC. The knapping place was then used for burial, when parts of several different people were buried together in a pit lined with gypsum. A triple-ditched barrow was constructed to mark the spot. A little to the south, a timber and earthwork structure was built.

The site of this structure was later marked by a huge, double-ditched henge. The inner bank was covered with gypsum. A few objects were deposited in the henge, maybe including some which had been discovered during its construction. After this, the henge ditches began to be filled in. The northern entranceway was blocked off. The focus of monumental construction moved outside the henge, when a line of posts was erected during the Early-Mid Bronze Age. Pieces of pottery were deposited in the postholes, and the area was used for burial in barrows. Eventually, the henge was ploughed, partially levelling the earthworks. People continued to gather at Thornborough periodically throughout the Medieval period.

### ***Comparing henge sites in Scotland and elsewhere in the British Mainland***

Although Harding (2013: 7) calls Thornborough a rare instance of henge sites being associated with an ‘earlier ceremonial focus’, this thesis has demonstrated that although there is no single standard life-history for a henge site, almost all henges are located on the site of earlier activity. This is certainly the case in Scotland, where all excavated henge sites have been shown to be complex, multi-phase sites used over long periods, where the henge represents neither the earliest nor the last use of the site. As the biographies presented in this chapter demonstrate, far from being a rare occurrence, a lengthy biography is evidently a widespread characteristic of henge sites elsewhere in Mainland Britain.

As these three brief biographies of sites in the south of England, Wales, and north of England have demonstrated, while there is no single biography of a henge site, it is useful to compare the lives of different henge sites in order to inform our understanding of what happened during the life of each individual site. The lives of henge sites are far from ‘universal’. However, it can be seen that, like the Scottish sites discussed throughout this thesis, similarities between henge sites are not restricted only to superficial typological similarities in morphology. Although there is no biography which describes all henges at all times of their lives, certain themes are recurrent in the life-cycles of henge sites. This includes (although is not necessarily limited to): place-making which may precede the construction of the henge by several hundred years; associations with pit-digging and pit deposition; close associations of henge sites

with settlement activities and house architecture; dismantling and reconfiguring earlier monuments; and associations with burial, particularly during the Early Bronze Age. Some of these, such as the re-use of henge sites for burial, are well-known and well-rehearsed in existing literature. Others, such as the association of henge sites with settlement and house architecture, are only beginning to be understood. These themes are discussed in the rest of this chapter.

## **Pits and pieces: place-making at henge sites**

At many of the henged places discussed in this thesis, the earliest (archaeologically visible) events in and around the site includes pit-digging, as well as the deposition of material culture, particularly sherds of pottery. Pit-deposition is not a practice which is restricted to henge sites; and not all places used for pit-deposition went on to be henged.

In their consideration of the Earlier Neolithic pit groups at Kilverstone in Norfolk, Duncan Garrow *et al.* (2005: 139) suggest that pits played a role in ‘creating and marking places, both physically and metaphorically’. The pits at Kilverstone contained various material (much of it fragmented), including pottery sherds, burnt flint, flint working debitage, hazelnuts, and quern stones (*ibid.*: 145-7). Garrow *et al.* (2005: 156) suggested that the site was used for repeated, but not continuous, occupation over a long period. The rhythm of life suggested by these pits, of episodes of occupation in the same place over a long period, reflects in some ways the rhythm of the lives of henge sites: repeated, but not continuous use and re-use over very long periods. The practice of returning to a familiar place after a long hiatus may have been a well-established lifeway for people during the Neolithic, and this rhythm may have played out in monument-building as in settlement patterns.

Garrow *et al.* (2005: 139) also note that the material buried in pits is increasingly regarded as more important than the pits themselves. The later biographies of henge sites suggest that this was not necessarily always the case, and that both the practice of digging pits and the deposition of material into pits were both important. The importance of pit-digging is suggested by the way henge ditches, dug in segments, recall and re-enact earlier pit-digging. However, not all pit-deposition sites are monumentalised in this way. For

example, the pit deposition site at Newton Farm, Lanarkshire discussed in chapter 5 shared common traits with the place-making activities at henge sites such as Balfarg - pottery was found in the pits, some of the pits had fires lit in them, and the site was used for burial (O'Brien *et al.* 2009). Yet the site at Newton Farm was never henged, unlike Balfarg, where the pit cluster was the first activity on a site where an extensive monument complex would later be built.

It is not clear why some pit-deposition sites remain as unenclosed places, while others follow a different trajectory and become henged places. Perhaps some pit groups were gradually forgotten and no longer returned to, while those which were remembered were returned to and monumentalised. Or perhaps the converse was true, and pit sites which were henged were those which had dropped out of use, and those such as Newton Farm or Kilverstone were still in use, and therefore it was not appropriate to monumentalise them and enclose them. Enclosing or wrapping a site by constructing a timber circle, stone circle or henge therefore implies a wish for containment and concealment, and to control access. Perhaps the pit groups which were henged were places which came to be associated with something dangerous which needed to be contained.

None of these explanations seems entirely satisfactory, but it is useful to speculate why some places should be henged, while other apparently similar sites are never enclosed. Certainly even unenclosed pit deposition sites might have long biographies. At Wellhill, Perth and Kinross, where a pit group was found associated with ard marks, the large pits were used during the Late Neolithic and the Bronze Age; some of the pits were left open for long periods, and others had been recut more than once (Wright 2014). Long biographies are not only a trait of pit groups associated with henges.

Pit-digging may have been an important place-making practice during the Earlier Neolithic (Pollard 2001). Not only henge sites, but also other monuments might begin life as places where pits were dug. For example, most excavated cursus monuments in Scotland have evidence of pits which pre-date the construction of the cursus monument (Brophy forthcoming). It is also worth noting that at henge sites, deposition was not always associated with pit-digging: sometimes fragmented objects were placed on the ground surface, rather than in pits, for

example the axe fragments at Cairnpapple, or the broken mace heads found just to the north of the Stones of Stenness. Perhaps objects placed in pits were meant to be hidden from view, while other items were meant to be visible and on display.

