

Excavations at Hunting Hall in 2021



REPORT OF THE SUMMARY AND FINDINGS AT HUNTING HALL, LOWICK, NORTHUMBERLAND

Issue: December 2023

This document is a compilation of reports relating to the 2021 dig and associated activities. It is available on the Lowick Heritage Group website. www.lowickheritagegroup.org

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CONTENTS

1 Introduction

2 Objectives for 2021

3 The Dig

4 Recording

5 The Excavation Finds

6 Flotation and Analysis

7 Summary of Results

8 Archaeologists Review

9 Proposed Trench Position for 2022

Attachment 1 Location of bone, pottery and charcoal finds

Attachment 2 Location of finds from flotation

LOWICK HERITAGE GROUP

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIG AT HUNTING HALL 2021

1 INTRODUCTION

After a break in 2020 due to Covid, work on the assumed Iron Age enclosure site at Hunting Hall farm near Lowick continued in 2021.

As before, the work was carried out by members of the Lowick Heritage Group (LHG) Archaeology sub group plus other local 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 and use of their facilities. Also to the Barmoor Windfarm Community Fund for continuing financial support.

The 2 trenches (T3 and T4 in red) excavated in 2019 were reopened and connected by a new trench (T5 in blue) to form a single large L shaped excavation, approx. 25m N-S by 20m W-E. and 4.5m wide. This trench lies in the northern half of the visible bank and ditch enclosure.



2 OBJECTIVES FOR 2021

The principal objectives, which governed the excavation strategy in 2021, were the following:

- Establish continuity in features between Trenches 3 and 4.
- Acquire cultural and environmental evidence from Trench 5, in particular, to determine the date and characteristics of the concentric feature observed in the geophysical survey
- The recovery of the evidence in Trench 4, to establish the date and characteristics of the rectangular feature identified in the geophysical survey.

3 THE DIG

The actual dig was carried out over 7 weeks from 1 September to 22 October with several days of work before and after this to prepare and clear up the site. The preparation of the site and methods of working were essentially the same as described more fully in the 2019 report.

Facilities on site were improved this year with the provision of a fresh water supply on site plus additional tent space. The start of the dig had been delayed to late August due to Covid and the weather deteriorated as the dig progressed with heavy rain and strong winds on some days making working conditions difficult.



(5044) Deep charcoal pit

A total of 43 people were involved, providing a total of 2937 hours of effort. 25 children from Lowick and Holy Island schools came for a morning of activities.

The majority of the actual dig was directed to T4, which had only been superficially examined in 2019 and to the new trench T5. Both these areas revealed a significant number of features, some particularly deep.

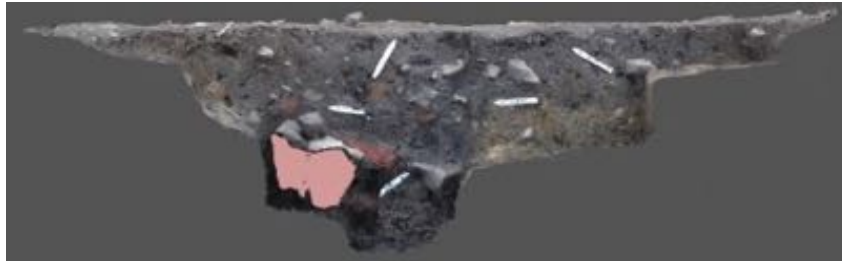
Some of the soil removed by trowelling was passed through a coarse sieve (1cm) to look for artefacts (flints, bone, etc). Soil from particular areas of interest was bagged for subsequent flotation.

At the end of the time available, the trenches were backfilled with the original topsoil.

4 RECORDING

A large number of 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 and were used to illustrate specific features and the position of finds. See Attachment 1.

The use of photogrammetry techniques provides clearer images of sections. The two images below show the section of the deep trench (5044) with significant bone, flint, pottery, slag finds and charcoal rich deposits.



Creation of photogrammetry images involves the combination of a large number of individual images (over 200 in some cases).

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

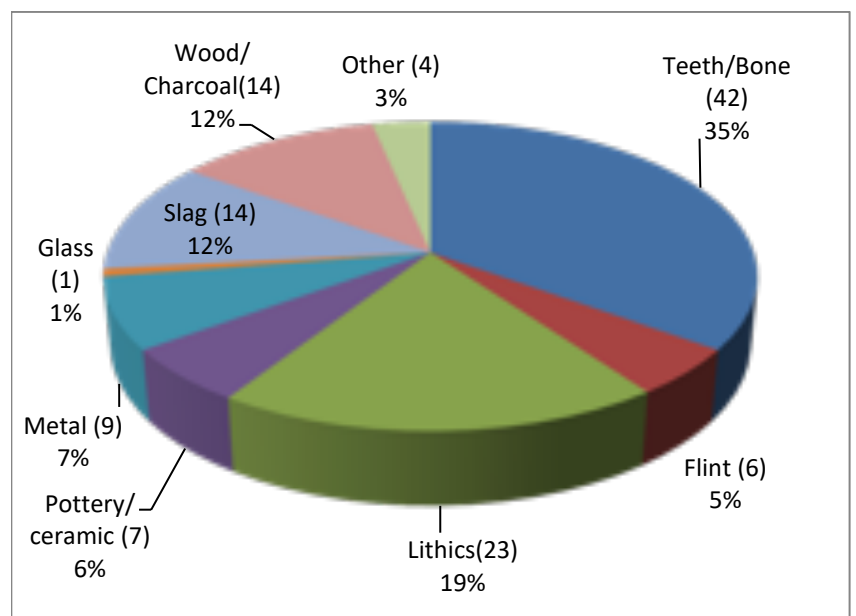
A number of scale drawings of the site were made including plans and cross-sections of the whole trench and of specific features. The height above sea level of various features were established by re-using the temporary OS benchmark established in 2019 and which gave a consistent result with feature measurements taken in 2019.

