

6. NEWTON PLANTATION

6.1 Introduction

An area of 0.2 ha was excavated at Newton Plantation, which lies on the lower slopes of the Clyde Valley on the eastern bank of the river (Illus 6.1). The excavated area lay at a height of *c* 275m AOD on the edge of a gently sloping parcel of land between two hills (Bodsberry Hill and Wellshot Hill). The village of Elvanfoot is located around 600m south-west of the excavated area on the western bank of the River Clyde, and Newton Burn, a small tributary of the Clyde, runs some 150m to the south-east of the site. The topography of the Clyde Valley in the immediate vicinity of the excavated area bears similarities to the location of Woodend (see Chapter 3) although the slopes of the hills are steeper and the valley in general narrower at this point, being further upstream. The uncultivable nature of the steeper slopes is likely to be the reason they are now covered in extensive forestry plantations which may be concealing archaeological evidence below.

The excavation took place during the winter of 2009–2010 (Illus 6.2) and revealed the scant remains of a Late Iron Age structure, with some associated pits providing evidence of non-ferrous metalworking.

6.1.1 Radiocarbon Dates and Dating

The only artefact recovered from the site came from the fill of a pit and comprised fragments of a ceramic casting mould of a type found from the Iron Age to the early medieval period. One radiocarbon date was obtained from charcoal recovered from the fill of the same pit (Table 6.1). Both the charcoal and the mould are interpreted as the waste material from metalworking activities which were deliberately deposited in the pit.

6.1.2 Background

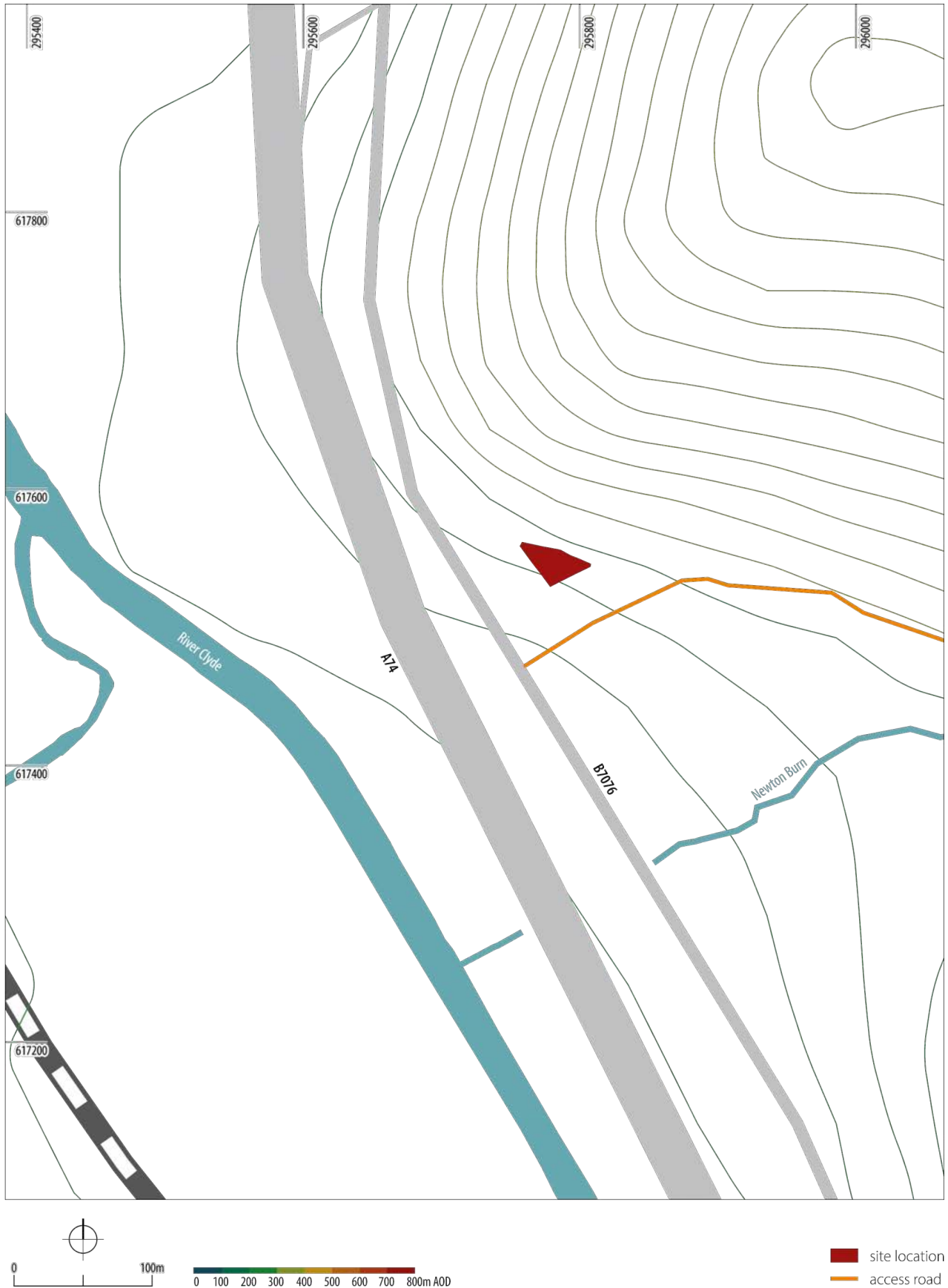
Archaeological sites have been identified throughout this part of the Clyde Valley (Illus 6.3), with settlement during the Bronze Age and Iron Age periods being of particular note. Unenclosed platform settlements are recorded on the lower slopes of the hills on either side of the Clyde and include Cakelaw Burn (Canmore ID [79458](#)), Lodge Hill (Canmore ID [79457](#)), Ellershie Hill (Canmore ID [47293](#)), Elvanfoot (Canmore ID [47323](#)), and Bodsberry Hill (Canmore ID [47296](#)). Excavation revealed that one of the platforms on the southern flank of Bodsberry Hill was dated to the Middle Bronze Age with reuse of the platform in the Early Iron Age (Terry 1993b). Three burnt mounds (Canmore IDs [79405](#), [79427](#), and [72526](#)) are recorded on the western side of the valley, a possible burial cairn is recorded on the northern slopes of Wellshot Hill (Canmore ID [79440](#)), and a large earthwork (Canmore ID [47311](#)) undated and unexcavated is tentatively suggested to be a Bronze Age ritual site (Ward 1992: 162).

