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The Traprain Law Environs Project

Fieldwork and Excavations 2000-2004

Colin Haselgrove

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Chapter 3

Excavations at Whittingehame Tower

COLIN HASELGROVE, PETER CARNE and LEON FITTS

The site at Whittingehame Tower lies 2.5km south-east of Traprain Law (Figure 3.1), on the northern edge of the steep-sided ravine of the Whittingehame Water, 250m south-west of the tower-house which gives the site its name. It occupies a slight promontory at 110m OD, bounded on the north-east by a shallow gully cutting back from the ravine, and is bisected by a field boundary. The enclosure was discovered from the air in 1983 and recorded again in 1998; in both cases, the visible cropmarks were recorded in the field south-west of the field boundary, which was under a cereal crop (apart from a strip of set-aside along the ravine edge in 1998, where the clay is particularly intractable).

The cropmarks describe the arcs of two ditches, a broad inner one, measuring between 5m and 6m across, and a narrower outer one about 2m across (Figure 3.2). Projecting these arcs into the field to the north-east of the field boundary (a former seed orchard, now pasture) produces a C-shaped arc of ditches set against the side of the ravine. The projected line of the inner ditch suggests a maximum internal length of the enclosure along the ravine edge of about 75m, with a maximum transverse measurement of about 50m; an internal area of about 0.26ha is thus likely.

The geophysical survey undertaken in 2000 added to this information by confirming that the main ditch,



Figure 3.1

View of Whittingehame Tower excavation looking towards Traprain Law

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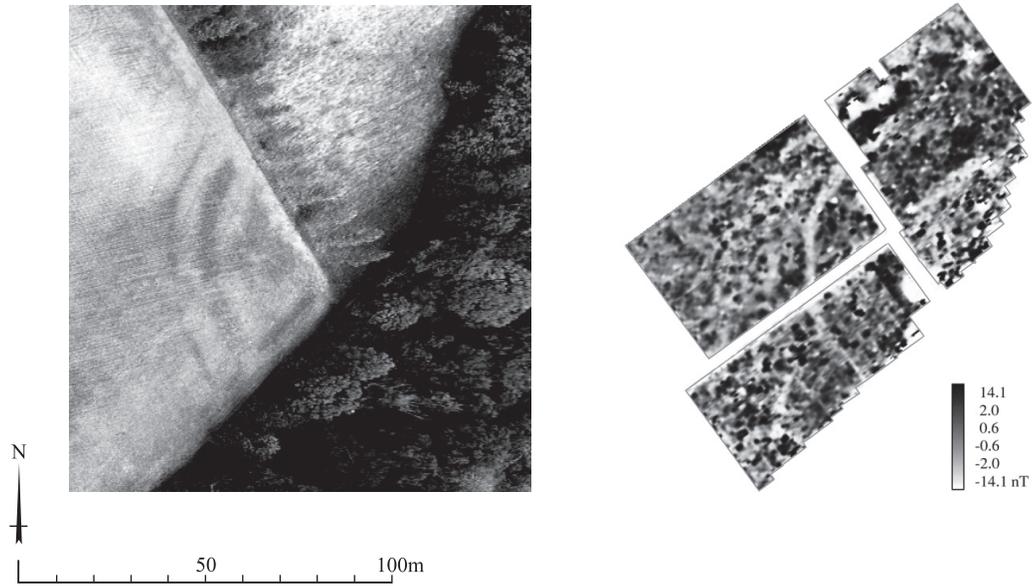


Figure 3.2
 Whittingehame Tower (NT67SW 15): rectified aerial photograph (EL6682) and TLEP geomagnetic survey
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at least, continued to the north-east of the field boundary. Beyond that, the data are unexpectedly noisy, perhaps due to the igneous rock content of the boulder clay overlying the Sedimentary Upper Old Red Sandstone and/or near-surface ferrous litter. A positive magnetic anomaly in the eastern part of the enclosure could be a substantial soil-filled pit, but an arcuate, positive magnetic anomaly detected just to the west of the enclosure is difficult to interpret, as no sign of its projected continuation was found in the excavation.

On basis of the cropmarks and geophysical survey evidence, Whittingehame provides a fairly typical example of the many curvilinear enclosures recorded in the TLEP study area, as well as being one of a significant minority situated on the edge of a ravine. The site was therefore selected for area excavation following an evaluation in April 2002, which located the main enclosure ditch and confirmed the presence of charred plant remains. Although its ravine-edge location might suggest the site was selected with defence in mind, the enclosure does not occupy a dominating position locally. The ground rises up again north-east of the gully leading down to Whittingehame Water (Figure 3.3), and, when approaching the site from

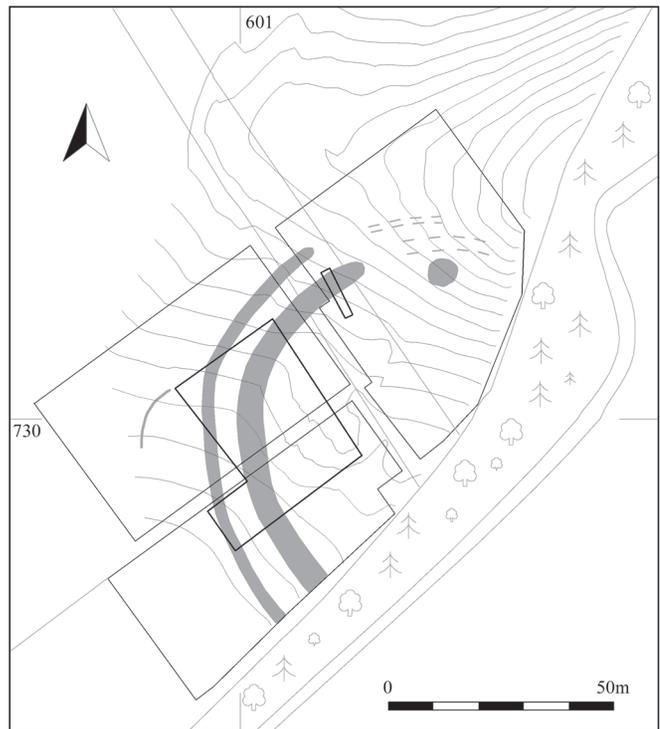


Figure 3.3
 The enclosure at Whittingehame, showing the principal subsurface anomalies and the location of the 2002 excavations. Contours at 0.5m intervals