After the end of the actual dig, work continued through 2021, 2022 and into 2023 to process the finds and soil samples and to analyse the results.

5 THE EXCAVATION FINDS

A total of 120 finds were recorded of which 42 were fragments of animal bone/teeth and 7 were fragments of pottery. There were 71 other finds including 14 wood/charcoal (significant deposits), 9 metallic, 6 flints (worked), 1 glass, 23 lithic, 14 slag and 4 others.

A large piece of hematite (iron ore), originating from Cumbria, was a particularly significant find. Also two pieces of worked ochre, possibly used as a crayon and a piece of broken quern stone.





Experts in animal bones (Peter Rowley-Conwy) and geology (Alison Tyman) have kindly given their opinions on these finds. The bones and teeth were primarily from cows with limited evidence of sheep. One bone fragment had dog teeth marks. There was also evidence of scratch marks and bone marrow extraction.

A plan showing the locations of bone, pottery and charcoal finds is at Attachment 1.

Funding was obtained from the Barmoor Wind Farm via the Community Foundation for a limited number of finds to be carbon dated and this has been carried out by the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre at East Kilbride near Glasgow.

Two of the bone finds from 2021 have been dated to the late Iron Age:

Find 224: Charred sheep rib from T5, Dated 81AD - 111AD

Find 245: Distal radius cow bone from T4, Dated to 14AD – 96AD

The AOC Archaeology Group in Loanhead, Edinburgh have x-rayed a selection of the metallic finds from 2019, 2021 and 2022. This confirmed that 5 of the items found in 2021 are nails.

6 FLOTATION AND ANALYSIS

A total of about 1400 litres of soil were removed from 51 contexts (discrete areas) of T3/T4/T5. This soil was subjected to the flotation process involving up to 8 sieves (2mm - 45µm), theoretically providing up to 472 (8x59) samples of light fraction (Flot). In practice, 332 samples were obtained from 43 contexts.

These samples were inspected using microscopy and macroscopy techniques and items of possible interest were identified in 138 of the samples from 43 contexts. These items were primarily insect parts, seeds and/or seed casings, with some other plant material, charcoal, bone and blue glass (?) particles.

An additional process was introduced this year (2021) with the residual sludge from the flotation tanks (the heavy fraction - Retent) being washed through a coarse sieve to separate out larger/heavier pieces for visual inspection. This process revealed items of possible interest in 37 of the 59 contexts.

These items included bone and tooth fragments (including burnt bone), charcoal and coal, seeds and seed casings, insects and insect parts, slag, various lithics (including agate and quartz) and a

Cuddy's Bead (fossilised crinoid found locally on beaches as used as ornaments). Only one of the bone fragments was sufficiently large to be identifiable. (sheep).

The seeds and insects provide a basis for determination of possible farming activity, also possibly an indication of climate and thus approximate dating. The Group does not currently have the expertise to carry out such further analysis but it is hoped that this can be outsourced.

A plan showing the locations of the finds from the flotation processes are at Attachment 2.

7 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The 2021 dig exposed overlapping stone features, concentric stone settings, burnt and other dark patches, postholes and a stone filled ditch. These are complex and still to be fully interpreted but suggest domestic occupation over an extended period of time, possibly Iron Age and Dark Ages.

2 strong linear features have been eliminated from further investigation as they are field drains.

Carbon Dating has provided evidence of the presence of domestic animals in the area in the late Iron Age.

A number of the specimens retrieved from the flotation process eg seeds, insect parts etc would benefit from expert detailed analysis to reveal species and possible time periods

8 ARCHAEOLOGIST'S REVIEW

The excavations undertaken in 2021 at the Bottom Dene site at Hunting Hall sought to expand the investigations that commenced in earnest in the 2019 field season. A copious collection of faunal material was recovered, along with a small collection of artefacts from the Iron Age and the Early Medieval periods. The finds corroborated the assumption that underpinned the decision to search for the settlement that first bore the name '*Lowick*' here—namely, that the occupation which had acquired this name in the Early Medieval era was situated on an Iron Age settlement. The presumption of continuity between the Iron Age and the Early Medieval periods has therefore been provisionally demonstrated, but there remains the less tractable questions of establishing whether this formal continuity of site location has corollaries in the continuity of the social characteristics of its inhabitants, its position in the local settlement hierarchy, and whether the economic foundation of the site in the Early Medieval period was similar to that which prevailed in the preceding Iron Age. A robust chronological framework is necessary to profitably address these questions, for it is not known whether there was an episode of abandonment before the Early Medieval settlement occurred; furthermore, the Iron Age occupation may also have been sporadic, and the antiquity of the settlement remains unknown.

