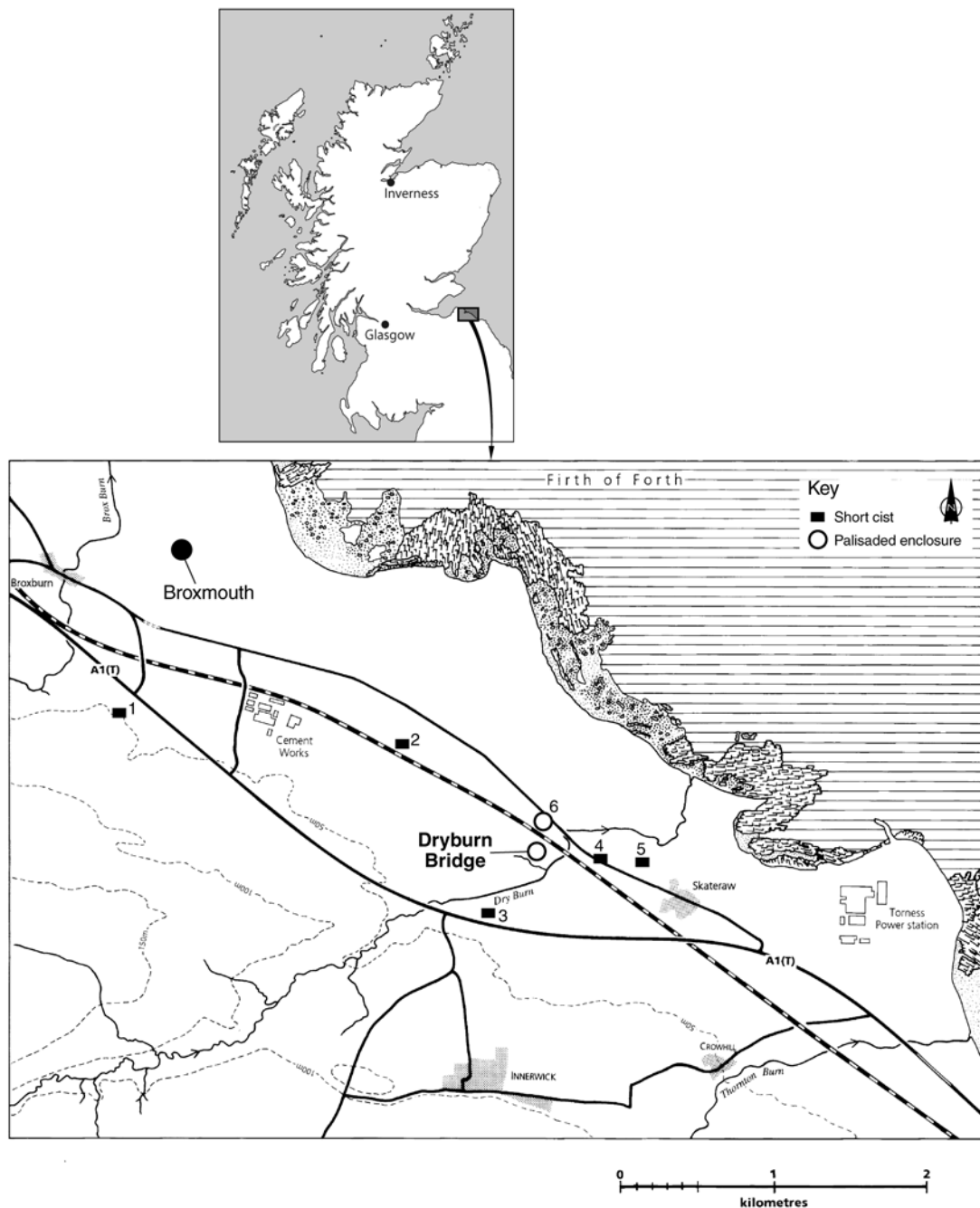


2 Introduction

2.1 Discovery and excavation

This report provides an account of the excavations of a cropmark enclosure and other prehistoric remains at Dryburn Bridge, near Innerwick in East Lothian (NT 724 755; [illus 1](#)). The excavations were directed

over two seasons in 1978 and 1979 by Jon Triscott and David Pollock, and were funded by the Ancient Monuments Branch, Scottish Development Department (now Historic Scotland). A summary statement of results was published in the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* ([Pollock & Triscott 1980](#)), and an



