

Illus 1 Location maps. Lower map based upon digital base map provided by Historic Scotland.

The excavation of prehistoric and medieval features at Inchturre, Perth and Kinross

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with contributions by Andrew Dunwell, Melanie Johnson, Jennifer Miller and Susan Ramsay

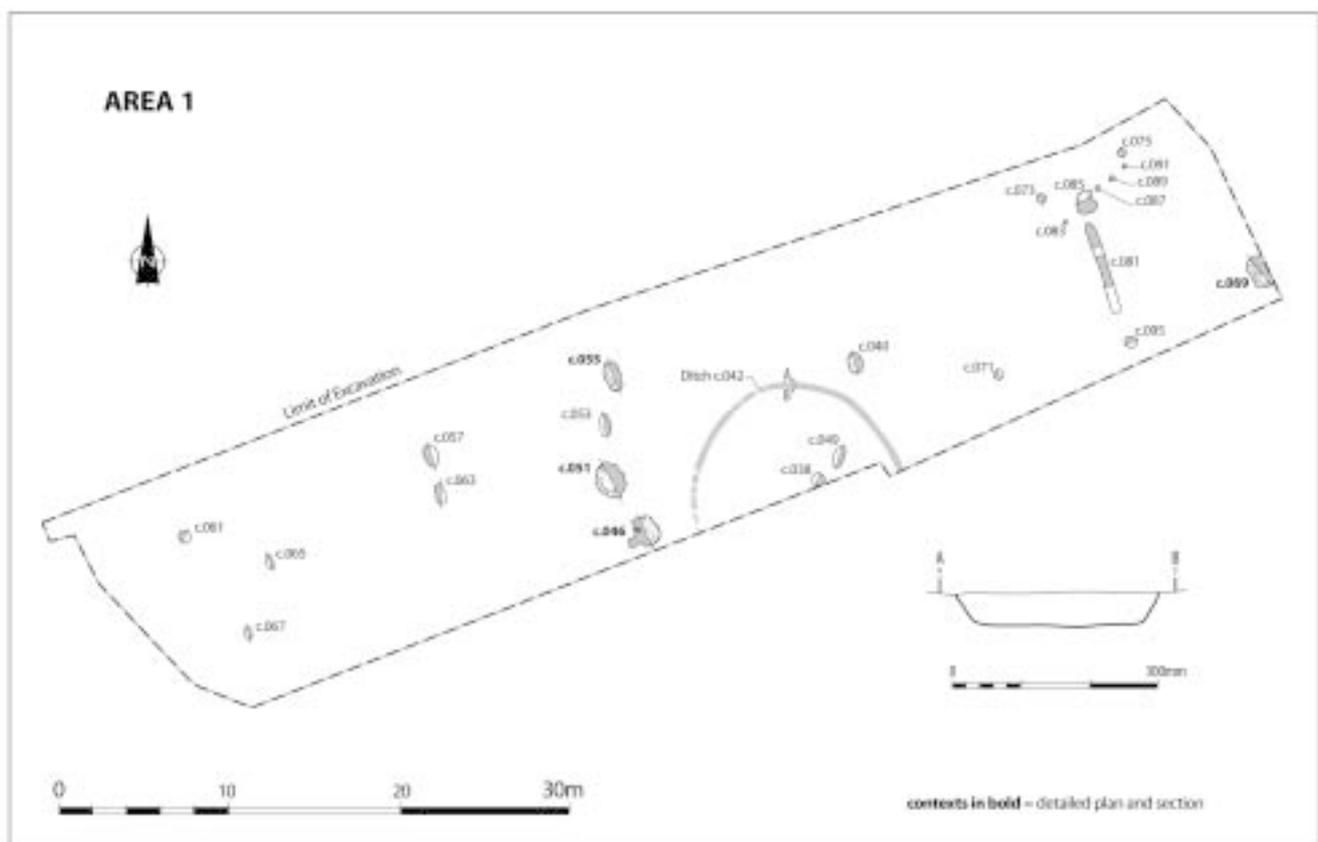
Introduction

In September 2001 CFA Archaeology Ltd carried out an archaeological excavation of a series of previously undetected plough-truncated archaeological features discovered at Inchturre, Perth and Kinross (NGR NO 2790 2899 centred), located towards the eastern end of the Carse of Gowrie (Illus 1). The features were revealed during a trial trenching evaluation conducted within the corridor of the new A90 road interchange at Inchturre, in advance of its construction (Illus 1). The site lay immediately west of the northern tip of the village, on the NW side of the road as it ran prior to its upgrading (Illus 1, lower). Fieldwork and post-excavation work were commissioned by Historic Scotland on behalf the Scottish Ministers.

