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## Chapter 4

### Materializing memories: inheritance, performance and practice at Broxmouth hillfort, southeast Scotland

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Well, the main fortified place was built, and, when finished, houses were erected within it. There were two well-fitted and framed houses among them, one of which was named Raukawa, after the sea that separates the two islands; this house belonged to Tautoki. The other superior house was named Wharerangi, in remembrance of the place where the sacred Wharekura [*place of learning*] was situated in the old-time fatherland. The fortified village was named Whetu-kairangi. (Best 1927, 96)

The opening quotation was reportedly spoken by a nineteenth century Maori elder and recorded by the New Zealand ethnographer, Elsdon Best, in the 1920s. It describes one particular example of a type of Maori fortified village (known as a *pā*), remarkably similar in many ways to European Iron Age hillforts (e.g. Fox 1976; Armit 2007). What is most important for present purposes, however, is that they were large communal enclosures that represented a high investment of labour and resources, and tended to have long periods of settlement. The traditions relating to this particular *pā*, at Miramar near Wellington, had reportedly been preserved over 28 generations (perhaps around 700 years). Whether this is accurate in historical terms is not particularly relevant here: what is important is that people locally believed it to be true.

The quotation is particularly interesting for a number of reasons. First, it reminds us that the archaeological remains we study were once people's homes. Our floor plans and sections represent places where people actually lived, and spent a large part of their lives. Individual buildings within the *pā* had their own names, and each name was meaningful, acting as an *aide-memoire* for stories and traditions about ancestors and the origins of the community. These houses were

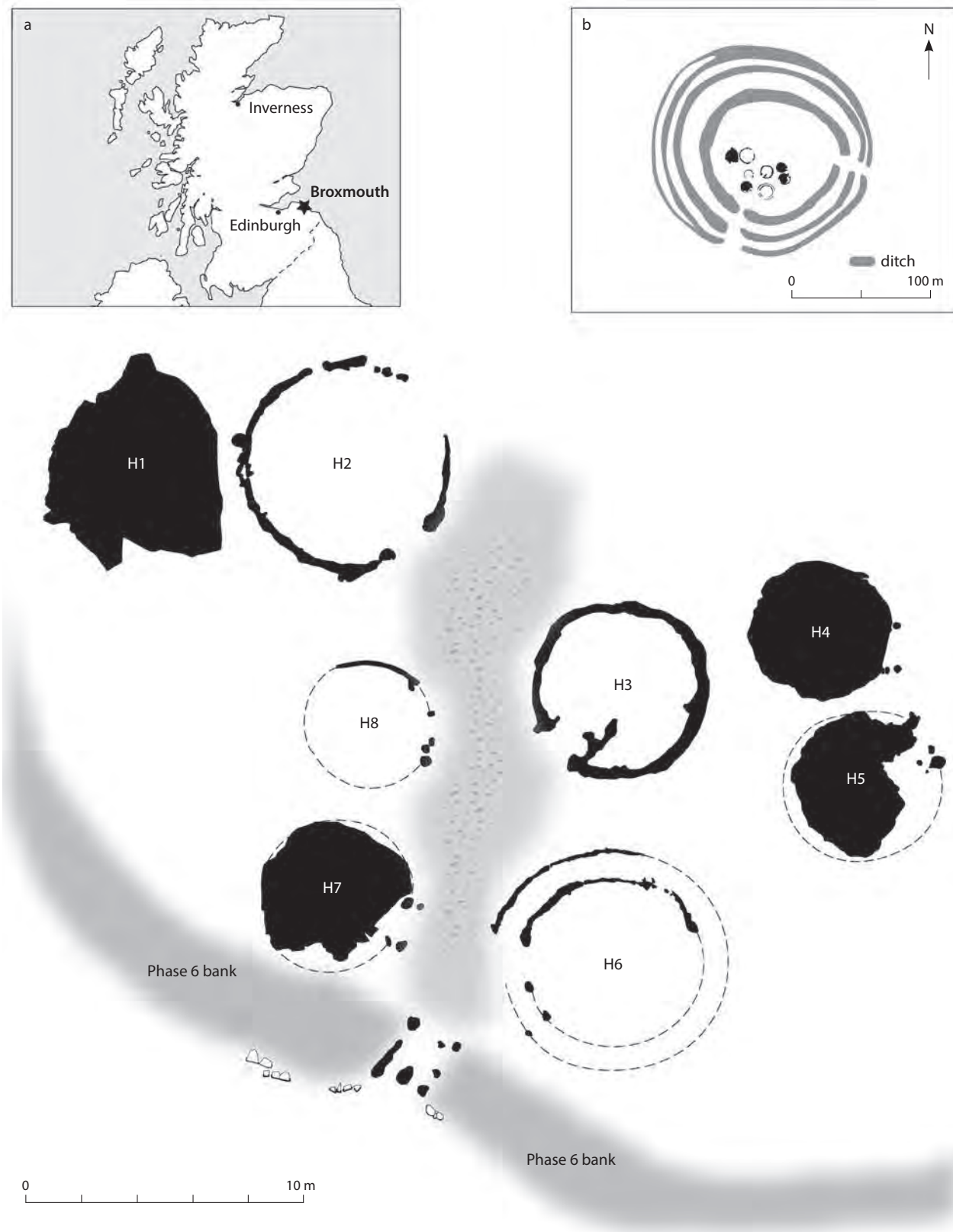
a locus for communal memory, each with its own identity. They were far more than just places to cook, eat and sleep. The name ('Whetu-kairangi') of the *pā* itself means something like 'precious' or 'finest star'. It seems to have referred to the view of the *pā* from the land below, particularly at night when fires lit up the hilltop. It suggests perhaps an affectionate regard for the place, and an allusion to its role as a home and place of safety.