Deposition in pits has so far been characterised as a 'place-making activity', the initial activity on a site which may never have been used before, and which transforms it into a significant place which is later elaborated in other ways. However, the practice of pit deposition might also be seen as a form of mnemonic practice. Joshua Pollard (2001) has looked at both Early and Late Neolithic pit deposition in relation to aesthetic practice (where 'aesthetics' refers to 'knowledgeable and skilful action'). He suggests that Early Neolithic pit deposition is often associated with the abandonment of settlement sites (Pollard 2001: 323). The objects which were deposited constituted, in Pollard's words, 'selectively gathered fragments of refuse generated during routine social life', and these selected objects became a focal point for people's memory. Indeed they may have attained agency as 'mnemonic devices' (*ibid.*). The deposition of fragments of objects in pits in places which would later become henge sites may then not only represent a way of establishing a relationship with a certain location, but also may have been the beginning of the use of these sites as places where people enacted practices related to memory. Late Neolithic pit deposition, according to Pollard, sometimes involved the deposition of a variety of different types of material, which may include 'transformed' material (*ibid.*: 325). It is also possible that such objects may have become 'temporary receptacles' for agencies, for example, receptacles for a 'soul' or 'life-force' which may have been released when the object was buried (Pollard 2001: 327).

Early Neolithic deposition at henge sites may combine some of these attributes of Late Neolithic pit deposition identified by Pollard. For example, the fragments deposited are often objects which may be associated with transformation, such as pottery (itself a transformed object, transformed from malleable clay to solid vessel during firing; but which may also be associated with other kinds of transformation, for example the transformation which occurs during cooking). The selection of such materials, which may then have been exchanged between individuals before their deposition, could therefore be seen as embodying transformation and memory. The objects, when deposited, may

have become 'temporary receptacles' (Pollard 2001: 327) for human memories, the performance of their deposition a metaphorical representation and physical, located representation of new, transformed relationships between people and place.

However, the deposition of fragmentary objects at henge sites was not restricted only to the Early Neolithic or to place-making activity, but may have been a longer-lived practice at some sites. For example, fragments of material may be deposited in henge ditches, such as the fragments of All Over Corded Beaker from the ditch terminal at Forteviot 1. This suggests that depositing fragmented objects continues later into the lives of henge sites. Perhaps the later deposition of fragmented objects at henge sites was meant to recall and to be a reminder of earlier practices.

## **Burning and fire at henge sites**

Fire seems to be associated with henge sites in two different ways: hearths, related to place-making activity and settlement; and fire-lighting associated with episodes of transformation at henge sites. The association of hearths and fire-lighting as a place-making activity at henge sites associated with settlement has already been discussed in the previous chapter. The discussion here will focus on fire at henge sites as associated with transformation and transition.

Perhaps the most obvious way in which fire could be used to transform a site would be to destroy or burn down timber monuments. This would be a memorable event, and burning might be employed to create a 'flashbulb memory', as it would be such a dramatic event that it would be fixed in people's minds (Noble 2006). However, there is no indication that timber monuments were burnt down at henge sites. At North Mains for instance, some of the timbers of the circular setting were left to rot *in situ*, and objects were deposited in the hollows left by the decaying timbers (Barclay 1983: 133-4). Yet, although the timber circle was not burnt down, burning took place on the site while the timbers were rotting (*ibid.*: 126). This is mirrored at other henge sites: burning is not used to destroy monuments, but may be associated with periods of transition on the site, when one monument is decommissioned and the site is transformed by the construction of a new monument - for example the hearth at

Dyffryn Lane, lit in the site of the ruined stone circle as the site was being prepared for the construction of the henge (Gibson 2010b: 232). At Balfarg Riding School, the middle fill of the ditch suggests that there was burning on the site (Gibson 2010a: 68) - and so this episode of burning took place *after* the henge had been partly filled-in, perhaps when the site was going out of use.

It has been suggested by Gavin MacGregor (2008) that fire may have been seen as 'elementally transformative' during the late third and early second millennia BC in Scotland. He argues that it may have been seen as potent, an element which could 'create, change and potentially destroy' (*ibid.*: 270), and suggests it may have been one of a number of elements which was cosmologically potent at this time (MacGregor 2008: 278). Perhaps in the use of fire at henge sites, it was this ability to transform which made fire-lighting and burning an important feature of stages in the life of henge sites when changes were being effected, such as the decommissioning of a monument, or preparations for the construction of a new monument.

In more general terms, fire may have been an important way of effecting landscape change during the Neolithic. For example, woodlands might have been managed by burning (Bell and Noble 2012: 88). Burning large areas of ground may also have been employed at monuments as a means of controlling vegetation growth. At the Ring of Brodgar, there is evidence that the ditch was periodically cleaned out and burned to keep it clear of vegetation (Downes *et al.* 2013: 110). The use of fire to transform monuments might therefore have been pragmatic in many respects, and if used to control the amount of vegetation growing on these sites, the practice of lighting fires would have had a significant impact on the appearance of henge sites.

At henge sites, not only the transformative potential of fire, but also its other associations may have been significant. In discussing fire and transformation in cremation practices, Sørensen and Bille (2008) note that fire can also be linked to memory. They suggest that because flame needs fuel to be sustained, and would otherwise die out, flame has great 'symbolic potential' and can work as a 'material analogy to the ephemeral domain of the memory' (*ibid.*: 254). Sørensen and Bille (*ibid.*) therefore argue that fire can 'sustain commemoration, remembrance or re-enactment'. The use of fire during periods of change at

henge sites - or indeed its use to effect such changes - could therefore be understood as not only transformative, but also memorial, creating a sense of continuity and links to the past even as it consumed and destroyed.

Lighting fires at henge sites also suggests the possibility that during some periods of their lives, people may have been visiting these places at night. This would obviously create a completely different experience of a henge site than visiting the site during daylight hours. With visibility limited to only a small pool of light surrounding a hearth, people's experience of the monument during such visits would be mediated through their other senses. Although it has been pointed out that the sense of vision is privileged in many archaeological studies (see MacGregor 1999: 263-4), the role of other sense should not be overlooked. Visiting a site in the dark - especially one which may have been ambiguous, such as an old ruined site which was in the process of being rebuilt - would have meant that other senses came to the fore. People's sense of smell or sound may have been manipulated during such visits in order to orchestrate a dramatic and memorable experience. The same smells or sounds could also perhaps be used as powerful triggers to memory on subsequent occasions, in order to make people recall their earlier experience.