EXCAVATIONS AT WHITTINGEHAME TOWER

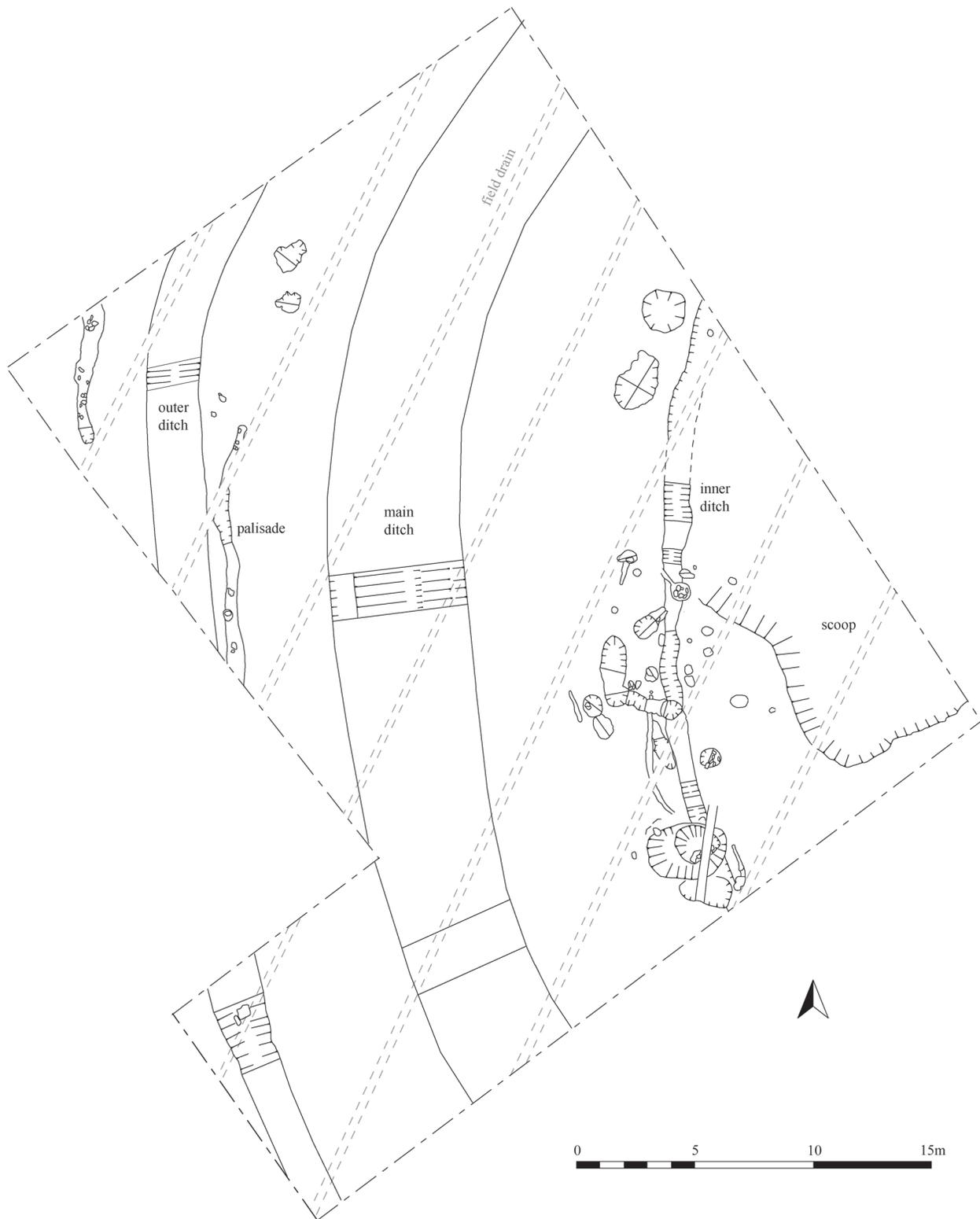


Figure 3.4
Whittingehame: plan of principal features excavated

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the north-west along the modern field boundary, the excavation spoil-heaps were hidden from view until only 150m away, suggesting that even as an earthwork, the enclosure would have been relatively inconspicuous in its immediate setting. The site is however visible from further afield and indeed can clearly be seen from the top of Traprain Law.

THE EXCAVATIONS

The principal objectives of the excavation were to sample the different enclosure elements; to investigate the interior for structural remains; and to sample deposits for material from which to reconstruct the chronology and character of activity. Area 1 (*c.* 1030m²) in the cultivated field uncovered a substantial length of the ditch circuits and a portion of the interior. A small trench (Area 2) was opened in the pasture to confirm the continuation of the inner ditch and to investigate the state of survival of deposits. The excavation was conducted in two stages: four weeks in late June–early July 2002, and a further period in October–November, necessitated by

the adverse weather conditions of the early summer! A Data Structure Report was submitted to Historic Scotland in March 2003 (ASUD 2003a). The site code is TWT02.

The results are described in two main sections: the first describes the enclosure features, the second deals with the interior, where several phases of activity were revealed. The topsoil was a brown clay loam *c.* 0.35m deep, whilst the subsoil consisted of slightly sandy orange-brown boulder clay. This was fairly consistent across the area investigated, although there was some variation, particularly in the south-eastern part of Area 1, where there was more colour variation and a greater concentration of rounded stone inclusions. Some limited disturbance (< 0.1m) caused by modern ploughing was evident to the subsoil and the upper horizon of archaeological deposits, and a parallel series of clay field drains cut through the site following the lie of the land, which falls gently from south-west to north-east within the enclosure. Their position is shown on the site plan (Figure 3.4); they were particularly clear where they cut through an area of stone spreads in the eastern corner of the site.



