

LOWICK HERITAGE GROUP

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIG AT HUNTING HALL 2019 Issue1

INTRODUCTION

Work on the assumed Iron Age enclosure site at Hunting Hall farm near Lowick continued in 2019. This involved digging in 2 new trenches in the area within the visible banks and ditches to identify features and to examine and record finds.

The work was carried out by members of the Lowick Heritage Group (LHG) Archaeology sub group plus other local volunteers and even some holiday visitors to the farm. 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.



THE DIG

The actual dig was carried out over 4 weeks in June and July. The locations of the 2 new trenches (T3 and T4) were chosen based on the results of the geophysical survey carried out in summer 2018. Both trenches are at the Northern end of the enclosure area. T3 was 20m x 4.5m and aligned roughly N-S. T4 was 14m x 3.4m and aligned roughly E-W.

A total of 36 people were involved in the dig providing a total of 1500 hours of effort. The majority of the effort was directed to T3 because of the number and complexity of the features that emerged.

The whole site was enclosed within an electric fence to keep livestock out. Some topsoil was removed with a mini digger but features started to appear quite close to the surface.

Further soil was removed, primarily by trowelling, to expose features and allow safe removal of visible finds. The features exposed were mostly complex areas of (unworked) stones and possible ditches indicated by differing soil colours. Some areas of possible burning (hearths) were also identified as were some possible post holes. The complexity of the stone patterns implies a number of overlaid features, including possible ring ditches, trenches and paved areas, developed over a long time period.

Much 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 (see below).

At the end of the time available, the trenches were lined with tarpaulins and backfilled with the original topsoil. The intention being to reopen the trenches in 2020.

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.

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 using an OS Benchmark on the Lowick – Fenwick road as a known reference point.

After the end of the actual dig, work continued through 2019 and into 2020 to process the finds and soil samples and to analyse the results.

THE FINDS (ARTEFACTS)

A total of 170 finds were recorded of which 89 were fragments of bone/teeth and 15 were fragments of pottery. There were 66 other finds including 5 charred wood, 8 metallic, 13 flints, 6 glass and 34 stone and slag. Possibly the most visually interesting finds were an early medieval bronze brooch and a drilled cow bone.

Experts in early pottery and in animal bones have kindly given their opinions on these finds. Some pottery is Iron Age. The bones and teeth were primarily from cows although evidence of sheep/goat/pig was also present. It is not possible to date bones from visual inspection.

FLOTATION AND ANALYSIS

A total of 189 bags of soil were removed from 27 areas of T3 and 2 areas of T4. These were put through a fresh water flotation process involving a stack of 8 sieves reducing in mesh size from 2mm to 45microns (45 millionths of a metre). The flotation process removes the lighter animal and vegetable fragments from the heavier minerals of which the soil is composed.

The residue from each sieve was dried and bagged. The contents of each bag was subsequently inspected with "large" visual objects (1- 2 mm in size) being passed for macroscopic analysis using a specialist top lit microscope. Random samples of the "smaller" material were placed on glass slides for conventional inspection through microscopes. A total of about 230 samples were analysed in this way and items of possible interest on over 100 of these samples were identified and photographed. As these items are almost all microscopic, further expert analysis is required. However examples of seeds, seed pods, insects and worms are believed to be present.

CONCLUSION

The 2019 dig was extremely successful in terms of the evidence exposed, although only covers a tiny part of what appears to be a complex site with human occupation over a long period - potentially Bronze Age, through Iron Age to early Medieval. A considerable amount of further work is required to properly understand this potentially very significant site.