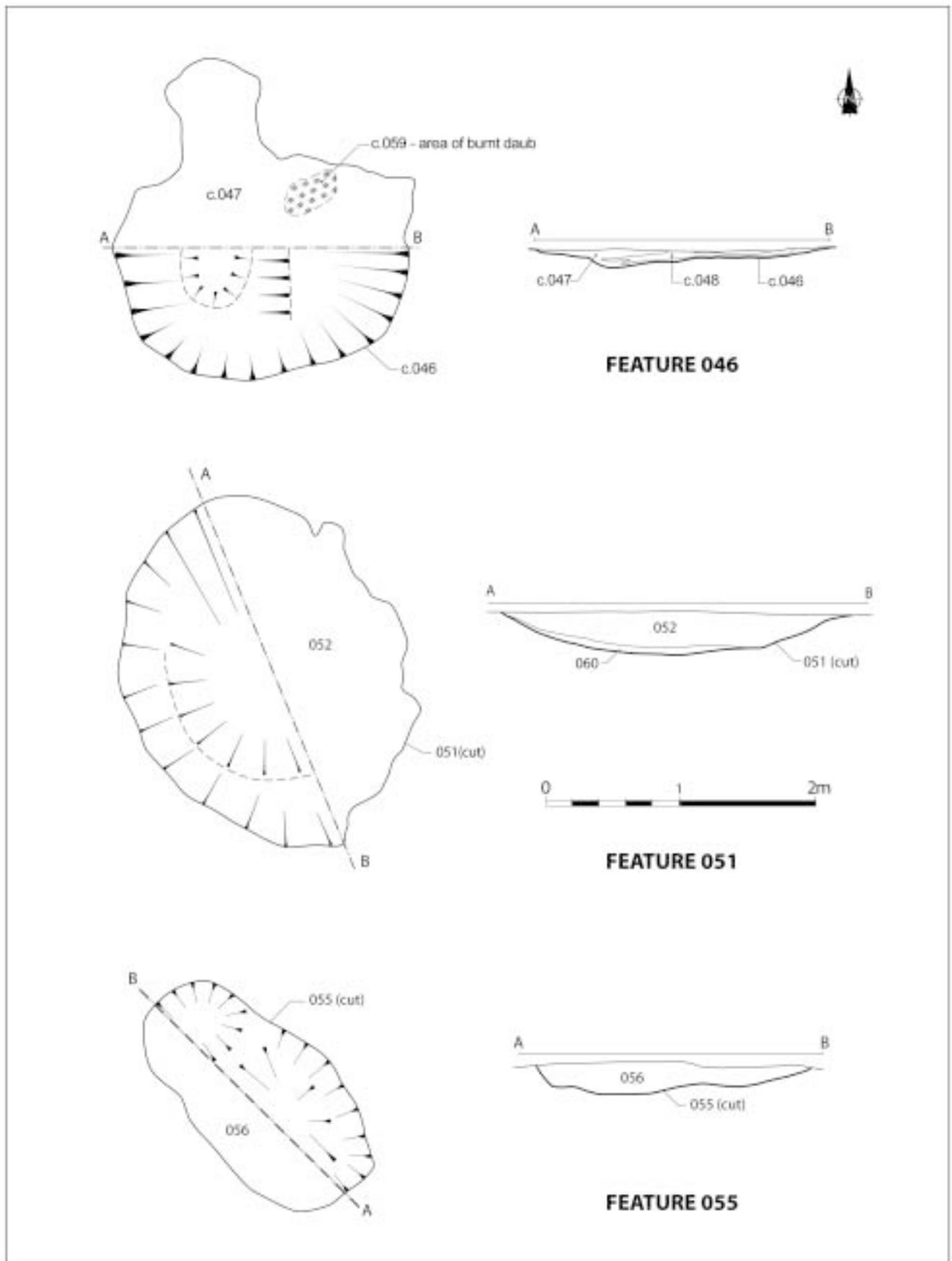
Excavation results

General

Two sections within the road corridor (Areas 1 and 2, Illus 1, lower) were stripped of topsoil over the full extent of the features identified during the trial trenching evaluation. Area 1 measured approximately 85m long by 17m wide, and Area 2 was 40m long by 15m wide, both trenches being aligned NNE–SSW. The excavation site lay within a fairly level field, sloping down gently towards the east, where the sandy topsoil also increased in depth from 0.3m to 0.5m. Topsoil overlay a compact, fine silty sand layer, which varied in depth from 0.1m, within Area 1, to 0.2m in the NE corner of Area 2. This buried soil is presumed to be a horizon of relict tilled



Illus 2 Area 1 excavation plan, and section of ring-groove 042.



