

Excavations at Hunting Hall in 2022



LHG
Archaeology

REPORT OF THE EXCAVATIONS AT HUNTING HALL, LOWICK, NORTHUMBERLAND

Issue: February 2024

This document is a report of the 2022 dig and associated activities. It is available on the Lowick Heritage Group website.

www.lowickheritagegroup.org

This excavation was part funded by Barmoor Wind Farm Community Foundation and supported by Hunting Hall farm and Natural England

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LOWICK HERITAGE GROUP

REPORT OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIG AT HUNTING HALL 2022

1 INTRODUCTION

As in previous years, the work was carried out by members of the Lowick Heritage Group (LHG) Archaeology sub group plus other paying volunteers including members of TILLVAS (Till Valley Archaeological Society).

The team is led by Dr Kristian Pedersen of Edinburgh University. Particular thanks are due to Tom and Karen Burn, the site owners, for their continued support. Also to the Barmoor Wind Farm Community Foundation for ongoing financial support.

In 2022 a new L shaped trench (T6) was opened at the southern end of the visible bank and ditch enclosure. The relationship to T3/T4/T5 is clearly seen in Photo 1 below. Note that T3/T4/T5 was not reopened but the grass had not fully recovered from 2021.

Trench T6 was initially 22m N-S (4.5m wide) and 25m E-W (4m wide) but was extended in places during the dig. See Photo 2 below.

Photo 1

T6

Photo 2



2 THE DIG

The actual dig was carried out from 4 May to 16 July 2022 with several days of work before and after this to prepare and clear up the site. A dig diary was circulated each working day and is available on the LHG website.

Over the winter the group had acquired two decontamination tents which had become surplus to the needs of the North East Ambulance Service. These provided a much improved storage and undercover work area. However, these tents are not designed for extended use in exposed conditions and did suffer during periods of high wind and heavy rain.

A total of 57 volunteers were involved in the dig providing a total of 2715 hours of effort. There were 62 visitors to the site, including a group from the Glendale Local History Society and various experts.

Some of the soil removed by trowelling was passed through a coarse sieve (1cm) on site to look for artefacts (flints, bone, etc). Soil samples from particular areas of interest (called contexts – undisturbed archaeological features) was bagged for subsequent flotation, a process to recover organic remains such as insects, seeds and pollens.



Flotation work in progress



Flotation and subsequent analysis of finds is very labour intensive and is ongoing. Results will be published on the LHG website when they are available.

At the end of the time available, the trench was backfilled with the original topsoil.

3 RECORDING

Photographs were taken to record the site as features emerged and to record specific areas of interest in close up. Drone photos allowed the features to be reviewed from vertically above. Photogrammetry provides more detailed 3D images of pits and sections.

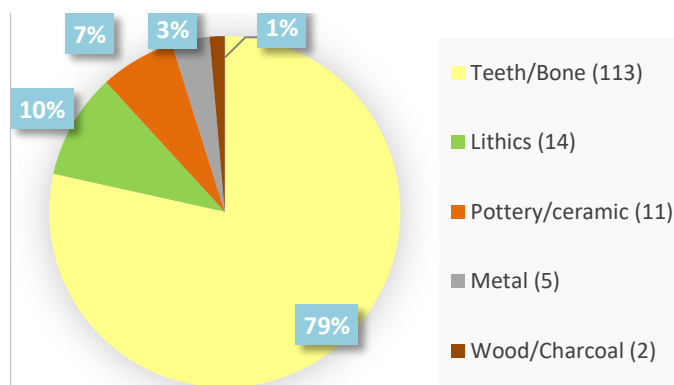
All finds were recorded and bagged for subsequent cleaning, inspection and photography.

A number of scale drawings of the site were made including plans and cross-sections of the trench and of specific features. The height above sea level of various features was established using basic surveying techniques.

Post excavation work continues to process the finds and soil samples and to analyse the results.

4 THE EXCAVATION FINDS (ARTEFACTS)

A total of 144 finds were recorded of which 113 were fragments of bone/teeth, 14 lithics (stone), 10 ceramic 5 metallic and 2 wood/charcoal. Charcoal occurs widely across the site and samples have been taken in previous years so only samples over 4cm were collected in 2022.



