Archaeological landscapes in Strathbraan, Perthshire

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An archaeological survey of the northern side of Strathbraan and the unafforested reaches of Glen Cochill (Illus 1) was undertaken by the Afforestation Land Survey (ALS) team of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) between September and December 1993. The River Braan is a tributary of the Tay, lying to the N of the Highland Boundary Fault and to the W of two areas previously published by the Royal Commission – North-east Perth and South-east Perth (RCAHMS 1990; 1994a). Since the Second World War large-scale afforestation has taken place to the N and E of the survey area, with smaller-scale infilling within the area, some of which has engulfed known archaeological monuments, and it was against this background of forest expansion that Historic Scotland suggested that the ALS team should carry out strategic archaeological survey in Strathbraan. The survey area selected by ALS presented a transect across the northern side of the valley system and comprised zones of land use ranging from the intensively farmed low ground, through agriculturally marginal ground, to what is now open moorland lying beyond the upper limits of prehistoric and medieval cultivation.

As a preliminary assessment had suggested, the survey area revealed a wealth of unitary archaeological monuments but, more significantly, a number of important relict archaeological landscapes were also identified, which encapsulate the settlement history of the valley, and four contrasting examples of these landscapes form the core of this paper. These relict landscapes offer keyhole glimpses of earlier phases of land use, and represent fragments of what were once more widespread settlement patterns now largely swept away by medieval and improvement-period agriculture. In more recent times, the threat to the surviving relict landscapes has increased with the spread of commercial forestry into what had previously been grouse moor and marginal agricultural ground, placing a premium on the recording and preservation of those windows of well-preserved remains which still survive.

The field survey methodology followed the normal pattern adopted by the ALS team: all areas of unimproved and semi-improved ground were walked; improved ground was also inspected, generally in the course of visiting structures marked on the first edition of the OS 6-inch maps to ascertain whether or not they survived. Sites were mapped at a scale of 1:10,000, and field notes were recorded into a database on a Husky Hunter hand-held computer. From this data, summary site descriptions were produced and these have been incorporated into the National Monuments Record of Scotland, where, together with the database, plans, and ground and aerial photographs, they are available for public consultation.

The results of the survey are presented below as four case studies (Illus 1), each relict landscape highlighting a different aspect of the archaeology and landscape history of Strathbraan. An introductory section outlines the main strands of the land use and settlement history of the area to provide a context for the case studies.

Land use and settlement in Strathbraan

Only a thin scatter of earlier prehistoric monuments survives in the survey area. Included among them are cup-marked stones and a standing stone, but they are sufficient to indicate some degree of occupation in the Neolithic period, while the White Cairn in Glen Cochill and several other large burial cairns elsewhere show that, even with no direct evidence for settlements, the area continued to be exploited in the Early Bronze Age.

The earliest-known settlements to have been recorded so far comprise groups of hut circles (Illus 2), some of which may date to the Bronze Age, but examples excavated elsewhere in Scotland indicate a potential date range extending

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from the early second millennium BC to the early centuries of the first millennium AD (e.g. Barber 1982; Carter 1994; Rideout 1996; Stevenson 1985). With the exception of thickening of the bank terminals on either side of some entrances, all the hut circles were simple single-walled structures (Illus 3). No examples of double-walled buildings, which constitute such a distinctive feature of the hut circle settlements in north-east Perth (RCAHMS 1990, 2–4), were found, and it is possible that the River Tay marks the western boundary of their distribution. Most of the hut circles occur in groups, and they may represent either successive structures or the remains of small communities. Juxtaposed with the hut circles there are groups of small cairns and field banks, which are probably the remains of their associated field systems.

Two roughly circular stone-walled homesteads were recorded in the area (Illus 2). Together they may form part of a loose grouping of homesteads recorded in northern Perthshire (Taylor 1990), but perhaps extending as far S as the Braes of Doune (RCAHMS 1994b, 9–11). Evidence for their date is limited, and while excavations at two sites to the NW of Strathbraan indicate occupation in the late first millennium AD, their origins and date of construction remain obscure.

