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The querns from Phantassie and Eweford Cottages

The Phantassie querns are an interesting assemblage. All are bun-shaped rotary querns, consistent with the later Iron Age date of the settlement.

Table 7.1 Characteristics of the Phantassie querns. An asterisk indicates an incomplete quern

<i>SF no</i>	<i>Diameter</i>	<i>Height</i>	<i>Handles</i>	<i>Decoration</i>	<i>Notes</i>	<i>(mm)</i>	<i>(mm)</i>
72	354	88	2 horizontal	Socket			
231*	?	126		Unfinished quern			
398*	400	57	1 slot	- Unusual slot			
495*	c. 364	70	2 horizontal	-	1 vertical	-	
508	343	107	1 Collar	horizontal	1 vertical		
563*	392	85	1 horizontal	Quarters; one radial, Socket worn through			one cup-marked

Interestingly, one of the querns was unfinished. All the others had seen heavy use, with polishing on the grinding surfaces and handle slots worn through. In three cases, the handle socket had been replaced; with two of these querns, whoever was using them eventually switched to vertical handles. This is similar to the picture from several other sites (for example, St Germain's, Traprain Law, and the Dod; Alexander and Watkins 1998, 222, illus 12; unpub.; Cool 2000, 305–7). It seems that querns were usually heavily used before they were discarded for grinding corn. At Phantassie, most of the querns were re-used in walls and paved surfaces (see Figure 7.18).

A surprising number of the finished Phantassie querns (three out of five) are decorated. One has a pecked band around the feeder pipe to create a low collar, another has radial lines, raised areas and circular hollows, while the third has circular hollows around the handle socket. Querns are rarely decorated – we know of only about 30 other Scottish examples, from a dataset of several hundred – and the proportion at Phantassie is remarkable. Parallels for the decoration are discussed in the full report (McLaren and Hunter, Chapter 12). However, it is notable that there are two other local examples of bun-shaped querns with cup-marked decoration, from Traprain Law and Broxmouth (both unpublished, and held in the National Museums of Scotland), a style which is otherwise rare. Although the decoration is not exactly the same, this seems to be a related decorative style, suggesting a regional type.

The excavations at Eweford Cottages also produced rotary querns, with three intact but heavily used stones (an upper and two lower quern stones) re-used in paving. The incorporation of large stone tools, especially quern stones, in structural elements is a common feature on Iron Age sites; there are plentiful East Lothian parallels, for instance from Traprain Law, St Germain's and Dryburn Bridge (for example, Cree 1924, 247; Alexander and Watkins 1998, 222, illus 12, 18:12; Dunwell forthcoming). Hingley (1992, 32) has discussed the likely symbolic significance of the re-use of quern stones, suggesting their placement within structural features or settlement boundaries had a symbolic as much as a functional role. The positioning of re-used querns at Eweford Cottages and Phantassie had clear functional aspects, but this does not rule out symbolic aspects as well.

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