The distribution of features and finds across T6 is shown in Attachment 1. The most interesting finds in 2022 included the following:

Find 136 Animal bone worked to resemble a spoon.



Find 062 Animal Bone



Carbon 14 dating of bone Finds 136 (45BC – AD118) and Find 062 (161BC – 54AD), was carried out by the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre at East Kilbride near Glasgow. This established that the bones are from the late Iron Age, consistent with those found in 2021.

Find 127 Copper alloy Brooch



Find 027 Quern stone



Spindle whorl Find 028



Flint scraper Find 033



The AOC Archaeology Group in Loanhead, Edinburgh undertook x-ray analysis of metal finds including 4 from 2022 and confirmed the following:

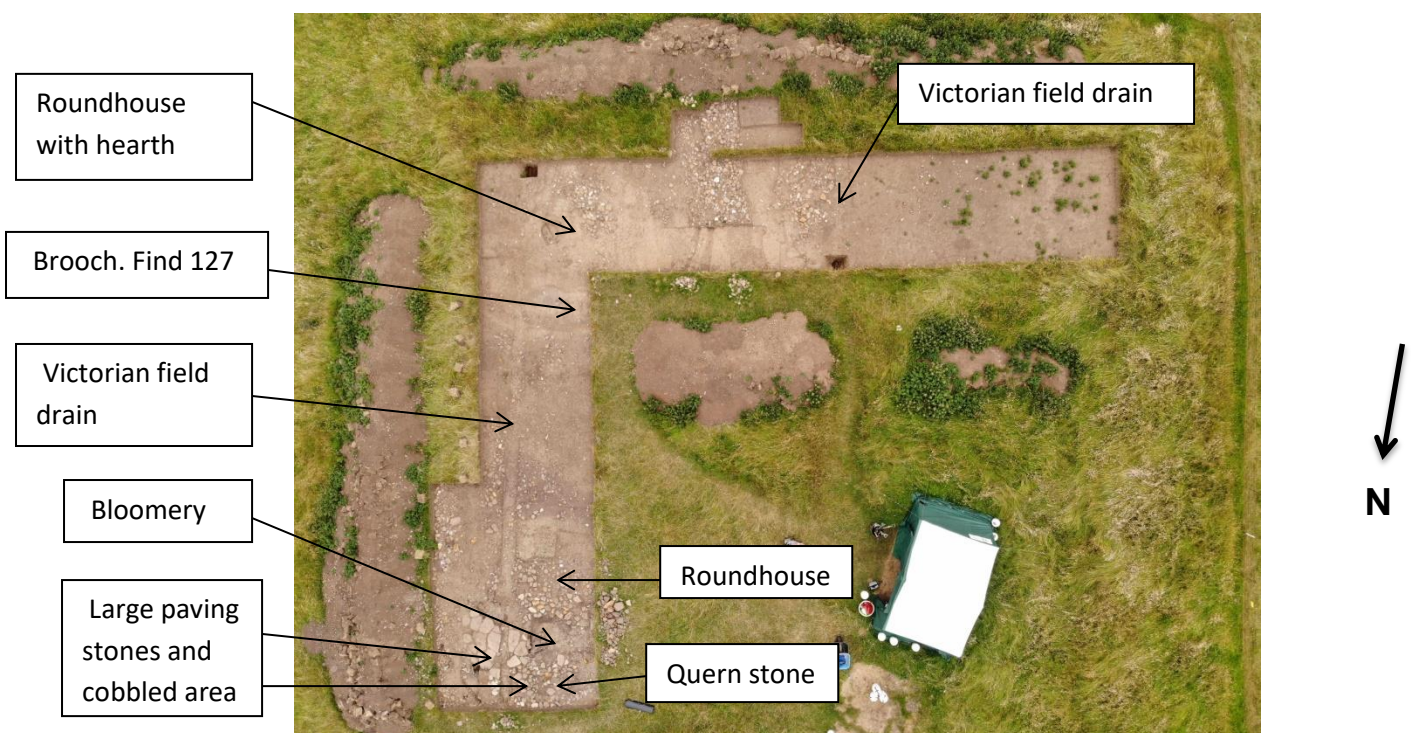
Find 19	iron	Flat object (nail?)
Find 53	Iron	Nail
Find 127	copper alloy	Brooch (see picture above).
Find 128	Iron	Possible fibula (brooch or pin for fastening garments)