The narrow nature of the Clyde Valley at this point may account for the number of sites with defensive characteristics. A hillfort (Canmore ID [47288](#)) on the summit of Bodsberry Hill overlooking the site has not been scientifically dated but is likely to be Iron Age. The Roman temporary camp of Little Clyde (Canmore ID [47314](#)) is located 3.5km to the south-east and survives as an upstanding earthwork, one of the finest of its type in the country. On the western side of the river the remains of a medieval bastle (fortified farmhouse) (Canmore ID [47320](#)) have been recorded.

There is evidence of possible prehistoric and historic agricultural practices with lynchets within cairnfields noted at Lodge Hill (Canmore ID [47306](#)), five clearance cairns on natural terraces on the north side of Wellshot Hill (Canmore ID [79443](#)), and 25 small cairns on the northwest side of Bodsberry Hill (Canmore ID [47302](#)). Earthworks

Table 6.1 Radiocarbon determinations from Newton Plantation

Lab Code	Context No	Material	Radiocarbon Age BP	Radiocarbon Date (95% probability)
SUERC-58833	07-0009	Charcoal: <i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	1927±29	cal AD 5–135



Illus 6.1 Location of site at Newton Plantation. (© Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd)



Illus 6.2 View north-west of site under investigation. (© Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd)

interpreted as possibly late medieval cultivation remains (Canmore ID [47318](#)) 0.9km to the south-west of the site. Other undated sites within the valley include enclosures (Canmore IDs [74681](#), [79461](#), [47303](#), [74677](#) and [47307](#)) and a possible standing stone (Canmore ID [340298](#)).

6.2 Archaeological Results

The excavation comprised an area forming a triangle measuring 37m by 33m down two of its sides (Illus 6.4). The total area of excavation was 2,000m².

6.2.1 Structure

An arc of features (C07-0014, C07-0015, C07-0018, C07-0038, and C07-0030) was identified at the north-western corner of the excavation (indicated by the red flags in Illus 6.5). They are interpreted as heavily truncated post-holes as they were all circular in plan with similar diameters of between 0.3m and 0.4m. All were filled with dark brown silty clay and although their profiles are not necessarily typical of a post-hole (Illus 6.6) they do represent the surviving basal elements of these. One, C07-0038, was slightly smaller and had a more gravelly fill, but its position on the arc indicates that it is associated with the others. The post-holes appear to form one side of a circular post-ring whose diameter, assuming a circular arrangement, would be around 17m.