Illus 3 'Pit alignment': plans and sections of pits 046, 051 and 055.

soil. It sealed beneath it all of the archaeological features within Area 1, which were preserved as negative features cut into a sand and gravel subsoil.

A scatter of features was spread across Area 1. As no one feature had any physical relationships with any other, the following description groups features according to their spatial location and general type. No significant archaeological features were recorded within Area 2, and this area will not be considered further in this report.

Full details of all features excavated at this site, as well as the results of the archaeological evaluation, are contained in the site archive lodged with the National Monuments Record of Scotland.

Ring-groove slot and internal features

An arc of foundation slot (Illus 2, 042) projected into the centre of Area 1 from the SSE side, and appears to form approximately half of a sub-circular structure or enclosure, with a maximum exposed internal width of *c* 12m. The slot was heavily plough-truncated and difficult to trace in parts unless the ground was damp, when the darker, sandy fill became visible against the lighter subsoil. Where excavated, the slot measured 0.3–0.5m wide and only 20–80mm deep. No post-impressions or other evidence for a palisade survived in the base of the slot. No obvious entrance break was identified. Two shallow pits (038, 049) were present within the area defined by the foundation slot. These pits contained sandy fills, and survived no deeper than 80mm.

Their morphology suggests that the remains are most likely those of either a ring-groove timber round-house, of broadly later prehistoric date, or a small fenced or palisaded enclosure. Unfortunately no artefacts were recovered from the excavated features, nor any material suitable for radiocarbon dating.

'Pit alignment'

Four pits (046, 051, 053, 055) were discovered a little to the west of the ring-groove feature, running in a slight arc on an approximate north–south alignment (Illus 2). The pits were evenly spaced, set *c* 1.5m apart, and appear to be related. The southernmost pit (046) was a sub-circular feature, measuring 2.4m by 2.3m in plan and up to 0.15m deep (Illus 3). Its sandy fill (047) contained a patch of burnt daub and a burnt deposit (048), from which wood charcoal and charred grain were recovered through wet sieving. Two radiocarbon dates (Refs: AA-52523 and AA-53130; see Table 2 below) were obtained from cereal grains recovered from the burnt deposit, both providing early Neolithic dates in the middle of the fourth millennium cal BC.

The adjacent feature to the north (051) was the largest in the 'alignment' and comprised a shallow oval bowl measuring 2.5m by 2.1m in plan by 0.27m deep (Illus 3). A small flint flake was recovered from the sandy fill of this feature. Feature 053 was the smallest

of the group, measuring 1.15 m by 0.72 m by 0.18m deep, and contained a silty sand. The northernmost feature (055, Illus 3) was broadly similar in form and depth to the other pits in this alignment.

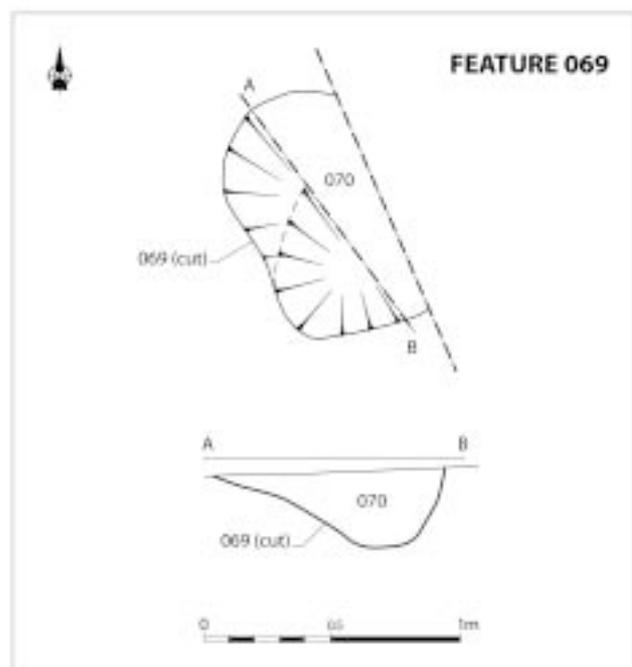
North-east area

A cluster of features was discovered at the NE end of Area 1 (Illus 2). It included a rough arc of two pits (073, 075), *c* 0.5m wide and 0.25m deep, and four stake-holes (083, 087, 089, 091), *c* 0.15m in diameter and 0.25m deep. A large irregular pit on the arc (085) measured 1.9m by 1.7m, surviving only 90mm deep. That feature lay at the NW end of a linear feature with rounded terminals (081), 7m long, 0.3–0.4m wide and 0.15–0.2m deep. At the southern end of the linear slot was another pit (095).