The next settlement horizon is represented by round-ended sub-rectangular buildings of Pitcarmick type (Illus 2), a form of building first identified during the RCAHMS survey of north-east Perth (RCAHMS 1990, 12), where it was suggested that they might date to the first millennium AD. The name of the buildings is derived from a group of structures at Pitcarmick in Strathardle where all the characteristics that identify the group are visible. The Pitcarmick-type buildings in Strathbraan measure from 12m by 5.8m to 33.8m by 7.1m overall and present a very obvious contrast with farmsteads of 19th-century date (Illus 4). Recent excavation at Pitcarmick North has provided radiocarbon dates for two Pitcarmick-type buildings demonstrating that they were occupied between the 7th and 11th centuries AD (Barrett and Downes n.d.).

In Glen Cochill and along the Ballinloan Burn the Pitcarmick-type buildings are juxtaposed with field systems composed of irregular plots, which may be contemporary; similar combinations of buildings and plots were noted in north-east Perth (RCAHMS 1990, 72–3). The evidence from survey and excavation (Barrett and Downes n.d.) suggests that some, if not all, of the Pitcarmick-type buildings may have been byre-dwellings and formed steadings at the centre of mixed farms.
Amongst the wide range of buildings in Strathbraan there is at least one (see below, the Glen Fender case study) that shares some of the characteristics of the Pitcarmick-type buildings, but not enough to warrant its inclusion in the group. Similar structures were identified in the north-east Perth survey and, together with the Pitcarmick-type buildings, may hint at several undocumented attempts at settlement of marginal ground in the earlier medieval period (RCAHMS 1990, 12).

Direct evidence for medieval and immediately post-medieval settlements is difficult to pinpoint, but the survey recorded a thin scatter of roughly rectangular buildings not related to the predominately 19th-century buildings associated with the farmsteads and townships (Illus 5). Several of these buildings are undoubtedly pre-improvement settlements, and they may be associated with irregular field systems, some containing patches of rig cultivation, which are consistently truncated or overlain by improvement-period field walls. Most of the cultivation ridging that survives in the area is likely to be broadly pre-improvement period in date; the rigs are now fairly ephemeral and measure from 3m to 7m in breadth. Fragments of high-backed, sinuous rig, measuring between 8m and 10m across, which may be of medieval date (Dixon 1994, 37–8), survive in corners of rough ground on the improved valley floors. Also associated with the medieval and post-medieval settlements are a number of huts and buildings situated in side valleys which can be identified as shielings (Illus 5, 6). Recent excavations of similar structures in Perthshire have produced dates as early as the 10th to 15th centuries AD (Barrett and Downes n d; Rideout 1996, 184–5), but their use is recorded well into the 18th century (Bil 1990).

Of the 168 rectangular buildings recorded by the survey, some 58% are shown as roofed on the first edition of the OS 6–inch map and can be dated to the 19th century. The majority (85%) of the rectangular buildings lie within the thirty-two farmsteads or townships identified by the survey (Illus 5). That many of these 19th-century settlements occupy the locations of earlier sites is indicated by Roy’s map (1747–55), which depicts 23 settlements within the survey area, 15 of which are in roughly the same location and/or have the same name as 19th-century farmsteads and townships identified during the survey. The remaining 42% of the rectangular buildings are depicted on the first edition map as unroofed and may have been abandoned early in the 19th century. The buildings (Illus 4, E-G) measure up to 28.3m by 4.2m internally with as many as five compartments, and include dwellings, byres, barns and mills.
The distribution of farmsteads and townships (Illus 5) is weighted towards the valley floors, with the settlements frequently lying along the boundary between improved and unimproved ground. Other sites lie on the hillsides, within a network of fields, and may represent phases of settlement expansion. Steadings of two or three buildings ranged around a yard are the basic unit of settlement, with one large building in each group which can usually be identified as the dwelling. The settlements vary from a single unit, comprising a farmstead, to groupings of up to eight steadings forming a township. The pattern of the 19th-century fields is well documented on the first and second editions of the Ordnance Survey 6-inch maps. An extract (Illus 7) of the first edition map (Perthshire 1867, sheet lxi) illustrating a portion of the lower Ballinloan Burn clearly shows the disposition of the settlements and fields in this side valley and the trackways providing access to hill grazing.

A particular aspect of the later land use, and one of the few traces of the once flourishing lint industry, are the retting ponds recorded during the survey; they occur in groups of up to eight, measure as much as 8m across, and are mostly situated beside water courses. One of the best examples can be seen at Tomnagrew (NN 939 395), where the ponds are disposed in three strings linked by channels, with some of the circular pools arranged in pairs to form figures-of-eight.