Illus 1 Location maps; showing distribution of other archaeological sites in the vicinity mentioned in the text: 1, West Pinkerton cist; 2, East Barns cist; 3, Skateraw 1 cist; 4, Skateraw 3 cist; 5, Skateraw 2 cist; 6, Dryburn; smaller palisaded enclosure

interim report was published in an edited volume on the later prehistoric settlement of south-east Scotland (Triscott 1982). Historic Scotland subsequently commissioned the Centre for Field Archaeology, University of Edinburgh and latterly CFA Archaeology Ltd (CFA), to undertake the production of this final excavation report. The directors of the excavations were made aware of these arrangements by Historic Scotland.

The site at Dryburn Bridge is situated *c* 5.5km south-east of Dunbar and *c* 1km from the North Sea coast, immediately to the south of the East Coast railway line (illus 1). It lies on a low ridge of banded glacial outwash sands and gravels on the north side of the Dry Burn. Its locality contains a dense distribution of recorded prehistoric sites, and evidently formed an attractive area for early settlement.

The site was discovered in 1974 as cropmarks on aerial photographs taken by Fairey Survey Ltd (Ref: 20/986-91) during an aerial survey of the Dunbar coastal strip. Those photographs reveal an elongated oval enclosure defined by a palisade trench and measuring *c* 90m by 50m. At least one circular structure is visible within the enclosure on those photographs, together with a small circular cropmark outside the palisade to the south-west.

The site was excavated as a result of the threat posed to it by limestone quarrying operations.

The first season of excavation took place between October and December 1978, and was designed as a large-scale trial to assess the archaeological potential of the site. This comprised the investigation of the northern half of the enclosure. Following this, excavation continued between April and July 1979, exposing the whole of the enclosure and adjacent areas, with the aim of recording the structural evidence located (illus 2). Plough-truncation was noted to have been relatively severe (Triscott 1982, 119), with at least 0.3m of the subsoil having been removed across most of the interior of the enclosure, increasing to as much as 1m to the north and south-east, where the preservation of archaeological remains was much reduced.

In 2004, when the author visited the site, limestone quarrying had encroached into the west side of the excavation site, although much of the site area remained intact.

2.2 Post-excavation studies

2.2.1 Limitations

There are inevitable drawbacks to excavation reports being compiled belatedly by a third party with no



Illus 2 Aerial photograph of site during excavation; from the north-east. (©Crown copyright; RCAHMS; ref 4061/CN)

first-hand experience of the site, owing to the distance between the author and the source data. In the case of Dryburn Bridge, however, this problem is considerably mitigated by the excellent site archive loaned to CFA by the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS). The site records include site diaries, context record forms, field drawings and interpretative inked drawings, a monochrome photograph record and a variety of concordance lists. To allow cross-reference between this report and the archive, the original context and feature numbers are retained, although their use is restricted to the minimum necessary to describe the key features of the site.

Unfortunately, the archive does not contain a concordance list between small finds numbers and context codes. Much of this information could be retrieved from specialist reports and individual context records; however, much of the chipped stone assemblage (Section 4.1) is not catalogued in the context records, and the small finds numbers on the finds bags cannot be linked to specific contexts. While this is regrettable, as one large collection of material which appears to have come from the same feature cannot be provenanced, it does not significantly detract from the interpretation of the site as a whole.