Richard Bradley (2005: 112) has also pointed out that as well as heightening people's senses, lighting a fire in a monument at night would separate them from the rest of the landscape, as only what was illuminated by the fire would be visible, and everything else would be lost in the darkness. Lighting a fire at a henge site, even before it was enclosed, therefore could have been another way in which the site was transformed (perhaps temporarily) into a heterotopia, a place separated from the everyday and cut-off from, although still part of, the rest of the world.

## **Timber monuments**

It has already been noted in this thesis that far from being simply a short-lived, 'pre-henge' phase, or temporary precursors to more permanent stone monuments, timber monuments built at henge sites were often complex, long-lived and multi-phase structures in their own right. For example, the timber structure inside Balfarg Riding School was rebuilt (Barclay and Russell-White



1993: 85), and more than one timber circle was built at North Mains (Barclay 1983) and probably also Balfarg (Mercer 1980; Gibson 2010a). Timber settings might also continue to attract attention even after they had begun to decay, and objects might be deposited into the postholes as the timber rotted, as was the case at North Mains (Barclay 1983: 133-4). This suggests that timber monuments may in themselves have been commemorative, and that the commemorative uses of henge sites did not only begin when the site was henged. The timbers selected for use in the construction of these monuments might have been chosen because they had been significant trees (Noble and Brophy 2014b: 70) - for example, the huge post erected at Leadketty must have required an enormous, and probably very old tree to be cut down. Cutting down such a tree might have been a significant and memorable event.

It has been suggested that stones chosen to form stone circles may already have been important entities, perhaps with their own biographies, or even personified and possessing their own agency, even before they were chosen to be moved and built into a monument (Gillings and Pollard 1999). Perhaps the same may have been true of the trees used in the construction of timber monuments. It has been argued for instance that trees may have been important in early farming economies, as leaves would have provided a source of fodder (Skoglund 2012). Trees might have been significant, not only as a source of timber for building monuments or houses, but also for providing other resources, such as leaves, bark or other fibres, or even resin and sap. On the basis of representations of trees in rock art, Skoglund (2012) has suggested that trees may have been managed and 'culturally modified' during the Bronze Age in Scandinavia, for example through pollarding or coppicing trees. There is evidence to suggest that coppicing was already an established practice in Britain by the Neolithic. There is some evidence of burnt pieces of coppiced wood from Warren Field in Aberdeenshire (Gaffney *et al.* 2013), and coppiced wood was used in the construction of the Sweet Track in the Somerset Levels (Coles 1986). In-situ preserved coppiced stools were found in the base of the ditch at Etton causewayed enclosure, Cambridgeshire (Pryor 1998). Certainly trees might have been an important part of life during this period, quite apart from their use in constructing monuments. Memories associated with trees might therefore have added an extra depth and meaning to the construction of timber monuments.

The other important facet of timber monuments constructed on henge sites may be their relationship with settlement architecture. The close relationship between some henge sites and domestic architecture has only relatively recently been observed, for example with the discovery of the ‘village’ underneath the henge at Durrington Walls (Parker Pearson 2012). Links between Neolithic house architecture and monumental architecture such as timber settings and henges are being increasingly recognised (Thomas 2010; Bradley 2013). It has been argued in this thesis that there may be a close link between henge sites and practices associated with ‘domestic’ settlement, not only in terms of the links between timber monuments and house architecture, but also in the occurrence of activities such as pit deposition or farming-related activities as place-making events at henge sites. Henge sites, although traditionally seen as ‘ritual’ monuments, may at many times in their lives have been closely linked with the rhythms of everyday life.

## **Building sites and ruins**

Henge sites were places which were rebuilt and transformed multiple times during their lives. What might they have looked like during periods when people were in the midst of carrying out monument-building projects in these places?

Henge sites may at times have been ambiguous places, blurring the lines between construction projects and dilapidated ruins. Colin Richards (2013b: 66-68) vividly describes how a visit to the Stenness-Brodgar area of Orkney during periods of monument construction would have been like visiting ‘an enormous populated building site’, while the Stones of Stenness, Ring of Brodgar, village at Barnhouse, and the site at the Ness of Brodgar were all in various stages of completion and being actively worked-on. This impression would have been prolonged and compounded if, as Richards and others have suggested, these sites were built as a series of discrete construction projects, rather than being built in a single massive effort (Downes *et al.* 2013: 106). The same might have been true during some episodes in the life of henge sites, especially those such as Forteviot, Leadketty or Thornborough which were parts of larger monument complexes. These would at times have been very busy, noisy places with all the bustle and animation of ongoing construction projects.

It has been long suggested that these construction projects may have been more significant than the actual 'finished' monument (Evans 1988; Bradley 1993; Richards and Wright 2013). Monuments might therefore never have been finished, 'complete' sites in the sense that we would understand them. Gathering people and resources together to work on a monument may have been more important than the finished monument, and the lasting impact of the project may stem from memories of this as much as from the physical presence of the monument itself. Furthermore, Jane Downes *et al.* (2013: 104) have recently suggested that some monuments may have been built to have an immediate visual impact, rather than being built to last or constructed with a view to longevity. They also suggest that rather than being built in a single effort, monuments may have been built piecemeal over time as a series of ongoing smaller projects; and therefore a visitor to a site such as the Ring of Brodgar during the early-mid 3rd millennium BC may have seen something similar to the present-day appearance of the site, with 'gaps' and 'missing' stones, rather than a complete monument (*ibid.*: 106). The same might have been true of other henge sites at other times, for example during the construction of timber circles which, as discussed in chapter 4, may have resembled incomplete timber roundhouses, either the skeletons of incomplete roundhouses, or roofless and semi-ruined structures. Again, the emphasis is therefore not on complete, 'finished' architecture, but on something more ambiguous, which blurs the distinction between construction and ruination. Thus timber circles and 'incomplete' stone settings might be seen as being at the same time memorial (creating an illusion of an 'ancient', ruined place, and a concomitant sense of age and past-ness), and representative of a new beginning (transforming a site through construction).