Thanks are due to the Barmoor Wind Farm Community Foundation for ongoing financial support which allows the external specialist analysis to be undertaken.

These finds provide strong evidence of domestic occupation of the site.

5 FEATURES

The drone photo below was taken at the end of the dig and shows the locations of some of the key features.



A 3D image of the area where the brooch (Find 127) was found. Possible burial site?





Possible Bloomery – a type of furnace used for smelting iron from its oxides.



A 3D image of an area of large paving stones cut through by the field drain. Cobbled area and site of bloomery (now excavated) on the left.

An interpretation of features is shown in Attachment 2 and is covered in Section 6 below.

6 ARCHAEOLOGISTS REVIEW

The predominant features found in Trench 6 in 2022 belong in the Iron Age. However, the site has given us some evidence of earlier periods, such as the finds of a few flint tools and possible Bronze Age stone structures. There is insufficient evidence at this stage to confidently point us towards earlier periods of occupation. However, preliminary stratigraphic interpretation indicates that the site was occupied over an extended period during the Iron Age.

There is strong evidence of a cobbled floor roundhouse at the north end of T6. The ceramic rich pit lies at the centre of this structure. Though it was initially felt that the ceramic debris represented pottery, either during manufacture or damage afterwards, another interpretation is that this could possibly have been a ceramic oven (bloomery) that was subsequently crushed.

The area of large flagstones lies eccentric to this roundhouse. It is possible that this floor was laid after the roundhouse fell out of use and the flagstones were for the purpose of industry. Any dateable evidence provided by the presence of the quern stone and spindle whorl has not been determined at this stage.

There is some evidence, though not as obvious, of a second roundhouse at the eastern end of the west to east limb of the trench. Twin ditches and several post holes indicate a structure of about 8.5m diameter but more work is needed to confirm its use. Within this structure was found a charcoal rich pit that contained little in the way of animal remains. Evidence of its purpose may lie with soil analysis.

Lying just within the northern perimeter of this structure is a curious oval shaped pit, lying east to west, and in which was found a copper alloy annular ring/brooch. No further investigation was made of this pit as this find was made very late in the dig. The size, shape and orientation of this pit may indicate a burial feature and this will be fully investigated at a later date.

The linear feature in Trench 4 from the 2021 dig may be a continuation of the linear stone structure at the extreme edge of the eastern extension of T6. Evidence from other Iron Age excavations in the North East suggest that linear palisades were built around small clusters of roundhouses. It was suggested that the unexplained second linear feature with the appearance of a low wall found towards the centre of the east west limb of T6 may form a rectangular structure enclosing at least four roundhouses (one in T4, three in T6) aligned parallel with the river. It's possible we may find a return 'wall' during a future dig.

The area immediately to the south of the cobbled roundhouse contains a ditch that warrants further investigation.

An artistic interpretation of the site by one of our volunteers.