Figure 3.5

View from the west, showing the palisade, main ditch and field drains

EXCAVATIONS AT WHITTINGEHAME TOWER

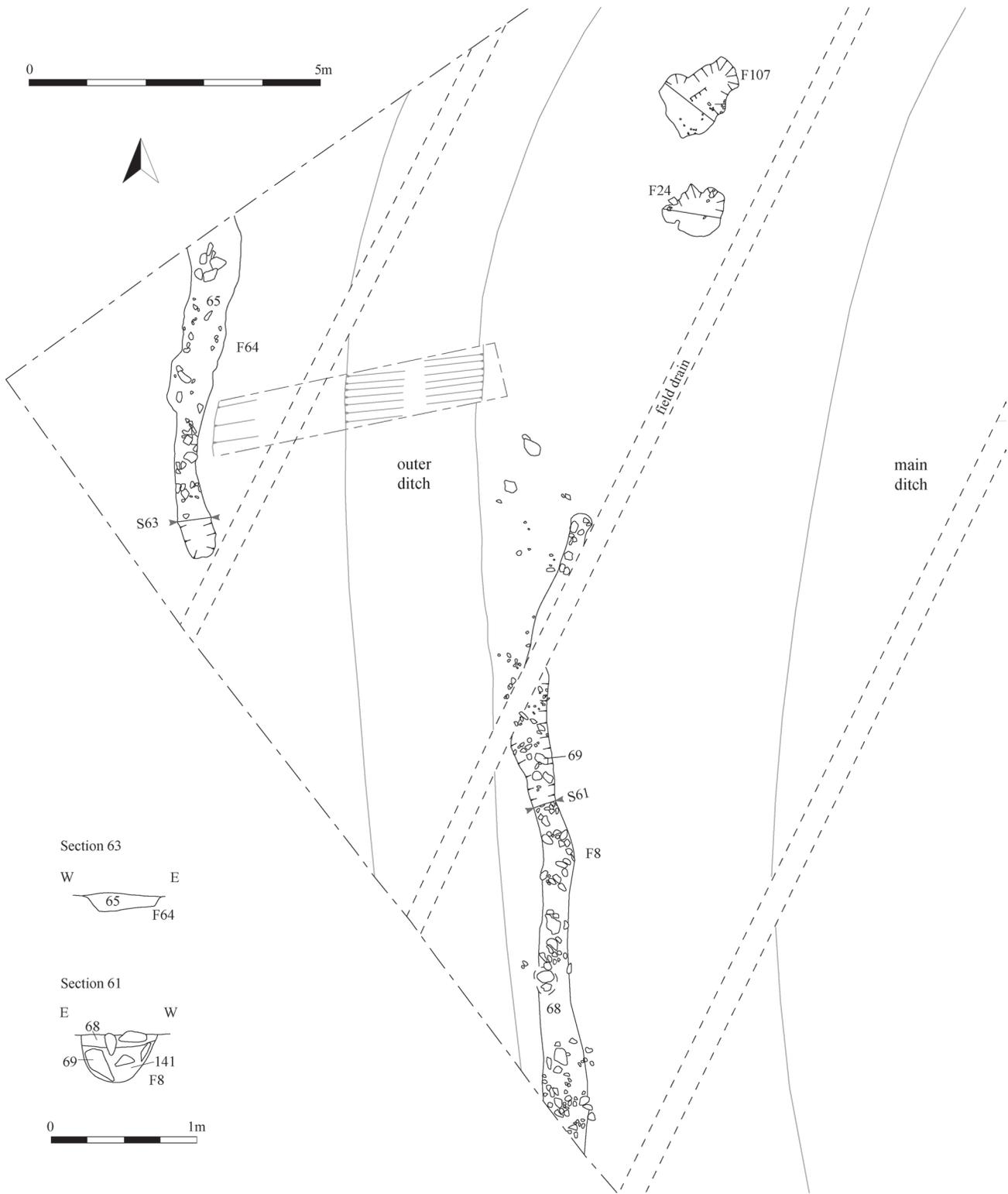


Figure 3.6
Plan and sections of the palisade

The outer ditch

The outer ditch was examined in two places, a 3m length in the highest part of the site in the south-west corner of Area 1 (Cutting 1), and a 1m section in the north-west corner (Cutting 2). No evidence for a break in the ditch was identified within the areas examined and the cropmarks seem to indicate that it was continuous between these points. Excavation revealed two main phases of ditch (Figure 3.7).

The primary ditch

The original outer ditch had sloping sides, with slightly different profiles in the two sections, becoming more substantial as it descended the hill. The fall in levels between the bases of the primary cuts in the two sections is *c.* 1.7m. In Cutting 1 (F104), it was 2m wide and 0.65m deep, with a flattish bottom interrupted by several natural boulders not removed by the ditch diggers. In Cutting 2 (F49) the ditch was substantially wider (2.5m) and deeper (1.2m), but maintained the same overall profile. In F49, a layer of silty clay [142] had formed in the base of the ditch, above which was a substantial deposit of clay with silt which almost filled the ditch [146 = 122]; the equivalent deposit in Cutting 1 was a tan coloured silty clay [105], which again extended most of the way up the ditch.

Second ditch phase

A second phase of boundary ditch was dug through the infilled earlier ditch, creating a feature of similar

depth, but with a markedly different profile and character from its predecessor – and to a certain extent between the two cuttings.

In Cutting 1 (F5), the recut ditch had shallower sloping sides than its predecessor, but with a pronounced, vertically sided slot, of the kind often termed an ‘ankle-breaker’, 0.35m wide and 0.2m deep in the base. Apart from a thin basal silt [63], the slot was filled with cobbles and small stones [46], perhaps as an aid to drainage (Figure 3.7, photo). Above this were alternating layers of silty clay [45; 15] and stones [44; 37]. The first of these stony layers [44] covered the bottom of the ditch, whereas the upper layer incorporated some more substantial stones.

In Cutting 2, the recut had a broadly similar profile, but the basal slot was less pronounced (F255). It was filled with stones in yellowish brown clay [111], broadly analogous to the basal deposit in Cutting 1, although not so obviously laid. A piece of birch charcoal from [111] yielded a date of 3350–3030 cal BC (SUERC-10617). Covering it was a layer of dark silt [110] with some stones, which might conceivably relate to the middle stony episode in Cutting 1. Within the overlying sandy loam [58], another possible shallow cut 1.5m wide (F256) was observed, perhaps indicating a partial redefinition of the boundary, but containing quite a lot of stone [257], which may well be equivalent to the upper stones in Cutting 1. The remainder of the ditch in both cuttings was filled with more silty deposits [14; 67], but in Cutting 2, this incorporated

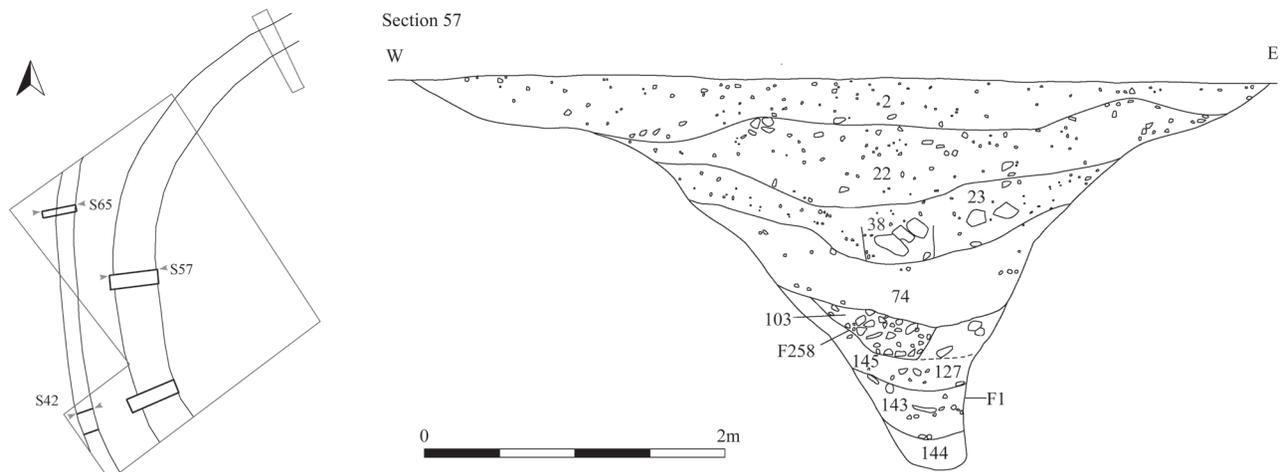


Figure 3.8
Section of main ditch

a deposit of charcoal, fuel ash and burnt stones [48], perhaps the remains of a fire or hearth, and the top of the ditch was covered by a thick deposit of loam [56], most likely agricultural in origin. The absence of an equivalent deposit in Cutting 1 and the smaller overall dimensions of the ditch there is consistent with its truncation by modern ploughing.

The main ditch

A continuous length of the main ditch was revealed running across the excavated area. This was substantially larger than the outer ditch, with which it is concentric. A 2m-wide section was excavated near the centre of the excavation (Cutting 1); a second partial section was positioned in the south-west corner of the site, where patches of cobbles were visible on either side of the ditch (Cutting 2), just to the south of the point at which the ditch was first located in the evaluation.