Case studies

The case studies presented below have been arranged in roughly chronological order of the periods they characterise, beginning with the predominantly prehistoric landscapes, before moving on to the medieval and post-medieval periods. There are considerable chronological overlaps in the material recorded in these landscapes, reflecting the cycle of use and abandonment which characterises so much of what is now marginal ground. As samples of landscapes where the ebb and flow of settlement has manifested itself, they chronicle the changing fortunes of settlement in the varied topographic zones in Strathbraan. These range from areas where activity has probably always been periodic or seasonal to settlements in the lower-lying, better quality, ground where occupation is likely to be characterised by continuity. The longest-lived and most successful settlements in the strath are likely to have occupied the best quality ground where, excepting forestry, land use has been most intensive and destructive. In these favoured locations the surviving remains are predominately of relatively recent date and the lacunae caused by medieval and later agriculture must be taken into account when assessing the overall distribution of monuments recovered by the survey, in particular those of prehistoric and early medieval date (Illus 2).

Glen Cochill

Glen Cochill lies towards the W end of Strathbraan (Illus 1), and since the construction of the Wade
road from Crieff to Aberfeldy in the early 18th century it has been an important route, although before that date it must have been relatively isolated. Most of the E side of the valley has been afforested and, except for a group of hut circles (NN 904 432) preserved within the planting, has produced little archaeological material. The western wall of the glen rises steeply, while the valley floor, which is about 800m broad and covered by low glacial knolls and terraces, contains a major relict landscape (Illus 8).

This archaeological landscape contains the most extensive remains of prehistoric settlement in the survey area, and has been preserved in an area lying beyond the limit of intensive medieval and later agriculture. The middle and upper reaches of Glen Cochill may always have been marginal for permanent settlement and, even by a relatively early date, occupation of the valley may only have been periodic. The limited availability of reasonable quality ground in the valley and the attractiveness of areas of former settlement for recolonisation have concentrated most of the remains in the area illustrated (Illus 8).

Activity in Glen Cochill may have begun in the Neolithic period, but it is not until the Bronze Age that any monuments related to settlement can be identified. The White Cairn, a large Early Bronze Age cairn (BC on Illus 8), is situated on the floor of the glen with an open outlook down the valley; excavation in the 1960s revealed a centrally placed cist, which contained fragments of a Beaker (Stewart 1961, 81; Stewart forthcoming). Although buildings that can be associated with the cairn have yet to be identified, its pivotal position in the landscape suggests that this large cairn may have been the focus for a Bronze Age community which farmed the valley.

Hut-circle settlements were probably established during the Bronze Age and may have continued in use into the early centuries of the first
millennium AD. Evidence from elsewhere in Scotland suggests that the occupation of these farms may not necessarily have been continuous (eg Barber 1982; Cowley forthcoming; Stevenson 1985) and that there may have been periods when the valley could not support permanent settlement. The hut circles are widely spaced across the area and show a preference for well-drained knolls and terraces. Although in the absence of excavation it is impossible to be certain, it is probable that many of the clusters of small cairns and the short disjointed stretches of bank that surround the hut circles are the remains of prehistoric field systems, broadly contemporary with the surviving hut circles. However, some of the small cairns that lie along the route of the Military Road may be associated with its construction and maintenance.

The next clearly identifiable phase of settlement is represented by a change in house style and the establishment of more formal field systems. The four Pitcarmick-type buildings (P on Illus 8) may represent a recolonisation of the area during the mid- to late first millennium AD, the settlers being drawn to ground that had already been at least partially cleared and improved. Three of the buildings, which lie in a group immediately to the W of the public road (A826), are associated with a well-defined field system covering about 4ha. The form of this field system is quite distinctive and is readily distinguishable from the irregular character of the prehistoric field systems and the well-defined pre-improvement field banks recorded elsewhere in the survey area (see case studies below, Illus 9, 10, 11). Although broad ridging is visible on aerial photographs (RCAHMSAP C11800–2) within some of the fields associated with the Pitcarmick-type buildings, its relationship with the surrounding field banks is
not clear, and it may indicate a much later period of use (a similar juxtaposition of remains was noted at Drumturn Burn, RCAHMS 1990, 44-9, no 124). Later settlement did occur in this part of Glen Cochill, as can be seen from several huts and a small building which overlie sections of the fieldsystem banks, but these appear to form part of the extensive remains of shieling activity in the glen (see below) and may not be associated with the ridging noted in the Pitcarmick fields.