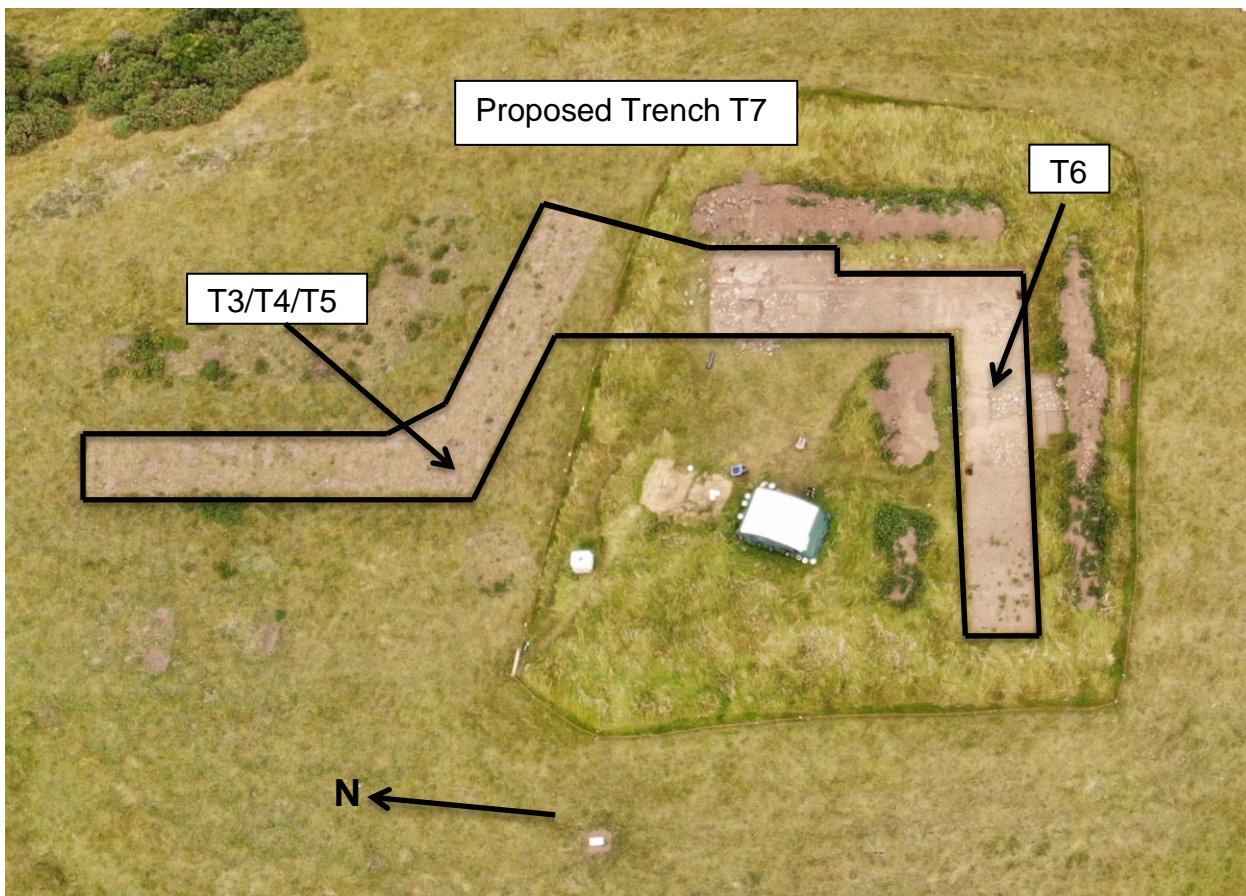


7 OBJECTIVES FOR 2023

The objective in the next season of excavation is to dismantle some of the roundhouses and attempt to establish how many phases of rebuilding occurred here. We will also seek to explore those deposits that have yielded metalwork and ceramics. Evidence of burning is widespread throughout the site, suggested by the magnetometric survey, but also by the large pits that are replete with charcoal and burnt material – the latter are suspected to be features for the production of charcoal to support the iron working indicated by the presence of the bloomery. Two principal concerns govern the excavations: first is the chronological sequence of occupation; and second is the elucidation of the economic activities on the site in the respective phases of settlement. This is important for understanding the degree of continuity or discontinuity in economic, settlement structure, and hierarchy, on the site over the Iron Age-Early Medieval transition, but also in earlier episodes.