At the time of writing (2006) most of the artefactual material is housed at the National Museums of Scotland (NMS). However, the whereabouts of the prehistoric pottery, apart from the Beaker vessel, and some of the coarse stone items are unknown, despite an extensive search. Specialist reports and finds illustrations were produced for some of the materials in the years around 1980. Hilary Cool examined the pottery (apart from the Beaker vessel) and coarse stone tools, and Mary Harman analysed the human and animal bone assemblages. During this final phase of report preparation the human and faunal remains have been re-examined, by Julie Roberts and Jennifer Thoms respectively, to take into account considerable research advances in these subject areas over the last two decades. Mary Harman's reports are contained within the site archive. Hilary Cool's reports are included here, as the absence of much of the material did not permit meaningful re-analysis. The absence of a proportion of this material is to be regretted because, as noted by Hilary Cool (pers comm in 2000 to D Alexander) in relation to the pottery report, the research questions asked of later prehistoric artefact assemblages have moved on considerably. These developments have occurred both through methodological advances and through the development of different paradigms as to how the deposition of artefact assemblages on later prehistoric settlement sites across Britain can be understood (eg Hunter 1996 and Hunter 1997 for the Iron Age in northern Britain). The various other artefact materials do not appear to have been considered around 1980, and were examined for the first time as part of this final phase of work.

The excavations pre-dated the practice of routine soil sampling and sample processing for the recovery of palaeoenvironmental materials (R McCullagh,

pers comm), and as a result much ecofactual material was probably not recovered.

In the following account the descriptions of, and stratigraphic relationships between, excavated features follow those proposed by the excavators except where otherwise stated following interrogation of the site records by the author, on the understanding that the authors of the site records were closer to the source data. Any errors in interpretations made beyond those of the excavators are solely the responsibility of the present author.

2.2.2 Opportunities

The delay between the completion of the Dryburn Bridge excavation and the final publication of its results has had some unintended benefits. These derive from the considerable paradigm shift which developed during the 1990s as to how we should understand Iron Age societies and interpret the physical remains of their settlements and burial grounds (for example papers collected in Hill & Cumberpatch 1995; Gwilt & Haselgrove 1997; see also Parker Pearson *et al* 2001, 125–6 for a summary of recent theoretical developments). The importance of structured deposition and roundhouse organization, as well as cosmology, have been proposed by many as fundamental to Iron Age life (cf Parker Pearson 1996; Fitzpatrick 1997; Oswald 1997; Parker Pearson 1999a), although more recently still doubts about the relevance of these ideas are emerging. The interpretation presented here for the organization and development of the Iron Age settlement at Dryburn Bridge has benefited from these fresh avenues of enquiry.

The Dryburn Bridge excavation took place at broadly the same time as several other important investigations of later prehistoric settlement sites in south-east and eastern Scotland, including those in East Lothian at St Germain's (Alexander & Watkins 1998) and Broxmouth (Hill 1982a), and in Angus at Douglasmuir (Kendrick 1995). Interim results of those works were published in a volume of conference proceedings edited by Harding (1982). The principal research concerns addressed in that volume relate to the comprehensive undermining of the model of Iron Age settlement development based on the Hownam Rings sequence (Piggott 1948) as universally applicable over a wide geographical area. Within this 'initial burst of post-Hownam' research' the Dryburn Bridge and Broxmouth excavations were considered to have proved fatal to the Hownam model (Armit 1999a, 71), and alternative methods for constructing chronologies were explored, such as through roundhouse morphologies (Hill 1982b) and artefact studies (Cool 1982). A more complex relationship between enclosed and unenclosed settlement forms was propounded. The interim report for Dryburn Bridge (Triscott 1982) is routinely referred to in what remains an area of considerable interest (Ralston 1996; Armit 1999a; Harding 2001), which has been enhanced by more recent large-scale

excavations such as those of the Port Seton enclosures (Haselgrove & McCullagh 2000).

With the benefit of hindsight nourished by additional site data gathered in the last 20 years, as well as theoretical and methodological developments, and not least the results of the post-excavation work, it is now possible to re-assess to what extent the Dryburn Bridge results can contribute to the post-Hownam research directions that were initially driven by Dryburn Bridge itself and Broxmouth.

