
3 The Excavation by *B Will and C Evans*

3.1 Aims, objectives and methodology

The primary objectives of the excavation were to establish whether human remains were present within the cists, the state of preservation of any such remains and how they had been deposited. The secondary objectives were to establish whether there were any intimately related structures in the vicinity of the site, and fully to record and recover any human remains and associated structures up to an area of 40m² or, in the event of multiple burials, to consult with Historic Scotland and the Regional Archaeologist to establish a suitable mitigation strategy.

On arrival, the condition of the site was assessed and recorded photographically. An area 10m by 10m was cordoned off and, within that, an area of 9.2m east/west by 6.8m north/south was hand-excavated through the topsoil layer to reveal the extent of the remnant mound and associated cists. All contexts containing human remains were 100% sampled. Selective bulk sampling of additional archaeologically significant contexts was also undertaken. On completion of the excavation, cist 003 was backfilled using the larger stones from cist 004 and the base slab of cist 010. Cist 004 was dismantled and the extant mound material excavated to the level of the rest of the surrounding material. Geotextile was placed over the remains of the mound and the whole site backfilled, affording preservation of the remnants of the site in situ (see [Illus 2](#)).

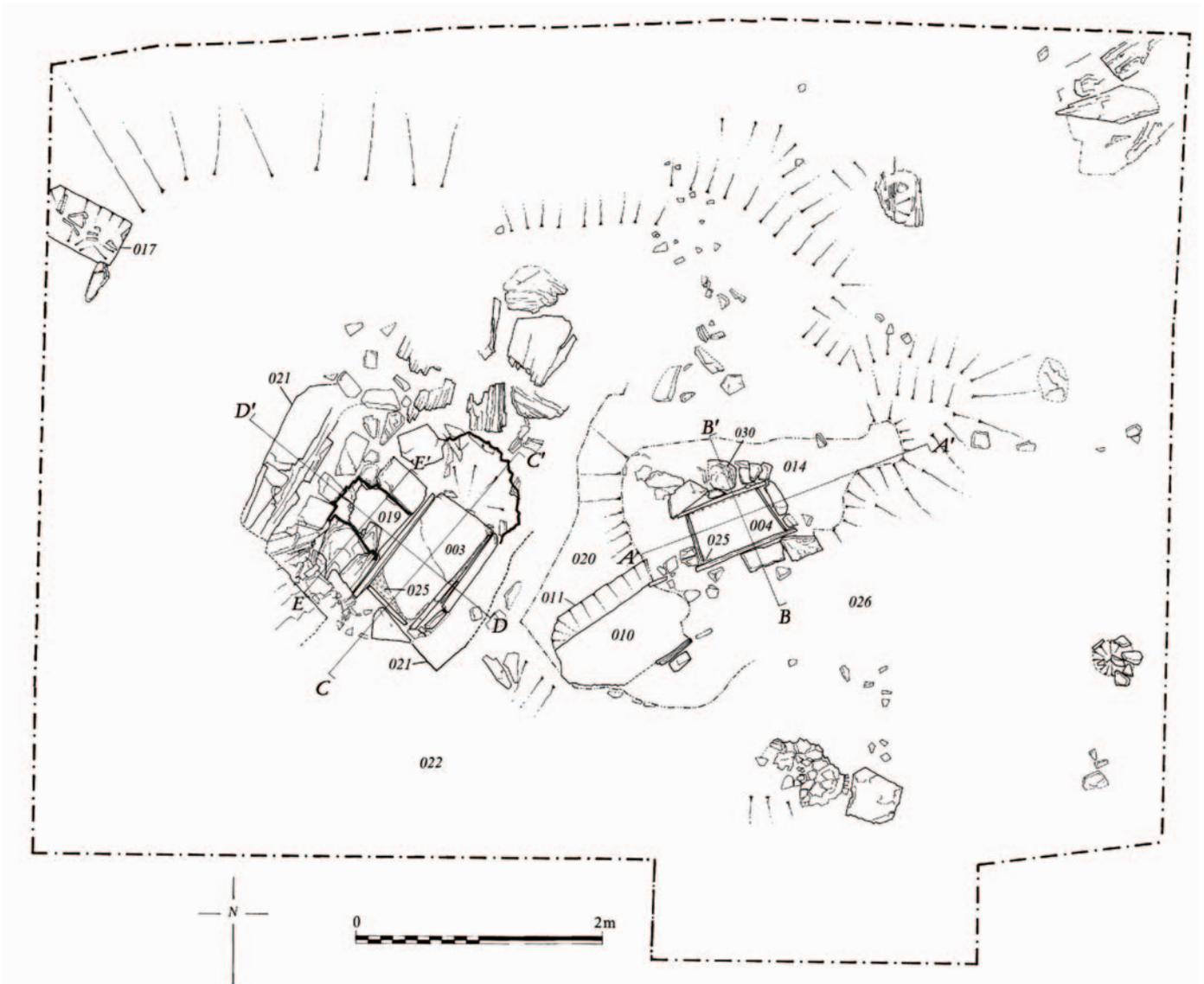
3.2 Excavation results

Very little of the mound (014) remained, with only the eastern side partly surviving next to a stone built cist (004) which stood proud of the surrounding mound matrix ([Illus 3](#), A–A'). This cist sat in a cut (029) measuring 2.4m east/west by 1.1m north/south excavated through the underlying old ground surface (026). Four regular sub-rectangular slabs formed the cist walls, which were surrounded with packing stones (030) on all sides. One of these packing stones had evidence of some surface decoration (see [Section 7](#) – Megalithic Art on the Ferndale Slab). The cist contained a deposit of well-preserved cremated human remains (008) and a loose, light to mid brown silt clay (009) and was sealed with a single capping stone (007) ([Illus 3](#), B–B'). The cist was orientated north-east/south-west and measured 0.7m north-east/south

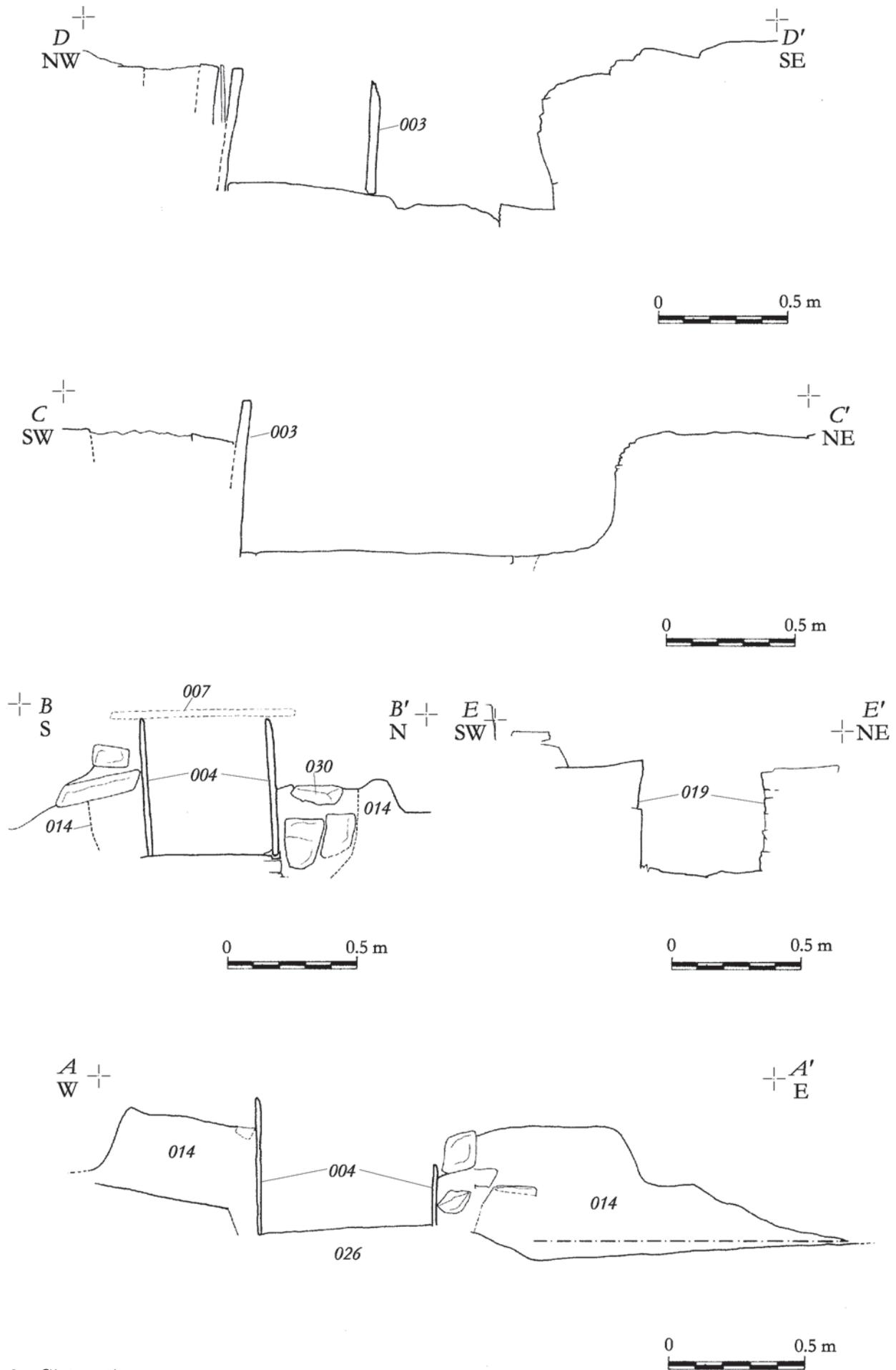
west by 0.5m north-west/south-east. At the south-west end, beyond the cut and within the mound material, a layer of dark brown clay silt with frequent charcoal flecks and angular gravel (024) was recorded.