After the failure of the settlement characterised by the Pitcarmick-type buildings, permanent occupation of this part of the glen appears to have ceased and was replaced by seasonal shieling, represented by numerous huts, small buildings and enclosures. The Military Road was built in 1730, but permanent settlement was not re-established until the 19th century, after the construction of the new road through the glen (A826). The farms of St Louis and Scotston are not shown on Roy’s map, but both appear on the first edition of the OS 6-inch map (Perthshire 1867, sheet Ixi), with Scotston labelled as an inn (serving travellers on the newly constructed public road), suggesting that it did not become a farm until considerably later.

Most of the shielings huts lie on the W side of Glen Cochill, where the ground begins to rise above the valley floor. One of the largest groups comprises about 20 huts, which are centred on an oval enclosure about 6ha in extent, and includes numerous small cairns, patches of rig and short lengths of bank, some of which may be associated with a prehistoric field system lying a short distance to the NE. The enclosure may have functioned as a corral, but stretches of rig visible in the western half indicate that more than one phase of medieval or later activity has taken place here, an impression corroborated by the blocking of a trackway on the SE by the enclosure wall and by the construction of some huts over the enclosure wall. There are concentrations of huts towards the E and N sides of the enclosure, while others lie on the NW and S out with the enclosure. Several huts are accompanied by outshots, and mounds outside two of the huts may be middens. Two further groups of shieling-huts and pens are situated in undulating heather moorland above the Military Road in the NW corner of the illustration (Illus 8). These form part of a scatter of structures, mostly shieling sites, but including an illicit still, which were identified along the W side of Glen Cochill.

The survey has demonstrated that from the prehistoric period onwards the glen has lain on the fringes of permanent settlement and its use has
been characterised by phases of permanent settlement followed by abandonment and seasonal activity. This provides an insight into patterns of settlement and land use which complement those in more favoured locations at lower altitudes.

**Ballinloan Burn**

The Ballinloan Burn drains a side valley to the N of the River Braan and lies to the NE of Glen Cochill (Illus 1). The headwaters of the valley have been afforested, and the relict landscape described below lies in the middle reaches, just beyond the limit of post-medieval settlement and more recent improvement (Illus 9). The chronological span of settlement in this stretch of the Ballinloan Burn is considerably shorter than the sequence observed in Glen Cochill, only beginning in the first millennium AD and ending in the immediately pre-improvement period. The range of remains also differs, although a scatter of Pitcarmick-type buildings and the ubiquitous small cairns provide a common thread, as do phases of settlement separated by periods of abandonment and the exploitation of the area on a seasonal basis.

Unlike Glen Cochill, no traces of occupation were identified which pre-date the later Iron Age, and the earliest settlement unit is probably a circular homestead which lies on the edge of a terrace to the E of the Ballinloan Burn and may
date to the first millennium AD. The homestead is similar to another newly identified site found during the survey at the mouth of the valley near Ballinloan Bridge (Illus 2), and the discovery of two of these sites in the valley provides an interesting contrast with the situation in Glen Cochill where no homesteads have been found.

On the slopes to the W of the Ballinloan Burn there are at least six Pitcarmick-type buildings and their associated field systems – one of the few instances where hut circles have not been found adjacent to settlements of Pitcarmick-type buildings. This juxtaposition of a homestead and Pitcarmick-type buildings is, to date, the only example of this phenomenon to be identified, and raises interesting questions about their chronological relationship and their survival in the landscape. The limited number of dates for Pitcarmick-type buildings and the unreliability of dating for the Perthshire homesteads requires further work to establish their chronological relationship. It is interesting to note that the Pitcarmick-type buildings are restricted to the less-favoured SE-facing slopes, and the homestead, but no 'Pitcarmicks', lie on the sunnier, SW-facing slopes. The most likely explanation is that the concentration of later agriculture on the SW-facing slopes may have swept away the relatively insubstantial remains of any Pitcarmick-type buildings situated on this side of the valley, while the more robust homestead has survived. On the W side of the valley, however, later medieval agriculture has not reached the same extent, thus preserving the early medieval farmsteads.