8 PROPOSED TRENCH POSITION FOR 2023

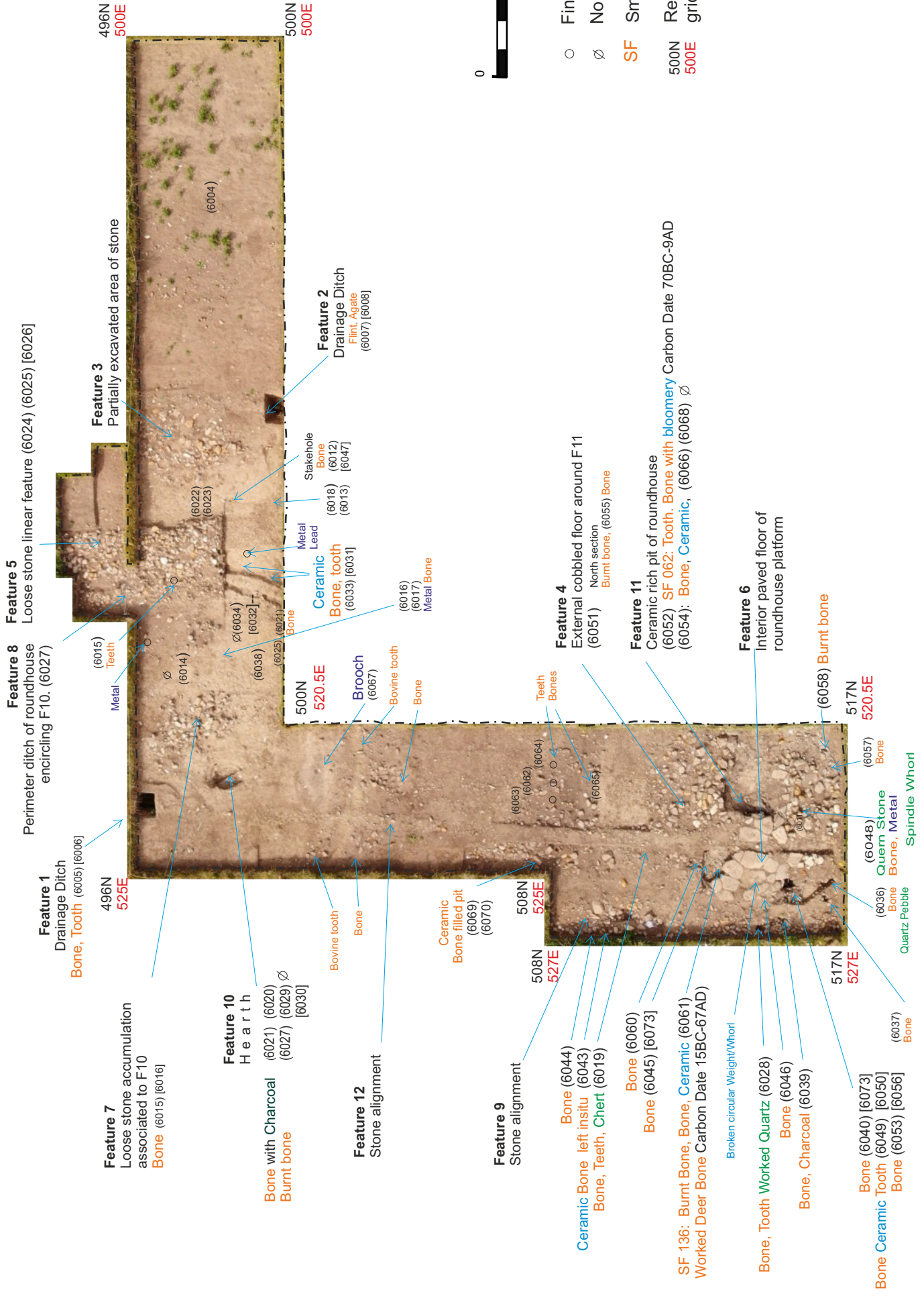
The intention for 2023 is to reopen and connect trenches T3/T4/T5 and T6 to form a single “megatrench” T7 as shown in the image below



The report on the 2023 dig will include an interpretation of the whole of T7 in the context of the wider enclosure site, based on all the work done from 2018 onwards.

May - June 2022: Excavation of trench 6 at Hunting Hall Bottom Dene

Context numbers, features and main finds



INTERPRETATION OF FEATURES IN TRENCH 6