With these ideas in mind, we will consider an equally long-lived settlement dating to the Iron Age in southeast Scotland.

#### Broxmouth hillfort

Broxmouth hillfort was located roughly 2.5 km south-east of Dunbar, and 600 m inland, on the East Lothian coastal plain (Fig. 4.1, inset a). Although excavated in 1977–78, post-excavation was never completed and the site remained unpublished beyond interim accounts (Hill 1979; 1982). A programme of post-excavation leading to full publication was carried out in 2008–12 by the University of Bradford (Armit & McKenzie 2013), funded by Historic Scotland (now Historic Environment Scotland).

The site comprised six main phases of Iron Age occupation, bracketed by ephemeral evidence for Late Neolithic activity and a single inhumation of early medieval date. The Iron Age sequence began around 640/570 *cal. BC*<sup>1</sup> with the construction of a palisaded enclosure (Phase 1). Whatever might have been inside, it was completely destroyed by later occupation. Later, a sequence of at least two, very large, timber roundhouses was built outside the palisaded enclosure. These only survive, fortuitously, under a later rampart, and this early settlement was probably originally much more extensive. Later, sometime around 490/430 *cal. BC*, the hilltop was completely



**Figure 4.1.** The Late Iron Age settlement (Phase 6) at Broxmouth. Insets, a) location map; b) schematic plan of the hillfort.

transformed by the construction of a univallate hillfort (Phase 2a), subsequently rebuilt as bivallate (Phase 2b), with massive timber-lined entrances facing east and west (although only the west one survived). This huge operation would have involved a large number of people for a significant period of time. Once built, the hillfort was progressively remodelled, becoming variously univallate, bivallate and trivallate (Phase 3), though exhibiting no unilinear sequence of development (Fig. 4.1, inset b). The original west entrance was blocked and a new, even more monumental, entrance was built facing southwest. From around 295/235 *cal. BC*, the ditches went out of use and the settlement expanded over them (Phase 4). A series of roundhouses was built within the line of the Inner Ditch, which were preserved where their floors had sunk into its subsiding fill (similar structures can also be discerned within various ditch sections around the perimeter of the site). Around 200 *cal. BC* (Phase 5), a small cemetery was built outside the ramparts to the north (Armit *et al.* 2013), though settlement continued within the interior. From around 100/60 *cal. BC*, a low, stone-faced bank, with a narrow, timber gateway, was re-established along the line of the old inner rampart, and a dense settlement of stone and timber roundhouses constructed within it (see below; Fig. 4.1). Finally, around *cal. AD 155/210*, the site was abandoned.

The dates quoted above are based on a comprehensive AMS dating programme (158 radiocarbon dates in total) which demonstrates that this Iron Age occupation, which appears to have been continuous, spanned a total of roughly 800 years (i.e. 640/570 *cal. BC*–*cal. AD 155/210*; Hamilton *et al.* 2013), or some 32 generations. By Phase 6, if not before, the settlement would clearly have been perceived as being of considerable antiquity, if not immeasurably ancient. Furthermore, since occupation appears to have been continuous, with no observable hiatus in the settlement sequence, it may reasonably be assumed that genealogical links existed between the Phase 1 founders of the settlement, and the inhabitants of Phase 6.