The only artefact recovered from this group of features was a sherd of plain prehistoric pottery from pit 073. Otherwise, the features contained sterile sandy or silty fills, none containing any material suitable for radiocarbon dating. Wet sieving of samples from the fills of pits 073 and 085 recovered almost no charred plant remains (Miller and Ramsay, below).

Other features

An isolated pit (069, Illus 4) was discovered running into the baulk section at the NE end of Area 1. It measured 0.9m NW–SE by 0.8m in exposed width, and was 0.3m deep. It was filled by a sandy silt with occasional lenses of re-deposited natural. A carbonised garden pea (*Pisum sativum*) recovered from this feature provided a radiocarbon date with a calibrated range of 1440–1640 cal AD (AA-52524, calibrated at 2s).



Illus 4 Plan and section of pit 069.

Two other pits (040, 071; Illus 2) were present between the north-east group and the putative ring-groove structure, but excavation provided no information on either their date or function. Two further pits (057, 063), with gently sloping sides, flattish bases, and the same silty sand fill, were found close together c 12m west of the putative ring-groove structure. From the smaller pit (063), measuring 1.2m by 0.8m wide and 0.13m deep, a sherd of medieval pottery was recovered. At the western end of the trench there were three isolated features (061, 065, 067), circular or oval in shape and c 0.4m across and 0.15m deep.

The finds

Prehistoric pottery

Melanie Johnson

A single sherd of plain prehistoric pottery was recovered from the fill (074) of pit 073. It measures 32mm by 25mm, is 9mm thick, and weighs 6g. The fabric is fine, with c 5% inclusions, comprising quartz grits up to 3mm across. The exterior face of the sherd is orange to red/orange and the interior is grey. There are no impressions or decoration on the exterior, which has no other

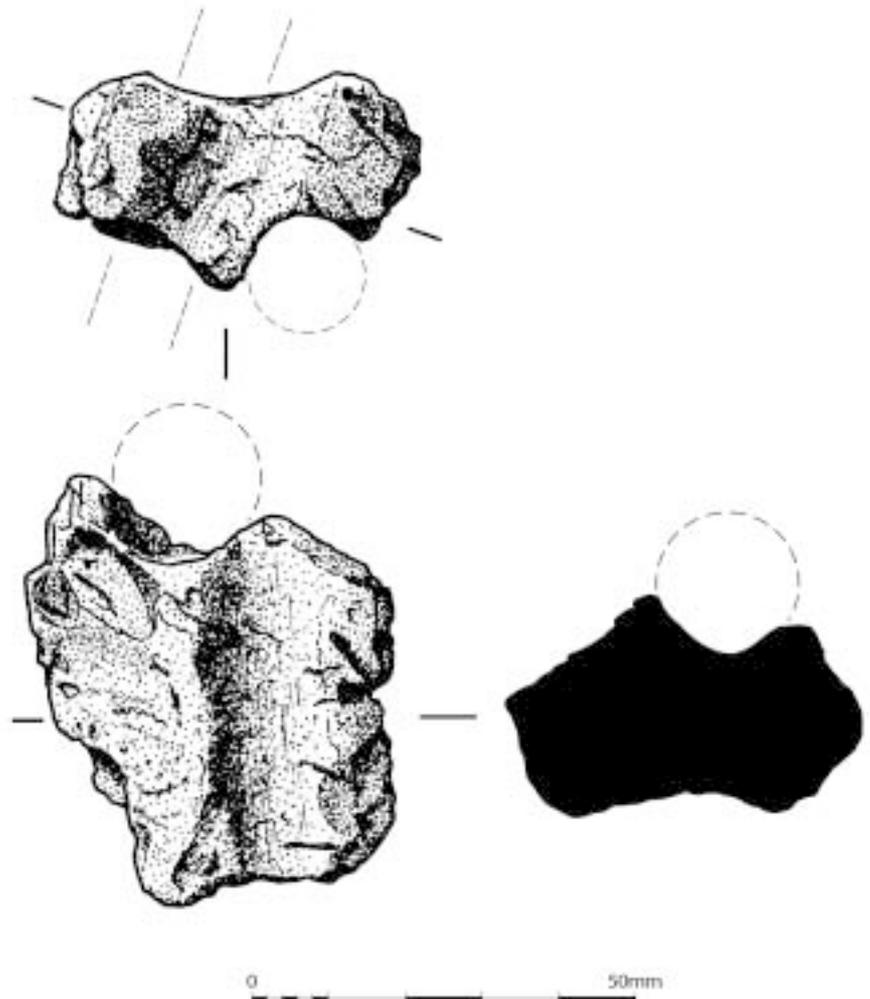
visible surface treatment. Insufficient of the vessel remains for its form or dimensions to be assessed. The sherd has some surface cracking and its edges are worn.