A single pit, C07-0036 (Illus 6.7), lay within the arc of the post-holes. The pit extended beyond the limits of excavation to the north but can be assumed

to have been sub-circular or oval in plan, measuring over 1.2m in diameter with steep sides. It was filled with mid-brown clayey silt with a large number of medium to large sub-angular stones.

6.2.2 Associated Pits

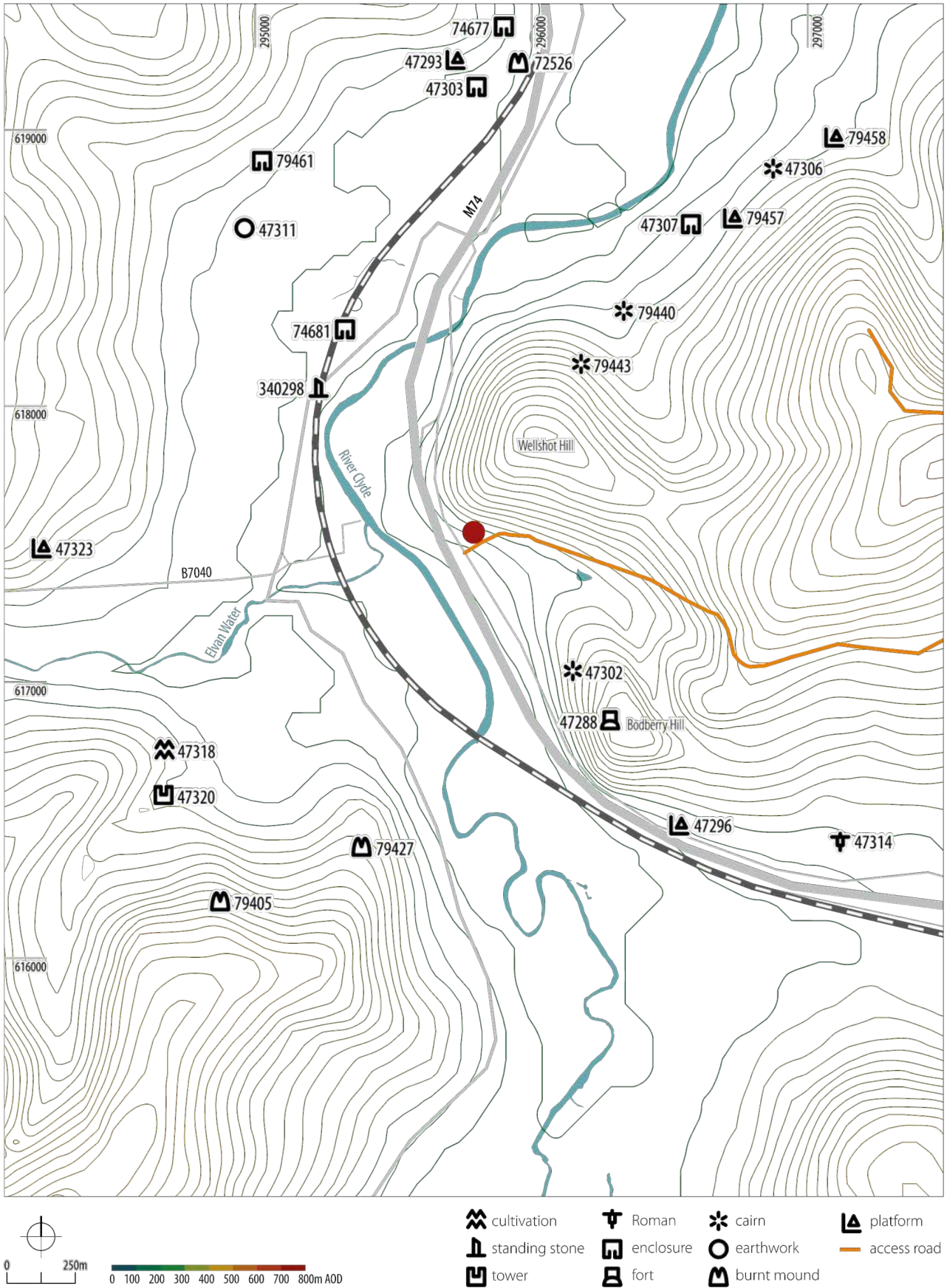
A number of pits thought to be associated with the arc of post-holes were found adjacent to it and a short distance to the south-east. Pits C07-0008, C07-0010, and C07-0012 lay around 5m to the west and pit C07-0040 to the south. Pits C07-0008 (Illus 6.8) and C07-0010 were filled with charcoal-rich material, and fragments of a ceramic casting mould were recovered from the fill of the latter. A fragment of alder charcoal from pit C07-0010 provided a radiocarbon date of cal AD 135 (95% probability; SUERC-58833). The pits are interpreted as containing the metalworking waste material from hearths or kilns. The remainder of the pits contained limited environmental material.