Evidence for internal occupation exists only for Phases 1, 4 and 6, the remainder apparently destroyed by truncation of the settlement during its Iron Age occupation (Armit & McKenzie 2013); this is indeed why the most comprehensive settlement evidence exists for the latest phase (6) of Iron Age activity. In fact, earlier (pre-Phase 6) roundhouses and associated structures only survive in Phases 1 and 4 where they were, respectively, protected from truncation under later ramparts and by subsidence into earlier ditches. Large amounts of redeposited material, identified through AMS dating, attest to the

continual reworking of the site during its Iron Age occupation, during which time it is also likely that earlier, previously buried, features were re-exposed within the context of later settlement activity. Indeed, a burial, which probably dates to Phase 1, appears to have been ‘rediscovered’ during construction of the Phase 6 settlement and may even have influenced the location and orientation of House 2, since the relationship between the two, with the grave lying adjacent to the northern post hole of the roundhouse entrance (Fig. 4.2), suggests a certain intentionality.

### The Late Iron Age settlement

The Late Iron Age settlement represents the latest phase (6) of Iron Age activity at Broxmouth, and, as such, has by far the best surviving evidence for occupation. The surviving settlement comprises eight roundhouses, six of them aligned along a central road running through the main southwest entrance (Fig. 4.1); this entrance was created in Phase 3 and retained, in various forms, throughout the remainder of the settlement’s history. The surviving settlement occupies only roughly half of the area within the enclosure system, however, since the northern part was badly scalped by ploughing. It is likely that both the roundhouse settlement and the road system were originally more extensive.

The roundhouses of the Late Iron Age settlement are all broadly contemporary, with Phase 6 occupation beginning around 100/60 *cal. BC* and ending around *cal. AD 155/210*, spanning a total of some 215–310 years (Hamilton *et al.*, 2013). Interestingly, and in contrast to chronological models based on roundhouse typology (e.g. Feachem 1965), the roundhouses exhibit a variety of form and fabric, including timber- and stone-walled structures, and combinations of the two. Furthermore, some of the house-stances containing stone-walled structures are scooped (i.e. cut into the subsoil so that the walls at the rear of the structure are semi-subterranean), whilst others (predominantly those of the timber-walled structures) are not.

### Household identity

The Phase 6 roundhouses are remarkably well preserved and indicate different maintenance and renewal strategies. Some structures, predominantly the timber-walled examples, appear to have been maintained/rebuilt on a piecemeal basis, and were never wholly replaced; by contrast, most of the stone-walled roundhouses, within their scooped stances, appear to have been completely remodelled on several occasions (Büster & Armit 2013). The latter phenomenon frequently included the