Medieval pottery

George Haggarty (pers comm) has identified the body sherd of medieval pottery recovered from feature 063 as being White Gritty Ware, and from a late 12th or 13th century cooking pot. The body sherd measures 55mm by 37mm, is 3–4mm thick, and displays burning on its exterior surface. It is unabraded and has clean, sharp breaks, indicating that it was likely to have been incorporated into the pit fill soon after breakage.

Burnt daub

Two fragments of burnt daub were recovered from pit 046. The larger fragment (Illus 5) measured approximately 65mm by 45mm, and 20mm thick. Wattle impressions on the surface of the daub indicate that it had been packed against two pieces of roundwood, c 13–16mm in diameter, set at 90 degrees to each other. Bark impressions were present on one of the wattle impressions, and there were impressions of fibrous grass material on the surface of the daub in places.



Illus 5 Daub from pit 046.

Palaeobotanical remains

Jennifer Miller and Susan Ramsay

The excavation produced samples containing carbonised cereal grains. Cereals and other remains were identified using a binocular microscope at magnifications between x4 and x45. Close reference was made to Jacomet (1987), and cereal nomenclature follows Zohary and Hopf (2000). Other vascular plant nomenclature follows Stace (1997).

Results are presented in Table 1. Sample 004 came from the fill (041) of the undated pit 040. Several cereal grains were recovered from this sample, although many were in poor or fragmentary condition and could not be identified. However, three grains of six-row barley (*Hordeum vulgare* s.l.) and one of emmer wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*) were confidently identified, together with a cotyledon fragment from a vetch or pea (*Vicia/Lathyrus*) genus seed, possibly a weed from crop processing. No other significant remains were recovered to aid the interpretation of this feature.

Four samples (005, 006, 009, 010) were taken from context 048, the black sooty fill within pit 046. Almost 1600 entire cereal grains were identified from 048, together with many fragments. All cereal grains from the retents were identified, but it was not possible to do the same for the entire flots due to time constraints. Several of the larger flots were partially sampled for cereals, in order to gain a representative selection of taxa. All chaff and seeds other than cereal grains were recorded from the flots, however. The samples contained primarily emmer wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*) and emmer/spelt wheat (*T. dicoccum/spelta*), the latter not being morphologically distinctive enough to merit specific classification. Nevertheless, they are considered in general to be more like emmer wheat. Lesser quantities of six-row barley grains were also identified, of which the naked type (*H. vulgare* var. *nudum*) was frequently recorded. Wheat chaff was identified from most of the samples, with emmer (*Triticum dicoccum*) spikelet and glume bases the most commonly identified types. No barley rachis internodes were observed. The only carbonised seeds recorded other than cereal grains were species of docks (*Rumex*), which are commonly encountered as arable weeds. One fragment of ergot fungus (*Claviceps purpurea*) was recorded. This poisonous and hallucinogenic fungus is difficult to remove from a cereal assemblage without careful hand gleaning as the fungal body is of the same size and shape as a grain.

A single carbonised garden pea (*Pisum sativum*) was submitted to the authors for identification from sample 016 taken from fill 070 of pit 069. A single grain of poorly preserved emmer/spelt wheat (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*) from sample 017 (fill 074 of pit 073) was also submitted to the authors for identification. No carbonised botanical remains were recovered from sample 018 taken from the fill (086) of pit 085.

Interpretation

Emmer wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*) was the dominant cereal type identified from the samples examined of fill 048 of pit 046. Although hulled six-row barley (*Hordeum vulgare* var. *vulgare*) has always been the most frequently identified cereal from Scottish mainland archaeological sites, emmer is common on Roman sites and has been part of the Scottish cereal assemblage since Neolithic times (Dickson and Dickson 2000). Emmer was identified at the timber hall at Balbridie, Aberdeenshire (Fairweather and Ralston 1993), and was the most commonly encountered cereal type at the recently excavated Claish timber hall, near Callander (Miller and Ramsay 2002). Both of these sites are of early Neolithic date, as was the assemblage contained within pit 046 at Inchturre (see Table 2).