In one sense, both building sites and ruins are transformative places - in the sense that they are places which are in the process of being changed. In this respect they might be seen as heterotopias, liminal places which are outside normal everyday life. Significantly in terms of henge sites being used as commemorative places, both building sites and ruins implicitly refer to times other than the present: building sites refer to the future, to a time when the construction project will be finished (although as discussed above, the understanding of when a project is completed may be culturally contingent);

while ruins refer to the past, and may be seen as a reminder of, or link to, a time before the site was ruined. Ruins, as places which are gradually decaying, could also be understood as transformative places. Josh Pollard (2004) has suggested that processes of decay can be powerful, breaking down distinctions between different categories of things. He argues that 'breakage and decay' have 'productive and generative potential' (*ibid.* 60). This may be seen in the fragmentation of objects (Pollard 2004), but also in other materials. Therefore, the gradual decay of sites, and reuse of old, ruined places, may be seen as a return to places which are potent, and full of potential to be transformed into something else.

## **Destruction**

As well as being places where multiple building projects were carried out over time, henge sites also witnessed periods when the emphasis was not on monument construction, but on the destruction of monuments. This may have taken a range of different guises, from the removal of stones from stone circles at Balfarg and Dyffryn Lane, or the dismantling and rebuilding of stone settings and cairns at Cairnpapple, to the levelling of earthworks at Thornborough. Even covering a site with a mound, as at Ringlemere, could arguably be seen as a means of effectively destroying or erasing the contents of a henge, as whatever is in the interior of the site is made irrevocably inaccessible and hidden from view for ever.

Such events may have been deeply traumatic for those who witnessed them. Destroying a monument might also have been a risky undertaking for those who carried out the work. As Colin Richards *et al.* (2013) have described, building a monument would entail a great deal of risk - not only the physical risks of injury inherent in being involved in activities such as quarrying and moving stone, but also a significant degree of social risk. A huge amount of potentially costly resources, and many people, may be needed to construct a monument, and therefore a considerable amount of expense may be incurred by building any kind of monument, added to which, reputations may be staked on the outcome of the project. As Richards *et al.* (2013: 120) explain, 'construction is a social performance'. If such risks are involved in building a monument, how much more (social) risk must be entailed in dismantling an existing monument, or building

something new on a site which has already been a significant place for generations?

At henge sites, some of the monument-building projects may actually have made use of material from earlier monuments - such as the cairns at Cairnpapple, which may have used stones from an earlier stone circle (Piggott 1948); the rebuilding of the hearth at Stenness (Richards 2005); or even constructing a mound on a henge site, which may have necessitated gathering material from earlier earthworks, or may have incorporated earlier objects, as at Ringlemere (Parfitt and Needham 2012). These materials may have been very significant. As discussed above, stones (or timbers) may have been personified, or considered to possess their own agency (Gillings and Pollard 1999). Certainly there are ethnographic accounts that the materials used in monument construction may have taken on different identities at different times in their lives, and may have had human-like identities or characteristics (Hoskins 1986). To dismantle a monument composed of such materials would have been a serious, and possibly even dangerous, act. Transforming henge sites by dismantling and rebuilding monuments might have been a risky undertaking, and a powerful and memorable statement.

## Henging

Amongst the dramatic transformations undertaken at these sites was the construction of the henge itself. Henging the site would impact on the experience of a person visiting these places, as it would restrict access to the site. Perhaps though the construction of a henge has had a disproportionate impact on archaeologists' perception and understanding of henge sites. As this thesis has demonstrated, the significance of henge sites did not begin when they were hinged, but often many generations earlier; and their significance often endured after the henge had begun to fill in and erode away.

Henging a site has been regarded by some as a single-phase and relatively short-lived event in the life of a site. For example, Roger Mercer (1981: 66) believed that the henge ditch at Balfarg had been dug 'as one exercise'. Harding (2013: 7) suggested that the henges at Thornborough may have been built and abandoned so quickly that they may only have been significant for 'a few days'.

However, it is also possible that digging a henge ditch was a more involved, long-lived project, involving different groups of people working over a protracted time period, rather than digging the whole ditch circuit in a single episode - for example by digging the ditch as a series of discrete segments, and then joining them up to form a continuous ditch.

Henge construction has traditionally been seen as a matter of digging the ditches, and therefore requiring hard work and physical labour. This has been reflected in the language used to describe henge construction - of work gangs digging ditches, and estimates of how many hours of labour would be required to excavate a henge ditch (e.g. Renfrew 1979). Such language makes the construction of such monuments sound like punishing work. It may be however that constructing earthwork monuments was regarded in a very different way in the past. For example, Pollard (2001: 325) has suggested that Late Neolithic pits were carefully shaped, and that it might be more appropriate to think of people 'crafting' or 'sculpting' them rather than simply digging them. The same might be true of henges, and perhaps we should think of their construction in more nuanced terms as a form of sculpture, architecture from the earth, rather than simply as an exercise in shifting large quantities of soil.

The process of constructing stone monuments has received a great deal of attention in the archaeological literature, covering the whole process from choosing stones, quarrying them and transporting them (e.g. Pollard and Gillings 2009; Richards *et al.* 2013). The question of the practical issues of how large stones could be moved and erected into monuments has been a classic debate in prehistoric archaeology (e.g. Atkinson 1960). Stone was not the only medium used to construct monuments however; yet there has been relatively little work on the construction of earthwork (or timber) monuments. Creating or sculpting a monument from soil and turf would present different challenges from constructing a stone monument, but might still have been an involved and complex process. As with stone and timber monuments, the material used might have been significant in its own right. Mary Ann Owoc (2002) has argued that during the Bronze Age in south-western Britain, soils (like stone) may have been carefully selected for use in barrow construction based on certain attributes such as colour. This may have been an important consideration for henge-builders too. At Thornborough, the henge bank was covered in a layer of gypsum

to give it a white appearance which Harding (2013: 209) has suggested may be ‘reminiscent of weathered bone’, and may have been one means of ‘creating a strong bond between people, their ancestors, and their earthworks’ (*ibid.*). The material used to create henges - and other earthwork monuments such as mounds - might have been deeply meaningful and significant. Sometimes it might also be a way of directly reusing materials from the past and incorporating them into a new monument, for example as was suggested at Leadketty where the mound might have been formed from material recut from the henge ditch; or Ringlemere, where the mound incorporated earlier pottery sherds and lithics, probably gathered along with turf and soil from the area immediately outside the henge (Needham and Parfitt 2012). Even the soil itself may have been considered in the same terms as other material culture, and equally as significant as other building materials such as stone or timber (Owoc 2004).