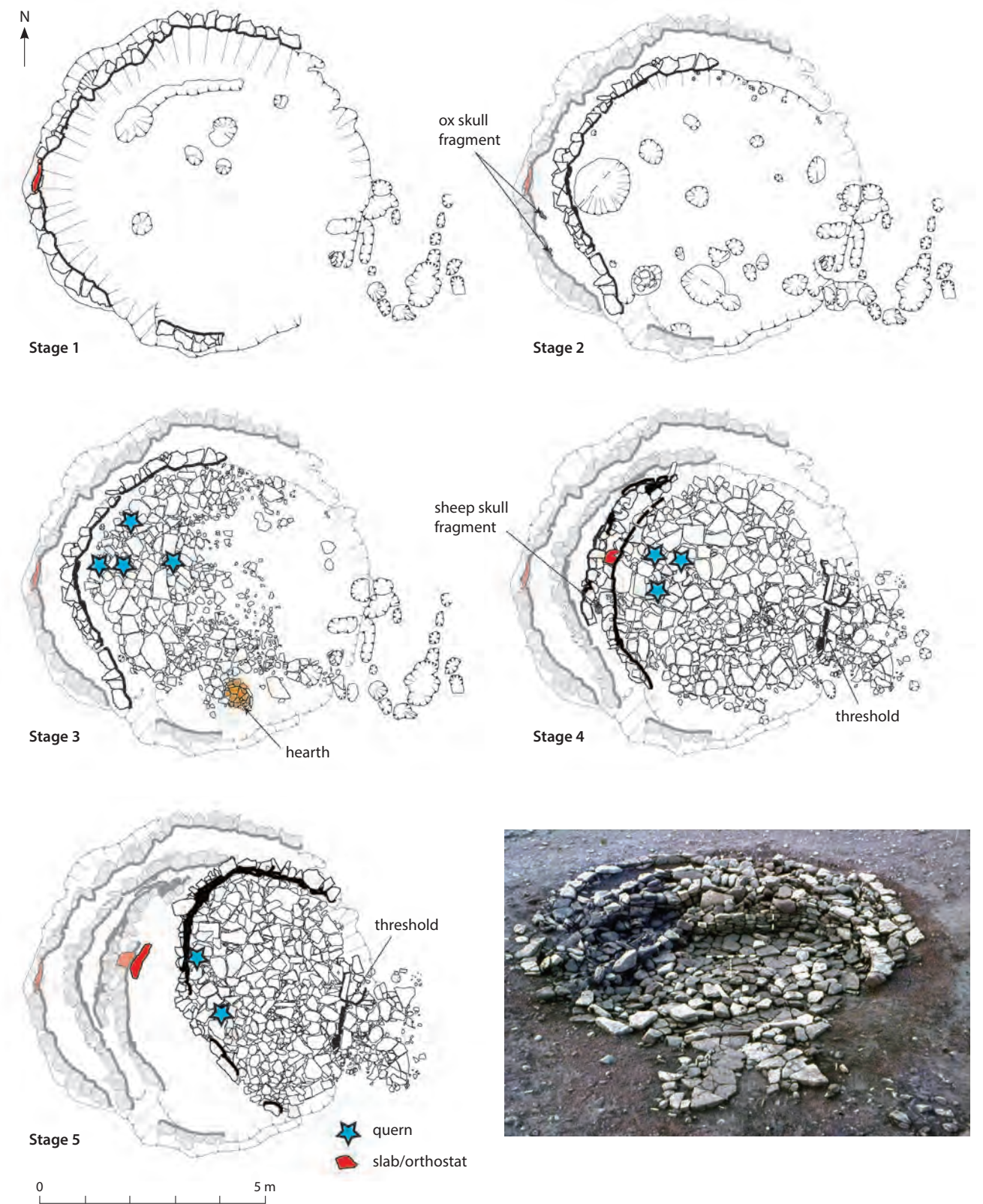
**Figure 4.2.** House 2, showing the (Phase 1) burial adjacent to the northern entrance post hole (represented by the crouched individual).

retention of fabric from previous structures, so that each new roundhouse was effectively cradled within the remains of its predecessor.

The high level of survival and the excellent stratigraphic information within the scooped houses provided the opportunity to look more closely at the biographies of the various structures and the ways in which these may have been intertwined with the biographies of the households which inhabited them. The AMS dating programme, which yielded roughly 45 dates for the Phase 6 roundhouses (in addition to five pre-existing conventional radiocarbon dates), allowed for a rough estimate of the rate of remodelling of the stone-walled structures. Based on the best-preserved stone-walled roundhouse (House 4, see below; Fig. 4.3), wholesale remodelling appears to have taken place roughly every 40–60 years (Büster 2012), that is, on a generational or bi-generational basis. It is likely, however, as ethnographic studies suggest (e.g. Boivin 2004, 172), that other types of modification such as replastering, re-roofing, or the rearrangement of (possibly non-earthfast) internal partitioning and other furniture (perhaps accompanying important events in the life of the household or the community at large), altered the appearance and experience of the roundhouse on a more frequent basis.

### Structured deposition

Most of the artefacts recovered from the Phase 6 roundhouses appear to represent deliberately placed items rather than the *in situ* remains of daily activities (Armit 2006, 241, 244; Webley 2007). This suggestion is supported by evidence, in the form of dished floor profiles and the erosion of floor surfaces well below the basal course of their associated walls, for the frequent sweeping out of roundhouse interiors, which would presumably have removed everyday refuse. Most of the evidence for structured deposition survived in the walls and paving of the stone-walled roundhouses, though it also occurred in the negative features (pits, wall-slots and post holes) of both the stone- and timber-walled structures. Much of this is represented by foundation or abandonment deposits associated with the construction or infilling of specific features and, in the stone-walled structures especially, the construction or abandonment of the successive roundhouses themselves (see below). In certain cases, deposits placed between successive walls, or within paving sealing earlier pits and post holes, may have been associated with both the closure of one roundhouse and the foundation of its successor; in these liminal circumstances it is perhaps better to understand them as structured *transitional* deposits.