As well as the irregular forms of the Pitcarmick-type buildings, there is a scatter of rectangular and sub-rectangular buildings visible on both sides of the burn; the majority are grouped in five clusters, while the remainder are disposed in a more dispersed pattern. These buildings are likely to be medieval or pre-improvement period in date and, while no definite examples of farmsteads could be identified amongst them, some of the buildings may belong to a phase, or phases, of permanent settlement, eg a cluster of buildings and huts around the pre-improvement field system at the S side of the area (Illus 9, D, see below). In addition to these buildings the valley also contains a number of huts, found singly and in groups, which, for the most part, are probably to be associated with the use of the upper valley as a sheltering ground in medieval and later times.

A wide range of cultivation remains were mapped on the better-drained ground, but, with the exception of the field system associated with the Pitcarmick-type buildings, the relationships between the settlements and the land-use remains could not be determined. The cultivation remains have therefore been described separately, starting with small cairns and rig, which may cut across chronological boundaries and may be associated with any, or all, of the phases of land use.

Small cairns, ie piles of field-cleared stones, are more or less ubiquitous, and may represent the earliest cultivation remains in the valley, perhaps originating in the first and second millennium BC but continuing to be created well into the post-medieval period. In some cases rig can be seen to make allowance for the cairns, contracting and expanding around the cairns as space dictated. Elsewhere cairns have been cut through by rigs. In other cases, however, cairns lie within blocks of ridging, and appear to be the by-products of rig formation. Although many patches of rig cultivation were recorded during the course of the survey, the low profile of the individual rigs suggests that further swathes may lie hidden under the deep heather that covers much of the ground. The vegetation cover also prevented the close inspection of much of the rig, but some patches of reverse-S ridging were noted, with the furrows traceable for at least 100m.

In addition to the small cairns and rig five distinct types of field system were identified – ranging from prehistoric to post-improvement in date. A field system comprising a group of strip fields lies at the western edge of the area (Illus 9, A). The strips run downslope and are defined by sinuous, low stony banks, measuring about 50m in length and spaced about 5m apart. A scatter of small cairns can be seen to the NW of the strip fields, some of which lie in rough lines, perhaps representing a stage in the formation of the strips. There is a suggestion of similar fields to the S of Newtown of Ballinreigh (see Glen Fender below), otherwise they were not encountered elsewhere in the survey area. The strip fields invite comparison with at least eight broadly similar sites recorded in north-east Perth (RCAHMS 1990, 163, 164), Angus (NMRS, NO 56 NW 18, 48) and north Kincardine (NMRS, NO 79 SW 9, NO 88 NW 2, 12, 15). None of the known examples has been dated nor is the type of agriculture they represent fully understood, but they may be linked to rig cultivation and perhaps date to the first millennium AD or possibly later.

What may be the remains of prehistoric agriculture were recorded to the E of the strip fields (Illus 9, B), comprising an extensive band of small cairns interspersed with banks, rickles of stone and occasional lynchets, some of which may have formed irregular plots. The potentially prehistoric fields in Glen Cochill (Illus 8) are broadly similar; indeed, these types of remains are common across much of Scotland and are generally assumed to be prehistoric in date.

A further field system (Illus 9, C) surrounds the north-western Pitcarmick-type buildings and is
almost certainly associated with the settlement. It comprises a series of small, irregular fields about 0.5ha in area as well as a larger field (in excess of 3ha). Within the large field there are traces of three patches of rig, aligned on three different axes, and numerous clearance heaps, some of which are aligned with the axis of the rig and are presumably associated with it. Two similar irregular fields of about 0.5ha each lie on a spur to the W.

The most complete of the medieval and later field systems lies to the S of the illustrated area and consists of sub-rectangular plots, each of about 0.25ha to 0.5ha in extent, surrounded by earthen dykes (Illus 9, D). Rig, which runs across the contour, is visible in one of the fields, while in others lynches have built up against some of the banks, indicating cultivation, even where rig is not visible. This field system is likely to be a pre-improvement intake of hill ground, perhaps associated with some of the nearby buildings or serviced by a farmstead further down the valley. Fragments of what are probably other pre-improvement fields can be seen at the E end of the prehistoric small cairns and lynches (described above) and to the NE of the burn on the slopes above the corn-drying kiln.