The ditch was 5.65m wide and proved to have two main phases (Figure 3.8). In its first incarnation (F1), it had a steeply sided V-shaped profile, the lower edges becoming even sharper below a depth of *c.* 1.75m, defining a narrow, near vertically sided cut with a slightly rounded base, giving a total depth of 2.6m. The upper part of the ditch was fairly wide, with a shallow lip on each side, probably the result of erosion.

After a period of neglect, during which the lower part infilled with a series of silt and silty clay layers [144, 143, 127, 145], the ditch was recut or cleaned out (F258). This new cut was 1.85m deep, so the ditch remained very substantial. In time, the recut filled up with clay and cobbles [103], above which a thick layer of sandy clay [74] formed, presumably due to erosion from the sides. Above lay another thick deposit of silty sandy clay [23] incorporating a substantial deposit of large boulders in blue clay [38] which had collected along the inner edge and centre of the partly infilled ditch; the most likely interpretation is that this deposit derives from an internal bank and its revetment, which had partly collapsed or been pushed back into the ditch. The ditch then filled up with clayey loam [22], eventually stabilising as a slight hollow.

No finds were recovered from the ditch fills proper, apart from fragments of a cattle tooth from [38] and a triangular stone slab decorated with incised lines (sf 15), found in the uppermost fill [2]. Two radiocarbon dates were obtained: a fragment of birch charcoal from the basal fill of the recut [103] yielded a date of 1200–940 cal BC (SUERC-10615); a second fragment from

the stony deposit higher up the fill [38] gave a date of 340–540 cal AD (SUERC-10609).

Cutting 2 (2m wide) examined the ditch at a point where a cobbled path was visible on its outer and inner edges, in order to verify the stratigraphic relationship between the ditch and the cobbles. Only the uppermost deposits were investigated. The sides of the ditch (F60) began to drop away sharply at a depth of *c.* 0.4m, at which point it was 3.1m wide (comparable to the profile in Cutting 1). The cobbled surface [3; 4] proved to have been laid right across the surface of the ditch, resting on a deposit of silty clay [121], which closely resembled the penultimate fill in Cutting 1.

This laid surface was aligned with the south-western end of a linear feature, which appears to have been a path or track running across the interior of the site (F77 below). An elongated shallow lip on the outer edge of the ditch implies that this had been in use for some time before the cobbles were laid down, presumably to improve the surface where it ran across the ditch.

In both sections, the top of the ditch ultimately filled up with loam [2; 61], which resembled the surface fill of the outer ditch, and appears to be ploughwash.

The course of the main ditch was also confirmed further down the slope in a 2m wide trench in the orchard area east of the main site (Area 2; Figure 3.3 above). At this point the top of the ditch (F269) was only 4.7m wide; it was not further investigated. Here too, the ditch was covered with ploughwash [273], indicating that the orchard area had previously also been under cultivation, so that survival is unlikely to be any better in this part of the interior. The only other feature identified in Area 2 was a field drain.

The inner ditch

A third, much smaller ditch was identified just over 8m from the inside edge of the main ditch and concentric with both the other ditches. This feature is not apparent on the air photographs or geophysical survey, being obscured and truncated over most its length by later features. It could nevertheless be traced for 25m running from south to north right across the site (Figure 3.9), although the southern part had been very largely removed by a later pit complex (F85).

The ditch was investigated in five separate locations. Even where best preserved, it was no more than 0.85m across and 0.4m deep, with an essentially V-shaped

profile and a rounded base (F9). For the most part, it was filled with silty clay [10; 114; 139; 187; 210; 211; 216]; small patches of cobbling were noted in the base in several places, perhaps as an aid to drainage. There was no evidence for settings for upright timbers, implying the feature was not structural. A possible recut was observed at one point (F186), but only in one place was the ditch observed to cut through another feature (F259), suggesting that the ditch was one of the earliest features in the interior.

The role of this ditch and its relationship with the other circuits is uncertain, but it does not seem substantial enough to have demarcated an enclosure on its own, whilst its concentricity with the other ditches argues that it referenced, or was referenced by, one or both of them, implying that it is not far removed in time. Since the distance to the outer ditch is too great (20m) for them to have functioned together in a meaningful way, any relationship is likely to be with the main ditch. However, the inner ditch does not seem close enough to the main ditch to mark the back of an accompanying bank (although the bank might have spread over time), but it would have been well-positioned to prevent water running off the bank from draining across the sloping interior. Whether or not this was its purpose, it clearly went out of use well before the overlying cobbled surface was laid, since there are various intervening features, evidently representing more than one phase of activity.

Banks

No *in situ* remains of banks were recovered next to any of the enclosure ditches, nor was there conclusive evidence from their fills, apart from the tumbled stone mid way up the fill of the recut main ditch. This appears to have derived from the eastern, inner edge, and could well be the remains of a bank revetment. Equally it is noticeable that a band of the same width as the main ditch, and immediately inside it, is devoid of features, as essentially is the area between the two larger ditches, apart from the palisades and a couple of shallow scoops. This suggests that banks probably did accompany the two larger ditches. Indeed, a bank inside the outer ditch may have contributed to the apparently better preservation of the inner arm of the palisade (assuming that it is earlier). At the same time, there are a number of features in the space between the rear limit of the putative main bank and the small inner ditch.

The enclosure entrance

No break for an entrance though the ditches was apparent within the excavated area or on the air photographs of the south-western part of the enclosure. The geophysical survey does, however, hint at a possible gap in the inner and outer ditches close to the northernmost point of the circuit (Figure 3.3), which might mark the position of an entrance giving onto the gully leading to Whittingehame Water. As we have seen, the cuttings through the outer ditch imply that the earthworks became more substantial as they descended the slope, which would be appropriate on the entrance side, although this effect could also be a function of more severe plough truncation at the top of the site and/or in deference to the topography.

THE INTERIOR

The main feature of the interior is a large scooped area with a cobbled surface. As we shall see, this was created at a time when the main ditch – although by then largely silted up – still formed a significant physical boundary, whereas the inner ditch had gone out of use and in fact is sealed by the cobbling associated with the scoop.

In the area close to the inner ditch, the excavation revealed a cluster of different types of cut feature, evidently representing several phases of activity. The task of phasing these features is far from straightforward; as they form no coherent structural plan and such relationships as exist do not always help! Various features, including some that cut the ditch are sealed by one or both phases of cobbled surface; they seem to represent at least two phases of activity and possibly as many as four. Others cut though the ditch, but cannot be related to the surfaces. A further group are either contemporary with the scoop or even later, but this leaves a residue, especially west of the ditch, which could be of any phase.

The features most likely to represent occupation contemporary with the main enclosure ditches are described first. Digging the scoop will have removed any insubstantial traces of earlier occupation in the area further away from the inner ditch.