Immediately to the south and west of cist 004 was a spread of peat-rich silt, boulder clay and grits mixed with fuel ash slag (cramp) and cremated bone (006). The deposit was very disturbed, and machine bucket marks were observed at the western extent of the material. Removal of the entire deposit revealed the base slab and fragments of the north and south sides of a second cist (010), orientated north-east/south-west and measuring 1.2m by 0.6m. Remnants of the original ground surface (026) were also observed at this time. Excavation revealed this cist sat in a cut (011), the size of which was not discernible due to machine disturbance, and which was excavated through the old ground surface (026). A deposit of brown-yellow sandy clay (012) was packed between the surviving cist walls and the edges of the cut. Removal of the cist base revealed a layer of compact yellow clay with angular gravel (027) above an original ground surface (028), similar to context 026.

Immediately to the west of these two cists, a third structure (003) was examined ([Illus 3](#), C–C' & D–D'). This cist was inserted into a cut excavated directly in the bedrock (021), which defined an area of approximately 2.20m by 1.60m orientated north-east/south-west. The east and west sides of the cist appeared to have been damaged, while the northern side was missing. Removal of the loose capping stones (005) revealed a brown-yellow sandy clay with lenses and lumps of dark brown clay silt (015). Underlying this deposit were the badly decayed remains of an inhumation contained within a layer of moderately compact yellow-brown sandy clay with frequent fragments and chips of stone and small lumps and lenses of grey-brown clay silt (016). On the west side the damaged side slab was supported by roughly coursed stone work to the north and south which formed a sub-rectangular space measuring 0.44m by 0.61m and 0.51m deep (context 019) ([Illus 3](#), E–E'). This space or box appeared to have been an attempt to create a construction stance and was subsequently filled with a mixture of yellow-brown clay silt with frequent stone flakes and chips (context 018). The interface between the two was stained darker with silt brought in through water infiltration. The cist space to the east of this stance measured 1m north-east/south-west by 0.75m north-west/south-east. Due to machine damage to the mound, the relationship between this cist and the other two structures was not discernible.



Illus 2 Site plan



Illus 3 Cist sections