The final type of field system belongs to the improvement period, by which time arable or mixed farming had been abandoned and the upper part of the valley was turned over to pasture for sheep. Large embanked and stone-walled fields, probably belonging to different phases, were laid out to control the stock (eg on the NE bank of the Ballinloan Burn), and a sheepfold was built against the N face of the main cross-valley wall.

The visible remains in this reach of the Ballinloan Burn suggest that settlement did not begin here until the first millennium AD, but it is unlikely that the area was not exploited earlier and the scatter of small cairns and irregular plots may indicate the presence of an, as yet, unlocated prehistoric settlement. The homestead and the Pitcarmick-type buildings demonstrate a variety to the settlement of the valley in the first millennium AD, in contrast to many areas of Scotland where material of this date is notable by its absence. As with Glen Cochill the area then seems to have been settled cyclically and/or used on a seasonal basis. The Ballinloan Burn illustrates the local variations on a common theme, as well as introducing rarer or unique elements, such as the homestead and strip fields.

Glen Fender

The Glenfender Burn debouches into Strathbraan between a series of broad terraces, which run into the gently shelving shoulders of the valley sides (Illus 1). A relatively recent head dyke cuts diagonally across the area from NE to SW and divides the ground into two zones. Above the dyke the slopes are largely of unimproved heather moorland with considerable numbers of prehistoric, medieval and later buildings on the lower ground, as well as extensive remains of cultivation (Illus 10). Below the head dyke, the ground has been heavily improved since the middle of the 18th century, truncating the remains of the earlier land-use systems.

As a relatively favoured location, settlement at the mouth of Glen Fender is likely to have been long lived and characterised by continuous occupation, which contrasts with the cycle of abandonment and seasonal activity seen in Glen Cochill and along the Ballinloan Burn. The greater degree of continuity has, however, meant that the earlier material is more likely to be disturbed or destroyed by the intensity and longevity of subsequent settlement.

The earliest settlement remains so far recorded in Glen Fender are four hut circles situated above the head dyke on terraces overlooking the pre-improvement and later field systems. Three lie on a broad terrace to the S of the Glenfender Burn which has not been enclosed within the improvement-period fields, and five relatively discrete clusters of up to 20 small cairns on the terrace may be part of a related field system. Two of the clusters lie within a series of sub-rectangular plots (measuring up to 110m by 150m) laid out across the contour and appear to extend into the semi-improved ground to the S of Newton of Ballinreagh. These fields are probably pre-improvement in date, but changes in the line of the banks at the western edge of these plots suggest that they belong to at least two distinct phases of use.

Two Pitcarmick-type buildings, which survive in pockets of rough or semi-improved ground to the S of the Glenfender Burn, mark a first millennium AD phase of settlement. Possibly contemporary with them is a large building situated on a terrace to the S of the Glenfender Burn (SP on Illus 10). Similar large buildings were found in northeast Perth, where it was suggested that some were structurally related to Pitcarmick-type buildings and that they were probably occupied during the same phase of settlement ( RCAHMS 1990, 12), and this may also be the case in Glen Fender. The un-improved ground contains a scatter of other buildings and huts, which probably post-date the Pitcarmick-type buildings, and are most likely to have been occupied during the pre-improvement period. The relative chronology of these later buildings is difficult to establish as, although individual buildings exhibit stratigraphic relationships with other structures, no general pattern can be detected.

By far the greatest number of structures
recorded during the course of the survey formed parts of four improvement-period settlements and their associated field systems - Ballinreigh, Midton of Ballinreigh, Newton of Ballinreigh and Innercochill. Most of the surviving buildings are of 19th-century date, but several may occupy the sites of earlier settlements, the approximate positions of which are shown on Roy’s map (1747–55). The first edition of the Ordnance Survey 6-inch map (Perthshire 1867, sheets lxi, lxxi and lxxii) indicates that in the mid-19th century most of the buildings were roofed and occupied; by 1900, the second edition of the map shows that all the settlements were in a decline, and by 1982 the OS 1:10,000 map depicted only one roofed building.