Features pre-dating the scooped settlement (Figure 3.9)

As noted above, only a single feature, a small pit (F259, 0.5m deep) filled with fire-cracked stones and burnt silty clay [260], can be shown to be certainly earlier

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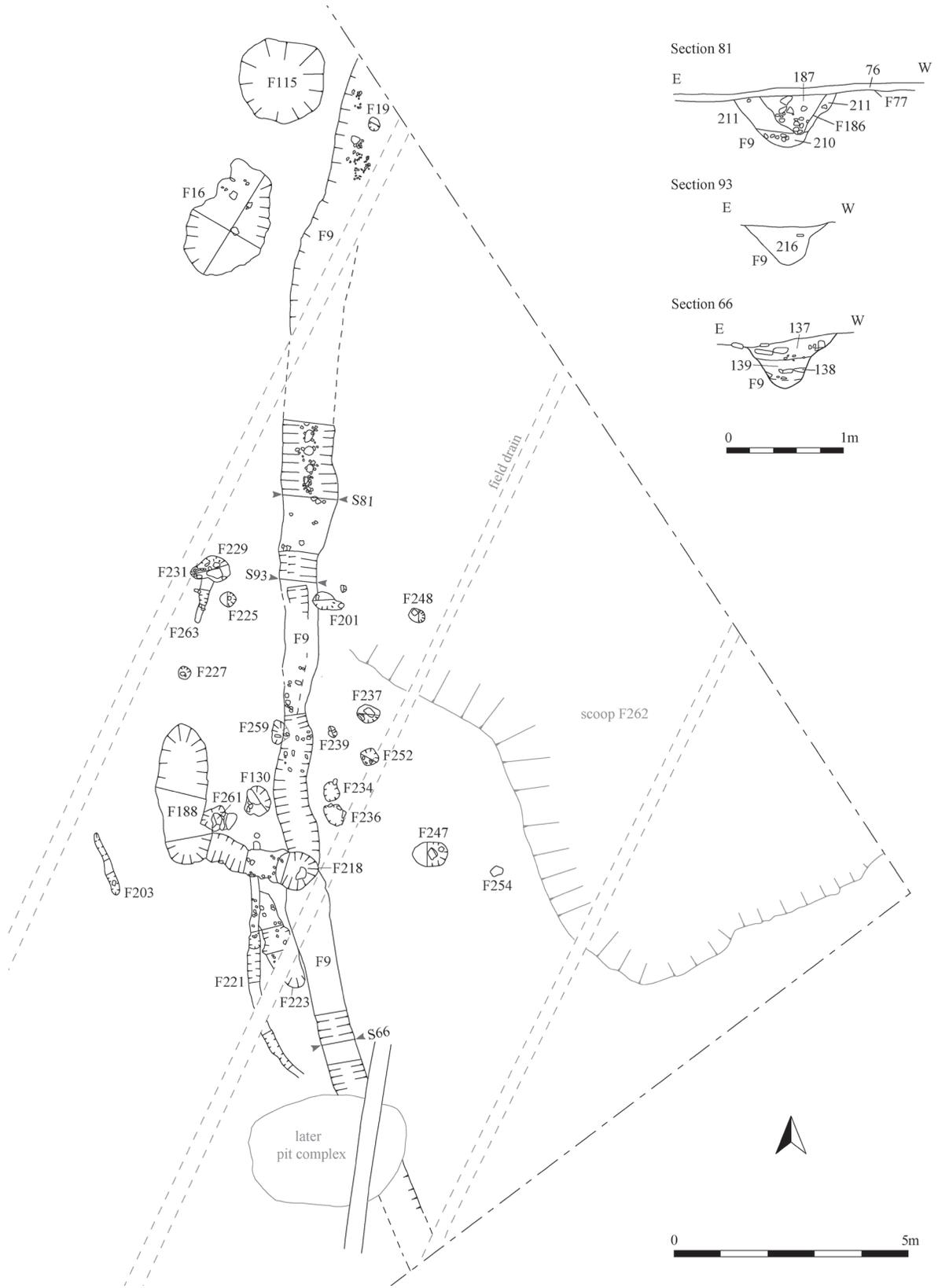


Figure 3.9
Plan and sections of inner ditch, early cut features and scoop

than the inner ditch. A fire-cracked sandstone boulder (F261) and another, shallower pit (F130, 0.15m deep) with fire-cracked stones and charcoal in its lower fill [181] lay just over 1m away and might be connected. The upper fill [168] of this second pit (which was sealed beneath the first cobbled surface) contained two large flat stones that might have been post supports.

Prominent among other features sealed below the early cobbled surface were two post-pits just under 3m apart and perhaps a pair (F247; F218). Both were of similar depth (0.35–0.38m) and contained a number of large packing stones in clayey fills. One of them (F218) cut the inner ditch as well as a gully beyond it (F152), one of a series of intercutting gullies west of the inner ditch. The earliest of these (F223) – an elongated feature some 2m long and 0.4m deep – may also have cut the inner ditch, but the relationship was obscured by a field drain. F223 was cut by a narrow, curvilinear gully F221, which was traced for a distance of c. 6m; its southern end was cut away by a later pit complex, whilst its northern end appears to tail out. Apart from one possible stake-hole at its northern end, there was no conclusive evidence for uprights and the gully seems too irregular to be the wall of a building, although it could perhaps mark a fence line or less regular structure. F221 was in its turn cut by gully F152. At its western end, F152 intersects at a near right-angle with another broad shallow gully (F188, 3m in length); the two together might form the remains of some kind of structure. Precisely how many phases of activity are represented is uncertain, since some of the inter-cutting gullies may nevertheless be essentially contemporary, but there are at least two and possibly up to four. Completing this group of features were three post-holes (F234, F236, F252), which are more rectangular in plan than the others in the area.

The remaining features sealed by the earlier cobbled surface consisted of a broken saddle quern (sf 6) set into the ground surface, which might have been re-used as a post-pad (F254) and a handful of post-holes of different sizes containing packing stones, none deeper than 0.15–0.25m (F201, F225, F237, F239, F248). F201 (which cuts the ditch) and F248 may have formed a pair, whilst F225 might form a pair with the similar F227, which lies beyond the cobbled surface, 1.8m to the south-west.

Unphased features

A number of unphased features are most usefully mentioned at this point, as some of them may well

pre-date the scooped settlement. The best candidates are two pairs of irregular, shallow pits or scoops (0.1–0.2m deep;), given their general resemblance to other features mentioned above. The first pair (F24; F107) lay between the main and outer enclosure ditches, north of the inner palisade, in a position where they would have been sealed by any bank associated with either ditch (Figure 3.6 above); they might therefore belong to the same phase as the palisade. The second pair (F16; F115) were located a little the north of the main concentration of cut features, beyond the area of the scoop but within the likely line of any bank for the main enclosure. These are slightly larger and more regular than the first, with silty clay fills.

Among the other unphased features are an intercutting pair of post-holes (F229; F231), connected to a short stretch of gully (F263). Finally, post-hole F19 cut into the north end of the inner ditch appeared comparable to other features and included two cobble tools in its stone packing (sf 13; sf 17), but charred barley in the fill yielded a post-medieval date (SUERC-10606), casting some doubt on its age.

The digging of the scoop and the first cobbled surface

In the eastern corner of the excavation, a broad and shallow scoop (F262) had been cut into the natural slope, creating a level, sub-rectangular platform roughly 5×7m in extent within the excavation, but extending beyond it to the east. The scoop had a sharp lip at its southern end, but the western edge was gentler. This terracing would have removed any smaller structural features associated with the earlier occupation described above.