Henging may have marked the beginning of the transition of the sites where they were built into becoming heterotopias - places which were separated from the day-to-day time and activities of everyday life. However, while wrapping a site by constructing a henge would close it off and contain it, whatever was inside might still be visible - as already mentioned, it is by no means certain that all henge sites had a bank. If henging a site began the transformation of a site into a heterotopia, blocking the henge and covering the interior with a mound would serve to complete the transformation, making the contents of the henge irreversibly inaccessible and hidden, forming a true ‘imagined landscape’ (McAtackney 2007), as although the mound would be visible in the landscape, whatever was sealed beneath it was hidden from view, and in effect would only exist in people’s imaginations. The phenomenon of blocking and mounding henge sites has been recognised at an increasing number of sites (see Brophy and Noble 2012a), and may have occurred in some form at many of the henge sites discussed in this thesis, including Forteviot, Cairnpapple, Balfarg, BRS, Leadketty, Dyffryn Lane and Ringlemere.

## **Relationships with the past at henge sites**

Throughout this thesis, it has been suggested that henging a site could be seen as a commemorative practice. However, it could be argued that henge sites were commemorative not only when the henge was constructed, but throughout

their lives, both before and after the construction of the henge - although the ways in which these sites were memorial changed over time. An interest in the past was expressed in a number of different ways at henge sites over time: in their location and the experience created when visiting the site; the appearance of the site; the uses of material culture at henge sites; the revival or imitation of past practices; and the burial of objects and of human remains at henge sites.

The first events at many henge sites included the deposition of fragments of pottery which, as discussed in chapter 5, may include in some cases 'heirlooms' or pieces of pottery which had been retrieved from middens. The deposition of fragments may also have been a way of commemorating relationships, as the exchange of broken pieces of objects could have been a way of establishing relationships between people. Later in the life of these sites, the elaboration of the sites where such deposition took place through the construction of timber monuments meant that these locations would be remembered. Such structures, which may be linked with domestic architecture, might also have been reminders of other aspects of life beyond the monumental arena. They may also have been intended to forge a relationship to the past by resembling ruined timber houses, thus acting as a visual prompt to create a sense of pastness.

Memory also plays an important role in the context of burial ritual. In a paper reflecting on the relationship of aesthetics and memory in contemporary archaeological illustration and also in Early Bronze Age Britain, Andy Jones (2001) discusses the ways in which the aesthetics of burial practice are connected with memory. He postulates that the material culture of Early Bronze Age burials would be an important agent in creating memory - both through decoration, but also, Jones suggests, through the stimulation of senses other than sight - through the smells and tastes evoked during burial ceremonies, and the use of meadowsweet in Early Bronze Age burials (Jones 2001: 349-50). Meadowsweet pollen was found in one of the Early Bronze Age Food Vessel burials at North Mains (*ibid.*; Barclay 1983). The meadowsweet may have been used to flavour the cereal-based food or drink (possibly a gruel or porridge) contained in the Food Vessel (Barclay 1983: 136). Meadowsweet flowers were also found in the cist burial at Forteviot 1 (Noble and Brophy 2011a). It may be that great care was taken during burials at henge sites to create powerful memories. Such memories might also be linked to specific seasons, e.g. the time



of year when specific plants flowered. Thus the memories associated with burial, and perhaps also the place of burial, could be repeatedly and cyclically evoked in people's minds through sensory prompts. Although this is a feature of burial ceremonies more generally and is obviously not a practice restricted to henge sites, it is another way in which the creation of memory and commemorative practices were prominent in the use of henge sites at various points throughout their lives.

According to Jones (2001: 350), not only smell but also other aesthetic properties of material culture are significant in creating and stimulating memories. This includes decoration, and Jones draws out a distinction between the deposition of pottery and metalwork during the British Early Bronze Age: decorated pottery, which in a mortuary context is usually deposited whole (i.e. complete pottery vessels are placed in graves with burials); and metalwork, which is usually undecorated but is often fragmented before it is deposited (*ibid.*). Jones suggests the reason for this is that fragmentation, or the deposition of complete objects, emphasise different kinds of relationship. Fragmenting objects, as discussed in chapter 5, creates the potential for exchanging fragments (Chapman 2000). The deposition of fragments therefore represents relationships between people; whereas burial of individuals, and of complete unbroken pottery vessels, creates memories which emphasise the deceased individual in the minds of the mourners (Jones 2001). At henge sites then, it seems that there is a change throughout the life of the site in what is being memorialised. Early place-making activity associated with the deposition of fragments of objects would be symbolic of, and create memories connected with, relationships between individuals, or of groups of individuals with a particular place. This may possibly have included the deposition of incomplete cremated remains or 'token' burials. The emphasis on memorialising relationships and communal relationship with place may have continued at some sites after the closing-off of the site and the construction of a henge monument, as broken pottery is sometimes deposited in henge ditches - for example, the sherds of AOC beaker in the base of the ditch terminal at Forteviot 1. Later in the life of henge sites, when they are used for burial, the focus of deposition may change to emphasise individual relationship with place, and this is associated with the deposition of 'un-fragmented' pottery, associated with

burials, such as the cist burial with handled Beaker at Balfarg, or the Beaker- and Food Vessel-associated burials added to the sites at Cairnpapple or North Mains during the Early Bronze Age.

The location of henge sites as places which were repeatedly returned to and where monuments were built over a long period certainly seems to suggest a continued (but constantly changing) relationship with place. Commemoration may be closely linked to one specific location (Casey 1987). However, the construction of monuments extends memory beyond the confines of the individual site and into the wider landscape. For example, quarrying and moving stones, or dragging timbers, would create links with other places beyond the henge site. In some cases, these links might be made physical in the form of actual paths, visible routes along which stones (or timbers) had been dragged, marking routes which could be re-traced (Pollard and Gillings 2009). The establishment of henge sites as special places in people's memory would take place long before earthwork, stone or timber monuments were constructed on the site however, when a relationship with these places was established through activities such as deposition.