2.2.3 Radiocarbon dating

Several radiocarbon dates were obtained from excavated samples of wood charcoal and human bone in the years around 1980, and are cited in the interim report (Triscott 1982; also Hill 1982b, 42). Those samples were dated at the University of Glasgow (refs: GU-1149, 1257, 1283–7, 1404–6, 1408–10, 1412, 1414). Calibrated age ranges are cited in this report based upon both the original lab error quoted and the adjusted errors recommended by Ashmore *et al* for University of Glasgow samples up to GU-1500 (Ashmore *et al* 2001).

The breadth of the adjusted errors associated with these determinations provides for very wide calibrated age ranges in most cases, rendering meaningful chronological interpretation impossible. To offset the problems associated with these initial dates, fresh samples were submitted for dating from human remains, animal bone, antler and wood charcoal, in many cases replicating materials previously dated.

The new samples were submitted to the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre (SUERC), who forwarded prepared samples for measurement at the University of Arizona AMS Facility. The results obtained from wood charcoal are cited in this report (AA-53703–5). However, the results returned for several of the dated human bone samples were surprising and outwith the expected age ranges, being significantly younger than had been anticipated and in some cases at considerable variance with samples of the same entities dated around 1980, raising significant problems for site phasing and interpretation. Subsequent investigation revealed that some of the samples had contained insufficient collagen for reliable measurement, and this probably accounted for the unexpected results (G Cook, pers comm).

In light of this, further samples of human and faunal material, including both previously dated and new sample material, were dated by the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre (SUERC). This final dating work provided results for the most part within the anticipated ranges, and consistent with the results of the initial dates obtained. The most recent radiocarbon measurements are cited in this report (SUERC-4068–74, 4078–9, 4082–4, 4088, 4412, 4938–9).

The measurements obtained from human and faunal remains during the intermediate dating

work are rejected as a group and are not cited in this report, even though the most recent measurements of some samples concurred with the results obtained during the intermediate dating. The results of the intermediate dating work are published in *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland 2003* (DES 2003, 158–9; lab refs: AA-53706–21), but it is recommended that they are not cited.

2.3 Structure of the report

The results are divided into two parts. The earlier prehistoric remains are presented and discussed first. While the presence of at least some of these remains may have been recognized and respected by the occupants of the Iron Age settlement, these features are chronologically distinct from it, as well as from each other in certain cases.

In describing the settlement site, a building block approach was considered to be the best method of underpinning the final interpretation of settlement development offered. For plough-truncated cropmark sites such as Dryburn Bridge, the opportunities for identifying meaningful stratigraphic relationships and datable deposits are limited, and those discovered are nearly always less than wished for. Such phased sequences as may be constructed are often not unassailable, but reflect the best judgement of the author/s (as is evident from this account, which refines the broad phasing sequence proposed in the interim account (Triscott 1982) in certain ways). It was felt that simply to describe this site based upon interpreted phases (cf St Germain's, Alexander & Watkins 1998) or by area (for example Port Seton East, Haselgrove & McCullagh 2000) would obscure the sometimes subtle evidence that underpins the phasing model and render the account less comprehensible to future researchers seeking to deconstruct this model and propose an alternative.

Description of the physical remains of the Iron Age settlement is thus ordered by categories of features present – enclosing works; roundhouses (grouped by ground-plan morphologies); rectilinear structures; pit graves; fence-lines and other boundaries; miscellaneous features – in each case highlighting the stratigraphic and spatial relationships between these and other features used to contribute to the overall sequence. Following the presentation of the results of the artefact studies and radiocarbon dating, the combined evidence is marshalled to put forward a relative and absolute chronology for the settlement.

Use of the term 'House' has been retained from the published interim report (Triscott 1982) to describe the timber-built roundhouses excavated, although it should be noted that the use of this terminology is not intended to imply a function for the structures as domestic dwellings. 'Iron Age' is also used as a convenient shorthand to describe the broad date of the settlement, although the date of settlement foundation could stretch back into a period conventionally termed 'Late Bronze Age'.