Some of the wheat grains recorded were of a glume type but were not morphologically distinctive enough to be identified further than emmer/spelt (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*). However, the grains had a general morphology more in keeping with emmer and, given that no spelt chaff was observed, and that the dates recorded for fill 048 were early Neolithic, it is more likely that the grains are emmer.

The presence of notable quantities of naked barley (*Hordeum vulgare* var. *nudum*) as well as the hulled type (*Hordeum vulgare* var. *vulgare*) is in keeping with the early Neolithic date returned for pit 046. Naked barley is frequently recorded on Neolithic sites, which may be due in part to the slightly better climatic conditions believed to have prevailed in the Neolithic period (van der Veen 1992). The glumes of hulled barley protect the grain from fungal attack in a way that naked barley is not, but as a result the former requires extra processing prior to cooking.

The presence of burnt daub within pit 046 may be connected with the large quantities of cereal grains, perhaps representing dumped remains from a cereal drying kiln or burnt grain storage pit. Alternatively, they may represent two different episodes of dumping and be entirely unrelated. One fragment of ergot fungus (*Claviceps purpurea*) from fill 048 attests to the presence of this noxious contaminant and is an interesting find.

The carbonised garden pea (*Pisum sativum*) from pit 069 was radiocarbon dated to the late Medieval period (Table 2). This is an interesting, unusual find, since the processing of legumes for consumption does not require a parching phase, and consequently the opportunity for preservation in a carbonised state is reduced. Records show that peas and beans were imported into Scotland in the 13th and 14th centuries (Dickson and Dickson 2000), and peas have been found in 11th–14th century layers at Edinburgh Castle (Boardman 1997) and in a 14th–15th century context at Stirling tollbooth (Miller and Ramsay forthcoming). The find at Inchturre adds a rural find to the previous exclusively urban sites.

Table 1 *Inchtute cereals*.

	context	041	048	048	048	048	070	074	086
	sample	004	005	006	009	010	016	017	018
	flot (f), retent (r)	f+r	f	f+r	f+r	f+r	f	f	f
taxon	common name								
cereals (c)									
<i>Hordeum vulgare</i> var <i>nudum</i>	naked six-row barley		5	50	7	12			
<i>Hordeum vulgare</i> var <i>vulgare</i>	hulled six-row barley				2				
<i>Hordeum vulgare</i> sl	six-row barley	3	6	56	8	29			
<i>Triticum dicoccum</i>	emmer wheat	1	33	471	81	225			
<i>Triticum spelta/dicoccum</i>	spelt/emmer wheat		25	111	42	88		1	
<i>Triticum</i> sp	wheat		14	82	40	26			
cf <i>Triticum</i> sp	cf wheat		8	14					
indeterminate cereal grain		7	32	52	31	44			
small cereal fragments									
without embryo ends		10	28	130	45	93			
cereal chaff (c)									
<i>Triticum dicoccum</i>	emmer wheat chaff			64	2	8			
spikelet/glume base									
<i>Triticum spelta/dicoccum</i>	spelt/emmer wheat			18		2			
spikelet/glume base	chaff								
cf <i>Triticum spelta/dicoccum</i>	cf spelt/emmer wheat			32					
spikelet/glume base	chaff								
seeds (c)									
<i>Fabaceae</i>									
cf <i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> fragment	vetch/pea fragment	1							
<i>Pisum sativum</i>	garden pea						1		
<i>Rumex acetosella</i>	sheep's sorrel			48		13			
<i>Rumex</i> sp	dock			81	16	5			
other macrofossils (c)									
<i>Claviceps purpurea</i> fragment	ergot fungus fragment			1					
seeds (m)									
<i>Chenopodium album</i>	fat hen			12		8			
<i>Fallopia convolvulus</i>	black bindweed					3			
<i>Fumaria</i> sp	fumitory		1	2		5			
<i>Rubus idaeus</i>	raspberry			90	2	6			
<i>Rumex acetosella</i>	sheep's sorrel			4					
<i>Sambucus nigra/racemosa</i>	elder/red-berried elder								1
miscellaneous (m)									
earthworm egg capsule		1			7	5			2
mineral vesicle		1							

Table 2 *Inchtute: radiocarbon determinations.*

lab no	context	material	lab age	lab error ±	2σ range, cal BC	d ¹³ C (‰)
AA-53130	pit 046	<i>Hordeum vulgare</i>	4745	40	3640–3370	-24.6
AA-52523	pit 046	<i>Triticum dicoccum</i>	4690	40	3630–3360	-23.0
AA-52524	pit 069	<i>Pisum sativum</i>	370	35	1440–1640	-25.2

Radiocarbon dates

The lack of *in situ* burning or other securely sealed deposits at Inchtute severely restricted the opportunities for obtaining meaningful radiocarbon dates with which to assess the range of periods and sequence of activities represented by the excavated features. Cereal grains retrieved from the burnt deposit in pit 046, found in association with fragments of burnt daub, appeared to represent either *in situ* burning or a deliberate dump of carbonised material.