To the south-east of the structure, pits C07-0045 and C07-0051 lay 0.65m apart, and pits C07-0002, C07-0004, C07-0006, and C07-0065 were located in a cluster 12m away. The pits were filled with light grey or brown sandy or silty clays. Again, they were heavily truncated, with pit C07-0045 the deepest at 0.3m (Illus 6.9).

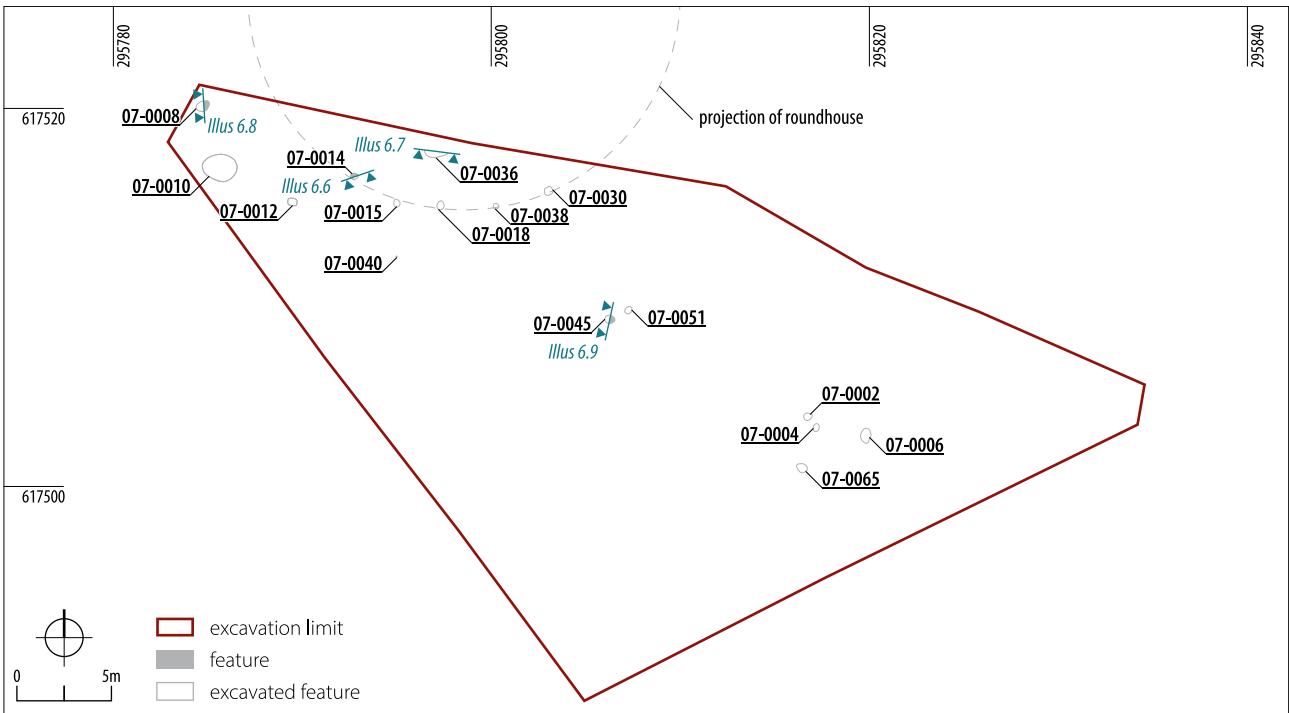
6.3 Finds Synthesis

Julie Franklin

The only finds recovered from Newton Plantation took the form of 14 small fragments of a ceramic casting mould found in pit C07-0010. The pieces were associated with an Iron Age date of cal AD 5–135 (SUERC-58833). It provided the only evidence for non-ferrous metalworking encountered at any of the sites on the project. The fragmentary condition of the mould meant that the object being cast could not be identified. In addition, no metallic residues survived so the alloy-type being used could not be determined either. However, the mould's form is consistent with the type of two-part mould used throughout the Iron Age and early medieval periods. A few broadly contemporary sites in the region such as Hyndford Crannog, South Lanarkshire (Munro 1899: 381, fig 9), Crawford, South Lanarkshire (Maxwell 1972: 177; Dungworth 1996), Lochend