**Figure 4.3.** House 4, through its five major structural stages. The photograph shows the final incarnation of the roundhouse, with the structural fabric from previous stages visible in the background.



In some instances, there was a striking repetition in the type and location of deposits. In the stone-walled roundhouses, querns were frequently incorporated into wall fabric and paved surfaces. The inclusion of worked stone artefacts in these contexts may, in part, simply represent their convenient use as building material, though the apparent votive significance of querns in particular is noted throughout Iron Age Britain (e.g. Heslop 2008). Other types of deposit appear directly to reference each other, either through strikingly similar contexts of deposition, or comprising closely similar artefacts or groups of artefacts, separated by significant periods of time; the latter in particular almost certainly indicates the deliberate curation of items prior to deposition (see below).

#### House 4: a brief biography

The best preserved of the stone-walled roundhouses at Broxmouth is House 4: this structure also displays the most complex surviving structural history, which involved the substantial remodelling of the roundhouse on at least four separate occasions after its initial construction (Fig. 4.3). These successive rebuilds are referred to here as 'stages 1–5': all date to Phase 6.

The house-stance, as for most of the stone-walled roundhouses at Broxmouth, was scooped, creating a structure with a semi-subterranean internal space. Fabric from each stage was retained as occupation progressed, creating a 'nested' structure, in which each subsequent remodelling was physically cradled within the shell of its predecessor. Indeed, the retention of successive walls progressively decreased the internal area of House 4 to less than 40 per cent of its original footprint in its final incarnation (stage 5), which must have had a significant impact on the use of space, and perhaps the function of the roundhouse. This phenomenon, seen also in stone-walled House 7, is quite different from the treatment of the timber roundhouses where walls were realigned and maintained in piecemeal fashion, with defunct or decaying sections being periodically replaced by newer ones. Indeed, it may have been the very materiality of stone, its durability, and thus its possible association with the ageing process and with the ancestors (Bloch 1995, 215), which led to its retention as a visible and tangible link with past inhabitants of the roundhouse. There may indeed have been a symbolic distinction between the stone-walled and timber-walled structures, the latter of which 'shed their old skins' upon remodelling or 'rebirth' (Parker Pearson & Ramilisonina 1998, 316; Parker Pearson 2004, 73, 75).

The deposition of a bone spoon under the stage 1 wall of House 4, apparently as a foundation deposit, is mirrored by a similar object under the stage 5 wall (Fig. 4.4, a & b). If the deposition of the first spoon (marking the initial construction of the roundhouse) was known by the stage 5 inhabitants, perhaps having been handed down via oral tradition as part of the life-story of House 4, the spoon deposited in stage 5 (the final period of occupation) may represent a deliberate attempt to reference this; in effect, bringing the life-history of the roundhouse full-circle. This pattern of repeated actions is mirrored by the deposition of ox and sheep skull fragments, in almost identical locations, respectively, against the base of the stage 1 wall during construction of the stage 2 roundhouse (Fig. 4.3, stage 2), and between the inner and outer faces of the stage 4 wall (Fig. 4.3, stage 4).

A further example of apparent structured deposition involves the use of building material rather than portable objects. Firstly, orthostats were incorporated into the stage 1 and stage 4 walls, in roughly the same relative location, opposite the roundhouse entrance (Fig. 4.3, stages 1 and 4; Fig. 4.5). Then, during construction of the stage 5 roundhouse, a non-earth-fast slab was positioned directly in front of the stage 4 orthostat, leaning against it, prior to infilling of the intramural space between the stage 4 and 5 walls (Fig. 4.3, stage 5; Fig. 4.5b); this later slab mirrors almost exactly, in terms of size and shape, the much earlier orthostat incorporated into the stage 1 wall (Fig. 4.5a). These three stones are strikingly different from the rest of the Phase 6 roundhouse fabric, and the thin, square dimensions of the stage 5 slab and stage 1 orthostat (Fig. 4.5) are particularly unusual; their inclusion in the fabric of House 4, directly opposite the entrance (Fig. 4.3), is thus probably deliberate. Once set in position, the slab would have been quickly covered by earth and rubble as the stage 5 wall was constructed, so it was never intended to remain visible during stage 5 occupation; this was clearly intentional, since the slab could just as easily have been incorporated into the stage 5 wall, as in stage 1. House 4 decreases dramatically in size in its final stage (5), and it is therefore possible that the slab was deliberately chosen in order to 'bracket' all House 4 occupation prior to stage 5, and to confine these earlier structures to a combined and amalgamated past; one from which the structure could be reborn (perhaps, given its small size in stage 5, with a different function).