The scoop had been surfaced with a layer of small rounded cobbles [31 = 32 = 75], bedded in a gritty layer [123, 124] (Figure 3.10A, B). There is no evidence for any accumulation of material in the scoop, or of features pre-dating the cobbles within it, which suggests that the surface is primary. Although the cobbles closely followed the southern edge of the terraced area, they extended beyond it to the west and north – covering the infilled inner ditch and many of the features described above – so that the total area covered is some 12×10m. The western edge of the surface was truncated by a later track through the site, but it appears to peter out at around the projected location of the bank for the main enclosure ditch, suggesting that the bank remains were still evident when the surface was laid. One sherd of hand-made pottery (sf 8) and scattered fragments of burnt clay



Figure 3.10 (A)
Plan of earlier cobbled surface



Figure 3.10 (B)

View of earlier cobbled surface, showing later field drains

were found among the cobbles [31], whilst a second sherd (sf 2) was found on top of them [87].

Other signs of contemporary activity were restricted to a small scoop with a charcoal-rich fill cut into the cobbling (F96) and a post-hole (F99), which occupies a void in the cobbling, and so *could* alternatively belong with the previous occupation. A stone spread along the southern edge of the scoop [118] may represent an episode of resurfacing or levelling before the new surface about to be described. A charred barley seed from within [118] produced a date of cal AD 60–240 (SUERC-10618).

The later cobbled surface and paving

A second surface was established over the western two-thirds of the first one, largely outside the scoop. This new surface covered an overall area of c. 9m × 8m and comprised areas of larger paving [47] as well as rough cobbles [21], the latter generally larger than in the earlier surface and including a fair amount of fire-cracked and burnt stone (Figure 3.11). Within the scoop, the existing cobbling appears to have continued in use, unless [118] is in fact part of the new surface.

On the eastern edge of the new surface, beside the scoop was a sub-circular paved area of large flag stones around 4m across, its north-west corner cut through by one of the field drains (Stone Structure 1; Figure 3.12). On analogy with other sites in the region such as St Germain's (Alexander and Watkins 1998), this is likely to be the remains of a stone structure or building of circular or sub-rectangular plan. No traces of a wall-line were observed, however, whether stone settings or post-holes, or wall foundations. A little to the south lay a discrete smaller patch of paving. This may be the remains of another structure, since to its south-east was a spread of larger stones [109] extending down the slope into the scoop over [118], too uneven to be an *in situ* surface, but which could be later tumble or collapse.

On the south-west side of Stone Structure 1 was an L-shaped arrangement of stones set on edge in a manner resembling hearths found at other sites. There was, however, no obvious evidence of *in situ* burning, although its silty clay [39] fill did yield two of the site's more diagnostic finds – a copper alloy and blue enamel stud (sf 1) and part of the base of a second century AD Drag 31 samian bowl worn almost beyond recognition

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Figure 3.11
Plan of later paved surface, with later cut features, showing location of later pathway



Figure 3.12

Stone Structure 1 under excavation, from the east

(sf 9)! Also apparently integral with this later surface were two substantial steep sided circular post-pits, 7m apart (F128; F199). Both were of similar dimensions (0.8–0.9m across; *c.* 0.55m deep) and were densely packed with large stones set in clay (Figure 3.13). F128 was clearly visible in plan at this level; F199 lay beneath the later track so its relationship is less secure, but the similarity in construction makes it likely that it too belongs to this phase. F199 was connected with a short segment of narrow gully F242, running north-west out of the top of the pit. The gully contained a row of slabs laid on edge, and its charcoal rich fill [241] perhaps indicates the *in situ* burning of wooden structural remains.

To the east of the paved areas, a series of silty loam deposits formed in the area of the original scoop [98, 52, 11], eventually infilling the hollow and covering rubble spread [109]. Two cobbles utilised as hones (sf 3; sf 12) were found in [98]. This lower deposit seems to have accumulated gradually, whereas the two upper deposits [52, 11], which contained large quantities of carbonised barley and seaweed, presumably accumulated as a result of activities undertaken nearby;

a few chips of burnt bone also survived. Radiocarbon dates of cal AD 330–540 and 350–550 (SUERC-10599; 10600) were obtained from burnt barley and hazelnut in the upper deposit [11].

Other late features

Around the edge of the cobbled area were a number of other features that cannot be related stratigraphically to either surface, but appear from associated radiocarbon dates to be broadly contemporary with the later deposits in the scoop.

The pit complex

The most prominent of these was a large sub-rectangular pit approximately 2.5m × 3.5m across (F85), lying just beyond the south-west corner of the cobbled area; this seems to have been recut once (F86) and also cut through the old inner ditch [114] (Figure 3.14). A series of thin deposits of loamy clay around the western and southern sides [88; 89; 94; 106] were all that remained of the original pit fill. The recut increased the depth of the pit slightly in the centre