The experience of visiting or re-visiting an 'old' place might have been an important aspect of commemoration at henge sites, and may even have taken the form of repeated visits or commemorative events. At certain times in the life of a henge site, care may have been taken to emphasise this experience of visiting somewhere 'other', for example by enclosing and separating the site from the everyday by constructing a henge monument. This may have served to engineer a feeling of visiting a special place. However, henge sites were already old places by the time the henge was built, and so this feeling of revisiting an old place cannot have been a new one. Monumentalising an existing site through the construction of a timber setting or a stone circle may equally involve re-visiting an old place. Some of these monument-building would also involve a revival or imitation of past practices. The ways in which a the construction of a henge ditch in segments might involve the revival of earlier events such as pit-digging have already been discussed. It should be noted however that digging a post-hole or a stone-hole would involve very similar actions. Even the process of gathering together people and resources to build a monument might have

brought to mind previous occasions when monument-building projects had been undertaken.

Embarking on a monument-building project at a henge site might also forge a material relationship with the past. Old materials might be used to construct the monument - for example, old trees might be cut down to construct a timber monument, as discussed above; or the fabric of earlier monuments or structures might be reused in a new configuration (such as the hearth at Stenness, remodelled using stones brought from Barnhouse, Richards 2005; or the cairn material at Cairnpapple, which may have derived from an earlier stone circle, Piggott 1948). Long before henge sites were monumentalised in any way, relationships with past material culture may have been important, as objects or even human remains could potentially have been curated before they were deposited as 'heirlooms'. In addition, since henge sites were used and re-used over many generations, every new episode of monument-building which involved digging must have opened up the possibility that ancient objects deposited at the site many years before would be (re)discovered. The discovery of such items would provide a tangible link with the past, and a physical reminder that the site had already been used, perhaps by unknown ancestors; or for events which were still remembered in folklore or myths. It may have been with the initial deposition of such objects, to create a relationship with place, that the establishment of henge sites as commemorative places began.

Henge sites may therefore have commemorated a range of different events, and the reasons why each place was henged may have differed from site to site. As discussed in the previous chapter, some henges may have commemorated aspects of life, while others might have been memorials where people coped with death. Whether henges marked the site of unusual events such as feasts or large gatherings, as may have been the case at the Stones of Stenness; events which were memorable or significant such as burials, as at Forteviot; or simply routine but important aspects of social life such as pottery production, farming or houses, the rhythm of commemoration and transformation at henge sites may have mirrored and been an integral part of the temporality of people's lives during the Late Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age.

## Conclusion

This chapter has contextualised Scottish henge sites with relation to henge sites elsewhere in the British Mainland. It can be seen that the lengthy biography of henge sites is by no means distinctive to Scottish henges, but rather is a characteristic of henge sites in general. The biographies of henge sites elsewhere in the British Isles have many aspects in common with those in Scotland. Pit-digging and deposition, timber structures and a relationship with settlement and settlement architecture and the construction and destruction of stone settings, sometimes all occurring centuries before the site is henged; and the mounding of henge sites and their use for burial, were all shown to be features in common between many of the henge biographies presented throughout this thesis.

The use of henge sites as commemorative places throughout their lives was also discussed. This may have begun early in the life of sites, when they were first established as significant places, often marked by the deposition of fragmented objects. It continued when henge sites were monumentalised by the construction of timber and stone monuments. The importance of the materiality of such monuments, and the project of their construction, as well as their aesthetic and location, was emphasised as contributing to the continuation of commemorative practices at henge sites. This continued with the construction of henges and other earthworks at henge sites, which transformed these places into heterotopias, separated from everyday life, and yet still visible and known about.

These themes - of commemoration and transformation - continued to be important throughout the life of henge sites. This may at times have involved dramatic, or even traumatic, reworkings of henge sites: fire-setting, the demolition of earlier monuments, and the reconfiguration of significant materials including at various times stone, timber and earth were all involved in important transformations in the life of henge sites. These events may not have been easy to witness, and might have been dangerous to participate in.

Events such as the dramatic rebuilding projects or traumatic demolition events which took place at many henge sites can only be understood if we understand

the biographies of henge sites as places which were significant over long periods, but which changed over time. This allows for more nuanced understandings of henges places than a typological approach ever could. Henge sites may have been significant for different reasons at different times, built for different reasons, and may have begun their lives in different circumstances; but it may be this prolonged life-history of commemoration and transformation, rather than any morphological similarities, which these sites have in common.

The final chapter of the thesis will reflect on the site biographical approach used in the thesis. The original contributions made in the thesis will be reviewed, and suggestions for future research directions will be made.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusions, reflections and new directions**

### **Introduction**

This thesis has sought to reinterpret henge sites in Scotland by moving away from approaches which focus largely on the final morphology of monuments, and instead considering the ways henge sites were used and transformed throughout their lives and often over considerable periods of time. Biographical approaches have been used in order to understand the significance of continuity and change throughout the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age at henge sites, and to avoid focusing on any single phase of monumental construction. The site biographies presented have been used to suggest that henge sites were places where people engaged with and renegotiated their past through a variety of means.

This final chapter briefly summarises and reflects on the original contributions made by the thesis to the understanding of henge monuments in Scotland and beyond. It also discusses the implications of this for other monument ‘types’, and for the wider study of prehistoric monumentality. Finally, potential directions for future research are suggested.

### **De-henging and reinterpreting Scottish henge sites: the original contributions of the thesis**

This thesis has made several original contributions, which are discussed here in relation to the study of henge sites, the Scottish and British Neolithic, and biographical approaches in archaeology.

Firstly, in terms of the original contributions made to the study of henge sites, by presenting a synthetic interpretive account of henge sites in Scotland, this thesis represents one of the first reconsiderations of Scottish henges for almost a decade, since Gordon Barclay’s (2005) paper on the topic. This represents an original contribution, since Scotland (with the exception of Orkney) has rarely been the main focus in discussions of henge sites, as explained in Chapter 2. This thesis therefore represents a much-needed consideration of a previously

somewhat neglected corpus of sites. The research in the thesis is situated within a context of increasing interest in Scottish henges, including important excavation projects (Bradley 2011; Noble and Brophy 2011a; Brophy and Noble forthcoming), and is therefore a timely contribution to the ongoing study of henge sites in Scotland. However, far from only being a regionally-applicable study, the themes explored in the thesis have a wider resonance and relevance to the study of henge sites throughout the British Mainland. This was demonstrated by the English and Welsh case studies discussed in chapter 6, which served to situate the study of Scottish henge sites within a wider context. Sites in Scotland - and indeed in other neglected parts of the British Isles, such as the north of England - should no longer be side-lined in wider studies.