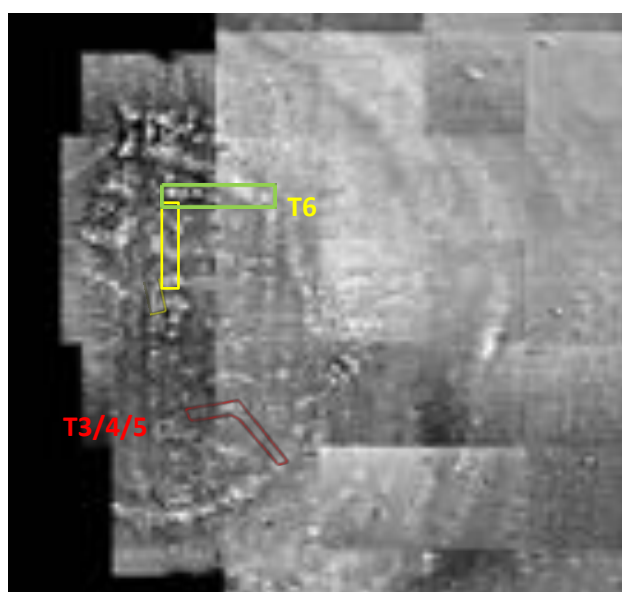
An explicit objective of the 2021 excavation was to acquire radiocarbon samples from individual features, and associate these features with others through their stratigraphic relationships and their reciprocal spatial dispositions, to identify the presence of structures. The trenches excavated in 2019 were expanded to the south, and then at its terminus, opened at a right angle to the east. In the former instance, the intention was to expose a large concentric feature observed on the magnetometric survey image; the latter sought to reveal the congeries of features that comprised an anomalous linear structure. A wide array of pits and ditches were exposed, many defined by stone arrangements or considerable stone concentrations. Priority was accorded to some of these above others, based principally on a combination of their size and their likely association with potential structures such as roundhouse platforms. All the sediment removed during the process of

excavation was retained and subjected to flotation through meshes of diminishing diameter, from 5mm to 45 microns.

The most salient and productive features from the excavations in 2021 were the primarily industrial: firstly, there was a stone arrangement for some sort of furnace; secondly, a large pit replete with charcoal into which a large posthole was inserted. Both of these must have had a cardinal importance while they were functional, and were used to process food, or to produce charcoal. At the eastern margin of the site, a roundhouse platform was identified whose course appears to have been disturbed by a long stone wall composed of densely concentrated boulders. This latter feature extends over a considerable distance. Less obvious, but nonetheless significant, was the recovery of a small boulder of haematite in one of the pits; this could not have occurred naturally in the landscape, for its origin was on the Atlantic coast of Cumbria, and thus must have been imported.

9 PROPOSED TRENCH POSITION FOR 2022

For 2022 it is proposed to open a new trench to the south of T3/T4/T5. The new trench, T6 (outline in red) is provisionally 22m N-S, 25m E-W and 4m wide.



Location of Finds from Flotation



Volume of Soil L (in litres)

Light Fraction LF

BS; Burnt Seed
CP; Carapace
Ca; Casing
CS; Calcified Seed
D; Diatome
FC; Flower Case
Fu; Funghi
H; Husk
in; Insect
in C; Insect case
in P; Insect part
Lav, Larvae
S; Seed
SC; Seed Case
P; Plant
Pu; Pupae
W/S C; Worm / Seed
Casing

Heavy Fraction HF

B; Bone
BB; Burnt Bone
BF; Bone Fragment
Ca; Casing
Cal S; Calcified Seed
CB; Cuddy's Bead
#; Charcoal
Fl; Flint
FC; Flower Case
Fo; Fossil
G; Glass
M; Metal
Oc; Ochre
P; Plant
S; Seed
SH; Seed Husk
Sl; Slag
T; Tooth
W; Wood
Wk Fl; Worked Flint

5021 Test pit outside trench 50L
in P, SH, S - Ca, P, B, M, Sl, #
5009 8 L S, in, pl - #

5012 Drainage Ditch
5109 Possible Roundhouse
Location of Brooch 2019

Possible Roundhouse

Location to be identifies
5078 4L SC Fo, P, W, #
5100 6L in C, Fo*, W, #

5044, 184L B, SC, BS, in, # - B, BF, #
5051 23L in, SC, Fu, # - #
5046 73.5L in, S, Fu, # - Ca, B, Coral, #, G
5062 224L S, D, in, # - B, BF, BB, #
5088 15L 5057 10L SC, in lav, P, Fi* 5065 3L S, in

ATTACHMENT 2