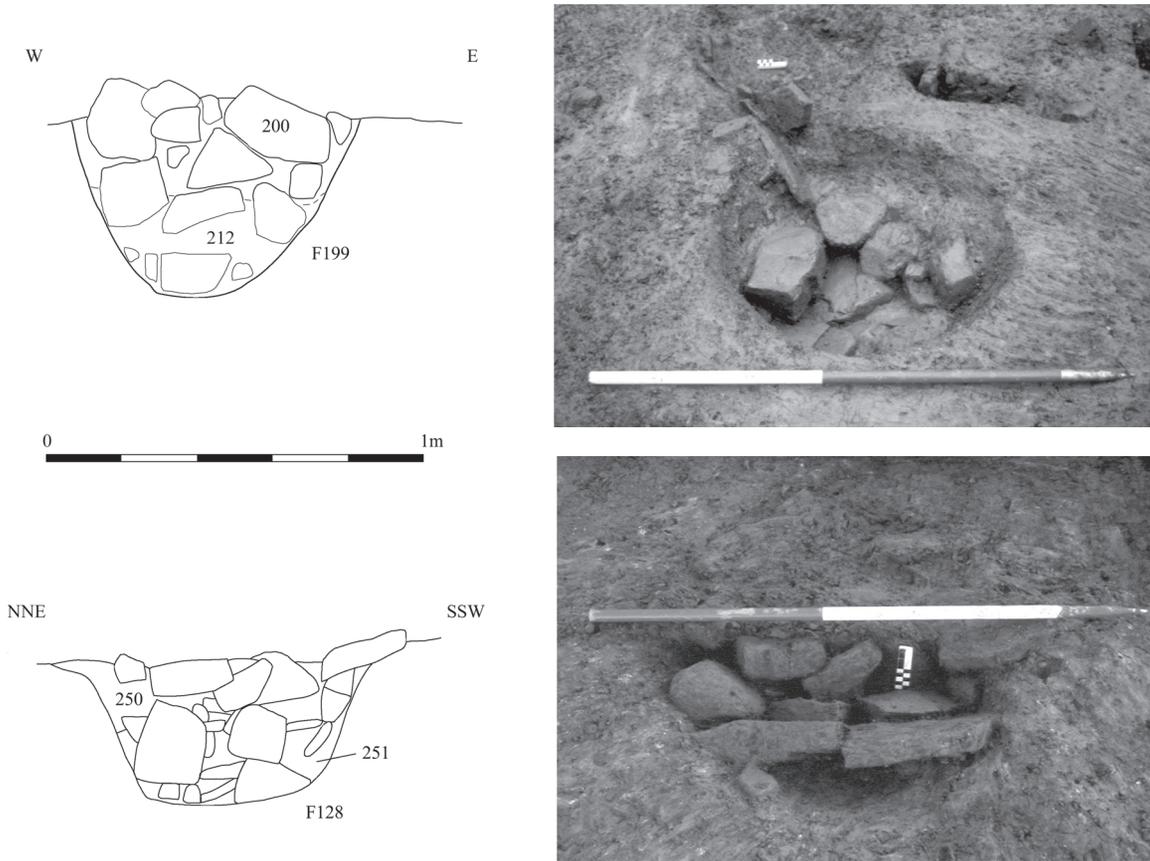


Figure 3.13
Stone packed post-holes F128 & F199

to 0.65m, although a deposit of bluish clay [93] at the centre, beside a large flat boulder in the natural subsoil, was strictly speaking perhaps the result of gleying rather than anthropogenic. Covering both of these was a layer of reddish-grey silty clay [87], whilst a deposit of clay with small stones [43] around the shallower southern edge, from which a rubber or polisher (sf 18) was recovered, may reflect erosion whilst the pit was open. Lining part of the northern side of the pit was a blackish deposit [113], perhaps a natural staining or concretion as there was no clear evidence of burning.

Around the pit were a number of features, which may represent a screen around it, since, as with the pit itself, there appeared to be two phases. The first is on the east side of the pit, and comprises a 2.5m long curvilinear gully (F12) filled with charcoal-rich sandy clay [13]. Cut into this were the remains of a post-setting (F33) perhaps replacing an earlier post-hole

(F101), whilst further around the pit's circumference were two more post-holes, one of which (F72) cut the fill at the edge of the first pit phase, the other just outside (F91); a small scoop on the edge of the pit might mark the position of a third. Together the post-holes and gully form an arc of diameter 4.75m, enclosing the northern side of the pit, but leaving the southern side open for access, which suggests they were contemporary. It remains possible, however, that the gully and post-holes instead relate to a shallow scoop F90, which was later dug into the southern edge of the infilled pit and was itself filled with stones [18].

Following its use, the upper part of the pit was backfilled with loam and large stones, perhaps deriving from an adjacent structure [42; 71] and was capped by a thin layer of reddish, slightly stony clay [40], from which a piece of fired clay was recovered. This final infill clearly post-dates the later cobbled surface, although the relationship of the pit itself to

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the cobbles is less certainly proved. A charred cereal grain from the lowest surviving fill of the first pit [106] produced a date of cal AD 420–590 (SUERC-10616), whilst emmer and barley grains from one of the adjacent post-holes (F33) yielded determinations of cal AD 400–560 and cal AD 410–570 (SUERC-10608; 10607). These very consistent dates tend to confirm the view that the pit and the post-holes were contemporary and also that the pit itself was dug after the second surface was laid.

Other features

Some 6m to the north of the pit, in the same area as the earlier pits and gullies, but underlying the later track across the interior, were two pairs of intercutting pits of similar dimensions. In each case, a fairly substantial

steep-sided post-pit (F182; F193) containing packing stones had been cut through an earlier shallow scoop (F205; F213). The base of both post-pits had a thin layer of grey clay, above which was a fill of clayey loam and stones. Samples of charred grain from the basal clay [195] in F193 yielded dates of cal AD 400–560 and cal AD 330–540 (SUERC-10621; 10625), whilst a charred oat grain from the lower fill [184] of pit F182 produced a date of cal AD 410–570 (SUERC-10619). A pea from the same deposit, however, proved to be post-medieval (SUERC-10620) and is presumably intrusive.

Also belonging to this general period is a shallow scoop F54 to the north-west of the cobbles, from which hazel charcoal yielded a date of cal AD 250–530 (SUERC-10610).

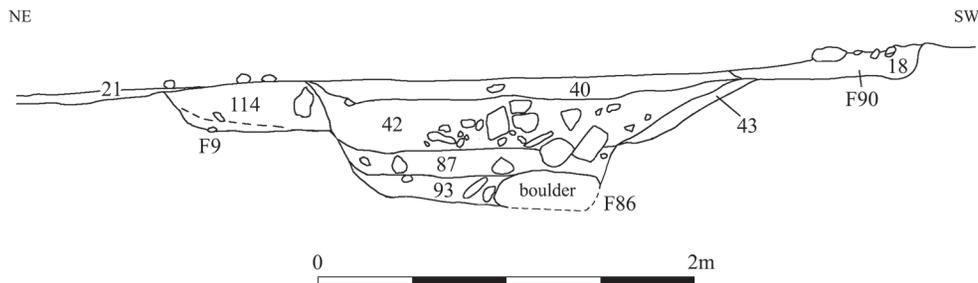


Figure 3.14

View of pit area during excavation and section

The trackway and later agricultural features

Some time after the abandonment of the settlement, a path or track (F77) was worn across the enclosure, discernible as a shallow hollow around 2.5m wide, skirting the north-western side of the former scoop (Figure 3.11 above) and running over a slight hollow marking the site of the main ditch, where a spread of small cobbles [3, 4] had been laid to stabilise the surface over the largely backfilled main ditch, after which it tailed off. To judge from the degree of erosion, this path was in use for some time, but the only archaeological dating evidence was a single abraded sherd of hand-made pottery (sf 11), which is clearly residual.

A period of agricultural use then followed, of sufficient duration for ploughsoil to fill the tops of the ditches, but pre-dating the insertion of a series of ceramic field drains, spaced at *c.* 5m intervals, presumably in the course of nineteenth century agricultural improvement. Like the trackway, these traverse the site on a north-east to south-west alignment, cutting the underlying archaeology to a depth of 0.3m.

DISCUSSION

The radiocarbon dating is presented in Chapter 9. As we saw, the excavated evidence only enables the site to be partially phased, since the enclosure ditches cannot be related to one another, or apart from the inner ditch, to the sequence in the interior. With the help of the radiocarbon dates, a fairly detailed picture of the later stages of occupation can be proposed, but the same unfortunately cannot be said for the enclosure ditches and the early features beneath the cobbles, which were largely barren of suitable samples, a problem compounded by the absence of diagnostic artefacts.

Before presenting a model for the site, we therefore need to review the evidence for the three enclosure circuits. Their concentricity suggests that at the very least they referenced each other, whilst the tops of both larger ditches were evidently still visible hollows when the last occupants abandoned the site. There is also reason to believe that (1) the palisade slots were replaced by the outer ditch; and (2) the inner ditch was an adjunct of the main ditch rather than an independent circuit. Both larger ditches displayed evidence of recuts.

Investigations at Bannockburn and Broxmouth have shown just how complicated sequences of

enclosure can be (Hill 1982; Rideout 1996). Discussion here will therefore be restricted to the merits of the two simplest models for Whittingehame. These are that the two main circuits represent discrete remodellings, or that essentially they belong together. Taking the first model to begin with, there are in fact arguments both for and against. In potential support is the Neolithic radiocarbon date from the outer ditch recut, whereas charcoal in the main ditch recut yielded a Late Bronze Age date. Neither sample is taphonomically secure, however, and pottery of later prehistoric character was found in the palisade. Unless other regional examples emerge, a Neolithic date for the outer ditch is probably to be discounted. The other argument against the outer circuit being an earlier settlement boundary is the lack of features beneath the bank of the main ditch (two pits between the circuits would have lain beneath the bank of the outer ditch). The outer ditch also seems unlikely to post-date the main ditch, since it would have been easier to recut the existing ditch – unless more living space was required, in which case we might expect the top of the existing ditch to be infilled, which it was not.