Henges are increasingly understood as monuments which occupy sites which are reused over long periods, and which are used in many different ways; and it is also being recognised that henge earthworks are often very late additions to these sites (Thomas 2010; Gibson 2012). This thesis has contributed to the research of this phenomenon, focusing on the ways in which sites are reused over time, and the reasons for this, and also considering henge sites in Scotland explicitly in relation to reuse.

The adoption of a biographical approach to document transformations at henge sites over time also represents an original contribution to the study of henge sites in Scotland. Previous biographies of henge sites have focused only on sites in Wessex (Avebury - Gillings and Pollard 1999; Pollard and Reynolds 2002, and Stonehenge - Darvill 2006) and Orkney (the Stones of Stenness - McClanahan 2013). A biographical approach is well-suited to the interpretation of henge sites which were multi-phase sites, repeatedly reused and rebuilt over millennia, and therefore it may be a useful approach to apply to other henge sites in future, beyond the few sites presented as case studies in this thesis. Henge sites are not unique in being monuments with a long use-life however, and the approaches used in this thesis would also be useful and applicable to other 'types' of monument, as discussed further below.

The use of a biographical approach in archaeology, and its use to interpret the uses of material culture, both artefacts and monuments, is well-documented. It is long-established, having been successfully applied in many different contexts,

and for a wide variety of objects, monuments and periods, for at least two decades. The contribution made by this thesis to the use of biographical approaches in archaeology has been to write the biography of a group of sites which have not previously been biographed.

In terms of specific contributions made to the understanding of henge sites in Scotland, several of the interpretations offered in the thesis represent unique and original interpretations. The relationship between henge sites and pit-digging and deposition has been little discussed. Pit-digging and deposition are not restricted only to henge sites, and have been discussed widely in their own right (see papers in Anderson-Whymark and Thomas 2012). The contribution of this thesis has been to consider how pit-digging can be used to transform a location, and also to examine the relationship between pit-digging sites and sites which are later monumentalised and henged. The occurrence of pit-digging and deposition activities at henge sites is interesting and would bear further research to ascertain how widespread these practices are at henge sites elsewhere.

Similarly, the deposition of fragments of objects (and possibly 'token' burials or burials of fragmentary human or animal remains) has been little-discussed in relation to henge sites. It was suggested in the thesis that practices of depositing fragmented material were an important aspect of how people established relationships between people, places and the past at henge sites. Given the potential significance of fragmentation for understanding past practices and uses of henge sites, more research should be conducted into the deposition of fragments at henge sites. The case studies discussed in the previous chapter, and the deposition of fragmented material at various points in the biographies of the sites at Dyffryn Lane and Thornborough, suggest that this was a practice which was not restricted to henge sites in Scotland, and therefore potentially has implications for the study of henge sites across the British Isles. The significance of fragmentation during the lives of henge sites also highlights the importance of an integrated approach to the study of monuments which combines an understanding of changes in monumental architecture *and* the consideration of material culture and artefacts, if we are to fully appreciate how sites such as henges were used and experienced throughout their lives. In addition to considering fragmentation at henge sites, the discussion of the ways in which fire and burning were used to transform henge sites was another theme



introduced in the thesis. The relationship of fire and henge sites in Scotland has not been considered before, and suggestions for further possible research on this topic are suggested below.

Another contribution to the interpretation of henge sites made by the thesis is the consideration of the relationship of henge sites with settlement and with farming practices. There has been some discussion in the past on the relationship between monuments and farming practices such as ploughing (e.g. Haggarty 1991; Bradley 2002), but relatively little has been made of the relationships between henge sites and evidence for farming practices. It may be that there is scope for further research to be conducted on this in future, although features such as ard marks have a relatively low archaeological visibility (although can be recognised, e.g. those at Wellhill; Wright 2014), and therefore it might be difficult to retrieve evidence for such practices, especially on sites such as henges which are subsequently rebuilt. The relationships between henge sites (and indeed other monuments, especially timber circles) and house architecture are increasingly widely acknowledged (Thomas 2010; Bradley 2013), as discussed in the thesis. Apart from similarities in architecture however, there may be other relationships between houses and henge sites, such as henge sites which monumentalise the sites of earlier houses, or are built close to earlier settlements. This has previously been acknowledged for sites in Orkney and Wessex, including Durrington Walls (Parker Pearson 2012) and Stenness-Barnhouse (Richards 2005), but the discovery of a possible Grooved Ware house beside the mini-henge at Leadketty (Brophy *et al.* 2012), and possible similar associations with a house structure at Ringlemere (Parfitt and Needham 2012) suggest that the relationship may be relevant elsewhere across the British Isles. This should be borne in mind in any future research into henge sites and other monuments.

These original interpretations of henge monuments also contribute to our understanding of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age in Scotland and the rest of Britain, in that they offer new contributions towards understanding of a kind of monument which is found across Scotland, as well as in the British Isles more generally. The approaches adopted in this thesis also have wider relevance for studying Neolithic and Bronze Age monumentality across Britain, because many of the themes explored concerning reuse and commemoration, and the repeated

use and transformation of the same site, are features not only of henge sites but of other monumental sites as well. For example, Kenny Brophy (forthcoming) has noted that cursus monuments were also built in places which were already significant locales in the landscape, and which continue in use after the cursus is old. Most excavations of cursus sites have revealed evidence of pre-cursus activity, and in some cases this is similar to the repertoire of activities carried out early in the lives of henge sites - for example, pit-digging (although it seems pits are not found so frequently at cursuses as they are at henge sites), deposition, and hearths and fires (Brophy *ibid.*). Likewise, many cursus monuments are used for burial later in their lives, during the Bronze Age, which again parallels the biography of many henge sites. The themes explored in this thesis in relation to henge sites, will also be a useful contribution to thinking through the biographies of other monuments, such as cursuses, where similar events might have played out during the lifecycle of these monuments.