Other deposits in House 4 appear to make direct reference to earlier activity in a more overt and tangible way. Two antler gaming pieces deposited at the base of the stage 3 wall (retained from stage 2)

during the foundation of the stage 4 roundhouse, for example, match another deposited in the infill of a pit during the closure of the stage 2 structure (Fig. 4.4, c–e). The distinctive appearance of these items, not found elsewhere on site, suggests that they belong to the same set. As such, it is likely that the pieces deposited during the foundation of stage 4 had been curated for some considerable time. Likewise, two sherds from the same pottery vessel were deposited during construction of the stage 2 wall and in the infill of a pit at the end of stage 2 occupation; the latter may similarly have been deliberately curated prior to its final deposition, perhaps in direct reference to the former.

Finally, two fragments of human bone (cranial and mandible fragments, from separate individuals) were deposited at the base of the stage 2 wall before it was sealed during construction of the stage 4 roundhouse. The condition of these human remains relative to the faunal bone which accompanied them suggests that they had been curated prior to deposition. The cranial fragment bore evidence for peri-mortem sharp

force trauma, most likely a sword-cut, whilst the isotopic signature of both fragments (as was generally the case for the whole assemblage of 22 human bone fragments recovered from across the site) was distinct from that of the Phase 5 cemetery population, suggesting that these individuals may have been non-local to Broxmouth (Armit *et al.* 2013, 84, 92–3). It would thus be tempting to see these fragments as having derived from trophies displayed in or around the roundhouse (Armit *et al.* 2013, 87, 94); perhaps the ultimate incorporation of these two particular fragments into the fabric of the stage 4 structure signalled the renegotiation of relationships between the Broxmouth community and its neighbours.

Querns also served to link the various stages of House 4; these (predominantly rotary examples) were incorporated into the paved floors which were laid down from stage 3 onwards. Shortly after the abandonment of the stage 2 roundhouse (since there is no evidence for a hiatus in occupation), the paved floor of the stage 3 structure was laid. This included four querns, all located towards the rear of the roundhouse



**Figure 4.4.** Paired artefactual deposits. Left: the bone spoons deposited at the base of the stage 1 (a) and stage 5 (b) walls; right: the gaming pieces deposited in the infill of the stage 2 pit (c) and at the base of the stage 2 wall, during the foundation of stage 4 (d & e).



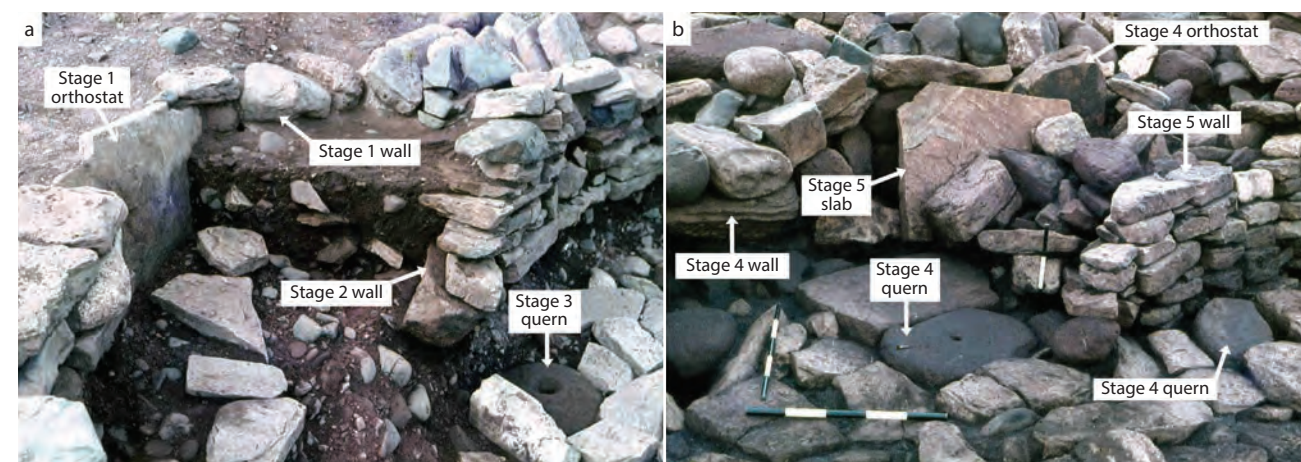
interior (Fig. 4.3). Two of these sealed the largest of the stage 2 pits (this phenomenon is also witnessed in House 7), whilst the stage 3 hearth sealed another. It is possible that the location of the querns (and hearth) was intended to reference these former features, creating a tangible link between the two stages of occupation, and perhaps between two generations of inhabitants. Such a link may have been strengthened, or periodically renewed, by the pouring of libations or other offerings through the quern feeder-pipes into the features below (Campbell 1991, 133); a particular affordance of rotary querns. The similar relative location of two querns in the succeeding stage 4 paving may also represent an attempt to reference the stage 3 querns, and the stage 2 pits below, or at least provide some physical continuity of function in this part of the roundhouse. The apparent continued visibility of one of the stage 3 querns in the stage 4 paving, and similarly, one of the stage 4 querns in the stage 5 paving, would have strengthened this link with earlier structures.