The settlements show considerable variation in size, ranging from discrete farmsteadings, such as Midton of Ballinreigh, which comprises two buildings and three enclosures, to the township of Ballinreigh, consisting of at least 28 buildings arranged in a series of steadings. The steadings of the farms and townships constitute the basic farming unit and typically comprise two to three buildings, placed parallel to each other or arranged in L- or U-shapes, and a number of associated enclosures (eg Illus 4, E, F). The enclosures include garden plots, stackyards, and miscellaneous yards. Other structures associated with the steadings include circular or sub-rectangular pits (possibly middens or clamps), horse-gangs (Ballinreigh, Illus 4, E, and Innercochill), and corn-drying kilns.

Aspect appears to have played a significant role in determining the character of the remains preserved on the unimproved and semi-improved ground to either side of the Glenfender Burn. A scatter of prehistoric and what may be medieval remains have survived on the E-facing shoulder of the hill above Newton of Ballinreigh (described above); while on the more favoured S-facing slopes to the N of the burn there are the remains of a sub-
stantial pre-improvement field system, which extends at least 50m above the upper limit of enclosure to the SW of the burn. As along the Ballinloan Burn more intensive agriculture on the more favoured ground may have swept away evidence of earlier settlement only leaving traces of prehistoric material on the poorer ground. The exception to this pattern lies to the SSE of Newton of Ballinreigh where three low parallel banks survive in a patch of rough ground, and these may be analogous to the strip fields noted along the Ballinloan Burn (Illus 9, A).

To the W of Newton of Ballinreigh, and along the terrace on the N bank of the Glenfender Burn, there are oval or sub-rectangular fields of at least two distinct phases, which are characteristic of the pre-improvement field systems. The two phases are easily distinguished on the terrace to the N of the burn. The more recent occupies the flatter ground on the terrace, and is characterised by fields measuring up to 200m by 120m and containing fragments of rig and heaps of field clearance. A terminus ante quem for the fields is provided by the Military Road, which was built in 1730 and appears to post-date at least one of the field banks. These large fields truncate a series of smaller oval and sub-rectangular plots lying on the broken ground at the back of the terrace, and lynchets within the plots indicate that they have been cultivated. A lade, whose full extent could not be traced, cuts across the smaller plots. On both sides of the burn, trackways, perhaps providing access to hill grazing from the settlements, run up the glen, cutting across the earlier plots but respecting the larger fields.

The line of the Military Road appears to have provided the main axis for the improvement-period fields, which are largely defined by well-built drystone walls up to 2m in height. In places iron post-and-wire fences form an integral part of the network of fields, the majority of which lie to the E of Ballinreigh. The layout of the fields is largely as depicted on the first edition of the OS map.

A final point of interest in this landscape is a cross-incised boulder which is situated on the crest of a rounded ridge with a fine prospect down Strathbraan. The cross is carved (40mm in average width and up to 30mm in depth) into the domed surface of the boulder, utilising a natural weathered groove for the shaft, which is 0.55m in length. The arms of the cross, 0.28m broad overall, have been cut into the rock and may have expanded terminals. Although it is placed in a locally commanding position, there is little that can be said about its likely context.

The landscape described above is one of a scatter of the core settlements in Strathbraan occupying relatively favoured locations above the valley floor, in this case with immediate access to both good quality farmland and hill grazing. The success, measured by the intensity and longevity of activity, of these settlements has resulted in the fragmentation of the prehistoric and early medieval remains, shifting the emphasis of the surviving monuments to medieval and later land use and 19th-century settlement. Despite the fragmentation of the earlier material, excavation of core settlements such as these could provide a more complete picture of the sequence of occupation, and contrasted with the cyclical pattern of settlement in the margins, as seen in Glen Cochill and Ballinloan.

Salachill
The remains of this 19th-century township (Illus 11, 12) are situated on a SW-facing hillside above the NE bank of the Ballinloan Burn some 1.5km downstream of the Ballinloan Burn case study area (Illus 1), and the township lies at the limit of permanent medieval and later settlement in this side valley. Roy's map (1747–55) shows that there was an earlier settlement at this location, and hut circles and small cairns to the E indicate the potential for much earlier activity in the vicinity, but the intensive nature of the reorganisation of the post-improvement landscape has produced a relict landscape which essentially belongs to a single period of occupation.

