

## Using archaeological plans to investigate Scotland's rural past

Archaeologists survey and record building remains to help gain a better understanding of daily life in the past and to gather evidence to see how society has evolved, diversified and changed through time. Accurate recording of a rural settlement, and the interpretation of these records enable archaeologists to visualise how a site looked when it was occupied. These plans of the Spittal of Glenmuick township were drawn by an archaeologist who surveyed the site to show the extent of what was discovered, record the level of preservation at the site and show how buildings in the township were planned and constructed. The positions of the buildings were sketched and drawn to relative scale. The Scotland's Rural Past team are training volunteers to create such plans with simple surveying tools and techniques.

### What does the plan of Spittal of Glenmuick show?

The plan shows the outline of a township consisting of at least 12 structures consisting of byre dwellings, barns, enclosures and a corn drying kiln. These structures are all turf and stone built and are the remains of a pre-19<sup>th</sup> century farming community. A photograph of a reconstruction of a byre dwelling from the Highland Folk Museum, Newtonmore, shows a similar type of building to those at Spittal of Glenmuick.

### Examples of how to use this resource

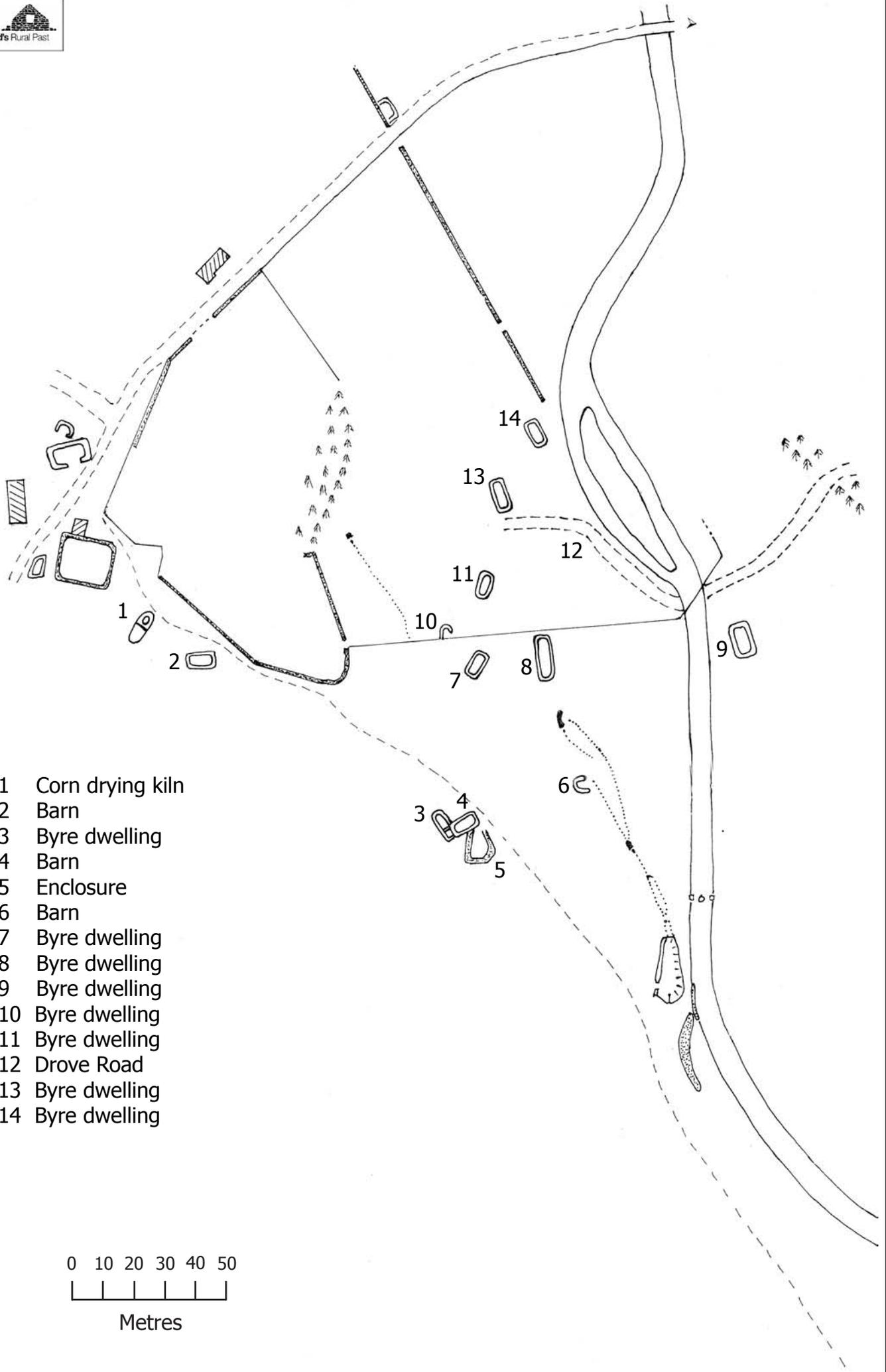
The following questions can be used to critically analyse the site plan and make observations about the way of life in a township. Background detail has been added to help with the answers.