Upon abandonment, House 4 became infilled with a mixture of rubble and midden, at least some of which derived from the partial structural collapse of the roundhouse walls. AMS dates of 350–50 cal. BC (2135±30 BP; SUERC-33364) and 400–210 cal. BC (2270±30 BP; SUERC-33368) indicate that some elements of this infill material could have pre-dated construction of the roundhouse by up to three centuries. It is possible that material, including animal bone, was deliberately deposited as part of the structured ‘closure’ of House 4. Alternatively, this material may derive from the turf/earth cores of the stone-faced walls that surrounded House 4 in its various incarnations. In either case, this material probably pre-dates the

construction of even the first (stage 1) roundhouse to occupy this stance by a significant period; since the construction of House 4 is undated, it is impossible to be sure exactly when its initial construction began, but the balance of probability is that it was constructed in the early first century BC along with the rest of the Phase 6 settlement. If the use of this material was deliberate, it may have been intended once again to create tangible links with a genealogical or mythical past. If deliberately deposited during the infilling of the house-stance, it may have signalled the final incorporation of the abandoned house into the realm of the community’s ancestors.

### Discussion

The evidence from the Late Iron Age settlement at Broxmouth suggests that a biographical and materiality-based approach to the study of roundhouses can offer insights into the lives of later prehistoric households. The materials used in roundhouse construction were chosen for more than simply practical reasons, governing, perhaps, the ways in which individual roundhouses subsequently developed. At Broxmouth, in the stone-walled roundhouses at least, reference to former inhabitants appears to have been important in everyday life. The generational (or near-generational) reconstruction of roundhouses that appear to have been structurally viable, and in no particular need of such drastic remodelling, suggests the periodic renegotiation of household identities, perhaps upon the death of the head of the household, or some other major event in the life of the community. The same generational tempo for change is true of the Broxmouth settlement sequence more generally, with



**Figure 4.5.** The orthostat incorporated into the stage 1 wall (a), and the slab, of similar proportions, leant against the stage 4 orthostat during construction of the stage 5 roundhouse (b).

AMS dates suggesting generational modification of the entrance gateways and the enclosing ditches of earlier occupational phases (Armit & McKenzie 2013).

Just as the Phase 6 settlement was cradled within the denuded earthworks of the earlier hillfort, which must have represented a visible reminder of past inhabitants, the retention of defunct structural fabric with each reincarnation of the stone-walled roundhouses suggests a desire to contextualize new household identities within the broader life-history of the house: as such, it was the house that became the link between generations (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1982). At Whetu-kairangi (the Maori *pā* described in the opening quote), the *name* of the enclosure and its houses provided a means by which continuity was established between past, present and future inhabitants; these names perhaps serving as mnemonic aids for stories regarding the origins of the settlement and its ancestral inhabitants. The same appears to have been true at Broxmouth, not just for the Phase 6 roundhouses, but for the settlement sequence more generally.

Within the roundhouse interior, the same tangible links were reflected in the curation and deposition of artefacts, or sets of artefacts, within and between structures. Many of the deposits within the Phase 6 roundhouses may best be understood as *transitional*, deposited when the structure and household were in a liminal state; times when social relations within the community would have been reordered and renegotiated in relation to what had gone before.