The dating samples were identified by Jennifer Miller and submitted to the Scottish Universities Research and Reactor Centre (SURRC). Samples were measured at the University of Arizona AMS Facility. The calibrated age ranges were calculated by SURRC using the University of Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit calibration programme (OxCal3). The results are presented in Table 2.

The two dates obtained from fill 048 of pit 046 are statistically indistinguishable, and support the field interpretation that the burnt deposit represents a single dump of burnt material. The use of this pit can be related to early Neolithic activity in this area.

Discussion

with Andrew Dunwell

The site at Inchtute consists of a palimpsest of features which, on the basis of the limited morphological, artefactual and radiocarbon dating evidence, represents episodic activity in the early Neolithic and Medieval periods, and less certainly at some point during later prehistory. The excavated features probably represent part of a more extensive suite of remains surviving to the north and formerly extending to the south but destroyed by the original construction of the A90 road. The remains preserved represent the heavily truncated bases of foundations and pits, and it is likely that much has been obliterated by ploughing.

Early Neolithic settlement

Early Neolithic activity on the site was indicated by radiocarbon dates obtained from samples of charred cereal remains dumped in a pit (046) and associated with burnt daub, together possibly representing debris from a cereal drying kiln or grain storage pit (see Miller and Ramsay above). The pit itself is likely to be of the same age as the burnt deposit contained within it, and appears to form part of an alignment of four pits of un-

known function running approximately north–south across the excavated area. A flint flake recovered from one of the other pits is of broadly prehistoric origin, but is not closely dateable. Other undated pits across the site could be contemporary with the arc, but no association can be proven.

These remains do not illuminate the precise nature of the early Neolithic activities that took place here, although the combination of pits and cereal products suggests that the site probably lay within or close to a settlement location. The absence of recognisable structural remains does not undermine this interpretation since, as noted by Ashmore (1996, 59), most mainland Neolithic settlement sites of the 4th millennium cal BC are characterised primarily by pits. It is also assumed (*ibid*) that Neolithic houses were generally built of turf, wood or stone and were not necessarily provided with foundations that would survive ploughing. These points are demonstrated on a larger scale by the results of recent excavations at Dubton, Brechin (Cameron 2002), a site broadly contemporary with that at Inchtute. It is also possible that any structures associated with the Inchtute site were located outside the area available for excavation.

In this context the discoveries at Inchtute represent a small but significant addition to the limited corpus of Early Neolithic sites for the region. As recently as 1994 RCAHMS (1994, 43) noted that 'Apart from the Neolithic ceremonial monuments... the only tangible evidence for early farming communities in South-east Perth is provided by the discovery of stone tools', and particularly stone axes. The Inchtute site provides tangible, if very limited, evidence for such an early farming community.

Other prehistoric features

The excavation identified what appears to be half of a sub-circular structure or enclosure, bounded by a ring-groove slot and measuring c 12m across internally. The character of the structure suggests that it has a broadly later prehistoric origin, and possibly that this was the site of a settlement. The feature may be a very poorly preserved timber roundhouse although, if so, survival was restricted to the wall-line and there was no trace of the foundations for any roof support framework, such as an internal post-ring. Floor deposits and hearths would not be expected to have survived ploughing at this location. The ring-groove structure alternatively could have been a non-domestic enclosure, constructed for activities such as penning stock or craft production. Both types of structure have been identified recently

within a plough-truncated later Bronze Age settlement discovered during pipeline construction near Ednie, Peterhead (Strachan and Dunwell forthcoming). Ring-groove construction techniques are present in the settlement record of south and east Scotland from the second millennium cal BC to early first millennium cal AD. In the absence of any firm dating evidence, however, it is not possible to exclude totally the possibility that the ring-groove structure was associated with the Early Neolithic activity represented by the adjacent alignment of pits, although such a possibility is considered highly unlikely.

The cluster of pits and stake-holes in the north-east part of Area 1 also appear to reflect broadly prehistoric activity on the site. Direct dating evidence for these features is restricted to one worn prehistoric potsherd recovered from one of the pits. It is not wise therefore to speculate further as to the age and associations of these features.