Illus 11. Salachill (1:5,000, based on the OS map, Crown copyright).
The remains of 27 buildings (Illus 11), most of them grouped into farmsteads, are set within stone-walled fields scattered with field-clearance heaps (Illus 7 presents a similar site in a valley to the S). The network of fields is typical of the later settlements, with trackways linking farmsteads with each other and providing access to hill grazing. The first edition of the OS 6-inch map (Perthshire 1867, sheet 1x) depicts almost all of these buildings, although only two are shown roofed. Within the main area of settlement, in the southern half of the illustrated area, four farmsteads can be identified, each comprising five or six buildings loosely clustered around an irregularly shaped yard. The buildings are all of broadly similar construction: roughly rectangular with square corners and mostly gable ended, they have faced rubble walls, and cruck slots are visible in a few cases. On the basis of their size the buildings can be divided into two distinct groups. In the first there are five buildings measuring internally between 20.3m and 29.5m in length, which may be identified as byre-dwellings. There is one of these long buildings in each farmstead, always forming one side of the yard. They are all divided into two or more compartments, and most of the compartments have separate entrances. Two of these buildings have fireplaces, in both cases in the western gable, while running the length of the eastern compartment in two buildings there is a central byre drain.

Most of the other 19 buildings, measuring up to 14.3m in length, are clustered close to the larger buildings, and serve to define, at least in part, the limits of each steadings’ yard. Several of the larger examples are divided into two compartments, and there is evidence of an upper floor in at least two cases. Occasionally features survive which suggest a particular function: a fireplace in one building indicates domestic occupation, and the opposed entrances in four buildings (one in each farmstead) points to their use as barns.

About 250m to the N of this concentration there is a fifth farmstead (Illus 11), now abandoned but still partly roofed, which appears to have superseded the others, and probably indicates a closing phase of this period of occupation. It comprises a farmhouse, which is still roofed, an L-shaped range of outbuildings, standing to gable height, and a third building reduced to its footings. The house is a three-bayed cottage with a garden plot to the SW. The L-shaped building is built of mortared rubble walls and has two compartments with loft rooms over both wings.

This relict landscape has spanned the shortest chronological range of all those examined in the
case studies. The remains are limited to the 19th century, and also exhibit the narrowest range of structures. Because of its short lifespan as a settlement, the remains are remarkably well preserved and offer opportunities to study the later settlement of Strathbraan not available in the more disturbed and/or still occupied sites further down the valley.

Conclusion
The RCAHMS survey has identified, mapped, and described a remarkable series of archaeological landscapes in a strath where coniferous plantations have blanketed large areas, severely curtailing their archaeological potential. These remains have an importance at national, regional and local levels. As a group, they demonstrate the chronological depth and breadth of settlement types that can be identified as a result of fieldwork in a relatively small area, and this type of study points the way for further multi-disciplinary research to examine the details and absolute chronology of what are clearly highly complex settlement systems.

At a regional level, the sequences of land use and settlement that have been identified provide parallels and contrasts with north-east Perth (RCAHMS 1990), for example in extending the distribution of Pitcarmick-type buildings and raising the question of their relationship with circular homesteads. Mapping extensive areas of land-use remains is of particular value when so much earlier archaeological recording has concentrated on the structural remains of unitary monuments, such as buildings and cairns, with little concern for their context. The detailed recording of the medieval and later settlement is particularly apposite given the threat from re-development for dwellings.

The archaeology of Strathbraan also illustrates the variety a survey of an area can highlight, representing the local adaptations of more general patterns. Thus areas of core and marginal settlement can be identified and the nature of activity in different zones of the landscape outlined and examined through time. This broad-brush outline provides a necessary basis for framing more detailed questions about the social, economic and climatic factors which have interacted to produce these patterns. This area would certainly repay further detailed work on the local and regional patterns of settlement. In particular arable field walking might shed light on activity in the lower reaches of the strath, while documentary research could flesh out the story behind the extensive medieval and later remains.

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Bibliography
Abstract

Survey by RCAHMS in Strathbraan has revealed complex archaeological landscapes, dating from the Bronze Age to the 19th century, surviving in windows of unafforested and unimproved ground. The landscapes are presented against an overview of the settlement and landuse history of the strath, and with reference to analogous material.

Keywords: archaeological survey, archaeological landscapes, Pitcarmick-type buildings, land use, settlement