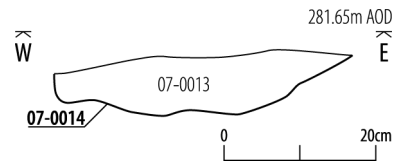
Illus 6.3 Plan of known heritage assets around Newton Plantation. (© Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd)



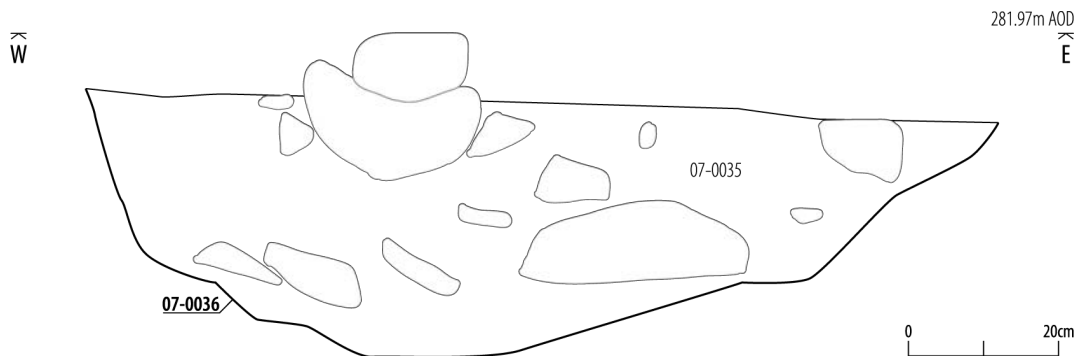
Illus 6.4 Plan of features at Newton Plantation. (© Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd)



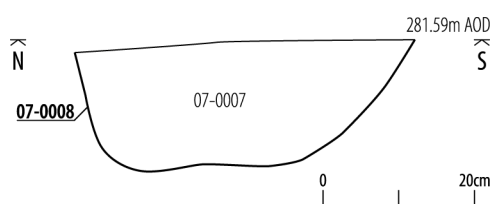
Illus 6.5 View west of arc of post-holes. (© Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd)



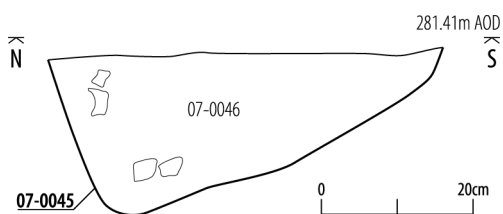
Illus 6.6 South facing section of post-hole C07-0014. (© Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd)



Illus 6.7 South facing section of pit C07-0036. (© Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd)



Illus 6.8 West facing section of pit C07-0008.
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Illus 6.9 West facing section of pit C07-0045.
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Crannog, North Lanarkshire (Monteith & Robb 1937), and Craigmarloch, Renfrewshire (Nisbet 1996; Heald 2005: 114), have shown evidence for non-ferrous metalworking, and it is considerably rarer than evidence for ironworking. As such, the discovery of the mould is of some significance in its own right.

6.4 Environmental Synthesis

Laura Bailey

Charcoal from two pits at Newton Plantation was analysed. Charcoal recovered from one of the pits was related to non-ferrous metalworking activities. It is generally assumed that wood for specialised activities, such as metalworking, was purposefully gathered, perhaps based on suitability rather than availability. For example, woods such as oak are likely to have been deliberately selected for ironworking whereas domestic fires do not necessarily require particular trees for fuel (O'Donnell 2016: 162).

Hazel, alder, willow, and birch were all represented in the charcoal assemblage from

Newton Plantation and all would undoubtedly have been locally available. However, the variety of species used does not indicate particular species selection for metalworking activity, which provides an interesting contrast with the results seen from a similar, contemporary Iron Age metalworking deposit at Woodend (Chapter 3).