Whilst some of the artefacts would have become invisible shortly after deposition, the referencing of former internal features by, for example, querns and hearths, is likely to have had considerable influence over the way the subsequent structure was organized and experienced. As such, the stone-walled roundhouses represent a microcosm of the Phase 6 settlement itself, cradled as it was within the ruinous Phase 3 enclosure works and organized along an arterial route-way which continued to use the long-established southwest entrance into the settlement. In this way, the roundhouses, and the Phase 6 settlement more generally, served as mnemonic devices through which the biography of Broxmouth and its inhabitants was played-out, remembered and renegotiated in daily life.

The curation of items or the transmission of memories relating to specific (depositional) events across several generations, spanning several hundred years, may stretch our modern notions of what is realistic in a world without documents. Ethnographic studies indicate, however, that oral tradition in non-literate societies is far more integral to the social cohesion of a community than in those where written documents

have become repositories of tradition and communal history. As such, oral tradition is capable of transmitting genealogical histories and origin myths over considerable periods. Indeed, amongst communities in the Tari Basin of Papua New Guinea, genealogical histories could extend over some 500 years (Ballard 1994); the same scale order as has been claimed for the Maori traditions quoted at the start of this chapter.

The creation of these memories is enabled not just by the manipulation and deposition of objects, but by the performative nature of these acts. As Wells (2012) has pointed out in the context of, for example, funerary performances, the physical movement of people and objects acts to turn experience into memory. As with Bradley’s (2005) conception of ritualization, the formality of such performances (perhaps accompanied by orations, invocations to the supernatural, extravagant gestures, etc), with material objects frequently at their centre, makes certain moments in the life of communities special and memorable. At Broxmouth, we might envisage the placing of the two bone spoons into the wall foundations of House 4, probably several generations apart, as being accompanied by exactly these sorts of elaborate performances, fixing them in the communal memory of the household. Since many of the deposits were subsequently buried, or obscured by later structural material, their presence and location would not have been obvious to those unfamiliar with the life-history of the roundhouse. Witnessing or having knowledge of their burial, their ‘making hidden’, may indeed have played a central role in the perception, understanding and legitimization of an individual’s inclusion within the household.

Over very long periods of time (perhaps beyond around 400–500 years), broadly factual accounts are inevitably replaced by ‘mythical histories’, where real, named ancestors give way to supernatural beings (Gosden & Lock 1998, 5–6). For the Phase 6 inhabitants of Broxmouth, their Phase 1 ancestors had most probably slipped into this mythical realm, and the inclusion in the Phase 6 roundhouses of limpet-scarred stones (from the nearby coast), which bear a superficial resemblance to Neolithic and Bronze Age cup-and-ring marked stones, may represent a desire to reference an even deeper mythical past. The young man buried at Broxmouth in the early medieval period (cal. AD 400–540; 1606±27 BP; combined determinations GU-1142 and SUERC-21989) attests to the likelihood that the memory (mythical or otherwise) of Broxmouth lived on, far beyond the physical abandonment of the site, and that it continued to play a sufficiently significant role in his, and his community’s, social identity to warrant its choice as his final resting place.

## Conclusion

Not all later prehistoric sites display the same longevity of occupation as Broxmouth, or indeed the level of preservation observed in its Late Iron Age roundhouses. The evidence from this remarkable site does, however, allow us to glimpse the ways in which prehistoric communities, here and elsewhere, could draw upon the world around them (their landscapes, their settlements, and their houses) to rationalize and renegotiate their place and role within it. Like the Maori *pā*, Iron Age places like Broxmouth would have had their own names, histories, characters, and personalities, and at least some of the buildings within them probably did too. Though Broxmouth occupied a low rise in the landscape, this was not a prominent natural feature: settlement could easily have drifted off elsewhere over the centuries, if some strong force had not acted to hold it there. The sheer persistence of occupation in this one location demonstrates that it retained meaning for the local community throughout its various incarnations, and suggests that the materiality of the settlement itself, and the stories it told, were central to the identity of the successive generations who called it home.

## Acknowledgements

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## Note

1. All italicized radiocarbon dates and date ranges quoted in this chapter are based on Bayesian modelling, full details of which can be found in Hamilton *et al.* 2013.