- What was the main occupation of the people who lived in and used these buildings?
  - A farming community lived at Spittal of Glenmuick.
- What were these buildings used for? How can you tell?
  - Within a township you would usually find examples of byre dwellings, barns and outhouses, corn kilns, enclosures and fields. Byre dwellings were houses where people lived with their animals. They are normally long buildings built with their gable ends (the short side of the building) facing the prevailing wind to keep draughts out. Byre dwellings usually had only one door, which would have been used by both people and animals. The animals would have been housed in the byre and the people would have lived next to them, separated perhaps by only a wooden partition.
  - Barns were used for storing and threshing crops, and unlike byre dwellings were built with the long sides of the building facing the direction of the prevailing wind. Access to draughty conditions was a necessary factor for building a barn. Opposing doors would have been built into the long sides of the buildings. Having the doors opposite each other in the barn would create a through draught which was important when threshing grain. After harvesting, cereal crops, such as oats or barley would be beaten with sticks or flails to separate them from the inedible straw and husks. The draught would blow away this waste material as the grains were being processed. The grains would be dried in a corn-drying kiln before being milled. Oats could be used to cook oatcakes, porridge or fed to animals; barley could be cooked and eaten or used in whisky making.
  - Any outhouses would most likely have been used for storage.

- A corn kiln is a structure in which cereal crops are dried after harvesting. Cereal grains are dried to preserve them as the drying process prevents them from germinating and sprouting.
- Enclosures might signify kail yards for growing vegetables or stack yards for storing stacks of oats and barley.
- What animals did the people keep?
  - Cattle were the most important animal to the farming economy.
- Why would people and their animals have used the same building?
  - Cattle would be kept in the byre over the winter months when there was little grazing on the hills. The cattle's body heat would have helped warm the byre dwelling. Byre dwellings are often on a slope. This makes it easier to clean the animal muck out of the byre end as gravity would make it accumulate at the bottom of the slope. A drain would assist removal of muck from the byre into a midden, or there might be a temporary entrance in the end wall which would be knocked through to clear out the muck and then rebuilt.
- Where would the occupants have cooked their food?
  - Food would have been cooked over an open fire on the hearth in the living end of the byre dwelling.
- What food did they cook?
  - The diet was made up of what the farmers would grow; oats, barley, potatoes, kale, and dairy products like milk, cheese and butter. Meat would have been an occasional luxury rather than an everyday food.
- What fuel were they burning on the fire?
  - The fire would burn peat, which would be dug up and cut on the hillsides around Spittal of Glenmuick.
- Where did they sleep?
  - Unlike a house today there are not numerous separate bedrooms. The people living here would have had to share rooms, and most likely beds in the living end of a byre dwelling. People slept in wooden box beds.
- What were the floors of the building made of?
  - There were rough floors of beaten earth in the byre dwellings; no carpets or floorboards.
- Where is the toilet?
  - There isn't one! People would use the byre or go out to the midden (dung heap).
- Can you see any evidence of windows?
  - There is no evidence of any windows in the site plan; however, the remaining walls stand less than one metre high – too low down to put a window. The building walls were made of turf, which may or may not have had windows in them. The picture of the reconstructed byre dwelling shows a window built into a turf wall.

### Further ideas

- What do you think it would have been like to live inside a byre dwelling? What would be the everyday sights, sounds and smells you would encounter?
- Using the site plan of Spittal of Glenmuick for guidance can you draw what you think what a building would have looked like when it was in use? Photos on SCRAN could give you some clues.
- The longest byre dwelling at Spittal of Glenmuick measured 20 metres long by 6 metres wide externally. Approximately half of this space was the byre, and the other half would have been the living space. Use a tape measure to measure the size of the byre dwelling accurately, or pace this distance out in the school playground. Draw the outline of the byre dwelling in chalk, you could draw a simple rectangle, or copy the plan accurately. Compare the outline you make with the size of pupils own homes and the size of the school classroom. See how much space there would be for cattle and for people. See how many of your class can fit into the living space comfortably.
- Measure and make a plan of your classroom or school on graph paper. Mark in significant features such as doors and windows.



- 1 Corn drying kiln
- 2 Barn
- 3 Byre dwelling
- 4 Barn
- 5 Enclosure
- 6 Barn
- 7 Byre dwelling
- 8 Byre dwelling
- 9 Byre dwelling
- 10 Byre dwelling
- 11 Byre dwelling
- 12 Drove Road
- 13 Byre dwelling
- 14 Byre dwelling

0 10 20 30 40 50  
 Metres



Reconstruction of a byre dwelling at the Highland Folk Museum, Newtonmore