Woodend is located approximately 10.5km to the north of Newton Plantation at a similar altitude and also overlooks the Clyde. Like the assemblage from Newton Plantation, alder, hazel, birch, and willow were all represented at Woodend, though oak (a wood frequently used as a fuel for metalworking), heather, and maloideae were not. The presence of oak charcoal in conjunction with evidence for ferrous metalworking at Woodend and non-oak charcoal in conjunction with non-ferrous metalworking evidence at Newton Plantation could be an indication that different woods were being selected for use in different industries. This could be related to the different qualities of these woods when burnt. The absence of evidence from other palaeoenvironmental proxies such as pollen, however, means it is difficult to establish whether the species profile is the result of differential selection, or rather the absence of certain species in the landscape. Different wood types and different sized material burn in diverse ways. Large logs or off-cuts of trunk wood, in particular oak heartwood, which is denser than sapwood, provides a longer-lasting heat than narrow roundwood (Pelling 2012). Conversely, the narrow roundwood produces an intense short-lived heat due to the higher ratio of atmospheric oxygen to wood surface (ibid). Therefore, bundles of roundwood or brushwood would provide rapid high heat to establish a fire, which may have been more suitable for the required purpose at Newtown Plantation.

6.5 Discussion

The function of the arc of post-holes is difficult to interpret due to the truncated nature of the remains and the fact that the majority of the post-ring extends outwith the excavation area. The arc is very unlikely to represent the post-ring of a very large roundhouse and there is no evidence of a tradition of massive Iron Age roundhouses in the Clyde area. There is no stratigraphic evidence that the arc of post-holes and the metalworking waste in pit C07-0010 are

contemporary. It can only be tentatively suggested based on the extremely limited evidence that the ring of posts was the remains of a fence demarcating an area within which the production of non-ferrous metal items took place.

Very few sites in south-west Scotland provide comparable evidence of non-ferrous metalworking. Ceramic fragments of moulds and crucibles found at Hyndford Crannog (Munro 1899), Lochend Crannog (Monteith & Robb 1937), and Craigmarloch Fort (Nisbet 1996) date from the Early to Late Iron Age. The nature of the sites (crannogs and a hillfort) suggests that such metalworking took place in areas noted for their defensive capabilities or at higher status locations. This would be indicative of power structures where metalworking knowledge and skill were confined to places where the activities and the artefacts that resulted could be controlled.

The date of the material recovered from the pit overlaps with the date of Roman activity in the area. The site itself is located less than 200m from the route of the Bodsberry Hill to Little Clyde section of the Roman road; the same Roman road along which many other Iron Age forts and settlements (including the Woodend Enclosure) are positioned. It is not known whether Newton Plantation would have been occupied at exactly the same time as the Romans occupied Little Clyde temporary camp, but evidence of interaction with the Romans by the inhabitants was not forthcoming at Newton Plantation. Where evidence of interaction with the Romans is found it takes the form of Roman artefacts recovered from Iron Age sites. It has been observed that Roman finds have been recovered on 40% of a sample of southern Scottish Iron Age sites (Hunter 2007a: 12) with a marked tendency towards more exotic Roman material (ibid: 16).

Three sites in southern Scotland within 40km of Newton Plantation show contrasting evidence of Roman–local interactions. A variety of Roman

artefacts, including a penannular brooch, glass fragments, and pottery, were recovered during excavation of an Iron Age enclosed farmstead at Boonies (Canmore ID [67818](#)), 40km south-west of Newton Plantation (Jobey 1975), even though it was not close to any Roman installations. Two fragments of Roman glass bangle from the 1st century AD were found on an Iron Age enclosure site at Upperleugh (Canmore ID [66774](#)), 30km south-west of site (Terry 1993a: 82), which was located 400m from a Roman road. It suggests that Late Iron Age people would have attached a value to this material (which was very different to their own wares) and fitted it into their existing Iron Age lifestyles and social systems (Hunter 2007a: 51). The goods would have been acquired by social elites of the Iron Age societies and distributed amongst the communities reinforcing bonds and hierarchies (ibid: 19).

Finally, the excavation of an enclosed Iron Age farmstead at Woodend Farm (Canmore ID [66918](#)), 23km south of site, found no evidence of Roman artefacts and therefore no interaction with the Romans despite its location 500m from a Roman road and not far from a Roman military structure (Banks 2000: 277). Two theories were proposed for the lack of evidence: one is that this might have been due to plough truncation; the other is that although the banks and ditches of the enclosure indicate a certain social status for the inhabitants of the farmstead, that status had eroded by the time the Romans passed through and they saw no reason to interact with those Iron Age farmers (ibid).

Clear conclusions about the nature of any interaction between the Romans and the Iron Age inhabitants of the Newton Plantation site cannot be made without more data than the very limited evidence from the excavation provides. Evidence from other sites suggests that such interactions were on the Romans' terms.