Medieval and later activity

Evidence of Medieval activity on the site comprised a sherd of 12th–13th century White Gritty Ware pottery recovered from one of a pair of isolated pits, and a 15th–17th century cal AD radiocarbon date from a garden pea recovered from another isolated pit. These discoveries tell us virtually nothing about the nature of medieval or later activities at this particular location. However a church has been present at Inchturre since the 12th century, replacing an earlier chapel (Melville 1939, 100), and the village first appears in the records in the 13th century (Easson 1947, 83–4) but probably had earlier origins. This settlement provides a context for the archaeological discoveries. A series of cropmark enclosures recorded by the NMRS (Ref: NO22NE 17) a little to the south-east, at Mains of Inchturre, provide some possible archaeological evidence for the early village at Inchturre.

Landscape context

The excavation site, along with the modern village of Inchturre, occupies a slight sand and gravel ridge within the Carse of Gowrie, towards its eastern end. Several other

'inches' (RCAHMS 1994, 2) present in the Carse, including Inchmichael and Inchmartine, are located in similar topographic positions and represent favoured areas for historic settlement, being raised above the Carse claylands.

These ridges are understood to have formed in prehistory, during a long period when the Carse lay within an estuarine environment. Based upon studies by Cullingford et al (1980) and others, RCAHMS (1994, 2) notes that what was to become the Carse was submerged by a marine transgression around 7000BC (c 6000 cal BC). In the estuarine environment that followed the Carse clays and silts formed, with sand and gravel beach deposits forming at the edges of the estuary and creating

the 'inches'. Marine shells sampled recently, also in advance of the A90 road upgrade, from the base of the carse clays c 300m south-west of the Inchturre excavation site have been dated by radiocarbon methods and confirm that a marine / estuarine environment had developed in that area by around 6000 cal BC (Cressey et al 2003).

RCAHMS (1994, 2, 7) state that the Carse gradually rose above the high water mark by around 3500 BC (c 3000 cal BC), but note that the land would have remained damp and liable to flooding. It was probably only from the 12th century AD onwards, through the efforts of the Cistercians from Coupar Angus, who owned various properties around Grange (Illus 1), that the land began to be drained extensively and converted into the arable landscape visible today.

This broad scheme of environmental development has implications for understanding the changing local landscape context of the excavation site between the identified chronological phases of activity. At the time of the Early Neolithic settlement, around 3500 cal BC, the Carse may still have been at least partly tidal. The putative coastal settlement may have occupied a slight ridge of fertile ground projecting southwards into the Carse, which may have provided a good environment for the exploitation of marine and coastal food resources.

From later prehistory until the medieval period the excavation site would have occupied a relatively well-drained and fertile ridge within a damp, possibly marshy environment. The Carse, although unsuitable for agriculture, would have been exploited in other ways. The Carse and the Tay estuary beyond could have been productive sources of fish, shellfish and wildfowl. Although the archaeological evidence from the excavation does not certainly indicate later prehistoric settlement at that location, ring ditches and a souterrain, recorded as cropmarks a little to the north, provide convincing evidence that the ridge was settled in later prehistory (NMRS Ref: NO22NE 28 and 29). By the time that the medieval and later activity on the site took place, the Carse was being transformed, probably only gradually, from wetland to the rich arable landscape often referred to as the 'Garden of Scotland'.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Patrick Ashmore of Historic Scotland for assistance provided throughout the project and for his comments upon an earlier draft of this report. Kevin Hicks of CFA Archaeology produced Illus 1–4 and Alan Braby produced Illus 5. Jennifer Miller and Susan Ramsay thank Jen Cochrane and Laura Hayes for their administrative assistance. Responsibility for the final form and content of the report rests with the author and CFA Archaeology Ltd.

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Abstract

In September 2001 CFA Archaeology Ltd excavated a series of plough-truncated archaeological features discovered at Inchtute, Perth and Kinross in advance of the construction of a new road interchange on the A90. On the basis of the limited morphological, artefactual and radiocarbon dating evidence available, this palimpsest of features appears to represent episodic activity in the early Neolithic and Medieval periods, and less certainly at some point during later prehistory. The most significant discovery is the fragmentary evidence for early Neolithic coastal farming settlement. The results of excavation are considered within the dynamic Holocene landscape context of the Carse of Gowrie. Historic Scotland commissioned all work on behalf of the Scottish Ministers.

Keywords

cereal grain
Inchtute
medieval
Neolithic
pits

This paper is published with the aid of a grant from Historic Scotland.