Despite some similarities with the biographies of other kinds of monuments, another contribution of this thesis has been to demonstrate that the term 'henge' can still be useful, if used critically. While it is clear that it is no longer valid to consider henges - or indeed any monument 'type' - only in terms of their final morphology, the character of henges as monuments which respond to earlier features, objects and materials by directly commemorating, containing, remaking and transforming them, can be seen as distinctive. These are the aspects which mark out the biographies of henge sites, and should be considered in future excavation and research, as detailed below.

### **Site biographical approaches and excavation: reflections and future potential**

As noted above, henge sites are obviously not the only 'type' of monument which have long biographies of reuse and reconstruction. Other 'types' of monument including for example cursus monuments, long barrows, chambered cairns, and timber circles also all have complicated building sequences, and many continue to be altered and reused for centuries after their construction (see Brophy forthcoming; Benson and Whittle 2007; Henshall and Ritchie 2001; Hingley 1996; Millican 2007; Bradley 2002; for information on each of these monument 'types'). Significantly, the biographical approach used in this thesis

was used not only to describe how sites changed over time (*cf.* Holtorf 1998), but as a framework for understanding *why* henge sites were repeatedly reused over such long periods, and the significance of returning to and rebuilding ‘old’ monuments. This perspective could also be of benefit to the interpretation of other kinds of monument.

Since the aim of the thesis was to consider the biographies of henge sites in relation to the creation of memory and relationships with the past during the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Early-Mid Bronze Age, the biographies presented in chapters 4-6 somewhat arbitrarily focused only on these periods. Biographical approaches have previously been used to document present-day perceptions and uses of monuments and objects (e.g. Holtorf 1998; McClanahan 2013; Edmonds 2012). This approach could also be applied to henge sites in Scotland, since their life obviously extends beyond the Mid-Bronze Age, and indeed their biographies are still being written. As Ffion Reynolds points out in her biography of a chambered tomb in the Vale of Glamorgan, Wales,

‘A site’s history does not end. The experiences and memories encountered in the past are as important as those experienced in the present and those yet to be experienced in the future’ (Reynolds 2014: 175).

However, useful though site biographies are as a way of considering how and why the development of a (henge) site followed a certain trajectory, the approach is only useful for excavated sites. Even then, since a biographical approach relies on understanding the phasing of a site and the chronology of the changes that occurred there over time, it is not an approach which can be easily applied to all excavated sites. For example, it is difficult to understand the biography of a site from which little dateable material has been retrieved, or where the stratigraphic relationships between features are poorly understood. Since these are problems which apply to many henge sites, some recommendations are offered here which may feed into future research designs for the excavation of henge sites.

Firstly, since henge earthworks are in most cases late additions to a site, it is necessary to understand *what they enclose* in order to more fully interpret the significance of the site and to understand the chronology of how various features

inter-relate and how the site developed over time. This requires that henge interiors should be looked at more comprehensively when henge sites are excavated. Excavations which focus only on the boundary of the site (i.e. the ditch, and bank if there is one) are unlikely to yield much useful information about how the site was used. In order to understand the phasing of a site and the trajectory of how it is transformed over time, it will be necessary to investigate the features enclosed by the henge, rather than concentrating only on the sequence of ditch fills.

Secondly, since it is important to understand the sequence of construction of a henge site and the features associated with it, dating and the chronological inter-relationships between features should be understood as comprehensively as possible. Ideally, this would include obtaining dates for each of the internal features of a henge site, as well as the earthworks. In practice, this may not always be possible depending on whether or not any dateable material is able to be retrieved, but other factors such as budgetary constraints will also obviously impact on this. Previous approaches to dating henge sites have sometimes assumed that all features are contemporary, and therefore dates from internal features such as timber circles are also applied to henge earthworks (as was the case when Balfarg was excavated in the late 1970s, Mercer 1981). With the increasing understanding that henge sites are multi-phase sites, and that internal features are unlikely to be contemporary with earthworks, such dating strategies can no longer be considered appropriate. More reflection is also needed on what is actually being dated by samples taken from deep ditches. Building Bayesian chronologies might be one potential route to better chronologies for henge sites with good stratigraphic sequences.

## **Potential for further research**

The approaches and interpretations presented in this thesis have highlighted several avenues which may be considered useful routes for potential future research into henge monuments, and monumentality in general, in addition to those mentioned above.

More research is needed into the construction of timber and earthwork monuments. As discussed in chapter 6, these have hitherto been overlooked in

favour of considerations of the construction of stone monuments, e.g. the risks of stone-quarrying and moving, and the significance of stone as a material. There may be scope for considering similar issues in relation to timber and earthwork monuments. In addition, considerations of how the appearance of such monuments would change over time, and whether any maintenance was performed on such monuments in order to maintain a particular aesthetic, would be interesting possibilities for further research. Such factors may be ephemeral in terms of the archaeological traces they leave behind, but they would have a significant impact on the experience of people visiting and using the sites in the past. Environmental work could be used to identify factors such as whether a sites was grassed over, or the growth of weeds on a site, which may be indicative of periods of abandonment or inactivity at a site.

One factor which may have influenced the appearance of monuments was the way in which fire was used at monumental sites. More research could be conducted into the use of fire at henge sites, for example extending beyond the geographical scope of this thesis, to determine how widespread the use of fire at henge sites is across Britain. The uses of fire at henge sites could also be compared to the uses of fire at other monuments, and also to uses of fire in other contexts and in other spheres of prehistoric life beyond the monumental.

Finally, a more integrated approach to interpreting monuments *and* material culture is needed. Obviously, such an approach is not always possible, for example very little material culture is recovered from excavations of some henge sites. Ideally however, interpretations of monuments should incorporate considerations of the uses of materials and artefacts at monumental sites. Considering the uses of material culture at sites such as henges will help us to gain a fuller understanding of past uses and experiences of monuments. This thesis has ‘de-henged’ henge sites in Scotland, that is, deconstructed them and begun to reinterpret henge sites through their biographies, understanding them as places where monument construction and destruction and uses of materials and (pieces of) objects came together to create memories and relationships with the past. Although henge sites were eventually sealed-off and separated from quotidian life, their biographies fitted with the rhythms of life throughout the Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age in Scotland. They were places where people forged and expressed relationships between individuals, communities,

their past and their contemporary wider world. Our own interactions with these monuments is the next part of their biography, as we also use them to consider our past, and seek to interpret them as we make sense of the world in which we live.

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