The absence of clear evidence that the two circuits represent individual remodelling episodes leaves us with the possibility that they belong together. If so, the simplest scenario is to see the main ditch and bank as originally fronted by a palisade, which was superseded by a ditch. The gap through the palisades might have served to channel people and animals entering the site into the area in front of the ditch and towards an entrance lying further round the main ditch circuit to the north, screened from direct access by the palisade. When the ditch replaced the palisade, either the entrance was now approached directly, or a new palisade was erected outside the area investigated.

A Late Bronze Age date for the enclosure is plausible in the light of broadly similar dates from Standingstone and East Linton (Chapters 4, 6) and on Traprain Law itself, whilst the steep-sided form of the main ditch recalls some of the Standingstone cuts. Against this, earthworks on the scale of the Whittingehame main ditch are generally of Later Iron Age date in southern Scotland, as at Bannockburn (Rideout 1996), Brixwold (Crone and O'Sullivan 1997), Fishers Road West (Haselgrove and McCullagh 2000) or St Germain's (Alexander and Watkins 1998); Broxmouth is the only excavated site in East Lothian with even larger ditches.

The pottery in the palisade apart, the only other pointers to the date of the enclosure are (1) the reused saddle quern from below the first cobbled surface; and (2) the late/post-Roman Iron Age radiocarbon date from among the bank remains higher up the main ditch fill. The former would accord better with occupation before the final centuries BC (but does not demand it), whilst the latter shows that by the mid-first millennium AD, the main earthwork was no longer being maintained, notwithstanding intensive activity in the interior at this time.

Pottery and rotary querns are both reasonably common on settlements occupied at the turn of the first millennia BC and AD in East Lothian, including Broxmouth, Foster Law, Knowes, Phantassie, and St Germain's (Chapter 7), perhaps providing a further argument against occupation at Whittingehame at this time. There is no hard and fast rule, however – the extensively excavated site at Fishers Road East (Haselgrove and McCullagh 2000) only yielded 12 sherds of pottery and one saddle quern – and the limited quantity of the former and lack of rotary querns at Whittingehame might just be down to the particular part of the site explored.

In view of the limited signs of pre-enclosure activity, the simplest option is probably therefore to take the Late Bronze Age radiocarbon date and the other late prehistoric finds at face value and to suggest that the Whittingehame enclosure was constructed and occupied at this period. The recutting of the ditches could however have taken place at a later date. As we will see in subsequent chapters, there is evidence of renewed episodes of ditch digging in the Later Iron Age on a number of other enclosures in East Lothian that were originally founded in the Late Bronze Age and/or Earlier Iron Age.

In the light of this discussion, the preferred chronological model for the site will now be presented, bearing in mind that various alternatives are also possible.

1. Neolithic?

Judging from the radiocarbon dated charcoal in the outer ditch, there was some kind of activity on the site in the middle Neolithic. No definite context was apparent, but it may be relevant that one of two adjacent early pits containing fire-cracked stones was cut by the inner ditch, whilst a nearby post-hole yielded bread wheat (F234), a species which does sometimes occur in the Neolithic (Chapter 8). It is

possible that these and some of the other unphased features in the cluster behind the main rampart represent a phase of pre-enclosure occupation.

2. Late Bronze Age/Earlier Iron Age enclosed settlement

There was apparently no further activity until the Late Bronze Age. Either then or in the Earlier Iron Age, a semi-circular enclosure was constructed on the ravine edge. Initially, the main ditch and bank were screened by a palisade, with a break on the north-west side of the circuit. This may have served to channel people and animals towards an entrance further along the circuit to the north, well-placed to give access to Whittingehame Water below.

The palisade was later replaced by an outer bank and ditch, while a smaller ditch behind the main bank and ditch silted up. Less is known about the contemporary occupation in the interior of the enclosure, but several phases of activity are represented in the area immediately behind the main bank, implying that it was of some duration. The various gullies and post-holes form no coherent structural plan, however, and the only finds from this period were a broken saddle quern reused as a post-pad and a single potsherd from the palisade. Both earthwork circuits were remodelled at least once during the lifetime of the enclosure, although precisely how much later is unclear.

3. The Roman Iron Age scooped settlement

Probably after a significant period of abandonment, the enclosure was reoccupied. The new occupants dug a large shallow scoop into the slope – in the process probably removing some of the evidence left by the earlier stages of occupation – and a cobbled surface was then laid over the scoop and much of the adjacent area inside the main ditch and bank – at this stage still a substantial earthwork. Again dating evidence is limited, but a single radiocarbon date from a secondary cobbling episode and a residual sherd of worn later second century AD samian imply that this reoccupation dates to the Roman Iron Age.

The first cobbled surface was later replaced by another laid directly over its predecessor. This second surface, however, included areas of more substantial paving, which are likely to be the remains of one or more stone buildings similar to those known on other Roman Iron Age sites in East Lothian. A small number of other features appeared to be contemporary with

the use of this second surface, including the remains of a possible hearth and some post-holes.

4. *Post-Roman occupation*

It then seems that the focus of habitation shifted out of range of the excavated area or the settlement may even have been abandoned again, as shown by the collapse of at least one of the stone structures and soil accumulation over the floor of the scoop.

After some time had elapsed, the western end of the enclosure once again became a focus of activity. This resulted in the upper part of the scoop being filled with soil containing a significant amount of burnt material including both cereal and seaweed, the latter perhaps having been brought to Whittingehame for use as a fertiliser. A large pit with two distinct phases and protected by a screen was dug next to the surface, along with a number of other scoops and post-holes. Many of these other features also yielded fairly rich carbonized assemblages, again attesting to the agricultural nature of much of this activity.

In contrast to the paucity of radiocarbon determinations for the earlier periods, several dates were obtained, placing this phase of activity firmly in the early post-Roman period; according to the modelling

undertaken in Chapter 9, this phase probably ended in the sixth, if not the seventh, century cal AD. Although this post-Roman activity seems fairly intensive, it need not follow, however, that the settlement was permanently occupied at this time. The remains of the enclosure might simply have provided a convenient place for processing crops close to where they were grown. The tight dispersion of the radiocarbon dates would allow the relevant activity to have been of relatively short duration – although long enough for some structures to be replaced – whilst it was around this time that the bank revetment finally collapsed or was pushed down, showing that by now the occupants no longer had any interest in keeping the ditch even partly open.

5. *Post-Medieval and modern*

Probably long after the settlement had been abandoned, a spread of cobbles was laid at the point where a relatively long-lived path or track crossed the hollow left by the main ditch. A period of agricultural use followed, during which the tops of the ditches filled up with ploughsoil, and finally, in the nineteenth century, a series of regularly-spaced field drains were inserted to aid drainage on the heavy clay soil.